

R.G. Collingwood: From Anthropology to Metaphysics

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Introduction

What I propose to examine in this paper is Collingwood's foray into anthropology. It has been well said that Collingwood was a philosopher who got his hands dirty. This is true, not only figuratively but literally – he was a working archaeologist. It is important to remember this because in the 1930s there were at least two philosophers in the UK who were both pondering the *Golden Bough*, ritual and magic. The other was Ludwig Wittgenstein, who says very similar things to Collingwood although in a more aphoristic manner. Wittgenstein got his hands dirty in various ways, but not as an active archaeologist or historian. It is an important point also for the simple reason that not only was Collingwood not pontificating from the proverbial armchair, but also because the gulf between archaeology and anthropology is not perhaps as clear cut as that between philosophy and anthropology.

Collingwood's archaeological speciality was Roman Britain, a subject on which he published hundreds of articles. This is worth noting because if he is familiar to you only as a philosopher it is important to be reminded of his parallel career. One of his most important works was on the inscriptions of Roman Britain. Some of these have only recently been published because it was a long term project, starting almost 100 years ago: Collingwood was at the heart of the project throughout its formative period.

Collingwood and anthropology

Let me remind you of some Collingwood chronology for the period 1935-1939. In 1935 he became the Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy. It is not unimportant to remember both the title and the fact that Collingwood was elected to that chair at the precise time that people like A. J. Ayer were bringing back news from Vienna about logical positivism. Everyone at the time was talking about the elimination of metaphysics, and at that very moment Collingwood had ascended to a chair which might, in the eyes of some, be termed the Emperor's New Chair, whose subject-matter existed only in the minds of its incumbents.

In 1936 Collingwood delivered a lecture to the British Academy called 'Human Nature and Human History' which was later reprinted in the *Idea of History*. This paper was on the conception of human nature: it denied the existence of a constant human nature by resolving it into human history. However this paper, taken by itself, would certainly mislead the reader concerned to understand Collingwood's complete position. This is because by the end of that year he had started some serious work on folk tales, folk lore, and anthropology. Related to this was the fact that as part of his duties as a delegate to the Clarendon Press he had already developed a relationship with the work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard and possibly also knew him personally. Evans-Pritchard's manuscript, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* was submitted to the Clarendon Press in 1935. Collingwood probably was the first reader

of the manuscript: he certainly knew of it before it was published in 1937 and was possibly the first to quote it in print, in his *Principles of Art* published in 1938.

Collingwood's work on folk tales and anthropology was serious and intense. He joined the Folk Lore Society in London and used their libraries for weeks on end. Although he was at one point scheduled to deliver a paper to the society, he was unable to do so because of ill health. On the other hand he did chair several of their meetings, join their discussions and quickly became a part of the group. At this time he also engaged in correspondence with various anthropologists, psychologists and others. An example of this is the interesting correspondence with Brenda Seligman on kinship, taboo and incest relations. He was evidently (although self-professedly not an expert) quite serious about these forays.

In 1937 Collingwood was writing *The Principles of Art*. It is not immediately obvious what a book on aesthetics has to do with anthropology or metaphysics, at least until one notices the references to Evans-Pritchard, anthropology and the chapter entitled 'Art as Magic.' The key point is that a lot of his work in *The Principles of Art* is very closely related to his work in anthropology, his study of folklore, fairytales and practices of so called primitive societies. Immediately after completing the book he started working on what was to become the *Essay on Metaphysics*. He was also writing his *Autobiography* in 1938 which contained a summary or account not so much of what he had done, although he did do that, but also what he intended to do in case he did not live long enough to do it. He knew he was dying. In 1938-1939 he took a long trip to the Dutch East Indies on board a cargo steamer and stayed there for the best part of three months or so travelling around the islands. On board ship he was busy writing *An Essay on Metaphysics*,

correcting the proofs of *An Autobiography*, and writing the *Principles of History* which was never published in the form he wanted.

Collingwood and the relation between the sciences

Let me say something about the attitude of Collingwood as philosopher to the natural sciences and the debates in the 1930s about whether or not there ought to be a school of science and philosophy. Collingwood wrote two letters to the *Oxford Magazine* on the matter; he was quite wary of it but for quite a precise reason, which was that he thought for the undergraduate level it was inappropriate because you couldn't really do justice to either by doing both together. However, at postgraduate level he would be happy to teach fully trained scientists how to do philosophy. And there is a passage here that I rather liked (as I had been to see King Tutankhamen just recently):

It is not, I submit, conceivable that one form of thought should raise problems which only another can solve, or that one kind of training should enable a man to ask questions which only another kind would enable him to answer. Any problem which arises out of the development of scientific thought must be soluble, if at all, only by a further development of the same kind of thinking and a philosopher, with whatever admiration and interest he may watch the work of scientists, has no more right to forestall the result of their inquiries by an edict as to what is "philosophically admissible" than to tell the archaeologists what it is philosophically admissible for them to find in the inner chamber of Tutankhamen (Collingwood, 1923a, p. 301).

This was written just after Carter had revealed the inner chambers of Tutankhamen and what Collingwood is saying is that these domains have their own methods of enquiry and that it is not

the job of philosophers (or anyone else) to do science for the scientists.

Collingwood and Psychology

Now let me make some comments on Collingwood's attitude to psychology. I mention these both because of their intrinsic interest and also because some of the themes are common to his critique of anthropological understanding. It is important to note that Collingwood did in fact take his comments on psychology very seriously: he had a dictum which was essentially that you can only philosophise about things with which you have had personal, first order engagement. This is why he was a little bit wary about doing philosophy of science, but very happy to engage in the philosophy of art because he played the violin and piano, he painted, he drew and he could claim similar familiarity with various other subjects. When it came to psychology he made a point of being psychoanalysed. He did not just talk about it in the way his colleagues did but had the full fifty sessions (Mabbott, 1986, p. 76). He was a great admirer of Freud, whom he regarded as a genius: however, he was severely critical of Freud when he saw him venturing into retrospective psycho-analysis of literary figures or into anthropological territory. In his view, Freud on these occasions was guilty of systematic violation of his own analytical principles.

To show his seriousness, let me first mention Margaret Lowenfeld, the child psychologist, whom Collingwood first met through her father during the First World War in London and knew her for the rest of his life. They would often meet in London or at Oxford to talk. Their families would stay at each other's houses, there was some correspondence between the two and they both referred to each other in their works and so on. Lowenfeld frequently asked Collingwood to comment on papers she presented, including one in

Manchester in the late 1930s, for those interested in the archives. Collingwood also knew J. S. Haldane, the physiologist and intrepid experimenter (he invented various forms of breathing apparatus and safety apparatus for coal mines). He observed and took part in his laboratory experiments on perception. He also, in the 1920s, reviewed books by Charles Spearman, R. H. Thouless, C. G. Jung and various other psychological works. Right now I am just going to give you a few quotations. This is from his review of Spearman's book *The Nature of 'Intelligence' and the Principles of Cognition*. Collingwood writes:

The original error, we think, lies in the hope of using intelligence-tests as a basis for the psychology of cognition. It might be supposed that anything done in a laboratory is a scientific experiment and a firm basis for any amount of theoretical superstructure; but this is a mere idol of the theatre. Intelligence-tests are meant to test intelligence, and intelligence, as Professor Spearman's opening chapter shows, is not scientifically definable. The word denotes not a scientific concept but a vaguely-defined and fluctuating mass of attributes which we wish to find in persons who are to be entrusted with certain vaguely-defined responsibilities. To pretend, in such inquiries, to scientific accuracy is like trying to plot the edge of a fog with a theodolite (Collingwood, 1923b, p. 118).

I rather like that last phrase and think it ought to be told to anyone preparing to use such a test in business or a university. The quotation continues:

We can see, normally, when we are in a fog and when we are not; so we can, after ordinary experience of a person, tell whether he is or is not a person of "intelligence" and suitable for positions of responsibility. We might invent an instrument which should inform us whether or not we were in a fog; this might be useful at night, much as intelligence-tests are useful when we cannot have prolonged practical experience of a person's character. But such an instrument

would not revolutionise meteorology, because, though in some cases indispensable, it would be less reliable than the unaided senses of the normal man (Collingwood, 1923b, p. 118).

And finally:

The ‘success’ of intelligence-tests, of which Professor Spearman speaks so highly, consists not in telling us something we could not otherwise know, but simply in telling us that those people are intelligent who our unaided common-sense tells us are intelligent. Thus intelligence-tests can never widen the sphere of our accurate knowledge; for when they tell us something which our unaided common-sense does not confirm, we call them unsuccessful; and so does Professor Spearman (Collingwood, 1923b, p. 118).

There are a couple of points to make. First, the style is very good: Collingwood hits and he hits hard; secondly, these sorts of responses to intelligence tests and Spearman’s approach to the principles of cognition were ones that we later find echoed in the work of Gilbert Ryle and others who have written about intelligence tests and what they can and cannot do. Collingwood was writing in 1923 at a time when they first became a serious issue. As you know, their use in (for example) U.S. Immigration control became notorious, so it seemed appropriate to shower a little cold water on scientific pretensions and on the value of these tests.¹

¹ For an extended discussion of Collingwood’s views on psychology, see Connelly and Costall (2000). The key point is that, whatever its merits, scientific psychology can never attain understanding of the subjectivity of experience and treats the psyche as object, not as subject. This critique is virtually identical to that which he levels at Frazer and other anthropologists.

Anthropology, Evans-Pritchard and Magic

But let me move back to anthropology. I want to quote here Wendy James, professor of anthropology at Oxford and author of *The Ceremonial Animal*. She also wrote one of the introductions to Collingwood’s posthumously edited *The Philosophy of Enchantment*, which contains his writings on anthropology, magic, folklore and fairytales. In her introduction she asks:

What was the state of anthropology, as Collingwood found it and conducted his own excavation of it, in the mid-1930s? With few exceptions, according to him at least, it was guilty of scientism, false naturalism, and a parochial utilitarianism in distancing ‘primitive’ humanity from ‘ourselves’ and from what we claimed as our ‘advanced’ civilization. (James, 2005, lxv).

Collingwood might be the first to have quoted E.E Evans-Pritchard’s *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* in print. I do not know this for certain (and I do not propose to check every book published in 1938) but he refers to it in *The Principles of Art*, written in 1937, just as Evans-Pritchard’s book was published; Collingwood probably read it for the Clarendon Press prior to publication. The passage he quotes in *The Principles of Art* is the (now) famous one where Evans-Pritchard writes:

Let the reader consider any argument that would utterly demolish all Zande claims for the power of the oracle. If it were translated into Zande modes of thought it would serve to support their entire structure of belief (Evans-Pritchard, 1937, pp. 319-20, quoted in Collingwood, 1938, p. 8fn).

Now, there are two obvious points that I want to make (one of which I shall return to later) which concerns understanding Zande practices and the general way in which one seeks to understand magic. But

the other, for those who might be interested, is that in my view Collingwood's doctrine of metaphysics as the search for analysis of absolute presuppositions owes something to Evans-Pritchard. Indeed, there are certain passages in the *Essay on Metaphysics* which read rather like rewrites of passages from Evans-Pritchard. My suggestion is that Collingwood's reading of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic* materially influenced the formulation of his doctrine of metaphysics as presented in the 1940 *Essay* and its immediate predecessor, the manuscript entitled 'The Function of Metaphysics in Civilization'.² I am not suggesting that it was the only influence, nor that Collingwood could not have formulated his views independently of this work; I am merely suggesting that the form it took, and some of its content, would have been otherwise in the absence of his reading of Evans-Pritchard.

The influence of Evans-Pritchard is most noticeable, not surprisingly, in the chapter 'Religion and Natural Science in Primitive Society'. In that chapter we find the following passage:

Anthropologists tell us of peoples who believe that there is no such thing as natural death. They think, we are assured, that every instance of death is due to magic. If that is so there might be peoples who hold the same belief about everything whatever ... It might be fancied that the mere course of experience would suffice to destroy it ... An absolute presupposition cannot be undermined by the verdict of 'experience', because it is the yard-stick by which 'experience' is judged. To suggest that 'experience' might teach my hypothetical savages that some events are not due to magic is like suggesting that experience might teach a civilized people that there are not twelve inches in a foot and thus cause them to adopt the metric system. As long as you measure in feet and inches, everything

you measure has dimensions composed of those units. As long as you believe in a world of magic, that is the kind of world in which you live. If any group or community of human beings ever held a pan-magical belief about the world, it is certainly not 'experience' that could shake it. Yet certainly it might be shaken. It might be shaken through the influence of a very powerful tribesman who found himself taking a different view; or by the prestige of some other community, accepted and revered in the first instance as extremely powerful magicians, and later found to reject and despise it (Collingwood, 1998, pp. 193-4).

This is very clearly a reference to *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic* both in respect of the denial of natural death and also the way in which experience does not undermine the belief. In 'The Function of Metaphysics in Civilization', Collingwood presents a slightly more developed account of the idea of a 'catalogue raisonnée' of absolute presuppositions than that found in the *Essay*.³ This account argues the case that within a living system of thought, the appearance of contradictions is frequently false because in practice principles or beliefs are employed depending on case and context.

[in] a catalogue raisonnée ... each principle is not merely stated but expanded and commented on in detail, showing how it is used in being applied to this or that kind of case. By a system of principles I mean a treatment in which the relations between these principles form an integral part of the exposition; so that if two principles A and B are inconsistent, an inquiry is instituted into the whole method by which this

² Now reprinted in the revised edition of *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 1998.

³ For Collingwood, the purpose of metaphysics, properly understood, was the discovery, through metaphysical analysis, of the absolute presuppositions lying at the heart of the thinking of each discipline or indeed civilisations as a whole. 'Absolute' presuppositions were distinguished from 'relative' presuppositions in that they were not the answer to a prior question but, rather, the underlying principles which alone make any acts of questioning (and hence any developed body of knowledge or inquiry) possible.

inconsistency is overcome in the actual application of them. ... The presence of a given item in a metaphysical system is a question of fact ... the metaphysician ... has to settle it ... by studying the actual way in which the people whose thought he is analysing treat their presuppositions. It is theoretically possible that these people should habitually think in such a way that they react to certain types of situation by applying principles which in other types of case they would not dream of applying, though they could give no reason why these principles should apply in one type of case and not in the other. In such circumstances it is not the metaphysician's business to invent a reason. His subject matter presents itself to him simply as a series of juxtaposed facts, and that is how he must report it. When he tries to present it systematically, the nearest approach he can make to a system is to point out that although abstractly considered the principles he enumerates might conflict with one another, in fact they do not conflict because they apply to different groups of cases. The *status* of a case in one or other group determines what principle it shall fall under (Collingwood, 1998, pp. 383-5).

This passage clearly bears the imprint of Part III, Chapter IV of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic* – the chapter quoted in *The Principles of Art*. The title of this chapter is 'Problems that arise from consultation of the poison oracle', and Collingwood was clearly impressed by the way in which the Azande system of belief was flexible enough to resolve apparent contradictions in its actual application. To appreciate the full flavour of the comparison, it is necessary to quote Evans-Pritchard at some length.

Azande are dominated by an overwhelming faith which prevents them from making experiments, from generalizing contradictions between tests, between verdicts of different oracles, and between all the oracles and experience. To understand why it is that Azande do not draw from their observations the conclusions we would draw from the same evidence, we must realize that their attention is fixed on the mystical properties of the poison oracle and that its

natural properties are of so little interest to them that they simply do not bother to consider them ... If a Zande's mind were not fixed on the mystical qualities of *benge* and entirely absorbed by them he would perceive the significance of the knowledge he already possesses. As it is the contradiction between his beliefs and his observations only become a generalized and glaring contradiction when they are recorded side by side in the pages of an ethnographic treatise. I have collected every fact I could discover about the poison oracle ... and built all these jottings into a chapter on Zande oracles. The contradictions in Zande thought are then readily seen. But in real life these bits of knowledge do not form part of an indivisible concept, so that when a man thinks of *benge* he must think of all the details I have recorded here. They are functions of different situations and are uncoordinated. Hence the contradictions so apparent to us do not strike a Zande. If he is conscious of a contradiction it is a particular one which he can easily explain in terms of his own beliefs ... Azande observe the action of the poison oracle as we observe it, but their observations are always subordinated to their beliefs and are incorporated into their beliefs and made to explain them and justify them. Let the reader consider any argument that would utterly demolish all Zande claims for the power of the oracle. If it were translated into Zande modes of thought it would serve to support their entire structure of belief. For their mystical notions are eminently coherent, being interrelated by a network of logical ties, and are so ordered that they never too crudely contradict sensory experience but, instead, experience seems to justify them (Evans-Pritchard, 1937, pp. 318-320).

And a later passage makes very clear the misrepresentation that Evans-Pritchard thought inevitable when real practices were rendered abstract and placed coldly side by side within the pages of an academic treatise:

I am aware that my account of Zande magic suffers from lack of co-ordination. So does Zande magic. Magical rites do not form an interrelated system, and there is no nexus between one rite and another. Each is an

isolated activity, so that they cannot all be described in an ordered account. Any description of them must appear somewhat haphazard. Indeed, by treating them all together ... I have given them a unity by abstraction that they do not possess in reality. This lack of co-ordination between magical rites contrasts with the general coherence and interdependence of Zande beliefs in other fields. ... Throughout I have emphasized the coherency of Zande beliefs when they are considered together and are interpreted in terms of situations and social relationships. I have tried to show also the plasticity of beliefs as functions of situations. They are not indivisible ideational structures but are loose associations of notions. When a writer brings them together in a book and presents them as a conceptual system their insufficiencies and contradictions are at once apparent. In real life they do not function as a whole but in bits. A man in one situation utilizes what in the beliefs are convenient to him and pays no attention to other elements which he might use in different situations. Hence a single event may evoke a number of different and contradictory beliefs among different persons. I hope that I have persuaded the reader of one thing, namely, the intellectual consistency of Zande notions. They only appear inconsistent when ranged like lifeless museum objects (Evans-Pritchard, 1937, pp. 540-1).

I hope that the foregoing is sufficient to show that Evans-Pritchard's work was at least one of the factors uppermost in Collingwood's mind when he was composing *An Essay on Metaphysics*.⁴

Magic, self knowledge and civilisation

Collingwood was an archaeologist and a historian as well as a philosopher. When he branched out into anthropology he was looking at conceptual differences in modes

⁴ For an account of Evans-Pritchard's work in relation to these themes, see Douglas (1980), chapter nine on 'Contradiction'.

of thought, thinking and feeling, not only across time, but also across space. It seems to me that this is one of the things feeding into his later works, in the sense that he was very acutely aware of the ways in which different people thought differently. He was very acutely aware that one could not attain a neutral standpoint from which to criticise their conceptual schemas, thoughts, structures or whatever simply by importing views from the outside, because they were based on what he came to call "a constellation of absolute presuppositions".

Let me pursue this through a discussion of his account of magic. I shall not develop the point here, but there are many striking similarities between Collingwood's discussion and Wittgenstein's.⁵ First, we have to consider what magic is not. It is not a kind of pseudo-science believed in by people who are or were too stupid to discover genuine scientific law. He is very insistent on this point. He is also insistent that anyone can make mistakes, so sometimes people (so-called 'savages') might actually believe in particular what we falsely think they believe in general: but this is not central to their belief system. His starting point is to analyse magic as being rooted in an expression of joy in possessing power over nature through the use of tools which enhance their ability to control it. For example, some glory in their ability, through using a plough, to bring about certain results that otherwise they could not bring about. We can understand their revelling in that glory by expressing

⁵ In Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*' you will find much that is very similar to Collingwood's approach, so much so that they could be taken to emanate from the same person. The main difference is that Collingwood's reflections were developed at book length and Wittgenstein's were not. Collingwood intended to write a book on folklore and fairytales, which included his discussion of anthropology and magic. This material now makes up the bulk of the volume on *The Philosophy of Enchantment*.

spontaneously their joy in their ability to use these instruments to their own ends; we can say 'look this is something we can understand, we do it ourselves.' This is a point I will come back to. But we have to understand in this that the 'savages' are not attributing pseudo-scientific properties to these instruments: they are simply expressing their delight in the way that these things work. Collingwood points out that if it were really the case that they were too stupid to understand the relationship between cause and effect, they would by the same token be too stupid to develop the very instruments, techniques, practices and tools which they glorify when they use them. You can't have it both ways: either they are stupid or they are not. If they are clever enough to devise these implements then they are clever enough to recognise the relationship between cause and effect and not stupid enough to think that there is some sort of 'magical' connection (in the supernatural sense) of properties attached to them.

Collingwood accuses J.G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, and all who think like him, of approaching their subject matter as something external to themselves, as something both external to themselves as individuals and also to their own civilisation. They do this without any attempt to work themselves into its spirit of it and make of it something they can understand themselves. In other words, just as with scientific psychology, they are viewing others not as subject but as objects:

Frazer ... approaches his subject-matter as a thing external to himself and the civilization which he feels as his own: without any attempt to work himself into the spirit of it and to re-create in his own mind the experiences whose outward expression he is studying. This may be the right method in natural science; but that is because in natural science man is working to understand and control the external world of things around him (Collingwood, 2005, p. 153).

One can see immediately how this relates directly to what he called the principles of history, possibly the most famous of which was the notion of re-enactment or rethinking of the thought of others. But here in anthropology he is extending the notion of re-enactment to our ability to re-enact emotions and the ritual ceremonies and so on attached to them. He continues:

In anthropological science man is trying to understand man; and to man his fellow-man is never a mere external object, something to be observed and described, but something to be sympathised with, to be studied by penetrating into his thoughts and re-enacting those thoughts for oneself. Anthropology ... is an historical science, where by calling it historical as opposed to naturalistic I mean that its true method is thus to get inside its object or re-create its object inside itself (Collingwood, 2005, pp. 153-4).

This goes back to the idea of the inside/outside metaphor we have already discussed. I would firmly underline the point that the phrase is not intended to refer to an unobservable mental entity. Collingwood is not a dualist by any means, although his language can be interpreted that way, especially by people who do not read the rest of his writing in which he makes it very clear he is not a dualist. We can think magic because it is not alien to us:

In order to understand [magic] we must give an account ... which will show that in its essence it is a thing familiar to ourselves, *not as a spectacle, but as an experience*: something which we habitually do, something which plays a part in our social and personal life, not as a mere survival of savagery, but as an essential feature of civilization (Collingwood, 2003: 129).

By the way, in these works Collingwood usually uses the term 'savage' in scare quotes: indeed, it is very clear that he is not using the term as a straightforward descriptive term. In fact, he says very

clearly at one point, there is no such thing as 'the savage.' He regards talks of 'the savage' as being a construct arising out of certain ways of looking at other cultures in which we classify people who think or feel differently from ourselves and then label them accordingly. But it has the same scientific reality as the term 'barbarian', originally used to denote anyone who is not Greek, which it hardly tells you any more than that they are not Greek. On the whole Collingwood is very careful to steer his way through some of these tortuous linguistic waters.

To return - I rather like this point:

I have heard a philosopher confess a desire to dance upon a book whose doctrines he disapproved of; not, clearly, because he thought this would refute the doctrines or induce others to reject them, but because the hostile and aggressive impulses which he felt towards the author directed themselves quite spontaneously upon his book (Collingwood, 2005, p. 197).

I don't know whether any of you have ever danced on a book, thrown one across the floor, hurled it down in disgust or whatever. But what Collingwood is saying is really two things. On one level he is insistent on the fact that magical practices (so called) are not things which belong to the 'other'. They belong to us too and we should recognise that fact. The second point is that underlying this (and this is important when we come to consider relativism and questions of human nature) is that he does really insist that there is a common human nature at some level. In other words we all experience certain types of emotions, but what differs is the expression of them, the institutions surrounding them, the cultural practices, ceremonials, and rituals built upon them. The underlying theme is some sort of common humanity in which we can recognise all of these things as expressions of things which we express in our own different, but nonetheless related, way. So

when Collingwood says there is no such thing as human nature he means humans are also historical beings; most of what we are is historical in character because we develop our customs and rituals, where usually the interesting differences lie. Nonetheless there is an underlying common humanity. Now of course, that in itself is not a surprising thing to say, but it does have some cutting edge against people who say, for example, that other people in other places are possess a 'primitive mentality' which is forever different from our own.

He expresses this point very clearly in considering emotions: 'Emotions of this kind have been felt *semper ubique ab omnibus*. Different civilizations have to some extent differed in the choice of objects for them ...' (Collingwood, 2005, p. 198). That is, we all have emotions but they may be expressed differently in different civilisations.

He wants to insist on this point. And then he argues that magic is a systematic and organised expression of emotion. What he then does is to look at all sorts of different practices on which we express emotions in one way or another, dancing on books or stabbing them viciously would be one example. But there are other types of magical practices he also wishes to look at. For example, rain dances and war dances and funerals and weddings and the singing of the national anthem. In *The Principles of Art* he provides a summary account: it is very clear that he has worked out what magic's function in human life is as a practical matter. But just to come back to the point I want us to keep reminding ourselves of: why and how we can understand magic. He reminds us that 'if magic were a form of belief or custom, peculiar to primitive peoples and absolutely foreign to the mind of civilised man the civilised historian could never understand it' (Collingwood, 2005, p. 129). Someone earlier quoted the passage

where Collingwood says that in history the more we can understand of other people and what they do, whether in the present or the past, the more we can understand about ourselves. It is a test of our own capacities, the extent to which we can understand other people, and this, he says, extends into the anthropological realm. He invokes Spinoza to the effect that everything human should be understandable by us. Our desire to distance ourselves from what we find shameful or disgusting must not inhibit us from understanding ourselves fully, especially when we discover that those things that we tend (or wish) to attribute to others are also found in ourselves. This is why he talks of 'the savage within':

We must learn to face the savage within us if we are to understand the savage outside us. The savage within us must not be stamped down out of sight. He ... must be neither condemned nor derided, but understood. Just as the savages around us, when thus understood, cease to appear as savages and become human beings, courteous and friendly and honourable and worthy of admiration for their virtues and of love for their humanity, so the savage within us, on the same terms, will become no longer a thing of horror but a friend and helper: no savage, but the heart and root of our civilization (Collingwood, 2005, p. 186).

This is an important point because what Collingwood is saying is that in modern civilisation (so called) we have a tendency to cut ourselves off from the emotional wellsprings of our own lives. We tend to deny that we are superstitious, deny that we feel things, and then tend to project our disowned feelings onto other people who *are* the sort of people who feel those things. We also, he says, give ourselves false explanations. We inhabit what he calls a utilitarian world in which all our justifications have to be utilitarian. 'I only have a car to get me from a to b'. How many times have you heard that? How many times have you believed it?

Especially when the new car is a Porsche? It is the same with new laptops: 'I really need it to enhance my efficiency' they say. No!, you want to reply, you bought it because it is a flash new computer! How many times has one of your children bought a new iPod for roughly the same reason? I am talking personally now but it is always their dad who ends up with the old one, has the old Walkman, isn't it? It still works but no, it is not good enough. There are genuine advances of technology, it would be stupid to overlook that, but equally it would be daft to overlook the fact that typically when we are called upon to give an explanation, we give a utilitarian justification for something which is not entirely utilitarian. In fact what we are looking for in the object is something to do with the power, the glory, and the delight we feel that the new computer works three times faster than the old one. But it doesn't make any difference to what you write and given that most of us only ever word process on them, what difference would it really make if it fired up two seconds quicker? Yet we know that waiting a minute for a laptop to start is unbearable if you are used to one which fires up in half the time: who wouldn't love the latter? In other words, we give ourselves a false account of why we do certain things. Maybe it doesn't matter much; but maybe it does, if at the same time we are suppressing certain facts about our nature as emotional beings, for whom not all real explanations are utilitarian. That is what we have to watch out for.

Collingwood's account of magic and the problem of relativism

In general Collingwood characterises magic as a universal human emotional response to our dealings with the world; in particular he assigns it a positive role in life. What is this role? First, it should not be seen as an attempt to control natural

events by supernatural means. Understanding magic that way was what led Tyler and Fraser to characterise magic as pseudo-science. This failure to grasp the nature of magic led to such distortion as the belief that savages had a primitive mentality which prevented them from understanding the relationship between cause and effect.

So, positively, what is magic? It is rational, not irrational, and it is the arousal of particular sorts of emotions on particular sorts of occasions, where the intention or purpose is to crystallise the emotions thus aroused and direct them upon the conduct of practical life. The function of a war dance is to arouse war-like emotions, and so on. So why do the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team perform that peculiar dance before they play – the haka? We all know why: it is to fire themselves up for the game – and also to instil fear into their enemies. Collingwood analyses funerals, weddings, and dinner parties in like fashion; he even provides a long discussion about how terrible it would be for someone who turned up to a black tie dinner party in his flannels – a very 1930s Oxford sort of comment. But the point behind it, of course, is if you are in the wrong place, dressed inappropriately, the associated emotional feeling can be very powerful even though abstractly considered it sounds like the epitome of superficiality. This strikes me as being an important point about understanding or thinking our way into how these rituals are built upon the expression of certain types of emotion, as appropriate to different occasions.

Collingwood also points out (as does Wittgenstein) that people performing rain-dances or rituals associated with the harvest and so on, know perfectly well when the rain will come, and that if you plough the field and scatter, crops will emerge at harvest time. Given that they know these things, they should not be

taken as believing that their ritual will *cause* it to happen. Clearly, something else is going on, something associated with their understanding of what is happening. In some cases it is about getting themselves ready to prepare for the harvest; in some cases it is about giving thanks for the harvest; and in each case it is an expression of some emotion attached either to what they have received from the land or what they are going to do in order to receive it. Or to stir themselves up in order to receive it. Or (in the case of funerals) to accept the departure of loved ones and re-orientate themselves emotionally to life without them.

This is why magic is no less a part of civilised society than of any other. It is because civilised society contains innumerable performances, rituals and activities whose partial or sole function is the stimulation of emotion for the purpose of its discharge into the conduct of practical life. Some, as I suggested above, deny its existence but attribute it to others. It is one of those famous irregular conjugations: 'I don't have superstitions (I have reasons); you have superstitions; he has irrational fears'; '*I* buy the Porsche because it gets me from a to b, *he* bought because he likes fancy cars.' For Collingwood, we deny these motives in ourselves, attribute false beliefs to others by misunderstanding their beliefs as pseudo-science, and then pat ourselves on the head for having freed ourselves from all that superstitious nonsense. But we should never do this, because, if we do, we are distorting part of our own humanity, a humanity shared with the others we wish to deride for being magical, superstitious or whatever. In that way danger lies.

Let me just say a few final words on the spectre of relativism. I mentioned earlier that Collingwood knew Margaret Lowenfeld and in 1937 he wrote to her about a paper she was going to present at a conference and he writes:

I am really *very much worried* about [this]. We all know what kind of world it is to which you refer as the reality (or objective reality) world. But what exactly is its *title* to the name reality? I am haunted by a suspicion that it has none except the fact that adult members of modern European society ... are agreed to treat it as real; that ... it is the *conventional* world of a particular historically-determined culture (Collingwood, 1937).

I mention this because there is a big debate in Collingwood's studies, which I won't detain you with, which hinges on whether in his later work he became a historicist, a relativist, a historical relativist or some such. Most people now would say he probably didn't. However, he is very clear how tempted he was and this letter expresses this very sharply:

It is *not* the world of adult human beings *as such*: not, e.g., of modern Indians & (educated) medieval Europeans. This doubt in my mind leads me to wonder whether such words as *phantasy* ... aren't quite non-scientific terms, indicating merely our wish to ignore those ... features of experience which we can't fit into our conventional scheme. These are difficulties (very nasty ones: they affect the whole validity of what is, or was a generation ago, called modern science, including psychology itself) (Collingwood, 1937).

This appears to be teetering on the edge of a relativism which is only a step away from a sort of nihilism. You can see how strong the temptation was. Notice the date: 1937, right after his anthropological work and at the time he was reading Evans-Pritchard. It is at exactly the time he is thinking not only of Lowenfeld's work, and how the child builds up a world picture, but also of the way in which other people in other societies build up their own world pictures. He is clearly very much impressed by the differences rather than the underlying continuity. Here is the spectre of relativism.

Ernest Gellner, who once called Collingwood 'the reluctant relativist', said that he was driven to it although it is not where he wanted to end up. Whether he was or wasn't a relativist in his later work is disputable, but it is quite clear that he was worried about the issue. In a manuscript written one or two years later, called 'What Civilisation Means,' (later absorbed into *The New Leviathan*) he explicitly raises the charge of historical relativism against himself. He asks whether the view he is expressing is open to the charge of relativism, and he answers that it is not. He then proceeds to explicate his view of the relation between civilisations by showing that different civilisations have different ideals. In some sense these ideals are one but in other senses they are different and the identities and differences captured by his notion of the scale of forms (as developed in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*) in which differences in degree unite with differences in kind so that each civilisation reaches the ideal in its own way or kind of way and to a different degree. I am not arguing here that this is a complete rebuttal of the charge of historical relativism; I am merely indicating that Collingwood was very well aware of the charge of historical relativism and sought to head it off.

From the power of magic to the power of PowerPoint

So what would Collingwood say about PowerPoint? I just want to say this. I arrived here very early this morning because I didn't want this to be an example of PowerPoint going wrong: so I am aware of the irony (to paraphrase Sideshow Bob in *The Simpsons*) of using PowerPoint to denounce PowerPoint. We justify PowerPoint instrumentally, although deep down we know that is not the whole story. It distracts us and becomes an end in itself and it is often rather less effective and efficient than alternative forms of

presentation. And if it fails, what happens? Everyone runs around in a panic. The paper giver is helpless and cannot proceed until it is ready to work its magic, its Power – not for nothing is it so called. Collingwood did not use PowerPoint. He did, however, use magic lantern slides to illustrate his archaeology lectures. An appropriate medium, the ‘magic’ lantern, and an appropriate adjective. Magic is dead, long live magic!

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Discussion

Mathieu Marion

I have two questions. One is about re-enactment; there was the debate about re-enactment of history involving the conduct of what we would call the majority side. It would be common to involve the re-enactment of emotions but now I guess when we are trying to understand the cultures it seems that the re-enactment of thought is the way to do this and I would like you to comment on this.

The other point is about what you said, which I find strange, that Collingwood argues that the so called 'savage', the 'primitive', knows perfectly well when the rains would come. It made me think of a film I've seen recently, at the end of which, is [depicted what] is known as a 'cargo cult' – a practice that came about at the end of the Second World War in the Pacific, where both the Japanese and the Americans set up temporary air fields. After they left, they [the locals] started creating false towers, false planes and so forth to try to get [the cargo back.] So I don't have a feel that they know perfectly well.

James Connelly

Thank you they are both very good points. The first one about emotion, yes it is true that hitherto in historical understanding people had taken Collingwood to be saying that the only thing that you can re-enact, for historical purposes is thought or the content of thought. There are passages in *The Principles of Art* that clearly run counter to that. There is a passage about Archimedes in there where he says - what Collingwood has is this thought that all thought has emotions in it attendant upon it. So that, and this is very particular, he says that if I had been passing Archimedes bathroom when he leapt out of the bath shouting Eureka I would have understood what he was saying. He says that in *The Principles of Art* but a lot of people

writing on history forget that of course. Now, I think it is a very tricky question because it is very clear in this book and also in *The Principles of History* that he is starting to include emotions. I think it is a tricky matter and I would say two things just very quickly about it. One is that I think the crucial thing for him in historical explanation is re-enactment of thought in understanding the features of another civilisation or culture, but in a relatively non-historical way, in other words not a temporal way, is still re-enactment of the content of thought rather than anything else. Which is why he says in the *Autobiography*, I think, that when we want to understand battles we don't need to understand the emotions of the foot-weary soldier so much (although that might be interesting) but what we really want to understand is the tactics and so on, how a commander did this or did that and that is about reconstructing their understanding of the situation and their thought relating to that. And you can do that without having to understand, as it were, the emotions of it. So that is pretty much what I would say about that except that very often what he does, and this comes back to the point raised yesterday about whether re-enactment is a method or not. I incline to the non-methodological interpretation of it, but nonetheless sometimes he does use it as a pointer, you say go over there and think about this, but of course, actual re-enactment, in the sense of rethinking a thought is an achievement concept for Collingwood, not anything else. But in the case of emotions he is not saying you will be able to re-enact these emotions, because I think you would be very sceptical of the extent to which we could reliably do that historically at all but on the other hand he might invite us, as a way of pointing our direction, saying imagine if you were in that situation. That would be at the start of a historical enquiry it would not be the outcome of it.

The point about cargo cults, Collingwood probably over-eggs the pudding on this one because he seems to be so clear that they are not *generally* acting irrationally that he sometimes seems to say that they *never* act irrationally, and neither has anyone who has engaged in magical practices. I think his more considered view is, or certainly ought to be, that anyone can act irrationally on occasion and make these pseudo scientific mistakes. There are passages where he sort of inclines to that. But, yes what you are saying chimes very well with E. F. Carritt's review of *The Principles of Art*; he makes exactly the same point that in some cases there are real false beliefs and that Collingwood cannot wish them away. So I think that is quite a telling criticism.

Phil Hutchinson

Mathieu's second point, I was going to make it slightly differently. All the way through, the more you went on, I was just struck by the parallel between Collingwood and Wittgenstein – more than I have ever been struck by it before, I don't know if you were but then I was trying to think well what is different? What is different about the way Collingwood goes about this? Because the content of what he is saying seems to be almost identical to a lot of what is said by Wittgenstein. I think the difference is the voice in which it is said. So if we go back to the first slide that is titled 'A quick guide to magic,' now, he does seem to be saying what you were criticising, he does seem to be saying that whenever we look at people engaged in what we call magic, they are never guilty of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* – they are always doing something else, they are never thinking the rain dance causes the rain to come etc. And that is what he is saying, and I don't think you would ever find Wittgenstein or Winch saying that, the reason is they don't avow philosophical claims – they are trying to dissolve some of the philosophical confusion.

The other thing I thought was that there is a parallel here with what I think is core stuff in Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion. It is that people who subscribe to Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion are Christians themselves, and seek to justify their own Christian practices. I think here they sometimes come closer to Collingwood's way than to the Wittgensteinian way. For instance someone like D.Z. Phillips wants to say, "look, when a Christian believes in God, the Christian belief in the existence of God is not a metaphysical belief in the existence of heaven." Well it is, I have heard Ian Paisley on film say there is a real place called heaven and there is a real place called hell, so that is my point.

James Connelly

I think it is in *The Principles of Art* where Collingwood does say very clearly that people can be mistaken, I think in fact his position is probably this: that a lot of what we take as being pseudo-science is not, and it should be understood another way. He did not say people never make these causal mistakes but again where people make these causal mistakes it is not only other people, it is us too. I think that is really his position on this and this makes a lot of sense because well, you may have a rabbit's foot in the room but I don't. You know it is a very common thing.

Phil Hutchinson

Or as Wittgenstein says: "have you ever found yourself kissing an envelope before you post it?", you know, or kissing a photograph of a dead relative, all these daily practices that we turn a blind eye to in the judging of other cultures. And that was the point actually; because this is a much overlooked aspect of Winch's writing - how it is as much about understanding ourselves as it is about understanding others and it is much played down, much overlooked by critics and that was one of the things that really struck me

as a similarity between Collingwood and Winch.

James Connelly

I think a lot of this is about self understanding. I think indeed in the later writings, by the time Collingwood got to write *The New Leviathan* - it was what he thought of as being his war work - he was trying to understand what civilisation is and what it is in it that we are trying to defend. But of course that also includes understanding the springs of civilisation, including those rooted in our emotional life as well as anything else. Because his view is that if we don't understand them we are in trouble, and that if we are systematically diverting them we are also in trouble because the diverted emotions will pop up somewhere else - somewhere perhaps beyond our control and likely to do great damage. So, in other words, Nazism (and similar movements) are feeding on real and important things which could be identified as magical things and we need to be very careful about this, rather than distancing ourselves from it and simply saying it is what those people 'over there' do.

Phil Hutchinson

I saw an Australian film last year *Jimdabayne* that for me raised similar issues. As I read it, it was about the conflict between utilitarian reasoning and emotion. Some guys went fishing and found a body in the river, of a young (twenty something) aboriginal girl but then continued their fishing trip for two days before reporting the body[...] you know, looking at the superstitions of the aborigine people, it was sort of saying that there is a humanity that we have lost in modern life - the guys on the fishing trip just couldn't understand why it was wrong to carry on fishing leaving the body; they just kept saying 'but she was dead, what difference would it make?' 'We would have just lost our fishing trip to report a dead body; if we had taken it out of the

river it would have started to decay, rather we left it in the river where we found it and came back to it like we would have done any way, what is wrong with that?' So, the point seemed to be that in coming to understand the aboriginal response we come to see the poverty of the modern, utilitarian approach to this issue.

James Connelly

There was a recent event on an Italian beach which isn't entirely dissimilar to that!

Mike Lynch

I have a question in the same general vein. First on the cargo cult. [...] I think this came up earlier in the questions, the tie between magic and emotions; [...] as I see it, it seems to account for some practices [...] but a lot of what we call magic is practised without any distinguishable kind of emotions [...] The other thing is that although you can see the moral rationale for cargo cults, there also seems to be the danger of the assumptions that we can understand what others are doing and there doesn't seem to be any conception of incomensurability. [...] This assumption of common humanity has two sides to it [...].

James Connelly

The first set of remarks seem to be fine and I can assimilate that without too much difficulty. I would prefer to respond to the second one, which is an important point. Collingwood does rather assume that there is not going to be a problem of incommensurability, he is perfectly prepared to accept that we will not immediately understand but that is a different matter. Now, it is odd that he should assume that there won't be a problem here. I mean given what he is talking about where you would think that incommensurability would be the obvious problem that might emerge, or when he is talking about absolute presuppositions and so on, different conceptual schemes and so on, that sort of thing, and that sort of

territory where incommensurability has a bite and where people spend a lot of time discussing these issues, it is odd that he does not really do that. Now, why he didn't I can't say, I don't really know. All I can say is this, that his own experience seems to have taught him one thing which is that you do not need very much to get along with someone else. There is a passage in *The Principles of Art* where he is saying if you are in a conversation with someone as long, as it were, as you can make the next step in the conversation, as long as you understand each other well enough to be able to continue, there is that sense in that which understanding is not a sort of all or nothing affair, not a matter of sudden revelation; it is a matter of common engagement in a way. So his principle of common humanity only allows him to say that you can do that sort of common engagement out of which understanding can emerge. That is the nearest I can get to think that he would directly address this point. I may be missing something and I am sure people would tell me if I am. But there is another point of course in what you said, or at least what I took to be an implication of what you said, which is that, as you said, common humanity can cut both ways. Which way is it going to cut when we do not understand someone? Do we try to assimilate them to us or us to them? You know, at this point one has to be at one's most careful because common humanity does not give you any content, so any content in it, as it were, may be smuggled in by your ideological or cultural or whatever prejudices or background, and that is a considerable danger. Now that is one that he was alive to I think because that is a driving force of a lot of what he is trying to say. That is, this is about self-understanding as you rightly said, and part of that of course includes this idea that I may in fact be mistaken in my self-understanding, not only in my understanding of others but of myself no matter how painful it might be I might

have to revise not only my own thinking but also look very squarely and carefully at elements in my own emotional make up or my psyche which I may otherwise wish to disown and so on. So in that sense I think he would face this issue. But in the stronger sense of incommensurability he says surprisingly little about it. I am not saying that there are no resources in Collingwood to get him out of the hole but I can't think of any single place where he gives me the spade to get on with it.

Question

[...] I am going to invoke a kind of third category, that it is not that people who are doing magic can't do a primitive science and it is not that they are doing something else. I mean there are parts of the rain dance where you say they know, but actually they don't know that is going to rain or when it is going to rain, they know when it should rain and if they are involved in the rural economy, it is very important that it does rain at that point, and they really are asking it to rain. And I wonder if what they are doing is treating the universe as if it is human and that explains a lot of that logic, if you address the universe as a human it may nod when you ask it.

James Connelly

That is an interesting point. I think that it is interesting in general what you just said, it is also something I found myself thinking yesterday because I was thinking of a title of a book by E. R. Dodds called *The Greeks and the Irrational*. I can't remember much about it now, but I was thinking about it for this reason that one thing we know about the Ancient Greeks is the way they ascribed intentionality to objects which fell, statues which fell and killed someone and so on, and their whole theory of punishment fitted with that. Now Collingwood knew the Ancient Greek stuff so how did his account of magic apply? Perhaps it fits perfectly well in this sense: that, just as we glory in the power of our

tools or equipment, so we can be frustrated by the same tools and equipment and attribute intentionality (metaphorically or really) by transference to them. Glory and frustration have the same emotional root, in other words. You remember Basil Fawlty when he hits his car with a branch to punish it? And people blame their computers all the time. We are never very far in the modern world from attributing intentionality (often malevolent intentionality) to inanimate objects. But nonetheless it seems to me that there might be something that Collingwood is leaving out of the account, which is the way in which we can, as it were, genuinely have what are possibly false beliefs, let's just assume here that they are false beliefs, he doesn't give sufficient space for that I don't think. And that is not just something that you find in other cultures, it is found pervasively in our own culture and also pervasively in the writers with whom he was brought up, as it were, writing about Ancient Greek civilisation and all the rest of it and the account of that in relation to emotion would only go some way. Now, if I burn my finger I will blame the stupid stove and of course I will know that *I* was the one who was being stupid. So of course there is a transference here, there is an emotional response. You can do that much with it but nonetheless I think very often more is going on there than the notion of emotion will allow us or will take us to.

Ivan Leudar

Collingwood talks about this in *The Idea of Nature*, I mean he specifically analyses the stage of thinking about the world where people think about the world as alive - but he doesn't talk about it in the cross-cultural context.

James Connelly

Thanks for that because there is a gap then. Either they really believe it is alive, in which case you have got a whole set of examples where that sort of thinking is

prevalent, or he has to go back and reinterpret that in the light of his newly discovered understanding of magic and he never quite got round to that job.

Giuseppina D'Oro

I think that my question relates most to the initial question about re-enactment than to the last one; it is about the relationship between history, philosophy of history and anthropology and the extent to which, Collingwood claims that history is a criteriological science. The way in which you describe it here, it looks more like a descriptive science. Anthropology looks more like a descriptive science, and I was thinking for example about that passage from *The Idea of History* where Collingwood tries to make sense of people who avoided the mountain chain because they believed there were devils there, and he says that once you subscribe to that belief then you can actually understand the actions as rational because they have that belief. Whereas here there seems to be a completely different kind of anthropology because what he is looking at is the fact that we are all wired up in the same way, to the extent that we are not psychopaths anyway, we tend to have the same emotional responses and then we can understand others on the basis of those. So, I can understand Archimedes' joy or I can understand when someone bounces around in joy because it is the same sort of thing that I might start to do. It seems, it is obviously something quite different that he is trying to do, and on the one hand I was thinking that maybe this is what simulation theories are taken as in Collingwood, in that sense you do not need sophisticated bodies of generalisations, because you are just looking at the way that we are emotionally, we tend to have the same hardware. So, what is the relationship because there seems to be a completely different story in *The Principles of History*, saying that we have to look at what people believe and at different times people have different beliefs and different

systems of beliefs and then in light of these we understand actions that on the surface seem irrational; whereas here it seems to say that we have to go deeper than the rationality, we have to look at some sort of common emotional humanity that we have. And maybe these don't exclude each other, they are complementary but I just wondered?

James Connelly

I think that it is a very complicated matter, to be honest with you, and I do not think that he ever brought it together. It is important to remember of course that *The Idea of History* was a posthumously published book and that he did not put it together himself and most of it was written just before the period of time I am talking about although some of it was written afterwards and there were changes in view, obviously, in Collingwood's understanding of whether emotions could be brought into play or not.

Question

I just want to clarify this thing about emotions very quickly. Is there any place where he unpacks what he takes emotions to be, does he think that emotions are irrational or is he a Jamesian about this where he thinks that they are a-rational? So there is no reason to think that emotion is to be juxtaposed to reason then?

James Connelly

No, he is very clear that emotion is not opposed to reason, although there are passages where he seems to put them in opposition, but essentially he is always very clear that emotion is not opposed to reason, he will talk about rational emotions for example, so in that sense there is not a problem there. So they do not necessarily exclude each other, however, just to take one passage almost at random, there are, I think it is either in 'Human Nature and Human History' or 'The Historical Imagination' which came out within a year of each other, just before the time I am

talking about, he talks about reason on the one hand which is what re-enact or rethink but that always takes place within an approximate environment of feelings and things, which is a proper subject matter of psychology and there he seems to say you have got reason, it just sort of happens as it were, to inhabit this grubby environment but somehow can float free, that is the sort of image you get and that gives you are notion of historical re-enactment grasping as it were for the thought or propositional content of an act or thought across time. And that works okay in one sense but it seems to say that there is a split off between the rational side of it and the emotional feeling or whatever side of it. Whereas here he is more explicitly bringing them together but he hasn't yet fully integrated this into his philosophy of history and I think that is quite a big job now to do because I don't think he really got round to doing it. And it does raise some questions for your whole debate about simulation and all the rest of it in a way.

Giuseppina D'Oro

It seems more of a kind, in Collingwood's terms., The anthropology doesn't seem to be of a normative enterprise, in the sense that if I understand somebody else because they have got the same instinctual responses that I have that is not a normative enterprise, whereas if I understand them because their thoughts logically follow on from one another then it is.

James Connelly

I mean yes, there is a sense in which I think it could become a criteriological enterprise in some ways. I certainly take your point, that is, Collingwood says that all thinking is critical thinking so that if you are thinking the thoughts of another you are at the same time critically assessing it criteriologically or normatively, for its success or failures or whatever. But I think you could do the

same if you started talking about the institutions or the customs or the ceremonies built upon the common element of humanity because some will be better or worse at performing their function.

Question

There is the passage from *The Principles of History* which says that history is not concerned with how the people die or eat or sleep, but with the customs and in that sense he seems to be pulling those two apart rather than bringing them together. Yes?

Wes Sharrock

I think that there two things here: there are issues about getting them right and then there are worries about protecting them from being wrong and I think that people tend to slip from one to the other. Because we know that magic can't work and that people can't make the rain fall and the sun rise, we have to find something else that magic does. I do not see this. What we need to understand is what their magical practice is. Wittgenstein says that they do not light their lamps in the middle of the night and this is not so that they can pretend to make the sun rise when the sun should rise, it says something about what their powers are and what they understand their powers to be; and they know as well as we do that you can't make the sun come up in the middle of the night but it doesn't mean that you cannot make the sun come up when it should come up; and that really you are doing something else than making the sun come up, and it is really just a question of, it is a factual question, what are they doing and what do they understand themselves to be doing here? And whether we know it to be right or wrong does not matter, and I think this is well, unfortunately half of my talk has gone down the toilet now because I have now told you all these things, but of course, what are we trying to understand? Are we trying to understand what they are

doing and whether it makes sense to human beings? Well it makes sense to these human beings and if they are wrong then we are not saying that they are making some simple factual mistake, not some stupid mistake where there is a fact that we know that they don't know. Well I mean, there are facts, but I mean in some way that we are cleverer than them because we know these things to be so, and so I think it is very important to try to see these things independently of this preoccupation of ranking people with smart and stupid because it then forces people into these moods to make out 'yes we are better than them' or 'no we are all the same'. What does this add to our understanding of the practice if we understand the practice fully and carefully?

James Connelly

I do not want to flush the other half of your talk away: so, just a very quick point. I think you are right to draw these distinctions, I think to say what Collingwood was saying about it. Clearly half of what he was saying was: you must not think of all those people as stupid because everyone can be stupid so don't start grading everyone in this way that you do; but he does not thereby have to commit himself to saying that no one is ever stupid and no one ever makes mistakes because of course they can. On the other hand what he is trying to do is to give a positive account of magical practices using this notion of emotion as the fuel for that account. Now of course that may be successful either as a partial or as a total account, I suspect that what we have discovered today is that it is more successful as a partial than as a complete account of the matter but that it is a good way of accounting for quite a lot of things common both to others and to ourselves

Alan Collins

I suppose the contemporary understanding of these ideas is associated with Geertz

and the notion of thick description. Frazer and others involved anthropology from a distance; Geertz, by contrast, wanted to think his way into the practices themselves, and he did this in a great article called 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight'.

James Connelly

Just as a factual point: Geertz did happen to know the writings of Collingwood very well. But I don't know that Geertz ever looked at that stuff in here, he probably didn't. But, yes I mean I don't know whether it is a parallel or a sort of unity between the way that Geertz approached things and the way that Collingwood approached them, you know in some ways it seems to be very marked, especially on what we call this Spinoza-like principle, you know: lets get in there and understand, before we start condemning things which might involve us condemning things which are part of the way we understand things and the world too. So I think that side of it is very strong. I think Geertz might have got it from Ryle, but then one of my points earlier on in making the points about intelligence testing and so on, was to show that often there are similarities between Collingwood and Ryle too, especially when it comes to understanding certain features of reasoning and intelligence.

David Francis

On the ontological argument. I wanted to ask you a question about that, I am presuming Collingwood and Ryle knew each other. What kind of relationship was there? People have talked about parallels between Collingwood and Wittgenstein; was there common knowledge? Did he know Wittgenstein's writings? Did know Ryle? Did he talk to Ryle?

Phil Hutchinson

Ryle did not know Wittgenstein until the very late 1930s so until that point I think he was a phenomenologist. So I assume

that if Ryle had known Collingwood personally it would have been while he was a phenomenologist.

James Connelly

Not quite, no. Josie can give you chapter and verse on this one, but there is a correspondence between Collingwood and Ryle that took place in 1935 following the discussion in the *Essay on Philosophical Method* of the ontological argument which Ryle loathed. Ryle wrote a paper in *Mind* on this and followed it up with a second paper in *Mind* later. In between there was a lengthy correspondence of about one hundred pages between Collingwood and Ryle. They were not particularly on friendly terms although they knew each other a little. At this point, after Ryle's flirtation with phenomenology (which was in the late twenties rather than the late thirties), from 1932 onwards – that is, from the time of the famous article 'Systematically Misleading Expressions', Ryle had a certain view of language, the so-called 'fido-fido' meaning of language which was directly opposed to Collingwood's understanding of language. So in their discussions they tended to talk straight past each other. But the interesting point is that the later Ryle's understanding of mind, language and so on was much more resonant or akin to Collingwood's understanding of mind, language and so on than it was in 1935.