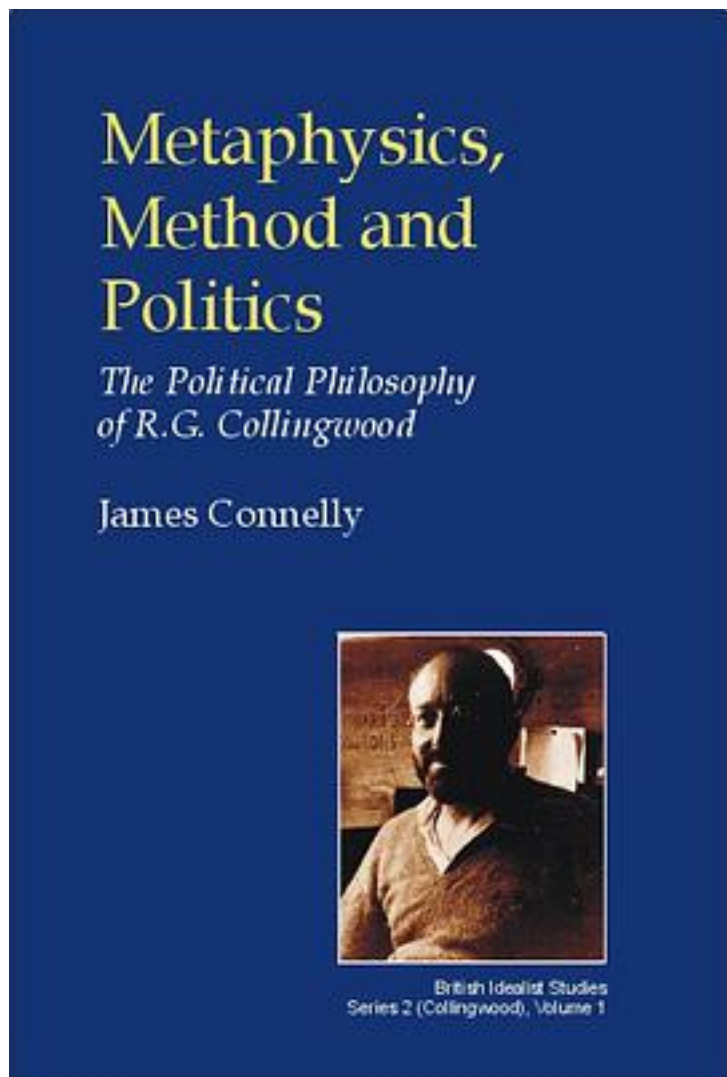


Metaphysics, Method and Politics



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Review

"A closely argued work, part of an excellent series on British idealists." -- Mark Garnett, Times Literary Supplement

"A valuable and commendable contribution to the study of Collingwood's philosophy" -- Richard Murphy, Collingwood and British Idealism Studies.

"Exegesis of the highest quality." -- Andrew Lockyer, History of Political Thought

Product Description

This book argues that R.G. Collingwood developed a rich and coherent account of politics and civilization. It situates Collingwood's political philosophy within his broad philosophical approach and shows how he understood and placed political experience within the context of human experience as a whole. The book argues both that Collingwood's overall philosophical approach is both coherent and unified and that his political philosophy should be considered as an integrated whole.

Part One demonstrates the overall unity of Collingwood's philosophical project and firmly rejects the 'radical conversion' hypothesis which suggests that he underwent a fundamental change of mind and came to embrace a form of historical relativism incompatible with his earlier philosophy. Through an outline of Collingwood's approach to the nature of philosophy, philosophical method and metaphysics it elucidates both their logical inter-relations and their emergence within his philosophical development.

Part Two explores Collingwood's 'political philosophy of civilization', displaying it as a whole by drawing on a wide variety of sources. It considers the distinctive character of political action in relation to other ethical concepts and experience, the relation between political theory and practice and the nature of civilization. It concludes with a consideration of the dimensions of civilization in which political action is situated within an overall conception of the forms of human experience.

From the Inside Flap

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About the Author

James Connelly is currently Professor of Political Thought and Head of the School of Human Sciences and Communication at Southampton Institute. He is co-author of *Politics and the Environment: From Theory to Practice* (with Graham Smith) and co-editor of the forthcoming new edition of Collingwood's *An Essay on Philosophical Method*.

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Introduction

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

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

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

is necessarily thrown onto the unpublished manuscripts; and if they help us resolve disputes or answer questions which would otherwise be unresolved and unanswered, I hardly think that their importance or value can be denied.

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

In what follows, Chapter One clears the ground, and Chapters Two and Three develop an account of the unity of Collingwood's philosophy, thereby laying the foundations for what follows. In Part Two I begin to construct an account of Collingwood's political philosophy of civilization. Chapter Four addresses Collingwood's understanding of the relation of theory to practice: I correct the slightly misleading account in *An Autobiography* by drawing on manuscript and other sources as well as briefly examining T.H. Green's position. Such a discussion is unavoidable in dealing with any author's social or political thought: in Collingwood's case it is inevitable given the great importance he attaches to the practical relevance of philosophy. I then outline the categories central to Collingwood's moral and political philosophy. The 'forms of action' are characterised and their relation to action as a form of experience indicated.

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

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

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

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