

**Research program:**  
***“Giovanni Gentile and the issue of Italian identity”***

**Annex Code 3**

**Department of Human and Social Sciences**

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**Research object**

The project intends to rethink the issue of Italian identity, as essential and not deferrable premise to the foundation of a European identity that could be not just an economical one, but rather a cultural historical and political one. For this purpose, the survey should investigate the philosophical and historical thought of Giovanni Gentile, who made this problem the centre of irradiation not only of his speculation, but also of his impressive activity of refoundation and rearrangement of Italian culture, which was fostered by the undelayable need of opposing the dreadful historical crisis of the Nation-State in the Twentieth Century. Thus, the research will investigate the fundamental aspects of Gentile's thought, along with a philosophical and historical examination of the crisis of the united Italy, at first apparently restrained, but eventually propitiated, by fascism. It clearly emerges a tragic and little understood history that could help to retrace the roots of an identity and cultural disorientation that involves Italy, but includes other European countries as well, jeopardizing the possibility itself of talking about Europe.

Therefore, the investigation should examine two main periods of Gentile's speculation, which are at the same time separated and connected by the rift of the Great War as epochal explosion of the contradictions of the national States, as well as historical premise of authoritarian movements, such as fascism, and of the totalitarian movements that will lead to the Second World War. The beginning of Gentile's theoretical path should be understood as an exploration of Italian cultural and philosophical tradition of Risorgimento, which was aimed to restore the Italian nation to a leading role in the assembly of European Countries. It is this very ambitious project that gives rise to the fruitful fellowship with Benedetto Croce, who was prompted by the same need for a refoundation of Italian cultural identity which would be mediated by the recovery of its great past, not yet completely understood in its more rich lines of evolution. At this very time, Gentile, acknowledged and reformed the Hegelian lesson, elaborates the actualism, strongly interpreted as a fulfillment, that is a preservation and an overcoming at once, of that thread of Italian thinking inaugurated by Vico and developed, through the mediation of Kantian transcendental philosophy, by Rosmini e Gioberti during Risorgimento.

The First World War not only occurs as a dramatic accelerating factor in the Italian and European crisis, but also brings to the fore the hidden tensions between the two leading figures of Italian idealism, up to their sensational and painful rupture in 1924. Unlike Croce, Gentile interprets the war as a crucial *katastrophé* for generating a living national conscience, as a historical event that would have restarted the process of the national revolution of Risorgimento, which was interrupted by the inactive and opportunist polity of the first years of united Italy.

So it begins the second period of Gentile's thought, which is mainly a political one. Therefore, the research should also address Gentile's participation to fascism. He considered fascism a political movement capable to realize historically his ideal of ethical State, that would have reformed and strengthened the national conscience, assuming at the same time a pedagogical and religious role. In a historical and philosophical perspective, the research aims to clarify Gentile's political thought as an attempt to make the fascist State a *katéchon*

that would be able of controlling the forces of chaos burst out from World War I throughout Italy and Europe.

**Research structure:**

The research should follow two essential direction of reflection: 1) a philosophical analysis of the theoretical and political thought of Giovanni Gentile, which should be tightly connected to 2) a historical and philosophical analysis of the crisis of the nation State in early Twentieth Century. As a matter of fact, the problem of Italian identity is included in the wider subject of the crisis of modernity in consequence of Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God, and thus it will be analyzed according to the leading idea of "mediation" as a collective experience capable to give foundation and orientation to human cultures.

In this perspective, the research should entail both a study of the theoretical and political production of Gentile and the survey of the historical records such as the correspondence between Croce and Gentile and Gentile's manuscripts, which are kept by the Fondazione Giovanni Gentile at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Rome "La Sapienza".

The results of the research should be presented in an essay that should work as a starting point to stimulate the philosophical and political debate on the hard and unsettled issue of Italian identity.