



Research Article

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A Brief Evaluation of Collingwood's Logic of Question and Answer

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Abstract

Robin George Collingwood, a renowned historian and philosopher, launched a vigorous critique of traditional epistemology and the realism school of thought. In the process of his criticism, he proposed a unique perspective on question-answer logic. He emphasized the importance of questions in scientific research and advocated for the examination and analysis of philosophical questions within a specific historical context. Collingwood introduced the concept of a question-and-answer complex, which consists of a question and an answer, these two have a correlation. Only under the premise of a specific given question can the truth value of a proposition be determined, and only then can two propositions have the potential for mutual contradiction. The author believes that Collingwood's logic of question and answer should be further developed into a comprehensive and rigorous new logic by incorporating modern scientific and technological advancements. The possible future direction of question-answer logic is to integrate it with science and technology, utilizing new technologies to explore question-answer logic models and propose new principles and methods.

Keywords: Collingwood, Logic of Question and Answer, Question-and-Answer Complex

Introduction

Robin George Collingwood is a renowned historian, thinker, and philosopher who has made significant contributions in the field of philosophy of questions. He has developed a comprehensive framework of thinking. Collingwood's scholarly works primarily focus on the field of history. Existing research literature mainly examines and expands on Collingwood's thoughts in the domain of history, with most discussions centered around his "methods of historical research." However, the study of Collingwood's logic of question and answer has been somewhat neglected. The research on Collingwood's historical methodology often centers around the phrase "all history is the history of thought [1]," while overlooking his logic of question and answer [2]. The existing literature, both domestic and foreign, has not clearly delineated the philosophical

logic of question and answer. Moreover, the potential future research directions in this area have not been explicitly elucidated. Zuocheng Zhang analyzed collingwood's historical theory and traced the development of his ideas, exploring how he transitioned from a realist to an idealist. Qingping Li outlined the perplexities of realism and briefly summarized the question-answer philosophical ideas presented in the book "The Idea of History." Wei Yu employed a situational analysis method to briefly outline "Question-Answer Logic in Situations," using this approach to provide an overview of the entire thought system. Despite these contributions, the analyses in both domestic and foreign literature have not been thorough, and there are some shortcomings. This article aims to explore Collingwood's question-answer logic and its potential development

directions, offering specific guidance to promote the advancement of humanities and social sciences.

The Proposal of Collingwood's Logic of Question and Answer

In the early 20th century, the "problem of reality" sparked extensive discussions in the academic community, giving rise to two factions: The Grellingian school and the Realism School. The Green School was inclined towards subjective idealism [3], with its representative figure, Francis Herbert Bradley, asserting that reality is spiritual [3]. According to the Green School, reality is a holistic entity that encompasses various sensory experiences. They advocated the idea that "Existence is being perceived." On the other hand, the Realism School, led by George Edward Moore, argued that the world is composed of numerous concepts, and propositions represent the relationships between these concepts. A true proposition, for George Edward Moore, corresponds to reality [4]. George Edward Moore also contended that the perceptibility of an object cannot serve as sufficient evidence for its existence. In other words, the mere fact that something can be perceived is not a prerequisite for its existence. Even if something is not perceived, it can still exist independently. Collingwood criticized the Realism School for distorting philosophy into a meaningless activity and turning it into a self-deceptive behavior [6]. He believed that this misinterpretation was based on "human folly" [7]. In this context, Collingwood developed his own concept of question-answer logic. In his influential work, "The Idea of History," he emphasized the unshakable position of "questions" in historical research and presented a series of viewpoints regarding the significance of "questions."

Collingwood's central idea is that "philosophy is reflective [6]." Philosophy is not some metaphysical or elusive entity, but rather it focuses on both the human subject and the philosophical thoughts of the human subject, delving deep into their relationship. These two aspects are not mutually exclusive but are closely connected and intertwined. The process of human cognition is essentially a process of posing and resolving questions [3]. These two processes alternate and propel the formation of human knowledge. "Questioning" is indispensable in the process of human cognition [8]. It is also a scientific activity. Many philosophers focus primarily on answers, relentlessly seeking solutions to questions while neglecting the logic of the questions. This approach is erroneous [8]. René Descartes attempted to critique traditional logic of question and answer [1], stating, "I will never accept anything as true if it has not been clearly and distinctly perceived [9]." The formation of Collingwood's perspective on question-answer logic relies on archaeological experience. Collingwood asserts that "only by clarifying specific questions can valuable materials be discovered [1]." He also states that questions inherently involve presuppositions. Here, presuppositions do not refer to providing or implying answers to the questions in advance, but rather presuppose the motivations and actions behind posing the question.

Collingwood's core viewpoint is that there is a clear correlation between posing a question and its corresponding answer.

Questions and answers cannot be separated, the two together form a question-and-answer complex. Any proposition should be examined within the context of a specific question, as it is only through this approach that the proposition can be fundamentally understood. Furthermore, individual propositions A and B cannot be in a contradictory relationship because it is impossible to determine the truth or falsity of an isolated proposition.

- I. Proposition A: The collar of the school uniform is red.
- II. Proposition B: The collar of the school uniform is green.
- III. Question C: What is the color of the collar of the school uniform?

In the given case, Collingwood states that propositions A and B cannot independently determine the truth or falsity of the propositions themselves. A proposition can only be evaluated in terms of its truth or falsity within the context of a specific question. Without a clear understanding of what the question is, propositions A and B are not contradictory propositions. Only when a specific question, such as "What is the color of the collar of the school uniform?" is given, and it is known that the actual color of the collar is red, can proposition A be considered true and proposition B false. Only with the premise of a specific question can the possibility of contradiction between two propositions arise; otherwise, one cannot infer their contradiction. Collingwood explicitly points out that the meaningfulness of a proposition is entirely dependent on the corresponding question. Only when a specific question is given, along with a defined context and object, does the proposition acquire meaning [6]. For the speaker, understanding the customer's specific question is essential to continue the conversation and avoid miscommunication. For example:

- I. Question D: Is the failure of my brake pads the direct cause of the accident involving my car?
- II. Proposition E: Examination of the accident vehicle revealed clear signs of excessive wear on the brake pads one month ago, with no abnormalities detected elsewhere.
- III. Proposition F: The bumper of this car is damaged.

In this context, it can be seen that proposition E directly answers question D and is a meaningful proposition. On the other hand, proposition F is irrelevant to the question. Without the answers and discourse aligned with the question, the discussion becomes weak and ineffective. "Questions" play a decisive role in the entire philosophical exploration and research process. Many scholars have also emphasized the importance of "questions." There is a close logical relationship between questions and answers [8]. Without delving into questions, philosophers of science cannot present their theories clearly [10]. Scientists consider the process of scientific research as a development from one question to another [11]. "Science is fundamentally a problem-solving activity [12]," and the formation of scientific theories is a process of problem-solving. In the process of forming scientific theories, efforts are made to eliminate conflicts between various theories and strive for harmony, completing a problem-solving activity [13].

The Future Direction of Collingwood's Logic of Question and Answer

Collingwood clearly pointed out that the activity of question-answer logic consists of two parts: the process of posing a question and the process of solving it. Only when these two aspects are combined does the complete question-answer logic emerge. The "true" and "false" of the question-and-answer complex are considered as a whole. The whole includes both the question and the answer. Furthermore, the question-and-answer complex is a response to specific questions. In the process of human cognition, merely posing a question does not constitute an activity of understanding a specific entity [6]. It is only through the process of posing and resolving questions that exploration and comprehension of new phenomena are achieved. When a question is posed, it, in a sense, presupposes its corresponding answer [3].

In Collingwood's question-answer logic, questions are open-ended. Once a question is posed, with each step of exploration and research conducted by scientists, new evidence and experimental results may emerge. Archaeological research by a historian cannot be a fleeting endeavor. Once a question is formulated, it remains open. As time evolves, research outcomes become uncontrollable and unpredictable. Solving a question signifies advancing scientific progress, as the process of scientific research essentially entails resolving historical problems [11]. For philosophers, the history of philosophy is not a closed history but one characterized by openness and inclusiveness. It continuously absorbs new historical perspectives, and attempting to construct a closed question is meaningless [3]. Philosophy is not about discovering problems for the sake of discovering problems; rather, it involves problem-solving, revising or restating questions, a question is a clear and explainable query, and making modifications and additions to the answers. This constitutes the normal research process. When a question is answered or resolved, it does not mean the question disappears; instead, it becomes part of history, becoming a question that has been answered.

In Collingwood's question-answer logic, questions possess a historical nature. The posing of any question should be contextualized within the specific historical era, cultural customs, and technological developments of that time. Questions are closely related to their era, and the corresponding answers to a question can undergo significant changes with the passage of time. Collingwood criticizes the realist school of thought. He argues that the realist school merely engages in mechanical analysis and discussion of propositions without considering the historical nature inherent in every proposition. Solely analyzing semantics can hinder philosophers from fully understanding a proposition and may even lead to misinterpretation, misunderstandings, or fabricating the thoughts of others. This does not contribute to the development of philosophy of technology.

According to Collingwood's question-answer logic, any theory or philosophical idea put forth by a philosopher essentially represents their understanding, response, and explanation of a particular question, the entire proposition is the answer to that

question. If present-day researchers are unaware of the question that a proposition corresponds to, they cannot fundamentally comprehend the philosopher's ideas. Collingwood attributes a new meaning to metaphysics, stating that "in regard to the subject, metaphysics is about a certain class of historical facts, namely absolute presuppositions [3]." Metaphysics, in its essence, is a specific historical question [7]. It tends to approach research from a historical perspective, emphasizing the need to understand actual propositions within their historical context. Only by doing so can one grasp the true essence of a proposition and comprehend a certain ideology, behavior, or theory. Therefore, metaphysics places great importance on studying the historical background. Collingwood's viewpoint that "any two propositions cannot independently form a contradiction; it is only by discussing them within the same question that they can potentially contradict each other" challenges traditional logic. In traditional logic, propositions A and B are considered contradictory without the need for them to be discussed within the context of the same question. Collingwood introduces the element of questioning into logical reasoning, which is unprecedented. If the basic principles of logic are applied to the element of questioning, it could potentially give rise to a new logic. This poses a significant challenge to traditional logic. Furthermore, Collingwood's proposition that "all history is the history of thought" has greatly inspired subsequent scholars [1]. Philosophical research is historical, and the same applies to research in other disciplines. History forms the foundation of scientific research, and studying without considering historical factors introduces history into logical research. Traditional static logic, based on this perspective, needs to develop into a dynamic logic. This presents another significant challenge to traditional logic.

Collingwood believes that philosophy fundamentally involves the activity of questioning. Its core objective is to explore the question itself, and the search for answers is not the ultimate goal but rather a small process within philosophical research. He argues that philosophers should focus more on the quality of the questions posed. A high-quality, good question often guides scientific researchers in discovering truth, inspiring human thought, and can even be more effective in learning and generating new ideas. Collingwood also emphasizes the creativity and inspirational nature of questions. Questions are the source of knowledge and truth, driving the progress and development of human thinking. Based on this, Collingwood introduces the concept of "philosophical spirit," emphasizing the importance of maintaining a skeptical and critical attitude. Philosophers should possess the ability to question various theories, dare to ask questions in the face of authoritative theories, and test existing theories by posing questions, thereby promoting the advancement of knowledge. Collingwood rigorously defines question-answer logic, stating that the question and its corresponding answer form a whole, and they have a strong correlation. While they have distinct differences, they are not mutually contradictory. Within this entity, questions and answers each occupy different positions and are clearly defined. Each "question" needs to be explicitly stated; in practical research, the question needs to be presented. Without stating the question, the proposition's formulation lacks practical significance.

While Collingwood provided critiques of the realism school and strongly opposed subjective idealism, rejecting extravagant and impractical philosophy, his exposition on the inability of any two propositions to form a contradictory relationship lacks further elaboration. Collingwood introduced several concepts in the development of question-answer logic, which are inspiring. The future direction of question-answer logic is likely to integrate with modern advanced technologies. For example, studying and analyzing the logic between questions and answers in recent ChatGPT question-answering models, understanding how the thought process of robots unfolds, how they efficiently search for suitable answers given specific questions, and how there should be a high degree of correlation and coherence between questions and answers. The semantic analysis, logical reasoning, and process of judgment and inference in question-answer logic are all areas that require further exploration and study.

Conclusion

Collingwood pointed out that questions and answers cannot be separated; together, they form a complex entity with four characteristics:

- I. The "truth" or "falsity" of the complex is determined as a whole, including both the question and the answer.
- II. The complex is a response to a specific question.
- III. The question is a clear and explicable query.
- IV. The entire proposition is the answer to that question.

Collingwood's perspective on question-answer logic emphasizes the importance of questions and the task of philosophy. Questions permeate scientific research, as scientific inquiry is an ongoing process of solving problems, generating new questions, and then addressing those new questions. This cycle drives scientific progress. Collingwood's question-answer logic presents unique viewpoints on the determination of the truth or falsehood of propositions, posing significant challenges to traditional logic and realism. Possible research directions for question-answer logic involve integrating current scientific technologies, such as exploring new logics distinct from traditional logic through ChatGPT question-answering models. This involves incorporating questions

and historical factors into logical research, proposing fundamental principles and deductive methods for new logics, and ultimately providing a solid logical foundation for technological development.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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