NOTES ON COLLINGWOOD'S *PRINCIPLES OF ART*

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I make these notes by way of coming to terms with Collingwood's book [1] on art. They do not represent a complete exposition of the book.

At the beginning of the last chapter of the book, Collingwood writes:

> My final question, then, is: how does the theory advanced in this book bear upon the present situation, and illuminate the path to be taken by artists in the immediate future?

The first part of the answer is, 'we must get rid of the conception of artistic ownership.' Indeed, Collingwood's own book has no copyright.

Beyond its introduction, Collingwood's book comprises three Books:

(I) Art and Not Art;
(II) The Theory of Imagination;
(III) The Theory of Art.

The purpose of the first book is to find out what we mean by the word 'art'—rather, what we are *trying* to mean: The word is to its proper meaning as a seagull to the deck of the ship it is hovering over. We want to induce the bird to settle on deck (p. 7).

The numbered sections below are my notes and comments on Collingwood's Books.

1

Art is expression of emotion, effected by creation of an imaginary experience or activity. The creation is for ourselves, but may also be for others. The imaginary is not make-believe.

The artistic experience as such is not sensuous (p. 141): For example, the art in a painting is not to be found in the exciting quality of certain colors; the art in music is not to be found in the soothing timbre of certain instruments. In this way, listening to music as art is like listening to a scientific lecture (p. 140), in which the point is not the sound of the speaker's voice as such. (However, in Book II (p. 267), Collingwood proposes an admittedly fantastic possibility: that, had another scientist been present when Archimedes lept from his bath crying 'Eureka' [as told in Vitruvius, quoted in [4]], that scientist might have understood something about what Archimedes had found, without needing it explained.)

Expression of emotion is not arousal of emotion, since emotions must exist before they can be expressed.

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Craft is to be distinguished from art. Craft produces something to serve a purpose. It is also fulfilment of a plan. The plan is not the craft. Also, by the way, the plan is not primarily something written down: it is 'in the head'.

Whereas art—for example, a poem—can exist entirely in the head, being art nonetheless.

However, art may be joined with craft: craft is the making of a physical object, but emotion may be expressed through this making. For example (Book III, p. 309), the portrait-painter, hired to craft a likeness, may in painting come to some insight about the sitter and express this through painting. (But the sitter may then find the painting not to be what he had ordered.)

2

We analyse experience into **thinking** and **feeling.** Two relevant distinctions are as follows:

- Feelings flow like a river; thoughts are more lasting, like the river-bed.
- Feelings just happen, and in this way are 'simple'; thought is 'bipolar', in that it can be right or wrong, be done well or badly, succeed or fail, and so on.

Feeling can be **sensation** or **emotion;** yet the two go together; every sensation has its **emotional charge.**

Feeling is independent of thought and is a foundation for it. Thus we may speak of 'levels of experience'. The level of mere feeling will be called the **psychic** level. The choice of words alludes to a distinction between psyche and spirit, although Collingwood never refers to spirit again.

By the way, consultation of the old OED suggests that this distinction between psyche and spirit is due to St Paul:

> But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. . .
> because they are spiritually discerned (KJV, I Cor. 2:14),

where 'natural' translates *ψυχικός* (and 'spirit', *πνεῦμα*; in the RSV, 'natural' becomes a footnote to the main translation, 'unspiritual'. See also 15:44.)

Also, according to Collingwood (p. 171 n.), the word 'psychology' was created in the sixteenth century to designate an empirical science of feeling. In the nineteenth century, some people tried to expand the meaning to include an empirical science of thought. But there is no such science—there is only a pseudo-science—because of the bipolarity of thought mentioned above. Sciences of thought must be normative or 'criteriological'; examples included logic and ethics.

The OED is more or less consistent with Collingwood's dates. It says that creation of the word 'psychologia' is attributed to Melanchthon in sixteenth-century Germany, but that the word is not much used in modern languages until the 19th century. In 1682, one Thomas Govan, in Latin, makes the following classification:

- *physica*
  - *somatologia* or *physiologia*
  - *pneumatologia*
    - *theologia*
    - *angelographia* (including *demonologia*)
    - *psychologia*

In his book on history [2, pp. 1 f.], Collingwood calls psychology the 'science of mind' and says that it 'treats mind in just the same way that biology treats life.'

Thoughts have their own emotional charges; these will not be called feelings.

Thought is primarily about feelings, secondarily about thoughts. Thought establishes relations amongst feelings. But this point will need further investigation, because feelings, as such, flow; they need to be retained to be related to one another, and this will require **imagination.**

Some standard terms referring to primary or first-order thought are 'understanding' and 'science'; to secondary or second-order thought, 'reason' and 'philosophy'. Again at [2, p. 2], Collingwood refers to psychology as 'thought of the first degree'.

All knowledge is derived from experience, 'as anybody can see' (p. 167). Here Collingwood understands experience to include experience of thinking. It is 'philosophical jargon' to restrict the meaning of experience to sensuous experience. When one makes this restriction, then two mystifications may arise:

(1) Kant's, that thoughts of the second order are known independently of experience;
(2) the mystification of 'some modern philosophers', that thoughts of the second order are about nothing but words.

In short, a paralogism arises:

- Knowledge is derived from experience;
- A thought is not an experience;
- Second-order thought is not knowledge (or, Collingwood says, is 'knowledge in a different and mysterious sense of the word').

Here 'experience' is used in two different ways. Compare Kant [3, B 410]:

> The whole procedure of rational psychology is determined by a paralogism, which is exhibited in the following syllogism:
>
> *That which cannot be thought otherwise than as subject does not exist otherwise than as subject, and is therefore substance.*
>
> *A thinking being, considered merely as such, cannot be thought otherwise than as subject.*
>
> *therefore it exists only as subject, that is, as substance.*

In Kant's paralogism, the problem is in the ambiguity of 'thought'.

Words like 'sensation' and 'thought' are also ambiguous, referring both to an act and to its object. Let us understand sensation to be the act whose verb is 'to sense'; the object of the act will be a **sensum.**

There is a common-sense distinction between **really sensing** and **imagining.** Is it a correct distinction, and if so, how does one make it? Philosophers from Descartes on have proposed answers; the important ones here are Hume and Kant.

Hume expresses the common-sense distinction by means of the words 'impression' and 'idea'. In Collingwood's terminology, Hume distinguishes, not between sensa, but between our sensations of them: we have less control over real sensation than over imagination. Thus we distinguish between the real and the imaginary by introspection.

But in trying to make this distinction, we may fail, as we do in sleep, fever, madness, and so on.

By contrast, for Kant (p. 186), reality is a category of the understanding [3, B 106]—of primary thought. A real sensum is therefore one that has been interpreted by the understanding.

To be more precise, Collingwood proposes a three-fold distinction. We refer to sensa as:

(1) real, if correctly interpreted;
(2) illusory, if wrongly interpreted;
(3) imaginary, if not interpreted at all.

Hume's introspection theory merits further investigation. Henceforth, let sensation be what we called 'real sensation' before. There seems to be a **freedom** associated with imagination, greater than with sensation, less than with thought.

It was suggested that imagination was needed to retain and think about sensa. How does this imagination relate to what we just called imaginary sensa?

In order to think about sensa, we first must *attend* to them: we must apply what Collingwood refers to indifferently as **consciousness** or **attention.** Now, by the way, how do we even know that there is psychical experience—that there are sensa of which we are not conscious? By analysing the object of consciousness into sensum *and* sensation. The *con-* of *consciousness* may be taken as implying this dual object.

Consciousness is not a response to a stimulus; it is a free act. However, it is not a choosing between alternatives. It is a domination of feelings by a self that was formerly dominated by them. Thus consciousness causes feelings to become less violent.

So a feeling may pass through three stages:

(1) being unrecognized;
(2) being recognized, in consciousness;
(3) being placed in relation to others.

Here, stage 2 corresponds to Hume's *idea*, while Hume's 'impression' is either 1 or 3.

Consciousness is thought (just not **intellect**); so it is bipolar: hence there can be **corruption of consciousness,** in which we start to attend to a feeling, then turn away before becoming fully conscious of it. The possibility of this corruption is Collingwood's chief concern:

3

Collingwood ends his book by saying:

> Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness.

He has been talking about *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot, having earlier (p. 295) referred to it as 'the one great English poem of this century'.

References

[1] R. G. Collingwood. *The Principles of Art.* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1938.
[2] R. G. Collingwood. *The Idea of History.* Oxford University Press, 1993. Revised edition.
[3] Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason.* St Martin's Press, 1965. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith.
[4] Ivor Thomas, editor. *Greek Mathematical Works.* Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1941. in two volumes.

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