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**La filosofia e la vita
spirituale e altri scritti
di filosofia e religione
(1910-1929) [OPERE Vol. I] &
Pedagogia e filosofia
dell'educazione [OPERE
Vol. IV]**

By Antonio Banfi
Istituto Antonio Banfi
Reggio Emilia, Regione Emilia
Romagna, 1986

The Antonio Banfi Institute has initiated the publication of the philosopher's complete works, coordinated by an editorial committee of over twenty members, among which are some of Banfi's former disciples (L. Anceschi, L. Sichirollo, D. Formaggio, and F. Papi) and others who worked in the same areas (Mario Dal Pra and Lino Rossi). The selections conform to a precise editing design, providing a volume subdivision attuned to the analysis of specific philosophical problems: *The Life of Art: Studies in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, *Writings on Literature*, *Political Writings and Speeches: School and Society*, and *Politics and Culture*, whereas other volumes will reissue writings selected and organized by Banfi himself: *Principles of a Theory of Reason*, *Pestalozzi*, *Galileo Galilei*, *Contemporary Philosophers*, *Copernican Man*, and *The Search for Reality*, most of which are out of print. To date, only two volumes have come out: the first, edited by Luciano Eletti with the collaboration of Luigi Sichirollo, and the fourth volume edited by Giovanni Bertin and Luigi Sichirollo. The former is a systematic gathering of Banfi's texts on philosophy and religion, dating to the early years of research and the emergence of his ideas. We see reissued for the first time in more than half a century the reviews for the journal of the Facoltà Teologica Battista of Rome, those that appeared in *Conscienza*, and the "Introductions" to editions of Simmel and Tillich, as well as to the

Libretti di Vita, created by his friend and poet Clemente Rebora and dealing with Plotinus, Böhme and Guyau. Volume I also reprints for the first time since 1957 the fundamental essay *Philosophy and the Spiritual Life* (1921), which develops a complex dialectical schema for the elaboration of the transcendental analysis of the problem of religion. Marked by the author's personal tormented religiousness, the text is also plagued by the unresolved contrast between "activity" and "struggle," between intransigence and doubt. This initial stage of Banfi's thought, documented moreover by over 200 pages of related minutiae, is devoted primarily to the analysis of Kantian transcendental spirituality. According to Banfi, spirituality is to be understood as a category of thought, that is, as a philosophical antinomy; yet this stage was overcome only during his more mature years, when he turned his attention to the "quest for reality."

In a book published in 1956, a few months prior to his death, bearing the title *The Search for Reality*, Banfi gathered his most significant writings in order to delineate the development of his thought. The volume was not ordered chronologically; instead it traces ideological stages so as to more effectively give a sense of an articulate, dynamic and open flow of ideas and thoughts. As a paradigm of this innovative itinerary in thought, the essays are not at all conclusive. They exhibit the traits of ongoing researches, coherently with the dialectical nature of the processes that links them. In this way, neither thought nor consciousness ever rests placidly, thus allowing the thinker (and the reader) to interpret as if always moving among the complex insurgence of philosophical topics, approaching them critically each time as they appear in historical reality. Banfi's philosophical venture may be characterized by its intrinsically prob-

lematical nature, as an incessant search evidencing a process of cognitive experience and shunning dogmatic inflexibility. To be sure, the philosopher's interest in the cognitive bipolarity between subject and object within the scope of a rational placement of intuitive knowledge is present even in the earliest writings on religion. Banfi's view on the relation I-world is never anchored to a single stage of intuitive or irrational immediacy, but is continually developed without abandoning an antinomic situation. Speculative dialecticalness is thus ensured by the contrast among systems. Such is the case with the relation between irrational and spiritual life, on the one hand, and rationality on the other, which permits a flexible approach to reality.

Banfi's thought evolves by means of a dialectical process which branches out in several directions, but each dialectical moment of development is a stage, not a defined end. Rationality as a stage leads Banfi to the formulation of an antidogmatic criterion of thought. Reason strives for the process of resolution of the given moment, without delimiting itself to the rigid objectivity of a structure of reality circumscribed by a limiting-dogma; moreover, reason places itself in an open system of relations that reaches out toward true speculation, founded on the critical employment of reason (even if nevertheless it is necessary to begin from conceptual intuitability). The cultural realm is thus disclosed to the multiple relations that interphase with the various levels of life, which are couched in their historical configurations and articulated by means of the dynamic of methods and through the results of various criteria of research. This way autonomy and universality pertain to rational necessity and are connected to philosophical experience, so the essential moments of the process of knowledge are connected to the process of action. In his mature years,

Banfi eliminates all hidden metaphysical and mystical elements contained in reason itself, thus restituting to thought a fuller rational freedom which coincides with the endless achievements of living reality and the richness of its phenomenological becoming.

From this perspective, knowledge and cultural life are freed from any ontological dependency as well as from any abstract determination. Caught between rational and irrational, metaphysics finds its orientation precisely in the contradiction of its dogmatic stance, as a negative significance with respect to reason. According to Banfi's "critical rationalism," the texture of reality [*trama della realtà*], composed with "the strokes of Hegelian memory, the one of the *hic et nunc*, of the concrete existential," shows an irreducible vitality in its unending realization. Critical rationalism is in fact instrumental against whatever is abstract and dogmatic in relativism and historicism, the latter being "the metaphysical shadow of life and spirit." On the level of historical existence, critical rationalism uncovers behind the manifold of reality the living wellsprings of an ethical consciousness, whose most important spokesmen are Descartes and Spinoza. The concept of nature goes back to Galileo's seventeenth-century rationalism, according to Banfi. "Materialness" [*materialità*] constitutes the structural objectivity of the world, the field of scientific reason, and this is so for Copernicus as for Galileo, for Descartes as for Hobbes.

In Volume IV of the *Opere*, we find Banfi's writings on the pedagogical contributions of Capponi, Simmel and contemporary German philosophy of education. It also includes various "Introductions" to and "Reviews" of Rousseau, Gentile, Bosco, Pestalozzi and Gabelli. The problems raised by education constantly occupied Banfi. His analyses deal with the duality between ideal and method, the contrast

between the need for educational equality and social disparity, and the tension between ideal human unity and individual differences. He writes:

The problematicity of education is to be situated within pedagogical dialectics, which in its turn attains unity in the philosophy of education understood as the positioning of the idea of education on the one hand in the system of mind, and on the other as consciousness of the phenomenological realization of such a pure signification in the educational milieu. The problematicity is therefore resolved in life as well as in the life of the mind, a typical necessary form of the infinite search of the self which, however, is never attained, because in this search the self is endlessly creator, and in such a creating is freed, transcending itself, or, better, it celebrates the transcendence of its pure unity with itself. (239)

The pedagogy mentioned by Banfi is never considered outside of the institutions which can make it possible. From this stems his interest in political, cultural and organizational problems, especially in his post-World War II period: Banfi was in fact actively involved in the Casa della Cultura, the Centro di difesa e prevenzione sociale, the Convitti della Rinascita, the Riforma della scuola e dell'Università, and so on. His personality has had a deep and lasting influence on Italian cultural life. His acute and vibrant awareness of issues and his readiness to intervene with total participation and commitment are witness to the vitality of a mind rooted in a praxis that yearned "for the clear and open consciousness of reality in which what is human constructs itself historically" (from the Introduction to *The Search for Reality*, 1956).

ALESSANDRA CENNI
[Trans. by Fiorenina Russo]

***The Defiant Muse: Italian
Feminist Poems from the
Middle Ages to the Present
(A Bilingual Anthology)***

Beverly Allen, Muriel Kittel,
and Keala Jane Jewell, eds.
Introduction by Beverly Allen
New York: Feminist Press, 1986

This anthology of poetry, part of a series published by the Feminist Press that includes volumes of women's poetry in the French, Hispanic, and German national traditions, stands as an important addition to anthologies of Italian literature published in the United States and England. The editors of the volume conscientiously pay tribute to an impressive list of Italian women poets, who merit more recognition than they have received thus far. Moreover, much of their work has never been previously translated and anthologized.

Beverly Allen's introduction provides an overview of Italian women's literature (not only poetry) and of Italian women's relation to male-dominated literary traditions. (This overview is supplemented by biographical sketches at the end of the volume that give very basic introductory information about individual lives.) Allen deftly describes different voices, themes, and social and historical issues in a limited space (seven pages). With equal ease, she articulates her view of women's political struggle and its connection to women's literary commitments.

Like the editors of the companion volumes in the series, Allen is working under the constraint of the Press's label of "feminist poetry." Each editor for the *Defiant Muse* series struggles to identify a way of justifying this new pan-historical label. Allen takes her stand with a statement open to debate: "whatever the historical context, the