



## BENEDETTO CROCE AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: - A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*The Neapolitan Benedetto Croce was a dominant figure in the first half of the twentieth century in aesthetics and literary criticism, as well as in philosophy. But his reputation as a philosopher did not last, either in Italy or in the English speaking world. Croce's way of presentation in his works seems, not to put too fine a point on it, dismissively dogmatic, it is full of the youthful conviction and fury that seldom wears well. However, the early works of Benedetto Croce along with his long running editorship of the journal La Critica, soared him to high fame and admiration. Yet, Croce's signal contribution to aesthetics that art is expression can be more or less is detached from the surrounding philosophy and polemics.*

**KEY WORDS:-**Croce, Philosophy, Neapolitan, aesthetics, La Critica, Polemics.

### INTRODUCTION:-

The credit for laying the foundation of the modern philosophy of history really goes to the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce. He was an Italian idealist philosopher, a critic, historian, and politician, who wrote on various topics, including philosophy, history, historiography, and aesthetics. In most regards, Croce was a liberal, although he opposed laissez-faire free trade and had considerable influence on other Italian intellectuals, including both Marxist Antonio Gramsci and fascist Giovanni Gentile.<sup>1</sup>

### EARLY LIFE OF BENEDETTO CROCE:-

Benedetto Croce was born on 25 February 1866 A.D. at Pescasseroli, Aquila, in Naples of an Abruzzese family. Pasquale Croce, the father of Croce, was a Neapolitan member of a wealthy family of the Abruzzo. His mother Luisa Sipari belonged to the most important family of Pescasseroli (L'Aquila). His family was influential and wealthy, and he was raised in a very strict Catholic environment.<sup>2</sup> Around the age of sixteen, he quit Catholicism and developed a personal



philosophy of spiritual life, in which religion cannot be anything but a historical institution where the creative strength of mankind can be expressed. He kept this philosophy for the rest of his life. He was educated at a Catholic school. Having lost both his parents in an earthquake he moved to Rome, in 1883 where he entered the university but did not pursue his studies seriously. He studied law, but never graduated, at the University of Naples, while reading extensively on historical materialism. He involved himself in research in local history and antiquities. His ideas were publicised at the University of Rome towards the end of the 1890s by Professor Antonio Labriola.<sup>3</sup> Croce was well acquainted with and sympathetic to the developments in European socialist philosophy exemplified by August Bebel, Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky, Paul Lafargue, Wilhelm Liebknecht, and Filippo Turati.<sup>4</sup>

## BENEDETTO CROCE

Influenced by Gianbattista Vico's thoughts about art and history, he began studying philosophy in 1893 A.D. His first contribution to philosophy began in 1893 with his two famous essays on the nature of history and the method of literary criticism. Later he expanded these two themes and made it more inclusive in his further essays from 1900 to 1905 A.D. His friend, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, encouraged him to read Hegel. Croce's famous commentary on Hegel, *What is Living and What is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*, was published in 1907.<sup>5</sup> He vehemently opposed Marxian economic doctrine. He discarded fascism as the product of irrationalism. He became a Senator in 1910 A.D. and a minister of Education in the Italian Government in 1920-1921 A.D. He died in Naples (Italy), on 20 November 1952 A.D. at the age of eighty-six.<sup>6</sup>

## OBJECTIVES:-

The Following are the objectives of the present study

1. *To highlight a concise biography of Benedetto Croce and his works.*
2. *To make a critical analysis on Croce's contributions towards the development of philosophy of history as an academic field of study.*
3. *To focus on the Croce's Methodology of history.*
4. *To highlight the Croce's Aesthetics and his Journal La Critica*

## Issues in Hand:-

*Following are the issues in hand for the present study*

1. *Who was Benedetto Croce?*
2. *What are his methods which greatly influenced the study Philosophy of history and his aesthetics?*

## Chief Works of Benedetto Croce:-

Croce's noteworthy works are as follows:

- *Philosophy of Spirit (1902 A.D.)*
- *Aesthetic (1902 A.D.)*
- *Logic (1908 A.D.)*
- *Philosophy of the Practical (1908 A.D.)*
- *History: Its Theory and Practice*

- *La Critica (Magazine)*

### Croce's Philosophy of History: - The Philosophy of Spirit:-

In 1902 A.D., Croce began the systematic description of his “*philosophy of spirit*,” his chief intellectual achievement. For Croce, the context for his philosophy of history and historiography is his philosophy of mind or, as he termed it, his philosophy of spirit. The philosophy of spirit is an attempt to provide a connected and general account of the cognitive activities which characterise minds, such as art and philosophy. Croce developed his philosophical system early in his career but continually revised it.<sup>7</sup> Croce was influenced by idealism because he held that the activities of mind or spirit represent a single, unified, reality. In his philosophy, there is nothing but the eternal alternation of the eternal values of the spirit. He applied his idea as a powerful tool of aesthetic, historiographic and political criticism. According to Croce, the activities of mind can be theoretical or practical. On the theoretical side are art (or aesthetic) activity and logical (or philosophical) activity.<sup>8</sup> On the practical side are economic (or useful) activity and ethical (or moral) activity. Historiography plays an exceptional role in the cycle of these activities because historiography combines the elements that define art and philosophy respectively. That is, historiography combines the intuition of art with the logic of philosophy. History becomes the unique principle for all the moments of spirit, while the spirit is completely spontaneous, without a predetermined structure. The philosophy of spirit in it's a systematic form produced by the effective method of Croce's later work, as in the *Anthology, Philosophy, Poetry, History (1951 A.D.)*.<sup>9</sup>

### La Critica:-

In 1903 A.D., Croce founded a research journal “*La Critica*” a journal of cultural criticism in which, during the course of the next forty-one years, he published nearly all of his writings and reviewed all of the most important historical, philosophical, and literary work that was being produced in Europe at the time. According to Croce, “The foundation of *La Critica* marked the beginning of a new period in my life, the period of maturity or harmony between me and reality.”<sup>10</sup>

### All History is Contemporary History:-

According to Benedetto Croce, all history is contemporary history, by which he means that all critical study of the past is informed by the problems and needs of the writer's own time, the more conscious historians are of their contemporary motives, the more searching and accurate their investigations of the past and the more useful their reconstructions. History consists basically in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems. The main task of the historian is not to record the events but to evaluate the events.<sup>11</sup>

### Croce's Methodology of History:-

Benedetto Croce prescribed a detailed methodology of history.

- **Firstly**, he developed a philosophy of history which is a strange mixture of shrewd commonsense and idealist philosophy. He proceeds to define the task of philosophy which is to discover identity and formulate the true methodology of history.
- **Secondly**, one must accept what is possible, real and rational. He says that the historians and the artist unlike the scientist do not treat individual events as instances of universal laws, nor do they classify them under abstract categories. Croce seems to have been influenced by Becker who said “Facts of history do not exist till he creates them”. Fundamental in culture is the

growth of man's mind. It is not subject to rational analysis. Man acts by rational inspiration. This comes out of emotional and intuitive forces.<sup>12</sup>

- **Thirdly**, history is the primarily reality of the universe. As such, it is cognitive. Experience is the sole reality and the highest source of knowledge. It explodes the myth of speculative abstractions.
- **Fourthly**, history is one unified spirit. It is a synthesis of history i.e. as enacted and occurring and as interpreting what is thus given.
- **Fifthly**, this unified spirit pervades all bounds of experience. It is omnipresent in the whole context of experience.<sup>13</sup>
- **Sixthly**, the whole of this spirit was divided into four operational grades, namely art (aesthetic), reason (logic), economics (business), and moral principles (ethics). Let us examine the operation of these four fundamental forces.

#### Art or Aesthetic:-

These four fundamental forces in their totality generate the content of human experience, and thus they happen to the soul and substance of history. The first one is aesthetics or art, which is the first form of knowledge. Croce was responsible for the contemporary distinction in aesthetics between the expressive and the representative functions of art. By introducing it, he sought to dismiss representation as aesthetically irrelevant and to elevate expression into the single, true aesthetic function. Art is not merely a medium to impart delight and pleasure. Art is highly individualistic.<sup>14</sup> The artist sees and represents the individuality. It is thus not an activity of the emotions but a cognitive activity. It is knowledge of the individual would present a piece of art which would not only be highly individualistic, but also a true representation of nature that a single piece would speak. Though, there is a minor difference between art and history. Art sometimes depicts not only what is real but also what is possible, but history has to conform only to reality and the actuality. Again art is intuitive but history is rational and the realism of history differs from the imagination of art. Yet, the main idea of Croce is to prove the point that history is not science, because there cannot be any science of the individual who is as unique as art.<sup>15</sup> Art involves intuitive knowledge of the individual, and concrete knowledge, through the imagination. The activities of art are universal, rather than the specialised or unusual activity of a few. That is, art is an activity of mind which occurs whenever there is expression or language, and which has its origin in our emotions. The intellect, on the other hand, involves knowledge of universals and relations, and it produces concepts. For Croce, historiography brings together art and philosophy, intuition and concept, because historiography illuminates concepts through individual facts. By illuminating concepts in this way, narratives about history may clarify and help to resolve philosophical problems. Philosophy, in turn, enables us to interpret and narrate history.<sup>16</sup>

#### Logic or Reason:-

The next one is logic or reason which is so essential for the writing history. Logic is the theory of thought and only thought can make the distinction between truth and false. Human behaviour requires logical or abstract philosophy sometimes to analysis its operation, which in every case is not individualistic but comes under general facts which can be reduced to fairly universal principles. Customs, manners, wars, rise and growth of the empires, cultures etc are common phenomena of history whose regularity, causes and consequences could be determined by framing general laws through logic.<sup>17</sup> In additional terms, history is an art dealing with isolated

events and individuals, and also the philosophy which offers us a universal system when it deals with general facts. Art is that which is created. Logic is that which is understood. Art requires making, logic requires knowing. Both making and knowing together constitutes history.<sup>18</sup>

### Economics and Ethics:-

Economics and Ethics are also vital for history as art and logic. Economics is the material cause, and Ethics lends moral support. The ethics of a society determines its level of culture. Food, shelter, clothing, land, labour, resources and all the belongings of the economic world would be required to make history. Similarly, ethics would be required as the final cause or the moral support without which whole manor of historical edifice will subside. It is the moral law that asserts itself sooner or later.

Thus, from the above analysis, Croce makes philosophy as a constituent part of history while other thinkers had made history a minor aspect of philosophy. His analysis opens with an importance on art which embodies the spirit of history.<sup>19</sup>

### CONCLUSION:-

Benedetto Croce is regarded as the most valiant campaigner of history. He liberated history from philosophy and makes philosophy a constituent part of history. To him, all history is contemporary history. History consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems. That is to say, while the historian thinks of the past that past event is contemporary with the act of thinking. He defines philosophy is the methodology of history and history is the precondition of science. Finally, he has improved the method of historical study in the real sense of the term. No one can deny the deep impact of his thought on the modern world, others had subordinated history to philosophy, and he subordinated philosophy to history. Others had made events and personalities as the subject matter of history, he made ideas, concepts and thought as the subject matter of history. He distinguished history from that of science and advocated that history resembles art rather than science. The artist and the historian perceived the unique and the particular.

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