

# Principles of Interpretation - (Observation by Collingwood)

Post by "Cassius" of February 28, 2018 at 1:42 PM

An observation that describes why we should be sure we understand what questions and challenges Plato, Aristotle, and others had raised about pleasure prior to Epicurus: "... [T]he besetting vice of philosophy is to abstract propositions away from the context of the practical problems and questions that gave rise to them. Until we know the practical context of problems and questions to which a proposition is supposed to be an answer, we do not know what it means. ... Applying this doctrine to the interpretation of historical texts, Collingwood insists that you cannot know what a philosopher meant by a doctrine until you know the question to which the doctrine was intended as an answer and how that question arose."

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## R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943)

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by Simon Blackburn

Collingwood was the greatest British philosopher of history of the twentieth century. His experience as a practising historian of Roman Britain led him to believe that the besetting vice of philosophy is to abstract propositions away from the context of the practical problems and questions that gave rise to them. Until we know the practical context of problems and questions to which a proposition is supposed to be an answer, we do not know what it means. In this respect his concern with the living

Applying this doctrine to the interpretation of historical texts, Collingwood insists that you cannot know what a philosopher meant by a doctrine until you know the question to which the doctrine was intended as an answer and how that question arose. Immediately it follows that you cannot tell whether propositions contradict each other unless you know that they are answers to the

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