

The Strictly Woven History

Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation in the Thought of Gentile and De Ruggiero

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical narratives of Giovanni Gentile and Guido De Ruggiero, focusing on their respective interpretations of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation. While Benedetto Croce famously presented these three movements as metaphors for political and cultural progress or regression, Gentile and De Ruggiero provided the historiographical scaffolding that shaped and contextualised Croce's thesis. Drawing on Gentile's *Storia della filosofia italiana* and successive editions of *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*, alongside De Ruggiero's *Sommario di storia della filosofia* and *Rinascimento, Riforma e Controriforma*, this article reconstructs their historical outlooks. Despite political divergence – Gentile's alignment with Fascism and De Ruggiero's liberalism – their historical narratives reveal a shared emphasis on the Renaissance as a philosophical turning point. Grounded in his theory of actualism, Gentile highlighted the intellectual dimension of the Renaissance, whereas De Ruggiero emphasised its moral dimension and clarified the significance of the Reformation as a formative moment in modern European thought. Through comparative analysis, the study elucidates how both thinkers reinterpreted early modern intellectual history to articulate complementary visions of modernity.

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I _ Introduction: Historical Background and Croce's Position

Benedetto Croce supported Fascism during the Senate debate held from 24 to 26 June 1924, suffered deeply in making this decision, as he himself confessed in his diary, describing it as an «inner

struggle»¹. At the same time Croce argued that the Renaissance and the Reformation played a progressive role in shaping modern thought whereas the Counter-Reformation remained in an inferior position than these two historical events. Fusao Morio, a Japanese scholar of history of Italy, and Gennaro Sasso interpreted Croce's reading of the Count-

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er-Reformation as a political metaphor expressing his negative impression of fascism².

Additionally, Croce must also have been aware that Curzio Suckert interpreted the Counter-Reformation as a core value of Fascist Italy in his *Europa vivente* (1923)³ and that later, in 1926, Suckert described Croce's *History of the Kingdom of Naples* (1923) as a «Fascist work»⁴.

The implications of Croce's idea – and the force of this metaphor – can be fully understood only when placed within the framework constructed by Giovanni Gentile and Guido De Ruggiero, because, as Salvatore Carannante has argued⁵, their narratives provided a historiographical context to Croce's famous thesis mentioned above.

Among the seminal works on Gentile's and De Ruggiero's historical narratives are those by Norberto Bobbio⁶ and Eugenio Garin⁷. Bobbio locates both Gentile and De Ruggiero within the trajectory of Italian intellectual history. Garin, notably, interprets the subordination of Gentile's philosophy to politics as a consequence of its estrangement from historical context, while he offers high praise for De Ruggiero's philosophical reflections, particularly his conception of ethics as grounded in the consciousness of freedom. In recent years, scholars in the United Kingdom have edited an important volume devoted to both thinkers⁸. Nevertheless, historical writ-

ing – specifically, the way they told the history of modern Europe – has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention.

2 — Previous Research

The relationship between Gentile's political thought and his philosophy has been examined by Henry Sifton Harris⁹ and Aldo Lo Schiavo¹⁰. However, few studies provide an analysis of his history of philosophy with its political context. Indeed, even a survey of the titles included in the fourteen-volume research collection *Giovanni Gentile. La vita e il pensiero* reveals only a handful of studies addressing Gentile's historiographical work¹¹ despite the fact that Gentile's historical work is quantitatively more substantial than his philosophical works¹². Moreover, most of this research focuses mainly on Gentile's historical methodology and its position within the contemporary academic context¹³, while only rarely exploring the contents of his historical narratives. Raffaello Franchini had already observed this tendency and emphasised the nationalistic character of Gentile's historical narratives and their significance¹⁴.

The principal scholar who discussed Gentile as a historian is Eugenio Garin. Positioning Gentile's historical narrative within the tradition of Bertrando Spaventa¹⁵ and Francesco Fiorentino¹⁶, Garin argued that Gentile conceived an

ambitious plan for a history of philosophy¹⁷ and that he identified a connection between the Renaissance and the nineteenth century¹⁸.

Antimo Negri confirmed Garin's interpretation and described Gentile's narrative as a «history of our cultural and civic tradition»¹⁹. As Davide Bigalli has argued, Gentile clearly regarded the Renaissance in a positive light and sought to examine its philosophical contributions in depth²⁰. Alessandro Savorelli, meanwhile, highlighted Gentile's emphasis on the literary character of the Italian Renaissance which he considered to be the cause of its subsequent decline²¹.

Cesare Vasoli analysed Gentile's narrative and detected certain political insinuations within it²². Antonio Corsano interpreted Gentile's historical research as expressing a hope to reconcile philosophy and religion²³. Andrea Scazzola advances a significant thesis that Gentile entrusted the overcoming of the Renaissance to his theory of actualism, and, ultimately, to fascism²⁴. Stefano Zappoli, meanwhile, argued that Gentile established the connection between the Renaissance philosophers such as Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella and Risorgimento philosopher such as Vincenzo Gioberti²⁵. These studies, however, do not suggest that Gentile subordinated his scholarship to fascism. Indeed, Simonetta Bassi clarified Gentile's academic integrity in the face of fascist pressure²⁶.

On the other hand, while Clementina Gily Reda has addressed De Ruggiero's political thought²⁷ and Renzo De Felice has explored the interrelation between political theory, philosophy, and historical methodology²⁸, it is Rik Peters who has carefully examined various editions of De Ruggiero's *Storia della filosofia* with regard to his perspective²⁹. Nevertheless, previous studies have not yet fully investigated the contemporary contexts or the implications of De Ruggiero's historical writings. Likewise, the bibliography of the major comprehensive study on De Ruggiero omits his *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana*, the work presumed to mark the starting point of his philosophical outlook³⁰.

This study examines the historical narratives of two philosophers, focusing on their interpretations of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation. To this end, I analyse Gentile's *Storia della filosofia italiana* and the three editions of his *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920; second edition 1925, third edition 1940 as *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento*)³¹. This analysis clarifies Gentile's overall historical perspective on these three major phenomena. I then turn to De Ruggiero's essay on *Giordano Bruno* (1913), his *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana* (1924), *Sommario di storia della filosofia* (ten editions, 1927-1948) and comprehensive work, *Rinascimento, Riforma e Controriforma* (three editions,

1930-1942). Through this comparative analysis, I demonstrate that Gentile and De Ruggiero shared a historical outlook despite political disagreements.

3 _ Contexts of Gentile's Narratives and His Historical Method

Giovanni Gentile³² graduated from the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa in 1897. After a period of high school teaching, he gradually published a series of essays from 1904 to 1915, which were later compiled into *Storia della filosofia italiana: fino a Lorenzo Valla*³³. According to Vito A. Bellezza's foreword to the volume, the work was intended as the first in a projected series, indicating that Gentile planned to continue his historical account, although subsequent volumes were never published.

Concurrently, from 1903 to 1914, Gentile contributed historical essays titled *La filosofia in Italia dopo 1859* to Croce's journal «La Critica». These writings led to his appointment as a professor of history of philosophy at the University of Palermo in 1906, where he delivered an inaugural lecture on 10 January 1907, entitled *Il concetto della storia della filosofia*³⁴. In 1914 he moved to the University of Pisa to take up a chair in theoretical philosophy, but in 1917 he returned to history of philosophy at Roma Sapienza. This trajectory demonstrates that his scholarship in the history of philosophy

played a decisive role in shaping his academic career³⁵.

In the lecture mentioned above, Gentile argued that history must be a human activity centred on civilisation and the spirit³⁶, asserting that «all the history of humanity is summed up in the history of philosophy»³⁷. On this basis, he maintained that the thought of all the philosophers of our civilisation must be taken into account, thereby emphasising the need for a wide-ranging perspective on the history of philosophy in terms of both its temporal scope and its variety of religious, artistic, and social themes³⁸. He further developed this point by arguing that philosophy is realised in its own history. From this perspective, historians' philosophical consciousness must be reflected in the histories they write, which should be presented systematically as a solution or correction of previous philosophical systems³⁹. Thus, for Gentile, philosophy and history are «substantially equivalent»⁴⁰.

4 _ Gentile's Narratives

Following this principle, in his *Storia della filosofia italiana*, Gentile began his account of medieval philosophy by not only attending to individual figures such as Thomas Aquinas, but also elevating Dante to a pivotal position, portraying him as the culmination of a philosophical trajectory without which the very

conception of Italian civilisation would be inconceivable⁴¹. Later Gentile affirmed that the development of Renaissance philosophy was not the exclusive domain of professional philosophers, but was also shaped by artists and literary figures, all of whom collectively constituted the humanist tradition⁴².

Having thus characterised the decline of Scholasticism, Gentile turned his attention to the emergence of Humanism, foregrounding the centrality of the human spirit as the defining force of the new intellectual orientation⁴³. He interpreted Petrarch as seeking to place the human being at the centre of scientific inquiry⁴⁴, thereby rejecting the theological premise of divine creation. In this view, Petrarch marked the true conclusion of Scholasticism and inaugurated the spirit of modernity⁴⁵.

Gentile regarded Lorenzo Valla as a foundational figure in the emergence of modern philological and historical criticism⁴⁶. According to Gentile, Valla rejected Christian dogma, not in order to return to paganism but rather to affirm the natural world⁴⁷. Building on Valla's legacy, Gentile concluded that the central contribution of Renaissance philosophy lay in its conceptualisation of nature as an object of thought – a shift that anticipated the intellectual achievements of Bernardino Telesio, Giordano Bruno, and Galileo Galilei⁴⁸.

Although Gentile was unable to complete his planned *Storia della filosofia italiana*, he instead published historical

essays on the Renaissance, which were later collected in the monograph *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*. This volume comprises seven essays⁴⁹. The first chapter is a reproduction of Gentile's 1907 pamphlet, *Giordano Bruno nella storia della cultura*, followed by essays published in subsequent years. Chapters Two and Three originally appeared in 1912; Chapter Four in 1916; Chapter Five in 1919; Chapter Six in 1917; and Chapter Seven in 1918. Collectively the volume represents the culmination of Gentile's engagement with Renaissance thought over more than a decade.

Although each essay reflects the historical consciousness of the respective period in which it was written⁵⁰, the volume as a whole does not distort the historical facts and is underpinned by the perspectives of Gentile's mentors, Bertrando Spaventa and Francesco Fiorentino⁵¹.

The chapters in the first edition of *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* are not arranged chronologically but appear instead to be organised thematically, a structure that warrants closer examination. Following Chapter One, Chapters Two and Three are devoted to a focused study of Bruno. Chapter Four expands the scope to include a broader range of Renaissance thinkers. Chapter Five then discusses Leonardo da Vinci, Chapter Six examines Galilei, and Chapter Seven concludes with a general reflection on the historical significance of Renaissance philosophy.

Although all chapters are grounded in meticulous philological analysis, they differ considerably in the breadth of their subject matter. This suggests that Gentile was navigating between two modes of inquiry: a concentrated biographical study, particularly of Bruno, and a broader philosophical analysis. This dual approach was likely an attempt to articulate more general propositions about Renaissance thought.

In the 1925 second edition of *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*, the structure was significantly revised: the original Chapters Fourth and Seventh, both devoted to general Renaissance theme, were moved to the beginning of the volume. These were followed by individual studies on Leonardo, Galilei, and Bruno. A newly added final chapter presents a specialised study on Campanella, written in 1924. This reorganisation suggests a deliberate shift in emphasis. By placing the general thematic chapters first, Gentile framed the broader philosophical context before delving into specific figures and culminating in a focused examination of Campanella's thought⁵². Although this edition may have carried political implications, its narrative coherence remained intact; rather, it reveals Gentile's endeavour to provide a clear and critical account of the Renaissance's historical currents.

An examination of the first three chapters of the 1920 edition reveals several key propositions. First, Gentile sees Bruno as an embodiment of the late sixteenth cen-

tury, a period in which the old history of European civilisation came to an end with the Renaissance; Bruno thus represents, for Gentile, the «logical conclusion of the Renaissance»⁵³. Gentile advances the thesis that while the Renaissance was artistically brilliant, it was politically and morally decadent – a condition that, according to Gentile, persisted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries⁵⁴. These centuries are thus characterised as a period of «decadence»⁵⁵.

Gentile portrays Bruno as a philosopher who sought to speak truth by distancing himself from practical contingencies⁵⁶. Following this logic, Bruno refrained from arguing with theologians who taught doctrines contrary to his own⁵⁷. Consistent with this stance, Bruno conceived of God not as a transcendent being but as an immanent presence.

Gentile further interprets this position as anticipating Kant's notion of the «thing-in-itself»⁵⁸ and as a gesture towards the limits of philosophical inquiry. Ultimately, Gentile maintains that Bruno discovered the historicity of the spirit, a notion that would remain largely unrecognised until the time of Giambattista Vico⁵⁹.

In short, because what mattered most for him was the way in which the Renaissance prepared the ground for modern idealism and historicism, he celebrated the central role of its intellectual spirit. This is a vision of history in which human thought – rather than political transformation – is what truly drives progress. Here we can

see that Gentile – by asserting the primacy of the act of thought – mirrored his own actualism in his historical writing⁶⁰.

The subsequent chapters were written to situate Bruno more precisely, thereby refining Gentile's claims through certain modifications. Gentile enriched his narrative of Renaissance philosophy: in addition to Bruno, he discusses Campanella – on whom Vico would later draw – as a figure representing a synchronic perspective. He also develops a diachronic perspective by examining thinkers such as Marsilio Ficino and Leon Battista Alberti, whose intellectual currents flowed into Bruno's thought. Furthermore, Gentile reiterates his characterisation of Bruno as a thinker who recognised «the value of the human being as the spirit that shapes the world in history»⁶¹.

Conversely, Gentile engages with Leonardo's conception of sensory experience, arguing that it allows for the presupposition of a reason unified with nature. In relation to successors such as Bruno, Campanella, and Galileo, Gentile contends that Leonardo belongs not to Galileo's scientific naturalism but rather to the metaphysical naturalism of Bruno and Campanella⁶². He also suggests that within Leonardo's thought one can discern a trajectory leading towards the concept of human reason found in Immanuel Kant⁶³.

Gentile then turns to Galileo, noting that his perspective diverged both from philosophers such as Telesio, Bruno, and Campanella and from scientists such as

Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Johannes Kepler. Gentile characterises Galileo's intellectual stance as a «direct recognition of fact»⁶⁴, arguing that Galileo regarded sensory experience as indisputable and believed that such experience could be verified and measured solely in quantitative terms.

In the final analysis, Gentile contrasts this development with the Reformation, arguing that it never succeeded in establishing a foundational presence in Italy. On balance, he assigns greater philosophical value to Renaissance thought than to the Reformation, particularly because of its continuity with the trajectory of modern European philosophy⁶⁵. However, these claims rest on a philosophical insight rather than concrete analysis; strictly speaking, he refrains from issuing a definitive judgment on the Reformation.

As we have seen, Gentile weaves a complex tapestry of historical and conceptual structures. If the first edition of *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* may be regarded as a direct and unmediated expression of Gentile's research, the second edition reflects a more developed historical synthesis, presenting a thicker narrative that moved from general considerations to more particular studies in roughly chronological order.

This evolution becomes especially evident in the third edition, which preserves the chapter structure of the second while introducing new material that further elaborates Gentile's methodological bal-

ance. A specialised study on Telesio is inserted after the essay on Galileo, and a general reflection on humanism is added at the beginning of the volume. Moreover, an intermediate essay – *La filosofia a Firenze nell'età medicea* – is positioned after the discussion of Leonardo, thereby bridging the particular and the general in a way that exemplifies Gentile's mature historiographical synthesis⁶⁶. His intention appears to have been to emphasise a philosophical current – consisting of Leonardo, Telesio, Bruno, and Campanella – that was distinct from Galileo's scientific current.

As we have seen, Gentile's historical narrative progressively expanded, aligning with his evolving perspective. Even while engaging in philosophical disputes with Croce in 1913, embraced fascism in 1923, and published a policy on the culture in 1925, his core historiographical view on the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation remained unchanged. This suggests that his account of these periods was stable and internally consistent, even though his social philosophy shifted with his later work, *Genesis and structure of Society* (posthumous edition, 1946).

5 — De Ruggiero's Philosophical Position and Political Contexts

De Ruggiero's interest in the history of Renaissance philosophy was sparked by

Croce, as De Ruggiero himself admitted in a letter to Gentile on 6 April 1912⁶⁷. To realise this project, he drew upon Gentile's academic work on the Renaissance, publishing it as Part IV (*Filosofia italiana*) of his book *La filosofia contemporanea* (1912)⁶⁸ and an essay on *Giordano Bruno* (1913). His historical perspective on Italian philosophy in these works was maintained in the second (1920) and third edition of *La filosofia contemporanea* (1929)⁶⁹.

De Ruggiero began teaching the history of philosophy with a fixed tenure at the University of Messina in 1923, moving to the University of Rome in 1925. Thus, as in Gentile's case, historical narratives played a decisive role in shaping his academic career.

Before examining his narratives on the Renaissance, it is worth noting De Ruggiero's view on Croce and Gentile. He initially saw Gentile's work as the «ideal succession» of Croce's, but he revised this judgement in the appendix of the second edition of *La filosofia contemporanea* (1920), recognising that «each developed himself independently»⁷⁰. He further clarified this position, dedicated himself to the research on *Il pensiero politico meridionale nei secoli XVII e XIX* (1922)⁷¹.

He believed that, in Croce's thought, one could find an «overestimation of the history»⁷² in comparison with philosophy, whereas in that of Gentile, the spirit was affirmed as «eternal action outside the time»⁷³, thereby denying its historicity.

It is also interesting to consider the relationship between De Ruggiero's *Problemi della vita morale* (1914) with *Problemi della conoscenza e della moralità* (1924)⁷⁴. Both works discuss the moral life, yet proceed from the different principles. In the former, De Ruggiero emphasised the concordance between knowledge and moral activity, basing his argument on the subject understood as social existence⁷⁵ and as historical self-consciousness⁷⁶.

Conversely, in the latter work, he introduced a view of «Civil history⁷⁷». While accepting the premise – shared with Gentile – that history is liberty, he acknowledged the significance of the Renaissance and the Reformation⁷⁸. Yet, he pursued his argument in a more articulate way, focusing on the distinction between theory and practice rather than their unity. He wrote: «we can begin our study with this at least provisory assumption that to think is one thing and to act is the other»⁷⁹. He then examined the subjects and objects of thought, drawing on Kant's philosophy. The principal development of De Ruggiero's philosophy in this book is his definition of science as «abstracting thought»⁸⁰ and its distinction from history, which he defined as «individualising thought»⁸¹. His approach reveals his attempt to synthesise the ideas of Gentile and Croce, while simultaneously carving out his own position by recognising the philosophical value inherent in science. It was within this context that he published the *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana* in 1924.

The context surrounding *Sommario di storia della filosofia* (1 ed., 1927) and *Rinascimento, Riforma e Controriforma* (1 ed., 1930) was more complex. His political disagreement with Gentile became explicit in a letter dated 26 April 1925, in which he wrote:

until 3 January, I had deluded myself into thinking that it was still possible to distinguish political dissent from the bonds of friendship and culture. But your recent attitude has deepened the divide... With your program of fascistising culture and education, you have chosen to sacrifice us without regret, setting us against you. We defend ourselves – and perhaps, in doing so, we also defend something of you⁸².

Between 1925 and 1926, De Ruggiero devoted himself to research and education, a period during which he published *Storia del liberalismo europeo* (1925)⁸³. In 1927, he resumed his collaboration with the journal «La Critica», which had been interrupted since 1915⁸⁴. The essays he published there would later be collected in his *Filosofi del Novecento* (1934).

Throughout this period, De Ruggiero sought to clarify the differences between his philosophy and Gentile's. With Gentile's political support for fascism in mind, he explicitly criticised the unifying tendency of Gentile's actualism. This philosophical distancing is evident in the third edition of *La filosofia contemporanea* (1929), where De Ruggiero omitted

several favourable explanations of Gentile's philosophy that had appeared in the second edition⁸⁵. For example, in the earlier edition he had defended Gentile against Croce's well-known accusation, describing Gentile's *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* as «the most suggestive work that contains rich inspiration»⁸⁶, while also reconstructing Gentile's solution. The omission of this discussion in the later edition did not reflect a change of assessment or a judgement of irrelevance; rather, De Ruggiero believed that he had philosophically moved beyond Gentile's position.

In his *Science, History and Philosophy* (1931)⁸⁷, De Ruggiero did not repudiate Gentile's philosophical contributions and maintained scholarly respect for him. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the inherent tension between scientific and historical knowledge. At the same time, he recognised their dialectical and mutually complementary relationship, arguing that philosophy could integrate these «opposites into an articulated and living unity»⁸⁸.

As De Ruggiero's philosophy evolved beyond Gentile's, his intention was no longer to defend it. At this point, the 'something' of Gentile that De Ruggiero sought to 'defend' appears to have been their shared historical outlook. He aimed to surpass Gentile not only as a philosopher but also as a historian. He considered himself to be completing Gentile's historical project rather

than rejecting it. His continued interest in this field is evident from his proposal for a book on Renaissance philosophy submitted to a British publisher in February 1925 and from his review of works on the Reformation and Counter-Reformation published in «La Critica» two years later⁸⁹.

To advance his studies on Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation, De Ruggiero drew upon his research into political thought, particularly from the analysis developed in *Il pensiero politico meridionale nei secoli XVII e XIX* and *Storia del liberalismo europeo*. This approach did not depart from Gentile's historical perspective, for both thinkers held that the history of philosophy must encompass the full range of human activity.

6 — De Ruggiero's Narratives: Shared Outlook and Divergent Political Views

In his book, *Giordano Bruno*, De Ruggiero positioned Bruno as one of the precursors of modern philosophy, alongside figures like Galileo and Campanella because Bruno affirmed the importance of the human interior spirit⁹⁰. In Bruno's thought, the physical world of Aristotle was overcome, God was understood as immanently present in the world, and matter became a source of «actuality»⁹¹. Significantly, De Ruggiero quoted Gentile's remark that Bruno's philosophy «divinized the nature»⁹².

Building on this understanding, De Ruggiero explored a distinctive feature of Bruno's philosophy: the indifference of contraries. He argued that Bruno dissolved all things into the unity of the universe. Large things cannot exist without small ones, heavy things without light ones, and noise without silence. This unity, he continued, entailed a complete negation of the external world and simultaneously oppressed the sense of individuality of life. De Ruggiero then connected Bruno's legacy with that of Vico⁹³.

De Ruggiero largely shared Gentile's historical positioning on the philosopher. Yet in 1924, although maintaining philosophical distance from Gentile, he adopted a broader perspective in a manner analogous to Gentile's expansion of *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*. In the preface to his *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana*, De Ruggiero affirmed that the Italian Renaissance transformed medieval society into a modern one, regarding Dante as its precursor and Petrarch as its point of departure⁹⁴.

Building on this premise, De Ruggiero began his account of sixteenth-century Italian philosophy. He positioned three key thinkers – Bruno, Galilei and Campanella – as contributors to the formation of modern intellectual elements. He argues that Bruno sought to perceive God in every part of the world⁹⁵, Campanella articulated a modern self-consciousness, and Galilei founded natural science⁹⁶.

De Ruggiero maintained the same assessment of protagonists themselves as Gentile did. However, as a result of his further research on the Reformation thinkers – research that Gentile had never undertaken –, his overall historical evaluation diverged from Gentile's. De Ruggiero regarded the Reformation as a more profound and comprehensive movement⁹⁷. Conversely, he criticised the Counter-Reformation with particular severity, claiming that it produced nothing original and constituted merely a «degenerative moment of Renaissance»⁹⁸.

Three years after publishing *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana*, De Ruggiero released *Sommario di storia della filosofia* in 1927. The former appeared in only one edition, whereas the latter went through ten identical editions from 1927 to 1948, indicating its considerable influence. From De Ruggiero's own perspective, however, the two works should be read together.

In this later volume, De Ruggiero integrated Croce's historical interpretations, drawing on Croce's essay on the seventeenth century published in 1924. In this essay, Croce argued that Renaissance and Reformation were «ideal principles» shaping modern Europe whereas the Counter-Reformation was a «social necessity»⁹⁹. Following Croce's lead in the introduction to the *Sommario di storia della filosofia*, De Ruggiero reiterated the conclusion of his earlier work, insist-

ing that modern philosophy began with the Renaissance and Reformation¹⁰⁰.

With this premise, De Ruggiero traced the development of philosophical thought from the ancient and medieval periods. In doing so, he complemented Gentile's account of the exploration of human consciousness – centred on the works of Bruno and Campanella – offering a multi-layered perspective that moved from the *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana* to *Sommario di storia della filosofia*¹⁰¹. Drawing on his liberal outlook he had developed while writing *Storia del liberalismo europeo*, he argued that «just as Humanism is the emancipation of the literary spirit from medieval authority and tradition, so the Reformation is a similar, but deeper and broader emancipation of religious and civic conscience from the Catholic Church»¹⁰². He concluded that the Reformation gave rise to the doctrine of tolerance and of religious liberty¹⁰³. Through this approach, De Ruggiero expanded his historical narrative and integrated the history of ethics into his philosophical account.

In the preface to *Rinascimento, Riforma e Controriforma*, De Ruggiero explained that his intention was to fill the gaps in the history of philosophy¹⁰⁴. To clarify the significance of his work, he provided a concise eighty-six-page introduction that presented medieval history from both philosophical and political perspectives – a feature that distinguished this volume from the other

works in his *Storia della filosofia*. Drawing on his methodological distinction between thought and action, he argued that the Renaissance and Reformation were born from the same impulse towards human regeneration, while also distinguishing the practical character of the Reformation from the theoretical one of Renaissance¹⁰⁵.

De Ruggiero adopted the same constellation of Renaissance thinkers that Gentile had employed in his works, and he argued that the «Reformation, with its fanatic sectarianism and outburst» went beyond the Renaissance¹⁰⁶. In his view, the Reformation preserved moral values through abnegation and sacrifice¹⁰⁷. The analysis of major Reformation thinker led him to the conclusion that the Reformation opened the way to modern rationalism¹⁰⁸.

While clarifying in concrete terms the thinkers of the Renaissance across various fields, De Ruggiero identified the death of Bruno on 17 February 1600 as «the point at which the highest thought of the Renaissance converges with the Reformation»¹⁰⁹. In contrast, he treated the Counter-Reformation less favourably and following Croce, he regarded it as inferior to both the Renaissance and the Reformation. He referred to Croce's *Storia della età barocca in Italia* and quoted: «the human and eternal character which we find in the Renaissance and in the Reformation is instead lacking in the Counter-Reformation, which therefore cannot

stand on the same level as the previous two»¹¹⁰. De Ruggiero thus argued that the Catholic thought became far less significant than secular thoughts¹¹¹.

7 _ Conclusion

Gentile clarified the philosophical current running through Telesio, Bruno, and Campanella, but he did not further develop the place of the Reformation within this trajectory. De Ruggiero incorporated this current into his own narrative. As his own philosophical thought evolved, he distinguished between thought and action, emphasised the importance of collective moral consciousness, and assigned greater value to the Reformation than to the Renaissance. Despite this divergence in evaluation, both Gentile and De Ruggiero pursued a common project: the positioning historical figures within a civil history in which the Renaissance and Reformation – rather than the Counter-Reformation – appear as the primary architects of the modern world.

We can now contextualise Croce's thesis with greater precision. In advancing it, Croce expressed a tension within his political thinking: on one hand, a lingering hope that Fascism might restore national order and stability in Italy; on the other, a penetrating insight into the negative side of fascism. At the same time, he responded to writers such as Suckert,

who attempted to overturn the established historical narratives by portraying the Counter-Reformation as a symbol of Fascist identity. Croce's intervention – grounded in the historical frameworks prepared by Gentile and De Ruggiero – thus constituted both a firm rebuttal and an effective defence of a collectively shared historical understanding.

Their concrete narratives represent a strictly woven history, highly resilient to journalistic discourse without proper critical textual analysis. This resilience derives not only from the diversity of their philosophical and ideological positions, but also from the relationship between master and pupil, sustained by a shared commitment to academic integrity.

Note

1 _ B. CROCE, *Taccuini di lavoro*, 6 voll., Arte tipografica, Napoli 1987, vol. II, p. 373.

2 _ F. MORIO, *Bunkano fashizumuka to chishikijin* [Fascistisation of culture and intellectuals], in FASHIZUMU KENKYŪKAI [Society for the Study of Fascism] (ed. by), *Senshi no kakumei Seisansha no kokka*, Taiyō Shuppan, Tokyo 1985, p. 252; G. SASSO, *Croce. Storia d'Italia e Storia d'Europa*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2017, pp. 55-56.

3 _ C. SUCKERT, *L'Europa vivente. Teoria storica del sindacalismo nazionale*, con prefaz. di A. Soffici, Editrice La Voce, Firenze 1923, cap. III.

4 _ [C. MALAPARTE], *Per l'arte fascista. Botta e risposta*, «Critica fascista», IV (15 novembre 1926) 22, p. 415.

5 _ S. CARANNANTE, *Croce: Rinascimento, Riforma, Controriforma*, in M. CILIBERTO (a cura di), *Croce e Gentile. La cultura italiana e l'Europa*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Torino 2016, pp. 489-497.

6 _ N. BOBBIO, *Profilo ideologico del Novecento*, Garzanti, Milano 1990, capp. 9 e 10.

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29 _ R. PETERS, *The Arduous Path: The Development of de Ruggiero's Philosophy of History in his History of Philosophy*, «Collingwood and British Idealism Studies», XXVI (2020) 1-2, pp. 145-182.

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31 _ There is also G. GENTILE, *Studi sul Rinascimento*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1923. This volume was edited as a sort of Appendix to *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1920. See G. GENTILE *Studi sul Rinascimento*, terza riveduta e accresciuta, Le Lettere, Firenze 1993³, p. V.

32 _ On his academic career, see P. DI GIOVANNI, *Introduzione*, in G. GENTILE, *Il concetto della storia della filosofia*, a cura di P. Di Giovanni e contributi di G. Cacciatore, C. Cesa, G. Cotroneo, L. Malusa, F. Rizzo, A. Savorelli, Le Lettere, Firenze 2006, pp. 9-35.

33 _ G. GENTILE, *Storia della filosofia italiana: fino a Lorenzo Valla*, a cura di V. A. Bellezza, Sansoni, Firenze 1962.

34 _ He discusses the same theme, writing an essay, ID., *Il circolo della filosofia e della storia della filosofia*, «La Critica», VII (1909) 2, pp. 143-149.

35 _ See L. MALUSA, *Rilevanza "dialettica" della concezione gentiliana della storia della filosofia (anche oggi, malgrado tutto)*, in G. GENTILE, *Il concetto della storia della filosofia*, cit., pp. 197-231. Upon further examination of this lecture, see G. CACCIATORE, *L'unità di storia filologica e logica speculative. Gentile e la storia della filosofia*, in G. GENTILE, *Il concetto della storia della filosofia*, cit., pp. 233-248.

36 _ G. GENTILE, *Il concetto della storia della filosofia*, cit., p. 58.

37 _ Ivi, p. 61. He also thought that the history is the human progress to the liberty (ivi, p. 63).

- 38 _ Ivi, p. 73.
- 39 _ Ivi, pp. 69-70.
- 40 _ Ivi, p. 65.
- 41 _ ID., *Storia della filosofia italiana: fino a Lorenzo Valla*, cit., p. 149.
- 42 _ ID., *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920), cit., pp. 256-257.
- 43 _ ID., *Storia della filosofia italiana: fino a Lorenzo Valla*, pp. 199, 202.
- 44 _ Ivi, p. 221.
- 45 _ Ivi, p. 225.
- 46 _ Ivi, p. 355.
- 47 _ Ivi, pp. 379-380.
- 48 _ Ivi, p. 351.
- 49 _ ID., *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920), cit.
- 50 _ For instance, *Giordano Bruno nella storia della cultura* was originally written for a conference held on 22 March 1907, after the publication of G. BRUNO, *Dialoghi metafisici*, nuovamente ristampati con note da G. Gentile, Laterza, Bari 1907 – prepared in previous years as a volume in the series «Classici della filosofia moderna» planned by B. Croce (cfr. B. CROCE, G. GENTILE, *Carteggio*, a cura di C. Cassani e C. Castellani, 5 voll., Aragno, Torino 2016, vol. II, p. 523) and was motivated by a desire to revise politically instrumentalised representations of Bruno (cfr. S. BASSI, op. cit., p. 121). In 1928, Gentile once again responded to Fascist critiques of Bruno. Furthermore, the essay ‘Campanella’, which was added in the 1925 edition, was composed with his theory of the ethical state in mind Gentile entrusted Fascism with the task of transcending the Renaissance, but when this endeavour failed, he returned to the Renaissance as a form of humanism that celebrates human dignity (cfr. A. SCAZZOLA, op. cit., pp. 261-264).
- 51 _ C. VASOLI, op. cit., pp. 291, 298-299.
- 52 _ G. GENTILE, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1925², pp. 301-303. The third edition includes three newly added essays; see G. GENTILE, *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento*, terza edizione accresciuta e riordinata, Sansoni, Firenze 1940³, pp. 429-432.
- 53 _ ID., *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920), cit., p. 52.
- 54 _ G. SASSO, *La questione del Rinascimento*, in ID., *Due Italie di Giovanni Gentile*, il Mulino, Bologna 1998, pp. 98-99, 144-145; cfr. ID., *Giovanni Gentile*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 53, 2000, available online at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-gentile_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (accessed 05/03/2022). For further references on Gentile, see my previous article T. KURASHINA, *Fashisuto no benmei: Giovanni Gentile niokeru jiyū to hō* [*The Apology of a Fascist: On the Relationship Between Freedom and Law in Giovanni Gentile*], «Departmental Bulletin Paper of the Institute for Advanced Studies, Kyoto Sangyo University», XIII (2018), pp. 166-154. In the present study, I additionally consulted L. FIRPO, op. cit., pp. 196-205; and E. GARIN, *Giovanni Gentile interprete del Rinascimento*, cit., both of which bear direct relevance to the present argument. I also refer to A. MUSCI, *Giovanni Gentile*, in M. CILIBERTO (a cura di), *Giordano Bruno: Parole, concetti, immagini*, 3 voll., Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2014, vol. I, pp. 814-817.
- 55 _ G. GENTILE, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920), cit., p. 53.
- 56 _ Ivi, p. 17.

57 _ Ivi, p. 17. Nevertheless, Bruno maintained that religion – including Christianity – remained necessary for law and the state to exist as ethical entities (ivi, pp. 18, 21). At the same time, he strongly condemned the Reformation, viewing it as a source of discord and warfare (ivi, p. 24).

58 _ Ivi, pp. 73-74.

59 _ Ivi, pp. 105, 109.

60 _ On this point, see U. SPIRITO, *Giovanni Gentile e la concezione dell'umanesimo*, «Giornale critico della filosofia italiana», LV-LVII (1976) 1, pp. 1-11.

61 _ G. GENTILE, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (1920), cit., p. 147.

62 _ Ivi, pp. 208-209.

63 _ Ivi, pp. 196-197, 201.

64 _ Ivi, p. 239.

65 _ Ivi, pp. 264-267.

66 _ ID., *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento* (1940), cit., pp. 429-432.

67 _ Fondazione Roma Sapienza, Archivio Giovanni Gentile: AFG, s. 1 Corrispondenza, ss. 1, fasc. De Ruggiero Guido (1911-1925).

68 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *La filosofia contemporanea*, Laterza, Bari 1912, pp. 353-437.

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71 _ ID., *Il pensiero politico meridionale nei secoli XVII e XIX*, Laterza, Bari 1922.

72 _ ID., *La filosofia contemporanea* (1920), cit., vol. II, p. 255.

73 _ Ivi, p. 265.

74 _ See also R. PETERS, op. cit., p. 157.

75 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *Problemi della vita morale*, Battiato, Catania 1914, p. 36.

76 _ Ivi, pp. 49, 54.

77 _ ID., *Problemi della conoscenza e della moralità*, Principato, Messina-Roma 1924, p. 13.

78 _ Ivi, p. 77. See also ivi, pp. 153-154, 167-168.

79 _ Ivi, p. 23.

80 _ Ivi, p. 70, see also ivi, pp. 94-95; cfr. ID., *Nota*, in ID., *La filosofia contemporanea*, (1929), cit., vol. II, p. 259.

81 _ Ivi, pp. 71-72.

82 _ Fondazione Roma Sapienza, Archivio Giovanni Gentile: AFG, s. 1 Corrispondenza, ss. 1, fasc. De Ruggiero Guido (1911-1925).

83 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *Storia del liberalismo europeo*, Laterza, Bari 1925.

84 _ R. DE FELICE, *Guido De Ruggiero*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 29, 1991, available online at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/guido-de-ruggiero_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (accessed 25/08/2025).

85 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *La filosofia contemporanea* (1920), cit., pp. 259-260, 263, 266.

86 _ Ivi, pp. 259-260.

87 _ ID., *Science, History and Philosophy*, «Philosophy», VI (1931) 22, pp. 166-179.

88 _ Ivi, p. 178.

89 _ B. CROCE, G. DE RUGGIERO, *Carteggio*, a cura di A. Schinaia e N. Ruggiero, introduzione di G. Sasso, il Mulino, Bologna 2008, pp. 177, 214; and R. PETERS, op. cit., p. 167.

90 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *Giordano Bruno*, Gaetano Garzoni Provenzani, Roma 1913, p. 39.

91 _ Ivi, p. 30.

92 _ Ivi, p. 37.

- 93 _ Ivi, pp. 41-42.
- 94 _ ID., *Sommario di storia della filosofia italiana*, Principato, Messina-Roma 1924, pp. 13-14, 29.
- 95 _ Ivi, p. 66.
- 96 _ Ivi, p. 69.
- 97 _ Ivi, pp. 57-59.
- 98 _ However, see also ivi, p. 60.
- 99 _ B. CROCE, *Controriforma*, «La Critica», XXII (1924) 6, p. 331.
- 100 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *Sommario di storia della filosofia*, Laterza, Bari 1927, p. 12.
- 101 _ Ivi, pp. 234-236.
- 102 _ Ivi, p. 219.
- 103 _ Ivi, p. 223.
- 104 _ ID., *Rinascimento, Riforma e Controriforma*, Laterza, Bari 1930, vol. I, p. VII.
- 105 _ Ivi, pp. 74, 78.
- 106 _ Ivi, p. 209.
- 107 _ Ivi, p. 217.
- 108 _ Ivi, p. 265.
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- 110 _ Ivi, p. 192; cfr. B. CROCE, *Storia della età barocca in Italia*, Laterza, Bari 1929, p. 10.
- 111 _ G. DE RUGGIERO, *Rinascimento, Riforma e Controriforma*, cit., vol. II, p. 192.