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Civilization as Self-Determination: Interpreting R. G. Collingwood for the Twenty-First Century – Part I

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Abstract

This article – the first of two – elaborates and endorses the understanding of civilization as advanced by R. G. Collingwood. Particular attention is given to two of his most neglected works, *The New Leviathan* and "What 'Civilization' Means." *The New Leviathan* in particular was written in the context of the rise of fascism and the prosecution of World War II. To support the war effort, Collingwood reconceptualized notions of civilization and linked it to a rationality of self-determination. Central to his argument are the distinctions he draws between civilization and barbarism, on the one hand, and between social, economic and legal civilization and their protean interrelationships, on the other.

The second of the two articles analyzes how Collingwood defined the nature and role of force in human relations, both within and among polities. He ultimately advocates a notion of progress that is shorn of utopianism and determinism and is focused on self-determination. This Collingwoodian paradigm provides a unique perspective on the overlaps and antagonisms between Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru's understandings of Indian civilization – understandings of India they developed in the same years as Collingwood developed his arguments.

Civilization and Its Contents

It is perhaps not surprising that how academics invoke "civilization" is often different from how it is invoked in other arenas of discourse. Scholars have, over time, pluralized the idea, so one hears of Western civilization and Egyptian civilization and modern civilization and ancient civilization, and without any overt presumption that one is, or some are, superior to others, or that one is obviously appealing and acceptable and the other(s) repugnant and to be rejected.

Interestingly, Samuel Huntington's famous "clash of civilizations" and its putative counterpoint, Francis Fukuyama's "end of history," both suggest, each in its own way, that civilizations *can* be evaluated as better or worse. But neither constructs his arguments in explicit relation to a term that scholars once proudly propagated, and which is part of the reservoir of popular, political and public discourse: barbarism.¹

¹ The idea of civilization is less explicit in Fukuyama than in Huntington but not, therefore, less pivotal in his analysis; writing at around the same time, in 1990, V. S. Naipaul is more explicit that a civilizational argument

In contemporary times scholars have, on the whole, eschewed an understanding of civilization that puts it in relation to the contrary term, barbarism. The relation between civilization and barbarism has varied in academia. One species sees the relation as a dichotomy: all societies can be understood as either entirely civilized or entirely barbaric. According to this view, a society could not and cannot be "almost entirely civilized, but a bit barbaric" or vice versa, any more than a person can be, in how we use our language, a little bit pregnant; one either is, or is not. Moreover, each is the *opposite* of the other.

Another species puts barbarism at one end of a continuum with civilization at the other end, with all societies placed somewhere along the scale. In nineteenth century Western thought, this idea was accompanied by evolutionism. Where a society was placed on the continuum was an indication of how much it had evolved. How evolution was defined and measured varied. For some it was gauged by mastery over nature in the form of science and technology (Morgan, Raglan); for others, spiritual maturity (Tylor, Toynbee), rationality (Kant), aesthetics (Schiller), manners (Elias, Spalding), fitness (Spencer) or complexity (Toynbee). For some (Spengler, Targowski) this evolution was and is more appropriately understood as a decline, though Oswald Spengler's thinking later emerged in debates about the growth as well as the decline of civilizations.²

Yet ultimately popular and public discourse reminds us of what scholars taught – and what I suspect scholars may still maintain, albeit in muted form – namely, that civilization is often understood in relation to its putatively contrary term, barbarism. Particularly in the wake of shocking actions by humans in relation to other humans, such as terrorist attacks or torture, the discourse of barbarism seems to come out of the civilization's shadow and into public light.³ The distinction proliferates in both its Manichean and evolutionist modes – sending

must drive an end-of-history one, an argument he does not critique but endorses. Conversely, the sense of inexorable progress found in Fukuyama and Naipaul is more muted in Huntington than in Fukuyama, but present just the same – and indeed elaborated, I would argue, in Huntington's later work, as reflected in particular in his fear of immigration from the Americas to the United States of America (Huntington 2004). Erich Kolig (2015) echoes Huntington's worries about immigration when he asks, essentially, how much the West can tolerate Muslim immigrants. He broadly and ultimately sees the West as "modern", "enlightened", "progressive", "liberal", "tolerant", "secular", the home of "human rights" and of "religious and cultural freedom" -- which is in stark contrast to Islam's exceptional inclination towards a "theocentric world view" that demands adherence to a "total way of life." Kolig worries that the immigration of Muslims to the West could lead to "social disintegration." He rebukes those who espouse a capacious pluralism: "[c]elebrating diversity and avoiding moral judgment is very New Age and post-modernist, but lacks in practical reason." Noting that some states are adopting increasingly strict immigration regimes he states "[s]ome spectacular cases of maladjustment of Muslims have encouraged a revision of rules relating to immigration and asylum seekers". See Kolig 2015.

² We should bear in mind that decline should not be equated with devolution, and neither with what will be referred to below as "de-civilizing" processes. The notion of civilization has also often been counterpoised to "savage" and "primitive"; this will not be addressed in either Part I or II of this project. But it may be noted that, though the term savage has been invoked, primitive has not in the contexts discussed here.

³ I use "public" in the sense of Jürgen Habermas's "public sphere"; see his 1989 work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge,

scholars scattering: protesting, endorsing, or willfully ignoring the idea of barbarism. Among those particularly discomfited are my fellow socio-cultural anthropologists, who developed the notion of culture in significant measure to displace the idea of civilization, as well as those of barbarism, savagery and the primitive.⁴

In the new millennium, in the West, the comparison of civilization with barbarism re-emerged forcefully after the attacks on the U.S. in September 2001 (9/11). In this context President George W. Bush declared to the United Nations that the attack had not been against the United States, but against civilization itself and a civilization shared by, presumably, those in the audience. The comparison emerged even more forcefully in 2015 with the attacks in Paris, first on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January and then at a number of sites in November. The attacks in Paris, the City of Light and the Enlightenment, colored the distinction between civilization and barbarism with a particular hue, the light of freedom and progress versus that of darkness and destruction.⁵ These attacks, and attendant concerns about terrorism, migration and challenges to one's "way of life" appear to have animated those who voted for the UK to leave the EU, i.e., the Brexit referendum.⁶

What follows below is the first (Part I) of two articles that will excavate and interpret R. G. Collingwood's arguments about what civilization and barbarism meant to him. He speaks to these in *The New Leviathan or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism* (1942) and in his "What 'Civilization' Means," which the editors of the 1992 reprint of *The New Leviathan*

Massachusetts: The MIT Press, see pages 30-31. See also Habermas 1992. I would also add that the worlds of intellectuals and others are never hermetically sealed from each other.

⁴ For Huntington, however, civilization is not in contradistinction to culture but, rather, seems to mean culture-writ-large: "A civilization is the highest *cultural* grouping of people and the broadest *cultural* identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species" (1993, p. 24, emphases added). For him culture, in turn, seems to be informed primarily by religion. In all this, what is most notable is that he is moving away from the long-standing position that human history is the history of rationality, whether technological or political, inductive or deductive. His use of culture – civilization as culture – is thus ironically akin to those socio-cultural anthropologists who implicitly or otherwise distill the essence of culture as something that is not rational.

⁵ That innocents, not soldiers or combatants, were targeted raises an interesting problem: The French Revolution(s) propounded the idea that governments could act only if authorized to do so by the will of the people, which in some way perhaps confounds the distinctions, moral and otherwise, between, e.g., a country's military and its citizens, as well as issues of wars as unavoidable defense versus those of choice. These are far too fraught and complicated a set of topics to be addressed here.

⁶ Defending a "way of life" is a phrase and concern Collingwood also invokes. Since this article was written there have been what appear to be other events inspired by radical and violent individuals and groups who associate themselves with Islam: the attacks at the Belgium airport, at a Florida nightclub, on Bastille Day in France (a day given unique significance in French and indeed Western history), in Istanbul, in Bangladesh, in Saudi Arabia and in Afghanistan. Interestingly, the Istanbul, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan attacks did not generate the civilization versus barbarism distinction to the extent as in the other attacks. In addition, the idea that there were fatalities and injuries to innocents (see footnote 5) was less pronounced in the latter. Is this because the distinction lost force over time – and if so, why? Or is it because when a Muslim majority population is attacked in the name of Islam, the line between civilization and barbarism is seen, somehow, as less bright?

added as an appendix (pp. 480-511). Both elaborate on the issues of barbarism and are – probably for this very reason – among the most neglected of Collingwood's writings.

Collingwood (1889-1943) was Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Magdalen College, Oxford University, from 1936 until his death. Among the most learned men of his time, he is best known for his writings on history, logic and art, as well as his work as a practicing archaeologist of the Roman Empire. Yet in his 1939 autobiography one can discern that his thinking on issues of civilization had informed almost all of his work, including what may seem like abstruse and unrelated philosophical arguments. For example, he saw the philosophical school of realism, which was emerging as a dominant paradigm in key philosophical circles in the years leading up to World War II, as a threat to civilization, insofar as he saw realism as undermining much of philosophy itself, including moral philosophy.

The New Leviathan (1942) is a remarkably provocative and, at times, mordantly witty tome. It is subtitled "Man, Society, Civilization, and Barbarism," and these correspond to the four parts into which the book is divided. This organization parallels the sections of Hobbes's original *Leviathan*, "Man, Society, Commonwealth, Kingdom of Darkness," as published in 1651. Both *Leviathans* were written in times of rapid change – making them, in broad terms, all the more relevant today. In Collingwood's case, he saw his work explicitly as a contribution to the war effort, i.e., against fascism. Collingwood supported the war and, in that context, saved some of his harshest criticism for British pacifists. He found fascism to be a form of barbarism, and turned to Hobbes to understand how barbarism could arise in the midst, as it seemed to him, of civilization.

Collingwood was an ardent, though critical, admirer of Hobbes.⁷ Like Hobbes, Collingwood grounded his theories of ethics and politics in a philosophy of mind and the bases of rational activity. My initial aim for this article was to fully excavate Collingwood on civilization and barbarism. However, I quickly realized that an examination of his understanding of mind and consciousness – and, in particular, intentional action – must be presented first because his arguments about self-determination, rationality, civilization and barbarism each and all have, as their edifice, his understanding of how consciousness evolves in the mind. His approach is one that resonates with actor-centered models in social and cultural analysis.

⁷For example, Collingwood appreciated Hobbes's insight that human activity is collective and consensual, a conjoining of wills oriented towards some goal; from such an understanding of human collective activity – which can, in key regards, be characterized as social contract theory – one can see how collective activity could also come unraveled and, at worst, work against itself. However, Collingwood disagreed with Hobbes's argument that human nature was one of pure self-maximization and thus the only reason collectivities came into existence was to further the individual interests of its members. Hobbes's view of human nature led him to endorse absolutism. Collingwood's revision of Hobbes led him to liberal democracy.

Collingwood defines the process of civilization as the “asymptotic approximation to the ideal condition of civility.”⁸ Full and complete civility is a utopian ideal and, in that sense, can never be fully realized. Collingwood understands civilization to have three dimensions: social civilization, economic civilization and legal civilization. The first, social civilization, concerns how humans relate to other humans, i.e., relationships between members of a polity and between different polities. It is this dimension that is, I will argue, the most important for Collingwood, for practical, ethical and theoretical reasons. The second aspect, economic civilization, pertains to how humans relate to nature, where the advancement of science is a crucial gauge, especially insofar as science allows for greater efficiency in productive enterprises that harness the resources of nature. Economic civilization also includes an aspect that requires that humans relate to other humans.⁹

For Collingwood, technological innovation and scientific production is not co-extensive with civilization: even a polity with civilized production and civilized exchange – thus an economically civilized collectivity – may lack in social civilization, which, for him, trumps all other dimensions of civilization. He maintains this on the grounds that civilization is relative to a polity’s particular definition of civility and barbarism, which implies that polities cannot be judged as points on a single continuum, but rather must be understood as each polity follows its own (always multidimensional) trajectory of civilization.¹⁰ Given this approach, a polity is only less civilized than another if it shares the same or similar ideals, or goals, of civility, but has realized these ideals to a lesser degree. It should be noted though that Collingwood is not a cultural relativist, as suggested by his rebuke of pacifism noted above; this will be elaborated in Part II but, for now, we may observe that his position in this regard pivots on the role that force or, conversely, consent, is allowed to play in how ideals and goals come to be recognized and then realized. At the heart of his notion of social civilization is the conviction that dialogue and persuasion are to be pursued over force as much as possible; the attempt to entirely eliminate all forms of force from all social relations, including relationships between polities, is however utopian, i.e., unachievable.¹¹ This principle is also integral to his critique of cultural relativism.

⁸ R.G. Collingwood. 2005. *The New Leviathan or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 282-284.

⁹ Accordingly, as we will see in Part II, Collingwood draws an important distinction between “wealth” and “riches” in order to locate the appropriate place of free markets in civilizational pursuits. It also allows us to reconsider how factors such as public works, monumental architecture, occupational specialization and state administration (including considerations of “core” versus “periphery”) should be understood in relation to the idea of civilization.

¹⁰ Norbert Elias suggests that civilization is intertwined with how different figurations of power, and of power in the form of violence in particular, changes over time, and gives attention to seemingly disparate areas of social life as manners and the state. However, he seems to have remained blinkered by his mentor Alfred Weber (the brother of Max Weber) in not seeing civilization as multidimensional in a robust sense. Elias’s position does not allow for as much flexibility and contingency as Collingwood does among the different dimensions. See both Elias 2012 and Mennell & Goudsblom 1998.

¹¹ As will be shown in Part II, the use of force versus dialogue is one criterion, for Collingwood, for judging how well the three dimensions of civilization discussed above – social, economic and legal – are integrated. Also to be elaborated in Part II is his important argument that though utopian ideals such as full civility on all occasions are unachievable, this does not mean that, for example, universal civility should not orient our

The third dimension of civilization, legal civilization, recognizes the importance of law. This can take myriad forms, including civil and criminal law. Cross-culturally, legal civilization refers to the fact that persons and peoples set up something we can call "rules."¹² Although Collingwood does not say so explicitly, rules are not the same as norms, habits and routines – though rules can intersect with any of these. Rules are expressed explicitly and come with the sense that there are persons or institutions that have the recognized role of codifying and adjudicating them.

Collingwood's gauge of civilization is, accordingly, how these three dimensions of human life (social, economic and legal) are interrelated or 'articulated' each with the other. His concern in the first instance is how these dimensions are related *consciously* and *intentionally* by human actors, individual or collective, in different times, places and cultures. However, it is also crucial, for Collingwood, to know what the actual *effects* of such interrelations are. As discussed below, he finds "civilization" also in the interrelationships between what he calls "social community" and "non-social community." In this unique paradigm, civilization has three aspects, and the civilizing process involves the on-going project of better interrelating these aspects. Insofar, and on those occasions, when a collectivity fails to recognize the difference between these aspects – for all collectivities have them – or fails to properly inter-relate, or integrate, them, such a collectivity can be seen as uncivilized. Insofar as collectivities actively seek to hide the distinctions between these dimensions, and actively work against their constructive interrelation, such activity can be called barbaric, de-civilizing. As will be elaborated in the subsequent article (Part II) it is through this model that Collingwood provides, in my view, a unique model for assessing and comparing the work of Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru on civilization in India.¹³

Collingwood on Action and Agency

For Collingwood, a polity is civilized, or civilizing, to the extent that it promotes self-determination within itself – including both individuals and sub-groups – and also among diverse polities. Self-determination, in turn, is founded on the ability to choose and to act freely, that is, with agency. But what counts as agency? And what if – as is too often the case – one individual's or polity's choices are counter to those of others?

civilizational pursuits. It is in this sense that Collingwood suggests that some notion of universal civilization is defensible – not as a material achievement (buildings or banking systems) or high-cultural ones (ballets or ragas) but a vigilant attitude and aspiration with regard to intra-human relations, and how these relations intersect with other relations (such as the relations and means of production).

¹² R.G. Collingwood, 2005. *The New Leviathan or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 290-291, 502, 510.

¹³ For example, Collingwood and Gandhi seem to share the understanding that civilization is a process (like "socialization") and, moreover, an *incremental* process. The most striking difference between the two is with regard to economic civilization: from a Collingwoodian perspective, Gandhi did not fully grasp the economic dimension of Indian civilization, and thus could not interrelate it with the other dimensions in a sustainable manner. Elias (2012) also saw the civilizing process as incremental, but underscored that de-civilizing processes could occur much more rapidly. These matters will be examined in Part II of this project.

Collingwood's approach to civilization is founded upon his convictions about human agency, i.e., his understanding of human consciousness and human action, with particular attention to action that is explicitly intentional and, to that extent, rational. For him, the essence of self-determination is being able to freely act to shape one's life. Yet this immediately raises questions such as "what counts as an action?" and "how does free choice play out in a world where there are others?" Below, I will present an outline of the fundamental understanding of human nature and human being that underpins Collingwood's answers to these questions, and which underwrites his advocacy for civilization. I select those aspects of *The New Leviathan* that are most relevant to the broader discussion of what I will call "civilizing action" and "barbarizing action" – matters that will receive more attention in Part II of this project.

Collingwood's *New Leviathan* follows the format of Hobbes's *Leviathan* in that it is enumerated and organized with sub-points, etc. When citing Collingwood, I will use this format, with brackets. The discussion below draws exclusively on Part I of *The New Leviathan*, "On Man."¹⁴

Discourse is the activity by which a man seeks to mean anything, such as through the production of a flow of sounds and silences [NL, 6.1, 6.19]. Note that discourse is not a tool but an activity. It is not a thing but an “-ing”; not a hammer, but hammering.

Language is an abstraction from discourse: it is the system adopted, the means employed, the rules followed in the activity of discourse. It is a system of discourse taken as having meaning. Language is not a device whereby knowledge already existing in one man's mind is communicated to another's, but an activity prior to knowledge itself, without which knowledge could never come into existence. As consciousness develops, language develops with it [6.11, 6.18, 6.41]. For Collingwood, the recognition that language precedes thought is one of Hobbes's greatest contributions [6.43].

Language in its simplest form is the language of consciousness in its simplest form; the mere register of feelings, irrational, unplanned, unorganized – what we may, at some risk, call sensation or experience. At this level of consciousness thought is merely apprehensive, or capable of taking what is "given" to it [6.58, 10.51]. When consciousness becomes conceptual thought, language is used to develop abstract terms. Here consciousness is capable of abstracting from what is given [6.12, 6.17, 6.58]. When consciousness becomes propositional thought, language develops the propositional sentence. Here consciousness begins to distinguish truth from error [6.59, 10.51].

¹⁴ Although the formal mathematical layout of the *New Leviathan* parallels that of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, David Boucher – a scholar who specializes in the links between British idealism and liberalism – argues that Collingwood follows the Bible instead. (Boucher 2003, pages 68 and 84).

When consciousness becomes reason, language begins to link one propositional sentence with another so as to demonstrate that the later statements are consequences of the former. At this level of consciousness the agent is capable of understanding himself also in relation to other things [6.59, 10.51].

Conceptual thinking is an act of practical consciousness by which a person emerges from a simple state of feeling. Persons make themselves conscious of their sensations and feelings by naming them either by gesture (e.g., a shiver) or in speech (e.g., saying "I'm cold") [6.2, 6.28]. With selective attention a person can focus on and name a particular feeling from amongst a mass of feelings. This selective attention changes both the person attending and the object attended to (the particular feeling selected out for attention) because it changes the nature of the "field" of feeling [7.23, 7.24]. The act of classifying is a practical activity of consciousness which "draws the line" between various (selected) "objects" in the field of feeling, e.g. the point at which one decides to stop calling a color red and start calling it purple.

Thus all classes, i.e., cognitive classifications and categories, are founded in practical activity on the part of the individual and are negotiated in the mutual practical activity of various individuals. The members of a class become so through their resemblance, a resemblance of both kind and degree, which is determined (established) through practical consciousness [19.22-19.35]. This point will be central in Collingwood's reformulation of the notion of "society" and, in turn, of "civilization" and "barbarism."

Propositional consciousness involves the asking and answering of questions. Asking a question implies contemplating alternatives [11.12]. Let's say a person is conscious of certain objects (x, y and z), and then has a consciousness of that initial consciousness. The latter consciousness makes the initial consciousness a first order object [5.26]. A proposition is never about such a first order object [11.34] but about a concept [11.35]. Because propositions are about concepts, any proposition may be mistaken and hence it is contestable [11.35] – which means it can be reassessed and re-proposed.

Here I would like to point out that these various levels of consciousness are closely connected with Collingwood's notion of rational action and of agency – and the difference between the two. Pretty much any level of consciousness can be associated with action. If I stub my toe and say "ouch," that is an action. If I act on an appetite or a desire, that is certainly also an action. But agency is a particular form of action that requires a particular form of consciousness. Indeed, if consciousness is always more or less some sort of activity (for body and mind are not disjointed), it is in agency that consciousness and action come together utterly. There are different forms of action that accompany different forms of consciousness. They not only differ in kind but also in degree. There is, then, some measure of agency in all action. Yet agency exists unquestionably when action is exercised with the consciousness of *choice* [cf. section 13 of part I, emphasis added].

Consciousness of choice has two preconditions. First, choice entails reflective thought. Reflective thought requires the movement to a "higher" level of consciousness from a "lower" level of consciousness (for no form of consciousness is aware of itself as a form of consciousness). Thus if one is merely acting on the basis of the "desire" level of consciousness, one is not reflecting on that desire. As one moves through higher and higher levels of consciousness (through making the previous level of consciousness the object of the subsequent level) one becomes increasingly reflective, or, more precisely, one has something to be reflective "about." When this reflective action is the outcome of deliberation within a society, no fundamentalist position can be posited as such, i.e., as stable. Through the process of the collective conscious refinement, desires, feelings and emotions are not disavowed, rather they are elaborated, processed reflectively, in new figurations of language and action.

At higher levels of consciousness, propositions, abstraction and indeed rationality develop. Rational thinking begins when a man accustomed to propositional thinking starts making a distinction which is not entailed in propositional thinking: the distinction between "the that" and "the why" [14.1-14.2]. In sections 15, 16 and 17 of Part I Collingwood describes and analyzes the three kinds of reason: utility, right and duty. And with rationality, the ability to choose. Now one can choose without being rational, that is, without being aware of the reason for one's choice. This is capricious agency. But if one has reflected enough to be able to be conscious of one's reason for choosing, then this is agency *par excellence*. Here consciousness is will, and free will at that. Agency, therefore, describes the actualized capacity for persons to be able to (when they are able to) act freely, willfully and rationally in the world.¹⁵

Human beings exist in association with other human beings. Human agency, therefore, always involves interaction with other agents [Ibid.: 23]. If we look for an individual acting in the world according to his or her own determinate nature, a nature that has come to exist without any interaction with other agents, we will not find it. That no human being is "an island" is inspiring in myriad ways. It is also a physical, biological, psychological and social fact.

Thus, to exist in society is to participate with other agents in an enterprise: "every society is formed for the joint prosecution of some exercise" [21.95]. Two or more agents who so come together can constitute a society. Planning and going for a walk with someone is to engage in society, though a relatively temporary one. The process that allows a person to say "I will" is the same that allows a person to say "we will." Thus society, properly speaking, involves the pursuit of common activity by agents who are free to choose that activity.

¹⁵ This capacity includes and in some cases requires the ability to use symbols and signs, but the capacity is not limited to symbols and signs as some socio-cultural anthropologists would have it. One of my central interests in civilizational analyses is that they could allow for bringing the insights of political philosophy, particularly the attention to rationality, into conversation with key strands in socio-cultural anthropology, not least the concept of culture itself.

It is crucial to distinguish society from class [19.37 *passim*]. A class is a group of things united because of their resemblance, their sharing of some common attribute(s); the creation of a class – i.e., discerning what are the common attributes – is a practical act of some agent's consciousness (individual or collective agent) as noted above. For Collingwood, a society is not a group of people brought together because of some attribute, however striking, they possess that then causes them to resemble each other. A society is a constituted coming together of two or more agents who together embark – ideally with maximum and mutual consent – on some practical enterprise. True, once a society comes into existence, all the members represent at least one class, share at least one attribute, namely the class of all who belong to that society. However (the class of) belonging to a society as gauged by "external" criteria never creates the society, rather the reverse: the class comes into existence as a consequence of the practical activities of agents.

The notion of class, for Collingwood, is often mistaken as a notion of society. In fact it masks the empirical complexity of agents by treating them as if they were unitary, determinate objects, the manifestations of some underlying essence or the product of some substantialized agent, a pure class of persons who share some permanent "something" despite their actual (dis)organization at any one time or, conversely, perhaps their unobserved unity of purpose.

In any case, society is nothing over and above its members. It is the on-going will and protean activity of its members, which recursively re-shape in relation to both internal and external factors [21.27]. This applies not only in the first instance when society is formed, but also throughout its duration: society is on-going activity. When the activity ceases, the society ceases. In this, Collingwood distinguishes himself from most modernist theorists. The latter see society as the more or less permanent product of a singular move away from nature. Thus for anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, the moment of the first exchange (of a woman, or a word) creates a social over against a natural distinction, and society is born in that single stroke. For Hobbes, too, the move from the state of nature to society is established with the creation of the Leviathan. Not so for Collingwood.

Collingwood suggests that to see society as a stable entity is to fail to recognize that it is actually the ongoing activity of agents. Hobbes made this mistake when he reified the body politic into a thing that exists like the body, which, in his view, was like that of a self-sustaining machine. For him, once society is constituted, it operates in terms of principles and laws of its own; the members of society are no longer agents consciously participating in a joint enterprise but are now mere components of the system. Boucher [1989:77 *passim*] says that, for Collingwood, both Hobbes and René Descartes contributed greatly to understanding how humans relate to the natural world and also how humans relate to other humans. One contributed by emphasizing the radically subjective basis of action, the other the same for thought.

However, both failed to move beyond this one-sided subjectivism which separated subject from object. To Hobbes, Collingwood says: action is subjective no doubt, but it is also an elaboration of how actions relate to each other, whether the diverse actions of a single subject in relation to the other, or the diverse actions of other subjects. To Descartes, Collingwood says: thought is subjective too, but all thought elaborates on how the body exists in the world. In fact the subject itself is created by reflection on bodily sensation, feeling, appetite, desire etc., not a transcendental rationalism that constitutes the subject out of thin air. Thus, all conscious action is ultimately borne of what may be loosely called experience.

And experience is ongoing. It doesn't just stop after some singular definitive move from nature to society. Such an egregious view assumes that after an original moment of consciousness (e.g., prudential reason in Hobbes's case), society is created and consciousness disappears. But, as experience is ongoing, so too is consciousness. Thus the move from nature to society is an on-going and dynamic activity of agents, for this is after all the very definition of society: the continuous reiteration or re-invention of agents participating in a joint enterprise.

Collingwood replaces Hobbes's notion of the state of nature, and its perpetual war of each-against-all, with the idea of non-social communities. Any complex polity – "complex" used here in Arnold Toynbee's sense – involves both non-social communities and corresponding social communities. No polity is ever without this mixed character. A non-social community is composed of those who are not fully actualized agents. They do not govern themselves but are governed by those in the governing society, such as children by adults. Thus the relation of society to non-social communities is one of agents who are embarked on a joint enterprise who rule and less-than-full agents who are ruled. There is a range or scale of more or less agentive subjects from those who do not govern at all, all the way up to those who govern themselves entirely. But all are agents of some kind and degree.

To have agency does not mean that one is fully conscious of every aspect of one's actions and its consequences. Nor does it mean that one can create one's reality as one chooses. For agents can be both the patients and the instruments of the agency of others. Many critiques of nineteenth century colonialism and of post-World War II global order show how societies seek to turn other societies, both internal and external, into non-social communities – although not presenting the critique in these Collingwoodian terms (see Jackson 2006).

For Collingwood, civilization or barbarism is to be found precisely in the relations between non-social communities and social communities. Is the latter, the ruling group, using their rule to persuade members of non-social communities into members of the ruling society? Does the social community see the distinctions between social, economic and legal civilization, and the on-going and protean challenge of articulating each with the other, and encouraging its new members to dissent and offer other visions of this articulation? If the answers are yes, then this is a civilizing polity.

Relations between agents can involve either dialogue (persuasion) or domination (force). In dialogue one tries to find a position in which both sides can come to agree, where each can see the partial accuracy of their own and others' views. Here Collingwood evinces his Hegelian heritage, for it was Hegel who enunciated the principle that concepts can never be set in resolute opposition for they will always find a higher synthesis. For Collingwood, however, this dialectical process is not exemplary of an unfolding process of universal rationality, but of the negotiations of historically situated agents. Agents can interact through domination as well, where one party seeks to force the other to abandon its agency. For Collingwood, the two modes of interaction are opposed to each other. Indeed, if one agrees with Collingwood here, one might say that overt domination is a sign of weakness: if you cannot persuade, you trot out the troops.

A social community maintains its non-social community in that position either via dialogue or by domination. Collingwood says that the latter may be maintained by "order" or by the inculcation of particular "ways of life" [21.3]. In any case, the non-social community is not allowed to exercise its free will. But this is not to indicate that there is a fundamental and essential difference in kind (only) between social and non-social aspects of a community.

Thus agents are always overlapping classes. This is a unique notion of social "system" which makes agency central: it assumes systems of this sort are made and not simply found and that they are continually being completed, contested and remade. This is a different notion of system from that projected onto the human world from the natural world. In the taxonomic discourse of natural science, systems are conceived to be composed of mutually exclusive, and opposed and yet interdependent parts. But, a construction such as this immediately raises the question of which part is "more fundamental" or "more important" [ibid.: 18]. Typically some transcendent principle of unity, perhaps one part elevated over the rest, was posited to deal with this dilemma, leading to essentialism [ibid.].

In contrast to taxonomy, for Collingwood, "the world of politics is a dialectical world in which non-social communities (communities of men in what Hobbes called the "state of nature") turn into "societies" [24.71].¹⁶ This is a processual view of human affairs, but not a disordered view. It is, rather, a different view of order. This is a vision of society as polity, where for the ruling society in particular the "work is never done" [25.23]. From this vantage, what some today see as fragments of culture – fragments to be lamented or celebrated – are perhaps better seen as consequences of a ruling society that does not acknowledge its role and responsibility as such, or has knowingly abdicated it (see Ghosh 2016, 2007). If the latter, and per above, such actions could be characterized as barbaric.

The task of Part II of this project, which will hopefully be published in a subsequent issue of this very journal, is to show that Collingwood's approach to civilization *and* barbarism,

¹⁶ I will retain the use of "men" and "man" rather than adopting more gender-neutral pronouns as a way to recall that those being presented were unlikely to be gender-neutral in their thinking.

as outlined above, provides a framework for comparing civilizational projects. The specific aim will be to use his framework to re-interpret the overlaps and oppositions in what Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, respectively, envisioned as the civilizing and de-civilizing contents of Indian civilization.

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