

Brian P. Copenhaver and **R. Copenhaver**, eds.
From Kant to Croce. Modern Philosophy in Italy 1800-1950.
Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press 2012.
859 pages
\$115.00 (cloth ISBN 978-1-4426-4266-9)

From Kant to Croce is an extensive volume devoted to the main aspects of Italian philosophy between 1800 and 1950. It is divided into two parts: the first one is a very long introduction to the most important Italian modern philosophers, that is to say Rosmini, Galluppi, Gioberti, Mamiani, Spaventa, Villari, De Sanctis, Fiorentino and Florenzi Waddington, Labriola, Barzellotti, Croce, Gentile, Gramsci and Bobbio. The second part, a sort of philosophical anthology, contains the translations of some philosophical writings of the above quoted philosophers. With the exception of Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile and Antonio Gramsci, the other Italian modern philosophers are almost unknown in foreign countries (especially in the Anglo-Saxon cultural area). What are the reasons of an history of Italian modern philosophy edited in English by two non-Italians? The reasons can be found from one side in the originality of Italian modern thought, but on the other side in the stop that this philosophy suffered after Benedetto Croce's death.

After Immanuel Kant's death in 1804 the philosophical current of Idealism journeyed from Germany (with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel) to Italy, where it found favour with Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile; but with Gentile's death in 1944 and Croce's in 1952 "ended the era of Italian Philosophy" (vii) according to Brian and Rebecca Copenhaver.

Italian neo-Idealism culminated in Croce's and Gentile's works, but many other great Italian philosophers contributed to the birth of Italian Idealism – Rosmini, Gioberti, and Vico, for instance. Rosmini, in fact, severely criticized the philosophical current of sensism exemplified by Locke or Condillac. As Brian and Rebecca Copenhaver write, according to Rosmini, the object of knowledge "cannot come from sensation alone, either by inference or abstraction: this will be Rosmini's reply to Locke's sensism" (28). So, following Rosmini's reasoning, "Ideas are the means by which things are present to the mind. They are different in kind from sensations and cannot be derived from them, logically or psychologically. They are also objective because they are general and universal, unconstrained by the particular realities given in sense impressions. Ideas are objective and hence representational" (28). Also critical of sensism were Gioberti, Bertrando Spaventa, and others.

All these philosophers contributed to the European circulation of Italian thought, but while German Idealism (first of all the Hegelian one) has been assimilated by European culture after Hegel's death (1831), in Italy it took place "long after it had expired elsewhere" and, according to Brian and Rebecca Copenhaver, this is the "heart of the Italian anomaly" (7).

While in the rest of Europe new philosophical currents like, for instance, pragmatism, existentialism, scientific philosophy and so on, were exploding, in Italy there was a kind of return to Hegelian Idealism. Furthermore, the main representatives of Italian neo-Idealism, that is to say Croce and Gentile, were affected by ideological-political factors: liberal in the case of the former and Fascist in the latter. Because of this each tried to impose their *Weltanschauung* on the

entire social and political life of Italy, thus exerting a kind of opposition to the publication of philosophical works coming from abroad (for instance, Croce, through his relationship with the Italian Editor Laterza, refused to publish authors like Heidegger and Jaspers, and he was also an enemy of the so-called scientific philosophy and of sociology). This is the reason why in Italy disciplines like sociology and epistemology as well as philosophical currents like phenomenology and existentialism arrived so late. It is no accident that after Croce's death in 1952 the philosophical current of Idealism ended very sharply.

Italian philosophy in the first half of the 20th century thus suffered from the dominance of neo-Idealism, a closed-minded philosophy that was never hospitable to other philosophical currents. In order to make Italian culture less provincial, the next generation of Italian philosophers opened its mind to philosophical currents like western Marxism, neo-positivism, existentialism, phenomenology, epistemology, sociology, and so on.

In fact, before Italian neo-Idealism exploded, the main philosophical currents were positivism (with Roberto Ardigò, Aristide Gabelli, etc.) and liberal-catholic spiritualism (with Rosmini and Gioberti). Positivism was attacked by Italian Marxists such as Antonio Labriola but also by Italian neo-Idealism (with its rejection of the "cult" of science). That is why, between positivism (with its *absolute* value of science) and liberal-catholic spiritualism (with its *spiritual* element), Croce and Gentile preferred to continue in the wake of spiritualism, yet without the theology. Their enemies were positivists on one side and Marxists on the other. The theoretical weakness of Italian positivism is well known, but things were different on the Marxist front, which could rely on Marxist thinkers like Antonio Labriola and Antonio Gramsci. The first, apart from being the Master of the young Croce, died at the beginning of the twentieth century, while Gramsci was imprisoned during the Fascist regime. Italian positivism thus ended because of the attacks coming from Italian Marxism on the one hand and from Croce and Gentile on the other, but Italian Marxism itself could not exert its intellectual influence because of the reasons cited above. This why Croce and Gentile could dominate Italian culture for almost four decades.

Another problem of neo-Idealism was its too-strong relationship with political ideology, which forced Italian intellectuals to bend their freedom of thought to ideology. That is why a philosopher of the likes of Norberto Bobbio severely criticized Croce's and Gentile's neo-Idealism (something Bobbio called a form of self-deception) in favor of a neo-Enlightenment or new Rationalism.

In short, this volume provides a very good and detailed introduction to the main aspects of modern philosophy in Italy. The second section, which devoted to translations (from page 194 to page 778), acts as a very useful support in order to study *directly* Italian modern philosophers.

Giacomo Borbone
Catania University