

# Dialectics and Typology. Narrative Structure in Hegel and Collingwood

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► **To cite this version:**

Rodrigo Díaz Maldonado. Dialectics and Typology. Narrative Structure in Hegel and Collingwood. Collingwood and British Idealism Studies, 2016, Collingwood and Philosophical Methodology, 22 (1), pp.117-142. hal-02545241

**HAL Id: hal-02545241**

**<https://hal-amu.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02545241>**

Submitted on 16 Apr 2020

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Rodrigo Díaz-Maldonado<sup>1</sup>

## *Dialectics and Typology*

*Narrative Structure in Hegel and Collingwood*

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to describe the similarities and differences between the historical narratives of Hegel and Collingwood. The central hypothesis is that the dialectical thinking, present in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* and in Collingwood's *Speculum Mentis*, produces narrative representations which have a specifically typological character. Following Northrop Frye, typology is understood here as a mode of language usage which involves a theory of historical process. Despite the differences, this theory of historical process works as an absolute presupposition in both philosophers, and can be traced down to the core of Collingwood's philosophical method. Consequently, after a short introduction, this paper presents the main features of Frye's notion of typology. Next, in the two following sections, the typological configuration of both philosophies is presented, stressing the structural (narrative) similarities between them. Finally, the differences are explained as the result of fundamental changes in the use of language. These changes, however, were not enough as to overrule the presence of typology but only to replace it from the ontological reflection over reality into the epistemological level of human consciousness.

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*Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, 22:1 (2016), pp. 117-142

### Introduction

Collingwood's relationship with Kant and Hegel has been widely studied. A central element in this interest is the thought that an adequate assessment of this relationship will help to clarify some of the more obscure aspects of Collingwood's philosophy. However, this is not an easy task. In the first place, even when the influences are apparently obvious, as in the case of dialectics, it is very difficult to establish how Hegelian Collingwood's dialectic is, or conversely, how far it strays from a possible Hegelian inspiration. In the second place, Collingwood said very little about his influences and their relevance. To these complications, we have to add the philosophical preferences of the interpreters, depending on which Kantian or Hegelian aspects are stressed or dismissed. In the end, the overall picture is uncertain, because the interpretations are alternately opposed or complementary. However, the tacit agreement is that Collingwood's philosophy presents some combination of Kantianism and Hegelianism. Thus, the disagreements are generally limited to the degree of influence and to the areas of its relevance, either in Collingwood's metaphysics or philosophical method.

Collingwood's metaphysics has alternately been seen as more Hegelian or Kantian. Lionel Rubinoff, for example, has described Collingwood's complete philosophy as 'an attempt to uncover the transcendental structure of mind'.<sup>2</sup> This 'structure', however, is not permanently revealed through a critical process of pure reason, as in Kant, but through a dialectical-historical process of self-knowledge, which places Collingwood closer to the 'transcendental historicism' first represented by Hegel. Thus, Collingwood's philosophy combines a phenomenological part, which Rubinoff sees as the analysis of mind 'as a system of necessary categories [...] transcendental and

2 Lionel Rubinoff, *Collingwood and reform of Metaphysics. A study in the Philosophy of Mind* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 25.

transhistorical', with a properly metaphysical part, understood as 'the more specifically historical analysis of the presuppositions of past and present thought'.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Giuseppina D'Oro has pointed out that the reform of metaphysics undertaken by Collingwood can be understood 'as a radicalisation of Kant's transcendental philosophy'.<sup>4</sup> For her, both Kant and Collingwood considered metaphysics not as an analysis of the structure of reality, but as an analysis of the structure of experience.<sup>5</sup> That is, both maintained a division between the order of knowledge and the order of existence. Collingwood's 'radicalisation' consisted in removing the ambiguities that still lurked in Kant's thought, particularly with regard to the understanding of Being, which Kant identified with existence (in the sense of instantiation), while for Collingwood, Being is the most abstract concept, devoid of any delimitations and therefore useless for description. In this way, D'Oro presents Collingwood's metaphysics as more purely conceptual than Kant's, but free from its epistemological scepticism.<sup>6</sup> This is so because Collingwood does not need a transcendent standpoint to ensure the reality of our forms of experience.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, D'Oro acknowledges that this proximity to Kant does not rule out the presence of Hegel, since one of Collingwood's aims was 'to overcome Kant's epistemological idealism/scepticism in favour of Hegel's

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- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 28. Additionally, Rubinoff points out that the main difference between Hegel and Collingwood is the final and definitive character of truth for Hegel, something completely alien to Collingwood's historical thinking, see: *Ibid.*, p. 327
- 4 Giuseppina D'Oro, 'How Kantian is Collingwood's Metaphysics of Experience?' in *Collingwood Studies*, VI (1999) pp. 29-52, p. 30. See also: James Connelly and Giuseppina D'Oro, 'Editors' Introduction', in R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) pp. xiii-cxxii.
- 5 G. D'Oro, 'How Kantian', p. 31
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 41
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

epistemological realism whilst retaining Kant's critique of transcendental realism'.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to Collingwood's philosophical method, Louis Mink places it closer to Hegel.<sup>9</sup> For Mink, Collingwood was a dialectical thinker,<sup>10</sup> although his dialectics is not exactly a Hegelian one. Mink explains that, for Collingwood, the mind works dialectically, and his dialectical analysis of the different activities of the mind (the forms of experience) presents the changes between them in a Hegelian way, as a process that retains, and at the same time, transforms its own past.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Mink establishes an almost perfect parallelism between Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Collingwood's *Speculum Mentis*.<sup>12</sup> However, Mink warns us that, unlike Hegel, Collingwood did not see in history the development of some kind of 'world-spirit', an idea that Collingwood considered to be pure mythology.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, while analysing Collingwood's logic of thought, Mink says that the absolute presuppositions are the Collingwoodian equivalent to Kant's categories of understanding, in the sense that both notions are intended to provide the general structure of experience.<sup>14</sup> The same applies to Collingwood's idea of *a priori* imagination, which renders the notion of a universal and necessary concept of history, akin to Kantian categories.<sup>15</sup> In short, for Mink, Kant and Hegel complement each other in Collingwood's philosophy: There are categories of mind which provide the for-

8 *Ibid.*, note 30, p. 52. For a critical view of D'Oro's approach, see : Serge Grigoriev, 'Continuity of the Rational: Naturalism and Historical Understanding in Collingwood', in *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2 (2008), pp. 119–137.

9 Louis O. Mink, *Mind, History and Dialectic. The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1987)

10 *Ibid.*, p. ix

11 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

mal structure of experience, as in Kant, but these categories are conceptual systems (or constellations of absolute presuppositions) which change over time in a dialectical way, as in Hegel.<sup>16</sup>

More recently, Rik Peters has studied Collingwood's philosophy within the context of its own development and relationship with the Italian idealism of Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile and Guido de Ruggiero.<sup>17</sup> Although Peters does not directly address the problem of Collingwood's relationship with Kant and Hegel, his work throws new light over this problem. According to Peters, because of his discussions with the Italians, Collingwood was able to develop his own original idea of the living past 'according to which the past does not die in the present'.<sup>18</sup> This idea, gradually deployed throughout almost all of Collingwood's philosophy, was the cornerstone for his metaphysics of becoming,<sup>19</sup> which combines both the idea of a critical metaphysics in the Kantian sense, with the historicist vision of Hegel and the Italian idealists. The metaphysics of becoming works dialectically and historically, but moves away from Hegel because it does not consider history as the gradual incarnation of the same eternal and absolute spirit; it also moves away from the Italians (Croce and Gentile) because it does not hold that history is a pure product of the mind.<sup>20</sup> In addition, seen

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16 Louis O Mink, 'Collingwood's Dialectic of History', in *History and Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1968), pp. 3-37, p. 24. For a critical development of the dialectical continuity thesis held by Mink and Rubinoff, see: Gary K. Browning, *Rethinking R.G. Collingwood. Philosophy, Politics and the Unity of Theory and Practice* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

17 Rik Peters, *History as Thought and Action. The Philosophies of Croce, Gentile, de Ruggiero and Collingwood* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2013). For an interpretation of Collingwood's logic of questions and answers as an original reform of Hegel's dialectics, see also from Rik Peters, 'Collingwood on Hegel's Dialectic', in *Collingwood Studies*, 2 (1995), pp. 107-27.

18 Peters, *History as Thought*, p. 136.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 331.

from the perspective of Collingwood's development, his relationship with Kant appears to be a progressive historicising of the categories of understanding, as his philosophical method moves from transcendental concepts (in the 'Preliminary Discussion' of 1927) to philosophical concepts (*An Essay on Philosophical Method*), to the fully historical absolute presuppositions (*An Essay on Metaphysics*).<sup>21</sup>

Even in this very schematic presentation, the above examples are enough to show the complexity of the problem, and in general, the analytical perspectives so far employed. I agree with much of what was said by other commentators, and therefore, I will not address the problem in the same terms. What I want to show here are the linguistic structures that lie behind, so to speak, the dialectical representation either of Hegel's World's History or Collingwood's forms of experience. In other words, I will consider both Hegel's representation of Universal History in his *Philosophy of History* and Collingwood's dialectical configuration of the forms of experience in *Speculum Mentis* as verbal structures organised in narrative form. What stories they tell us, how they work and what differences there are between the two are the main subjects of this article. My hope is that this perspective may bring a different light into the problem of Collingwood's influences, at least for the Hegelian part of it. I choose these works because they are manifestly dialectical, and as such, both display a typological arrangement of the historical processes they intend to represent. As typology will be the central part of my argument, the first thing to do is to explain what I understand by it.

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21 *Ibid.*, p. 339.

### Typology

Inspired by Vico, Northrop Frye has identified three modes of language usage throughout history: metaphorical, metonymic and descriptive.<sup>22</sup> Each mode involves a specific relation between words and things, and each roughly corresponds to different historical periods, although they may overlap in a given time. The metaphorical phase comprises most of the Greek literature before Plato, especially Homer, the pre-Socratic philosophers and most of the Old Testament. It is characterised by using words as 'particular kinds of signs'. These signs are related to things in a metaphorical way ('this is that'), which means that there is not a clear distinction between the sign and the thing it represents. According to Frye, in the metaphorical phase, the sharp division between subject and object has not yet developed: Words and things, subjects and objects, are linked by a 'common energy or power', hence the magical capacity of words to interfere with the non-verbal world in the form of spells or charms.<sup>23</sup>

In the metonymical phase (which starts with Plato and extends until the nineteenth century), words 'become primarily the outward expression of inner thoughts'.<sup>24</sup> The relationship of words to things is metonymic ('this is put for that'), which implies the separation between world and mind. The separation, however, is not complete, because the inner reality expressed by words is pointing out to the existence of another reality, which, although invisible and transcendent, can only be reached by thought and expressed by words.<sup>25</sup> Discourse, then, is no longer conjoined with reality, but rather follows it as a parallel line, as an analogy: 'Thus metonymic language is,

22 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1982). pp. 3-30

23 *Ibid.*, p. 6

24 *Ibid.*, p. 7

25 *Ibid.*, p. 8.



or tends to become, analogical language, a verbal imitation of a reality beyond itself that can be conveyed most directly by words'.<sup>26</sup> The outward reality is not reached through direct experience of things, but by reflection and dialogue, which transforms the metaphorical meanings (often contradictory) into a conceptual language governed by the causal force of arguments: a language which, ultimately, can always reconcile all contradictions.<sup>27</sup> In this phase, words no longer have a magical capacity; their power lies in logical consistency, in the compelling force of syllogistic thinking. According to Frye, the metonymical mode retained its cultural influence well into the time of Kant and Hegel. In fact, '[o]ne of its culminating points is the metonymic universe of Kant, where the phenomenal world is 'put for' the world of things in themselves'.<sup>28</sup>

The descriptive phase opens around the sixteenth century. It begins with the search for a criterion of truth, external to the order of words. This means that truth is no longer considered to be a result of the inner consistency of arguments, and consequently, it must be something belonging to the natural world. Thus, the separation between subject and object is complete, and the subject is regarded as exposed, through sense experience, to 'the impact of an objective world'. In this way, '[t]he objective world is the order of nature; thinking or reflection follows the suggestions of sense experience, and words are the servomechanisms of reflection'.<sup>29</sup> The analogy is substituted by the simile, and discourse should try to be like its external reference ('this is like that'). Dialectics gives its place to inductive observation, and therefore, the argument is replaced by the proof. The descriptive use of language is, for Frye, a reaction against the transcendental perspective,

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, p. 10

28 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and it lies at the root of all of the arguments against metaphysics in its ontological sense.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their differences, the three modes of language share a common feature: The relations that they establish between words and things are based on the assumption that the two ingredients exist simultaneously.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, one variation of the metaphorical phase moves in time and is able to set parallelisms between past and present or between present and future. I am talking about typology, a form of speech typically present in the Bible, which establishes temporal connections between the two Testaments: What has happened in the Old Testament is a 'type', an anticipation or promise of what will become, in the New Testament, an 'antitype' or fulfilment of the original promise.<sup>32</sup> Typology was, according to Frye, the way in which the Bible was written, and perhaps, the best way for reading it, at least from the perspective of the literary critic. But the crucial point here is that typology is also a mode of thought:

what [typology] both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously.<sup>33</sup>

During the metonymic phase of language, typology was gradually replaced by causal thinking, which works as a form of temporal inverted typology: 'The causes are the antitypes of their effects, that is, revelations of the real meaning of the existence of the effects'.<sup>34</sup> This means that causal thinking is largely based on the past, while

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

32 For a short introduction to the type/antitype movement, see: Robert E Reiter, 'On Biblical Typology and the Interpretation of Literature' in *College English*, vol. 30, no. 7, (Apr., 1969), pp. 562-71

33 Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 81.

34 *Ibid.*

typology points to the future, to events considered transcendent or definitive. The emphasis on final or ultimate events has an important implication: The movement of time is regarded here not only horizontally, but also as a vertical lift, in the sense that it moves forward up to its own culmination. Because of this conception of time, typology has survived in the secular world in many ways: Marxism is a typical example, but evolutionism and the belief in the constant progress of democracy are as well, among many others.<sup>35</sup>

Typology, then, is a mode of thought especially well-suited to provide a temporal framework to historical processes. In this sense, it presents two different but related levels: It implies a conception of the historical process as a whole and contains some notion of the relationship between the parts of that whole. These two levels can be schematised as follows:

- 1) Time moves toward completion in a horizontal and ascending way. However, the beginning and the end of the process meet each other, because the end is not something entirely new, but a sublimated and enhanced version of the beginning. History, as a whole, is a process of learning (or suffering), intended to recover, in the end, what was lost in the beginning.
- 2) The process is not homogeneous: It moves through several stages, each qualitatively superior to the previous one. This not only because it is closer to completion, but because each stage is the fulfilment (antitype) of the promise contained in the preceding stage (type). Accordingly, each stage obtains its full meaning in the function of the place it occupies in the whole process. At the same time, each step is essential and necessary to the completion of the process.

These two levels allow me to draw a parallel between typological thought and the dialectical representation of historical processes. In my view, if history is conceived as a dialectical process composed by progressively more perfect stages, the verbal representation of this process can

35 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

only be a typological story. In what follows, I will try to show, not exhaustively, but through some concrete examples, the presence of typology in the historical representations of Hegel and Collingwood, and the differences between them.

### Typology and Universal History in Hegel

It is a well known fact that Hegel saw world history as the realisation of a single rational process aimed at a definite goal. This fact, however, has been understood in many different ways. For some commentators, it reveals the abiding influence of Christianity in Hegel's thought.<sup>36</sup> For others, the development of a 'cosmic plot' in Hegel's philosophy of history reveals him to be not so much a Christian philosopher, but rather a philosopher of reconciliation, who accepts only some parts of the Christian doctrines, while largely modifying some others.<sup>37</sup> Finally, some interpreters have discussed the aim or purpose of that process, that is, its eschatological dimension.<sup>38</sup> In short, the presence of a master plan in Hegel's concep-

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- 36 The classical example is Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949). See also: Hans Küng, *Christianity: essence, history, and future*, trans. John Bowden (New York and London: Continuum, 2003); Paul Lakeland, 'A New Pietism: Hegel and Recent Christology' in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), pp. 57-71; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie. Ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), especially chapter 10; Richard Schaeffler, *Reason and the question of God: an introduction to the philosophy of religion*, tr. Robert R. Barr and Marlies Parent (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1999).
- 37 See for example: Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel en son temps (Berlin 1818-1831)* (Paris: Éditions Delga, 2011); and Mark Lilla, 'Hegel and the Political Theology of Reconciliation' in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 54, no. 4, (Jun. 2001) pp. 859-900.
- 38 Examples are: Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology. The Presence of Eternity* (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1962); and more recently Daniel Berthold-Bond, 'Hegel's Eschatological Vision: Does History Have a Future?' in *History and Theory*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Feb. 1988), pp. 14-29.

tion of history is largely admitted, and what is discussed is its relevance and meaning.

In a well-known passage at the beginning of his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel explains his intentions:

Our intellectual striving aims at realizing the conviction that what was intended by eternal wisdom, is actually accomplished in the domain of existent, active Spirit, as well as in that of mere Nature. Our mode of treating the subject is, in this aspect, a Theodicaea –a justification of the ways of God– [...] so that the ill that is found in the World may be comprehended, and the thinking Spirit reconciled with the fact of the existence of evil. Indeed, nowhere is such a harmonizing view more pressingly demanded than in Universal History.<sup>39</sup>

In at least one sense, this passage leaves little room for doubt: For Hegel, the ‘eternal wisdom’ designed a plan and performed it throughout the World’s History. At this point, I have no need to define whether, by ‘eternal wisdom’, Hegel means God, Spirit or Mind; it is enough that there is the idea of a plan taking place in history. Hegel presents this plan throughout his *Philosophy of History*, and it can be summarised as follows:

Spirit (or God or Reason) actualises itself in History through a gradual process of self-knowledge. As Spirit, the main character of this story is the opposite of Matter, so it does not belong to the kingdom of necessity. Consequently, its process of self-knowledge must be the awareness of its own essence: freedom. Spirit has to learn over time what it really is, in a process that occurs within the effective reality of the world. Therefore, as it moves on, Spirit acquires different concrete forms – the various World Historical peoples, organised in specific moral and legal systems, that is to say, in States. Each State is the external manifestation of the Spirit’s inner development, the ‘embodiment of a rational freedom’, and each one is closer to the Spirit’s own ideal of

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<sup>39</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), p. 18.

perfection.<sup>40</sup> The conjunction between this ideal and individual human actions is achieved, according to Hegel, by an ingenious device he called the 'cunning of Reason'. This idea is very close to Kant's 'unsocial sociability', but now it does not work for Nature, but for Spirit.<sup>41</sup> When humans act, they do so following their own interests and passions, particularly the great men, such as Caesar or Napoleon. In doing so, they do not realise that their blind impulses are pursuing the Spirit's own wishes. Thus, unconsciously and perhaps unwillingly, men are working to accomplish the Spirit's cause.

The final result is a story in which the Spirit goes from East to West, incarnating itself in different historical peoples. It starts in the Oriental Empires of China, India and Persia; then, it moves to the Mediterranean world with Greece and Rome, and it reaches its culmination in the German nations under the influence of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> World History gets its fulfilment (not its end) in Europe, not by chance, but by pure necessity, because Christianity overcomes all of the previous incarnations of freedom: Because of Christianity, it is possible to attain the consciousness that man, as such, is free: not only one or some men, but all.<sup>43</sup>

For Hegel, all of this process is, as we saw, the outward and historically concrete expression of the World Spirit's self-knowledge.<sup>44</sup> Hegel has previously dealt with the same process in, so to say, its individual manifestation. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel shows the gradual elevation of mind from sensuous immediacy to absolute

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40 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree with an Introduction by C. J. Friedrich (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1956), pp. 47-53.

41 Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View' in *On History*, edited by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1963) pp. 11-26.

42 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 18.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 103-10.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

knowledge.<sup>45</sup> The crucial point here is that, in both cases, the process begins with an original sin, with a fall that separates consciousness from Truth.<sup>46</sup> In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel expresses this idea as follows:

Knowledge, as the disannulling of the unity of mere Nature, is the 'Fall', which is no casual conception, but the eternal history of Spirit. For the state of innocence, the paradisaical condition, is that of the brute [...] Only Man's Spirit has a self-cognizant existence. This existence for self, this consciousness, is at the same time separation from the Universal and Divine Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the dialectical process of reconciliation begins with a 'fall' from a 'paradisaical' condition. This is the *Via Dolorosa*, 'the way of despair' of consciousness that seeks to recover its lost unity.<sup>48</sup> The Mind, then, has to go through this 'pathway of doubt' before it may return to the truth. Even when the whole process is extremely complex, its dialectical phases are quite clear: It begins with the sensuous certainty which generates the apparent division between subject and object. Then, the conscious mind affirms the full existence of the object, independently of the subject. This is followed by the negation of the object and its subordination to the subject, and finally, the reconciliation of subject and object in absolute knowledge. In this way, consciousness finally discovers that the original distinction between subject and object was only an alienation from itself and that its true essence is absolute knowledge.<sup>49</sup> In conclusion, for Hegel, both mind and his-

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45 For a short but accurate exposition of Hegel's phenomenology, see: Roger Garaudy, *La pensée de Hegel* (Paris: Éditions Bordas, 1966), specially chapter 3.

46 See, for example: G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 49.

47 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 321

48 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 49.

49 Hegel explains this process with his usual clarity in the Introduction of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 46–57.

tory have the same structure presupposed by typological thinking.

Something similar may be said about the relationship between the parts of the process. In *The Philosophy of History*, the development of freedom's consciousness comes gradually through several phases. Each one has its own concrete and particular quality, but each one is, at the same time, a more perfect expression of the same principle.<sup>50</sup> Despite its imperfections, each phase contains within itself the germ that will become the next stage, and therefore, it potentially contains the whole process.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, each phase is a 'type', a promise to be fulfilled in the next phase, its 'antitype'. However, this relationship is not cast in a metaphorical way as in Biblical typology. It is rather a dialectical process in which each stage consumes and destroys itself, in a war of the Spirit against itself. The result, however, it is not the obliteration of the Spirit, but its amplification:

Spirit—consuming the envelope of its existence—does not merely pass into another envelope, nor rise rejuvenescent from the ashes of its previous form; it comes forth exalted, glorified, a purer spirit. It certainly makes war upon itself—consumes its own existence; but in this very destruction it works up that existence into a new form, and each successive phase becomes in its turn a material, working on which it exalts itself to a new grade.<sup>52</sup>

This quote makes clear that the Spirit 'incarnates' in each phase as its external manifestation ('the envelope') and that it will leave behind each particular incarnation to follow its path to perfection. The connection between the phases is, thus, the one and unique transcendental Spirit in its journey to recover, in the end, what was lost in the beginning. However, the movement is not entirely circular because it is based on the premise of progressive per-

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50 See for example: Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 63

51 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 73.



fection.<sup>53</sup> This fits well with typological thinking, but there is an important difference between Hegelian dialectics and Biblical typology: Hegel does not establish parallels between particular events or actions. For him, the typological repetition lies in the entire structure of the process, not in its particularities.<sup>54</sup> This difference is not to be underestimated, and it may be explained if we recall what Northrop Frye said about the growth of typology within the metaphorical phase of language. In this phase, as we saw, there is not a clear distinction between words and things, subject and object, and so on. Instead, what we find is that everything is more or less mixed into a generalised metaphorical identification. In my view, Hegel's philosophy was intended to achieve a similar effect: the final reconciliation of all differences into absolute knowledge. In other words, his philosophy strains to reach a metaphorical form of consciousness, and this is why typology still works in it. However, and this is the crucial point, Hegel does not write in a metaphorical way: He belongs completely to the metonymic phase of language. And this phase is characterised by the differentiation of subject and object, causes and effects, and in general, by the primacy of thought and inwardness over sensitivity and externality. Consequently, in Hegel, we find a tension that is absent in Biblical typology. If we consider that, for him, the World's History, at 'first glance', was just the meaningless spectacle of human miseries, and that History reveals its meaning only through the idea of an absolute aim,<sup>55</sup>

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53 This is one of the reasons why Hayden White characterised Hegel's historical narrative as being structurally a comedy composed by several tragedies. See: Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), especially chapter 2.

54 There is one important exception to this: Hegel's theory of Great Men or heroes. In *The Philosophy of History*, historical characters such as Socrates, Alexander the Great or Charlemagne are strikingly similar, in structural and narrative terms, to Christ.

55 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 20–21.

then we can understand that Hegel did not profess that his discourse was identical with reality (as in the metaphorical phase), nor that it was 'like' that reality (as in the descriptive phrase). What he tried to achieve was a substitution of the meaningless 'first glance' by a fully significative rational verbal structure. Thus, Hegel's discourse is an analogy of reality and runs parallel to it. He does not describe or copy reality: World History's true meaning is presented as the result of the work of consciousness that happens in reality, but which is finally achieved in discourse. In this way, metaphysics meets epistemology: Being and Logos complement each other.

#### Typology and Forms of Experience in Collingwood

Like Hegel, in *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood is attempting to restore a lost unity. This time, however, the search is for a completely different kind of unity. As we saw, Collingwood defined the Hegelian tale of the World Spirit's development as 'mere mythology'.<sup>56</sup> This criticism does not imply that Collingwood embraces the opposite view and sees history as 'a sheer flux of unique and disconnected events' or as 'a barren cyclical repetition of the same pattern over and over again' (*SM*: p. 56). On the contrary, for him, there is actually a plan taking place in history. But it has little in common with Hegel's plan. In his essay, 'The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History', written shortly before *Speculum Mentis*,<sup>57</sup> Collingwood clearly explains his thoughts on this matter: 'The plan which is revealed in history is a plan which does not

56 R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis or The Map of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 298. For his position against abstract schemes in general, see p. 54. Further quotations from this work will be indicated in the text by the usual abbreviation (*SM*).

57 For an analysis of the place of *Speculum Mentis* within Collingwood's philosophy of history, see: Jan van der Dussen, *History as a Science. The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood*, (Heerlen: Springer, 2012), especially pp. 11-36.

pre-exist to its own revelation; history is a drama, but an extemporised drama, co-operatively extemporised by its own performers'.<sup>58</sup>

History, then, is effectively a drama, but its plot is entirely human, not previously designed by the 'eternal wisdom'. For Collingwood, the notion of a plan is necessary in a Kantian sense: It is a regulative idea, without which historical knowledge is impossible. Without the idea of history as 'an organised and coherent whole of events', what we get is only an indefinite series of unconnected elements, not even the sad spectacle of human miseries envisaged by Hegel.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the plan revealed in history is not its substantial reality or its true meaning, as for Hegel, but a mental device that we use to think about a specific aspect of reality. It is a 'teleological metaphor', to borrow an expression used by Collingwood some years later when discussing Kant's philosophy in *The Idea of History*.<sup>60</sup>

In *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood presents a complete overview of history's development. Not surprisingly, the main character is not Absolute Spirit or the like, but the human mind in its relationship with the world, that is, the development of our forms of experience. Once again, the underlying story is the quest for the lost unity. But this unity is not understood as the complete identification of subject and object in the *parousia* of the Absolute. What Collingwood has in mind is something much more concrete and historical. He aims to solve what he thinks is the special problem of modern life: the separation of the

58 R.G. Collingwood, 'The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History' in W. Debbins (ed.) *R.G. Collingwood: Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966) pp. 34–56, p. 36.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 37

60 R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, revised edition, ed. Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 95. For a discussion of this notion in relation to Collingwood's historical methodology, see: William H. Dray, *History as Re-enactment. R.G. Collingwood's Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), specially pp. 184–90.

diverse forms of experience (art, religion, science, history and philosophy) (*SM*: p. 21). This problem has its origin in the Renaissance, when forms of experience began to be independent of each other. This hitherto unknown freedom allowed each form to rise up to the highest achievements. However, all progress comes with a price. Freedom was gained at the cost of the unity of mind: a unity that connected the different activities between them, and all of them to the practical life (*SM*: p. 30). The separation evolved into a generalised state of dissatisfaction that is characteristic of modern life in which each form of experience has become a specialised activity 'pursued by specialist for the applause of specialist' (*SM*: 34). According to Collingwood, the cure for this disease is not an impossible return to childhood, that is, to the unity of mind that is characteristic of the Middle Ages. The solution can only be a reunification of all of the activities of the mind 'in a complete and undivided life'. Thus, 'our task is to seek for that life, to build up the conception of an activity which is at once art, and religion, and science, and the rest' (*SM*: p. 36).

Seen from the perspective of narrative structure, the separation of the forms of experience occupies, for Collingwood, the same place as the separation between Man and Divine Spirit for Hegel: It is the 'fall' at the beginning of the reconciliation process. In what follows, Collingwood presents the dialectical process that gives place to the development of the different forms of experience. Collingwood's conclusion is that the separation was only an illusion and that 'each form is at bottom identical with all the others' (*SM*: p. 308). In this way, the end of the process meets its beginning. In the meantime, the mind has learned something very important: It has defeated the false distinctions and has recognised itself as absolute mind (*SM*: pp. 310 and 317). Structurally speaking, this is the same pattern that we find in Hegel and in typological thinking.

Nevertheless, unlike Hegel, Collingwood does not think that the development of mind comes through the sublimation of a single transcendental Spirit. For him, mind does not have a given, pre-established nature. Mind is a pure self-creating activity (*SM*: p. 298). In this sense, each step of the process is not a new incarnation of the same mind, but an activity, a particular form of relationship with the world. The different forms of experience may be arranged, according to Collingwood, in two different ways: They could correspond, on the one hand, to the development of the individual human being, in the sense that some activities are usually preferred more than others as the person matures (childhood/art, adolescence/religion, maturity/science). On the other hand, they could correspond to the different moments in the history of mankind, in the sense that some epochs prefer one activity over the others (for example, science among the ancient Greeks). These are, for Collingwood, abstract schemes, but they suggest some kind of empirical order in the emergence of the forms of experience. This order is a serial arrangement, which implies a dialectical movement: 'For a series of terms implies that each term is as it were built upon or derived from its predecessor and therefore does not start in vacuo, is not a wholly fresh embodiment of the universal, but is essentially a modification of the term before'. (*SM*: p. 55)

Thus, the relationship between the forms of experience can be summarised as follows. Each one has two indivisible but distinct elements: first an intuitive, immediate moment, and second, a reflexive, mediate moment. The first one is called sensation, and the second one is thought (*SM*: p. 95). These moments are not two different processes, but two faces of the same activity (*SM*: p. 185). They are related dialectically, which in this case, means a distinction within unity. In other words, the content of experience is, in the first place, always implicit, and as such,

belongs to intuition, and when it becomes explicit, it also becomes an object for thought. Thus, the content of experience always involves the unity of intuition and thought, first implicitly, which means unconsciously, and second, explicitly or consciously. This dialectical process describes not only the movement within each form of experience, but also the relationship between each of them, which means that each form of experience makes explicit what was only implicit in the previous form.<sup>61</sup> This implies a typological movement in which each phase is not only a higher degree in a series, but also that each one fulfils the promise contained in the previous one. Just as in Hegel's dialectic, each phase generates its own contradictions until the point that gives birth to the next phase. Unlike Hegel, however, the previous phases are not destroyed or left behind. They remain as an ingredient of the next form of experience, just as in Collingwood's later philosophy of history, the past is living in the present.<sup>62</sup>

#### Conclusion:

##### Absolute Mind and the Eschatology of Present Time

Absolute knowledge is the final result of the dialectical process of the development of the forms of experience. It is pretty clear that by 'absolute', Collingwood does not mean something like absolutely true or total and complete knowledge of reality. It means that the mind has reached a point at which it 'says what it means' (*SM*: p. 295), that is, a point at which the explicit and implicit aspects of experience perfectly coincide, avoiding, in this way, the errors of the previous forms of experience. Absolute knowledge is 'the conscious self-creation of the mind, not mere discovery of what it is, but the making of itself what it is' (*SM*:

61 For a discussion of this point in the context of Collingwood's theory of error see: Peter Skagestad, *Making sense of history. The philosophies of Popper and Collingwood*, (Oslo: The Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities, 1975) pp. 68–70.

62 See Rik Peters, *History as Thought*, esp. chs. 9 and 10

p. 296). Consequently, the absolute mind is not, for Collingwood, a substantial or transcendental Spirit, but a historical concrete whole in which each individual mind has an active part to play. In this way, knowing one's own mind is to know the other's minds and the world to which they all belong: 'In knowing my mind, I know yours and other people's: these reveal me to myself and I simultaneously explain them to myself. My mind is obviously a product of society, and conversely the society I know is the product of my mind, as thinking it according to its lights'. (*SM*: p. 299)

Philosophy, which is the highest form of experience, is the reflexion of the mind over itself. But this 'itself' includes all of the other minds, their world and history. This knowledge is concrete knowledge, that is, historical, because it is the knowledge of the process of the mind's self-creating activity which happens over time. In this sense, history is the 'mind's triumph over time' (*SM*: p. 301). In knowing its own history, the mind becomes aware of the changes it has suffered over time, and because of this, it can transcend those changes and recognise itself in the past. In this way: 'In the absolute process of thought the past lives in the present, not as a mere trace or 'effect' of itself in the physical or psychical organism: but as the object of the mind's historical knowledge of itself in an eternal present'. (*SM*: pp. 301-2)

Hegel linked the meaning of history to its teleological movement, that is, to its final resolution in the future. Unlike him, Collingwood established the present as the fulfilment of history. But it is important to notice here that Collingwood was not thinking of his own present, but rather, of all of the past presents. History as a whole is always complete; it is what it should be at every moment. It does not have a final goal or ultimate purpose. Consequently, progress for Collingwood is not evolutionary or directed toward achieving something specific, but is the

movement itself: all the activities of mankind that progressively add new things to the universe of what may be known. When discussing Collingwood's philosophy of history, Rudolf Bultmann rightly pointed out the same idea. For Bultmann, Collingwood was not a prophet in any sense, his philosophy does not speak about the future. Instead, Collingwood's intense awareness of the human historical condition takes him to the notion of each present as its own fulfilment, each one as its own eschatology.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, it is highly significant that Collingwood has chosen to illustrate the whole process of the mind's self-knowledge with the same image used by Hegel. It is the religious drama of the original sin and the final redemption of mankind. According to this, God, the Absolute Spirit, has created by His free will all that exists, including men, who share part of His divine essence. But men's thirst for knowledge originates the separation from God and the fall into error:

The error deforms his own true, that is divine, nature, and the deformation takes the shape of banishment from the presence of God into the wilderness of the visible world. Having thus lost even the sight of God, the knowledge of what he himself ought to be, he cannot recover his lost perfection until he comes to know himself as he actually is. But not knowing himself as he ought to be, he cannot know himself as he is. His error is implicit just because it is complete. It can only become explicit if God reveals himself afresh, if the true ideal breaks in upon the soul clouded by error. This, in the fullness of time, is granted. Human nature sunk in error is confronted by the confutation of its own error, and thus, through a fresh dialectical process, redeemed. (*SM*: p. 303)

These words suggest a very close proximity between Collingwood and Hegel's views of history. But a literal reading would be misleading. We are facing here two different modes of language use. For Collingwood, this image was only a metaphor, an illustration intended to

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63 Bultmann, *History as Eschatology*, pp. 123–37.



produce clarity in the reader's mind by appealing to something that is well-known and familiar. In contrast, for Hegel, this image was not only an example, but the actual description of the Spirit's development. In other words, the religious images are, for Collingwood, incapable of demonstrating the truth of any philosophy because they belong to a different and previous form of experience, while Hegel thought that philosophy was precisely the translation into philosophical terminology of the truths contained in religion.<sup>64</sup> However, this difference does not eliminate the significance attached to the use of the same images. What these images reveal is the power of typology to produce meaning, even when it has been removed from its original context. Perhaps another example can help to clarify this point.

In his *Essay on Philosophical Method*, Collingwood deals with the distinctive features of philosophical thinking, those which make it different from empirical science.<sup>65</sup> Collingwood's first claim is that both philosophy and science deal with universal concepts: not this or that particular triangle, but triangles in general. But this similarity is only an appearance, because philosophical concepts are radically different from scientific concepts. In general, the latter 'strictly conform to the rules of classification and division as laid down by logicians' (*EPM*: p. 29) because they are divided and classified in exhaustive and mutually exclusive forms; however, philosophical concepts are not so easily classified, and more important, they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, philosophical concepts always overlap, and despite their differences of kind and degree, they show partial coincidences. Thus, they must be arranged in a different way than scientific concepts, which means that method in philosophy is quite different than

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64 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 13–16

65 R.G. Collingwood, *Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

method in science. To reconcile differences and coincidences, a complex form of thought is needed:

The combination of differences in degree with differences in kind implies that a generic concept is specified in a somewhat peculiar way. The species into which it is divided are so related that each not only embodies the generic essence in a specific manner, but also embodies some variable attribute in a specific degree [...] In such a system of specifications the two sets of differences are so connected that whenever the variable, increasing or decreasing, reaches certain critical points on the scale, one specific form disappears and is replaced for another [...] A system of this kind I propose to call a scale of forms. (*EPM*: p. 57)

It has been generally admitted that Collingwood's scale of forms is the purely logical setting of the dialectical movement represented in *Speculum Mentis*. This is true, but if my reading of *Speculum Mentis* is correct, the scale of forms also implies the presence of typology within Collingwood's logic. In fact, Collingwood describes the relation between the higher and lower terms in a scale of forms using the quite typological metaphor of promising and performing (*EPM*: p. 87). This means that philosophical concepts are only intelligible because of their place in the scale, each only an imperfect form to be more fully achieved in the next, higher term. However, just as in history, the scale of form is not an evolutionary process; each step is its own fulfilment:

The higher term is a species of the same genus as the lower, but it differs in degree as a more adequate embodiment of the generic essence, as well as in kind as a specifically different embodiment [...] The higher thus negates the lower, and at the same time reaffirms it: negates it as a false embodiment of the generic essence, and reaffirms its content, that specific form of the essence, as a part and parcel of itself [...] Each term in the scale, therefore, sums up the whole scale to a point. Whenever we stand in the scale, we stand at a culmination. (*EPM*: pp. 88-9)

In my view, this quote indicates a strong correspondence between the scale of forms and the dialectical development of experience and history. But not only that: It also shows that the typological structure of promises and fulfilments has survived, as an organising metaphor, in the very heart of philosophical method. Nevertheless, the fact that Collingwood recognises it as a metaphor is a sign of one important fact in the history of philosophy. It indicates that the process of transforming metaphysics into a critical inquiry, initiated by Kant, has succeeded only up to a point. In other words, metaphysics, understood as the system or internal order of the universe, has been abandoned, just like its companions in the form of the speculative philosophies of history. However, this transformation, in which Collingwood played a very important part, did not break away from the linguistic structures responsible for creating meaning in Western culture. To phrase it in Collingwoodian terms, typology has been shown to be a very long lasting absolute presupposition.