



The Conduct of Life

Benedetto Croce

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But they are not "Fragments," properly, if by that term we mean contributions toward the formation of a system of ethics. Long before they were written I had completed such a system in the third volume of my "Philosophy of the Spirit." They are independent and separate investigations, rather, of certain problems in our spiritual lives which needed to be analysed and reduced to the principles I had previously propounded. The older treatises on ethics (even that of Kant) used to have their "casuistries" and their "theories of the virtues," where particular "cases of conscience" were studied in appendices to the systematic works themselves. The abstract and arbitrary character of such studies I have demonstrated in the course of other writings, showing the reasons why they were destined to vanish, as in fact they have vanished, from modern thought. But these efforts did respond to an actual demand: the need we all feel for having the fundamentals of ethics made specific and applied to the various situations that arise in life. These requirements, it seemed to me, might well be met by essays like those which I here present in specimen—in specimen merely—in the hope that others may be stimulated by them to pursue similar lines of research and meditation according to their own experiences and their own spiritual needs. Never planned as a whole nor assembled in accord with any design, the essays were suggested to me by the most varied queues—a remark by some philosopher, a verse by some poet, some episode in public life, some personal problem of my own, some crisis of conscience in a friend. There is accordingly a certain lack of continuity among them, and here and there a repetition. But such defects are a reflection of the spontaneous origin and the free and independent character of the articles themselves. In reprinting these in book-form I have thought it wiser not to make any abbreviations or modifications which would, force an artificial unity upon them



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