

Croce, Benedetto

By [Adviye Damla Ünlü](#)

Croce, *Benedetto*

Italian philosopher, historian, and politician
Born 25 February 1866 in Pescasseroli, Italy
Died 20 November 1952 in Naples, Italy

Benedetto Croce is an important figure for both Italian intellectual life (through his philosophical and historical writings) and the political history of Italy (through his work as a politician). Croce began his political life in 1910 and was a member of the Italian Senate at the outbreak of World War I.

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Early Life

Born in Pescasseroli, in the Abruzzo region of [Italy](#), Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) went to Rome with his brother in 1883 to live with [Silvio Spaventa \(1822-1893\)](#). He studied law at the University of Rome, but did not graduate. Afterward, he attended [Antonio Labriola's \(1843-1904\)](#) lectures on moral philosophy and took the opportunity to immerse himself in the rich intellectual milieu of Rome. He thus became interested in national, philosophical, and political issues. Through both Labriola's influence and his encounter with Italian and German socialist literature, Croce became interested in Marxism and socialism. In 1866, he returned to Naples from this intellectual environment. He began to research Neapolitan history, learned different languages, and paid closer attention to philosophical problems. Between 1902 and 1914, he wrote primarily philosophical texts. [Giambattista Vico \(1668-1744\)](#) and [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel \(1770-1831\)](#) were influential in his approach to philosophy and history. In 1903, he founded the journal *La Critica* with philosopher [Giovanni Gentile \(1875-1944\)](#). In 1910, he was appointed to the Italian Senate for life.

World War I

Before the outbreak of World War I, Croce was a politician and supported the Libyan War in 1913. He was mostly concerned with local political problems in Naples, but on the eve of First World War, he became more involved in national and international politics. The conflict was an important point in his life. At the beginning of hostilities, the Italian [government](#) declared [neutrality](#) with the support of the majority of Italians and liberal members of parliament. Then, a new movement arose that supported the idea of involvement in the war. This split society and politicians into two camps – [interventionists](#) and neutralists. Croce supported the neutralist camp by concentrating on the probable social, political, and economic outcomes of the war. He believed that the Italian army was not ready for the war, especially in terms of materiel assets. He was also concerned about the possible harm war would do to the cohesion of Italian society and national unity. He criticised democratic and nationalist interventionists

because their gut reactions led to the neglect of the Italian people. For him, nationalists were looking for war, regardless of how to wage it, since, for them, the ultimate aims of combat were military success and industrial expansion. He also criticised the discourse of [pacifism](#) and Wilsonian internationalism that claimed that this was the war to end all wars. Croce's idea of war was related to his ties with the German culture that linked his intellectual view to his political ideas and his opposition to democratic and interventionist [nationalism](#). Moreover, for him, [Germany](#) was politically the ancient ally of Italy and he saw the building of new alliances as unsafe. According to Croce, political life was separate from ethics and had its own morality. He highlighted the authority of states and the importance of force in politics. However, unlike the Hegelian view of the state–morality relationship, his position was that the state was inferior to the morality of politics. Within this logic, wars were part of the struggle in politics, and through this, he supported the decision of his country and stated his loyalty to the national cause when Italy declared war on Austria in May 1915. During the war, as a philosopher and historian, he believed in the importance of two matters. The first was his insistence on the separation of [science](#) from wartime politics and war [propaganda](#). The second was his insistence on the necessity to protect the European common heritage, European civilization, and independence of culture from politics. On the other hand, as a citizen and politician, he provided social and economic assistance to the people and emphasised the importance of preserving the national unity of Italy. The defeat of the Italian forces in the [Battle of Caporetto](#), which took place between 24 October and 10 November 1917, caused Croce great mental anguish. To overcome this tragedy, he invited Italians to fight in unity. At the end of the war, his attitude towards victory was different from that of the general public. He approached the victory cautiously and devoted himself to the future of Italy. Until this event, he had remained distant from liberalism. However, after the conflict, he believed that one of the important outcomes was the victory of liberalism and its promise for the future of society.

Post-War

After the war, Croce became more involved in politics. Between 1920 and 1921, he was the minister of education under the government of [Giovanni Giolitti \(1842-1928\)](#). From 1922 to 1924, he supported the regime of [Benito Mussolini \(1883-1945\)](#). Nevertheless, in 1925, as a response to the Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals led by Giovanni Gentile, he wrote the Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals – which was signed by leading intellectuals of Italy – and joined the liberal party. Henceforth, he became a leading anti-fascist figure in Italian politics and was surveilled and censored by the [fascist](#) regime for years. He retired from active politics in July 1944 but remained as the president of the Liberal Party from 1944 to 1947. He was elected to the constituent assembly which existed from June 1946 to January 1948. In May 1948, he became a member of the new republican senate. In 1946, he founded the Italian Institute for Historical Studies in Naples and devoted his energy to this institution until he died in 1952.

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