Obituary

Paolo Rossi
30 December 1923 – 14 January 2012

Ferdinando Abbri
Università di Siena, Italy
ferdinando.abbri@unisi.it

Figure 1. Paolo Rossi (left) and the President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano in the library of the Museo Galileo on May 12, 2011.

On the 14th of January 2012 Paolo Rossi died in Florence from a grave blood disease, and with his passing one of the most important voices in Italy in the history of philosophy and the history of science from the second half of the twentieth century has been silenced.
Born in Urbino on 30 December 1923, Rossi attended school in Ancona and Bologna before transferring to Florence, where he studied under Eugenio Garin and in 1946 received his university degree in moral philosophy. The fact that he chose as his thesis topic *La libertà* (1928) by the spiritualist philosopher Piero Martinetti was of great ethical and political significance because Martinetti was the only Italian philosopher who in 1931 refused to take the oath of loyalty to the fascist regime. After graduating Rossi published other studies on Martinetti, and edited the works of the nineteenth-century republican philosopher Carlo Cattaneo. He completed his post-graduate studies in philosophy and accepted a teaching post at a secondary school in Città di Castello. There he met Andreina Bizzarri, who became his wife and life-long companion.

In 1948 Rossi moved to Milan when Antonio Banfi, professor of the history of philosophy at the University of Milan, offered him a position as a teaching assistant. Antonio Banfi and Eugenio Garin were perhaps the most influential figures in the development of his philosophical thought. Rossi wrote several essays on Banfi and in 1971 he published a memorial volume in which he acknowledged his profound debt to this mentor. For the whole of his life Rossi would also recall with gratitude the enlightened teaching of Garin. Reminiscing just a year before his death, he said that having been a protégé of this eminent philosopher opened many doors for him in the community of European philosophers. In 1959 he was granted a fellowship from the Warburg Institute, and the warm reception that was accorded him could be attributed to his philosophical 'heritage' and to the high esteem in which his professor was held by the scholars at this prestigious institution. Twenty years ago Rossi declared that he had learned much from Garin, but one thing stood out in his mind as being particularly significant – not a philosophy but a methodology, a historical perspective that he would apply in all of his thinking. Textbooks could convey the fundamental theorems of philosophy, but these apparently clear and self-evident concepts were actually the outcome of long and complicated processes, and the task of the historian was to reconstruct these processes. Through historical analysis one could gain an appreciation of the infinite variety of philosophical thought – the subtle differences in position, the clash of opposing ideas, and the persistence of traditions – all of which were necessary to the construction of new ideas.

During his early years in Milan, Rossi worked for the publishing house of Mondadori. In 1954 he received a teaching appointment in the history of philosophy at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Milan (Università Statale) and the following year he was assigned to teach