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# All thought exists for the sake of action

The historical and philosophical relations between R.G.  
 Collingwood and classical pragmatism

## **Proefschrift**

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de  
 Rijksuniversiteit Groningen  
 op gezag van de  
 rector magnificus prof. dr. C. Wijmenga  
 en volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties.

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door

**Ymke Braaksma**

geboren op 18 september 1992  
 te Leeuwarden

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Prof. dr. L.W. Nauta

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“Whitehead has escaped from the stage of thinking that the great philosophers were all wrong into the stage of seeing that they were all right; and he has achieved this, not by philosophical erudition, followed by an attempt at original thought, but by thinking for himself first and studying the great philosophers afterwards.”

– R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 170.

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## Introduction

In 1938, after suffering a devastating stroke and, as a result, fearing that he did not have much longer to live, the British archaeologist, historian and philosopher Robin George Collingwood (1889-1943) decided to write his autobiography at the early age of 49. In the preceding years he had been working on his philosophical system which he now suspected to remain unfinished. *An Autobiography* (1938) is thus a philosophical testament; a summary statement of Collingwood's most important ideas as he had hitherto developed them, and an indication of what—health permitting—was yet to come.

One of the crucial themes throughout his career, Collingwood says in his autobiography, is the distinction between theory and practice.<sup>1</sup> In this context, he discerns several “R.G.C.”s. The first “knew in his philosophy that the division was false”, and saw that “the relation between them was one of intimate and mutual dependence, thought depending upon what the thinker learned by experience in action, action depending upon how he thought of himself and the world”.<sup>2</sup> The second R.G.C., however, “in the habits of his daily life” acted as if the distinction between theory and practice “had been sound; living as a professional thinker whose college gate symbolized his aloofness from the affairs of practical life”.<sup>3</sup> Collingwood's life and his philosophy were out of touch. “My wife used to tell me so”, he confesses, “and I used to be a good deal annoyed”.<sup>4</sup>

Slumbering beneath the clash of the first two R.G.C.'s, however, there was a third one, “a man of action, or rather ... something in which the difference between thinker and man of action disappeared”.<sup>5</sup> The third R.G.C. most prominently expressed himself in Collingwood's archaeological practice, where he was the leader

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Johnson has called the relation between theory and practice Collingwood's “big worry”. See: Peter Johnson: *R.G. Collingwood: An Introduction* (Bristol: Thoemmes 1998), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography and Other Writings: With Essays on Collingwood's Life and Works* [1938]. Edited by David Boucher and Teresa Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), pp. 150-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>5</sup> *Idem.*

of many expeditions and in that capacity had to convince others of his plans.<sup>6</sup> But the “*rapprochement*” between theory and practice had to be taken further than this.<sup>7</sup> Living amidst the rise of fascism in Spain and Italy, and Nazism in Germany, Collingwood felt he had to take a stand against these forces of “barbarism”.<sup>8</sup> “All my life”, he concludes his autobiography, “I have been engaged unawares in a political struggle, fighting against these things in the dark. Henceforth, I shall fight in the daylight”.<sup>9</sup>

The development of Collingwood’s attitude towards theory and practice as described in *An Autobiography* is reflected in his published work.<sup>10</sup> We hear ‘the first R.G.C.’ speak in the opening sentences of *Speculum Mentis* (1924), which state that all “thought exists for the sake of action. We try to understand ourselves and our world only in order that we may learn how to live”.<sup>11</sup> Again, in his lectures on *The Idea of History*—published posthumously in 1946—Collingwood argues that human action should be seen as an indivisible whole having an “inside” and an “outside”, the ‘outside’ being observable practice, the ‘inside’ the thought of the actor which explains her deeds.<sup>12</sup> In his autobiography Collingwood likewise asserts that “historical problems arise out of practical problems ... the plane on which, ultimately, all problems arise is the plane of ‘real’ life”.<sup>13</sup> Finally, *The New Leviathan* (1942) presents the culmination of Collingwood’s *rapprochement* between theory and

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of Collingwood’s career as an archaeologist, see: William M. Johnston, *The Formative Years of R.G. Collingwood* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1967), pp. 37-44 & Jan van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (Leiden: Brill 2020), pp. 247-314.

<sup>7</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan: or Man, Society, Civilization & Barbarism* [1942]. Revised Edition: with an Introduction and Additional Material Edited By David Boucher (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992), pp. 375-87.

<sup>9</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 167.

For the relation between Collingwood’s political theory and his political actions, see: James Connelly, *Metaphysics, Method and Politics: The Political Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (Exeter: Imprint Academic 2003), pp. 177-88.

<sup>10</sup> According to Johnson, Collingwood’s “commitment to the unity of thought and action” can be traced back to his upbringing. See: Johnson, *R.G. Collingwood: An Introduction*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis: Or the Map of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1924), p. 1

<sup>12</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘Human Nature and Human History’ [1936], in: Idem, *The Idea of History* [1946]. Revised Edition with Lectures 1926-1928 Edited with an Introduction by Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994), p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 114.

practice. Not only does he there claim that “[r]eal thinking ... always starts from practice and returns to practice”, the book also came about through a huge sacrifice in the service of duty.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding his race against the ticking time bomb that his body had become, Collingwood abandoned working on his system to write *The New Leviathan*, wherein he analyses what was at stake in the fight against Hitler and Mussolini. Collingwood considered it an obligation to thus contribute to the allied war effort to the best of his declining abilities. Almost literally to his last breath, Collingwood fought ‘in the daylight’ against what he conceived to be the forces of evil. The third R.G.C. had finally triumphed.

These thoughts and feats, one might say, have a definite *pragmatist* ring about them. Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that first arose in the nineteenth century in opposition to traditional empiricism and idealism. Taking their cue from developments in evolutionary biology, classical pragmatists seek to push human activity to the forefront of philosophical thought.<sup>15</sup> In this vein, thinkers such as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952) famously hold, like Collingwood, that an intimate relationship exists between thinking and acting. All three of them follow the psychologist Alexander Bain (1818-1903) in defining belief as “that upon which we are prepared to act”.<sup>16</sup> James captures the pragmatist spirit well when he says that there “can be no difference anywhere that doesn’t *make* a difference elsewhere—no difference in abstract truth that doesn’t express itself in a difference in concrete fact and in

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<sup>14</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> I speak of ‘classical’ pragmatism to loosely refer to a group of thinkers associated with the rise of the inchoate movement of pragmatism (roughly 1878-1910), in order to distinguish them from later so-called ‘neopragmatists’ like Richard Rorty (1931-2007) and Robert Brandom (born 1950).

As Trevor Pearce puts it: the “‘classical’ pragmatists” are “so named because they were the most prominent ... defenders of pragmatism in the years following its introduction in 1898”. In: Trevor Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 2020), p. 326.

<sup>16</sup> Cheryl Misak, *The American Pragmatists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), p. 77.

conduct consequent upon that fact”.<sup>17</sup> Some pragmatists, subsequently, consider beliefs to be true if they ‘work’.<sup>18</sup>

However, we would be too quick to conclude from all of the above that Collingwood was some kind of pragmatist. In a few scattered and frustratingly brief remarks he repudiates pragmatism and what he conceives to be its accompanying theory of truth. In *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood speaks of “the babblings of pragmatism” and calls its philosophy “confused”, a dismissal he repeats in his autobiography.<sup>19</sup> The question arises how Collingwood’s philosophical views allow for both a clear rejection of pragmatism and him putting forward theses that resemble pragmatist ones.

Given this tension within his writings, it should not come as a surprise that the secondary literature is as yet undecided about Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism. On the one hand, commentators have pointed out the similarities between his philosophical views and those of the classical pragmatists. Louis O. Mink, one of Collingwood’s foremost interpreters, claims that he and the pragmatists can be seen as “tributaries to a common stream”.<sup>20</sup> Lionel Rubinoff, of like stature as Mink in the community of Collingwood scholars, thinks that “Collingwood’s thought bears a remarkable resemblance to the ... views of John Dewey”.<sup>21</sup> Stein Helgeby endorses this idea by saying that “Dewey’s and Collingwood’s theories [on logic] can each illuminate and reinforce the other”.<sup>22</sup> And in a similar vein Jan van der Dussen

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<sup>17</sup> William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* [1907], in: Idem, *Writings 1902-1910*. Edited by Bruce Kuklick (New York: The Library of America 1987), p. 508, James’ emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, p. 589; F.C.S. Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, in: Henry Sturt (ed.), *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays by Eight Members of the University of Oxford* (London: Macmillan and co. 1902), p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 182 & Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Louis O. Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1969), p. 12. Cf. Gary Ciocco, ‘Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience’, in: *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (2003). Retrieved via: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/collingwood-and-the-metaphysics-of-experience/>.

<sup>21</sup> Lionel Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (Toronto: Toronto University Press 1970), p. 383n1.

<sup>22</sup> Stein Helgeby, *Action as History: The Historical Thought of R.G. Collingwood* (Exeter: Imprint Academic 2004), p. 78. Colin Koopman has recently hinted at the similarities between Collingwood’s logic of question and answer and Dewey’s theory of reconstruction as well. See: Colin Koopman, ‘Genealogical Pragmatism: How History Matters for Foucault and Dewey’, in: *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2011), p. 535; Koopman,

argues that Peirce's idea of abduction "provides the specific type of inferences used in history and for which Collingwood was looking".<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Laine Ketner goes as far as introducing Collingwood as a "distinguished historian of Roman Britain, scientist, aesthetician, idealist, and *pragmatist*".<sup>24</sup> Lastly, and most provocatively, Angela Requate suggests that Collingwood was in fact an "undercover" or "clandestine pragmatist".<sup>25</sup>

Many other interpreters are more sceptical about or even staunchly opposed towards the claim that Collingwood's position resembles pragmatist viewpoints. Serge Grigoriev points out some dissimilarities between Collingwood's and Dewey's views on history, the most notable one being that for "Dewey, historians can occupy themselves with any aspect of the past", while for "Collingwood ... history is always a history of thoughts".<sup>26</sup> Gary K. Browning estimates Mink's contention that the views of Collingwood and the pragmatists are similar to be insufficiently argued for.<sup>27</sup> Giuseppina D'Oro too is "particularly eager to distinguish between the pragmatic rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and Collingwood's rejection of it" and concludes that there exist "crucial differences" between the two positions.<sup>28</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, in a review of Requate's book, protests that Collingwood "would never

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*Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2013), pp. 226-7.

<sup>23</sup> Jan van der Dussen, 'Collingwood's Claim that History is a Science', in: *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2007), p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Laine Ketner, 'Our Addictions', in: *Contemporary Pragmatism*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2004), p. 159, my emphasis.

Cf. Kenneth Laine Ketner, 'An Emendation of R.G. Collingwood's Doctrine of Absolute Presuppositions', in: *Graduate Studies Texas Tech University*, No. 4 (1973), pp. 3-41.

<sup>25</sup> Angela Requate, 'Was R.G. Collingwood an Undercover Pragmatist?', in: *Diálogos*, Vol. 66 (1995), p. 95. It must be noted that Requate does not herself explicitly answer the title question of her article, either negatively or positively.

Cf. Angela Requate, *Pragmatischer versus Absoluter Idealismus: G.W.F. Hegel's und R.G. Collingwood's Geschichtsphilosophie* (Cuxhaven: Junghans 1994); Angela Requate, 'R.G. Collingwood's Pragmatist Approach to Metaphysics', in: *International Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1997), pp. 57-71 & Angela Requate, 'R.G. Collingwood and G.H. Mead on the Concept of Time in History', in: *Collingwood Studies*, vol. 5 (1998), pp. 72-89.

<sup>26</sup> Serge Grigoriev, 'Dewey: A Pragmatist View of History', in: *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, vol. 6 (2012), p. 191.

<sup>27</sup> Gary K. Browning, *Rethinking R.G. Collingwood: Philosophy, Politics and the Unity of Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004), p. 10

<sup>28</sup> Giuseppina D'Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience* (London/New York: Routledge 2002), pp. 47 & 37.



have chosen the way of pragmatism”.<sup>29</sup> And in the same spirit William M. Johnston considers pragmatism to be one of Collingwood’s “least favorite varieties of philosophy”.<sup>30</sup>

It is my aim in the present book to bring order in this interpretative confusion. I do so by approaching Collingwood’s relation to classical pragmatism from another direction than has hitherto been done. What all the commentators cited above have in common is that they propose a predominantly *philosophical* analysis of Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism. That is, they offer an interpretation of Collingwood’s ideas and use this interpretation to show that Collingwood’s view either is or is not compatible with the thinking of the pragmatists. The present book, by contrast, starts from the until now neglected, more *historical* question: ‘Why did Collingwood *himself* reject pragmatism?’ Besides this question seeming prior to the philosophical positions of the interpreters cited above, it is also to be expected that an answer to the former will illuminate the latter.

My historical approach to the topic at hand manifests itself most forcefully in the first three chapters of this book. I do not assume a rigid, analytical definition of ‘pragmatism’, using that as a yardstick for holding up Collingwood’s philosophy against. Rather, I reconstruct in some detail how the pragmatists manifested themselves in the philosophical debates of the early 1900s and how their views were received by other thinkers, in order to get a sense of what pragmatism entailed *at that point in time for that group of people*. Of course I have to be selective here: it is impossible within the confines of this project to include everything the pragmatists have ever written, nor all the responses that their ideas have generated. I therefore restrict myself to two contexts relevant to Collingwood’s philosophical development. The first chapter of this book focuses on the British context, looking at debates taking place in journals such as *Mind* and the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, as well as books that were discussed by prominent British philosophers. This context is bound to be relevant, as Collingwood grew up and was educated in Britain. The

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<sup>29</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, ‘Reviewed Work: *Pragmatischer versus Absoluter Idealismus: G.W.F. Hegel’s und R.G. Collingwood’s Geschichtsphilosophie* by Angela Requate. Review by: G. Vanheeswijck’, in: *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, vol. 57, no. 4 (December 1995), p. 754. The original text is in Dutch. The translation is mine.

<sup>30</sup> Johnston, *The Formative Years of R.G. Collingwood*, p. 132.

merits of pragmatism were the stakes of what Cheryl Misak has termed “The Ten Years War” (roughly 1900-1910) in British philosophy, and Collingwood was aware of this clash.<sup>31</sup> In the second chapter I look at how pragmatism was received by the Italian thinkers Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) and Guido de Ruggiero (1888-1948). By now, it is widely acknowledged that Collingwood developed his ideas from the 1910s onwards in conversation with these Italians.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore *a priori* likely that their opinions on pragmatism shaped Collingwood’s views on the matter, and the former therefore need to be taken into account.

The first selection of two relevant contexts leads to a second demarcation. It is well known from the secondary literature that whereas the views of James and Dewey were widely debated in the first decade of the 1900s, this is not the case for Peirce. He died a virtually unknown thinker in 1914 and his work was only gradually rediscovered in the course of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> We will see that this general observation is born out when we look at the British and Italian contexts in which Collingwood started his work as a philosopher. Peirce is there mentioned by name a few times, but never seriously discussed. Moreover, as Skagestad says, “I know of no evidence that he [Collingwood] was familiar with Peirce’s writings”.<sup>34</sup> When asking ‘what pragmatism entailed at that point in time for that of group of people’, then, the answer to this question does not include the ideas of Peirce—barring for his

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<sup>31</sup> Cheryl Misak, ‘James and British Philosophy’, in: Alexander Klein (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of William James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199395699.013.25.

Cf. R.G. Collingwood, ‘The Metaphysics of F.H. Bradley: An Essay on ‘Appearance and Reality’ [1933], in: R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* [1933]. New Edition with an Introduction and Additional Material Edited by James Connelly and Giuseppina D’Oro (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2005), p. 229 & Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Rik Peters, *History as Thought and Action: The Philosophies of Croce, Gentile, de Ruggiero and Collingwood* (Exeter: Imprint Academic 2013).

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 99-105.

Misak however, has convincingly shown that Peirce had an important non-public influence on Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and Frank Ramsey (1903-1930). See: Cheryl Misak, *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016) & Cheryl Misak, *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Peter Skagestad, *Exploring the Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood: From History and Method to Art and Politics* (London: Bloomsbury 2020), p. 19.

pragmatist compatriots, of course—and he will therefore not be seen as one of the main interlocutors of Collingwood in the body of the present book.

Where one pragmatist goes another comes. F.C.S. Schiller (1864-1937) was born in the German Empire, but moved to England at an early age. He was educated at Oxford and taught there himself for the greatest part of his professional life. Though not much studied by recent intellectual historians, Schiller was the foremost pragmatist on the English soil.<sup>35</sup> As we will see, he was a non-negligible presence in the British debate over pragmatism and, moreover, personally known by Collingwood. In contrast to Peirce, then, Schiller will be regarded in this book as one of the main pragmatists to be discussed. Whereas Misak, from her perspective, regards him as nothing more than a “fellow traveller” of the other pragmatists, I, for my purposes, see Schiller as a central figure in the reception of classical pragmatism.<sup>36</sup>

In the third chapter of this book I shift focus to Collingwood’s own stance towards the pragmatists. Based on his early work (roughly 1914-1924) I reconstruct the reasons for which Collingwood felt necessitated to reject pragmatism. The term ‘reconstruct’ is very appropriate here. Collingwood’s remarks on pragmatism are brief, scattered and sometimes outright implicit throughout his published *and* unpublished writings. They have to be brought out and put in the context of his overall philosophical development to make any sense, and this is precisely the task I set myself in the third chapter. This shows that the nature of my work is both historical *and* philosophical. Although focussing on what Collingwood himself actually says about the pragmatists, his opinions can only be understood by tracing their logical relations to other parts of his philosophical system, relations not always pointed out by Collingwood himself. My insistence on describing the approach of this book as being historical, then, must be seen as expressing a focus of orientation towards the subject matter, rather than as the adherence to a strict distinction between historical and philosophical work.

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<sup>35</sup> With the notable exception of: Mark J. Porrovecchio, *F.C.S. Schiller and the Dawn of Pragmatism: The Rhetoric of a Philosophical Rebel* (Lanham: Lexington Books 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, p. 91.

This is even more clear in the fourth and fifth chapters. As will become apparent, after 1924 Collingwood's explicit engagement with the pragmatists was over, but his development was not. In his autobiography Collingwood describes how he struggled with some philosophical problems that were resolved early in the 1930s, and only after formulating his views on philosophical method in 1934 he was fully prepared to start expressing his mature system. Would the later Collingwood see pragmatism in the same light as the Collingwood of 1914-1924? Purely on the basis of textual evidence this question cannot be answered. I therefore adopt a different strategy here. First, I explain the later Collingwood's system in terms of those aspects of it that are a development of viewpoints relevant for his earlier position *vis-a-vis* pragmatism. Then, I look at how pragmatism—conceptualized as how it was seen by Collingwood in 1924—would fare against Collingwood's views as he expressed them towards the end of his life. In other words, although grounded in Collingwood's historical engagement with pragmatism early in his career, the fourth and fifth chapters of this book rely heavily on philosophical reconstruction as well.

My findings throughout the chapters converge towards one conclusion. It is the thesis of this book that, if we see pragmatism as championing the eradication of the distinction between theory and practice, then Collingwood would have regarded himself as more of a pragmatist than the pragmatists themselves. What James, Schiller and Dewey propose is, from Collingwood's perspective, nothing more than "a confused *attempt* to overcome the dualism of thought and action".<sup>37</sup> If we really want to go beyond this dualism, we had better look to Collingwood rather than the pragmatists, or so he would have argued, had he completely spelled out his views on pragmatism.

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<sup>37</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 182, my emphasis.



# I. The British context: ‘transcendentism’ versus ‘situationism’

## Introduction

In the greater part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British philosophy was dominated by a distinctive form of idealism. Figures such as T.H. Green (1836-1882), F.H. Bradley (1846-1924) and Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) appropriated the thought of the German idealists Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and especially G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) in order to answer the problems they saw to be inherent in native philosophical traditions.<sup>38</sup> This program was so successful that British Idealism, as the school came to be referred to, would reign virtually uncontested until the turn of the century, when it came under attack from realists and pragmatists alike. This, then, was the scene upon which Collingwood entered the stage.

In what follows, I will first introduce British Idealism, limiting myself to arguments and thinkers that were going to play a part in the debate over pragmatism shortly after 1900.<sup>39</sup> I will show that Bradley and Bosanquet analyse human thought or rationality in such a way that it should ultimately strive for transcendent, necessary, eternal knowledge. On this basis they build a coherence theory of truth and a metaphysic of the Absolute. I will also argue that, despite all their criticism of Idealism, realists such as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and G.E. Moore (1873-1952) are not at all opposed to the goal of transcendent knowledge. Finally, I will show how Bradley came to doubt the power of reason to achieve its ostensible ideal. The result of this scepticism seems to open the door to a kind of pragmatism.

However, this door is firmly shut by the British pragmatist F.C.S. Schiller, as I will make clear in the second section of this chapter. Bradley’s ‘pragmatism’ is still premised on the view that the ideal of thought is to achieve transcendent, necessary, eternal knowledge. But this goes against the kernel of *real* pragmatism, Schiller holds, which is the theory that thought is and ought to be situated, i.e. aimed at

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<sup>38</sup> Although the extent of Kant’s and Hegel’s influence is disputed. See: William Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), pp. 40-61.

<sup>39</sup> For a broader overview, see e.g. David Boucher & Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum 2012) & Mander, *British Idealism*.

solving particular problems in the here and now. Hence Bradley must be denied the status of pragmatist. I conclude that, at least for Schiller, not one's theory of truth makes them a pragmatist, but the view of thought on which it is based. Moreover, I will devote the remainder of this section to showing that something similar is the case for William James and John Dewey.

The rest of the chapter is aimed at demonstrating how James (section 3), Schiller (section 5) and Dewey (section 7) construct theories of meaning, truth and the will to believe from their notion of thought, and how these were received by realists (section 4) and British Idealists (section 6). The general picture, it will turn out, is that criticisms aimed at pragmatist theories of truth and the will to believe are highly unfair, while some good points are made against the underlying pragmatist view of thought, at least against the versions proposed by Schiller and James. We will see in chapter 3 that Collingwood – while generally agreeing with pragmatism's insistence that thought always is and ought to be situated – echoes some of these latter objections.

## 1. The 'transcendentism' of British Idealism and realism

Two of the landmark works of British Idealism were Bradley's *Principles of Logic* (1883) and *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (1893). In both of these books, Bradley's view of thought as necessarily aiming at transcendent knowledge comes to the fore.

"Thinking", for Bradley, "is the attempt to satisfy a special impulse"<sup>40</sup>, which he describes as follows:

When two elements will not remain quietly together but collide and struggle, we cannot rest satisfied with that state. Our impulse is to alter it, and, on the intellectual side, to bring the content to a shape where without collision the variety is thought as one. And this inability to rest otherwise, and this tendency to alter in a certain way and direction, is, when reflected on and made explicit, our axiom and our intellectual standard.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* [1893]. Sixth Impression (Corrected) (London: George Allen & Unwin 1916), p. 153.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

So when we, in our experience, encounter two phenomena that seem to contradict each other—say, an empirical finding that appears to disprove a scientific theory—our natural impulse is to alleviate this contradiction—e.g. by adjusting the scientific theory in such a manner that it is no longer contradicted by the empirical finding, or by somehow explaining the latter away. The two elements as particular, disconnected existences are now transcended and can be thought as non-contradictory parts of one whole.

Of course, even with our updated theory we shall probably encounter new anomalies, and so the process of our thinking is destined to go on until we find a universal system in which collisions, contradictions and incoherencies can no longer occur at all. This, then, is the ultimate desire of thought:

Unawares ... we strive to realize a completion, single and self-contained, where difference and identity are two aspects of one process in a self-same substance ... This idea of system is the goal of our thoughts, and to sight of this perfection we have been conducted.<sup>42</sup>

This is what I call idealism's *transcendentism*. It is the idea that human thought ultimately aims at finding a universal system in which all particular experiences are transcended and become integrally connected parts of a single, unchanging, eternal whole, such that contradictions between these particular parts are excluded permanently.<sup>43</sup> The crucial corollary of this view, for my purposes, is that particular experiences become irrelevant, even unmeaning in themselves, that is, apart from the whole to which they belong.

It is important to note that Bradley presents his view of thought as simply following from an analysis of the human mind. That thought ultimately desires a

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<sup>42</sup> F.H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic* [1883]. Anastatic Reprint of the London Edition (New York: G.E. Stechert and co. 1912), p. 447.

<sup>43</sup> The concept of 'universality' at play here is not the traditional one of the 'abstract universal', where the universal is what proves to be common to a set of particulars after we abstract away from their complexity. Rather, it is the idea of the 'concrete universal', where the universal is understood as organically uniting within a system particulars in all their complexity. Although present in Bradley, Bosanquet theorized the notion of the concrete universal most explicitly. For a more elaborate discussion, see: Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 313-21.

According to Brand Blanshard, Bradley's (and Bosanquet's) notion of thought "was taken over in all its essentials" from Hegel. See his: *Reason and Analysis* [1962] (La Salle: Open Court Publishing 1991), p. 90.



universal, transcendent system is a “fact”<sup>44</sup>, the discontent of our thinking when confronted with incoherence an “inability to rest”<sup>45</sup>, and all of this is true even if we are unaware of it.<sup>46</sup> Whether this analysis of human nature and the place of thought within it is actually correct is precisely what the pragmatists dispute.

Bradley’s theory of thought morphs into his notions of truth and the Absolute quite naturally. “Truth”, he claims, “is the object of thinking” and “its end is to give a character to reality in which [thinking] can rest”.<sup>47</sup> For Bradley, in other words, there clearly is an intimate relation between thought and truth. Truth is not some external metaphysical entity, independent of the way in which any human being happens to think. Rather, it is the fulfilment of the intellectual impulse that necessarily underlies and propels into action every thought. This impulse, again, is the “striving for perfection, the desire of the mind for an infinite totality”.<sup>48</sup> What we as thinking beings try to discover is a harmonious whole, a universal system in which everything is organically connected to everything else. Were we to find something like that, we would no longer be confronted with parts of our experience that appear to contradict one another, and our thought would be put to rest. In other words, we would have truth.

Bradley’s technical term for the harmonious whole alluded to above is ‘the Absolute’, which he describes succinctly as “a single and all-inclusive experience, which embraces every partial diversity in concord”.<sup>49</sup> Bradley’s talk of the Absolute is highly speculative, metaphorical and somewhat vague. This is not accidental. As I will describe below, Bradley is actually adamant that human thought can never truly reach the Absolute.<sup>50</sup> But this does not mean all is lost. Our vague idea of the Absolute, even if

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<sup>44</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 180.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152

<sup>46</sup> Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, p. 447.

<sup>47</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 165.

<sup>48</sup> Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, p. 451.

<sup>49</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 147.

<sup>50</sup> As Mander points out, this felt need to describe the Absolute in metaphorical and poetical terms was common among the British Idealists. See e.g. for the case of T.H. Green: Mander, *British Idealism*, p. 96.

a dream, or ... a mistake, ... is not a mere delusion. It does set before us that which, if it were actual, would satisfy us as thinking beings. It does represent that which, because it is absent, serves to show imperfection in all other achievements, takes away our rest in all lesser productions, and stirs our reason to a longing disquiet.<sup>51</sup>

If nothing else, at least the Absolute can be described negatively as “that which excludes contradiction”.<sup>52</sup> However little we can really know about the conception of ultimate reality, at least we can say that it does not allow contradiction, for if it would, it would not be an organic system. If two pieces of reality contradict each other, clearly they cannot be two integral parts of one harmonious whole. If so, our intellectual desire for transcendence would be vitiated and truth—defined as that which puts thought to rest—would not be achieved. We would still feel the need of somehow bringing the two disparate elements together, to subsume them under a transcendent entity that connects them. Hence Bradley’s view of coherence as the criterion of truth: whatever professes to be true must at the very least be coherent with all the other elements of the system to which it belongs.<sup>53</sup>

Again, I would like to stress the great extent to which Bradley’s analysis of thought and his notions of truth and the Absolute hang together. It seems that if the former must go, so must the latter. That the reverse holds true as well is what Schiller argues in his polemic against Bradley, as we will see in the next section.

Bosanquet, the other relevant British Idealist to play a part in the reception of pragmatism, subscribes to more or less the same model of thought as Bradley: “Thought always tends to coherence and necessity”.<sup>54</sup> Or, as he later puts it, in experience reason is always present as a “*nisus* towards the whole”, which “can only be noted and not explained”.<sup>55</sup> Just as Bradley, then, Bosanquet presents the British Idealist view of thought as a fact simply to be accepted.

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<sup>51</sup> Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, p. 450.

<sup>52</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 140.

<sup>53</sup> Mander correctly points out that Bradley’s is strictly speaking not a coherence theory of truth. *Coherence* is merely the criterion of truth, while its essence is actually the *identity* of judgement and reality. See: Mander, *British Idealism*, p. 307.

<sup>54</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Logic: Or the Morphology of Knowledge*, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1888), p. 132. For the similarity between Bosanquet and Bradley on this point, also see: Blanshard, *Reason and Analysis*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (London: Macmillan and co. 1912), pp. 98 & 192. Also see: Bernard Bosanquet, *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Macmillan and co. 1921), p. 189 & E.E. Constance

And, again, Bosanquet advances a coherence theory of truth and a metaphysic of the Absolute on this basis. In his *Logic: Or the Morphology of Knowledge* of 1888, he claims that “truth is individual”.<sup>56</sup> In the second edition of this work, published in 1911, Bosanquet clarifies this statement by explaining that it “is only another form of words for the principle of non-contradiction, the principle that the truth is the whole, and the doctrine that coherence is the test of truth and reality”.<sup>57</sup> In other words, there is ultimately only one individual about which we can discover truth, and this is the whole that transcends particular experiences, the Absolute.

As with Bradley, in Bosanquet the connection between thought as aiming for this transcendent knowledge and the notion of truth as coherence is clear. Following our ‘*nisus* towards the whole’ we aim to find a system in which all particular experiences can be shown to be no more than integrated parts of one individual reality. We can test in how far this wholeness is achieved by the criterion of coherence. If two elements in experience still seem to contradict one another they cannot, in their present shape, be integral parts of an organic whole and hence must somehow be overcome. Conversely, if we have discovered complete coherence, if the whole of reality can be thought as a transcendent system of which all particular experiences are organic parts, we have a true account of reality. That is, we have found the Absolute.<sup>58</sup>

Around 1900 British Idealism, and especially its theory of truth, came under heavy attack by so-called ‘New Realists’. The leaders of this movement were the

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Jones, Bernard Bosanquet & F.C.S. Schiller, *Symposium: The Import of Propositions*, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: New Series*, Vol. 15 (1914-15), pp. 416-18 & Bernard Bosanquet, *Logic: Or the Morphology of Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Vol. 2 (1911), p. 266: “to push the explanation further and further in response to the demand for removal of contradiction in the relative whole of experience at every stage. This interest and purpose is the clue pursued by the effort of judgment from beginning to end. It is the special and distinctive cognitive interest”.

<sup>56</sup> Bosanquet, *Logic*, Vol. I, p. 3. At the same page he stipulates that “For logic, at all events, it is a postulate that ‘the truth is the whole’”.

<sup>57</sup> Bosanquet, *Logic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Vol. II, p. 267.

<sup>58</sup> I should add that, despite all the agreement between Bradley and Bosanquet that I allude to, there are also important differences between their idealist philosophies. For example, contrary to Bradley, Bosanquet believes that at least in principle the Absolute can be grasped by thought. See: Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 309-321. These differences, however, are not relevant to the point I wish to make here.

Cambridge philosophers Russell and Moore, while simultaneously an ‘Oxford realism’ was developed by thinkers such as John Cook Wilson (1849-1915) and H.W.B. Joseph (1867-1943).<sup>59</sup>

The realists’ main bone of contention with idealist logic is that it is too subjective. Supposedly, it makes truth, conceived in one way or another as coherence, too dependent on mind. On this basis, realists worry, one would be able to construct a system of judgments that is completely coherent yet completely false in the eyes of common sense. Russell, for example, points out that from the false judgment “Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder” (we know he died in bed) we could construct a fully coherent system of judgments, analogous to the story in a novel.<sup>60</sup> And to distinguish between true and imaginary experiences before we have such a system will not do, Russell holds, for that would be either circular or involve an appeal to another notion of truth. A corollary of this objection is that with a coherence theory of truth we might end up with two or more maximally coherent systems of judgments which yet exclude each other, e.g. one starting from the proposition “Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder” and one from “Bishop Stubbs died in his bed”. The British Idealist view of truth would give us no means to choose between these two opposing systems.

To avoid worries such as Russell’s, a theory of truth should take into account the world external to mind, realists hold. As Moore puts it, “when I have an idea of something, that something must ... *also* be regarded as something other than part of the content of my idea”.<sup>61</sup> If we accept this, the ‘Bishop Stubbs objection’ would be a

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<sup>59</sup> For a brief historical account of this ‘Oxford realism’, see: Mathieu Marion, ‘Oxford Realism: Knowledge and Perception I’, in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2000), pp. 299-338 & ‘Oxford Realism: Knowledge and Perception II’, in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2000), pp. 485-519. For an account of the early Russell and Moore and their relationship to British Idealism, see: Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytical Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990) & Nicholas Griffin, ‘Russell and Moore’s Revolt against British Idealism’, in: Michael Beaney (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199238842.013.0024.

<sup>60</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘On the Nature of Truth’, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1907), p. 32. For a defense of the idealist position, see: Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 444-45.

<sup>61</sup> G.E. Moore, ‘The Nature of Judgment’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 8, No. 30 (1899), p. 177, Moore’s emphasis.

non-issue, for we could immediately decide between the two contradictory propositions with appeal to the external world, without needing a full-blown system of coherent judgments. Following this consideration, multiple realist accounts of truth have been proposed. Most notable among them are versions of the correspondence theory of truth, which state that a judgment is true if it corresponds to or agrees with external fact.<sup>62</sup> We will see James trying to clarify what this statement means in the third section of this chapter.

What is most important now, however, is to realize that realists still presuppose the ideal of transcendent knowledge, albeit in a somewhat different sense than their idealist predecessors. According to realists we can have particular truths such as “Bishop Stubbs died in his bed”.<sup>63</sup> This contradicts the idealist view that such a judgment can never in itself be true or false, but only insofar it coheres with a whole system of judgments. Nevertheless, the truth attributed by the realist to such a proposition is *itself* not particular but transcendent. The proposition is true independently of any particular thinker or situation in which such a thinker operates. It is true even if nobody ever thinks the proposition. In the words of Moore: “It is indifferent to the nature” of true propositions “whether anybody thinks them or not. They are incapable of change; and the relation into which they enter with the knowing subject implies no action or reaction”.<sup>64</sup> Or as Russell puts it: “[T]he truth or falsehood of a given judgment depends in no way upon the person judging, but solely upon the facts about which he judges”.<sup>65</sup> True propositions themselves are fixed, unchanging and eternal, even though the experience that those propositions are true of might not have these qualities. And this view of truth is to a great extent in line with the transcendentalism of the idealists. Both groups of thinkers hold that

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<sup>62</sup> See e.g.: Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Williams & Norgate 1912), chapter XII & G.E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin), chapter 15.

<sup>63</sup> See: Russell, ‘On the Nature of Truth’, pp. 29-37.

<sup>64</sup> Moore, ‘The Nature of Judgment’, p. 179. In the passage quoted, Moore is actually speaking about the concepts that make up a proposition. However, just a little further (p. 180) he indicates that a “proposition is a synthesis of concepts; and, just as concepts are themselves immutably what they are, so they stand in infinite relations to one another equally immutable”.

<sup>65</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood’, in: Idem, *Philosophical Essays* (London/New York: Longmans, Green and co. 1910), p. 173.

beyond particular experiences encountered under specific circumstances there is an ultimate reality to be discovered, be it the Absolute or the collection of true propositions about the world external to mind.

In short, the realists are not so much attacking the idealist quest for transcendent knowledge, as they are disputing that the notions of coherence and system form the right way to get there. As Brand Blanshard puts it: “the realist attack, effective as it was in undermining idealism, was not directed ... against the rationalistic side of the doctrine”, where this rationalistic side is described as the view that it is the business of thought to grasp what I term truth about some transcendent reality.<sup>66</sup> And as we will see, it is precisely the discarding of the situated in favour of the transcendent in matters of thought that the pragmatists oppose vehemently, no matter from which side this discarding comes.

The British Idealists never took the realist and pragmatist criticisms of their position fully to heart, but this does not mean that they were dogmatic or devoid of doubt.<sup>67</sup> To the contrary, I will end this section by showing why Bradley thinks it necessary to also develop a more modest account of truth that actually takes him rather close to pragmatism, or so he thinks.

Already in *Appearance and Reality*, Bradley is very sceptical of the ability of thought to achieve its ideal of absolute truth. By its nature thought is relational. In its highest form judgment, thought predicates a quality of reality. In other words, it relates a certain quality to reality, a “what” to a “that”.<sup>68</sup> But relations, Bradley concludes, belong to the sphere of appearance and are hence not fully real. If we have a relation between A and B, what is this relation? It cannot be an extra quality C in between A and B, for then we would have to ask about the new relations between A and B on the one hand and C on the other, driving us towards an infinite regress. But neither can the relation be a feature of A and B, for then there is a distinction within A and B between aspects that enter into the relation, and aspects that do not. But how, then, are these sets of aspects related to each other? Again, an infinite regress

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<sup>66</sup> Blanshard, *Reason and Analysis*, pp. 30 & 25-26.

<sup>67</sup> See: Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 392-7, 444-9 & 544-5 for the idealists’ engagement with the ‘New Realism’.

<sup>68</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 163-5.

looms. Bradley concludes that no satisfactory account of relations can be given, and they must be banished to the realm of appearance.<sup>69</sup> By implication thought, being inherently relational, is appearance as well. By producing relations in the form of judgments it produces unrealities. This means that, in the end, thought must be transcended if we want to grasp the Absolute. As the latter is its ostensible ideal, Bradley thinks that thought is bound to embrace its own “happy suicide”.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, Bradley recognizes that, though “theoretically unintelligible”, the “arrangement of given facts into relations” is “necessary in practice”.<sup>71</sup> In navigating our day to day lives we cannot help but think. Following up on this consideration, Bradley proposes a so-called “practical creed” in his 1908 piece ‘On the Ambiguity of Pragmatism’. It is worthwhile to quote at length here:

I perhaps may here recall the fact that I have advocated elsewhere certain views of first principles. But on the other hand I have seen, if I may say so, far too much of metaphysics to think of staking vital issues on the result of speculative inquiry. And for practical purposes I hold in reserve a belief, in common, I imagine, with an increasing number of persons, a belief, the advantages of which Pragmatism would, it seems, like to appropriate surreptitiously. According to this practical creed there is in the end no truth for us save that of working ideas. Whatever idea is wanted to satisfy a genuine human need is true, and truth in the end has no other meaning. ... The one question in the end is whether the ideas work. ... The above is scepticism, if you please, but it is not the stupid scepticism which offers itself as positive theoretical doctrine. It is the intelligent refusal to accept as final any theoretical criterion which actually so far exists.<sup>72</sup>

Bradley here concedes a lot to the pragmatist notion of truth, or so it seems. How such a notion precisely looks like for James, Schiller and Dewey we have yet to see, but that it is sometimes summed up as ‘that which works is true’ was already made clear in the introductory chapter. And this is precisely what Bradley now advances in response to his own sceptical worries about the power of thought.

The passage is all the more striking if we remember that, for Bradley, thought is appearance and can hence never yield absolute truth. Taken in conjunction with

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<sup>69</sup> Over the question whether Bradley’s views on relations are persuasive much ink has been spilled. However, that issue does not concern me here. But see: Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 106-9.

<sup>70</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 173.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>72</sup> F.H. Bradley, ‘On the Ambiguity of Pragmatism’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1908), pp. 229-30.

that it is ‘intelligent to refuse to accept as final any theoretical criterion which actually so far exists’, this means that, in practice, we are forever condemned to Bradley’s practical creed. After all, thought, as necessarily producing unrealities in the form of judgments and hence relations, can *never* produce a satisfactory ‘theoretical criterion’. It seems, then, that despite thought’s ostensible ideal of finding an absolute, transcendent truth, we are in fact never capable of reaching it and must satisfy ourselves with ‘working ideas’. And this is allegedly just what the pragmatists claim.

Supposing his ‘practical creed’ to be acceptable to the likes of James and Dewey, Bradley now wonders whether “Am I and have I been always myself a Pragmatist?”<sup>73</sup> We will shortly see that Schiller answers this question firmly in the negative, thereby pointing us towards the kernel of the dispute between pragmatism and the other philosophical schools.

## 2. Pragmatism’s insistence on the ‘situatedness’ of thought

Though already privately coined by Peirce in the 1870s, the term ‘pragmatism’ was introduced to a wider audience by James only in 1898.<sup>74</sup> In the years following that event, the pragmatist movement increasingly began to present itself as a serious philosophical alternative to both idealism and realism. Fierce debates ensued over especially the pragmatist theories of truth. Before beginning to map that battleground, however, I start by taking a step back and look at what the pragmatists themselves thought was fundamentally at stake in their encounters with the other philosophical schools. It will turn out that this is not in the first instance their theory of meaning or truth, but the conception of thought on which the former are based.

That this is the case comes most prominently to the fore in Schiller’s response to Bradley’s ‘practical creed’. As we have just seen, this creed involves a

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226. Bradley finds himself “unable to answer” this question, as he finds the ideas of the pragmatists ambiguous and hence is not sure what they mean.

<sup>74</sup> In a lecture titled ‘Philosophical Concepts and Practical Results’. See: William James, ‘Philosophical Concepts and Practical Results’ [1898], in: William James, *Writings 1878-1899* (New York: The Library of America 1992), p. 1079.

For an intellectual history of the origin and development of pragmatism, including its name, see: Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (London: Flamengo 2002).



view of truth that, Schiller admits, “sound[s] very pragmatic”.<sup>75</sup> One might expect Schiller to warmly welcome Bradley—one of the most famous philosophers alive—to the pragmatist camp. But the opposite happens. Bradley’s practical truth, Schiller observes, is but a meagre substitute for the transcendent truth which we ostensibly desire but cannot get. Bradley holds on to the view of thought necessarily aspiring to the Absolute, recognizes that this ideal is impossible to realize, and only then introduces a ‘practical creed’ so that at least we can get on with our daily lives. But this is not the way a *real* pragmatist arrives at her theory of truth, Schiller is adamant to stress. The real pragmatist has a positive analysis of thought and its role in human life and formulates a notion of truth in accordance with that analysis. Bradley, on the contrary, proposes his ‘practical creed’ as a result of the negative view that transcendent truth cannot be had. “The true analogue” of Bradley’s ideas, then, according to Schiller, “is not the pragmatic Criticism, but the Humian scepticism, which also sought to atone for its philosophic failure by laxity of practice”.<sup>76</sup> In Schiller’s view, not your theory of truth decides whether you are a pragmatist, but the conception of thought on which it is based.

But what is the positive pragmatist analysis of thought according to Schiller? It is the view, inspired by Darwinian evolutionary theory, that thought is an integral part of the complete human organism, which can only be functionally but not ontologically separated from other parts such as feeling and will. The organism *as a whole* has as its goal to adapt to its environment in order to survive and thrive, and thought has its specific role to play in this process. As Schiller puts it in ‘Axioms as Postulates’ (1902), “the organism is *one*” and “cannot afford to support a disinterested and passionless intelligence”. Rather, “thought must be conceived as an outgrowth of action ... while the brain which has become an instrument of intellectual contemplation must be regarded as the subtlest, latest and most potent

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<sup>75</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, ‘Is Mr. Bradley Becoming a Pragmatist?’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1908), p. 381.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381 (sic). Of course, Schiller is here referring to David Hume (1711-1776), who reassures us that sceptical arguments produce only “momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion” but “no conviction” so that our daily, practical life is not affected by them. See his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Edited With an Introduction and Notes by Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), Chapter 12, Section 15, Note 32, Hume’s emphasis omitted.

organ for effecting adaptations to the needs of life”.<sup>77</sup> Again, in *Studies in Humanism* (1907), Schiller declares that all “three faculties [feeling, will, thought] are at bottom only labels for describing the activities of what may be called indifferently a unitary personality, or a reacting organism”.<sup>78</sup> Hence, thought does not have an ideal of its own, as the idealists presuppose explicitly and the realists implicitly. It is not the aim of thought to arrive at transcendent truth, be it a grasp of the Absolute or of facts external to mind, but to help the human organism live. The point of pragmatism is not that thought should be subjugated to action, but “rather that there can be no independence of [thought] ... and no opposition to practice, because [thought] is an outgrowth of practice and incapable of truly ‘independent’ existence”.<sup>79</sup>

I summarize this view by saying that, for pragmatists, thought is invariably *situated*, always functions in a particular situation. It is always related to *this individual* organism which has to adapt to *this specific* environment at *this particular* time.<sup>80</sup> This stands in contrast to the ‘transcendentism’ of British Idealism and realism, according to which the particularities of a concrete situation are irrelevant for thought. For them the ideal of thought is to find a transcendent truth

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<sup>77</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, pp. 84-5, Schiller’s emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism* (London: Macmillan and co. 1907), p. 129.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8. See: F.C.S. Schiller, ‘The Present Phase of “Idealist” Philosophy’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 19, No. 73 (1910), pp. 33-4 & 38-40 for another instance of Schiller criticizing Bradley along these lines.

<sup>80</sup> My analysis is in broad agreement with Daniel J. Brunson’s proposal to view the debate between idealism and pragmatism as a clash between “intellectualism” and “voluntarism”, i.e. the idea that “psychologically, will is more fundamental than intellect; that metaphysically, the ultimate nature of reality is some form of will; finally, that in epistemology, will must be recognised as essential to the construction of truth” (L. Susan Stebbing, cited in Daniel J. Brunson, ‘Voluntarism: A Difference that Makes the Difference Between German Idealism and American Pragmatism?’, in: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Volume X, No. 2 (2018), retrieved via <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1333>, 25).

However, my account goes further by also explaining *why* the pragmatists opted for voluntarism, namely because of their insistence that the goal of thought is to help us deal with problems in the here and now. My view also goes further by taking up Brunson’s suggestion that a “fuller account of the relation between idealism and pragmatism would do well to look at English proponents of each side in more detail (Brunson, n43); Brunson limits himself to the American classical pragmatists (with only brief mention of Schiller) and the American idealist Josiah Royce (1855-1916).

Trevor Pearce explicitly says that “[a]lthough pragmatism was and still is most famous for its theory of truth, I agree ... that the central insight of the classical pragmatists was their model of inquiry” which is “fundamentally linked to biology”. See: Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution*, p. 290.

which either absorbs the particular situation or is completely independent from it; for pragmatism the aim is precisely to contribute to resolving specific problems that the individual organism encounters in a particular context. We might refer to this latter position as ‘situationism’.<sup>81</sup>

How the view of thought as situated leads to a pragmatist theory of truth is rather intuitive, I think. Although we will see in more detail how the pragmatists take that step in the next sections, the move from ‘thought ought to help effect adaptations to the needs of life’ to ‘a belief is true when it works’ seems natural enough for now. That Bradley arrives at his practical creed via quite a different, explicitly negative route is equally obvious. For him it is the case that we must satisfy ourselves with ‘working ideas’ because human thought is incapable of fulfilling its true purpose. In other words, Schiller is right in claiming that his pragmatism diverges sharply from Bradley’s seemingly pragmatist views at this fundamental point.<sup>82</sup>

And we get a very similar story from Dewey. Just as Schiller he claims in 1907 that pragmatism is first and foremost a theory of thought, also referred to by him as ‘intelligence’ or ‘knowledge’: “the essential point of pragmatism is that it bases its changed account of truth on a changed conception of intelligence”, and “since truth is the adequate fulfilment of the function of intelligence, it is clear the whole question turns on the nature of the latter”. Whoever sees pragmatism as merely proposing a theory of truth fails “to take its contention seriously enough”.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The view that I attribute to the classical pragmatists may have some features in common with contemporary modes of feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, such as standpoint theory. However, my interpretation of is developed in complete independence of this contemporary movement. See: Elizabeth Anderson, ‘Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science’, in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 edition). Retrieved via: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-epistemology/>, esp. Sections 1 & 2.

<sup>82</sup> Bradley did not respond to Schiller, which the latter may have anticipated. “Dr. Schiller’s unceasing manifestoes have for some time past failed to attract my attention”, Bradley dryly remarks in ‘On the Ambiguity of Pragmatism’, p. 226.

In 1915, Schiller, to his own surprise, discovered that Bradley’s views had significantly shifted towards pragmatism during the last decade or so. Nevertheless, Bradley’s position still occupied “the last halting place but one before true pragmatism is reached”. See: F.C.S. Schiller, ‘The New Developments of Mr. Bradley’s Philosophy’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 24, No. 95 (Jul. 1915), pp. 354 & 363.

<sup>83</sup> John Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion for the Truth of Ideas’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 16, No. 63 (1907), p. 325n.

Schiller's and Dewey's views of thought are also akin. In Dewey's case it arises from his work as a psychologist. In the landmark paper 'The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology' (1896), he famously gives a functional analysis of thought, according to which it is no more than a function in the whole experience of an organism.<sup>84</sup> Sensation, thought and action must "be viewed, not as separate and complete entities in themselves, but as divisions of labor, functioning factors, within the single concrete whole".<sup>85</sup> They are "teleological distinctions ... with reference to reaching or maintaining an end", namely "adaptation".<sup>86</sup> Dewey repeats this claim in his philosophical work, such as *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903). There he explains that thought should not be regarded as a separate part of the human organism, distinct from other such parts. Instead, it is "intimately and indissolubly connected with the like yet diverse functions of affection, appreciation and practice" and "it only distorts results reached to treat knowledge as a self-inclosed [sic] and self-explanatory whole".<sup>87</sup> *Contra* idealists and realists, then, for Dewey thought cannot have an aim of its own. It is merely one aspect of an organism, playing its specific but limited role in achieving that organism's goals. Dewey explicitly holds this view against Bradley:

His [Bradley's] underlying presupposition of the separate character of thought comes out in the passage last quoted. 'Our impulse', he says, 'is to alter the conflicting situation and, *on the theoretical side*, to bring its contents into peaceable unity'. If one substitutes for the word 'on' the word 'through', one gets a conception of theory and of thinking, which does justice to the autonomy of the operation and yet so connects it with other activities as to give it a serious business, real purpose and concrete responsibility and hence testability.<sup>88</sup>

Again, the paths of the philosophical schools diverge considerably before we even reach discussions about truth or meaning.

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<sup>84</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of the Darwinian roots of Dewey's thesis in this article, see: Eric Bredo, 'Evolution, Psychology, and John Dewey's Critique of the Reflex Arc Concept', in: *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 98, No. 5 (1998), pp. 447-66.

<sup>85</sup> John Dewey, 'The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology', in: *The Psychological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1896), p. 358.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365. Cf. John Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*. With the Co-operation of Members and Fellows of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1903), p. 57: "Thinking is adaptation to an end through the adjustment of particular objective contents."

<sup>87</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Dewey, 'Reality and the Criterion for the Truth of Ideas', p. 330, Dewey's emphasis.

According to Dewey, then, we find the nature of thought by looking at the precise function it has for the organism as a whole. The “evolutionary method in biology” teaches us, Dewey explains, “that every distinct organ ... has to be treated as an instrument of adjustment or adaptation to a particular environing situation”.<sup>89</sup> In this vein, thinking “is adaptation *to* an end *through* the adjustment of particular objective contents”.<sup>90</sup> In other words, thought is always related to the specific environment with which an organism has to deal. When threats to its wellbeing arise, thought has to help the organism cope adequately. It must reconstruct experience for the better. “The activity of thought”, then, “marks merely a phase of the transformation which the course of experience ... undergoes in entering into a tensional status where the maintenance of its harmony of content is problematic and hence an aim”.<sup>91</sup> Or as Dewey puts it elsewhere: “[The] purpose [of a man’s thinking] is always to harmonise the conflicting elements of some situation through their own reorganisation”.<sup>92</sup>

We will look at how thought should exactly operate according to Dewey in more detail in the seventh section of this chapter. For now, the most relevant observation is that Dewey, like Schiller, forwards the view that thought or intelligence is always situated.<sup>93</sup> It is always aimed at reconstructing *this specific*

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<sup>89</sup> Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>92</sup> Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion for the Truth of Ideas’, p. 329.

<sup>93</sup> My conclusions on Dewey are corroborated by Jörg Volbers, who claims that Dewey rejects idealism on grounds of an over-exaggerated “intellectualism”: for Dewey “any conception of rationality ... has to attribute a determining role to the non-thinking, embedding context of thought. Due to its exclusive focus on knowledge and logic, intellectualism cannot cope with that existential and experiential background of thought proper” (‘Reclaiming the Power of Thought: Dewey’s Critical Appropriation of Idealism’, in: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2018), retrieved via <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1327>, 44).

Volbers reaches that conclusion, however, by exclusively focusing on Dewey’s work from *Experience and Nature* (1925) onwards (2), while I here draw my conclusions from Dewey’s earlier writings.

For a fine-grained analysis of Dewey’s views on situatedness, reconstructed on the basis of sources from the same period as Volbers addresses, see: Paul Benjamin Cherlin, ‘John Dewey’s Emergent Naturalism: Conditions and Transfigurations’, in: *Contemporary Pragmatism*, No. 12 (2015), pp. 199-215.

environment of *this particular* organism for the better.<sup>94</sup> The intended result is not the finding of a transcendent truth, but an improved *specific* experience for the same *particular* organism: “The conscious stimulus or sensation, and the conscious response ... have a *special* genesis or motivation, and a *special* end or function”.<sup>95</sup> Importantly, Dewey also agrees with Schiller that this analysis of thought forms the kernel of pragmatism: ‘the essential point of pragmatism is that it bases its changed account of truth on a changed conception of intelligence’, we have seen Dewey claim.

The case of James is a bit different. He has an inclusive vision of pragmatism, describing it not as primarily a theory of thought (or truth), but as a method available for everyone to use:

at the outset, at least, it [pragmatism] stands for no particular results. It has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method ... it lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next some one [sic] on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a body’s properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown.<sup>96</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that James is much more willing to welcome Bradley to the pragmatist camp than we have seen Schiller to be.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, it will become clear that James’ *own* use of the pragmatic method puts him in a position on thought very much in line with that of Schiller and Dewey. As a result, just as in the case of the latter two, our understanding of James’ philosophical positions will be limited if we do not take his view of thought into account.

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<sup>94</sup> Although such language has Darwinian overtones, Pearce points out that Dewey was in this period more influenced by the evolutionist thinker Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). See: Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution*, pp. 292-3.

<sup>95</sup> Dewey, ‘The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology’, p. 370, my emphasis. Cf. Matthew Crippen, ‘Embodied Cognition and Perception: Dewey, Science, and Skepticism’, in: *Contemporary Pragmatism*, No. 14 (2017), p 127: “perception and cognition [for Dewey] are pre-eminently a matter of acting and altering worldly arrangements, as opposed to merely representing them.”

<sup>96</sup> William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways of Thinking* [1907], in: Idem, *William James: Writings: 1902-1910*. Edited by Bruce Kuklick (New York: The Library of America 1987) , p. 510.

James attributes the metaphor of the corridor to the Italian pragmatist Giovanni Papini (1881-1956).

<sup>97</sup> See: Schiller, ‘The New Developments of Mr. Bradley’s Philosophy’, p. 346.

The traditional picture of thought as an independent faculty with a goal of its own has been rendered untenable by “the psychology of our own day”, says James, and it is the “theory of evolution [which] is mainly responsible for this”.<sup>98</sup> Darwin and the biologists working in his wake have shown us that thought is “in the first instance nothing but a sort of superadded biological perfection—useless unless it prompt[s] to useful conduct, and inexplicable apart from that consideration”.<sup>99</sup> Thought, in other words, cannot be regarded as being distinct from other spheres of experience, most importantly practice.<sup>100</sup> As James puts it in his psychological work: “Primarily ... and fundamentally, the mental life is for the sake of action of a preservative sort”.<sup>101</sup> In short, there is no ‘pure thought’ which has a goal that is exclusively its own—the contemplation of some transcendent reality, be it the Absolute or the world external to mind. There is only thought as one more tool for adapting the organism to its environment in order to enable its thriving. If it does not lead to successful conduct, this tool is ‘useless’. In the words of James: “The only use of ... thoughts ... is to determine its [the current of life’s] direction to ... act in the way most propitious to our welfare”.<sup>102</sup>

James connects thought to our needs and desires, as well as to action. The former “are an all-essential factor which no writer pretending to give an account of

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<sup>98</sup> William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* [1899], in: Idem, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*. Edited by Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1992), p. 726.

Also see: William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course* [1892], in: Idem, *Writings 1878-1899*. Edited by Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1992), pp. 12-3.

<sup>99</sup> James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, p. 727.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Trevor Pearce, ‘James and Evolution’, in: Alexander Klein (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of William James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199395699.013.1.

<sup>101</sup> James, *Psychology*, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> William James, ‘Reflex Action and Theism’ [1881], in: Idem, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*. Edited by Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1992), p. 542. Cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902], in: Idem, *William James: Writings 1902-1910*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1987), p. 399; Henry Jackman, ‘James’s Naturalistic Account of Concepts and his “Rejection of Logic”’, in: Sandra Lapointe (ed.), *Philosophy of Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge 2018), esp. pp. 136-37 & T.L.S. Sprigge, *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality* (Chicago: Open Court 1993), p. 83.

mental evolution has a right to ignore<sup>103</sup>, and James provides the following account of their relation to thought:

the conceiving or theorizing faculty functions *exclusively for the sake of ends* that do not exist at all in the world of impressions we receive by way of our senses, but are set by our emotional and practical subjectivity altogether. It is a transformer of the world of our impressions into a totally different world—the world of our conception; and the transformation is effected in the interests of our volitional nature, and for no other purpose whatsoever. Destroy the volitional nature, the definite subjective purposes, preferences, fondnesses for certain effects, forms, orders, and not the slightest motive would remain for the brute order of our experience to be remodelled at all.<sup>104</sup>

Thought for James, as we have seen, must prompt successful conduct. But what counts as ‘successful’ is not given, it is something that needs to be determined. And this determination takes place through interests. That action which furthers my interest is successful; my desires are the exclusive ends for which my ‘theorizing faculty’ produces ‘conceptions’ on the basis of which I may act. We are reminded of Schiller’s and Dewey’s insistence that thought exists for the sake of ‘effecting adaptations to the needs of life’.

In short, as for Dewey and Schiller, thought is situated according to James. It is not aimed at finding a transcendent truth, but helps a human being furthering its *particular* interests by leading to successful conduct in a *specific* environment. Although for James this is not the kernel of pragmatism *tout court*—as he conceives it as primarily a philosophical method—it is the foundation of his *own* branch of pragmatism.<sup>105</sup>

In the next sections we will see the pragmatists trying to do justice to what they perceive thought to be, by formulating theories of truth that define truth as the successful linking of beliefs to other parts of the situation in which thought operates. It is here that Schiller, Dewey and James begin to deviate from one another, which

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<sup>103</sup> William James, ‘Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence’ [1878], in: Idem: *William James: Writings 1878-1899*. Edited by Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1992), p. 897.

<sup>104</sup> James, ‘Reflex Action and Theism’, pp. 544-5, James’ emphasis. Also see: William James, ‘The Psychology of Belief’ [1889], in: Idem, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*. Edited by Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1992), pp. 1021-56.

<sup>105</sup> For corroboration of my point that James’ pragmatism is ultimately rooted in evolutionary theory, see: Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution*, pp. 297 & 304-5 & 319-21.



leads to divergent possible objections against them. For that reason I will now take them in turn, starting with James and his realist adversaries.

### 3. James' pragmatism

For pragmatism, thought is always situated. Its function is to successfully guide the behaviour of a specific organism in a particular situation. It does so by producing beliefs on the basis of which the organism might act. Such beliefs are true, then, if the action issuing from them is successful. They are false if that action is unsuccessful. In his most famous book, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), James spells out the features of this view in more detail. In this section I explain the essentials of James' theory of truth. In addition I show that James' other much discussed work, 'The Will to Believe' (1896), is very much in line with his theory of truth, and dispense with an important misrepresentation of that text. What is most peculiar about James' notion of truth *vis-à-vis* the views of Dewey and Schiller, it will turn out, is that James almost exclusively stresses thoughts' relation to future action. In the next section we will see the Oxford realist Joseph point out that this precisely is the weak point in James' pragmatism.

To arrive at a concept of truth, James draws heavily on Peirce's best-known contribution to pragmatism: the pragmatic maxim. This notion Peirce develops in 'How to Make our Ideas Clear' (1878). When we ask about a concept, e.g. 'What does 'human' mean?', that question can be answered in three valid ways. First, we can answer by picking out examples of the concept, e.g. 'Socrates is a human'. Second, we can answer by giving an analytic definition of the concept, e.g. 'A human is a rational animal'. These two aspects of meaning are valuable, according to Peirce: "The books are right in making familiarity with a notion the first step towards clearness of apprehension, and the defining of it the second".<sup>106</sup> However, he wants

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<sup>106</sup> C.S. Peirce, 'How to Make our Ideas Clear' [1878], in: Idem, *Chance, Love and Logic: Philosophical Essays*. Edited With an Introduction by Morris R. Cohen, With a Supplementary Essay on the Pragmatism of Peirce by John Dewey (London: Kenan Paul, Trench, Trubner and co. 1923), p. 35.

to add a third “grade of clearness”, which is, in fact, a “far higher grade”<sup>107</sup>. And this is the pragmatic maxim, which Peirce formulates as follows:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these is the whole of our conception of the object.<sup>108</sup>

In other words, if we really want to know what we mean with a concept, we must look at what consequences its deployment has for our experience and action. In my example, ‘If I converse with Socrates, I will get sensible answers to my questions’ might be a consequence of my conception of ‘a human’ as ‘a rational animal’. Together with all other such conceivable experiential consequences, it makes up my concept of ‘human’.

It will be clear that Peirce’s maxim fits nicely with pragmatism’s view of thought as situated.<sup>109</sup> We are not asking about some sort of transcendent concept of ‘human’ *per se*, apart from any individual situation in which that concept might figure. Instead, by using the maxim, we are inquiring what *concrete* difference is made by our deployment of the concept ‘human’ under *specific* circumstances. In my example, this means that I, amongst other things, in virtue of my concept of ‘man’, will converse with Socrates in such a way that I expect him to give sensible answers to my questions. In other words, there is a clear link between my beliefs about humanity and the subsequent action I undertake with regard to a particular human being.

In *Pragmatism*, James applies “Peirce’s principle” to the concept of truth.<sup>110</sup> It is usually held, James says, that a belief is true if it agrees with reality. But while this may be a perfect dictionary definition of truth, what does it practically mean?

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp. 45 & 38.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>109</sup> According to Pearce, Peirce’s pragmatism, just as the philosophies of James, Dewey and Schiller, is rooted in evolutionary biology, although arguably in different ways. See: Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution*, pp. 295-7 & 309-11 & 313 & 328-9. Cf. “James, Dewey and Peirce all linked pragmatism to both experimentation and evolution”, in: Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution*, p. 324.

<sup>110</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, p. 507.

But for differences between Peirce’s and James’ use of the pragmatic maxim, see: Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 57-60.

How do we *know* whether a belief agrees with reality or not? What consequence in our experience does it have? As James formulates the problem in ‘The Will to Believe’, there is “no bell in us” which “tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp”.<sup>111</sup>

According to James, then, what we practically mean if we say that beliefs agree with reality is the following:

They lead us ... through the acts and other ideas which they instigate, into or up to, or towards, other parts of experience with which we feel all the while—such feeling being among our potentialities—that the original idea remains in agreement.<sup>112</sup>

It is the function of ‘agreeable leading’, of successfully guiding the human organism from one part of its situation to the next, which distinguishes a true belief from a false one. James uses this term interchangeably with “verification”, “being useful” and “working”.<sup>113</sup> To give a simplified example: if I assert ‘That is a chair’, this might lead me to sit on said object. If it does not collapse under my weight, is comfortable, and so on, my original belief (‘That is a chair’) has led me to another part of my experience (the sitting) with which I feel the original belief to be in agreement. Hence, for James, my belief that ‘That is a chair’ is ‘verified’, or is ‘useful’, or ‘works’. In short, it is true.

It is only in this way, in concrete verification-processes, that truth exists. There is no metaphysical “Truth” that “shoots straight over the head of experience, and hits its reality every time”.<sup>114</sup> “Truth” is “simply a collective name for verification-processes”, just as ‘wealth’ is only a collective name for concrete instances of wealthiness.<sup>115</sup> In other words, ‘truth’, like thought in general, is always situated, always consists in the verification of particular beliefs in specific circumstances.

And it is in this sense that *we* can be said to ‘make’ truth. Truth depends on verification-processes, and what becomes verified depends on our ‘feeling of

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<sup>111</sup> William James, ‘The Will to Believe’ [1896], in: Idem, *Writings 1878-1899*. Edited by Gerald E. Myers (New York: The Library of America 1992), p. 478.

<sup>112</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, p. 574.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 574 & 575 & 589.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 581-2.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 581-3.

agreeable leading' or "psychological ascertainment[...] of truth".<sup>116</sup> Here of course, James is in conflict with British Idealists and realists alike; for the latter two the Absolute and the external world do in fact guarantee an eternal, metaphysical truth, which is wholly independent of individual human beings or the situations in which they operate. For James, even the truth of 'theories' and general propositions – such as 'chairs are pieces of furniture' – ultimately depends on their "cash value" in concrete experience.<sup>117</sup>

But does this mean that anything goes, for James? Can we 'make' any belief true, just because it would feel good if it were true? No, this is not the case. While unpacking the meaning of reality, James declares that we experience it as a bundle of matters of fact, relations of ideas, and beliefs "already in our possession".<sup>118</sup> To be true, therefore, beliefs must agree with this threefold reality. And we "cannot play fast and loose" with our feeling of agreement. Especially our experiences of matters of fact and relations of ideas "coerce" us: "Between the coercions of the sensible order and those of the ideal order, our mind is ... tightly wedged".<sup>119</sup> The beliefs we already have, on their turn, demand to be deranged "as little as possible".<sup>120</sup> What James has in mind with feeling, then, seems to be a sensation akin to how we experience pain. A sensation, that is, which arises involuntarily, and cannot so easily be escaped. This also shows in James' formulation of truth as utility, but utility "in the long run and on the whole of course" because experience "has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas".<sup>121</sup>

'The Will to Believe' was published a decade before *Pragmatism*, but James seems to have had a similar theory of truth in mind already at that time. In this infamous essay, he criticizes a relentless form of evidentialism adopted by many of his scientifically minded contemporaries. As an example, James cites the English mathematician and philosopher William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879), who claims that it "is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe upon insufficient

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 585.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 509-10.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., pp. 575-8.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 578.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 581.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 583, James' emphasis.

evidence”.<sup>122</sup> That is, for Clifford, it is permissible to have a belief in x if, and only if, one has sufficient evidence for x. James takes issue with this approach: not only would it be impractical to follow Clifford’s dictum, it would be downright irrational. This is especially true for religious beliefs. Hence, James wants to write “an essay in justification of faith, a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced”.<sup>123</sup>

While, according to James, it is in general indeed best to stick with what the evidence forces us to believe, this is not true in certain exceptional situations. Particularly, in some instances, it is just our belief in x which makes x the case. For example:

Do you like me or not? ... Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking’s existence is in such cases what makes your liking come. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence ... ten to one your liking never comes.<sup>124</sup>

To adopt Clifford’s advice in such cases would be nonsensical from James’ viewpoint. We would miss out on finding out what a certain piece of reality is like. Moreover, this is a piece of reality that could be of great interest to us. To make friends, as in James’ example, can be perceived as generally a good kind of thing.

The same is true for religious belief, or so says James. The “religious hypothesis”—conceived abstractly by James as being no religion in particular—usually comes in the form of asserting the existence of a personal deity. Whether the hypothesis is true we can only find out through prior faith: “[E]vidence might be forever withheld from us unless we meet the hypothesis halfway”.<sup>125</sup> It is only when we call out that a god will answer. To refrain, therefore, from all faith until we have received some positive evidence is irrational for James. We will never find out whether the religious hypothesis is true—and is ‘truth’ not what rational beings are

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<sup>122</sup> William Kingdon Clifford, ‘The Ethics of Belief’ [1877], in: William Kingdon Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*. Edited by Leslie Stephen and Frederick Pollock (London: Macmillan and co. 1879), p. 186.

<sup>123</sup> James, ‘The Will to Believe’, p. 457, James’ emphasis.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

after? Moreover, our lives might be enormously changed for the better if we discover a deity. Why should we deprive ourselves of this possibility, James asks?

Some have taken the above argument as trying to establish that we are allowed to proclaim everything true that we would like to be true.<sup>126</sup> In my vision, however, this is entirely mistaken. It is not the case that, for every x we believe, we make it the case that x. It seems quite uncharitable, for example, to attribute to James the view that every person on the earth will like us if we first *believe* that they will like us. James' point is rather that for some x's, it is necessary to believe in their existence before we ever can come into a position to see whether it is indeed true that they exist, or not. That this is James' position clearly shows from his preface to *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*:

If religious hypotheses about the universe be in order at all, then the active faiths of individuals in them, freely expressing themselves in life, are the experimental tests by which they are verified, and the only means by which their truth *or falsehood* can be wrought out.<sup>127</sup>

To repeat, James is arguing *for the right to adopt a religious belief*, despite a lack of evidence, and *not for the truth* of some or even any religious hypothesis. As Misak puts it: "on the most charitable reading of 'The Will to Believe', the paper is about cognitive strategies for discovery (i.e. when you don't yet have evidence), not strategies for justification".<sup>128</sup>

This is completely in line with what would later become James' theory of truth. We have seen that, in *Pragmatism*, James holds that beliefs must lead to other parts of experience. If we feel that these other parts of experience are in agreement with the original belief, then it is true. The same is the case for the religious hypothesis of 'The Will to Believe'. We must act on a religious hypothesis so that it leads us to future experiences in accordance with which we can test it. However, in the special case of the religious hypothesis, to act on it requires our faith prior to us being in a position to really judge whether it is true or false. Or so James holds.

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<sup>126</sup> See for example Russell's response to 'The Will to Believe' in the next section. Also see: Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 60-7.

<sup>127</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* [1896], in: James, *Writings 1878-1899*, p. 451, my emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> Cheryl Misak, 'James and British Philosophy', in: Alexander Klein (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of William James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018).

In conclusion, I have made it clear that, according to the pragmatists, we must never see thought and its products in isolation from their context. Beliefs always function to help the human organism perform successful behaviour in a particular situation. What is striking in James' theory of truth as proposed in *Pragmatism* and 'The Will to Believe' is that beliefs are only linked—by the presence or absence of a feeling of 'agreeable leading'—to a rather limited part of their context, namely future action. James takes the existence of certain beliefs, such as the religious hypothesis, for granted and then goes on to show how we can know whether they are true or not, purely by reference to the future experience to which they do or do not agree. This is surprising, as we have seen James himself assert that not only action, but also 'the interests of our volitional nature' should be taken into account in our theory of thought. Apparently, he does not think this is necessary in the case of our theory of truth. In the next section, I will demonstrate how Joseph, by focusing on this very aspect of James' view of truth, deals a potentially deadly blow to the pragmatist account of thought. Later, however, I will show that both Schiller and Dewey have an answer to Joseph, precisely by taking both the antecedents *and* consequences of thought into account in their respective theories of truth.

#### 4. The realist response to James: Moore, Russell and Joseph

Before turning to Joseph, however, I must pay attention to the reception of Jamesian pragmatism by Moore and Russell, as the opinions of these two giants of early analytic philosophy determined the reputation of pragmatism for decades to come.<sup>129</sup> Their responses to James can be characterized as outright dismissive, and it are especially the latter's theory of truth and his notion of the will to believe that cause offence. In my opinion, however, both are gravely misunderstood by Russell and Moore. Hence, it is a pity that their dismissal of pragmatism has been so influential.

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<sup>129</sup> Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 101-3.

James is Moore's only target when it comes to pragmatism. Russell also has some critical things to say about Schiller and Dewey, but only very briefly; he clearly takes James to be the arch-pragmatist.

Russell and Moore alike regard the theory of truth as “the cardinal point in the pragmatist philosophy”.<sup>130</sup> It is the notion that what is true is that which works that sets James *cum suis* apart from their rivals. From the point of view of the pragmatists, of course, this is a crucial mistake. Whoever sees pragmatism as primarily proposing a new theory of truth ‘does not’, in the words of Dewey, ‘take its contention seriously enough’. For both him and Schiller, pragmatism is first and foremost a theory of thought. James, although not seeing it as the fundament of pragmatism *tout court*, subscribes to this same theory, of which his view of truth is a direct outgrowth. As I have made clear in the above sections, James’ conception of truth is much easier understood with his theory of thought in mind; it is the kernel of his *own* pragmatism.

As a result of their limited estimation of pragmatism, both Russell and Moore severely misrepresent James’ views and then proceed to tear down the straw men they set up. According to Russell, James holds that:

Our beliefs have to agree with matters of fact: it is an essential part of their ‘satisfactoriness’ that they should do so. James also mentions what he calls ‘relations among purely mental ideas’ as part of our stock-in-trade with which pragmatism starts. ... *Thus it is only when we pass beyond plain matters of fact and a priori truisms that the pragmatic notion of truth comes in.* It is, in short, the notion to be applied to doubtful cases but it is *not* the notion to be applied in cases about which there can be no doubt.<sup>131</sup>

Russell, in other words, denies that James is a “global pragmatist”<sup>132</sup>; the pragmatist theory of truth is not applicable to *all* beliefs, but should be deployed *exclusively* in cases which cannot be decided by matters of fact and relations of ideas.<sup>133</sup> It is only when we cannot decide on empirical or logical grounds whether a belief is true that we call on the pragmatist theory of truth to help us out. In such cases, it is the idea whose truth would best satisfy our practical desires that is to be regarded as working.

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<sup>130</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘Pragmatism’, in: Idem, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell 6: Logic and Philosophical Papers 1909-13* (New York/London: Routledge 1992), p. 261.

<sup>131</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘William James’s Conception of Truth’ [1908], in: Doris Olin (ed.), *William James: Pragmatism in Focus* (London/New York: Routledge 1992), pp. 200-1, my emphasis.

<sup>132</sup> This formulation I read first in: Cheryl Misak, ‘Introduction’, in: Cheryl Misak & Huw Price (eds.), *The Practical Turn: Pragmatism in Britain in the Long Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), p. 8. As me, Misak holds that, “the classical pragmatists”—Peirce, Dewey and James—are all ‘global pragmatists’.”

<sup>133</sup> James’ third aspect of experience, past beliefs, Russell ignores.



For Russell, then, ‘to work’ means something quite limited to the pragmatist; a belief works if it is beneficial to us if it would be true, its coherence with empirical and ideal experience being of no importance.

Moore proposes a similar view. He distinguishes between two opinions supposedly held by James: “That all those ideas, which we can verify, are true” and “That all ideas, which are useful, are true”.<sup>134</sup> For Moore, these two propositions are distinct; to the first he has “no serious objection”, whereas he repudiates the second.<sup>135</sup> Again, according to Moore, the term ‘usefulness’ is employed in a very limited sense by James. An idea is useful if it yields us some practical benefit, with no relevant connection to verification, that is, agreement with matters of fact or relations of ideas.

However, the interpretations of both Russell and Moore are deeply mistaken. In a way, one could say with Dewey that they do not take James’ contention seriously enough.<sup>136</sup> His pragmatism is not localized, applicable only to what Russell calls ‘doubtful cases’. For James, *all* thought is situated, is meant to guide the organism towards successful behaviour in particular circumstances. This means that *all* beliefs are only true if they work, not just the ones that do not refer to matters of fact and relations of ideas. Crucially, it is not even necessary to look at James’ underlying theory of thought to see this. The theory of truth proposed in *Pragmatism*—and described in the above section—at no point distinguishes between beliefs suitable for analysis in terms of their working and those that are not.

Hence, James has something in mind with ‘working’ and ‘usefulness’ that is quite different from what Russell and Moore think. *Pace* Russell, James does not think that ideas should simply agree with our practical desires in order to work. Rather, as we have seen in the previous section, they should be connected by a ‘feeling of agreement’ to matters of fact and relations of ideas encountered in future action. And against Moore, James does not distinguish between ‘verification’ and ‘usefulness’. If an idea agrees with the experiences instigated and predicted by that

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<sup>134</sup> G.E. Moore, ‘Professor James’s “Pragmatism”’ [1907], in: Doris Olin (ed.), *William James: Pragmatism in Focus* (London/New York: Routledge 1992), p. 163.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>136</sup> Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion’, p. 325n.

idea, it ‘works’, it is ‘verified’, it is ‘useful’, all these terms used by James interchangeably.<sup>137</sup>

As a result, the counterexamples to the pragmatist theory of truth given by Russell and Moore turn out to counter nothing at all. Here is one of Russell’s:

Take, say, belief in the Roman Catholic faith ... It is far easier, it seems to me, to settle the plain question of fact: ‘Have Popes been always infallible?’ than to settle the question whether the effects of thinking them infallible are on the whole good. Yet this question, of the truth of Roman Catholicism, is just the sort of question that pragmatists consider specially suitable to their method.<sup>138</sup>

This example only comes about as a result of Russell’s interpretation of the pragmatist theory of truth as excluding beliefs about matters of fact. Were he right, then the pragmatist could indeed not answer the question ‘Have Popes always been infallible?’. But, given what James actually says, I think it is clear that such a question may figure prominently in the pragmatist inquiry.

Similar examples are given by Moore:

A man often thinks that his watch is right, when, in fact, it is slow, and his false idea may cause him to miss the train. And in such cases, no doubt, his false idea is *generally* disadvantageous. But, in a particular case, the train which he would have caught but for his false idea may be destroyed in a railway accident, or something may suddenly occur at home, which renders it much more useful that he should be there, than it would have been for him to catch the train.<sup>139</sup>

On Moore’s interpretation, the man’s idea that his watch is right is true according to James, while common sense dictates that it is false. But, again, Moore’s refutation is unjustified. For James, the belief that my watch functions appropriately does not ‘work’ in this case. Because in reality the watch is broken, sooner or later my belief will disagree with matters of fact, for example the fact that I miss the train. As soon

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<sup>137</sup> For James’ own response to Russell and Moore, see: William James, *The Meaning of Truth* [1909], in: Idem, *Writings 1902-1910*. Edited by Bruce Kuklick (New York: The Library of America 1987), pp. 962-8. Both T.L.S. Sprigge and Misak regard this response as largely unsuccessful, but hold that James can be (partly) defended against the charges of Russell and Moore on other grounds. See: T.L.S. Sprigge, ‘James, Aboutness, and His British Critics’, in: Ruth Anna Putnam (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), esp. pp. 129-30 & Misak, *Cambridge Pragmatism*, p. 112.

<sup>138</sup> Russell, ‘William James’s Conception of Truth’, p. 201.

<sup>139</sup> Moore, ‘Professor James’s “Pragmatism”’, p. 173, Moore’s emphasis.

as this happens James would say that my belief is false, although I might benefit considerably from it.

Russell commits a straw man fallacy with regard to James' idea of the will to believe as well. As we have seen in the previous section, James argues for the right to believe—despite a lack of evidence—in certain exceptional circumstances. Russell, however, makes it look like James holds the much less plausible position that we are sometimes allowed to say that a belief is positively *true* while lacking the evidence that we normally require for such an assertion. This clearly shows in the following example:

He [James] points out that to different people different options are living. It follows that the beliefs which, on his principles, different men ought to adopt, are different ... One gathers (perhaps wrongly) from his instances that a Frenchman ought to believe in Catholicism, an American in the Monroe Doctrine, and an Arab in the Mahdi (he wrote before the battle of Omdurman) ... his doctrines lead to the conclusion that different people ought to have incompatible beliefs.<sup>140</sup>

In my view, however, James does not claim that a Frenchman *ought* to believe in Catholicism, but that he has a *right* to hold that belief, and that only experience in the long run can tell whether the Frenchman or the Arab with his Mahdi belief is right. In other words, it is not a moral obligation to hold a certain religious belief, but it is morally permissible to do so. So, yes, for James, different people might have incompatible beliefs. But this does not mean that all those incompatible ideas are true as well, which seems to be implied by Russell's use of the word 'ought'—for how could we be morally obliged to hold on to a falsehood, which one of those incompatible beliefs will surely be?

Despite the unfair treatment James receives from Moore and Russell, an invaluable but relatively unknown criticism of pragmatism has come forward from the realist camp.<sup>141</sup> It is levelled by the Oxford realist Joseph in a piece titled 'Prof.

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<sup>140</sup> Russell, 'Pragmatism', p. 266, Russell's emphasis.

<sup>141</sup> See for other critical treatments of Russell's and Moore's interpretations of James: Sprigge, 'James, Aboutness and His British Critics', pp. 129-33 & D.C. Phillips, 'Was William James Telling the Truth After All?' [1984], in: Doris Olin (ed.), *William James: Pragmatism in Focus* (London/New York: Routledge 1992), pp. 229-47.

James on “Humanism and Truth” (1905).<sup>142</sup> Although the article was written before the publication of *Pragmatism*, Joseph’s criticism is equally applicable to James’ philosophical *magnum opus*. It is formulated as follows:

Prof. James is indignant that it should be supposed impossible for the pragmatist to recognise a duty to think truly. But in rejoinder he falls back upon feeling. There is a ‘felt grain inside of our experience’ and that seems to him sufficient. He does not see that his opponent wishes to distinguish between a psychological compulsion that drives you to think in a certain way, and a logical recognition that you ought to think in that way, and that others ought to, whether psychologically they are compelled to or not.<sup>143</sup>

As we have seen, the ‘felt grain inside of our experience’ of which Joseph speaks returns in *Pragmatism*. There, a belief is true if it agrees with our future experiences, this agreement consisting of a coercive ‘feeling of agreeable leading’ or ‘psychological ascertainment of truth’. But, as Joseph points out, this notion of truth is insufficient. What if a person is not psychologically compelled to recognize certain truths that are generally agreed upon? What should we do, for example, with a person who claims that ‘murder is not bad’? It seems that, on James’ account, we have no means of making the other person see that they are wrong if that person has the coercive feeling that the proposition is true. We could at least not win her over by way of argumentation, but must use some sort of psychologically coercive force. Moreover, how could we justify to put such a person in jail, might she commit a murder?

In my view, this is a powerful critique against James’ pragmatist theory of truth to which he gives no convincing reply. In a response article, James claims that of “course [pragmatism] agrees” that we need a normative theory of truth, but then goes on to more or less reiterate his earlier position.<sup>144</sup> A belief SP is better than S, James says, if “S gets superseded by an SP that gives our mind a completer sum of satisfactions”.<sup>145</sup> But this is just to say that SP is better than S if it psychologically coerces us in a stronger fashion. This move still does not provide us with an answer to the person who denies that murder is bad.

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<sup>142</sup> In response to: William James, ‘Humanism and Truth’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1904), pp. 457-75.

<sup>143</sup> H.W.B. Joseph, ‘Prof. James on “Humanism and Truth”’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1905), p. 37.

<sup>144</sup> William James, ‘Humanism and Truth Once More’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1905), p. 191.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

Recent interpreter Alexander Klein does not share my assessment of Joseph's argument. He regards Joseph's challenge as "an incredible charge", and bases this estimation on a detailed analysis of James' earlier work, especially 'Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence' (1878).<sup>146</sup> However, Klein, as Thomas Uebel correctly points out "relies to a large extent on texts of James's that" commentators contemporary to *Pragmatism* "are most unlikely to have read".<sup>147</sup> In my view, this is especially true for Joseph, who was commenting on a very specific article from James' hand, namely his 1905 'Humanism and Truth' and not on his earlier work.

Thus, I conclude that, at least within the historical context of which Collingwood would become a part as well, Joseph's criticism of James' conception of truth still stands. And it has important consequences for the pragmatist theory of thought. As Schiller and Dewey, James holds that thought is always situated; a belief is always connected to other elements of the particular situation in which the organism operates. James' account of this connection is unsatisfactory, Joseph now points out. There must be more than merely a psychological 'feeling of agreeable leading' linking beliefs and future action if the pragmatist theory of truth—and by implication its theory of thought—is to be convincing. A better account, in my opinion, is given by both Schiller and Dewey. In the next section I will begin by describing Schiller's pragmatism and explain how it is an improvement on James' theory of truth.

## 5. Schiller's pragmatism

Born in Germany and living the greater part of his life in England, Schiller was the most prominent non-American exponent of classical pragmatism. He introduced this way of thinking to the British audience in 'Axioms as Postulates' (1902). There, Schiller asserts that reality consists of two aspects: experience on the one hand, and

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<sup>146</sup> Alexander Klein, 'Was James Psychologicistic?', in: *Journal of the History of Analytical Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (2016), p. 6. Retrieved via: <https://jhaponline.org/jhap/article/view/2945>.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas Uebel, 'Pragmatisms and Logical Empiricisms: Response to Misak and Klein', in: *Journal of the History of Analytical Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (2016), p. 4. Retrieved via: <https://jhaponline.org/jhap/article/view/2947>.

“certain assumptions, connecting principles, or fundamental truths” on the other.<sup>148</sup> With the latter, he has in mind things akin to the Kantian categories such as ‘cause’ and ‘substance’. However, Schiller disagrees with Kant and others about the nature of such principles underlying experience.

For Schiller experience as a whole—including its fundamental truths—consists of “experimentation” and “reaction”.<sup>149</sup> In order to structure our chaotic, primary experience, we propose to look at reality in a certain way. What if we assume, for example, that every event has a cause? Does this postulate work? If not, we discard it and try to order reality in a better way. If yes, the principle turns from a postulate into an axiom; we accept it as a general truth and keep using it to get a grip on what we experience. Our experiment has been successful and its result now turns into a reaction; an unconscious habit of thought with which we order the world. Here Schiller clearly deviates from Kant. Whereas for Kant the categories are *a priori* universal and necessary conditions of rationality, for Schiller they are only postulates that have proven successful. Far from being necessary, this means that our axioms might be done away with if other postulates turn out to work even better.

Again, for Schiller, the whole of reality consists of experimentation and reaction. Therefore, he says, the possibility of an external reality, available to us to evaluate whether our beliefs are true, is precluded. The world is to an unascertainable extent of our own making. Made, that is, by our successful experiments. In Schiller’s words:

[E]ven our most passive receptivity of sensations can, and should be construed as the effortless fruition of what was once acquired by strenuous effort, rather than as the primal type to which all experience should be reduced.<sup>150</sup>

Moreover, a postulate, for Schiller, is always practical. We ask whether every event has a cause, because it would be *good* if this was the case. It would be very useful indeed to be able to predict future events with our conception of causation in hand. In the end, therefore, all truths originate with our practical desires.

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<sup>148</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 51.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

As with James, does the above mean that anything goes for Schiller? Can we make reality into anything we would like it to be? No, this is not the case. We perform experiments on the basis of our desires, but these experiments might fail. In our experience there is a “resisting something” to which our experiments must conform.<sup>151</sup> According to James’ interpretation of this point, Schiller has in mind something similar to James’ own view of reality as a coercive combination of matters of fact, relations of ideas and past beliefs.<sup>152</sup> To call the resisting factor in experience ‘the external world’, however, would be a bridge too far according to Schiller, for “while there can be no dispute as to the fact of this resistance, there may be not a little as to its nature, and no slight difficulty about defining it with precision”.<sup>153</sup> In any case, a truly external reality, external to human experience, that is, would be out of reach for us per definition.

This point forms an important part of Schiller’s dispute with realists and absolute idealists alike. For Schiller, these two groups of philosophers form two sides of the same coin. Both believe, as we have seen, that there is a reality that transcends human experience and which determines whether any one of our beliefs is true or not. For realists this is the external world, for absolute idealists the Absolute. But from Schiller’s viewpoint the assumption of a transcendent reality of either kind is futile. Against the correspondence theory of truth, Schiller holds that we can never compare the world and our *thought about* the world with each other. The world is only known in thinking and cannot be separated from it without making it *unknown* and hence *incomparable*. Whether a belief corresponds to an external reality, therefore, we are never in a position to know. And the upshot of Bradley’s conception of the Absolute is the same, or so Schiller holds:

For though he [Bradley] has reserved for it [the Absolute] the title of Sole and Supreme Reality, it is only used to cast an indelible slur on all human reality and knowledge. It ‘absorbs’, ‘transcends’, ‘transmutes’, etc. all our knowledge and experience. It is therefore quite ... unknowable.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>152</sup> James, ‘Humanism and Truth’, pp. 457-75.

<sup>153</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 59.

<sup>154</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (London: Macmillan and co. 1903), p. 191.

The Absolute is an entity that goes way beyond our limited human experience, and can never be fully known by our finite minds. But if this is true, Schiller holds, the Absolute is just as incapable of being the arbiter of truth as the external world of the realist. For how could we compare our beliefs to the Absolute, if the latter must remain unknown to us?<sup>155</sup> Realism and absolute idealism, Schiller concludes, face “precisely the same” problem.<sup>156</sup>

In their place, Schiller wants to posit a logic which holds in the highest regard the fact that truth must always be situated within concrete human experience if it is capable of being known at all. Not the external world or the Absolute are the arbiter of truth, but our own practical purposes:

[W]hether an assertion is ‘true’ or ‘false’ is decided uniformly and very simply. It is decided, that is, by its consequences, by its bearing on the interest which prompted to the assertion, by its relation to the purpose which put the question. To add to this that the consequences must be good is superfluous. For if and so far as an assertion satisfies or forwards the purpose of the inquiry to which it owes its being, it is so far ‘true’; if and so far it thwarts or baffles it, it is unworkable, unserviceable, ‘false’ ... To determine therefore whether any answer to any question is ‘true’ or ‘false’, we have merely to note its effect upon the inquiry in which we are interested, and in relation to which it has arisen.<sup>157</sup>

To take up again our earlier simplified example, for Schiller ‘That is a chair’ is true if it furthers one of my purposes. For example, I might want to rest my feet and, as a result of that, ask whether this object that I see is a chair, it being the case that chairs can be used to rest feet. If I am subsequently able to sit in the object, and as a result I don’t have to stand or walk for a while, it is true that it is a chair for Schiller.

The example shows that meaning as well as truth is dependent on purpose. We might expect a lot of practical consequences from one object, but which ones are relevant to me depends on the specific inquiry I am conducting. As Schiller says:

If ... I can sit in the ‘chair’ ... I shall trouble little whether it ought to be called a ‘sofa’ or a ‘stool’. Of course, however, if my interest was not that of a mere sitter, but of a collector or dealer in ancient furniture, my first judgment may have been woefully inadequate, and may need to be revised.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> See: Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, pp. 181-2.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 181. Cf. F.C.S. Schiller, ‘The Rationalistic Conception of Truth’, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1908-1909), pp. 85-99.

<sup>157</sup> Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, p. 154.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 193.



And this is precisely the reason why Schiller is extremely critical of formal logic. In his controversial book *Formal Logic: A Scientific and Social Problem* (1912), he attacks the discipline for failing to take into account the purpose-relatedness of meaning. The logician studies the formal features of a proposition or judgment, but the latter lose their meaning if not applied to a concrete case: “They [logicians] did not see that ultimately in every case of actual thinking the question involved was bound to be that of expressing a *particular* meaning, and that therefore the form employed had to be relative to a particular purpose.”<sup>159</sup> As formal logic is unable to discern the real meaning of propositions, it also becomes impossible to say whether any judgments actually made are true or false. The result is that logic, and by extension philosophy, is no longer relevant to practical life, a situation much regretted by Schiller.<sup>160</sup>

As in the case of James, it is clear that Schiller’s theories of meaning and truth remain faithful to the pragmatist insight that human thought is always situated. For Schiller it is nonsensical to talk about transcendent truth, that is, truth that supposedly stands apart from any particular human experience. Rather, if we want to judge whether any hypothesis is true, we should look at how it is connected to both future action *and* the specific practical purpose that made us propose the hypothesis in the first place. And the same is the case for meaning. A proposition never has a meaning that is purely its own, it only has meaning through its relations to its practical consequences *and* the interest it is meant to satisfy.

And it is here that Schiller deviates from James’ theory of truth. For both of them, thought and its products cannot be studied in isolation of the other parts of the experience of the organism to which they belong. Schiller and James agree as well that future experience plays a crucial role in determining the worth of an assertion. But whereas James stays silent on where such assertions come from,

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<sup>159</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, *Formal Logic: A Scientific and Social Problem* (London: Macmillan and co. 1912), pp. 5-6, Schiller’s emphasis.

Cf. F.C.S. Schiller, Bernard Bosanquet & Hastings Randall, *Symposium: Can Logic Abstract From the Psychological Conditions of Thinking?*, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: New Series*, Vol. 6 (1905-1906), pp. 224-6 & Jones, Bosanquet & Schiller, *The Import of Propositions*, pp. 385-6, 394-7 & 421-2 & Schiller, ‘The Present Phase of “Idealist” Philosophy’, pp. 42-3.

<sup>160</sup> Schiller, *Formal Logic*, pp. 394-409.

Schiller is explicit about this point: they are postulates arising from our desires or purposes. And not only does Schiller explain how assertions originate from purposes, he is also adamant to stress that the latter play a crucial role in inquiries. An assertion is true insofar it has experiential consequences *which further the purpose* that gave rise to the assertion in question. So where James thinks that the consequences of a belief are enough for finding out whether it is true, Schiller disagrees and holds that the belief's antecedents are crucial for that as well.

In my view, this gives Schiller the means to address the worry levelled by Joseph against James. This worry is that the coercive feeling of agreeable leading that James proposes to be the giver of truth is unsatisfactory. James' view merely describes why people get convinced of some hypotheses, but does not give us a normative theory about whether or not they also *ought* to believe those hypotheses. For Schiller, however, a belief is not true if it psychologically compels us, but if it furthers our practical purposes. This means that, in theory, our beliefs can be mistaken, even if they coerce us. It is perfectly possible that we would be compelled to think that murder is not bad. But another person might explain to us that, in contrast to what we believe, the proposition 'murder is not bad' in point of fact does *not* further our practical purposes. We might then drop the belief, not because of a feeling, but because we recognize that our belief was false. By taking this Schillerian path, James could circumvent Joseph's criticism. What is more, is that this route seems open to James as well. As we have seen, he argues in the context of his theory of thought that 'the theorizing faculty functions exclusively for the sake of ends that are set by our emotional and practical subjectivity altogether.' Transferring this insight to the theory of truth would probably mean ending up with a notion of truth along the lines of Schiller's proposal.

An important question to be raised at this point is what exactly is a 'purpose' for Schiller. As foreshadowed in 'Axioms as Postulates', from his later writings it becomes clear that it is a psychological or biological phenomenon. "[P]urpose is as clearly a psychological conception as meaning is professedly a logical one ... It is, in fact, a biological function", Schiller says in *Studies in Humanism* (1907).<sup>161</sup> In the

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<sup>161</sup> Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, p. 10.

same work he declares that “purpose is primarily a function of psychical fact, which admits of being psychologically determined”.<sup>162</sup> And: “The human mind ... is full of interests, all of which are directly or indirectly referable to the functions and purposes of life. Its organisation is biological”.<sup>163</sup> The purposes we have, in short, are the result of our biological and psychological constitution. Ultimately, then, what is true will also depend on human psychology. Just as the ‘resisting something’ within experience, our biological and psychological purposes are “conditions of some sort” from which our experimentation starts and by which it is “limited”.<sup>164</sup>

But who decides when a purpose is fulfilled? When does a belief work? Schiller has often been accused of a thoroughgoing subjectivism.<sup>165</sup> But this is not fair; for Schiller, it is not the individual who is the judge in matters of truth, but the collective. In *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (1903) he makes this clear in explicit response to the “problem of constructing an objective truth out of subjective truth-valuations”.<sup>166</sup> Again, Schiller appeals to one of our psychological purposes, in this case one that is grounded in the social nature of our being. As we like to communicate with our peers, we are looking for truths that are not tied to the individual but shared by many. It is thus that beliefs that are recognized by the *collective* to be useful gain the status of “objective” truths: “Truth ... to be really safe, has to be more than an individual valuation; it has to win social recognition, to transform itself into a common property” and pragmatism “contends that once more ... it is the usefulness and efficiency of the propositions for which ‘truth’ is claimed that determines their social recognition”.<sup>167</sup>

In the next section we will see the British idealists Bradley and Bosanquet pick up on both Schiller’s view that purpose is grounded in psychology and biology, and his supposed subjectivism. The upshot of their criticisms will be much the same as in the case of the realist rejections of James. That is, while the idealist characterization of the pragmatist notion of truth is largely unfair, the critique of

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 82. Also see: Schiller, Bosanquet & Rashdall, *Logic and Psychology*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>163</sup> Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>164</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 59.

<sup>165</sup> See for example Bradley’s discussion of Schiller below. Also see: Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 91-6.

<sup>166</sup> Schiller, *Humanism*, p. 58.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-9.

Schiller's theory of thought is to the point and calls for yet another pragmatist response.

## 6. The idealist response to Schiller: Bradley and Bosanquet

When it comes to the pragmatist theory of truth, as advanced by Schiller in particular, Bradley levels the objection that can be paraphrased as 'beliefs work because they are true, they are not true because they work'.<sup>168</sup> According to Bradley, when I am trying to find a means to cross a river, my "end is practical, but surely my ideas about the means must be dictated by something which is clearly not myself". In other words,

when you ask what it is which makes each idea [about the means] right or wrong, you cannot exclude its agreement with fact other than my will. And to ignore this aspect of the case, or to treat this aspect as if it were something somehow immaterial, to my mind, I must repeat, is wholly unprofitable. In selecting my means I am forced to consider their relation to the facts, and, if my idea works, it is because of this relation which is not made by my idea.<sup>169</sup>

Bradley thinks that it is a mistake to claim that ideas are true because they further my ends. It is the other way around: because my ideas agree with 'fact other than my will' they are true, and hence work.<sup>170</sup> It also follows that I do not make the truth, but rather find it.<sup>171</sup> According to Bradley, this is in blatant contradiction with the pragmatist position, which is "the insane doctrine" that reality "and truth are what I want and are that which at any time I choose to make them".<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> For the acknowledgement that this argument is directed to Schiller's 'Axioms as Postulates' in particular, see: F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1914), p. 65.

<sup>169</sup> F.H. Bradley, 'On Truth and Practice', in: *Mind*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1904), p. 312.

<sup>170</sup> See for a very similar critique from the same time: Samuel Alexander, 'Collective Willing and Truth (II)', in: *Mind*, Volume 22, No. 4 (1913), pp. 182-9, esp. 184-5.

<sup>171</sup> Also see: F.H. Bradley, 'On Some Aspects of Truth', in: *Mind*, Vol. 20, No. 79 (1911), pp. 326-30, e.g. p. 330: "Whatever else you find to say about truth, you must still be able to add that it was, and is waiting there to be found, and that it is made by no man".

<sup>172</sup> Bradley, 'On Truth and Practice', p. 329. Also see: *Ibid.*, p. 322: "But the loud assertion of the Personal Idealist will not move those who have learned otherwise from the facts. And it will move them the less since they are convinced that the assertor, if he understood his own doctrine, must hold any end however perverted to be rational if I insist on it personally, and any idea however mad to be the truth if only some one [sic] is resolved that he will have it so".

Schiller is much puzzled by this Bradleyan move. According to him, it involves a swing to the correspondence theory of truth, which, as we have seen, is devised by realists precisely to remedy the supposed defects of British Idealist logic.<sup>173</sup> This interpretation might indeed be suggested by Bradley's insistence that truth consists in agreement with fact, but I nevertheless think that Schiller is mistaken here. Bradley's point is not that my ideas should correspond with facts wholly external to my experience, but merely that my ideas should agree with facts independent from my *individual volition*. This clearly follows from his claim that truth consists in 'agreement with fact *other than my will*'.<sup>174</sup> As Damian Ilodigwe has recently put it: Bradley "is reacting to any attempt to subjectivise truth such that it becomes *merely* a human creation".<sup>175</sup>

Still, Bradley's charge is, in my opinion, unfounded. This is especially true in the case of James, who, as has become clear, held that ideas which agree with my experience of matters of fact and relations of ideas 'coerce' me, whether I will it or not. For Schiller, as we have seen, this is slightly different. He does link his theory of truth to psychological purposes. A belief is true if it furthers such a purpose, false if it does not. Truth with Schiller, then, indeed seems to never come apart from our volition. However, even in his estimation of Schiller, Bradley is not right.

First of all, Schiller's account of truth gives an important role to 'the resisting factor in experience', akin to James' matters of fact and relations of his ideas. A belief must indeed further my purpose if it is to be true, but I do not get to decide whether this furthering will also take place. The resisting factor in experience might frustrate the attempt to bend experience to my will. Moreover, in his account of the working of an idea, Schiller has a large role for reaction. And this reaction-aspect of my experience is for an important part the result of the experimentations of my forebears. That is, it is the result of wills *other than my own*, though not apart from volition in general. The same goes for the facts and axioms on which, according to

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<sup>173</sup> Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, pp. 115-9.

<sup>174</sup> Also see what Bradley himself says about this in 'On The Ambiguity of Pragmatism', p. 227: "I had been, I confess, led to think that, where the Pragmatist meant successful practice as the test of truth, he meant this to hold of the individual agent".

<sup>175</sup> Damian Ilodigwe, 'Bradley's Account of Truth', in: *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), p. 225, my emphasis.

Schiller, our experimentations and scientific questions are premised. And we have also seen that in his account of truth, Schiller is adamant to stress that *objective* truth only comes about through social selection. That is, an idea is only called objectively true if it is recognized by *a group of people* to be 'good'. Again, the truth of the idea is not independent of human volition in general, but it is independent from my *individual* will.<sup>176</sup>

To continue, in 1911 Bosanquet published, as we have seen, the second edition of his *Logic*, and it also contains an added section in which he deals with pragmatism. His general attitude towards the new philosophy is best captured in his description of the pragmatist point of view as a "half-truth turned into a complete delusion".<sup>177</sup> Bosanquet offers a complaint about the prominence of 'practice' within pragmatism.<sup>178</sup> He thinks that pragmatists are right to claim that judgments should cohere with practical experience in order to be true. However, he also thinks that judgments should not cohere *only* with practical experience in order to be true. In other words, pragmatism arbitrarily restricts the scope of experience relevant to the truth of judgments:

[T]he environment for thought is not the sphere of external action but the universe of experience. The occasions which evoke responses of thought within specific limitations are merely a fragment of this total environment. The genetic theory [pragmatism], so it seems to me, has merely insisted on an arbitrarily limited fragment of the genuine logical theory.<sup>179</sup>

This error leads pragmatism into further troubles, which Bosanquet terms "Occasionalism" and "Adaptationism".<sup>180</sup> According to pragmatism thought is always provoked by very specific occasions, and the result of thought, therefore, is always a particular adaptation to a particular problem in the environment. Again, Bosanquet does not completely disagree with this, but thinks that the view is incomplete:

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<sup>176</sup> This point is later conceded by Bradley with regard to James in: 'On The Ambiguity of Pragmatism', pp. 227-8 & 'On Some Aspects of Truth', p. 337.

<sup>177</sup> Bosanquet, *Logic*, Vol. II, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 272.

<sup>178</sup> Bradley was also troubled by the supposed pragmatist degradation of theory in favour of practice. See: 'On Truth and Practice', pp. 316-8 & 'On the Ambiguity of Pragmatism', pp. 232-3.

<sup>179</sup> Bosanquet, *Logic*, Vol. II, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pp. 270-1.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271 & 272.

It consists in neglect of the character of thought as a system of functions adapted to the removal of contradiction throughout experience and having always this complete systematic function operative in controlling specific responses or adaptations.<sup>181</sup>

So while it is true that thought is always occasioned by a particular problematic situation, it is not true that it is only aimed at resolving this specific problem. The underlying goal of thought is always to remove contradiction in experience as a whole, and to contribute to a system which is completely coherent.

Like Bradley's, I think Bosanquet's criticism is not fair. It has become clear that pragmatists do not think that judgments should only cohere with practical purposes in order to be true. This is why James and Schiller insist that ideas should agree with matters of fact, relations of ideas and past beliefs, or, as Schiller summarizes them, 'the resisting factor in experience'.<sup>182</sup> Bosanquet's second point is begging the question. It is interesting that he recognizes pragmatism's fundamental insight that thought is always situated. However, to reject this it is not enough to simply assert the alternative view that thought is ultimately aimed at finding a completely coherent system, a view which the pragmatists already deny in the first place.

We may conclude, then, that, as the realists, Bradley and Bosanquet do not do a very good job at interpreting their pragmatist opponents fairly when it comes to the latter's theory of truth. Unlike Bosanquet, however, Bradley also offers a new and powerful critique to the very foundations of the pragmatist theory of truth, that is, the basis of thought in psychological ends.

In 'On Truth and Copying' (1907) Bradley repudiates a version of what has been called 'the myth of the given' in later analytic philosophy.<sup>183</sup> Bare 'facts' either do not exist or are unknowable; for us, at least, they always already involve the work of thought, they are never given as things-in-themselves.<sup>184</sup> This, of course, is very much in line with Schiller's argument against the correspondence theory of truth.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>182</sup> Schiller, 'Axioms as Postulates', p. 59.

<sup>183</sup> Most famously in Wilfrid Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in: H. Feigl & M. Scriven (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. I (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press 1956), pp. 253-329.

<sup>184</sup> F.H. Bradley, 'On Truth and Copying', in: *Mind*, Vol. 16, No. 62 (1907), p. 166.

However, interestingly, Bradley now turns this argument against pragmatism itself.<sup>185</sup>

It is worthwhile to quote Bradley at length on this point:

We are, it seems, to take an end, such say as the abstraction of practical success or of felt pleasure, and we are to understand truth as a means, an external means, to this end. And what, we may hear, can be more plain and intelligible than this? ... But first let us ask as to our end, is this known or unknown? If it is unknown, how do we know that it is an end served by means? And, if it is known, then what are we going to say of *this* knowledge? Is it true? Can we discuss it? Have we got a truth about our end, and, if so, does 'about' mean no more than merely subserving? I do not myself know how these particular questions should be answered.<sup>186</sup>

Bradley is accusing pragmatism of subscribing to another version of the myth of the given, one could say. For pragmatists, not bare facts are given, but the ends to which our truths are means. We simply *have* some psychological purposes, which are grounded in our biological nature and that need to be furthered. But this view runs pragmatism in all kinds of trouble, Bradley now shows. If the ends of thought are given to us—that is, if they do not result from thought itself but from biology—how can we know anything about them in the first place? Schiller's psychological purposes seem to be just other instances of the bare facts he has discarded earlier in his criticism of the correspondence theory of truth. But even if, on the other hand, purposes *do* result from thought, are there then two kinds of truth? One about the ends of thought, and one about the means? Besides seeming strange in itself, Schiller remains silent about the latter possibility. He always describes truth in terms of a belief being true if it actually furthers a purpose. That is, a true belief is always a means to an end. The only case in which we would criticize such an end, in other words, would be if we have some further psychological purpose that inclines us to do so. No matter how far we continue this process, there will ultimately always be some 'given' psychological purpose that grounds our inquiry. In our thinking, then, we will ever be at least to some extent a slave of our biology. And this is a view very unattractive to Bradley and, as we will see, Collingwood.

Schiller's reply to Bradley is, in my view, utterly unconvincing. He claims that "it must be for us irrelevant to ask whether the end was 'known or unknown'".

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<sup>185</sup> See: Bradley, 'On the Ambiguity of Pragmatism', pp. 231-2 & 237.

<sup>186</sup> Bradley, 'On Truth and Copying', p. 168, Bradley's emphasis.



This is the case because “whatever the end, the ‘truth’ of the means chosen to attain it is vindicated by success upon trial”. Hence, Schiller concludes, “Mr. Bradley’s thought clearly has not entered at all into the trying and testing, the valuing and revaluing, which issues in our ‘making of truth’.”<sup>187</sup> But this is to miss Bradley’s point entirely. He does not ask whether, according to the pragmatists, an end can be *attained*, but whether it can be *criticized*. Must we more or less slavishly follow up on every purpose that enters our mind, or can we first inquire whether it is a good, or, in the language of Bradley, ‘true’ end? Hitherto, Schiller’s writings have suggested the former by his insistence on the biological or psychological nature of purposes. This suggestion is, if anything, only reinforced by the above reply. When asked about the possibility of knowing the ends of thought, Schiller immediately starts talking about what it is for thought as *a means* to be true. The option that the *ends* of thought might *also* be true or false is apparently not open to him. The impression that the worth of such ends is irrelevant for Schiller is strengthened by his indifferent talk of them, exemplified by his use of the phrase ‘*whatever the end, the truth of the means chosen to attain it is vindicated by success upon trial*’.

In the previous sections I have made it clear that James’ notion of truth has some unattractive consequences for the pragmatist theory of thought. For James, thought is situated by linking beliefs to future action through the presence or absence of a psychological ‘feeling of agreeable leading’. Some beliefs simply ‘coerce’ us, whether we ought to be coerced or not. That this is not a convincing view is pointed out by Joseph, but a way out is suggested by Schiller. For the latter, beliefs are not only linked to action consequent upon thought but to antecedent purposes as well. This idea gives the pragmatist the means to construct a normative theory of truth out of the view of thought being situated, thereby circumventing Joseph’s objection. However, that Schiller’s pragmatism is ultimately unsatisfactory as well is pointed out by Bradley. The dependence of our thinking on psychological purposes, Bradley shows, would make us a slave of our biological constitution, at least in some measure.

In the next section, I look at whether Dewey’s form of pragmatism is more convincing than the versions of James and Schiller.

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<sup>187</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, ‘Mr. Bradley’s Theory of Truth’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 16, No. 63 (1907), p. 406.

## 7. Dewey's pragmatism

In terms of influence on the British philosophical debate, Dewey falls somewhere in between James and Schiller on the one hand and Peirce on the other. James was identified as the arch pragmatist and drew most of the criticism of especially Russell and Moore, as we have seen. Schiller was by far the most present of the pragmatists and published multiple controversial books and numerous articles in prominent British journals. Peirce, by contrast, was almost entirely neglected in the explicit philosophical debates of the time, as we have seen.

Dewey, while not as present as James and Schiller, was not as absent as Peirce either. In *Mind*, he published 'The Experimental Theory of Knowledge' (1906) and 'Reality and the Criterion for the Truth of Beliefs' (1907). These articles were preceded by the influential *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903), of which Dewey authored the first four chapters. I will use these texts to analyse Dewey's position on truth in the first decade of the twentieth century. It will turn out that he can circumvent Joseph's objection to James in the same way as Schiller. Moreover, I will also cast doubt on whether Dewey is as susceptible as Schiller to Bradley's criticism of pragmatism. This will leave his philosophy as pragmatism's most promising statement at the moment Collingwood arrives at the British philosophical scene around the First World War.

In the second section of this chapter we have seen that the pragmatists take extremely seriously the evolutionary explanation of the development of humankind. A human organism is not some special being with a *quasi* divine rational faculty, aimed at the contemplation of a transcendent truth. Rather, as any organism, the central aim of the human being is survival, and it must use all the powers at its disposal to achieve this end, including its thinking abilities. It follows that thought does not have a goal of its own, but assists the human organism in its quest for survival in the here and now. I summarized this point of view by saying that for pragmatism thought is always situated.

This is all in contrast to what philosophical idealists and realists claim. The latter do in fact hold that it is the goal of thinking to arrive at a truth that transcends the particular situation, be it about the Absolute or the external world. It has already become clear that this difference between pragmatism and the other philosophical

schools is fundamental for Dewey. The “essential point of pragmatism is that it bases its changed account of truth on a changed conception of intelligence”, he insists. And “since truth is the adequate fulfilment of the function of intelligence, it is clear the whole question turns on the nature of the latter”.<sup>188</sup>

To reconstruct Dewey’s theory of truth, then, we must see how it follows from his account of thought.<sup>189</sup> In line with his already quoted statements, Dewey points out that “[t]hinking is adaptation to an end”, and this adaptation takes place “through the adjustment of particular objective contents”.<sup>190</sup> What are the ‘particular objective contents’ which are thus adjusted? These are the elements of some previously integrated situation that have become thrown into jeopardy. While there first was a harmonious whole in which the organism lived without ado, this whole has for some reason come under threat of disintegration; two or more of its elements now contradict each other. The organism enters a “tensional status where the maintenance of ... harmony of content is problematic and hence an aim.”<sup>191</sup> It is the function of thinking to devise an idea on which we can act, our action restoring experience to its harmonious state.

This function, then, provides us with the criterion for the truth of ideas:

it is precisely the capacity of the idea as an aim and method of action to determine this transformation [the construction of an inherently satisfied situation out of an inherently dissident one] which is the criterion of its truth. The criterion of the worth of the idea is thus the capacity of the idea (as a definition of the end or outcome sought in a way likely to be serviceable as a method) to operate in fulfilling the object for the sake of which it was projected. Capacity of operation in this fashion is the test, measure, or criterion of truth.<sup>192</sup>

An idea is true, then, for Dewey, if it has two characteristics. First, it must lead to an action that in principle resolves the tensional status into which experience is thrown.

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<sup>188</sup> Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion’, p. 325n.

<sup>189</sup> Thus Pearce says that the “methodological approach of *Studies in Logical Theory* ... was directly inspired by this psychological ... research... [i.e. a psychological approach constructed on biological foundations]”. See: Pearce, *Pragmatism’s Evolution*, p. 305.

<sup>190</sup> Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*, p. 57. Cf. Dewey, ‘The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology’, p. 365.

<sup>191</sup> Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*, p. 55.

<sup>192</sup> Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion’, p. 341.

Second, this tensional status must not only *in principle* be resolved, but also *in practice*. The idea must really work in order for it to be true.

All of the above might sound not so fundamentally different from what we have seen Bradley and Bosanquet argue in the first section of this chapter. They too hold that thought develops by alleviating contradictions between elements of experience, and that it should be judged by whether it succeeds in doing so. However, Dewey stands the idealist position on its head.<sup>193</sup> For Bradley and Bosanquet, contradictions are not features of *reality* but of *appearance*. The Absolute is perfect and cannot contain inconsistencies. Hence, the idealists presuppose that contradictions can be resolved because in ultimate reality there *are* no contradictions. For Dewey, on the other hand, incoherencies are features of objective situations, and the “assumption which concrete thinking” rather “makes about reality is that reality in its achieved form is such that *through activity guided by thinking*, it may *acquire* a certain character which it is excellent for it to possess...”<sup>194</sup> This presupposition is, in a sense, far more hazardous than the one which the idealists make. The latter are assured that incoherencies will be resolved because they are bound to be unreal appearances. For Dewey, on the other hand, things are much more doubtful. Every idea presupposes that reality can be made consistent, but every time experience may resist the presupposition and our ideas could fail. The test of Dewey’s assumption, again, “is practical, consisting in acting upon it to see if it will do what it pretends it can do, namely guide activities to the required result.”<sup>195</sup>

From all this it follows that for Dewey both truth and reality are to some extent human made. Echoing James, Dewey rhetorically asks: “Is not the truth of ... ideas wholly an affair of *making* them true by constructing, through appropriate behaviour, the condition of affairs which satisfies the requirement of the idea?”<sup>196</sup> As

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<sup>193</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note that many commentators have regarded Dewey as trying to synthesize idealist insights with Darwinian naturalism. E.g., Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 108-14; Trevor Pearce, ‘The Dialectical Biologist, Circa 1890: John Dewey and the Oxford Hegelians’, in: *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (2014), pp. 747-777; Cherlin, ‘Dewey’s Emergent Naturalism’, p. 208.

<sup>194</sup> Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion’, pp. 327-8.

<sup>195</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335, Dewey’s emphasis.

James and Schiller, Dewey is adamant that this “pragmatic account” is no “denial of the reality of truth”, although “intellectualists” sometimes claim that pragmatism does exactly this. Rather, if an idea works this is “neither the cause or the evidence of its truth, but its nature”.<sup>197</sup> For Dewey, in other words, pragmatism does not make a distinction between ‘being true’ and ‘working’ (or ‘being verified’, etc.). This is in line with how I, in the fourth section of this chapter, defended James’ notion of ‘working’ against Russell and Moore’s charge that it entails a form of extreme subjectivism.

Reality as well as truth is human made. By reconstructing the problematic situations as we experience them into harmonious ones, we create reality. For Dewey, the world of our experience is not some shadowy appearance which conceals a stable, more fundamental reality. It rather is the only reality we have, which means that reality itself is constantly developing through our actions as instigated by our ideas.<sup>198</sup> Like Schiller, Dewey denies the relevance of a reality outside experience for the notion of truth. For such a realism, the “standard or test of objectivity is so thoroughly external that by original definition it is wholly outside the realm of thought. How can thought compare its own contents with that which is wholly outside itself?”<sup>199</sup> And again like Schiller, Dewey points out that if reality is to an extent human made, we must not make the mistake of treating our current beliefs as absolutely true. In our experience, some very successful ideas, such as Newton’s law of gravitation, “get an ‘eternal’ status”.<sup>200</sup> However, to ascribe such ideas

to some interior and *a priori* constitution of truth is to make fetishes of them. We must not exaggerate the permanence and stability of such truths with respect to their recurring and prospective use. It is only relatively speaking that they are unchanging. When applied to new cases, as resources for coping with new difficulties, the oldest of truths are to some extent remade.<sup>201</sup>

These quotes could have come straight from Schiller’s ‘Axioms as Postulates’.

All of the above implies that a correspondence theory of truth is out of order for Dewey. Experience is constantly changing and inflected with ideas created earlier

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., pp. 335 & 337.

<sup>198</sup> Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>200</sup> Dewey, ‘Reality and the Criterion’, p. 339.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

in time, so to which phase of the development should our ideas correspond? And even if there was an ultimate unchanging reality outside our experience, how would we ever be in a position to compare it to our beliefs? Dewey not only stands the British idealist account of truth on its head, he also rules out the realist position.

But what about the criticisms that have been launched against pragmatism by the other philosophical schools? In the fourth section of this chapter I concluded that Joseph presents a convincing argument against James' version of pragmatism. According to James, an idea is true if it is connected to action by a 'coercive feeling of agreeable leading', and Joseph pointed out that this is a descriptive account of truth whereas a normative account is needed. Schiller, I argued in the fifth section, circumvents this problem by connecting truth to the antecedents as well as the consequences of beliefs. Via that route, pragmatists have a means to determine the truth of an idea irrespective of whether it is coercive, namely by looking at whether it indeed furthers the practical purpose that instigated inquiry.

In my view, Dewey avoids Joseph's charge in the same way as Schiller does. He connects ideas to the actions instigated by them *and* the problematic situations out of which they arise. An idea only comes about "with reference to performing a certain office in the evolution of a unified experience" and can only be "tested" by "discovering whether it does what it intended to do and what it purports to do".<sup>202</sup> In other words, whether a belief is true depends on if it can and in fact does solve the *specific problem that occasioned it*. An idea, in order to be true, must bring about an agreement between "the exact or specific elements which in their collision with one another set the problem of thinking".<sup>203</sup> Dewey, then, can answer Joseph in the same way as Schiller could. He can point out that the pragmatist does not rely on a psychological feeling of agreeable leading to determine whether a belief is true. For the Deweyan pragmatist, an idea is true if it solves the problem that was put to thinking by a problematic situation, whatever the feeling that accompanies the idea's being put into practice.

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<sup>202</sup> Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*, p. 76.

<sup>203</sup> Dewey, 'Reality and the Criterion', p. 332. Cf. John Dewey, 'The Experimental Theory of Knowledge', in: *Mind*, vol. 15, no. 59 (1906), pp. 300 & 305n.

Bradley's objection, which we encountered in the previous section, is somewhat more difficult to resist for Dewey. As we have seen, Bradley challenges the pragmatist to give an account of the ends of thought. Thinking is often presented by pragmatism as the means to some end, set by for example our desires (Schiller) or a problematic situation (Dewey). But what about our thought *about* these ends? Can we have knowledge of them? Are they produced by or rather given to thought? Can we criticize them, and, if so, will we not end up in an infinite regress towards some ultimate, uncriticizable end? Would this not make us to some extent a slave to something external to ourselves? It has become clear that for Schiller such criticism is hard to answer. For him, the purposes that drive thought are given by the biological desires of the human organism and must simply be accepted, or so it seems.

With Dewey the situation is more complex. For him, the "condition which antecedes and provokes any particular exercise of reflective thinking is always one of discrepancies, struggle, 'collision'." He paints this struggle or collision as a clash of elements within a situation. Some elements are perceived "as obstacles, as interferences, as deficiencies", others "as wanted—as required, as a satisfaction which does not exist".<sup>204</sup> Can we see the latter 'wanted elements' as desires in Schiller's sense? That is, are they rooted in our biological and psychological constitution? Or are they perhaps the result of thought, the conclusion of an argument that establishes that things are not the way they are supposed to be? The texts under discussion allow for both readings.<sup>205</sup> Dewey notes the clashing elements, but does not explain how they arise. This, of course, is in sharp contrast to Schiller, who is very explicit that the notion of 'desire' in his philosophy has to be given a biological-psychological interpretation.

Dewey's account is a bit more sophisticated than Schiller's in the sense that he allows for different phases of reflective thinking. Thought, according to Dewey, is

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<sup>204</sup> Dewey, 'Reality and the Criterion', p. 339-40. Cf. Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>205</sup> According to Pearce, "Although Dewey was deeply influenced by biological ideas, he did not think that the processes of ethical deliberation or scientific inquiry were simply reducible to biology", without, however, going into the issue what is the nature of the problems that prompt the activity of thought. See: Pearce, 'The Dialectical Biologist', p. 765.

provoked by a problematic situation, and this problematic situation can be analyzed as containing multiple elements. Before thinking starts, however, these elements are entangled and intertwined, they form one messy whole. It is only in reflective thinking itself that distinctions such as that between the subjective and the objective, and the given and the wanted arise:

The intellectual or reflective and logical is a *statement* of this conflict: an attempt to describe and define it. It is, as it were, the practical clash held off at arm's length for inspection and investigation. In this way brute blind reaction against the unsatisfactoriness of the situation is suspended. It is turned into the channel of observing, of inferring, of reasoning, or defining means and end.<sup>206</sup>

So for Dewey the problem with which thinking starts is at least not given in the sense that we immediately respond to it. We first study its details and carefully reconstruct it so we better know what to do next. In Schiller we do not find such considerations. However, even with Dewey it remains unclear what 'stating' the problem exactly entails. Is it merely a clear description of what was first confusing or fuzzy? Or is it also a means of criticism, a way of being able to dismiss altogether the idea that we are dealing with a 'problematic' situation, to assert that the 'wanted element' contained in it should not be wanted after all? If the latter, this would take the sting out of Bradley's argument against pragmatism's use of the notion of ends, if the former, not. However, again it seems that on the basis of the textual evidence both interpretations are possible.

In summary, Dewey's pragmatism is similar to the philosophies of James and Schiller in that its account of truth is rooted in a Darwinian philosophy of mind, and in that it tightly knits together thinking and acting, thereby insisting on the situatedness of thought. Dewey is especially close to Schiller in multiple respects, the most important one being that the both of them connect thought to its antecedents as well as its consequences. It is unclear, however, how far Dewey and Schiller agree about the nature of those antecedents. For Schiller, they are biological desires, whereas Dewey is not explicit about this. So while both Schiller and Dewey circumvent Joseph's criticism of James, it remains to be seen whether Dewey is as susceptible to Bradley's charge against pragmatism as Schiller is.

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<sup>206</sup> Dewey, 'Reality and the Criterion', p. 340, Dewey's emphasis. Cf. Dewey et al., *Studies in Logical Theory*, pp. 29-30.



## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given a sketch of the British debate on pragmatism in the first decade of the twentieth century. Providing this sketch has two purposes. First, following the historical approach proposed in the introduction of this book, my aim is to give a characterization of pragmatism, not by way of analytic definition, but by reconstructing how it manifested itself in historical reality.

With regard to that aim, I have argued the following. Both British idealism, the most dominant school in British philosophy at the time, and its most important rival, realism, hold a – what I have called – ‘transcendent’ view of thought. That is to say that for them the function of thinking is to discover a reality that transcends particular experiences and situations. For the British idealists this ultimate reality is the Absolute, for realists the collection of true propositions about the world external to mind.

According to the pragmatists under discussion, this view of thought is mistaken. They all follow Darwin in seeing thinking as an ultimately biological phenomenon, its function being assisting the human organism in its survival. It follows that thought does not have a function of its own, such as the discovery of a transcendent reality of whatever kind. To the contrary, for pragmatism thought is always situated, aimed at solving the *particular* problems of a *particular* human being in a *particular* context.

I have also shown that it is this analysis of thought that must be regarded as the kernel of pragmatism in the context of the early 1900s. Whereas for example Russell and Moore regard the theories of truth and the will to believe as ‘the cardinal point’ of pragmatism, Schiller and Dewey regard their account of thinking as ‘the essential’ one. Moreover, I have argued that we can much better understand James’ notion of truth as well if we take his view of thought into account, although he sees pragmatism primarily as a method.

The second aim of this chapter was to indicate a part of the dialogical context of Collingwood’s reception of pragmatism. What texts and arguments of both the pragmatists and their British adversaries were most conspicuous and promising when Collingwood started his philosophical career?

With a view to this question I have shown how James, Schiller and Dewey construct notions of truth from their theory of thought. For James, a belief is true if it is connected to action by a coercive feeling of agreeable leading. Russell and Moore launch unfair attacks at this account, but Joseph scores an excellent point when he points out that James' theory of truth is descriptive whereas we need a normative one. I have shown how Schiller and Dewey circumvent Joseph's charge by connecting truth not only to future action, but also to the antecedents of thought, i.e. desires (Schiller) or problematic situations (Dewey). For them, a belief is true if it, through the action it instigates, fulfils the purpose that triggered thinking in the first place.

However, this runs especially Schiller into new trouble, as is pointed out by Bradley. The desires that, according to Schiller, are the starting point for thinking, are biological-psychological givens, and this makes our thought the slave of our organic constitution, an unattractive view. How far Dewey is susceptible to this worry is not clear from the texts that played a role in the British reception of pragmatism in the early 1900s. This leaves his version of pragmatism as the most promising one at the time Collingwood started his philosophical career. However, I will re-evaluate Dewey's position on the basis of later sources in the fifth chapter of this book.

Before turning to Collingwood's own thoughts on pragmatism I must take another detour in the next chapter of this book. For to answer the question 'What texts and arguments of both the pragmatists and their adversaries were most conspicuous and promising when Collingwood started his philosophical career?', we must take one more group of thinkers into account, next to the giants of early twentieth century American and British philosophy. These are the Italian idealists.



## II. The Italian context: ‘historical’ versus ‘psychological’ situationism

### Introduction

After it appeared at the philosophical horizon in the early 1900s, pragmatism was a hotly debated topic not only in Britain, but in other European countries as well. Italy, for example, spawned its own school of pragmatists, with Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909), Mario Calderoni (1879-1914) and Giovanni Papini (1881-1956) as its best known proponents.<sup>207</sup> In 1903 Papini founded the journal *Il Leopardo*—to which Vailati and Calderoni contributed regularly as well—allowing Italian pragmatism to attract wider attention. In Italy as in Britain, pragmatism became a school that could no longer be ignored by philosophers from other stamps.

Three of the most important thinkers to heed the provocative calls of the pragmatists were the Italian idealists Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) and Guido de Ruggiero (1888-1948). All of them dedicated portions of their most important works to pragmatism, which generally appears as a subject of contempt. These books were soon to be eagerly read—and some even translated—by a young British scholar by the name of R.G. Collingwood, enthused by teachers such as J.A. Smith (1863-1939) and E.F. Carr (1876-1964) who introduced Italian idealism to the English audience.<sup>208</sup> Hence, it is important for me to look at the Italian response to pragmatism as well as the British in order to understand how Collingwood develops his own position on the matter.

Collingwood’s relation to Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero has by now been well documented, most elaborately by Rik Peters in *History as Thought and Action*:

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<sup>207</sup> See for recent overviews of Calderoni’s, Vailati’s and Papini’s respective positions: Giovanni Maddalena & Giovanni Tuzet, ‘The Sign of the Four: Italian Pragmatists Retold’, in: *European Journal of American Philosophy and Pragmatism*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2011). Retrieved via: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/877> & Giovanni Maddalena, ‘Vailati, Papini, and the Synthetic Drive of Italian Pragmatism’, in: *European Journal of American Philosophy and Pragmatism*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2019). Retrieved via: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1533>.

It must be noted that Papini’s philosophy devolved firstly into a view he termed ‘futurism’, and later into fascism. Maddalena and Tuzet, in the articles cited above, deny any ideological connection between Papini’s pragmatism and his fascism.

<sup>208</sup> See: Peters, *History of Thought and Action*, pp. 191-7.

*The Philosophies of Croce, Gentile, de Ruggiero, and Collingwood* (2013).<sup>209</sup> It is not my intention to do over this work. However, I am coming at the material from another angle, focusing exclusively on the relation between the Italian idealists and Collingwood on the one side and pragmatism on the other. Therefore, I might include some aspects that are left out by Peters and others, and vice versa, all relative to the respective purposes of our researches.

Another caveat I wish to indicate is that I will limit myself to the traction the response of the Italian idealists has on the positions of James, Schiller and Dewey, and ignore the Italian pragmatists for the moment, as a focus on the latter would transcend the limits of the present book. This approach is possible because, as we will see, Croce and Gentile speak of pragmatism generically, implying that their interpretations and criticisms are equally applicable to all pragmatists. De Ruggiero mentions only Peirce, James, Dewey and Schiller, and not their Italian compatriots.

In this chapter, then, I will first (section 1) introduce Italian idealism by looking how it fits within the transcendentalism versus situationism scale introduced in Chapter 1. It will become clear that Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero must be seen as situationists. Reality is process, and thought must always be situated by linking it to the specific place it occupies within that process. In this regard, in other words, Italian idealism seems to side with pragmatism rather than British Idealism and realism. However, I will next show (section 2) that pragmatism is sternly rejected by all three Italian idealists, but on grounds I find inadequate. Nevertheless, I think there is an important difference between the two forms of situationism defended by Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero on the one hand and the pragmatists on the other. Hence, I argue (section 3) that Italian idealism contains an implicit criticism of pragmatism that actually is both very pertinent and also relevant for the position Collingwood takes towards the pragmatists.

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<sup>209</sup> Also see, e.g.: Johnson, *R.G. Collingwood*, pp. 6-7; James Connelly, 'Art Thou the Man: Croce, Gentile or de Ruggiero?', in: David Boucher, James Connelly and Tariq Modood (eds.), *Philosophy, History and Civilization: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on R.G. Collingwood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 1995), pp. 92-114; William M. Johnston, *The Formative Years of R.G. Collingwood* (1967), pp. 66-90 & Fred Inglis, *History Man: The Life of R.G. Collingwood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009), pp. 101-38.

## 1. The Italian idealists on the transcendentalism-situationism scale

In the first chapter of this book, I juxtaposed two possible positions with regard to the aim of thought. The first I termed *transcendentalism*, which I ascribed to both the British idealists and realists. It is the view that thought essentially aims at discovering an ultimate reality in which all particular experiences are transcended and become integrally connected parts of a single, unchanging, eternal whole—either the Absolute (for the idealists) or the collection of true propositions that describes the world independent of mind (for the realists). The idea of transcendentalism I contrasted with that of *situationism*, which I used to interpret the writings of the pragmatists. They hold that the aim of thought is to help resolve concrete problems in the here and now. Thinking is always related to this individual organism which has to adapt to this specific environment at this particular time. How should we place the Italian idealists in this debate? Are they rather transcendentalists or situationists?

In this section I will make it clear that for Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero thought is always situated. For them, reality is not some static whole, a world of being, but a spiritual, developing process, a world of becoming. It follows that, if we want to understand a past product of thought, such as a philosophical concept in Plato or Kant, we must always take its wider historical context into account. Likewise, contemporary philosophers need to study history in order to see how the problems they are working on have arisen in concrete circumstances. In both cases, we are looking at a particular part of the spiritual process of reality, which is very different from other parts, and hence must be taken on its own terms. I will look at Croce's, Gentile's and de Ruggiero's specific positions in turn.

Croce presents reality as an “eternal becoming”<sup>210</sup>, as a perpetual passing into each other of thought and action:

From the ... apprehension of reality, from philosophical reflection upon it, from historical reconstruction, which is its result, is obtained that knowledge of the actual situation, on which alone is formed and can be formed the volitional and practical synthesis, the new action. And this new action is in its turn the material of the new ... figuration, of the new philosophical

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<sup>210</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept* [1909]. Translated from the Italian of Benedetto Croce by Douglas Ainslie (London: Macmillan and co. 1917), p. 319.

reflection, of the new historical reconstruction. In short, knowledge and will, theory and practice ... constitute ... a *circle*.<sup>211</sup>

In other words, the world is a process which has two aspects that mutually presuppose each other. On the one hand we have ‘knowledge’ or ‘theory’, consisting of ‘apprehension’, ‘philosophical reflection’ and ‘historical reconstruction’. This theory does not function in a vacuum but has ‘reality’ as its ‘material’. Reality, however, is nothing more than the outcome of ‘action’ or ‘practice’. Hence, theory presupposes practice. On the other hand, however, practice can only proceed on the basis of knowledge: the situation in which action is called for must be known first. So practice presupposes theory as well. New action leads to new knowledge, as new knowledge leads to new action. Croce’s metaphor of the circle suggests that there is no need of telling where this process starts or ends. We can step into the circle at any point; practice is not more fundamental than theory, or vice versa.

If thought always presupposes action as its material, than thought is always historically conditioned in the sense that it is conditioned by the action it reflects on at that precise moment in time. As Croce puts it in his *Philosophy of the Practical* (1909):

If Life condition [sic] Thought, we have in this the apodictic demonstration of the always historically conditioned form of every thought; not only of Art, which is always the art of a time, of a soul, of a moment; but also of Philosophy which can solve only those problems presented by Life. Every philosophy reflects and cannot but reflect the preoccupations, as they are called, of a definite historical moment.<sup>212</sup>

Considerations such as these lead Croce to posit the identity of history and philosophy in *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept* (1909). Just as all thought, philosophy is always conditioned by ‘Life’, which we know through history: “philosophy is not possible without the ... historical element. ... Without the historical conditions that demand it, the system would not be what it is.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Philosophy of the Practical: Economic and Moral* [1909]. Translated from the Italian of Benedetto Croce by Douglas Ainslie (London: Macmillan and co. 1913), p. 300, Croce’s emphasis.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>213</sup> *Logic*, p. 310.

The philosopher is unavoidably bound to the circumstances of her philosophizing and can only ignore them at her own peril. If she does so, she is unwittingly limited by them, being no different than an animal which “is precisely conditioned by the whole of nature and the whole of history, but does not know it”. The breadth of a philosopher’s theories, Croce concludes, “will depend upon the breadth of his historical knowledge”.<sup>214</sup> In other words, to develop her own thinking, the philosopher must relate herself to the past. She must position herself with regard to the whole process of reality of which she is a part in order not to be unconsciously bound by it. Only if she has done this the philosopher has a clear view of the conditions that call forth her thinking, only through history she truly knows the unique, particular situation that requires reflection. In short, only by being a historian she can be a philosopher.

For Gentile, just as for Croce, reality is spirit, which means it is becoming. We must understand reality, according to Gentile, “not as being or a state, but as a *constructive process*”.<sup>215</sup> He opposes this “idealism”, on the one hand, to views that claim that there is “any reality which can be opposed to thought as independent of it and as the presupposition of it”.<sup>216</sup> On the other hand, Gentile considers his philosophy also to be in conflict with those who conceive thought *itself* “as a reality existing apart from its developing process, as a substance independent from its actual manifestation”.<sup>217</sup> In other words, Gentile’s position diverges radically from both transcendentalist views discussed in the previous chapter. Against realism, Gentile denies that there is a world independent from mind which our thought seeks to describe. And *contra* British idealism, reality, even if conceived as thought, is not an eternal, static substance, such as the Absolute. Instead, reality must be equated with the *act* of thought which is “a continual creation of reality, a continual increase

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>215</sup> Giovanni Gentile, *The Theory of Mind as Pure Act* [1916]. Translated from the Third Edition with an Introduction by H. Wildon Carr (London: Macmillan and co. 1922) p. 15, Gentile’s emphasis.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>217</sup> Idem.



of its own being”.<sup>218</sup> For this reason, Gentile does not distinguish between theory and practice. Thought creates reality, and what can be more practical than that?<sup>219</sup>

At this point it should be mentioned that Gentile is not claiming that *my* act of thought creates reality. He distinguishes between the “transcendental ego” and the “empirical ego”.<sup>220</sup> I, as an individual, would be an empirical ego, whereas the transcendental ego is the aggregate of all such empirical ego’s, i.e. the whole of mankind. The spirit of which he speaks, Gentile says, is not limited to any individual but is “the world-process itself”, or “history”.<sup>221</sup> And it is the act of thought of the *transcendental* ego, *not* merely the empirical ego, that creates reality. Hence, Gentile’s philosophy, at least in this respect, is intersubjectivist rather than subjectivist.<sup>222</sup>

The creative act of thought, for Gentile, is the form that is presupposed by all thought as content. We could try to contemplate, say, a concept or philosophical system in itself, as a product that stands on its own, but this would be an abstraction. In truth, such a concept or system is always intimately connected with the thought that created it. In the words of Gentile: to “detach ... the facts of mind from the real life of the mind is to miss their true inward nature by looking at them as they are when realized”.<sup>223</sup> He speaks of Plato, Spinoza and Wolff as examples:

The world of Platonic ideas, the system of concepts in Spinoza’s ethics, the world of possibles in the intellectualist system of Wolff—what are all these, when we turn them from abstract thought to the concrete, but definite historical philosophies, the thought of individual philosophers, realized by them, and realizing themselves in us when we seek to realize them, in our individual minds? They deal with the *cogitare* which realizes itself in a definite being who is absolutely unique.<sup>224</sup>

So in order to truly understand a product of thought—that is, any aspect of reality whatsoever, as reality is created by thought—we must always see it in relation to the

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>222</sup> For an account of Gentile’s (and Collingwood’s) attempt to deal with the supposed subjectivist implications of his point of view for the theory of truth, see: James Wakefield, ‘Talking Their Way out of Relativism: Collingwood and Gentile on the Nature of Inquiry’, in: *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2013), pp. 139-68.

<sup>223</sup> Gentile, *Mind as Pure Act*, p. 12.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

act of thought that created it, the act of thought of an absolutely unique individual. Or, more precise, the act of thought of the transcendental ego 'which realizes itself in a definite being'.

Gentile applies this point of view to the interpretation of a poem by the Italian poet Ariosto (1474-1533):

To realize that reality to the best of my ability, I must at least read the poem. But what does reading mean? Can I read the poem unless I understand the language in which it is written? And what is the language? Can I learn it from the dictionary for all writers of the same literature? And can I know the language of any writer as his language, unless I take into account what there is individually real in the process of spiritual history, which no longer belongs only to the empirically determined individual but lies deep in the spiritual world in which the mind of the writer lived? And so we must say that reading Ariosto means in some way reading what Ariosto had read and re-living in some way the life which he lived, not just when he began to write ... but before, long before, so long as we can trace back the whole course of his life of which [the poem] was the flower.<sup>225</sup>

Truly being able to understand the poem and appreciate its beauty implies knowing a host of other things concerning Ariosto's act of thought, including the world in which he lived. In fact, as Gentile points out, we must try to re-live Ariosto's life to the fullest extent possible. Reading the poem as a self-standing object will not do, it is a specific product of thought, produced by an individual act of thought in a particular context.

But this particularity, for Gentile, does not imply an absence of universality. Precisely by engaging with Ariosto's particular poem, by placing it in a wider context, we get to know reality as a whole. Reality is nothing more than the continuous becoming of the transcendental ego, which is the aggregate of empirical ego's such as ourselves and Ariosto.<sup>226</sup> By learning about Ariosto's poem and life, then, we ultimately learn about the development of the transcendental ego as well. In Gentile's metaphor, "idealism ... has found God and turns to Him; but it has no need to reject any single finite thing: indeed without finite things it would once more lose God."<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-7.

<sup>226</sup> See: Bruce Haddock, 'Gentile as Historian of Philosophy: The Method of Immanence in Practice', in: *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1-2 (2014), pp. 24 & 30.

<sup>227</sup> Gentile, *Mind as Pure Act*, p. 277.

De Ruggiero's position on these matters is very much in line with that of Croce and especially Gentile.<sup>228</sup> As both of them, he thinks of reality as a spiritual becoming and thus rejects the idea that it is a static, complete whole that exists independently of mind. And similarly to Croce, de Ruggiero argues that the spirit proceeds through problems that call forth solutions, which lead to new problems, et cetera. Both aspects of this view are reflected in the following quote from *Modern Philosophy* (1912): "The world of thought is actuality, concreteness, search and achievement, aspiration and attainment; this new conception of the world as the world of our struggle and labour must supplant the old world as a natural whole".<sup>229</sup>

According to de Ruggiero, if one accepts the view of reality as a process that is purposefully developed by human beings, it follows that the philosopher of the present cannot do without history. All our thought is the solution to a particular problem, which arises out of prior solutions to older problems, and so on. Therefore, to understand the problem we are dealing with at this moment we need to know what went before it. As de Ruggiero puts it, "the past is our own past which lives through our present experience".<sup>230</sup> We need to account for that past in order not to be unwillingly bound by it.

*Modern Philosophy*, an encyclopaedic overview of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> philosophy, is an attempt to live up to that task. It has the explicit aim of justifying the philosophical project that de Ruggiero and his allies are engaged in, by showing why and how their predecessors went wrong. De Ruggiero contends that, as all thought arises as a response to particular problems in particular places, every country has a philosophical "national soul ... with its own unique rhythm of development". Therefore, he defines his task as follows: "We must trace each stream back to its source, follow its movement and disclose the immanent criticism which determines its direction and ultimate goal".<sup>231</sup> This way, de Ruggiero hopes to save contemporary philosophy from mistaking past solutions as answers to present day

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<sup>228</sup> According to Bruce Haddock, de Ruggiero wrote *Modern Philosophy* "at a point in his career when he identified himself closely with Gentile". See his: 'Gentile as a Historian of Philosophy', p. 28.

<sup>229</sup> Guido de Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy* [1912]. Translated by A. Howard Hannay and R.G. Collingwood (London: George Allen & Unwin 1920), p. 375.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 375-6.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

problems. For example, “the dominating abstract formulas, which, still imbued with the conceptions of the French Revolution, are more than a century behind the culture of to-day” must be “overcome” by a “thorough study of history”.<sup>232</sup> Thus de Ruggiero clears the path for his own philosophy as the way to further the development of the spirit.

For all three philosophers we must conclude that they are situationists rather than transcendentists. They all deny a static reality by claiming that we live in a world of becoming; we are all part of a spiritual process that is never complete but keeps developing. As a result, thought is always immersed in a *particular* situation that differs from what comes before and after it, and can never be aimed at discovering some transcendent reality. If we ignore this fact, we can never fully understand past thought and, as Croce and de Ruggiero point out, are also incapable of fully expressing the philosophical problems of our own day.

This, in a sense, is similar to what we have seen the pragmatists claim in the previous chapter of this book. Against British idealism and realism, James, Schiller and Dewey are adamant that thought does not function independently, with a goal of its own, but is always intimately linked to practical desires or problems on the one hand and action on the other. To understand and evaluate thought, then, we must always take into account which *specific* problem it is meant to solve by leading to successful action. How far this similarity really goes we will see in the third section of this chapter. I will now first look at how Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero estimate pragmatism themselves.

## 2. The explicit mischaracterization of pragmatism in Italian idealism

That there are some *prima facie* similarities between Italian idealism and pragmatism is also recognized by Croce and de Ruggiero. As we have seen, for Croce, theory always presupposes practice, and he admits that the pragmatists have the same insight. He even calls his own view that thought is the response to problems

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

that arise out of action a “new pragmatism”.<sup>233</sup> Likewise, de Ruggiero recognizes that for both idealists and pragmatists, truth is not something static and external, but is in some sense made by humans:

Pragmatism has, in fact, given expression to one essential part of the spirit of modern philosophy. To have affirmed the human character of truth, to have denied a reality perfect and ready-made outside thought, to have maintained that truth, science, is being made, is being created and is not absolutely given once and for all, is to have struck a blow in the cause of idealism.<sup>234</sup>

Nevertheless, both Croce and de Ruggiero reject pragmatism in the strongest of terms. According to Croce, it is “the school of the greatest confusion that has ever appeared in philosophy”<sup>235</sup>, “a little of everything, but, above all, chatter and emptiness”.<sup>236</sup> In the view of de Ruggiero, with pragmatism, philosophy “has vanished, and we are on the brink of comedy, if not downright charlatanism”.<sup>237</sup> And though not as outspoken as his colleagues, Gentile agrees with their verdict: pragmatism is entirely mistaken.

In this section I will look at the specific reasons for the Italian idealist rejections of pragmatism. It will be my conclusion that these reasons are not adequate; they are based on two misconceptions of the position of the pragmatists.

The first misconception can be found in the works of Croce, Gentile *and* de Ruggiero. It is the interpretation of pragmatism as a form of scepticism according to which the formation of concepts is not due to thought but to volition: it is the will that arbitrarily devises concepts to accommodate our every whimsy. According to Croce, with this view pragmatism overstates its correct observation that volition has a role to play in the intellectual life: “the passage from this thesis to the other, that the true is the production of the will, is nothing but a sophism ... It should be clear

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<sup>233</sup> Croce, *Philosophy of the Practical*, p. 304. Also see: *Ibid.*, p. 35. For the development of Croce’s ‘pragmatist’ philosophy of history, see: Rik Peters, ‘The Spinning Silkworm: Benedetto Croce’s *History as the Story of Liberty*’, in: *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2021), pp. 305-22.

<sup>234</sup> De Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 254. For a similar acknowledgement in Croce, see his *Philosophy of the Practical*, p. 36.

<sup>235</sup> Croce, *Philosophy of the Practical*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>236</sup> Croce, *Logic*, p. 559.

<sup>237</sup> De Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 254.

that to assist the work of thought with the will is one thing and that to substitute the will for the work of thought is another”.<sup>238</sup>

In a sense, if this were the view that is at the core of pragmatism, it is striking that Croce does not give the pragmatists more credit.<sup>239</sup> For in the eyes of Croce, an awful lot of the concepts we apply in our day to day lives are precisely ones that are fashioned by the will. In Croce’s terminology, these are “pseudoconcepts”, produced “by means of a manipulation of single representations, so concentrated and simplified as to give rise to classes or symbols, which are without reality but convenient, fictitious but useful”.<sup>240</sup> Pseudoconcepts are distinguished from “pure concepts”, which are the proper subject of logic. A concept is pure if it is both “ultrarepresentative” and “omnirepresentative”.<sup>241</sup> It is the first if it is applicable to the whole of reality, not merely a fragment of it. It follows that a concept like ‘horse’ can never be a pure concept: it is only applicable to a relatively small portion of reality, namely those objects that we call horses. According to Croce, all concepts produced by the natural sciences are pseudoconcepts like this. A concept is omnirepresentative if it refers to reality at all. Hence, the concept of e.g. ‘geometric triangle’ is not a pure concept, as it does not refer to anything real; a geometrical triangle does not exist. In the view of Croce, this goes for all mathematical concepts. In the end this means, then, that only quite a select group of concepts, including ‘quality’, ‘quantity’ and ‘existence’, is pure and the proper object of thought. Pseudoconcepts must not be dispensed with, according to Croce: they are useful and even indispensable for life. But we must always remember that they are merely arbitrary fictions, they are ‘without reality’.<sup>242</sup>

This all seems pretty much in line with pragmatism as interpreted by Croce. The supposed mistake of the pragmatists, however, is that they think that *all* concepts are pseudoconcepts, that all concepts are fashioned by the will. That this is not true Croce shows by a *reductio ad absurdum* of that position:

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<sup>238</sup> Croce, *Philosophy of the Practical*, p. 35.

<sup>239</sup> Thus, according to David D. Roberts, Croce was “surely too dismissive of pragmatism”. See his *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2016), p. 90.

<sup>240</sup> Croce, *Logic*, p. 13.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-39.

Finally, the theorists of fictions and of toys, in their amiable satire of logic and of philosophy, forget to explain one small particular, which is not without importance; that is to say, whether their theory of the concepts as fiction, is in its turn *fiction*. Because, were it fiction, it would be useless to discuss it, since by its own admission it is without truth; and if it were not (as it is not), it would have a character of true and not fictitious universality; or, it would be, not at all a simplification and symbol of simplification, but a concept, and would establish the true concept at the very moment that it unmasks those that are fictitious.<sup>243</sup>

In other words, Croce asks the pragmatist what the status of her own theory is. Is the notion that ‘all concepts are fictions’ itself a fiction? If so, it is ‘without truth’ per definition and not up for philosophical discussion. But surely the pragmatist must want something more. The very fact that the pragmatists write polemical works and try to get people on their side indicates that they think of their philosophy as correct. But then the pragmatist acknowledges that she proposes her view as a pure concept, hence falsifying the idea that ‘all concepts are fictions’. Hence, pragmatism, in the eyes of Croce, is demolished.

However, for one to accept this *reductio*, one must first agree that Croce’s characterization of pragmatism is correct. And in my view it clearly is not. In defending the pragmatists against similar charges in the first chapter of this book, I have already shown that for none of the pragmatists discussed ‘the true is the production of the will’ and that none of them ‘substitutes the will for the work of thought’.<sup>244</sup> In contrast, much like Croce, they point out the fact that will and thought cannot be ontologically separated from one another and must always be seen in connection. But with the pragmatists as well thought keeps a function of its own and is not reduced to will. Of course, the pragmatists reconceptualise ‘thought’, and claim that its function is to help the organism adapt to its environment, with which Croce would disagree for reasons to be discussed later. However, he overlooks this point completely and therefore never addresses it.

Because he fails to see the pragmatists’ reformed philosophy of mind, Croce also misconstrues their theory of truth. His whole *reductio* turns on the meaning of ‘fiction’ and ‘truth’, which for the pragmatists follows from their theory of thought. Indeed, concepts are not ‘true’ in the traditional sense that they are correct

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-7, Croce’s emphasis.

<sup>244</sup> See pp. 31-40 of this book.

descriptions of some transcendent reality; in that sense they might indeed be called fictions. However, they *are* 'true' in the pragmatist sense that they aid the human organism in living. Hence, I reject Croce's characterization of the pragmatist position as saying that there is a distinction between useful and true, and that, in this scheme, concepts are useful but not true. The pragmatist philosophy itself, then, is up for rational discussion just as all other concepts, provided the correct meaning is given to the word 'rational'. Just as his British idealist and realist colleagues, Croce fails to recognize the deep disagreement between him and pragmatism on the level of philosophy of mind, tries to fit pragmatism in his scheme, and thereby mischaracterizes its position completely.

As indicated before, Gentile's interpretation of pragmatism is on a par with that of Croce. He too regards pragmatism as a species of scepticism "insofar as it depreciates an act of cognition in order to appreciate it as a practical act". Gentile's 'pragmatism' says that the purpose of concepts, "which are fashioned by the will, ... is that of directing, and imposing order on, the mass of single and particular facts of experience".<sup>245</sup> So, as Croce, Gentile claims that the pragmatists hold that concepts are created, not by thought, but by volition, in order to help us navigate 'the mass of single and particular facts of experience'.

He protests to this point of view by making a move we have seen Bradley make before, i.e. by asserting that the pragmatists get things backward.<sup>246</sup> Concepts cannot claim truth because they are useful, they are useful because they are truthful descriptions of reality. Every "concept [is] useful in so far as it permeates the intuition of the particular with itself", Gentile says.<sup>247</sup> In other words, we cannot pull the concept and the 'mass of single and particular facts' apart, as the pragmatists allegedly do. Only insofar as a concept is truly capable of permeating the experience it is meant to order, can it be useful.

I answer Gentile as I did Croce. The pragmatists do not hand over to volition the tasks of thought. Hence, they do not distinguish between 'truth' and 'usefulness' and deny truth to concepts while affirming their usefulness. Rather, pragmatism

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<sup>245</sup> Gentile, *Mind as Pure Act*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>246</sup> For Bradley's argument, see pp. 59-60 of this book.

<sup>247</sup> Gentile, *Mind as Pure Act*, p. 82.



reframes what it means to be 'true' on the basis of what thought ought to do according to their evolutionary theory of mind. Again, Gentile, just as Croce, would not agree with the pragmatist philosophy of mind, but he does not engage with them on that level.

Lastly, I turn to de Ruggiero's rejection of pragmatism, which is compatible with that of Croce and Gentile, but also involves the second misconception I mentioned above. De Ruggiero sees pragmatism as "the logical conclusion and therefore the *reductio ad absurdum* of empiricism".<sup>248</sup> True reality, according to empiricism and pragmatism, is given through the senses. Thought, then, must be seen as less than real. We cannot deny that it provides us with concepts, but these are always deficient if compared to the concrete reality of sensation. The concept is "an arbitrary but convenient fiction" and "its validity can only be determined by its results, by its success", says de Ruggiero, deploying Crocean terminology.<sup>249</sup> But who or what gets to decide whether a concept is successful, whether it works? It "is the mere agreement of individuals in the recognition of what it pays to call truth".<sup>250</sup> In the end then, according to de Ruggiero's 'pragmatism', human beings decide what is true; whatever they think 'pays' works.

This point of view, de Ruggiero says, pragmatism also applies to itself:

The pragmatists are therefore quite consistent in replying to the question whether pragmatism is a doctrine of knowledge, a metaphysic, an ethic, or a religion, that it is whatever happens to be convenient. One man hates all metaphysics, another is inclined towards pluralism, another towards monism, and pragmatism can welcome them all; in her ample bosom every suppliant will find a home. But with all its frenzy for work, pragmatism in reality does nothing but spin its absolutely empty formula and rest content with superficial paradoxes and extravagant fantasies. That ideas should work is all very well, but in practice they always seem to be other people's ideas: if it has any of its own it never gives them anything to do.<sup>251</sup>

In other words, for de Ruggiero, pragmatism is a philosophy of 'anything goes'. We shall call true whatever anyone finds it convenient to be true. This is also the case for the concept of pragmatism itself. Hence, 'pragmatism' is an 'empty formula': its

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<sup>248</sup> De Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 253.

<sup>249</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>250</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253-4.

meaning is not fixed but can be whatever anyone finds it convenient to be. As a result, pragmatism has not got any ideas of its own which it gives work to do.

In my opinion, this is all wrong. If pragmatists start from a metaphysical position, it is not empiricism but the theory of evolution. From this they derive a philosophy of mind, i.e. the view that thought is there to assist the surviving and thriving of human beings. This idea, then, leads to the concept of truth as working. Seen in that context, it is clear that ‘working’ cannot be equated with ‘what we agree to be convenient’ for the pragmatists. An idea will work or it will not, you will survive or not, independently of whether you find this convenient. Yes, our thinking is there to help us fulfil our practical desires, but whether this will succeed is not up to us.<sup>252</sup>

Also, it is clear that pragmatism is not an ‘empty formula’. Schiller and Dewey insist that the kernel of pragmatism is precisely its theory of thought, and use it to strictly demarcate themselves from other philosophers. And even James, who is more democratic in that respect, never says that pragmatism *itself* is up to multiple interpretations. For him pragmatism essentially is ‘Peirce’s principle’, a method which can be *used* in multiple, possibly incoherent, inquiries.<sup>253</sup> If de Ruggiero truly wants to repudiate pragmatism, he must engage with the positions they actually take, but he fails to do so.

Among the three Italian idealists, de Ruggiero is the only one to differentiate between James, Schiller and Dewey. Peirce is not discussed but only mentioned in passing as the inventor of pragmatism. Of Schiller, de Ruggiero says that “the name [humanism] is the only novelty here; under the new name Schiller develops the same theory [as pragmatism].”<sup>254</sup> Dewey, despite de Ruggiero dedicating only one paragraph to him, is considered to be “the most serious member” of the pragmatist school.<sup>255</sup> I will go into de Ruggiero’s interpretation of Dewey in the next section.

It is clear that de Ruggiero sees James as the arch pragmatist, dedicating no less than two and a half pages of *Modern Philosophy* to the latter’s thought. He is especially critical of *Pragmatism*, which, according to de Ruggiero, “marks the

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<sup>252</sup> See pp. 43 & 54 of this book.

<sup>253</sup> See pp. 31-40 of this book.

<sup>254</sup> De Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 257.

<sup>255</sup> Idem.

complete decline of [James'] mental faculties, the final impotence of his thought".<sup>256</sup> For de Ruggiero, James' book is the ultimate example of the 'anything goes' approach taken by pragmatism:

Here the pragmatist method is represented as a method of avoiding metaphysical discussions, or better, of solving every problem by caprice. ... Must we decide between theism and materialism? The past does not tell us anything in favour of either one or the other. Let us look within us. The world of materialism closes in tragedy and doom: that of theism legitimizes our sublimest hopes. Is this latter in our interest? If so, let us accept it. This is magnificent reasoning; and the whole book is strewn with similar gems of logic. Truth is reduced to an economic fact, a form of wealth, a 'property' of our ideas: thought has an exchange value like that of a bank-note which 'passes' so long as nobody rejects it; and so on through a series of ineptitudes that bring disgrace on the name of philosophy.<sup>257</sup>

Again, de Ruggiero betrays his ignorance of how James' pragmatism is rooted in the theory of evolution. It is not up to us whether a belief is true or not. Yes, we can tentatively accept a belief, such as 'theism', but only acting on it and seeing whether it works in practice will decide its validity. And this working is independent of our 'hopes': reality as a combination of matters of fact, relations of ideas and past beliefs will coerce us, whether we will it or not.<sup>258</sup> So, again, de Ruggiero's interpretation of pragmatism as claiming that ideas are true 'so long as nobody rejects them' turns out to be a straw man.

I conclude that in their explicit rejection of pragmatism, Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero are unsuccessful. Their failure is due to two misconceptions. First, Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero claim that pragmatists transfer the work of thought to will. In the end, this makes them underestimate the robustness of the pragmatist theories of thought and truth as rooted in evolutionary theory. Additionally, de Ruggiero presents pragmatism as an 'empty formula', as having no ideas of its own but proclaiming everything true which anyone finds convenient. However, this is correct for none of the pragmatists discussed.

Nevertheless, in my view an interesting criticism of pragmatism can be found in the writings of the Italian idealists. This criticism is implicit in their idea of *historical* situationism, which, I will argue, is quite different from the pragmatist

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<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>257</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>258</sup> See p. 43 of this book.

idea of *psychological* situationism. In the next section I will make this difference fully explicit and explain in which sense the thought of Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero sheds some significant doubt upon the pragmatist project, at least in the guises of James and Schiller.

### 3. The implicit criticism of pragmatism present in the idea of historical situationism

At the end of the first section of this chapter, I claimed that there is some affinity between the position of the Italian idealists and that of the pragmatists. Both groups of philosophers see thought as occupying itself with specific problems that arise in particular contexts. This idea stands in sharp contrast to ‘transcendentism’, a view to which Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero on the one hand and James, Schiller and Dewey on the other are equally opposed. In this section, however, I will show that the ‘situationisms’ of both groups are, in the end, not quite on a par. The difference between them comes into full focus if it is realized that, for Italian idealism, history is always a matter of spiritual becoming. In what follows I will explain what this means for Gentile, de Ruggiero and Croce in more detail. It is here, I argue, in the idea that thought is *historically* situated, where history is seen as a spiritual process, that the real difference lies between pragmatism and Italian idealism, and not in the explicit Italian idealist rejections of pragmatism.

What it means for history to be spiritual can perhaps best be glanced from Gentile’s *Theory of the Mind as Pure Act* (1916). In that work, Gentile argues, as we have seen, that reality is the creation of the pure act of thought. And as thought is becoming, so is reality. Reality is a constructive process which is constantly evolving.

Additionally, Gentile declares that thought is “*causa sui*”.<sup>259</sup> This means that it does not presuppose anything outside itself by which it is determined. Thought only answers to itself and does not have to reckon with some external reality. Hence, Gentile criticizes for example Plato’s idealism for denying the autonomy of thought:

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<sup>259</sup> Gentile, *Mind as Pure Act*, p. 256.

The Platonic dialectic is only dialectic in appearance ... the value of ... inquiry presupposes that an eternal dialectic is a presupposition of the thought, the dialectic belongs to the ideas, and though it is possible to conceive a mind sharing in it, still it is not the dialectic of the mind.<sup>260</sup>

Does this mean that Gentile denies the concept of fact, of ideas taken to be true and hence having some stability? No, he does not. He does, however, deny its oft supposed characteristics of immutability and necessity, which implicate fact's autonomy over thought. This notion, Gentile holds, must be destroyed by a criticism "of the category of fact itself, we must show its abstractness and how it implies an even more fundamental category, the spiritual act which posits fact".<sup>261</sup> Fact is dependent on thought, not the other way around. In other words, thought as '*causa sui*' ultimately means that thought is "freedom".<sup>262</sup>

But with freedom comes responsibility. If thought creates reality,

man makes himself what he is and is not made. ... And when we suppose the course of a man's moral life can be determined *a priori*, like that of a celestial body, we are denying the freedom of power of creation belonging to him as spirit, debasing him to the level of natural things which are what they are.<sup>263</sup>

For Gentile, then, it is clear that we are just as responsible for our thinking as for our action. It is often thought that we choose how we behave, but have no control over how we think, and "this is a most serious error". Mind must subject itself to law. Not to a standard akin to natural laws, but to "an ideal which the mind presents to itself". Gentile sums up the above viewpoints by declaring that mind "is freedom; but also, and just on that account, it is law".<sup>264</sup>

De Ruggiero's point of view is very much in line with that of Gentile. As we have already seen, he also thinks of reality as a process produced by thought. In recent philosophy and especially his own, de Ruggiero declares, "an ever-clearer

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-5.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

This "*etica del sapere*", the 'responsibility to think the truth' Gentile elaborated in his *Sistema di Logica Come Teoria del Conoscere* (1917-1922). See: Rik Peters, 'The Actuality of Giovanni Gentile's Philosophy of History', in: James Wakefield & Bruce Haddock (eds.), *Thought Thinking: The Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Luton: Andrews, UK 2015), pp. 188-98.

understanding is being attained of the actual immanent value of experience, which is no mere *reproduction* of a thing-in-itself, but a *production* of reality and of human values”.<sup>265</sup> ‘Facts’, such as presented to us by the natural sciences, must be seen as the outcome of thought, rather than entities imposed on us from outside. “The true centre of natural reality’, de Ruggiero holds, “is not natural law but human thought”.<sup>266</sup> The process of reality as a whole, or “universal history”, then, must be seen as “the history of the human mind”, for outside thought there is nothing. Again, even physical reality must be “included in the spiritual process, for it is not something extraneous to us, it is our science itself: it is our research and our achievement”.<sup>267</sup>

And just as for Gentile, for de Ruggiero the above point of view implies that human thought must take responsibility for its own thinking:

the conception of the human reality of the world removes all justifications for laziness and fatalism and comfortable reliance upon a kindly providence, and that we must depend on ourselves for strength, because we are what we make ourselves, and our reality is our own work.<sup>268</sup>

In other words, for de Ruggiero as well it would be a grave mistake to assume that the way we think is out of our control, dictated by some force external to thought. It is we who create reality, so it is we who are responsible for how we do that. Thinking or acting as if we are forced to do so can only be justified by unfounded excuses, the new philosophy teaches us.

Despite insisting on the mutual interdependence of theory and practice, Croce also fiercely defends the autonomy of thought. Volition never stands on its own, but always has knowledge as its basis: “the practical activity presupposes the theoretical. Will is impossible without knowledge; as is knowledge, so is will”.<sup>269</sup> As we have seen, for Croce this also goes the other way around. Thought always has history as its basis, history which is the outcome of human action. However, “philosophical propositions, though historically conditioned, are not effects

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<sup>265</sup> De Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 373, my emphasis.

<sup>266</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>268</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>269</sup> Croce, *Philosophy of the Practical*, p. 33.

produced and determined by these conditions, but creations of thought, which is continued in and through them”.<sup>270</sup> So theory, although reflecting on historical problems, is not bound by these problems; it has the freedom to deal with them in any way it sees fit. Thought realizes itself *in* history rather than being determined *by* it. Thus, Croce straightforwardly rejects the idea that

the history of philosophy should be treated *psychologically*, by the attribution of ideas to the temporal conditions and the personal experiences of philosophers, to social history and biography, is reducible to materialism and determinism in its least evident form, namely psychologism. Such a thesis is the failure to recognize spiritual value.<sup>271</sup>

For Croce, then, the spirit must never be reduced to something outside of itself. Ideas are not the result of biographical or social circumstances, but the products of autonomous thought.

This point of view has a profound influence on Croce’s philosophy of history. In his well-known book *Theory and History of Historiography* (1916) he dedicates an entire chapter to “The Humanity of History”.<sup>272</sup> It starts by declaring that, enfranchising “itself from extramundane caprice and to blind necessity, freeing itself from transcendency ... thought conceives history as the work of man, as the product of human will and intellect, and in this matter enters into that form of history that we shall call *humanistic*”.<sup>273</sup> The correct view of the process of reality unfolding, Croce tells us, has been “well formulated ... as mind or reason that constructs history”. History is “the eternal spirit individualizing itself”.<sup>274</sup> As with Gentile and de Ruggiero, then, Croce sees reality as being made by thought. If we accept this, we must free ourselves from “the despair caused by pessimism”.<sup>275</sup> We do not have to surrender ourselves to anything outside human thought, be it some kind of transcendent providence or external world. It is in our power to change reality if we muster the capacities of our minds.

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<sup>270</sup> Croce, *Logic*, p. 319.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320, Croce’s emphasis.

<sup>272</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Theory and History of Historiography* [1916]. Translated From the Italian of Benedetto Croce by Douglas Ainslie (London: George G. Harrap and co. 1920), pp. 94-107.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94, Croce’s emphasis.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Although not brought to bear on pragmatism, the above viewpoints contain, in my opinion, an important implicit criticism of the ideas of certainly James and Schiller, and perhaps Dewey. All three of the Italian idealists hold that the mind, although historically situated, is free, and hence that we are fully responsible for what we are thinking. The pragmatists, on the other hand, by situating thought in a *psychological* context potentially provide easy cop outs for thinking in ways that we might under normal circumstances criticize. We can see this if we reflect back a bit on the criticisms of James by Joseph and of Schiller by Bradley discussed in the first chapter of this book.

James, as we have seen, considers truth to consist in the agreement between a belief and the action resulting from that belief. On the basis of said belief, we must be able to function 'agreeably' in the context of experience as a bundle of matters of fact, relations of ideas and past beliefs, in order for it to be true. This agreement is a 'feeling' that 'coerces' us, whether we will it or not. Joseph, in his response to James, points out that this is not enough. James' theory at best provides us with a description of what happens when someone accepts a belief, but definitely not with an account of whether she also *ought* to have accepted it. To re-use my own example, what, on James' view, are we going to do with the person who denies that murder is bad and claims that she cannot be blamed for this because she is simply 'coerced' that this is the case? Gentile, de Ruggiero and Croce would point out that James has made the mistake of denying the autonomy of thought, and hence has taken away our duty to think responsibly.

And Schiller fares none the better in this respect. I have explained how he avoids James' problem by introducing psychological desires as a second factor in deciding whether a belief is true or not. For Schiller, a belief is true if it furthers such a psychological desire by leading to agreeable action. The notion of 'agreeability' here is not explained through 'feeling' but by referring to the psychological desire that led to the inquiry. Hence, with Schiller's theory, we could, in principle, explain to the person who denies that murder is bad, that her view is wrong because, in fact, it does *not* further her psychological desire. But Bradley has shown that this is only deflecting the problem to another level. With Schiller, it is not the 'feeling of agreement' that is placed outside our control, but the psychological desire, which he



presents as a biological fact simply to be accepted. What, now, are we to do with the person who has the psychological desire to murder people? Such a person, according to Bradley, is sheltered from criticism by Schiller's theory of truth. Again, in the eyes of the Italian idealists, pragmatism is denying the freedom of thought, this time by linking it to desires conceived as given natural facts, which leads to 'lazy' thinking.

At the end of the first chapter of this book, I have concluded that Dewey is not as straightforwardly prone to the same error as Schiller, despite also linking thought to both action and the practical problems of the human organism. Interestingly, de Ruggiero seems to disagree with me on this point. He says that

Dewey misconceives the problem of knowledge when he says that it should run, not 'How can we know in general?' but, 'How can we know here and now?' He fails to observe that 'here and now' is the same thing as knowing here and now; that is to say, 'here and now' are just elements in knowledge which his way of putting the problem would make into the whole of knowledge.<sup>276</sup>

I interpret this as follows. According to de Ruggiero, Dewey does not recognize that 'here and now' is already a product of thought: we must not take the present for granted, as given, but as the outcome of the act of thought, the outcome of history. In order to understand the 'here and now', then, we must understand the whole process of knowledge to which it belongs, i.e. the past that led to it. This, to me, seems to be the only possible answer to the question what de Ruggiero could mean with the 'knowledge in general' that Dewey fails to take into account. A knowledge that is general in the sense that it does not develop, but is static and given from the outset, would seem to be out of the question, not only for Dewey, but for de Ruggiero as well. Clearly this would violate the latter's idea that the spirit develops through a dialectic of problems and solutions.

If this is the correct analysis of de Ruggiero's text, then his criticism of Dewey is similar to Bradley's repudiation of Schiller. Both Dewey and Schiller, in that case, would link thought to something that is prior to it and taken for granted as a fact simply to be accepted. However, in trying to establish the validity of this claim against Dewey, I have already concluded that the question remains undecided on the basis of the sources used by the British critics of pragmatism. In *Modern Philosophy*,

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<sup>276</sup> De Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, p. 257.

de Ruggiero makes use of precisely one of those sources, i.e. Dewey's *Studies in Logical Theory*. He does not provide any extra evidence in the form of quotation or citation. Therefore, the question whether Dewey falls prey to the same criticism as Schiller must still be postponed to Chapter V of this book, where a wider collection of Dewey's writings will be taken into account.

Why have I considered it to be important to bring out the implicit criticism of pragmatism present in Italian idealism? Because it is very much akin to the argument that we will see Collingwood give against pragmatism in the next chapter of this book. He will explicitly use his own version of the idea of historical situationism to accuse the pragmatists of denying the autonomy of thought by putting it in a psychological context.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have reconstructed the philosophical positions of the Italian idealists Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero *vis-a-vis* those of the pragmatists in the early 1900s. By doing this, I have sketched the Italian context of Collingwood's relation to pragmatism, which will be the subject of the next chapter of this book.

I started by looking at how the Italians fall within the transcendentalism-situationism scale. Do they consider thought to be ultimately aimed at a transcendent, unchanging, eternal reality such as the Absolute or the world independent of mind? Or ought thought rather to function in a particular situation, like the pragmatists hold? Put like this, Croce, Gentile and de Ruggiero must be seen as situationists. For all three of them, reality is a developing process of becoming, which means that thought is always an act that takes place on a specific point within that process, a point that differs from what comes before and after it. To understand a product of thought, then, we must always take into account the specific place that product occupies in the process that is reality.

But this does not mean that the Italian idealists see pragmatism as a philosophical ally. As made clear in the second section of this chapter, all three of them strongly reject the ideas of the pragmatists. I showed, however, that these rejections were based on two misconceptions of pragmatism. First, Croce, Gentile

and de Ruggiero claim that according to the pragmatists the will takes over the work of thought in the formation of concepts. Second, de Ruggiero adds to this the view that pragmatism is an 'empty formula' according to which anything goes. Both ideas spring from a failure to recognize that the pragmatists base their ideas on a reformed philosophy of mind rooted in evolutionary theory. Hence, pragmatism is much more robust than the Italian idealists think.

In the third section I indicated where I think the real difference between Italian idealism and pragmatism lies. This is in the contrasting contexts in which both schools situate thought. Whereas the Italian idealists situate thought in a historical context, pragmatists situate it in a psychological context. This makes an implicit criticism of pragmatism possible based on the idea of historical situationism. According to the Italian idealists thought is free, and hence we are responsible for our thinking. Pragmatism, by making us dependent on either a feeling of agreement (in James) or psychological desires (in Schiller) implicitly denies that responsibility. I have indicated that it remains to be seen whether Dewey is also liable to this argument.

In the next chapter we will see Collingwood using his own version of the idea of historical situationism against pragmatism. It will be interesting to look at this idea, as in Italian idealism we have seen its potential as an attempt of conceiving of thought as always situated, while also avoiding the pitfalls of James' and Schiller's pragmatism as identified in the first chapter of this book. In Chapters III and IV we will see how Collingwood is trying to accomplish the same feat.

### III. Collingwood on the pragmatism of James, Croce and Schiller (1912-1924)

#### Introduction

Robin Collingwood was born on 22 February 1889 in the Lake District, England. He was the third of four children, son of William Gershom Collingwood (1854-1932) and Edith May Isaac (1857-1928). Robin's parents were accomplished musicians and painters, his father also being secretary to the well-known artist John Ruskin (1819-1900). Furthermore, William Gershom was an amateur historian and archaeologist and involved his son in these investigations early on. Moreover, Collingwood junior was a Christian, getting baptized in 1905, the occasion on which he also took his second name, George. We will see that these youthful preoccupations with art, history and religion are reflected in Collingwood's later work in philosophy.

Collingwood was educated at University College, Oxford from 1908 to 1911, and was afterwards awarded a Philosophy Fellowship at Pembroke College, Oxford. This would remain his position until 1935. During the first decade or so of this period, Collingwood was mostly surrounded by realists. John Cook Wilson was one of his teachers, and Collingwood's tutor was E.F. Carritt. Under their guidance, Collingwood recalls in his autobiography, he was "thoroughly indoctrinated with its [realism's] principles and methods. ... I called myself a 'realist'".<sup>277</sup>

After World War One, however, Collingwood gradually moved away from realism, and this was in no small part due to his interest in Italian idealism. Well-versed in Italian and influenced by a small group of Oxonians interested in Italian philosophy—a group led by J.A. Smith, holder of the Waynflete Chair of Metaphysical Philosophy—Collingwood read Croce as early as 1909. He translated Croce's *Filosofia del Vico* (published in 1913 as *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*) but also engaged with the work of Gentile and de Ruggiero. Together with A.H. Hannay, Collingwood translated de Ruggiero's *La Filosofia Contemporanea* (published in 1921 as *Modern Philosophy*). Collingwood's transition from a realist to

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<sup>277</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 22.

a more Italian idealist position is, we will see, clearly discernible in the differences between his first book, *Religion and Philosophy* (written between 1912 and 1914, published in 1916) and *Speculum Mentis* (1924).<sup>278</sup>

It is in this period, between 1912 and 1923, that Collingwood most extensively engages with pragmatism. But ‘extensive’ is a relative term here. Whereas Collingwood practically does not speak about the pragmatists at all during the later phases of his career, he devotes only a couple of sentences to them in *Speculum Mentis* and ‘Ruskin’s Philosophy’ (1921). Moreover, we learn from *An Autobiography* that *Religion and Philosophy* contains a criticism of James, but in the earlier book itself it remains completely implicit that James is Collingwood’s target there. The following chapter, then, is dedicated to making fully explicit Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism in the period stretching from *Religion and Philosophy* to *Speculum Mentis*, with the aid of a lot of context from published and unpublished material.

I start the chapter by explaining Collingwood’s relation to James, which, I will show, changed significantly from 1912 to the early 1920s. In the second section, I argue that when Collingwood speaks of ‘pragmatism’ in the years before *Speculum Mentis*, he is referring to a generalized version of Croce’s theory of the pseudoconcept. This, I hold, distorts Collingwood’s earliest interpretation of the pragmatisms of James, Schiller and Dewey by ascribing to them a realist theory of thought. Finally, in the third section, I demonstrate that Collingwood’s later analysis of pragmatism, in *Speculum Mentis*, is much more adequate, and render it probable that Schiller is Collingwood’s specific target there. I conclude that, on the basis of his correct characterization of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood is right to reject the philosophies of James and Schiller, but that his relation to Dewey remains to be determined.

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<sup>278</sup> For more comprehensive overviews of Collingwood’s early life and career, see: James Connelly, Peter Johnson and Stephen Leach, *R.G. Collingwood: A Research Companion* (London: Bloomsbury 2015), pp. 3-56; Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, pp. 186-256; Johnston, *The Formative Years of R.G. Collingwood & Inglis, History Man*, pp. 1-138.

## 1. The “bilge” of William James

While looking back at his intellectual development in *An Autobiography*, Collingwood recalls that early in his career he was preoccupied with philosophical problems associated with religion. Some ten years before Collingwood began his theological investigations, William James was invited to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901-1902) in Edinburgh, Scotland. In those lectures, James catalogues a wide array of religious beliefs, ranging from Lutheran theology to mysticism. The lectures were reworked into a book (published in 1902) and became an instant success.

The opinion that great value should be attributed to the *Varieties*, however, is not shared by Collingwood. To the contrary, in his autobiography he is clear that he considers James’ book a “fraud”:

Like every one [sic] else who studied that subject [theology] in those days, I read William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* and a lot of other books in which religion was treated from a psychological point of view. If I was profoundly shocked by the *Varieties*, that was not because some of the facts described in it were such as I would rather not hear about. They were, on the whole, amusing. Nor was it because I thought James was doing his work clumsily. I thought he did it very well. It was because the whole thing was a fraud. The book professed to throw light on a certain subject, and threw on it no light whatever. It was not because the book was a bad example of psychology, but because it was a good example of psychology, that it left its subject completely unilluminated.<sup>279</sup>

That Collingwood held James’ thought about religion in a low regard in the 1910s is corroborated by a letter he sent to his sister Barbara Crystal (1887-1961) on 12 November 1912:

As for the philosophy of religion, I keep going at it, but only reading, not writing just now. ... I get more and more convinced of the necessity for the work; there are very few people here who really see where the difficulties lie and want to tackle them ... . And most current philosophy of religion is bilge. You read William James if you want to see.<sup>280</sup>

In fact, Collingwood was so annoyed by James’ analysis of religion that this irritation became one of the chief motivations for writing his first book, *Religion and*

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<sup>279</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 93.

<sup>280</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘Letter to Barbara Crystal Collingwood, 12 November 1912’, quoted in: James Patrick, ‘The Oxford Man’, in: Idem, *An Autobiography and Other Writings: With Essays on Collingwood’s Life and Work*. Edited by David Boucher & Teresa Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), p. 225.

*Philosophy*. This work was composed between 1912 and 1914 but, due to the occurrence of World War One, published only in 1916. One of the intended upshots of *Religion and Philosophy* is that it precludes the psychological treatment of religious belief as proposed by James and others. This aim Collingwood considers to be of enough importance to mention it more than twenty years later in his autobiography: "...in *Religion and Philosophy* I attacked, not William James, but any and every psychological treatment of religion..."<sup>281</sup>

My objective in this section is threefold. First, I will explain why Collingwood thinks of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as a fraudulent attempt at explaining religion, and judge whether this verdict is fair if we look at what James actually says. Second, I will analyse how Collingwood's thinking on this point evolved from *Religion and Philosophy* to the early 1920s and what implications this development has for his criticism of James. Finally, I will consider how Collingwood's misgivings relate to the philosophical outlooks of him and the pragmatists more generally.

### 1.1. *Religion and Philosophy*

Collingwood claims in *An Autobiography* that the key point in his earlier refutation of James is the proposition that "the mind, regarded in this [James'] way, ceases to be a mind at all".<sup>282</sup> In fact, the passage from *Religion and Philosophy* that Collingwood refers to runs a bit differently: "The mind, regarded in this *external* way, really ceases to be a mind at all".<sup>283</sup> What does he mean by this? First of all, what does it mean for James to treat the mind from an *external* point of view?

According to Collingwood, James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, deploys the method common to all psychology. The book, that is, approaches beliefs from a purely descriptive point of view. The aim of psychology is merely to recount what beliefs are actually held by people at some definite time, without going into the question whether those beliefs are true or not. A belief is true if it stands in an adequate relation with the reality to which it refers, but psychology is only concerned

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<sup>281</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 93.

<sup>282</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>283</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Religion and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan and co. 1916), p. 42, my emphasis.

with the belief as a real thing. The reality external to that belief is to be dealt with by metaphysics and falls outside the purview of psychology. In the words of Collingwood, take “the mental activity as a self-contained fact; refuse, so far as that is possible, to treat of its metaphysical aspect, its relations with real things other than itself; and you have psychology”.<sup>284</sup>

Is this a fair description of what James is doing in the *Varieties*? I think it is. In fact, James is quite explicit about his intentions:

The question, What are the religious propensities? and the question, What is their philosophical significance? are two entirely different orders of question from the logical point of view; ... The answer to one question is given in an *existential judgment* or proposition. The answer to the other is a *proposition of value*, what the Germans call a *Werthurtheil* [sic] ... Neither judgment can be deduced immediately from the other. They proceed from diverse intellectual preoccupations, and the mind combines them only by making them first separately, and then adding them together ... I make these general remarks about the two sorts of judgment, because there are many religious persons who do not yet make a working use of the distinction, and who may therefore feel at first a little startled at *the purely existential point of view* from which in the following lectures the phenomena of religious experience must be considered.<sup>285</sup>

To summarize, James distinguishes between two kinds of questions that can be asked about religious beliefs: ‘What are they?’ and ‘What is their value?’ An answer to the first he calls an ‘existential judgment’, an answer to the second a ‘*Werthurtheil*’. An example of an existential question is: “Under just what biographic conditions did the sacred writers bring forth their various contributions to the holy volume [the Bible]? And what had they exactly in their several individual minds, when they delivered their utterances?”<sup>286</sup> The corresponding “still further” question of philosophical significance is: Of “what use should such a volume, with its manner of coming into existence so defined, be to us as a guide to life and a revelation?”<sup>287</sup> For James, these two questions must come apart, and he is only concerned with the first in the *Varieties*. In short, Collingwood is correct: James here treats religious beliefs apart from whether they are true or not.

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>285</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 13-4, first emphases James’, the last mine.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 14.



But what is wrong with this approach, according to Collingwood? Why does it lead to an ‘external’ view of mind, and why does the ‘mind, regarded in this way, cease to be a mind at all’? There are two, related, answers. First of all, James, by taking a psychologist approach, does not take seriously the religious experience of the believer. In opposition to those who think that religion is merely ritual or emotion, Collingwood claims that it is beyond doubt that religion has intellectual content as well. That is, besides involving certain practices and feelings, every religion has a creed, which is “a view of the universe, a theory of man and the world, a theory of God”.<sup>288</sup> It follows that a believer “is interested, not in the fact that he is making that statement [about the nature of God], but in the belief, or hope, or fancy that it is true”.<sup>289</sup> The psychologist, then, by merely describing the religious creed, in however much detail, is only offering a false sense of concreteness: “If ... the psychologist merely makes a note of the statement and declines to join in the question whether it is true, he is cutting himself off from any kind of real sympathy or participation in the very thing he is studying—this man’s mental life and experiences”.<sup>290</sup> This is what Collingwood means by an external account of religious belief. It is an account that does not go to the heart of the matter, because it leaves out a facet of central importance to any believer.

The above can be read as the ethical principle that it is only courteous and respectful to take seriously the self-reports of people you are investigating. But that by itself would not be a convincing rebuttal of James. After all, James nowhere denies that believers hold convictions that they think are true, and neither does he say that the question about the value of a particular religious belief should not be raised *at some point*.<sup>291</sup> He claims that this question can be treated separately from the inquiry

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<sup>288</sup> Collingwood, *Religion and Philosophy*, p. xv.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>290</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>291</sup> Here I disagree with Peters, who claims that “Collingwood first attacks all theorists who deny that religion is a function of the mind without an object at all. These are theorist [sic] like William James (1842-1910), who considered religion as pure feeling ... Secondly, Collingwood attacks theorists who admit the thought-character of religion, but who tend to consider thought apart from its object ... These are ‘psychologists’...” (*History as Thought and Action*, pp. 226-7).

Although I agree that in the end for James the truth of religious beliefs—like all beliefs—is decided by feeling, it is clear from *An Autobiography* and *Religion and Philosophy* that

as to what people actually believe, but this does not exclude the possibility or even the necessity of a later '*Werthurtheil*'. If so, this means that, for James, the psychologist is not by definition debarred from a 'sympathetic participation' in the experience of his object of study.

However, Collingwood's criticism is rooted in a deeper, philosophical viewpoint about what it means to have knowledge. This brings me to the second answer to the question of what Collingwood claims is wrong with James' psychologist method.

According to the Collingwood of *Religion and Philosophy*, the "*esse* of mind ... is *de hac re cogitare*".<sup>292</sup> This means two things. First, that mind is not itself an object, but a process, an activity that *knows* objects. It is "not so much an active thing as an activity".<sup>293</sup> The implication is that mind is not a self-persisting substance, independent of what it does, but that it only exists *in* the activities which it undertakes. Hence the '*esse*' of mind is '*cogitare*'. Second, given that the mind is nowhere separated from what it is doing, it follows that it is always intentional. No one is ever thinking in the abstract, thinking about nothing in particular; you are always engaged in thought *about* this or that object. Therefore the '*esse*' of mind is not just '*cogitare*', but '*de hac re cogitare*': it is the essential task of mind to think about concrete objects.

If this is the mind's job, what does this mean for our view of knowledge? When thinking about a concrete object, when can I be said to know it? If I discover its real nature, Collingwood says. He gives the example of a table, and sharply distinguishes between imagination and knowledge:

My imagination of a table is certainly different from the table itself, and to identify the two would be to mistake fancy for fact; but my knowledge of the table, my thought of it in that sense, is simply the table as known to me, as much of the table's nature as I have discovered. In this sense, my 'thought about' the table—what I think the table to be—*only* differs from the

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Collingwood attacks James there as a member of the second group of 'theorists' that Peters discerns.

For the same reasons, I disagree with Rubinoff, who is of the opinion that in *Religion and Philosophy* "Collingwood was attacking the definition of religion as emotion, which was advanced by William James". See: Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics*, p. 91.

<sup>292</sup> Collingwood, *Religion and Philosophy*, p. 100.

<sup>293</sup> *Idem*, Collingwood's emphasis.

table itself if and in so far as I am ignorant of the table's real nature. My thought of the table is certainly not something 'like' the table; it is the table as I know it.<sup>294</sup>

Collingwood, in other words, holds that the table has a nature that is independent of myself. Insofar as my thought uncovers that 'real' nature I have knowledge of the table, insofar as it does not I am ignorant of it. What is more is that, when I truly have knowledge, my belief about the table is *identical* to the real table instead of being some sort of mental copy of its properties that is more or less like the table itself. The *only* way in which my knowledge of the table deviates from the table itself, Collingwood says, is the extent to which I have not discovered its real nature yet.

This idea has an important consequence for the possibility of shared knowledge. To the extent that I have real knowledge of the table, my thought is identical to it. But this also means that if *you* have that same knowledge, your thought is identical to the table *as well* as to my thought. This ensures the possibility of communication between us. If we converse about the table we can be confident that we are not talking past each other: we can truly be said to know each other's minds. In the words of Collingwood, "if we both have real knowledge of the table, it seems to follow that our thoughts are the same, not merely similar; and further, if the mind is its thoughts, we seem to have, for this moment at least, actually one mind..."<sup>295</sup>

We can now put into full focus the sting of Collingwood's argument against James. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James professes to give an account of how religious believers think. He tries to accomplish this by merely describing religious convictions, without going into the metaphysical question of how well they accord with reality. But, Collingwood now shows, this is inconceivable. How is it possible for us to know what other people think? Mind's *esse* is *de hac re cogitare*: it always consists in the activity of thinking about a particular object. And it is only when we discover the real nature of that object—this real nature lying beyond the activity of mind—that we have knowledge of it. If I have knowledge of the object, my thought is identical to it. If another person has the same knowledge, her thought is

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<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101, my emphasis.

<sup>295</sup> *Idem.*

identical to the object as well and hence also to my thought. Only now I can report what the other person knows, because I am merely reporting what I myself know.

If I, then, would be a researcher wanting to investigate religious experience, I would first have to ascertain whether this experience involves thinking. According to Collingwood, it does: religion contains creed. Now, I know that thinking always consists in thinking of a concrete object, in this case ‘the universe, man and the world, and God’. My ability of knowing what the religious believer is thinking, depends on making her thought my own, to make it identical to mine. And the only way to do this is to ascertain the real nature of the object that the religious believer is thinking about. Only insofar as we both do this is our knowledge the same and can one person describe what is going on in the mind of another. James’ project, then, is jeopardized from the get go if he refuses to inquire into the metaphysical aspect of religious belief. If he does not discover the real nature of the universe for himself, he can never understand the knowledge of any religious believer.<sup>296</sup>

I must add two points of clarification. First, one could object that it is possible to assert that religion, although involving belief, does not contain any knowledge at all. For it might be reasonable to assume that the supernatural does not exist and hence has no real nature beyond what religious people think. But this is no problem for Collingwood, for he identifies religion and philosophy: both are in the business of providing a “theory of existence”.<sup>297</sup> Hence, for Collingwood *every* metaphysical system, including materialism and atheism, is a religion in this sense. They all provide an account of the “philosophic Absolute”, though not necessarily involving, e.g., the belief in a personal God. Only “scepticism ... the refusal to deal with the problem at all” falls outside the scope of theological investigation.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> I thus disagree with Alan Donagan, who claims that “Collingwood did not ... quarrel with James for putting aside the question of their [the varieties of religious experience’s] validity while investigating their origin; for he knew that it is sometimes possible to establish the nature of a past belief without incidentally determining its validity.” Donagan does not cite any evidence for his opinion, but asserts it as a matter of fact. See: Alan Donagan, *The Later Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* [1962]. With a New Preface (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985), pp. 160-4.

<sup>297</sup> Collingwood, *Religion and Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-9.

Second, if, in understanding the real nature of the universe, our minds become identical, how is it that there are ‘varieties’ of religious experience? Should not all religions have the same creed if they all contain knowledge? This question can be answered, I think, by Collingwood’s mention of ignorance. ‘My thought about the table’, we have seen him explain, ‘only differs from the table itself if and insofar as I am ignorant of the table’s real nature’. Collingwood, in other words, allows for gradations of knowledge, and hence for differences of beliefs. All religion must contain *some* knowledge if it is to be knowable to us, but this does not have to be *equally sophisticated* knowledge everywhere.<sup>299</sup>

All of the above shows that Collingwood’s criticism of James’ ‘external’ treatment of religious beliefs is much deeper than the moral observation that one should always respect how believers conceive of their own experience. Treating creed as involving knowledge is not only courteous and respectful, but is actually necessary if one wants to give an account of religion in the first place. James, by denying this principle, lets the ‘mind cease to be a mind at all’; he does not realize that the mind is an activity aimed at objects other than itself, this actually being precisely the ‘*esse*’ of mind.

In a footnote to his account of mind and knowledge, Collingwood claims that “I believe that the argument I have tried to express contains little if anything which contradicts the principles of either Realism or Idealism in their more satisfactory forms”.<sup>300</sup> Based on my analysis of these two schools in the first chapter of this book, Collingwood’s opinion is at least in one sense correct.<sup>301</sup> According to both Bradley

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<sup>299</sup> This interpretation is in line with how Collingwood, from the beginning of his career, analyses error. See the following succinct formulation in Collingwood’s unpublished book *Truth and Contradiction* (1917): “In view of this, can we not say that error is a species of truth? Surely we can. *It is* truth, but incomplete truth; truth that fails of being quite satisfactory because it is not sufficiently comprehensive” (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 16/1 ‘Truth and Contradiction. Chapter II’, (n.d.) 20, Collingwood’s emphasis). For the evidence that Collingwood held this view in 1912 already, see: Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, pp. 218-9.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101n1

<sup>301</sup> It is correct in a different sense as well. Both Bradley and Oxford realists such as Cook Wilson hold a so-called ‘identity theory of truth’, meaning that one has true knowledge if subject and object become identical in the act of thinking. For Bradley, see: Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 307-8. For Cook Wilson, see: Marion, ‘Oxford Realism I’, pp. 307-16. It is noteworthy that such an identity theory of truth was rejected by non-Oxford realists such as Russell and Moore. For them, there always is, in knowledge, a third object that

*cum suis* and Moore et al., the goal of thinking is to discover the nature of a reality that transcends the individual mind. As this is also Collingwood's view, it seems that we must conclude that his argument—much like those of Bradley, Russell, etc.—will have little purchase on James, as he and the other pragmatists deny that this is the goal of thought in the first place. We do not think in order to discover a transcendent reality, but so that we achieve an increased capability to act in a particular situation. Hence, any theory of knowledge based on idealist or realist views of mind is bound to be unacceptable to pragmatism.

However, in the years following *Religion and Philosophy*, Collingwood abandoned his initial position on the purpose of thought, bringing him closer to the pragmatist philosophy of mind. I will now turn to describing that development and looking at the implications for Collingwood's criticism of James.

## 1.2 Collingwood's early anti-realism and his new criticism of psychology

In the later 1910s Collingwood slowly disentangled himself from the influence of his realist teachers, and this process culminated in the writing of *Libellus de Generatione* (1920), or 'Book of Becoming'. The work was written "only to help the process of crystallization in my own [Collingwood's] thoughts", with no intention of publication. In fact, according to Collingwood's autobiography, "the original manuscript ... was destroyed after I wrote this book".<sup>302</sup> However, a version of the text survived and is now held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

The *Libellus* is most instructive for understanding Collingwood's developing position on the aim of thought. Its first part is negative, showing how realism in all its forms must end in utter failure because it presupposes the world of being. Philosophy can be saved, however, by re-interpreting all its concepts in terms of process, or the world of becoming. That is the topic of the second part of the book. For my purposes, it is important to focus on the fact that in the first part of the

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stands between subject and external world, the so-called '*tertium quid*'. For them, in other words, knowledge is never *identical* to the object, but *representative* of it. Again, see: Marion, 'Oxford Realism I', pp. 316-25. It is therefore doubtful whether Collingwood would consider the realism propagated by Russell and Moore as 'satisfactory' in this regard.

<sup>302</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, pp. 99 & 99n1.

*Libellus*, Collingwood is implicitly attacking the view on the relation between mind and its object that he himself held in *Religion and Philosophy*.

In the *Libellus*, Collingwood defines realism as “the belief in the distinction of opposites”.<sup>303</sup> Most prominently, it is the belief in the distinction of subject and object. These, according to the realist, are two separately existing substances that are connected by a knowledge-relation. After accepting this position, the realist can take either of two ways. He can give pride of place to the object, claiming that to have real knowledge is to have the subject conform itself to the object. This is what Collingwood calls “objectivism”, a view he attributes to thinkers such as Cook Wilson. The other option for the realist is to hold that things should be the other way around: the subject should dominate over the object. This position, “subjectivism”, Collingwood ascribes to e.g. George Berkeley (1685-1753) and Thomas Huxley (1825-1895).

Both kinds of realism, however, fail, and in the same way, namely by *coincidentia oppositorum*. Realism begins by affirming the distinction of subject from object, and giving priority to one over the other. It then realizes that the subject can only be described in terms of the object or *vice versa* (depending on which of the two is given priority). This means that, in the end, there is no longer a distinction between subject and object, and hence realism turns out to be incoherent by denying its own starting-point.

Collingwood clarifies his position by giving the example of what it means to cognize a circle for realism. For objectivists

if there is a mind which is wholly contemplative of (say) the circle & its properties, then the nature or character of that mind at that time is wholly to be that which is conscious of circularity; all its predicates are, so to speak, the subjective correlates of the predicates of the circle, & it has no properties save these.<sup>304</sup>

In other words, what the mind or the subject is, for the objectivist, can only be defined in terms of the object. What the mind is while conceiving a circle is just ‘correlative’ to the qualities of the circle. In the words of Collingwood: “The mind is its own thought: the thought is that which is thought, i.e. the object: therefore the

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<sup>303</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 28, ‘Photocopy of the original manuscript of *Libellus de Generatione*’ (1920), p. 35.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

mind is the object".<sup>305</sup> The subject hence turns out to be the object; we have a coincidence of opposites, a *coincidentia oppositorum*. But now the objectivist has contradicted her own premise: that there are two kinds of radically different things, subject and object. Therefore, her position is untenable.

We can now see why Collingwood thinks of 'subjectivism' as a form of realism as well. As objectivism, it distinguishes between subject and object, but it gives primacy not to the objective but to the subjective. Here, the object can only be described in subjective terms which again results in a coincidence of opposites. So, like objectivism, subjectivism ends up negating its own initial assumption that there are two kinds of things, subjects and objects.

The above is an implicit criticism of Collingwood's own position in *Religion and Philosophy*. There he argues, like the 'realism' of the *Libellus*, that subject and object, however closely connected, are ultimately distinct. Mind is not itself an object but an activity which knows objects; the object has a 'real nature' of which the knowing mind can be, to some extent, ignorant. Moreover, mind comes to know the object by becoming identical to it. My knowledge of the table, we have seen Collingwood claim, differs from the real table *only* insofar as I have not discovered its real nature yet. This is nothing else than the explicit formulation of the coincidence of subject and object. Mind, by becoming identical to the object in knowing it, ceases to be something distinct from the object, and hence Collingwood ends up denying his own starting point.

In fact, judging by the *Libellus*, it seems probable that Collingwood took over the example of the table directly from the 'objectivist' Cook Wilson:

First, objectivism. This is the process which exhausts subjectivity of all content and transfers it all to the object. Its conclusion is a thesis of this kind: knowledge is the annihilation of subjectivity: the subject loses itself in the object, spends itself in precisely reduplicating the object, a purpose which is only fully achieved when the reduplication is no mere copy side by side with an original, but *is* the original. The mind simply is the object. Towards this position modern Realism seems to me to be moving. It is certainly foreshadowed in a great deal of Cook Wilson's teaching: for instance, his continual emphasis on the rejection of any such phrase as 'content of thought', for, said he, *the content of thought simply is the object: what I think is that which I am thinking about: 'my idea' of the table is the table itself as known to me.*<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10, first emphasis Collingwood's, second emphasis mine.



On the basis of the above, I disagree with Peters' view that in "*Religion and Philosophy* Collingwood does not distinguish between ... object and subject as given entities, but he regards both as aspects of a process of experience".<sup>307</sup> Collingwood does conceive of mind as a process, but he explicitly contrasts this activity with the object which is, to the contrary, described as a 'thing'. This suggests that it is, in fact, a 'given entity' that is markedly different from mind. Moreover, Collingwood insists that the object has a 'real nature' of which the mind can be ignorant. In other words, the object falls outside the 'process of experience' insofar as mind is ignorant of the object's real nature. Further, in the *Libellus* Collingwood attributes to Cook Wilson the same stance towards mind as he himself takes in *Religion in Philosophy*. Collingwood's negative remarks about that position in the *Libellus* therefore indicate that his own views developed in the period separating the two texts. Finally, we will shortly see that this development is reflected in Collingwood's new criticism of psychology, which is strikingly divergent from the one given in *Religion and Philosophy*.

In light of his own repudiation of realism, then, Collingwood must revise his original analysis of mind and knowledge. How is this to be done? In the *Libellus*, Collingwood solves the problem of realism by re-interpreting subject and object, like all other philosophical distinctions, in terms of the world of becoming. Instead of seeing them as two separate *substances*, or 'beings', we must conceive subject and object as *moments* or *phases* in an overarching process, the process of experience. As Collingwood summarizes his position in the preface of the *Libellus*:

My fundamental doctrine is that reality is becoming, that is to say reality not so much is as *happens*, which implies that the reality of mind is the process of its experience, its life, and nothing else. Nor do I admit any dualism between mind and its object such that while mind is wholly process its object can be conceived as a stable whole outside it. The object is process too, and these are not two processes but one process.<sup>308</sup>

If this is our metaphysical starting point, then it is no longer possible to keep subject and object strictly distinct: they are two elements of one situation which is ontologically and logically prior to them. We must beware of the "cardinal mistake"

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<sup>307</sup> Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, p. 229.

<sup>308</sup> Collingwood, 'Libellus de Generatione', p. 1, Collingwood's emphasis.

of “existentialisation”, of thinking that the subjective and objective elements that we abstract from concrete experience are real things in themselves, one existing apart from the other.<sup>309</sup>

All of this has grave consequences for Collingwood’s view of knowledge. For if we admit that the object is always inextricably bound up with the subject, it is no longer possible to conceive knowledge as the discovery of the ‘real nature’ of objects, a real nature that has a being independently from the knowing mind. Such a thing simply does not exist in the world of becoming. The unit that our knowledge must now rather be aimed at is the situation as a whole. And in the world of becoming this situation must not be synchronically conceived, but diachronically. That is, we must not inquire into the being underlying the situation, but into its relation with the situations that come before and after it. In the words of Collingwood, knowledge “is one continuous development ... developing by casting off its own outworn formulae in order to reinterpret reality in a new way”.<sup>310</sup> It is the understanding of the old situation, detecting the problems inherent in it, and thereby creating a new situation in which those problems are alleviated. Again in Collingwood’s phrasing: “The new act of thought ... unites in itself the opposing character of thinking (development of the old position into its implications...) and observation (passage *per saltum* [discontinuously] to some quite new position...)”.<sup>311</sup>

The affinities with the views of the Italian idealists, as described in the previous chapter of this book, are clear. The latter conceive reality as a process that is constantly developing through the pure act of thought that critically reflects on what is hitherto achieved. What thought occupies itself with is not some transcendent reality, but the historically situated context in which thinking finds itself. Only by understanding how we got where we are now are we capable of understanding the intellectual problem before us, and thus of making further progress. Hence, for Croce, de Ruggiero and Gentile one must also be a historian in

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-3.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 73. Peters locates the introduction of the view of knowledge as self-creation in Collingwood’s essay ‘The Devil’ (1915). See: Peters, *History of Thought and Action*, p. 236. For Collingwood’s essay, see: R.G. Collingwood, *Faith & Reason: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. Edited with an Introduction by Lionel Rubinfon (Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1968), pp. 212-33.

order to be a good philosopher. Collingwood is now saying something similar. Thought is not in the business of discovering a 'static whole' outside the process of experience, but rather propels the 'development' of that process. And in order to make the 'passage *per saltum* to some quite new position' we must first 'develop the old position into its implications'. The Collingwood of the *Libellus*, in short, can be seen as a situationist. Is his situationism, like that of the Italian idealists, of a historical kind, or is it rather psychological, as that of James and Schiller? I will go into this matter in the third section of this chapter.

For now, the important question is: what becomes of Collingwood's criticism of the psychologic method with regard to belief? In *Religion and Philosophy* this method leads to 'barren and trifling abstraction', but that repudiation is premised on a realistic conception of knowledge. For the Collingwood of *Religion and Philosophy*, I have knowledge of an object insofar as my mind becomes identical to that object. To the extent that other persons have the same knowledge, their mind becomes identical to mine, and I can faithfully report what they know, as I am merely describing my own knowledge. The psychologist, by not inquiring into the 'real nature' of the object, debars her own mind of becoming identical to the mind of the person she studies, and thus psychology can never reveal what other people know. For the Collingwood of the *Libellus* this position is no longer tenable. Knowledge can no longer be defined in terms of the mind becoming identical to the 'real nature' of an object, for that nature *never* exists apart from the subject. Instead, we must now focus on the situation as a whole, and ask ourselves how it fits in with the other parts of the concrete process of experience. Where does this leave psychology?

The answer to this question can be found in another of Collingwood's unpublished manuscripts, 'Draft of Opening Chapters of a "Prolegomena to Logic" (or the like)' (1920). Here, the analysis of how the psychologic method functions is the same as before. Again, Collingwood stresses that psychology does nothing more than describe what people believe, without inquiring about the value of such beliefs: "Psychology begins by ... ignoring, as we say, the question whether beliefs are true, and treating them as mere psychical events all with the same title to reality – the

reality of something that simply happens..."<sup>312</sup> But the criticism that follows is markedly different from that in *Religion and Philosophy*. According to the 'Prolegomena', psychology

is all the time ignoring *not the relation between beliefs and an external reality* or world of facts, *but the relation between beliefs and other beliefs*: the relation, not between a lunatic's mathematical judgments and mathematical reality but the relation between a lunatic's mathematical judgments and ... those of accredited mathematicians. Psychology thus posits an absolute discontinuity or unrelatedness within thought, an absolute discrete character ... psychological atomism is not a particular error of certain schools: it is psychology.<sup>313</sup>

So where the psychologist in *Religion and Philosophy* refuses to let her mind become identical with the real nature of an external object, in the 'Prolegomena' she declines to inquire into the relation between beliefs. The psychologist notes that a belief A and a belief B have been formed, but leaves it at that. She does not explain why A has developed into B or why the belief of an 'accredited' mathematician might be preferable to that of a lunatic.

Collingwood explicitly says that this 'atomism' is an 'error', but in the 'Prolegomena' he does not give a direct reason for that estimation.<sup>314</sup> On the basis of the *Libellus*, we might think of something like the following. Reality must not be conceived as a collection of objects that exists independently of the mind, but as the concrete process of experience. A process is not static but constantly developing. This development, however, is not one of haphazard change; there does not occur some

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<sup>312</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 16/5, 'Draft of opening chapters of a "Prolegomena to Logic" (or the like). I. Empirical Logic...II. Transcendental Logic...' (1920), 57, my emphasis. Cf. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, pp. 248 & 274.

<sup>313</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>314</sup> In *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood refutes psychology by reducing it to the absurd: "If psychology is a correct account of thinking, it is a correct account of the thinking of psychologists; that is to say, psychology itself is only a kind of event which goes on in the minds of people called psychologists, a complex of mental idiosyncrasies innocent of any distinction between truth and falsehood" (p. 274).

Here, I focus on the argument that can be reconstructed from the *Libellus* and the 'Prolegomena', as I do not think the above *reductio ad absurdum*—whatever its general merit—can be rightfully applied to James. As we have seen above, James clearly allows for religious beliefs having something to do with truth and falsehood, there are 'existential judgments' and '*Werthurtheilen*' about such beliefs. James, however thinks that the inquiries that would result in such judgments can come apart. This position is not attacked by Collingwood's *reductio* in *Speculum Mentis*, but it can be criticized on the basis of the argument reconstructed from the *Libellus* and the 'Prolegomena'.

random transition from A to B. As Collingwood says in the *Libellus*, in the act of thought we create a new situation *on the basis of* the problematic implications of an earlier situation. In other words, there is a *logical* connection between the two situations and not a merely diachronic one. From this viewpoint, it is clearly impossible to give a correct account of belief B without going into the question *why* it replaced belief A. The failure of A must be explained in order to understand the actual conditions under which B could occur. The psychologist, by declining to go into the question of A's failure, is hence deprived from the possibility of truly understanding B. Again, we are reminded of Croce's, de Ruggiero's and Gentile's insistence that in order to be a philosopher, one must be a historian as well.

The above interpretation of Collingwood's position is further corroborated by his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religious Evolution*, given in March-April 1916 at the Foyer D'Étudiants, Kingway. Collingwood's aim in these lectures is precisely to account for the existence of different religions by placing them in a series of gradual development. As in *Religion and Philosophy* he stresses that religion always contains an intellectual element, that it is aimed at truth.<sup>315</sup> And again he takes to task other scholars who neglect this aspect of religion. "[E]very human institution exists to satisfy a human need", according to Collingwood, and one of the needs that religion satisfies is "the need for truth".<sup>316</sup> Institutions are modified in the light of failure to satisfy human needs, so such failure explains the modification: "When people discover that their institutions do not satisfy the needs which they were meant to satisfy, then they change them so as to make them better fitted for their purpose".<sup>317</sup> In other words, a "religion must present a view of the world which will bear scientific and philosophical criticism; and a religion which has been proved false, that religion is bankrupt and must be destroyed".<sup>318</sup> If truth, then, is one of the *desiderata* of religion, and if institutions are modified in light of their capability of

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<sup>315</sup> "In the first place, it seems that every religion involves *belief*. We talk of man's religious opinions, religious convictions, creed and so on. To accept or hold a religion always means accepting as true some particular system of beliefs" (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 1/2, 'Lectures on the Philosophy of Religious Evolution Delivered at the Foyer D'Étudiants, Kingsway, March-April 1916', 9, Collingwood's emphasis).

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 & 12.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

fulfilling needs, then it follows that we can only understand religious evolution if we take into account why the falsity of religion A led to the rise of religion B. If we refuse to do so, we can only note that A has existed and that B has existed, and not explain *why* the transition from A to B has occurred. A “really scientific history of religion”, according to Collingwood, “would not merely record events, such as the rise of Mohammedism or The Reformation in western Europe, but would try to explain these events, to show why they happened and what caused them”.<sup>319</sup>

Collingwood makes no mention of psychology or James in the above lectures. It seems probable, however, that when he talks about real scientific history of religion as ‘not merely recording events’ he has *The Varieties of Religion Experience* firmly in his mind as a paradigmatically unscientific exemplar of religious scholarship.

In any case, Collingwood’s statements in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religious Evolution* correspond quite precisely to my interpretation of his comments on psychology in the ‘Prolegomena’. In both cases Collingwood holds that, if in a process of development a transition from A to B occurs, then this is not a random transition, but one for which reasons can be given that explain the transition. The rise of B can be explained by the failure of A to produce a satisfying theory of reality. The psychologist, merely noting the occurrence of A and B, and refusing to inquire into their philosophical value, debar herself from truly understanding A, B and the process to which they belong. In short, she can never give an adequate account of religious experience.

In the end, then, although Collingwood drifted away from the realism on which his earliest criticism of James is based, the latter is no better off because of that. The *Varieties of Religious Experience* is as fraudulent in ‘the world of becoming’ as it was ‘in the world of being’.

### 1.3 Consequences for Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism

Above, I said that Collingwood’s argument in *Religion and Philosophy* would have little traction on James, as it is based on a theory of thought that James and the other

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 6.

pragmatists already reject in the first place. Is this also true for the line of thought that can be reconstructed from the *Libellus* and the 'Prolegomena'?

As foreshadowed earlier, I think that Collingwood's philosophy of mind comes closer to that of the pragmatists than it was before. For all of them, as well as for the Italian idealists, thought is and ought to be situated. For the Collingwood of the *Libellus* it is no longer the purpose of knowledge to contemplate objects that transcend the activity of mind. Rather, thought becomes instrumental in bringing about the developing process of experience. It does this by detecting problems in the situation as it presently stands and creating a new situation that solves these problems. This is *prima facie*, at least, akin to what James, Schiller and Dewey say. For them as well, the mind exists to help solve concrete problems that occur in a particular context. Especially Schiller and Dewey relate this problem solving function of mind to the needs of the human being. Collingwood does something similar when he connects the institution of religion to the human need of truth in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religious Evolution*. How close this really is to pragmatism will depend, of course, on what Collingwood specifically means with 'human needs' and 'truth' here. For the pragmatists, it is crucial that needs or desires ultimately arise out of the biological constitution of the human organism. Truth, on its turn, must be related to successful action. How is this for Collingwood? I will get back to this question in the third part of this chapter.

I end the present section by zooming in on what all of this says about Collingwood's relation to James' specific form of pragmatism. Suppose for the moment that James would have accepted Collingwood's new philosophy of mind and hence his criticism of the psychological treatment of belief. Suppose that James would now recognize that, indeed, an adequate treatment of religion requires a story about the development of the various religions, and that this would have to include '*Werthurtheilen*' about religious beliefs as an explanatory factor. Could James, within his pragmatist framework, provide such a story?

Yes, I think he could. For James, a belief is true if it works, that is, if it is connected to future experiences by a coercive feeling of agreeable leading. Suppose religious belief A is true in this way, and subsequently gets replaced by religious belief B. Is James the pragmatist limited to merely noting that two beliefs have

occurred without explaining the transition from one to the other, like James the psychologist? No, he is not. In the first chapter of this book, we have seen Joseph denounce James' pragmatism for its supposed inability to criticize any belief that is seriously held by anyone.<sup>320</sup> James responds that, for him, a belief SP is better than S if "S gets superseded by an SP that gives our mind a completer sum of satisfactions".<sup>321</sup> Hence, S can, within the confines of James' pragmatism, be criticized for being less satisfactory than SP, which just means that SP is connected to future experiences by a *stronger* coercive feeling of agreeable leading than S. In a like manner, James could explain developments in religious experience. On that account, a religious belief B would replace a religious belief A because it is more coercive than A.

This is a psychological explanation and would for that reason not be acceptable to Joseph, as I have explained earlier. Nevertheless, it *is* an *explanation* of the development from belief A to belief B, not just a *description* of A and B which leaves the relation between them out of the story. And that—an explanation instead of a mere description—is precisely what Collingwood has hitherto asked for in his repudiation of James. Is the particular way in which James would frame this explanation enough to circumvent Collingwood's criticism? This question as well can only be definitively answered in the third section of this chapter, after a full examination of the relation between Collingwood and the pragmatist theory of thought has been provided.

## 2. The failure of "Croce's pragmatism"

In the last section, I have been dealing with Collingwood's criticism of James as a psychologist. As we have seen, this criticism raises questions with regard to Collingwood's relation to James' philosophical views and pragmatism more generally. Nevertheless, I have not yet mentioned Collingwood's *direct* confrontations with pragmatism during the earliest decades of his career. It is to this subject that I now turn.

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<sup>320</sup> See pp. 50-2 of this book.

<sup>321</sup> James, 'Humanism and Truth Once More', p. 192.



The central contention of the following section is that Collingwood's attitude towards pragmatism, at least until *Speculum Mentis*, is best characterized as the rejection of a generalized form of Croceanism. That is to say, Collingwood attributes to pragmatism the position that all knowledge consists of the use of pseudoconcepts, and this implies that he would criticize pragmatism in a similar manner as he did in fact criticize Croce's idea of the pseudoconcept.

To be clear, I will not be arguing that Collingwood conceives of *Croce* as a full-blown pragmatist, or 'global pragmatist' in the terminology of the first chapter of this book. Croce is a 'local pragmatist' for Collingwood, that is, a pragmatist with regard to science and only with regard to science. Not all concepts are merely useful, but just the ones deployed in the empirical and mathematical study of the world. As Collingwood later formulates it in the lectures (1936 & 1940) published posthumously as *The Idea of History* (1946): "we find Croce adopting the pragmatist theory of natural science".<sup>322</sup> My point will be, rather, that Collingwood sees pragmatism as a generalization of Croce's theory of the pseudoconcept. In other words, Collingwood's interpretation of 'global pragmatism' is informed by his knowledge of Croce's 'local pragmatism'.

I will now first explain Collingwood's reservations with regard to Croce's notion of the pseudoconcept, and the distinction between thought and will on which it is based. Second, I will argue that Collingwood's scant mentions of pragmatism in the years leading up to *Speculum Mentis* must be understood in the light of his criticism of Croce. I will conclude the section by discussing how relevant that criticism is to the positions of James, Schiller and Dewey.

## 2.1 Collingwood's criticism of Croce

I start by recalling what Croce's theory of pseudoconcepts maintains.<sup>323</sup> For Croce, the proper object of thought is formed by the so-called 'pure concepts'. These are concepts that are both 'omnirepresentative' and 'ultrarepresentative'. This means

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<sup>322</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* [1946]. Revised Edition with Lectures 1926-1928, Edited with an Introduction by Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994), p. 198, my emphasis.

<sup>323</sup> See the second chapter of this book for a fuller exposition of Croce's philosophy.

that they both refer to reality *überhaupt* (omnirepresentativity), and that they refer to the whole of reality (ultrarepresentativity). As a consequence, the concept of a geometrical triangle is not a pure concept as it does not refer to reality at all; there are no geometrical triangles to be found in the world. 'Horse' equally is not a pure concept. There are what we call horses, but it would be nonsense to predicate this concept to the whole of reality. We can find other objects in the world to which the quality 'horseness' cannot be attributed.

'Geometrical triangle' and 'horse' rather are pseudoconcepts. They are created "by means of a manipulation of single representations, so concentrated and simplified as to give rise to classes or symbols, which are without reality but convenient, fictitious but useful".<sup>324</sup> The use of such pseudoconcepts is indispensable for life, and hence they should not be abolished. We must not, however, make the mistake of thinking that in using them we are describing reality as it really is. We are merely making practical shortcuts by the use of abstract symbols. It follows that the mathematical and natural sciences, for Croce, are practical as well. They do not produce knowledge about the world as it truly is, but provide tools that can be used to deal with reality.

The distinction between pure and pseudoconcepts depends on a rather sharp separation of thought from will. Croce, in his philosophical system, divides the mind into a theoretical and practical compartment. The first is identified with thought, the latter with will. The two are bound together by an overarching 'spirit'. Thought is the contemplation of reality, while will is the creation of new situations. Hence, pure concepts are the objects of thought and never of will. They are features that are necessarily to be found throughout the whole of reality and cannot be made by any act of our own. With the pseudoconcepts it is precisely the other way around. They are not pre-existing, real aspects of the world, but newly created tools, produced to help us navigate reality. Hence, they must always be associated with will and never with thought.

Finally, it must be pointed out that, for Croce, will as a function of mind itself is an object for thought. We have seen that, according to the Italian idealists, there is

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<sup>324</sup> Croce, *Logic*, p. 13.

no reality outside the realm of spirit. The will, being a necessary aspect of spirit and hence of reality, therefore is a proper object of thought and hence can be included in Croce's philosophical system. This last point will turn out to be crucial.

Collingwood is extremely critical of this portion of Croce's thought. "Croce's asserted pragmatism", he declares in an unpublished manuscript (1920), "cannot be really asserted: it has too much sway on, and wrecks his philosophy..."<sup>325</sup> Why is this the case? Why, by introducing the idea of pseudoconcepts, does Croce endanger his whole philosophical project according to Collingwood? Because it is ultimately based on the strict separation of subject and object that Collingwood so heavily criticizes in *Libellus de Generatione*. In other words, 'Croce's pragmatism' betrays a fundamental realism, which is diametrically opposed to the idealism that Croce ostensibly propagates.

In 'Croce's Philosophy of History' (1921), Collingwood describes what he takes to be the theoretical framework with which Croce approaches his philosophical questions:

Nothing exists but the spirit; but the spirit has two sides or parts, thought and will. Whatever is not thought is will. If you find some fact which cannot be explained as an instance of thought, you must explain it as an instance of will. Thought is the synthesis of subject and object, and its characteristic is truth: will is the creation of an object by the subject, and its characteristic is utility. Wherever you find something which appears at first sight to be an example of thinking, but which on inspection is found not to possess the quality of truth, it follows that it must be an example of willing, and possess the quality of usefulness.<sup>326</sup>

So whenever Croce approaches a topic, according to Collingwood, he first discerns whether it is an instance of thought or of will. The criterion for making that decision is whether it involves discovering the truth or the creation of something useful. Whatever fits into one category is thereby excluded from the other and *vice versa*. Hence, the whole world can be divided into objects of thought and products of the will, as there is no reality beyond the spirit.

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<sup>325</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 19/1, 'Notes on Croce's philosophy' (July 1920), 3.

<sup>326</sup> R.G. Collingwood, 'Croce's Philosophy of History' [1921], in: Idem, *Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Edited with an Introduction by W. Debbins (Austin: University of Texas Press 1965), pp. 6-7.

Whatever the merit of this analysis in general, Collingwood's observation seems to be at least correct with regard to Croce's discussion of pseudoconcepts. A concept like 'horse' is 'omnirepresentative' but not 'ultrarepresentative'. We must conclude, therefore, that it is not an idea that we can truly predicate of reality. It immediately follows, for Croce, that it must be a construction of the will. We invent the concept 'horse' in order to summarize the general characteristics of some particular objects that exist in the world. These general characteristics do not describe the universal nature of reality, but refer to the aspects of its objects that are useful for us to remember. In other words, the concept is an instance of will and not of thought, a convenient fiction, a pseudoconcept. Of course, all the concepts used by the empirical sciences are like this, and the story is similar for the concepts of the mathematical sciences, such as 'geometric triangle'. Thus, in the end, all science is a product of the will rather than thought. In the words of Collingwood, for Croce "[s]cience is the external and arbitrary construction of abstract types; and the manipulation of them for practical ends; it is not thinking at all, but willing".<sup>327</sup> In this sense, science must be opposed to philosophy, which deals with pure concepts rather than pseudoconcepts and is hence aimed at truth.

The central point of this discussion of Croce's idea of the pseudoconcept is to show how much that notion relies on the distinction between thought and will. A concept falls under one of the two categories, and if it cannot be fit into one it must belong to the other. This further results in the opposition of two functions of the mind: on the one hand philosophy, which is aimed at truth, and the other science, aimed at utility. And it is precisely all these sharp separations that Collingwood attacks.

To understand that attack, it is important to stress that Croce is engaged in a project that he calls *The Philosophy of the Spirit*. In a series of books he tries to give a philosophical account of all the functions of mind and how they are related to each other. As the Italian idealists deny a reality external to spirit, this is at the same time a metaphysical undertaking. In other words, Croce, as a philosopher, can only have the spirit itself as his object.

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

Now, Collingwood's worry about the notion of the pseudoconcept and all that it implies is that it vitiates the fundamental premise of Croce's project: that the spirit, in its highest function philosophy, can only have itself as its object. For it seems that, by insisting so strongly on the differences between thought and will, Croce has brought about a cleavage *within* the spirit, turning it into two separate entities rather than conceiving them as integrated parts of an overarching whole. We now have one activity of mind, philosophy, aimed at discovering the universal features of reality, and, as one of its objects, science, which turns out to be fundamentally different from philosophy by being wholly the resultant of will and never of thought. In the words of Collingwood, philosophy ends up being "the contemplation by a subject of a Transcendent, positive & pre-existent object; ... In essence it [science] is the Not-Self".<sup>328</sup>

But then it turns out that Croce is, in fact, a realist in the sense of the *Libellus*. We now have a subject connected by a knowledge-relation to an object that is fundamentally different from itself. Collingwood formulates this criticism as follows in the unpublished 'Notes on Croce's philosophy' (1920):

whereas for a dualistic realism 'the mind' exists in a world consisting partly of things which are not mind, for an idealist there is nowhere a distinction between the mind & its other. ... idealism just exists to deny that the world is divisible into minds & other things. ... his [Croce's] dualism between science & philosophy restates the dualism between mind & its own other: it asserts the principle that the object of thought (in this case science) is not thought, but another. And this makes thought itself an other than something else, therefore makes it unable to be a principle of unity: therefore we have a world of multiplicity (=objectivity) in which thought itself is to be found as one element in the multiple (dualism, realism).<sup>329</sup>

And the identification of Croce's philosophy as being realist is present in the *Libellus* itself as well:

Realism ... has never ceased to subdivide reality according to some a priori and fanciful scheme, now distinguishing three parts of the soul with Plato, now an active and a contemplative life with Aristotle, and so on to the modes of the one substance in Spinoza, the Scottish Philosophies of the Human Mind, the Hegelian Logic and the *Crocian Philosophy of the Spirit*.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Collingwood, 'Notes on Croce's philosophy', 3.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>330</sup> Collingwood, 'Libellus de Generatione', 33-4, my emphasis.

But surely Croce identifies himself as an idealist and would deny any fundamental, metaphysical opposition between thought and will, or philosophy and science? Correct. But Collingwood would not be impressed by such protests. That thought and will are supposedly united in the higher synthesis of 'the spirit' amounts to "a matter of faith only".<sup>331</sup> Collingwood recognizes that Croce would say this, but cannot find any evidence for the sincerity of this view in the way Croce works out his theory of science. He discerns two Croces: Croce the idealist, "who sweeps away dualisms and reunites distinctions in a concrete ... unity", and Croce the realist, "who delights in formal distinctions and habitually works in dualistic ... terms".<sup>332</sup> With the idea of the pseudoconcept, Croce the realist has gotten the upper hand, Collingwood has now shown. It relies on a dualism between thought and will that Croce the idealist and post-*Libellus* Collingwood cannot accept. In short, 'Croce's asserted pragmatism cannot be really asserted' if *The Philosophy of the Spirit* is to remain an idealist project. Nor can it be asserted in Collingwood's world of becoming.

## 2.2 Pragmatism as the generalization of Croce's theory of pseudoconcepts

Croce's notion of the pseudoconcept gives Collingwood the means for understanding the position of pragmatism in general. Whereas Croce enormously restricts the proper work of thought by making it concerned exclusively with the study of pure concepts, pragmatism goes even further according to Collingwood. Like Croce, the pragmatists recognize a distinction between thought and will, or the theoretical and practical faculties of mind. But unlike him they think thought is incapable of achieving anything *at all*. In other words, the pragmatists, in contrast to Croce, are complete sceptics with regard to the value of thought. We can piece together this interpretation from three of Collingwood's texts written in the early 1920s.

Collingwood publicly mentions pragmatism for the first time in *Ruskin's Philosophy*, an address he delivered at the 'Ruskin Centenary Conference' in 1919 and subsequently published in 1922. In a footnote, pragmatism is introduced as part

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<sup>331</sup> Collingwood, 'Notes on Croce's Philosophy', 3.

<sup>332</sup> Collingwood, 'Croce's Philosophy of History', p. 8.

of a wider diagnosis of British intellectual culture during the nineteenth century: “The rise of Pragmatism at the end of the Victorian era [roughly 1837-1901] represents a revival of the ‘Victorian heresy’ in protest against the idealism of Hegelian origin—as Victorianism and Pragmatism are Kantian—which threatened to destroy it”.<sup>333</sup>

This quote requires context to make sense. What does Collingwood mean with ‘Kantian’ here? Two things. First, the bifurcation of mind into a theoretical and practical compartment. Second, the priority of the practical over the theoretical. Both these things “seem[...] to” be “suggest[ed]” by Kant when the German thinker expresses doubts over the power of reason to establish truths about e.g. God and freedom, but at the same time holds that such difficulties should not deter us in our practical activities.<sup>334</sup> In the sphere of morality it is permitted, barring metaphysical knowledge, to act on the basis of faith alone. This “combination of intellectual scepticism with moral dogmatism” was taken over by English thinkers of the Victorian age such as Huxley and Spencer, and this is what Collingwood refers to with ‘the Victorian heresy’.<sup>335</sup> He considers it to be “an intellectual disease which ate like a canker [sic] into the whole life of the nineteenth century”.<sup>336</sup> And pragmatism is the latest manifestation of this illness, a counter movement against the ‘Hegelian idealism’ of Bradley and his compatriots who put theoretical reason in its rightful place again. Just like the Kantian thinkers of the Victorian age, pragmatism distinguishes between the theoretical and practical faculties of mind, and glorifies the practical as a result of scepticism about the power of theoretical thought.

Collingwood takes a further step in his interpretation of pragmatism in the unpublished ‘Draft of opening chapters of a “Prolegomena to Logic” (or the like)’ (1920). Here he implicitly connects it to Croce’s theory of the pseudoconcept.

Collingwood brings up pragmatism in the context of a critical discussion of realist logic, which presupposes that thought is “the process by which we come to

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<sup>333</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Ruskin’s Philosophy: An Address Delivered at the Ruskin Centenary Conference, Coniston, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1919* [1922], in: Idem, *Essays in the Philosophy of Art*. Edited and Introduced by A. Donagan (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press 1964), p. 26n.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>335</sup> Idem.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

know that which exists”.<sup>337</sup> This implies that thought is passive; it merely finds a pre-existing reality that is in no sense altered by being known. Thought does not create the world but discovers it. Traditionally, Collingwood observes, this process of discovery has been thought to happen by way of inference, judgment or the use of concepts. He first rejects inference and judgment as viable options. In inference, there is supposed to be a movement from premises to conclusion, and it is by observing what conclusion follows from some given premises that we learn. However, in reality, the relation between the two is ironclad. Whatever content is contained in the conclusion cannot in any significant sense be different from what is already contained in the premises. Inference is just tracing out the implications of the information we already possess, it is not a means by which ‘we *come* to know reality’. In the words of Collingwood, “[t]hought, then, is not a process: and inference, which implies process, is an illusion”.<sup>338</sup>

Premises, of course, are judgments. But Collingwood excludes them as modes of thought that can lead to knowledge of reality as well. Reality is what it is, it is not altered by our knowing it. But that means that our judgment S is P does not really tell us something new. If the judgment is true, then P simply is part of the nature of S: again, P is already implied in the adequate conception of S. According to Collingwood, “the judgment is the assertion that the thing is itself, and it is quite correctly represented by the formula A is A. Every judgment as such is tautologous and asserts that the subject is the predicate, the subject and predicate being identical”.<sup>339</sup>

This brings us to the concept. If every judgment about an object is already implied in a correct conception of that object, could conceiving be the key to reality? Not if we are talking about the abstract universal. Strictly speaking, Collingwood claims, abstraction is not even a form of thinking within the realist framework. Thought, for realism, is the discovery of a reality that already exists before a thinker comes along. The thinker merely finds what is already there. But abstract universals are not ‘there’. What exists is an object, e.g., a billiard ball, that is red, round, hard,

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<sup>337</sup> Collingwood, ‘Prolegomena to Logic’, 1.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



etc. Abstraction, then, is “the selection of one from a number of given attributes, all present in a concrete object of experience, and the concentration of our thought upon this single attribute regarded as if it were a really independent existent”.<sup>340</sup> But the selected quality of, say, redness is not really independent from the qualities of roundness and hardness: they are found in conjunction as the billiard ball. Abstraction therefore *makes* ‘redness’; the abstract universal ‘red’ is a construction rather than a finding.

It is at this point in his argument that Collingwood introduces pragmatism:

In cognising such an abstract universal the mind does not simply see reality as it is, but carries out a certain operation upon reality; the will interferes with the course of thought. But the interference of the will in cognition is precisely the falsification of knowledge. It is the assertion of the subject as against the object, the refusal of the subject to follow the object in implicit obedience. Thus from our realistic point of view (and that means the point of view of thought *qua* mere thought, purified from all interference with reality or creation of what was not there before, thought as apprehension, not construction) abstraction is falsification, and the concept which is reached by abstraction is not a truth but a fiction. It is therefore not a concept. It is not thought but action; and as such it must seek its justification not in logic but in economics and ethics. *Hence the pragmatic theory of the concept...*<sup>341</sup>

Here we can discern the origin of Collingwood’s interpretation of pragmatism. For him it arises against a realist background. Thought is the discovery of a pre-existing reality, will is the production of something new. In *Ruskin’s Philosophy* we have already seen that, according to Collingwood, pragmatism is sceptical about thought’s capability of reaching its ostensible goal. But what, then, becomes of the concept? For pragmatism, it is not an object of thought but a construction of the will. Hence, it should not be asked whether it is a correct or incorrect description of reality, but whether it is useful in dealing with the world. It is not thought but action.

Croce is not explicitly mentioned in the above passage. However, his theory of the pseudoconcept is, in my view, clearly present in the background. Like Croce’s ‘pseudoconcept’, the ‘pragmatic concept’ comes about as a result of the manipulation of concrete objects. By abstracting qualities that do not in reality exist independently from the objects to which they belong, a universal is *constructed*. Hence it is the result of will and not of thought, the latter for Croce as well as pragmatism being

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<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20, my emphasis.

aimed at discovery rather than creation. Consequently, concepts should be judged by the criteria of ethics or economics instead of asking about their representative adequacy. Given these similarities it seems extremely unlikely that Collingwood develops his interpretation of pragmatism independently from his criticism of Croce's notion of the pseudoconcept. It rather is probable that Croce's local pragmatism is the model for Collingwood's interpretation of pragmatism *tout court*.

It is further noteworthy that Collingwood does not stop his destructive work with the abstract universal. For yet another alternative has been proposed as the means through which the mind may discover reality: the conception of the *concrete* universal, also known as the Absolute. According to Collingwood, "[Hegel's] followers have erected the 'whole' into a kind of fetish", but they misunderstand the nature of that whole.<sup>342</sup> Absolute idealists think that reality has parts and that the whole explains these parts. But if the concrete universal is a concept, that is, an *intelligible* whole, it cannot have separable parts. It is "a system of relations, inseparable because they are relations and not parts".<sup>343</sup> If so, the realist presupposition that thinking is the process by which reality is discovered is falsified, for there can no longer be a distinction between thought and reality in the first place: they are just elements in the one whole that is the Absolute. In short, "this notion of thought as concept ... may be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* of realistic logic".<sup>344</sup>

Thus, like the pragmatists, Collingwood sees realism and Absolute idealism as two sides of the same coin: both presuppose the untenable position that thought must be defined as 'the process by which we come to know that which exists'. At least on the negative side, then, the views of Collingwood and pragmatism appear to be similar. And indeed, Collingwood foreshadows that "we shall meet [the pragmatic theory of the concept] again when we pass beyond the sphere of realistic logic and seek a ground on which logic and ethics may meet", thereby suggesting that pragmatism at least comes closer to his own position on thought and logic than realism.<sup>345</sup> Unfortunately, the 'Prolegomena' never reaches the point where

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>344</sup> Idem.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 20.

pragmatism is taken up again, but I will discuss how close the two views really come in the last section of this chapter.

In the meantime, I point at one more text that supports my reading of Collingwood's interpretation of pragmatism as a generalized Croceanism. In 'Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?' (1922), Collingwood claims the following:

The metaphysical notion of reality as process, movement, change, or becoming has had its reverse (perhaps really its obverse) side in an epistemology which places history at the centre of knowledge. In this, implicitly if not explicitly, the schools of Mach, of Bergson, of James, and of Croce agree: and even more plainly they agree in holding that science is not knowledge at all but action, not true but useful, an object of discussion not to epistemology but to ethics. Any cognition (such seems to be the Berkeleian principle common to these schools) must be of the particular, and must therefore be history: what is called a cognition of the universal cannot be a cognition at all but must be an action. They do not all intend by this analysis to 'degrade' science in the sense of denying its *value*: for it is, they maintain, *useful*: what they deny is simply its truth.<sup>346</sup>

Here for the first time Collingwood himself draws attention to the parallels between Croce's philosophy of the spirit and the pragmatism of James *cum suis*. For both these philosophies, reality is not a static entity such as the external world or the Absolute, but a developing process. This metaphysical position is reflected in an epistemology that prioritizes historical knowledge, according to Collingwood. What he means by this, is that, according to this view, our thinking should always be aimed at the particular. Reality is constantly changing, so it is no use searching for objects that remain the same over time. History is here contrasted with science, which is precisely presented as the search for such stable entities, that is, universals. But, as reality contains no universal elements, the concepts of science do not pick out objects that really exist. Hence, they are not cognitions at all for Croce and the pragmatists, but actions; not discoveries but manipulations of reality.

It is clear, then, that Collingwood sees very close parallels between the philosophies of Croce and the pragmatists. In 'Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?' he discusses them under one heading, as schools of thought that embrace knowledge of the individual and reject the possibility of knowledge of

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<sup>346</sup> R.G. Collingwood, 'Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?', in: *Mind*, Vol. 31, No. 124 (1922), p. 445, Collingwood's emphasis.

the universal. For both Croce and pragmatism, (most) universals are not objects of thought at all, but constructions of the will. For Croce, Collingwood gives this interpretation in ‘Notes on Croce’s Philosophy’ and for pragmatism in the ‘Prolegomena to Logic’. We see, crucially, that the position of pragmatism—both in its local and its global variant—depends on a sharp separation of will from thought: thought is the *discovery* of reality, will the *creation* of reality. The dividing line between Croce and pragmatism is that, whereas Croce acknowledges the pure concepts as objects of thought, pragmatism is completely sceptical about the potency of the theoretical faculty of mind, as Collingwood makes clear in *Ruskin’s Philosophy*. Hence the distinction between Croce’s ‘local pragmatism’ and the ‘global pragmatism’ of ‘the school of James’.

### 2.3 Consequences for Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism

So far I have limited myself to arguing for a certain interpretation of Collingwood’s view of pragmatism. I have not gone into how Collingwood may have criticized this position. He does not directly provide such a criticism in the texts discussed hitherto, but we may surmise that his estimation would not have been all too positive. In *Ruskin’s Philosophy* pragmatism is seen as akin to the ‘canker-like disease’ of Victorianism. And in ‘Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?’, Collingwood ultimately answers that question in the negative. For him, knowledge of the individual and knowledge of the universal cannot be separated: “To possess or think a concept is to interpret a fact in terms of it: to possess or observe a fact is to interpret it in terms of a concept”.<sup>347</sup> This, of course, is an implicit criticism of theories which hold that knowledge of the individual is more important than knowledge of the universal. And this is precisely what pragmatism, according to Collingwood, entails.

In other words, plausible reconstructions can be made of what Collingwood would have thought of a generalized Croceanism. However, before going into this, it must be asked whether Collingwood’s account of pragmatism is correct. In view of

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<sup>347</sup> Collingwood, ‘Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?’, p. 447. Cf. R.G. Collingwood, ‘Sensation and Thought’, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1923-4), pp. 55-76.

this, it is interesting that ‘Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?’ actually was the title of a symposium organized jointly by the *Mind Association* and the *Aristotelian Society*. The first paper was given by Collingwood, and one of the respondents was Schiller.<sup>348</sup> Schiller is quite positive about Collingwood’s contribution, saying that with “Mr. Collingwood’s attitude indeed I find myself in such cordial agreement that I can accept all of his contentions”.<sup>349</sup> Given the central point of Collingwood’s paper—that there is no principal distinction between cognition of the particular and knowledge of the universal—this is not surprising. In the first chapter of this book, we have seen Schiller claim that our experience of the world is always already interpreted by means of the axioms previously established by our forebears.<sup>350</sup> To recall this point in Schiller’s own terms: “[E]ven our most passive receptivity of sensations can, and should be construed as the effortless fruition of what was once acquired by strenuous effort”.<sup>351</sup> For Schiller, we never cognise the particular immediately, but always through some conceptual scheme. Hence, for Schiller, when our axioms change, the world changes, for there is no reality external to our experience, the latter thus always including universal elements.

But this raises the suspicion that Collingwood’s account of pragmatism might not be entirely correct. For in Schiller, the distinction between cognition of the individual and knowledge of the universal that Collingwood attributes to the pragmatists does not seem to be present. And indeed, Schiller says that, although he agrees with the central contention of Collingwood’s paper, it nevertheless “reveal[s]” that Collingwood does “not quite understand pragmatism”.<sup>352</sup> Schiller does not elaborate this point and goes on to state his own opinion about the relation between historical and scientific knowledge. But on the basis of the first chapter of this book we can reconstruct what he means.

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<sup>348</sup> The other respondent was the British Idealist A.E. Taylor (1869-1945).

<sup>349</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, ‘Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 31, No. 124 (1922), p. 450.

<sup>350</sup> See pp. 52-3 of this book.

<sup>351</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 56.

<sup>352</sup> Schiller, ‘Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?’, p. 450.

Collingwood sees pragmatism as a generalized form of Croce's theory of the pseudoconcept. That is to say, the spirit has a theoretical part, thought, and a practical part, will. Thought is concerned with the discovery of reality, will with the creation of reality. Whatever does not belong to one of these categories belongs to the other. For Croce, most of the concepts that we regularly deploy are not concerned with truth and hence belong to the practical part of the spirit. They are forms of action instead of thought, ultimately distorting the reality they are predicated of. According to Collingwood, pragmatists go further and declare that *all* concepts are like that. Hence, pragmatism is a kind of scepticism about thought.

But the pragmatists, as we have seen, do not endorse the dualism between thought and will. For them, it is true, there is no theoretical part of the spirit that is exclusively aimed at the discovery of some transcendent reality. However, this does not mean that everything is will. Both thought and will do not exist independently but are merely functions in the overarching whole that is the organism. The aim of the organism is survival, and thought is one element in achieving that aim. It does this by conceiving postulates or hypotheses that can be tested in experience. If such hypotheses work, they are not merely useful, they are positively true: they are instances of successful *thinking* and become universalized as the axioms of subsequent experience. In other words, pragmatism is not sceptical about thought; it does not hold that concepts cannot be truly predicated of reality. Rather, it is a fundamental reinterpretation of what it means to be a thinking being, and hence what it is for a concept to be truly predicated. It is exactly for this reason that we have seen Schiller denying Bradley's 'practical creed' the title of pragmatist. That creed is precisely based on scepticism about thought's capability of achieving its ostensible ideal. But a *real* pragmatist, Schiller holds, reaches her theory of truth on the basis of a positive analysis of thought; she arrives there from the belief that successful thinking is possible once we realize what the true nature of intelligence is.

Hence, at least *prima facie*, Collingwood is wrong to conceive of pragmatism as a generalized form of Croceanism. Croce's idea of the pseudoconcept is premised on a dualism between thought and will that is explicitly denied by Schiller and the other pragmatists. Therefore, all criticisms that Collingwood might base on this interpretation of pragmatism will be unacceptable to the pragmatists themselves:

they would claim that Collingwood ‘reveals that he does not quite understand pragmatism’, and is attacking a straw man.

It seems that there are two ways in which Collingwood can go forward. First, he could engage with what the pragmatists actually say. Or second, he can argue that, denials notwithstanding, pragmatism after all *is* premised on an unacknowledged dualism between thought and will, just as Croce’s assertion of the unity of the spirit is shown to be merely ‘a matter of faith’. In the next section, we will see that the latter is the route Collingwood takes. We can only speculate whether he does this as the result of the engagement with Schiller in ‘Are History and Science Different Kinds of Knowledge?’. But it is striking, we will see, that the new interpretation Collingwood gives of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis* closely matches Schiller’s version of that philosophy.

### 3. “The babblings of pragmatism”: Collingwood and Schiller

The symposium on the question whether history and science yield different sorts of knowledge was not the first occasion on which Collingwood and Schiller met in person. Collingwood’s diary, kept from 1912 to 1922, indicates that he met Schiller for dinner on 30 January 1915. According to James Patrick, “R.G.C. [Collingwood] called” Schiller “good company”, and Patrick describes their relation as a “friendship”.<sup>353</sup> In other words, though Collingwood saw pragmatism through a Crocean lens at the time, he must have been aware of at least the existence of Schiller’s pragmatism, though perhaps not of its distinctiveness.

What is more is that Schiller remained by far the most vocal protagonist of pragmatism in Britain. James, frontrunner of the movement, passed away in 1910. Peirce had always been almost entirely absent from the public discussions across the Atlantic ocean and died as a virtually unknown thinker in 1914. Dewey, on the other hand, continued to be extremely active as an educationist and philosopher and would live until 1952. However, he ceased to publish in British journals such as *Mind* and *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. This situation left Schiller as the main banner carrier for pragmatism, and he fulfilled this task dutifully by continuing to

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<sup>353</sup> Patrick, ‘The Oxford Man’, p. 226&n.

take on both realism and idealism. In 1920 Schiller debated Russell on “The Meaning of “Meaning””, reiterating his now familiar point that what “anything means depends on *who* means it, when, where, why, on what occasion, in what context, with what purpose, with what success”.<sup>354</sup> A year later Bosanquet published his last book, *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, in which he attacks pragmatists, realists and ‘neo-idealists’ alike. Of this work, Schiller wrote a scathing review.<sup>355</sup>

In *Speculum Mentis*, Schiller is Collingwood’s most prominent target in the latter’s critical discussion of pragmatism. Or so I will argue, as Collingwood does not elaborate who of the pragmatists he is thinking of specifically. Skagestad has recently conjectured that it is James who is attacked by Collingwood, as James was “presumably” the “most famous pragmatist of the time”.<sup>356</sup> On the basis of a painstaking comparison between *Speculum Mentis* and the writings of Schiller, however, I think it is much more probable that Collingwood is repudiating Schiller’s version of pragmatism.

In this section, I first reconstruct Collingwood’s interpretation and criticism of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*.<sup>357</sup> I then conclude by explaining what consequences Collingwood’s argument has for his relation to James and pragmatism more widely.

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<sup>354</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, “The Meaning of “Meaning””, in: *Mind*, Vol. 29, No. 116 (1920), p. 391, Schiller’s emphasis.

<sup>355</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, ‘An Idealist in Extremis’, in: *Mind*, Vol. 31, No. 122 (1922), pp. 144-53. For a critical discussion of Bosanquet’s interpretation of Gentile in *The Meeting of Extremes*, see: R.G. Collingwood, ‘Can the New Idealism Dispense with Mysticism?’ [1923], in: Idem, *Faith and Reason*, pp. 270-82. For a critical discussion of Bosanquet’s interpretation of Croce, see: Rik Peters, ‘Companions of Thought and Faith? The Reception of Croce’s Philosophy in the United Kingdom’, in: Teresa Leo (ed.), *La Diffusione Internazionale Dell’opera di Benedetto Croce: Atti del Convegno, Napoli 22-23 Settembre 2016, Nel Centocinquantesimo Della Nascità (1866-2016)* (Rubbettino Editore: Soveria Manelli 2020), pp. 70-71.

<sup>356</sup> Skagestad, *Exploring the Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood*, p. 118.

<sup>357</sup> The argument of this part of the chapter has now, in condensed form, been published. See: Ymko Braaksma, “‘The Babblings of Pragmatism’: Reconstructing R.G. Collingwood’s Rejection of F.C.S. Schiller’s Pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*”, in: *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2021), pp. 241-66.



### 3.1 *Speculum Mentis*

*Speculum Mentis* represents the culminating point of Collingwood's early development. It is also the book from which his most sustained engagement with pragmatism can be reconstructed. This, however, is not a straightforward task, as the pragmatists are explicitly mentioned only twice in the entire text. Nevertheless, in the context of the reception of pragmatism as discussed in the first and second chapters of this book, and Collingwood's development hitherto, these scant mentions can be given enough significance so as to provide a convincing account of Collingwood's interpretation of pragmatism.

In what follows I aim to show three things. First, that in *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood is not entirely negative about pragmatism. For both Collingwood and the pragmatists, thought is active instead of passive, and Collingwood recognizes this similarity. Second, this implies that Collingwood's interpretation of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis* is more adequate than that of the 'generalized Croceanism' that he adhered to before. As a result, Collingwood now gives a rather convincing rebuttal of pragmatism. Both these points can be explained, I will argue throughout, by thinking of Schiller as Collingwood's primary target in *Speculum Mentis*.

Collingwood first introduces pragmatism in the chapter on art, in the section titled 'Knowledge as Question and Answer':

People who are acquainted with knowledge at first hand have always known that assertions are only answers to questions. So Plato described true knowledge as 'dialectic', the interplay of question and answer in the soul's dialogue with itself; so Bacon pointed out once for all that the scientist's real work was to interrogate nature, to put her, if need be, to the torture as a reluctant witness; so Kant mildly remarked that the test of an intelligent man was to know what questions to ask, *and the same truth has lately dawned on the astonished gaze of the pragmatists*.<sup>358</sup>

At first sight, it seems surprising to find the pragmatists in such illustrious companionship, and all the more on this specific place in Collingwood's argument. In his autobiography Collingwood discusses the logic of question and answer, which he himself considers to be revolutionary. This logic—in line with Collingwood's situationism—has it that the meaning and truth of a proposition are always relative

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<sup>358</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, pp. 77-8, my emphasis.

to the specific question it was meant to answer. Collingwood says that it follows from the view that the activity of knowing is always composed of the two correlative and interdependent aspects of questioning and answering.<sup>359</sup> Admittedly, the pragmatists are mentioned in quite a sarcastic tone in *Speculum Mentis*. But still, they *are* credited with co-discovering the fundamental insight on which Collingwood bases his ostensibly innovative logic.

But is this really so surprising if we compare Collingwood's view to the ideas of Schiller? Let us look at the main aspects of the notion that knowledge always consists of questions and answers and see if we can find similar considerations in Schiller.

First, the mind's primary attitude towards reality is that of questioning or *hypothesizing*. We have already seen that, for Collingwood, 'assertions or only answers to questions'. What is important is that he equates questioning to intuition, representation and, most prominently, supposal and hypothesis: "supposal ... is *identical* with questioning", as Collingwood puts it.<sup>360</sup> Like Collingwood, then, I will use these terms interchangeably.

Secondly, the attitude of questioning or hypothesizing is opposed to that of answering or asserting by treating its objects as *possible* instead of *real* or *unreal*. If I ask, for example, whether there is a cat on the mat, or say 'let's suppose that there is a cat on the mat', I am, at least for the time being, leaving open whether it is in fact the case that there is a cat on the mat. Only in the answering phase of thought such an assertion will occur. Now, Collingwood introduces hypothesis in the chapter on art for a reason. As supposing is the act of thinking about the possible instead of the real, it is closely connected to the imagination. In the words of Collingwood: "we never ask a question without to some degree contemplating the non-existent, for asking a question means envisaging *alternatives*, and only one at most of these alternatives can really exist".<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, pp. 29-36. Also see pp. 247-50 of this book.

<sup>360</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 186, my emphasis.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78, my emphasis.

Thirdly, all of this means that in knowledge the mind is active rather than passive. As Collingwood observes, this puts him into conflict with classical forms of empiricism. “The activity of questioning”, Collingwood says,

is a puzzle to empiricist theories of knowledge because in it we seem to contemplate an object which does not necessarily exist, and empiricism believes that it is only because an object really exists that it has, so to speak, the force to imprint itself upon our mind or engage our attention.<sup>362</sup>

Hence, a “crude empiricism imagines that knowledge is composed wholly of assertion” but “those who look upon it as an affair of discovery and exploration have never fallen into that error”.<sup>363</sup> In other words, for Collingwood, we do not gain knowledge by passively letting the facts impinge themselves on us, but by actively envisaging alternative realities and discovering which one is to be called true. In the terms of Bacon, cited by Collingwood, nature must be interrogated as a reluctant witness, rather than simply listened to as a reliable source.

Lastly, Collingwood stresses that questioning never exists “*in vacuo*”. It is always based upon facts already in our possession, that is, assertion: “To ask any question, even the silliest or most irresponsible, we must already possess information”.<sup>364</sup> At the very least, Collingwood says, “any hypothesis presupposes at least one fact, “namely our own freedom and competence to frame hypotheses in general”.<sup>365</sup> Similarly, we can see that the question ‘Is there a cat on the mat?’ presupposes that there is in fact a mat on which a cat may be found.

Now let us turn to Schiller. Can we find the main aspects of the view of knowledge as question and answer in his work? Yes, we can. In ‘Axioms as Postulates’, Schiller precisely insists on the need to differentiate between two forms of thought that map onto Collingwood’s distinction between hypothesis and assertion. The central goal of Schiller’s text, as we have seen in the first chapter of this book, is to warn for the mistake of identifying the whole of our knowledge as consisting of assertions, or ‘axioms’ in Schiller’s terminology.<sup>366</sup> What we must never

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<sup>362</sup> Idem.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., pp. 77 & 79.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>366</sup> See pp. 52-4 of this book.

forget is that *every* assertion or axiom starts of as a ‘postulate’, which Schiller also frequently identifies with “hypothesis” and sometimes with “question”.<sup>367</sup> We conceive a postulate or hypothesis as *possibly* true, and only when it is brought to bear upon experience and then gets verified does it turn into an axiom. As Schiller puts it, the organism

needs assumptions it can act on and live by ... These assumptions it obtains by postulating them in the *hope* that they *may* prove tenable ... But the world does not always grant our demands. The course of postulation does not always run smooth. We cannot tell beforehand whether, and to what extent, a postulate can be made to work.<sup>368</sup>

Again, as Collingwood, Schiller’s stresses the importance of the possible. “The world is always ambiguous, always impels us at certain points to say ‘it may be’, ‘either ... or’, etc.”.<sup>369</sup> Hence, for example physicists “never hesitate to calculate into existence new ‘ethers’ and modes of matter and to endow them with whatever qualities ... their imagination suggests”.<sup>370</sup> Consequently, according to Schiller, to

conceive an inquiry as a question ... is ... implicitly to conceive it as having a plurality of possible answers, all of which have to be examined. All these answers are initially hypotheses, and a choice has to be made between them. This renders the recognition of alternatives a paramount necessity for a logic of discovery.<sup>371</sup>

Schiller is also well aware that his pragmatism, for the very reason that it gives pride of place to postulates and the possible, conflicts with empiricism as usually regarded. As Collingwood, Schiller puts the point in Baconian terms: if we

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<sup>367</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, pp. 106-8.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Cf.: “what we want to know in the science will determine the questions put, and their bearing on the questions put will determine the standing of the answers we attain” (Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, p. 152);

“If, in the example of the last section, I can sit in the ‘chair’, my confidence in my eyesight is confirmed and I shall trouble little whether it ought to be called a ‘sofa’ or ‘stool’. Of course, however, if my interest was not that of a mere sitter, but of a collector or dealer of ancient furniture, my first judgment may have been woefully inadequate and may need to be revised. ‘Success’, therefore, in validating a ‘truth’, is a relative term, relative to the purpose with which the truth was claimed. The ‘same’ predication may be ‘true’ for me and ‘false’ for you, if our purposes are different. As for truth in the abstract, and relative to no purpose, it is plainly unmeaning” (*ibid.*, p. 193).

<sup>369</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 56.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>371</sup> Schiller, ‘Scientific Discovery and Logical Proof’, p. 260.

want to know the world “we must put the question to nature and nature to the question”.<sup>372</sup> We cannot “remain unresistingly passive, to be impressed, like the tabula rasa of the traditional fiction, by an independent ‘external world’ which stamps itself upon us.”<sup>373</sup> Again, “[e]xperience is experiment, *i.e.* active. We do not learn, we do not live, unless we try. Passivity, mere acceptance, mere observation (could they be conceived) would lead us nowhere, least of all to knowledge”.<sup>374</sup>

Finally, the idea that questions or postulates are not conceived out of thin air is present in Schiller as well. Virtually as Collingwood, he says that thought never operates “*in vacuo*”: “intelligence always operates upon the basis of previously established fact ... our hypotheses are suggested by, and start from, the facts of already established knowledge”.<sup>375</sup>

Above I have relied heavily on quotation and citation. The purpose of this exercise is to show just how close Collingwood’s analysis of knowledge parallels Schiller’s views. It is necessary to demonstrate this, because Collingwood’s claim that the ‘truth’ about the significance of questions ‘dawned upon the astonished gaze of the pragmatists’ is unintelligible in itself: in *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood nowhere explains why he thinks that the pragmatists have this insight. Given the quotations provided above, however, it is highly probable that Collingwood bases his estimation

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<sup>372</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 106.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>374</sup> Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, p. 191, Schiller’s emphasis.

Cf.: “It [humanism] does not accept Hume’s psychology with its associationism and its sensationalism. Its voluntaristic is essentially different from his sensationalistic empiricism, and by comparison with the latter may even be called a sort of apriorism. For a postulate, however much it may be suggested by experience, is still an anticipation of nature, which we bring to the facts. Even though it was meant for application to experience, it was assumed because it was desired, even though it serves as a guide in experimentation and a major premiss in argumentation, it is clearly prior to the experience we try to organise thereby” (F.C.S. Schiller, ‘Humanism and Humanism’, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1906-1907), p. 96);

“...it is clear that unless we seek we will not find, nor ‘discover’ realities we have not looked for” (*Studies in Humanism*, p. 196).

<sup>375</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, pp. 59 & 107.

Cf.: “In a sense he [the scientist] will start from what he knows, or thinks he knows. For it is psychologically impossible to do anything else. The knowledge he believes himself to have cannot but affect all his ideas, and he cannot get away from it. His boldest speculations, his most hazardous hypotheses, will have *some* relation, however subtle and recondite, to the knowledge at his disposal. It will influence all his thoughts and guide all his guesses” (‘Scientific Discovery and Logical Proof’, p. 257).

of pragmatism on the work of Schiller, who was personally known by Collingwood and the most prominent pragmatist voice in Britain.

The interpretation of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis* is a development with regard to the preceding period, where Collingwood conceived of pragmatism as a generalized Croceanism, as I have argued. Croce's theory of the pseudoconcept is based on a distinction between thought and will. Thought is passive, it merely discovers a reality that already exists. The will is active, it creates things that were not there before. A pseudoconcept or 'the pragmatic concept', as Collingwood calls it in the 'Prolegomena', abstracts qualities from objects that in reality do not exist independently. Hence, it is a creation rather than a discovery and belongs to the will rather than to thought.

But if we accept the view that knowledge consists of question and answer, then thought is not passive, as we have seen above. It does not simply find reality as it is in itself. Rather than being 'imprinted' by external objects, the mind contemplates the possible, which does not necessarily turn out to be real. Thought *creates* imaginary worlds, or hypotheses, which it subsequently tests. This is Collingwood's view, but in *Speculum Mentis* he also ascribes it to pragmatism. But then the idea of the pseudoconcept, being based on the separation of passive thought from active will, cannot be held by the pragmatists. For it is not simply in virtue of being a construction rather than a discovery that a concept can be referred to the will rather than thought. Thought is itself an activity and creative, and hence its products do not simply correspond to an external reality, as realist logic proposes.

At the end of the second section of this chapter I argued that pragmatism as developed by James, Schiller and Dewey cannot be conceived of as a generalized Croceanism. In *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood's interpretation of pragmatism is much more adequate. Thought is no longer conceived as passive, as aimed at the contemplation of reality as it really is. It is now seen as active, as creating objects that are brought to bear upon reality. And as we have seen in the first chapter of this book, this is precisely how the pragmatists differentiate themselves from realists and idealists alike. Thinking is only one function of the active organism, which also involves desire and action. Thought does not have a specific goal of its own, such as the discovery of the world external to mind or the Absolute. Its function is to

contribute to the aims of the organism as a whole – survival and well-being – by forging tools that must be tested in action for their capability of solving problems. We have seen how for Schiller, this forging of tools involves the imagination and the conception of alternative possible realities that do not have to exist *per se*. All of this clearly negates Croce's opposition of passive thought and active will. Will and thought are, so to say, collapsed into one another: thought is itself an activity instead of being opposed to it.

It now becomes fruitful, in other words, to look at Collingwood's evaluation of pragmatism. If Collingwood understands what pragmatism is up to, it becomes increasingly likely that he has something to say that is worth listening to for the pragmatists themselves. For even in his criticism of pragmatism, Collingwood shows his renewed understanding of the movement. He now presents it as "a confused attempt to overcome the dualism of thought and action".<sup>376</sup> That is to say, pragmatism is no longer seen as premised on a distinction between theory and practice, as a generalized Croceanism would be, but precisely as an attempt to overcome such a distinction, albeit a failed attempt.

Before going into the reasons Collingwood has for considering pragmatism a failure, it must first be noticed that he is not at all unsympathetic towards overcoming the dualism between thought and action. To the contrary, he himself rejects that very dualism: "Thought and action, truth and freedom ('ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free') are inseparable, and are in fact correlative aspects of an indivisible reality".<sup>377</sup> For Collingwood, thought and action are so closely connected that a false theory not only defeats the goal of thought, but also impedes successful practice. He claims that

the characteristic mark by which a form of experience is shown to be satisfactory is simply that it is possible. We ask only for a life that can be lived, a programme that can be carried out. Art, science and the rest are schemes of life by adopting which we are promised happiness and truth. Any scheme which is in itself contradictory or nonsensical cannot redeem these promises, because it cannot be put into execution; but if there is any scheme of life which is

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<sup>376</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 182.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

inherently consistent and therefore, ideally speaking, practicable, we may safely assume that this the scheme to adopt.<sup>378</sup>

In other words, a philosophy that is incoherent is not only theoretically unacceptable, it will also lead to unsuccessful action; ‘it cannot be put into execution’. *Vice versa*, a philosophy that is entirely consistent is ‘practicable’ as well. Thought serves the masters of both truth *and* happiness.

Collingwood goes as far as claiming that “all thought exists for the sake of action” and that, hence, *Speculum Mentis* is written as the solution to a practical problem.<sup>379</sup> He laments the situation of his day in which art, religion, science, history and philosophy are seen as independent and self-sufficient activities. Collingwood, to the contrary, believes that these are only functions of the mind, and that they are all co-equally present in every experience. Hence, e.g. the artist is always at the same time a philosopher and a historian as well. And equally, every mind consists of all these functions and has demand for their products. Throughout history, “men have surrounded themselves with beauty [art], they have found peace in God [religion], they have come appreciably nearer to a solution of the world’s mystery [philosophy]”.<sup>380</sup> If we neglect this fact, everybody will think it is natural to live a solitary life and the “producers and the consumers of spiritual wealth are out of touch”.<sup>381</sup> Thus the ultimate motive of *Speculum Mentis* is to show the incoherence of every form of experience if it is taken purely on its own terms, in order to solve the practical problem of the disintegration of the modern mind.

So, despite a similar commitment regarding the relation between thought and action, why does Collingwood consider pragmatism as a failure? To give an answer we need to look at the chapter on science. It is here that Collingwood first gives a characterization of pragmatism, instead of just mentioning it. According to

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 44. Cf. “...the mind, having formed a false conception of itself, tries to live up to that conception. But the falseness of the conception just means that it cannot be ‘lived up to’. There is therefore a permanent discord between what the mind thinks it is and what, on the strength of that conception, it does: even though this behaviour is not at all the same thing as the behaviour of a mind that knows itself truly. The result is an open inconsistency between theory and practice; and this inconsistency, as ground for dissatisfaction, is the starting-point of the attempt at truer self-knowledge” (Ibid., p. 250).

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>381</sup> Idem.



Collingwood, if “one first adopts the economic theory of the concept ... and jumps to the conclusion that the analysis applies to knowledge in general, one becomes a pragmatist”.<sup>382</sup> The economic theory of the concept is the idea that concepts are not predicated in order to describe reality as it is, but to deal with it successfully. In other words, concepts are not ‘true’ in the traditional sense of the word, but ‘useful’, that is, true in the pragmatist sense of the word.

It must be noted that ‘the economic theory of the concept’ is still a Crocean term that the Italian and his followers sometimes use as a synonym for ‘the theory of the pseudoconcept’.<sup>383</sup> Is Collingwood unaware of the tension between deploying such language on the one hand and ascribing to pragmatism the view that thought is active rather than passive on the other? Or does he perhaps think that the economic theory of the concept does not necessarily have to be based on a realist theory of thought, as Croce ultimately does base it? Given the available evidence we can only speculate. Nevertheless, I recall that in the ‘Prolegomena’, after repudiating realism, Collingwood announces that “we shall meet [the pragmatic theory of the concept] again when *we pass beyond the sphere of realistic logic* and seek a ground on which logic and ethics may meet”<sup>384</sup> This could indicate that Collingwood indeed holds that the economic theory of the concept does not necessarily have to be premised on a realist conception of thought. However, this must remain a mere hypothesis because, as I wrote before, the ‘Prolegomena’ never reaches a fuller discussion of pragmatism than the one cited in the second section of this chapter. At any rate, Collingwood’s usage of Crocean terminology does not lessen the accuracy of his criticism of Schiller, as we will shortly see.

To continue, in order to understand Collingwood’s rejection of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*, it is critical to grasp his analysis of ‘usefulness’ or ‘utility’. In ethics, this is the view that “to be means to an end is the invariable characteristic of all action ... all actions, no matter what, aim at something other than themselves,

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p. 182. Cf. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 36.

<sup>383</sup> See e.g.: Croce, *Logic*, p. 551 & J.A. Smith, ‘The Economic Doctrine of the Concept’, in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1925), pp. 103-22. Cf. Peters, ‘Companions of Thought and Faith?’, pp. 57-65, esp. p. 63

<sup>384</sup> Collingwood, ‘Prolegomena to Logic’, 20, my emphasis.

which may be called their end or good”.<sup>385</sup> According to ‘the economic theory of the concept’ the same applies to at least some kinds of knowledge, and according to pragmatism it applies to knowledge in general. In other words, for pragmatism, ‘to be means to an end is the invariable characteristic of all *knowledge* ... all forms of *knowing*, no matter what, aim at something other than themselves, which may be called their end or good’. What, then, for pragmatism, is the end that knowledge is aimed at? Collingwood does not say in *Speculum Mentis*. But in an unpublished manuscript titled ‘The Conflict Between Religion and Science’ (1921) he makes it clear that it is ‘desire’ or ‘passion’. In that text Collingwood claims that “[p]ragmatists tell us that all our knowledge is rooted in desire and that we must desire before we know; they say that *truth itself is only that which satisfies our passion*”.<sup>386</sup>

Is Collingwood right in this characterization of pragmatism if we look at Schiller? In my view, yes. In ‘Axioms as Postulates’, Schiller explicitly says that “Θεωρία [theory] must not be separated from πράξις [praxis], but related to it *as means to end*”.<sup>387</sup> And what holds for ‘theory’ in general, holds for concrete instances of thinking as well. For example, “we must use the postulate (or hypothesis) as *a means to an end* that seems desirable”.<sup>388</sup>

Now, the crux of Collingwood’s analysis of utility was that it sees action or thought as useful towards an end *outside themselves*. This aspect we clearly find in Schiller as well. For him, we postulate a hypothesis in order to fulfil a desire or need. We then test the postulate for whether it truly does fulfil such a need. Only if it does, a postulate becomes an axiom. As Schiller puts it succinctly, “[w]e conceive the axioms as arising out of man’s needs as an agent”.<sup>389</sup> To fulfil the needs of the agent is the end of thinking, then. And this end is located *outside* thinking itself. For Schiller, as we have seen in the first chapter of this book, ‘the agent’ is in the first place a biological organism with an accompanying psychology. Its needs, then, are not consciously conceived, but rather given to it by its physiological and

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>386</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘The Conflict Between Religion and Science’ (1921). Unpublished manuscript in possession of James Connelly, 4, my emphasis.

I thank James Connelly for kindly sending me the relevant passage.

<sup>387</sup> Schiller, ‘Axioms as Postulates’, p. 85, my emphasis.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., p. 107, my emphasis.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

psychological constitution. The direction of thought, in other words, “is ultimately *determined* ... by the needs of life [biology] and the desires [psychology] which correspond to those needs. Thus the logical structures of our mental organisation are the product of psychological functions”.<sup>390</sup>

So Collingwood is right to characterize pragmatism—at least as defended by Schiller—as conceiving knowledge as means to an end *external* to it. Why does this make pragmatism problematic? Because, the upshot of this view is that the pragmatist position is ultimately incoherent. It starts off as an attempt to overcome the dualism between thought and action, or thought and will. We have seen that Schiller tries to accomplish this feat by turning thought itself into an activity in the form of postulation. To this attempt Collingwood is sympathetic. However, if we think of thought and action in terms of utility, Collingwood complains, we precisely reinstate the dualism between will and thought: “The utilitarian view of action ... results ... in the false abstraction of the will from the intellect”.<sup>391</sup> And this is exactly what we have seen happening in Schiller. He conceives postulation as a means to fulfilling desires, and these desires are ultimately biological, that is, situated outside thought. In the end then, Schiller returns to a position where there is a strict separation of will from thought where he started from the intention of overcoming just that dualism. In short, his position is incoherent.

Collingwood’s repudiation of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis* is akin to the doubts raised by Bradley in the early 1900s. In the first chapter of this book, we have seen Bradley argue that, if thought is always merely means to an end, then such an end must ultimately be simply given to thought. For thought apparently is never an end in itself, and, as a mere means, does not have the ability to judge ends: it is necessarily always related to yet another end that it simply has to accept. In other words, for pragmatism it seems that thought can never criticize ends and is powerless

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p. 57, my emphasis.

Cf.: “purpose is as clearly a psychological conception as meaning is professedly a logical one ... It is, in fact, a biological function” (*Studies in Humanism*, p. 113);

“purpose is primarily a function of psychological fact, which admits of being psychologically determined (ibid., p. 82);

“The human mind is ... full of interests, all of which are directly and indirectly referable to the functions and purpose of life. Its organisation is biological (ibid., pp. 190-1).

<sup>391</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 172.

against their domination. Ends, in other words, are, in Collingwood's terms, 'external' to thought: they fall outside its control. We may imagine, then, that Schiller would have replied to Collingwood as he did to Bradley. But I have already argued in the first chapter of this book that Schiller's response to Bradley is utterly unconvincing.<sup>392</sup> Hence, I do not think that Schiller can escape Collingwood's criticism as formulated in *Speculum Mentis*.

Much like in the case of Croce's philosophy of the spirit, then, the unity of the organism, for Schiller, is more like a 'matter of faith' than a seriously held belief that is persuasively argued for. In practice it turns out, Collingwood has shown, that Schiller's pragmatism precisely involves a fundamental cleavage between two functions of the organism, a dualism Schiller set out to resolve in the first place and that Collingwood rejects out of hand.

### 3.2 Consequences for Collingwood's relation to James

We are now in a position to answer the question left open at the end of the first section of this chapter: can James invoke his pragmatist theory of truth to explain the development of religion and thus circumvent Collingwood's criticism of his psychological method? And what does this say about the relation between Collingwood and pragmatism?

We have seen Collingwood taking James to task for failing to include considerations of truth in his psychological description of religion. By neglecting to ask whether a certain religious position is true or not, James puts himself in a position wherein he cannot explain how one religious system evolves into another. For Collingwood, each new system B develops itself out of the failed old system A: mind reflects on A, detects its shortcomings, and creates B so as to resolve these shortcomings. Hence, James, by refusing to inquire into the truth value of A, thereby automatically misunderstands B, and makes it seem as if religious evolution consists of random, haphazard transitions. And this, for Collingwood, is a false account of becoming. But earlier I suggested that James *does* have a story to tell about the development of beliefs if we take his pragmatism into account. According to James'

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<sup>392</sup> See pp. 63-4 of this book.

theory of truth, religious system B will replace religious system A if B ‘gives our mind a completer sum of satisfactions’ than A. At least we now have a development that is not random, we can see that there is a *cause* for the direction in which religion evolves.

But Collingwood’s rejections of Croce’s theory of the pseudoconcept and of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*—which I take to be a response to Schiller—contain an implicit criticism of Jamesian pragmatism as well. Whereas Croce’s notion of the pseudoconcept is based on a dualism between thought and will, and Schiller’s philosophy turns out to be premised on a distinction between desire and thought, James’ theory of truth relies on an opposition of thought and feeling. This is already pointed out by Joseph, as I have explained in the first chapter of this book.<sup>393</sup> A belief is true, according to James, if it leads to future experiences by way of a feeling of agreeable leading. This feeling is *coercive*; we stand powerless against it. So thought, in the end, must submit to the dictates of feeling, without being able to answer the question *why* it must do so. But then, as in the case of Croce and Schiller, thought has ‘an other’, there is a distinction between subject and object. And this, as we have seen, is unacceptable in Collingwood’s world of becoming.

But clearly Collingwood adheres to the idea that reality is process. Our experience does not stay the same but constantly develops into new forms. How, then, does this happen if it is not by way of something external that determines thought? We have seen a first hint in the *Libellus*. There Collingwood explains that ‘the act of thought ... unites in itself the opposing character of thinking (development of the old position into its implications...) and observation (passage *per saltum* [discontinuously] to some quite new position...)’. In *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood puts more flesh on the bones of this idea.

There he makes it clear that the mind reflects on its own products. Thus, the ‘facts’ to which mind is related are not objects which stand over against the subject. Rather, “fact is just its [the mind’s] own nature as that stands for the time being”.<sup>394</sup> The object of thought, in other words, is present experience. But all experience, Collingwood holds, contains implicit and explicit elements. If one cannot but be

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<sup>393</sup> See pp. 50-2 of this book.

<sup>394</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 292.

aware of a certain principle or distinction, this principle or distinction is explicit. Collingwood gives the example of “a moral agent” who, “in so far as he is a moral agent, is necessarily aware of the distinction between right and wrong”.<sup>395</sup> Of others however, we are unaware. These are presuppositions that our experience requires, but which we have not consciously made. And it is the task of the philosopher to make the implicit elements of experience explicit. In the course of this process, we may discover that making explicit what a certain form of experience implicitly contains renders that experience incoherent and hence ‘impracticable’. This insight, then, is the starting point for what Collingwood in the *Libellus* calls ‘observation’, i.e. the ‘passage *per saltum* to some quite new position’. In the terms of *Speculum Mentis*, the “open inconsistency between theory and practice, ... as ground for dissatisfaction, is the starting-point of the attempt at truer self-knowledge”.<sup>396</sup> But this truer self-knowledge is not the more adequate contemplation of an external reality, but the active *creation* of a new, coherent experience. “The life of absolute knowledge”, Collingwood says, “is ... the conscious self-creation of the mind, no mere discovery of what it is, but the making of itself what it is”.<sup>397</sup>

In other words, *contra* what the pragmatists believe, there does not have to be something outside thought that drives the process of experience. The mind constantly produces intellectual systems which are holistic in nature: they are complete views of the world, uniting in themselves all distinctions such as subject and object, and thought and will. And *as a whole*, such a system contains implicit principles that may, on reflection, turn out to be incoherent amongst each other. This means, as we have seen, that the system is false and by extension that it fails as a guide to life. In the words of Collingwood, the system ‘cannot be executed’. If so, thought endeavours to resolve the tensions inherent in the old philosophy and tries to create a new system that is more coherent and hence more practicable.

Collingwood, I conclude, embraces a position in *Speculum Mentis* that comes very close to the historical situationism of the Italian idealists. For the latter, thought, although reflecting on specific problems, is ‘*causa sui*’. It is free from

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p. 85n.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

external forces and only gives laws to itself. According to Schiller, on the other hand, thinking depends on psychological and ultimately biological desires. For James, it depends on feeling. Thus, although Croce, de Ruggiero and Gentile agree with pragmatism that thought is not aimed at discovering a transcendent reality, but always is and ought to be situated, the two parties would not necessarily agree about the context *in which* thinking is situated. I expressed this difference by calling the Italian idealist position ‘historical’ and that of James and Schiller ‘psychological’ situationism. In the first section of this chapter I already argued that Collingwood can be viewed as a situationist from the *Libellus* onwards, and we can now see that he is a situationist of a historical rather than a psychological stripe. For Collingwood, as for the Italian idealists, the spirit changes *itself* by reflecting on and developing its own past products.

It is crucial to note, however, that we must not *identify* Collingwood’s views with those of the Italians. In the second section of this chapter we have already seen how, for Collingwood, Croce’s idealism ultimately implies a realist point of view, and in the ‘*Libellus*’ he is actually adamant that *all* contemporary forms of idealism fall prey to the clutches of realism.<sup>398</sup> So although he broadly falls within the camp of what I have termed historical situationism, Collingwood takes up a distinctive position *within* that camp.

## Conclusion

We can now sketch Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism as it stands by 1924. In the first chapter of this book I have argued that we must regard pragmatism first and foremost as a theory of thought. Taking their cue from evolutionary biology, pragmatists deny that thought is an independent entity that has a goal of its own. In particular, they deny that thought is aimed at discovering a transcendent reality. Rather, thinking is one function of the complete human organism, and contributes to the aims of that organism as a whole, most prominently survival and well-being in

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<sup>398</sup> Collingwood, ‘*Libellus de Generatione*’, pp. 1-2 & 34. Cf. Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, esp. pp. 345-74.

the here and now. To this end, thought devises ideas or postulates that are subsequently tested in action for their capability of fulfilling human desires.

Collingwood's early philosophy is, in a certain sense, more similar to pragmatism than to realism or Absolute idealism. We have seen how he argues that realist logic, for the very reason that it presupposes that the aim of thought is the discovery of a transcendent reality, fails. For Collingwood as for the pragmatists, thought is creative rather than contemplative, active rather than passive. In thinking, mind creates a new experience that must remedy the incoherencies of our philosophy as it presently stands. Such incoherency does not only indicate the theoretical inadequacy of our present experience, but also its impracticability: it cannot be put into execution. In the end, for Collingwood, all thought exists for the sake of action. We must find a philosophical theory that can be lived as well as thought. This close relation between theory and practice, of course, brings Collingwood even closer to pragmatism.

However, Collingwood cannot accept how the pragmatists try to bridge the gap between thought and action. In denying the dualism between theory and practice, Schiller and James create new distinctions that result in the opposition between the subject and an object against which it stands powerless. In the case of Schiller this is desire. Thought has the freedom to postulate hypotheses, but it does so in order to fulfil desires. And these desires are not chosen by thought, but given to it by the biological constitution of the organism. James, on the other hand, draws a line between thought and feeling. A belief is true if we are coerced by feeling that it is true. Again, thought turns out to be quite impotent: it is forced to accept the dictates of psychological feeling. In opposition to both Schiller and James, Collingwood argues in Italian idealist fashion that thought changes *itself*, without being reliant upon something external that propels its development. In the terms of the previous chapter, for Collingwood as for the Italian idealists, thinking is situated in a *historical* rather than in a *psychological* context. Hence, Collingwood rejects pragmatism, and, from his perspective, rightly so. Ultimately, it is nothing more than a 'confused attempt to overcome the dualism of thought and action'.

This conclusion must be nuanced in at least one way. Collingwood deals explicitly with James in *Religion and Philosophy* and with Schiller in *Speculum*



*Mentis*, or so I have argued. But as I have shown in the first chapter of this book, the pragmatisms of James, Schiller and Dewey must not be regarded as precisely alike. Specifically with regard to Bradley's criticism of Schiller—which, as I have pointed out, resembles Collingwood's—I raised doubts whether Dewey was just as susceptible to such counterarguments. Therefore, the question whether Collingwood correctly rejects pragmatism *tout court*, or whether he ought to make an exception for Dewey's form of that philosophy, remains to be answered. I will get back to this issue in the fifth chapter of this book.

## IV. Widening ‘the situation’: Collingwood’s later development (1933-1943)

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I have focused on the development of Collingwood’s philosophy from *Religion and Philosophy* (1916) to *Speculum Mentis* (1924). It is in this early period that Collingwood publicly mentions pragmatism a few times, and using those scant remarks as my starting point I reconstructed his interpretation of James and Schiller. What should, in this context, be said about Collingwood’s philosophical development after 1924?

Following his turn away from realism, Collingwood increasingly insisted upon a “*rapprochement* between history and philosophy”, he tells us in his autobiography.<sup>399</sup> In line with what I have termed his historical situationism, Collingwood came to reject the idea of eternal problems in philosophy; every philosophical theory is the answer to a unique question, and not one in a series of solutions to one and the same problem. This line of thought calls for a new conception of philosophy, which should be closely aligned to the theory of history. In the 1920s Collingwood struggled with multiple problems associated with the idea of a historically informed philosophy, and it is in that period that he, for example, developed his famous theory of “re-enactment”.<sup>400</sup> This process culminated in Collingwood’s appointment as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy in 1934. In his inaugural lecture on ‘The Historical Imagination’ (1935), Collingwood once again announced that he intended to focus his attention primarily on the problems of history.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 77.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-119. For the re-enactment doctrine, see esp. p. 114. Cf. Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, pp. 405-37. For biographical details of this part of Collingwood’s life, see: Inglis, *History Man*, pp. 101-209.

<sup>401</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘The Historical Imagination’ [1935], in: *Idem, The Idea of History*, pp. 231-49. Cf. R.G. Collingwood, ‘Inaugural: Rough Notes’ [1935], in: *Idem, The Principles of History: And Other Writings in the Philosophy of History* [1939]. Edited with an Introduction by W.H. Dray & W.J. van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), pp. 143-69.

The appointment as Waynflete Professor allowed Collingwood more time to write than he had before, as a philosophy tutor. In 1933 he had already published *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, which was to serve as the basis for a philosophical system which Collingwood was now in a position to develop. The system was to be comprised of a series of books, “probably ... six to eight volumes” on subjects such as history, art, ethics and cosmology.<sup>402</sup> However, Collingwood was not able to properly start, let alone to finish his system. From 1938 onwards he suffered a series of strokes, this being the direct motivation for writing *An Autobiography* (1938) at the relatively early age of 49. His dwindling health ultimately led to Collingwood’s premature death in 1943, aged 53, this dreary situation of course seriously interfering with his philosophical work. The latter was also affected by the Second World War. In view of this barbaric onslaught on civilization, Collingwood abandoned working on his system in order to write *The New Leviathan: Or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism* (1943). This book was intended as a contribution to the war effort, showing the public what the allied troops were ultimately fighting for.<sup>403</sup>

Despite these difficult circumstances, any fame Collingwood has in contemporary philosophical circles is based on the works he *did* manage to publish in the 1930s and early 1940s. Besides the ones already mentioned above these are *The Principles of Art* (1938) and *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940). Moreover, some of Collingwood’s work from this period was published posthumously and contributed greatly to his popularity. This is the case for *The Idea of Nature* (1945) and especially *The Idea of History* (1946), and more recently *The Principles of History* (1999). Moreover, where Collingwood’s philosophy is related to pragmatism in the secondary literature, this comparison is usually based on Collingwood’s later work. It is to his development from *An Essay on Philosophical Method* onwards, then, that I now turn.

My approach here must be different from that of the third chapter of this book. As Collingwood stops explicitly discussing pragmatism in the 1930s and 1940s,

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<sup>402</sup> Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, p. 566.

<sup>403</sup> For more biographical details of this part of Collingwood’s life, see: Inglis, *History Man*, pp. 210-313.

I cannot rely on his own remarks on the subject to guide me through his writings, as I did before.<sup>404</sup> For that reason, I now take a more comprehensive approach, describing his later philosophical position in some detail while exploiting both published and unpublished sources. I will use that account, then, to compare Collingwood's views to those of the pragmatists on a more philosophical level. In short, I will answer the question: 'Given Collingwood's later position and his interpretation of pragmatism as discussed in the third chapter of this book, what *would* he have thought of pragmatism towards the end of his career?' I will now first deal with Collingwood's relation to James and Schiller before turning to his position pertaining to Dewey in the fifth chapter of this book.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Collingwood rejects the pragmatism of James and Schiller on the basis of their psychological situationism. For James, a coercive feeling of agreeable leading decides whether a belief is true. For Schiller, this is the satisfaction of a psychologically-biologically given desire. In short, for James and Schiller it are the psychological elements of a particular situation that ultimately determine the course of thinking. For Collingwood, as for the Italian idealists, however, thought is *causa sui*. It determines itself and is not determined by anything external to it. Thought is always related to the context in which it operates, but this situation is itself the outcome of the development of thought, and not of psychological processes.

In what follows I will argue that Collingwood, during the later phases of his career, develops a position wherein the situation in which thought operates is widened. Not only thought processes play a role, but physical and biological elements as well. This brings him closer to the pragmatism of especially Schiller. Nevertheless,

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<sup>404</sup> Collingwood does mention pragmatism in his autobiography. However, this is in the context of a retrospect on his own development in the 1910s. Thus, these remarks throw little light on Collingwood's position *vis-à-vis* pragmatism in the 1930s and 1940s but rather belong to the discussions in the third chapter of my book.

Similarly, Collingwood elsewhere recalls that in the 1910s pragmatists reacted against British Idealism, but that by "now, Pragmatism has little more than historical interest", nowhere indicating what his opinion of pragmatism is during the period relevant for the present chapter.

See: Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 36 & R.G. Collingwood, "The Metaphysics of F.H. Bradley: An Essay on "Appearance and Reality"" [1933], in: Idem, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, p. 229.

I will also show that Collingwood never abandons the arguments underlying his criticism of pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*. Thus, in the end, the philosophy of Collingwood on the one hand and the positions of James and Schiller on the other remain incompatible for the later Collingwood as well.

I now proceed by first explaining Collingwood's philosophical method, as he applies this to virtually all the topics he deals with after 1933. I also discuss Schiller's response to *An Essay on Philosophical Method*. Second, I look at how Collingwood applies his method to cosmology, and with what metaphysical view he ends up because of this. I do that, because Collingwood's metaphysics has important repercussions for the function of physical and biological elements in his philosophy of mind, which I discuss in the third section of this chapter. In the fourth section, I explain how all of this affects the status of psychology in Collingwood's later philosophy. Lastly, in the fifth section, I reconstruct how the philosophical relation between Collingwood on the one hand and James and Schiller on the other must be seen at the end of Collingwood's life.

## 1. Collingwood's philosophical method and Schiller's response

### 1.1 *An Essay on Philosophical Method* and 'Notes towards a Metaphysic'

To prepare for the construction of the rest of his system, Collingwood develops a philosophical method. For him, the problem of method involves two central problems: what is philosophy trying to achieve, and what is the best way to do this? According to Collingwood, "no great [philosophical] progress can be made until these questions have been asked and some answer to them given".<sup>405</sup> Moreover, it is his view that "the theory of philosophy is ... not only a possible problem [for philosophy itself], but an inevitable problem, one which sooner or later it is bound to raise".<sup>406</sup> Therefore, Collingwood considers it necessary to clarify his own metaphilosophy in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933) before embarking on the adventure of further theorizing.

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<sup>405</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* [1933]. Edited with an Introduction and Additional Material by James Connelly and Giuseppina D'Oro (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), p. 1.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Instead of summarizing the whole content of the *Essay*, in the following section I will limit myself to explaining the portions of that text which are necessary to understand Collingwood's application of his method to the concept of 'reality'. This I do because his analysis of that notion will turn out to be crucial for his evolving relation to pragmatism. Specifically, applying his philosophical method to the concept of reality allows Collingwood to establish a close relation between 'mind' on the one hand, and 'life' and 'matter' on the other, thereby widening the situation in which thought operates. I will explain all of this in detail later in the present chapter.

Collingwood started working on the concept of reality immediately after writing his essay on method in the unpublished 'Notes towards a Metaphysic' (1933-4). The central issue of the 'Notes' is the relation between three orders of being: matter, life and mind. It is prompted by the science of Collingwood's days, in which he finds a consensus that "Mind ... came into existence out of mindless Life, Life out of lifeless Matter".<sup>407</sup> This story about the evolution of the cosmos, Collingwood thinks, is "so intimately bound up with the whole scientific point of view which is the focus of the modern mind, that there is an obligation to take [it] seriously".<sup>408</sup> The business of the cosmologist, then, is to "render it intelligible by metaphysical interpretation".<sup>409</sup> In other words, Collingwood asks the question, what must the concept of reality be like so that the relation between matter, life and mind is as the scientists say that it is?

This might come across as a rather surprising approach towards cosmology. Instead of building his own system from the ground up, as one may expect, Collingwood starts from the other side. He accepts the validity of contemporary science and deduces a metaphysical theory from its findings.<sup>410</sup> But this way of working, however remarkable, is entirely in line with *An Essay on Philosophical*

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<sup>407</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/3, 'Notes towards a Metaphysic A' (1933), 1.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>409</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/4, 'Notes towards a Metaphysic B' (1933-4), 3

<sup>410</sup> Cf. W.H. Dray & J.W. van der Dussen, 'Editors' Introduction', in: Collingwood, *The Principles of History*, p. lxxxiii: "at this point [1934] ... he [Collingwood] [is] offering his own cosmological conclusions, however tentatively, as based in part on what he accepts as contemporary findings of natural science".

*Method*. There Collingwood emphatically declares that, in philosophy, we never discover anything really new. We start from a given form of experience, but in this experience are always implicitly present concepts, distinctions, et cetera. It is the task of the philosopher to make these explicit, thereby making the initial experience more intelligible than it was before.<sup>411</sup> In the words of Collingwood, in philosophy, we come “to know better something which in some sense we knew already”.<sup>412</sup> In the language of the later but complementary work *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940), the task of the metaphysician is to deduce the “absolute presuppositions” underlying a given field of knowledge, such as natural science or history.<sup>413</sup> It follows that, for Collingwood, philosophical theories must always be checked against experience: “the theory is nothing but the experience itself, with its universality further insisted upon, its latent connexions and contradictions brought into the light of consciousness”.<sup>414</sup> This attitude can also easily be discerned in the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’. After having made ‘metaphysically intelligible’ some notion used in physics, Collingwood makes sure he does not appear over-pretentious. As “usual”, he says, “the priority belongs to the physicist”, again alluding to the idea that he is merely making explicit that which “is already known”.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> This view of the task of philosophy is, of course, continuous with what Collingwood says about this subject in *Speculum Mentis*. See pp. 148-50 of the present book.

<sup>412</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, p. 11.

<sup>413</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 34-48.

For the continuity between and the complementarity of *An Essay on Philosophical Method* and *An Essay on Metaphysics*, see especially: D’Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience*, p.2: “The change in philosophical vocabulary from EPM to EM is, I believe, to a great extent, the expression of Collingwood’s attempt to adjust to the new philosophical climate. There are, in other words, no *philosophical* reasons for Collingwood’s change in philosophical vocabulary, but principally only sociological ones” (D’Oro’s emphasis).

Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-87; Connelly, *Metaphysics, Method and Politics*, pp. 7-54; James Connelly & Giuseppina D’Oro, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, in: Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, pp. lxxviii-lxxvi; Rex Martin, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, in: Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. liii-liv; Guido Vanheeswijck, *Metafysica als een Historische Discipline: De Actualiteit van R.G. Collingwoods ‘Hervormde’ Metafysica* (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum 1993), pp. 50n18 & 61-3.

<sup>414</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, p. 171. But see pp. 170-5 for the warning that this ‘checking against experience’ is entirely different from empirical testing as it is found in the natural sciences.

<sup>415</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/4, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic B’ (1933-4), 51.

At the beginning of the ‘Notes’, Collingwood makes it clear which aspects of his philosophical methodology he finds particularly important for his present project:

The main principle of my method is the scale of Forms. In this problem we have a genus (I suppose its name is reality) divided into a scale of species Matter Life Mind [sic]. According to the method, these should be *kinds* of reality and also *degrees* of reality, the highest the most real: each should be *distinct* from the next and also *opposed* to the next – and Matter-Mind are just as truly ‘nexts’ as Matter-Life & Life-Mind. Life here forming the ‘twilight term’ between them; and the whole triad being only a rough preliminary triangulation for a much more detailed survey – each should sum up the whole scale up to that point and from its own point of view be identical with the genus, so that, from the point of view of a lower term (e.g. Matter) that term *is* the genus (Reality) and the higher terms (Life, Mind) are simply nothing – the name of errors. Whereas from the point of view of a higher term (e.g. Mind) although that term *is* the genus (Mind=reality) the same term includes the lower terms (Matter, Life) and, instead of denying these, asserts them as implications of itself. It does deny them in one sense, but only in the sense that it denies their denials, viz. their claim to be the only or highest term in the scale.<sup>416</sup>

I will use this passage as my guide through *An Essay on Philosophical Method* so that, in the next section, I can more readily explain Collingwood’s cosmological conclusions in the ‘Notes’ and related works.

The central notion both in the quote above and in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* is the ‘scale of forms’. Every philosophical concept, Collingwood holds, is arranged along a scale that runs from low to high. On the scale you find expressions of the concept that each on their own claim to embody the essence of that concept. The better such an expression does indeed embody the concept, the higher it is on the scale. To illustrate his view, Collingwood draws on the history of philosophy. Aristotle’s theory of life, for example, is formulated as a scale of forms. Aristotle “distinguishes the vegetable, animal and human ‘souls’ as three forms of life arranged on a scale so that each includes its predecessor and adds to it something new”. Collingwood also points to Locke, who “classifies his main types of knowledge [sensation, intuition and demonstration] explicitly into ‘degrees’” of one overarching concept.<sup>417</sup>

The forms on the scale differ from each other both in degree and in kind. This idea starts from the observation that the species of philosophical concepts, in

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<sup>416</sup> Collingwood, ‘Notes towards a Metaphysic A’, 5–6, Collingwood’s emphases.

<sup>417</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, p. 58.



contrast to their non-philosophical counterparts, can overlap. That is, one object may exhibit multiple philosophical classes but not multiple empirical concepts. A bird can be a duck *or* a swan, but not both. An action, to the contrary, may be ‘useful’ and ‘right’ at the same time, although the classes of ‘utility’ and ‘right’—which are species of the philosophical concept ‘good’—are clearly not identical. Of “what kind”, Collingwood asks, “must be the differences between the species of a philosophical concept, that an overlap between them should be possible?”<sup>418</sup> The answer is that the classes of a philosophical concept must differ from each other in both degree and in kind.

Collingwood explains what he means as follows:

The species into which it [the philosophical concept] is divided are so related that each not only embodies the generic essence in a specific manner, but also embodies some variable attribute in a specific degree. In respect of the variable, each specific form of the concept differs from the rest in degree; in respect of the manner in which the generic essence is specified, each differs from the rest in kind. In such a system of specifications the two sets of differences are so connected that whenever the variable, increasing or decreasing, reaches certain critical points on the scale, one specific form disappears and is replaced by another.<sup>419</sup>

In other words, the species of a philosophical concept all exhibit the essence of that concept to some degree. As soon as the degree to which a species embodies the generic essence hits a certain point, it also becomes distinct in kind from the other species in the scale. We can again turn to the history of philosophy for an example. For Leibniz, the essence of knowledge is ‘clear and distinct conception’. Hence, he differentiates the species of knowledge along these lines, calling sensation ‘confused conception’. By doing this, according to Collingwood, “Leibniz is calling it knowledge—for, on his view, all knowledge is conception—but qualifying that statement by an epithet indicating that it is knowledge only in a low degree.”<sup>420</sup> Sensation and knowledge, in other words, are species of the same genus, as they both embody the essence of that genus, i.e. clearness and distinctness. However, they

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

exhibit that genus in such wildly differing degrees, that they are distinct in kind as well.<sup>421</sup>

Species of philosophical concepts *differ* from each other in a peculiar way, but they are also *related* to each other in a special sense. That is, they are related by both opposition and distinction. According to Collingwood, opposition is usually conceived as the relation between a term and its own negation. Hence, ‘cold’ in a physical sense is simply the absence of heat, “nothing but a name for the fact that in any given body there is not more heat present”.<sup>422</sup> However, we *feel* coldness not simply as an absence of heat, but also as a particular sensation in its own right. This is a relation of distinction as well as opposition. We have two objects that are the negations of each other and hence opposites, but also have their own peculiar character and are thus distinct. This then, is also the way in which the species of philosophical concepts are related to each other. To give Collingwood’s example: “To call a man bad is not merely to say that he does fewer good acts, or acts less good in their degree or kind, than another whom we call good; it is to say that he does acts positively bad. What is bad is thus distinct from what is good as well as opposed to it”.<sup>423</sup>

Collingwood is now in a position to explain the surprising observation that the species of philosophical concepts can overlap in their instances:

The higher term is a species of the same genus as the lower, but it differs in degree as a more adequate embodiment of the generic essence, as well as in kind as a specifically different embodiment; it follows from this that it must be not only distinct from it, as one specification from another, but opposed to it, as a higher specification to a lower, a relatively adequate to a relatively inadequate, a true embodiment of the generic essence to a false embodiment; as true, it possesses not only its own specific character, but also that which its rival falsely claimed. The higher thus negates the lower, and at the same time re-affirms it: negates it as a false embodiment of the generic essence, and reaffirms its content, that specific form of the essence, as part and parcel of itself.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Collingwood’s language about differences in degree between species of philosophical concepts does not imply that he thinks that these differences can be quantitatively measured, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 69-74.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>423</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Let me clarify this passage by returning to the example of Aristotle's concept of life. On Collingwood's account, the vegetative and the rational soul are both, for Aristotle, specific species of 'life'. They are different in kind: the rational soul cannot be defined merely by the negation of the vegetative soul but has a nature of its own. It follows that they are related by distinction. But this is not the whole story. The rational soul is a *better* embodiment of the concept of life than the vegetative soul. Hence, the two also differ in degree and are thus related by opposition. How do we infer that the rational soul is superior to the vegetative soul? By the fact that the former includes the latter. The rational soul accepts the vegetative soul as a part of itself, while it denies the assertion that the vegetative soul is the true embodiment of the philosophical concept 'life'. As the scale progresses, every new form in the scale will include the positive content of its predecessor, and this predecessor already contains the positive content of *its* predecessor, and so on. As Collingwood puts it, all "lower stages in the scale are telescoped into this situation".<sup>425</sup> Hence the overlap of classes: if we accept Aristotle's classification of species of the concept of 'life', when we see a person walking by we can see her as an embodiment of the 'vegetative soul' as well as the 'rational soul'. One empirical object can exhibit multiple philosophical classes.

I have now explained all the key terms that appear in the passage from the 'Notes towards a Metaphysic' quoted above: the scale of forms, differences of kind and degree, relations of distinction and opposition, and the idea that one species of a concept 'sums up the whole scale up to that point'. Before turning to the 'Notes' themselves, however, I will first look at the response to this story by Schiller, who reviewed *An Essay on Philosophical Method for Mind*.

## 1.2 Schiller and Collingwood on *An Essay on Philosophical Method*

In a letter to his first wife, dated 15 November 1933, Collingwood describes how he learned of Schiller's review of the *Essay*:

To take down my pride I met Schiller walking round the meadows just now and he told me he had reviewed my book for *Mind*. It keeps one humble to think that one's work is being reviewed in the leading English-speaking philosophical journal by such an awful old fool ...

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<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Still, Schiller was quite pleasant about it and said he had explained very fully why ‘it wouldn’t work’.<sup>426</sup>

It is clear that Collingwood in 1933 does not think very highly of Schiller as a philosopher. Upon which basis he puts forward this estimation is unclear from the letter. However, given the previous chapter of this book, we can speculate that Collingwood thinks of Schiller as an incoherent thinker, exhibiting in his writings the very dualism between thought and action that he starts out to discard. To make matters worse, it will become clear that Collingwood holds that Schiller gets the gist of the *Essay* wrong. However, it turns out that the differences between Schiller and Collingwood are not as great as they initially appear.

To understand Schiller’s review, it is necessary to draw out some implications of Collingwood’s philosophical method in a bit more detail. First, the idea that in philosophy we never learn something truly new has fallibilist consequences. When we philosophize, we start by looking at some given form of experience. It is our goal to render this experience more intelligible by showing which philosophical concepts or absolute presuppositions undergird it. We can see, then, that philosophy is in some sense an empirical endeavour, “there is a continuity between the experience and the theory”.<sup>427</sup> In fact, Collingwood points out, experience and the philosophical conclusions which are deduced from it

are names for any two successive stages in the scale of forms of philosophical knowledge. What is called experience ... must be permeated through and through by philosophical elements; but relatively crude and irrational as compared with the next stage above it, in which these philosophical elements are more fully developed.<sup>428</sup>

It follows that philosophical theories must always be checked against the experience out of which they grew; it must be ascertained that the higher species in the scale of philosophical knowledge truly includes and explains its predecessor. But this means that philosophy is corrigible by experience, and hence fallible.

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<sup>426</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘Letter to Ethel Winifred Collingwood, 15 November 1933’, unpublished document in the possession of James Connelly.

I thank professor Connelly for kindly sending me the relevant passage from the letter.

<sup>427</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, p. 171.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Moreover, the very idea of the scale of forms has fallibilist consequences. It implies that there is development in philosophy, that we progress from one species of a philosophical concept to the next. The theory that we have just developed out of some prior experience, *itself* becomes experience for the next phase in the progression of the scale. On this point we are reminded of Collingwood's view in *Speculum Mentis* that "fact is just its [the mind's] own nature as that stands for the time being".<sup>429</sup> In the words of *An Essay on Philosophical Method*:

...the last stage reached, regarded as a theory, is now a theory criticized and refuted; what stands firm is not its truth as theory, but the fact that it has actually been reached, the fact that we have experienced it; and in criticizing and demolishing it as a theory we are confirming and explaining it as an experience.<sup>430</sup>

And we cannot tell when or if this process will end. No philosophical system is final, progress is always possible. "[B]is hieher ist das Bewusstseyn gekommen", Collingwood quotes Hegel, "and on this note ... every system, philosophical or other, must end".<sup>431</sup>

As might be expected, Schiller applauds the fallibilism implied in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, as well as the connection drawn between philosophy and experience. "Truly an admirable description of the progress of knowledge!" is Schiller's verdict.<sup>432</sup> He raises not a single objection against Collingwood's analysis of philosophical method itself. The scale of forms, the differences of degree and kind, the relations of distinction and opposition; apparently all these notions are acceptable to Schiller. However, he thinks Collingwood does not go far enough. However adequate a description of philosophical method, does not the *Essay* in fact describe how knowledge in *general* progresses? Is there not a connection between theory and experience in all scientific fields? Is not even mathematical knowledge fallible and hence capable of change? In short, is Collingwood correct in calling his book an essay on *philosophical* method?

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<sup>429</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 292.

<sup>430</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, p. 173.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>432</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, 'Review of *An Essay on Philosophical Method*', in: *Mind*, Vol. 43, No. 117 (1934), p. 118.

These issues are raised by the chapters in the *Essay* where Collingwood compares philosophy to deductive demonstration on the one hand, and to inductive science on the other.<sup>433</sup> In contrast to mathematics, where conclusions follow with ironclad certainty from self-evident premises, in philosophy, as we have just seen, there is a constant back and forth between conclusions and the experience they try to elucidate. And as opposed to inductive science, philosophy does not accept its ‘data’ as givens from which universal laws can be formulated. It rather transforms the facts with which it starts: “in seeing why things are thus, we are not merely adding one piece of knowledge [the universal law] to another [the given datum], we are coming to know the old better”.<sup>434</sup>

On the basis of assertions such as these, Schiller concludes that it is Collingwood’s “essential contention ... that there are three ways of knowing, that of empirical science, that of exact science (mathematics), and that of philosophy”.<sup>435</sup> But Schiller cannot accept this conclusion. The recent history of ideas has shown that things are not so simple as Collingwood makes them out to be. For example, scientists now widely accept, Schiller holds, that observational data are not to be conceived as givens but “that they are commonly hypothetical and relative to current ‘knowledge’ and fashionable theories”.<sup>436</sup> Similarly, the ‘self-evident’ Euclidian premises of mathematics have recently come under attack by “such writers as Mach, Poincaré ... Russell, Whitehead ... to mention but a few”.<sup>437</sup> Hence, the distinctions that Collingwood draws between philosophy on the one hand, and mathematics and empirical science on the other, do not hold. The ‘ways of knowing’ of the three fields are much more alike than Collingwood admits. And thus, Schiller concludes that “I cannot think that Mr. Collingwood has made out his case”, although “if it is true that philosophy aims at unity, it ought not to be a matter for regret that there are not *three* methods of knowing but only one and the same, in philosophy and in *all* the sciences”.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, pp. 151-75.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>435</sup> Schiller, ‘Review of *An Essay on Philosophical Method*’, p. 117.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>438</sup> *Idem*, Schiller’s emphases.

Schiller sent a copy of the manuscript of his review to Collingwood, and the latter responded with a letter. In that letter, Collingwood expresses regret for his apparent lack of clarity. For it is precisely Schiller's interpretation—that according to the *Essay on Philosophical Method* there are three ways of knowing—which the book tries to block in several places. Collingwood refers to pages 9, 10 and 151 of the *Essay* to back up this claim.<sup>439</sup> And indeed, we can read there:

Perhaps a mathematician, if I am fortunate enough to number mathematicians among my readers, may say to me: 'Your account of the method used in exact science is altogether beside the mark; modern mathematical theory has changed all that, and you are tilting at a man of straw.' If so, I shall reply that my contentions, so far from being invalidated, are confirmed in precisely that quarter where confirmation is most welcome. For what I am discussing, when I distinguish philosophical method from that of exact science, is not mathematics itself but a certain method, often mistakenly used in philosophy, which is believed to be that of mathematics ... A corresponding answer would apply to a scientist who objected to my account of inductive science.<sup>440</sup>

And:

In considering the nature of philosophical inference it is convenient to begin by asking 'is it deductive or inductive?' This implies comparing it with the deductive reasoning of exact science and the inductive reasoning of empirical; and this I shall try to do, subject to the warning given the first chapter that my business is not to ask how reasoning is actually done in exact or empirical science, but how it ought to be done in philosophy.<sup>441</sup>

In other words, Collingwood's contrast between philosophy on the one hand, and mathematics and the natural sciences on the other, is not supposed to be read as a truly existing opposition. It is rather employed for pedagogical purposes, to put into full focus the distinct nature of philosophical method as proposed by Collingwood. At the most, we could say that Collingwood is trying to dispel the idea that philosophical reasoning conforms to inference in other sciences as the latter are *mistakenly* conceived by some philosophers. In the end, then, the *Essay* leaves open whether philosophy is like the exact and empirical sciences as proposed by Schiller, and also whether there may be other differences between them besides these

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<sup>439</sup> R.G. Collingwood, 'Letter to Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller, 25 November 1933', Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller Papers (Collection 191). Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>440</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

similarities. But this is a question which falls outside the scope of the *Essay*: “I was writing an essay on philosophical method, not a treatise on the ways of knowing”.<sup>442</sup>

Despite Schiller’s misidentification of Collingwood’s ‘essential point’, Collingwood comforts himself with the fact that

you [Schiller] have not breathed a word of criticism against one single element in my real argument, and that so far as I can judge you actually agree with me in all that I take to be essential. So I venture to claim you as an ally, in spite of an apparent divergence which I can only attribute to the effects of my clumsy and obscure exposition.<sup>443</sup>

In a response letter, Schiller lets Collingwood know that he is still not convinced that the latter does not believe that there are multiple ways of knowing, but “if you will write a reply to *Mind* in that sense I shall be delighted to confess and apologise”.<sup>444</sup>

Collingwood never followed up on this invitation. For my purposes, however, the most important take away from the exchange between Schiller and Collingwood is that Collingwood is right in at least one sense, namely in the sense that Schiller has not ‘breathed a word of criticism’ against Collingwood’s ‘real argument’. In other words, the way in which Collingwood proposes to carry out philosophical research, including his own, is in principle valid for Schiller. This means that any philosophical conclusions Collingwood arrives at using that method cannot be rejected by Schiller *merely* in virtue of Collingwood following a certain way of going about philosophical research.

## 2. Matter, life and mind

I now return to Collingwood’s developing philosophy, and in particular his cosmology. As said before, he was working on this latter project in the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’ from 1933 through to 1934. These notes form the backbone of Collingwood’s lectures on *The Idea of Nature* (given in 1934, 1935, 1937, 1939 and 1940, and posthumously published in 1945). I will use these texts, then, to

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<sup>442</sup> Collingwood, ‘Letter to Schiller’. Cf. Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics*, p. 386n1.

<sup>443</sup> Collingwood, ‘Letter to Schiller’.

<sup>444</sup> F.C.S. Schiller, ‘Letter to Robin George Collingwood, 1933’, Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller Papers (Collection 191). Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.



reconstruct Collingwood's views on the metaphysical connection between matter, life and mind. That connection, as it will turn out, is quite intimate. On a metaphysical level, matter, life and mind overlap, mind having 'telescoped' into itself physical and biological elements. This has crucial implications for Collingwood's relation to pragmatism, as it is precisely the close connection between thought and especially life on which James and Schiller seize, as we have seen.

In accordance with his method, Collingwood regards matter, life and mind as three species of the philosophical concept 'reality'. We should expect, then, that they are differentiated from and related to each other in the ways specified in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*. That is, they embody the essence of reality to some varying extent, and are hence differentiated by degree and related by opposition. But they also embody this essence in a specific way, and are hence differentiated by kind and related by distinction. What is more is that the species that is highest in the scale should somehow include its predecessors. How do we see all of this translated in the sources mentioned above?

According to Collingwood, modern physics and biology both point in the direction of a process metaphysics. Charles Darwin and others in the nineteenth century showed that life develops differently than had been thought for centuries. In reproduction, biological species do not aim at perfectly copying themselves in their offspring. Rather, nature "works from within" to constantly produce new and improved forms of life, improved in the sense that these forms are increasingly better at the task of living. It follows that we should expect the biological world of "past ages" to include radically different "flora and fauna" than ours, and this has indeed been empirically proven by geologists.<sup>445</sup> So nature, at least in the biological realm, is in the process of constant change. And this is not some random flux, but development in a definite direction: the direction, that is, of increasing power to be alive. "I think it is fair to say", Collingwood concludes, "that the conception of vital process ... has come to stay, and has revolutionized our conception of nature".<sup>446</sup> James, Schiller and Dewey could not have agreed more.

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<sup>445</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*. Edited by T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press 1945), p. 134.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Collingwood further detects a similar spirit in contemporary physics, where a “new theory of matter” is being developed.<sup>447</sup> No longer is the atom regarded as the most basic building block of inorganic nature, but the electron. The atom is no more than a peculiar pattern of more fundamental electrons. And this pattern must not be merely conceived synchronically, as taking up a certain amount of space here and now, but also diachronically, as being in motion during a certain stretch of time. Electrons must “move in a certain rhythmical way” to form, say, an atom of hydrogen. From this it follows that at any given point in time the atom does *not* possess the qualities of hydrogen. It only possesses these in a *tract* of time, “long enough for the rhythm of the movement to establish itself”.<sup>448</sup> The conclusion to be drawn is that we cannot understand inorganic nature by merely looking at what it *is*, but that we must look at what it *does*. In short, substance collapses into function, essence into process. Modern physics, then, “reveals a fundamental similarity, instead of an indefinite series of contrasts, between the world of matter and the world of life”.<sup>449</sup>

The process thinking in biology and physics is made possible, Collingwood claims, by an analogy with historical thinking. In the eighteenth century, so even before the advent of evolutionary biology, history started going through a revolutionary phase of its own. It came to regard “process, change, development” as “the fundamental category of historical thought”, and learned how to gain knowledge of a world that is always in motion.<sup>450</sup> This world is the world of mind, the realm of human beings acting according to principles and knowledge which are not eternally given, but produced in history itself. In other words, for history, there is no “unchanging substrate” that underpins historical development.<sup>451</sup> By around 1933, scientists are saying the same about the natural processes of matter and life. For Collingwood, therefore, it seems likely that these latter developments were “greatly strengthened, if not actually suggested, by the study of human history”.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

We see then, that for all three species of the philosophical concept of reality identified in the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’—matter, life and mind—, scientists studying them have converged on ‘process’ as a fundamental explanatory category. And it is on this idea of process that the “modern cosmologists” Samuel Alexander (1859-1938) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) seize.<sup>453</sup> From them Collingwood is taking his cue in developing his own metaphysics, embracing some of their notions and criticizing others.

Before diving into Collingwood’s interpretation of Alexander and Whitehead, I must mention one more consequence of the ‘new theory of matter’. This is the idea of the finitude of nature. Any piece of matter is essentially what it does, it is activity. And in acting it impinges on other pieces of matter, thereby causing events to happen. But this is unintelligible if space is infinite. For in that case, “it will follow that at every point in space there are infinite forces impinging from every side upon any piece of matter situated there; and consequently, since these forces will cancel out, none of them will act on that piece of matter at all”.<sup>454</sup> In physics, this, according to Collingwood, has become unproblematic since Albert Einstein’s (1879-1955) theory of relativity. Thanks to Einstein, physicists no longer require the ideas of “absolute situation” and “absolute size”, i.e. infinite space. All they need is “the conception of one thing’s situation or size relatively to another”.<sup>455</sup> Likewise, physicists have started to reject the idea of infinite time. Close study of the universe has resulted in the view that it expands outward from a common centre, indicating that the world as we know it came into existence at a definite point in time “in something resembling an explosion of energy which at once began time and began, in time, to generate space”.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

Collingwood bases his discussion of Alexander on the latter’s *Space, Time and Deity*, Vol. I & II (London: Macmillan & Co 1920 & 1927), and his views on Whitehead on the latter’s *Nature and Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1934) and *Process and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1929).

The question whether Collingwood’s interpretation of Alexander and Whitehead is correct goes beyond the purposes of this book. See for a critical discussion of Collingwood’s interpretation of Whitehead, however: Vanheeswijck, *Metafysica als een Historische Discipline*, pp. 126-35.

<sup>454</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 153.

<sup>455</sup> Idem.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

Cosmologically speaking, the rejection of infinite space-time by contemporary physics requires looking for something that metaphysically grounds nature as a whole, for what is finite cannot ground itself. This is the reason, Collingwood thinks, for why “modern scientific leaders ... talk about God in a way that would have scandalized most scientists of fifty years ago”.<sup>457</sup> These ‘modern scientific leaders’ follow their new theory of matter to its logical conclusion, namely the finitude of nature, and give “the traditional name of God to that upon which it [the physical world] depends”.<sup>458</sup>

After surveying the idea of nature up to this point, we now know which elements a cosmology must include to make sense of contemporary scientific experience. These are the three species of the philosophical concept of reality: matter, life and mind; a theory of process explaining the relations between these species; and the something grounding that development. How does Collingwood, in conversation with Alexander and Whitehead, construct such a cosmology?

Alexander and Whitehead are both “a philosophical genius of very high order”, and Collingwood takes their work extremely serious.<sup>459</sup> From Alexander, he takes the idea that the world is a cosmic process which in its development produces new orders of being, the later higher than the earlier. Higher orders are “emergent”, which means that they are not simply caused by the earlier, lower orders, but something “genuinely and qualitatively new”.<sup>460</sup> It follows that reductionism is not an option: every order of being must be explained on its own terms. For Alexander, the orders of being are matter, life and mind. On each level, objects arrange themselves into rhythmical patterns according to the laws belonging to that level. Here, Alexander is extending the ‘new theory of matter’ discussed above to all orders of being.

Besides novelty there is also continuity between the orders. The patterns of a living organism are composed of elements that are, taken by themselves, inorganic.

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<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156. Collingwood cites the astrophysicist Arthur Eddington (1882-1944) and physicist, astronomer and mathematician James Jeans (1877-1946) as examples of such ‘modern scientific leaders’.

<sup>458</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9. According to Collingwood, Alexander borrows the notion of ‘emergence’ from the ethologist and psychologist C. Lloyd Morgan (1852-1936).

Likewise, mind arises “in living organisms and us[es] life as its substratum or material”.<sup>461</sup> It is only the special way into which these elements are combined, that is, into a “rhythmic process”, that lets new orders of being emerge. Mind is the highest level that has yet been achieved, but that is not to say that cosmic development stops there: the “evolutionary process is theoretically infinite”.<sup>462</sup>

Whitehead’s “theory of nature”, according to Collingwood, “much resembles Alexander’s”.<sup>463</sup> For Whitehead too, the world consists of dynamic patterns (‘societies’) that can be analysed into their constituent elements (‘events’ or ‘occasions’), but never fully explained by them. This is why Whitehead calls his view the “philosophy of organism”: we must look at wholes as being organic, and not conceive them as mere aggregates.<sup>464</sup> A whole is larger than the sum of its parts. If so, a processual view of reality follows, for the patterns into which elements are arranged are, again, always dynamic. Those patterns are taken up in a larger process of “creative advance”: in its development new orders of being are coming into existence.<sup>465</sup>

So far, we find in Alexander and Whitehead some of the elements that Collingwood considers to be crucial for a cosmology aimed at rendering intelligible the experience of modern scientists. They integrate into their systems the ‘new theory of matter’ which implies a dynamic view of nature. From this follows a process metaphysics wherein new orders of being are coming into existence during the evolution of the world. Alexander explicitly identifies these orders as matter, life and mind. Collingwood can use these ingredients to explain contemporary science with the use of his philosophical method. What Alexander and Whitehead make clear, is that matter, life and mind—as species of the philosophical concept ‘reality’—are arranged along a scale of forms. They are three orders of being that develop out of

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>462</sup> Idem.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., pp. 166-7.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., p. 167. In the context of this book, it is noteworthy that Whitehead, who is admired by Collingwood, is himself quite positive about the pragmatists: “I am ... greatly indebted to ... William James, and John Dewey”, he says in the preface to *Process and Reality*. See: A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [1929]. Corrected Edition edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press 1978), p. xii.

each other, matter being the lowest form on the scale, mind the highest. Moreover, the forms are different in kind and related by distinction. Both Alexander and Whitehead are adamant that the development of the world is a 'creative advance': the orders of being that sequentially come into existence are 'emergent', they are genuinely new. Hence, mind cannot be reduced to life, and life cannot be reduced to matter. In short, they are different *kinds* of being and in that sense *distinct* from each other. Lastly, Alexander points out that the highest form in the scale—mind—sums up the development of the world hitherto. A being belonging to that order of existence is not only 'enminded', but also embodied and physical: the dynamic pattern that forms the mind is composed out of organic elements, and organic patterns on their turn consist of physical elements. Hence, a mind is always at the same time a physical and biological body as well.

What is still missing from this is an account of the something that grounds the world process. It is all very well that reality is constantly in development, but *why* is this the case? And why does the development move in a particular direction rather than another, producing first matter, then life, then mind? These questions hang together with what Collingwood calls differences of degree and relations of opposition between forms of philosophical concepts. What is the quality that matter, life and mind to some degree share and makes them species of one philosophical concept? And what is the difference in degree that makes it the case that mind is opposed to life, and life opposed to matter? Alexander and Whitehead do in fact discuss these questions, but here Collingwood can no longer follow them in their conclusions.

In the case of Alexander, Collingwood is thrown off by the former's empiricist method. Alexander sees certain necessities in the world that drive the development of reality. These are categories that are immanent in the process itself, and it is the task of philosophers to identify them by merely reporting their experience: "he [Alexander] tells us that the business of philosophy is not to reason or argue or explain but simply to observe and describe facts".<sup>466</sup> Thus Alexander's cosmology as described above is the result of observation. We, with the help of

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<sup>466</sup> Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 163.

scientific methods, simply look at the world and see that it is a process rather than a substance, and that it evolves in a certain direction rather than another. And “a reader who stubbornly asks, ... ‘*why* should matter generate life; *why* should life generate mind?’, and so on, will get no answer”. Alexander would advise such a reader to “accept the facts in a spirit of natural piety”.<sup>467</sup> But if the aim of philosophy is to make intelligible the experience of scientists and others, as Collingwood argues in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, then Alexander’s strategy is unacceptable. For it precisely leaves large portions of that experience unexplained.

Whitehead fares a little better in this regard. For him, the categories that drive the ‘creative advance’ of the world are not merely immanent in the process but also transcendent of it. Whitehead calls them “eternal objects” and they belong to “a world of what Plato called forms or ideas”.<sup>468</sup> This means that “necessary and eternal truths” can in principle be had about Whitehead’s categories, a feature of his system that Collingwood traces back to Whitehead’s training as a mathematician.<sup>469</sup> Whitehead, then, is in a position to truly explain the cosmic process. According to him, eternal objects ‘ingress’ in particular existent patterns and are hence the latter’s formal cause. At the same time eternal objects are also a ‘lure’ for that same patterns: a pattern ingressed with an eternal object is striving towards realizing that eternal object more fully. The eternal objects, therefore, are also the final cause of the cosmic process, the reason for why the development of the world goes in a certain direction rather than another.

But although Whitehead’s cosmology has more explanatory potential than Alexander’s, Collingwood is not entirely happy with Whitehead’s explanation itself. First, Whitehead treats all patterns as if they have their own eternal object, such as “the blueness of the sky at a particular moment”.<sup>470</sup> But this cannot be correct, Collingwood thinks. Some of the qualities of these patterns must be merely the “products” or even “by-products” of the “eternal presuppositions of the cosmic process”. They are “not even necessary or intelligible in themselves, but intelligible

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid., p. 163, Collingwood’s emphases.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>469</sup> Idem.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

only as accidents in a creative process”.<sup>471</sup> This must be the case because otherwise the eternal objects cannot be said to *explain* the development of the world at all: the world of essence, on Whitehead’s picture, would be no more than “a mere replica of these processes with the process left out”.<sup>472</sup>

Second, according to Collingwood, Whitehead fails to make sense of the idea of *creative* advance as well. This is, as we have seen, the notion that in its development, the cosmic process produces new orders of being that cannot be reduced to anything that went before. Now, Whitehead certainly subscribes to the view that mind cannot be reduced to life, and life cannot be reduced to matter. But he seems to deny, according to Collingwood, that there was a time in which there existed only physical things, or only physical and living things. Matter and life, for Whitehead, are merely abstractions from our concrete experience in which they are always inextricably tangled up with mind. But this idea, Collingwood holds, leaves Whitehead on the horns of a dilemma:

Either mind is at bottom the same as [matter and life], in which case there is no creative advance, and life is a mere abstraction from mind as matter is from life, or else it is also something genuinely new, in which case we have to explain its relation to that out of which it grew.<sup>473</sup>

According to the first horn of the dilemma, the three irreducible orders of being always co-exist, anyone of them on its own being an abstraction. And this rules out the possibility that once matter evolved into life and life into matter. But this position, according to Collingwood, contradicts Whitehead’s explicit statements that, in fact, the cosmic process *is* a creative advance in which new orders of being sequentially come into existence. However, because Whitehead plays around with the idea of matter and life being abstractions, he does not follow up on the second horn of the dilemma. Hence, Whitehead is left in a doubting position: “when we ask him whether this series of forms represents a series really developed in time he seems

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<sup>471</sup> Idem.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., p. 174.



uncertain of his answer; and if we go on to ask the precise nature of the connexion between one form and the next, he has no answer to give”.<sup>474</sup>

Thus, Alexander and Whitehead both fall short of convincingly stating a cosmology that can be used to make modern science intelligible. How does Collingwood improve on their theories? To answer that question, we must leave behind the version of *The Idea of Nature* as it was posthumously published in 1945 by Collingwood’s editor Knox. In the conclusion to *The Idea of Nature* as published, Collingwood explains why we should “go from the idea of nature to the idea of history” without explaining how this move would help clear up the puzzles left unsolved by Alexander and Whitehead.<sup>475</sup> However, Collingwood wrote two other conclusions to his ‘Lectures on Nature and Mind’—i.e. the lectures that form the substance of *The Idea of Nature*—as well. These other conclusions were probably written in 1934 and 1935, and provide more insight into where cosmology should go after the interventions of Alexander and Whitehead. The same ideas can be found in ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’, but I will quote as much as possible from the alternative conclusions to *The Idea of Nature*, as these have now been published.<sup>476</sup>

Collingwood starts the conclusion of 1934 with clearly connecting his own metaphysical views to the history of science and cosmology discussed above: “I must now give some brief account of the view of nature which in my opinion is indicated or demanded by the development of thought I have described”.<sup>477</sup> He reiterates the modern theory of matter, how it implies a process metaphysics, and that this process metaphysics involves the notion of creative advance. What is new is that Collingwood now gives an account of that creative advance which improves on the cosmological systems of Alexander and Whitehead:

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<sup>474</sup> Idem.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>476</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘Conclusions to Lectures on Nature and Mind’ [1934 & 1935], in: Idem, *The Principles of History*, pp. 251-70. Cf. Browning, *Re-Thinking R.G. Collingwood*, pp. 68-9.

For information about the discovery of the conclusions, as well as their dating, see: Ibid., p. 251n & Dray & Van der Dussen, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, pp. lxxx-lxxxvii.

Excerpts of ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’ are published in the same volume on: pp. 119-39.

<sup>477</sup> Collingwood, ‘Conclusions to Lectures on Nature and Mind’, p. 254.

The result [of Whitehead's view] is a metaphysical dualism between two worlds—a world of unchanging abstractions and a world of changing events—and Whitehead leaves this dualism unresolved. His view has, however, the merit of facing the problem of eternal or necessary being which Alexander evades ... Our problem is: if nature is all process, how can there be anything eternal?<sup>478</sup>

So the question is, according to Collingwood, how we can have a cosmic development in which genuinely new orders of being arise—orders of being that were not there before—while at the same time we want to say that this development is intelligible, that it is necessarily following an eternal order. The solution can partly be found, Collingwood thinks, in the notion of process itself. More precisely, it can be found in the way this notion is deployed by historians.

For a historian, “one and the same thing can be the product of a process and also an eternal object”.<sup>479</sup> Collingwood explains what he means in the language that we have already encountered in the third chapter of this book. The defining characteristic of a historical process is the one that was already identified by the Italian idealists in the 1910s: in a historical process you have a substance that does not develop due to external causes, but changes itself. In short, it is a self-creative process. In their self-creative advance, historical processes spawn events, like the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was produced by the development of the English constitution in the foregoing century. But the crux is that, although the revolution itself was “brought into existence” and “passes out of *existence* again”, it “does not pass out of *being*”.<sup>480</sup> It is not that the revolution is still going on, but it is the case that “it is still an object for historical thought”.<sup>481</sup> Moreover, its being

does not consist in or depend on its being known to historians. The Revolution of 1688 enjoys its eternity through being a permanent element in the political experience of the English people; even if they forgot the event itself, the fact that they have lived through it would continue to colour their political outlook and influence their political activity.<sup>482</sup>

But if this is the case, than the historical process of the English constitution has produced “in the strict sense of the words an eternal object”.<sup>483</sup> The revolution of

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>479</sup> Idem.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., p. 264, Collingwood's emphases.

<sup>481</sup> Idem.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., pp. 264-5.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

1688 was something genuinely new, it was not an event that was already occurring before that moment. At the same time, as soon as it has come into existence, it gains eternal being. From 1688 onwards the revolution is permanently available as an object for historical thought, and present as an element in the subsequent historical process of English politics.

Thus, according to Collingwood, Whitehead is mistaken. Eternal objects are not necessarily the presuppositions of self-creative developments, they can also be the result of it. If so, we can regard matter, life and mind as products of the cosmic process instead of forms that were already there before coming into existence, and hence as being genuinely new at the moment they appear. It becomes unproblematic to speak of mind as evolving out of life, and life out of matter. In this way, Collingwood saves the idea of creative advance from the threat posed to it by Whitehead's account of eternal objects.

But the other part of Collingwood's question is still open. What is it that makes the cosmic process an intelligible development, instead of some change that can be observed in 'natural piety' but not explained, as Alexander proposes? Why is it that the world, in its self-creative advance, produces the eternal objects of matter, life and mind instead of others, and why in that order?

To answer this question, Collingwood points to another kind of eternal object, "namely that which is the ground or supposition of any process whatever".<sup>484</sup> Such eternal objects must be presupposed, Collingwood thinks, because "all process is essentially finite and must depend upon something other than itself".<sup>485</sup> Here we are reminded of Collingwood's earlier observation that modern scientists regard nature as being finite, and hence dependent upon something else. As a result, these scientists started talking about God as the ultimate ground of nature again. And this is the route taken by Collingwood as well.

For Collingwood, God is

pure and absolute being, unqualified and undifferentiated: if we ask what particular kind of being, the answer is no particular kind—not mental or physical, not even creating or created,

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

but no kind at all; the ocean or abyss of being which is indistinguishable from an abyss of nothingness. This conception ... must be the starting-point of cosmology.<sup>486</sup>

Nevertheless, this undifferentiated being is the ground of logical determinations about itself: from its description it follows that at least pure being must be one, necessary and self-identical. So for Collingwood, there is in pure being a process from itself to its determinations—Collingwood calls them eternal objects or categories—but this is a purely logical process, not a temporal one. In other words, this process does not belong to the spatio-temporal development of the world of which it is the ground. We see, then, that prior to the cosmic process of that what exists in nature, we have “a world of categories or eternal objects, all determinations of pure being and all pervaded by logical process”.<sup>487</sup>

If we want to make the cosmic process intelligible, then somehow the “existence of nature must ... be a necessary logical consequence of pure being”.<sup>488</sup> And it is. Every determination logically implies its own opposite. In the case of the determinations of pure being, their opposites are plurality (as opposed to oneness), difference (as opposed to self-identity) and contingency (as opposed to necessity). And these, according to Collingwood, are precisely the characteristics of space-time as described by Alexander. In other words, space-time logically follows from the concept of God as the latter’s own opposite. The development of space-time into subsequently matter, life and mind, then, must be seen as “the process by which God works out new determinations of his being”.<sup>489</sup> In every step taken, a form of “externality” or “outwardness” is overcome. So in matter, we have electrons, which in themselves exist outside one another, coming together to form an atom. In life, we have an organism which literally transforms its environment into itself by eating, drinking or breathing it. And lastly, in mind, as in life, mind takes up its environment into itself. But, contrary to life, mind does this not by way of nutrition, but by sensing

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<sup>486</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>487</sup> Collingwood, ‘Conclusions to Lectures on Nature and Mind’, p. 267.

<sup>488</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

and knowing. Each in their own way, matter, life and mind eliminate existing differentiations, thereby approximating the ideal of the pure being of God.<sup>490</sup>

We are now finally in a position to state Collingwood's full answer to the question: what cosmology must we presuppose to render intelligible the view of modern scientists and historians that mind evolved out of mindless life, and life out of lifeless matter? I will state this answer in the terms of Collingwood's *Essay on Philosophical Method*.

Matter, life and mind are three species of the philosophical concept 'reality'. The central quality that we must ascribe to 'reality' is 'undifferentiated, pure being' or 'inwardness'. This, then, is also the quality that the three forms of reality express in their own unique way. Matter tries to achieve inwardness through overcoming the externality of electrons by combining them in the overarching unity of the atom. Life strives towards the same goal by turning its environment into itself through nutrition. Mind does something similar, but by means of sensation and thinking. In short, matter, life and mind are different in kind and related by distinction. They are highly divergent ways of achieving the same ideal. However, the three species are also different in degree and related by opposition, because their respective attempts are not equally successful.<sup>491</sup> In matter, the electrons *are* working together, but they are still, in the end, outside one another. In this sense, life improves upon matter, for a living organism transforms the outside object into itself, and thus a grade of true inwardness is achieved. However, this inwardness is accomplished through destruction: the environment loses its own specific character by being digested in the organism. Mind, then, presents a further advance upon life. In sensation and

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<sup>490</sup> Cf. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/5, 'Notes Towards a Metaphysic C' (1934), 66-7: "Minds are one of the world's inventions for overcoming its self-externality ... It [mind] does not destroy the things it perceives, as an organism does those it eats. Instead of consuming them like fire, it illuminates them like light; and hence light is the age-old symbol of mind, as fire is that of life. To be a mind is to eat your cake and have it too: what you enjoy remains undiminished by the enjoyment of it".

Browning points out the similarity of Collingwood's views here—from the conception of pure being to the cosmological process as the over-coming of externality—to ideas found in the work of Hegel. See: Browning, *Re-Thinking R.G. Collingwood*, pp. 65-6.

<sup>491</sup> Cf. Collingwood, 'Conclusions to Lectures on Nature and Mind', p. 255: "Each phase of that evolution [of the world] is consequently a *special* case of such a passage [from outwardness to inwardness]. At any given stage there is a certain *degree* and *kind* of inwardness ... achieved..." , my emphases.

knowing the environment is also turned into the subject. But this is done without destruction. In seeing a tree, I leave it intact. In knowing a historical event, I take nothing away from it. In mind, then, we come closest to the ideal of overcoming externality. Mind absorbs its object, and neither have to give up anything in the process. But this does not mean that mind can function independently from matter and life. The elements of organic patterns are material, and the elements of ‘mind patterns’ are organic. Matter and life are ‘telescoped’ into mind. It does follow, however, that, if the achievement of ‘inwardness’ is the ideal that pulls forward the cosmic process, then “in reality mind is not a means to existence of life, life is a means to existence of mind”.<sup>492</sup>

The last quote already points in the direction which the remainder of this chapter will take. Elements of matter and life are, for Collingwood present in mind, which takes his position closer to the psychological situationism of James and Schiller. Mind, however, stays an independent metaphysical level and is even the highest species in the scale of forms of the philosophical concept of reality. Life, in other words, can never determine the development of mind, just as Collingwood already argued against pragmatism in *Speculum Mentis*. In the following section I will show how Collingwood elaborated this position in his philosophy of mind.

### 3. Implications for Collingwood’s philosophy of mind

The main source from which to reconstruct the later Collingwood’s philosophy of mind is *The New Leviathan: Or Man, Society, Civilization & Barbarism* (1942).<sup>493</sup> This work Collingwood developed—shortly before his death in 1943—as a contribution to the British military effort in the Second World War. He intends to make clear what was philosophically at stake in the war, what the allied forces were ultimately fighting for. As the subtitle of the book indicates, in the context of this

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

In this book I am not concerned with the validity of Collingwood’s cosmological conclusions; I am merely trying to determine his philosophical relation to pragmatism. However, for a critical discussion, see: Dray & Van der Dussen, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, pp. lxxx-lxxxvii.

<sup>493</sup> Cf. Johnson, who sees “this later Collingwood, the Collingwood primarily of *The New Leviathan*” as “a philosopher of mind we can listen to”. See: Johnson, *R.G. Collingwood*, p. 35.

grander purpose Collingwood develops a theory of ‘man’, with a focus on man as mind.<sup>494</sup> I will supplement Collingwood’s account in *The New Leviathan* with *The Principles of Art* (1938) and passages from ‘Notes towards a Metaphysic’. The former contains Collingwood’s theory of imagination, which plays a major role in his philosophy of mind; through the latter a continuity can be established between Collingwood’s cosmology and his view of mind. In the final section, I will explain how all of this changes Collingwood’s philosophical relation to pragmatism as described in the third chapter of this book.

In *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood again applies his philosophical method, this time to the concept of ‘mind’ instead of to ‘reality’. Thus, all functions of the mind—such as imagination, desire and reason—are distributed along a scale of forms, differing from one another in kind and degree, and related to each other by distinction and opposition. They all express the essence of the concept of mind in various ways and with varying success. In *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood stresses another aspect of his method, which he here terms the “law of primitive survivals”. It runs as follows: “When A is modified into B there survives in any example of B, side by side with the function B which is the modified form of A, an element of A in its primitive or unmodified state.”<sup>495</sup> We have already seen that, according to *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, a new form of a philosophical concept has ‘telescoped’ within itself all its predecessors. But in *The New Leviathan* this view is more pronounced still.<sup>496</sup> Here, Collingwood wants to make it absolutely clear that

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<sup>494</sup> For an overview of Collingwood’s social and political thought in general, and his attitude towards the Second World War in particular, see: Boucher, *The Social and Political Thought of R.G. Collingwood*.

<sup>495</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 65, Collingwood’s emphasis omitted.

<sup>496</sup> Boucher argues that the law of primitive survivals as presented in *The New Leviathan* is more than a more pronounced version of some element of *An Essay on Philosophical Method*: it actually entails “two clear qualifications” of the latter text. See: Boucher, *The Social and Political Thought of R.G. Collingwood*, pp. 95–6.

These qualifications refer to Collingwood’s idea of the overlap of classes, and do not influence my account of his cosmology and philosophy of mind. I therefore remain agnostic with regard to the merits of Boucher’s evaluation.

I do doubt, however, that Collingwood himself saw the law of primitive survivals as a radical departure from his *Essay on Philosophical Method*. Boucher traces the notion to Collingwood’s work on folklore, and especially to his criticism of the anthropologist Edward Tylor (1832–1917). Collingwood formulated this criticism somewhere in the period mid-1936 to 1937 (Connelly, Johnson & Leach, *R.G. Collingwood: A Research Companion*, p. 228), but the term ‘law of primitive survivals’ appears already in the decidedly earlier ‘Notes

in the higher forms of the philosophical concept 'mind' (say, reason) there still is present an entirely unchanged element of the lower forms (say, elements of imagination or desire). The law of primitive survivals will prove to be crucial with regard to the connection between matter and life on the one hand and mind on the other, and for the relation between practical and theoretical reason in Collingwood's philosophy of mind.

In the opening chapters of *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood makes it clear that, given the aim of his book, he will limit himself to the human being as enminded and will neglect the human being as embodied as much as possible. But he immediately admits that the latter cannot be fully done. Man's body enters into his mind in the form of 'feeling', which is an "apanage" of mind rather than a "constituent" part of it. This means that feeling functions as the "object" of mind: mind is thought, while it *has* feeling. Mind proper begins at the level of "simple consciousness", the latter's central function being the apprehension of feeling.

According to Collingwood, feeling has a dual character. On the one hand, it consists of "a *sensuous* element such as a colour seen, a sound heard, an odour smelt" and on the other hand of "what I call the *emotional charge on this sensation*: the cheerfulness with which you see the colour, the fear with which you hear the noise, the disgust with which you smell the odour".<sup>497</sup> Feeling is the apanage of mind, its object, and not a constituent part of it. If not created by consciousness, where do the aspects of feeling, the sensuous elements with their emotional charges, come from?

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toward a Metaphysic C' (March-April 1934), without mention of Tylor, and with the same meaning as in *The New Leviathan*: "In a logical sequence, the earlier terms cannot be cancelled when the later emerge: they must still be there as basis or ground of the latter: so the development of the series is a multiplication of terms, not simply a transition from one form to the next. Now if the world of existence is a spatio-temporal deployment of logical nexus, the emergence of what is later & higher in evolution must leave outside itself undeveloped representations of what is earlier ... Thus Nature is a System der Stufen in which the logical stages appear as empirically distinct realms, all existing, at once & side by side in the world. I will call this the law of primitive survivals". (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/5, 'Notes toward a Metaphysic C' (1934), 5-6; cf. *The New Leviathan*, pp. 65-6).

Not only do the 'Notes' closely follow *An Essay on Philosophical Method* in time, Collingwood explicitly presents the ideas discussed there as following from an application of his method, as we have seen. If he sees the law of primitive survivals as an important development of this method, then, one would have expected him to stress this in the relevant passages of the 'Notes'. But such stipulation does not occur.

<sup>497</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 18, Collingwood's emphasis.



In my view, we here see the law of primitive survivals at work. In the previous section it became clear that for Collingwood, reality consists of matter, life and mind. The three are different in kind and degree, but still develop out of each other, the higher form having lower orders of being ‘telescoped’ into itself. Feeling is the apapanage of mind, but this does not rule out that it in some sense contains matter as well. In fact, in the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’ Collingwood makes it crystal clear that matter ‘survives’ into feeling:

A perceptual field is a peculiar type of structure, whose elements are physical things – spatio-temporal wholes with distribution – patterns & process patterns of their own – grouped in space-time round a living organism having sensoria. The sensorium is the focus in which this field is brought together into a unity. The question what field is focussed depends on the sensorium; the question what pattern-qualities it reveals when so focused depends entirely on the field itself, i.e. on its components (sensibilia) & their relation. Thus, if the sensorium be an ear, its field consists of air-vibrations; it hears these by focusing them into patterns having determinate qualities, e.g. into a set of vibrations with a certain uniform frequency whose pattern-quality is the pitch called middle C.<sup>498</sup>

In other words, for Collingwood, what a living body senses depends not only on what kind of body it is, but also on its material surroundings. As we have seen in the previous section, modern physics has discovered that matter consists not of inert atoms, but of processes that take place in a ‘rhythmical’ way and so form patterns. Multiple such patterns exist around the living body and make up its surroundings. The organism, by means of its sense organs – its ‘sensoria’ – perceives its environment and turns it into sensation. But in this work it is limited: ‘what pattern-qualities the sensorium reveals depends *entirely* on the components of the field and their relations’. Again:

The ‘focusing’ of the field occurs in the percipient body. It involves a peculiar structure in that body by which the patterns of the field reflect themselves in the body. Thus, the ear is an instrument for setting up in the nervous system a set of periodic vibrations *repeating*, within the organism, the patterns of the vibrations in the air outside it. Similarly with the eye.<sup>499</sup>

To put it differently, the physical ‘pattern-qualities’ that make up the material world are transported into the feeling of the living body unscathed: they are primitive

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<sup>498</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/3, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic A’ (1933), 60

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2, my emphasis.

survivals. As Collingwood puts it elsewhere: the “sense-data any mind perceives at any moment are absolutely determined by the space-time patterns which at that moment it is focussing: they *are* the world as perceived here & now”.<sup>500</sup> Or, again: “Finally, there is nothing arbitrary about the result of this perceptive act. What we see as red really is red; ... in the sense that redness is the only possible result of fusing that particular type of physical pattern”.<sup>501</sup>

A possible counterpoint to my interpretation of matter surviving into a living body is that in *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood answers the question, “Are there objects of feeling or not?” with a “methodological negative”.<sup>502</sup> The view he is here denying is the following: “*Seeing* is an activity which has a proper object, namely *colours*. *Hearing* has a proper object, namely *sounds*. As a general name these objects may be called *sense-data* or *sensa*”.<sup>503</sup> What Collingwood seems to be saying, then, contrary to what I have argued above, is that our feelings do not depend on things other than themselves, but that they are “products of the activity whose objects they were”.<sup>504</sup> In other words, Collingwood seems to suggest that our sensations merely result from the activities of our sensoria, and not from independent, material objects. But I do not think this would be the correct view. What Collingwood is denying is the existence of a certain *kind* of independent object, namely *sense-data*, where he gives the example of colours and sounds. And this is entirely compatible with what he says in the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’. What he there holds to be sense-independent are the ‘pattern qualities’ that make up the material world. These are *not* sounds and colours but processes like ‘air vibrations’ and electrons behaving in a certain way. The sensoria, then, ‘focus’ these pattern qualities, and as a *result* we hear ‘the pitch called middle C’ or see the colour red. So indeed, sense-data are, for Collingwood, not sense-independent. They are the co-products of both matter and our sensoria. But this does not mean that anything goes in sensation. What we can sense is determined by physical reality, the ‘quality

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<sup>500</sup> Collingwood, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic C’, 69, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>501</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/7, ‘Notes towards a Metaphysic E’ (1934), 79.

<sup>502</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, pp. 28 & 31.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

patterns' of physical science *are* sense-independent. Matter survives into the sensuous aspect of feeling.

But what about the 'emotional charge on sensation', such as the feeling of disgust that may accompany my seeing of a certain colour? Where does this emotion come from? In his published work Collingwood says next to nothing about this issue. Only in *The Principles of History*, which came out posthumously but was at least intended for publication, he tells us that: "I do not doubt ... that the purely physical effects produced in man's organism by its physical environment are accompanied by corresponding effects in his emotions and appetites".<sup>505</sup> So here, again, Collingwood seems to suggest that feeling – in both its sensuous and emotional aspects – is a co-production of physical environment and living body. But how exactly does that work in the case of emotion? How does matter produce emotion in an organism without the interpretation of said matter by a thinking mind? To return to the example of a frightening sound, it seems most intuitive to regard the fear involved as the result of our *interpreting* the sound as dangerous, e.g. as the growl of an angry dog. But this option is not open for Collingwood, as emotion on the level of feeling is prior to consciousness, and hence cannot be its result. As he puts it in *The Principles of Art*: "Feeling appears to arise in us independently of all thinking, in a part of our nature which exists and functions below the level of thought and is unaffected by it".<sup>506</sup>

The solution to this conundrum can be found in the 'Notes toward a Metaphysic' and another unpublished text: 'Outline of a Theory of Primitive Mind' (1933). Here Collingwood makes it clear that the emotions we experience at the level of feeling are due to the 'interpretation' of sensations by our living body itself. For Collingwood, the defining characteristic of life is a *conatus* or *nisus* aimed at the perpetuation of the organism's own individual existence on the one hand, and the perpetuation of the species to which that organism belongs on the other.<sup>507</sup> In order

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<sup>505</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History: And Other Writings in the Philosophy of History*. Edited with an Introduction by W.H. Dray and W.J. van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), p. 93.

<sup>506</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1938), p. 163.

<sup>507</sup> "...the body has a permanent effort, very intricate & complex, to perpetuate itself (a *conatus* to preserve its own being) independently of & antecedently to its having any mind, and this *conatus* is its life, i.e. its essence as a living body." Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 16/8 'Outline of a Theory of Primitive Mind' (Dec. 1933).

to preserve its existence, the organism must survive in a particular physical environment. Some elements in this environment are conducive towards its survival, others detrimental to it, and yet others are of neutral value. It is the function of emotion to tell the organism to which category any given part of the environment belongs:

[Emotions]<sup>508</sup>, which are simply vital nusus directed upon perceived objects, are not felt: their effect is simply to invest certain objects with ‘importance’ – attractiveness or repulsiveness. They are the source of a kind of polarity in the perceptual field, distinguishing it into (a) objects charged with positive affect (b) objects charged with negative affect (c) neutral objects. All this happens below the level of consciousness, so that this ‘charging with affect’ is not the same thing as ‘placing in the focus of consciousness’ or ‘attention’.<sup>509</sup>

What Collingwood suggests here, is that emotions do not have some separate existence. They are not self-sustained objects which can be ‘felt’ on their own. Rather, they are responses to what the living body perceives in its environment.<sup>510</sup> These responses happen ‘below the level of consciousness’, they are ‘simply vital nusus’. In other words, they originate from the level of life. Emotions, then, are biological responses to our surroundings that tell us what objects in the environment further our survival, and which objects are harmful to our biological being: “[emotion] is bodily need plus perception of things able to supply that need: and these things are object of [emotion]”.<sup>511</sup>

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“A body, I think, is alive when its activities are directed towards its own survival, (a) individually, in which case they take the shape of nutrition (b) specifically as reproduction”. Collingwood, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic A’, 38).

<sup>508</sup> In the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’ Collingwood calls emotions also ‘wants’ and ‘appetites’. See, e.g. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 18/6, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic D’ (1934), 30: “Consciousness would thus be defined (or at least it would be part of its definition) as that to which emotion (appetition) can become (through expression) a percept. Consciousness is that which perceives emotions; expression is consciousness’s way of perceiving appetites.” This may be misleading, as Collingwood later in his career distinguishes feeling from appetite, assigning the latter to the realm of mind and reserving the term ‘emotion’ for feelings in the realm of body. See: Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 16. Therefore, for clarity’s sake, I replace the term ‘appetites’ with ‘emotions’ in all quoted passages from the ‘Notes’.

<sup>509</sup> Collingwood, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic C’, 87.

<sup>510</sup> Cf. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 161: “There is a relation between sensation and emotion which is more intimate than this. When an infant is terrified at the sight of a scarlet curtain blazing in the sunlight, there are not two distinct experiences in its mind, one sensation and the other an emotion of fear: there is only one experience, a terrifying red”.

<sup>511</sup> Collingwood, ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic C’, 71.

But how sure can we be that Collingwood is here talking about the same thing as in *The New Leviathan* and *The Principles of Art*, that is, the published works in which Collingwood deals with the topic at hand? Might the passage from the ‘Notes’ not be a different speculation altogether? In my view, it is not. Immediately following the citation on emotion quoted above, Collingwood continues his ‘Notes’ as follows:

This field [the perceptual field], thus bipolarly arranged, is in one sense a *simple idea*. It is of course highly complex, in the case of a complex percipient: including various colours, variously dispersed, ditto sounds, ditto smells etc. ditto visceral sensations, and all differentially charged with + and – affects; but it is simple in the sense that all the complexities are differentiations within a single indivisible whole, no part of which can be changed without reorganizing every other. It is an absolutely atomic experience. It is the *here-and-now* world. It can only exist at one time, at one place, for one percipient.<sup>512</sup>

In this quote we recognize that Collingwood is talking about feeling in the same sense as in *The New Leviathan* and *The Principles of Art*. In all three texts, the idea that feeling is a perceptual *field*, an organic whole rather than a collection of disparate sensations and emotions, is asserted. In *The New Leviathan* Collingwood puts it like this: “feeling is a *here-and-now*. What I feel is something that exists when I feel it and where I feel it. There are place-differences and time-differences within what I feel, but they are differences within my here-and-now, not between what is inside it and what is outside it”.<sup>513</sup> We see here the same stress on differentiations between sensations as relations *within* an overarching perceptual field, and also the central description of feeling as the ‘here-and-now’. Again, in *The Principles of Art*: “what presents itself to our eyes ... is never a red patch. It is always a visual field, more or less parti-coloured; having no definite edges...”<sup>514</sup> And: “its [feeling’s] object is never a plurality of terms with relations between them, but a single indivisible unity: a sheer here-and-now”.<sup>515</sup>

To conclude, in the ‘Notes toward a Metaphysic’, *The Principles of Art*, as well as *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood speaks about feeling as a perceptual field, a here-and-now, in which we find sensuous elements such as colours and sounds, all charged with emotion. In all three texts, Collingwood also makes it clear that

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 87, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>513</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 21, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>514</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 204.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

emotion is something that occurs below the level of consciousness. In his published work, Collingwood does not explain how this works. From the 'Notes toward a Metaphysic' we learn, however, that emotions are the 'interpretation' by a living organism of its environment as being conducive to its survival or rather a threat to it.

Before moving on to the role that feeling plays in consciousness, I must make one more disclaimer. The emotions to be found at the level of feeling, for Collingwood, are not the only emotions. As we will see, consciousness develops itself from its simplest form onwards, and on every level reached new emotions come into play. "Take any form of consciousness, however highly developed", Collingwood says in *The New Leviathan*, "it always has an immediate object, and the immediate object always carries an emotional charge".<sup>516</sup> And he says something similar in *The Principles of Art*: "When thought comes into existence it brings with it new orders of emotions: emotions that can arise only in a thinker, and only because he thinks in a certain way".<sup>517</sup> In our emotional life, then, we are, in the view of Collingwood, certainly not limited by our organic response to a physical environment. This is true on the level of feeling, which falls below consciousness, but in the end we are thinking creatures as well as biological ones.

Now that we have a clearer picture of the 'apanage of mind', I move on to the 'constituent part of mind': consciousness or thought. As Collingwood in *The Principles of Art* and *The New Leviathan*, I will here use these two terms interchangeably. A few general remarks on what Collingwood says about thought are in place here. First, that for him "thought is both theoretical and practical" and that "thought is primarily practical; and only in the second place theoretical".<sup>518</sup> We will see exemplifications of this principle below. Further, that Collingwood distinguishes multiple forms of consciousness which are arranged along a scale of forms.<sup>519</sup> A higher level of consciousness has as its object a lower one. These objects of thought, however, are always ultimately grounded in feeling. Through "its practical work",

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<sup>516</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 25.

<sup>517</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 164.

<sup>518</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 5.

<sup>519</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 61-6.

consciousness creates “specialized forms of feeling” which become an object for theoretical thought.<sup>520</sup> Here, again, we see Collingwood’s law of primitive survivals at work.

The lowest form of thought is “simple consciousness” which has as its object “simple feeling”.<sup>521</sup> This is the feeling I spoke of above: a continuous sensational field that is laden with emotional charge. How does this field become an object for the theoretical side of consciousness? Through the primary work of its practical aspect, through the act of selective attention:

Out of the tangle or confusion of the ‘here-and-now’ in which feeling-elements of all kinds are given to simple consciousness in their simplest form, overlapping and interpenetrating and mixed up together, selective attention gradually makes a pattern... then affording an object of contemplation to theoretical consciousness.<sup>522</sup>

Why is selective attention a practical form of thought? Because it is essentially creative, it makes something that was not there before. Feeling, for Collingwood is a field. It is one organic whole. Selective attention breaks up this whole, placing some part of it in the spotlight of consciousness while driving others to the side. Hence, it divides feeling into a “focal” and a “penumbral” region, realms that do not at all exist at the level of simple feeling itself.<sup>523</sup> For example, when I attend to a red patch in the field, I single it out from the rest of my sensations such as the seeing of other colours or the hearing of certain sounds. I may also separate it from the emotional charge that goes with the sensation, such as pleasure or disgust. In other words, I create boundaries around my seeing a red patch, boundaries that are not there on the level of simple feeling: “Edges nowhere exist in the here-and-now as actually ‘given’. They have to be made by the various acts of attention that cut it up in various ways”.<sup>524</sup>

Although creative and hence practical, it is not the case that anything goes for selective attention. Attention is free in the sense that it chooses for itself what part of feeling it puts in the spotlight of consciousness. But whatever part it chooses,

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>521</sup> Idem.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

this must always be a feeling that is already there. As Collingwood puts it in *The Principles of Art*, a “conscious being is not ... free to decide what feelings he shall have; but he is free to decide what feeling he shall place in the focus of his consciousness”.<sup>525</sup> Hence, selective attention really is a form of thought, as it can, in a sense, be true or false. “A true consciousness”, Collingwood says, “is the confession to ourselves of our feelings; a false consciousness would be disowning them, i.e. thinking about one of them ‘That feeling is not mine’.”<sup>526</sup> This disowning of feelings Collingwood terms “the ‘corruption’ of consciousness”.<sup>527</sup>

But this is also the *only* sense in which selective attention can produce truths or falsehoods. Usually when we say that an assertion is false, we mean that in it an object is incorrectly related to other objects. For example, when someone claims ‘That is a cat’ while in fact ‘that’ is a dog, that person is falsely relating the animal in front of her to other objects in the world. But by thinking and speaking about relations we already have transcended the level of simple consciousness. What can be said about simple feeling selectively attended to by consciousness is merely “*This is how I feel*”, and nothing more.<sup>528</sup> Even by claiming, for example, ‘This is red’, we are by implication already saying that ‘This is a colour’ and ‘This is not green’. That is, we have gone beyond the objects of simple consciousness and have reached the level of “thought in a narrower sense, thought *par excellence*, or intellection”.<sup>529</sup>

How does this transition from simple consciousness to intellection occur? Through evocative thinking, appetite and passion. First, with “*selection* goes the act of *evocative thinking*: the act of arousing in yourself by the work of thought feelings you do not find as ‘given’ in yourself”.<sup>530</sup> By selectively attending to some part of the here-and-now, we immediately thereby put that part in a context of related feelings. The latter are feelings we are not having right now and which thus have, according to Collingwood, “a ghost-like quality”.<sup>531</sup> Again, we can see that thought is primarily practical: it creates something that is not immediately given in simple consciousness.

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<sup>525</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 207.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216, my emphasis.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>530</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 49, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.



Through this creative act of thought, then, arises appetite. If I selectively attend to a certain unpleasant feeling in my stomach, I thereby, through evocative thinking, place it in a context of feelings not yet but potentially present – such as the eating of food – which could alleviate the unpleasant feeling I am having right now. This is what Collingwood calls “the *pleasure-potential* attached to the there-and-then, its superiority in pleasure to the here-and-now”.<sup>532</sup> This ‘pleasure-potential’ is the emotional charge on the ‘ghost-like’ feeling evoked by the unpleasant ‘given’ feeling I am selectively attending to in the present moment. Appetite is the striving towards satisfaction of that pleasure-potential.

According to Collingwood, there are ultimately only two general types of appetite: hunger and love.<sup>533</sup> The hungry self is weak and wants to be strong. For example, “the defect was bodily lassitude due to an empty stomach; the satisfaction would be the feeling of this lassitude dispelled by repletion”.<sup>534</sup> In love, the self is lonely and wants to be attached. “The type-case here is sex”, Collingwood asserts. “Sexual love is looking to a member of the opposite [sic] sex to supply one with certain satisfactions; those of sex among others, but not those alone”.<sup>535</sup> Notice how hunger and love closely match the essential characteristic of life as defined by Collingwood: the *conatus* toward self-preservation (hunger) and reproduction of the species (love). I see this as yet another indication that Collingwood conceives the emotions at the level of feeling as arising from the metaphysical realm of life. These emotions evoke appetites, Collingwood explains in *The New Leviathan*, that we can see to resemble the ‘*nisus* towards life’ as described by him in his cosmological writings. The relation between life and appetite is even explicitly asserted by Collingwood in his unpublished ‘Moral Philosophy Lectures’ of 1932:

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<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>533</sup> This distinction is philosophical: “If I had been studying appetite physiologically I should have divided it into a very large number of kinds: the appetite for food, for drink, for air, for rest, for exercise, for sunshine, for scores of other things. But the distinction does not concern me ... When I consider appetite as a mental thing ... I find it falling into two types and no more.” Likewise, in the case of love, “there are many kinds of love ... for example a man’s love for other men, children, non-human animals, flowers, places, rivers or mountains or the sea.” *Ibid.*, pp. 54 & 57.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

This distinction between the particular [the organism] and the universal [the species to which the organism belongs], which at the level of vital function appears as the distinction between nutrition and reproduction, reappears in the content of appetite as the distinction between hunger and love, the two master passions of our nature.<sup>536</sup>

Moreover, my interpretation is in accordance with the opinion of Mink: “within emotion there is a difference between the two primary emotions, hunger and love, corresponding to the organic processes of nutrition and reproduction”.<sup>537</sup>

The effort to satisfy appetite is unconscious: “Appetite is blind. Nobody in a condition of wanting knows what he wants or is conscious of wanting anything definite; only when he comes to reflect on his appetite is he even conscious of wanting at all”.<sup>538</sup> The reflection of which Collingwood speaks comes about through passion. He uses this term here not in its original sense, where ‘passion’ signifies something that is done to you. In ordinary language, Collingwood holds, we mean by ‘passion’ something you do *because* something is done to you, “for example, you become angry or ‘fly into a *passion*’”.<sup>539</sup> And this is the sense in which Collingwood uses the word.

Passion, for Collingwood, “is the power of the not-self” in frustrating you in the satisfaction of your appetites.<sup>540</sup> Appetite turns into passion “when a man starts thinking of the not-self no longer as existing for the satisfaction of his own appetites, but as having an independent character of its own: as being, so to speak, *alive*.”<sup>541</sup> In unconsciously going about our business, satisfying our wants, we may stumble upon something blocking that satisfaction. We become aware of the not-self which has an existence independent of our own and has the power to get in our way, which, of

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<sup>536</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. Collingwood 7, ‘Moral Philosophy Lectures – New MS., 1932’, 9.

<sup>537</sup> Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic*, p. 86.

<sup>538</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 51.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67, Collingwood’s emphasis.

I here disagree with Mink, who interprets fear and anger as merely “passive emotions”, as “the forms of [hunger and love’s] frustration” (*Mind, History, and Dialectic*, p. 86). The difference is important, I think, because at the level of desire fear and anger appear to consciousness as possible alternative *reactions* to the not-self, and thus set into motion the whole train of practical thought and action for Collingwood. It is hard to conceive how this should work if anger and fear were simply passive, affective states with regard to the frustration of appetite.

<sup>540</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 67.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69, Collingwood’s emphasis.

course, is bound to happen. Again, we have two general types of ways in which to respond: fear and anger. If we are frightened of the not-self, we surrender to it. In anger, we fight the not-self. “The difference is purely practical”, Collingwood says. “You conceive yourself as ‘contradicted’ or ‘contrasted with’ by the not-self. The simplest thing to do is to lie down under this menace. That is fear. The alternative is to rebel against it. That is anger”.<sup>542</sup> With the two passionate responses to the not-self that frustrates the satisfaction of appetite, we finally reach the level of ‘intellection’.

For we now have in our mind alternatives between which we must choose. We are conscious that with regard to the not-self we can react through fear or through anger, and that we must somehow select one of these options and reject the other. In other words, we must answer the question “Which do I want, *a* or *b*?” by saying: ‘I want *a* (and not *b*)’ (or *vice versa*).<sup>543</sup> And this, the answering of questions by asserting propositions – which Collingwood names “propositional thinking”<sup>544</sup> – is the first stage of consciousness where the distinction between truth and falsehood properly applies. We have seen Collingwood use these terms in a somewhat unfamiliar sense on the level of selective attention. There a consciousness is ‘corrupt’, or false, if it disowns its own feelings. On the level of propositional thinking, truth and falsehood apply in the regular sense. That is, if something is related correctly to something else, it is true, if related incorrectly, it is false. In the case above, the proposition ‘I want *a*’ ascribes an appetite to me. It is true if I really want *a*, it is false if it turns out that, in fact, I do not want *a*.

Collingwood calls the proposition ‘I want *a*’ a desire, which is distinguished from appetite by my *consciousness* of being in the state of wanting some definite thing. A desire is called an intention if it is freely chosen.<sup>545</sup> By intending an object or action we invest it with the quality of goodness, Collingwood holds: “‘Good’ means ‘desired’; or, what is not easily to be distinguished from this, *desirable*, meaning ‘worthy to be desired’”.<sup>546</sup> Hence, we can translate the sentence ‘I want *a*’ into the

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., p. 74, Collingwood’s emphasis.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>545</sup> See: Ibid., pp. 90-8.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., p. 80, Collingwood’s emphases.

alternative statement ‘*a* is good’ without changing its meaning. But this implies that the initial proposition establishes yet another relation. Besides ascribing an appetite to myself, it also subsumes that appetite under the concept of ‘goodness’. It follows that the assertion ‘I want *a*’ can be true or false in two senses. Not only must it be established whether it is in fact correct that ‘I want *a*’, it must also be proved that ‘*a* is good’ if the proposition is to be true. In desiring or intending, then, we are potentially doubly at fault: “you may be very easily mistaken in thinking what you desire to be good, that is to say you may be mistaken in desiring it *or* thinking you want it”.<sup>547</sup>

When we begin to question intentions and other judgments formed at the stage of propositional thinking, we reach the level of reason or rational thinking.<sup>548</sup> Where propositional thinking is about establishing relations between *things*, such as me and an action connected by the relation of wanting, in reason we think about relations between *propositions*. It is “the mental function” where you think “one thing, *x*, because you think another thing, *y*; where *y* is your ‘reason’, or, as it is sometimes called, your ‘ground’ for thinking *x*”.<sup>549</sup> So where propositional thinking allows me to form a belief like ‘My Dad is coming home’, reason allows me to formulate the train of thought ‘My Dad is coming home *because* I hear the gravel of the driveway crackle’. Rational thinking arises for practical reasons, according to Collingwood. If I assert a proposition *x*, I might become aware that my belief is fallible, for example by being challenged by someone else. As a response, I ask myself the question, ‘Why do I believe *x*?’ In trying to find another proposition *y* which can function as support for *x*, I am “trying to alleviate the stress caused me by the untrustworthiness of my knowledge”.<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Idem, my emphasis.

<sup>548</sup> These ‘other judgments’ I hold, in accordance with the interpretation of Mink, to be judgments of perception. Collingwood does not actually claim this in *The New Leviathan*, but hints at it in *The Principles of Art*. See: Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, pp. 164-8. Mink convincingly argues that, without perception, there would be a missing link on the side of theoretical consciousness in the development of mind, and that perception is the most suitable candidate for filling this gap. See: Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic*, pp. 103-6. Cf. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, pp. 307-8.

<sup>549</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 99.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

Collingwood distinguishes between practical and theoretical reason. The former can be described as “making up your mind *to* (reason for what moralists call an intention)”, the latter as “making up your mind *that* (reason for what logicians call a proposition)”.<sup>551</sup> Practical reason is the means by which desire may be judged. In the history of western philosophy, Collingwood discerns three strands of practical thinking, each proclaiming its own kind of goodness. For utilitarianism, as we have already seen in *Speculum Mentis*, an action *x* is good if it is a means to a desirable end *y*. For people adhering to ‘right’ as the highest form of goodness, *x* is good if it conforms with the rule *y*. Lastly, we have those who think that we should act in accordance with duty. For them *x* is good if it is my duty *y* to do *x*.<sup>552</sup> If I, then, on the level of propositional thinking, have freely chosen the desire ‘I want *x*’, I have formed an intention which at the same time expresses the belief that *x* is good. If, further, I become aware of the fallibility of my practical knowledge, I might start looking for reasons for holding that *x* is good. I can go about this, according to Collingwood, by looking at *x* from the perspective of utility, right or duty. If *x* is not good from any of these perspectives, I must conclude that my positive estimation of *x*, which is implied by my intention of doing *x*, is incorrect. Moreover, Collingwood holds that the forms of goodness are hierarchically ordered, utility being the lowest kind of goodness and duty the highest. In other words, even if my intention is good from the perspective of utility, it may still be criticized from the perspectives of right and duty. I get back to the hierarchy of forms of goodness in the next chapter of this book.

Practical reason occurs prior to theoretical reason, according to Collingwood, and therefore, because of the law of primitive survivals, “a practical element is always present in a case of theoretical reason”.<sup>553</sup> I will quote at length here:

In all forms of rational thinking a distinction is made between the self and the not-self. Such thinking is primarily practical; its first function is to ask and answer the question: ‘Why am I doing this?’ It has, however, a secondary function, to ask and answer questions about what is not myself.

These may be called ‘theoretical’ questions; but they are never purely theoretical. They *arise* out of practical problems concerning the relations between the self and other

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<sup>551</sup> Idem.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-24.

<sup>553</sup> Idem.

things; their answers are obtained by doing something to things and watching the result; and *these answers are always in effect solutions to the practical problems out of which they arise.*

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Is there nowhere such a thing as 'purely theoretical thinking'? There is; but it is not real thinking, and it does not lead to real knowing. It is the thing called academic thinking or make-believe thinking ... Real thinking is always to some extent experimental in its method; it always starts from practice and returns to practice; for it is based on 'interest' in the thing thought about; that is, on a practical concern with it.

The questions about a thing wherein the thinker has an interest will be different kinds of questions according to the differences in this interest. A man will have a different theoretical attitude towards things other than himself according as his practical attitude towards them is different; and his practical attitude towards them will be different according to differences in his attitude towards his own actions.

The main difference there can be in his attitude towards his own actions is whether the reasons he gives himself for these actions are habitually given in terms of utility, right, or duty.<sup>554</sup>

We have already seen that, for Collingwood, mind develops itself out of feeling, through appetite, into desire. If desire is freely chosen it is an intention. Our intention might get challenged, and as a result we go about finding reasons supporting it. Thus we reach the level of reason or rational thinking. But this is *practical* reason; we are looking for an answer to the question 'Why am I doing *a*?' or 'Why is *a* good?' rather than 'Why do I believe that *x*?'. According to Collingwood, the latter question will only arise after first answering the former one from the perspective of utility, right or duty. For example, I might answer 'Why am I working out?' by asserting that 'I must work out because it is a means to the desirable end of a healthy body'. But this answer immediately raises theoretical questions. How often should I do my training in order to achieve my goal? Which exercises do I have to do? What food should I eat to support my training? Answering such theoretical questions helps me devise a plan for carrying out my intention. They assist in turning my practical "decision" into a "deed", which is "the initial stage of the action" and is an integral part of the intention.<sup>555</sup> In my example, the answers to my theoretical questions might result in me opening my laptop in order to buy online the fitness

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<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6, my emphasis. For a critical discussion of these passages, see: Donagan, *The Later Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood*, pp. 87-91.

One of the political reasons for which Collingwood so strongly reacted against the separation of theory from practice and 'academic thinking or make-believe thinking', seems to have been his opinion that such irrationalism in ethics helped the fascists gain power. See: Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, pp. 147-68.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96 & 97.

equipment I need according to my research. Hence, theoretical thinking starts from practice and returns to practice. It arises after answering the question ‘Why am I doing this?’ and releases itself into action by helping to turn an intention into a deed.

In the above long quote I emphasized the word ‘arise’ in the sentence ‘theoretical questions arise out of practical problems’. This is a term Collingwood employs regularly in a *logical* context with regard to the asking and answering of questions. Thus, in *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Collingwood claims that “any given question involves one presupposition ... from which it directly and immediately ‘arises’” and that 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”.<sup>556</sup> So if I would ask ‘What food should I eat to support my training?’, this question logically presupposes the proposition that ‘Eating some kinds of food supports physical training’. The presupposition explains how it is logically possible that my question can arise. However, in going about my daily life I carry with me a host of presuppositions from which, on the present occasion, no questions arise at all. Collingwood’s logic of question and answer, taken by itself, cannot explain *why* certain questions arise rather than others or none at all. It merely tells us what delimits the logical space of possible questions. But if we take into account Collingwood’s philosophy of mind, we see how this works. Not only does a theoretical question presuppose a logical entity, it also presupposes a practical problem to whose solution it is meant as a contribution.

I now come to a conclusion. I ended the second section of this chapter by claiming that, for Collingwood, mind arises out of life and life out of matter. The three metaphysical realms are distinct in kind and degree, mind being the highest embodiment of the philosophical concept of reality. Mind succeeds in overcoming the externality of the world by knowing its own environment without destroying it. However, matter and life are not thereby abandoned. Rather, they are ‘telescoped’ into mind. What Collingwood needs to provide, then, is an account of how mind is related to matter and life while at the same time having a nature of its own.

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<sup>556</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 25 & 26. Cf. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 37.

This account we find in Collingwood's philosophy of mind. Mind is related to matter and life by developing out of feeling. Feeling contains primitive survivals of matter in the form of sensations, and of life in the form of emotions. Through the practical work of selective attention and evocative thinking, mind turns feeling into appetite. If the non-self frustrates the satisfaction of appetites, mind becomes aware of itself as a separate existence. It discovers that there are alternative ways of responding to the not-self from which it has the freedom to choose. In choosing, mind forms a desire, in freely choosing, it forms an intention. With desiring or intending an action, mind invests it with goodness: desiring  $x$  is identical to claiming that  $x$  is good. However, this estimation of  $x$  might be wrong, and it is the function of practical reason to evaluate  $x$  by answering the question 'Why am I doing it?'. Only after answering this question, theoretical reason comes into play. In theoretical reason we try to discover the truth about what is not myself. In accordance with Collingwood's cosmology, theoretical reason must thus be seen as the highest embodiment of the philosophical concept of mind: it is on this level that we find mind truly overcoming the externality of the world. However, due to the law of primitive survivals, it is clear that theoretical reason has 'telescoped' into itself all lower forms of mind, practical reason being the one directly prior to it. Hence, for Collingwood, 'all thinking starts from practice and returns to practice; for it is based on 'interest' in the thing thought about; that is, on a practical concern with it'.

It is almost redundant to point out how similar many of the above sounds to what the pragmatists hold, and I will return to their relation to Collingwood in the final section of this chapter. First, however, I delve into the consequences Collingwood's philosophy of mind has for his views on psychology.

#### 4. Psychology in Collingwood's later philosophy

We have seen in the previous chapter of this book that Collingwood held psychology in a low regard during the earliest years of his career. The psychologist method implies, Collingwood claimed, that its practitioner should not be interested in the truth value of the belief she is studying, but merely in the content of that belief. This is problematic, for in this way the development of thought cannot be explained. New beliefs arise out of a criticism of old beliefs, and such criticism is inexplicable apart



from standards of truth. Without the latter, the history of thought is nothing more than a random series, beliefs following up on each other for no discernible reason. Does this evaluation of psychology change with Collingwood's more developed philosophy of mind? Somewhat, but not in its essentials. Collingwood claims in multiple places that thought is "criteriological", i.e. judging itself by its own criteria, and that any professed science of thought that does not take this into account is a pseudoscience.<sup>557</sup> And that is precisely what a certain form of psychology does. However, Collingwood now also identifies a 'proper' psychology, making his view more nuanced.

Collingwood explains the distinction between criteriological and non-criteriological activities in the following way:

An organism unconsciously seeking its own preservation will simply on any given occasion either score another success or score for the first and last time a failure. A mind aiming at the discovery of a truth or the planning of a course of conduct will not only score a success or a failure, it will also think of itself as scoring a success or a failure; ... Any piece of thinking, theoretical or practical, includes as an integral part of itself the thought of a standard or criterion by reference to which it is judged a successful or unsuccessful piece of thinking. Unlike any kind of bodily or physiological functioning, thought is a self-criticizing activity. The body passes no judgment upon itself. Judgment is passed upon it by its environment, which continues to support it and promote its well-being when it pursues its ends successfully and injures or destroys it when it pursues them otherwise. The mind judges itself, though not always justly.<sup>558</sup>

So for Collingwood there are two human activities between which an important distinction must be drawn. On the one hand we have bodily action, performing its function to survive in an environment. This action is unconscious, the body does it without being aware that it does it. As a consequence, the body also does not judge its own activity. This is done by the environment in allowing the organism to survive or, by contrast, in frustrating the achievement of that goal. This account corresponds to the forms of consciousness below the level of desire as described by Collingwood in his philosophy of mind, unconscious action aimed at biological survival and reproduction falling under the category of appetite.

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<sup>557</sup> Most notably in: Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 171n & Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 101-42.

<sup>558</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 107-8.

Thought, on the other hand, is a self-conscious activity. Not only does it pursue an end, it also knows that it does so, and hence will eventually inquire whether it is doing so successfully. But to judge anything you need standards for determining success or failure. Thought, then, is an activity which aims at the pursuit of an end, is aware of this, and hence throughout the process adjusts itself in accordance with criteria for thinking. In short, thought is criteriological. Thinking is inexplicable if we merely note the belief that has been formed through its work, without taking into account the standard in consonance with which the thinker has developed it. Psychology, by neglecting the criteriological aspect of thinking, is a pseudoscience of thought.

Psychology proper, for Collingwood, is the science not of thought but “of sensation, appetite and the emotions connected with them”.<sup>559</sup> And as such, “psychology is not only a science of respectable antiquity; it is a science with great triumphs to its credit, some of long standing, others lately achieved, others even yet incomplete, and (one may hope) others to come in the future”.<sup>560</sup> Among the ‘great triumphs’ of psychology, Collingwood counts the work of psycho-analysts on what he himself has termed ‘corrupt consciousness’. They have established a vocabulary for describing the mental pathologies associated with corrupt consciousness. The “disowning of experiences”, for example, “they call repression”.<sup>561</sup> Through their work, psycho-analysts have made possible the “detailed tracing of particular evils to this source [corrupt consciousness]” and this is “one of the most remarkable and valuable lines of investigation initiated by modern science”. Collingwood even goes as far as claiming that the attempt of psycho-analysts “to rescue” people from the evils of corrupt consciousness, “is an enterprise that has already won a great place in the history of man’s warfare with the powers of darkness”.<sup>562</sup>

Psychology goes astray if it starts to overestimate itself, if it encroaches on the territory of the criteriological sciences. In its determination to merely note beliefs without inquiring in how far they satisfy the criteria inherent in the thought process

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<sup>559</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 95.

<sup>560</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 141.

<sup>561</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 218.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

that produced them, psychology mutilates what it means to be a thinking being. We “must never forget”, Collingwood says, that psychologists use “the word ‘think’ ... in a rather special sense. It has lost all suggestion of an attempt to think truly and avoid thinking falsely. In fact, since this is at bottom what distinguishes thinking from feeling, the word ‘think’ here simply means feel”.<sup>563</sup> Psychologists turn thinking into feeling.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that psychology is a worthwhile scientific enterprise with a subject-matter of its own for the later Collingwood. This is a clear development from his position in *Speculum Mentis*. In that book, he is not completely negative about psychology as well, but he couches this cautious sympathy in completely different terms as in *The Principles of Art* and *An Essay on Metaphysics*:

What we want is not a clean sweep of psychology but a psychology bent upon overcoming its own abstractness, a psychology of concrete mind; and, in a sense, that is the aim of this book. It is all to the good that psychology attempts to conceive mind as a self-contained system, working by its own laws and not determined by relation to anything outside itself. Its error is to regard this system not as thought itself but as an object of thought, external to the psychologist as a thing to be observed, not living in him as a thing to be enjoyed. By this error, it reasserts the very fallacy it is trying to avoid.<sup>564</sup>

In the above quote, Collingwood makes it clear that psychologists have correctly focused their energy on mind itself, instead of mind’s relation to the external world. However, their mistake is that they neglect the fact that the laws according to which mind develops are self-imposed. *Speculum Mentis* precisely is the attempt to overcome this ‘abstractness’ of psychology.

This is quite striking in comparison with Collingwood’s later writings. In *Speculum Mentis*, both psychology and philosophy have the same subject-matter, namely mind. Psychologists have come to an important insight about mind, but in the end their theories are lacking. Collingwood’s philosophy aims at remedying this mistake by giving a more comprehensive account of the same object. By contrast, in the later *The Principles of Art* and *An Essay on Metaphysics* psychology proper and philosophy are *not* distinguished by their differing interpretations of one and the

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<sup>563</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 117.

<sup>564</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 277.

same subject-matter. Rather, they should be seen as intellectual activities aimed at two distinctive kinds of objects, namely 'sensation, appetite and the emotions connected with them' in the case of psychology, and 'thought' for philosophy.

What this shows is that Collingwood at the end of his career has developed a much more nuanced understanding of mind as the one he works with before. Whereas he first, in *Speculum Mentis*, equates mind with criteriological thought, he later comes to realize that something more primitive is going on as well. Reason arises as the reflection on propositional thinking, but propositional thinking, on its turn, only arises on the basis of appetite and ultimately feeling. And appetite, although the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply to it, is just as much a constituent of mind as propositional thinking and reason are. Hence, it is possible that psychology has mind as its subject-matter without competing with the criteriological sciences of thought. For there is now a region within mind in which non-criteriological activities take place, namely appetite and selective attention, and these are worthy of research as well. This possibility Collingwood did not see in *Speculum Mentis*.

Does this partial reappraisal of psychology affect Collingwood's relation to pragmatism? It is here that I take up the thread of the main argument of this chapter again.

## 5. Consequences for Collingwood's relation to pragmatism

As I have made clear in the preceding sections, Collingwood towards the end of his life develops a philosophy of mind wherein he takes seriously the human being's physical and biological constitution. Mind is the highest form of the philosophical concept of reality, but has 'telescoped' into itself matter and life. The latter primitively survive in feeling as sensation and emotion. Mind itself, again, must be conceived as a scale of forms, wherein the simplest form of consciousness develops into higher levels, eventually becoming theoretical reason. The 'criteriological' activities of mind only occur halfway through this process, when we reach the level of desire or propositional thinking. They are free activities, but have as their object the lower levels of consciousness. The direct object of desire is appetite, which, on its

turn, is ultimately evoked by the biological needs of life aimed at survival and reproduction.

Because Collingwood stresses the continuity between the human being as a biological organism and the human being as a thinking subject, Mink sees him as approximating the position of the pragmatists:

Collingwood is an empiricist, but one who belongs to no identifiable school. ... Collingwood is much closer to sophisticated pragmatism than to traditional empiricism. But while he differs from the latter in extending the *lower* levels of the forms of consciousness, he differs from the former in extending the *upper* levels, and recognizing that rational consciousness develops its own criteria and ends out of the matrix of the lowest levels of consciousness rather than constructing increasingly complex techniques of adaptation which remain, through all the variations of intelligence, inveterately biological.<sup>565</sup>

About Mink's assertions I have five things to say, which, if taken in combination, sum up my view about the development of Collingwood's relation to pragmatism after 1933.

First, I agree that Collingwood's attention to appetite and feeling brings him rather close to the pragmatists. As I showed in the first chapter of this book, pragmatism must first and foremost be seen as a theory of thought. James, Schiller and Dewey stress that thinking is an activity of a biological organism that has to survive in a particular environment, and not some more or less divine faculty with a nature of its own. Hence, for James thinking is successful if it guides the organism into action through a coercive feeling of agreeable leading, and for Schiller if it fulfils a psychological-biological desire. In other words, according to James and Schiller, thought is always situated in a psychological context.

Collingwood, we have now seen, is of a similar opinion. Mind has feeling as its 'apanage', and in this feeling we find 'emotional charges' which I have shown to be biological responses to the organism's environment. Through selectively attending to feeling, the organism evokes appetite in its two 'master' forms hunger and love. These correspond to the biological nisus towards survival and reproduction. Appetite, finally, is the object for desire or propositional thinking, which is the first rational form of consciousness for Collingwood, the first to which

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<sup>565</sup> Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic*, p. 111, Mink's emphasis.

the distinction between truth and falsehood properly applies. The law of primitive survivals, moreover, demands that elements of lower levels of consciousness survive in higher forms. In other words, feeling lives on in appetite, and appetite in propositional thinking. And as feeling is the basis for all consciousness, and is always a unique here-and-now, we can without distortion say that for the later Collingwood, just as for the pragmatists, thought is always psychologically situated. Clearly then, for Collingwood as well as for the pragmatists, there is a fundamental continuity between the human being as a biological, and the human being as an enminded creature. Mink is right about this.

But, secondly, there is another way in which Collingwood comes close to pragmatism, one not mentioned by Mink. This is the priority that practical thinking has for Collingwood, and the fact that due to the law of primitive survivals there is always an element of practical thought present in theoretical aspects of consciousness. We have seen that this is true on every level of mind, even in propositional thinking and reason. We reach propositional thinking because our appetite gets frustrated by the not-self. Towards this frustration we have two *practical* attitudes, fear and anger, from which we must choose. This choice takes place on the level of propositional thinking. Once we have made this choice and formed an intention we may, again, face a *practical* problem: it is possible that our intention gets challenged by the doubt of ourselves or others. To alleviate that uncertainty, we try to find other intentions to support the original one, and hence reach the level of reason. The search for intentions  $x,y,z$  to support intention  $a$  is practical reason. But that, on its turn, may give rise to theoretical reason, which is the attempt to ‘make up your mind that...’ rather than ‘making up your mind to...’. For example, if I decide that I want to pursue  $a$  because it is a means to the end  $x$ , I may ask ‘What is the best way to carry out  $a$ ?’. The answer to that question depends on how the world works, and hence I must ‘make up my mind that the world is such and so’. Collingwood is adamant, as we have seen, that all theoretical questions ultimately arise out of practical problems. This may as well have been said by James, Schiller or Dewey.

Gary K. Browning has recently claimed that “the links Mink establishes between Collingwood and these philosophies [e.g. pragmatism] are general rather

than specific”, and that “Mink does not establish that Collingwood’s thought contains a defining and overriding concern with pragmatic ... concerns”.<sup>566</sup> In the above I have provided the ‘specific links’ between Collingwood and the theories of James and Schiller that Browning calls for. Moreover, I have also shown that two pivotal ‘pragmatic concerns’ play a major role in Collingwood’s philosophy of mind as well.

Now to my third point about Mink’s view of the relation between Collingwood and the pragmatists. It appears that Mink does not see Collingwood as *coming closer* to pragmatism nearing the end of the latter’s career. Mink does not explicitly say this, but it is suggested by his assertion that “in general outline it [Collingwood’s theory of mind] is fully continuous with the dialectic of experience in *Speculum Mentis*”.<sup>567</sup> The only exception Mink notes is history, a form of theoretical reason, which seems to have a different role in Collingwood’s later philosophy than it had before. If there is no fundamental change in his thinking about the lower levels of consciousness, then Collingwood’s proximity to the pragmatists in the senses mentioned above must already have been apparent in *Speculum Mentis*, and there is no real development in Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism. With this I do not agree.

In *Speculum Mentis*, the life of the mind begins with imagination. We begin by ‘envisaging alternatives’ for how to conceive reality, followed by checking which alternative is correct. However, imagination does not exist ‘*in vacuo*’, it is always based on ‘facts already in our possession’. But what are these facts? In the end, they are nothing external to mind. ‘Fact is just the mind’s own nature as that stands for the time being’, we have seen Collingwood claim.<sup>568</sup> What the spirit does, Collingwood argues in *Speculum Mentis* and *Libellus de Generatione*, is detect inconsistencies in the way mind currently organizes experience (fact), imagines alternative ways of such organisation, and then picks one of these options as the best one. In *The New Leviathan*, consciousness starts with selective attention, which Collingwood equates with imagination in *The Principles of Art*.<sup>569</sup> Again, this

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<sup>566</sup> Browning, *Rethinking R.G. Collingwood*, p. 10.

<sup>567</sup> Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic*, p. 114.

<sup>568</sup> See p. 148 of this book.

<sup>569</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 233ff.

function of the mind does not exist *in vacuo*. But here the object which selective attention focuses is not fact that is wholly internal to mind. It is feeling, which contains primitive survivals of matter and life in the form of sensations and their emotional charges. And, as we have seen Collingwood argue very clearly against Whitehead, matter and life are orders of being that must be seen as metaphysically separate from and diachronically prior to mind. It is primarily the emotions associated with the biological nisus towards survival and reproduction that are important in placing Collingwood's position close to pragmatism. And it is precisely these emotions that play no role in *Speculum Mentis*. As I formulated it earlier, between *Speculum Mentis* and *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood *widens* the context in which thought is situated by including matter and life as elements in this context, besides the historical circumstances of mind.

The idea that feeling, consisting of sensations and emotions, is much more important in Collingwood's later philosophy is strengthened, I think, by the fact that he now has room for a 'proper psychology', a science that deals with 'sensation, appetite, and the emotions connected with them' rather than with thought. As I showed in the previous section, this estimation of psychology is different from the one in *Speculum Mentis*, where psychology even in its most satisfactory form is a deficient theory of mind rather than feeling. This indicates that for the Collingwood of *Speculum Mentis* feeling is of so little relevance that it could not be the subject-matter of a serious science.<sup>570</sup> This is clearly different in *An Essay on Metaphysics* and other works from that period.

Collingwood's law of primitive survivals also affects the relation between theory and practice. Both in *Speculum Mentis* and in *The New Leviathan*, Collingwood sees a very close connection between the two. But in each case the grounds for this intimate relation are different. In *Speculum Mentis* Collingwood asserts that it is the goal of mind to give full coherence to experience. This aim is theoretical as well as practical: an incoherent philosophy cannot be put into action according to Collingwood. Theory and practice, in other words, are virtually

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<sup>570</sup> It is also noteworthy that the term 'feeling' is mentioned only twice in *Speculum Mentis*, where neither mention has anything to do with the role played by feeling in Collingwood's later philosophy. See: Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, pp. 63 & 263.



identical. This is markedly different in *The New Leviathan*. Here theory and practice are clearly *not* identical. The functions of the mind are arranged along a scale of forms, of which theoretical reason is the highest. It is immediately preceded by practical reason, which means that in every piece of theoretical reason a primitive survival of practical reason is to be found: all theoretical questions arise out of practical problems. Nevertheless, theoretical reason must be seen as an independent level of consciousness. Given Collingwood's method, it differs in kind and degree from other forms of mind. The resulting statement of the relation between theory and practice—that theoretical questions always arise from practical problems—is actually more recognisably pragmatist than the assertion of *Speculum Mentis* that theory and practice are akin because an incoherent philosophy cannot be executed.

For these two reasons—the new role of feeling in Collingwood's later philosophy of mind, and the freshly conceived relation between theory and practice—Mink's implicit suggestion that there is no development in Collingwood's relation to pragmatism is, in my view, incorrect.

I now come to my fourth remark about Mink's view on Collingwood's relation to pragmatism. In Mink's words, Collingwood, despite the similarities discussed above, departs from the pragmatists by 'recognizing that rational consciousness develops its own criteria and ends out of the matrix of the lowest levels of consciousness rather than constructing increasingly complex techniques of adaptation'. A similar opinion is voiced by Giussepina D'Oro: "pragmatists ... denied that thought ... should be guided by principles and norms. In contrast, Collingwood ... defends a conception of philosophy as a normative or criteriological science".<sup>571</sup> With both these statements I am in full agreement if limited to Collingwood's relation to James and Schiller.

In the third chapter of this book I have shown that the early Collingwood rejects pragmatism because the dualism it upholds between thought and something else which determines its success. In *Speculum Mentis*, this is the dualism between thought and desire. According to the pragmatists, Collingwood claims, thinking is always the means to an external end. This implies that, however far back we trace

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<sup>571</sup> D'Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience*, p. 52.

the ends which thought tries to achieve, there must always be some ultimate end which is simply given to it. For thinking is always means to an end, and never an end itself. This ultimate end, then, decides what good thinking is and what bad thinking is. Good thinking is that which leads to the achievement of said end, bad thinking is thinking that leads to failure in the achievement of that end. I have shown that this is a correct interpretation of Schiller's form of pragmatism. For him thought is the means for fulfilling desires, which are the psychological counterparts of biological needs. And these needs are givens. They arise out of the human organism's biological being; thought finds and accepts them instead of conceiving and criticizing them. Ultimately, then, for Schiller thinking is the slave of biology, while for Collingwood thought can only be judged by itself.

This rejection of Schiller's position does not change if we take into account Collingwood's later philosophy. We have seen above that desires now play an important role in Collingwood's theory of mind. But they never do so as biological givens. The latter we find in feeling as the emotional charges on sensations. But feeling is the 'apanage' of mind and not a constituent part of it. It is the object of simple consciousness, and is transformed by selective attention and evocative thinking into appetite. Here it is already clear that biological needs are not given to thought. Before we reach the level of thinking proper, the emotions we experience due to our biological *nisus* towards survival are already manipulated by mind. Selective attention itself decides which emotion to focus on, pushing others towards the penumbral region of feeling. Only the emotions selectively attended to get the chance to evoke feelings of a 'ghost-like quality' to form appetite. And there is always the risk of corrupt consciousness, the faulty disowning of feeling as not our own.

But Collingwood goes further. If the satisfaction of appetite gets blocked by the not-self we reach the level of propositional thinking. And it is only here that desires get formed. Again, we do not simply accept our practical attitudes towards our frustrated appetites. We have to *choose* between fear and anger, and it is us that make the choice, not our biological constitution. Moreover, the decision we end up making might very well be mistaken. Not only could it be the case that in fact we do not at all want that which we think that we want, we might also be wrong in judging that what we want is good. For this, in Collingwood's view is implied in desiring

something, that the action desired is always thought of as a good action. But this judgment can be criticized through practical reason, and we might end up discarding our initial desire in favour of an intention thoroughly thought through from the perspectives of utility, right, and duty.

So as in *Speculum Mentis*, Schiller turns out to be mistaken. Thinking is not the servant of biological needs. These needs may end up, through the transformative work of selective attention and evocative thinking, as the objects of desire, but desire is not necessarily to be followed slavishly. Thought always *judges* desires to be good, instead of simply *accepting* them as good, and it does so through the criteria of utility, right and duty, criteria thought itself has developed through practical reason. What Schiller fails to take into account is the discovery of modern historians that mind is an emergent metaphysical realm, different in kind from matter and life. It is an order of being that follows its own laws and is non-reducible to the order of life. In short, while the later Collingwood agrees that thought is always situated in a psychological context, he still denies that thought is *determined* by that context.

The situation with regard to James is not very different. With him, we have a dualism between thought and feeling, as I have shown in the first and third chapter of this book. How do we know whether a belief is true? If it leads us to future experiences by a coercive feeling of agreeable leading, says James. Feeling dominates thought, the latter simply has to accept the former's dictates. James thus quite literally makes the mistake Collingwood attributes to some psychologists in *An Essay on Metaphysics*: James turns 'thinking' into 'feeling'. With Jamesian pragmatism we see a clear example of psychology encroaching on the terrain of the criteriological sciences. It forgets that in thinking there are always norms at play that determine our train of thought. These norms thought applies to itself: they do not come from outside, not from feeling or any other kind of external source.

Hence, in my view, Mink and D'Oro are right. Thought, for Collingwood, is a criteriological function of the mind. It judges its own activities in accordance with principles that are internal to itself. Pragmatists, by making thinking dependent on the psychological context in which it is situated, deny that it is criteriological in Collingwood's sense. Hence, the two positions are far removed from each other. It must be noted, however, that we have so far predominantly focused on Schiller and

James. Whether Dewey makes the same mistake as his compatriots remains to be seen. This will be one of the main topics of the fifth chapter of this book.

I now turn to my last comment on Mink's evaluation of the relation between Collingwood and pragmatism. Mink, as we have seen, asserts that Collingwood 'differs from traditional empiricism in extending the *lower* levels of the forms of consciousness, and that he differs from pragmatism in extending the *upper* levels'. With this statement I cannot fully agree. In fact, I think that the mistake Collingwood would attribute to 'traditional empiricism' is equally applicable to the pragmatism of James and especially Schiller. Seen from the perspective of *The Principles of Art* and *The New Leviathan*, Schiller, in his account of how thinking works, starts way too high in the scale of forms of consciousness. Thought, for Schiller, is about conceiving postulates that need to be tested in experience for their ability to fulfill desires. They are constructs aimed at finding out how the world works so that we can manipulate reality to our advantage. For Collingwood this is a form of theoretical reason, which is already the highest form of consciousness. But an awful lot is going on before that level is ever reached, starting from feeling, going through selective attention, evocative thinking, appetite, passion, desire, propositional thinking on to practical reason and only then theoretical reason. In all these functions mind is constantly at work, with the risk of making mistakes through corrupt consciousness or the assertion of false propositions at the level of desire, which may be criticized from the perspective of the three forms of practical reason. All of this is neglected by Schiller. He takes for granted the things happening before the occurrence of theoretical reason, accepting them as simply given to thought. But this is a serious blunder from Collingwood's perspective. Intentions, which ideally are desires arrived at through the work of practical reason, survive in theoretical reason as sources of practical problems that need to be solved. But they are themselves already products of thought which for that reason may be true or false. Schiller overlooks this fact, thereby making the same mistake Mink attributes to traditional empiricism: by seeing them as foreign to thought, Schiller does not extend the lower levels of consciousness far enough.

James, we have seen in the first chapter of this book, is not as outspoken as Schiller about the connection between desire and thought. However, in *The*

*Principles of Art* we find a clue that Collingwood suspects him of misunderstanding the lower levels of consciousness as well. This is implied by Collingwood's criticism of the so-called 'James-Lange theory of emotion'. That is the counterintuitive analysis that an emotion such as anger does not *cause* the physical expression of a "flush", but on the contrary is *caused by* it: physiological expression precedes emotional experience.<sup>572</sup> James and the physician Carl Lange (1834-1900)—who arrived at this theory of emotion independently of each other—come to that conclusion, Collingwood thinks, because the only sensum present in this situation is the flush, and an emotion is supposedly always the charge on a sensum. But this last statement is erroneous. Anger is not the emotional charge on a sensation, but the emotional charge on a frustrated appetite, as we have seen above. Anger, in other words, is not an emotion of feeling but an emotion of consciousness. It is only because we are aware, not just of our wanting something, but also of the not-self frustrating the satisfaction of our appetite, that we become angry. The sequence of occurrences is therefore not (1) flush (sensation), (2) anger (emotion), Collingwood holds, but (1) consciousness of our frustrated appetite, (2) anger, (3) flush (physical expression of the emotion).<sup>573</sup>

The above seems like a small technical disagreement on the nature of emotion, and Collingwood does not go on to state any wider consequences of the dispute. But in my view an important difference between him and James is betrayed in this discussion. Collingwood recognizes that feeling is not simply given to thought. In between the two we find the non-criteriological activities of the mind, such as selective attention and evocative thinking, which transform feeling before presenting it to thought. Selective attention creates artificial edges around a certain sensation or emotion, which evokes other feelings of a 'ghost-like quality'. Hence arises appetite and its emotional charges, anger and fear. James, by assigning anger to 'simple', undifferentiated feeling, shows neglect towards the transformative role of consciousness. For him anger is caused by the physiological functions of the body,

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<sup>572</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 232.

<sup>573</sup> Collingwood himself, although mentioning anger as well, works out the example of shame, but, as I have myself hitherto focused on fear and anger, I translate Collingwood's example to the case of anger. See: Idem.

while for Collingwood it arises only after the mind decidedly mutates the purely biological responses to the environment. Again, as in the case of Schiller, it appears that the pragmatists do not extend the lower forms of consciousness far enough. Mind is already present in the formation of anger for Collingwood while that is not the case for James. Mink's statement about Collingwood's ostensibly different relationships to traditional empiricism and pragmatism, therefore, must be corrected.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sketched the development of Collingwood's philosophy from *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933) to *The New Leviathan* (1942) with the goal of establishing his relation to pragmatism in the last phase of his career. Where the third chapter of this book was predominantly historical in character, aimed at the elucidation of arguments actually given by Collingwood against pragmatism, the attention now has shifted towards philosophical interpretation. In the 1930s and early 1940s Collingwood no longer explicitly relates himself to the pragmatists, with the exception of a relatively minor reference to James' psychological theory of emotion. The purpose of this chapter has been, then, to establish what Collingwood *would* have thought of pragmatism given his own philosophical position and his interpretation of pragmatism as described in the third chapter of this book.

On the basis of all of Collingwood's later works lies his philosophical method. According to this method, philosophy is aimed at the elucidation of experience, at discovering and making intelligible the philosophical concepts immanent in that experience. Hence, in philosophy we never discover anything really new, we only come to know better something which we in some sense already knew. This is in line with Collingwood's historical situationism as we have seen him develop it in the *Libellus de Generatione* and *Speculum Mentis*. Thought, for Collingwood, is not aimed at some transcendental reality, but at the specific phase reached in the historical development of experience.

Philosophical concepts, according to Collingwood, have the peculiar feature that they are organized along a scale of forms. This scale runs from lower to higher, where the highest form embodies the concept to which it belongs to a fuller extent

than the ones below it. All forms of a philosophical concept differ in kind and degree, and are related by distinction and opposition. Nevertheless, a form that is higher on the scale has telescoped in itself aspects of its predecessors. This principle Collingwood later calls the law of primitive survivals. Schiller reviewed *An Essay on Philosophical Method* and is enthusiastic about it. Hence, the conclusions reached by Collingwood cannot be discarded by Schiller on mere methodological grounds.

The first subject to which Collingwood applied his method is cosmology. In the 'Notes toward a Metaphysic' and *The Idea of Nature*, he attempts to make intelligible the experience of contemporary scientists and historians, whose work indicates that mind has evolved out of mindless life, and life out of lifeless matter. What cosmology do we need in order to make sense of this idea? A process metaphysics, Collingwood claims, wherein matter, life and mind are emergent species of the philosophical concept 'reality'. Hence, they are different from each other in kind and degree, and related by distinction and opposition. Mind is the highest form in the scale, as it embodies the essence of reality to the highest degree. It does so by its ability of turning the environment into itself without destroying it, through sensation and knowing. However, mind has matter and life telescoped into itself: matter and life primitively survive into and alongside mind.

These cosmological ideas have crucial ramifications for Collingwood's philosophy of mind. Mind, again, is a philosophical concept that is arranged along a scale of forms. As its apanage it has feeling, which contains primitive survivals of matter and life in the form of sensations of the environment and emotional charges on those sensations. The constituent parts of mind develop themselves exclusively out of feeling. In other words, mind is always psychologically situated. Through selective attention a particular sensation or emotion is put in the focus of consciousness, which evokes other feelings not yet present. Hence arises appetite with, when frustrated, its own emotional charges of fear and anger. When we have to choose between these two practical attitudes towards our frustrated appetite, we reach the level of propositional thinking by asserting 'I want *a* (and not *b*)'. If this assertion gets challenged we try to further support it by finding other propositions which are related to our initial judgment as reasons for it. This is practical reason. Once we have definitively answered the question 'What do I want, *a* or *b*?' there

might arise further, theoretical questions. In our effort to pursue *a*, we need to find out how the world works. Practical thinking occurs first and hence, through the law of primitive survivals, there is always an element of practical reason present in theoretical reason: every theoretical question arises out of a practical problem which can ultimately be traced back to the level of feeling, according to Collingwood. Nevertheless, all forms of thinking are criteriological. They can be good or bad ways of thinking, and the criteria by which this must be evaluated are developed within thought itself and not by something external to it.

What does all of this mean for Collingwood's relation to the pragmatists? As I have discussed in the first chapter of this book, pragmatism must first and foremost be seen as a theory of thought. For James, Schiller and Dewey, thinking is only one function by means of which the biological organism tries to solve specific problems standing in the way of wellbeing. According to Mink, because of Collingwood's attention to feeling and appetite in his later philosophy, he is closer to a 'sophisticated pragmatism' than to 'traditional empiricism'. I agreed with this, formulating this point by saying that for Collingwood as well as the pragmatists thought is always psychologically situated. I further added that the proximity between Collingwood and the pragmatists is even more pronounced if we consider the fact that for Collingwood in all forms of theoretical reason we find a primitive survival of practical thinking. I also agreed with Mink, and with D'Oro as well, that Collingwood must be seen as decidedly non-pragmatist if we focus on the criteria by which thought is to be evaluated. For Collingwood, thought develops its own norms, while for Schiller and James beliefs are to be judged by desire and feeling respectively. In other words, though situated in a psychological context, thought is never *determined* by that context in Collingwood's view, but only by itself.

I also disagreed with some important aspects of Mink's interpretation of Collingwood's relation to the pragmatists. First, he implicitly suggests that there has been no development in this relation between *Speculum Mentis* and *The New Leviathan*. This is not correct. While for the early Collingwood the primitive survivals of matter and life in mind play no role at all, they are very prominent for the later Collingwood. And it are precisely these primitive survivals that place him in close proximity to pragmatism. The later Collingwood, in other words, widens the



context in which thought is situated by including elements that are crucial for the pragmatists as well. Besides that, the all-important connection between theory and practice is conceived differently in *The New Leviathan* as in *Speculum Mentis*, where the relation as formulated in the former work is much more like what the pragmatists say that it is. Collingwood, in short, must be said to be *coming* closer to pragmatism in the last phase of his career.

Also, Mink asserts that while Collingwood differs from ‘traditional empiricism’ by extending forms of consciousness downwards, he differs from pragmatism by extending forms of consciousness upwards. This estimation is incomplete. Especially Schiller, just like traditional empiricists supposedly do, starts much too high in the scale of forms of consciousness. What he calls ‘thought’ is what Collingwood terms ‘theoretical reason’, and for the latter a lot of thinking is already going on before that level is ever reached. With James the situation is less clear, but Collingwood’s criticism of the James-Lange theory of emotion suggests that James also neglects the lower levels of consciousness.

All of my conclusions come with the caveat that hitherto I have only spoken of Collingwood’s relation to James and Schiller. This means that his philosophical position *vis-à-vis* that of Dewey still needs to be determined. This is the objective for the next chapter of this book.

## V. Historical situationism further elaborated: Collingwood and Dewey

### Introduction

In the first chapter of this book, I have argued that James's version of pragmatism is vulnerable to a fundamental criticism by the Oxford realist Joseph. The latter shows that James' theory of truth is not normative, as it relies on given feelings, while what we are looking for in an account of truth is precisely that it tells us what we *ought* to believe. We have also seen that Bradley launches a very similar attack against Schiller. Although Schiller's theory of truth depends not on feeling but desire, the effect is much the same in the eyes of Bradley. Just as feeling, desire is a biological and psychological fact that therefore cannot be criticized. As thought, for Schiller, is nothing more than a tool for the fulfilment of desire, this means that thought can be criticized on its ability to reach its end, but that end itself must necessarily be left unscathed and accepted as given. I summarized this pragmatist position by saying that for James and Schiller thought is *psychologically* situated. A belief's truth-value is determined by the psychological elements of its context, i.e. feeling (James) or desire (Schiller).

It has become clear in the previous three chapters of this book, that Joseph's and Bradley's criticisms of psychological situationism are echoed in the works of the Italian idealists and Collingwood. For the latter, thought is criteriological. In its historical development, thinking *itself* produces the norms to which it subscribes, and it is never determined by something external to it, such as feeling or desire. So although thought *functions* in a specific historical and even psychological context, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it is never *determined* by it. This position I termed *historical* situationism. From this perspective, then, the philosophy of Collingwood on the one hand and the pragmatisms of James and Schiller on the other are ultimately incompatible.

However, I ended the first two chapters of this book by reaching an agnostic conclusion regarding the merits of Dewey's form of pragmatism. I argued that, on the basis of the articles and books that played a role in the British and Italian discussions on pragmatism in the early 1900s, it cannot be conclusively shown how

far Dewey is susceptible to the arguments of Joseph and Bradley. By extension, as I stipulated in the previous chapters of this book, it is also unclear whether Dewey's philosophy would have been equally unsatisfactory to Collingwood as the positions of James and Schiller.<sup>574</sup> The present chapter is therefore still aimed at answering the question of the previous one: 'Given Collingwood's later position and his interpretation of pragmatism as discussed in the third chapter of this book, what *would* he have thought of pragmatism towards the end of his career?' However, this time I will focus on Dewey rather than James and Schiller.

The argument will be based on three of Dewey's later works: *Experience and Nature* (1925/1929 second edition), *Logic: A Theory of Inquiry* (1938) and *Theory of Valuation* (1939). Together, these three books—which are central to Dewey's metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, respectively—throw sufficient light on the issues pertinent to the later Collingwood's relation to pragmatism so that the agnostic conclusion of the first chapter of this book can be turned into a more definitive one. However, this selection of sources must of necessity remain somewhat arbitrary. Dewey was an enormously prolific writer, and it is impossible to take all of his work into account within the confines of the present book. The conclusions reached in this chapter are therefore relatively tentative and must also be seen as an invitation for further research.

At any rate, what follows will at least provide more insight into Collingwood's specific form of historical situationism. As I conclude in the first section, Dewey, from Collingwood's perspective, moves beyond the psychological situationism of both James and Schiller. This means that a more in depth look at Collingwood's later philosophy is needed than has hitherto been provided to evaluate his relation to Dewey. In particular, I will describe in detail the relevant contents of Collingwood's

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<sup>574</sup> Rubinoff suggests on the basis of Dewey's 1902 article 'The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality', that "Collingwood's thought bears a remarkable resemblance to the much earlier views of John Dewey". See: Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics*, p. 383n1.

However, as that article played no role in the British or Italian idealist reception of pragmatism during the early 1900s, I will not go into this 'remarkable resemblance' in the present book.

Cf. John Dewey, 'The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality: I. It's Scientific Necessity', in: *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 11 (1902), pp. 107-24.

moral philosophy (section 2), philosophy of history (section 3) and theory of absolute presuppositions (section 4). In section 5, I draw together the material of the previous four and reflect on the similarities and dissimilarities between Collingwood's philosophy and that of Dewey.

## 1. Collingwood and Dewey's mature philosophy

In the previous chapter we have seen that, according to the later Collingwood, the human mind develops along the following lines. It starts in an apanage of feeling, which is made up of sensations and emotions. Through selective attention a part of the field of feeling is put in the centre of consciousness. The selectively attended to part evokes other feelings of a 'ghost like quality' which leads the mind to experience appetite. If the satisfaction of appetite is frustrated, we discover the not-self, towards which two emotional responses are possible: fear and anger. It is here that conscious thought, in the form of propositional thinking, first arises. In the face of its frustrated appetite, mind must choose how to respond, fearfully or angrily, which results in a proposition of the form 'I want *a* (and not *b*)'. This Collingwood terms a desire. One characteristic of propositions is that they can be true or false, and hence it is possible to criticize desires from the perspective of practical reason in its three moments of utility, right and duty. Practical reason, on its turn, may lead to theoretical reason. For example, if mind decides that 'I want *a* because it is the means to the desired end *x*', this might raise the theoretical question, 'What is the way to achieve *a* (given the laws of nature, the historical context I am currently in, and so on)?'.

All the forms of consciousness, from appetite to theoretical reason, are species of the philosophical concept of mind. Due to the law of primitive survivals, theoretical thinking, as the highest form of consciousness, has all the lower forms 'telescoped' into itself; in every act of theoretical thought a form of practical thinking primitively survives, whereas in all practical thinking a form of propositional thinking survives, and so on. On the other hand, all forms of consciousness are different in kind and degree, and related by distinction and opposition. Hence, they are all autonomous with regard to forms lower in the scale. It follows that practical and theoretical reason, as the highest embodiments of the concept of mind, produce their own norms. They deal with judgments that arise from the level of propositional

thinking, but how they handle these judgments depends on the principles that underly practical and theoretical reason themselves. Thus reason never depends on anything but itself. How do Dewey's views compare to this account of mind and thought?

The first thing to be noted is that the starting-point for thought is quite similar in the case of both Dewey and Collingwood. For the latter, as we have seen, it follows when the smooth transition from appetite to the satisfaction of appetite is blocked. In such a case the mind becomes aware of the not-self and must decide how to deal with it, which sets in motion the whole process from propositional thinking to theoretical reason. For Dewey as well thought begins as the result of what he calls an "indeterminate situation".<sup>575</sup>

A situation is indeterminate when there is a discrepancy between the elements of which it is constituted; when things are not "going smoothly" because there is "something lacking, wanting".<sup>576</sup> Dewey names the example of hunger, which "is a manifestation of a state of imbalance between organic and environmental factors in that integration which is life".<sup>577</sup> In this case, then, we have a situation—life—wherein there is a tension between two of its constituent parts, the organism and its environment: the environment does not provide in the way of food what the organism needs. The situation, in short, is indeterminate.

Thinking, then, manifested in action, is one way in which to render the situation secure again, to re-integrate those of its elements that were in tension with one another before. Thinking, or cognitive inquiry<sup>578</sup>, is the attempt to devise and carry out a plan to remedy the problems inherent in the situation as it stands. This, it can be observed, is in line with the biological background of Dewey's thinking as discussed in the first chapter of this book. As Tom Burke puts it: "Inquiry ... should

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<sup>575</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt 1938), p. iii.

<sup>576</sup> John Dewey, *Theory of Valuation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1939), p. 33.

<sup>577</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, p. 27.

<sup>578</sup> As Tom Burke, explains, inquiry is a technical notion for Dewey, which "should apply to a wide range of organism/environment systems at virtually any level of evolutionary complexity". Hence, in this sense, an animal searching for food is also performing an inquiry. See: Tom Burke, *Dewey's New Logic: A Reply to Russell* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1998).

In the following, however, I am predominantly concerned with inquiry that takes place at the level of what Collingwood calls 'mind'.

be viewed as an evolutionary variation on what originally appears as an innate impulse of organism/environment systems to transform situations so as to counteract ... instabilities.”<sup>579</sup>

Dewey describes inquiry as follows in his own *Logic*: it “grows out of an earlier state of settled adjustment, which, because of disturbance, is indeterminate or problematic ... and then passes into inquiry proper, (corresponding to the searching and exploring activities of an organism)...”<sup>580</sup> In the case of hunger, this might mean the deliberate search for food in parts of the environment that were not directly available to the organism, such as under the ground or behind the hill that is presently blocking the organism’s sight. It is *only* in this “struggle”<sup>581</sup> of re-integrating the parts of an unsettled situation that thinking arises, as Dewey makes clear in *Experience and Nature*:

There is the individual that belongs in a continuous system of connected events which reinforce its activities and which form a world in which it is at home, consistently at one with its own preferences, satisfying its requirements. Such an individual is in its world as a member, extending as far as the moving equilibrium of which it is a part lends support. It is a natural end, not as an abrupt and immediate termination but as a fulfillment. Then there is the individual that finds a gap between its distinctive bias and the operations of the things through which alone its need can be satisfied; it is broken off, discrete, because it is at odds with its surroundings. It either surrenders, conforms, and for the sake of peace becomes a parasitical subordinate, indulges in egotistical solitude; *or its activities set out to remake conditions in accord with desire. In the latter process, intelligence is born...*<sup>582</sup>

This analysis is in line with Collingwood’s discussion of the transition from appetite to propositional thinking and beyond. As long as appetite is satisfied more or less as soon as it arises, mind is able to continuously function below the level of conscious thinking. The latter only comes about when mind has to choose how to deal with its frustrated appetite, fearfully or angrily, just as for Dewey cognitive inquiry only starts after a determinate situation has become unsettled. For Collingwood, as for Dewey, the distinction between subject and object, or self and not-self, or organism and environment, is recognized when the activities of the mind are frustrated by the

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<sup>579</sup> Burke, *Dewey’s New Logic*, p. 22.

<sup>580</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, p. 34.

<sup>581</sup> Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, p. 33.

<sup>582</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*. Second edition [1929]. (New York: Dover 1958), p. 245, my emphasis.

environment. Before such a problematic situation occurs, subject and object are two integrated elements of one over-arching life-process. And on this point Collingwood is in agreement.

And the agreement is more extensive. For Collingwood, again, theoretical reason answers questions that arise from the plane of practical thinking. To repeat the example I gave above, if mind decides that ‘I want *a* because it is the means to the desired end *x*’, this might raise the theoretical question, ‘What is the way to achieve *a* (given the laws of nature, the historical context I am currently in, and so on)?’ In other words, theoretical thought tries to understand the situation in which the agent has to act. Dewey has something similar in mind. The “situations which evoke deliberation”, he says, “are themselves indeterminate with respect to what might and should be done. They require that *something* should be done. But *what* action is to be taken is just the thing in question”.<sup>583</sup> Coming back to the example of hunger, I might have propositional knowledge that my stomach is empty, that the environment does not directly provide the resources to replenish myself, and that I want to do something about it rather than wait for some food to arrive at the scene. In the terms of Collingwood, I have formed the desire of acting ‘angrily’ towards the not-self that is blocking the satisfaction of my appetite. But all of this does not in any sense tell me in what way I should go about fulfilling my desire. This will depend on where and how I might normally find food that is not directly available to me, and this is theoretical knowledge for Collingwood as well as for Dewey. As the latter puts it: “The intellectual question is what sort of action the *situation* demands in order that it may receive a satisfactory objective reconstruction”.<sup>584</sup> In other words, Collingwood and Dewey could agree that the question ‘How should I act in this situation so that I and my environment are re-integrated and the problem of hunger that has arisen is resolved?’ is a typical one for theoretical thinking to answer.

But now a fundamental issue must be raised. For it might be pointed out that the comparison between Collingwood’s and Dewey’s views has hitherto not been fine-grained enough. In my example of hunger, we jump too quickly from what, in Collingwood’s terminology is called a desire to the employment of theoretical reason.

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<sup>583</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, p. 261, Dewey’s emphasis.

<sup>584</sup> Idem, Dewey’s emphasis.

As most persons will probably recognize from their own experience, it is all too easy to proceed from thinking that 'I am hungry and want something to eat' to immediately following that up by finding out what food I have in the fridge. But crucially, for Collingwood, there is present, at least ideally speaking, an intermediate activity of mind, namely practical reason, the effort to subject my desires to criticism before acting upon them. This is possible because a desire, for Collingwood, is a proposition and is therefore capable of being true or false. Schiller's denial of this latter view was, in the previous chapter of this book, my main reason for regarding his pragmatism and Collingwood's philosophical position as being incompatible. For Schiller, desires are psychological and ultimately biological givens incapable of being criticized. Thought, on the other hand, is the means towards the fulfilment of such desires. This makes thought dependent on biology and psychology: a proposition is true insofar as it fulfills a desire, and whether a desire is fulfilled is a question of psychological fact. Thinking, in short, is determined by the psychological situation in which it functions. For Collingwood, by contrast, desires fall within the sphere of thought and may be judged by the principles and standards that thinking has devised in its own historical development. Desires belong to the criteriological part of mind rather than to the non-criteriological part, as in the case of Schiller. From how I have thus far presented Dewey's position, one might draw the conclusion that his view is more akin to that of Schiller than that of Collingwood. If correct, this means that Dewey's pragmatism would have been equally detrimental to Collingwood than Schiller's humanism is.

But this estimation would not be correct. For Dewey, just as for Collingwood, desires are propositional states occurring between an indeterminate situation (for Collingwood, a frustrated appetite) and inquiry (for Collingwood, reason) and may be judged 'adequate' or 'inadequate'. Hence they are not simply given, biologically or otherwise.<sup>585</sup> This is the case precisely because desires respond to a problematic situation that was determinate before. As we have seen, in a settled situation there is an integration between subject and object, the two are merely elements in one overarching, well-functioning whole. When a lack is introduced these elements are

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<sup>585</sup> Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 16-7.



thrown off balance and a “want” arises, a problem that calls for the re-integration of the previously settled situation.<sup>586</sup> A desire, then, is always aimed at resolving such a specific want and this means that it refers to existential situations: it is a *judgment* or *proposition* diagnosing a problematic situation to be such and such and that it will be resolved by doing so and so. As Dewey puts it: “The content and object of desires are seen to depend upon the particular context in which they arise, a matter that in turn depends upon the antecedent state of both personal activity and of surrounding conditions”.<sup>587</sup> It is the fact that desires refer to complete situations, involving both subjective *and* objective factors, that distinguishes them from “mere wish and fantasy”.<sup>588</sup> In contrast to Schiller, Dewey denies an inflexible connection between desires and the biological nature of the organism involved. As the former “include foreseen consequences along with” other “ideas”, when “valuation is identified with the activity of desire or interest, its identification with vital impulse is denied.”<sup>589</sup> As a result, Dewey’s view opens the door to the possibility of desires being criticized rather than being simply accepted:

Since the situation is open to observation, and since the consequences of effort-behavior as observed determine the adaptation, the adequacy of a given desire can be stated in propositions. The propositions are capable of empirical test because the connection that exists between a given desire and the conditions with reference to which it functions are ascertained by means of these observations.<sup>590</sup>

In other words, a desire involves judgments about the problematic situation in which an organism finds itself and instructions on what, given this diagnosis, must be done to resolve it. These judgments and instructions are capable of being translated into hypotheses that may be confirmed or disproved. Hence, desires may turn out to be false.

And there is a second way in which desires, according to Dewey, can be criticized. He distinguishes between desire and what he calls “end-in-view”.<sup>591</sup> Whereas the former is the beginning of inquiry, the latter is its terminal point, the

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<sup>586</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>587</sup> Idem.

<sup>588</sup> Idem.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., p. 17. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

projected end *towards which* inquiry is conducted. The word ‘end’ here, then, must be taken, according to Dewey, in its double meaning of goal and endpoint. In order to resolve the indeterminate situation that stands at the basis of inquiry, we conceive of a new determinate situation in which current problems are resolved. To bring about this new situation actions must be undertaken. But such actions have additional consequences besides procuring the desired end, and these consequences become clear in the course of inquiry. In other words, our conception of the end-in-view becomes more complete during the process of reflection. If this happens, we may come to the conclusion that the desire with which we started, all things considered, turns out to become an end-in-view that after all we cannot accept. The desired becomes undesirable and thus must be rejected. “Ends-in-view” are, Dewey thinks, “things viewed *after deliberation* as worthy of attainment and as evocative of effort.”<sup>592</sup> To give one of his examples: “If a person moved by an experience of intense cold, which is highly objectionable, should momentarily judge it worth while to get warm by burning his house down, all that saves him from an act determined by a ‘compulsion neurosis’ is the intellectual realization of what other consequences would ensue with the loss of his house”.<sup>593</sup>

I conclude, then, that on these points Dewey cannot be rejected by Collingwood along the same lines as Schiller. For all three of them thought, inquiry or reason is situated in a context of desire. For Schiller, desire is a biological and psychological given that must simply be accepted as the end toward the fulfillment of which thought is the means. This is anathema to Collingwood, who is adamant that desire should first be criticized from the perspective of practical reason before it becomes a factor in theoretical thought.<sup>594</sup> And we now see that the same is true for Dewey. Desires can be translated into propositions about an indeterminate state of affairs and its resolution. Such propositions can be mistaken. Moreover, the actions that are needed for carrying out desires may, inquiry could show, have unacceptable additional consequences. If so, those desires must be rejected. In other words,

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<sup>592</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 104, my emphasis. Cf. Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>593</sup> Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, p. 44.

<sup>594</sup> See pp. 208-10 of this book.

desires, for Dewey, are not necessarily givens for thought, but starting-points that can be modified in the course of deliberation. This is contrary to what Schiller holds, but in line with Collingwood's view. The following quote from Dewey, by way of illustration, might have come directly from one of Collingwood's works:

If, however, the question is raised whether the subject-matter is *worthy* of being directly enjoyed; if, that is, the question is raised whether as to the existence of adequate grounds for the enjoyment, than there is a problematic situation involving inquiry and judgment. On such occasions *to value* means to weigh, appraise, estimate: to *evaluate*—a distinctly intellectual operation. Reasons and grounds one way and the other have to be sought for and formulated. ... we evaluate only when a value, in the sense of material enjoyed, has become problematic.<sup>595</sup>

The process that Dewey describes from valuing—or desiring—, via the raising of questions about values, to the finding of reasons for their adequacy, corresponds exactly to Collingwood's proposed sequence of desire, doubt and practical reason as stated in *The New Leviathan*.<sup>596</sup>

I end this section by fleshing out Dewey's views on what in Collingwood's terminology is called practical and theoretical reason. Practical reason is about determining *why* some desire or intention should or should not be executed, theoretical reason about *why* to believe or not believe a proposition *x* about a situation *y*. The question here is: on what grounds does Dewey think that desire may be criticized, and what are the consequences of this view for his account of inquiry? In the next sections of this chapter I will compare in detail the answer to that question with Collingwood's ideas on the matter.

According to Dewey,

ends are appraised in the same evaluations in which things as means are weighed. For example, an end suggests itself. But, when things are weighed as means toward that end, it is found that it will take too much time or too great an expenditure of energy to achieve it, or that, if it were attained, it would bring with it certain inconveniences and the promise of future troubles. It is then appraised and rejected as a 'bad' end.<sup>597</sup>

In other words, we start from an indeterminate situation that for some reason we think can be resolved in a certain way. That is to say, we estimate that by undertaking

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<sup>595</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, p. 172, Dewey's emphases.

<sup>596</sup> See pp. 194-6 of this book.

<sup>597</sup> Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 23-4.

this or that action we will be able to create a new situation that is determinate; in which the problematic features of our starting point are eradicated. This projection is our 'end-in-view'. But the end to be achieved will not be the only consequence of our action. It will also result in depletion of energy and cost of time, and have side effects that are not immediately apparent. In short, the result will be a reconstructed *complete* situation rather than some fairly limited endpoint. It is the function of "judgments of practice", then, to decide "what to do on the basis of estimated consequences".<sup>598</sup> In the course of inquiry we have to find out what is the future cost that will be cojoined with pursuing the desire we currently have and reach a conclusion about whether it is, in fact, worthy of being pursued. In other words, observation "of results obtained, of *actual* consequences in their agreement with and differences from ends anticipated or held in view, thus provides the conditions by which desires and interests (and hence valuations) are matured and tested".<sup>599</sup>

These convictions with regard to practical thought have a profound influence on Dewey's analysis of scientific inquiry, or theoretical reason in Collingwood's terms. If thought in general is aimed at resolving indeterminate situations, if this resolution is accomplished through the carrying out of ends-in-view, and if the adequateness of these ends-in-view is established by looking at what consequences they produce, then the task of inquiry is to furnish knowledge about what consequences can be expected of a given action. This knowledge, for Dewey, consists of "laws, relations ... regularities" that enable us to predict what is going to happen.<sup>600</sup> He distinguishes between the "matter" and "form" of experience, the matter being individual events as they happen, the form consisting of the causal relations existing between such events.<sup>601</sup> It is matter, also termed "primary experience", that we really care about, and the ends of practical thinking belong to this category.<sup>602</sup> (Remember that Dewey is here exploiting the dual meaning of the word 'end', being 'goal' and also 'the terminal close of a process', i.e. a completed situation.) Matter in this sense consists of events that we experience as either

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<sup>598</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, p. 174.

<sup>599</sup> Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, p. 31.

<sup>600</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 146.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

“enjoyments” or “sufferings”: the former we are determined to seek out, the latter we strive to avoid.<sup>603</sup> Form, on the other hand, is the “object of knowledge”.<sup>604</sup> It is the account of the relations that we discover to exist between events, which turns the latter into causes and effects rather than haphazard occurrences. By observing the form of experience, we find out how one event—say, an action—leads to another—some situation—, and this gives us the power to “control” the enjoyable or reprehensible matter of experience.<sup>605</sup> All “the intelligent activities of man”, Dewey says, “have for their task the conversion of causal bonds, relations of succession, into a connection of means-consequence”.<sup>606</sup> This knowledge, then, is what enables a man “to foresee probable consequences of his prospective activities and to direct his conduct accordingly”.<sup>607</sup>

Thus it is the task of inquiry to discover regularities in agreement with which we can plan our actions. The actual discovery of any such regularity is also, of course, an ‘enjoyable’ event occurring in primary experience, and must hence, if in any way possible, be itself controlled by knowledge of laws. In other words, we require a meta-inquiry, logic, to discover general ways in which inquiry is successfully conducted. The question logic asks is, what rules should we abide to if we want our theoretical thinking to make predictions that are accurate, or “warranted assertions” in Dewey’s terminology?<sup>608</sup> The answer to this query is not found by reasoning about some eternal, transcendental realm of logical objects, as some ancient Greek thinkers thought, but by looking at the history of science, according to Dewey.<sup>609</sup> Logic looks at what general rules of thinking, or “logical forms” different sorts of inquiry have actually employed, and whether their results bear out the validity of these forms.<sup>610</sup> Logical principles, in other words, are not imposed on inquiry from the outside, but arise from the process of thinking itself. It is the task of logic, then, to catalogue these principles and inquire in how far they have been valid. In Dewey’s words:

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p. 424.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., p. 117. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>607</sup> Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>608</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, p. 4.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., p. 13. Cf. Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, p. 118.

The theory, in summary form, is that all logical forms (with their characteristic properties) arise within the operation of inquiry and are concerned with control of inquiry so that it may yield warranted assertions. This conception implies much more than that logical forms are disclosed or come to light when we reflect upon processes of inquiry that are in use. Of course it means that; but it also means that the forms *originate* in operations of inquiry. To employ a convenient expression, it means that while inquiry into inquiry is the *causa cognoscendi* of logical forms, primary inquiry is itself *causa essendi* of the forms which inquiry into inquiry discloses.<sup>611</sup>

Besides that such a view on logical forms precludes the dependence of thought on some transcendent collection of logical laws, it also implicitly denies subservience to phenomena such as feeling and desire. The principles of thought discovered by logic arise within the historical course of inquiry itself, and are tested for their capability of producing warranted assertions, which is the ostensible ideal of inquiry. Neither for their existence nor their validity, in other words, do logical forms depend on something external to inquiry, be it eternal laws, feeling or desire. In my terminology, for Dewey, the course of thought is never determined by a transcendent reality, nor by the psychological situation in which it develops.

In this way, Dewey tackles the other major Collingwoodian objection against James' and Schiller's forms of pragmatism. For Collingwood, thought is criteriological; it submits to norms and principles that it itself develops in its historical development. For James, whether something is true or false depends on feeling, for Schiller on desire. This means that, from Collingwood's perspective, they see thought as being non-criteriological and hence their positions are unacceptable. For Dewey this is clearly different. He sees the logical forms that 'control' thinking as arising from inquiry itself. Moreover, they are not justified by feeling or desire, but by their proven capability of helping inquiry achieve warranted assertions. Thus, as before in the case of desire, Dewey, from Collingwood's point of view, moves beyond the pragmatisms of James and Schiller. I therefore tentatively agree with Helgeby that "Collingwood's theory [of logic] has affinities with that of John Dewey", but will get back to this point in the fifth section of this chapter.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>612</sup> Helgeby, *Action as History*, p. 88.

According to Dewey, inquiry, both in its primary guise of looking for generalizations about the world and as the search for logical principles, is about the 'form' of experience, as we have seen above. But what we are really interested in is controlling the 'matter' of experience. It is on this point that sciences such as history and anthropology come in. It is all well and good that inquiry comes up with accounts of universal laws on the basis of which predictions can be made, but if these predictions fail to help controlling primary experience then they are useless. History and anthropology, then, although dealing with individual occurrences and hence not productive of generalities themselves, are extremely important ways of thinking for Dewey. According to him, laws as inquiry discovers them are no more than 'instrumentalities' or 'means' that must be brought to bear on primary experience in order to have any concrete being. History and anthropology precisely show how that happens: they are concerned "with not just instrumentalities but instrumentalities at work in effecting modifications of existence..."<sup>613</sup> In this sense, one could even say that "history and anthropology are scientific in a sense in which bodies of information that stop short with general formulae are not".<sup>614</sup> By showing how laws manifest themselves in primary experience, historical writing becomes practically relevant: it is an event of its own that brings forth further consequences. For example, the

Marxian conception of the part played in the past by forces of production in determining property relations and of the role of class struggles in social life has itself, through the activities it set up, accelerated the power of forces of production to determine future social relations, and has increased the significance of class struggles.<sup>615</sup>

Hence, according to Dewey, "[i]ntelligent understanding of past history is to some extent a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future".<sup>616</sup>

To sum up, in this section I have shown that Collingwood's relation to pragmatism acquires a new form as we move from a comparison between him and Schiller to a juxtaposition of him and Dewey. All three of them hold that thinking is

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<sup>613</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 161.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>615</sup> Dewey, *Logic*, pp. 237.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

situated in a context in which desire plays an important role. However, Schiller thinks that desire is a biological and psychological given, whereas both Collingwood and Dewey are adamant that it can and must be criticized by reason. For Dewey, such criticism takes the shape of seeing to what possibly objectionable consequences fulfilling a certain desire would lead. Inquiry supports this activity by detecting the general relations that hold primary experience together, and hence making the occurrence of consequences predictable. How the assessment of desire precisely works for Collingwood we have yet to see. Nevertheless, we can already conclude that whereas for Schiller the worth of beliefs is *determined* by their psychological context, this is not the case for Collingwood *and* Dewey. Thus while we could answer with a somewhat qualified ‘no’ the question ‘was Collingwood a kind of pragmatist?’ on the basis of the previous chapters of this book, that response is more doubtful now.

To get a completer picture of Collingwood’s relation to pragmatism in general and Dewey in particular, I now turn to a detailed comparison of their respective accounts of practical and theoretical thinking, thus taking an in-depth look at how, for Collingwood, thought is precisely situated in a historical context.

## 2. Collingwood’s later moral philosophy

In the fourth chapter of this book, I have indicated the place of practical reason in Collingwood’s philosophy of mind. After having formed a desire that ‘I want *a* (and not *b*)’ by choosing between possible responses to some frustrated appetite, that desire can be challenged by myself or others. Having thus discovered the fallibility of my thinking, I resort to reason to find grounds for my desire in order “to alleviate the stress caused me by the untrustworthiness of my knowledge”.<sup>617</sup> Practical reason, then, is the attempt of “making up your mind *to*” do *x* because of *y*.<sup>618</sup> It also has already become clear that, according to Collingwood, the question ‘Why do I do *x*?’ can be answered in three ways: in terms of utility, in terms of right and in terms of duty. In this section I will spell out these forms of practical reason and the relations between them.

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<sup>617</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 100.

<sup>618</sup> Idem, Collingwood’s emphasis.



The first thing to be noted is that utility, right and duty must again be conceptualized from the perspective of Collingwood's philosophical methodology. That is to say, they are three species of the philosophical concept of goodness.<sup>619</sup> This means, first, that utility, right and duty differ from each other in kind and degree and are related by distinction and opposition. On the one hand they realize the concept of goodness in their own specific way and are hence distinct from each other. On the other hand, they realize the concept of goodness to differing degrees and are thus also opposed to each other. Second, following Collingwood's method, we must also conclude that utility, right and duty are not mutually exclusive. Philosophical concepts overlap and so one action can be described in terms of usefulness, regularity *and* duty. Moreover, the highest species of the concept of goodness in the scale has the lower forms 'telescoped' into itself.

So, what is goodness for Collingwood? In other words, what is the criterion that we use to refer the species of the concept of the good to their place in the scale? The answer to these questions we have already encountered in the previous chapter of this book: "Good", Collingwood says in *The New Leviathan*, "means 'desired'".<sup>620</sup> That is to say, the moment we choose *x* over *z* as the desired course of action, we invest *x* with goodness and *z* with badness. As Collingwood puts it in his 1940 moral philosophy lectures 'Goodness, Rightness, Utility':

The proposition 'x is good' is equivalent to 'x is chosen'. The proposition 'I think x is good' is equivalent to 'I choose x'. It presupposes that I am in a situation where I have alternative possible actions before me, or more precisely that I conceive alternative actions as possible to me, and it asserts that I conceive myself as choosing one of the possible alternatives and rejecting the other or others.<sup>621</sup>

To be 'good', then, means to be chosen. This idea furnishes us with a criterion of goodness if we combine it with Collingwood's earlier observation that the choices we make are not immune to doubt. If I claim that 'I choose *x*', somebody else, or myself in a moment of reflection, could ask 'Why do you choose *x*?' This puzzlement about

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<sup>619</sup> Actually, Collingwood developed his philosophical method in the course of preparing his moral philosophical lectures throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. See e.g.: Peters, *History as Thought and Action*, p. 487.

<sup>620</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 80, Collingwood's emphasis omitted.

<sup>621</sup> R.G. Collingwood, 'Goodness, Rightness, Utility: Lectures delivered in H[ilary] T[erm] 1940 and written as delivered' [1940], in: Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 419.

$x$  causes stress, which can only be relieved by finding justificatory grounds for my initial desire. What we are ultimately looking for, in other words, is a reason that so completely determines my choice that it precludes any possibility of doubt. It is the species of practical reason that most completely shields my choice from the danger of doubt, then, that is to be placed highest in the scale of forms of goodness.

Based on the foregoing, it is the central contention of Collingwood's moral philosophy that utility and right fall short of the criterion of full determination of choice, whereas only duty is successful in that regard. Duty, then, is the highest species of the concept of good.

Utility is the form of practical reason which says that I want  $x$  because it is the means to the desirable end  $y$ . To return to one of my earlier examples, I give a utilitarian explanation of my desire if I claim that 'I want to eat healthy food because eating healthy food is the means for achieving loss of weight'. Such an explanation in terms of utility "does go some way towards explaining why I choose  $x$ ".<sup>622</sup> According to Collingwood, there is a logical relation between means and end; desiring to achieve an end  $y$  logically implies the desire of carrying out the means  $x$ : "A man plans to do  $y$ ; he finds that he cannot think that plan out unless he thinks it out as the plan of doing  $y$  by doing  $x$ . The word 'cannot' refers to a logical necessity. The  $y$ -plan logically necessitates the  $x$ -plan."<sup>623</sup> So given the fact that I choose the end of losing weight, this logically necessitates me to desire the means of eating healthy food. Without eating healthy food I cannot hope to lose weight, the two actions go hand in hand. As Collingwood puts it elsewhere, in utilitarian action "the means-action is what the agent is immediately doing; the end-action is what he at the same time is mediately doing, doing by 'means' of the immediate action which we have called the 'means-action'."<sup>624</sup> By immediately eating healthy food I am concurrently but mediately losing weight. If somebody were to ask 'Why do you desire to eat healthy food?' I am now in a position to give at least some form of explanation, namely by saying 'Because I want to lose weight'.

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<sup>622</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 105.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>624</sup> Collingwood, 'Goodness, Rightness, Utility', pp. 437-8.

But this explanation is limited, for further questions might be raised that cannot be answered on the basis of utilitarian principles. Both on the side of the means and on the side of the end much is left undetermined. For example, there might be multiple foods that are healthy enough to allow for loss of weight. What food do I have to choose? The utilitarian point of view does not say; any food that will help me achieve my end will do. In any actual action, however, this choice cannot remain undetermined. At some point I *have* to choose one food over another, but from the perspective of utility this choice is capricious. In the words of Collingwood, an

indefinite individual, such as those which occur in utilitarian thinking, may be planned, for the plan may be left vague; but the plan cannot be carried out, for in the process of execution the points left vague must be some how [sic] settled. There is, accordingly, an inevitable discrepancy between what can be explained on utilitarian principles and what happens in the world.<sup>625</sup>

With regard to the status of the end in utilitarian thinking, Collingwood returns to an argument that we are already familiar with from the third chapter of this book.<sup>626</sup> If somebody were to say: ‘Alright, I now understand that you want to eat healthy food because you want to lose weight. But why do you want to lose weight in the first place?’, this question ultimately cannot be answered on utilitarian grounds. I could carry it on for a while, explaining that losing weight is a means to a further end, for example having a healthy body. But this further end can again be questioned, and so on. This can only lead to either an infinite regress—so that there is always some part of my action that is left unexplained—or to the postulation of an end-in-itself that is not itself a means to a further end. But the adoption of such an end-in-itself can, from the viewpoint of utility, only be capricious. For a utilitarian reason is always that I want *x* because I want *y*, and such an explanation is clearly not applicable to an end-in-itself. The “utilitarian action”, Collingwood concludes, “offers no reason, and in its very nature can offer no reason, why I will the end”.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>626</sup> See pp. 144-6 of this book.

<sup>627</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, p. 472.

Ultimately, then, utilitarianism can only offer a “partial reason” for action and thus falls short of the criterion of goodness.<sup>628</sup>

The same is true of ‘right’. Drawing on the authority of etymological studies as expressed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Collingwood holds that to desire  $x$  because it is right means to desire  $x$  because it is in accordance with the rule  $y$ .<sup>629</sup> For example, the “‘right’ time is time kept by a timepiece whose movements conform with a rule correlating them with the movements of the standard clock at Greenwich Observatory”.<sup>630</sup> Acting in accordance with right, then, is to embrace the “purpose to do things of a certain kind on all occasions of a certain kind ... to decide upon a general way of behaving, defined as involving some act of a specified kind if and when some occasion of a specified kind arises”.<sup>631</sup> Such action on the basis of rules—Collingwood calls it “regularian action”<sup>632</sup>—involves two acts on the part of the person doing it: the recognition of the existence of a rule, and the decision to obey it (or not). Again, there is a logical relation between the rule  $y$  and the action  $x$  that conforms to it. If I choose to obey  $y$  than I am necessitated to perform an action belonging to a certain category. For example, I might recognize and choose to obey the rule of always telling the truth. If somebody then were to ask me, ‘Why are you saying this to me?’, I can answer her by explaining that: ‘I have chosen to obey the rule of always telling the truth. What I am now saying I believe to be the truth. Thus my obedience to that rule necessitates me to tell you this’.

As in the case of utility, this kind of reasoning goes some way toward explaining my action, but not all the way. First, from a regularian perspective, *all* actions of a certain kind are good if they conform to the rule that is obeyed. In the example of truth telling, I have to make a decision how to carry out this intention. Must I only say the true thing  $a$ , or also  $b$ ,  $c$  and  $d$ ? Or must I even continue speaking the truth to everyone every waking hour? Regularian thinking cannot help me, as all these actions conform to the rule of always telling the truth. Likewise,

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<sup>628</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>629</sup> This method is in line with Collingwood’s insistence that the meaning of words must be found by looking at how they are used in ordinary language. See: Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>630</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 112.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>632</sup> *Idem.*

The rule to return a book ... does not tell you how you must return the book, it leaves you free to return it in any of the various possible ways. The rule to pay your debts leaves you free to pay them in any way in which your creditors will accept payment. The rule to abstain from meat on Fridays leaves you free to obey it by simply leaving out that article of diet or by substituting another. And however narrowly a rule is defined it always leaves this freedom of choice between alternative ways of obeying it. The choice may be restricted as narrowly as you like it, but it is in the nature of a rule that the element of choice cannot be abolished.<sup>633</sup>

In practice, I have to choose between these options, but from the perspective of right this must be a capricious choice. In the words of Collingwood, regularian thinking provides me with a “disjunctive imperative”; it tells me to do an action of a certain kind, *x*, *y* or *z*, but not which of those alternatives.<sup>634</sup>

Additionally, analysing our desires and actions in terms of right does not help us in determining what rule we should obey. We might recognize that there is a rule to tell the truth, but why submit to it? This problem comes most prominently to the fore when we are aware of the existence of two conflicting rules that are applicable to the same desire or action. For example, there is a rule of telling the truth and also one “to save human life”, thus providing you with the dilemma what to do “when an intending murderer asks you where his intended victim is hidden.”<sup>635</sup> This dilemma cannot be solved with the help of regularian thinking itself. We would again end up with an infinite regress of obeying a rule because a different rule obliges us to obey the first one, or end up with some ultimate ‘rule-in-itself’, obedience to which cannot be explained by thinking in terms of a further rule. As in the case of utility, then, an element of capriciousness remains, and thus the possibility of doubt remains open. Regularian thinking as well fails to express the philosophical concept of goodness to the fullest extent.

Both utilitarianism and right, then, must be superseded by the highest form of practical reason: duty. If I am explaining my desire or action in terms of duty I am saying “I have got to do it because I have got to do it”.<sup>636</sup> In this case there is no

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<sup>633</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, pp. 466-7.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 466.

<sup>635</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 116.

<sup>636</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, p. 474.

For a fuller exposition of Collingwood’s concept of duty, see: Boucher, *The Social and Political Thought of R.G. Collingwood*, pp. 102-9 & Connelly, *Metaphysics, Method and Politics*, pp. 199-204.

dividing up the action in two parts, where one part is partially explained by the other, which itself remains unexplained, such as a means-part and an end-part or an obedience-part and a rule-part. By contrast, a duty is always a “one-one relation” an “*individuum omnimodo determinatum*”, i.e. an individual that is determined in all its aspects.<sup>637</sup> My action and the duty that explains it are identical. Not only does duty fully determine action, it also completes the utilitarian and regularian analyses. Given Collingwood’s philosophical method, utility, right and duty are overlapping species of the concept of good; duty has utility and right telescoped into itself. This means that even if we embrace the idea of duty, we can still analyse action in terms of utility and right as well. However, we now no longer have to leave open questions such as ‘Why do I choose this end?’ and ‘Why do I choose to obey this rule?’ These questions can be answered from the perspective of duty: I choose this end because it is my duty to pursue it, and I obey this rule because it is my duty to obey it. Duty, in short, resolves the capriciousness of utility and right.

For Collingwood, all of this means that “dutiful action, among these three kinds of rational action, is the only one whose explanations really explain; the only one whose answer to the question: ‘Why did I do that action?’ (namely, ‘because it was my duty’) answers precisely that question and not one more or less like it.”<sup>638</sup> But does it really answer that question? Is the phrase ‘I have to do this because I have to do this’ not sheer tautology and thus of limited logical value? Collingwood admits that it is.<sup>639</sup> But this does not mean that it is void of *all* value. A man who utters the above phrase shows that he is aware of

a form of moral consciousness which does not consist in analysing one’s action into means and end, or rule and obedience to rule, or in any other way whatever, but is aware of it in its unbroken or unanalysed individuality as his own response to a situation in which, as I said, he finds himself or places himself.<sup>640</sup>

In other words, for Collingwood the phrase ‘I have to do this because I have to do this’ has *rhetorical* value.

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<sup>637</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>639</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, p. 474.

<sup>640</sup> *Idem.*

Still, the explanation of an action in terms of duty seems rather random and thus capricious. If someone doubts my decision to desire or do *x*, and I answer her doubts by claiming that I do *x* because I have to do *x*, would this answer as such really alleviate her misgivings or even my own reservations? It seems not. But in this connection it is crucial to note that there is a way in which the explanation of dutiful action can be carried further, according to Collingwood. For the recognition of duty depends on two things: awareness of the situation in which I am acting and awareness of my own character. As Collingwood puts it: “A man’s duty ... is ... the act which at that moment character and circumstance combine to make it inevitable ... the he shall ... will to do”.<sup>641</sup> *Given* the fact that my circumstances are such and so, *and* that my character is as it is, it is my duty to do *x*. In the words of Helgeby, Collingwood “believed that our self-knowledge and a true understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves could determine our actions. The idea of duty means that when we have such knowledge, we know that there is only one act possible for us, being who we are, in our situation.”<sup>642</sup> And we are perfectly familiar with such explanation of action from the study of history, according to Collingwood. For example:

Granted that Gladstone<sup>643</sup> was the man he was, conscious of himself as standing in the situation in which he was aware of himself as standing, the historian is able to ask how he came, towards the end of his life, to pursue Irish Home Rule as an end, and to pursue it, though unsuccessfully, through the means of parliamentary action.<sup>644</sup>

But surely self-knowledge and acquaintance with the facts of my situation are forms of theoretical reason, which for Collingwood, as we have seen earlier, is “making up your mind *that*” something is true or not.<sup>645</sup> Indeed, Collingwood claims that the questions about Gladstone raised in the above quote “are historically answerable”, history being one form of theoretical reason.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>641</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 124. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 128 & 220.

<sup>642</sup> Helgeby, *Action as History*, p. 131.

<sup>643</sup> Collingwood is referring to William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898), a politician of the British Liberal party.

<sup>644</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, p. 479.

<sup>645</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 100.

<sup>646</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, p. 479.

Moreover, Collingwood is adamant that someone, although being directly aware that they have a duty to perform, might be unclear about what that duty precisely is. As he puts it: “Conscience tells him that there is something he ought to do. It does not tell him what”.<sup>647</sup> To the question ‘What ought I to do?’ there can only be an answer that is “*morally* certain”; an answer, roughly, in the form: ‘I have considered *x*, *y*, and *z* as claimants for the title of my present duty: *x* is a better answer than *y*, and *y* than *z*...’<sup>648</sup> The consideration of these alternatives can, given what was said above, only be based on inquiring into my present circumstances and unique personal character. It seems, then, that in the concept of duty the *rapprochement* between theory and practice is complete. The question ‘Why do I desire *x*?’ can best be answered in terms of dutiful action (practical reason), and what I conceive to be my duty depends on my awareness of the situation in which I am to act plus my self-knowledge (theoretical reason).

Thus Collingwood’s situationism. In theoretical reason there is always present a primitive survival from the level of practical reason. The highest level of practical reason is duty, which raises theoretical questions about the specific circumstances in which I now have to act, and the present shape of my character. Thought, in other words, if it is concerned with helping me act in the most rational way, must be aimed at elucidating the *particular* situation in which action is called for, and not at discovering some transcendent reality. In the following sections I will explain why Collingwood thinks that history is the form of theoretical reason best equipped to perform this office, thereby further fleshing out what I have termed the *historical* situationism in Collingwood’s later philosophy.

### 3. Collingwood’s later philosophy of history

In the fourth chapter of this book we have seen that Collingwood berates “academic thinking”, which he equates with “make-believe thinking”.<sup>649</sup> For him there is no pure theoretical thought but, through the law of primitive survivals, there is always present in theoretical reason a practical element: theoretical questions arise out of

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<sup>647</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 124.

<sup>648</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.



practical problems. Based on the previous section of this chapter we can now give more content to that idea. Duty is the highest form of practical reason; finding out what my present duty is entails understanding myself and my circumstances; hence, the theoretical questions that arise from the practical problem of discovering my duty are ‘What is this situation in which I now have to act?’ and ‘What is at present my character?’ In the following section I show how, for Collingwood, history is the specific kind of theoretical reason that is best equipped to address these questions, and how it must go about this.<sup>650</sup>

Discovering my duty, according to Collingwood, entails finding out about the reality in which I am supposed to act. As we have seen in the previous chapter, mind is the highest species in the scale of forms of the philosophical concept of reality, having matter and life telescoped into itself. Moreover, as became clear most prominently in the third chapter of this book, Collingwood, inspired by the Italian idealists, rejects the world of being in favor of the world of becoming. All substances, such as subject and object, must be resolved into the process of history, wherein mind develops itself by reflecting on its own past. And the same is true for the principles that mind adheres to, they too are susceptible to change. Along the way, the historical process produces eternal objects, such as the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which came into existence and passed out of it again, but remain into being by becoming permanently available as objects of knowledge for the historian *and* as coloring the subsequent political experience of the British people, even if they are unaware of it. Hence, the process of mind is itself a creative force within the overarching development of the cosmos as a whole. As a result, reality is different depending on at which point in the historical process you are located; at one moment different eternal objects are into being than at another time. Thinking out about the situation in which I have to act, then, must be sensitive to the uniqueness of any such situation. This, again, is what I have termed Collingwood’s historical situationism:

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<sup>650</sup> I limit my description of this sequence of ideas to points relevant with regard to Collingwood’s relation to Dewey. For fuller accounts, see: Helgeby, *Action as History*, chapters 5-9 & Van der Dussen, *History as a Science*, esp. pp. 446-61. My interpretation is in broad agreement with Helgeby’s and Van der Dussen’s.

thought must not be aimed at discovering some transcendental reality, but at elucidating the specific context in which the thinker finds herself.

And what is true for the development of mind in general, is true for the character of every individual human being as well. If a person “has acted in a determinate way on” some “occasion, the fresh action leaves (as it were) a deposit in his character, develops it in this way or that: so that, when he comes to his next action, his character has been, however slightly, modified”.<sup>651</sup> If then, for the sake of discovering my duty, I ask what at present my character is, I must always take into account its historical nature. My character is not given once and for all, but might be slightly different from moment to moment, dependent on the actions I undertook in the interim time.

From the above it follows, for Collingwood, that history is the form of theoretical reason that is to inquire into mind. History is the study of human action, where practice is regarded as the expression of thought. Practice and thought are two aspects of one whole, practice being its “outside”, thought its “inside”.<sup>652</sup> On the basis of evidence, the historian reconstructs the constellation of presuppositions, motives and beliefs that find their expression in observable practice.<sup>653</sup> In other words, historians analyse what happens in the historical process in terms of that process itself: human action is explained by human thought, and not reduced to the result of biological impulses or some such. History, in short, takes into account the independent, criteriological nature of the mind. It is therefore a better candidate for studying mind than, say, psychology, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter of this book, precisely neglects that criteriological nature.

Further, history is the study of *concrete* human thought and action, action that takes place at a *specific* point in the historical process. It does not assume a universal human nature or a set of eternal problems that people uniformly try to solve. Rather, history reconstructs thought in its individuality, aiming to explain why this particular action was carried out at this particular occasion. It does this by

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<sup>651</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘Reality as History’ [1935], in: Collingwood, *The Principles of History*, p. 190.

<sup>652</sup> Idem.

<sup>653</sup> Collingwood, *The Principles of History*, pp. 7-110.

zooming in on the beliefs and motives of the individuals that brought about, for example, the French Revolution, instead of explaining that event by subsuming it under some general law of revolutions. The “business” of the historian “is solely with the individual situation or complex of situations in its context of equally individual situations; the individual action or complex of actions in its context of equally individual actions”.<sup>654</sup> Thus, history also does justice to the fact that the historical process is a creative force that changes reality; you cannot assume the identity of two moments in the process and history does not do so. In short, history is the science best equipped to study mind in practical situations and must hence be deployed in the discovery of my present duty. As Collingwood puts it, the “consciousness of duty is ... identical to the historical consciousness”.<sup>655</sup>

What, specifically, can history contribute to the consciousness of duty? To explain my action in terms of duty is to say ‘I do this because I, being who I am and standing in this particular situation, must do this’. In other words, recognizing my duty means being aware of my personal character and unique circumstances. Historical knowledge, according to Collingwood, can greatly heighten this awareness by showing us the past eternal objects that are spawned by the historical process and live on in the present. In what follows I introduce multiple examples of this “living past”.<sup>656</sup>

In the third chapter of this book, we have seen that the historical process, for Collingwood, is not some chaotic flux. Rather, it is a continuous development in which the new develops itself from the old in a way that is intelligible for a rational observer. It follows that we cannot understand any point in the process without considering what came before it and out of which it grew. Mind, we have seen Collingwood claim, develops *per saltum*, i.e. discontinuously, by detecting problems in some situation and, by solving them, creating a new situation. The latter, then, can only be understood if seen as a solution to the former. It follows that the situation in

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<sup>654</sup> Collingwood, ‘Goodness, Rightness, Utility’, p. 476. See the same page for the example of the French Revolution.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 477.

Cf. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 100; Connelly, *Metaphysics, Method and Politics*, pp. 200 & 203; Helgeby, *Action as History*, pp. 115-38.

<sup>656</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 97.

which I now stand must be thought of as a complex, consisting of an answer-part and a question-part, the question-part being a form of living past, a past that lives on as a problem to which the present situation forms a solution.

We find an example of this kind of a persistent past in Collingwood's archaeological work. In his autobiography, Collingwood describes how he struggled with the problem of explaining why, after centuries of "Romanization", Celtic art forms resurfaced later in history. Why had this "cultural steamroller" not "flattened the Celtic taste out of the Britons"?<sup>657</sup> With the idea of the living past in hand, Collingwood was able to solve this puzzle. The attempt to romanize the Britons was an attempt to replace Celtic fashions, i.e. an answer to a question. But it was an unsuccessful answer: Celtic art was of much higher quality than the Britons' imitations of Roman art. In the "tradition" and "folk-memory" of the Britons, then, the 'problem' to which Roman art was meant as a solution remained alive and well. It was only their awareness of this living past that made the revival of Celtic art possible. In the words of Collingwood, where "you find the new ways of thinking and acting never displayed with more than a low degree of success, you may take it as certain that the discarded ways are remembered with regret, and that the tradition of their glories is being tenaciously kept alive."<sup>658</sup>

But the past lives on in more ways. Although mind develops by partly rejecting its old products, there may be much from the past that remains unchallenged. This "residue" is carried over to the present situation by means of for example tradition and education. Hence, the living past in this sense consists of "ways in which people still think".<sup>659</sup> A simple example of this phenomenon that Collingwood gives is the mastery of the Latin language that lives on from antiquity to the present and allows the contemporary historian to interpret a medieval parchment.<sup>660</sup> But the living past is not always this innocent. Often, Collingwood indicates, we are unaware how the past influences the present and this can have detrimental effects. To again turn to one of his own examples, in *The Principles of*

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>660</sup> Idem.

*Art* he argues that the Aristotelian idea of art as craft has survived into the present of 1938, where it impedes the development of a sound theory of art, which, according to Collingwood, should sharply distinguish between art and craft.<sup>661</sup> We should not forget, Collingwood holds, that Aristotle formulated his concept of art as the solution to problems that arose in his own time, and is not necessarily suitable to address the issues we face today. A thorough analysis of Aristotle's views in their own historical context discloses their limits. This lesson, from the perspective of Collingwood, can and must be extended to many of the scientific presuppositions and 'common sense' beliefs that we might currently hold.

Further, the past lives on in the present in the form of intersubjective phenomena: "economic facts, social facts, legal facts, and so forth".<sup>662</sup> The way we organize our economy, the norms and characteristics of social groups, the laws that are in place—and in this connection one could also think of political systems and the functioning of educational institutions—all of these things are not given once and for all but rather are products of the historical process that occur at specific times. Such "facts are what he [the agent] inherits from his ancestry, who have bequeathed to him the situation in which he finds himself".<sup>663</sup> These historical circumstances do not determine the action of the agent, but they do limit him: "Finding himself in that situation, he finds himself bound to act in one or another of certain ways. His awareness of himself as a free agent is awareness of these alternative possibilities for action which arise from the situation..."<sup>664</sup> In other words, in action an agent has to navigate the circumstances in which he finds himself. The better he is aware of the situation in which he stands, the more aware he is of the alternative possibilities of action that lay before him. Such awareness, in short, increases his freedom. The facts of the situation are historical facts, which the agent inherits from the past. Historical knowledge of these facts, then, increases freedom of action.

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<sup>661</sup> For the details of this analysis, see: Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, pp. 15-41.

<sup>662</sup> R.G. Collingwood, 'What Civilization Means', in: Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 497.

This manuscript is undated, but according to Connelly it can be estimated to have been written in 1939-1940. See: Connelly, *Metaphysics, Method and Politics*, p. 270.

<sup>663</sup> Collingwood, 'What Civilization Means', p. 497.

<sup>664</sup> Idem.

Elsewhere, Collingwood suggests another way in which historical knowledge is crucial for action in cases in which you have to deal with the living past. It is quite possible that you find yourself in a certain political or economic system that you estimate to be less than satisfactory and hence are looking to change. Collingwood himself names the examples of “capitalism or war”.<sup>665</sup> But simply overthrowing these institutions will not do. Just as every fact, they must be understood as moments in the historical process that arose to answer a certain question. Progress, for Collingwood, then, would be the development of a post-capitalistic economy that *not* only solves the problems inherent in capitalism itself, but *also* the problems that capitalism was meant to solve in the first place. We “must begin by understanding them [capitalism or war]: seeing what the problems are which our economic or international system succeeds in solving, and how the solution of these is related to the other problems which it fails to solve”. If we refuse to do this we will have “change but no progress; we shall have lost our hold on one group of problems in our anxiety to solve the next”. Progress for Collingwood, then, is impossible without historical knowledge of the living past. Progress is generated by historical thinking through providing “a knowledge of the past conditioning our creation of the future”.<sup>666</sup>

So far I have looked at ways in which history can contribute to the discovery of duty by informing us about the situation in which we have to act. I now turn to the other element in dutiful action, awareness of my own character. In this connection Collingwood revisits many of the same themes as we have already dealt with. First of all, he denies that my character is determined by the physical environment or some natural racial temperament. Mind is a separate realm of being and, moreover, the highest embodiment of the concept of reality. Hence it is autonomous and cannot be reduced to matter or life. Furthermore, the existence of some uniform human nature is denied.<sup>667</sup> Mind is process, it develops itself out of its own past into the future. Just as the situation in which I find myself, then, my character must be studied historically, by looking at which place it occupies in the historical process and how it

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<sup>665</sup> R.G. Collingwood, ‘Progress as Created by Historical Thinking’ [1936], in: Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 334.

<sup>666</sup> All of the above quotes are from: Idem.

<sup>667</sup> Collingwood, ‘Reality as History’, pp. 195-7. Cf. Collingwood, ‘Human Nature and Human History’, pp. 205-31.

is related to what went before. Again, the concept of the living past is crucial here. A person's character is built up by the habits she has developed throughout her life, the actions she has performed before have left "(as it were) a deposit in [his] character".<sup>668</sup> So an agent's "past and his character are the same thing. His character is the name we give to his past as existing here and now, in so far as it determines his present action". Or again, "what a man is, is what he has made himself and been made in his history".<sup>669</sup>

As before, Collingwood equates this living past with 'fact', which opens up the way for change of character because it must be distinguished from 'compulsion', which would be an appropriate term if character was determined by physical circumstances or racial temperament. Fact, in the sense of what has happened, cannot be changed. However, "since the habit is *mere* fact, it falls away, like any other fact, into the past, unless it is constantly renewed by new action".<sup>670</sup> Becoming aware of my character through historical knowledge, then, becoming aware of my habits, enables me to free myself of them by stopping to act in accordance with them. The parallel with the intersubjective living past described above suggests, however, that in aiming to change my habits, I must not forget which problems they were meant to solve in the first place.

To sum up: for Collingwood, duty is the highest form of practical reason. It is the explanation of action that says 'I have to do this because, being the person I am and standing in this unique situation, I have to do this'. The recognition of duty thus entirely depends on the awareness of my own character and circumstances. Both my character and my circumstances belong to the metaphysical realm of mind and are formed by what has happened in the past. Hence they must be studied by history. Knowledge of the living past that I inherit from my ancestors and my own actions is the only way in which I can increase my capability of recognizing my present duty.<sup>671</sup> The living past is often hidden from sight, and thus the historical thinker can be

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<sup>668</sup> Collingwood, 'Reality as History', p. 190.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194, my emphasis.

<sup>671</sup> Partly because of the reasons I allude to here, Peters has argued that the concept of the living past is fundamental to Collingwood's philosophy as a whole. See: Peters, *History as Thought and Action*.

compared to a “trained woodsman” and the non-historian to an “ignorant traveller”: “Nothing here but trees and grass’, thinks the traveller and marches on. ‘Look’, says the woodsman, ‘there is a tiger in that grass.’ The historian’s business is to reveal the less obvious features hidden from a careless eye in the present situation.”<sup>672</sup> For Collingwood, history, being the only form of reason that increases the capability to act out of duty, is to become the new “science of human affairs”.<sup>673</sup>

#### 4. Collingwood’s theory of absolute presuppositions

In the following section I bring together some of Collingwood’s ideas that have hitherto been mentioned only in passing. Already in the first chapter on Collingwood in this book we have seen that, for him, thinking always consists of questioning and answering. Every proposition uttered is an answer to a question that we put to reality. This notion has resurfaced many times, for example in the present chapter, where I presented the persistence of past questions into the present as one form of living past. Another of Collingwood’s concepts, that of principles or absolute presuppositions, has also already been mentioned. In the fourth chapter I made it clear how Collingwood builds up his own cosmology on the basis of inquiring into the metaphysical presuppositions of contemporary scientists, including historians. The ideas of thinking as questioning and answering on the one hand and absolute presuppositions on the other come together in what Collingwood regards as his revolutionary “*logic of question and answer*”.<sup>674</sup> Not only does thinking happen according to a pattern of questioning and answering, this pattern also has a certain logic to it. Explaining this logic hangs together with identifying the presuppositions on which the activity of thinking rests. An understanding of what Collingwood means by these assertions is crucial for evaluating his relation to Dewey, as will become clear in the last section of this chapter.

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<sup>672</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 100.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-43.

Collingwood here also claims that he had completely worked out his logic as early as the late 1910s, in a manuscript titled ‘Truth and Contradiction’. He offered the text to a publisher in vain; only one chapter of the book survived and is now being held in the Bodleian Library.



Collingwood introduces his theory of questions, answers and presuppositions in *An Essay on Metaphysics* by way of an example:

I write these words on the deck of a ship. I lift my eyes and see a piece of string—a line, I must call it at sea—stretched more or less horizontally above me. I find myself thinking ‘that is a clothes-line’, meaning that it was put there to hang washing on. When I decide that it was put there for that purpose I am presupposing that it was put there for some purpose. Only if that presupposition is made does the question arise, what purpose? If that presupposition were not made, if for example I had thought the line came there by accident, that question would not have arisen, and that situation in which I think ‘that is a clothes-line would not have occurred.’<sup>675</sup>

‘That is a clothes-line’ is a proposition. From *Speculum Mentis* we already know that this must be the answer to a question, in this case ‘For what purpose was that line put there?’ But now we learn that this question, and by extension its answer, does not occur haphazardly. It ‘arises’ from a presupposition that is being made, namely ‘That line was put there for some purpose’. Had Collingwood been presupposing that ‘That line came there by accident’, the question would not have ‘arisen’.

The relation between answer, question and presupposition is a logical one. One implication of this is that a person does not have to be aware of presupposing something or even be consciously raising a question in order for Collingwood’s analysis to hold. Presupposition and question are mere conditions of possibility for the answer: according to Collingwood, it is impossible to conceive the proposition ‘That is a clothes-line’ without also implicitly conceiving the question ‘For what purpose was that line put there?’ and the presupposition ‘That line was put there for some purpose’. In contrast to what some commentators have claimed him to say, Collingwood is quite clear that it is perfectly possible that the “thought ‘that is a clothes-line’ came plump into my mind ... all at once and unheralded. Only by a kind of analysis, when I reflect upon it, do I come to see that this was a presupposition I was making, however little I was aware of it at the time”.<sup>676</sup> It is only in the “orderly

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<sup>675</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 21.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 26 & 34-6 & 43.

For some of the ‘commentators’ that I allude to here, see: A.J. Ayer, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Unwin 1984), p. 198 & James Somerville, ‘Collingwood’s Logic of Question and Answer’, in: *The Monist*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1989), p. 537. Cf. Helgeby, *Action as History*, pp. 81-2.

For a critical discussion of the logic of question and answer, see: Johnson, R.G. *Collingwood*, pp. 69-72.

and systemic thinking we call science” that we “disentangl[e] all this mess, and reduc[e] a knot of thoughts in which everything sticks together anyhow to a system or series of thoughts in which thinking the thoughts is at the same time thinking the connexions between them”.<sup>677</sup>

There is no reason why the logical analysis described above should stop with the presupposition ‘That line was put there for some purpose’. This is in fact what Collingwood terms a “relative presupposition”, which is a proposition which is related to one question as an answer (e.g. ‘Was that line put there for some purpose?’) and to another (‘For what purpose was that line put there?’) as a presupposition.<sup>678</sup> The ultimate ground for such sequences of relative presuppositions, questions and answers is formed by what Collingwood “absolute” presuppositions.<sup>679</sup> These are related to some questions as a presupposition, but to none as an answer. They ground all other questions, but are not grounded themselves, at least in a logical sense. So where relative presuppositions can, from one perspective, be conceived as a proposition, i.e. the answer to a question, absolute presuppositions cannot.

This means that the distinction between true and false does not apply to absolute presuppositions, for these are properties that can only be attributed to propositions. The business of absolute presuppositions is not “to be propounded ...; their business is to be presupposed”.<sup>680</sup> Moreover, absolute presuppositions make possible the distinction between true and false in the first place. For example, the idea of verification in the empirical sciences absolutely presupposes the uniformity of nature, as has been thoroughly instilled on the philosophical tradition by Hume. If the uniformity of nature would not be presupposed, the inductive logic of some sciences would be impossible to carry out in the first place. To apply a concept such as verification to absolute presuppositions, then, is nonsensical: they are “suppositions which in principle neither admit nor require verification”; “to talk of justifying them is to talk nonsense”.<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42 & 46. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 32 & 52-4.

Here we can clearly see that Collingwood himself wrote *An Essay on Metaphysics*—published in 1940—as the answer to a question that arose in his own time. It had recently been argued by logical positivists, most prominently A.J. Ayer (1910-1989), that metaphysical statements such as ‘nature is uniform’ are meaningless because they are neither tautological nor capable of being verified.<sup>682</sup> Hence, metaphysics should be discarded. One aim of Collingwood’s book is to show that, although metaphysical statements are indeed incapable of being true or false, they cannot be thrown in the dustbin because they are still “logically efficacious”, which is to say that they give rise to questions and make possible entire fields of inquiry.<sup>683</sup>

For the above reason interpreters such as D’Oro have placed Collingwood in a Kantian tradition.<sup>684</sup> All thinking absolutely presupposes statements to which the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply, but are nevertheless making possible entire fields of experience such as the empirical sciences. This is akin to the insistence of Kant that there are certain categories that we apply to experience, but that are not derived from experience. They are ‘merely’ categories of thought and cannot tell us anything about the ‘things-in-themselves’. Likewise, Collingwood regards a “metaphysics of pure being”, that is, the pursuit of presuppositionless knowledge of reality as it is in itself, as an impossibility.<sup>685</sup> Metaphysicians should rather be concerned with arguing back from propositions actually made by scientists and others to the thoughts that such propositions absolutely presuppose, thus making them as intelligible as possible by showing all their implications. As Collingwood puts it, metaphysics

is the attempt to find out what absolute presuppositions have been made by this or that person or group of persons, on this or that occasions, in the course of this or that piece of thinking. Arising out of this, it will consider (for example) whether absolute presuppositions are made singly or in groups, and if the latter, how the groups are organized; whether different absolute presuppositions are made by different individuals or races or nations or classes; or on occasions when different things are being thought about; or whether the same have been made *semper, ubique, ab omnibus* [always, everywhere, by all]. And so on.<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> See: A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollanz 1936).

<sup>683</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 27 & 32.

<sup>684</sup> See: D’Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience*, pp. 24-36.

<sup>685</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 11-20. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

We have seen Collingwood perform precisely such a ‘Kantian’ task himself in his cosmological writings and *The Idea of Nature*. There, he reflects on the ‘pieces of thinking’ of contemporary physicists, biologists and historians, finding out about the philosophical concepts absolutely presupposed by them relative to ‘the different things that are being thought about’, and ‘organizing’ them into ‘groups’ in conversation with Alexander and Whitehead.

But there is a crucial difference between the views of Kant and Collingwood too, a difference of which D’Oro is of course well aware. Whereas Kant regards the categories of thought as universal, applying ‘*semper, ubique, ab omnibus*’, Collingwood is adamant that they change over time. For that reason, metaphysics is a “historical science”. Every one of its questions is “simply the question what absolute presuppositions were made on a *certain* occasion”.<sup>687</sup> Collingwood gives as an example the development of physics, which consecutively presupposed that some events have a cause (Newton), that all events have a cause (Kant) and that no events have a cause (Einstein). All of this is not to say that e.g. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was not a great metaphysical achievement, but we must be aware that it does no more than analyse the science of his age and show that “eighteenth century scientists did think in terms of” the categories Kant identifies.<sup>688</sup>

What explains the alteration of absolute presuppositions through history if it cannot be considerations about their truth? According to Collingwood, every complex of absolute presuppositions at any time presents an “unstable equilibrium”, it contains “strains”.<sup>689</sup> The “constellation ... [is] kept together by dint of a certain compromise or mutual toleration having behind it a motive like that which causes parties to unite in the face of an enemy”, but may break under pressure.<sup>690</sup> Such strains, then, have the potential to throw the whole structure that the absolute presuppositions in question are supporting into jeopardy because, ultimately, they

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid., p. 49, my emphasis. Cf. Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>688</sup> Collingwood, ‘Human Nature and Human History’, p. 230. Cf. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 73.

<sup>689</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 74.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

make it impossible to answer new questions as they arise. In short, strains in a given complex of absolute presuppositions might lead to unsolvable problems.

The strains, it is crucial to note, are *internal* to the field of knowledge in question. It is not up to the metaphysician to criticize the absolute presuppositions of a science; it is the scientists themselves—consciously or unconsciously—who make the transition from one set of presuppositions to the next: “To criticize the concepts of science is the work of science itself as it proceeds...”.<sup>691</sup> Scientists do this because, as the strains grow “too great”, the *complete* “structure” of their field “collapses”.<sup>692</sup> That is to say, absolute presuppositions do not get replaced because they are found to be unjustified in and of themselves, which is impossible, but because the whole field of experience to which they gave rise has become impossible to carry out. As Collingwood puts it: “How can we ever satisfy ourselves that the principles on which we think are true, except by going on thinking according to those principles, and seeing whether unanswerable criticisms of them emerge *as we work?*”<sup>693</sup> Scientists have to put absolute presuppositions into practice, and see how far they can carry on without running into unsolvable problems. If the latter occurs, the absolute presuppositions have to be changed, the new set of presuppositions being “a modification of the old with the destructive strain removed”.<sup>694</sup>

All of this is in line with what we have seen Collingwood claim before. The strains present in absolute presuppositions are akin to the incoherent implicit principles in experience of which Collingwood says in *Speculum Mentis* that they form the basis for the mind to develop itself. Also, the evolution of absolute presuppositions is like any historical process as we have encountered that idea in Collingwood’s writing hitherto; it propels *itself* forward without depending upon anything outside itself. Lastly, the criterion of progress for the development of absolute presuppositions we have already encountered above: a complex of absolute presuppositions AP2 is better than a complex of absolute presuppositions AP1 if AP2 answers the questions arising from AP1 *plus* solves the problems the adoption of AP1

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<sup>691</sup> Collingwood, ‘Human Nature and Human History’, p. 230.

<sup>692</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 48n.

<sup>693</sup> Collingwood, ‘Human Nature and Human History’, p. 230, my emphasis.

<sup>694</sup> Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, p. 48n. See Johnson, R.G. *Collingwood*, pp. 76-7 for a criticism of this account of the development of absolute presuppositions.

leads to, just as a post-capitalist economic system must also solve the problems of capitalism in order to count as an improvement.

## 5. Collingwood and Dewey

We are now in a position to complete the comparison of Collingwood's philosophy with Dewey's pragmatism. In the secondary literature it has been correctly remarked that there are clear affinities between Dewey's theory of inquiry and Collingwood's logic of question and answer.<sup>695</sup> In particular, commentators draw attention to the fact that for both Dewey and Collingwood inquiry, or the question and answer process, is situated in a context that exists prior to the thought about it. As Helgeby puts it: "For Collingwood, as well as for Dewey, there are questions because situations are problematic to a being."<sup>696</sup> Moreover, Collingwood's insistence that thought is successful insofar as it answers the particular question that has arisen echoes Dewey's central claim that it is the aim of inquiry to resolve specific indeterminate situations.

Dewey and Collingwood are also of like mind if it comes to what Dewey calls 'logical forms' and Collingwood 'absolute presuppositions'.<sup>697</sup> These are the principles that ground inquiry in a logical sense and ultimately determine whether a proposition is true (Collingwood) or a judgment warrantably asserted (Dewey). Such principles are historical in the sense that they are internal to any given form of inquiry that they belong to. That is to say, they are imposed by a field of science upon itself, and not from some external metaphysical realm of logical entities or pure being accessible only to the *a priori* philosopher. In the words of Dewey, while the study of logicians is the '*causa cognoscendi*' of the principles of inquiry, that inquiry itself is their '*causa essendi*'. It follows that, should logical forms or absolute presuppositions change, that this change also comes from within. It is not the case that the metaphysician forces a field of knowledge to change its presuppositions by showing

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<sup>695</sup> Mink, *Mind, History, Dialectic*, pp. 8 & 138; Verónica Tozzi, 'Dewey, Mead, John Ford, and the Writing of History: Pragmatist Contributions to Narrativism', in: *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2016), n20. Retrieved via: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejppap/641>.

<sup>696</sup> Helgeby, *Action as History*, p. 95.

<sup>697</sup> Cf. Mink, *Mind, History, Dialectic*, p. 9.

a defect in the latter. Rather, if that field starts to become unable to answer its questions or solve its problems, its fundamental principles must be changed so that the field remains possible to carry out. It are scientists themselves, then, that—consciously or unconsciously—adopt new fundamental bases for their activities.

These similarities, however, betray fundamental differences between the positions of Dewey and Collingwood that are not so clearly recognized in the secondary literature and are only hinted at. These differences are precisely connected to the first similarity named above, that for Dewey and Collingwood inquiry or question and answer must always be situated in the context of the wider development of experience. If Dewey's and Collingwood's respective insights on the historical process of experience would diverge, then this would have profound consequences for the concrete forms of inquiry they identify, similarities in general outline notwithstanding. And this is exactly what we see happening in the case of moral philosophy and historical research.

With regard to moral philosophy, Dewey and Collingwood agree that practical thinking is the criticism of desire. For Dewey, this means that I have to look for the existential consequences that will accompany the carrying out of my present desire. This action *x* might resolve the indeterminate situation *a* that gave rise to my desire in the first place, but could also lead to the unintended consequences *b*, *c* and *d*. If these unintended consequences are unacceptable to me, then I must not pursue my desire, even if it solves my current problem. The desire has turned into an end-in-view that I should not bring into existence; it has been effectively criticized.

In Collingwood's terms, Dewey's theory of valuation is a species of utilitarianism. What Dewey proposes to look at is a certain means (my action, the carrying out of my desire) and the ends that it brings about (*a*, *b*, *c* and *d*). The justification of action or, in this case, of not acting, is that 'I do not do *x* because it is the means to the objectionable ends *b*, *c* and *d* besides the desirable end *a*'. But for Collingwood utility is the lowest form of practical reason. It leaves many aspects of action undetermined, most prominently the chosen end. Utility on its own cannot explain why I should choose the end *a* but not *b*, *c* and *d*, as we have seen in the second section of the present chapter. Utilitarian thinking then, for Collingwood, must be superseded by regularian thinking and ultimately by reasoning in terms of

duty. This is not recognized by Dewey, for which, in fact, he has been criticized by others. In the words of Matthew Festenstein: for Dewey, “[r]ational or ‘intelligent’ agency, it seems, is viewed as instrumental and goal-directed, but the goals to which it is or should be directed have been left out of the picture of inquiry and practical judgment”.<sup>698</sup> Or, as Misak puts it: “It seems that Dewey’s efforts to assert the contrary notwithstanding, our ends are whatever standards are prevalent in any culture”.<sup>699</sup> So what Collingwood argues for utilitarian thinking in general, Festenstein and Misak confirm for Dewey in particular: for the latter the ends that figure in our practical thinking are capriciously adopted rather than reflectively chosen.

We have seen that Collingwood holds that dutiful action is the most reasonable kind of action. If I act from duty I say that ‘I do *x* because, being the person I am standing in this particular situation, I have to do *x*’. The awareness of my character and my circumstances is a historical awareness, and therefore it can be heightened by inquiring into the living past. In other words, my practical reason gives rise to theoretical questions. For Dewey too, there is an intimate link between acting and thinking. If I am to criticize my desires by looking at their potentially detrimental consequences, then I have to know what consequences to expect from my action. Inquiry, therefore, should be aimed at establishing the ‘form’ of experience that holds its ‘matter’ together. I must find ‘laws’ or ‘generalities’ that allow me to predict what will happen in the future if I perform this action now, so that I can reflect upon the salience of my initial desire. All forms of inquiry can contribute to this overarching goal of ‘controlling’ experience. Fields such as physics try to detect laws, whereas historians and anthropologists show how such ‘universals’ concretely manifest themselves in primary experience.

For Collingwood this point of view indicates that Dewey has not taken history seriously enough. By studying the work of historians, as well as reflecting on his own archaeological practice, Collingwood develops a theory of mind that gives it

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<sup>698</sup> Matthew Festenstein, ‘John Dewey: Inquiry, Ethics, and Democracy’, in: Cheryl Misak (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), p. 89.

<sup>699</sup> Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, p. 133.



an autonomous place in the scale of forms of the philosophical concept of reality, as we have seen in the previous chapter of this book. Mind is an emergent realm of being, developing out of but not limited to matter and life. It is itself a *creative* process, wherein new forms of being come into existence. These new forms of being are ‘eternal objects’ which thus continue to colour the developing process of mind from their genesis onwards. The consequence of this is that no one place in the process of history is the same as any other. At any point different eternal objects are in being. It is therefore no use to look for generalizations in history, as Dewey proposes. Every situation is unique and cannot be subsumed under some general category. What history *can* and must contribute to practical life, then, is not a story of how universal laws are exemplified in concrete experience, but a “trained eye for the situation in which one has to act”.<sup>700</sup> It discloses features in the present state of my character and circumstances that are often hidden because we are regularly unaware of past eternal object that live on through the process of history.

Both Grigoriev and Mink recognize the fact that Collingwood distinguishes between history and other forms of inquiry. Grigoriev puts the point in terms of subject matter:

The key difference between the two positions emerges when we consider the object of historical study. For Dewey, historians can occupy themselves with any aspect of the past which appears relevant in the light of our social, cultural, or research interests. For Collingwood, on the other hand, history is always a history of thoughts, and of events only insofar as they express thoughts.<sup>701</sup>

Mink mentions the same consideration in passing: “Unlike pragmatism ... Collingwood wished to distinguish between scientific thought and historical thought and to justify the latter as an intellectual activity with its own aims and methods”.<sup>702</sup> Neither of them seem to think this difference between Collingwood and Dewey is a big deal. Grigoriev even argues that it can be smoothed over and the two positions be brought in line.<sup>703</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, p. 100.

<sup>701</sup> Grigoriev, ‘Dewey’, p. 191.

<sup>702</sup> Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic*, p. 138.

<sup>703</sup> Grigoriev, ‘Dewey’, p. 192.

I disagree with this estimation. The discrepancies between Dewey and Collingwood pointed out above indicate that, from Collingwood's perspective, he is more of a pragmatist than pragmatists such as Dewey themselves. What is needed for good practice—one of pragmatism's ostensible ideals—is action of which all the details can be explained and justified. Such an explanation and justification can only be found in the form of dutiful thinking, whereas Dewey's account of practical reason does not transcend the level of utility. Moreover, in order to act from duty, our only help comes from historical thinking, which shows us the specific situation in which we have to act. Dewey, however, provides a mistaken account of history as a science. The theoretical knowledge that his theory of inquiry helps us achieve, then, is of no use for the most rational kind of action that we can procure.<sup>704</sup>

I conclude that, in the end, the differences between Collingwood's philosophy and Dewey's pragmatism are as profound as the commonalities they share.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the first four chapters of this book, I concluded that Collingwood rejects, or would reject, the philosophies of James and Schiller because they portray thought as being non-criteriological. Ultimately, for them, thinking is determined by the psychological elements of the context in which it is situated, be it feeling (James) or desire (Schiller).

In the first section of the present chapter I showed that Dewey, although agreeing with his pragmatist compatriots that thought is always situated, transcends their positions by allowing for the possibility of criticizing desires in view of their consequences. This required a more in-depth look at Collingwood's later philosophy,

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<sup>704</sup> The above also throws some doubt on Van der Dussen's claim that Peirce's idea of abduction "provides the specific type of inferences used in history and for which Collingwood was looking" ('Collingwood's Claim that History is a Science', p. 15). In his *Logic*, Dewey claims that the "readers who are acquainted with the logical writings of Peirce will note my great indebtedness to him in the general position taken" (p. 9n). If Dewey correctly claims Peirce as his precursor, and Peirce agrees that the aim of all scientific thought is to detect regularities rather than explore unique situations, then we must be careful with transposing Peirce's logical ideas to the science of history as Collingwood envisages it.

so we could see in how far Dewey's accounts of practical and theoretical reason would be satisfactory to Collingwood.

Besides some important commonalities—such as the affinities between Dewey's theory of inquiry and Collingwood's logic of question and answer, and their respective accounts of the development of the principles of thought—I concluded that ultimately there is a great rift between their respective positions. In his 'theory of valuation', Dewey does not come further as what Collingwood calls utilitarian thinking, a verdict shared by present-day commentators, which Collingwood regards as the lowest form of practical reason. Moreover, duty, Collingwood's highest type of practical thinking, depends on historical inquiry that sees the development of mind as a creative process that is in constant development. Dewey's analysis of history as a science, through its focus on generalizations rather than the unique, precisely precludes the historical knowledge needed for acting out of duty. In other words, though improving on the psychological situationism of James and Schiller, Dewey's position cannot be said to be on a par with Collingwood's historical situationism. An ironic consequence of this conclusion is that Collingwood would probably regard his own position as more pragmatist, i.e. as better serving the needs of practice, than that of Dewey.

## Conclusion

Some years ago, Gary Ciocco expressed the hope that “someone can meet Mink’s decades old challenge—not yet attempted let alone met, as far as I know—to prove Collingwood part of the same philosophical stream as ... the pragmatists”.<sup>705</sup> The main objective of the present book has been to show, to the contrary, why Collingwood *rejects* the pragmatisms of James, Schiller and Dewey. Nevertheless we may ask: do the quarrels between Collingwood and these pragmatists take place *within* one over-arching ‘philosophical stream’, as Mink and Ciocco suggest, or should we rather speak of incommensurable world-views?

I think the former is closer to the truth. Both Collingwood and the classical pragmatists are dead set against what I have termed the ‘transcendentism’ of the British idealists and realists. Thought should not be aimed at discovering a reality that transcends the world of experience. It rather ought to function in a particular situation, solving problems and answering questions that arise at a particular time in a specific place. In this way, James, Schiller and Dewey obliterate the distinction between theory and practice. Thinking always starts from practical problems and can only be deemed successful if it issues in adequate action. And again, Collingwood is of like mind. “All thought exists for the sake of action”, we have seen him claim.<sup>706</sup> And, later in his career: “All real thinking starts from practice and returns to practice, for it is based on ‘interest’ in the thing thought about; that is, on a practical concern with it”.<sup>707</sup>

As a result of their allegiance to evolutionary biology, James and Schiller situate thought in a predominantly *psychological* context. True beliefs must result in successful action, and we know whether this is the case through a ‘coercive feeling of agreeable leading’, James holds.<sup>708</sup> Schiller, on his turn, thinks that thought is prompted by psychological desires that are ultimately grounded in the biological

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<sup>705</sup> Ciocco, ‘Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience’. Cf. Browning, *Rethinking R.G. Collingwood*, p. 10.

<sup>706</sup> Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, p. 1.

<sup>707</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, p. 125.

<sup>708</sup> James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 574 & 578.

constitution of the human organism. Thinking is successful if it fulfils such desires. Hence the 'psychological situationism' of James and Schiller.

It is at this point that Collingwood can no longer agree with the pragmatists and finds their position incoherent. Whereas they set out to repudiate the dualism between theory and practice, James and Schiller precisely reinstate it by letting thinking be determined by something outside itself, psychological feeling (James) or desire (Schiller). While for the later Collingwood desire—ultimately induced by the biological needs of the human organism—does indeed play an important role in thought, it never does so by way of *determination*. Desire and feeling rather provide input that reason can critically engage with on the basis of its own principles. That this viewpoint puts Collingwood in conflict with at least some of the pragmatists is correctly seen by Mink and D'Oro.

For Collingwood, thought is primarily situated in a *historical* context. There is no transcendent reality to discover, because there is nothing beyond the process of history. And history is the development of mind, the highest species in the scale of forms of the philosophical concept of reality. This means that, although including matter and life, mind develops *itself* by reflecting on its own past products on the basis of criteria produced by the same historical process. History, furthermore, is creative. It spawns events that pass into and out of *existence*, but not out of *being*, thereby becoming 'eternal' objects. These objects remain available for historical knowledge and keep influencing the further development of history, whether we are aware of it or not. Therefore no position in history is precisely the same as any other, and thought must take this fact into account. Hence, Collingwood's 'historical situationism'.

The classical pragmatist that comes closest to Collingwood in this regard is Dewey. *Contra* Schiller, Dewey does not hold that thought is ultimately determined by biological desire. Desire can be criticized by taking into account the unintended consequences that its fulfilment would procure. Inquiry, then, should be aimed at discovering the scientific laws that allow us to predict the consequences of our actions, so that we can 'control' experience. Further, Dewey is adamant that the principles which science uses to advance its own development are the products of scientific thinking itself, and are not imposed from outside. Ideas like this have led

some interpreters, such as Helgeby and Rubinoff, to believe that the views of Dewey and Collingwood are akin.

But even Dewey's pragmatism is untenable from Collingwood's perspective. Dewey criticizes desire on utilitarian grounds, but this is the lowest grade of practical reason for Collingwood, because it leaves much of our action capricious. Most prominently, Collingwood shows that utilitarianism cannot explain why we pursue the ends that we do. It should be superseded by duty, the highest form of practical reason, which explains action by saying that 'I do this because I, being the person that I am and standing in this situation, have to do this'. In duty, our only help comes from understanding the situation in which we are placed. And here again, Dewey's pragmatism is not helpful. According to him, inquiry should be aimed at discovering regularities, but Collingwood has shown that this is precisely impossible in history because at each point in the process different eternal objects are in being. In order to understand the situation in which we have to act, which is necessary for the highest form of practice, we thus rather have to inquire into the unique rather than the regular. This crucial contrast makes it highly unlikely that the differences between Dewey's and Collingwood's philosophies of history can be smoothed over, as Grigoriev proposes.

I conclude, then, that Collingwood would consider himself more of a pragmatist than the pragmatists themselves. He agrees with their central contention that thinking always ought to help solve problems in a particular situation, and that the dualism between thought and action should be demolished. However, in how they work out their philosophies, Schiller and James precisely uphold the dualism between theory and practice that they set out to destroy. And from Collingwood's perspective, Dewey elaborates a position in which thinking is not capable of supporting the highest form of action of which the human being is capable. Requate's bold suggestion that Collingwood was an "undercover pragmatist", then, must be seen as wildly exaggerated.<sup>709</sup> Collingwood can indeed be seen as part of the same philosophical stream as the pragmatists, as Mink proposes, but within that stream he takes up a distinctive and highly critical position.

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<sup>709</sup> Requate, 'Was R.G. Collingwood an Undercover Pragmatist?'



## Epilogue: a *rapprochement* between pragmatism and the philosophy of history?

In the foregoing, I have answered the question ‘Why did Collingwood *himself* reject pragmatism?’, and in light of this query, some methodological choices have been made. Most prominently, I have chosen to approach my topic from a predominantly historical perspective. Further, I have selected two contexts in which I placed Collingwood’s reception of the pragmatists. And within these contexts, I singled out some thinkers, texts and topics on which to focus. In essence, one could say that I followed what Collingwood himself calls “the principle of the limited objective”. This is the advice to take

time seriously. Aim at interpreting not ... any and every fact in the ... world, but only those which you think need be interpreted, or can be interpreted (the two things are not after all, so very different); NOW, choose where to begin your attack. Select the problems that call for immediate attention. Resolve to let the rest wait.<sup>710</sup>

The methodological choices made in this book are, I think, justified by its limited objective. Nevertheless, every selection, every inclusion of problems and material, implies the exclusion of others. It is about the latter that I now want to say something. More specifically, I will end this book by pointing out its caveats and limitations, and what further research it implies.

First of all, of the pragmatists discussed, I have included a rather limited portion of their corpus in this book. Only works that were discussed in the British and Italian contexts of the early 1900s play a role, plus some later books of Dewey’s. This means that my conclusions about Collingwood’s relation to especially James and Dewey are liable to revision. We have already seen, for example, that Klein thinks that James can be defended against the charge of ‘psychologism’ by taking his earlier work into account.<sup>711</sup> And on the basis of the “much earlier views” of Dewey, Rubinoff claims that the ideas of Dewey and Collingwood are akin.<sup>712</sup> In short, my methodology has allowed me to explain why Collingwood himself rejects

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<sup>710</sup> Collingwood, *The New Leviathan*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>711</sup> See p. 52 of this book. Cf. Klein, ‘Was James Psychologistic?’

<sup>712</sup> Cf. Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics*, p. 383n1.



pragmatism, but the question whether he was right in doing so can be further explored. One way to go about this would be to take into account a broader range of writings by the pragmatists.<sup>713</sup>

Second, the selection of contexts relevant for Collingwood's reception of pragmatism also leads to the exclusion of pragmatist thinkers not present in these contexts. The most notable of these is, of course, pragmatism's founding father Peirce, to whom Collingwood has been related by multiple interpreters.<sup>714</sup> But the same goes for George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and later (quasi-)pragmatists such as Rudolf Carnap (1891-1970), Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000) and Donald Davidson (1917-2003).<sup>715</sup> It would indeed be very interesting to investigate whether Collingwood's concerns about pragmatism as I reconstruct them in this book would equally apply to other pragmatists. This is especially the case because commentators such as Susan Haack and Misak have shown that within the pragmatist 'family' many differences of opinion about multiple topics exist.<sup>716</sup>

Third, what goes for works and thinkers discussed is also true for topics considered. While reconstructing Collingwood's rejection of pragmatism, I found that he bases this rejection primarily on misgivings about the pragmatist philosophy of mind. The latter, then, has been the principal focus in this book as a whole. But this also means that other areas of interest have been relatively neglected. For example, the epistemological and methodological dimensions of Collingwood's philosophy of history have barely been touched upon, while it is precisely on this

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<sup>713</sup> For some more thoughts along these lines on Collingwood and Dewey specifically, see. p. 218 of this book.

<sup>714</sup> Requate, 'R.G. Collingwood's Pragmatist Approach to Metaphysics', pp. 57-8; Ketner, 'An Emendation of R.G. Collingwood's Theory of Absolute Presuppositions' & Van der Dussen, 'Collingwood's Claim that History is a Science'.

<sup>715</sup> Cf. Requate, 'R.G. Collingwood and G.H. Mead on the Concept of Time'; Giuseppina D'Oro, 'Unlikely Bedfellows? Collingwood, Carnap and the Internal/External Distinction' in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2015), pp. 802-17; Giuseppina D'Oro, 'Understanding Others: Cultural Anthropology with Collingwood and Quine', in: *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, Vol. 7 (2013), pp. 326-45 & Giuseppina D'Oro, 'Re-enactment and Radical Interpretation', in: *History and Theory*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2004), pp. 198-208.

For the argument that Carnap, Quine and Davidson can be seen as affiliated to pragmatism, see: Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, pp. 173-4, 197-208 & 252-4.

<sup>716</sup> Misak, *The American Pragmatists* & Susan Haack, 'The Meaning of Pragmatism: The Ethics of Terminology and the Language of Philosophy', in: *Teorama*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2009), pp. 11-2.

point that multiple commentators have seen interesting connections between Collingwood's thinking and that of the pragmatists.<sup>717</sup> These connections deserve to be further investigated. However, as I have shown, for Collingwood as well as for the pragmatists their philosophies of mind are of crucial importance, and for Collingwood his view of mind underlies his philosophy of history. Therefore, if connections between Collingwood and the pragmatists are established with regard to the philosophy of history, the philosophy of mind must be taken into account as well.<sup>718</sup>

Finally, my book has an, in my view, essential philosophical implication. The presupposition common to both the classical pragmatists and Collingwood is that 'all thought exists for the sake of action'. Thinking is situated and arises due to a particular, practical problem which it helps to solve. If Collingwood is correct that historical knowledge is essential for good practice, *and* that it has radically different absolute presuppositions than the natural sciences, then a fully elaborated pragmatism has to provide a convincing account of history in all its facets. On the other hand, from the perspective of the philosophy of history, the precise connection between historical thought and action must be worked out, together with all its implications for the epistemology, methodology and ethics that belong to the special kind of knowledge that is history. It is to investigating this possible *rapprochement* between pragmatism and the philosophy of history that I plan to devote my own time and energy from here on, no doubt greatly helped by those who have gone before and work alongside me.

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<sup>717</sup> Requate, 'Was R.G. Collingwood an Undercover Pragmatist?'; Van der Dussen, 'Collingwood's Claim that History is a Science' & Helgeby, *Action as History*, pp. 88ff.

<sup>718</sup> Cf. p. 257n704 of this book.



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# Appendix A – Academic CV

## General information

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## Education

2015-2016	M.A. in philosophy (exchange student)	KU Leuven
2014-2016	M.A. in philosophy (research master)	University of Groningen
2013-2014	B.A. in philosophy of a spec. discipline	University of Groningen
2010-2014	B.A. in history	University of Groningen

## Appointments

2022-present	Researcher	Fries Sociaal Planbureau
2019- 2022	Junior researcher	Fries Sociaal Planbureau
2016-2022	PhD student	University of Groningen
2014-2016	Teaching assistant	University of Groningen

## Publications

2021	‘The Babblings of Pragmatism’: Reconstructing R.G. Collingwood’s Rejection of F.C.S. Schillers’ Pragmatism in <i>Speculum Mentis</i>	<i>Collingwood and British Idealism Studies</i> , Vol. 27, No. 2
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### **Administrative tasks**

2017-2019	Chair and organiser of the research meetings of the department of the history of philosophy, faculty of philosophy	University of Groningen
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### **Conference presentations**

2019	'The Babblings of Pragmatism'	The British Idealism Conference
2019	'Is Mr. Bradley Becoming a Pragmatist?'	The Reception of American Pragmatism in Europe

## Appendix B – Abstract

In this PhD thesis, I research the relation between the thought of the British philosopher, historian and archaeologist R.G. Collingwood (1889-1943) and the pragmatists William James (1841-1910), F.C.S. Schiller (1864-1937) and John Dewey (1859-1952).

This project is called for because Collingwood's estimation of pragmatism seems puzzling. On the one hand, he, throughout his career, asserts views such as that "all thought exists for the sake of action" and that "real thinking ... starts from practice and returns to practice", which have a definite pragmatist ring about them. On the other hand, however, Collingwood speaks of "the babblings of pragmatism" and sees their philosophy as "confused". How do all these statements fit together?

Collingwood does not explain the connection, and the secondary literature is undecided. Interpreters have thus far sought to answer the question by adopting a predominantly philosophical approach, reconstructing Collingwood's system and then comparing it to the views of the pragmatists. My thesis, however adds a historical perspective, starting from the question why Collingwood *himself* rejected pragmatism.

On the basis of a close reading of primary sources and painstaking archival research, my thesis argues the following. First, reading the pragmatists in the context of the debate with idealists such as F.H. Bradley (1846-1924) and realists such as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), we must *not* regard pragmatism as primarily a theory of truth, but as a philosophy of *mind* (with implications for the notion of truth). In their theory of mind, pragmatists deny the distinction between thought and action by closely connecting thought to practical desires on the one hand and conduct on the other.

Second, I reconstruct Collingwood's developing position towards pragmatism over the course of his life. I show that, throughout his work, he is sympathetic to the idea of repudiating the dualism between thought and action. However, in the way the pragmatists elaborate their theories of truth they fail to accomplish precisely this, or so Collingwood implies in his early writings. By making truth dependent on feeling (James) or biological/psychological desire (Schiller),

some pragmatists inadvertently reinstate a dualism between thought and something external to it. Dewey, furthermore, although not susceptible to the criticism of James and Schiller, misunderstands the historical nature of mind. From Collingwood's perspective, mind must be seen as a self-creative process which creates itself out of its own past, and cannot be likened to natural processes, as Dewey does.

In addition to the above, I show how Collingwood's early interpretation of pragmatism is heavily influenced by the Italian idealists Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), Guido de Ruggiero (1888-1948) and Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944). I also explain why Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) – generally regarded as one of the founders of pragmatism – is not a big part of the history of Collingwood's relation to pragmatism.

Most of Collingwood's explicit engagement with pragmatism takes place in the 1910s and 1920s. After that, he further develops his philosophical system until his untimely death in 1943. My thesis shows that, although Collingwood's development brings him closer to the position of the pragmatists in the decade preceding his death, he never abandons the criticisms summarized above. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Collingwood's mature philosophy has more in common with sophisticated forms of pragmatism than with either idealism or realism.

In short, the main conclusion of my thesis is that – if we regard pragmatism as the attempt to overcome the dualism between thought and action – Collingwood, in my view, would have regarded himself as more of a pragmatist than the pragmatists themselves.

## Appendix C – Samenvatting (Dutch)

*Titel:* “All thought exists for the sake of action”: de historische en filosofische relaties tussen R.G. Collingwood en het klassieke pragmatisme

In deze doctorale dissertatie onderzoek ik de relatie tussen het denken van de Britse filosoof, historicus en archeoloog R.G. Collingwood (1889-1943) en de pragmatisten William James (1841-1910), F.C.S. Schiller (1864-1937) en John Dewey (1859-1952).

Dit project is nodig omdat Collingwoods beoordeling van het pragmatisme verwarrend lijkt. Aan de ene kant heeft hij gedurende zijn carrière uitspraken gedaan zoals: “all thought exists for the sake of action”, en: “real thinking ... starts from practice and returns to practice”, die erg pragmatisch aandoen. Maar anderzijds heeft Collingwood het over “the babblings of pragmatism” en ziet hij die filosofie als “confused”. Hoe passen al deze uitspraken bij elkaar?

Collingwood legt het verband niet uit, en in de secundaire literatuur is er geen consensus. Interpreten hebben tot dusverre de vraag beantwoord door een voornamelijk filosofische aanpak te kiezen. Ze reconstrueren Collingwoods systeem en vergelijken dat dan met de ideeën van de pragmatisten. Mijn dissertatie voegt echter een historisch perspectief toe door met de vraag te beginnen waarom Collingwood *zelf* het pragmatisme afwijst.

Op basis van het zorgvuldig lezen van primaire bronnen en nauwgezet archiefonderzoek beargumenteert mijn dissertatie het volgende. Ten eerste, kijkend naar de pragmatisten in de context van hun debat met idealisten als F.H. Bradley (1864-1924) en realisten als Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) moeten we concluderen dat het pragmatisme niet in eerste instantie een waarheidstheorie is, maar een filosofie van de geest (met implicaties voor concepten van waarheid). In hun filosofie van de geest ontkennen de pragmatisten de distinctie tussen theorie en praktijk door het denken innig te verbinden aan praktische verlangens enerzijds en aan het handelen anderzijds.

Ten tweede reconstrueer ik Collingwoods evoluerende positie ten opzichte van het pragmatisme gedurende zijn carrière. Ik laat zien dat hij in al zijn werk positief staat ten opzichte van het idee om het dualisme tussen denken en handelen

op te blazen. Maar in hoe de pragmatisten hun waarheidstheorieën uitwerken falen ze precies op dit punt, zo zegt Collingwood in zijn vroege geschriften. Door waarheid afhankelijk te maken van gevoel (James) of verlangens (Schiller) zetten sommige pragmatisten juist het dualisme op tussen het denken en iets dat daar extern aan is. Daarnaast is het zo dat Dewey, hoewel hij niet vatbaar is voor de kritiek op James en Schiller, het historische karakter van de geest verkeerd begrijpt. Vanuit Collingwoods perspectief moet de geest worden gezien als een creatief proces dat zichzelf uit zijn eigen verleden creëert, en kan die niet met natuurlijke processen worden vergeleken, zoals Dewey doet.

Naast het bovenstaande laat ik zien hoe Collingwoods vroege interpretatie van het pragmatisme in belangrijke mate is beïnvloed door het denken van de Italiaanse idealisten Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), Guido de Ruggiero (1888-1948) en Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944). Ik leg ook uit waarom Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) – die bekendstaat als één van de grondleggers van het pragmatisme – geen groot onderdeel is van de geschiedenis van Collingwoods relatie tot het pragmatisme.

Het grootste deel van Collingwoods expliciete verstandhouding met het pragmatisme vindt plaats in de jaren 1910 en 1920. Daarna ontwikkelt hij zijn filosofische systeem verder tot zijn vroege dood in 1943. Mijn dissertatie laat zien dat, hoewel Collingwoods ontwikkeling hem dichterbij de positie van de pragmatisten brengt in de tien jaren voor zijn dood, hij bovengenoemde kritieken nooit loslaat. Desondanks kan beargumenteerd worden dat Collingwoods volwassen filosofie meer overeenkomsten heeft met gesofisticeerde vormen van pragmatisme dan met idealisme of realisme.

In het kort is de hoofdconclusie van mijn dissertatie dat – als we het pragmatisme zien als de poging om de distinctie tussen denken en handelen af te schaffen – dat, zoals ik het zie, Collingwood zichzelf dan als pragmatischer dan de pragmatisten zelf zou hebben gezien.