

***Contemporary Italian Philosophy: Crossing the Borders of Ethics, Politics, and Religion.***

**Edited by Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder.**

**Albany: SUNY Press, 2007; 306 pages.**

English-speaking philosophers have known for some time that they should pay more attention to Italian thinkers, that Italy represents an under-valued and often omitted perspective in the intellectual development of Europe after World War II, and that beyond the most familiar names (Eco, Agamben, Negri and Vattimo) there stands a rich and diverse body of work that only rarely receives its due in the English-speaking world. These concerns have been fully answered in a collected volume of work that is as overdue as it is timely: *Contemporary Italian Philosophy: Crossing the Borders of Ethics, Politics, and Religion* is the product of the diligence and expertise of its co-editors, Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder.

The 306-page volume succeeds primarily in its ability to frame the scope and importance of Italian philosophy as practiced by the generation of scholars who came of age during the 1960s and who remain to this day the standard-bearers for Italian thinking. The editors' preface sets the tone of the work—describing the milieu from which this project emerges and outlining the rather daunting task of introducing an audience to a tradition of thinking that spans many decades and involves a multitude of motivations, ideals, and figures. While the editors willingly admit that this is neither the first attempt to introduce Italian philosophy nor a comprehensive one due to the absence of many key figures from the same generation (as well as younger thinkers), they are nonetheless successful in their primary goal—to introduce Italian philosophy in a manner that reflects its unique historical, cultural, and intellectual lineage. More than a document of the giants of Italian thought, this work sets the stage for continued research into the many contemporary Italian thinkers who are the worthy students and followers of the individuals collected in this volume.

The Introduction by Maurizio Pagano provides an essential historical rubric for understanding what happened to Italian philosophy after World War II and how this climate produced the thinkers whose essays are contained in this volume. One not only gains the information needed

to trace the broad historical arc from Croce, Gentile, and Gramsci to the present day, but more importantly one is introduced to the influential thinkers and teachers who would shape Italian philosophy after the war: Nicola Abbagnano, Norberto Bobbio, Enzo Paci, Augusto del Noce and Luigi Pareyson (to name a few). Pagano's essay identifies the conflict between religious and secular thought (a split that mirrors all of Italian culture) as integral to the development of Italian philosophy, one that in the convergence of philosophy and theology today faces the new challenge of the culture wars and globalisation. Pagano's assessment of this situation sets the conceptual tone of this volume, as it seems that in order for Italian thinking to confront the challenges of the globalised world, it can move forward only by engaging its own history.

The work is divided into three parts, each containing essays organised around a particular theme. While I cannot comment on each essay, it is worth noting that Benso and Schroeder have used the organisation of this volume to highlight some of the signature moments and methodologies in recent Italian thinking.

The first part, "Marking the Borders: Historical Legacies," exemplifies the highly theoretical approach that Italian thinkers take when reflecting upon the legacy of philosophy and the crisis that it faces today. Of note is Sergio Givone's first publication in English, "Philosophy, Poetry, and Dreaming," which engages the issue of "truth become fable" through a reading of Nietzsche back to Vico and forward to Adorno and Horkheimer. Likewise, Giovanni Ferretti's investigation of "Philosophy and Christian Theology Today" brings the unique Italian perspective—and philosophical lineage—to bear on problems that have once again become relevant in Continental engagements with religion and theology. These essays, along with the contributions by Vincenzo Vitiello and Carlo Sini, provide a rich background of ideas that accentuate the more well-known but often decontextualised hermeneutic theory of Gianni Vattimo, whose seminal essay, "The Ontology of Actuality," appears in this volume for the first time in English.

The second part, "Crossing the Borders: Current Thematizations," traces out the fragile and contentious space that the human inhabits between the finite and the transcendent. In so doing, the essays demonstrate the various ways that the lineage of Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger is both embraced and rejected in Italian thinking. In "Transcendental without Illusion," the late Marco Maria Olivetti presents his idea

of the “Third Person” that was central to his thinking before his untimely death in 2006. Olivetti reformulates transcendental metaphysics by replacing the interrogative “what?” with “who?” that responds to an anterior intersubjectivity and thereby points to our “responsibility for responsibility” in the figure of the absent third person. Salvatore Natoli, in his essay “Finitude and Responsibility,” meditates upon technics, risk, and the Aristotelean concept of the “mean” in an attempt to ground an ethics in the unique encounters that humans face in the day-to-day of this era.

The third part, “Opening the Borders: The Appeal of the World,” demonstrates the very powerful and diverging ways in which Italian thinkers bring their unique theoretical commitments to bear on what are the most politically inspired and relevant essays of the collection. While each touches upon issues of great importance today—delusion, globalisation, gender, justice and virtue—the overall effect of this part, and perhaps the entire collection, is one that is best addressed in the final essay of the book. Massimo Cacciari’s “Names of Place: Border” presents the *aporias* that surround the idea of border and place. To equate the two terms is to embrace the very positive dilemma that this book, and perhaps Italian philosophy as it is construed here, faces in relation to its neighbors, both Continental and analytic: that defining the place of Italian philosophy means, in one sense, to bring it finally into the fold of other, more identifiable traditions, to move its borders, to change its space.

Such a movement might truly be the essence of the Italian thinking: powerfully *attuale* or “of the times” while remaining theoretical and undeniably unique while nonetheless communal in that it understands philosophy as integral to the life and success of the finite individual engaged in the *polis*. In this sense, it is a truly political thinking at home in the public square rather than exiled from it. And yet, given the direction this volume ultimately takes, figures like Agamben and Negri seem to be the most obvious omissions in this collection. Moreover, despite the expansive view provided by the authors collected here, one might still long for the more recent excursions Italian thinkers have made into analytic philosophy and psychology, or even the exceptional work currently being done by the students of the contributors.

These concerns aside, Benso and Schroeder are to be commended for providing what is not the first, but certainly the most comprehensive and essential collection of Italian thinkers in English to date.

If we have yet to understand the valuable contributions made by Italian thinkers in the well-trodden paths of Continental philosophy, the essays provide a valuable set of new itineraries, and perhaps even a breath of *aria fresca* to enliven our older ones. This collection documents the wealth of a generation of Italian thinking and positions us eagerly on the border of new generations of thinking yet to come.

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***Issues in Interpretation Theory***

**Edited by Pol Vandavelde**

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This volume offers a variety of loosely connected papers by scholars who participated in the seminar on phenomenology and hermeneutics at Marquette University over the past few years. The essays pertain in some cases to hermeneutic theory and in the rest to various issues on the general theme of interpretation. The title is slightly misleading; if one wishes to read a volume on what is new in hermeneutics, one will not find it here. It is, however, a rather good collection and relatively even in quality for a volume of this kind. It is better approached as a relatively thick journal issue than a volume with a clearly discernible theme. The contributors are Jacques Taminiaux, Stephen Watson, Ronald Bruzina, Hans Rainer Sepp, David Vessey, Keith D'Souza, Paul Gyllenhammer, David Ingram, D. R. Koukal, Kenneth Maly, and Anthony Steinbock. The essays cover a broad range of themes and figures, including Sartre, Beckett, Royce, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Vico, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and, of course, Heidegger. The volume also includes a rather perfunctory, two and a half page foreword by the editor, which serves no purpose that I can see.

The essays by Vessey, Maly, Gyllenhammer, and D'Souza are among the stronger contributions. In his well-written piece, "Engaging Across Traditions: Royce and Gadamer on Interpretation," David Vessey takes up a few questions regarding the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Josiah Royce and the relation between them. As Vessey explains, Royce explicitly took up the question of interpretation in *The Problem of Christianity* (1913) and gave a surprisingly nuanced, phenomenological ac-