

Preface

This book is an attempt to do two things: the first is to demonstrate that Collingwood's philosophical work as a whole comprises a unity in which, although there was development, there was no 'radical conversion' rendering the later writings philosophically incompatible with the earlier; the second is to display Collingwood's political philosophy as a unified whole. The first task is a necessary prelude to the second, because the second presupposes that writings from different periods of Collingwood's career can be appropriately juxtaposed in the presentation of his political philosophy, a procedure that is open to obvious objection if the presupposition of essential unity is unjustified. The book is accordingly divided into two parts, the first being devoted to an examination of Collingwood's views on philosophical method and metaphysics, and the second to what I have termed 'the political philosophy of civilization'. Although it comprises, I hope, an integrated whole, nonetheless each part can be appreciated separately.

The book as a whole is largely exegetical and constructive in that it draws heavily on Collingwood's writings (both published and previously unpublished) in order to answer certain questions concerning his philosophical development and also to draw together a complete picture of what I believe to be a complete political philosophy of civilization. This is why I have not adopted the approach typified by Peter Johnson's *R.G. Collingwood: An Introduction*. That approach seeks to address Collingwood's arguments individually on their merits, to engage him in a critical conversation in which some arguments might be allowed to stand and others to fall, without reference to the overall issue of the coherence of Collingwood's thought or its development over time. I agree with Johnson that this is an important task because, ultimately, why should anyone care about a thinker's development or the coherence of their thought unless that thought is worth expressing in the first place and has

philosophical value for us? However, there is room for both dimensions for, as Collingwood himself remarks in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, 'the question whether a man's views are true or false does not arise until we have found out what they are'. This book is a contribution to this dimension of study, but I firmly believe that the other dimension is valuable even though I am not practicing it here. Thus a reader would be right to assume that I believe Collingwood's thought of value and hence worth studying, but wrong to assume that I believe that everything he wrote or published was of equal philosophical worth.

For convenience I draw a distinction between published and unpublished material, even though many of Collingwood's manuscripts have now been (and continue to be) published. However, referring to the 'published' and 'unpublished' writings serves as a convenient shorthand to refer, on the one hand, to books and articles published in Collingwood's lifetime (or immediately after his death), and, on the other, to manuscripts which either remain unpublished or were published only in the past few years, typically as addenda to reissued editions of his major works.

Long ago and far away a much earlier version of this book was written as a PhD dissertation. By the 'law of primitive survivals' it undoubtedly still bears marks of this origin, visible to the scholarly eye of readers if not always to my own. But to have cast aside the origin would have meant writing a different book entirely; besides, the original (and its occasional offspring)¹ have established a place of sorts in the world of Collingwood studies, and publication of the book in this form serves to draw together this work in an accessible form.

Collingwood studies have developed apace since I first started reading the unpublished manuscripts in Oxford in 1980. A thriving Collingwood Society which runs popular biennial conferences has been formed, and an annual journal, *Collingwood Studies* (now *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*) provides an invaluable outlet for much fascinating writing. Many books have been published over the same period of time, including one covering the same territory as this — *The Social and Political Thought of R.G. Collingwood* by David Boucher. There is clearly overlap between the two books; however, their approach and purposes differ; I hope that they complement one another, and that each has something distinctive to offer.

[1] Chapters Two and Three were first published in a different form as 'Metaphysics and Method: A Necessary Unity in the Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood', 1990, pp. 33–156.

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As always, I am solely to blame for any errors of philosophy, fact or interpretation to be found in the following pages.

In memory of Liam O'Sullivan
who inspired so many of us

Introduction

Any philosophy of civilization or politics must situate its subject matter within the full context of human experience; and similarly, Collingwood's political philosophy of civilization must be situated within his whole philosophy and philosophical approach. This, of course, presupposes that there is an overall philosophical approach and that Collingwood developed a consistent philosophy and consistent method. My claim is, therefore, twofold: first I claim that Collingwood developed a philosophy of politics and civilization, and that this philosophy has its roots in the early just as much as in the later work; and secondly, I claim that Collingwood developed a general philosophy which is for the most part consistent and best regarded as an integrated whole. This second claim, if justified, serves to ground the first claim by eliminating the contention that works from different periods are likely to be mutually inconsistent.

In the nature of things, the second part must come first: the attempt to exhibit the unity of Collingwood's political and social philosophy presupposes the demonstration of the unity of his philosophy as a whole. In drawing upon diverse texts from different periods of Collingwood's career in order to build a picture of his philosophy of civilization and politics, I have first of all to be confident that the procedure is justified. As we shall see in Chapter One, many critics have maintained that Collingwood's work suffered some form of radical break or 'radical conversion'. If this were so then it would clearly be inadmissible to juxtapose texts taken from different periods without first ascertaining either that these texts were unaffected by the 'radical conversion' or that there was no 'radical conversion'. I shall accordingly argue, throughout Part One, that Collingwood's philosophical work is best seen as a developing whole, admitting of differences both of emphasis and content, but not admitting of radical discontinuity. I shall attempt to demonstrate that Collingwood's philosophy is a unity: this demonstration

is presupposed in what follows, where I bring together disparate writings on politics and civilization in order to display them as constituting a coherent philosophy.

My presentation of Collingwood's philosophy does not rely solely on published works: a substantial proportion of the material employed comes from unpublished manuscripts. These manuscripts have been used in order to supplement published writings through the use of added detail, and also through the provision of fresh material on all manner of topics either not dealt with in the published works, or at best, dealt with only briefly. Published works are primary in the sense that they, and they alone, were authorised for publication in permanent and accessible form. However, this does not invalidate the use of the manuscripts. Collingwood's intentions in publishing a book are one thing: the difficulties and perplexities which arise in the course of a scholar's efforts to assess these works as a whole are quite another. We are entirely justified in looking at unpublished manuscripts in the hope of answering questions arising from our reading of the published books and articles: and here, while the published works do not cease to be primary, the weight of investigation is necessarily thrown onto the unpublished manuscripts; and if they help us resolve disputes or answer questions which would otherwise be unresolved and unanswered, I hardly think that their importance or value can be denied.

The use of the manuscripts constitutes the core of my presentation. However, the view I take concerning the overall unity of Collingwood's philosophy and philosophical method is not derived solely from the unpublished manuscripts, and could be argued for without recourse to them. But, given that the manuscripts are available in the public domain and increasingly available through re-issue of Collingwood's main works, I thought it important to seize the opportunity presented by these manuscripts to amplify the published writings, to clarify points left unclear or insufficiently developed in them, and to supplement them with fresh material.

In what follows, Chapter One clears the ground, and Chapters Two and Three develop an account of the unity of Collingwood's philosophy, thereby laying the foundations for what follows. In Part Two I begin to construct an account of Collingwood's political philosophy of civilization. Chapter Four addresses Collingwood's understanding of the relation of theory to practice: I correct the slightly misleading account in *An Autobiography* by drawing on manuscript and other sources as well as briefly examining T.H. Green's position. Such a discussion is unavoidable in dealing

with any author's social or political thought: in Collingwood's case it is inevitable given the great importance he attaches to the practical relevance of philosophy. I then outline the categories central to Collingwood's moral and political philosophy. The 'forms of action' are characterised and their relation to action as a form of experience indicated.

Chapter Five is concerned with Collingwood's understanding of political action: it includes a discussion of society, community, ruling and being ruled based largely on *The New Leviathan*. It also presents Collingwood's views on punishment, mostly through the use of unpublished manuscripts: and sketches the place of punishment within the overall account of society and community as developed in *The New Leviathan*. Chapter Six addresses the concept of civilization central to *The New Leviathan*: I use that book, along with manuscripts and earlier drafts, in order to draw out the meaning of the concept. In doing so I also bring in Collingwood's interesting discussion of civilization as an ideal which is to be found in an early draft manuscript of *The New Leviathan*.

Chapter Seven, *The Dimensions of Civilization*, takes its title from a phrase Collingwood uses in the 1936 manuscript, 'Man Goes Mad'. The dimensions are emotion, tradition and intelligence and I attempt to indicate how the brief account of these things in 'Man Goes Mad' fits into the much more detailed accounts provided in *The Principles of Art*, *The Idea of History*, *An Autobiography* and *The New Leviathan*.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I summarise and restate the overall thesis of the book.