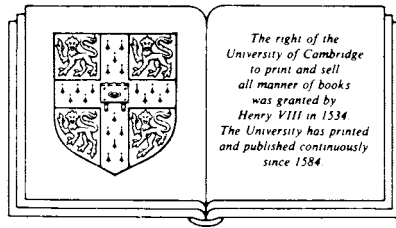


The social and political thought of R.G. Collingwood

DAVID BOUCHER



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

New York New Rochelle Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1989

First published 1989

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Boucher, David.

The social and political thought of R.G. Collingwood.

Includes index.

1. Collingwood, R.G. (Robin George), 1889–1943 – Contributions in political science.
2. Collingwood, R.G. (Robin George), 1889–1943 – Contributions in sociology. I. Title.

JC257.C6B68 1989 320'.092'4 88 – 28535
ISBN 0-521-36384-5 (hard covers)

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication applied for

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i>	<i>ix</i>
1 Collingwood in context		1
1 Introduction		1
2 Life and career		2
3 The place of Collingwood in contemporary thought		8
4 The Italian connexion		15
5 Contemporary reception of Collingwood's work		21
6 Order of enquiry		23
2 <i>The New Leviathan</i> in context		27
1 Introduction		27
2 The long-term considerations		27
3 The short-term considerations		57
3 The two <i>Leviathans</i> and the criteria of rational action		63
1 Introduction		63
2 Why Hobbes?		64
3 The apparent relation		68
4 The philosophical relation		71
5 Collingwood's synthesis: constrained by convention		80
6 Collingwood's synthesis: utility, right, and duty		93
4 The development of the European mind		110
1 Introduction		110
2 Mind and history		111
3 The levels of consciousness		119
4 Emotion, imagination, and language		130

- 5 Collingwood's liberal politics 228
 - 1 Introduction
 - 2 Classical politics and the problem it fails to solve
 - 3 Collingwood's solution to the problem of classical politics
- 6 The state and the body politic 270
 - 1 Introduction
 - 2 The state as activity
 - 3 The state and punishment
 - 4 International relations
- 7 The process of civilization 315
 - 1 Introduction
 - 2 The vocabulary of the problem
 - 3 The meaning of civilization
- 8 Conclusion: civilization and its enemies 356
 - 1 Introduction
 - 2 The properties of civilization
 - 3 What is wrong with European civilization?

Notes

Index



Collingwood in context

1. Introduction

It has now become commonplace to refer to R. G. Collingwood as an unduly neglected thinker. Agnes Heller, for instance, expressed this view only a few years ago in dedicating her book *A Theory of History*¹ to the memory of Collingwood. Collingwood may still be undervalued among Heller's sociological colleagues, but philosophers of history and historians of ideas have come to acknowledge his significance. However, it is still essentially correct to suggest that aspects of Collingwood's work suffer relative neglect. One such area is his political philosophy. This is all the more surprising when one considers that in the early days of the Second World War Collingwood put aside his lifelong ambition to bring to fruition his mature thoughts on the philosophy of history and instead decided to devote his remaining energies to 'recovering the hard boiled Hobbesian attitude to politics',² in an endeavour to make sense of the crisis in twentieth-century European civilization. In a letter to O. G. S. Crawford, Collingwood made it clear that he regarded it as a 'public service' to articulate and publish his thoughts on 'the first principles of politics'.³ The result was the publication of *The New Leviathan*, which, of all the books published in his own lifetime, received the most favourable and enthusiastic reviews.⁴ Very little attention has been given to Collingwood's political philosophy subsequent to the initial responses to the publication of one of the few attempts in the first half of the twentieth century to expound a 'grand theory' of politics. Grand theory is once again becoming a respectable and fashionable intellectual pursuit,⁵ which serves to underplay or disguise the distinct novelty of the emergence of a book such as *The New Leviathan* from the walls of the Oxford colleges in the 1940s. Isolated studies of Collingwood's political philosophy have appeared from time to time, and some intrepid Ph.D. students have attempted to unravel the

complexities of this aspect of his work,⁶ but on the whole scholars tend to be rather dismissive of his political theory. Indeed, in a relatively recent examination of Collingwood's political theory an eminent Conservative intellectual, Maurice Cowling, simply brushed aside *The New Leviathan* as the muddled thoughts of a dying man.⁷

Given the immense reputation in philosophy of history, aesthetics, philosophy of science, and hermeneutic theory that Collingwood has posthumously acquired, the time has come to look once again at his political philosophy. This aspect of his work is not isolated from the others but rests upon and incorporates much of his general philosophical outlook. The aim of this book is to rescue Collingwood's political philosophy from its state of relative neglect and place it in the context of his other philosophical concerns. In order to understand more fully the development of his political and ethical theories, I have made extensive use of Collingwood's unpublished papers. They reveal that *The New Leviathan* was not a hastily conceived and ill-executed treatise, or, as is often claimed, primarily an expedient response to the Second World War, but a work which has firm roots in what Collingwood himself described as the 'many thousand pages of manuscript on every problem of ethics and politics'.⁸

2. Life and career

Collingwood was born 22 February 1889 at Cartmel Fell in Lancashire. His father, W. G. Collingwood, was John Ruskin's secretary and biographer, and an accomplished author, painter, and archaeologist in his own right. Collingwood's father took it upon himself to educate his son at home until he was thirteen, after which Robin Collingwood was sent to grammar school and, a year later, to Rugby. It was during his first thirteen years that the foundations of his various and many talents were laid. Under the tutelage of his father, Collingwood became proficient at reading ancient and modern languages, a talent he put to good use later on in reading German, French, and Italian philosophy, as well as the 'classics' in Latin and Greek; in reading or refereeing manuscripts for the Macmillan Press and Oxford University Press; in translating works of Croce and de Ruggiero; and in facilitating his own archaeological work, not least of which was the continuation of Haverfield's project of collecting and deciphering the Roman inscriptions in Britain. In addition, he was taught to sing, play the piano, draw, and paint. All these skills he also put to good use. The training of his voice he believed to be an essential prerequisite for a professional teacher; as a means of relaxing he composed tunes and played them, although he refrained from this as he got older. Drawing and painting, too, were a form of relaxation and equipped him admirably for his archaeological pursuits. His archaeological publications are beautifully

illustrated with diagrams and maps, and the thousands of Roman inscriptions he collected were also drawn by his own hand. The task of completing these inscriptions was entrusted by Collingwood to R. P. Wright in 1938, and the first volume was published in 1965.⁹ It is ironic that Collingwood's 'hobby' gained him an international reputation in his own lifetime, something that had eluded him in his philosophical work. On Collingwood's death in 1943, for example, the obituary notice in the *New York Times* referred only to Collingwood's collection of seven thousand inscriptions, and said that he 'probably knew more than any other authority about everyday life in the Britain of the Roman period'.¹⁰

During his early years Collingwood was also taught the rudiments of sailing by his father, and throughout his life this was a major recreation for him. During periods of recuperation, after bouts of serious illness, he would take a boat out sailing or else go on a long cruise on a cargo boat.¹¹ After his first serious stroke in 1938, for instance, working on the principle of kill or cure, he embarked upon an abortive four-month cruise in a nineteen-foot sailing yacht called *Zenocrate*. After only a week he encountered a gale on the shoreline between Southend and Plymouth and found himself in difficulties. His yacht had to be towed ashore. This incident was reported in the *London Times*, and Collingwood is claimed to have said that he had believed that 'the yacht would founder at any moment'.¹² Collingwood, however, strongly denied that his predicament was as serious as it had been portrayed in the *Times*. As late as mid-1939 Collingwood joined a crew of young Oxford students on a cruise around the Greek islands. This stimulating experience and the pleasure he gained from the companionship of the young crew inspired him to publish his impressions of the journey.¹³

It was also during his early years at home that Collingwood developed a curiosity about, and a delight in, philosophy and the natural sciences. Collingwood's own account of his induction into these subjects indicates that the curiosity was largely self-motivated.¹⁴ His disappointment at not being able to understand, at the age of eight, 'Kant's Theory of Ethics' is an often-quoted illustration of the precociousness of Collingwood minor. At the same time Collingwood would undoubtedly have been introduced to the work of that great polymath of the nineteenth century, a friend of the family as well as the employer of W. G. Collingwood, John Ruskin. Through his father and elder sisters, Collingwood must have become thoroughly acquainted with Ruskin's work. William M. Johnston makes a great deal of Ruskin's purported influence on Collingwood. He suggests, for example, that

Collingwood did not achieve a vision of the unity of experience by setting out to resurrect Hegel. Indeed the vision came to him not from books at all. Rather

it was transmitted to him by his father, who had received it from John Ruskin. If Collingwood reincarnated many of Hegel's achievements and still more of his goals, the capacity to do so came not from Hegel but from Ruskin.¹⁵

This, I think, overstates the case. It is certainly true that Collingwood admired Ruskin's erudite manner and immense range of interests, but this is hardly sufficient grounds for attributing to Ruskin the inspiration for Collingwood's interest in Hegel. Indeed, in reading Collingwood's lecture on Ruskin one is reminded of Edward Caird's procedure of enquiry. Of Caird it was once said that he 'will show us Comte or Kant as "almost persuaded" to be Hegelians'.¹⁶ The same is true of Collingwood's account of Ruskin. While acknowledging that Ruskin probably never read a word of Hegel, and as likely as not would have had difficulty in understanding him anyway, Collingwood talks of the 'Hegelism of Ruskin' and of Ruskin's 'kinship with Hegel'.¹⁷ Ruskin could not provide a philosophy for Collingwood, but Collingwood could, and did, provide a philosophy, albeit Hegelian, for Ruskin.

The all-round education that Collingwood received at home up until his thirteenth year provided him throughout his life with the exemplar of what a child's education should be. He returned to this topic many times during his life, and the experience of his early years provides the foundation for his view, expressed most explicitly in *The New Leviathan*, that if the values of civilization are to be preserved and passed on to a new generation, then parents have to take the responsibility for educating their own children.

In contrast to the halcyon days of his childhood, Collingwood appears to have been deeply unhappy at Rugby School, disillusioned with what purported to be a formal education. He was later of the view that far from developing the intellect the system served to inhibit natural inquisitiveness and dulled the sensibilities of youth. His hostility to the whole public school system in England stems from his time at Rugby. The living conditions he likened to those of a pigsty; the teaching he found boring because of the poor quality of the teachers; the intellectual worth of the curriculum was less than adequate because the time-tabling militated against continuity and depth. The emphasis upon athletics, he believed, while ostensibly designed to divert youth from thoughts of sex, actually served to provide a necessary release of the energies stifled in the classroom.¹⁸ The reminiscences of one of Collingwood's former students reveal that Collingwood sometimes made disparaging remarks about the British institution he loved to hate. Tom Hopkinson recalls Collingwood saying to him, 'I went to Rugby, where we thought winter a time for playing football – and summer a time for thinking about playing football.'¹⁹

In 1908, in spite of, rather than because of, his education at Rugby, Collingwood gained a classical scholarship to University College, Oxford, the college from which his father had graduated in 1876, taking a second class degree in Classical Moderations in 1874 and a first in *Literae Humaniores* in 1876. Going up to University College from Rugby, Collingwood maintained, 'was like being let out of prison'.²⁰ Once given the freedom to indulge his insatiable appetite for learning, Collingwood quickly demonstrated his aptitude for academic pursuits. He took a first in Classical Moderations in 1910 and a first in *Literae Humaniores* in 1912. Prior to the latter result being announced, Collingwood was elected to a philosophy fellowship at Pembroke College. He was to remain on the faculty until 1935, with the exception of the years 1914 to 1918, when he served with his father in the intelligence department of the Admiralty, and of a few months after the autumn of 1918 when he was compelled, because of his marriage, temporarily to vacate his fellowship. Collingwood was, in fact, the first Pembroke tutorial fellow to take advantage of the recently amended statutes concerning marriage. He was also the only tutorial fellow allowed to live outside the college, but was required to reside there three nights a week during term time.²¹ From 1924 to 1933 Collingwood was joint editor of the *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, a position he resigned after a bout of chickenpox which led to serious health complications necessitating a term's leave of absence in 1932.

After 1933 a series of professional distinctions were bestowed upon Collingwood in recognition of his very high achievements in philosophy and archaeology. In 1934 he was elected a fellow of the British Academy. This honour was all the more appreciated because the academy, he felt, provided for him 'a more open-minded audience'²² than that to which he was accustomed in Oxford. In 1935, after having long expressed the wish to be lightened of his teaching burdens, and having applied unsuccessfully in 1928 for a chair in moral philosophy, Collingwood was appointed Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Magdalen College. The previous incumbent, J. A. Smith, had personally supported Collingwood's application.²³ In 1938 the University of St. Andrews, in Scotland, undertook to honour Professor Collingwood by conferring upon him the honorary degree of LL.D. No direct evidence exists as to who recommended that Collingwood should be honoured by the university. However, it appears that it was his former pupil, close friend, and later literary executor who made the recommendation, Sir Malcolm Knox, then professor of moral philosophy at (and later the principal of) St. Andrews.²⁴

Collingwood was unable to attend the July graduation ceremony, as he had intended, to receive the degree, because he had suffered the first of the series of strokes that eventually led to his early death. He did,

however, receive his LL.D. at a small ceremony held in October of 1938. Professor A. Blyth Webster, in introducing Collingwood, referred to his outstanding achievements in philosophy and archaeology, and said that St. Andrews was proud that it was 'still in time to be the first University to give him his honorary degree'.²⁵ Collingwood resigned his chair in 1941 on the grounds of ill health and died on 9 January 1943 in Coniston, where he had retired to live with his second wife and his daughter.

As a university academic Collingwood undertook his teaching and research duties with the utmost seriousness. He also served for many years as a reader of manuscripts for the Macmillan Press and later became a most valued delegate for Oxford University Press, because of his efficiency and his ability to read a variety of foreign languages, including German, French, and Italian. Teaching and research, for him, were integrally related, and he managed to combine them in a way rarely equalled today. His books, even those posthumously published, were first 'tried out' on students in the form of lectures.²⁶ Even *The New Leviathan*, with which the present study is principally concerned, had its origin in the lectures on moral philosophy delivered every year, at times with substantial revisions, from 1921 to 1927, and then in 1929, 1930, 1932, 1933, and 1940. During the Michaelmas term of 1940 and the Hilary term of 1941 Collingwood delivered a series of lectures entitled 'Philosophical Theory of Society and Politics', which is no longer extant but is believed to have been the preliminary draft of much of the central parts of *The New Leviathan*.²⁷

Collingwood did not believe in an amateur approach to teaching. On becoming a tutor at Pembroke College he took a number of singing lessons in order to polish his lecture presentation and delivery.²⁸ The combination of his professional delivery and substantive content made Collingwood's lectures highly attractive to eager young undergraduates, who, in his days at Pembroke, turned up in sufficient numbers to necessitate moving to a larger lecture theatre.²⁹ Many of the students who attended the lectures were not formally enrolled for philosophy but merely went along because of the reputation of Collingwood as a lecturer. Reminiscences of those who attended his lectures certainly indicate that this reputation was not misplaced. In the view of E. W. F. Tomlin, for instance, Collingwood discharged his duties as a lecturer 'with brilliance', and C. V. Wedgwood states that 'trains of thought which are sometimes blurred on the printed page registered with impressive clearness in the lecture-room'.³⁰ These sentiments were echoed by Richmond, McCallum, Knox, and Bouch in their obituaries and assessments of Collingwood.³¹ Richmond, McCallum, and Knox qualify their praise by suggesting that the ease of delivery and the polished structure of the lectures made the more gifted students suspect Collingwood of being sophistic. This was compounded, at least in his philosophical lectures, by the fact that Collingwood's approach to philosophy, relying heavily upon history, was out of keeping with the

'realist' philosophical tendencies of the times. In tutorials, he was noted for his ability to delineate the terms of complex problems with precision and clarity. Indeed, his breadth of knowledge and practical skills enabled him to illustrate his points most admirably. Tom Hopkinson, for instance, states that 'in discussion he [Collingwood] could explain a point by making a quick drawing, taking a musical instrument down and playing it, or with reference to the morning's newspapers'.³²

Collingwood's attitude to teaching was ambivalent. He sometimes resented the fact that his heavy burden of teaching reduced the time he could use to write books. However, at the same time he believed that trying out his ideas on young lively minds helped him to further his own thinking on historical and philosophical problems.

There is no doubt that by today's standards Collingwood's teaching load as a tutor was very heavy. The system of individual tutoring placed a considerable weight upon the shoulders of young academics. In addition to his duties as a tutor and college librarian at Pembroke College, Collingwood taught philosophy to Lincoln College students between 1921 and 1928. When he was appointed university lecturer in philosophy and Roman history in 1927, his teaching commitments were slightly lightened. In his reports to the faculty of *Litterae Humaniores*, for instance, he talks of the work he hoped to complete as a result of the new 'command of leisure' resulting from his new appointment.³³ However, even in 1930, after his burden was diminished, he still commented upon the encroachment of teaching upon his time to do other academic work. In a letter to E. B. Birley, for instance, Collingwood comments, with a hint of envy at the former's having secured a chair, 'When I think of myself teaching for 30–40 hours a week from the age of 23 to that of 40, barring the War, I rejoice to think how much you will be able to do that none of us could ever hope to do'.³⁴

Collingwood could have freed himself from the predicament in which he found himself long before gaining his chair in 1935. As early as 1921 he was 'looking forward to the distant day' when he could leave Pembroke and do serious academic work, and in 1928, again, he maintained that 'unless I free myself of College teaching' work could not progress very far in 'formulating the problem of historical methodology'.³⁵ Yet despite many offers of professorships at universities in Britain and the United States, Collingwood refused to leave Oxford. This is quite difficult to understand, given Collingwood's own sense of intellectual isolation in Oxford, as expressed in *An Autobiography*. Indeed, he did not seek, nor, it appears, did he enjoy, the company of most of his philosophical colleagues at Oxford.³⁶ For many years during the 1920s he did not live in Oxford at all but travelled there on Mondays and returned home to North Moreton, near Didcot, on Friday evenings.

There is a combination of reasons why he continued to work in Oxford

rather than move elsewhere. It can be inferred from *An Autobiography* that his principal reason for staying was that he felt an obligation, as Haverfield's sole remaining protégé teaching in Oxford, 'to keep alive the Oxford school of Romano-British studies . . . , and to make use of the specialist library he [Haverfield] had left to the University. It was this obligation that made me refuse all offers of professorships and other employments elsewhere which I received during the years that followed the War'.³⁷ However, even though he felt isolated as a philosopher in Oxford, he aspired to gain the recognition and respect of his colleagues. In 1924, for instance, Collingwood wrote to de Ruggiero, 'I think Oxford is the best centre for my present work, and I now find that *Speculum Mentis* is exciting a good deal of attention there and is regarded as possibly opening a new movement in English philosophy'.³⁸ This view proved, to Collingwood's chagrin, to be overly optimistic. A third reason why he stayed at Oxford was that although he often found the heavy teaching load onerous, he nevertheless derived a great deal of satisfaction from the response he got from students, and he also believed that the teaching helped to clarify his own philosophical ideas. He wrote to de Ruggiero, for example, 'This teaching does (I think) help a little towards getting one's mind clearer: at any rate I find myself beginning to make some sort of a mark. Not among my elders and contemporaries so far as I can see, but among the undergraduates . . . and my friends among them increase in numbers'.³⁹ In addition, he found the business of 'applying' and 'testing' his philosophical theories in his teaching of undergraduates much more congenial than expounding his views before his colleagues. Implied in his teaching were two principles: Determine the relevance of criticism before accepting its validity, and, before assuming that one has understood the argument of a philosopher, satisfy oneself that one has uncovered the question that the philosopher was trying to answer. In applying these principles in teaching, Collingwood found the tutorials 'no less salutary' than did his pupils.⁴⁰

What, then, was the nature of Collingwood's perceived intellectual isolation, and with whom did he feel that he had philosophical affinities?

3. The place of Collingwood in contemporary thought

In the *Autobiography* Collingwood gives us an account of the intellectual environment in which he found himself. On the one hand there were the 'realists' like Carritt (his former tutor), Cook Wilson, and Pritchard, all of whom Collingwood associated with naturalism and a reverence for scientific explanation. The implication of 'realism' was that the knowing subject makes no difference to the object that is known. In respect of

moral philosophy, this meant its relegation to the object of scientific study or its excision from philosophical enquiry altogether. On the other hand there was the new generation of idealists, following in the tradition of the school of Green, men such as J. A. Smith and H. H. Joachim, whom Collingwood criticizes for having nothing to say, and thus of having contributed to the demise of British idealism. Collingwood suggests that idealism never dominated philosophy and teaching at Oxford, and that its greatest impact was felt among those men who went out into the professions and put the creed into practice. He maintained that only the epigones of the movement of philosophers remained in Oxford. He was as concerned to disassociate himself from the remnants of the idealist school as he was to distinguish himself from the realists.⁴¹ His reasons for doing so will be discussed in due course. What I want to argue at this point is that Collingwood's characterisation of British idealism and its contemporaneous disintegration is not altogether accurate. The roots of British idealism went far deeper into the philosophical culture than he wanted to allow, and its branches extended far wider during his lifetime than he was prepared to admit.

To be fair to Collingwood, he explicitly states in the *Autobiography* that his sketch of the idealist movement was not to be taken as a history. Although 'no one has yet written the history of this movement', he suggests, 'I do not propose to attempt it here'.⁴² In fact, J. H. Muirhead had written a history of British idealism in 1931,⁴³ and it is difficult to imagine how this could have escaped Collingwood's attention – unless, of course, his comment is meant to be an oblique criticism of Muirhead or was simply the result of a lapse of memory. Whatever the case may be, Collingwood was well qualified to make a judgement upon any historical characterisation of the emergence of idealism in Britain because he had explored this area of research himself and intended to write a history of the thought of the Victorian period.⁴⁴

When Collingwood became a fellow of Pembroke College in 1912, a number of leading idealists, such as T. H. Green (1836–1882), R. L. Nettleship (1846–1892), Edward Caird (1835–1908), D. G. Ritchie (1856–1903), and William Wallace (1843–1897), had died. However, during Collingwood's career many major and minor idealists lived on. For example, Bernard Bosanquet, erstwhile professor of moral philosophy at St. Andrews and leading light in the Charity Organization Society (1840–1923); F. H. Bradley, fellow of Merton College, Oxford (1846–1924); J. A. Smith and H. H. Joachim, friends and colleagues of Collingwood at Oxford, who were to die only a few years before him; G. R. G. Mure in Oxford, who lived many years after him; J. M. E. McTaggart in Cambridge, who did not die until 1925; and W. R. Sorley, the professor of moral philosophy in Cambridge, who held his position until 1933. M. J. Oake-

shott, whose philosophy of history Collingwood regarded very highly, lectured on history in Cambridge during the 1930s. Sir Henry Jones was professor of moral philosophy in Glasgow University until his death in 1922. Others who were active during Collingwood's lifetime were J. H. Muirhead in Birmingham; J. S. Mackenzie in the University of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff; and H. J. W. Hetherington, who taught at Glasgow, Cardiff, and Exeter and who became vice-chancellor of the University of Liverpool and, in 1936, principal of the University of Glasgow; and, representing the younger generation, Malcolm Knox in St. Andrews and Michael Foster in Oxford, both of whom were 'disciples' of Collingwood. Indeed, although it may be said that idealism was certainly on the defensive by 1912, it still had enough troops to carry on the battle for some time yet, and those troops entrenched themselves in most of the leading chairs of philosophy in the country. Quinton suggests, for example, that 'until well into the 1920s idealists held nearly all the leading positions in the philosophy departments of British Universities and continued to be the largest group in the philosophical professoriate until 1945'.⁴⁵

Collingwood's attitude towards the British idealists oscillates between admiration and rejection. His *Autobiography* shows that he had a great admiration for Green, Bosanquet, and Bradley. In *Speculum Mentis* Collingwood even described Sir Henry Jones as 'one of our most eminent philosophers'.⁴⁶ At the same time he was irritated by the encumbrances of carrying the label of idealism and was always at great pains to disavow the title of idealist, and thus to disassociate himself from its increasingly pejorative connotations. Why, then, did Collingwood want to part company with the British idealists? I have argued elsewhere that the British idealists brought about two fundamental changes in British philosophy. First, they maintained that there are no isolated individual facts. Each fact is implicated in a whole of interrelated facts, and it is this whole in which each fact has meaning and significance. Second, they argued that each philosophical problem could only be fully understood in terms of its genesis and the development of responses to it. These two aspects of British idealism, I suggested, implied a historical perspective. However, for the most part the implication did not manifest itself in practice.⁴⁷ This constitutes one of the main reasons why Collingwood found himself 'rather inclined to react against the British idealists'.⁴⁸ Throughout his life, Collingwood always emphasized the need for historical understanding of philosophical problems; indeed he regarded as his own subject 'the history of thought'.⁴⁹ In his mind the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history were always closely associated – even, at times, identical. Hegel, of course, had identified philosophy with its own history, but in doing so rendered both history and philosophy timeless.⁵⁰ Collingwood, however, wanted genuinely to establish history in its temporal

concreteness. His very first publication was a translation of Croce's *Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*.⁵¹ One of Vico's fundamental principles was that mind can know and understand what mind has made. The world of nations is eminently more knowable than the world of nature because the former is the product of human creativity, whose principles are to be found in the changing features of the human mind, while the latter is the creation of God and thus susceptible only to his understanding.⁵² It was Vico, Collingwood used to say, who had influenced him the most.⁵³ Vico's emphasis upon the creativity and development of the human mind permeates the whole of Collingwood's work, and in Collingwood's writings we find presupposed at every point Dilthey's famous dictum that 'we are at home everywhere in this historical and understood world; we understand the sense and meaning of it all; we ourselves are woven into this common sphere.'⁵⁴

Of more importance, perhaps, than the British idealists in disseminating and preparing the ground for the assimilation of the philosophy of history in Britain, and thus opening the way for Collingwood, was Robert Flint.⁵⁵ He did not himself make any original contribution to the philosophy of history, and it is for this reason that he is either forgotten or rebuked. He is mentioned now only because the new revival of interest in Vico credits Flint with the distinction of being the first writer in the English language to publish a monograph on Vico, although Vico was only Flint's third choice in Blackwood's series on philosophers.⁵⁶ What historians and philosophers seem not to recognise in respect of Flint is the distinction between the production of original thought and the dissemination of thought that is unfamiliar to the audience to which it is directed. It is in the latter category that Flint excels, and it is because the works of the more eminent writers he discussed are now more readily accessible that his contribution has been forgotten. Flint's books on the philosophy of history were all remarkably well received by readers in Britain and on the Continent,⁵⁷ and his monograph on Vico did much to strengthen his ties with Italian scholars; indeed, it was translated into Italian by Francesco Finocchietti and published in 1888.

In the same year as Bradley published his *Presuppositions of Critical History*, an essay which Collingwood described as constituting a Copernican revolution in the theory of historical knowledge,⁵⁸ Flint was arguing that the facts of history and their interpretation are not distinguishable entities: The facts *are* their interpretation.⁵⁹ Later he was to argue that thought must be shown to emanate from its context, because 'no life can be understood altogether apart from the environment in which it is developed', and no particular work can be seen in isolation from the whole of a person's life.⁶⁰ In large measure Flint was a professed follower of Vico and appropriated the latter's ideas in formulating his own con-

ception of how history should be studied. For example, Flint tells us that the human mind and its history are eminently more knowable and more intelligible than any physical occurrence: 'Matter is the stage prepared for the drama of the spirit. There is, we may be sure, more significance in the drama than in the stage. . . . The truth is known by us only to the extent that we have made it'.⁶¹ Although Flint was not himself an idealist philosopher, he did much to disseminate in Britain the ideas of idealist philosophers of history, but it was not until the second quarter of the twentieth century that British idealists, namely R. G. Collingwood and M. J. Oakshott, made distinguished and sustained contributions to the critical study of history as a mode of enquiry and tried to establish its efficacy in relation to positivist claims to the autonomy, supremacy, and exclusiveness of scientific method.

In the first place, then, Collingwood reacted against British idealism because it was not fulfilling its potential of becoming a genuinely historical philosophy. In a letter to de Ruggiero dated 9 January 1931, Collingwood succinctly expresses his attitude and consequent sense of isolation:

Even the 19th Century idealists in England were not, in general, historically minded: there are traces of a historical point of view in Bradley and Green, and Caird – but they are not very strong, and in Bosanquet they vanish entirely, and the relics of that school in Oxford today are quite out of touch with history. Therefore a historically-minded philosopher here is a *vox clamantis in deserto*.⁶²

Bosanquet, for example, was quite contemptuous, as Collingwood was well aware, of the historical mode of enquiry, describing it as 'the doubtful story of successive events'.⁶³ A number of the elder idealists were also quite intolerant of the new generation of historically minded philosophers on the Continent. Henry Jones, for instance, thought that 'the men some folk cackle about . . . Bergson and Croce etc.' were greatly overrated in comparison to Bradley and Bosanquet.⁶⁴ Bosanquet himself had a low opinion of Croce. In a reference to Croce and Jakob Böhme, Bosanquet says, 'Ask yourself if a reasonable man could sit down with either'.⁶⁵

A second reason for Collingwood's rejection of the British idealists was that not only were they not historically minded enough; he also believed that they were much closer in thought to the British empiricist tradition than was commonly believed. Indeed, when he does enter into criticism of such people as Bradley and Bosanquet, Collingwood convicts them of lapsing from idealism into naturalism.

Let me illustrate this contention. Collingwood suggests that 'the break in English philosophy about 1870 is rather illusory' and convicts A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, Green, Bradley, Bosanquet, and MacTaggart of deserting 'Hegel for a more realistic view'.⁶⁶ In his specific criticisms of Bradley and Bosanquet this, again, is essentially the line he pursues. Bradley, for