

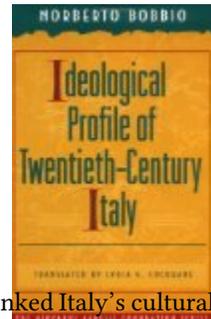
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Norberto Bobbio. *Ideological Profile of Twentieth-Century Italy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. vii + 239 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-04352-4.

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Although academic works abound on the subject of Italian postwar history, little insight from Italian writers of their own history is available in English. In an attempt to bring Italian history by Italian writers to the fore, the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation, through Princeton University Press, has begun to translate and publish key works of modern Italian historiography. Norberto Bobbio's work is the first of the series.

An authoritative intellectual voice in contemporary Italian politics and a professed democrat, Bobbio, in a work initially published in 1969, traces "the historical roots of the weaknesses of democracy in Italy" by analyzing ideological patterns that have dominated intellectual thought in the twentieth century (p. xvii). Bobbio examines the history of ideas versus the social and political history, and "has been preeminently concerned with drawing on liberalism and socialism and explaining the points of contact but confirming the differences" (p. xi).

In *Ideological Profile*, political reality has little to do with ideological thought and culture. Bobbio defines true Italian culture as that interpreted by intellectuals; cultural politics, which is the planning of culture by politicians, is delineated from the politics of culture, which to Bobbio is formulated by men of culture—intellectuals, and is representative of true Italian culture. Bobbio sees fascism as a political anomaly, "a long parenthesis" (p. 157) that not only interrupted the current of intellectual thought and subsequently Italy's cultural growth, but also "failed to produce a culture of its own" (p. 133). Bobbio asserts in chapter 13 that "what spirit of innovation and, in a certain sense, of unity there was in the Resistance survived not in politics ... but in culture" (p. 159). According to Bobbio, it was Benedetto Croce who provided the focus for the opposition to fascism; the ide-

ologies embodied in the Resistance linked Italy's cultural past to its present and propelled intellectual thought into its future democratic era.

Bobbio opens his treatise with a juxtaposition of Positivism and Marxism—two interpretations of the Industrial Revolution that shared science as a common ideal. Positivism influenced political thought in that it encouraged the development of the sciences, the social sciences in particular. However, Bobbio says that Positivism never took hold in Italy. Marxism and Positivism "as philosophies of innovation and change, both were the target of concerted attacks from the traditional intellectuals who launched the cultural movements of the new century" (p. 14) (i.e., the Catholics, the Irrationalists, and the Anti-Democrats).

Just as the event of World War I is presented as an interlude, the end of fascism (and the failure of the Resistance to have brought about a revolution) marks the point when "... history would begin more or less where it had left off..." (p. 157). During the Resistance opposing ideologies joined together in the struggle against fascism and were renewed by the Resistance. Unlike after World War I, however, the end of World War II generated in Italy's history "one of its most flourishing cultural movements" (p. 159).

The first years of the republic witnessed the emergence of Neo-Marxist, Existentialist, and Neo-Positivist thought and the awareness of the new role of the intellectual in society, who unlike his traditional counterpart, would establish a relationship with Italian policymakers. Bobbio writes that in the early years of the twentieth century Croce's inspiring maxim "the only way for an intellectual to be involved in politics was to become involved in culture," was turned around to mean that the intellec-

tual could contribute to culture only by being active in politics (p. 166).

Bobbio's last chapters are an examination of the trials and debate on what characterizes Italian democracy. He posits the question whether Italy is now ready for a new Republic. Asking whether the problems are "the result of [a] crisis of authority ... or of a lack of that ideal tension out of which the Italian republic was born," he concludes that it is "further proof of the perennial difference between men of ideas and men of action that has been my constant theme in these pages" (p. 197).

Bobbio's intellectual study is highly theoretical and philosophical. It is a complex and difficult work not suitable for a novice of Italian political history. As the title suggests, it is an ideological profile of both twentieth-century thought and the author's personal beliefs. It is best suited for the scholar of Italian political philosophies and intellectual currents of the twentieth century.

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