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Benedetto Croce, Historian-Philosopher: Is History Autobiography?

Benedetto Croce's reply to the question raised in my title was affirmative. History, for him, was indeed termed "autobiography": *Storia è autobiografia*. Others have proposed that history is instead merely autobiographical (*autobiografica*); and have distinguished further between history considered as a completed deed (*factum*) that exists in some sense to be discovered, and narrative about it. According to Croce, however, any deed, object or event that lies outside the historian's consciousness, is "dead", by which he meant "non-existent". Whenever Croce used the terms "history" and "historical narrative," he meant judgmental states of consciousness that "live" in the historian's mind. For this reason he also described history as contemporary¹.

Since Croce's descriptions of history would seem to violate ordinary language usage and to obscure the customary distinction between biography and autobiography, it would be useful to inquire about what Croce meant by his assertions. Let us examine Croce's epistemic assumptions about history and then determine whether by altering them, we can develop viable descriptions of historical narrative and of philosophy in its relation to history.

1. The discovery of the categories of historical interpretation

Lest anyone suppose that Croce's unusual view of historical narrative was the result of philosophic concepts which he extraneously brought to it, let me say that quite the contrary was the case. Croce's theory of history evolved out of the reciprocal relations between Clio and philosophy that

¹ B. CROCE, *Postille*, «La Critica, rivista di letteratura, storia e filosofia», 26 (1928), pp. 231-232 (my translation). Also see CROCE, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, translated by Douglas Ainslie, Russell & Russell, New York 1960.

pervaded his long career — one which lasted from about 1886 to 1952². A brief look at its development will aid us in understanding his conception of history as autobiography.

During the years between 1886 and 1892, immediately following Croce's departure from the University of Rome, he became aware of a need for categories³ of interpretation in historical narrative. At that time Croce was absorbed with studies on the Kingdom of Naples and the diplomatic relations between Italy and Spain. But he soon wearied of «lifeless and disconnected facts at the expense of much toil and with no constructive result»⁴. And while attempting to solve specific difficulties of hermeneutical research, Croce turned to the general topics of history and knowledge. With their explication in mind, he studied Italian and German books on the philosophy and method of history. The German ideal of history as a science then dominated historical inquiry in Europe and in the U.S.A. In Italy, Croce led the revolt against neo-positivism, and in North America, Frederick Jackson Turner stimulated some historians to rethink the limits and goals of their disciplines.

Out of the various perplexities that beset Croce while pursuing these inquiries, emerged his philosophical work, *La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte*⁵ (History subsumed under the general concept of art),

² B. CROCE, *Postille*, «La Critica, rivista di letteratura, storia e filosofia», 26 (1928), pp. 231-232. Also see Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, Russell & Russell New York, 1960; and Benedetto Croce, *Philosophy, Poetry, History*, translated by Cecil Sprigge, Oxford University Press, London 1966, pp. 539-541.

³ Croce used the terms “category”, “concrete-universal”, “pure concept” and “directive concept” interchangeably. During the course of my discussion, I will follow his practice. For a discussion of the Crocean concept of the pure concept see M.E. MOSS, *The Crocean Concept of the Pure Concept*, «Idealistic Studies», XVII, (1987), 1, pp. 39-52.

⁴ B. CROCE, *An Autobiography*, translated by R.G. Collingwood, Oxford University Press, London 1927, p. 52. Years later when Croce reflected upon that early period of erudition and inquiry without benefit of guiding principles and directive concepts, he wondered that: «an ardent reader of De Sanctis like myself, who ought to have known by heart every word of the doctrine that erudition without philosophy is neither criticism nor history but mere formless matter (and no doubt I did know every word of it, but not by heart, for I repeated the words without grasping their full sense, could spend so long in the pursuit of erudition without philosophy, in mere antiquarianism [...] Yet, if I had not done this, I could never have thoroughly and firmly understood De Sanctis' central thought, the transcending of mere erudition» (pp. 82-83).

⁵ B. CROCE, *La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell' arte*, «Atti dell' Accademia Pontaniana», XXIII, (1892), 32. This essay was republished in Croce's *Primi saggi*, Laterza, Bari 1919, pp. 1-46.

which temporarily organized his ideas in terms of categories of art⁶ and philosophy. Each of these categories of historical interpretation represents an activity of human consciousness—intuitional or aesthetic that is the fundamental and particular cognitive expression on which all knowledge depends; and conceptual⁷ or logical which includes intuition transformed in the universality of conceptual expression. As yet, however, Croce had not distinguished clearly between the theoretical disciplines which issue from reason, e.g., aesthetics, philosophy, history, and the practical ones that depend on will, e.g., empirical and abstract sciences, and ethics.

Immediately after the publication of *La storia*, there followed another period (1893-94) of intense historical investigation of the relations between Spain and Italy. Eventually Croce's research was broken off, this time by Antonio Labriola's invitation to read the first of his essays on Karl Marx's conception of historical materialism. Croce's subsequent work with Marx's philosophy resulted in the adoption of a third category of historical interpretation, the economic, in addition to the aesthetic and philosophic ones.⁸ This category represented human practical activity and thus the strivings of will to achieve immediate goals. Its manifestations included what Croce named "pseudoconcepts" (*pseudoconcetti*), which amounted to empirical and abstract class names. Their denotation and connotation along with the judgments that were formed from them were limited by need and interest. Among such classifications, for example, were divisions of history into ancient, feudal, renaissance, and modern, or into classical and romantic. And as we could surmise, much of historical narrative consisted of empirical and abstract concepts and the pseudojudgments that expressed them. Unlike, however, what Croce termed individual or true historical judgments which included

⁶ For discussions of Croce's category of art see M. E. MOSS, *Croce's Theory of Intuition Reconsidered*, «La rivista crociana» 15 (1978), pp. 292-306; and Giovanni Gullace's introduction to Benedetto Croce, *Poetry and Literature*, translated by G. Gullace, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1981, xiii-xxiv.

⁷ For discussions of Croce and Hegel on the concrete-universal see R. FRANCHINI, *Croce interprete di Hegel: e altri saggi filosofici*, Giannini, Napoli 1964 and *Le origini della dialettica*, Giannini, Napoli 1965.

⁸ See B. CROCE, *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica*, Sandron, Milano Palermo 1900. Some of the essays in this book were translated into English in B. CROCE, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*, translated by C.M. Meredith, Howard Latimer Ltd., London 1914. For a discussion of Croce and Marx, see E. CASERTA, *Croce and Marxism*, Morano Editore, Napoli 1987.

philosophical categories or concrete-universals, pseudojudgments were evaluated solely in terms of utility and need.

The only major category of historical interpretation, which was to follow upon the economic one, was that of moral value. This category represented the fourth fundamental activity of the human spirit and comprised volition of a universal goal. Moral or ethical will extended thus beyond the fulfillment of immediate economic needs. It expressed itself as the quest for greater degrees of political liberty than those already existing within a particular historical context. Croce's writings on history published during the fascist regime, as for instance *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, 3rd ed. (1937)⁹, translated as *History as the Story of Liberty* (1941), clearly illustrated the importance that he gave to his concept — one which was reinforced by restrictions of personal and political freedom that had occurred during this period. Even social justice, for Croce, played a role subordinate to political freedom¹⁰.

With his description of ethical will, Croce's inventory of the four fundamental activities of consciousness, their interrelations and representations became complete. The phenomenological links between diverse expressions of consciousness formed, metaphorically speaking, a circle, and not a linear progression. Thus, over the long run a greater degree of political liberty or progress was not inevitable. It had to be recognized, fought for, and won. Intuitions nevertheless, remained autonomous and pure concepts or categories included them in the concrete universality of their conceptual representations. Rational volition of immediate goals originates from conceptual knowledge, just as will of universal ends arises out of the satisfaction of immediate desires and needs. Ethical volition, in turn, stimulates new intuitions, which, however, do not explicitly include the former in their expressions. The phenomenological interconnections between intuition, concept, will of an

⁹ B. CROCE, *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, 7^e ed., Laterza, Bari 1965. The 3rd edition without "final considerations," or the appendix and philological notes was translated by S. Sprigge under the title *History as the Story of Liberty*, Meridian Books, New York 1950. Subsequently the section entitled *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, in «La Storia», pp. 1-50 was retranslated by S. Sprigge in B. CROCE, *Philosophy, Poetry, History*, cit., pp. 546-588. More recently, with the help of Folke Leander and Claes G. RYN, *History as the Story of Liberty* was republished by the Liberty Fund, Indiana 2000.

¹⁰ G. MURRAY, M. BROSIO, G. CALOGERO, *Benedetto Croce*, Italian Institute, London 1953, pp. 34-35.

immediate goal, and of a universal one are mirrored by the relations that hold among the four fundamental categories of historical interpretation — aesthetic, philosophic, economic and ethical. By this time, Croce also had delineated most of the concepts that are deducible from these categories. Crocean aesthetic terms included beauty, organic unity, lyricity, aesthetic universality; philosophic —concrete-universal, individual judgment; economic, — utilitarian or instrumental value; and ethical — moral good, political liberty. How did Croce's conceptions of the functions of consciousness and their categorial representations relate to his view of history as autobiography?

2. The new idealism: history as autobiography

After the publication of his 1902 *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*¹¹ (*Aesthetic as science of expression and general linguistic*), Croce discarded the Kantian postulate of the *noumenon* and maintained a phenomenology of the human spirit. He described his philosophical position as post-berkelian “absolute” or “new” idealism. Although later in his career Croce preferred the label “absolute historicism,” his epistemology or gnoseology did not fundamentally change¹². By “idealism” and “absolute historicism” Croce meant that the existence of an object depends on its expression by consciousness. Indeed it is fair to say that Croce did deny the existence of anything that bears no relation to mind. In other words, he denied absolute existence or any existence that is not an object for rational consciousness. To restate his view in positive terms: whatever exists must be conceived in relation to consciousness. Mind is foundational to reality in the sense that the synthetic *a priori* logical act is the source of the categories (predicates) and the aesthetic *a priori* activity of imagination, that is, intuition provides the representations (subjects) of historical judgment. The world exists solely as a manifestation of human spirit, and nature can be understood only insofar as it bears the stamp of *lo*

¹¹ B. CROCE, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*, Sandron, Milano-Palermo-Napoli 1902. For an English translation see *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, translated by D. Ainslie, Macmillan & Co., London 1909. This translation was revised by Ainslie and republished in 1922 by Macmillan, but without the Heidelberg lecture that had been included in the 1909 edition. The 1922 version also presented all of part 2 (*History of Aesthetics*) of the *Estetica*, which had been summarized in the 1909 work.

¹² The term “gnoseology” refers to post-Berkelian epistemology.

spirito. Croce's epistemology affirmed objects and qualities in their relations to consciousness only and denied any object or quality that claims ontological status independently of such relations¹³.

In the crocean philosophy, the tenet that every objective true judgment expresses an immediate, logical state of mind followed from his epistemic idealism. His conception of judgment as a logical expression of consciousness led him to propose that history itself is contemporary¹⁴. By this assertion he meant that the subject-matter of judgment is created by the historian's present interests and needs. For Croce, history amounts moreover to autobiography, inasmuch as it issues entirely from the unique perspective of the historian's consciousness: «it is my solid conviction that every and clear history may be and ought to be “auto-biography,” that is, enter into the mind of the writer as his very own drama, such that he feels and says to himself about every event of it: *Res tua agitur*¹⁵».

If, as Croce claimed, history amounts to autobiography, then it must consist of reconstruction of merely the historian's inner states. But is this really the case in narrative? Or is there implied during the imaginative process of historical reconstruction a reality or event that is independent of and exceeds our knowledge of it? By “independent”, I mean that the objects of our judgments do not issue exclusively from our activities of consciousness. Croce's claim that narrative expresses solely states of mind contradicts the usual opinion of historical judgment and inquiry. Ordinarily we do suppose a real difference between judgment — whether it be that an event has occurred, or that a document (to be understood in its widest sense as “evidence”) is correct — and its object. Judgment according to the crocean philosophy is indeed followed by practical activity, such as compiling and classifying evidence. But these diverse activities — theoretical and practical — are entirely expressions of the human spirit, and the “circle” of purely cognitive and volitional representations remains unbroken. According to Croce, any deed, object, or event that lay outside

¹³ See, for example, B. C. CROCE, *Lo storicismo e l'idea tradizionale della filosofia*, «Quaderni della Critica» 13, 1949, p. 83. Here and elsewhere, Croce used “historicism” to denote his view of history as the treatment of distinct problems. For a treatment of Croce's historicism, see D. D. ROBERTS, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1987.

¹⁴ For a contemporary discussion of epistemic realism and idealism in physics, see S. HAWKING, L. MLODINOW, *The Grand Design*, Bantam Books, New York 2010), ch. 3.

¹⁵ B. CROCE, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, cit., p. 12.

the historian's consciousness, is "dead" by which he meant, "non-existent". Thus for him there occurs no ontological alienation between subject and object, between consciousness and nature (considered as fundamentally other than spirit).

The contradictions between Croce's view and what we ordinarily suppose about the relationship between historical event on the one hand, and judgment on the other, do not disprove Croce's epistemology. These inconsistencies do, however, give us good reason to examine its presuppositions, since Croce's unsatisfactory theory of history as autobiography may derive from the inadequacy of his assumptions.

3. Croce's epistemological assumptions

Croce assumed that philosophic method is one of self-examination, which consists of a kind of introspective inspection of consciousness. By "introspection", Croce did not mean anything resembling psychoanalytic inquiry. In fact, he denied the existence of unconscious mind and proposed that the self reveals itself in conscious creative acts. Even the "true biography of a person" lies in the "history of his work or of his action"¹⁶. Croce displayed no interest in what might remain behind or beyond these events. And he clearly illustrated his aversion to any such possibility in his own biographical sketch, in which he discussed the development of his personal philosophy exclusively in relation to its historical influences — understood not in a private sense, but as determinants of an ongoing process. Nor was the Crocean self-examination to issue in confessions of emotion, which for him would have amounted to poetry. Rather, the philosopher is to develop a self-awareness that reveals theoretical (cognitive) and practical (volitional) forms of conscious expression¹⁷.

Croce labeled his method, moreover, as "speculative", by which he meant that mind is to become cognizant of its own functions and structures. The philosopher is to investigate the intuitional, logical, economic, and ethical activities of the human spirit. Croce's description of philosophic

¹⁶ See B. CROCE, *Biografia che è storia è biografia che è psicologia*, «La critica», 31, 1933, p. 397 (my translation).

¹⁷ B. CROCE, *Autobiography*, p. 19. Also see B. CROCE, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, cit., p. 151.

method and task, however, should not be understood as implying some version of traditional metaphysics. By calling his approach “speculative,” he wished to distinguish it especially from forms of empirical claims, since Croce’s introspective method purported to discover categories and concepts not derived *a posteriori* and by induction. The goal of critical reflection is instead to make explicit the *a priori* categories that direct historical interpretation. Autocritical thought thereby establishes its categories for understanding events and objects.

Although Croce held conceptions of philosophy and history that follow from his epistemological idealism, his exhortation to know one’s self has occurred throughout the history of ideas. We see it in the philosophies of Socrates, Hobbes, Spinoza, and others whom we would not ordinarily describe as “epistemological idealists.” Furthermore, the results of the application of this imperative have varied significantly among these thinkers. Indeed, Croce’s own self-discoveries suggest these queries: does his claim that history amounts to autobiography commit the error of oversimplification? In other words, is there something inherent in historical judgment itself that renders Croce’s claim false? Does it neglect an aspect of cognition that does not result from conscious activity of mind or will? My answer to all these questions is an unqualified “yes”.

4. Guiding principles and methodological changes

What guiding principles and methodological changes should we propose? Instead of investigating the nature of merely mental and volitional expressions, we must look at experience in general, at the way the world presents itself to us. I would not exclude (as Croce’s speculative approach did) the use of a second method, along with his coherence theory with its privation conception of value, for determining true judgment — for example, an empirical one. According to Croce, however, empirical and empirico-abstract judgments formed of pseudoconcepts are neither true nor false.

What are some implications of these alterations of crocean philosophy? By considering experience as it presents itself, without reducing it entirely to the effects of mind and will, we have recognized the possibility that reality may transcend our consciousness of it. This starting point is justified by assumptions made in science and ordinary life. We thus would allow

“the real” to supersede our conscious expressions of it by appealing to something in the historical event that lies beyond the subject-object relationship. Merely because an object cannot be known unless it is an object to some subject is no good reason for supposing that it cannot exist apart from that subject. Croce never argued the truth of his presuppositions, so his conclusions give us good reason for evaluating and perhaps revising them. His theory of judgment also failed to account for true and false propositions derived from the use of an inductive method. And if true propositions occur, surely they are founded upon repeated observations, a community of agreement, and carefully weighed evidence.

Suppose that the cognitive act includes, directly, an aspect not entirely the result of the expressive activity of mind. Let us acknowledge a characteristic of epistemic experience, whereby it transcends our intuitional and conceptual awareness. True judgment then would express more than our mental states. By recognizing a real relationship between an event and our knowledge of it — not simply the occurrence of conscious activities and their interrelations (in Croce’s terms “intuitional,” “conceptual,” “economic,” or “ethical”) — we would escape the problems that arise from his reduction of history and indeed philosophy itself to autobiography.

5. Croce’s categorial theory of error

Having discussed what I would discard in the Crocean theory of history as autobiography, I will now consider what should be retained, that is, Croce’s categorial theory of error. Besides his privation conception of theoretical error as incoherence, either in the subject of judgment or in the relations that hold among various judgments¹⁸, Croce proposed that false judgment occurs also whenever various subjects and predicates are misrepresented and the resulting judgment is claimed to be correct. Because this type of mistake falsifies a relation that should hold between a representation (subject) and a category (predicate), I will refer to it as “categorial”. Croce himself did not use this adjective. Indeed he never

¹⁸ For a discussion of Croce’s coherence theory see M. M. MILBURN, *Benedetto Croce’s Coherence Theory of Truth: A Critical Evaluation*, «Filosofia», 19, 1968, pp. 107-116. Also see B. CROCE, *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept*, translated by D. Ainslie, Macmillan & Co., London 1917, pp. 391. According to this theory, a judgment may be entirely or to some degree true, but not absolutely false. It presupposes a privation theory of value.

formally labeled this conception of error. I trust that the reasons for naming it will become clear during the exposition of his philosophy. To put it briefly: My selection of “categorical” derives from a wish to differentiate this theory from Croce’s coherence conception of true judgment. I want to indicate, moreover, that his categorical conception of error depends on his view of the phenomenological relations between the categories of historical interpretation.

A categorical theory is unusual in a philosophy such as Croce’s, since idealist systems frequently espouse some form of coherence conception only in determining true judgment. What was the historical antecedent for his view? Croce was influenced early in his career by Giambattista Vico’s conceptions of art and history. Croce also adopted and developed Vico’s notion of error «as an improper combination of ideas»¹⁹. Categorical mistakes consist thus of improperly substituting intuition or pseudoconcept for a category in judgment. They stem also from disrupting the organic unity between subject and predicate. Attempts to attribute logical or moral value to art and to deduce history from *a priori* concepts were included among Croce’s examples of categorical mistakes.

Unlike the “negative” errors of incoherence, categorical mistakes are “positive” and not purely theoretical. Positive error cannot occur in the philosophic “sciences” as such, inasmuch as these disciplines express true judgments only. Such errors issue instead from one’s practical or volitional activity, since they require the false affirmation that any combination of representation and category that serves human short-term needs (“practical” goals) be true. By “practical” Croce intended to include not the ethical, but more simply the economic desire for personal gain. Categorical mistakes include prejudices of country, religion, class, and profession, along with deceptions based on wishes to satisfy vanity and ambition.

The categorical mistakes that derive from practical acts are also fundamentally logical. For this reason Croce described them as theoretical-practical: «a fact like *humano capiti cervicem equinam jungere*, or *simulare cupressum* in the sea where the shipwrecked struggles in the waves, does not constitute [...] aesthetic error, unless there be added [...] a logical

¹⁹ R. PICCOLI, *Benedetto Croce*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York 1922, pp. 117-118. Also see B. CROCE, *Logic*, cit., p. 397.

affirmation, so that the practical act becomes [...] logical error»²⁰. Thus a logically improper combination of ideas taken by itself is neither true nor false. As an illustration, the idea of a human head joined to a horse's neck could amount to an expression of pure fancy, a complex intuition. Intent to deceive one's self or others, which in the Crocean view requires the affirmation that an incorrect combination of ideas be true, is a necessary prerequisite for categorial error. Unlike true judgments, such affirmations, which were acts of will for Croce, always include something of the contingent and arbitrary in them.

A limited number of improper combinations of intuition and concept can be deduced from the phenomenological relations among the four kinds of human expression — intuitional, logical, economic, and ethical. Moreover one of Croce's major philosophic tasks was to refute the errors that derived from these sources. Let us take a look at several types of categorial error that Croce listed. In *a priori* approaches to history that occur in philosophies of history, for instance, subject and predicate are improperly combined for practical purposes. Objects are designed to agree with a preconceived theory of the general nature of history. The historian then attempts to deduce events *a priori* rather than in accordance with concrete occurrences. In this case one writes narrative without confirmation by documentation and endeavors to understand "the past" in terms of false analogies. Croce offered examples of these erroneous judgments: "the Middle Ages are the negation of ancient civilization"; "the modern epoch is the synthesis of these two opposites"; "Greece was thought and Rome action"²¹.

Croce also applied his categorial theory to what he called "poetical history". This incorrect interpretation of events derives from an attempt to rectify the "barren" discoveries of philological treatises. Sentiment (intuition) overwhelms critical thought. Aesthetic coherence becomes substituted for logical consistency. Examples occur in historical biography,

²⁰ B. CROCE, *Logic*, cit., p. 398. Also see B. CROCE, *Logica come scienza del concetto puro*, 2' ed., Laterza, Bari 1909, p. 257. In the ninth Italian edition (1964), the Latin phrases «*humano capiti cervicem equinam jungere*» and «*simulare cupressum*» do not appear. The text reads instead: «l'atto di congiungere al capo umano la cervice equine o dipingere il cipresso in mezzo al mare» (The act of joining a horse's neck to a human head or representing a cypress in the midst of the sea).

²¹ B. CROCE, *Logic*, cit., pp. 425-26.

where the author's feelings dominate, or in the history of a country in which the historian justifies events in terms of political ideals²².

"Universal history" provides another example of categorial error. Like other pseudohistories, this variant includes an unrealizable claim — to «form a picture of all the things that have happened to the human race, from its origins upon the earth to the present moment»²³. The historian can never satisfy such a requirement. Universal narrative amounts to either chronicle (which Croce named "dead history") or poetry. In the first instance (chronicle), statements consist of representation and pseudoconcept. A "true" judgment is not formed. In the second instance, no pure concept occurs but merely poetic expression takes place.

What then does authentic historical inquiry involve for Croce? The historian is to solve specific problems and his response becomes limited by what he purports to treat. Universal histories thus must be transformed into "particular" ones²⁴. Croce concluded that history is not entirely subjective (poetic), or purely universal (abstract), or merely practical. The subject of an investigation of past is "the individual object", and the categories that direct historical narrative represent what is concretely universal²⁵. Much of history makes use of conceptual fictions (pseudoconcepts) for purposes of classification and quantification. Again, such usage is indispensable for organization and communication of material. Categorial errors occur only when the historian asserts that such pseudojudgments correctly describe events and objects and that narrative is formed exclusively of pseudojudgments.

6. Relations between philosophy and history

What role does philosophy assume in relation to history? Early in his career Croce was influenced by Vico's notion that knowledge of the past

²² B. CROCE, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, cit., p. 35. Also see B. CROCE, *Logic*, cit., p. 291 and pp. 406-407.

²³ B. CROCE, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, cit., p. 56.

²⁴ For a critique of the attempt to formulate a universal history, which issues from a foundation diverse from Croce's idealist one, see M. MANDELBAUM, *The History of Philosophy: Some Methodological Issues*, «Journal of Philosophy», 74, Oct. 1977, pp. 561-572.

²⁵ B. CROCE, *La storiografia letteraria è artistica*, «La critica» 17, 1929, pp. 86-87.

falls within the province of philosophy²⁶. Croce amended this conception by maintaining instead that, logically speaking, neither discipline is subordinate to the other. His theoretical change followed from the view that definition and individual judgment presuppose each other, much as pure concept becomes expressed via historical representation. In short, philosophy cannot be resolved simply into history and, as we have seen, philosophy of history is based on a category mistake. Furthermore, neither history nor philosophy occurs without the other. On the one hand, historical narrative requires categorial interpretation. On the other, philosophical categories and concepts necessarily present themselves in historical contexts, providing thereby a framework in terms of which events and subjects are to be interpreted. Philosophy is to make explicit *a priori* categories of judgment used in historical narrative, e.g. political liberty. This is what Croce had in mind when he described philosophy as the «methodological moment of historical narrative»²⁷. Here I am in complete agreement with the Crocean conception of the relations that hold between philosophy and history.

Let us propose, however, that we sever Croce's categorial theory from his idealist epistemology and from his theory of the phenomenological relations among activities of consciousness, as indeed we must if we accept the realist position proposed earlier in this essay. How, then would we select the categories for historical narrative? Their selection would be made on pragmatic grounds, that is, in terms of the historian's needs and interests. I would also grant them *a priori* status inasmuch as they could not be falsified. Nevertheless categories of historical interpretation can and should be discarded when they no longer serve a useful function.

My list of *a priori* interpretive terms, moreover, would be broader than the one delineated by Croce's philosophy. Let us discard his view of the four fundamental acts of mind, along with the phenomenological relations between them. Our list would then include categories and their directive concepts drawn from theoretical and empirical disciplines such as aesthetics, philosophy, economics, sociology, demography and psychology. An economic interpretation of the American Civil War, for instance, might be as viable as one in terms of the human struggle for greater

²⁶ See M. H. FISCH, *Croce and Vico* and L. M. PALMER, *Reflections on M. Fisch's "Croce and Vico"*, in *Thought, Action and Intuition*, L. M. PALMER and H. S. HARRIS, University of California Press, New York 1975, pp. 184-240.

²⁷ B. CROCE, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, p. 151.

political liberty, or of an Adlerian drive for power expressed in the debates between Lincoln and Douglas. In diverse narratives religious concepts might predominate, for example when treating the development of the present-day Libyan and Iranian states, or the contemporary Catholic rebellion in Ireland. In other cases, for instance, when discussing the evolution and interplay among art forms, the category of art and aesthetic concepts might best suit the historian's needs. And finally, when we look at events in the Middle East during the early decades of the twenty-first century, Croce's concept of the struggle for greater political liberty seems viable.

The *a priori* interpretive categories — economic, political, aesthetic, psychological, ethical, religious, and so forth — should remain distinct from one another. To evaluate an economic interpretation of events, thus, with aesthetic or ethical concepts would amount to a categorial error, and when writing a history of art, a definition of art in terms of economic and political concepts would be equally erroneous. Accordingly, I would affirm the sort of mistake that arises when miscombining categories, or when one claims that all histories must be organized in terms of one category only, e.g., religious, or socio-economic, or political. As I argued earlier, it seems inevitable that experience will invariably transcend our attempts to categorize it.²⁸ In agreement with Croce, I maintain that history does amount to "histories", and that the application of the crocean categorial conception of error in the ways outlined above does provide and will continue to provide solutions to important philosophic problems in theories of history.

Abstract

Whenever Croce used the term "history," he meant judgmental states of consciousness that "live" in the historian's mind. For this reason he described history as autobiography and contemporary. Since Croce's description of history would violate ordinary language usage and obfuscate the customary distinction between biography and autobiography, it would be useful to examine what Croce meant by his assertions and further determine what still "lives" in his theory of history.

²⁸ See C. I. LEWIS, *Mind and World Order*, Dover Publications, New York 1956, chs. 3, 8, and 11.

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