What is the Business of Collingwood's *The Principles of Art*?

1. Introduction

The business of Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (1938) (henceforth
PA) is "to answer the question: What is art?" (p. 1) The answer to that
question, Collingwood argues over the course of the book, is that art is
the total imaginative experience or activity of the expression of the art-
ist's emotions. This answer has become notorious, because it strikes
many as obviously and utterly false. One major objection, and the one
most relevant to this paper, is that it is unclear how much of human
activity is art, according to Collingwood: for he says sometimes that all
our utterances and gestures are art, and at other times that much of
what we think to be art is in fact not art at all.

This objection to Collingwood's philosophy of art remains un-
addressed.[1] It is my contention that the reason for this is the universal

---

[1] Prominent misunderstandings in this regard, in generally sympathetic and
    sensitive interpretations, include Ridley (1998), Graham (1997/2000: Ch.
    2), Robinson (2005: pp. 253–4, where she also notes that this objection is
    "standard" and "decisive") and Kemp (2012), none of which so much as

misunderstanding of the philosophical methodology underpinning *PA*. That is, the answer looks absurd because of a mistaken assumption concerning what the business of *PA* is. I will argue that if we look carefully at Collingwood's methodology, which is expounded primarily in his *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933) (henceforth *EPM*), we can re-interpret his philosophy of art in a way that is both hermeneutically and philosophically superior.

The main re-interpretation that needs to be done concerns what kind of concept Collingwood takes the subject of his investigation – 'art' – to be. He has been taken to be asking what distinguishes works of art from non-art entities. The concept of art, on this understanding, applies binarily: something simply is, or is not, art. As an attempt to answer this binary question, Collingwood's theory fails abjectly. First, it is not clear what the extension of 'art' is supposed to be: Collingwood offers two inconsistent answers and is committed to them both; and second, neither account is plausible. The first answer is that art is a very limited category, containing, if anything, only pure artistic masterworks. But this looks too restrictive. The second answer is that the concept extends over all utterances and gestures. But then 'art' looks hopelessly broad.

However, Collingwood does not have to worry about this objection, because, as we will see by reading *PA* through the lens of *EPM*, 'art,' for him, is not something found in certain places, such as art galleries and concert halls, but not in other places, such as everyday speech: it is

mention Collingwood's methodology. Mink (1969), who is alone in discussing Collingwood's philosophy of art through his methodology and who better understands him, briefly suggests what could be my part of response to this objection on pp. 219–21.

something found in every human experience or activity, but to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the extent to which it meets his definition of art. Collingwood sometimes speaks of art as something that expresses emotion *at all* – which is why he sometimes suggests a very inclusive definition of art – and sometimes of art as only something that expresses emotion very successfully – which is why he sometimes speaks very restrictively of the scope of art. (He argues for the importance of being able to use terms in different ways like this in *EPM*, Ch. X.§2.) Collingwood is not interested in separating works of art from non-art entities. Rather, he is interested in giving an account of a certain *aspect* of *all* human experience or activity.

However, although Collingwood's project is not the project of separating artistic from non-artistic entities, neither is it unrelated to that project. At the end of the paper (§3), I will suggest one reason why Collingwood's project is more philosophically and artistically fruitful.

I do not need to, and will not, give a full and detailed account of every part of Collingwood's philosophical system in order to make the point of this paper. I will focus on a few particularly relevant parts of his philosophical methodology, namely the 'overlap of classes' and the 'scale of forms'. I will do relatively little by way of defence of this methodology. My main concern is to make clear what his methodological claims *are*, that we might understand his philosophy of art.

2. Collingwood's Philosophical Methodology

In science and philosophy both, we use concepts to classify: we group things together in virtue of them having some conceptual commonality: by their being a mammal, or an artwork. However, Collingwood argues that classification has markedly different features in scientific

and philosophical contexts. (Note, though, that Collingwood is concerned only to give an account of philosophical classification, so his account of scientific classification throughout *EPM* is only relevant to his (and this paper's) project as a counterplan: a rival account of philosophical classification, inspired by an account, whether adequate or no, of scientific classification. See Ch. I.§2.6.) First, scientific concepts do not overlap, but philosophical concepts do so as a matter of course (*EPM*: Ch. II). Consider, as an example of scientific classification, apples. We classify apples into a number of species (or cultivars): Granny Smith, Golden Delicious, Gala, and so on. If something is part of one species, it is not also part of another species at the same level of abstraction. If an apple is a Granny Smith, then it cannot also be a Golden Delicious. It may, by some random mutation, be peculiarly similar to a Golden Delicious in its taste or texture, but it can never *be*, to any extent, a Golden Delicious. (This is not to deny that there can be cases that are hard to determine – e.g., whether a platypus is a mammal or a reptile, or whether Pluto is a planet – because of a poor epistemic situation or an inadequate classificatory system or whatever.) However, not everything is adequately classified in this way, and Collingwood contends that philosophy has traditionally been interested in things which are not so classifiable. Consider the quintessentially philosophical concept of goodness: An act is never simply either good or bad; rather, every act is somewhere between being perfectly good and perfectly bad, better than some possible alternative acts and good to that extent, but worse than some other possible alternative acts and bad to that extent. The concept of 'art' – to anticipate – has a similar structure: it is not something done only by some people (e.g., artists), but something done by everyone, to some extent, whenever they act.

The second relevant difference between scientific and philosophical classification is that whereas in scientific classification every member of

a species is equally a member of that species, this is not so in philosophical classification (*EPM*: Ch. III). Every Granny Smith is equally a Granny Smith if it is a Granny Smith at all; ice, water and steam are equally H_2O; however much it may be uncertain how to classify a liminal species such as 'platypus', whichever class it is a member of it is a full member of. Not every good act, however, is equally good; not everything beautiful is equally beautiful. That goodness and beauty come in degrees is incontrovertible, but what, precisely, does this mean? Does it mean that although a moderately good act does not have as much goodness as a saintly act, it equally partakes of the concept of goodness, or has goodness equally truly predicated of it? Or is it that a moderately good act not only has less goodness than a saintly act, but is less truly good at all? To make sense of Collingwood here, we need to turn to another feature of Collingwood's methodology, the 'scale of forms' (*EPM*: p. 57).

Some species of a genus differ from each other quantitatively (books of different sizes), and some species differ from each other qualitatively (the curves of parabola and circle). Some species of a genus, however, differ from each other in both ways. Ice is not only colder than liquid water (a quantitative difference relative to the genus 'H_2O'), but solid rather than liquid (a qualitative difference relative to that genus). When a genus contains species which differ from each other both qualitatively and quantitatively, Collingwood calls the system a scale of forms. This is a system in which (a) the members of the species all embody what Collingwood calls the 'generic essence' (*ibid.*) but differ relative to some variable attribute, and (b) the forms are connected in such a way that they replace each other as the variable changes on reaching certain 'critical points'. So ice and liquid water are both H_2O, but differ relative to their matter state (more generally, their form), and replace each other at the freezing/melting point. To give another ex-

ample (also Collingwood's (*ibid.*)), we can have a genus of 'taxable income', with species of the different incomes, which all share the generic essence of being taxable income, but differ relative to the variable of the rate at which they are taxable.

Scales of forms are not unique to philosophy. But philosophical scales of forms do have this peculiarity: whilst in non-philosophical scales of forms the variable relative to which the species of a genus differ from each other is *extraneous* to the generic essence, in philosophical scales of forms the variable relative to which the species differ from each other is *identical* with the generic essence (*EPM*: Ch. III.§1.5–1.6). To see this, take again the example of H_2O. Ice, water and steam vary relative to heat, but heat is no part of the definition of H_2O. Ice, water and steam are all equally H_2O because they do not differ relative to anything essential to H_2O. Take, by contrast, a philosophical concept – Plato's notion of truth or reality (again, this example is Collingwood's (*EPM*: Ch. III.§1.6)[2]). The scale of forms of reality in Books VI–VII of *The Republic* has as its variable 'truth' (ἀλήθεια (alêtheia)), 'definiteness' (σαφήνεια (saphêneia)), or, of course, 'reality' (οὐσία (ousia)). The nature of the physical world is such that it is confused and indeterminate, not 'genuinely' or 'ultimately' real.[3] This 'reality' *is,*

[2] Or rather, Collingwood elides two examples of his point: the scales of forms of truth/reality and of knowledge. I consider only the former. Collingwood's confusion is understandable: the two concepts are much more closely related than they are taken to be in modern philosophy. See White (1992).

[3] 'Ultimately' and 'genuinely' are Lee's terms (Plato (c. 380BC/1955/2003): pp. 194-5). Lee also sometimes translates ἀλήθεια as 'genuine' (see 510a). Vlastos (1965: p. 1) uses 'completely', 'purely', 'perfectly' and 'really'.

however, participated in by the Forms. But this 'reality' is not only the variable, participated in by the Forms to a higher degree than by the physical world: it is also the generic essence participated in (to a greater or lesser degree) by all the species of the genus. What is shared by both the Forms and the physical world, such that we can classify them together, is just that they are both real – they both participate in that generic essence – but what separates them is again just reality: they vary in their participation of that essence.

Collingwood gives other examples of philosophers who have treated many more philosophical concepts as possessing this structure (*EPM*: Ch. III.§1.4–1.6 and *passim*), but I will not repeat the examples.[4] I am keen here only to show that it is *plausible* that *some* philosophical concepts are structured this way, so that I can plausibly claim that 'art' is so structured.

> It should also be noted here that Collingwood's interpretation of what it is about the Forms that make them real in a way that the physical world is not is controversial. (See White (1992) for an alternative account.) For our purposes, it is enough that Plato has the notion that reality can come in degrees, and that the generic essence and variable are identical. On this point Collingwood's position is mainstream.

[4] I will, however, briefly add to Collingwood's examples, to show that his position remains live. First, 'epistemic contextualism,' the view that the veracity of knowledge ascription is context-dependent, is a live option in contemporary Analytic epistemology. There are a huge variety of views of this sort on offer, though, which are variably consonant with Collingwood's methodology, and I will not go into this here. See Rysiew (2011). Second, some philosophers see personhood as differentially realisable. Scruton (who is in this respect, as is Collingwood, Hegelian) endorses this view (1978: p. 225). A consonant notion of personhood is also found in Akan philosophy: see Wingo (2006).

Two further relevant points are that, in philosophical concepts, (1) differences of kind and of degree (viz., of qualitative and quantitative difference respectively) always come together: every philosophical difference between two species of a philosophical genus is both (*EPM*: Ch. III.§3.14–3.16); and (2) distinction and opposition also always come together: every philosophical concept within a class is both distinct from and opposed to everything else in the class (*EPM*: Ch. III.§3.17–3.18). (1): Collingwood gives the example of felt heat: if we put our hand into a basin of 20°C water, and then into a basin of 40°C water, the latter experience will be one of greater heat – and so a quantitative difference – but also a different type of heat: we may find the former uncomfortably chilly, the latter pleasantly warm; and this is a qualitative difference. Considering a similar example, Collingwood writes, "I can detect as many differences in kind as I can detect differences of degree; and these are not two sets of differences" – as would be the two sets of differences between ice at –1°C and water at 1°C – "but one single set." (*EPM*: Ch. III.§3.15) (2) is not peculiar to philosophical concepts either. Felt heat and felt cold again have this characteristic: 'hot' and 'cold' are opposed to each other, opposites, as well as being different. Relative to the basin of 40°C water we say the water in the basin of 20°C water feels cold, and relative to that basin we say that the water in the former basin feels hot. 'Hot' and 'cold' are here opposed. In physical (i.e., not felt) heat, opposition and distinction are two separate modes of difference. The molecules of water in the basin of 20°C water vibrate more slowly than those in the basin of 40°C water, and in that respect the water in the two basins are distinct but not opposed – there is no opposite of '40°C' – but under another aspect we can attend to the fact that the warmer water has a certain amount of heat that the cooler water does not, and under this aspect there is opposition – having heat is opposed to having no heat. Both the felt and

physical heat in the basins of water differ by both opposition and distinction, then – but only in the case of felt heat are opposition and distinction 'fused.'

Plato can again furnish us with a philosophical example of these two principles. The four modes of reality adumbrated in the Divided Line analogy differ not only in that the Forms are *more* real than physical objects, but also in that they exist in a different *way* – they are abstract rather than physical. And relative to the Forms, physical objects are not just 'less real' (and so distinct) but *un*real (and so opposed). This last distinction, which is important, is also clear in the case of goodness. Faced with the option of either communicating or withholding a hard but important truth, the latter option is not just 'less good' or 'the worse option' – which it is – but also positively bad; and this is entirely consistent with that choice being better than other alternatives (and so good relative to them), such as assaulting our interlocutor.

We can now make sense of the thought that a generic essence can be realised to degrees, and so that species can be members of a class to degrees. The degrees are not of percentages or anything so calculable: it is not a matter of certain acts being x% good or certain artworks being x% beautiful. It is rather a matter of certain species of a genus instantiating the generic essence relative to certain other species which correlatively do not instantiate that generic essence, but which in turn instantiate the essence relative to other species which do not instantiate it relative to either of the other species. So far, this is to say it is more like an ordinal than ratio scale. But it is more than this: it is also a matter of various species *absolutely* instantiating or not instantiating the generic essence. Collingwood says by way of illustration: "Every achievement of truth involves combating some particular error, which again is regarded not as one among possible errors, still less as (what incidentally it always is) a partial and fragmentary truth, but as identical with error

9

at large." (*EPM*: p. 84) One might again put it this way: given two species in a genus, everything they share is taken for granted; wherein they differ is the grounds on which we say one does and the other does not embody the essence of the genus to which they both belong. Even from the perspective of the whole scale, though, we cannot speak of percentages or any precise or quantifiable degree of generic-essence instantiation; the relative embodiment of the generic essence is as precise as one can be. This is because philosophical scales of forms are infinite. There can be no highest or lowest point on the scale (*EPM*: Ch. III.§5). Even a 'perfect' act, for instance, such as a Kantian would say of the fulfilment of a perfect duty, is not perfect in Collingwood's sense, if it does not also meet all relevant imperfect duties to the highest possible degree – which is an infinite task. The matter is of relevance to Collingwood's philosophy of art for two reasons: first, there is something jarring or infelicitous in the thought that some things are artworks to some precise extent. Asking whether a poor work of art, such as William McGonagall's *The Tay Bridge Disaster*, is art or not, it seems that one answer we ought *not* to be able to give is, "It is x% art". Collingwood's methodology does not allow us to give this bad answer. Second – to briefly anticipate what we will see in much greater detail below – it further clarifies how Collingwood can say that art is utterly pervasive in human life, such that every act we do is, to some extent, art.

It is worth, finally, stressing that Collingwood is not attempting to monopolise the usage of the terms or concepts that he says have the 'scale of forms' structure. He allows that concepts may have different 'phases,' (*EPM*: Ch. II.§2.4–2.6) of which there are at least two: the scientific and philosophical. Indeed, far from attempting to say that concepts have always to be understood in this way, Collingwood would argue that it is *improper* for the scientist to use concepts as the philosopher does. It is thus no objection to Collingwood that we *sometimes*

speak as if 'reality' or 'art' were binarily realisable. He will accept this, but insist that when we speak this way we are not speaking of reality or art in their philosophical phases. We will return to this point.

So much, then, for Collingwood's methodology. It is hopefully now clear what the relevant claims are, and hopefully the methodology is *prima facie* plausible. As I said, this paper is not a defence of Collingwood's methodology, but an explication of it, so I will not explicitly inquire into it any further.

3. Collingwood's Philosophy of Art

3.1 What Collingwood Means by 'Art'

My discussion of Collingwood's philosophy of art will be even briefer than my discussion of his philosophical methodology. This is because this paper is about the more abstract question of what *kind* of question Collingwood is asking in *PA*, and what *kind* of answer he is giving, rather than the logically subsequent question of whether the particular answer, within that framework, is correct. Briefly, however, art, for Collingwood, is the total imaginative activity of the expression or clarification of emotion, thought or worldview.[5] How to interpret this definition, however, depends on what methodological framework we adopt: the traditional one, or the one I have just adumbrated.

---

[5] I give a thorough explication of Collingwood's philosophy of art in my Ph.D. dissertation (in progress).

The most striking difference between the interpretations, and the one with regard to which the methodology I am advocating is most obviously at an advantage, concerns the scope of the term 'art.' 'Art' is sometimes very broad for Collingwood, extending over "[e]very utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes." (*PA*: p. 285) However, he also says that far less than this qualifies as art. For instance, he argues that craft is not art (*PA*: Ch. II), and then, to make sure that there is no misunderstanding, that specific varieties of craft – representation (Ch. III), magic (Ch. IV) and amusement (Ch. V) – are not art, and states in no uncertain terms that puzzles, instruction, advertisement, propaganda and exhortation are not art (p. 32). "None of them has anything to do with art proper." (*ibid.*) He reaffirms the point toward the end of the book: "a pot-boiler… cannot ever become a work of art." (p. 278) But these answers are inconsistent: Collingwood can hardly be denying that there are propagandistic utterances, exhortational gestures. Further, there can be no hoping that his philosophy of art can be saved by excising one half of his theory. Suppose we were able to excavate a theory of art from the contradictions of *PA* that did not involve anything about how all our utterances and gestures are art, one which was internally consistent. This would still be no good, because it is grossly implausible that representations, for instance, are not art. It is surely an incontrovertible criterion of a theory of art that it does not deny arthood to the *Mona Lisa*. Contrariwise, I see no hope of a plausible theory being constructed from the parts of *PA* that suggest that all gesture and utterance is art: that would have nothing particularly to do with what is found in art galleries, concert halls, and other traditional sites of art.

So what is Collingwood up to? On the traditional interpretation, it is hard to know what he can say: the extension of 'art' logically cannot be both all utterances and only pure artistic masterworks, and it cannot

plausibly be either. But with *EPM*'s methodology in place, we can very easily dissolve this contradiction, by understanding art as a philosophical concept. For just as what is good is good to some extent, and bad to another extent, every human action and artefact is art to some extent, but craft to another extent. In the case of art, the genus (or generic essence) is, of course, the expression of emotion. Collingwood argues elsewhere (*PA*: p. 162) that there is some emotional charge to everything we feel, and that to attend to this is already to engage in a process continuous with what we call art, and so there is art or the expression of emotion even on this tiny scale.

If we see Collingwood's project in this light, we realise that his theory of art is not in direct competition with the other project of giving an account of what art is, much more common in Analytic aesthetics, engaged in by philosophers such as Danto, Dickie, Kennick and Robinson.[6] This sort of theory is interested in separating the class of entities that are artworks from those that are not. The sort of project this is is perhaps best illustrated by the opening of Danto (1981). Indeed, it is well illustrated by the title of the first chapter: 'Works of Art and Mere Real Things'. Danto opens this chapter with a description of an imaginary art exhibition of (almost-)identical red rectangles, each with a different history. (One is a representation of nirvana, another of the Red Sea, another just a colour swatch, etc.) Some of these objects are artworks, and some are mere real things, Danto assumes. His question is: what makes them one rather than the other? Collingwood does not

---

[6] See Danto (1981), Dickie (1969), Kennick (1958) and Robinson (2005). The project is as common now as ever: see, for recent examples, see Cook and Meskin (2015) and Maes (2015), whose question, 'what is a portrait?', would be, in Collingwoodian terminology, 'what is a D-portrait?'

offer an answer to that question. In fact, he would consider it a non-philosophical question, because it is interested in 'art' in its non-philosophical phase; and that in its philosophical phase there is nothing human that is not to some extent art.

It might be objected at this point that, although we of course can't stop Collingwood from using the term 'art' in this way, and from trying to give a philosophical account of what that to which that term refers, there is no reason for us to accept his idiosyncratic terminology, or to be interested in his idiosyncratic philosophical project. However, I dispute that this usage of the term 'art' is idiosyncratic (though I accept that his is not the question asked by mainstream Analytic philosophers of the past few decades). To defend his claim that art is a scale-of-forms concept first: We often say things such as, 'now *that's* a work of art.' The ontological implication of this is interesting. To say, without stress, that 'that is a work of art', implies just that whatever it is at which the speaker is pointing is a work of art. It is consistent with everything being simply either a work of art or not a work of art. But when the stress is added, the utterance suggests that some things are 'really' works of art (another natural phrase), or something of this sort. But what does it mean to say that some things are 'really' works of art? One obvious answer is that being a work of art is differentially realisable, such that some objects realise it to a certain moderate extent, and so more or less count as works of art, but that others realise it more, and so are 'really' works of art. This, of course, is perfectly consonant with Collingwood's methodology: it is the same as goodness: one act can be unobjectionable and fairly beneficent, and so more or less count as good, and another act can be positively saintly, and that we would say is *really* good; or equally felicitously, we might say, 'now *that's* goodness.' Locutions suggesting a similar structure are common. Attending Turner Prize shortlists, people often express incredulity: 'this may technically be art,

but it's not really art,' for instance. This attitude is hard to square with Danto's approach. Suppose we were to walk around a house with an art insurer tasked with inventorying all the artworks, and we gushed about how "this one – now that's *really* a work of art!… this one, not so much." One imagines her becoming confused, and asking with regard to the liminal cases, "Do you want it insured or not!" For an art insurer, this impatience is entirely legitimate.

Consider also that other authors have explicitly said that art has a structure something like the structure Collingwood says it has. Croce, a significant influence on Collingwood, said this ('Identity of Linguistic and Aesthetic' is the subtitle of one chapter of his *Estetica* (1902));[7] Dewey, from another philosophical tradition, also draws together artistic masterpieces with the everyday:

> A primary task is… imposed upon one who undertakes to write upon the philosophy of the fine arts. This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience. Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not just rest upon the earth. They are the earth in one of its manifest operations.
>
> <div align="right">Dewey (1938): p. 2 (emphasis in original)</div>

---

[7]   The two theories are sufficiently similar that they have been referred to collectively as the 'Croce–Collingwood theory' (see, e.g., Wollheim (1980), §22, who calls this appellation "usual nowadays"). A comparative study is not part of my current project, but suffice it to say here that though the similarities are indeed striking, they differ on a number of points. Perhaps most notably, Collingwood does not, like Croce, claim that artworks are purely mental. See Ridley (1997).

Scott McCloud, with a different philosophical background again, also says something very similar: "[I]n almost everything we do there is at least an *element of art*." (1993: p. 168; emphases in original) And again, Novalis wrote that "*Jeder Mensch sollte Künstler sein. Alles kann zur schönen Kunst werden*" ("Everyone should be an artist. Everything can become fine art") (1798), which sentiment has been endorsed by Beuys, who often said that "*Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*" ("Everyone is an artist"), and again by countless compilers of 'words of wisdom;' and even Danto, *in flagrante philosophicum delicto*, says that it is a "commonplace" that every metaphor is "a little poem" (1981: p. 189).

It might at this point be granted that 'art' can be reasonably understood to have the conceptual structure Collingwood claims for it, but objected nonetheless that he is mistaken that the variable essence is the expression of emotion. But that the expression of emotion is the variable essence of art is precisely what Collingwood argues in *PA*, and so I will not defend this here.

3.2 C-Art and D-Art, and their Connection

For all I have said so far, the two concepts of 'art' – Collingwood *et al.*'s and Danto *et al.*'s, which with apologies I will now refer to as C-art and D-art respectively[8] – might have nothing to do with each other. D-art may indeed always involve the expression of emotion, just by virtue of the fact that everything human does by Collingwood's account; but what I have said so far gives us no reason to think that there is any cor-

---

[8]   I will also use these terms to refer to what instantiates them, qua instantiating them: so a painting, for instance, is D-art or a D-artwork, and C-art (insofar as it expresses emotion). Its creator is a D-artist, etc.

relation between D-art and the expression of emotion. But Collingwood clearly thinks that C-art is relevant to those concerned with D-art. We see this from the preface right through to the conclusion of *PA*. On the first page of the preface, he writes that "we have a new and very lively… growth of aesthetic theory and criticism, written mostly not by academic philosophers or amateurs of art, but by poets, dramatists, painters, and sculptors. This is the reason for the appearance of the present book." The natural reading of this – that the various sorts of artist are D-artists – is correct, as is confirmed by the differentiation of them from 'amateurs of art' and 'academic philosophers': there can be people better and worse at C-art, insofar as some express their emotions better than others, but there is no amateur–professional distinction. Further, the book makes constant reference to D-artworks, such as those of Cézanne, T. S. Eliot, Beethoven; and examples from painting and poetry, references to symphonies, and so on, are staple. Collingwood also of course makes reference to C-art apart from D-art – for instance the baby who removes its bonnet in Ch. XI, §1 – but such examples do not dominate the book like D-art does.

Now, that Collingwood thinks that there is some strong connection between C-art and D-art does not establish that there is such a connection, or, if there is, what its nature is. There is an account available, though, even if Collingwood does not explicitly offer it. The connection is built on the value of C-art, though, so I must first say something about Collingwood's account of this value, even though I can say only very little about it when I am passing over Collingwood's general account of C-art. I will only very briefly state that C-art's value is the value of a particular sort of self-understanding and self-becoming. It is a learning and clarifying what one's 'worldview' is, 'what it's like to be' one. This 'worldview' is dynamic, and in particular is changed by one's awareness of it; and so to successfully inquire into what it is (to self-

understand) is also to change it in such a way that it becomes more rational (to self-become). Further, this is a deeply public activity, and so to create and experience C-art is also to understand others. Self-understanding and self-becoming (which are two sides of a single coin) lead to three further sorts of good. (1) It immediately leads to an emotional self-government, in the sense that our emotions become civilised and rational rather than affecting us in ways we can neither understand nor predict; (2) it is necessary for the 'intellect,' the more abstract mental faculty, to do its business securely and well; and (3) the sanity and self-government it creates has various effects on our physical health.[9]

3.3 C-Art as the Highest Value of D-Art

How does this articulation of the value of C-art allow us to see how C-art relates to D-art? Although Collingwood ascribes (sometimes profound) value to many of the things that can be found in D-art,[10] he clearly thinks that C-art has some *special* relation to D-art, such that a treatise on D-art can legitimately focus on C-art, and such that D-art that is C-art is somehow a 'central' case of D-art. The only clue in Collingwood's *œuvre* about what the connection might be is his brief discussion in *EPM* of how concepts in different 'phases' relate to each other. He claims there that there are "regular and uniform" differences

---

[9]   This account is found throughout PA. See my Ph.D. dissertation for a fuller account of this understanding of the value of C-art.

[10]   Collingwood's serious interest in and respect for magic, and in its connection with (both D- and C-)art, is manifest in his The Philosophy of Enchantment (2005).

18

in meaning between words used to describe the scientific and philosophical phases of concepts, and that beneath the differences "something fundamental in their meaning [remains] unaltered," and that it is for this reason that the words are not just homonymous. He mentions 'matter' by way of illustration. He claims that we can trace "a general connexion between the physical and metaphysical notions of matter, in spite of the difference between them" – although he declines to do so or even suggest how it might be done – and also "a special connexion between a particular physical theory of matter and a particular metaphysical theory corresponding to it; for example, the concept of matter in what may be called classical nineteenth-century materialism is the metaphysical counterpart of the scientific concept of matter in the classical Newtonian physics."[11] Collingwood says almost nothing more on the matter than these suggestive but uninformative remarks.

I cannot see how one might develop a proper account from these remarks, and so I will not pursue them any further. There is another way to draw a connection between D-art and C-art, and I will briefly develop this instead. This account is rather speculative: there is no evidence in Collingwood's *oeuvre* that he thought about this connection; but the connection is readily drawn. Perhaps it is a consequence of the deeper connection he evidently takes there to be between D- and C-art, or perhaps not. Perhaps, or perhaps not, it just is the connection Collingwood sees, differently expressed. In any case, it is consistent with everything Collingwood says. The connection is this: *the nature of D-art renders certain ends differentially feasible relative to other practices,*[12]

---

[11] The quotations in this paragraph are all from Ch. II.§2.6.

[12] I will speak here of 'practices' (and I do so in MacIntyre's sense (1981: p. 194)), and speak as if D-art has agency, but this is only shorthand. I would

which ends are differentially valuable; and that specifically, *C-art is the most valuable end feasible for D-art*, and *D-art as a practice is peculiarly capable of C-art.* In other words: there are many things that D-art can do, and some of them are more easily done by D-art than by any other practice. When these things are valuable, D-art has a special obligation to them. One of them, C-art, is not just one valuable end among many, but a foundation of any valuable human practice, and so D-art has an especially strong obligation to it, and so C-art is central to D-art.

Whether this is in fact the connection between C-art and D-art needs defending. However, as I have said, this paper is primarily hermeneutic, so I will not attempt to demonstrate that this is the connection. My point is rather to make the connection sufficiently *prima facie* plausible that it is a reasonable hypothesis concerning what Collingwood took the connection to be, and plausible enough that it can be used, or built upon, in constructing a contemporary Collingwoodian philosophy of art. As such, I will pass only briefly over the arguments that a full defence of this connection would have to give.[13]

One element that needs little defence is that D-art is better fitted to some roles than others. D-artworks are typically bad aeroplanes, though some particular D-artwork might be a good one; and this is not accidental, but is because the aims of D-art, and so the kinds of skills required of D-artists, are not conducive to the manufacture of efficient and safe aircraft. More controversial is that C-art is especially valuable; but this is the business of a philosophy of art, not of a metaphilosophi-

more accurately also refer to traditions and institutions, and to the various activities and people that in various senses comprise these practices, traditions or institutions. But this would be unnecessarily unwieldy.

[13] I spend more time on these matters in my Ph.D. dissertation (in progress).

cal paper, and I will not consider it further here.[14] Third, that D-art is particularly well-suited to C-art is hardly obvious; we will turn to this below. Fourth, that practices particularly well-suited to some value therefore have some particular obligation to that value needs defence; but this is a question for normative theory in general, not metaphilosophy or even the philosophy of art.

It should also be stressed that this connection does not require us to say anything about the essence of D-art – thankfully, as no account of the essence of D-art has ever reached wide acceptance, nor even has the position that there is such an essence.[15] We need only say that certain features and practices relatively (to other contemporary practices) common in the practice of D-art at the present time, and since the emergence of this practice in its current form, are such as to render C-art relatively realisable by this practice. In other words, all that is needed is for it to be reasonable to advise someone interested in C-art to look for it in D-art. Finally, making the connection in this way also does not require all D-artists to dedicate themselves to C-art, any more than it is in general required that we always aim for the highest value.

In any case, the project of establishing that D-art is particularly well-suited to C-art is, beyond a certain point, unnecessary and confused. It

---

[14] It is one of the core strands of PA; I also give some defence of it in my Ph.D. dissertation (in progress). Ridley (1998) also gives an eloquent Collingwoodian defence of C-art.

[15] See, e.g., Margolis (2010: p. 215): "The philosophy of art may be doomed, again and again but always once and for all, to define what it is to be 'a work of art,' an 'artwork,' 'art' in the sense best suited to 'the fine arts.' Modern efforts seem to end in exhaustion or bafflement or sheer scatter or a sort of bad faith that assures us that it was never worth the bother in the first place." See also the SEP article on the definition of art (Adajian 2012).

is *unnecessary* because that D-art is *best*-suited to C-art is a stronger claim than Collingwood needs: it is enough that D-art is not at a large disadvantage relative to some obvious pretenders. It would not be fatal to Collingwood's theory if it turned out that religion or philosophy, say, had greater potential for C-art. If this were the case, but D-art still had a large potential for C-art, then D-art would remain a good site for C-art, and this would be enough to ground the claim that the two concepts are closely connected.[16] The project is *confused* because to ask whether some particular emotion is better expressed one way or another (by D-art or by something else) is to separate emotion from its expression, which separation, as Collingwood argues at length, is incoherent. Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, for instance, is not in direct competition with any other expression of emotion, because it is through the particular artistic activity of painting that work that the emotion finds expression.[17]

3.4 Is this Account of the Connection between D-Art and C-Art Too Weak? No: It Is Exactly as Strong as We Should Want It to Be

I have claimed that the connection between C-art and D-art is a matter of D-art being a particularly good site for C-art and so particularly ob-

---

[16]   We should actually not be so insouciant, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. The position I have advocated is strong enough for present purposes. I discuss this more fully in my Ph.D. dissertation (in progress).

[17]   See PA, Chs. II–VI, esp. Ch. II, §4. See also Ridley (1998: Ch. 2).

ligated to it, and that this is why Collingwood thought C-art central to D-art. Suppose we provisionally accept this claim, despite the fact that I have disclaimed most of its defence as beyond the scope of this hermeneutic paper. A new problem now arises: by making the connection empirical rather than conceptual, I have made it precarious: for all I have said, some social change could occur such that D-art will lose the advantages it currently enjoys *vis-à-vis* C-art – D-artists' freedom of speech could be curtailed in such a way that the honesty required for C-art could become too onerous for them, for instance – and then C- and D-art would have very little to do with each other. Is the fact that the connection between C- and D-art can become so weak a problem for Collingwood? No: it is enough for him that it is *currently* the case that there is such a connection. Indeed, he would be quite happy to find a high concentration of C-art in places that have little to do with D-art. This, I will argue in this final section, is a strength of his theory: it allows us to consider more directly and openly that certain practices have the value of C-art about them without having to first wonder whether they are D-art.

To see why the weakness of the connection between C- and D-art is desirable, let us consider a liminal case of D-art. The world is full of such things – industrial design, jokes, ditties, linguistic devices like metaphor, extemporised showersinging, folk art, etc. – but I will focus on one example that *challenges* the art/not-art dichotomy by embracing its ambiguous D-art status while richly instantiating C-art. This example is intrinsically aesthetically interesting *qua* C-art, and Collingwood's philosophy of art allows us to see it *qua* C-art without getting bogged down in the distraction of whether it is D-art.

The example is Patrick Rodriguez's Twitter feed, "Is it art?"[18] This is an algorithmically generated feed, in which locutions along the lines of "Are *x* art?", or "Can *x* ever be art?", with the *x* replaced by procedurally chosen nouns, were posted every few hours for a few years. The resulting tweets are often funny in their absurdity: e.g., "I'll believe hockey is art when I see it in a museum," or, "Emptiness? Okay, but is it art?"[19] There is a satirical point here – the question (or worry) concerning whether certain things are art is in some way ridiculous – but my point is that determining whether this Twitter feed is itself (D-)art does not help us understand what it is 'up to.' The evidence for this is in the fact that despite the difficulty of deciding whether or not the Twitter feed is D-art or not, we can still easily engage with it under the aspect of C-art. Concerning its D-art status, what even is our candidate? The individual tweets? the computer programme? the tweets that, as a whole, are the result of the programme? But despite our uncertainty here, it is clear what is happening with the Twitter feed: *inter alia*, it is a clever bit of satire that refers to new and old arts, avant-garde and folk art, philistine beancounting attitudes in the artworld, itself and liminality. (I will not engage in art criticism here, but it is clear how it would go, and more importantly, that there is plenty to say.) We know that it is C-art, simp-

---

[18] URL: twitter.com/IsItArtBot. Rodriguez is the creator of this and other twitterbots: see thelightaesthetic.com/games (accessed 16 Feb 2015). Rodriguez's brief explanation at that site suggests that he created IsItArtBot as a response to those who doubt that computer games can be art.

[19] These posts are from 2 February 2015 (URL: twitter.com/IsItArtBot/status/562422021141712898 (accessed 16 Feb 2015)) and 20 December 2014 (URL: twitter.com/IsItArtBot/status/546537351116115968 (accessed 16 Feb 2015)) respectively.

ly because it is an artefact, and we are also able to get good traction on the question of whether it expresses emotion *well*. But if we are labouring under the impression that C-art is restricted to D-artworks, and if our taxonomising rules the Twitter feed to be, in Danto's words, 'a mere real thing,' then, unless our perception outpaces our theorising, we will be blind to the C-art value of the feed.

It might be responded at this point that if IsItArtBot is as rich in C-art as I have argued, then a good theory of D-art will include it. The example, continues the response, does not highlight the inadequacy of the project of attempting to define D-art, but just the inadequacy of a single, hypothetical, theory of D-art.

This response fails, because so long as D-art is binarily realisable there will always be liminal cases, their inclusion into or exclusion from D-art will always be as arbitrary as the exclusion of IsItArtBot, and their inclusion or exclusion will always conflict with natural, scalar, ways of speaking about art. This is because, as I have said, C-art is found to some extent in *all* human activity and experience: there is no 'natural joint' that we can use as a way of separating art from non-art, there is just the infinitely fine-grained scale. IsItArtBot is one of any number of things that may or may not count as D-art but which are certainly expressions of emotion, and which we can look at in ways similar to how we look at D-art: viz., *qua* C-art.[20] Further, we can see

[20] I would go so far as to say that anyone interested in where the avant-garde has been in the last ten or twenty years would do well to start searching here. See, e.g., contemporaryartdaily.com, a site which daily reports contemporary-art happenings, typically art exhibitions: much of what is on that site (I subscribe to its RSS feed) is liminal in this way; see also thejogging.tumblr.com, a blog of liminal 'art.' See also Wershler (4 April 2012) and Goldsmith (22 October 2013) for lists of and references to

this without having any idea whether or not they are D-art, just as we can in the case of IsItArtBot. Why ask whether they are D-art?[21]

More than just a waste of time, asking whether something is D-art can be positively harmful: it can function as a malign élitist gate-keeping.[22] Something which has acquired the status of D-art is naturally seen, by virtue of the close connection it has with C-art for which I have argued, as more worthy of an attention interested in C-art than something that has not won this status. Now, for various reasons, our canon of D-artworks is disproportionately the product of white, cis-sexual, dead European men, has been created in upper-class, monied and well-educated contexts, and contains works of limited variegation. It is natural, then, to infer that C-art is disproportionately realised by works that arise from, and people who inhabit, this sort of *Lebensgefühl* or 'manner of living.' But C-art is a value that is deeply important to everyone, and its realisation involves values such as self-government and sanity that are simply part of what it is to be a full human being. Is *this* found predominantly among those *Lebensgefühlen* that differentially create D-art? That would be an awfully élitist thing to say – that non-

    things that occupy this space. Two interesting very recent examples of such liminal 'art' are #cachemonet (URL: cachemonet.com (accessed 16 Feb 2015)) and Secret Habitat, the latter of which is illuminatingly discussed at Rock, Paper, Shotgun (21 December 2014).

21   As Lopes says with regard to comics, are we "likely to gain much insight into that genre by campaigning for its [D-]art status, once its character and value have been fully appreciated?" (2014: p. 204) Quoted in Shiner (2015: p. 392), who endorses the sentiment with regard to perfume.

22   A similar concern to the one I express here, though concerning philosophy rather than art, is made by Dotson (2012a). See also Priest's reply (2012) and her counter-reply (2012b).

Europeans, the poor, transsexuals, women, recent generations, and so on, tend to be less free and sane. Of course, this could be a tragic truth, but we certainly shouldn't *build it into* how we theorise about art as we risk doing by confusing D- and C-art.

One response to this is to expand the boundaries of D-art to make it less homogenous in its *Lebensgefühl*. This battle has been sequentially and successfully fought by musicians, architects, film-makers, comic book artists, *et al.*, and that is well and good. But there are two limitations to this strategy. First, the challenge is harder when the proposed D-art candidate has little surface similarity with established D-art genres: Twitter feeds, for instance, but also food and drink,[23] non-Western arts without notions fundamental to Western art such as the 'work' taxonomy,[24] and those things I have mentioned in n. 20 above. Second, it cedes the terms of the debate to the status quo by allowing that the proposed D-art is similar to what is already acknowledged to be D-art. If the argument is that it is similar only in that it involves C-art to an extent commensurate with admitted D-artworks, then the argument is unproblematic; but if it argues for its similarity in any other respect, then it is liable to undermine or obscure the C-art of the proposed D-art, because the candidate's C-art may manifest precisely in its dissimilarity, in that respect, to D-art. (To give a simple example: if beauty is seen as central to D-art, as it has been, then a proposed D-artwork that expresses emotion by being ugly will have great difficulty being admitted as D-art.) The situation then is the paradoxical one of a proposed D-artwork having to be misrepresented in ways that undermine its meaning and value in order to gain the prestige that allows its mean-

[23]   See, e.g., Smith (2007).
[24]   See, e.g., Goehr (1992/2007).

ing and value to be understood. Worse, to the extent that the non-C-art properties of D-art bear the signature of the *Lebensgefühl* I have delineated above, the candidate D-art may have to undermine precisely those of its aspects that challenge this *Lebensgefühl* in order to gain the honorific 'D-art.'

It would be better, I propose, for us to 'cut out the middleman' and ask directly whether and to what extent this candidate instantiates C-art. This is not to say that we should discard the category of D-art: it is a concept essential to the understanding of much art (Duchamp's *Fountain* is one obvious example). Nor is it even to deny that the practice of D-art has been a fertile source of C-art. It is rather to say that, with regard to what does not invite aspection under the concept of D-art, we don't grant the easily-gatekept concept of D-art authority or prestige in trying to understand it, and keep the concept separate from C-art, which, by being gradientially realisable, does not lend itself to gates which might be kept, and which, by being more general, does not carry the same problematic baggage of D-art's *Lebensgefühl*; and it is to say that we should be mindful of the tensions that the concept of D-art can suffer, as in liminal cases of D-art, and be open to the possibility that the source of the tension is not the dubious quality of the liminal D-artwork but the artificiality and limitations of the concept of D-art.

4. Conclusion

I have argued in this paper for a new way of understanding the business of *PA*, namely one in which 'art' is differentially realisable and found to some extent in everything human. Establishing this interpretation is of course a hermeneutic task, and so this has primarily been a hermeneutic paper. However, this is of course not entirely separable from the

critical task of assessing the philosophical plausibility of the theory under this interpretation. A complete critical reappraisal of Collingwood's philosophy of art is of course the work of a tradition, not of a single paper; but I hope to have shown that his account is philosophically promising, especially because it allows us to distinguish the concepts of D-art and C-art, and so to avoid confusing the culturally and aesthetically limited practice of D-art with the universal and universally important activity of C-art.[25]

Bibliography

Adajian, Thomas (2012): 'The Definition of Art,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. URL: plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/art-definition/

Collingwood, R. G. (1924), *Speculum Mentis, or The Map of Knowledge* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press)

— (1933), *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: OUP)

— (1938), *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: OUP)

— (2005), *The Philosophy of Enchantment: Studies in Folktale, Cultural Criticism, and Anthropology*, ed. David Boucher, Wendy James and Philip Smallwood (Oxford: The Clarendon Press)

Cook, Roy T. and Meskin, Aaron (2015), 'Comics, Prints, and Multiplicity', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 73, No. 1, pp. 57–67

Croce, Benedetto (1902), *Estetica: come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale* (Florence: Sandron)

Danto, Arthur C. (1981), *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press)

Davies, Stephen (1998), 'Artistic Expression', in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, pp. 493–8

Dewey, John (1934), *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree)

Dickie, George (1969), 'Defining Art,' in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp.

Dotson, Kristie (2012a), 'Why Is This Paper Philosophy?', in *Comparative Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 3–29

— (2012b), 'Well, Yes and No: A Reply to Priest', in *Comparative Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 10–15

Goehr, Lydia (1992/2007), *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev. ed. (Oxford: OUP)

Goldsmith, Kenneth (22 October 2013), 'The Writer as Meme Machine', *The New Yorker*. URL: www.newyorker.com/books/pageturner/the-writer-as-meme-machine (accessed 16 February 2015)

Kemp, Gary (2012): 'Collingwood's Aesthetics,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL: plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/collingwood-aesthetics/

Kennick, W. E. (1958), 'Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?', in *Mind*, Vol. 67, No. 267, pp. 317–34

Lopes, Dominic McIver (2014), *Beyond Art* (Oxford: OUP)

MacIntyre, Alasdair (1981): *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth)

Maes, Hans (2015), 'What is a Portrait?' in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 303–22

Margolis, Joseph (2010), 'The Importance of Being Earnest about the Definition and Metaphysics of Art', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 215–23

McCloud, Scott (1993), *Understanding Comics* (New York, NY: William Morrow)

McGuiggan, James Camien (in progress), *Everything is Art* (working title), Ph.D. dissertation

Mink, Louis O. (1969), *Mind, History and Dialectic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press)

Novalis (1798): 'Glauben und Liebe, oder, der König und die Königin,' in *Jahrbücher der Preußischen Monarchie unter der Regierung von Friedrich Wilhelm III*. URL: www.zeno.org/nid/20005447046 (accessed 22 January 2016)

Plato (c. 380BC/1955/2003), *The Republic*, tr. with intr. by Desmond Lee (London: Penguin)

Priest, Graham (2012), 'In the Same Way that This One Is: Some Comments on Dotson,' in *Comparative Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 3–9

Ridley, Aaron (1997): 'Not Ideal: Collingwood's Expression Theory', in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 263–72

— (1998): *R. G. Collingwood* (London: Phoenix)

Robinson, Jenefer (2005), *Deeper than Reason* (Oxford: OUP)

Rock, Paper, Shotgun (21 December 2014): 'The Bestest Best WHAT Of 2014: Secret Habitat'. URL: www.rockpapershotgun.com/2014/12/21/best-procedural-generation-2014-secret habitat (accessed 16 February 2015)

Rysiew, Patrick (2011), 'Epistemic Contextualism,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL: plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/contextualism-epistemology/

Scruton, Roger (1978): *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)

Shiner, Larry (2015), 'Art Scents: Perfume, Design and Olfactory Art,' in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 375–92

Smith, Barry, ed. (2007), *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine* (Oxford: OUP)

Vlastos, Gregory (1965): 'Degrees of Reality in Plato,' in Renford Bambrough (ed.): *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 1–20

Wershler, Darren (4 April 2012), 'Best Before Date' in *alienated*. URL: www.alienated.net/poetics/best-before-date (accessed 16 February 2015)

Wingo, Ajume (2008), 'Akan Philosophy of the Person,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL: plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/akan-person/

White, Nicholas P. (1992), 'The Metaphysical Epistemology of Plato', in Richard Kraut (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 277–310

Wollheim, Richard (1980), *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)