

The Institute for Philosophical Studies in Naples
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For quite a number of years now, I have been accustomed to receive announcements from the *Istituto per gli Studi Filosofici* in Naples. When they first came I knew nothing of the Institute, not even the name of its founder. But I soon realized that although I, like most of my North American colleagues could hardly expect to be able to accept any of the kind invitations showered upon me from this source, there was a real point in telling the philosophical world generally what was happening at the Institute. For the announcements covered the whole range of the history of thought, and the speakers were often eminent foreigners. Sometimes a short series of lectures by one speaker was offered; and sometimes a short cycle of lectures by different speakers on a single theme. It was very evident that Naples was keeping up with the world, and that one would learn something important about the currents of thought in the world, and especially in Italy, by paying attention to the announcements from Naples.

The Course of my own philosophical formation had made me aware already that there was a long and illustrious tradition of philosophical interaction between Naples and the rest of Europe. Behind (and around) Giambattista Vico, the greatest of all Neapolitan thinkers, there was a large circle of lesser lights all of who were acquainted with the school of Descartes, with the work of Newton, and with all the prevailing currents of thought. Not until the advent of Benedetto Croce did Naples again produce a mind that could respond to the main tradition of Europe with something even better than the rest of that tradition had to offer. But Naples was always an *active* partner in the exchange; and when Bertrando Spaventa [1817-1883]¹ (another Neapolitan) spoke in the great age of the Risorgimento of “the circulation of European thought” from Italy and back again, his thesis contained a great measure of truth. Since 1975 the Institute has been seeking to make Spaventa’s thesis true (though in a humbler spirit) not just for European culture but for the world.

In the last three years, largely through the agency of my friend Theodore Geraets (of the University of Ottawa) I have become a participant in the activities and programmes of the Institute. So I know more about it now; and I know that Spaventa’s doctrine formed a real part of its inspiration. It was actually founded in 1975 by Gerardo Marcotta; and he was consciously following the example of Croce who established the Italian Institute for Historical Studies in his own house in 1947. But in setting up a *parallel* Institute for Philosophic studies, Marotta was dissenting clearly from Croce’s view that “philosophy” had been resolved finally and definitively into the methodology of history. In his friendly *opposition* to Croce, he was consciously defending and reviving the more orthodox tradition of Hegelian speculation which Croce’s uncle Bertrando Spaventa was the finest Italian representative.

It is my own view that Spaventa, rather than Croce, or any of the followers of Hegel in Germany and Britain, was the true heir of Hegel; and since it has been the

abiding concern of my own life to recover and define the philosophical legacy of Hegel properly, it is naturally this aspect of the activities of the Institute that interests me the most. In my own contributions to its work, I sought first (in 1985) to draw attention to the Hegel-inspired work of Josiah Royce and Charles S. Peirce; Royce is now too generally neglected, and the Hegelian inspiration of Peirce hardly has been recognized. I wished, so to speak, to be the voice of Spaventa from the Western Hemisphere, and to make this tradition circulate back to Naples. But over the last two years my contributions have concentrated upon the interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, commenting upon certain parts of the text in a concrete historical spirit that would (I hope) have been pleasing to Croce. Eventually (and fairly soon) the Italian public will be able to decide about that for itself, since the Institute has assumed the task of getting my lectures translated and published in Italian.² My little volumes, when they come, will be only minor items in the Institute's already impressive publication list. But I look forward with sanguine hope and pleasure to the making of further contributions of this sort in the future.

My own voice, however, is only one; the Institute has made many other voices heard, even about Hegel. Indeed, through its publication of Karl-Heinz Ilting's editions of several lecture courses at Berlin, it has made Hegel's own voice audible once more. And Hegel himself, with all the controversies about him, is still only *one* voice in the "conversation of mankind". From the first, the Institute has striven to express the whole European tradition — and even other traditions, for it sponsored an international conference on Buddhist studies in 1983, and in the catalogue of its seminars there is one in which several scholars spoke of "Buddhismo e al Vedanta a confronto".

Very appropriately the first seminar given at the Institute was presented by Norberto Bobbio on "La teoria delle forme di governo e Giambattista Vico". (This is appropriate because in Naples Vico's name should be the first spoken, and because Marotta's own career as a philosophical jurist is reflected in the topic.) But in the twelve years since then, scholars like Hans Gadamer have spoken of ancient philosophy, P.O. Kristeller on Humanism and the Renaissance, E.H. Gombrich on the history of aesthetics, and I.B. Cohen on the history of science; there have been Symposia on Jung, on Croce, on the art of Germany in the twenties; and major modern thinkers like Apel, Gadamer, Levinas, and Ricoeur have spoken for themselves and been argued with by others.

Since 1981 the Institute has maintained a Scuola di studi Superiori. One or two of my examples have already been drawn from its courses. But since I have so far emphasized the speakers from abroad, I will now mention some of the most notable Italian contributors to the programme of the school: Luigi Firpo gave a course on Renaissance Utopias in 1981; Eugenio Garin gave one on the rediscovery of Greek philosophy in 1982; Mario Dal Pra ranged in 1983 all the way from Sextus through the Middle ages to Condillac; Gustavo Costa (who hails from Berkeley) spoke on Vico in 1984; and in 1985 (to circle back to my own native culture) Robert Shackleton, a friend and mentor of my undergraduate days at Oxford forty years ago, spoke on the beginnings of the Enlightenment. I wish I could have been there then, for it must have been one of

his last courses; and I have just now (in 1987) finished a course on “Hegel’s Concept of the French Enlightenment”.

To choose from a list so full of eminent names is arbitrary; and I hope that no one will imagine that I take myself to be the Recording Angel, with divine knowledge of who should be mentioned, and who omitted. On the contrary, my list does not reflect even my own cultural knowledge adequately; and reading the record of the Institute’s activities has helped to teach me how many limitations and biases there are in my own world-view. Nor is my record finished yet; the Institute has gone abroad often to support seminars and symposia elsewhere. There have been Convegni on “Hegel and the Natural Sciences” at Tübingen, and on Hegel and Marx at Poitiers; the German Enlightenment has been discussed in Lessing’s Wolfenbüttel, and the French Enlightenment in Paris; Bacon and Newton (and their almost forgotten adversaries) have been discussed in London. The whole history of ethics was ranged over at Frankfurt; and the programme of the colloquium at Rotterdam (“L’autre et la pensée de la difference” Nov. 1985) reminds me of the Renaissance treatises *De omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*.

That is by no means the end of the list, but (together with the international conference on Buddhism) it forms a fitting climax for my thesis about the extension of Spaventa’s “circulation of European thought” to the whole global village. I am not competent in any case to speak of seminars on the history and theory of economics; nor yet of those on psychiatry, still less those on modern physical theory and biology. I will end with a story about myself that illustrates the ambiguities of cultural enthusiasm. At Oxford when I had completed my first degree and had been awarded the fellowship for study in the USA which was to be the first step in my academic career, the Principal of my College (actually St. Edmund Hall) quoted to me a satirical proverb which goes back (I believe) to the Seicente: “An Englishman italianate is the devil incarnate” (L’inglese italianato è diavolo incarnato). Principal Emden was then an old man, and he had begun *his* career as a tutor in the Aula Sancti Edmundi when Dr. Edward Moore, the great English Dantist was Principal. I was a young enthusiast, possessed by an Italian devil indeed, in the shape of my fanatical commitment to the actual idealism of Giovanni Gentile. But that fanatical spirit was redeemed into something a little closer to the angels as my studies in the USA proceeded; and ironically, it was the spirit of Naples, incarnate in the person of Max Fisch (the great *American* Vico scholar who was my *Doktorvater*) that was a principal instrument in my salvation.

I have been always proud of my right to claim a sort of spiritual descent from Dr. Moore; for Dante was one of the first apostles of philosophical reconciliation, and a mighty archangel against all forms of devil-possession. But I am no poet; and it is the “new scientific” spirit of Vico which I would wish to incarnate, and to see incarnated in my own cultural world. This is the spirit that lives in Marotta and in the Institute to which he has devoted his life, and his own personal fortune. It is no national or cultural devil therefore that possesses me when I say: Let Naples, and let Italy be proud of what he has created for them, and may they now support and maintain worthily what he has begun. For then the whole world will have reason to be grateful.

¹ [Transcriber's note: H.S. Harris wrote the entry on Bertrando Spavento for *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Paul Edwards, editor in chief. New York, Macmillan, 1967. He also wrote an article entitled *Hegel in Italy* that was published in *The Word and I*. Washington, D.C., August 1992, pp.579-593.]

² [Transcriber's note: As of 2006 it has been possible to confirm that only one of these series of lectures have been published in Italian translation. *La fenomenologia dell'autocoscienza in Hegel*. Traduzione e cura di Riccardo Pozzo, Milano, 1995. (Five lectures delivered in May 1985.)]