DE GRUYTER OPEN

studia humana
QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Studia Humana
Volume 5:3 (2016), pp. 45—52
DOI: 10.1515/sh-2016-0014

R. G. Collingwood's Views on the Feeling – Thought Relation and Their Relevance for Current Research

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Abstract:
Current research in affectivity is often dominated by perspectives on the feeling/thinking dichotomy. In the paper first I reconstruct Collingwood's position on this point as it is presented in his *Religion and Philosophy*, *The Principles of Art*, and *New Leviathan*, and then compare it shortly with Bergson's view. In total five of Collingwood's different readings of the feeling/thought relation are brought to light. Finally, I opt for a view that takes feeling and thought to be complementary and inseparable, and I try to explain why and how they are better treated in this way.
Keywords: Collingwood, feeling, thought, feeling/thought linkage, feeling/thinking relation.

1. Introduction

For years, my principal area of interest was early Greek philosophy and language. In my research I arrived at what can be called the idea of the feeling—thinking linkage.[1] This is the view that neither reason nor emotion can exist in isolation from one another. The early Greek language does not have the words to speak about pure reason or pure emotion.[2] Contrariwise, several terms, such as *thumos*, *phren* (or *phrenes*), or *noos* (*nous*), are both thought—and feeling-related.[3] The idea of a feeling–thinking linkage, with a focus on its being different to the common feeling–versus–thinking dichotomy[4], comes up frequently in current philosophy and psychology. Yet rarely, if at all, do modern researchers refer to early ancient philosophy in this regard. But there are several other philosophers who come close to the idea of a feeling—thinking linkage and who do not refer to their predecessors and are not referred to by their successors with respect to this idea. One of them is R. G. Collingwood.[5] In what follows I shall examine three works by Collingwood, and then attack the issue of a thinking/feeling relation more directly.

2. Analysis

In his reply to R. S. Peters' *Emotions and the Category of Passivity*, C. A. Mace calls attention to the fact that:

> [o]ne of the simplest of statements to this effect [*scil.* emotional states are complex upheavals involving elements of passivity and elements of activity] is that of Collingwood's: "Emotion is not a totally separate function of the mind independent of thinking and willing [...] There is no emotion which does not entail the activity of the other so—called faculties of the mind" [10, p. 141].

The quote is borrowed from Collingwood's first book *Religion and Philosophy* [4, p.10]. Yet the statement seems to be made *en passant*. It is placed at the very beginning of the book, in the first chapter, where Collingwood discusses the *general nature of religion*. First, Collingwood observes that:

> certain views of religion [...] place its essence in something other than thought, and exclude that faculty from the definition of the religious consciousness. [...] or again that it is a function of a mental faculty neither intellectual nor moral, known as feeling [4, p. 4].

Thus, having isolated the notion of an intellectual faculty, Collingwood passes on to *that faculty of the mind whose function is feeling* [4, p. 10].[6] He carries on by saying that:

> [t]he term feeling seems to be distinctively applied by psychologists to pleasure, pain and emotions in general. But emotion is not a totally separate function of the mind, independent of thinking and willing; it includes both these at once. If I feel pleasure, that is will in that it involves an appetition towards the pleasant thing; and it is also knowledge of the pleasant thing and of my own state. There is no emotion which does not entail the activity of the other so-called faculties of the mind [4, p. 10].

From the above it is not clear what the difference between feeling and emotion is. It seems there is no difference, because "[t]he term feeling is applied to emotions in general", and Collingwood himself follows this use since he speaks about "the faculty of the mind [...] feeling", then about "emotion [...] not a totally separate function of the mind", and, again, about "the term itself [...] [t]he word feeling" [4, p. 11]. It looks as if *term* means *word* (or *its sense*), and *emotion* and *feeling* are to be understood synonymously[7], with the difference that feeling is used in a verbal form (feeling pleasure, and as a parallel to think-ing or will-ing), and emotion as a substantive. We can be sure of this since in what follows we read:

> [...] Moreover the term itself is ambiguous. The word feeling as we use it in ordinary speech generally denotes not a particular kind of activity, but any state of mind of a somewhat vague, indefinite or indistinct character. [...] In another commonly—used sense of the word, feeling implies absolute and positive conviction coupled with inability to offer proof or explanation of the conviction [4, p. 11].

Next, more important than synonymy of *feeling* and *emotion* in Collingwood is his proviso: *not a totally separate*. We can infer that there is a separation between emotion (feeling), thinking, and willing, but not a complete one. The nature of this incomplete separation is not determined, however. The extent of *partly* is not elucidated and, therefore, we do not know how much feeling is *a separate function of the mind.* Finally, and crucially, the passage explicates the nature of the dependency of feeling, thinking, and willing, which is not mutual. Thinking and willing hinge on feeling, since the latter includes the former and, again, the latter entails the former.

In *The Principles of Art*, published 22 years later, Collingwood is more explicit on affectivity than in *Religion and Philosophy*. Indeed, one finds there a chapter entitled *Thinking and Feeling*, including subchapters *The Two Contrasted*, *Feeling*, *Thinking*, and finally *The Problem of Imagination*. According to Collingwood, there is a contrast between feeling and thinking that we are

aware of from our experience. He states that: “Thinking and feeling are different” [...] [5, p. 160].[8] This is so for three formal reasons:

> [...] not only in that what we feel is something different in kind from what we think, nor also because the act of thinking is a different kind of act from the act of feeling, but because the relation between the act of thinking and what we think is different in kind from the relation between the act of feeling and what we feel [5, p. 160].

If so, there is, I think, a slight difference to be noted in Collingwood’s approach to relation between feeling and thinking: while in 1916 he conceived feeling as entailing thinking (= C1: feeling includes thinking), in 1938 feeling and thinking are pictured as contrasted (= C2: feeling and thinking are different). If I am right, a change occurred in Collingwood’s view. A few pages later, we find the following:

> Feeling appears to arise in us independently of all thinking [...] our sensuous—emotional nature, as feeling creatures, is independent of our thinking nature, as rational creatures, and constitutes a level of experience below the level of thought. [...] it has [...] the character of a foundation upon which rational part of our nature is built [...] Feeling provides for thought more than a mere substructure upon which it rests [...] [5, pp. 163–164].

Let us call this view, namely that feeling provides a base for thought, C3, which in terms of containing/contained can be reformulated as C3.2: thought includes (as its foundation) feeling. If this reformulation is correct, it now looks as if Collingwood holds, from a diachronic perspective, two reverse opinions, for claiming that *feeling includes thinking* is not at all the same as claiming that *feeling includes thought*. One may wonder if we are here dealing with two different views that make Collingwood inconsistent or are evidence of his change of mind, or with two different approaches, or, finally, perhaps with two different senses of feeling (because of different uses of feeling and emotion in both works).

Something similar to Collingwood’s latter claim, though in somewhat different terms, had been expressed by Bergson, barely six years earlier: “Not only emotion is a stimulus, because it incites the intelligence to undertake ventures and the will to persevere with them. We must go further. There are emotions which beget thought [...]” [2, p. 31].

To be exact, Bergson’s and Collingwood’s theses stand in a similar relation to each other as a weak versus a strong thesis. In fact, [t]*here are emotions* in Bergson is weaker than [t]*here is no emotion* in Collingwood’s sentence [t]*here is no emotion which does not entail the activity of the other so-called faculties of the mind* since the latter means that *all* emotions, not just *some* of them, entail thought.

Yet, to be more exact, in the above quote Bergson says two things that are apparently not identical. His claim that *emotion is a stimulus, because it incites the intelligence to undertake ventures and the will to persevere with them* seems to refer to (*all*) emotions (= B1), while his claim that [t]*here are emotions which beget thought*, even if it goes further by replacing *incit*[ing] with *beget*[ing], refers to *some* emotions *only* (= B2). This is why I am not convinced that the second claim goes further. Certainly B2 goes further than B1 with respect to recognizing as stronger the influence of emotion on thought, but B1 goes further than B2 in embracing emotions without qualification, this is, as it seems to me, *all* emotions.[9]

When compared, Collingwood’s and Bergson’s theses remain in various relations:

– C1 ((every) feeling includes & entails thinking) ≈ B2 ((some) emotions beget thought), because (i) entails = begets, but (ii) every ≠ some,
– C3.2 ((every) thought includes (as its foundation) feeling) = B1 ((every) emotion is a stimulus & incites the intelligence).

And as for Collingwood himself:

– C1 ((every) feeling includes & entails thinking) ≠ C3.2 ((every) thought includes (as its foundation) feeling),
– C1 ((every) feeling includes & entails thinking) ≈ C3 ((every) thought includes (as its foundation) feeling) in view of universal quantifier and the concept of containing, though C1 and C3.2 are opposite because of what contains what.

However, in another chapter of the same book we are told by Collingwood that: "There is no need for two separate expressions, one of thought and the other of the emotion accompanying it. There is only one expression" [5, p. 267].

With that we arrive at a new thesis (= C4: thought and emotion are one expression). It says that both emotion and thought are inseparably linked, since, for example, when "expressing the emotion the act of thought is expressed too" [5, p. 267]. It looks as if emotion and thought form a kind of dyad in which neither element has any superiority over other in any respect.

This is not Collingwood's last word. In 1942, shortly before his death, he published *The New Leviathan*, where we find another claim that makes things even more complex. We are now told that: "[...] man's mind is made of thought; but here comes something else, feeling, which seems to belong somehow to mind. [...] Feeling is an apanage of mind [...]" [6, 3.73 & 4.19, pp. 17–18]. Belonging as an apanage—unlike belonging as a constituent—is explained by Collingwood thus: "[...] the way in which an estate belongs to a family or a mooring to a boat or a card in the library catalogue to a book" [6, 4.16, p. 18].

If so, this means that, indirectly, feeling is an apanage of what makes up the mind, that is, of thought/s. And if this is correct, there is no more symmetry between feeling and thought, for thought is not an apanage of feeling.[10] But does this mean that feeling is conceptually a part of thought (= C5)? If so, C5 is close to C3.2 but different from C2 and C4, of which both, in turn, are to some extent opposite each other, since the former is about feeling and thought being different while the latter about their being one. Hence there are two conceptual levels:

– on one level feeling and thought are symmetrical, whether similar (C4) or dissimilar (C2),
– on another level, which is more specific, feeling and thought are asymmetrical and (i) the difference is detailed, (ii) this detailing pertains to opposite kinds of inclusion based on the different aspects of inclusion taken into account, to wit feeling including thinking (C1) and thought including feeling (C3.2/C5).

And this, I think, is a solution that combines Collingwood's five claims, provided I am right in distinguishing them as five, i.e. C1, C2, C 3 (C3.2), C4, and C5. In order to avoid contradiction, similarity and dissimilarity as well as thought's subordination to feeling and feeling's subordination to thought should be understood as bearing on non-identical aspects of either symmetry or asymmetry. But in suggesting this I neglect the fact that C1 is dated 1919, while C2, C3.2, and C4 are dated 1938, and C5 is dated 1942.

One of Collingwood's editors, W. J. van der Dussen, makes the following point: "[...] it is nevertheless not correct to interpret Collingwood as making an absolute distinction between thought and emotion. On the contrary, in his view emotions contain thought and thought emotions" [8, p. 265].

This is excellent. However, given the variety of Collingwood's theses, as I have shown above, it is not clear what van der Dussen relies on here (there is no reference to support the claim, which is inserted among quotes from *The Principles of Art* and *New Leviathan*). Moreover, note that van der Dussen's proposition (= D) contains, in fact, not one but two claims: about there being no absolute distinction between thought and emotions (= D1) and about the mutual incorporation of emotions and thought (= D2).[11] While D1 may refer to C4[12], D2 echoes C1 and C3.2/C5. Therefore:

D =
D1 + D2 =
C4 + C1 + C3.2/C5.

Since C2 is left out, I would suggest, in order to offer a fuller interpretation, including all five claims, the following:

C (Collingwood) =
symmetry of feeling and thought = C2 + C4
+
asymmetry of feeling and thought = C1 + C3.2/C5.

This means that I follow the same interpretative pattern as van der Dussen, that is, I combine several works by Collingwood, with the difference that van der Dussen omits C2. Second, I suggest that at least two (or better, three) of them should be mentioned. Finally, it will be prudent to remember that this interpretation is constructed with no regard to the diachrony of the works taken into account.

3. Synthesis

Let me now pass on to my main point. I take a step beyond theses about the inclusion of feeling in thinking and vice versa and set forward another idea about the linkage of two equally important elements that are inseparable. Feeling and thinking are linked symmetrically, in a coordinate, not subordinate way (= Z).[13]

Now, it is essential to bear in mind that epistemic and ontic approaches are not interchangeable. For it can be the case that if the realms of feeling and thought are hardly distinguishable (= Z1), this might be for various reasons: it can be difficult or impossible to distinguish them epistemically, while they are different ontically (= Z1.1) or it can be impossible to distinguish them epistemically, because they are not different ontically (= Z1.2). If the former, either the distinction is not known but it will be known, or at least could be known (= is knowable) (= Z.1.1.1)[14], or it will never be known, even though there is a distinction between thought and feeling (= is unknowable) (= Z.1.1.2). If they are not different ontically (Z.1.2), they are inseparable epistemically, which means that because the distinction between thought and feeling is non-existent ontically, it is only of conceptual character.[15] A fortiori, a pure thought and a pure feeling as such are unknowable.[16] Feeling and thought are dissociable only as analytical constructs but do not exist *in crudo*, namely feeling (alone) and thinking (alone). Thinking without feeling and feeling without thinking may appear useful in certain steps of analysis, but should not be considered as existing as such. If they are distinct but inseparable, the proportion of feeling and thinking in diverse cases of linkage varies. They form a kind of atomic linkage, like Descartes' *no mountain without valley*.[17] There is a mountain and there is a valley, but there is no borderline between them (or even a zone where a borderline could be drawn, because it depends on the environment and other neighbouring mountains and valleys) and only higher/the highest and lower/the lowest points can be indicated.
All in all, we are confined to simply setting hypotheses as long as we are limited epistemically. From the ontic point of view the hypotheses are as follows[18]:

ontically	epistemically
thought and feeling are ontically two symmetrical and foundational—but separable—elements of the mental	there are epistemically two concepts that correspond to two elements that can be treated in isolation
thought and feeling are ontically two symmetrical and foundational—and	there are epistemically two concepts that should not be treated in isolation

inseparable—elements of the mental	
ontically there are no such things as thought and feeling—there is only one atomic function or act	they are only pure concepts we use to describe one function or one act, but this is inaccurate; the fact that we are used to describing it so results from our deformed epistemic perspective

From the epistemic point of view we have the following hypotheses:

epistemically	ontically
feeling and thought are difficult to distinguish epistemically; the distinction is not known but it will be known or, at least, could be known (= is knowable)	whereas feeling and thought are different ontically
feeling and thought are difficult to distinguish epistemically and the distinction will never be known	whereas feeling and thought are different ontically
feeling and thought are only concepts, or empty concepts	because feeling and thought are not distinct ontically

As long as there is no way of deciding about these hypotheses I suggest giving a formal description of any function or any act. Its structure is this[19]:

$$\text{a function/an act} = x \cdot \text{feeling} + y \cdot \text{thinking}$$

where:

$$0 < x < 1,\ 0 < y < 1,$$
$$\text{and } x+y=1$$

or, if I am wrong and in extreme cases there is such a thing as pure thought/pure feeling:

$$0 \leq x \leq 1,\ 0 \leq y \leq 1,$$
$$\text{and } x+y=1.$$

4. A Short Conclusion

In this paper I intended to analyse Collingwood's views on the thinking/feeling relation because of their relevance for current research in philosophy of affectivity. I interpreted a variety of his positions as mirroring difficulties in grasping the ontic dimension of this relation. For example, his focusing once on the priority of feeling over thinking and once on the priority of thinking over feeling can be seen as an anticipation of the current expressions *emotional intelligence* and *intelligence of emotions*. As it is, these two expressions are used independently, the first by one group of authors, the second by another. My impression is that they speak about the same or a similar phenomenon. But why rather this than that expression is preferred I don't know. In this context Collingwood's approach—if I may take his various claims as parts of one approach—is comprehensive. The surprising fact, however, is that neither contemporaneous nor succeeding authors who tackle the feeling/thinking relation refer, to my knowledge, to each other. Is this a reflection of simple ignorance or something else—say, that each of them understands the distinction differently and, consequently, I am wrong in identifying them as proponents of the thinking/feeling linkage? I consider answering this question valid insofar as it not only concerns the history of

philosophy but also and more interestingly, it seems to me, may contribute to advancing the philosophy of affectivity. If the latter is plausible, Collingwood is an important figure who offers an inspiring vista for treating the feeling/thinking relationship.

Acknowledgement

A first, short version of this paper was given at the R. G. Collingwood Society Conference in Prato, Jul. 19–22, 2010. From Oct. 2010 to Sept. 2015 I supervised the PhD project of W. Chołostiakow, *Monadyzm dzieła sztuki. Praca porównawcza z zakresu polskiej i brytyjskiej filozofii sztuki XX wieku: H. Elzenberg (1887–1967) i R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943)*. The work of W. Chołostiakow had no impact on modifications I made to the 2010 version of my own paper recently. I thank Giuseppina D'Oro for having read my paper.

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Notes

1. E.g. [16], [17], [18], [21], and, above all, [15]. One of the reviewers of [15], G. Boys–Stones [3, p. 127] wrote: *The conclusion – that Presocratic psychological models were not the dichotomies of reason and emotion with which we are familiar from Plato onwards – is not all that surprising* [...]. Yet, I must say I still meet hostility, criticism or, at best, incomprehension of this idea. I suppose that this unwillingness stems from a strong predominance of another approach, that of the reason/emotion dichotomy.
2. But even after the terminology had been established this view was supported, e.g. by [13, 1025D] (see below).
3. To quote just one work, available also on line: [25, esp. pp. 22–36].
4. A. Heller, [9, p. 191] calls this dichotomy *characteristic of everyday thinking* [...] *practically a* lieu commun.
5. There is more to say about R. G. Collingwood's views on affectivity. A systematic treatment of feeling is developed in: [6, pp. 18–39 (*IV Feeling* & *V The Ambiguity of Feeling*)]. In [5] Collingwood seems to adopt a hierarchical approach to affectivity, e.g. p. 164: *This level of experience* [...] *I propose to call the psychical level*. & pp. 232–233: *The higher level differs from the lower in having a new principle of organization; this does not supersede the old, it is superimposed on it*. Compare Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann (for analyses and interpretations see respectively [19] as well as [20] and [23]).
6. Compare [11, ch. 3, § 6, p. 55]: *Of the first leading division of nameable things, viz., Feelings or States of Consciousness, we began by recognizing three sub–divisions; Sensations, Thoughts, and Emotions.*
7. Which will not be the case in [5, p. 160]: [...] *a general activity of feeling specialized into various kinds* [...] *not, clearly, of quite the same kind as sensation; to distinguish it, let us call it emotion*. & p. 164: *I shall in this book use the word 'feeling'* [...] *not as a synonym for emotion generally*. Contra [5, p. 239]: *What is expressed is* [...] *an emotion* [...] *This feeling* [...]. See also [14, §68 and §488] giving joy [*Freude*] as an example of, respectively, feeling [*Gefühl*] and emotion [*Gemütsbewegung*].
8. See also [5, p. 157]: *the contrast between thinking and feeling*.
9. This ambiguity is inherent to the French text, [1, p. 39]: [...] *l'émotion est un stimulant, parce qu'elle incite l'intelligence à entreprendre et la volonté à persévérer.* [...] *Il y a des émotions qui sont génératrices de pensée* [...] – the first sentence having no quantifier and with the definite article can be read as *toute*, *chaque* (*all*) and *il y a* amounting to the existential quantifier.
10. See also [6, 41.33, p. 344]: *It ought not to surprise you to be told that emotions may turn into thoughts or that thoughts may originate as emotions.*
11. Let me mention that this thesis is not ideally symmetrical, because there we meet *emotions contain thought and thought emotions* instead of, for instance, *emotion contains thought and thought emotion* or *emotions contain thoughts and thoughts emotions*.
12. Van der Dussen's proviso *absolute* (*distinction*) may correspond to Collingwood's *totally* (*separate*) ([4, p. 10]).
13. This is more general and as such close to C4 (but also to C2 since I don't claim that feeling and thinking are identical). For a more specific sense of Z see what follows.
14. See [13, 1025D]: *it is not easy to conceive any emotion* [πάθος] *of man devoid of reasoning* [λογισμοῦ] *or any motion of thought* [διανοίας κίνησιν] *without desire, emulation, or joy or sorrow added*.
15. As remarked by A. Heller, [9, p. 23]: *If we should not take this functional difference seriously, then the question: "what does it mean to feel?" would be synonymous with the question: what does it mean to think* [...]*?*
16. See [24].
17. See [7, V, 52].
18. See [22].
19. See [18, p. 81].