

ROBIN GEORGE COLLINGWOOD ON THE LOGIC OF TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

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Abstract: *The interpretation of written texts demands from the reader a certain hermeneutic methodology of reading. In this paper we aim to propose the logic of question and answer constructed by the British philosopher Robin George Collingwood as such an instrument. We seek to demonstrate his thesis through the four objectives we set out in this paper, namely (1) to clarify the context in which the idea of such a logic arises; (2) to what extent it differs from ordinary logic as a discipline; (3) to examine whether Collingwood is a revolutionary in this field; and finally (4) to discuss the principles according to which this logic of question and answer operates. The manner in which we approach these issues is intended to make this paper an illustration for the discussion at hand. The consequences of such an approach are welcome as they are hermeneutical in nature, not only facilitating the interpretation of textual materials, but above all helping the reader in understanding them. Thus, the present study can be of value and is helpful to the reader interested in dealing with a wide range of texts, especially those in the [human] spiritual and social sciences.*

Keywords: *Collingwood, hermeneutics, propositional logic, the logic of questions and answers, textual interpretation.*

Introduction

For those who often have to deal with certain texts, regardless of their specifics, their interpretation requires a working method, a veritable arsenal of strategies, habits, skills, and so on. There is, of course, a logic to this intellectual endeavour, and the word “logic” must be understood here not necessarily as a discipline, but as that *something-which-conveys-meaning*. Therefore, proceeding from the hypothesis that in the interpretation of texts operates something we can call hermeneutic logic, we will draw in the present essay on some of the ideas of the British philosopher Robin George Collingwood, who, inspired by his archaeological work, proposed a logic of questions and answers, which comes very often into play when deciphering texts, and even more so in their interpretation.

We intend to justify the above statement in the form of a thesis on the basis of it meeting the following objectives: (1) drawing a distinction between hermeneutic logic, that is, what some exegetes understand it to mean, and “formalized” logic, the discipline taught in universities – in other words, the pretext and context of

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Collingwood's ideas; (2) we shall examine, following the British thinker, whether propositional logic does indeed suffer any hermeneutic shortcomings; (3) the third objective will be to answer the question: "to what extent has Collingwood revolutionised logic?", as he himself had claimed; (4) and finally, we will outline the components of the logic of questions and answers and its four principles, as identified by some of his commentators. Having achieved the above objectives, we will proceed to formulate a number of hermeneutical implications derived from this thesis.

As far as the methodology of our approach is concerned, we will examine the writings of the British philosopher as well as those of his commentators, using primarily the logic of questions and answers. In this way, we will attempt both a hermeneutical analysis of these texts and a phenomenological description of their underlying concepts and their actual application thereof.

1. Pretext and context

Romanian philosopher Alexandru Surdu, in an essay⁴ on the Aristotelian texts⁵, suggests that words express thoughts more or less accurately. There are cases where one word expresses several thoughts, or where one thought is expressed through several words. Therefore, the shortcomings of ordinary interpretation have led to "the emergence of a logical interpretation of thought [expressed] through words, hence of a hermeneutic logic"⁶. Of course, the logic that developed after Aristotle was not to the same extent as hermeneutical as it was during his time. By logic here we mean in particular the logic that deals with the forms of thought, or the mathematical logic that is applied mainly in the exact sciences.

Starting with Wilhelm Dilthey⁷, a philosophical text or a text belonging to the so-called sciences of the spirit – *die Geisteswissenschaften* – becomes "in itself a spiritual creation which, once constituted, can acquire meanings independent of any predetermined intentionality"⁸. As a consequence, from now on, time is introduced into the interpretation, since the analysis of such texts is done from a historical perspective. Therefore, in order to correctly assess a text, we must necessarily take into account the historical context in which it appeared. As we shall see, this is also the thesis of the British philosopher Robin George Collingwood. In this sense,

⁴ Alexandru Surdu, *Specificul logicii hermeneutice [The specificity of hermeneutic logic]*, In *Cercetări filosofico-psiologice [Philosophical-psychological research]*, Year III, No. 2, pp. 9-12, București, 2011, p. 1.

⁵ Aristotle, *Categorii; Despre interpretare [Categories; On interpretation]*, translation, foreword, notes and commentaries by Constantin Noica, București, Humanitas, 2005.

⁶ Alexandru Surdu, *Op. cit.*, p. 1

⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences: Selected Works*, edited, with an introduction, by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁸ Alexandru Surdu, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

neither the author nor the reader of a text are absolute. The author may be interpreted differently from what they originally intended. And the interpreter may be entirely different from the one the author had in mind when they wrote the text.⁹ Within hermeneutic logic, the truth value manifests nuances depending on the context. Unlike the logic used by science or logic in general, wherein it is assumed that a statement corresponds to a state of fact and thus the existence of the state of fact precedes the statement, in hermeneutic logic this is not always the case. For example, in the case of ethical, legal or political statements, the state of fact conforms to the statement. The Kantian categorical imperative does not precede any state of affairs, although it should be the other way round, the state of affairs should have preceded it.

In addition to the above, there are numerous reasons for divergent interpretations of some texts. One of these is language, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. These distinctions are intended to clarify what Robin George Collingwood means when talking about logic. He did not have in mind the modern meaning of logic. To better grasp his understanding of logic, we must refer to the Aristotelian treatise mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, we may add here that Collingwood's hermeneutic logic is not specifically concerned with the understanding of utterance, as was Aristotle's. The British philosopher's logic is, in a sense, another stage in the philosophical method. This does not mean that Collingwood's logic can only be applied to philosophical texts. It is possible, and, in fact, even strongly encouraged, for this logic to be applied to various other specialised fields. Thus the logic of interpreting philosophical texts becomes, in Collingwood's philosophy, the fundamental element of any hermeneutical application.

2. The shortcomings of propositional logic

Starting from Aristotle's own conception of logic – namely that logic is necessarily a hermeneutic logic – by tracing what came in the posterity of the ancient Greek philosopher, it can be seen that, by the end of the 19th century, logic was no longer even remotely hermeneutic. Logic had by now become the instrument of the mathematical sciences, more so than at any other time since Aristotle. As an example along these lines, if, out of curiosity, we open an edition of Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, we notice that it is intended to be more of a philosophical text rather than a physics or mathematics one. It was only in later centuries that these statements were rewritten in the newly emerging logical language. To consult some of the fundamental notions of Newtonian physics today, a more or less interested reader is greeted by a cumbersome and incomprehensible language. The same applies to modern mathematics. One cannot master a field of mathematics without a good understanding of logic, and in particular of propositional logic.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3

This wide applicability of logic in modern technology has imposed “the prestige of symbolic language as the language of accuracy”¹⁰. If we look at this logic from a hermeneutical perspective, we see that such a language is of no interest because the symbols in question have no determinate meaning. According to some, a logical-mathematical calculation is not a text.¹¹ Such a calculation is largely an algorithm, and therefore its interpretation becomes purely the interpreter's creation. If, for example, we now propose an equation, of whatever type, to be solved, the solution requires the knowledge of certain mathematical rules and their correct application. We cannot foresee the result of said equation from the start, but as we go through the steps of the solution, we get closer to it. Accordingly, such an exercise is our own interpretation. In this sense, the interpreter cannot possibly have a better understanding of the author, as Dilthey demanded. Furthermore, the author himself may not be able to “interpret” what he is proposing. Even if a logical-mathematical calculation is not a text, it can still be subject to a degree of interpretation. We should not forget the applications of mathematics in music, or, in other words, the fact that music “obeys” certain mathematical laws.

Things are similar in propositional logic. If we have before us a number of logical schemata, in following them we are simply giving them our own interpretation. Therefore, although such things are not excluded from the scope of hermeneutics, they cannot in themselves constitute its object. An important observation must be made here: even if propositional logic is no longer hermeneutic, it is still useful for hermeneutics, but in other aspects than those required by logicians. When we are dealing with a text, it is necessary that the text be logically and, of course, grammatically correct. This does not contradict the point previously stated. A text without the rigour of a few rules is utterly meaningless, and it follows that the interpreter will have nothing to interpret. If we had to examine a text by Plato in which the sentences were jumbled up, no matter how good an exegete we were, the text would not “make sense”. Of course, there are cases where a logically correct text does not “make sense” because the exegete is missing a number of fundamental notions in the field.

In short, what Robin George Collingwood observed was that when we are dealing with a text, we cannot confine our interpretation of it to the formal stage of sentences, that is, to syllogisms. Surely there is more to be found in such a text. Also, at the syllogistic level of a text, time is excluded, which means that historicity is annulled. Logically speaking, a Platonic text is the same as it was two thousand three hundred years ago, or at least approximately, for linguistic reasons and because of the development of propositional logic. Therefore, when we try to delve into the depths of this Platonic text, we are stepping beyond the logical framework, or rather the logical timeline, if we could call it that. In this case we say that we relate

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 3

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 3

to the text historically, that is, we relate to it from the direction of the present to the past. We are referring here to the thesis of the reactualization of the past in the present.¹²

Consequently, propositional logic suffers from a “hermeneutical shortcoming”. For these reasons, Collingwood, inspired by Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* and René Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*, writes that “the principle that a body of knowledge consists not of 'propositions', 'statements', 'judgements', or whatever name logicians use in order to designate assertive acts of thought (or what in those acts is asserted: for 'knowledge' means both the activity of knowing and what is known), but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer; and that a logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic”¹³. So we see that asking questions is just as important as answering them. However, propositional logic disregards the questions that the proposition is answering. In the example of the equation given above, it is of no interest to anyone solving it whether it actually answers one question or several. In fact, the question as such is not even considered. Today nobody is interested in what questions Leibniz or Newton answered when they invented differential and integral calculus. It is simply taken as a method of working. What Collingwood calls *questioning activity* therefore represents only one half of an act which, as a whole, constitutes knowledge. The other half being completed by the answers to the questions posed.¹⁴

3. Collingwood – a revolutionary of logic?

Collingwood first spoke of a logic of questions and answers in 1917 in a book he titled *Truth and Contradiction*. Regrettably, for various reasons it was never published and the manuscript appears to have been destroyed. In his *Autobiography*, Collingwood writes that he offered a draft to a publisher but it was rejected on the grounds that the times were unsuitable for such a book. And it was probably not very well written either, for, as the British philosopher adds: “Not only were the times unpropitious, but I was still a beginner in the art of writing books”¹⁵.

Nonetheless, according to some exegetes¹⁶ of his work, the second chapter of the book did survive. This chapter has been the subject of much debate. Alan Do-

¹² Adrian Hagi, Constantin C. Lupașcu, Sergiu Bortoș. *Robin George Collingwood on Understanding the Historical Past*, In *Hermeneia*, No. 29, 2022, pp. 83-92.

¹³ R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, pp. 30-31.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹⁶ James Connelly, *Metaphysics and Method: A Necessary Unity in the Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*, In *Storia, antropologia e scienze del linguaggio*, Anno V, fascicolo 1-2, Bulzoni Editore, Roma, p. 103.

nagan¹⁷ argues that the theory of questions and answers would mark the whole of Collingwood's work, from its beginning to its end. This is certainly possible, especially as the British philosopher claims in his autobiography that he arrived at the assumptions of this theory a year after the outbreak of the war, and at that time he was barely at the beginning of his career. Following this path, it has been argued that the development of this logic is continued in a 1919 lecture and later in the work *Speculum Mentis*, where the British philosopher would have advanced the idea of a question-answer complex, but in a different context from the one we are interested in now. Rex Martin argues that we should give credence to the theory explicitly set out in the *Autobiography*, which would provide a much better grounding than the mere speculations claimed by others.¹⁸

Our hypothesis is that Collingwood most likely had some ideas about this theory from his youth. Moreover, in his *Autobiography* again he mentions that “during my spare time in 1917, I wrote out at considerable length, with a great many applications and illustrations [...]”¹⁹. The reason why he did not express any of them directly in the works written and published afterwards can be attributed to his academic status. At the time when he first came up with these ideas he was still a young philosopher struggling to do his best for his students. By 1938, when he ultimately published his *Autobiography*, in which the logic of questions and answers is authoritatively formulated, Collingwood was already established at Oxford. He was recognised as an eminent figure in the fields of philosophy, history and archaeology. Therefore, commentators of this period related to the British philosopher's hypotheses differently than they would have done twenty years prior. Leaving these matters aside, it is interesting to see how Collingwood claims to have come to realise the possibilities of this theory and, more importantly, its hermeneutical relevance. In the fifth chapter of his *Autobiography*, titled *Question and Answer*, he writes that he became obsessed with a historical monument – the Albert Memorial – because it seemed to him that “everything about it was visibly misshapen, corrupt, crawling, verminous”.²⁰ He wondered what Sir George Gilbert Scott, the architect, had in mind when he designed “a thing so obviously, so incontrovertibly, so indefensibly bad”²¹. The key question here was whether there was any connection between what Scott did and what he wanted to do. For often we may wish to do something in a certain way, but when we actually proceed with the work, it is nothing like what we had in mind before.

¹⁷ R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*. Revised edition, with an introduction and additional material edited by Rex Martin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. XCIV.

¹⁸ Rex Martin, *Collingwood's Logic of Question and Answer, its Relation to Absolute Presuppositions: A Brief History*, In *Collingwood Studies*, Vol. V, 1998, p. 128.

¹⁹ R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 42.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

In order to answer this problem, Collingwood hypothesized that we cannot know what a person is thinking just by studying his verbal or written statements. To find out what someone is thinking we have to reconstruct the question that is in their mind and to which they respond through what they say or do. To put it more simply, we can say that to understand the thoughts expressed by someone in a written or spoken sentence, we must have in mind the question he answers by this sentence, by reconstructing it. If we do not do so, we run the risk of seeing his words and deeds as “ugly and distorted”. For example, someone may say something that would seem meaningless to us in a given situation. But for the person saying them, the words are not so meaningless, because they are the answer to a question that is troubling them. We can hear someone say: “Such a statement may lead us to think of the multitude of irrational numbers or the multitude of rational numbers or to something entirely different”, but only if we try to reconstruct the question to which this statement was given as an answer can we understand what it is about. The question, relevant in this context, would be: “what is the size of the diagonal of a square of the side of 1?”. This is how Collingwood was thinking about the Albert Memorial. Of course, as we shall see, this way of thinking can immediately be applied to the field of textual interpretation.

This discovery led the British philosopher to talk about “a new logic”: the Logic of Question and Answer. In his autobiography, he notes that: “In logic I am a revolutionary; and like other revolutionaries I can thank God for the reactionaries. They clarify the issue”²². And in the next section we will clarify this logic in order to better understand and apply it in the interpretation of texts.

4. The logic of questions and answers

A century after the events recounted above, Collingwood theorises the logic of questions and answers as a reaction against non-historical thinking, namely against propositional logic, which, as we have pointed out earlier, does not appeal to temporality. This logic was, at the time the *Autobiography* was written, in operation in all fields of science. Moreover, it was also being hotly debated by philosophers. This, as far as we can see, seems to have prompted Collingwood to formulate the theory we are discussing now in response to what the latter were arguing.

The British philosopher, taking as his starting point his experience in the practice of archaeology and what he called *questioning activity*, posits a logic of questions and answers within which the truth and meaning of a sentence are dependent on the questions to which the sentence is an answer to.²³ It is worth noting that, in these circumstances, Collingwood understands by “proposition” what the

²² *Ibidem*, p. 52.

²³ Dana Țabrea, *Dezvoltarea metafizicii ca hermeneutică. Robin George Collingwood. O filosofie practică [The development of metaphysics as hermeneutics. Robin George Collingwood. A practical philosophy]*, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2013, p. 173.

realist logicians understood by “judgement” or what Cook Wilson understood by “statement”. Moreover, for the Oxfordian, the word “proposition” always denotes a logical entity, not a linguistic one.²⁴

The theory of questions and answers rests on a few simple principles. Some of which are taken from general logic and others that have been formulated by some of Collingwood's commentators. Dana Țabrea²⁵ suggests discussing three of these principles: the principle of correlativity, the principle of contradiction, and the propositional principle. To these we can add some remarks on the notion of truth and the role of the question, in other words the question-answer complex. In what follows, we will draw on the descriptions of these principles from the work cited, explain what they consist of, and where appropriate, give examples.

4.1. *The principle of correlativity*

As we have discussed above, in order to understand someone's words it is necessary to know the questions to which they are given as answers. Therefore, to understand what X is writing or saying, we need to find a way of reconstructing the question Q in X's mind. Most of the time X will assume that the question Q is also present in our minds. Of course, this is false in almost all cases. Moreover, if this were not false, all the hermeneutical significance of this theory we are addressing would be nullified. We would, therefore, be spared all this philosophical labour of finding a hermeneutical logic generally applicable to texts. In these circumstances, an answer A belongs to a question Q. However, as Collingwood writes, things also work the other way round. The same question Q belongs, at the same time, to an answer A. On the basis of this principle, Collingwood rediscusses two problems: that of the meaning and that of the truth of a sentence. A sentence is not knowledge by itself, but only together with the question it answers. As such, a sentence is a dynamic unit that involves the correlation between a question and an answer.²⁶ It follows that this question-answer correlation has hermeneutic implications, since understanding the sentence presupposes finding its corresponding question.²⁷

4.2. *The principle of contradiction*

It is time to see now what happens when we apply the principle of correlativity between questions and answers to the idea of contradiction. As we know, general logic holds that two propositions can contradict each other simply by virtue of the fact that they are propositions, contradictory to each other. By examining them as mere propositions, a logician can find out whether they contradict each other or not. Collingwood disagreed with this. Since we can only tell what the meaning of a

²⁴ R. G. Collingwood, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

²⁵ Dana Țabrea, *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

sentence is when we know the question to which it is intended to as an answer, it follows that if we somehow fail to arrive at its question, or arrive at it the wrong way, we are certainly also missing the meaning of the sentence.²⁸

Therefore, in the British philosopher's view, two sentences can only contradict each other if they represent answers to the same question.²⁹ Furthermore, Collingwood writes the following: "Meaning, agreement and contradiction, truth and falsehood, none of these belonged to propositions in their own right, [to] propositions by themselves [...]"³⁰. In his logic of questions and answers, they all belong to their respective sentences only in their capacity as answers to the corresponding questions. Which means that the principle of correlativity applies in this case as well. In conclusion, the contradiction between two sentences is established at the level of meaning and not at the formal level, as in propositional logic. The meaning, in this case, is itself determined by the correlation between questions and answers.

4.3. *Establishing the truth value*

Determining the value of truth is the next principle that Collingwood's commentators identify. For him, "right" never means "true", "definitive", from which no further steps can be taken. The "right" answer to a question allows us to move forward in the sequence of questions and answers.³¹ According to his theory, a sentence is "true" only if it satisfies the following: (1) the sentence belongs to a complex of questions and answers that is, as a whole, "true" in the proper sense of the word; (2) the sentence is an answer to a particular question within that complex; (3) the question is what we commonly call a rational or intelligent question – "silly", or ill-formulated questions are excluded; (4) the sentence is the "correct" answer to that question.³²

We can see that a proposition is not true in itself, but its truth is conditioned by its ability to answer a question. Truth therefore appears in a context, on which it depends and from which it cannot be detached. For these reasons, Collingwood denies all the definitions and criteria formulated up to that point, namely: the truth-correspondence, truth-coherence and truth-utility theories.³³ Another consequence is that truth is not established on logical criteria. Truth is not a logical operation, but a hermeneutical one, for we arrive at it only because we know the question to which that sentence answers, and reconstructing that question forces us to think historically and relate to it hermeneutically. Thus, for the British philosopher,

²⁸ R. G. Collingwood, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 38.

³³ Dana Țabrea, *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

if a philosophical doctrine D is given, which is criticized as self-contradictory because it is divided into two parts E and F, where E is in contradiction to F, the criticism is valid only if the one who stated it as such has correctly reconstructed the questions to which E and F were given as answers.³⁴

4.4. *The question-answer complex*

It is necessary at this stage of our exposition to introduce a few observations on the question-answer complex. From the outset, we have noted the interest that Collingwood attaches to the question, and the privileged place it occupies in his theory. We have also seen what truth consists of and how, through it, the propositional principle of traditional logic is negated. Briefly summarizing, if we have a proposition we cannot say anything about it until we have reconstructed in our minds the questions it answers. All this is clear, however how do we reconstruct this question? Is there a starting point, a first step to be taken in this search for it? For without identifying this question, our efforts so far are futile and Collingwood's theory meaningless.

Dana Țabrea remarks that Collingwood does not neglect the role of the question for two important reasons. The first of these would be that "any theory that asks the question of meaning and links meaning to the concept of truth must explain how questions (interrogative sentences), having no truth value, nevertheless seem to have meaning"³⁵. This observation answers our query above. Thus, when we have to find the question Q starting from the proposition A, taken as the answer to Q, we rely on what the British philosopher called *presuppositions*.³⁶ It is therefore upon these presuppositions that a question is based, and which make it meaningful. Without these presuppositions as principles, we cannot identify the question Q, which is related to the answer A, that is to say any proposition, with any other question. Without these presuppositions, one proposition could correspond to several questions. As such, these presuppositions are what make Q and A related. The second reason why Collingwood does not neglect the role of the question is that, as we have pointed out, he rejects ordinary logic. Ordinary logic holds that to think is to assert truth or falsehood, or to affirm or deny the various characteristics of an object.³⁷

By giving the question such a significant role in this question-answer complex, Collingwood includes the act of asking [a question] among the activities of

³⁴ R. G. Collingwood, *Op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

³⁵ Dana Țabrea, *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

³⁶ Adrian Hagi, Constantin C. Lupașcu, Sergiu Bortos, *Robin George Collingwood on metaphysics as understanding the world*, In *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, Issue 1, Vol. 41, March 2023, pp. 404-411.

³⁷ Dana Țabrea, *Op. cit.*, pp. 177-178.

thinking.³⁸ In this sense, thinking consists of three types of activities: the act of asking, the act of supposing, and the act of stating. Logic is therefore the science of thinking that employs these three types of activities. It studies thinking on the basis of the evidence that resides in language. For the British philosopher, therefore, the logician's activity is to read this language, and in reading it, the logician behaves more like a historian-hermeneut than a logician in the ordinary sense of the word. It follows from this that this science of thought deals with three objects: propositions, questions and presuppositions. It is therefore clear that Collingwood's logic is closer to hermeneutics than to ordinary logic.³⁹ However, even though in his *Autobiography* the philosopher writes that he wanted to replace propositional logic with what he called the logic of questions and answers⁴⁰, this logic of his does not exclude the former. Things are precisely the other way round, the logic of questions and answers incorporates propositional logic.

5. Conclusions and hermeneutic implications

Robin George Collingwood proposed, through the logic of questions and answers, a methodology⁴¹ to facilitate the understanding of a text. Although he aimed to replace propositional logic, it must be recognized that this did not happen. Moreover, the logic of questions and answers complements propositional logic, giving it a hermeneutic character. It follows, therefore, that the logic of questions and answers is related to hermeneutics, seen as a field of philosophy in its own right, and to the historical method⁴², and thus to some extent to historical thinking.

These are confirmed by the philosopher, who wrote in *An Essay on Metaphysics* about his conviction that: "The P [proposition] and the Q [question] are strictly correlative. A person who does not know what Q a given P is the answer to does not understand it. A person who thinks a given P is the A [answer] to a Q which it is not the answer to misunderstands it"⁴³. Therefore, the problem or question that a text answers is addressed by starting from a question of a historical nature: "what question did so-and-so intend to answer with this proposition?" In order to solve this problem, that is to say, to discover the author's intention at the time the text was written, it is necessary to apply the historical method.⁴⁴

³⁸ R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, revised edition, with an introduction and additional material edited by Rex Martin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 422.

³⁹ Dana Țabrea, *Op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁴⁰ R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 37.

⁴¹ Sergiu Bălan, *Între istorie și filosofie. Sistemul lui R. G. Collingwood [Between history and philosophy. The system of R. G. Collingwood]*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2009, p. 171.

⁴² Adrian Hagi, Constantin C. Lupașcu, Sergiu Bortoș. *Robin George Collingwood on Understanding the Historical Past*, In *Hermeneia*, No. 29, 2022, pp. 83-92.

⁴³ R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, revised edition, with an introduction and additional material edited by Rex Martin, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 425.

⁴⁴ Dana Țabrea, *Op. cit.*, p. 180.

An example, we believe, would shed some light at this point. Every philosopher is always compelled to solve the problems of the age in which he lives. Therefore, these problems are known to all his possible readers in that period. For these reasons, the philosopher, when writing his text, no longer explicitly formulates the question or questions to which the text answers, but assumes them to be already present in the minds of his readers. A problem of comprehension arises when that text is then read by someone many years later, when the question to which the text was responding has been lost. For example, a philosopher dealing with the problems of political philosophy in the third decade of the 21st century might be asked to provide an answer to the refugee crisis in Ukraine. This problem is known to almost everyone at the time because it has been intensely publicized. Thus, the philosopher offers his solution. Whether or not the solution is useful to the problem, it belongs, we can say, to history. Decades later, a curious scholar discovers this text. Obviously, he reads it, studies it, re-reads it, but the chances are very high that he will not grasp the meaning of that text, because at that time – in which the reader finds himself – the problems of political philosophy will be different. The problems of the world will be different. How, then, should that reader proceed? Collingwood answers this question as well.

The reader, in order to understand a text, must resort to the historical reconstruction of the question, which is the problem that the text once answered. The text left to us in writing is only a part of the question-answer complex, and this complex must be seen as a process of our mind, as an activity of thought. Dana Țabrea writes about this complex that it is “a dynamic structure of our thinking, in which any statement appears as an answer to a question, and the question is based on a presupposition”⁴⁵. For these reasons, the logic of questions and answers is, in Robin George Collingwood's thought, the foundation of the theory of presuppositions, as well as the theory of history as re-actualization of past thinking (or re-thinking of past issues). As we can see, from a hermeneutic point of view, the logic of questions and answers plays a double role: (1) it helps us to understand a text, a doctrine, and on the other hand it is used to find the meaning of a sentence; (2) it takes philosophy out of its anhistorical decline, considering that there are no eternal questions in this field.

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⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 181

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