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All thought exists for the sake of action

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Propositions

belonging to the PhD dissertation

‘All Thought Exists for the Sake of Action’
The Historical and Philosophical Relations Between
R.G. Collingwood and Classical Pragmatism

by

Ymko Braaksma

1. The pragmatism of Schiller, Dewey and James should first and foremost be seen as a philosophy of mind (rather than e.g. a theory of truth).
2. This philosophy of mind has it that the aim of thought is to help the human organism live, rather than having an independent goal of its own.
3. Hence, according to these three pragmatists, there can be no dualism between thinking and acting, or thought and will.
4. The various pragmatist theories of truth are better understood when taking the pragmatist philosophy of mind into account.
5. James’ theory of truth relies on psychological feeling.
6. Schiller’s theory of truth relies on biological/psychological desire.
7. In *Speculum Mentis*, Collingwood targets Schiller’s pragmatism.
8. There, Collingwood regards Schiller’s pragmatism as incoherent, because it relies on the dualism between thought and will that it set out to refute in the first place.
9. The same line of reasoning can be applied to James’s pragmatism, which relies on a dualism between thought and feeling.
10. In his mature work – *An Essay on Philosophical Method* and beyond – Collingwood develops a cosmology and philosophy of mind that takes him closer to the pragmatisms of Schiller and James.
11. Nevertheless, his (implicit) arguments against Schiller and James from *Speculum Mentis* still apply.
12. From Collingwood’s perspective, Dewey’s pragmatism fares better than the positions of Schiller and James.
13. But Dewey’s moral philosophy is a form of utilitarianism, while utilitarian thinking should be superseded by practical reasoning in terms of right and ultimately duty, Collingwood holds.
14. And Dewey thinks the task of history is to discover how generalities have played out in actual events, while for Collingwood the historical process is in each of its phases unique, so that generalities do not apply to it.
15. For Collingwood, a thorough understanding of history is needed for acting in accordance with duty.

16. Hence, from Collingwood's perspective, Dewey's pragmatism must be rejected as well.
17. Collingwood thinks that his philosophy does not rely on a dualism between thought and will, and that it explains how acting in accordance with duty - the highest form of action - is possible.
18. Hence, he would have regarded himself as more of a pragmatist than the classical pragmatists discussed (Schiller, Dewey and James) themselves.