

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BENEDETTO CROCE

THE PROBLEM OF ART AND HISTORY

BY

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THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
BENEDETTO CROCE



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PREFACE

AT the end of the volume I have given a list of Croce's principal works on Philosophy and of the English translations.

I have not made use of the English translations in the present study. My references are to the original Italian, and where I have made quotations I am entirely responsible for the rendering. In no case are the passages in quotation marks literal translations; they are freely paraphrased. What I have endeavoured to do is to understand the philosophical meaning and express it in my own manner; so much so that in many cases the quotation marks are put for reference purposes only.

English readers are deeply indebted to my friend, Mr. Douglas Ainslie, the translator of Croce's works, for his indefatigable zeal in spreading the fame of his author and obtaining recognition for the originality of his philosophy.

On one important point of terminology I find that I differ not only from Mr. Ainslie but from others who have written on Croce's philosophy, and this is not mere caprice. They use the term spirit for what I call mind.

I do not deny that there is some ground for choosing to render *lo spirito* spirit, rather than mind, inasmuch as there is a very common use of the term mind which restricts it to intellect, and *lo spirito* is more than intellect. On the other hand, I find it quite impossible to express the meaning by the word spirit, simply because to speak of an idea coming into the spirit or of an image being present to the spirit, or even to speak of the life of spirit, seems to me contrary to ordinary or desirable usage. Moreover, it seems to me that the essential doctrine of Croce is somewhat obscured by the use of the term. It is an intelligible and easily recognised doctrine that mind is reality outside which (to use a spatial expression which literally is inapplicable) there is nothing ; but it seems, to me at least, unintelligible to say that spirit is the whole of reality. When I use the term spirit it is to mark a distinction from matter. I am pleased to find that in this I am supported by the authority of the late Professor William Wallace, who has given reasons for translating *Geist* by the word Mind and not by the word Spirit (Introduction to *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, p. xlix).

I have not attempted to deal with all the problems which find a place in Croce's philosophical writings, nor with all the new interpretations, theoretical and practical, which his philosophy necessitates. A critical commentary on his whole work is quite outside the scope and purpose of this study. I have selected certain leading ideas which seem to me of supreme importance in the present state of philosophy.

I have to express my grateful acknowledgment to Mr. Bernard Bosanquet for the help he has given me. He read the MS., and notwithstanding that so many of the doctrines are in more or less disagreement with the doctrines expounded in his own works, especially his works on Aesthetic, his sympathetic criticisms have helped me to clear up many points which otherwise would have been left obscure or even misleading.

I have also to thank Professor J. A. Smith, whose own writings have been of great assistance to me in this work, for kindly reading the proof and giving me valuable suggestions.

I have to thank Signor Benedetto Croce for kindly sending me some of his recent addresses and contributions to Academy Journals, not easily accessible, which have been of great value to me in the elucidation of some of his theories; also for a most useful manuscript epitome of his philosophical doctrines.

H. W. C.

September 1917.

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CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

BENEDETTO CROCE is one of the few living philosophers who have won recognition beyond the borders of their own country. He was born in 1866. His home is in Naples. He is a Senator of the Kingdom of Italy. Possessing sufficient wealth to be full master of his time and leisure, he has devoted his life to literary and philosophical research. He rejoices that he has been able to give his mind to philosophy without the constraint a professorial appointment would have laid upon him, and a quite distinct flavour is imparted to his work by his consciousness of this freedom.

Philosophy is part only of Croce's literary activity. Literary criticism and general historical research seem to have drawn him to this field. The amount of editorial work he finds time to do is extraordinary, and bears witness to a mind overflowing with activity. He is editor of *La Critica*, a "Review of Literature, History, and Philosophy," published every two months, every number of which contains considerable contributions from his own pen. He has edited a series of translations into Italian of the classical authors of modern philosophy, and he has himself translated Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* for the series. He has also

searched out and published and reanimated valuable works of authors and philosophers which had become buried in museums and public libraries. Notably he has revived the study of two great but neglected Italian philosophers, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) and the Neapolitan patriot and literary critic, Francesco de Sanctis (1817-83). De Sanctis suffered imprisonment under the Bourbon government, 1848-52, and was afterwards first Minister of Public Instruction in the United Kingdom of Italy.

The philosophy of Croce is presented by him as a compendium and systematic classification of the mental sciences. It bears the general title *Philosophy of Mind* (*Filosofia dello Spirito*), and consists of four volumes. The first volume is entitled *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (*Estetica, come scienza dell' espressione e linguistica generale*). It appeared in 1907 and has gone through many editions. It consists of two parts, one theoretical, the other historical. The fundamental thesis, we are told in the preface, was read before the Accademia Pontaniana of Naples at three sessions in 1900 and is included in their Proceedings. Mr. Douglas Ainslie has translated the theoretical part, and has made a summary and abstract of the historical part. The second volume is entitled *Logic as Science of the Pure Concept* (*Logica come scienza del concetto puro*). The third volume is entitled *Philosophy of Practice—Economics and Ethics* (*Filosofia della pratica—Economica ed etica*). The English translation of this by Mr. Ainslie is entitled *Philosophy of the Practical*. The fourth volume is entitled *The Theory and History of History* (*Teoria e storia della storiografia*). It has been published since my present study of the philosophy was written and while it was under revision

(1917); most of the theoretical portion, however, consists of papers communicated to Academies and published in their Proceedings and Essays published in Reviews, and these I had the privilege of reading. There are many essays and criticisms dealing with philosophy among Croce's other writings, but these four volumes aim at giving the complete theory in systematic form.

It is his theory of art which has brought Croce most fame. More than any other of his doctrines it marks out an original direction. The theory has now taken a permanent place among rival theories of art, and is named in the text-books *The Expressionist Theory*. Its characteristic doctrine is that beauty is expression. The term "expressionist" is not itself enough to characterise the theory, and Croce is not the only philosopher who holds that beauty is expression. But the form which he has given to the doctrine is, I think, now generally intended when the term is used without qualification. The philosophical importance of the doctrine is not merely that as an isolated theory it can claim to be freer from intellectual difficulties than any of the many other attempts to define the beautiful. It is something more significant. In defining the true nature of an aesthetic fact it indicates the place of the aesthetic activity in the mental life. It is not a discovery in the scientific sense, it brings to light no new fact, no new law. In itself it may even be, so far as its mere enunciation is concerned, only a question of logical or even of grammatical accuracy; that is to say, all it purports to do is to define a recognised fact of common experience. Its value and significance, however, lie in what it implies. This is nothing less than a new standpoint from which with a new principle there arises a new order of knowledge and a new meaning of life and mind.

Croce presents philosophy as the science of mind. It is divided, as the science of nature is divided, into departments or groups of particular sciences, each distinguished by its subject-matter and by its special method, but no one science separate or isolated from the others, knowledge and reality being one and indivisible. The philosophical sciences are realms within the realm of mind. But the order of these sciences is not arbitrary, and the success of philosophy wholly depends on presenting the various facts of experience in their true order, the order which coincides with and represents for thought the organic unity of the individual whole.

Are there then two divisions of human knowledge, a science of nature and a science of mind? There is but one reality, and but one science. What, then, is the principle, what the necessity of the division? And what is the nature of the opposition between science and philosophy?

The idea that philosophy deals with abstractions altogether removed from the vulgar realities of life, or at least that it is concerned only with problems which, however interesting as speculations, are remote from any practical issue, is not mere ignorant opinion; it is often enough pronounced in scientific circles and even among philosophers themselves. The view that underlies it is that science deals with something peculiarly and obstinately matter of fact, while philosophy deals with abstract notions of origin, with realities which, if they are realities, are metaphysical, in the sense that they are beyond the realm of physical inquiry and therefore beyond the sphere of positive knowledge. And many who are not actually scornful of philosophy are inclined to treat it with benevolent tolerance, as a good

diversion for those who are able to acquire the taste for it.

In Croce's philosophy there is nothing transcendent in the sense that it lies beyond the sphere of positive knowledge with no relation to human life. Indeed, from the first page to the last and throughout we are invited to consider exclusively the ordinary and commonplace concepts—beauty, truth, utility, and goodness—in their ordinary and commonplace meaning. What may strike the student apart from the subject-matter itself is the excessively formal treatment. There seems nothing to inspire, nothing to thrill the imagination, there are no bold speculations or brilliant hypotheses of cosmological origins or destinies; on the contrary, most of the argument seems to be taken up with dull and at first sight unimportant and otiose inquiries. Are certain concepts true concepts or false concepts? Are certain pretentious sciences true claimants or false? An inattentive reader might easily derive the impression that the one and only purpose of the philosopher is to classify facts in a specified order to the rejection of every other, quite apart from whether the new order is convenient or not, as though in fact it is not the matter which constitutes philosophy but only the form or framework in which the matter is arranged. We have criticisms of such sciences as rhetoric, rejections of a whole host of familiar and generally reckoned useful classifications of kinds of artistic and literary work, not as something indifferent—a mere question of convenience or taste,—but as the very essence of philosophy. It must seem, therefore, to any one who comes to this philosophy with a mind full of awe and wonder at the mystery of the universe and intent on the great problem of life and its meaning, that so far from philosophy

being high above us and hidden in cloud, it really stoops so low that it invites us to treat as matters of grave importance what to the ordinary man are trivialities.

What, then, is the distinctive note in Croce's conception of Philosophy and its place in human life? Philosophy studies the concrete, whereas science, in the sense in which that term can be opposed to philosophy, studies the abstract, and the concrete alone is real in the ultimate meaning of the term real. This is not the ordinary view, it is indeed the direct contrary of it, and probably to reach the view that reality is concrete is the hardest task the philosopher has to perform. It goes against the bent of our intellect, and the whole bias of our nature tends to contradict it. For inasmuch as with greater abstraction greater precision is attainable, and inasmuch as the ideal of all science is precision, we seem with every new abstraction to be approaching nearer the ultimate reality itself. It is illusion. The sciences increase our control of nature, they widen the range of our knowledge and therewith enlarge the sphere of our activity, they give us a deeper and more penetrating insight into reality; but they are turned from and not towards reality itself, they take us further and further from the individual, indivisible, concrete whole which alone is actual. The abstractions which the sciences deal with, and which seem to separate themselves out as independent and isolated facts and events, and groups and classes of facts and events, have no existence and no meaning apart from the whole from which they are abstracted. On the one hand there is no limit to the process by which we abstract, and on the other hand there is no way, by mere addition, of reconstituting the whole out of which we have sorted them. If, then, science be the knowledge

of reality, there may be many abstract sciences, but there is only one science, and that is the science of the concrete, philosophy.

This philosophy, the science of the concrete, Croce calls Philosophy of Mind. Mind is reality, and there is no reality which is not mind. What are we to understand by this? Is not the science of mind an abstract science? There is such a science of mind, an empirical science, which like the natural sciences abstracts mental facts from the whole as things of a special kind, different from the class of things we call physical facts, and from the class of things we call biological facts or physiological facts; this is the science of psychology. It can give us an abbreviated description and classification of the infinite facts of mind just as zoology can abbreviate and classify the infinite varieties of living animals. This is not the science of mind which is Philosophy.

Is, then, this philosophy mainly and merely an idealism? Does it only insist that thoughts about things are thoughts and not things, and that there is no passage from thoughts about things to things, no means of escape from a subjective world of knowledge to an objective world of independent reality? Is it only *esse* is *percipi* once again? Or is it the doctrine that mind makes nature? Or is it the theory that the rational is actual and the actual rational? In some form Croce would, I suppose, acknowledge the truth of all these maxims, but he means something more and something different from anything which finds expression in them. He means that every form which reality assumes or can assume for us has its ground within mind. There is not and there cannot be a reality which is not mind. This is not a manner of speaking, or a vague metaphor;

it is intended literally. This mind which is reality, or this reality which is mind, is an activity the forms of which we may distinguish ; and also we may distinguish the order and relation of the forms ; but we cannot separate them, for they are in an indissoluble organic union of dependence and interdependence on one another. Reality is a system. The work of philosophy is to present these forms of activity and show how in their processes they unite to form the concrete world of experience. Two forms of this activity we are accustomed to distinguish—knowing and acting. The first is the understanding, the theoretical activity ; the second is the will, the practical activity. They stand to one another in the relation of a definite order. Will depends on understanding in a manner in which understanding does not depend upon will. All knowing has action in view, but it is not necessary to will in order to know, and knowing does not depend on any other form of mental activity lower than itself.

We may now understand Croce's characteristic doctrine. Knowing is not a simple relation between the mind and an object independent of mind. It is not contemplation, it is an active process, and its activity has two forms, one an activity of intuition, the other an activity of conceptual thinking. The science of the one is aesthetic ; of the other, logic. Aesthetic stands to logic as a first to a second degree, for logic is dependent on aesthetic, while aesthetic depends on no other activity. The practical activity is also subdivided into an economic and an ethic activity. Knowing and acting each with its two subdivisions yield to us four pure concepts which together exhaust reality. The four pure concepts are beauty, truth, usefulness, goodness.

Let me now try and illustrate what I take to be