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NEGLECTED IMPLICATIONS OF R. G. COLLINGWOOD'S ATTACK ON "SCISSORS-AND-PASTE HISTORY"

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R. G. Collingwood's condemnation of "scissors-and-paste history" is represented especially by the essay entitled "Historical Evidence" in the *Idea of History*. We will do well to remember that the *Idea of History* was a posthumously edited collection of writings that had issued from Collingwood's fertile intellect between 1935 and 1940. T. M. Knox, the editor of the book, has explained that the essay "Historical Evidence" is an excerpt from the uncompleted manuscript of a work on the special characteristics of historical inquiry which Collingwood had begun to write in 1939.[1] Thus the essay stands close to the end of Collingwood's career, when his health and, in some respects, the quality of his writing were deteriorating. It also stands at the end of a four-year period during which — whether repudiating his earlier thought or simply bringing certain of its components to fruition is a matter of controversy — Collingwood gave an increasingly high value to historical knowledge as opposed to natural science and philosophy.[2] Both of these circumstances can be expected to have some bearing upon an assessment of the essay. But why should we bother to assess it? The essay seems to have met with tacit approval on the part of historians, and it has received little attention from philosophers of history.[3] Yet it contains assertions about historical method which, by implication, cast doubt upon the value of much respected, present-day historical scholarship. Historians, therefore, owe the essay more serious consideration than they have apparently given it.

It is perhaps because of a misunderstanding of Collingwood's now familiar expression "scissors-and-paste history" that his pronouncements on the subject have generated little controversy. His exposition of the concept does invite confusion. In the essay he explains that he is using this expression to describe "history constructed by excerpting and combining the testimony of different authorities."[4] The word "authorities" in this context would ordinarily refer to historians whose reconstruction of some aspect of the past commands assent. Collingwood does, by implication, use the word at one point to include an historian whose "ready-made answer" to a question is accepted.[5] He also says that Herodotus and Thucydides have maintained a special position as authorities in scissors-and-paste accounts of Greek history.[6] At the

same time, however, it is testimony that he sees being excerpted and combined in this type of history, and for him the testimony of authorities consists of statements "oral or written, purporting to be made by actors in the events concerned, or by eyewitnesses of them, or by persons repeating what actors or eyewitnesses have told them, or have told their informants, and so on."[7] This liberal understanding of testimony does perhaps encompass part of what Herodotus and Thucydides have told us; as Collingwood observes elsewhere, their reconstruction of the recent past depended largely on reports of eyewitnesses with whom they had personal contact.[8] Quite obviously, however, he depicts testimony as consisting, in the first place, of what eyewitnesses of events or actors in them have reported about the events. Accordingly an authority, for Collingwood, is simply someone whose word, or "ready-made statement", about some aspect of the past is treated by an historian as being true and is therefore incorporated into the historian's account of the subject.[9] In addition, Collingwood's understanding of testimony implies that the authority whose testimony is being accepted will not ordinarily be an historian. Scissors-and-paste history, therefore, is not to be understood solely or primarily as historical writing which the historian produces by excerpting and combining passages written by other historians; it is to be understood primarily as historical writing produced by excerpting and combining the testimony of people who were temporally close to the events being reconstructed.

It is perhaps even more crucial to observe that Collingwood's scissors-and-paste history is not to be identified with an uncritical acceptance of testimonies. He recognizes that a sophisticated technique of historical criticism began to take shape in the seventeenth century and reached fulfilment in the nineteenth century. But he sees this technique as having been directed to a problem which was characteristic of scissors-and-paste history — the problem of determining the truth or falsity of statements made by authorities with a view to their incorporation into, or their exclusion from, an historical narrative. Thus "critical history" was still constructed by excerpting and combining the testimony of authorities; "it was still only a form of scissors-and-paste."[10]

For Collingwood, the shortcoming of critical history is that it cannot be "scientific". In his historical survey of the idea of history, Collingwood normally uses the word "science" as equivalent to the Latin *scientia*. A science is an inquiry in which we ask questions and try to answer them: science as the fruit of such inquiry is "genuine knowledge."[11] In addition Collingwood, having explained that for the ancient Greeks genuine knowledge must be based on demonstrative reasoning, himself says in the essay "Historical Evidence" that any claim to knowledge requires demonstration; it must exhibit the grounds upon

which it is based. That is to say that knowledge, or science, is inferential; its content is proven by means of inference from premisses. In the exact sciences such as logic and mathematics, the premisses are assumptions and the conclusions inferred from them are logically obligatory, or compulsive. In the inductive sciences of observation and experiment, the premisses are observations and the conclusions inferred from them are not logically compulsory; they are only justified, or permitted, for anyone who wishes to adopt them. Having thus recognized that both compulsive and permissive inference provide us with science, Collingwood at a later point in the essay — after he has begun to examine the nature of historical inference — proceeds to identify science exclusively with compulsive inference: "science... must impress itself as inevitable on anyone who is able and willing to consider the grounds upon which it is based...."[12]

Historical criticism, in Collingwood's analysis, can be inevitable, or compulsive, only in its negative conclusions concerning the questions upon which it is brought to bear. The "critical historian", in considering whether to accept or reject a certain testimonial statement upon the question in which he is interested, seeks to determine the trustworthiness, or credibility, of the statement's author in general and of the statement in particular. If he finds that the author of the statement must have been ignorant of the matter about which he testified or that he has a record of mendacity, the historian is compelled to reject the statement in question. Although Collingwood does not say so explicitly, he implies as well that, if the critical historian finds the statement itself implausible, he is compelled to reject it. On the other hand, if the author of the statement is reputed to have been well informed and honest, he may nevertheless on this occasion have fallen a victim to misinformation about the events in question, to a misunderstanding of them, or to a desire to suppress or distort the truth about them. Also, if the statement itself "bears upon it no recognizable marks of being untrue", it may be untrue for all that. Thus we are only permitted, not obliged, to embrace the positive conclusions of historical criticism.[13]

Yet for Collingwood there is a procedure of historical investigation which yields compulsive positive conclusions, which proves its point "as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics."[14] It is the procedure of "scientific history". The "scientific historian" is his own authority rather than being dependent upon the word of someone else who provides ready-made statements about past events. In reconstructing these events he does not put his questions to an authority; he puts them to himself and accepts only his own answers. In his rejection of dependence on the word of authorities, he is especially alive to the possibility of exploiting what have been called "unwritten sources". That

is not to say, however, that he avoids all dependence upon testimonial statements as found in "written sources". Rather what distinguishes his approach to testimonial statements from that of the critical historian is that he treats them in essentially the same way as he treats the unwritten remnants of the past. "Confronted with a ready-made statement about the subject he is studying, the scientific historian never asks himself: 'Is this statement true or false?', in other words 'Shall I incorporate it in my history of that subject or not?'"[15] Instead he asks himself what the statement means. That is not to ask what the author of the statement meant by it, although the historian must determine the meaning of the statement in this sense too. Rather it is to ask what light is thrown on the subject by the fact that this person made this statement. In other words the scientific historian "does not treat statements as statements but as evidence...."[16] Treating them as evidence consists of "twisting a passage ostensibly about something quite different into an answer to the question he has decided to ask."[17] By this process of inference he can extract historical knowledge even from statements that are not literally true or are downright false, statements which the critical historian would reject and leave unexploited, and he can find out things that his authorities do not tell him. Thus the scientific historian is both autonomous and constructive.[18]

The crucial outcome of this procedure is that scientific history, either as an historian's body of historical knowledge or as his written account of a subject, "contains no ready-made statements at all."[19] That is to say, it does not rest at any point upon a giving of credence to someone's testimony about past events or situations. Therein it avoids the major source of uncertainty in the positive conclusions of critical history.

But circumvention of the pitfalls of critical history does not in itself justify Collingwood's assertion that scientific history proves its point as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics. He seems to rest that assertion ultimately upon the "logic of question and answer", which he has upheld in other writings as the proper way of arriving at truth.[20] With reference to historical investigation, he emphasizes that the drawing of inferences from evidence must proceed by a systematic presenting and answering of successive questions, each arising out of the answer to the preceding one and the whole complex of questions being aimed at answering the initial, major question in the historian's mind. Collingwood does not tell us why this systematic questioning leads to inescapable conclusions in historical inquiry. He only says, in effect, that if you employ it you will find, at least in some instances, that eventually the pieces of the puzzle fit together as in a case of criminal detection. You will then know that you have the right answer to

your major question with the same certainty as you know, after following Euclid's demonstration, that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides.[21]

Thus summarized, Collingwood's thesis is most clearly at odds with the present practice of historians where he rules out all incorporation of ready-made, testimonial statements into the historian's body of knowledge or his final written account of a subject, no matter how carefully they may have been screened by historical criticism. There are places in the essay, however, where Collingwood appears to condone the incorporation of testimony. In one brief passage he hints at the possibility of starting with testimony, reinforcing what it has said by referring to other evidence, and thus arriving at scientific historical knowledge. He says that this knowledge will not have been attained by "the acceptance of testimony as such."[22] Yet historical knowledge thus arrived at would presumably contain what had initially been ready-made testimonial statements and the historian would have asked himself whether the original statements were true or false. The passage in question is clearly inconsistent with Collingwood's explicitly stated thesis.

A similar departure from this explicit thesis is implicit in the short murder mystery that figures in the essay as an illustrative analogy to scientific history.[23] The investigation of the death of John Doe — stabbed in the back while sitting at a desk in his study — is intended especially to illustrate the process of questioning that is essential to history as a science.[24] Collingwood relates that the village constable, in conducting the initial inquiry, received three gratuitous testimonies. A neighbouring spinster asserted that she had killed the victim; the village poacher testified that he had seen the squire's gamekeeper climbing in at John Doe's study window; and the rector's daughter, in a state of agitation, said that she had done it herself. The constable discredited all three testimonies. Collingwood explains, in reference to the confession of the rector's daughter, that the constable reasoned that she lacked the strength to commit the murder, that she probably lacked the requisite knowledge of anatomy, and that if she had indeed done it she would not be in such a hurry to accuse herself. The constable therefore concluded that her story was a lie. Clearly, as Collingwood himself points out, the constable began "by using the methods of critical history."[25]

Then, proceeding in what Collingwood considers the manner of a scientific historian, the constable asked himself why the rector's daughter was telling a lie. He surmised that she was trying to shield someone.

Then, asking himself who it could be, he eventually concluded that she suspected her young man, Richard Roe, who had spent the night of the murder at the rectory, which was next door to John Doe's residence. This second conclusion, which Collingwood describes as a "true conclusion",[26] obviously depended upon the preceding conclusion, arrived at by a procedure analogous to historical criticism, that the rector's daughter was lying.

By thus implying that scientific history takes up where critical history leaves off, Collingwood seems unwittingly to have undermined his claim of compulsiveness for the conclusions of scientific history. How can the main structure be secure when it rests upon foundations which he has found so shaky? He could have countered by reminding us that it is only the positive conclusions of historical criticism that he has found uncertain; he has recognized the compulsiveness, in principle, of its negative judgments as to the credibility of testimonial statements. The conclusion that the rector's daughter was lying is such a judgment, although we may well doubt that it was really inescapable. In addition, it will be observed that, so far, no ready-made statements have been incorporated into the body of knowledge being built up in the investigation of John Doe's death.

There are in the John Doe illustration, however, some places where testimonial statements were taken and, seemingly with some confirmation from non-testimonial evidence, were incorporated into the line of reasoning as though they were true answers to questions that had been posed. For example, Detective-Inspector Jenkins of Scotland Yard, who represented scientific questioning at its best, started out from the second conclusion of the village constable and asked himself why the rector's daughter suspected Richard Roe. In approaching an answer, he started out with a third conclusion — that Richard had been out in a thunderstorm on the night of the murder. But this information had been provided by the rectory parlour-maid, in testifying that Richard's shoes had been very wet in the morning, and by Richard himself, who admitted having gone out in the middle of the night but refused to say where or why.[27] In addition Inspector Jenkins observed Richard's tracks in the mud of the rectory garden path, but we are not told how it was established that they were Richard's tracks. Tracks can be easily matched with a particular pair of shoes, but can shoes be said to belong to a particular person and, especially, to have been worn on a particular occasion by that person without resort to testimony? In any event Inspector Jenkins, assuming this third conclusion and examining the location of the tracks, asked himself whether Richard killed John Doe. Then adopting the hypothesis that Richard did do it, he asked himself when and how he could have done it. Judging from the tracks,

he concluded that the murder would have to have been committed after the storm. Yet there was no mud in the study. A reconstruction in his imagination of how the murderer must have carried out the deed, in view of the position of the dead body, led the Inspector to conclude that the culprit could not have taken off his shoes before carrying out the murder. Therefore Richard could not have done it.[28]

Having exhausted that lead, Inspector Jenkins returned to the third conclusion, as amplified by the finding of Richard's tracks, and asked himself why Richard had gone into the garden. Various answers that he put to himself — for example that Richard had gone out for a walk or a smoke — were implausible under the circumstances. He concluded that something strange must have been going on there, and this conclusion suggested the hypothesis that the murderer came from the rectory, before the storm, that Richard had seen him and followed him, getting caught in the rain, and that Richard had refused to say where he had gone in the night because he was trying to shield someone. Was it the rector?

Inspector Jenkins tackled the question of the rector's guilt by again reconstructing the murder in his imagination. This time he followed the rector through the various steps that he would have taken from the point of leaving the house to returning and undressing. It was plain that the rector, because he knew the garden well, could have accomplished the murder without leaving tracks on the path or mud in the study — by keeping to the grass. One especially significant fact in this reconstruction was that John Doe had just painted his garden gate on the evening before the murder. The inspector surmised that the rector would not have known about the fresh paint and that he would have got some of it on his gloves, which he would presumably have worn to avoid leaving finger prints, and also on his jacket; he would have been obliged somehow to dispose of the affected clothing. This hypothesis and thereby the major details of the reconstruction were confirmed by the finding of leather ashes in the rectory dustbin, along with metal buttons bearing the name of a glove-maker whom the rector always patronized, and by the discovery that shortly after the murder the rector had given his jacket, with paint on the right cuff, to a deserving parishioner.

As an illustration of scientific questioning, this part of Collingwood's story betrays some crucial omissions. All we are told about the manner of identifying the jacket recovered from the parishioner is that it was observed to be a clerical style of jacket and to have been shrunk by wetting.[29] We are not told how it was known that the garden gate had been freshly painted, or that the paint on the clothing was the same

as that on the gate, or that the rector always bought his gloves from that particular manufacturer, or that he had given it to the parishioner in question after the murder. We can see how all of these facts could have been established without dependence on the word of a testifier, except perhaps the last of them, and that one was not essential to the proof of the rector's guilt as long as the jacket was identified. Even so, it is hard to imagine the inspector studiously avoiding the taking of testimonies on these matters and the incorporation of them into his line of argument as at least hypothetical data.

Finally the identification of a possible motive for the murder entered into Inspector Jenkins' second reconstruction of the murder. He asked what was known about John Doe at the Yard and was told that he was a blackmailer.[30] Accordingly the inspector asked himself whether John Doe could have been blackmailing the rector and could have been perusing incriminating letters at his desk when he was murdered. The finding of a large amount of writing-paper ash in the rectory dustbin confirmed both hypotheses. With that the inspector was convinced of his case against the rector; the latter's subsequent suicide only confirmed what was already known.[31]

In taking the word of Scotland Yard for John Doe's record of blackmail, Inspector Jenkins seems to have been indulging in scissors-and-paste investigation. Collingwood has provided, however, for that kind of borrowing in scientific history. In the closing passages of the essay, he observes that the scientific historian will take previously written monographs as his starting point.[32] The implication is that, if the scientific historian is satisfied that the conclusions of such monographs have been scientifically established, he is justified in incorporating them into his own body of knowledge and his writing. That is quite a different thing from incorporating testimonial statements therein.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, testimonial statements did enter into Inspector Jenkins' body of knowledge. It is doubtful, however, that Collingwood was aware that he had thus departed from his explicitly stated ideal of scientific history. In looking back over the John Doe case, he reflects that the scientific historian can get conclusions even when no statements are made to him. By way of example he asserts that the premisses from which Inspector Jenkins inferred that Richard Roe was innocent were all statements which the inspector made to himself as to what he himself observed in the garden and the study; "not one of them was a statement about statements made by anyone else."[33] Collingwood has evidently overlooked the role which he gives to testimony in the establishment of Richard's innocence. Sim-

ilarly he contends that "the ultimate case against the rector did not logically depend upon any statements made by the Detective-Inspector about statements made by other persons"; it depended on a number of facts that "were vouched for by his own observation."[34] If we give Collingwood the benefit of the doubt concerning the gaps in his story, that contention seems to be literally true. Yet it fails to do justice to the role of testimony in the total heuristic procedure which led to the inspector's entertainment of the hypothesis that the rector committed the murder.

Thus Collingwood, evidently without intending to, really presented three different models of historical investigation in the essay "Historical Evidence". To recapitulate, they are the explicitly propounded procedure of pure scientific history, the briefly described procedure of taking testimony and confirming it by evidence, and the complex mixture of scientific history and critical history which the John Doe illustration actually represents. Because of Collingwood's apparent unawareness that the second and third models differed from the first, it is only the first one — the model of pure scientific history — that we can presume to have been unequivocally upheld by him. Because of its radical opposition to critical history, moreover, it demands special consideration as a challenge to present-day historical practice.

We encounter a further problem concerning Collingwood's intentions when we consider other writings in which he has referred to historical method, in particular his essay "The Historical Imagination", which was published in 1936.[35] Although he does not use the label "scientific history" in this essay, he does speak of historical knowledge as being inferential, or reasoned, and of the historian as being his own authority. Accordingly Collingwood here rejects the common-sense theory that historical truth is furnished ready-made to the historian in the ready-made statements of authorities. Much of it, he says, is constructed. In particular, the historian takes events that are part of a process and whose occurrence he has established on the evidence of his sources and he interpolates between these "nodal points" intermediate events in the process. It is by virtue of his imagination that he does so, but the interpolation is not arbitrary; it is necessary, and the historical imagination thus has an *a priori* character.[36] The "*a priori* imagination" also provides the historian with a sense of coherence which enables him to decide conclusively whether a particular statement about the past which he is considering fits into his existing picture of the past or not.[37] It helps him thereby to establish his nodal points. Thus far the views presented in "The Historical Imagination" are consistent with, and complementary to, Collingwood's model of scientific history.

In other respects, however, the essay of 1936 falls short of scientific history. For one thing, the statements which the historian is considered to be testing for their coherence with his picture of the past are contained in sources and, if they pass the test, are incorporated into the historian's body of knowledge. Collingwood cites as an example a statement by Suetonius that Nero at one time intended to evacuate Britain. He rejects this statement out of preference for the account of Tacitus, saying "I find myself able to incorporate what Tacitus tells me into a coherent and continuous picture of my own."[38] Moreover, he links the determination of coherence explicitly to historical criticism. Here he includes under historical criticism a function that is later treated as distinctive of scientific history — the extraction from authorities of information which they have not explicitly divulged. Nevertheless, in this connection he represents historical criticism as being concerned first with determining the credibility of statements made by authorities.[39] Therefore his extolling of historical criticism, along with his approval of the incorporation of testimonial statements, means that, although his pronouncements of 1936 on historical method foreshadow scientific history in some respects, in other respects they cannot be reconciled with his position of 1939 on the same subject.

Viewed from the perspective of 1939 this difference represents a heightening of the value which Collingwood explicitly placed on historical knowledge. His claiming of a mathematical certainty for the inferences of scientific history was of a piece with his assertion in the same year that "philosophy as a separate discipline is liquidated by being converted into history" and that "history is the only kind of knowledge."[40] Thus scientific history represents one aspect of Collingwood's historicism, and in 1939 he expressed at least this aspect of it with unprecedented boldness.

What are we to make of the challenge of scientific history? Various objections against it will arise simply out of a reading of Collingwood's exposition. For one thing, the account there of historical criticism is very superficial. Even so, he does appear to be right in describing historical criticism as a procedure for determining the credibility of testimony. As V. K. Dibble has observed, many of the manuals of historical method that have been published in English explicitly identify their subject with the evaluation of testimonial documents.[41] An examination of the contents of such manuals will reveal lengthy descriptions of an inherited technique of evaluation which, in essential accord with Collingwood's account of historical criticism, consists of determining the capacity and willingness of the testifier to tell the truth and the plausibility of his testimony itself.[42] Moreover, much of this technique is conclusive only as a means of weeding out suspect state-

ments and, for the reasons given by Collingwood, permits us on the positive side to say no more than that the statements which have passed the test of criticism are probably true.

Yet Collingwood has neglected to mention one feature of historical criticism which can go a long way toward establishing the truth of a statement made in testimony. That is the corroboration of such a statement by a statement to the same effect on the part of another testifier — and preferably of more than one — who had reported independently of the first testifier. Of course independence of testimony may sometimes be impossible to establish. And even if it has been established, the corroboration seems to be a matter of high probability rather than of logical certainty; it rests presumably on the assumption that it is highly improbable that two independent witnesses will report the occurrence of a common event in essentially the same detail if they have not witnessed an event such as they have described. Also this sort of corroboration is complicated by the fact that independent witnesses can give different accounts of the same event.

Accordingly some of the manuals on historical method describe an additional way of corroborating testimony — the confirmation of it by the contents of non-testimonial documents and sometimes by the existence of non-verbal remains. This type of corroboration is apparently what Collingwood had in mind in his brief reference to the reinforcement of testimony by evidence. By his own definition of historical criticism as being concerned with determining the credibility of statements of authorities, it is properly part of historical criticism. Yet he himself says that it yields historical knowledge, or science.[43] This sort of corroboration would consist, for example, of taking a testimony by an official that he had sent certain instructions to a subordinate and confirming the testimony by tracking down a letter answering to the description of the one mentioned in the testimony. In so far as the letter gives instructions, as opposed to reporting events or circumstances, its content is non-testimonial. Even if it does contain testimonial statements on some subject, it is the non-testimonial elements in this case — the date, the salutation, the instructions, the signature and address of the sender — that are used to corroborate the testimony in question. Some manuals on historical method, in spite of their formal preoccupation with testimony, list various types of documents that are wholly or in part non-testimonial. V. K. Dibble calls them "direct indicators" of the events for whose occurrence they constitute evidence.[44] L. R. Gottschalk says that "they are primary evidence of their own content."[45] That is to say, provided that they are known to be authentic, or genuine, they provide the same level of certainty with respect to some types of question which Collingwood formally reserved to scientific

history. In that sense he has underrated the capacity of historical criticism to yield convincing positive conclusions.

But this type of corroboration carries us beyond the boundaries of historical criticism as defined by Collingwood. We do not have to be in the process of corroborating testimony to extract desired information from non-testimonial materials, whether verbal or non-verbal. In so far as we use them as direct indicators, Collingwood's elaborate process of question and answer can be dispensed with. Yet the information that we thus draw from them would otherwise fall within his conception of science.

There is a further deficiency in Collingwood's account of historical criticism. In the essay "Historical Evidence" he describes only the criticism of testimony for its credibility — that is to say, internal criticism. He makes no reference to external criticism, which is directed primarily to testing the authenticity of documents within which testimony may or may not be found. The implications of that omission depend on how much certainty we attribute to the conclusions of external criticism. Marc Bloch tells us that Mabillon, the founder of diplomatics, himself admitted that the external criticism of medieval charters could not attain a "metaphysical" certainty.[46] There is a seemingly inescapable incompleteness in the demonstrations of external criticism. For example a charter may be proven spurious by reason of the fact that its form does not correspond to the standard form of charters of the time and place to which it supposedly belonged. But that proof assumes that the charters used to establish the standard form were themselves authentic. An attempt at absolute proof would involve us in an infinite regress. Similarly a letter may be proven spurious by the fact that it is written on wood-pulp paper but was supposed to have been written at a time before the introduction of wood-pulp paper. Our knowledge of the date of this innovation, however, is based on historical documents which in their turn would require authentication, and so on. Sometimes, of course, documents and objects can be very convincingly shown to be spurious. But external criticism, as a test of authenticity, functions mainly in a negative role. How can we pretend to be sure of the authenticity of the millions of documents that are not weeded out by it? It seems that we rely ultimately on the safety of numbers. As J. G. Renier has argued, "the individual document is supported by the bulk of documents which could not possibly have been produced by a universal faker."[47] But that makes it only highly probable, not absolutely certain, that the document which we see no reason to regard as spurious is actually authentic.

If we cannot be certain about the authenticity of documents and

other evidence, that is a handicap that applies to scientific history as well as to critical history. The scientific historian must decide whether his evidence is authentic or not if he expects to infer any meaningful conclusions from it. By failing to take account of this requirement, Collingwood has left a serious gap in his argument for the certainty of scientific history's conclusions

Collingwood's failure to assign a role to external criticism is a failure to take account of a practical requirement of his own scientific procedure. Similarly his insistence that the scientific historian never asks whether a ready-made statement is true or false overlooks certain practical difficulties in this ideal. The precise inference that the scientific historian draws from a ready-made statement will conceivably depend upon whether he considers the statement true or false. In the John Doe illustration, the inspector's dependence upon the conclusion that the rector's daughter's confession was a lie is a case in point.

To make an adequate assessment of the practicability of Collingwood's scientific history, however, we will need to go beyond his fictitious and somewhat inappropriate detective case, as well as the manuals on historical method, and examine actual historical research and writing. Our first step might be to determine the extent to which Collingwood's scientific history is actually being practised already. The answer to that question will probably depend on the type of historical scholarship under examination.

Even traditional, erudite, critical historiography can be expected to contain substantial instances of scientific history. For example it will often resort to documents which are, wholly or in part, of a non-testimonial nature — laws, treaties, instructions, notices, advertisements, enquiries, literary works, sermons, political speeches and the like. The historian's exploitation of the non-testimonial material in such documents can hardly be a matter of accepting ready-made statements in Collingwood's sense. Similarly the traditional type of historical scholarship will resort on occasion to drawing oblique inferences from testimonial statements, even from testimonial statements that are considered untrue.[48] Yet the straightforward incorporation of testimonial statements, duly tested by historical criticism, will be a normal feature of it. The question of the practicability of scientific history in this area of historical scholarship is a question of whether the remaining component of scissors and paste can be eliminated and, if so, with what effects.

The recently emerging styles of historical investigation can be expected to vary in their approximation to scientific history. Psychological history, for example, evidently employs the same range of docu-

mentary sources as does conventional historical biography or conventional historical writing which focuses on public figures,[49] and it seems to find out what individuals have said and done in the conventional way. It is most obviously innovative in its use of psychological theory to *explain* what was said and done. On the other hand applications of the technique of content analysis to historical questions can be totally scientific. Questions, for example, about the frequency with which certain public figures used certain words will be answered by taking appropriate non-testimonial writings and speeches of these individuals as direct indicators. And questions about the values of such persons will be answered by inference from their use of words in these writings and speeches.[50]

Between the poles represented by these two examples there lie a number of recently developed research procedures that are less easy to classify. A good demographic history will be full of inferential assertions which transcend testimonial statements about matters of population in the period under study. Yet the process of inference will begin with the acceptance of essentially testimonial records of births, marriages, burials and so on as being true. A similar incorporation of testimonial statements, along with varying degrees of reference to non-testimonial evidence, will characterize other highly inferential techniques of historical research — for example in determining living standards in an early modern society from records of prices and rents; in determining the political propensities of a particular section of a modern democratic state from election returns, censuses, and records of legislative voting; or in determining the incidence of political upheaval at various locations and times within such a state by a massive accumulation of data from newspaper and yearbook accounts of disturbances.[51] Thus some of the newer methods of investigation, although they come close to Collingwood's scientific history, contain a remnant of scissors and paste. As with the more traditional historical scholarship, the possibility of eliminating this remnant and the effects of doing so invite examination.

Finally Collingwood's claim of compulsiveness, or certainty, for the conclusions of scientific history should be assessed without reference to the practical obstacles to scientific history. It may turn out that historians are capable of eliminating all elements of scissors-and-paste from their research and writing and that they can normally establish the authenticity of their evidence. Would the resulting, purely inferential history, if it was guided by Collingwood's logic of question and answer and was supplemented by the use of direct indicators, really be compulsive? That is a question for philosophers to answer, and it would have to take account of philosophic expressions of historical scepti-

cism.[52] If practical obstacles or philosophic objections lead us to reject the claim to certainty, we might still fruitfully consider whether Collingwood's model of procedure holds out any promise of making historical inquiry at least more cogent in its conclusions, more respectable in the eyes of non-historians, than it is now.

NOTES

[1] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. T. M. Knox (Oxford, 1946), pp. v-vi.

[2] For a summary of differing interpretations of this change, see Lionel Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics: a Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 14-24.

[3] For two brief discussions of it by philosophers, see Alan Donagan, *The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (Oxford, 1962) pp. 177-92, and Louis Mink, *Mind, History, and Dialectic; the Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (Bloomington, Ind., 1969) pp. 187-94.

[4] *Idea of History*, p. 257.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 260. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 269.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 259. See also pp. 260 and 269.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 21 and 24-26.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 265. See also *ibid.*, pp. 21 and 250-55.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59 and 261.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 262. For similar references to the inevitability or certainty of historical knowledge, see *ibid.*, pp. 268 and 270.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 275. See also *ibid.*, pp. 256-57, 274 and 276-77.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 259, 266 and 269-70. See also his evaluation of Vico's contribution to historical method, *ibid.*, pp. 69-71.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[20] See especially his *An Autobiography* (London, 1939), p. 37, and his *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford, 1940), pp. 25-30 and 37-39.

[21] *Idea of History*, p. 263.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 266-68, 270-73 and 276.

[24] *Ibid.*, p.273.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 267 and 271.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 271.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 276.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 268 and 273.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 276.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 231-49. See also *ibid.*, p. vi.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37 and 240-44.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 237-38. See also *ibid.*, pp. 235 and 245 for further examples of the identification of historical criticism with the determination of credibility.

[40] Quoted by Knox, *Idea of History*, pp. x and xii.

[41] Vernon K. Dibble, "Four Types of Inference from Documents to Events," *History and Theory, III(1964)*, pp. 204 and 219.

[42] See especially Ch. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. G.G. Berry (London, 1898), pp. 155-208, and Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: a Primer of Historical Method*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1969), pp. 148-70.

[43] *Idea of History*, p. 257.

[44] Dibble, p. 213.

[45] *Understanding History*, p. 108. For complications in the use of such documents and of non-verbal remains, see Ernst Bernheim's classic *Lehrbuch der Historische Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 5th and 6th revised and enlarged ed. ("Burt Franklin Bibliographical and Reference Series" no. 21, originally published Leipzig, 1908), pp. 465-79.

[46] Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (Manchester, 1954), p. 133.

[47] J. G. Renier, *History: its Purpose and Method* (London, 1950), p. 115.

[48] Gottschalk associates this sort of inference with internal criticism in *Historical Understanding*, pp. 112-13 and 163-64.

[49] Alain Besançon, "Psychoanalysis: Auxiliary Science or Historical Method?", *Journal of Contemporary History*, III, no. 2 (April 1968), 152 and 161.

[50] For some examples, see Ole R. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, Mass., 1969), pp. 5, 78, 80-82, 85-86, 92 and 122.

[51] For a recognition of this dependence upon testimonial material and of a need to apply historical criticism to the material, see Charles Tilly and James Rule, *Measuring Political Upheaval* (Princeton, N.J., 1965), pp. 63-69.

[52] Notably as set forth in Jack W. Meiland, *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge* (New York, 1965).