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Giuseppina D'Oro, *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience*. London: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-23971-0.

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Over thirty years ago it would have been correct to say that “so many people have called Collingwood an ‘unduly neglected’ thinker that he is coming to be surely the best known neglected thinker of our time.” Although Collingwood’s work had been widely read, it had not received the recognition it deserves. Since then the proliferation of monographs on Collingwood prohibits one from calling him a ‘neglected thinker.’ However, most of the critical attention on Collingwood since 1970 has concentrated exclusively on individual aspects of his philosophy. A revival of his philosophies of history and politics was followed more recently by a revival of his aesthetics. What these readings have in common is an acknowledgement of the ‘philosophical baggage’ that each of Collingwood’s specific theories carries. But the ‘baggage’ itself has remained unexamined.

Unexamined only until recently, because Guiseppina D'Oro addresses precisely this lack. Her remarkable book *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience* is, as the title suggests, a close reading of Collingwood through the foil of Kantian philosophy. D'Oro focuses primarily on *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933). Although Collingwood regarded it as his best book, the *Essay* has not received much critical attention. The achievement of *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience* is to clearly describe the epistemological idealism that is expounded in the *Essay*, and to show how this position informs the whole of Collingwood's oeuvre. Every aspect of Collingwood's philosophy is motivated by the question of ‘how is this or that aspect of knowledge possible.’ D'Oro insists that Collingwood's metaphysics is an investigation into the epistemic conditions of experience and not into the existence of entities. And it is for this reason that the dialogue with Kant's thought is so very instructive for Collingwood studies.

It is extremely important that D'Oro demonstrates how this basic argumentative strategy is employed throughout Collingwood's writings. From this perspective, the absolute presuppositions in *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940) are portrayed as the *a priori* heuristic principles that govern domains of inquiry and, therefore, must necessarily exist. *The Idea of History* (1946) takes for granted the existence of these principles in order to delineate their function in historical knowledge. This is a persuasive account of the continuity of Collingwood's thought. But D'Oro's book is valuable in another respect as well: she is constantly situating Collingwood within the debates that shaped twentieth century philosophy (see esp. chapters 7 and 9). Thus, Collingwood's ideas “of why there is a role for philosophical reflection even in the face of the decline of traditional metaphysics and the growth of natural science” (143) acquire a contemporary relevance. Collingwood's epistemological idealism is pertinent today because of his Kantian insistence on the autonomy of ‘disciplines’; a position which implies that ‘metaphysics’ is the investigation into the transcendental conditions of possibility of these ‘disciplines.’

A demonstration of D'Oro's tactics in order to approach Collingwood's thought is found in chapter 5, entitled “Collingwood's ‘rehabilitation’ of the ontological argument.” The defence of the ontological argument in the *Essay on Philosophical Method* has been one of the thorniest issues of Collingwood

scholarship. D'Oro tackles it by emphasizing that Collingwood's account of the ontological argument is not concerned with theology at all. Rather, Collingwood argues that philosophy as a discipline is possible only if the existence of philosophical propositions entails an essence of thinking. According to D'Oro, this is an epistemologically compelling but ontologically neutral position. In other words, Collingwood wants to prove that the 'discipline' of philosophy has its own essential rules which are, however, intimately connected to the practice of individual philosophical thinking. If this interrelation was regarded as unacceptable in the 1930s to someone trained in analytic philosophy – the reason why the *Essay on Philosophical Method* met with a hostile reception – it should not appear unacceptable today to one familiar with discourse theory.

What persists as a silent undercurrent in *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience* is the figure of Hegel. It has been a remarkable feat of consistency and focus exclusively on Collingwood's Kantian credentials to manage to expunge any reference to Hegel. Of course, Hegel's 'spirit' is implicit – or, perhaps, explicit – in Collingwood's 'rehabilitation' of the ontological argument. And, any student of Collingwood knows the influence that a book like the *Phenomenology* had exercised on *Speculum Mentis* (1924), as well as the Hegelian heritage in the dialectical structure of later works, such as *The Principles of Art* (1938) and *The New Leviathan* (1942). This is not to say that the absence of Hegel from D'Oro's book is a defect. Rather, it is, on the one hand, a peculiarity; and, on the other, perhaps, a promise of what is more to come from D'Oro's fine scholarship.

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