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A STUDY OF R.G. COLLINGWOOD'S THEORY OF LOGIC AND
PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD:
ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE



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the Faculty of the Department of Philosophy
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by
Allen Gerald Bedford
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FRB
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG
PORTAGE & SALMERAI
WINNIPEG 2, MAN. CANADA

PREFACE

To estimate a philosopher's position is, at any time, a difficult task, and for those who have done their work in the present century the rapid shiftings of contemporary thought impose even greater difficulties upon the student. Such has been the case with R.G. Collingwood. There are many sides to his thought; we might have devoted whole sections to his idea of history, his idea of nature, his archaeological contributions, or his theory of metaphysics. It was evident, therefore, that selection was necessary in a work such as this, and, if possible, selection of the most important ingredients of his thought. On this basis his conception of philosophical method was chosen.

The problem of method has always been, more or less, central to philosophy, but during the twentieth century it has been especially so. In concentrating upon a theory of logic and a method for philosophy, Collingwood was thus moving in the main stream of philosophical tradition.

The method of the following study has been two-fold. First, it was necessary to study Collingwood the man, and consider the influences from his early years, and from his other fields of interest, which were responsible for the growth of his conception of a method. Secondly, the method itself had to be stated, and in order to reveal its meaning

and significance, its affinities with the pragmatism of John Dewey were investigated. As the following pages will reveal, it is my belief that Collingwood was, in many ways, a pragmatist, although he, himself, was apparently unconscious of it.

Chapter I presents a general introduction to the subject. Chapter II is a study of the earlier Collingwood, insofar as his first years influenced the development of his conception of "how we think", and in Chapter III his first important work is treated in a similar fashion. Chapter IV is a study of his theory of logic; a brief outline of the method of pragmatism is also given, in order to reveal Collingwood's close relationship to it. The final formulation of his method for philosophy is presented in Chapter V, and again pragmatic affinities are pointed out. Chapter VI contains the conclusion.

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It is not truth that makes man great; but man
that makes truth great.

-- Confucius.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Every period of history and every race upon the earth have produced men who yielded to the call, so peculiar and so vital to the nature of man, to embark upon a quest for certainty. The material world, in which man lives and moves and has his being, is characterized by a quality which has always been truly recognised as transient and shifting. The uncertainty of the future is a thought which has been uppermost in men's minds since the dawn of history, and one which was even more primary and fundamental to primitive man than the man of today. The immediate and recurring discovery that values in the world of action are uncertain led to a natural result -- the quest for something permanent, for truth. It was essential to man's being that he feel the need of something which could be relied upon. To move with confidence amongst his fellow men, man required a knowledge of rules of conduct which were absolute and unchanging; to feel at peace with himself, he required a faith in the belief that a greater Being, immutable and omniscient, existed. Man's need for dependence provided one stimulus in the motivation of the human mind to a quest for certainty.

The fact that the search exists, therefore, is one which may go unquestioned. A deeper and more significant problem

concerns the method which has marked the activity of those men who chose to devote themselves to furthering the progress of mankind in the quest which seems to be unending. Experience has taught us again and again that it is the method which deserves our greatest attention, that the particular problem we face is of temporary value only. It is to an examination of method, then, that we must turn, and, because the deepest truths have always been approached through philosophical thought, to an examination of the method of philosophy.

The external, material world was the primary factor in the life of primitive man, for he came into direct contact with it every day. In order to survive, he had to secure his food and clothing from it, and had to protect himself against it. The natural result, therefore, was that early man took an objective view of nature, and considered himself as apart from it; it was as though the forces of the material universe were arrayed against man, and man had to fit himself into the world in which he had been placed. As well as being an element to be met and conquered, however, nature was a fact which had to be explained. No explanations of physical changes seemed forthcoming to the savage, and so he turned to superstition and mysticism as methods of discovery. The recognition that material values were essentially transient led to the belief that the thoughts of the mind were of a permanent

character. "The quest for certainty by cognitive means", therefore, became supreme over what might have been "a search for security by practical means". It was partly through this tendency to exalt the imagination that the first religions arose, in the form of various kinds of nature worship. It is through the medium of religious conceptions, too, that we catch our first glimpse of the search for truth, and our first awareness of a developing change in method.

The first great leaders who rose in answer to a demand for something permanent were religious leaders. This was due to two fundamental reasons. The first was the aspect of continuous change which everywhere seemed to characterize the material world. "All things flow; nothing abides"¹ appeared to be the law of nature. But a call within man's being demanded something more; Man was a rational creature, and this fact provides the second reason for our concern with the religious. The idea that he was meant to serve some purpose, that the transient materiality which faced him every day was merely a surface covering, that permanency really lay behind the world, haunted him. Man had to turn somewhere in his need for the permanent, for that which he considered to be the truth, and so he turned inward. The mind provided an escape, and from the mental it was only a step to the spiritual. Perhaps, after all, truth was a spiritual thing.

And so the great search began. There was Confucius and

¹ Cf. B.A.G. Fuller, A History of Philosophy (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1946), p. 50.

Buddha, and many other great prophets too numerous to mention. Their presence marked the beginnings and early years of every race upon earth. In western thought the teachings of the Hébrew prophets were destined to become of lasting importance, and gradually, with the decline of Grecian culture and the period of the intellectually barren Roman Empire, they supplanted the earlier naturalism as the core of cultural progress.

The change was not without its value for the development of philosophical method. We have pointed out the objective viewpoint of primitive man, a viewpoint which characterized the writings of the Greek philosophers as well. This was due, in large measure, to their conception of a God who moulded the universe out of a primordial chaos, as an architect would plan and construct a building. God therefore, though He had made the universe, had remained outside it. Such a view had colored the philosophical approach to an understanding of nature. The Christian conception of God, on the other hand, introduced a significant change. God had not created the universe out of chaos, but out of Himself. He was an immanent God; His very being was in the process, was, in fact, the very substance of that process. Man, in seeking to understand, began to consider the mind as supreme, and the mental realm as the realm which would supply the answer. And hovering over the search, above and supreme, was the spiritual. In the discovery that mind and spirit were to be considered as part

of the universe, and not as separate from it, mankind had taken a great step forward. But he was not yet prepared to make the step complete. The objective and classificatory tendency clung to the philosophical mind, and, in effect, the change became one which merely saw mind and spirit as objective instead of matter as objective. What might have been an advance in method was lost in the illusion; the focus of attention had been shifted from the outer to the inner, but the canons of thought remained the same. The outcome of the shift to the self was to culminate in the individualistic humanism of the Renaissance before a new influence appeared to reshape the progress of method.

A glimpse of something deeper and more intrinsic to the nature of philosophical method was not entirely absent from the work of the earlier thinkers, however. Preoccupation with an objective, classificatory view predominated their thinking, but beneath the surface lay the seeds, in embryo, of a development which was to slowly take root and spread its branches in the centuries that followed.

Greek thought was, to a large extent, mathematical. This was natural, for it is essentially connected with an objective view of nature and with concepts of the mind, two tendencies which we have seen to be characteristic of early civilization. The first Greek philosophers, therefore, occupied themselves

with speculation about the origin of the universe, of "all things", and with probing into the nature of number and pure mathematics. This is the intellectual ferment in which we also discover Socrates, who, perhaps, occupied the central position in Greek thought. Socrates was one of the first thinkers of western civilization to conceive of method as perhaps entailing more than the outer viewpoint. To generalize, we may say that he dealt with problems chiefly in mathematical terms; embedded in his discussion of those problems, however, was something which is of interest to us -- his invention of the technique of a question-and-answer method.

Socrates stated his own theory of his invention by saying that knowledge was to be sought within the mind, and brought to birth by a process of questioning. The contrast here insisted upon is the contrast between perceiving (*diagnos*), regarded as the observation of things outside oneself, and thinking (*noos*), regarded as the discovery of what is within. Socrates showed that this second activity was common to two kinds of inquiry, which he does not seem to have distinguished in his theory of method: mathematics and ethics. His revolt against the study of nature was essentially a revolt against observation in favor of thought; and whereas mathematical method, as an example of thought, had already been discovered by his predecessors, his own discovery was that a similar method, for which he invented an appropriate technique, could be applied to ethical questions.²

Associated with this method is the Socratic doctrine of anamnesis, which propounds the theory that the soul, in a pre-natal existence, had come to know certain perfect, archetypal forms which represented the divine patterns to which

² R.G. Collingwood, An Essay on Philosophical Method (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 10-11.

all things in the imperfect, material world approximated to. To know something, therefore, was not to "discover something of which until now we have been ignorant, but to know better something which in some sense we knew already".³

Plato, too, is significant for our brief glance at the development of philosophical method inasmuch as he is the inventor of "dialectic". It was a well-known fact that in mathematics the mind moves from an hypothesis to a conclusion. This is the deductive method, which played such a fundamental role in traditional logic. But the method of dialectic expressed the view that the mind goes from an hypothesis through a series of hypotheses to a non-hypothetical principle, from which the steps can all, in succession, be established.⁴ In the invention of such a theory Plato had touched upon something which was part of the "inner" method as apposed to the "outer". But the idea was not clearly formed within his mind, and even though he used it in giving to the world a deep and fundamental truth, he never stated it fully as a method. We are left in doubt as to how one moves from hypotheses to a non-hypothetical principle, and to how dialectic really differs from mathematics, besides giving a greater freedom to thought.

With Aristotle, however, traditional logic was to be given its foundations. He was the scientist, and brought to the study of nature a keen, analytical mind. The objective view,

³ R.G. Collingwood, An Essay on Philosophical Method (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 11.

⁴ Plato, Republic, 511 b.

the view which we choose to call the "outer", triumphed completely. Aristotle gave to logic the syllogism, and his three laws of thought; the principle of identity, the principle of contradiction, and the principle of excluded middle. For this brief survey, only certain main points about the Aristotelian logic concern us. In the first place, knowledge was formalistic, was "cut and dried". Nature was thought of as changing, but because of the teleological principle that knowable change tends toward a limiting fixed end, all motion was thought to tend naturally to a state of rest.⁵ Knowledge, therefore, consisted exclusively of definition and classification. This leads to a second significant point, the fact that the Aristotelian logic, while it allowed for the conception that in discovery we are coming to know better that which we knew before, such was only in a limited sense. By the methods of traditional logic, "learning belonged in the inferior region of change, and like every mode of change comes to something, amounts to something, only as it falls within fixed limits of knowledge".⁶ It was almost as if what was accepted with one hand was discarded by the other; the material world was admitted to be transient; but because of the tendency to search for the immutable solely in the paths of the mind, such transiency was subordinated to a teleological scheme which mitigated the significance of change. Man, therefore, was not within the process; his mind was outside it.

⁵ John Dewey, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), p. 90.

⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

and by reason he was thought to see beyond the physical.

The syllogism in the original logic was in no way a form of inferring or reasoning. It was immediate apprehension or vision of the relations of inclusion and exclusion that belong to real wholes in nature.⁷

A third point of importance for our study lies in the difference between the Greek and the modern conception of nature. For the Greeks, the reality of a material substance did not dwell within its physical measurements, but in the "essence" of its being. The Aristotelian cosmology, therefore, failed to attach any significance to quantity, considering it as wholly irrelevant to essence, and lying outside the scope of knowledge. The modern conception, on the other hand, effected by the scientific revolution of the sixteenth century and the introduction of "primary" qualities by Descartes and Locke, considers measurement to be of supreme importance in the knowledge of the material world.

The search for truth had thus led man onto the pathway of traditional logic by the time Aristotle left the scene. His influence was destined to play a paramount role during the medieval ages, and it was not until the syllogism was pushed to absurd usages that man again took a step forward in the quest.

The emergence from medieval scholasticism and the resulting effect upon man's method of inquiry was due chiefly to the peculiar combination of two factors: the rediscovery of

⁷ John Dewey, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (New York: Henry Holt and Company), p. 88

⁸ Such as: "If angels exist outside of space, and if a point has no real magnitude in space, how many angels can sit on the point of a pin?" -- Henry Thomas, The Living World of Philosophy (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1946), p. 80.

Platonic mathematical conceptions, and a growing awareness of the physical universe. The effect of these influences is summed up in the work of the Copernican and Cartesian revolutions, and for our present purpose we need only point out the principles involved which carried implications for the method of modern science. Two such principles are discernible, one having to do with the mathematical harmony lying behind observed facts, and the other with the recognition of quantitative characteristics as the only real characteristics of the sensory world. The first is plainly Pythagorean and Platonic in spirit, but it carries an implication of tremendous importance for modern physics, namely, that "of a number of variant hypotheses about the same set of facts, that one is true which most simply shows why the facts are what they are, i.e., which demonstrates their orderly and mathematical connection".⁹ The second involves the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which was to play such an important part in British and continental philosophies during the centuries which followed. To gain a full conception of this development we must return again to the early Greeks.

The sixteenth century was not the first occasion upon which the human mind had obtained a glimpse of the duality involved in the matter-mind problem. Leucippus, in the fifth century, B.C., made one of the most momentous insights in the

⁹ E.G. Bowkes, and others, Experience, Reason and Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 448.

history of human thought when he discovered space, and realized that matter was separate from it.¹⁰ He and Democritus had then proceeded to invent a theory of atoms, of different weights and sizes, falling through a void, to account for the natural world. And at the same time, Anaxagoras discovered the dualism of matter and mind. He called it Nous, and constructed a cosmology around his new concept, basing it upon the idea that Nous pervaded the universe, was infinite and self-ruled. During the medieval period, however, such speculation was forced into the background by a preoccupation with religious conceptions; man conceived of all things as united in God, and any tendency to separatism as a final philosophy was expunged. So the problem remained until scientific advancements of the Renaissance again brought it to the surface, this time in company with Platonic mathematical idealism.

This was the philosophical framework into which Galileo stepped when he revived atomism, or atomic materialism, as a convenient theory to aid him in his mathematical interpretation of the data which observation and experiment had yielded.

The real world was henceforth held to consist of physical bodies moving in space and time according to laws capable of mathematical formulation. The qualitative aspects of things, their colors, odors, tastes, and sounds, must accordingly be regarded merely as effects in the minds of men -- effects caused by the motions of atoms which in themselves are odorless, colorless, tasteless, and without sound. The distinction was, therefore, drawn between primary and secondary

¹⁰ J.E. Boodin, God (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 139.

qualities. Primary qualities are the absolute, immutable, objective qualities which belong to the world independently of human knowledge. These are the qualities of number, figure, magnitude, position, and motion. The secondary qualities are the relative, fleeting, and unstable characteristics which depend upon the mind of the perceiver. These are the qualities of taste, smell, sound, and color. Since real knowledge consists of mathematical formulations, the primary or measurable qualities alone constitute its subject matter. The secondary qualities, subjective and beyond the reach of mathematical description, constitute the realm of opinion and illusion. Such is the logic of Galileo's philosophy of science.¹¹

But what might have been a tremendous advance in the philosophical quest was again enshrouded in the numerous forces of the age; the result was a transition from the culmination of spiritual dogma to the beginning of a movement which was to develop into scientific dogma. Again man was set apart from his world, and thinkers continued to search for reality by starting on the outside, with nature, and working down to man. The method Descartes¹² propounded was a mathematical method, and he used it with great success in that science. It never occurred to him that perhaps a philosophical method might involve something more than a purely objective approach to knowledge.

A century and a half later Kant appeared upon the scene. Mathematics, in following the method prescribed by Descartes, had progressed rapidly; philosophy, however, had worked itself into a blind alley. The material world, claimed the continental rationalists, must be capable of explanation by the rules of scientific logic; they were possessed by

¹¹ E.G. Bewkes, and others, *op. cit.*, pp. 453-54.

¹² Cf. "Discourse on Method", *French and English Philosophers*, C.W. Eliot, editor, (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1910), pp. 5-62.

a faith that all things could be rationalized. The British empirical school, on the other hand, found the material world the source of all man's ideas,¹³ and, in pushing empiricism to its logical limits, found themselves hopelessly involved in scepticism. Surely, thought Kant, philosophers were following the wrong method.

The German idealist, therefore, in The Critique of Pure Reason proceeded to reconstruct the basis of philosophical thinking. His attempt promised, at the outset, to be a union of rationalism and empiricism, of the inner and the outer in a new conception of the nature of knowledge. Perhaps the most significant thing about his work was the proposal that in the process of knowing the mind changed the nature of the object. But Kant failed to develop the idea, failed to see in it an evolutionary and growing context. The chains which had bound human reason since the golden age of Greece¹⁴ still exercised their stifling effect. In allowing for the object to change in the act of knowing, we find Kant stepping forward in the next breath to deny that the "real" nature of the object underwent change. The objective point of view again survived supreme; the truth of things was still conceived as part of that great world which existed outside of and beyond man.

In the introduction of a critical philosophy, however, Kant had made a contribution. He set out to propound a

¹³ Cf. John Locke, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding", Modern Classical Philosophers, B. Rand, editor, (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1936), pp. 215-262.

¹⁴ Cf. E.T. Bell, The Search For Truth (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934), p. 17.

methodology which was to act as a propaedeutic to a substantive philosophy, or a metaphysics. But in the exposition he made the discovery that methodology cannot be separated from philosophy, that it is, in fact, an essential part of philosophy. Method is an evolutionary conception, and develops hand in hand with the broadening of our metaphysical horizons. It was almost as though metaphysics had become a propaedeutic to criticism in Kant's thought.¹⁵ But even though he failed to revolutionize method, he had made a contribution in the laying of a foundation for all future inquiries.

What is truth? The question cannot be evaded or "shrugged off" in any permanent fashion. It searches us out, no matter how we attempt to lose ourselves in experience, in temporary enthusiasm, or satisfy ourselves with a pseudo-answer. And the paradox is this: that no answer has yet come, or seems forthcoming. In more than two thousand years of philosophical search by the greatest thinkers of the ages, the domain of Truth still stands impregnable, still remains unpenetrated. But the search is beginning to turn inward upon itself, and in that turning a method is slowly emerging. It may be that man has been looking in the wrong direction. Perhaps he has held the answer in the palm of his hand throughout the years. Might it not be that

¹⁵ Cf. R.G. Collingwood, op. cit., p. 24.

he has been blinded by its very nearness; and been awestruck by the imposing presence of a vast physical universe before him, and an appealing body of transcendental doctrine concerning an ideal realm of absolute ideas? These are problems which concern us as we approach the twentieth century, our own day, and, in particular, the work of Robin George Collingwood. The temporary background of ideas, tempered by a highly departmentalized society, a world of tremendous scientific advancement, and an era in which the "humanities" and the cultural have oft-times hung perilously in the balance, is, by-and-large, split into three schools of thought upon the nature of truth. It is to a brief glance at these schools that we shall now turn.

The idealist of the current century is still the one who has a conception of an absolute truth; the fundamental fact for him is still the whole universe, is still one underlying Reality; Plato's Idea of the Good still influences him. Truth, therefore, he conceives of as that which a proposition has from its relation to its implicative system. This is known as the coherence theory. A statement must agree with other, known facts and hypotheses, for it derives its value from them. Whatever truth any particular assertion or inferential process possesses is wholly constituted by its place in the implicative system to which it belongs.¹⁶ One idealist has written: "Unless we hold that human science is progress

¹⁶ Cf. D.S. Robinson, The Principles of Reasoning (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company Incorporated, 1947), p. 345.

sively feeling its way into the actual nature of the universe, we are really shut up in utter relativism and scepticism. Either the coherence theory is true or human knowledge is a fairy tale".¹⁷

A second theory of truth is the correspondence theory, that held by the modern realist. For a proposition to be true, or a statement to be valid, it must correspond with fact, with that part of the "real world" about which it is made. And the material world is "real" to the realist, for the two prime postulates in his thinking are that the objects given through sense/data have independent existence, in and by themselves, and that they undergo no change in the process of knowing.

One such type of theory is the "copy" or "one-one correspondence" theory. According to this view we have ideas in our minds which copy or agree with objects in nature or with facts. An idea is true, partially true, or false, inasmuch as it is an exact copy of, an approximate copy of, or a false representation of an object in the material world.

A second type, and one more widely held, is known as the representative theory. Here the universe is seen as a dualistic affair, divided into psychical existents and physical existents. In the action of knowing the mind abstracts from the psychical existents certain characters which taken together constitute an "idea" or "essence" of the psychical existent as distinct

¹⁷ D.F. Robinson, op. cit., p. 359.

from its "existence". This essence is then referred to some physical existent; if the latter is the right physical existent, the judgment (act of reference) is true, otherwise it is false.

Still another form of the correspondence theory of truth is that held by Bertrand Russell and the neo-realists. According to this theory certain complex entities called fact complexes or propositions exist in a logical world which is non-human and non-physical.

A human judgment or belief is a purely subjective assertion of some mind. It is true when it correctly represents or corresponds to the proposition or fact complex to which it refers in that independent world of subsisting propositions. Now, both the human judgment and the non-human proposition are highly complex, involving both terms and relations. The relation which ties together the constituents of the proposition is known as the object relation, and the relation which ties together the terms in the judgment is known as the relation of believing. Now the judgment is true when the relation of believing ties together the constituents in the same way in which they are tied together in the fact complex by the object relation. Otherwise the judgment is false.¹⁸

A third general theory, and one which has earmarked the growth of modern times and the rising supremacy of scientific method is the instrumental theory of truth, or the pragmatist theory. Truth for the pragmatist is the intellectual process of verifying a judgment.¹⁹ "Truth is not a static and fixed quality of a judgment. It is very human and notoriously variable. It is what happens to judgments when they lead to good practical consequences."²⁰

¹⁸ D.F. Robinson, op. cit., p. 356.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 346.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

Truth, then, has to do with utility. If an hypothesis "works", it is true, and that is as far as we need inquire into its validity. But in the full pragmatic sense, its value does not stop there. For a proposition to be true, it must aid us in furthering inquiry into new problems for which it has itself paved the way. It is for this reason that Dewey prefers to substitute the term "warranted assertibility" for "truth"; a proposition is true insofar as it warrants further assertions. William James has expressed this conception of truth as an ever-growing element of man's experience in Pragmatism:

Truth means that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience.²¹

It is in such a background of ideas, therefore, that we find the figure of Collingwood, rising out of the early years of the century, and developing a rather unique and largely historical approach to what he felt was philosophy's most fundamental problem, the problem of method. At the zenith of his powers, and in the very heart of his career, he produced Philosophical Method, a direct treatise of that which had always been his chief concern. The tragedy, however, is that he was not destined to go on. It was about this period of his life that tiny blood vessels began to burst in his brain, and, by degrees, he was slowly reduced to helplessness during the following decade, until pneumonia ended his life in 1943.

²¹ William James, Pragmatism, p. 45, quoted in D.F. Robinson, op.cit., p.347.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLIER COLLINGWOOD

Collingwood was destined from the first to become a thinker. As a youth, gleaning his educational foundations in the shelter of his own home, he often found himself lost in thought about the nature of things. The significant thing was that such thinking seemed important to him; he felt that the results of the inquiries he was making would be important in his later experience. And that feeling was to become a guiding factor in the development of a "question-and-answer" logic, for more and more Collingwood came to realize that the only significant and meaningful knowledge man obtained was arrived at as the answer to a problem, and derived its value in so far as it was coherent with experience. The early years of the British philosopher are important for our study inasmuch as they reveal the development of a method, or, as we might ^{perhaps} say with a greater degree of exactness, the growth of an awareness of a method. As with everyone we shall find that there were a few major influences which shaped the mind of Collingwood, and each must be considered in some detail. There was, to begin with, the influence of his first contact with the books in his father's study; there was his reaction against the Oxford "realists", and the training he had received under Cook, Wilson; there was the work he exper-

lenced during his summers, from 1913 onwards,²² as a member of research parties performing archaeological diggings; and, in the final analysis, and acting as a pervasive and shaping influence throughout his life, there was his steadily growing interest in history and historical method. This last might almost be said to be the guiding light of his intellectual experience, for as he himself stated in An Autobiography, his life's work was "in the main an attempt to bring about a rapprochement between philosophy and history".²³

Collingwood was a precocious child. This may have been partly due to his being an only child (no mention is anywhere made of any other children), and the fact that his father taught him at home until he was thirteen. He began Latin at four and Greek at six. His formal training was only secondary, however, for it was in those moments when he was left to his devices that the real Collingwood began to develop. He was early seized with a burning desire to find out all he could about the natural sciences. This interest was mixed with a good deal of music, painting, and literature. At the age of eight, a new addition was made in his discovery of Kant's Theory of Ethics, an event which, seen in the light of his later years, takes on an importance.

...as I began reading it, my small form wedged between the bookcase and the table, I was attacked by a strange succession of emotions. First came an intense excitement. I felt that things of the highest importance were being said about matters

22 Cf. R.G. Collingwood, An Autobiography (New York: Penguin Books, 1939),

23 Ibid., p. 54.

of the utmost urgency; things which at all costs I must understand. Then, with a wave of indignation, came the discovery that I could not understand them. Disgraceful to confess, here was a book whose words were English and whose sentences were grammatical, but whose meaning baffled me. Then, third and last, came the strangest emotion of all. I felt that the contents of this book, although I could not understand it, were somehow my business; a personal matter to myself, or rather to some future self of my own.²⁴

Thus it was that "a veil had been lifted and (his) destiny revealed"; Collingwood was to become a thinker, and to devote his life to an understanding of truth. The young lad spent many an afternoon alone with his thoughts.

So when the fit was upon me I would set myself to make something quite uninteresting, like a regiment of paper men, or wander aimlessly in the woods or on the mountains, or sail all day in a dead calm.²⁵

Collingwood's few years at Rugby were followed by his entrance into Oxford in 1910, and his subsequent contact with John Cook Wilson and the "realists", who seemed to have undertaken "the task of discrediting the entire work of Green's school, which they described comprehensively as 'idealism'".²⁶ He remarks of having passed a great deal of time following his own bent in his reading, and entering contests simply for the experience of participating in a "foreign" field. Such behavior -- spending his years not joining in the social life of the College, and oft-times producing the bare minimum of classwork -- was apparently rather irksome to his professors.

²⁴ R.G. Collingwood, An Autobiography (New York: Penguin Books, 1939), pp. 8-9.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

But the mind of Collingwood was developing along its own lines, and during the war, after he had left Oxford, the full effect of his contact with the realists began to be seen.

The growth of a method of thought and a conception of the nature of truth does not occur suddenly. It is essentially a process which has its roots deep within experience as a whole, and so with Collingwood we must continually bear in mind the entire background of his ~~early~~ life. In allowing our thought to dwell upon a stone memorial as a symbol, therefore, we must not forget the experience out of which it rises. Moreover, in building the awakening, the coming to birth of a realization, around a memorial, we are following Collingwood's own illustration of a significant development in his thinking.

Collingwood passed by the Albert Memorial every day on his way to work during his period of service with the Admiralty Intelligence Division. When he first began to pass it he went by with averted eyes.

Everything about it was visibly mis-shapen, corrupt, crawling, verminous; for a time I could not bear to look at it...²⁷

Then he began to wonder why the architect had designed it in such a fashion, for it certainly didn't appeal as being beautiful. But, mused Collingwood, perhaps he had been looking for the wrong effect; perhaps the memorial was meant to fulfill

²⁷ R.G. Collingwood, An Autobiography (New York: Penguin Books, 1939), p. 24.

some other purpose. The reason it appealed to him as loathsome was due to the fact that he had always been looking for beauty in it. He ought to have raised the question, "What did the architect intend?", before assuming an aesthetic attitude toward the production.

And therein lay the secret, the discovery which Collingwood was later to expand into a detailed conception of philosophical method. All questions, all judgments, come as the answer to a ~~specific~~ question! And not a vague, general question, but a specific question.

My work in archaeology, as I have said, impressed upon me the importance of the "questioning activity" in knowledge; and this made it impossible for me to rest contented with the intuitionist theory of knowledge favored by the "realists". The effect of this on my logic was to bring about in my mind a revolt against the current logical theories of the time, a good deal like the revolt against the scholastic logic which was produced in the minds of Bacon and Descartes by reflection on the experience of scientific research, as that was taking new shape in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Novum Organum and the Discours de la Methode began to have a new significance for me. They were the classical expressions of a principle in logic which I found it necessary to restate; the principle that a body of knowledge consists not of "propositions", "statements", "judgments", or whatever name logicians use in order to designate assertive acts of thought (or what in those acts is asserted; for "knowledge" means both the activity of knowing and what is known), but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer; and that a logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic.²⁸

²⁸ R.G. Collingwood, An Autobiography (New York: Penguin Books, 1939), p. 25.

Collingwood proceeds to illustrate by an example. For instance, if his car stops, and he is looking for the trouble by testing a spark plug, his action is made not in answer to the general question, "Why won't my car go?", but the specific question, "Is the stoppage due to failure in number one plug?". From an everyday example he moved to a consideration of the validity of the body of traditional logic of the schoolmen.

The same principle applied to the idea of truth. If the meaning of a proposition is relative to the question it answers, its truth must be relative to the same thing. Meaning, agreement and contradiction, truth and falsehood, none of these belonged to propositions in their own right, propositions by themselves; they belonged only to propositions as the answers to questions; each proposition answering a question strictly correlative to itself.²⁹

At this point Collingwood parted company with "propositional logic" (by which he meant "traditional logic", the "idealistic" logic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the "symbolic" logic of the nineteenth and twentieth. He saw that truth of falsehood did not belong to propositions as such. The central doctrine of propositional logic seemed to be that there exists a "one-one correspondence between propositions and indicative sentences, every indicative sentence expressing a proposition, and a proposition being defined as the unit of thought, or that which is false or true."³⁰

²⁹ R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1939), p. 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

This is the doctrine which is presupposed by all the various well-known theories of truth. One school of thought holds that a proposition is either true or false simply in itself, trueness or falseness being qualities of propositions. Another school holds that to call it true or false is to assert a relation of "correspondence" or "non-correspondence" between it and something not a proposition, some "state of things" or "fact". A third holds that to call it true or false is to assert a relation between it and other propositions with which it "coheres" or fails to "cohere". And, since in those days there were pragmatists, a fourth school should be mentioned, holding (at least according to some of their pronouncements) that to call a proposition true or false is to assert the utility or inutility of believing it.

Collingwood denied all these theories of truth because they all presupposed the principle of propositional logic.

For a logic of propositions I wanted to substitute what I called a logic of question and answer. It seemed to me that truth, if that meant the kind of thing which I was accustomed to pursue in my ordinary work as a philosopher or historian -- truth in the sense in which a philosophical theory or an historical narrative is called true, which seemed to me the proper sense of the word -- was something that belonged not to any single proposition, or even, as the coherence-theorists maintained, to a complex of propositions taken together; but to a complex consisting of questions and answers.³²

Thus Collingwood's break with the realists was complete. But he was not yet prepared to write, to set down his views. There were years of teaching, thinking, and debating to experience before the method took its final shape in his mind -- and in saying "final" shape, we must say it softly, for by the very nature of the method, it could never be expressed in any absolute form.

³²Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 29.
32-loc. cit.

There were many elements in the "realist" philosophy which Collingwood disagreed with. His whole temperament was opposed to it. Because of his occupation as a teacher, however, we may say that the "realist" approach to students and the subject matter of philosophy was the first aspect to abuse him. He saw in this an attack on moral philosophy, due chiefly to the prevalence of the objective approach. Moral and political theory was presented as something to be studied, not as something which would make a difference to the lives of those who took it seriously. Theory and action were separated, the old, well-known, and inevitable result of the objective viewpoint. This was closely linked, in "realist thought", with a tendency to separatism. In moral philosophy, any doctrine which was tested "to show whether it was fit to form part of that theory was found wanting". A theory of knowledge was found to be "a contradiction in terms" because of a refusal to see propositions as essentially related to a context. Political theory was destroyed by the denial of the conception of a common good; all "goods" were held to be private.³³ Separatism, as Collingwood again revealed, tends to abstractness, and when knowledge becomes separated from life and action, we may well ask how it may profit us.

We have noticed how Collingwood's summers, during the war years and after, were spent in charge of digging expe-

³³ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 37.

ditions. A general thirst for knowledge, inherited from his early youth, and a rapidly growing interest in history, combined to make these ventures interesting and significant. Out of them developed, for Collingwood, the idea of a living past and a theory of historical method. He found that many of his predecessors had been "just digging" in order to unearth more information. Information about what? The obvious reply was, about nothing in particular; the new facts could be added to an accumulation of unrelated data, with the result that we would "know more" about such and such a site. Such action appeared to be foolish to Collingwood, who realized that, above all, people should think and act to some purpose. He therefore conceived of the past as living ^{on} in the present, though incapsulated in it.³⁴ If the past and present are completely separated, there would be no justification for studying the past, for how could knowledge of it aid us in solving the problems of the present? We must realize, he pointed out, that the past is still with us, although hidden beneath the surface of the present.

His theory of history, then, was "primarily a study of the nature and implications of process and becoming".³⁵ It was also an attack on "realism", for the "realists" refused to admit the reality of becoming. They would analyze the proposition "P₁ becomes P₂" into the complex: P₁ is P₁, P₁ is not P₂, P₁ ends where P₂ begins, P₂ is P₂, and P₂ is not P₁.

³⁴ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 69.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

This, however, merely defeats itself, and renders history meaningless. Collingwood describes his own approach in detail:

If P_1 has left traces of itself in P_2 so that an historian living in P_2 can discover by the interpretation of evidence that what is now P_2 was once P_1 , it follows that the "traces" of P_1 in the present are not, so to speak, the corpse of a dead P_1 but rather the real P_1 itself, living and active though incapsulated within the other form of itself, P_2 . And P_2 is not opaque, it is transparent, so that P_1 shines through it and their colors combine into one. Therefore, if the symbol P_1 stands for a characteristic of a certain historical period and the symbol P_2 for the corresponding but different (and therefore contradictory or incompatible) characteristic of its successor, that successor is never characterized by P_2 pure and simple, but always by a P_2 tinged with a survival of P_1 .³⁶

History, therefore, has to do with purposive activity; we must know why a thing happened. All history is the history of thought, and Collingwood has given us the conditions which make it possible to know the history of a thought. First, the thought must be expressed in some form of expressive activity.³⁷ Secondly, the thought must be re-enacted in the historian's mind,³⁸ and thirdly, following from this, we have a third proposition: "Historical knowledge is the re-enactment of a past thought incapsulated in a context of present thoughts which, by contradicting it, confine it to a plane different from theirs".³⁹

The advantage of Collingwood's theory is readily evident if we glance at an example taken from his summer activities.

³⁶ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 68.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

For years archaeologists had worked at the Roman Wall between Tyne and Solway, but had been at a loss as to its purpose and how to explain certain features of it. They had merely gathered information, assuming that the wall was simply another barricade from which defenders might repel attacks. Collingwood, however, suggested that they first ask why was it built, and then look for further, definite evidence. To proceed turning up irrelevant facts just for the sake of turning them up seemed useless to him. He had noted the height of the wall, the strange parapet along the outside (one side of the wall was higher than the other), and the towers at regular intervals. Could the wall not have been intended as a sentry walk? One question always leads to another, and it seemed that if the wall were a sentry walk, it would not serve its purpose fully unless it were extended down the Cumberland coast, beyond Bowness-on-Solway, so a watch could be kept on vessels moving on the sea. Along the coast there would be no need for a continuous wall and a parapet, for the danger from snipers would not exist. Only towers, at intervals, therefore, would be needed. The question was, did such towers exist? Old archaeological records revealed that towers of exactly the right type had been found years ago, but the information forgotten about because it seemed to indicate nothing of importance. Again the advantage of considering the purpose behind inquiry was

apparent. Further search on the ground revealed evidence of other possible towers. It is quite obvious, too, that no government should spend funds foolishly in excavating at random, when far more is to be gained by asking proper questions first, and then proceeding to excavate with a purpose in mind.

If we interpret this example in terms of Collingwood's theory, we see that the existence of the remains of the wall represents the expression of the thought. The questioning activity experienced in reconstructing the purpose of the wall is the re-enactment of the thought in the historian's mind. And finally, the fact that Collingwood was Collingwood, a philosopher living in the twentieth century, working with colleagues like himself, serves as a present context which relegates the past thought, the historical knowledge, to another plane.

Another problem arose in the attempt by archaeologists to explain the "Celtic Revival", which occurred in Britain about three centuries after the Roman conquest had resulted in what seemed a complete "Romanization". Three theories were advanced. One was that the case was a perfectly normal one of survival, that Celtic traditions in design, music, etc., had really never been broken. But no substantiating evidence could be found for this. A second suggestion was that there existed a few Celts who were not subjected to the full impact

of Roman culture. This, however, was highly improbable, for the districts where a Celtic revival occurred were those farthest away from the frontier. A third theory presupposed Celtic art to be a product of the "Celtic temperament", and that whenever certain conditions were favorable it blossomed into artistic expression. But this explanation was far too psychological and uncertain to be accepted. The problem, therefore, had remained unsolved.

Collingwood proceeds to point out how such a phenomena is understandable if seen in terms of the "incapsulation" theory.

...any process involving an historical change from P₁ to P₂ leaves an unconverted residue of P₁ encapsulated within an historical state of things which superficially is altogether P₂.⁴⁰

Incapsulation differs, too, from the "occult entity" appearance of a psychological temperament. It is represented in the outward habits of a person, and of a people, and when a deliberate change is undertaken in behavior, habits persist and continue to influence action. A proper consideration of the problem giving rise to the inquiry and ~~and~~ the application of the historical perspective, therefore, aid us in the proper interpretation of experience. Through his interests in history, Collingwood had touched upon a new inroad to the nature of truth.

A thinker, in order to think systematically and clearly, generally has to create. This is usually done in two ways, through discussion and lecturing, and through writing.

⁴⁰ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 95.

Collingwood did both, and here we are concerned chiefly with the latter, for it is in his books that his record lies open to the world. The early publications are, in a sense, nothing more than experiments, written to help him think; but even if they were valuable only for that, they would still be significant for a true understanding of the man.

Religion and Philosophy was published in 1916. Collingwood has given us his own statement upon it, that it was written "in order to tidy up and put behind me a number of thoughts arising out of my juvenile studies in theology".⁴¹ This was followed in the next year by Truth and Contradiction, which was never published. It was valuable, however, in helping its author to formulate more clearly the foundations of a new "question-and-answer" logic which had been developing in his mind as a reaction to the "realists".

With the end of the war and the beginning of the second decade of the century we come to the end of our study of the earlier Collingwood. More important advances in his development of a philosophical method were to spring from these early influences, and it is to a consideration of them that we shall turn our attention in the next chapter.

⁴¹ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 33.

CHAPTER III
"SPECULUM MENTIS"

Collingwood's first philosophical work of real importance was produced in 1924, entitled Speculum Mentis. It, too, is not a great work; it is another experiment, but we insist that it is not a "mere" experiment. It was the first book in which Collingwood tried to indicate his position.⁴² It is particularly valuable for our understanding of its author, however, for two primary reasons. First, it is perhaps the greatest example he ever gave us of the application of his "philosophical method" to literature. From beginning to end the book is an ingenious piece of literary composition, and to read it is an experience in itself. The conception of history given within it may or may not be totally valid -- such is beside the point; the value of the book lies in the splendid fashion in which the conception it presents grows upon the reader. Facts discovered in the early pages are rediscovered again and again as the reader proceeds, each time in a slightly changed and fuller form; there is both an overlapping and a developing of concepts, and yet, moving concurrently with this, the process of "incapsulation" is present. It looks backward to the doctrines Collingwood proposed in his approach to history, and forward to that lasting monument to his contribution to the search for truth,

⁴² Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 41.

Philosophical Method.

A second reason for the significance of Speculum Mentis is the introduction, by example, which it provides to Collingwood's theory of metaphysics. His published treatise, An Essay on Metaphysics did not appear until 1940, but there is evidence in the earlier work that the main beliefs contained in the later were already at least partially formulated in his mind. Before examining the content of Speculum Mentis, therefore, it will be necessary for us to make a brief digression, and acquaint ourselves with the fundamental points in Collingwood's view of metaphysics.

Metaphysics is defined as "the science which deals with the presuppositions underlying ordinary science"⁴³ or "the attempt to find out what absolute presuppositions have been made by this or that person or group of persons, on this or that occasion or group of occasions, in the course of this or that piece of thinking".⁴⁴ Whenever anyone states a thought in words, there are many more thoughts in his mind than are actually expressed. These stand in a peculiar relationship to the stated thought, and are just as essential to it as its immediate context. They are its presuppositions; they have to do with the questions which gave rise to the thought, or the statement. The priority affirmed by "presupposition, therefore, is not a priority in time but a logical priority. The theory of metaphysics is thus reduced to the

⁴³ Collingwood, Metaphysics, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

theory of presupposing as far as its fundamental tenets are concerned. It is to the latter, then, that we must turn, with Collingwood, in this consideration of what is meant by metaphysics.

Following is a formal statement of the theory:

Proposition I. Any statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question.

Definition 2. Let that which is stated (i.e., that which can be true or false) be called a proposition, and let stating it be called propounding it.

Proposition II. Every question involves a presupposition.

Definition 2. To say that a question does "not arise" is the ordinary English way of saying that it involves a presupposition which is not in fact being made.

Definition 3. The fact that something causes a certain question to arise I call the "logical efficiency" of that thing.

Definition 4. To assume is to suppose by an act of free choice.

Proposition III. The logical efficiency of a supposition does not depend upon the truth of what is supposed, or even on its being thought true, but only on its being supposed.

Proposition IV. A presupposition is either relative or absolute.

Definition 5. By a relative presupposition I mean one which stands relatively to one question as its presupposition

and relatively to another question as its answer.

Definition 6. An absolute presupposition is one which stands, relatively to all questions to which it is related, as a presupposition, never as an answer.

Proposition V. Absolute presuppositions are not propositions.

Proposition I is perhaps the most fundamental doctrine in Collingwood's entire theory of logic. From the beginning we have seen that he was obsessed by the idea that some purpose lay behind all action, some problem behind all inquiry. The present situation must arise out of a past having logical priority. And then, in considering the question, it is natural that it should exist against a background of beliefs. Such beliefs may belong to us as the result of experience, or they may be inherited (i.e., obtained in a second-hand fashion, from the experience of an older generation), but they exist, for every person and for every age. And the most significant thing about such beliefs or presuppositions is that they are not to be questioned; they are the foundation, so to speak, of the pattern of inquiry, of knowledge itself, and the whole edifice tumbles and becomes meaningless if they are questioned. This leads to Proposition III, the irrelevance of the truth or falsity of the proposition. There are two reasons for this. If a belief is held, and serves as a supposition, it is acting as a step in a process, and the process, even if leading to false statements, is still

logically valid. Also, if a supposition is false, it must have arisen from a false presupposition, and as the latter is the only ground upon which a person may base his knowledge, it is meaningful for him whether true or false.

It is thus evident that metaphysics is fundamental to any study of history, science, or any form of knowledge. We must know the frame of reference within which those people whose records we are studying are moving. If we are examining what Newton meant by a certain scientific doctrine, we must first know what absolute presuppositions lay at the basis of his thought. If we wish to compare and contrast Plato's conception of the state with that of Hobbes, we must again search for absolute presuppositions. We may find that our discussion is meaningless, for they may quite well have been answering different questions, i.e., beginning from different premises. Collingwood, in fact, shows us that this is the case. "Plato's Republic is an attempt at a theory of one thing; Hobbes' Leviathan is an attempt at a theory of something else."⁴⁵ In order to gain a true view of the meaning of a theory or a body of knowledge held at any period in history, we see that it is essential to know the metaphysics of that era. And the absolute presuppositions, themselves, are changing in an evolutionary fashion. "All metaphysical questions are historical questions, and all metaphysical propositions are historical propositions."⁴⁶ We must never lose the vision, nor

⁴⁵ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Collingwood, Metaphysics, p. 49.

forget the implications, of the growing ideal.

Pursuing this line of inquiry, I soon realized that the history of political theory is not the history of different answers given to one and the same question, but the history of a problem more or less constantly changing, whose solution was changing with it. The "form of the " is not, as Plato seems to have thought, the one and only ideal of human society possible to intelligent men. It is not something eternally laid up in heaven and eternally envisaged, as the goal of their efforts, by all good statesmen of whatever age and country. It was the ideal of human society as that ideal was conceived by the Greeks of Plato's own time. By the time of Hobbes, people had changed their minds not only about what was possible in the way of social organization, but about what was desirable. Their ideals were different. And consequently the political philosophers whose business it was to give a reasoned statement of those ideals had a different task before them; one which, if it was to be rightly discharged, must be discharged differently.⁴⁷

We have described Speculum Mentis as an attempt to state a philosophical position. Collingwood begins his preface by giving us an insight into what that position was:

This book is the outcome of a long-growing conviction that the only philosophy that can be of real use to anybody at the present time is a critical view of the chief forms of human experience, a new Treatise⁴⁸ of Human Nature philosophically conceived.

And yet Collingwood would be the first to admit that the complete and final description of a system is impossible. As soon as the pen had been laid down, after writing the final word, error would immediately become part of the essential being of that system. This is the keynote to his method;

⁴⁷ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 46.

⁴⁸ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), Preface, p.9.

it is the result of his application of historical method to metaphysics and to philosophy; it is the positive aftermath of his early reaction to the abstractness and particularization which so characteristically marked the objective approach to knowledge practised by the "realists". In Speculum Mentis he had set out to construct a map of knowledge. But he was convinced before beginning that such was impossible in any absolute sense; he was also convinced that the work was worthwhile, however, for his "trouble" would be "well spent if it produced no other result than the recognition that the task was impossible."⁴⁹ And Collingwood knew why it was impossible. The reason was embodied in the very conception of history which had given birth to his philosophical system. It is also to be found in his justification of the study of history,⁵⁰ a justification which fundamentally follows from his basic conception. For he saw history as the "self-knowledge of mind", and a philosophy of the "forms of experience"⁵¹ as the only worthwhile philosophy. To know history is to know the history of the thoughts which gave rise to the physical details, and thus the history of the absolute mind.

The absolute mind, then, must be an historical fact, not a generalization...the mind of which we are speaking is an absolute fact, one of which there can never in anybody's mind be any doubt. That is to say, it must at least be the mind of each one of us, for each his own particular mindit is obviously a product of society, and

⁴⁹ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, p. 306.

⁵⁰ Cf. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p.10.

⁵¹ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, p. 9.

conversely the society I know is the product of my mind, as thinking it according to its lights. The absolute mind, then, unites the differences of my mind and other people's, but not as the abstract universal unites. The absolute mind is an historical whole of which mine is a part.⁵²

It follows, therefore, that because we exist as living beings, we cannot halt our experience at any point, and still retain the privilege of stepping outside it and estimating its worth or systematising its completeness. Our very act of thinking upon it would be adding to its being, and, in addition, modifying the whole. And because knowledge is experience of the mind, it must be lived, not studied.

Therefore

there is and can be no map of knowledge, for a map means an abstract of the main features of a country, laid before the traveller in advance of his experience of the country itself. Now no one can describe life to a person who stands on the threshold of life. The maxims given by age to youth are valueless not because age means nothing by them but because what it means is just its own past life. To youth they are empty words. The life of the spirit cannot be described except by repeating it: an account of it would just be itself.⁵³

The evolutionary concept is to be seen upon every page of Speculum Mentis, and is the most important doctrine for us to bear in mind as we examine the view of history expressed therein. It sums up for us, at this early stage in Collingwood's thought, those various aspects of a philosophical method which he was later to formulate in detail. And the substance through which evolution as a process reveals itself

⁵² Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, pp. 298-99.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 309.

is the metaphysics of western civilization. The absolute presuppositions which have been responsible for European culture taking the course it did are set before us amid the full body of historical evidence which presents their effects.

Man's first efforts in the search for truth were related, begins Collingwood, to that which appealed to his aesthetic sense, in much the same fashion as a child values the beautiful over the deformed. The object which was beautiful was worthy of possession, was true, in a sense. Such a criterion, the mark of the aesthetic consciousness, marked the age of Hellenic civilization. Beauty to the Greek was a quality to be sought after, in art, education, physical activity; the beautiful was linked with perfection, efficiency, harmony. Like the child, however, the Greeks did not question the validity of their criterion. "Should something be valued because it is beautiful?" is a question which simply did not arise. People do not doubt their presuppositions; it never occurs to them to do so. Knowledge would be rendered meaningless if they did. And when they finally do begin to question them, as inevitably happens, it is an indication that presuppositions of a slightly different kind are beginning to take shape. These new presuppositions exist only implicitly at first, but as soon as they become powerful enough to influence the questioning activity of a people, they become explicit, and

force the former absolute presuppositions to become relative presuppositions. At the precise moment when the value of the beautiful began to be questioned, it ceased to exist as an absolute presupposition. It had been replaced, Collingwood points out, by the postulation of a religious symbol as the explanation of all reality. The religious consciousness had blossomed out in the development of the absolute mind.

This process of going behind the hypothesis is the true method of metaphysics, and more than one thinker of the past realized its significance. Plato lived at a time when one absolute presupposition was giving way to another, when the very nature of all judgments was being questioned by the Sophists. In the Republic he caught a glimpse of what was happening, and in the method of dialectic placed his finger upon the pulse of the method which two thousand years of philosophy has not yet succeeded in fully discovering. The most significant element he discussed was the "removing of hypotheses" as inquiry proceeds. By this he meant "causing the non-supposal of what had been supposed." 54

The religious consciousness was the characteristic feature of the Medieval Ages, and was responsible for what historians have described as the medieval unity of mind. No matter what one wished to do, it could be done with a feeling that a purpose existed for it. Today there is a difference.

⁵⁴ Collingwood, Metaphysics, p. 158.

One wishes to be an artist, but there is nothing for him to do as an artist except to paint pictures that nobody wants. Another wishes to devote his life to religion or philosophy, and he can only preach sermons to which no one will listen or write books that no one will buy. In the middle ages the first would have worked happily at missals or churches, the second would have passed life in prayer and meditation, the third would have helped in some nascent university to create that medieval logic which is still the background of all our speech and thought. This fact is so obvious that some of our social physicians are all for reverting to a medieval institutionalism and entrusting our welfare to a system of guilds or a great international Catholic church or the like, thinking that our individualism is the root of our troubles. This is an error. Individualism is a symptom, not a cause; and the middle ages enjoyed that degree of happiness and success that was theirs, not because of their institutionalism, but because of something they possessed which made institutionalism workable. ⁵⁵

The "something which made institutionalism workable" was the special absolute presupposition of the time. In those days the church was held to be of supreme value. "God" was a symbol which was thought to be reality, conceived as spirit. Thought was still imagination, had yet to become explicit as rational thought. The truth of the religious symbol was, therefore, never questioned. It did not occur to anyone to question it; such was accepted by all, and life was integrated about the church.

In the period of the Renaissance, however, the breakdown came. Man began to go behind his postulates, began to think about it. What rendered it valid? Of what was it composed?

⁵⁵ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, p. 26.

Observation and the general growth of knowledge had brought more facts to the surface, and rational thought led to division and classification. The idea of systems arose, and gradually the scientific consciousness succeeded the religious. In the former the mind was accustomed to regard the unity of God as standing in perfectly self-contained independence over against the reality of observed facts. Abstractions were personified; the divine spirit was thought to invest all things, and so the supremacy of God as the final authority was complete. But in turning to science, the mind moves from the life of imagination to the life of thought, and ceases to personify abstractions.⁵⁶ This attitude is readily observable in the tremendous swing to an impartial concern for scientific facts which marked European thought from the time of Galileo onwards. Such facts were henceforth to be considered for their own value, apart from any connection with the religious or the life of the spirit.

But in this self-reformation the mind did not go far enough. It was the nineteenth century before the scientific consciousness gave way to the historical consciousness, and the mind began to stop abstracting facts. To abstract is to consider separately things that are inseparable; to think of the universal, for instance, without reflecting that it is merely the universal of its particulars, and to assume that one can isolate it in thought and study it in this

⁵⁶ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, p. 159.

isolation. But one cannot abstract without falsifying. The evolution of the historical consciousness, therefore, was another advance in method, as well as a change in the absolute presuppositions of a culture. Mankind, in his interpretation of facts, began to see each one as naturally and essentially related to all the rest. The tendency to "particularization" was replaced by that of "individualization". A startling example of Collingwood's position in this regard is that no histories, in the scientific and evolutionary sense in which we know them today, were produced until the nineteenth century. Man had not thought in such terms before.

But the full realization of this conception paved the way for the collapse of the historical consciousness. Man finally began to conceive that he was an essential part of the process, and, if every new discovery and activity affected the meaning of the whole, then no absolute interpretation would ever be possible.

...the realization that history or perception is an activity which affects its own object in such a way that the hope of discovering was eigentlich geschehen ist is foredoomed to failure, is the breakdown of history, its collapse before an historical scepticism to which there is no answer.⁵⁷

The philosophical consciousness is thus the inevitable result. To think philosophically, however, is not to exclude the other aspects which are taken up into it. That period in the development of the mind in which the aesthetic consciousness

⁵⁷ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, p. 246.

was dominant was not one in which the others were excluded. In every stage, all the forms are there; they are repeated, however, on higher and higher levels as one and then another becomes supreme. And to say that the twentieth century has ushered in the reign of philosophy is to say that we are finally brought face to face with the problem of method itself. Kant, long ago in The Critique discovered that method and metaphysics could not be separated, that one was essential to the other, and both formed the proper subject matter of philosophy.⁵⁸ The objective viewpoint, the tendency to set man and his mind apart from the world and to begin the search for truth by a consideration of the "great outside," which was so impressive in its material vastness, had finally given way to a realization that method itself was "part and parcel" of the very goal of the quest. Thought had returned upon itself, had ceased to contemplate the external object and had begun to study the process by which it came to be aware of such an object; thought had become self-conscious. This is one definition of philosophy. A second is that it is the self-liberation of thought from all uncriticized assumptions, the determined effort to believe nothing except on firm and valid grounds, the pursuit of the ideal of knowledge as rational through and through. The first definition defines philosophy by reference to its object; the second by reference to its method.⁵⁹ The first

⁵⁸ Cf. *Supra*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Collingwood, Speculum Mentis, p. 247.

opens the door for us to Collingwood's conception of philosophical method; the second places us upon the threshold leading to that door, comprised of two basic steps: a "question-and-answer" logic, developed by Collingwood, and the pragmatic "theory of inquiry", propounded by John Dewey and the devotees of the pragmatic method in philosophy.

CHAPTER IV
TWO THEORIES OF LOGIC

We have seen how Collingwood's experience as a philosopher and a historian had gradually led him to a rejection of "propositional" logic, and to the belief that the only true method of inquiry was through a medium or complex consisting of questions and answers. It is useless, he argued, to attempt to find answers to questions which do not arise in the course of one's experience; and, from the opposite side, he realized that most questions do legitimately arise from something, and that every statement or proposition we make is made as the answer to some question. Our attention, then, should not be devoted to a consideration of the form of the proposition and its absolute truth or falsity, but to an attempt to discover what question gave rise to it, for only in relation to this question can the truth of the proposition be determined.

Collingwood sets forth three general conditions concerning the question-answer complex. First, "each question and each answer in a given complex had to be relevant or appropriate, had to 'belong' both to the whole and to the place it occupied in the whole."⁶⁰ Secondly, "each question had to 'arise';

there must be that about it whose absence we condemn when we

⁶⁰ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 30.

refuse to answer a question on the ground that it 'doesn't arise'. Finally, "each answer must be the 'right' answer to the question it professes to answer.

The last mentioned condition gives rise to a discussion of that question which seems to lie behind all philosophies, and which is the main concern of the present essay, the question: "What is truth?" Collingwood distinguishes between a "right" answer and a "true" answer. The "right" answer, he maintains, is "the answer which enables us to get ahead with the process of questioning and answering".⁶¹ The right answer to a question may therefore be false. If one is following a "false scent" in order to prove a point (method of reductio ad absurdum), or simply through an unawareness that one's premises are false, the right answer, the one which logically follows, is usually false. When a proposition is called "true", on the other hand, it implies four things:

- (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 Collingwood's terminology it "arises";
- (d) the proposition is the "right" answer to that question.

⁶¹ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 30.

As Collingwood proceeds to point out, the whole complex hangs upon the basic question the proposition was intended to answer. Only when this question is known can we proceed to stamp the proposition as true or false. And even if a proposition is true, it can be made to appear false by assuming it to be the answer to a question to which it would be the wrong answer; similarly, a significant proposition would seem to be meaningless if a person convinced himself that it was intended as the answer to a question which it fails to answer at all, rightly or wrongly. We must, therefore, go behind all propositions to the questions which gave rise to them, and such a process is historical. Again we see the inseparable link between philosophy and history. Was Plato right or was Hobbes right in proposing a theory of the state? If we consider the questions they were proposing to answer, we may see that both were right. This is the only true method of studying the past. It is senseless to compare Plato with Hobbes, and ask "Who is nearer the truth?" for they were moving in different question-answer complexes.

If we now carry our examination a little further, and go behind the complex itself, we might raise a question as to the first condition given by Collingwood in discussing the truth of a proposition. How do we know when a complex "as a whole is 'true' in the proper sense of the word"? What is our criterion? Collingwood's answer would be, we think, that a complex is "true" if it arises as a problem in our experience.

If my car stops on the road the question arises, "what is the trouble?", and we have the basis for a complex of inquiry. Such an answer brings us very near to another modern theory of logic, a theory which, we think, Collingwood follows very closely, even though he is unconscious of it. That theory is John Dewey's logic of inquiry, and we shall now consider it in some detail, after which its affinities with Collingwood will be pointed out.

The supremacy of method could well be the title given to the chapter which American pragmatism has written into the history of philosophy. Metaphysics, for it, has fallen into the background and almost the sole content of philosophy has become method itself.

To those who know him by his less technical writings, John Dewey appears as a great moralist and educator.. But his basic doctrines and most fundamental contributions have been in the field of logic. Logic has been his primary intellectual interest for more than forty years. It is safe to predict that his place in the history of science -- broadly conceived -- will depend upon the influence his conception of logic as the theory of inquiry will exercise upon subsequent generations.⁶²

In Dewey's experience we can detect a similarity to that of Collingwood. He too, early in life, felt a growing distaste of traditional logic and the need for an "inquiry-context" to be placed at the centre of our principles of reasoning. The purpose behind our actions, ^{and} therefore our thoughts, is what lends meaning to them, and we should

⁶² Sidney Hook, John Dewey, An Intellectual Portrait (New York: John Day Co., 1939), p. 88.

therefore concentrate upon the relationship of logic to our daily experience. In speaking of the types of older epistemological theory, he writes:

...each type represents a selective extraction of some conditions and some factors out of the actual pattern of controlled inquiry....this borrowing is what gives them their plausibility and appeal, while the source of their invalidity is arbitrary isolation of the elements selected from the inquiry context in which they function. They will not be criticized, then, on the ground that they violate all conditions of inquiry as means of obtaining knowledge, but on the ground that the selections are so one-sided as to ignore and thereby virtually deny other conditions which give those that are selected their cognitive force and which also prescribe the limits under which the selected elements validly apply.⁶³

With the "theory of inquiry" as propounded by Dewey, man's quest for truth has completed a complete revolution in method. Dewey insists that we must begin with the "inner", with our own experience, with problems as they arise in the course of living, and begin our questionings from what we know of the world as we have experienced it. In the language of Collingwood, Dewey would say that questions which concern the ultimate nature of the universe simply do not arise; it is senseless to ask them. The focussing of attention upon the individual also yields us a basic insight into the new logic, and it is this: the realization that thinking makes a difference.⁶⁴ The world, in so far as we know it, is man's world, and he has the power to change it (again, as far as he is concerned) in the process of knowing it.

⁶³ John Dewey, op. cit., p. 514.

⁶⁴ Sidney Hook, op. cit., p. 89.

Let us begin by considering ideas. For Dewey an idea is a plan of action.⁶⁵ It originates in our minds only because we are faced with a problem, and are forced to some responding action. Also, an idea always originates in an "existential inquiry" pattern, i.e., nature and mind are always together, and an idea is a product of their interaction.

Thought is as much an inquiry into the microscopic and stable conditions of nature, which have been settled in nature before they have been settled in us, as thought is a reconstruction of gross experience.⁶⁶

And because ideas arise in the existential pattern, the results which determine their nature, or the actions which follow from them, also are to be seen in the complete situation, and not in any one part of it, abstracted from the whole. That is to say, the nature of an idea is not to be determined by merely thinking about it; rather, its value is to be determined by observing the kind of action it leads to.

Ideas, therefore, never create what they act upon although a new creation may be the consequence of their action. When there is no relevant specifiable difference in the kind of actions that follow from entertaining two ideas, the ideas are logically one and the same, even though they sound different; when specifiable differences are observable, ideas are logically different, even when they sound alike.⁶⁷

The questions of the relation of thought to reality is thus accepted as central by the pragmatist, and he endeavors

⁶⁵ Sidney Hook, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁶⁶ Donald A. Piatt, "Dewey's Logical Theory", John Dewey, ed. Paul A. Schilpp in *Library of Living Philosophers* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1939), p. 109.

⁶⁷ Sidney Hook, *loc. cit.*

to answer it in the operational and situational context through which the questions obtains intelligible meaning and is capable of being answered.⁶⁸ The common sense world in which people act, therefore, forms the starting point for Dewey, and here we detect an affinity with Collingwood. The latter, too, thought that there would be no such thing as inquiry apart from a world of human experience which gave rise to problems; actual and necessary presuppositions are prerequisite for inquiry.

We thus have ideas as plans of action arising out of our contact with the common sense world. But all plans are relevant to some problem, and, in the case of an idea, the question arises: "What problem?" The answer depends upon "the particular difficulties out of which problems arise and the particular purposes which are being frustrated by the difficulties."⁶⁹

This concentration upon the particular problem at hand also forms the keystone in Collingwood's logic. If his car, for instance, fails to climb a steep hill, the problem which arises for him concerns the cause of the stoppage. A passerby may say that it is because the top of the hill is farther from the earth's centre than the bottom. This proposition, however, is meaningless, for it does not aid in solving the problem. A mechanic might lift up the hood, examine the motor, and notice that only three cylinders were ~~working~~

⁶⁸ Piatt, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁶⁹ Hook, *op. cit.*, p. 53-4.

This would be a relevant answer to the question, and the right answer, for it would enable the motorist to remedy the trouble and proceed with his journey.

In taking such a view Collingwood is definitely pragmatic. The fundamental ^{critterion} of truth for Dewey is whether or not a proposition "works", or is successful. If a theory or an hypothesis succeeds in explaining phenomena, or in solving problems which have arisen, it is true; if it fails, it is false. Such a criterion is a direct result of the intrusion of scientific method into philosophy. Inseparately linked with it is another element which we also find in Collingwood, and that is the idea of continuity or progress. As well as being the answer which "works", a statement, if it is to be true, must lead to further inquiry; it must allow us to proceed with the process of discovery. Dewey stresses this element so much that the term "warranted assertibility" is used instead of "truth". The statement that a proposition is true means only that it warrants further assertion, or is coherent with a system of reasoning within the existential situation. Such a system is continuous in the sense that further inquiry follows naturally from the assertion of the proposition. Collingwood has propounded a similar theory. We have seen that the fourth of his conditions for a proposition to be true is that it must be the right answer,⁷⁰ and the right answer is, for him, the one which enables us to "get ahead"

⁷⁰ Supra, p. 50.

with the process of questioning and answering. Both philosophies, therefore, recognize the prime role played by the "existential situation", and the necessity of not abstracting the pattern of inquiry from it.

Pragmatism recognizes the mind-matter dualism in the world, a recognition which is really implied in the positing of the existential situation as the basis for the pattern of inquiry. But what the epistemological dualist mistakes usually for a dualism of mind and nature as independent substances, the pragmatist acknowledges as a dualism within the world.⁷² The situation exists; it must not be denied importance in determining judgment. But the individual, or the mind, also exists as a determining factor, and it takes from the situation data depending upon biological, psychological, and cultural conditions. Suppose, for example, an animal is resting in the grass and it scents another animal upon which it usually preys. The former may continue resting and take little note of the presence of its prey. But if it is hungry, the data taken from the situation may be entirely different.

The particular sensory excitation occurs, but it is coordinated with a larger number of other organic processes -- those of its digestive and circulatory organs and its neuro-muscular system, autonomic, proprioceptor and central. This coordination, which is a state of the total organism, constitutes a stimulus. The difference between this condition (whatever name it be called by) and a specific sensory excitation, is enormous.⁷³

⁷¹ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 30.

⁷² Piatt, op. cit., p. 114.

⁷³ Dewey, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

This example illustrates a biological influence. The example of the car from Collingwood reveals a psychological influence, for all his actions were guided or influenced by the problem arising from the stopping of the vehicle. The data which one takes from a situation may vary greatly, therefore, from time to time.

For the realist, any experience is knowledge; for the pragmatist there must be a problem which is capable of being solved through the transformation of the situation due to inquiry.

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is ~~so~~ determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.⁷⁴

Things, therefore, acquired through immediate experience are not affairs of knowledge because there can be no question about their occurrence for thought to raise, no doubt that they exist as they appear.

Experience is not a knowing experience save as there is in the existential situation experienced something dubious or problematic, calling for judgment about and hence inquiry into the meaning (not the existence) of the situation. Inquiry passes into knowledge or rather warranted assertion when inference from features of the situation taken as data or signs is actively followed out to other existential occurrences signified, in such a way that the initial dubious situation becomes reconstituted and settled. Only relative to other natural events is the initial perceived situation cognitive or problematic.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Bertrand Russell, "Dewey's New Logic", John Dewey, ed Schilpp, op. cit.,

⁷⁵ Piatt, op. cit., p. 117.

p. 143.

At this point Russell raises an objection. He points out that no criterion is given for measuring the extent of the situation. The problem which gives rise to inquiry has to do with a situation which is defined as "a qualified existential whole which is unique". But how large must it be to fulfil this condition? Apparently the pragmatist is forced to admit the whole universe, which leads to Bradley's conception that every judgment qualifies reality as a whole. Russell's realism, however, is confusing the issue. Dewey, in insisting upon the centrality in the pattern of inquiry of the existential matrix implies that the "largeness" of the situation is to be determined by the truth we are seeking for; the effect we desire determines the data we take. Collingwood is one with Dewey here, and we may take an illustration from the former to reveal the latter's meaning. If a car stops on a hillside, the "situation" includes only those aspects of the trouble which, if "inquired" into, or successfully investigated, will yield to the motorist the power of starting the motor again. It seems to us that Russell has forgotten that all experience is not knowledge for Dewey, as it is for the realist.

The organic unity which exists between the question and the answer, the problem and the solution in the theory of inquiry leads directly to another basic difference between it and traditional logic. Logical forms are not imposed

upon propositions from without; rather "all logical forms", with their characteristic properties, arise within the operation of inquiry and are concerned with the control of inquiry so that it may yield warranted assertions."⁷⁶ Pragmatism thus does not reject logical principles, but merely reconceives their origin in terms of Pierce's guiding or leading principles. The method is regarded as supreme, and the way of doing a thing becomes indispensable to what is done.⁷⁷ This implies that logic is a progressive discipline, and that its subject matter is determined operationally. Logical forms are generalizations of the nature of the means which must be employed if assertibility is to be attained as an end. This, in turn, implies that logic is a naturalistic theory, and a social discipline; language becomes the "dress" of thought, not that without which "thought" cannot be. Finally, Dewey's position renders logic autonomous, inasmuch as it doesn't rest upon a metaphysics or an epistemology; it is sufficient in itself.

Let us now consider the pragmatic pattern of inquiry⁷⁸ and point out its close resemblance to Collingwood's logic of question and answer. The first step is to begin with a specific situation which is objectively determinate, and the second proceeds to the discovery of what constitutes the problem. So far we have merely been discovering the location of the trouble, or determining, as Collingwood would say,

⁷⁶ Dewey, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁸ Cf. Hook, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

what question has arisen. As a third step, the pragmatist entertains relevant ideas as possible ways of solving the problem; Collingwood, too, proceeds to consider the relevant possibilities. Fourthly, the pragmatist formulates the entertained hypothesis, formulated in a proposition, into a set of equivalent propositions and by a process of reasoning "tracks down" the relevant idea. The experiment is then performed; the idea is tested, and if successful, it is true. Then, as a final step, the difficulties are settled out of which the problem has arisen. This again is similar to the manner in which Collingwood remedies the trouble after "hitting upon" the relevant question. With both theories, the fact that thinking makes a difference is recognized as fundamental. Inquiry should exist in order to serve some purpose. For both this purpose is the solution of the difficulties which arise in human experience. In addition, for Collingwood, we have seen that it is to gain a self-knowledge of mind in the belief that such knowledge is essential to the full realization of our capabilities.

CHAPTER V

"PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD"

It may be that Collingwood may never stand in the list of great and proven philosophers, and that the mists of time may engulf his memory before his contribution to the method of inquiry has been fully recognized. It may be, too, that the vast majority of his writings are destined to be justly forgotten, for the earlier ones were mainly aids to his own thinking, and the later ones were the product of a man whose powers were being sapped by ill health. One work, however, written just before his powers began to fail, stands supreme as his greatest and is one which promises to take its place as a lasting contribution to philosophical theory. That work is Philosophical Method, published in 1933. It represents the culmination of the development of a method in the author's mind, and represents his position more than in any other single work. The chief thing Collingwood was to give to philosophy was a method, and this is his own full statement of it. Method seemed to be of first importance to him always, and it seems as if the Gods had been kind in allowing him to produce his greatest work before illness began to shorten his life. Professor T.M.Knox has called Philosophical Method a "philosophical classic", and says:

In The Idea of Nature Collingwood laid down his his own test for detecting the greatness of a philosopher. The grand manner in philosophy 'is the mark of a mind which has its philosophical material properly controlled and digested. It is thus based on width and steadiness of outlook upon its subject-matter;...it is marked by calmness of temper and candour of statement, no difficulties being concealed and nothing set down in malice or passion. All great philosophers have this calmness of mind, all passion spent by the time their vision is clear, and they write as if they saw things from a mountain-top. That is the tone which distinguishes a great philosopher; a writer who lacks it may or may not be worth reading, but he certainly falls short of greatness.' Judged by this test there is only one book of Collingwood's which could be called great, namely the Essay on Philosophical Method, though it must be added that the same philosophical temper is to be found in most of The Idea of Nature and The Idea of History....I was fortified in it (this opinion) by seeing a letter about the book from Alexander to Collingwood and, some years later, by a talk with Joachim, who described the Essay as a philosophical work 'of the first order'.⁷⁹

Collingwood's own description of his work is simple and straight-forward:

By this time I had in my head a great deal which I believed the public would value; and the only way of giving it to the public was by writing books. On this, therefore, I decided to spend my leisure; and planned a series, to begin with An Essay on Philosophical Method. This I wrote during a long illness in 1932. It is my best book in matter; in style, I may call it my only book, for it is the only one I ever had the time to finish as well as I knew how, instead of leaving it in a more or less rough state.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ T.M. Knox, Preface to Collingwood, Idea of History, op. cit., p. xx.
⁸⁰ Collingwood, Autobiography, p. 80.

Philosophy, in being concerned with truth as such, and this or that truth, is concerned with something which is universal. It thus resembles science, for science⁸¹ also deals with universal laws and concepts. This would perhaps validate the extension of scientific method to philosophy, which, as we have seen, so dominates the pragmatist school. But Collingwood, even though the originator of a logic which bears a close relationship to that of Dewey, is far from being an advocate of scientific method. It is, in fact, upon a distinction between the subject matter of science and philosophy and the methods peculiar to the investigation of each that the chief characteristics of his philosophical method rest.

To begin with, traditional logic regards the concept as uniting a number of different things into a class. The division is clear-cut and well-defined, being based upon two distinct kinds of plurality, that of individual instances and that of specific differentiation. The class of "trees" for example, unites all those objects that have the essential properties of a tree; consideration of specific differentiations would then lead to a further division into various kinds of trees, such as oak, elm, maple, etc. In the former the concept is general, and in the latter it is generic.⁸² Such a treatment suffices in the realm of exact science, but in philosophy it fails, claims Collingwood. The concepts of

⁸¹ Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 26.

⁸² Ibid., p. 28.

philosophy are of a different nature. "The specific classes of a philosophical genus do not exclude one another, they overlap one another. This overlap is not exceptional, it is normal; and it is not negligible in extent, it may reach formidable dimensions."⁸³ The classificatory system, therefore, cannot strictly be applied to a subject matter which refuses absolute division. Aristotle long ago showed that goodness was a concept which did not fit into the system of classification.

Examples are to be found everywhere. Judgments, for instance, have been classified as affirmative and negative, upon the assumption that the two classes are mutually exclusive. Such an assumption is false, however, for all negative judgments contain an affirmative element, and all affirmative judgments a negative element.

If I say that my watch has stopped, I both affirm that its mechanism is at rest and deny that it is in motion; but this is not a compound statement made up of one affirmative and one negative proposition; I am making one statement, not two, and that statement is both the affirmation of one thing and the denial of its opposite.

The theory of overlapping concepts is carried into the fields of logic⁸⁵ and of ethics⁸⁶ as well, and in both it is seen that an overlapping is present.

In assuming that classes overlap, however, there are dangers which must be avoided. We may conceive of the

⁸³ Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

overlapping as having a definite margin beyond which it fails to spread. This is to fall into the fallacy of precarious margins, for "once the overlap is admitted in principle, there is no ground for assuming that it will stop at any particular point."⁸⁷ Then again, the recognition of this principle may lead to the fallacy of identified coincidents, in that all concepts may be conceived of as being the same, when they are really different.⁸⁸

The nature of the subject matter of philosophy, therefore, necessitates the realization that it cannot be conceived as an aggregate of parts nor as admitting the application of a classificatory system; the elements of an object of philosophical thought cannot be conceived of as separable. Implied, too, is a continuous revision of method.

A principle of method is necessarily provisional. To commit oneself to it at the beginning of one's inquiries, as a cast-iron rule to be followed, come what may, in every possible variety of problem and subject-matter, would be foreign to the whole spirit of philosophical thinking. Thinking philosophically, whatever else it means, means constantly revising one's starting-point in the light of one's conclusions and never allowing oneself to be controlled by any cast-iron rule whatever.⁸⁹

In exact science we often notice a double change occurring in the subject matter of our investigation. If we apply heat to ice, the result is a change in temperature and a change from a solid to a liquid; a change in both degree and kind has been effected. Systems which reveal this

⁸⁷ Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 48.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

characteristic Collingwood calls a "scale of forms".⁹⁰ Such a peculiar double characteristic forms a property of philosophical concepts as well, but not in the same fashion as in the above example. In the non-philosophical instance the variable (the temperature) was something extraneous to the generic essence (the water); in a "philosophical scale of forms, the variable is identified with the generic essence itself."⁹¹ A difficulty which seems to rise is that the lower forms would not be species of the genus at all, except in a very low degree. Does the philosophical scale of forms, then, explain the overlap of classes? The answer is yes, if the species are opposites; no, if they are distincts. The former would imply a zero and infinity ends of the scale. An objection to this as a criterion is the fact that a non-philosophical scale of forms has the same characteristic. Further investigation reveals, states Collingwood, that in philosophical concepts opposition and distinction combine to form a peculiar type of double characteristic -- thus only one set of differences exists. The difficulty concerning the philosophical scale of forms is thus removed.

To sum up. Differences of degree and differences of kind, which in non-philosophical thought can be disentangled from one another, are in philosophy fused into a new type of difference uniting the characteristics of both. Distinction and opposition, which in non-philosophical thought are two mutually exclusive kinds of

⁹⁰ Collingwood, Philosophical Method., p. 57.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

relation, in philosophy coalesce into one, so that what seems at first sight a mere opposition -- the relation, that is, between a term and its own absence -- turns out to be also a distinction between two terms and vice versa.⁹²

Let us apply this to the concept of goodness. An act which possesses a low degree and kind of goodness is just as much an act as one which possesses a higher degree and kind of goodness. But it is not merely a low type of goodness; it is bad, and the opposite of good. We must also remember that, bad as the act is, there is a certain amount of goodness in it, that it is good within its own special limits. In this sense, it is distinct from the higher form of goodness. We thus have both opposition and distinction involved in the philosophical concept.

The overlap of classes in the scale gives rise to one of the most significant doctrines of Collingwood's philosophical method. This is the conception that each term in the scale sums up the whole scale to that point.⁹³ The lower is always included in the higher. This is an outgrowth of his theory of incapsulation in history, is another indication that Collingwood is applying the historical method to philosophy. The negative element which is left behind in the lower form is the affirmation that it is a full answer; the development to the higher form reveals that there exists something which wasn't taken account of. The higher overlaps the lower

⁹² Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 76.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 89.

because it includes the positive content of the lower as a constituent element within itself; the lower overlaps the higher in that it adopts part of the positive content of the higher, while rejecting another part -- for it, the new which the higher has added is simply superfluous and unnecessary. The scale of forms reveals to us more clearly what is meant by an overlap of classes.

The overlap consists in this, that the lower is contained in the higher, the higher transcending the lower and adding to it something new, whereas the lower partially coincides with the higher, but differs from it in rejecting this increment. Thus the overlap is essentially not, as we took it to be in our first rough survey of the ground, an overlap of extension between classes, but an overlap of intension between concepts, each in its degree a specification of their generic essence, but each embodying it more adequately than the one below.⁹⁴

Collingwood proceeds to consider the major implications of his theory of philosophical method and the view of philosophical subject matter contained therein. The first of these is the problem of definition. To define means to fix limits, not in the sense of making absolutely definite what was absolutely indefinite but in making more definite what was to some extent definite already. In exact science, absolute definition is possible. The essence of a thing is capable of being sharply cut off from its properties, and an equally sharp line is drawn between knowing and not knowing. In philosophy, however, no such distinction is possible.

⁹⁴ Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 91.

The properties of a concept are the elements which constitute its essence, and a definition must be the whole exposition of the concept. "Essence and property are two species of attribute, and definitions and theorems are two corresponding species of exposition".⁹⁵ There is also no absolute difference between knowing and not knowing a philosophical concept; we must distinguish between knowing better and knowing worse instead of knowing and not knowing. We see, therefore, that definition in philosophy resembles description in empirical science.

The implications for philosophical judgment affect both relations of quality and quantity. In respect of the former, we find two principles, following from the two divisions of quality which are traditionally made -- affirmative and negative. The first is the principle of concrete negation, the rule that every negation implies an affirmation. To neglect this is to commit the fallacy of abstract negation. Similarly the rule that every affirmation contains a denial is called the principle of concrete affirmation, and following from it is a corresponding fallacy of abstract affirmation. If, for example, I say that my pen has ceased to write, I am denying that it continues to write. At the same time, however, I am affirming that it is out of ink. To neglect the latter would be to commit the fallacy of abstract negation. The affirmation gives point to my denial by indicating exactly

⁹⁵ Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 95.

what it was meant to deny. We note, in this regard, the difference between a philosophical statement and a non-philosophical one. As an example of the latter we might choose: "This chair is brown." Something is being denied here, but no particular error is implied. It is not denied specifically that the chair is blue, green, red, etc.

Thus a non-philosophical judgment, when it affirms, denies indiscriminately all the judgements incompatible with it; a philosophical judgement, when it affirms, picks out some one incompatible judgement, focusses itself on the denial of that, and by this denial comes to focus or define its own precise significance.⁹⁶

In respect of quantity, Collingwood points out that the species universal, particular and singular all naturally overlap in judgments of philosophy. All three forms of structure co-exist, and it is fallacious to consider any one type by itself.

If we pause for a moment to place Collingwood's theory of philosophical method beside Dewey's theory of inquiry, we shall see, as in our consideration of the former's logic of question and answer, marked similarities to the method of pragmatism. The evolutionary conception is, again, an obvious point of resemblance, and is characteristic of both thinkers because it is a natural attribute of any system which finds its roots in a reaction to traditional logic

⁹⁶ Collingwood, Philosophical Method, p. 107.

and the "realist" viewpoint. In neither theory is knowledge conceived of as an absolute something, but rather as an element which grows as the search or the inquiry is carried forward. And the inquiry is made from problems arising out of man's experience, not from abstract generalizations concerning elements outside of experience.

Knowledge has truth value in so far as it leads to further inquiry, to a fuller and more complete conception of what we might call the goal of our search. But the method of that search is historical; the inner must be allowed to develop, as man gradually grows to a fuller knowledge of the universe in which he lives.

In another sense, however, Collingwood differs from Dewey. Those things which form the subject matter of philosophy are not of the same kind as those with which science deals. The scientific method in Dewey has been replaced by the historical method in Collingwood, a step which, in Collingwood's own conception of history, represents an advance. Scientific method involves a theory of classification and definition which cannot be applied to philosophical subject matter, as Collingwood has carefully revealed in the exposition of his philosophical method. But we have seen that in so far as Dewey uses the method of science as a method of inquiry, he makes an "historical" use of it, a fact which serves to keep the pragmatist

within Collingwood's philosophical field.

The important element for our present consideration is the manner in which truth is established, and the conception of that truth; Dewey and Collingwood agree upon the former, for both insist that our starting point is the relevant problem at hand, and the true proposition is that which solves our problem or answers our question by allowing us to proceed with the process. As for the conception of the truth established, however, we can detect a difference. For Dewey the truth value of a proposition depends upon the success which attends its application; his is a philosophy of action in the social environment, and the existential matrix of inquiry is always in the foreground. Collingwood requires that a true proposition be one which enables him "to get ahead with the process of questioning and answering", but, in addition, it must belong to a complex "which is true as a whole". Collingwood never ceases to take cognizance of the fact that absolute pre-suppositions exist, that the metaphysics of the time fulfil a function in determining our problems and the questions which arise. The nature of history, that is, is such that the individual mind is never really separated from the universal of absolute mind.⁹⁷ We might say that Collingwood goes further than Dewey in the acknowledgment of the significance of metaphysics; the former stops short with an

⁹⁷ Supra, pp. 40-41.

immediate application of scientific method and the immediate testing of an hypothesis or a proposition as the determination of its truth value -- he is not concerned with its relationship to any larger whole outside of the coherence established with the individual's process of inquiry.

For Collingwood a proposition is not true if it just "works"; it is essentially related to the problem and the proposition which gave rise to it in the sense in which a higher form on the philosophical scale of forms overlaps a lower form. It must broaden and make fuller and more complete our knowledge; it must represent a change in both degree and kind, in the former in as much as it yields a deeper and more definite conception of the true meaning of a concept, and in the latter in including something which the lower form would reject as irrelevant. A true proposition is, therefore, emergent. It also sums up the earlier process of questioning and answering, so that the thread may be unravelled solely from it. There is no such evolutionary conception in Dewey's logic stretching over the whole pattern of history. For pragmatism, the continuity stops short with the immediate situation; scientific method does not allow for the overlapping of classes, but only for a preceding proposition to "point to," or be logically prior to, a succeeding one. It is in this historical perspective that we find Collingwood's philosophical method reaches beyond the pragmatic use of scientific method in inquiry.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages we have attempted to set forth the conception of philosophical method held by R.G. Collingwood, and to show that it is one essentially linked to modern times, first, as coming in the main stream of a tradition which has seen the source of man's thinking move from the "outer" to the "inner", and secondly, by pointing out its similarities to the method of pragmatism. In turning from the "outer" to the "inner", philosophers have become, apparently, less and less ambitious, and more and more humanistic in their approach to problems. No longer do they take all knowledge for their province, as Bacon proposed; rather, they seem to be concerned about only that which seems of paramount importance for the time. This change, however, is not to be interpreted as a loss of the universal element in philosophy, but only as a recognition of that which is truly universal. For the first two thousand years of recorded history man's total sum of knowledge was so limited that it seemed possible for a single mind to possess it all; the tremendous growth of his knowledge since the Renaissance has erased that illusion, and with its fading man has been thrown back upon himself.

The old method was to begin with the outside, and proceed to know everything; the new method begins with the inside, and proceeds on the assumption that man should come to know only those things which concern him as a human being. Such an approach to the ever-widening sphere of knowledge is humanistic, natural, and above all, practical.

An examination of the subject matter of philosophy will reveal the trend. The central core during the middle ages was man's conception of God. With the rise of science, scientific method and mathematical theory immediately became the centre of attention. The nineteenth century produced the historians and the concept of evolution, and again philosophy reflects the change. Philosophy's subject matter at the present time has to do with science, as in Jeans, Eddington, Russell, and the realists (a reflection of the work being done by the scientists in the fields of relativity and the quantum theory), and with social values, as in Dewey, Hook, and the pragmatists (a reflection of our acute consciousness of clashing social ideologies), as well as other fields. This trend, illustrated more and more fully from the Renaissance onward, is indicative of the growing recognition that to know everything is impossible, and it is best to investigate, instead, that which is of temporary significance and of immediate interest to man.

If we examine the trend more closely, however, we shall

see something else emerging, something which does seem to be of universal and permanent import. That something is method, and even though the subject matter of philosophy may change, the method of approach to it, no matter whether the subject is the idea of God, the theory of relativity, or a plan for a better society, remains distinctly something of philosophical concern. It is undoubtedly true that the scope of human knowledge has become too vast for a single individual, or even a generation, to encompass; it is also true, however, that the discovery and mastery of a method, to serve as a guide to conduct and to study in all spheres of life, is essentially not beyond our grasp. To the problem of method, then, philosophy has legitimately turned.

We see evidence everywhere of the significance of method in contemporary philosophy. We see it in the razor-edge minds of those writers who have so keenly and so precisely revealed the inadequacies of idealism, such as G.E. Moore and C.D. Broad. Through the use of "cold logic" they have succeeded, from that standpoint, in refuting idealism, and the latter has given us, in addition, a constructive conception of method in discovery.⁹⁸ We also see the concern for method in the entire school of the pragmatists, where scientific method has been adopted, on the ground that its productivity is a deserving criterion. And with the growing significance of method has come a tendency, which we have already noted

⁹⁸ C.D. Broad, The Mind and Its Place in Nature (Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1925), pp. 6-7.

in Collingwood, to not neglect the individual, to remember always that it is a person who thinks and who must use the method. Dr. Susan Stebbing, in one of her last books, has indicated a recognition of the trend which we discovered to be supreme in Collingwood. She writes:

To think logically is to think relevantly to the purpose that initiated the thinking; all effective thinking is directed to an end. To neglect relevant considerations would entail failure to achieve that end.⁹⁹

and proceeds to recognize the importance of the one who thinks:

It is, we need to remember, persons who think, not purely rational spirits.¹⁰⁰

and again:

...we need to remember that it is persons who think, and, therefore, persons who argue. I think, not something thinks in me. My intellect does not function apart from the rest of my personality.¹⁰¹

It may be, as we glance back over the history of philosophy, that we perceive Collingwood to be found on the right path. We would be doing him an injustice, however, to assume that he has given a complete conception of a method, or even that he thought he had done so. Philosophical Method has a dogmatic ring, but, as one who knew him well sees fit to remind us, "the real Collingwood was not like that."¹⁰² Collingwood has only made another contribution to the search which belongs to the very nature of man. And already destructive criticism has been levelled at his work. Professor Ducasse¹⁰³

⁹⁹ L. Susan Stebbing, Thinking To Some Purpose (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1939), p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰² R. M. Knox, Preface to Idea of History, op. cit., p. xviii.

¹⁰³ C. J. Ducasse, Philosophy as a Science (New York: Oskar Prest, 1941), pp. 31-48.

has come forward to point out many "telling" inadequacies; and even though he brings a scientific frame of mind to bear upon the subject, and, we think, fails to catch the spirit -- and, perhaps, the fundamental purpose -- of Collingwood, his objections are not such as can be lightly brushed aside. But if method is to remain the core of philosophy, and we feel that it justly may, it is essential that such criticisms as Professor Ducasse's come forward; it is only through work of this sort that progress is achieved.

And so the goal of truth still shines afar, beckoning us onward. The method philosophers have followed in its search has varied from age to age, from individual to individual. At times man's attention has been caught by some one aspect of truth's form -- by the ideal state, by the mathematical formulae of Newton and Leibnitz, by the rolling planets above, or by the welcoming prospect of material comfort below -- but through it all he has moved; yet even today he must admit that, for all he knows, the end of his search is as far off as ever.

But, as human beings, we are destined to proceed with a search which has become a very part of us. Milton recognized its presence, in the midst of the turmoil wrought by the clash of religious ideas and the fury of civil war, when he wrote, in that glorious defence of freedom of unlicensed

printing, Areopagitica:

To be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal, and proportionall) this is the golden rule in Theology as well as in Arithmetick, and makes up the best harmony...¹⁰⁴

Because the goal we seek and its search belong to man as such, we must remember that, even though Truth is surrounded by an atmosphere of abstraction and far-flung idealism, philosophy must always be concerned with things human and earthly. Man, it is true, is gifted with the power of vision and of reason, which elevate him above the biological; but he is also a material being, and lives in a material world. The true purpose of philosophy, then, must be to bridge the gap, to link the divine with the human, to make idealism a working idealism. And it is in times of social chaos, when opinions clash in every sphere of thought, and racial, national, and class pride and prejudice become paramount that the need for clear philosophic thought is greatest. Such a time is our own, and, today, it is essential that we keep the task of philosophy constantly before us.

It is the business of philosophy to help us: to tell us about the intellectual basis for the moral law and its sanctions; how far our actions must be regarded as determined by external causes, and how far by causes within ourselves, within our own personal or social responsibility; the nature of what we call Evil, its causes, and the possible remedies;

¹⁰⁴ John Milton, "Areopagitica", Complete Poetry and Selected Prose (New York: The Modern Library, 1942), p. 713.

whether our general attitude towards the present human situation should be one of pessimism and detachment, or of conscious resistance to wrong tendencies and energetic support for right ones. The age is crying out for serious constructive philosophic thought.¹⁰⁵

That philosophic thought may be primarily to serve those who lead, as Field-Marshal Smuts has put it:

Philosophy has an opportunity and a platform, as seldom before, to teach sanity, to appeal to reason, to point to fundamentals, and to steady us in this critical time. Philosophy has of necessity a limited appeal; it cannot lead the world at large; but it may help to guide and lead the leaders who will be responsible for conducting us to the more settled future.¹⁰⁶

or, in a more general sense, to direct human interests and responsibilities, as Benedetto Croce has written:

The thing of most importance for philosophy is to reject all theories based on political or class considerations, and to maintain, in all circumstances, her characteristic quality of universal and undivided humanism.¹⁰⁷

and Jacques Maritain:

The present state of mankind makes the task of philosophical reason more necessary -- and more difficult -- than ever. Seeking and serving truth for the sake of truth, philosophers thereby serve the highest interests of the human community.¹⁰⁸

But no matter which aspect is emphasized, it is the duty of philosophy to continue her golden path, at times rising to heights of enthusiasm and discovery, at times moving quietly in the valleys of slower progress, but ever following the ideal which Plato long ago set before her, the ideal of Truth embodied in the Idea of the Good.

¹⁰⁵ Lord Samuel, "British Philosophy and the World Situation", The Listener (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, Jan. 1., 1948), Vol. xxxix, No. 988, p. 22.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Samuel, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

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