



# The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger

By Rocco Rubini

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**The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger** By Rocco Rubini

A natural heir of the Renaissance and once tightly conjoined to its study, continental philosophy broke from Renaissance studies around the time of World War II. In *The Other Renaissance*, Rocco Rubini achieves what many have attempted to do since: bring them back together. Telling the story of modern Italian philosophy through the lens of Renaissance scholarship, he recovers a strand of philosophic history that sought to reactivate the humanist ideals of the Renaissance, even as philosophy elsewhere progressed toward decidedly antihumanist sentiments.

Bookended by Giambattista Vico and Antonio Gramsci, this strand of Renaissance-influenced philosophy rose in reaction to the major revolutions of the time in Italy, such as national unity, fascism, and democracy. Exploring the ways its thinkers critically assimilated the thought of their northern counterparts, Rubini uncovers new possibilities in our intellectual history: that antihumanism could have been forestalled, and that our postmodern condition could have been entirely different. In doing so, he offers an important new way of thinking about the origins of modernity, one that renews a trust in human dignity and the Western legacy as a whole.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“*The Other Renaissance* will be of immense interest to historians of the Italian Renaissance, especially to those who wonder how humanism, despite the term’s ubiquity in scholarship, became a bad word. Philosophers too, whether interested in German or Italian thought in the modern era, will benefit from Rubini’s account, especially if they tend to view philosophy in a transnational context and with an eye toward historical influences. If there is a strand of philosophical thought backstitched into Italian historiography but lost to historical memory, shaped by Vico, Hegel, Gentile, and Heidegger, then *The Other Renaissance* is the first, necessary step toward its fruitful recovery.”

(James Sommerville *Renaissance and Reformation*)

“*The Other Renaissance* is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on the Italian philosophical tradition. Well-constructed, bolstered by meticulous documentation, and presenting a highly original take on its subject, Rubini’s book is an outstanding example of intellectual history at its very best.”

(Gary Ianziti *Review of Metaphysics*)

“This erudite and vastly illuminating book, which seeks to extend the boundaries of ‘modern philosophy’ back past Descartes, offers at its core an account of interpretations of the Italian Renaissance put forward in the years 1860–1947. . . . In the course of telling this story, Rubini meditates on the origins and limits of modernity; on the nature of humanism and the anti-humanism; on the need to cultivate an affective and futural, as well as scientific, relation to the past; on the undesirability of the prevailing schism between philosophy and history; on the honorable character of rhetoric truly understood; and on the cunning of scholars.”

(committee statement, *Morris D. Forkosch Prize*)

“Rubini’s thought-provoking and elegantly written *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger* participates in the recent international trend in unearthing the contribution of modern Italian philosophy to Continental philosophical discourse. Given that Italian philosophy has been construed as only marginally important in the wider European context, its rediscovery and re-collocation requires, as Rubini himself rightly puts it, ‘a thorough genealogical reconstruction.’ This meticulous reconstruction is achieved in Rubini’s exhaustively researched book, which thus makes a fundamental contribution to the recent intellectual shift toward creating ‘Italian theory.’ . . . Rubini’s book more than successfully accomplishes what it sets out to achieve. It is most certainly a consistent and ‘vivid evocation of how the Renaissance was (re)experienced by some of its leading interpreters’ in Italy and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger* enlightens the modern-day reader by offering a broader, more comprehensive picture of the ‘philosophical merits of historical humanisms.’”

(Roberta Cauchi-Santoro *Quaderni d’Italianistica*)

“Intellectual history at its finest. I recommend it not only for its content, but for its style, too, which manages to be both engrossing and engaging without sacrificing any of its rigor. In other words, it is a book about ‘afterlife’ that deserves to have a quite lengthy one itself.”

(*Annali d'italianistica*)

“An excellent and important book, one that will prove indispensable to the history of philosophy, dramatically changing our understanding of Italian Renaissance humanism, its legacy, and its future. Working out of the tradition of Grassi and Garin, Rubini’s narrative allows us to see past the limited and often severely limiting judgments of modern critics and philosophers about Renaissance humanism—a legacy of judgments reaching as far back as Descartes—to again to discover what was philosophical about the movement, and what may still be philosophical about it today.”

(Joshua Brazee *Appositions*)

“The wealth of evidence and close readings that Rubini marshals through the text is complemented by the elegantly written prose...*The Other Renaissance* is a book of great importance for the interpretation of Renaissance Humanism. Not only it challenges the current understanding of Renaissance Humanism, often still treated as mere rhetoric, but also its future developments, providing a more comprehensive picture of its philosophical merits.”

(Beatrice Variolo *Modern Languages Notes*)

“Rubini’s book is not just for Renaissance aficionados and historians—it is a study that sets standards of how intellectual history should be done: through entering the minds of the partners in the debate, understanding the philosophical issues from the inside, locating them in the human/personal as well as social and political contexts, and paying attention to the shifts and changes over time.”

(Paul Richard Blum, Loyola University Maryland)

“Rubini has done something unique in this exhaustively researched, passionately argued book: he has shown definitively that interpretations of Italian Renaissance intellectual life are linked to modern Italian philosophy. His work has important ramifications for the history of literature and the history of philosophy as a whole. As he demonstrates, the Italian Renaissance and twentieth-century Italian intellectual life are linked, both by subject matter (a strong focus on the ethical) and method (the prizing of dialogical, intellectually stimulating ambiguity, rather than syllogistic system-building, with the latter being the basis for Enlightenment-era historiography of philosophy). And the twentieth-century thinkers on whom Rubini is focused, Eugenio Garin and Ernesto Grassi especially, were themselves interested in the Italian fifteenth century, both as a neglected scholarly subject, consequently worthy of serious investigation, and as a source of modern philosophical reflection. No one has gone nearly as far as Rubini in developing a deep, precise, and exhaustively researched understanding of these thinkers and of these phenomena. His book will represent a touchstone, not only on the historiography of the Italian Renaissance, but also on the history of philosophy in Italy in the twentieth century.”

(Christopher S. Celenza, Johns Hopkins University)

“The story Rubini tells is befittingly as intricate and character-filled as the Italian Renaissance itself. And to his credit, Rubini treats the Renaissance not as some pre-modern historical past but as a crucial intellectual horizon from which modern thought emerges and that is therefore of ongoing relevance.”

(Paul Kottman *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*)

“*The Other Renaissance* is a major achievement in intellectual history. Rubini demonstrates an impressive mastery of sources across disciplines and epochs. His argument is tightly-woven and his examples judiciously chosen. The book combines sharp portraits of major thinkers and convincingly demonstrates how the various and multiple interpretations of the Renaissance radically re-made modern Italian philosophy.”

(Stanislao G Pugliese, Hofstra University *Forum Italicum*)

#### About the Author

**Rocco Rubini** is associate professor of Italian literature in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago. He is the editor of *The Renaissance from an Italian Perspective: An Anthology of Essays, 1860–1968*.

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