

**GIAMBATTISTA VICO AND ANGLO-AMERICAN SCIENCE:  
PHILOSOPHY AND WRITING**

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Edited by Marcel Danesi.

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The volume under review contains sixteen essays in addition to Marcel Danesi's introduction and Anthony Verna and Danesi's bibliography. The volume is a collection of selected papers read at an international conference on Giambattista Vico which was sponsored by the 1990 International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies at Victoria College, University of Toronto. Included at the end of the volume is an extensive and helpful bibliography of Anglo-American writings on Vico published between 1970 and 1991 which would assist, according to Verna and Danesi, Vichian research in the behavioral, social, and cognitive sciences.

The main rationale of this volume is to give "a post-discovery look" at Vico in the Anglo-American world since the 1960s. The volume includes contributions from the familiar faces of Vichian scholarship such as Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Donald Phillip Verene, John O'Neill, and Marcel Danesi — to mention only a few. Its topics cover the relevance of Vico's seminal thought to the behavioral, linguistic, and cognitive sciences and the trekking of the intellectual lineage between Vico and other thinkers such as Edmund Burke, James Joyce, Northrop Frye, Marshall McLuhan, Ernst Cassirer, Susan Langer, Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and George Lakoff. The focus of the volume is clearly on Vichian linguistics or semiotics which covers the theory of language learning (Aldo D'Alfonso), language acquisition (Robert J. Di Pietro), linguistic logic (Adam Makkai), and language education (Renzo Titone). The thematic focus of the volume includes the central idea and themes of Vico: the tripartite nexus of the mental faculty called *fantasia* (imagination), *ingegno* (invention or ingenuity), and *memoria* (memory), metaphor, myth, *sensus communis*, and above all the most important

Vichian principle of *the verum-ipsam-factum* (what is true is what is made). I would be remiss if I forgot to mention Vico's anti-Cartesianism regarding disembodied reason since Cartesianism is the harbinger of today's cybernetics and even the philosophy of virtual reality. The Cartesian legacy continues in the linguistics of Noam Chomsky in search of the universal grammar which is nonhistorical and noncultural (i.e., noncontextual).

Since Danesi's superb "Introduction to Giambattista Vico" (1-33) includes a concise synopsis of each of the contributions in the volume, I will single out for review some contributions which are central to Vico's philosophy and germane and relevant to the Vichian development of the behavioral and linguistic sciences for the Anglo-American audience.

First, Danesi gives in his introductory essay a quick tour of the epochal or paradigmatic thought of Vico for the benefit of Anglo-American scholars who are engaged in the study of mind, body, language, culture, and history (i.e., *Geisteswissenschaften*). Here the 1948 abridged and 1984 unabridged translations of Vico's *Scienza nuova* (1725) by Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Fisch into English as *The New Science* had an inestimable and invaluable influence on Anglo-American Vico scholarship — a fact which can never be overlooked or overemphasized. Danesi provides us with a convenient table of contents of *The New Science* (27-33). His introductory remarks put an accent on the web of Vico's seminal topics such as imagination, the cyclical view of history, language as central to the "science of humanity" (or human sciences), and the *verum-factum* principle.

Second, Verna and Danesi (213-35) take an inventory of Anglo-American Vichian scholarship in the behavioral, linguistic, and cognitive sciences which concern the investigation of the "interrelation of body, mind, and culture." They single out for their review some important "post-discovery" contributions to Vichian scholarship: (1) Bergin and Fisch's translation of Vico's *New Science* and its implications; (2) Verene's definitive anatomy of Vico's thought in arriving at "imaginative universale" as the most central theme of Vico's philosophy; (3) Peter Burke's *Vico* (1985); (4) Lorraine Weir's study of Vichian semiotics of Joyce; (5) John D. Schaeffer's study of Vico's *sensus communis* or, as Vico has it, "judgement with reflection"; (6) Tagliacozzo's Institute for Vico Studies in New York City which publishes annually *New Vico Studies*. Here one might be tempted to add

the sociological works of John O'Neill whose "wild sociology" and "body politics" are inspired by and rooted in Vico's thought.

Third, Verene's short essay (201-12) continues the themes of his 1981 classic work on Vico's "science of the imagination." In opposition to modern epistemology which treats imagination as "the handmaiden of cognition," Verene contends that Vico's formulation of "imaginative universals" offers "a new starting point" of the "phenomenology of knowledge" and semiotics. As a matter of fact, Vico's *verum-factum* principle defined in terms of imaginative universals is the foundation not only of the philosophy and methodology of the cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) alone — as Cassirer narrowly if not mistakenly saw it — but also of the unity of knowledge or pansophism. It runs counter to scientism — the model of whose encyclopedic knowledge is the natural sciences in general or physics in particular (i.e., physicalism). Indeed, Verene contends that cognition alone is insufficient to *invent* the meaning of reality and moral virtue.

Fourth, Danesi's Vichian critique of "computationism" is witty and poignant. He offers a sweeping historical overview of "computationism," which is nothing but, in the words of Danesi himself, "a fallacy forged by Metaphor" from Descartes and Hobbes to Marvin Minsky and his robotics. Danesi makes clear in no uncertain terms that his Vichian perspective is not opposed to cognitive science as such but only "computationism" or "computational fallacy" which, by taking the mind "out of the body," analogizes the working of the mind with the functioning of disembodied machines or cybernetics whose founding father is Descartes who took the mind (*res cogitans*) "out of the body" (*res extensa*). Danesi judiciously contends that Noam Chomsky built his linguistics on the model of Cartesian (disembodied) rationalism. From the Vichian perspective, concepts are formed out of percepts by the vehicle of metaphor which is a feature or property of the creative mind. In contrast to Chomsky's Cartesian linguistics, Danesi links George Lakoff's linguistics with Vico's philosophy of language. I find that there are indeed uncanny similarities between Vico's and Lakoff's "metaphorology." For the critique of artificial or disembodied reason in the tradition of Cartesianism, I should also mention the phenomenological critique of Hubert L. Dreyfus on "what computers can't do" or "what computers *still* can't do."

Fifth, Frank Nuessel (127-45) continues Danesi's argument and conversation within the confines of cognitive linguistics. Nuessel argues

again the Cartesian or Chomskyan, logocentric paradigm of linguistics and takes the side of Vico's "ecological" approach to linguistics and metaphorology. Lakoff's "experiential realism" is in essence Vichian without being influenced by Vico. Speaking of Vico's "ecological" framework of mind, Nuessel's discussion reminds me of Gregory Bateson's "ecology of mind" in which — to put it in ecological terms — the mindscape is rooted in or mirrors the landscape including mountains and forests (see René Magritte's 1933 *La Condition Humaine*). Couched in ecological terms, Nuessel discovers the hidden treasure or golden nuggets of Vico's ecological philosophy that thinks like a "geocosm" of "mountain" or "forest." That is to say, Nuessel seems to have opened a tiny crack that enables us to peep into Vico's vast mental chamber of ecology. In opposition to the Cartesian severance of mind from body, Vico's perspective on thought or conception is rooted deeply in corporeality or corporeal experience of which metaphor is an inseparable part. I would also urge that it is high time for Lakoff (and Mark Johnson) to read and examine with care Vico's *New Science* to enrich his linguistics and metaphorology which are often comparative and intercultural.

Sixth and last but not least is Tagliacozzo's essay "The Study of Vico Worldwide and the Future of Vico Studies" (171-88) which is also printed with minor editorial changes in the recent volume *The Arbor Scientiae Reconceived and the History of Vico's Resurrection* (1993), pp. 172-89. *Resurrection* it is, indeed! Tagliacozzo, who is also a Vichian archivist, is most instrumental in propagating and promoting Vichian scholarship in the Anglo-American world and beyond. He has no rivals and, if he has, he is certainly the *primus inter pares* — to borrow his own expression in characterizing Vico in the procession of postmodern philosophers.

There are essentially two parts in Tagliacozzo's essay. The first part is the concise global survey and progress report of Vichian scholarship beyond the United States and Italy — from Israel to Korea and from Russia to Australia. The second part is most intriguing, interesting, and promising in speculating and projecting the future of Vico's philosophy and scholarship. Tagliacozzo's project of linking Vico's philosophy with postmodernism may be matched with McLuhan's allusive dictum that "the future is a thing of the past." Not only is Vico's forte interdisciplinarity but also interculturalism or transculturalism is ingrained in his very quest for truth which is, as Tagliacozzo puts it,

anti-foundationalist, contextualist or historicist, and hermeneuticist. Vico is a born pluralist or multiculturalist. Postmodernism, too, is quintessentially a philosophy of dialogue as it espouses the open way of making multiple interconnections — both interdisciplinary and intercultural — in the face of difference(s). Here I am reminded of the dialogical predisposition of the twentieth-century Russian literary hermeneuticist, Mikhail Bakhtin, whose thinking was inspired by and embedded in Dostoevsky's heteroglossia. By the dialogical, Bakhtin means to emphasize the idea that dialogue has limitless or infinite contexts which may extend into the remotest past as well as the most distant future, and that meanings born in dialogue are never exhaustive but infinite and will always be renewed and resurrected at a later time. Vico's proclivity to pansophism opens up a radically new way of doing philosophy. It would escape or overcome, I think, the commonplace trappings of Eurocentrism, Sinocentrism, Indocentrism, or Afrocentrism altogether. In comparative philosophy in the age of globalization, the Vichian approach would *invent* "transversals" — or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lévi-Strauss call "lateral universals" — to replace "universals" which are always already implied in the notion of the (timeless) Truth with a capital "T" or — as Tagliacozzo puts it — Philosophy with a capital "P."

In the final analysis, the volume under review both serves well as a point of departure, as the editor hopes, for the behavioral and linguistic sciences and promotes the Vichian perspective which opens up a new way of exploring the question of cognition in the "science of humanity." It also vindicates the fact that interest in Vico's thought — in the words of Nuessel (p. 127) — "continues unabated." There are, however, three minor organizational drawbacks I wish to mention: (1) organizing the essays without a consistent thematic or topical order; (2) incomplete citations of pagination on names and subjects in the Index; and (3) not having notes on the contributors. Needless to say, they in no way diminish the merit and importance in substance of the volume's contribution to the cultivation and promotion of the Vichian perspective on the "science of humanity."

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