

THE ROLE OF PROVIDENCE IN THE  
*NEW SCIENCE* OF GIAMBATTISTA VICO

by  
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## THESIS ABSTRACT

The question of how to interpret the role of providence in the *New Science* of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is one of the most vexing problems of interpretation surrounding Vico's magnum opus. In this essay I come at the problem by attempting to understand Vico's theory of knowledge and how it comes to bear upon his interpretation of history.

In chapter one I offer a phenomenology of the historical world according to Vico. I consider the problem of historical knowledge as such and attempt to show that Vico makes an original contribution by his insistence that we need to critically appropriate the historical texts from the past. Vico's philosophy attempts to mediate between the 'ideal' and the 'eternal', between the transcendently fixed and the temporally changing. He calls for a complementarity between philosophy and history (philology).

In chapter two I explore some of the main features of Vico's epistemology. I focus on the *verum-factum* principle: Vico's axiom that the true is equipotent with what is made. I show from Vico's earlier work, *On The Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* (1710), how Vico's use of *verum-factum* principle as an epistemological fulcrum is inextricably bound up with theological considerations. I then attempt to show that while there are important developments and changes between the *Ancient Wisdom* and the *New Science*, the *verum-factum* principle is still the fulcrum of Vico's mature epistemology and that the theological model upon which it is based still obtains in the thought of the mature Vico.

I then attempt to get more deeply into Vico's view of history by looking at him through important interpretations. In chapter three I discuss the interpretation of Leon Pompa. Pompa is concerned to preserve Vico for contemporary science of history. His approach focuses on the concepts of the 'modifications of the human mind', and the 'ideal eternal history'. Pompa brings some important problems from contemporary social theory to bear upon his reconstruction of Vico. Pompa's is clearly a rationalist reading of Vico.

In chapter four I discuss the interpretation of Vichian epistemology found in the work of Donald P. Verene. Verene sees in Vico not so much a science of history as a very unique epistemology, centered around a theory of imagination in which *fantasia* is the original form of mind, and the originating moment in every act of human cognition. I discuss Verene's interpretation of 'fantastic' and 'imaginative' universals. Herein is a distinction between a sort of rationalizing abstraction and an

imaginative thinking governed by 'poetic logic'. Verene sees in Vico an epistemology which is at once a theory of concept formation, an analysis of the existential conditions of thought, and a principle of continuity by which human thought is understood in a genetic unity.

In a fifth and final chapter I attempt to then make some determination of how providence functions in the *NS*. I seek to interpret Vico's providence doctrine as requiring a transcendental referent or God, based on the *verum-factum* principle as the central epistemic model. I note, however, that most contemporary readings of Vico reject real transcendentalism, seeing it as an inference of the science which may be jettisoned without harming the logical integrity of Vico's scientific history (Pompa). I indicate briefly how Verene's interpretation is more amenable to a transcendentalist reading. I conclude that the role of providence is to act as a preserving power in opposition to the individual human being's sociopathic tendencies. I argue that providence has one main *explanatory* feature: that of generating from the nonhuman animality the first human beings, i.e. persons who live in social groups. I indicate how its proper place is in confession of faith, and that attempts to prove providence are inconsonant with its status as an article of faith.

### List of Abbreviations

- Autobiography** - *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico* Trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1944.
- NS** - *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*. Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744) with the addition of "Practic of the New Science." Trans. by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- SMT** - Giambattista Vico. *On the Study Methods of Our Time*. Trans. with an Introduction by Elio Gianturco. With a Trans. of "The Academies and the Relation between Philosophy and Eloquence," by Donald Phillip Verene. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- SR** - *Social Research An International Quarterly of the Social Sciences*. Guest Ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo. Volume 43, Autumn, 1976. This issue devoted entirely to Vico studies.
- Symposium I** - *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium*. Edd. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969.
- Symposium II** - *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*. Edd. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

- VH** - Ernesto Grassi. *Vico and Humanism: Essays on Vico, Heidegger, and Rhetoric*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.
- VMAC** - *Vico and Marx: Affinities and Contrasts*. Ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo. New Jersey: Humanites Press, 1983.
- VPP** - *Vico: Past and Present*. 2 Volumes. Ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo. Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981.
- AWI** - Giambattista Vico. *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*. Including the Disputations with the *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia*. Trans. with an Introduction and Notes by L. M. Palmer. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1988.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## A. Vico's Life and Works

Giambattista Vico was born at Naples on June 23, 1668, where he spent his entire life, dying there on 22-23 January, 1744. Vico's personal life was one of academic frustrations and marginalization, despite his close contact with the intellectual life of the Naples of his time.<sup>1</sup> Vico wrote his *Autobiography* in two parts<sup>2</sup> and published it in 1728. Vico's *Autobiography* manifests a surprising paucity of information about its author's personal life, focusing instead on his intellectual development. In it all of the frustrations of Vico's personal life, culminating in his failure to win the chair of civil law at the University of Naples in 1724, are presented as the work of God's providence honing and shaping in Vico the tools necessary for his heroic scholarly task of establishing the new science.

Vico's intellectual life has two main phases to it. The first phase includes all of the work done up to the publication of the first *New Science* (1725).<sup>3</sup> The developments which occur in the revisions of the *NS* and are embodied in the

<sup>1</sup> See on this Max Fisch, "Introduction" to the *Autobiography*, 33ff., and, by the same author, "The Academy of the Investigators," in *Science, Medicine, and History*, 1:521-563.

<sup>2</sup> "Vico's original *Autobiography*," notes M. Fisch, "is thus to be read as the expression of his state of mind at the end of his two great creative efforts: Part A after completing the 'new science in negative form', and Part B after publishing 'the first *New Science*'." See "Introduction" to *NS*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> See on this Enrico DeMas, "On the New Method of a New Science: A Study of Giambattista Vico," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971): 89. Distinguishing Vico's intellectual development into before and after the first *NS* is somewhat arbitrary, especially when we recall that an "outline" of a new science was published at the end of Vico's three volume *Diritto Universale* (1720-22). Our consideration of the early and the mature Vico will focus on *Wisdom* (1711-12), Vico's most consistently metaphysical work, and the third edition of the *NS* (1744), respectively.

1744 edition will be the main focus of this thesis.

## **B. A Vichian Phenomenology of the Historical World**

Vico's theory of history is generated by a unique and rich epistemology, and his epistemology is conditioned by his concern to unite the historical and the conceptual realms. Here I will give a brief sketch of Vico's Historiography, where I indicate that Vico's concern with history was not as a "historian" but as a philosopher meditating on historico-cultural development.

Knowledge of the past is integral to how we know ourselves as a culture. True knowledge of an historical object consists of knowledge of its origin and its development, since this ontogenesis and development *is* the object. The problem of historical knowledge is particularly acute and raises questions as to how we may know the object in question. In Vico's philosophy, the concept and reality of divine providence, understood in a more-or-less Christian sense, is an absolutely indispensable feature of our attempt to understand how order emerges out of chaos, and how civilization emerges out of animality. Human beings "make" their "civil world," yet this world issues from a "superhuman mind."

There seem to be two basic approaches to the problem of how we know historical realities. On the one hand, we know historical realities when we have reconstructed the concrete events which constitute the past. On this accounting the historian's task is simply to reconstitute the picture in its integrity. In this way we purportedly know what an object of historical knowledge is. On the other hand, we

are said rightly to know the past, so far as this is possible, only when we have gained access to the epistemological structures which gave rise to the historical period or object in question. History is simply the effect of which these epistemic structures are the cause. On this accounting history is quintessentially the development of ideas, and from these ideas we may thus deduce the range of possible historical effects (in something like an *a priori* manner).

The former view of history is not capable of discriminating the meaning of events, for, it is assumed, such meaning died with those whom it animated. On this reductively empirical view, the internal ideas which generated history are by its definition of history forever beyond our knowing. On the latter view of historical knowledge, history in its concreteness is not permitted to penetrate the world of thought. History is thus at risk of being reduced to a history of ideas, uninformed by concrete particulars. Vico's view of history draws on both of these dispositions, but filters them through his own mediating viewpoint: a fusion of the *philosophical* with the *philological*.<sup>4</sup>

The fulcrum of "Vico's wheel" (Tagliacozzo) is that we can have access to the historical past, even the remotest beginnings, since all human beings share a common "metaphysics of the mind." Vico's axial assumption, that a thing's essence

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<sup>4</sup> One of the enduring values of the *NS* is the manner in which Vico effects a synergy of the 'ideal' and the 'factual'. Vico's historicizing of ideals effects also his understanding of the historical, in dialectical fashion. Or, as Nicola Badaloni puts it, the transformation of ideality into a historical methodology or model, "serves substantially to justify utilization, in the field of history, of certain mathematical and logical techniques that had been discovered in the physical sciences. In Vico's philosophy the *ideas* are no longer defined in their abstract substantiality, but rather serve to indicate the existence of constant structures in the flow of events." See "Ideality and Factuality in Vico's Thought," *Symposium* I, 398.

or nature is equipollent with its coming to be, extends to all species of historical knowledge. Human history is most adequately suited to yield "knowledge," which in Vico is always "true,"<sup>5</sup> since we have within our own epistemic constitution the same or similar categories to those which gave rise to civilization, i.e. we participate in the same structures (sociologically or ontologically), and bear within our epistemic make-up the same mental modifications or attributes of mind which gave rise to civilization in the first place.<sup>6</sup> If we accept these general metaphysical conditions, then we are in a position to understand the "how" and the "why" of historical and cultural reality. These assumptions are expressed in the *NS*'s central epistemological declaration:

But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind.<sup>7</sup>

While Vico is asserting some sort of empathic connection among human beings through time, it is a matter of dispute precisely what Vico means by

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<sup>5</sup> Vico's conception of knowledge/truth is that it is contrasted in the first place with mere consciousness (*coscienza*), not falsehood or error. More on this in chapter two.

<sup>6</sup> Behind such a view of history is Vico's epistemological theory of maker's knowledge, or the *verum-factum* principle, which is the focus of chapter two.

<sup>7</sup> *NS* § 331. In the continuation of this passage, we see the theological assumption informing Vico's theory of knowledge: "Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world, which, since men had made it, men could come to know. This aberration was a consequence of that infirmity of the human mind by which, immersed and buried in the body, it naturally inclines to take notice of bodily things, and finds the effort to attend to itself too laborious; just as the bodily eye sees all objects outside itself but needs a mirror to see itself." (*NS* § 331)

"modifications of our own human mind." At least this much seems certain: that the progenitors of humankind had minds something like ours, and that because minds cause the emergence of civilization we can know something of the internal workings of the civilizing process because we are inheritors and products of this human enculturating process.<sup>5</sup>

It was said a few pages earlier that for Vico *all* knowledge is historical knowledge. The exception to this is the duality which Vico sets up between the salvation history growing out of and along with God's revelation to the Hebrew people, and continued in the Christian continuation of that revelation. Even this knowledge has a history, but it is of a different sort. Revelation keeps the origin and development of the Hebrews separate from the origin and development of the Gentile peoples.<sup>6</sup> There is herein a peculiar feature of Vico's *NS*. Vico purports to be leading the reader into a pious Christian meditation on God's providential working in history, yet makes only suggestions and nuances as to how the new science might be connected to Christian revelation. Why, for example, does revelation make his new science needful as a supplement? Why, if Vico's goal was the formation of piety, does he not once mention Jesus Christ--the foundation of Christian faith and turning point of history--in his *NS*? Whatever the reason for Vico's imposition of this duality, it is one on which he insists throughout the *NS*,

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<sup>5</sup> Lionel Rubinoff states this point tersely: "And since history consists of events and institutions which 'express' (in the sense of giving concrete embodiment to) the universal 'modifications' of mind *qua* mind, the mind or self which only in isolation can be experienced with 'certainty' becomes, through the study of history, an 'object of *knowledge*'." See his "Vico and the Verification of Historical Interpretation," *SR*, 487.

<sup>6</sup> See on this *NS* §§ 167-168.

and only hints at the compatibility of his new science and revelation.<sup>10</sup>

Vico's epistemological framework is necessary if we are to know the past, but it is not sufficient, for history is made up of particulars which are specific, temporal, and remote. Vico needs to specify what factors make intergenerational and transcultural knowledge of humanity possible. It is, after all, a universal science that Vico is promulgating. The "particulars" of past historical cultures crystallize into customs and laws which constitute *common sense*.

In Vico's account of historical knowledge, one must have a grasp of the *causes* which bring about a particular historical phenomenon (law, religion, language) if one is to account for them in an explanatory construct. Causal explanation, alone and exclusively, however, recedes into infinite regress and induces us to abort the entire project of historical knowledge. There need to be transcendental elements in our knowledge if we are to be able to say anything about the past at all. Vico's theory of historical knowing, needs sufficiently generalized axioms to make the project possible *ab initio*, but must leave room for the concrete if it is to be a true account of *history*, and not simply the idea of history. Common sense serves this purpose for Vico.

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<sup>10</sup> At *NS* § 366, for instance, Vico implies that the natural law of the gentiles--the objective embodiment of providential preservation in human societies--functions as a preparation to ready barbaric humanity for reception of revealed truth. This view of nonrevealed truth is similar to that tradition which goes back to Justyn Martyr (d. c. 165), who saw Greek philosophy as a *praeparatio evangelica*. For Vico, notes Hayden White, "The truth which opposes falsehood in Christian societies . . . is superior to the natural truths arrived at by natural means in minds not informed by Christian faith." This produces a dualistic attitude in Vico's work, continues White, toward his material, such that with respect to Hebrew-Christian history, Vico is "utterly uncritical," but with respect to Pagan histories Vico's attitude is "ironic, inasmuch as what all pagan thinkers take for *the* truth, Vico himself takes for a mixture of truth and error." See his essay "The Tropics of History: The Deep Structure of the *New Science*," *Symposium* II, 84.

Vico describes common sense as "judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race."<sup>11</sup> Vico counts common sense as the single most important factor operative in the formation of every society's customs, laws, beliefs, and even philosophies.<sup>12</sup> Common sense is not a rational-contractual product agreed upon by those whose lives are qualified by it. It is, however, shared by a common group of people, emerging from that group's particular way of responding to natural phenomena, or their sensual experience of the world around them.<sup>13</sup> This response is qualified by the particular conceptual framework of human beings at a particular time in the historical cycle. Vico makes two specifications of common sense: that it is a *social faculty*<sup>14</sup> and that it is subject to a *specifiable course of development*.

Common sense is a *social faculty* in so far as it makes human beings

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<sup>11</sup> *NS* § 142; cf. § 311.

<sup>12</sup> In Vico's theory of the orders of civilization, philosophy (the academies) is one of the last features to emerge: first laws, then societies, then the marketplace, then the academies (*NS* § 239). In an interesting passage (*NS* §§1040-1043) Vico explains how it is that Socratic method could not have arisen until the historical stages of civilizing had been enacted according to the order set by providence. It was only after the "enactment of laws" gave structure to society that abstract reflection on those laws and their workings gave rise to philosophy. "By placing philosophy within the flow of providential history," notes Mark Lilla, "Vico is now able to reveal its many debts to subrational social practices--most surprisingly, to religion itself." See *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993): 218.

<sup>13</sup> *NS* §§ 177-189. Humans in their ignorance are prompted by their "curiosity," "ignorance," and "wonder" to attribute to the divine the causal efficacy of that which they do not understand, which in the beginning of humanity's emergence from brutality, is everything. It is this habit of mind that explains the personification of most of the natural world by early humans. Says Vico: "Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance man makes himself the measure of all things" (*NS* § 120).

<sup>14</sup> That much common sense has its root in *myth* is not for Vico a serious problem, since Vico sees myth not so much as an account of how things really came to be and how they changed, but rather as records of what was important in early humanity's *experience* of its world. Joseph Mali sees Vico as a creative synthesizer of the Enlightenment tension between *tradition* and *criticism* ["'The Public Grounds of Truth': The Critical Theory of G. B. Vico," *NVS* 6 (1988): 61]. The importance of the public grounds of truth (common sense) is that it stands as a constant reminder of the pre-rational source of rational thought. Cf. *NS* § 144.

receptive to law, which is an essential ingredient in the possibility of a society. Humankind has always, as far as memory extends, lived in social groups, and Vico holds that law emerged in human history spontaneously, or "by nature." Law emerges in society according to a providential determination, and for the preservation of the human race.<sup>15</sup>

Humanity is in need of Divine aid. It is a fundamental axiom of Vico's anthropology that the human race is fallen. Vico accepts the Christian tradition of the Fall of humanity in a self-alienating act of disobedience. Humanity is all but ruined with regard to our ability to will what is good and right, but there remains sufficient freedom of will in fallen humans that we can with God's aid--"naturally by divine providence and supernaturally by divine grace"<sup>16</sup> --transform our natural (*post lapsum*)<sup>17</sup> proclivity to sociopathic actions into virtues which serve society. The capacity of human beings to live in social communion rather than acquiesce to their fallen impulse toward isolation and self-aggrandizement is brought about by natural law, which is the primary constituent of common sense.<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew-Christian conception of the Fall has, then, broad repercussions for Vico's conception of human origins and of the emergence of natural law. "If man were not fallen," explains Mark Lilla, "there would be no 'order of ideas'; he would be free to think

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. *NS* §§ 2, 133, 312.

<sup>16</sup> *NS* § 136.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *NS* § 310, where Vico asserts the traditional Christian ambiguity in the notion of our being sinful by *nature*, when he writes that humankind is "not unjust by nature in the absolute sense, but by nature fallen and weak."

<sup>18</sup> *NS* §§ 308f.

rationally at any moment, just as Descartes contended."<sup>19</sup> The notion of orders (an "ideal eternal history") and of things unfolding in time according to eternal, providential patterns is a fundamental feature of Vico's view of history, in its origins and its development (about which more presently).

The Fall means, for Vico, that human thought is now oriented to the realm of *certum*, the realm of ignorance.<sup>20</sup> Access to the realm of God's *verum* has been occluded by the Fall. It is from the realm of *certum* as immediate, sense dominated consciousness that human being must work its way back to the realm of *verum*. The process by which this movement back is governed is set by the ideal eternal history, and must be achieved by this means. The residual effects of this movement back to *verum* are found in the metaphysical constituents of the human mind (the *modifications* of mind).

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<sup>19</sup> *G. B. Vico*, 131. On pp. 16-23 Lilla expands upon the pervasive influence the concept of the Fall had for Vico. Actually, one should speak of falls plural, though the fall of Adam is more serious for it is the logical antecedent of the other two, the fall of Ham, after the Flood, and the fall which is the scattering of the nations at the Tower of Babel. Lilla thinks that in Vico's Historiography, humankind as it "exists today, cannot be understood apart from these three events in sacred history" (p. 18). Their importance philosophically is the way in which Vico uses them to explain the corruption of human nature. Vico's basic philosophical anthropology consists in seeing the human being as a tripartite consisting of "mind, body, and speech, and speech stands as it were midway between mind and body" (*NS* § 1045). These attributes were given to human beings and endowed with perfect operation through Adam, who in paradise, thinks Vico, enjoyed their perfect operation. Now the three falls are the three sacred events in which humans lost the perfect operation of these divine faculties. In Adam's fall, the **mind** was impaired; in the fall of Ham after the flood, when he incurred *shame* by gazing upon Noah's naked body, the **spirit** of humankind was impaired, which also resulted in the separation of the Hebrews from the Gentiles), and in the diaspora following the Tower of Babel incident, **speech** was impaired. See further on this, Arnaldo Momigliano, "Vico's *Scienza nuova*: Roman 'Bestioni' and Roman 'Eroi'," *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 23.

<sup>20</sup> Before the Fall, Adam was created in "ideal perfection" (*NS* § 310; cf. § 2), but the Fall of Adam was a fall into ignorance. "Thus, when Adam came to scorn the true knowledge he enjoyed by the grace of God," says Vico, "and desired to acquire infinite knowledge, God castigated him with an appropriate punishment, making him conscious of error or misdeed, this consciousness being nothing other than the shame of the truly ignorant." From the *Universal Law* (1722), as cited in M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, 18.

An important feature of Vico's theory of the origins of humanity, and one which separates him from his contemporaries on this question, is his assertion that the formation of society from and within the natural state of affairs is *not* a self-conscious rational and contractual process. The natural state of affairs for fallen humans is selfishness, which can be curbed only by the institutions of natural law. The self-love of primal humans informs all of their actions and motives with the desire to satisfy only their own felt needs. "Unable to attain all the utilities he wishes, he is constrained by these institutions to seek those which are his due," says Vico, "and this is called just. That which regulates human justice therefore is divine justice, which is administered by divine providence to preserve human society."<sup>21</sup> Society and the cumulative common sense which sustains it, is thus not the product of rational agreement among human beings. It must be noted that Vico holds this to be true of the *origins* of society. The thrust of Vico's new science is that we may now *rationally* and *critically* assess the mental structures which gave rise to the first humans and are thus determinative for subsequent humanity. The "newness" of the new science is its discovery that the first humans were not rational but poetic people, who *thought* more out of *imagination* than out of *reflection* (which is characteristic of rationalistic mind).

Vico expresses the problematic facing his new science in terms of a series of "conceits" (*boria*) which characterize philosophy and philology up to his own time. The conceit of scholars is the perversion of *anachronism*, on account of which

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<sup>21</sup> *NS* § 341.

scholars tend to see their ideal of knowledge and truth as having existed from the beginning of time.<sup>22</sup> This problem is compounded by the fact, so Vico declares, that the ancient peoples whose literary remains we are seeking to use to understand them, were themselves wrong in their own assessment of their origins as nations. This confusion on their part Vico characterized as the "conceit of nations."<sup>23</sup> These two barriers to the true judgment of the origins and development of nations, must be overcome if Vico's new science is to disclose the mystery of past developments.<sup>24</sup> His contemporaries, on the assumption of these terms, were doubly removed from the past, as M. Lilla notes, "once by ancient man's ignorance, once by their own."<sup>25</sup>

Vico tells his own myth, to communicate the sort of humans he needs to get his science off the ground. To underscore the irrational origins of human society, Vico picks up the story of humankind following the flood--i.e., the gentile portion

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<sup>22</sup> *NS* §§ 127, 128. The result of this error of thinking is the attempt to see in ancient texts and wisdom a *consciously* veiled mytho-poetic husk, covering an eternal and rational kernel of truth. Vico emphatically rejects this view of the textual remains of antiquity.

<sup>23</sup> *NS* §§ 125, 126.

<sup>24</sup> I should like to underscore once again the importance of the principle of origins to Vico's interpretation of history. Nations just *are there ontogenesis* and coming to be: "The nature of institutions is nothing other than their coming into being (*nascimento*) at certain times and in certain guises. Whenever the time and guise are thus and so, such and not otherwise are the institutions that come into being" (*NS* § 147). Corresponding to this ontogenesis of history there is a genetic (ordered) pattern to our knowledge of these same institutions. The institutions which condition the particular modification of human mind, leave an epistemic trace in the extant structure and working of mind in humanity. Thus, by a sort of mental archaeology we may determine--in a general manner--what must have been the order of development of our human mind and the reciprocally developing culture to which these modifications gave rise ["The order of ideas must follow the order of institutions" (*NS* § 238)]. Since it is a *methodological* axiom for Vico that "doctrines must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat" (*NS* § 314), it is imperative that Vico find some way to disclose the first beginnings of that enormous "object" he is treating of: the coming to be of the nations and the rules for their growth and development.

<sup>25</sup> *G. B. Vico*, 141. I will return shortly to the structural features of Vico's metaphysics of history. In addition to the *conceits*, Vico's starting point posits two other aspects which make for our ignorance of origins: our proclivity to *familiarize*, and our tendency to *anthropomorphize* (*NS* §§ 120-123).

of humankind--when the gentile remnant was wandering the earth as bestial giants, descended into nonhumanity. Vico then postulates an event as the origination of humankind (i.e. *civilized* humanity). John D. Schaeffer gives this interesting, and I think accurate, assessment of the philosophical implications of Vico's account of human origins.

Vico's account of the giants not only claims to describe the *arche* of speech, but also of language. Once the giants perceive the metaphoric quality of thunder and posit its fabulous origin, they must interpret it. *In Vico's account, language begins, not with men speaking, but with men listening. Their first linguistic act is not speech but hermeneutic, the interpretation of the thunder's meaning. They must 'figure out' what Jove wants them to do.* Vico then claims that giants interpret the thunder as a warning against indiscriminate copulation. They flee into the caves to escape Jove's wrath and thus form the first families. *The metaphor gives birth, not only to language, but also to judgment, the flight into the caves is the first res gesta, in which God, religion, and community are created simultaneously, with the adoption of this first metaphor.*<sup>26</sup>

To return now to the theoretical structures by which Vico is able to penetrate the anachronism of the conceits, there are a series of concepts through

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<sup>26</sup> See Schaeffer's *Census Communis: Vico, Rhetoric, and the Limits of Relativism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1990): 87f., emphasis added. Given Vico's elaborate interpretive apparatus, it seems natural to see his *NS* as, among other things, a work of hermeneutic philosophy. Yet important scholars shrink from attaching this label to Vico's philosophy. Donald P. Verene ("Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," *NVS* 6 (1988):16) hesitates to characterize Vico's philosophy as hermeneutic because the term has come to mean "almost anything its advocates wish it to mean." Nevertheless, it seems to me that if we take hermeneutic to involve linguistic, interpretive, and explanatory methods for making remote texts and concepts intelligible to living thinkers (see R. Palmer's *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwest UP, 1969): 12-45) then Vico's work is a model of hermeneutic philosophy. Valuable interpretations of the hermeneutic aspect of Vico's thought may be found in H. White, "The Tropics of History," *Symposium* II, 70, and Emilio Betti's fine essay "The Principles of the New Science of G. B. Vico and The Theory of Historical Interpretation," *NVS* 6 (1988): 31-50. For Vico's own account of the transition from post diluvial animal to imaginatively thinking human being see *NS* §§ 369-373.

which Vico is able to use metaphysical assumptions to penetrate to historical origins. On the one hand, Vico proposes that it is possible to disclose an *order of ideas* by way of a *metaphysics of mind*, which together yield an *ideal eternal history* and in conjunction with these, that it is possible to disclose an *order of things* by means of a *mental language* which names them.<sup>27</sup> The concept of order is what enables Vico to make inferences about the possible structures of development in early humankind. Vico's "metaphysics of mind" is his way of describing the act by which we perceive the "modifications of our own human minds."<sup>28</sup> Because the order of ideas must follow the order of institutions, the residual structures of our minds bear in them the order or pattern which things themselves have passed through.<sup>29</sup> This is no mere idealism. In keeping with his own efforts to unite philosophy and philology, Vico claims that there is an order of languages, i.e., a sequential development in linguistic capacity which we can detect in the historical record, and which confirms the existence of a Mental Dictionary. Language is the body of ideas, and both develop together. Vico thinks that there is a Mental Dictionary which is empirically discernible. Through all the multiplicity of languages there are certain meta-linguistic forms which govern the rate and scope

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<sup>27</sup> I am here following the suggestions of Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, 141f. It is hard to overlook the comparison here with one of Vico's "four authors," the "divine" Plato, who in his *Timaeus* considers the world of time to be "a moving image of eternity," which the Demiurge made to be as much like the eternal (atemporal) world as possible (see *Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee, (Penguin, 1965): 51).

<sup>28</sup> *NS* § 331; cf. § 1108.

<sup>29</sup> *NS* § 238.

for the development of all human languages.<sup>30</sup>

These features of Vico's thought underscore the manner in which it is very much a theoretical structure, as opposed to a purely empirical derivation. Without insight into these providentially furnished orders of thought and being, we could not overcome the "conceits" of scholar or nation, and so could not gain access to proto-humanity. The triadic structure of the ideal eternal history--born out in real history--is characteristic of Vico's thought as such. He is so certain of its influence on reality that, in conjunction with his axiom that all of the institutions of a nation or culture are organically connected, he can determine that all institutions and mental-linguistic developments must occur according to this general pattern.<sup>31</sup> History unfolds in three basic "ages," those of the gods, of heroes, and men. Each of these is characterized by a mentality proper to its context, such that human 'thought' develops according to a pattern by which men "at first feel without perceiving, then they perceive with a troubled and agitated mind, finally they reflect with a clear mind."<sup>32</sup>

We have, then, a fusion of *ideal* and *historical* or *real* elements in Vico's philosophy by which we are enabled to gain access, in principle, to the remotest

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<sup>30</sup> At *NS* § 161 Vico asserts that there must be a common mental language shared by all nations. Vico promises to list some of the contents of this language, but does not appear to do so.

<sup>31</sup> Thus human civilizations are born, mature, and decay according to a threefold pattern. The entirety of book IV of the *NS* (§§ 915-1045) is given over to delineating the history of culture as the realization of this triadic form in all aspects of cultural life (religions, theogonies, languages, laws, customs, governments, speech, etc.). This order is the work of providence, acting to preserve fallen humanity from its tendency toward self-will and self-destruction.

<sup>32</sup> *NS* § 218.

past. In this method Vico qualifies philosophy with historico-cultural realism, and brings to historical reflection the possibility, so Vico thinks, of an eternal foundation by which to understand the flow of temporal things.<sup>33</sup> The tension in Vico's own thought between the eternal/perfect/changeless and the temporal/erroneous/mutable can be seen in his interpreters also.<sup>34</sup>

To conclude this introductory section I should like to indicate the importance of language for Vico's philosophy, even though this thesis will not be able to develop this aspect of Vico's thought, it would be remiss to overlook it. On Vico's assessment of things, speech is the link between the mind and spirit of human being.<sup>35</sup> In his "new art of criticism" Vico inaugurated contemporary higher critical theory, breaking new and controversial ground with his "Discovery of the True Homer."<sup>36</sup> We have already seen how for Vico it is the existence of an order of development in language which, in part, makes possible our access to the historical past. Language also is, in the case of ancient texts, a written record of the development of mind, especially in the construction and preservation of theogonies.

In an eloquent essay, John O'Neill has characterized the role of language in Vico's thought well.

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<sup>33</sup> See on this, again, N. Badaloni, "Ideality and Factuality in Vico's Thought," *Symposium* I, 391-400, and also the Platonic interpretation of Vichian history given by Vittorio Mathieu, "Truth as the Mother of History," *Symposium* II, 113-123.

<sup>34</sup> The "world," says Vico, has been created "in time and particular," but the "institutions established therein by providence are universal and eternal" (*NS* § 342).

<sup>35</sup> *NS* § 1045.

<sup>36</sup> See Vico's critical treatment of the Homeric tradition in Book III of the *NS* (§§780-914). See also Isaiah Berlin's fine exposition of this part of the *NS* in "Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment," *SP*, 645-51. Berlin's exposition bears out the mediating nature of Vico's thought and underscores nicely how Vico applies his axioms and principles to the literary remains of the past.

Philology is the method of the new science because language is the same thing as our humanity, the same in our childhood as in other men whose ways we learn by understanding their language. For we are just as strange to ourselves as other men in other times are to us unless we learn the history of our language. Vico's new science is therefore a science of language and kinship, a poetry of the archetypes and fantastic universals which have shaped time's body into the natural institutions of human intellect and imagination.<sup>37</sup>

In the remainder of this work, I propose to try to get more deeply into Vico's thought by looking at an important epistemological theory he argues for, the *verum et factum convertuntur* principle. The purpose of this discussion will be to illustrate the continuity between the theological basis of the epistemic model of the *AWI* and that of the *NS*, despite differences in substance (mathematical and historical) between the two (Chpt. 2). I then proceed to discuss Leon Pompa's interpretation of Vico's philosophy which emphasizes its rational side, in the attempt to redeem Vico for a contemporary *science* of history (Chpt. 3). In Chpt. 4 I discuss Donald Phillip Verene's interpretation of Vico, which underscores the philosophy of Vico as a science of *imagination*. In Chpt. 5 I then attempt to draw some conclusions about how providence functions in Vico's thought in light of these two possible interpretations. I conclude that the view of Vico's science as a science of imagination is most fruitful for a Christian interpretation of Vico's conception

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<sup>37</sup> See "Time's Body: Vico on the Love of Language and Institution," in *Symposium* II, 335. See also the illuminating essay by Hayden White, "The Tropics of History: The Deep Structure of the *New Science*," *Symposium* II, 65-85.

and use of providence,<sup>36</sup> even though the standard interpretation of providence in Vico by contemporary scholars involves dismissing it by some form of anthropomorphism--making providence over into an attribute of the human mind.

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<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that Verene's interpretation purports to be a Christian reading of Vico. The point will be made that this interpretation best underscores the view of humankind as contingent and dependent upon the divine for its preservation. It emphasizes those parts in Vico's thought which show human beings to be creative and imaginative, yet acting within a prescribed limit set by God (through providential activity), whose own thought is the ultimate paradigm for human thinking.

## CHAPTER TWO: SOME KEY FEATURES OF VICHIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

In the introductory section indication was made of the pervasive and profound effects which Vico saw in the Christian doctrine of the Fall of humanity into sin. In the beginning of these considerations of Vico's epistemology I should like again to underscore the noetic effects of the Fall. The problematic of knowledge, in Vico, is shot through with the consequences of the Fall into sin. Mark Lilla, with his usual emphatic expression, states the matter well.

The problem of knowledge arose for Vico because of man's fall, which left him so corrupted that his capacity for any knowledge whatsoever was put into serious question. Time and again Vico emphasizes that *verum-factum* as an epistemological doctrine rests on a theory of cause and on the existential distinction between *verum* and *certum*. God's making, with the elements he contains, is the absolutely necessary condition of man's making.<sup>1</sup>

Vico's conception of science is an ellipsis whose two foci are *coscienza*

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<sup>1</sup> *G. B. Vico*, 33. For a reading of Vico which is penetrating and self-consciously revisionist and which takes the *verum-certum* instead of the *verum-factum* relationship as foundational in the *NS*, see Gino Bedani, *Vico Revisited* (Oxford: Berg, 1989): esp. 183-202. Bedani's critique is really a protest against any "privileged insight" from which Vico is to be interpreted, by which he intends a critique of idealistic interpretations of Vico.

(consciousness or conscience) and *scienza* (knowledge or science).<sup>2</sup> The object of *coscienza* is the particular, which is comprehended with maximal *certainty*. The object of *scienza* is the general, or common, truths (or trues). Truth in Vico's thought is primarily an attribute of *things* and then, in dependence on them, of propositions. Vico's conception of science has two fundamental requirements within which it must operate. Vico holds that "science has to do with the universal and eternal."<sup>3</sup> This definition and criterion of science is taken right from Aristotle, and is consistent with the tradition. Similarly, Vico takes over another standing criterion of science, that it must be a knowledge of the causes of a thing or

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<sup>2</sup> See Max Fisch, "Introduction" to *NS*, F1-F8, esp. F1: "*Coscienza* has for its object *il certo*, the certain; that is particular facts, events, customs, laws, institutions, as careful observation and the sifting of evidence determine them to be; *scienza* has for its object *il vero*, the true; that is universal and eternal principles. (Otherwise put, *Scienza* is the common [321].) The pursuit of *coscienza* of the certain is philology of history; the pursuit of *scienza* of the true or common is philosophy." On the dialectical relation of these two features, see for example *NS* § 137: "Men who do not *know* what is *true* of things take care to hold fast to what is *certain*, so that, if they cannot satisfy their intellects by knowledge (*scienza*), their wills at least may rest on consciousness (*coscienza*)" (emphasis added). There is a "wider sense" in which the term *science* is used in the *NS*, and in this sense Vico understands science, his new science, to be a new method for comprehending and utilizing both sides of this dualism. See on this M. Fisch, *ibid.*; *NS* §§ 138-140. On the concessions to skepticism which follow from Vico's basic dualism see José Faur's insightful essay "Francisco Sanchez's Theory of Cognition and Vico's *verum/factum*," *NVS* 5 (1987): 142ff., esp. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *NS* § 163.

phenomenon which it is purporting to explain.<sup>4</sup>

There are many features of Vico's thought which draw upon late medieval theology and philosophy, and to gain a grasp on how Vico intends to use this concept we need to know that the terms come from late medieval philosophy, from the doctrine of the transcendentals (*ens, unum, verum, bonum, res, aliquid*).<sup>5</sup> Vico's treatment of the transcendentals leaves his own singular mark on them

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<sup>4</sup> At *NS* § 163 Vico relates his conception of science to that of Aristotle, but his true master in this matter is Plato, as he notes in the *Autobiography*, 127: "This reading [of seventeenth century materialism] therefore only served to confirm him [Vico] still further in the doctrines of Plato, who from the very form of our human mind, without any hypothesis, establishes the eternal idea as the principle of all things on the basis of the knowledge and consciousness [*scienza e coscienza*] that we have of ourselves. For in our mind there are certain eternal truths that we cannot mistake or deny, and which are therefore not of our making. But for the rest we feel a liberty by thinking them to make all the things that are dependent on the body, and therefore *we make* them in time, that is when we choose to turn our attention to them, and we make them all by thinking them and contain them all within ourselves. For example, we make images by imagination, recollections by memory, passions by appetite; smell, tastes, colours, sounds and touches by senses; and *all these things we contain within us*. But for the eternal truths which are not of our making and have no dependence on our bodies, we must conceive as principle of all things an eternal idea altogether separate from body, which, in its consciousness, when it wills, creates all things in time and contains them within itself, and by containing them sustains them" (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> See Jorge E. Gracia, "The Transcendentals in the Middle Ages: An Introduction," *Topoi* 11 (1992): 113-120. The transcendentals were discussed as an entailment of the problem of being *qua* being, and they all had three features in common: "(A) Being *qua* being has certain attributes; (B) Being *qua* being and its attributes are transcendental; and (C) The attributes of being *qua* being are convertible with it" (113). Of interest in our present context is the meaning of the term "convertible." Gracia explains it thus: "... whatever is a being is also one, true, and good; whatever is one is also a being, true and good; whatever is true is also a being, one, and good; and whatever is good is also a being, one, and true" (116). The basic issue is that a being's essence implies the secondary attributes which constitute it and are thus coextensive with it. The problem is that the transcendentals are said to be *particular qualities* of metaphysical properties, but metaphysics as such is the discussion of being as such, that is, being without reference to any particular being. To what, then, do the secondary properties attach and with what are they convertible? So long as Vico retains the language of transcendentals in his epistemology, and then turns it to a consideration of the *human being*, then he will be in difficulty to explain what human being is. For, as S. T. Holmes has pointed out ("The Barbarism of Reflection," *VPP*, 2:215; cf. R. Crease, "Vico and the 'Cogito'," *VPP*, 1:175-178) Vico does not conceive of human nature as obtaining in a fixed essence. See useful discussions in *AWI*, "First Response," 122; J. Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992):85; B. Croce, *Vico*, 279-301; M. Fisch, "Vico and Pragmatism," *Symposium* II, 407-411; K. Lowith, *Vicos Grundsatz: verum et factum convertuntur*, (Heidelberg: Karl Winter, 1968):7-9.

(such that *factum* --usually understood to be outside of and inferior to the family of transcendentals--becomes a transcendental).

In the mediaeval debates there were two contending schools of thought, those of the Thomists and the Scotists. The Thomistic doctrine of transcendentals holds that the investigation of *truth* ends in the notion of transcendentals, metaphysical entities known only through themselves.<sup>6</sup> For St. Thomas the transcendental is that which stands outside of the categories, just because these apply to particular entities. "A transcendental," says J. A. Aertsen of Thomas's view, "transcends the special modes of being, because it is not limited to one category."<sup>7</sup> Thomistic transcendentals are exhaustively embodied in God, which makes difficult any attribution of them to particular, temporal creatures.

John Duns Scotus had a different approach to the concept of transcendentals which integrated knowledge of creatures into it.<sup>8</sup> Like Thomas, Scotus held *ens* to be the primary transcendental, with *unum*, *verum*, and *bonum* as coextensive with it. Contrary to the Thomists, Scotus held that *ens* is univocally predicable of both God and creatures. Through our knowledge of creatures (experience) Scotus held

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<sup>6</sup> The Turin edition of the *Lexicon* to St. Thomas's *Summa Theologia* under the heading "transcendentals" places their number at six: *ens, verum, bonum, unum, res, aliquid*.

<sup>7</sup> See "Truth as Transcendental in Thomas Aquinas," *Topoi* 11 (1992), 165. In Thomas's thought transcendentals stand in "opposition" to categories.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Copleston describes Scotus's problematic succinctly: "On the one hand our knowledge is founded on our experience of creatures, while on the other hand we cannot predicate of God any attribute precisely as it is found in creatures. Therefore, unless we can attain a common middle term with a univocal meaning, no argument from creatures to God is possible or valid. That we can form a univocal concept of being, without reference to infinite or finite, uncreated or created, Scotus regarded as a fact of experience" (*History of Philosophy*, 2, ii, p. 227f.)

that we could derive a list of "disjunctive attributes,"<sup>9</sup> which were considered a secondary class of transcendentals. Scotus thus derives from empirical experience metaphysical concepts. It is in the Scotist, rather than Thomistic, tradition that we should seek the background of Vico's use of the language of transcendentals.

The transcendentals not only furnish Vico with a starting point for his own epistemology, they also bequeath some of their difficulties to his treatment of the *nature* or *essence* of human institutions, most notably due to Vico's denial of any *fixed essence* in which human being obtains.<sup>10</sup> This is a problem solved in the new science not by re-essentializing human nature, but by setting the limits within which that nature may manifest itself.<sup>11</sup> Human being consists in its capacity for (social) relationship.

It is in the *AWI* (1710) that Vico gives the clearest expression of his metaphysical principles, and it is there that he explains the paradigmatic role that the *verum-factum* principle plays in his metaphysics. Already in the *SMT* (1708) the importance of the notion of the convertibility of the true and the made makes

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<sup>9</sup>These include, e.g., necessary or contingent, cause or caused, finite or infinite, etc. See on this whole discussion A. B. Wolter, *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 4f. Scotus's method here is a sort of reverse apophatic theology (though not quite a cataphatic theology), in which the attributes are arrived at by "positing the less perfect extreme of some being, [and concluding] that the more perfect extreme is realized in some being" (*Oratio*, I, 39 as cited in Wolter, *ibid.*, 5).

<sup>10</sup>Robert Welsh Jordan Makes the point well: "What is true of nature or creation in general is true of minds as well, so far as they are created by God *they are known and knowable only by God*" (emphasis added). See his "Vico and Husserl," *Symposium* II, 257. One of the central problems for Vico's new scientist is how she may claim knowledge (*scienza*) of human institutions which are the effects of a cause which is of an "indefinite nature" (*NS* § 120; cf. § 141).

<sup>11</sup>*NS* § 916 (cf. §§ 185, 376, 385).

its appearance.<sup>12</sup> In the opening chapter of the *AWI* Vico sets out a relationship between *verum* and *factum*.

For Latins, *verum* (the true) and *factum* (what is made) are interchangeable, or to use the customary language of the Schools, they are convertible. For them the verb *intelligere* is the same as 'to read perfectly' and 'to have plain knowledge'. In addition, their *cogitare* was the same as our vernacular 'to think' (*pensare*) and 'to gather' (*andar raccogliendo*). And for them, *ratio* meant the reckoning of arithmetic ratios. . . . Also, they commonly described man as an animate being, *rationis particeps*, that is, as partaking of reason, but not always having full possession of it.<sup>13</sup>

From these philosophical speculations Vico derives the principle which, with important modifications, he will appropriate. He surmises that the ancient sages must have thought that "the true is precisely what is made (*Verum esse ipsum*

<sup>12</sup> In the "Introduction" to his translation of *SMT*, Elio Gianturco indicates the presence and importance of this concept in Vico: "An important feature of the *De nostri* [i.e. *SMT*] is the *verum ipsum factum* -- 'knowledge is equipotent to operation' -- the epistemological criterion consciously set up in opposition to the Cartesian standard of the clear and distinct perception" (*SMT*, xli). B. Croce (*Vico*, 1-20) offers a fine summary of chapter one of *AWI*, which is insightful and scholarly, but his general judgments about the role of the *verum-factum* principle are impaired by his total inability to recognize the theological factor in Vico's account of knowledge, insisting instead that human knowledge is "qualitatively identical with the divine," and asserting that in the world of history the human being is "truly God" (*Vico*, 29).

<sup>13</sup> *AWI*, 45. Rudolfo Mondolfo describes the epistemic operation at work in the *verum-factum* process when he notes that ". . . *factum* does not signify a reality (of event or thing) offered to the knowing subject, but it wants to indicate the creative action of the subject that truly conquers the knowledge (*verum*) of that which he makes (*factum*) in so far as he is making it, that is, in so far as he himself does it, in his quality of author, and as such he knows the product of his own action." R. Mondolfo, as cited in J. Faur, "Francisco Sanchez's Theory of Cognition and Vico's *verum/factum*," *NVS* 5 (1987): 131. Robert Flint similarly underscores the close connection between knowing and making: "There is no unknown truth. If there were there would be unmade or ungenerated truth, and the criterion would not apply. The truth is what is known, to be known it must be made; the knowing and the making of truth are inseparable." See his *Vico* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1884), 94.

*factum*.)<sup>14</sup> If so, then God is the first truth because "God is the first Maker; this first truth is infinite, because he is the maker of all things; it is completed truth because it represents to Him all the elements of things, both external and internal, since he contains them."<sup>15</sup> From the convertibility of *verum* with *factum* Vico deduces that God is the first Maker, and because God contains all things in her infinity, God is exhaustive truth, for all that God makes-knows, and God makes all things, is known to God both internally and externally simultaneously.

Given this truth about the true Vico develops some consequences of his axiom. For humans, to know (*scire*) is to put together the various elements which constitute a thing such that "discursive thought (*cogitatio*) is what is proper to the human mind."<sup>16</sup> Divine knowing cannot be discursive, but is instead "intelligence

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<sup>14</sup> *AWI*, 46. In the "First Response" to the reviews of his book in the *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia* Vico gives a very clear account of how the true is made: "... that the truly unique cause is the one that needs nothing else to prove its effect, being that which contains within itself the elements of the thing it produces and disposes them, and thus it forms and comprehends the mode of them, and by comprehending it sends forth the effect." On this passage David Lachtermann has commented that "the man-made truth, in the case of geometry is an image or a sequence of images mimicking *in time* the order and arrangement of those genera or eternal ideas in the Divine Intellect through which it *instantaneously* gives birth to Divine Truth." See Lachtermann's essay "Vico and Marx: Notes to a Precursory Reading," *VMAC*, 5f.

<sup>15</sup> *AWI*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> The business of knowing is inextricably bound up with praxis on Vico's terms (see A. Pons, "Prudence and Providence: The *Pratica della Scienza nuova* and the Problem of Theory and practice in Vico," *Symposium* II, 441-448.). In an interesting speculation M. Fisch has suggested that we translate *verum-factum* into the classical Greek equivalent of το ελεγχος-το πραγμα for this underscores the "unpacking" aspect of knowledge as the true "in the transcendental sense--the unconcealed, that which hides nothing, that which is intelligible without remainder--is the deed, action, behaviour, practice, affair, pursuit, occupation, business, going concern" ("Vico and Pragmatism," *Symposium* I, 424). See also Fisch's insightful essay "Vico's Practica," *Symposium* II, 423-430, where Fisch links Vico notion of knowing with the traditions of Plato and Aristotle.

(*intelligentia*).<sup>17</sup> God's knowledge of things has three dimensions, She knows things from "inside"--i.e., exhaustively. Human knowledge is two dimensional, and parasitic on the prior creating which God has caused. In God, knowing and making are simultaneous. Human beings must analyse things into their causally constituent elements, and reconstruct them discursively to get an insight into their nature, and then it is still not an exhaustive knowledge. This is true of human knowledge of what God has created, which is nature--*including human beings made in the image of God*.<sup>18</sup> In Vico's epistemology *divine knowing and making is the model for human knowing and making*.<sup>19</sup>

Vico is constrained by his Christian conception of God to complicate this model somewhat, in order to preserve the integrity of his theology. The assertion of the convertibility of the true and the made was easier for the ancients who thought of the world as eternal, and for whom the 'creator' of the world was in no way immanent within it. Vico promulgates the following adaptations to the

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<sup>17</sup> *AWI*, 46. Vico illustrates the difference between divine and human knowing with an illustration from the world of art: "Divine truth is a solid image like a statue; human truth is a monogram or surface image like a painting" (*ibid.*).

<sup>18</sup> M. Lilla brings out the skeptical implications of this epistemology for anthropological knowledge. "The necessary, if startling, conclusion," he writes, "is that perfect self-knowledge is impossible, since the mind does not know the *genus* of its own being. Only God above knows the cause of my being, the *genus* by which I was formed. He alone has knowledge (*scientia*) of absolute Being, while we are limited to consciousness (*conscientia*) of it, a distinction to which Vico will return" (*G. B. Vico*, 35).

<sup>19</sup> D. P. Verene describes the activity by which we come to a knowledge of the truth, when he writes: "Like physics, philology finds its objects only as certainties, in this case certainties of the human, not the natural world. As the *certain is part of the true*, philology is part of science when joined with philosophy; that is, *when the true in the certain can be brought forth*. Philosophy alone yields only conceptions without contents and makes nothing true. Without philology philosophy can produce only certainties of the Cartesian sort. *The science of the nations, the human historical world, requires that the true be made through the certain*." (emphasis added) (see "Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," *NVS* 6 (1988): 9. This is the more comprehensive "wider sense" of the word "science," referred to on p. 18, n. 2 above.

*verum-factum* model he has developed thus far.

In the context of our own religion, therefore, where we proclaim the world to have been created in time out of nothing, we need to make here the following distinction: created truth is interchangeable with what has been made, *uncreated truth with what has been begotten*. For this reason, Sacred Scripture, . . . called the Wisdom of God 'the Word', in which the ideas of all things--as well as the elements of all ideas--are contained. For, in the divine Word, truth is identical with comprehension of all the elements that constitute the universe of things, and which could, if He should wish, found countless worlds.<sup>20</sup>

Vico here introduces an analogy between created and uncreated truths and their respective interchangeabilities. This is done by way of articulating a theologically oriented epistemology in which human thought is understood as having God as its model (*ad Dei instar*).<sup>21</sup> This is an important point for those who wish to argue the genuineness of Vico's Christian commitments and their influences

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<sup>20</sup> *AWI*, 47 (emphasis added). Vico is here attempting to integrate elements of Christian Trinitarian theology into his theory of knowledge. D. P. Verene has indicated that for Vico (with reference to the *NS*) there must be a "kind of *coscienza* or awareness of the divine that is presupposed and necessary for human *scienza*," ("Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," *NVS* 6 (1988): 10.) This theme has been explored with great depth and historical breadth by John Milbank in his book *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), and he is more explicit than Verene on the specifically Christian origins of Vico's philosophy: "The revelation of the Trinity is for Vico also the revelation of the *verum-factum*: only in the Christian era can the fullness of this first truth become the common sense of humanity" (114). Milbank, also, notes the influence of skepticism on Vico's philosophy, since it concedes the dependence of knowledge on consciousness after all. This skepticism, says Milbank, can be overcome only in the "realization--or the revelation given in Christ--that ultimate truth is itself the completed work of which our truths are but fragments" (*ibid.*, 114). In other words, Vico's theory of knowledge implies that we are always establishing our finitude and the imperfection of our knowing processes, vis-a-vis God and His Creation. On the role of Trinitarian dogma in Vico's thought see also Donald R. Kelly, "Giambattista Vico," *European Writers*, 14 volumes, 3: 299f., 306. Kelly holds that "despite the pagan base" in Vico's thought, Trinitarian thought gives a unity in the pluriformity of Vico's work.

<sup>21</sup> See *AWI*, 97 on the operative term *ad Dei instar*, where L. Palmer augments her translation with an interpretive note indicating that "we make truth only as an image of God's speaking word" (*AWI*, 51, n. 11).

upon his philosophy.

In the light of these arguments Vico produces a hierarchy of the sciences or faculties of knowledge according to which of them are most scientific. In this hierarchy, human (moral) sciences are on the bottom of the list--furthest removed from scientificity, while metaphysics is on the top, followed closely by mathematics. Mathematics and geometry are for Vico, in 1710, those human faculties which most closely approximate perfect knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Even here the analogy is not perfectly proportional, for God creates the elements out of nothing through which She then proceeds to create the universe, while in geometry humans *do not create* the elements out of nothing, although they do rather freely arrange and compose them.

Between the *AWI* and the completion of the second edition of the *MS*, Vico undergoes a development in his philosophy in which the human sciences are said

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<sup>22</sup> See *AWI*, 97 and esp. 94 for Vico's ordering of the faculties. Nikhil Bhattacharya has emphasized the novelty Vico's conception of mathematics and how it instantiates the *verum-factum* principle in his essay "Knowledge 'Per Causas': Vico's Theory of Natural Science," *VPP*, 1:182-197. Even mathematics is an artificial construct *made* by the human mind, and to the degree that it is such it is contingent, not eternal and autonomous. In Vico's construal of the *verum-factum* principle causes are "simply our actions" (188). "Mathematical knowledge is causal knowledge," says Bhattacharya, "because demonstration is construction, and our construction activities, the steps in the process of construction or demonstration which bring about the final result, *are* causes of the result" (189). See in this connection, Vico's definition of cause in *AWI*, "First Response," 124: ". . . the truly unique cause, is the one that needs nothing else to produce its effect, being that which contains within itself the elements of the thing it produces and disposes them, and thus it forms and comprehends the mode of them, and by comprehending it sends forth the effect."

to be much superior to mathematics and geometry.<sup>23</sup> This has led many commentators to deduce that Vico has abandoned the *verum-factum* paradigm, with its theological assumptions,<sup>24</sup> and others have inferred that the principle has become useless in light of the turn to human science in the *NS*,<sup>25</sup> or, similarly, some have held that the *verum-factum* paradigm is a contradiction to the epistemological assumptions of the *NS*.<sup>26</sup>

I should like to argue, in deference to these assorted judgments, that there is

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<sup>23</sup> Max Fisch describes the change in Vico's thought between 1710 and 1730 when he indicates that "no longer bound by the transcendentals, Vico has made the certain coordinate with the true, and has elaborated the distinction between them. The true is still the intelligible; the certain is now the ascertainable. The intelligible is that which may be understood by reason, in terms of causes, universals, laws. The ascertainable is that which may be witnessed, or suffered, or known by the testimony of witnesses or from competent authority. Science is knowledge of the true, *conscience*, the witnessing consciousness, is knowledge of the certain. Philosophy *aims* at science; philology *aims* at conscience" ("Vico and Pragmatism," *Symposium* I, 411f.).

<sup>24</sup> See Gino Bedani, *Vico Revisited* (Oxford: Berg, 1989): 190-202; and Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, (London: Hogarth, 1976): 100.

<sup>25</sup> See Stephen Gaukroger, "Vico and the Maker's Knowledge Principle," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 3 (1986):29-41, for whom the *verum-factum* principle is a "special form of knowledge" and who thinks that we do not need special forms of knowledge (e.g., a reflexive theory of privileged access to historical knowledge) (42) and that Vico is therefore mistaken to construe the *verum-factum* principle as he does; and James C. Morrison, "Vico's Principle of *Verum is Factum* and the Problem of Historicism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (1978): 579-595, for whom the *verum-factum* principle runs aground on the problem of human indeterminacy, with the consequence that the *NS* is "ultimately a failure" (595).

<sup>26</sup> Max Fisch, in the context of discussing Vico and Cartesianism, says that the *NS* represents a radical break from Vico's earlier thought. "What is both anti-Cartesian and new is the new science itself. *It is anti-Vichian too, if we measure Vico by the Study Methods and the Ancient Wisdom*" ("Vico and Pragmatism," *Symposium* I, 411; emphasis added). Karl Lowith thinks that the principle cannot be taken literally in the context of the new science, otherwise it would lead to the "absolutely un-Vichian conclusion that man is the god of history" [*Meaning in History*, (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1949):124f]. In his fine essay *Vicos Grundsatz: verum et factum convertuntur* (Heidelberg: Karl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1968), Lowith modifies his earlier judgment somewhat: "Das eigentliche Prinzip der Wissenschaft ist daher nicht schon die Konvertibilität des verum und factum, d.i. die Wahrheit der vom Menschen geschaffenen Welt, sondern die göttliche Vorsehung, der alles zu verdanken ist, wenn sich das Menschengeschlecht nicht selber zugrunde richtet, sondern erhält." [15: The real principle of the New Science is thus *not only* the convertibility of the true and the made, i.e., the truth that the world has been made by humans, but also by divine providence, on account of which alone the human race does not perish but is preserved. (my translation)]

a continuity in Vico's epistemological principle, and that even though the geometric paradigm is not the most Godlike model of human thinking in the *NS*, that the criterion of the true is (still) to have made the *factum* one knows. While change in Vico's thought has clearly occurred, the principle of *verum-factum* survives into the *NS* as the paradigm of human thinking, and that the theological model still obtains, though it is now expressed in terms of the hidden and "natural" working of God in the natural law of the gentiles. I should first of all like to clarify aspects of Vico's geometric paradigm from the *AWI* and show that it is not so inconsonant with the theory of knowledge presupposed in the *NS*, and then, secondly, I should like to point out how the paradigm is present in the *NS*, if in modified form.

Benedetto Croce draws attention to the nominalistic character of Vico's mathematical theory as it is expressed in the *AWI*. Croce interprets Vico as teaching that human beings create the elements of mathematics *ex nihilo*, as God creates the elements of the universe. The products of such human cognitive activity are mere *ficta*, purely mental, illusions with no reality.<sup>27</sup> Isaiah Berlin, while he emphasizes the originality of Vico's theory of mathematics, confirms this nominalistic judgment,<sup>28</sup> holding that Vico's theory was little more than the manipulation of counterfactuals. Max Fisch, one of the more astute commentators

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<sup>27</sup> Croce, *Vico*, 11f.

<sup>28</sup>I. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, 21. *Μεταβασις*, the forbidden practice of using methodological techniques from one intellectual discipline in another in which they would normally not be used, was turned into a virtue in seventeenth century thought. Vico, as Attila Fáj has well illustrated ("Vico as Philosopher of *Metabasis*," *Symposium* II, 87-109), was a master of this technique, though not always in fruitful ways (109). The enormous success of the science of Mechanics led seventeenth century thinkers to apply its techniques in other faculties of knowledge. For an account of how Vico was effected by these new possibilities, see Amos Funkenstein, "Natural Science and Social Theory," *Symposium* II, 194, 195f.

on Vico, also characterizes the mathematical theory of the *AWI* as nominalistic, although in a mediatorial position he sees the turn toward "realism" in the *NS* as modifying Vico's earlier theory rather than abrogating it.<sup>29</sup>

It should be conceded that while the geometric paradigm is a central feature of the *AWI*, the *AWI* is not the definitive statement of Vichian epistemic principles.<sup>30</sup> If we attempt to understand why the geometric paradigm was important to Vico, then we can see how it is connected with the *verum-factum* principle and how the latter is in turn--though now shorn of its transcendentalist rigidities--at the root of the operative epistemic principle of the *NS*: That the world of human cultural accretions is most intelligible to us *because* we have *made* it.<sup>31</sup>

David Lachtermann makes a good argument for the continuity of the *verum-factum* principle throughout the early and the later Vico, and he shows how the geometric paradigm is the operative analogue throughout Vico's work.<sup>32</sup> With the aid of geometry, through Vico's conception of *metaphysical points* and

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<sup>29</sup> Fisch observes that "whereas Vico had been a nominalist in his constructive theory of mathematics, the new science of history, though also constructive, has made a realist of him, and has even modified the nominalism of his theory of mathematics. In the *Ancient Wisdom* God made realities, and man, in his most Godlike making, only fictions. In the *New Science*, man in his most Godlike making makes realities" ("Vico and Pragmatism," *Symposium* I, 413).

<sup>30</sup> See D. P. Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 37.

<sup>31</sup> See *NS* § 331. H.-G. Gadamer, in critiquing W. Dilthey's use of the *verum-factum* principle in cultural sciences--and by implication Vico, in whom Dilthey "finds support"--is critical of the principle in question for he is certain that the *object* of historical knowledge cannot be objectified in the way that mathematical objects can. Knowledge of the human world and knowledge of mathematics are simply non-analogous. Gadamer criticizes Vico's metablastic tendencies which resulted in the transposition of "an experience of the human artistic spirit to the historical world, where, one can no longer speak of 'making'." [See on this Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall. (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 222, 227, 230f.]

<sup>32</sup> See D. Lachtermann, "Vico and Marx: Notes on a Precursory Reading," *VMAC*, 38-61; esp. 45ff.

*conatus*, which he develops already in the *AWI*,<sup>33</sup> Vico attempts to make the abstractness of mathematics come into relevant contact with concrete reality, particularly, he attempts to overcome the general dualism of Cartesian *res extensa* and *res cogitans*.<sup>34</sup> Metaphysical points and *conatus*<sup>35</sup> are not original Vichian ideas, but Vico does put them to his own use. In the Vichian paradigm metaphysical points originate as a product of the *verum-factum* process. "The point," says D. Verene, "is a real intelligible to metaphysical thought and made by it through reflection on geometric thought."<sup>36</sup> Geometric making is an approximation of divine making and the metaphysical point has its reality not outside the human mind in the physical world, but outside the human mind in the mind of God. The metaphysical point is thus a "middle ground between divine making *ex nihilo* and the reflection of this in geometric making in which man is in

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<sup>33</sup> *AWI*, 67-84, cf. "First Response," 125.

<sup>34</sup> This theory is not an attempt to describe, mathematically, any concrete object. Instead, Vico attempts to connect abstract mathematical concepts to concrete occurrences in nature, i.e., he attempts to offer a *metaphysical* theory to account for the ground or possibility of physical objects (extended things) and the structural properties by which we may know them. *Conatus* has also for Vico a theological application.

<sup>35</sup> M. Fisch gives an excellent description of how these concepts function in Vico's philosophy: "On the hypothesis that our making in mathematics is as near as we can come to God's making, but that what we make are fictions and what God makes are realities, we reach the hypothesis that the elements made by God, out of which he makes the world of extension and motion, are metaphysical points. As in geometry we construct the extended line, plane, surface, and figure from the unextended geometrical by postulation or hypothesis, and, as in rational mechanics, we construct motion in the same way, so in metaphysics our hypothesis must be, first that God produces extended bodies from points that are unextended and indivisible but endowed with infinite power of extension, and second, that the *conatus* or power of motion ascribed by physicists to bodies must be ascribed instead to these metaphysical points. . . . By this hypothesis we can descend from metaphysics to physics, that is, from God and from the true Forms of things as they are in God, to the physical world; we escape dualism by taking the substance of bodies to be incorporeal, the causes of motion to be motionless; and thus, instead of taking the physical as brute fact, we *explain* its existence."

\* *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 49.

some way God."<sup>37</sup>

*Conatus* is postulated to explain motion. It denotes physical motion, but has for Vico connotations of an ethical force or power by which the human will is moved to act toward the good. In the *NS* *conatus* is that irrational substrate in human culture which prevents the total destruction of the human race, and is as such salvific. Thus understood *conatus* is the counterpart of reason, and where reason fails to preserve human societies in lawful order, God's residual presence in culture moves humanity inexorably back to the good.<sup>38</sup>

David Lachtermann finds in Vico's mathematical theory a "congruity" with the divine making-knowing, "assuring that human science is proceeding *ad scientiae divinae instar* --on the model of divine science."<sup>39</sup> Lachtermann highlights the fact that mathematics/geometry are synthetic exercises and thus satisfy the requirement for *scienza*, that it be a knowledge of causes.<sup>40</sup> Mathematics is a causal science in so far as it "demonstrates how a complex structure necessarily follows from its elements."<sup>41</sup>

Lachtermann makes much of the fact that on Vico's philosophy humans do

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<sup>37</sup> D. Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 49f.

<sup>38</sup> I am following here the illuminating discussion of *conatus* given by Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, 36-45, where he characterizes *conatus* as important in Vico's thought "because it explains the nature of free motion, and with it, the possibility of free will in the human realm of *certum*" (43). See also on *conatus* the scholarly essay by Attila Fáj, "Vico as Philosopher of *Metabasis*," *Symposium* II, 105; and with reference to *NS* §§ 340 and 504 see 105, n.84.

<sup>39</sup> Lachtermann, "Vico and Marx," *VMAC* 54.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 55f.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

*not* make the elements of mathematics *ex nihilo*<sup>42</sup>. The making in the geometric paradigm is instead a

mental operation through which already existent elements, themselves the images of divine generative archetypes, are set in order in a decorous way. . . . In other words, we might say that Vichian making, in its mathematical format, is the 'schematizing' of external ideas by the faculty of 'productive imagination'.<sup>43</sup>

From this sketch of the paradigmatic function of geometry in Vico's early philosophy we can see the important structures in the model by which it is able to survive into the *NS--mutatis mutandis--* as the core of Vico's epistemology. The doctrine of metaphysical points and *conatus* were offered in an attempt to bring the abstract/mental world into closer contact with the concrete/particular world. It is the *nonreality* of the products of geometrical thinking which later causes mathematics to slip on the hierarchical scale from its privileged position. God's making-knowing generates not merely a conceptual picture of the world, but the actual physical universe itself.

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<sup>42</sup> R. G. Collingwood expresses the view of many writers when he says that for Vico "the fabric of human society is created out of nothing, and every detail of this fabric is therefore a human *factum*, eminently knowable to the human mind as such" [*The Idea of History*, (London: Oxford UP, 1946), 65]. For Vico this unqualified assertion of human culture being "eminently knowable" is qualified by the fact that human beings are themselves creatures of the God who alone knows them exhaustively. Indeed humans make themselves *in a sense*, as in the *Autobiography*, 127, where we are said to make the products of imagination, memory, and sensation. In the *NS* (at §§ 367, 520, 692ff.) Vico indicates his important conception that humankind "in a sense" makes itself by making the social structures, which alone separate humans from their "beastial," "gigantic" progenitors. Humanity emerges in the process of imposing on itself social restraints, which it both makes and receives. It is, however, Vico's teaching that this process is *initiated* by divine providence, and that all of the epochal moments in human history--the ones he is concerned with in the *NS*--are prompted by the working of God's providential plan. See on this, chapter five below.

<sup>43</sup> Lachtermann, "Vico and Marx," *VMAC*, 56.

We may conclude, then, that it is not the *verum-factum process* which changes from the early to the mature Vico, but the *object meditated in the process*. The human world is also a making of the human mind, but is much more Godlike for the fact that it has physical concrete reality and form. In both mathematics and the new science of humanity there is produced an intellectual structure or product along the lines of the maker's knowledge principle. It is only in the new science however, that the mental product also has concrete reality. Vico is clear about the relationship when he indicates that

as geometry, when it constructs the world of quantity out of its elements, or contemplates that world, is creating it for itself, just so does our Science [create for itself the world of nations], but with a reality greater by just so much as the institutions having to do with human affairs are more real than points, lines, surfaces, and figures are. And this very fact is an argument, o reader, that these proofs are of a kind divine and should give thee a divine pleasure, since in God knowledge and creation are one and the same thing.<sup>44</sup>

It is this distinction between the epistemological status of the cultural world and the mathematical realm which enables Vico to boldly assert the superiority of the human sciences over the mathematical and--by extension--natural sciences.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *NS* § 349.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. here Vico's programmatic axiom at *NS* § 331, that we can know the world of nations because we have made them, but cannot know the world of nature because God has made it. H.-G. Gadamer does not think that Vico's move here is convincing. To it he raises the objection that "Man is alien to himself and his historical fate in a way quite different from the way nature, which knows nothing of him, is alien to him" (*Truth and Method*, 276). Humanity is alienated from an understanding of itself in a different way than we are alienated from nature, so a solution which solves the problem of natural knowledge will not *a fortiori* solve the problem of the "historical fate" of humans. But Vico does not see history as a part of nature as Gadamer here seems to. Because both realms, the inner and the outer, the immediate and the historical have their existence under God's aegis, and we have some insight into the purpose of these realms through our grasp of providence, both are intelligible to us, though in varying degrees of certainty.

The "object" which the new scientist is striving to know is the human cultural world itself. The human cultural world as an object<sup>46</sup> of thought is possible only as a synthetic<sup>47</sup> product of the discursive mental process informed by the axioms and insights of Vico's new science. Since we are most *certain* of what is nearest to us and fashion what is more distant according to what is more proximate,<sup>48</sup> we would be--and Vico's contemporaries indeed were--ignorant of the origins of humankind if we did not have a new science by which to penetrate these origins. If we cannot penetrate the origins of humanity we cannot *know* what it is to be human. As to the question of the historical remains (texts) which transmit to us a philological record of the past Vico proposes treating them with a new art of

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<sup>46</sup> While Vico's text constantly refers to historical particulars, usually taken from the Greek and Roman historical record, he intends these to be instantiations of universal laws which, as such, must obtain anywhere that human beings emerge from animality and begin to live humanly (i.e. in society). The *NS* is itself a meditation but is intended to be supplemented by a praxis, a social and political activity ( See the "Practica," *NS* §§ 1405ff.). The *NS* itself is a theoretical work and not the history of any one nation, nor yet of the human race. As Raffaello Franchini puts it: "Vico's true aim was not, and could not be, the narration of the universal history of mankind; rather *it was the discovery of the universality of history*, of the supreme laws that govern it and that are immanent in its very process, just as the reconstructive activity of the historian-philosopher is immanent within the process" ("Vico, Historical Methodology, and the Future of Philosophy," *Symposium* I, 547 (emphasis added). Cf. M. Fisch's essay "Vico's Practica," *Symposium* II, 423-430.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *NS* § 349 on how the one who meditates this new "Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history *so far as he himself makes it for himself* . . . ."

<sup>48</sup> *NS* §§ 180-81. On Vico's resurrection of the ancient Protagorean maxim see *NS* §§ 120-123; A. Funkenstein, "Natural Science and Social Theory," *Symposium* II, 204f.; Tom Rockmore, "A Note on Vico and Antifoundationalism," *NVS* 7 (1989): 26. In Funkenstein's essay, he characterizes the *verum et factum convertuntur* as not only a gloss on the Hobbesian dictum that the inquiry into the human world is nearer to us than the physical world because we cause it. Instead, he sees Vico as setting out to "prove that the method of historical inquiry is throughout different from the method of reconstruction of physical laws. . . . Vico seems to see in the Protagorean *homo mensura omnium* principle a mode of cognition, serving the construction of society (imagination) as well as its reconstruction (the understanding of its origin). . . . Vico thus gave new foundation to the traditional speculative *topos* that the *aetates hominis* are a recapitulation of the *aetatis mundi*."

criticism and a corresponding "poetic logic."<sup>49</sup>

On Vico's philosophy, cultures--with their institutional elements--come first in the "order of things." Social structures embodied in the natural laws which enable humanity to exist in groups are implanted and directed in historical reality by the silent working of divine providence.<sup>50</sup> Providence acts to maintain the *form* of humanity--its social nature<sup>51</sup> --until its substance--its rational nature<sup>52</sup> -- could mature in the age of humanity. Philosophically, Vico proposes that the further we are removed from the immediacy of consciousness, the more we must rely upon the conception of providence as worked out in the ideal eternal history to explain how nations could develop from barbarity to civility (and back). This ideal eternal history is the metaphysics revealed to be operative in the emergence and governance of the various modifications of our human mind, for in all things

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<sup>49</sup> Ernesto Grassi explains *poetic logic* by contrasting it with *rational logic*: "In rational logic . . . the *universal*--which is to represent the 'commonness' of a class--is obtained by a process of abstractions whereby we proceed from the perception of individual objects to the essentials formed by species and genera. In such logic, moreover, the connecting is the result of a process of derivation. And similarly, the mental activity consists in the process of derivation.

"In the logic of imagination, on the other hand, the act of putting into relationship (*legein*) 'things that are remote from one another' is the result of an immediate original connection, a connection which, because of its immediacy, can appear only in the form of a momentary vision, or in other words, an image.

"Finally, the mental activity of the logic of imagination does not consist of a rational process, but expresses itself in a primary, twofold experience, that of the absence of, and the need to look out for *necessary connections* on the basis of which men can and must build up the world that is their due." See "The Priority of Common Sense and Imagination: Vico's Philosophical Relevance Today," *VH*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> For an insightful discussion of how the problems of jurisprudence, especially the problem of how eternal law receives temporal embodiment and application, see R. Caponigri, *Time and Idea*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1953), 36ff.; D. R. Kelly, "Giambattista Vico," *European Writers*, 14 volumes, 3:301.

<sup>51</sup> *NS* § 2.

<sup>52</sup> *NS* § 29.

human, "the order of ideas must follow the order of institutions."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *NS* § 238; cf. §§ 239f.

**CHAPTER THREE: LEON POMPA'S INTERPRETATION OF VICO'S  
THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Leon Pompa's writings on Vico<sup>1</sup> are comprehensive and penetrating. Pompa is concerned with the scientific status of the *NS*, and his efforts, both on the internal structure of Vico's thought, in his book, and his comparative studies of Vico, are given over to the vindication of the *NS* as a *science* of history.<sup>2</sup>

Pompa notes the difficulties entailed in trying to present Vico's *NS* as an empirical doctrine, especially from the point of view of philosophy. Nevertheless, it is precisely in his philosophical contribution that Vico's work is most valuable to a contemporary philosophy of culture. "It is evident, therefore, that the reasoning of the philosopher," says Pompa

goes beyond giving the kind of account of the social and historical nature of man with which Vico has been so far concerned. It now includes that adducing of historico-sociological principles in which the universal conditions which determine the growth and development of the various kinds of

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant here are "Vico's Science," *History and Theory* 10 (1971): 49-83; "Vico and the Presuppositions of Historical Knowledge," *Symposium* II, 125-140; "Human Nature and the Concept of a Human Science," *SR*, 434-449; "Imagination in Vico," *VPP*, 1: 162-170; "Vico and Hegel: A Critical Assessment of the Role of Ideas in History," *VPP*, 2: 35-46; "Ontological and Historiographical Reconstruction in Vico and Marx," *VMAC*, 62-77; *Vico: A Study of the 'New Science'*, Second Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Gino Bedani also sees Vico's science as primarily empirical in its intent and method, a philosophy in which the "senso commune" . . . provides the observable pattern of evolution of structures of thought and feeling on the basis of which humanity creates its institutions." While Vico intended his science to be an empirical one, there were aspects of his thought which made this problematic, says Bedani.

social phenomena are stated.<sup>3</sup>

The viability of Vico's project is contingent upon its capacity as both critical and constructive. Pompa rejects a prevalent interpretation of Vico according to which the "ideal eternal history"<sup>4</sup> is deduced by deriving the common denominators from a plurality of historical accounts.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation flounders on the fact that it requires the historian to accept the received texts of historical accounts as accurate vehicles of historical happenings, a proposal which Vico rejects.<sup>6</sup> The "ideal eternal history" is of itself empirically vacuous, but necessary to understand the integrity and development of cultures. Pompa believes that Vico's "ideal eternal history" is something like a warranting theory for the acceptance of historical reconstructions.

Ideal eternal history does not *presuppose* the historical accounts before it.

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<sup>3</sup>Pompa, "Vico's Science," 65. Since Vico's project is generated by the intention to bring philosophy and philology (or history) into union, the role of philosophy is important, but not imperial among the Elements of Vico's system. Philosophy's tasks are no longer purely conceptual in nature. Elsewhere, Pompa expands upon the role and import of philosophy in the *NS*, indicating its various contributions. Through various elements philosophy provides historical research with a theory of knowledge whose categories "are such as to render it more intelligible than other branches of knowledge" (See Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 93ff.).

<sup>4</sup>See on ideal eternal history, e.g., *NS* §§ 239-245.

<sup>5</sup>At *NS* § 144 Vico says: "Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth." With some sleight "variation of detail" there exist certain basic ideas or laws which are common to all cultures. From the fact that cultures in isolation formulate identical laws, Vico deduces a "mental dictionary" by means of which the "ideal eternal history is conceived, which gives us the history in time of all the nations" (*NS* § 145). Vico blends the ideal and the factual. At issue is how he does this. See on this the fine essay by N. Badaloni, "Ideality and Factuality in Vico's Thought," *Symposium* I, 391-401.

<sup>6</sup>Due to humanity's Protagorean impulse to fashion that of which we are ignorant in our own likeness, and to characterize that which is historically distant with that which is familiar and at hand (*NS* §§ 120, 122), historical records have been cumulatively distorted and corrupted. Vico's "new art of criticism" is intended as, among other things, a technique for getting at the meaning of ancient myths/histories by seeing them as records of experience, not chronicles of actual events. Cf. on this J. Mali, "The Public Grounds of Truth: The Critical Theory of G. B. Vico," *NVS* 6 (1988): 59-83.

In so far as it is inductive it works with the literary remains of the past. In Vico, argues Pompa, historical method is primarily deductive in character. Discovering the elements of the ideal eternal history is the philosophical task of the new scientist. The theoretical elements of the new science are *confirmed* by the historical and inductive aspect of the new science.

On this view, the philosophical aspect of the method is best thought of as the reasoning involved in the production of a systematic, deductive theory, tracing and explaining the genesis and development of the general structure of an ideal society in accordance with those descriptive and explanatory categories already approved by Vico.<sup>7</sup>

The ideal eternal history prescribes the range and quality of those changes through which human societies must go when they begin the course of historical or human existence. The ideal eternal history thus presupposes Vico's "metaphysical theory of causation in so far as he claims that, whenever men act in the way he describes the consequences of their actions must be as he describes them."<sup>8</sup> The causal component in cultures is most visible in the way that they develop laws

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<sup>7</sup> Pompa, "Vico's Science," 61. It has not escaped the notice of some critics that if this is the true nature of the ideal eternal history, then it remains vacuous *even after appeal to facts*. This seems to be the case since the facts which corroborate the ideal eternal history *cannot be had without the use of the ideal eternal history*. This seems to be the basic criticism raised against it by W. H. Walsh, in "The Logical Status of Vico's Ideal Eternal History," *Symposium* II, 153, 154.

<sup>8</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 24.

which constitute them as societies.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the ideal eternal history, a second leading notion guides Pompa's interpretation of Vico's theory of historical knowledge: the notion of the *modifications of the human mind*<sup>10</sup>. Pompa construes this central Vichian notion as an invitation to the historian to engage in self-reflection or to establish history through self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is supposed to be one of the essential requirements of the new scientist, since by way of self-reflection we come to know the various changes or modifications through which our minds have come to be as they are, and therefore gain access into the cultural world of which they are the cause.<sup>11</sup> Pompa's suggestion orients Vichian epistemology toward an anthropological centre, a centre in which the metaphysics of mind is crucial for the

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<sup>9</sup> Natural justice is a social concept, says Pompa: "The institutional context in which, at any given period of history man finds himself, conditions future social changes by conditioning the conceptions of natural justice upon which such change must rest. The conception of a natural justice is thus a social concept. . . . It is also, however, an historical concept, for it is conditioned by the historical circumstances in which it arises and is itself a determining condition of any further historical change" (Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 39). There is a dialectical relationship between institutions which embody an extant sense of justice, and the adaptations which give rise to new social forms (or sequences of forms). There is no social catastrophism in Vico's view of change. There is a continuity in the movement of history such that more advanced stages in the ideal eternal history are necessarily dependent on their temporal (and therefore logical) antecedents.

<sup>10</sup> Important passages in the *NS* on modifications are §§ 331, 374-77.

<sup>11</sup> Pompa gives this assessment of the meaning of the term "modifications" in the context of the *NS*: ". . . it is useful to draw attention to the word *guisa* which Vico uses as a synonym for *modificazione*. One of the senses of *guisa* is 'mode' in the sense in which this is distinguished from 'substance'. . . . Malebranche . . . used the terms 'modification' and 'mode' interchangeably, and regarded the understanding, the imagination, and the senses as merely three different modes or modifications of thinking substance. It has been suggested that Vico's use of *modificazione* may derive from that of Malebranche" (Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 4, n. 4). Pompa accepts this connection with Malebranchist usage of the term 'modifications' in his own account of Vico's theory. The subsumption of imagination to intellectual substance is a basic point of difference between Pompa and Verene.

course which the nations run in time.<sup>12</sup>

Vico, Pompa says, holds that for history to become an object of knowledge a special kind of insight or form of knowledge is needed. To be free of circularity in reasoning, a necessary condition for any science of the actual, historical reconstructions must be testable against history itself. In its philosophical structure, however, this science cannot use in its argumentative premises that for which it seeks to argue. It is, after all, seeking to establish what is historical in distinction from what is not. If a datum of "knowledge" (*scientia*) uses the elements of its conclusion (the fact) in the premises by which we derive it, it will be inextricably *circular*. Yet, if "historical" knowledge fails to bring before its considerations history itself, or employs a methodology which occludes this possibility, it will never be able to begin its task.<sup>13</sup>

Pompa explores this problem in a fine essay comparing the methods of Marx and Vico.<sup>14</sup> Pompa discusses the relationship between ideas and historical reality. When Vico, for example, says that God is the cause of the various ideas of the divine which emerge in history he cannot mean that God is the *entire* cause. For he insists that social necessities must be a factor in explaining concepts of divinity. That is why he argues that social conditions are the *occasion* but not the *cause* of

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<sup>12</sup> For an argument against the anthropological centring of Vico's thought, see E. Grassi, "Vico as Epochal Thinker," *VH*, 194f., where it is noted that Vico's subordinating of all human activity to a providential plan rules out any such interpretation. Grassi takes Vico to imply that human culture is theocentric, rather than anthropocentric.

<sup>13</sup> When Vico makes elucidation of causes the essence of *scientia*, and proceeds to define a perfect cause as exhaustively determinative of its effect (cf. *AWI*, "First Response," 124, as in 25, n. 18 above), a very metaphysically qualified definition, it is hard to see how he can avoid circularity.

<sup>14</sup> "Ontological and Historiographical Reconstruction in Vico and Marx," *VMAC*, 62-77.

various historical manifestations. Social utility will partly explain why the "class war" takes the shape it does in history. But, these occasions (causes) invariably underdetermine the phenomenon which they are invoked to explain. There is always another, a second component in historical explanation as Vico understands it. The other component is accounted for by the fact that human beings always act out of an *ideal* which, "in the course of their history, they are progressively developing. Vico, in other words, argues that ideas do effect history in significant ways, and that ideas have a traffic with history in which they are changed in changing history.<sup>15</sup>

Vico, Pompa thus argues, attempts to solve the problem of history and philosophy by a sort of theory of complementarity. The axioms which govern the *NS* are derived *in part* from the historical record itself, *in part* deduced from the theoretical requirements for a science to be a science.<sup>16</sup> Vico cannot accept the literary remains *prima facie*. First, because these remains have been cast and recast through time by scholars who are possessed of a "conceit" (*boria*) which prompts them to see in the myths and 'histories' of the past, cryptographic accounts of their own (rational) wisdom, which they assume to be truth from the beginning of time.<sup>17</sup> In addition, ancient cultures themselves were erroneous in their accounts for they tended to see their own nations as having invented all the

<sup>15</sup> "Ontological and Historiographical Reconstruction in Vico and Marx," 71f.

<sup>16</sup> Vico follows Aristotle in part when he endorses the view that science "has to do with what is universal and eternal" (*NS* § 163) [cf. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1003a 15].

<sup>17</sup> Those possessed of this conceit "will have it that what they know is as old as the world" (*NS* § 127).

benefits of human life.<sup>18</sup> Vico's "new art of criticism," in addition to his discovery and proposal of an "ideal eternal history" enable him to critically discern the *meaning* of these ancient accounts.

Pompa sees the "modifications of the human mind" as central to understanding Vico's theory of knowledge. In this concept is comprehended the aprioristic and deductive,<sup>19</sup> as well as the synthetic and inductive elements of Vico's theory of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> While recognizing both features, Pompa tends to emphasize the deductive component in Vico's thought.

The connection between Vico's metaphysical theories and scientific history is achieved by means of the 'ideal eternal history'. The latter is a scientific theory, embodying the determinate empirical presuppositions required to interpret man's actual history in the light of the metaphysical theories. Since these theories involve the assertion that man is both sociologically and historically determined, the 'ideal eternal history' must have two dimensions: an actual account of the empirical content of the system of social relationships which

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<sup>18</sup> In this conceit every nation is said to believe that "it before all other nations invented the comforts of human life and that its remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world" (*NS* § 125).

<sup>19</sup> "Science is concerned with the universal and eternal. The introduction of scientific principles into history can be achieved only by basing the interpretation of the latter upon principles which govern the humanity of nations, i.e., upon the laws which govern the development of the empirical content of human nature itself. *Such laws cannot be inductively established, since they would then presuppose the very facts to be based upon them. Nor, since they are empirical laws, relating to what actually happens, can they be established a priori. They can be established only by being shown to be involved in the constitution of the historical facts themselves. The 'ideal eternal history' is therefore an empirical theory deduced from certain assumptions about laws, to which we commit ourselves when we interpret historical evidence in a particular way.* These assumptions are necessary within such a system of interpretation but they are not *a priori*, for should no acceptable interpretation of evidence be possible by means of them they, along with the interpretations in question, must be rejected. *Nor, again, are they inductive. They are, nevertheless, testable, not directly but via the acceptability of the facts to whose constitution they contribute*" (Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 91f.; emphasis added). Pompa sees Vico as idealistic, but not *a prioristic*, as empirical, but only as informed by a *conceptual framework*.

<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of Book IV (*NS* § 915) Vico himself suggests that he reads the general course of history in light of the ideal eternal history.

must obtain in any given historical age; and a theory about the historical laws upon which the development of this content depends.<sup>21</sup>

Pompa develops at length the concept of the 'ideal eternal history', organizing his analysis around four aspects: (i) its theoretical, (ii) deductive, (iii) sociological, (iv) and historical characteristics.

(i) The ideal eternal history has a **theoretical character**,<sup>22</sup> in virtue of which it is able to render an otherwise incalculable array of causes and effects intelligible. It does so by applying a new critical art to the historical texts. History contains such a plurality of causes and effects that we could never determine what caused and what effected if we had no limited range of possibilities by which to indicate the plausibility of or explanations for historical accounts. The ideal eternal history is such a limiting conceptual framework.<sup>23</sup>

The 'ideal eternal history', of which this determinate sequence

<sup>21</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> In Element XXII Vico divides the Elements as a whole into those given as the "foundations of the true, [and which] will serve for considering this world of nations in its eternal idea," which include Elements V-XV, and those Elements which give us "the foundation of the certain. By their use we will be able to see in fact this world of nations which we have studied in idea," which include Elements XV-XXII (Vico seems to have inadvertently counted Element XV in both groups). The distinction between the "certain" (*certo*), to which correspond as objects the particular, historical, philological, having the epistemological status of *coscienza* (conscience), and the "true" (*vero*), to which correspond as objects the contents of metaphysics (mind, philosophy, ideas), and has the epistemological status of *scienza* (science or knowledge), is central to Vico's epistemology. For a helpful exposition of these distinctions in Vico's thought see R. Flint, *Vico*, 94ff.

<sup>23</sup> The ideal eternal history is not akin to the Weberian 'ideal type'. Pompa notes that the ideal type of Weberian social theory does not find instantiation in any historical actuality, and thus is not a proper analogue to the theoretical aspect of Vico's *NS*. "The basic difficulty with such a view," says Pompa of ideal typification, "is that the employment of the model [i.e., the ideal type] presupposes some independent way of establishing what happened. Consequently the illumination or understanding which the use of the model is supposed to bring does not penetrate into accounts of the facts themselves" (Pompa, "Vico's Science," 83). For a contrary view, which sees the ideal eternal history as the ideal type *par excellence*, see W. H. Walsh, "The Logical Status of the Ideal Eternal History," *Symposium* II, 148: "... strictly, a social theory of the kind Vico sets out to elaborate cannot have a perfect instance, just because it is and must be *schematic*."

is a part, is thus a theory about the determination of various kinds of human phenomena. It is, moreover, the product of philosophical reflection or reasoning. It is not the product of an inductive enquiry for, as Vico's references to the Homeric works indicate, it makes possible the correct interpretation of historical evidence.<sup>24</sup>

If the historical scientists have done their work correctly they ought to be able to predict what, under specific historical circumstances, human beings will do within the range of institutions which constitute a society.<sup>25</sup>

(ii) The ideal eternal history also has a **deductive character**. Since it is governed by a theoretical construct (an ideal eternal history) one should not read the *NS* as a set of "empirical generalizations inductively established."<sup>26</sup> A problem confronts this assertion immediately when we consider that Vico understood himself as translating the Baconian inductive method for natural science into a similarly inductive method for the *new* science of humanity.<sup>27</sup>

Against the theory that the ideal eternal history is primarily deductive in character is Vico's strong criticism of the deductivistic method in Cartesian

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<sup>24</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 103. To state the matter so tidily is to truncate Vico's picture of things. Pompa's apriorist emphasis is criticized as too rationalistic by H. White (see his Review of Pompa's book, First Edition (1976) in *History and Theory* 17 (1976), 197f. Vico in fact draws the ideal eternal history from irrational and imaginative expressions of humans in the first two ages of the historical cycle, who construed the world by *mis* understanding it, not by rationally understanding it (says White).

<sup>26</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> See on this E. De Mas, "Vico's Four Authors," *Symposium* I, 3-14, who notes that Vico's four scholarly models (Plato, Tacitus, Grotius, and Bacon) were construed by Vico almost as *imaginative universals* (5; see chapter five below for more on this concept), though the influence of Bacon was perhaps more 'real' than 'poetic' (ibid., 14). That is, Vico drew on these thinkers more as foils or authorities than as substantial inspiration for his own philosophy. This interpretation fits well with Vico's attack on Descartes, whose work as presented in Vico's writings, appears based on "second-hand information" (See Y. Belaval, "Vico and Anti-Cartesianism," *Symposium* I, 78.

philosophy, and his attack on the limitations of Aristotle's syllogistic logic. These attacks were foregrounded in Vico's earlier works,<sup>28</sup> but are not, thinks Pompa, to be read as a total repudiation of induction on Vico's part.<sup>29</sup> "What Vico wants to create," says Pompa, "is not a non-deductive science, but one which is both synthetic and deductive."<sup>30</sup> Vico rejects Cartesian philosophy because he does not accept as adequate the standard of "clear and distinct ideas," which is only a datum of consciousness, and as such a *sign*, not a proof or guarantee of my existence.<sup>31</sup> He rejects Aristotelian logic because its syllogistic method is unfruitful in the natural sciences, and it does not lend itself to constructive discoveries in the science of history.

(iii) A third aspect of the ideal eternal history is its **sociological content**. Empirical theories "presuppose the metaphysical theories."<sup>32</sup> The particular social constitution of each of Vico's three phases of the ideal eternal history is determined by the human nature which is characteristic of each phase. Poetic humanity, for instance, feared god and was thus pious.<sup>33</sup> Poetic humanity was also vicious and this cruel streak was reflected in the institutions which poetic humanity made, its religion, language, writing and jurisprudence.<sup>34</sup> In the ideal eternal history, then,

<sup>28</sup> See *SMT*, chpts. I, II, VI & VII; *AWI*, 53-56.

<sup>29</sup> "It must be noted . . . that Vico does not here present himself as being against deduction as such. His claim is that it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of knowledge" (Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 77; cf. 63f. 70-74.). Pompa is here commenting on Vico's views expressed in the *SMT* (1708).

<sup>30</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *AWI*, 53ff.

<sup>32</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 112.

<sup>33</sup> *NS* §§ 916, 922.

<sup>34</sup> *NS* §§ 938, 929, 933.

"a determinate content is organised in accordance with a sociological theory which itself satisfies the requirements of certain metaphysical claims."<sup>35</sup>

These metaphysical claims are central to Pompa's reading of Vico. Through them the historian is able to judge the plausibility of a reconstruction of an historical period. "It is clear that the distinction between historical possibility and impossibility depends upon, and involves the application of, some sort of necessity which determines the genetic growth of human nature, from which it can be decided what is to be counted as a higher and lower state of its development."<sup>36</sup>

(iv) Pompa distinguishes a fourth and final aspect of the ideal eternal history in its **historical character**. The ideal eternal history asserts that there is a specific sequence through which *all* nations must develop once they emerge from bestiality to civility by forming social groups.

The claim is that human nature develops from a state in which its primary activities are sensory and imaginative and in which its conceptual world consists largely of an imaginative objectification of its own characteristics, to a state in which it can understand its own needs and requirements and create institutions fit to satisfy these.<sup>37</sup>

The problem in Vico which Pompa seeks to resolve is suggested in Vico's two equipollent assertions that human institutions in their historical development

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\* Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 116. Pompa describes Vichian philosophy as social philosophy. "If the deductive account is correct . . . Vico wants to use the term 'philosophy' to cover not only the . . . conceptual (and methodological) enquiry but also another activity, the actual construction of an historico-sociological theory conforming to these conceptual requirements. In this second sense the 'philosopher' may be thought of as a theoretical sociologist." ("Vico's Science," 63).

\* Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 119.

" Ibid., 123.

are *causally determined by human nature*, and that human nature is *causally determined by institutions* at any given phase in its development. In fact Vico asserts both claims. Human nature does effect the institutions which it creates and sustains, but its capacity to do so and to do so in a specific manner is contingent upon the institutions (as expressions of the *sensus communis*). For Vico, *ideas* do emphatically influence history.<sup>39</sup>

Pompa is at pains to distinguish the historical process involved in the concept of an ideal eternal history from Hegel's conception of the role of Absolute Reason in history. Pompa is critical of B. Croce's interpretation of the ideal eternal history<sup>39</sup> as being merely empirical and inductive and bound to all the contingencies of such sciences. Croce, of course, is standing on Hegel's shoulders here, and Pompa's critique of Hegel's perception of the role of ideas in history is applicable to Croce as well. The assumption that the *verum-factum* principle is the

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<sup>39</sup> At root, the problem for Vico is how *change* can occur. If the ideal eternal history unfolds and is proved by its being a providentially *necessary* process which absolutely conditions human beings in their historicity, and if human nature and its capacities condition the historical epoch or phase of the cycle in which humans live, what third factor is involved by which an epoch and or human nature changes? It must be the case that there is not be exact parallel development between the conditioning structure and the conditioned human nature. Pompa's solution to this problem can be found in his discussion of providence, to which I will come in the final chapter, and in his comparison of Marx and Vico on historiographical reconstruction.

<sup>39</sup> Croce sees Vico's intention of synthesising history and philosophy as "impossible," since "History is already essentially philosophy" ( *Vico*, 32). Because history is inexpressible outside of thought it is already an aspect of philosophy. Croce therefore interprets Vico's attempt to unite philosophy and philology as an attempt to find a place or category which is both and neither, which would be characterized as "an empirical science of man and society . . . [which is] neither exact nor true," (34) but permeated with verisimilitude. Pompa contests Croce's claim that history is reducible to philosophy in the sense of being identical with it, or neglected by it. If so, then history could not furnish philosophy with the certainty it lacks. Cf. on Croce, Pompa, "Vico's Science," 70-74.

fulcrum of Vico's epistemology as expressed in the *NS* has often been interpreted in an idealistic or Hegelian manner. In view of Vico's (professed) allegiance to Plato, and his heavy reliance upon 'ideas', one must concede the affinity of much in Vico with idealistic thinking.

However, Vico's philosophy does intend to carve out a place which is "both and neither" empirical and ideal (as Croce suggests), but not to manufacture untruths. On the contrary, Vico's new *science* intends to revolutionise our concept of 'truth' by making the ideal historical, and the historical ideal. The thrust of Vico's philosophy involves a union of history and philosophy in which both ways of knowing complement each other. Pompa acknowledges two main points of similarity between Vico and Hegel on the role of ideas in history. (1) For both, the institutional level of explanation in history has priority over the individual.<sup>40</sup> (2) Also, both agree that human ideas must be embodied in historical institutions, but that this necessary feature is not sufficient to explain the pervasive effect of ideas in history.<sup>41</sup> The problem with Hegel's philosophy of history, thinks Pompa, is that while it may illumine the constitutive role of ideas in history, history cannot enter Hegel's thinking to verify the claims made for ideas in history.<sup>42</sup> The historical agent in Hegel does not possess the *telos* of history as an ideal, and cannot

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<sup>40</sup> It is one of the contributions of Vico, notes Werner Stark, to have discovered the reality of "social wholes," ("Vico's Sociology of Knowledge," *Symposium* I, 298: "The discovery of the true Homer was in this way a discovery of the *real* existence of social wholes; they were real, as real as any concrete man, because, like him, they could *create*."

<sup>41</sup> See "Vico and Hegel," *VPP*, 2:35-46.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps it would be better to say (recalling Croce) that history cannot get out of Reason, there is no objective distance by which subjective veridicality may be determined. The subject as Reason is omnivorous.

therefore conceptualise history's goal.<sup>43</sup>

In a brilliant essay<sup>44</sup>, Pietro Piovanni expresses the contrast between Hegel and Vico in terms which go to the very heart of the distinction between these two philosophers. I quote him at length for his points are worth noting.

Here Vico stands at the antipodes of Hegel; in order to rationalise history, Hegel will wish only to see the unity achieved synthetically in the completion, in that divine thought (*pensato*) which is the historical development that has been perfected in absolute knowledge. By contrast, Vico wishes to observe the *fatto*, seeking in its primitive *farsi* (self-making) its essence. For Vico the essence is literally in the beginning; for Hegel it is in the conclusion, where history and logic meet and become identified one with the other. The roads could not diverge more sharply. Vico is principally concerned with the initial term of the development; Hegel dwells upon the developed process, perfect in its sententious self-reflecting. For Vico, rationality opens history inventively; for Hegel it closes history conceptually. For Vico the new science is the science of the beginning of things "philologically," "etymologically" comprehended in their birth processes; for Hegel the new science is the science of triumphal fulfilments philosophically comprehended in their perfect self-manifestations.

For Vico, unfolding is contained in the process of self-forming and self-development; for Hegel the real unfolding is the unfolded, in the absence of which the real is mutilated, incomplete, not truly real, because it is not unifiable in the conceptual systematization of the absolute, which alone can

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<sup>43</sup> Pompa, "Vico and Hegel," *VPP*, 42f.

<sup>44</sup> "Vico Without Hegel," *Symposium* I, 117f.

really know it and make it known.<sup>45</sup>

Pompa seeks to retain an apriorism by reference to historical actualities, without losing the distinctiveness of either philosophy or history. This shows at every stage of his reconstruction of Vico's ideal eternal history. To avoid being pulled into an idealistic orbit Pompa has to accentuate those features in Vico which are ineluctably historical and concrete. Pompa interprets the necessary cast of the ideal eternal history, what Vico refers to as his philosophy of "authority,"<sup>46</sup> as conforming to the requirements of a science which is composed of laws which enable the historian to discriminate the plausible from the implausible in historical interpretation. Pompa's interpretation revolves around a particular understanding of the *verum-factum* principle according to which it is a principle working solely by intellectual introspection. For Vico, introspection is but the vehicle to see *historical* reality, and only in an indirect sense does introspection reveal anything historical: namely, the structures which have shaped (causally) the course of history, genetically contained in the human being who is the product of such *historical* development. On Pompa's interpretation the turn to the modifications of

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<sup>45</sup> In connection with this, it is worth noting N. Bhattacharya's observations about the fate of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* distinctions under the influence of Vico's new topos for thought: "... we must notice that our distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge of truth is no longer applicable in Vico's epistemology. *A priori* knowledge precedes sense experience, *a posteriori* knowledge follows. In Vico's theory of knowledge all knowledge must be after the fact, that is, *after* effecting a construction. Cognitively, traditional epistemology separates mathematical and empirical judgments into two different categories: Vico does not. *It would be misleading, I suggest, to describe Vico's view of knowledge as being of the a priori; we would simply be imposing our own Cartesian framework on him*" ("Knowledge 'Per Causas': Vico's Theory of Natural Science," *VPP*, 1:189f.

<sup>46</sup> Vico's overall philosophy is undeniably conservative, yet his conception of authority is--in light of this--surprisingly flexible. See on this *NS* §§ 350, 386ff.; and *AWI*, "Second Response," 168, where, in the context of discussing literary authorities Vico says that "authority must make us think of investigating what could have led our authors--even the most profound ones--to think in one way or another."

our own minds means that *reflection* is the centre of Vico's mature theory of knowledge.

The concept of *reflection* is therefore the crux of Vico's later theory of knowledge. Vico is claiming that by self-conscious reflection upon our own ways of seeing the world and our own attitudes to it, we can come to understand the natural propensities which cause these.<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, the sort of history which we learn of in this reflective mode will have a natural sort of fit with that mode by which we come to know it.

For Vico, the peculiar intelligibility of history rests upon insights into our own nature which are accessible to us by virtue of our capacity to reflect upon ourselves in our various social and historical activities, so that we can be aware not merely of the different ways in which we see and react to our world but also of the different conditions which cause us to see and react thus.<sup>18</sup>

It is the assumption that the modifications of consciousness and mind are the fulcrum of Vichian epistemology which enables Pompa to construe this centre as a special category or viewpoint privileging the sciences of humanity, a point which seems to be clearly made in Vico himself.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 166.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>19</sup> The point in the *NS* at which Vico's *verum-factum* is clearly portrayed as reflective self-understanding is in § 331, where it is the making of primitive culture by minds like ours that enables us, by looking at the structure of our own thought, to get at what their world must have been like. History and culture, as to their epistemic status, are human *artifacts*. It is this quality in them that make them superior, as Pompa says: "... epistemological superiority of the human sciences stems from the fact that in them alone our prior knowledge of certain basic experiential truths about human nature involved in them enables us to recognise not merely that a given explanation is true but also to understand it in a special way" (Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 168).

The dialectic<sup>50</sup> between the epistemological model on the one hand, and the historiographic model on the other, makes for a flexible and responsive science of humanity. The distinction between first and second order historical accounts, with the weight of veridicality favouring first order accounts,<sup>51</sup> means that when facts do not fit theories we are warranted in modifying the theory, rather than exchanging it for a purely inductive model, with its excessively restrictive approach to the problem of historical reconstruction. In this way, Vico's philosophy blends the intelligibility of philosophical method with the contingent and protean nature of knowledge of the historical, which is constantly in need of revision.

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<sup>50</sup> Pompa seems consistently to avoid the term 'dialectic' as a tool for describing what happens in the interplay between human subjectivity and historico-institutional objectivity. See, however, K. Löwith, *Vicos Grundsatz*, 15, and H. White, "The Tropics of History," *Symposium* II, 76-78 on the appropriateness of dialectic as a description of what happens in Vico's historical consciousness. White observes that Vico's dialectic is "not a dialectic of the syllogism (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) but rather the dialectic of the exchange between Language on the one side and the reality it seeks to contain on the other" (Ibid., 78). On the importance of reflection in Vico's philosophy, see also L. Rubinof, "Vico and the Verification of Historical Interpretation," *SR*, 484-511: "But the logical problems associated with introspection are most evident in cases where introspection is alleged to occur in isolation from experience. . . I would suggest . . . that for Vico introspection is a process that occurs simultaneously with the critical reconstruction of past thought as expressed in historical behaviour" (497). On the ambiguity of reflection in Vico--a point not very well emphasized by Pompa--see D. T. Holmes, "The Barbarism of Reflection," *VPP*, 2:213-222, who highlights the Vichian paradox that 'barbarism' is such *because* those who manifest it are *not* reflective in their 'thought' structures, and yet how this same reflective mode which brings about humanization can and-- says Vico (*NS* 55 239, 241)--does bring about a rebarbarization of humankind.

<sup>51</sup> Pompa defines a first order historical account as "an inquiry which seeks to establish and throw light upon what happened without presupposing some epistemologically prior account." Second order historical accounts *presuppose* first order history and is embodied in writers such as Toynbee and Spengler--the methods of whom Pompa characterizes as producing an "abstraction account." "The findings of such a second order inquiry, since they presuppose first order histories, cannot be used to reevaluate the latter nor, in the case of any conflict, can they be used to rectify them." Whenever conflicts over historical accounts arise, therefore, one of the accounts must be abandoned. In first order historical accounts, the very fact of a conflict in accounts entails that some *theoretical alternative* has rendered an account problematic. "Vico's claim," concludes Pompa, "is *about the place of theory in first order history*." See on this Pompa, "Vico's Science," 76.

**CHAPTER FOUR: DONALD PHILLIP VERENE'S INTERPRETATION  
OF VICO'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Donald Verene's work on Vico<sup>1</sup> exposes a very different aspect of the Neapolitan philosopher's work than we saw in Pompa's interpretation. Vico's philosophical *Standpunkt*, Verene suggests, is an alternative to modern philosophy's disjunct to choose between "philosophical understanding either in terms of the principles of evidence, the concept, and the argument, or to reject these and think directly from the situation of life, to 'transvaluate values', introspect, or await Being."<sup>2</sup>

Verene's approach involves the connection of the project of philosophy to its subrational roots in imaginative thought forms.<sup>3</sup> Verene, looking for that in thought which is more basic than abstraction and logical discursivity, finds the

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant to our discussion here are: "Vico's Philosophy of Imagination," *SR*, 410-433; "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals and the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms," *Symposium* II, 295-317; "Categories and the Imagination," *Categories: A Colloquium* ed. H. Johnston, Jr. (n.p.: Dept. of Philosophy, Pennsylvania State University, 1978): 185-207; "On Rhetoric and Imagination as Kinds of Knowledge," (*Sixteenth World Congress of Philosophy*, 1978): 675-678; "Vico's Humanity," *Humanitas* 15 (1979): 227-240; *Vico's Science of Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981); "Vico's Philosophical Originality," *VPP*, 1: 127-143; "Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," *NVS* 6 (1988): 1-19; "Giambattista Vico's Reprehension of the Metaphysics of René Descartes, Benedict Spinoza, and John Locke: An Addition to the *New Science* (Translation and Commentary)," *NVS* 8 (1990): 2-18.

<sup>2</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 33.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect Verene's work shares much in common with the work done by Ernesto Grassi on Vico, who explores the connection between Vico and the Humanist/Rhetorical tradition. See Grassi's *VH*.

centre of Vico's thought in the concept of imaginative universals, *generi* or *universali fantastici*.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, too, has noted the uniqueness and centrality of this concept to Vico's philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

The primal imaginative universal is that of Jove. The formation of this primary imaginative universal is foundational for the development of human culture and civilization, in Vico's speculative model. Humankind first came into being with its capacity to form this imaginative universal and, as Vico points out,

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<sup>4</sup> *NS* § 34: "We find that the principle of these origins both of languages and of letters lies in the fact that the first gentile peoples, by a *demonstrated necessity of nature*, were *poets who spoke in poetic characters*. This discovery, *which is the master key of this Science*, has cost us the persistent research of almost all our literary life, *because with our civilized natures we [moderns] cannot at all imagine, and can understand only by great toil the poetic nature of these first men*." In this passage is both the warrant and the challenge to Verene's interpretation, for Vico asserts both that imaginative universals were indeed the 'thought form' of the first humans, and that we *cannot imagine* what these natures were like. This latter point must be overcome if Verene's interpretation is to stand, a point which has not escaped Leon Pompa's attention (see "Imagination in Vico," *VPP*, 1: 168f.). Other important passages on this in the *NS* are §§ 204-210, 400-403; and 381 on Jove as *the* paradigmatic universal.

<sup>5</sup> In his *Vico and Herder* Berlin describes imaginative universals (*fantasia*) as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the possibility of historical knowledge of past cultures. See pp. 30-32, and especially the qualifying note, p. 32, n. 1. Elsewhere, Berlin characterizes the sort of knowledge operative in imaginative universalizing, describing it as "a species of its own. It is a knowing founded on memory or imagination. It is not analyzable except in terms of itself, nor can it be identified except by examples, such as those adduced above. This is the sort of knowing which participants in an event claim to have as against mere observers: the knowledge of the actors as against that of the audience, of the 'inside' story as opposed to that obtained by some 'outside' vantage point . . ." ("A Note on Vico's Concept of Knowledge," *Symposium* I, 376). Berlin links *fantasia* --the faculty by which we form imaginative universals--with the language of *verstehende Sociologie*. See on this connection also, H. Aronovitch, "Vico and Verstehen," *VPP*, 1: 216-226.

and, as Vico points out, "every nation had its Jove."<sup>6</sup> Verene distinguishes two levels on which this primal imaginative universal is operative in Vico's thought. It operates in the theory of the "poetic wisdom" as the "mentality of imaginative universals," but also as "the *fantasia* [imaginative faculty] which functions as the medium through which the *New Science* itself gains its recollective understanding of the human world."<sup>7</sup>

As a mentality or characteristic feature of human thought, *fantasia* or imagination is the only type of thought available to the humans in the first age, the age of the gods. The first human beings "by a demonstrated necessity of nature," says Vico, "were poets who spoke in poetic character."<sup>8</sup> These poetic characters Vico calls "imaginative class concepts," and they were the primary means by which the first humans expressed themselves, since they *could not* form "intelligible class

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<sup>6</sup>NS § 193. Max Fisch indicates that Vico's conception of a *nation* is organically tied to its origins, and these origins are emphatically religious in tone. Commenting on NS §§ 147-148, where Vico says that the nature of nations is "nothing but their coming into being (*nascimento*) at certain times and in certain guises," Fisch emphasizes the "genetic sense" of the relationship of a nation to its origins in religion and matrimony. "Every other institution will have its nature, its time and guise of birth; and it is by the birth of all in due course that a nation is born and lives." See Fisch, "Introduction" to NS, C2.

<sup>7</sup>Verene, "Vico's Philosophy of Imagination," 417.

<sup>8</sup>NS § 34.

of human mentality."<sup>10</sup> It is out of this *tabula rasa* of primitive consciousness that intelligible universals and the human mind as such will develop. Vico's speculative reconstruction of the primeval beginnings of humanity has pragmatic significance. Max Fisch gives a fine summary of this context.

To illustrate, we may take what Vico supposes to be the very first step in the birth of a nation; namely, the birth of a religion, which coincides with the birth of Zeus, Jupiter, or Jove, the first god of the gentile nations. In this case, the "certain time" was when the sky first thundered--a hundred years after the flood in Mesopotamia, two hundred elsewhere [192ff]. The certain guise was as follows. The descendants of Ham and Japheth and the non-Hebraic descendants of Shem, having wandered through the great forest of the Earth for a century or two, had lost all human speech and institutions and had been reduced to bestiality, copulating at sight and inclination. These dumb beasts naturally took the thundering sky to be a great animated body, whose flashes and claps were commands, telling them what they had to do [377, 379]. The thunder surprised some of them in the act of copulation and frightened copulating pairs into nearby caves [387ff.]. This was the beginning of matrimony and of settled life [504f., 1098]. What otherwise might have been a random act, preceded by other such acts with other mates and followed by others with others, became a permanent lifelong companionship sanctioned by the god of the thundering sky who had frightened them into the cave. The two institutions, religion and matrimony, thus have a common birth.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 65f. "Vico variously uses three terms *catteri poetica*, *generi fantastica*, and *universali fantastici* interchangeably to describe imaginative universals" (*Vico's Science of Imagination*, 65f.). To be emphasized here is the distinction between *imaginative* and *intelligible*. The latter, indeed, is made possible by the formation of the atavistic 'concept', which is what the former is. It is one of Vico's main contributions to western philosophy to recognize that proto-humanity could not think in *intelligible* class concepts.

<sup>11</sup>M. Fisch, "Introduction," to *NS*, C2.

In this manner culture is born. So, too, is thought. Verene reconstructs this primeval beginning, interpolating a phenomenology which is at once "a theory of concept formation," "a theory of metaphor," as well as "a theory of the existential conditions of thought."<sup>12</sup>

Vico combines the Hebrew-Christian account of the universal flood<sup>13</sup> with the pagan conception of Jove to furnish a context for the emergence of the first human beings.<sup>14</sup> Post-diluvial humanity lived like beasts, wandering in an inhospitable Earth, void of human community. The sons of Noah, Shem (except for his Hebraic offspring<sup>15</sup>), Ham, and Japheth, spread over the Earth and became feral giants. In time, as the soaked Earth was replaced with thick forests and the chemical properties of the evaporated moisture formed clouds, the first thunder and lightening occurred. It was in response to the phenomenon of thunder and lightening that the first human beings thought for the first time. Prior to this proto-humanity's consciousness was one of one sensation supplanting another, each cancelling the other out in a blank field of undifferentiated perception which had

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<sup>12</sup>Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 69.

<sup>13</sup>NS § 369.

<sup>14</sup>NS § 193.

<sup>15</sup>Vico's historiography reflects his method of excluding the Hebrew-Christian tradition from the scope of his science, at least on the surface. On the importance of this distinction see A. Momigliano, "Vico's *Scienza Nuova*: Roman 'Bestioni' and Roman 'Eroi'," *History and Theory* 5 (1966), 12: "As a Christian, Vico accepted the idea of fall; as a humanist, the idea of decline. His theory of the 'ricorsi' was a combination of both, the least surprising feature of the *Scienza Nuova*." Also, J. Mali, *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico's 'New Science'*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 93-109; and M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, passim.

no fixed images or concepts. Time was an amorphous flux. When the first humans reacted to the phenomenon of thunder and lightening, they *interpreted* it as having a *meaning*.<sup>16</sup> In *fear* some of these humans interpreted the thunder and lightening as a message from a being.<sup>17</sup> The sky became this being's body, thunder and lightening its messengers. This phenomenon of nature and the sensations of fear and amazement it generated became the raw material for the imaginative construction of the first god: Jove.<sup>18</sup> Verene gives a speculative sketch of the sense-dominated thought of the first human beings.

Meaning can be achieved only if a sensation can become a particular that is not cancelled by the presence of the next sensation. The mind can have something before it through its power to produce identity. A sensation is apprehended by the being of the other sensations in the motion of the flux. The time of the flux is cancelled by the locus within itself. A single sensation becomes a permanent reference point of the flux of sensations which now have their being in it. Through this fixed point of sensation, or particular, the meaning of the flux can be

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<sup>16</sup> See John D. Schaeffer's insightful comments on this in chapter one, 11f. (above).

<sup>17</sup> In a very insightful consideration of the emergence of religion and culture out of fear of nature's contingencies, Stephen Taylor Holmes notes that it was not fear which generated a theological misinterpretation of the environment, but the converse. Taylor's argument is that Vico was the first to see that the onto-theological fables of our first human progenitors were deliberately deceptive, i.e., self-deceiving devices to keep the ubiquitous contingency of nature from dissolving the possibility of social cohesion. "By reducing complexity and absorbing uncertainty, religious myths allow for the coordination of group behaviour through memory and custom. The theological fantasies which Vico himself conjures up are called 'natural' precisely because they suppress from view nature's unbearable contingency" ("The Barbarism of Reflection," *VPP*, 2: 218).

<sup>18</sup> It is not important that these first human beings were illiterate, nor that they had no signification system (beyond bodily gestures) for expressing the characteristics of this god they perceived. In Vico's philosophy, Roman history and thought are paradigmatic, the embodiment of an inevitable course of development. Jove is a symbol for the origination of humanity and culture in religious awakening, "and every nation had its Jove" (*NS* § 193).

repeatedly grasped.<sup>19</sup>

Jove was born, and with him the nation, out of a transference (μεταφερειν)<sup>20</sup> of their own bodily trembling and state of consciousness to the sky as Jove's body, as his lightning bolts illuminated the lugubrious Earth. Vico's "thick darkness" is geographic as well as intellectual. The flux of sensations becomes fixed for the first time when these fearful humans form the image of Jove as god of the sky, which, by anthropomorphic projection, becomes Jove's body. Verene emphasizes that for Vico the primary instance of the "fixation of sensation is the image of Jove."<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Verene indicates the way in which Vico's account of the construction of Jove yields insight into Vico's philosophy of mind.

The imaginative universal of Jove is an intelligible or a true because it is made by the power of *fantasia*, but this first form

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<sup>19</sup>Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 82. It is noteworthy that the "power to produce an identity" demonstrated by the first humans was not the logical concept of identity, of A=A. "The *fantasia* of the first men," Verene explains elsewhere, "the power of thinking and acting through the senses, is the ability to bring things into being; it involves the creation of identities in perceptual immediacy. The problem of grounding modern mentality in a point of origin, a point of the origin of mentality itself, is one of establishing an identity between this mentality and the point of origin. The identity is not one of giving form to immediate perceptual flux but one which involves the process of recollection. This process of seeking an origin is not one of simple chronological tracing, nor is it one of metaphysical reasoning to the principle of a ground. It is a process in which the origin is approached as if it were something present to the senses" (Verene, "Vico's Philosophy of Imagination," 415f.).

<sup>20</sup>E. Grassi has explored the fruitfulness of the notion of μεταφερειν to the imaginative thought of the first humans with their "indicative" manner of communicating. "Such speech is," notes Grassi, "immediately a 'showing'--and for this reason 'figurative' or 'imaginative', and thus in the original sense 'theoretical' (θεωρειν, i.e., to see). It is metaphorical, i.e., it shows something which has a sense, and this means that to the figure, to that which is shown, the speech transfers (μεταφερειν) a signification; in this way speech which realizes this showing 'leads before the eyes' (φαινομεναι) a significance. This speech is and must be in its structure an imaginative language" ("Rhetoric and Philosophy," *VH*, 77). See also Grassi's fine essay "The Priority of Common Sense and Imagination: Vico's Philosophical Relevance Today," *VH*, 19-46.

<sup>21</sup>Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 83.

of *scienza*, a *scienza in divinita*, imitates; that is, is based on a *coscienza* of the divine, a witnessing or awareness of an other. The form of this awareness is mimetic. The convertibility of the *verum* and *factum* in which the first *is* of human experience requires the transformation of a primordial *certum*, a sign into a made intelligibility.<sup>22</sup>

The first religious rights were inaugurated to insure the right interpretation of the meaning of Jove's 'speech' (thunder). The imitation of Jove's speech gives rise to human speech, though this was at first only a physical gesturing (for "speech was born in mute times by mental [or sign] language"<sup>23</sup>). The image of Jove is the first realization of Being which enters human thought. Verene is at pains to show that this realization is not formed by means of analogy or comparison of images. "No element of analogy is here possible, because the flux of sensation is in no way *like* one of its sensations, the universal is not *similar* to the particular."<sup>24</sup> The universal and the particular, the flux of sensation and its fixation in the image, are never exchangeable. "They originate at once."<sup>25</sup> In the fable or metaphor, which Vico regards as the *vera narratio* (true speech),<sup>26</sup> there is an identification of the true with the made, the facticity of Jove (god) is united with the mental image of

<sup>22</sup> Verene, "Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," 12f. The thunder and lightning are signs which are mimicked or imitated in the formation of Jove as body. In the positing of Jove as an "Other," heaven and earth are differentiated. *Fantasia* is the *fulcrum* through which the *factum* is generated.

<sup>23</sup> *NS* § 401.

<sup>24</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* It is only with the emergence of the third stage of human nature--the human--that the capacity for *reflection*, and thus a separation of thought from its grounding in sensation, that the possibility of the analyzability of sense and signification can arise.

<sup>26</sup> *NS* § 404.

Jove constructed, and thereby given being in the faculty of imagination.<sup>27</sup> In this way, Verene sees Vico's *verum et factum convertuntur* principle as operative in the matrix of mind as such.

The given is something made. The *verum-factum* principle is the inner working of the *universali fantastico* because, through the image, which is the metaphor understood on this level, the primary act of intelligibility takes place. The *verum-factum* principle applies here as an element within this process of making. The *verum* and *certum* are not convertible, but they are held in an original and indissoluble bond. . . . *The metaphor is the power of true speech, the narration that makes the particular appear as an image within the movement of sensation.*<sup>28</sup>

On this accounting truth is not merely a psychological attribute, for the truth--about what is 'out there'--comes to us by the mediation of the senses (*certum*). Noteworthy here is that while the *verum* and the *factum* are interchangeable, *verum* and *certum* are not. If *verum-certum* were convertible, there would be no critical distance within which to distinguish mind from objects

<sup>27</sup> Part of the novelty and genius of Vico's new art of criticism is that he was able to take the ancient stories or myths seriously without taking them literally. "For Vico," writes J. Mali, "this collective experience [of forming fables], mistaken and fanciful as it was, was as important as the deeds and the events themselves, which may only have 'occasioned' it. For him, myth was by definition a true narration (*vera narratio*), an account of historical experience, not of historical events. The historic truth of myth lay not underneath or beyond its specific form of narration, but in this form itself . . . . What they attest to are images-of-reality, rather than that reality itself" ("The Public Grounds of Truth: The Critical Theory of G. B. Vico," *NVS* 6 (1988), 74.

<sup>28</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 83; emphasis added.

mediated to it through sensation.<sup>29</sup> The *certum* of Jove (his origination in sensate experience assures his externality. Jove is an Other, manifested in thunder and lightening. The point here is not that the first humans got a right idea of God, but that in their formation of an image of god they used their imaginative faculty to derive from a *certum* a *verum*, and thus conceived of Being. The age of poetic humanity believed its gods to be real, and the characteristics with which they endowed them were the consequence of their own sensate and bodily manner of *thinking*. "Vico asks us to imagine," says Verene

a beginning point of human experience in which all was body and bodily motion, in which meaning was an action between bodily motions, and in which human thought was nothing more than the bodily act of sensation. *There is not mere sensation for Vico. Sensation is the act that underlies or is the first moment in any act of knowing. It is a necessary act through which the mind initiates for itself what is to be known or thought. There is true speech only at the level of sense.*<sup>30</sup>

Thus far I have been developing the Vichian psychology of primitive cognition (according to Verene) as an expression of the imaginative universal considered as a form of mentality. I should like now to develop further Verene's treatment of the epistemological status of imaginative universals. It is Verene's

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<sup>29</sup> *Prima facie*, Vico's *verum-factum* theory could be taken as an assertion that the true--and by extension the real--is simply what we have as the content of our minds. This of course, is a fallacious assumption. Validation in Vico's epistemology appears to be a matter of operation. Vico assumes that all things are made--by God or by human minds--and he thus starts with the facticity of things in their concreteness. In asking about veridicality, the primary relation is not one of *correspondence* but one of *procedure*. See on this the penetrating reflections of N. Bhattacharya, "Knowledge 'Per Causas': Vico's Theory of Natural Science," *VPP*, 1: 185-87.

<sup>30</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 85; emphasis added.

contention that imagination in Vico's *NS* is considered a *faculty* of mind.<sup>31</sup> Verene has argued that the mind "makes" sensation over into "being," and that the faculty of imagination generates the image (fable). Modern theories of knowledge begin with the given object in consciousness (idea, concept) and proceed to relate it to other objects of consciousness or to external objects. Vico's theory of mind takes its starting point from a more primitive query: *Vico asks how the mind comes to have anything before it in the first place*. "The power of the mind to have something before it," urges Verene, "rests on its power to rise beyond immediacy. Immediacy is the state of pure particularity in which each moment is new, in which there is no place, no *topos* for thought."<sup>32</sup> The first humans gave place for thought in the fixation of moments of sensuous flux by imagistic, mimetic constructs of *fantasia*. Once thought has been given place through the imaginative universal, it can be recalled through Memory.<sup>33</sup>

Verene develops at length the place which philosophy of memory has in Vico's theory of knowledge. It was said earlier that the fixation of sensuous flux in the image generated by *fantasia* makes possible the notion of being, the notion of the other. This is possible only if we have the capacity to recall the image which

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<sup>31</sup> *NS* § 819.

<sup>32</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> We moderns come at *fantasia*, the power of constructing images, through the possession of the abstract concept (Vico's 'intelligible universal'). Our first progenitors were not capable of the power of abstraction required for concept formation so that when they encountered particulars they formed them as universals through the power of imagination. "Imagination," declares Verene, "has no categories" ("Categories and the Imagination," 193).

has been so fixed, and to correlate it with the original phenomenon which caused *fantasia* to form it.<sup>34</sup> It is the power of memory which makes this possible.

Verene follows Vico in his discernment of three different functions of memory in the *NS*. Memory consists of *memoria*, *fantasia*, and *ingegno*. While distinguishable, all three aspects of memory are operative in acts of memory. Each of these terms "is inseparable from the others. They are a totality."<sup>35</sup> Verene speaks of "three memories," the first of which is memory itself. Memory is both a collective term for its three components, and a specific power of the mind, the power of simply recalling things. Vico explains the workings of memory when he says that Memory is "memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitates them, and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship. For these reasons the theological poets called Memory the mother of the Muses."<sup>36</sup>

When memory is operative as imagination (*fantasia*) it is "the power to reorder what has been recalled and to shape it after the general form of the

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<sup>34</sup> Verene notes the similarity between Vico's theory of the rise and development of the culture-mentality and that proffered by Ernst Cassirer in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Verene has made use of Cassirer's concept of *Weiderfinden* (to 'find again'). See on this Verene's "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals and the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms," 311-317; "Imaginative Universal and Narrative Truth," 10f.; *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 2. Cf. also Enzo Paci's essay "Vico and Cassirer," *Symposium* I, 457-473.

<sup>35</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 101. *Fantasia* is that faculty through which we grasp the whole, a necessary condition for our being in contact with the Truth, which is the goal of all knowledge. The grasp of, or insight into, the whole is "the flower of wisdom," says Vico (*SMT*, 77). Cf. Verene, *Vico's Science*, 36-62.

<sup>36</sup> *NS* § 819.

subject."<sup>37</sup> What has been fixed by memory is later recalled and "moved by *fantasia* into the medium of the subject."<sup>38</sup> The "medium of the subject" changes and develops along the lines of Vico's ideal eternal history.

The third aspect of memory is invention (*ingegno*).<sup>39</sup> Verene defines this term in the Vichian usage as "the power of the subject to move from one act of formation of sense to others, to create further acts of formation, and to have past acts combine and influence present ones," a capacity of mind which presupposes that "in any act of forming sensation there is present all that is necessary to transform all of sensation into a world of meaning."<sup>40</sup>

Linking this understanding of *ingegno* with the primordial conditions in which thought emerges, Verene attempts to show that *ingegno* emerges from the fact that human beings acquire the power of *naming* the places of memory. The function of memory, especially as *ingegno*, is central to the complexification of

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<sup>37</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. The notion of imitation in imagination "is not that of pictorial realism." "Jove as the fear felt by the first men is imitated by them; they shake their body's like the sky-body of Jove himself. Jove is *found again in the medium of their own bodies. Jove is 'represented' in their own bodies. This primordial power of re-feeling Jove is slowly transformed into the world of human symbols, into the medium of language and cultural institutions in which all sensation is modified and given shape as humanity develops into the ideal eternal history*" (*Vico's Science of Imagination*, 104f.; emphasis added).

<sup>39</sup> Max Fisch has underscored the plurality of meanings in the Italian word and its Latin cognates: "*Ingegno* (Latin *ingenium*), is difficult to render. Perception, invention, the faculty of discerning the relationship between things, which issues on the one hand in analogy, simile, metaphor, and on the other in scientific hypothesis." See his note at *Autobiography*, 216, n. 4. It is this plasticity of the notion of *ingegno* which makes it so suitable as a definition of the "middle term" in the structure of metaphor, which is so important to the "poetic logic" of the *NS*. Compare Vico's definition of *ingegno* as the "faculty that connects disparate and diverse things," in *AWI*, 96f. See also E. Grassi's essay "The Priority of Common Sense and Imagination," *VH*, 25-27.

<sup>40</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 105.

mind in the development of history.

*Ingegno* is memory in the sense that the process of *memoria* and *fantasia* which has made the thunder intelligible as Jove must be held in mind and moved across the field of sensation to create nature as gods, to transform all sense experience into a world of names. It is also a process of memory in the sense that all such names are held in a total, each having bearing in all directions on all others. *This process of ingegno is not mechanical in the sense of building up mind from part connected to part. All three memories come about at once. All three are inseparable elements of a universali fantastico. Ingegno is that element which makes the universali fantastico a total form of thought.*<sup>41</sup>

The unity of knowledge is thus assured by the *totalizing* effect of a memory animated by *ingegno*. This is the key feature of the imaginative universal. Once the imaginative universal has been named, images and their communication within the mind of an agent, and among the members of a culture, is facilitated. The dynamic faculty which originates thought, is the same faculty which makes the accumulation and ramification of knowledge possible. That faculty is imagination. Imagination as a faculty is not absorbed into a dialectical *Aufhebung* and thus dissolved in a higher synthesis,<sup>42</sup> nor is it shed and lost in some extinction of thought in the evolution of mind in its interaction with history.<sup>43</sup> The creative

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<sup>41</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 105f., emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> See Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 113; "Vico's Philosophy of Imagination," 415, n. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Compare Werner Stark's observation that in Vico, "Truth is always absolute . . . modes of expression" ("Vico's Sociology of Knowledge," *Symposium* I, 306); and V. Mathieu, "Truth as the Mother of History," *Symposium* II, 118f.

and constitutive activity of imagination lives on in every act of thought.

That Vico wished to bring his poetic logic into critical encounter with the prevailing metaphysics of the seventeenth century is clearly indicated by him in a passage from his "Reprehension," in which he announces the central place of imagination in his philosophy.

For the metaphysics of the philosophers must agree with the metaphysics of the poets, on this most important point, that from the idea of a divinity have come all the sciences that have enriched the human world with all the arts of humanity: just as this vulgar [poetic] taught men lost in the bestial state to form the first human thought from that of Jove, so the learned must not admit of any truth in metaphysics that does not begin from true *Being*, which is God.<sup>44</sup>

We are now in a position to consider the second major sense in which *fantasia* operates in the *NS*. In the origination of mind *fantasia* operates collectively, assembling the imaginative universals and proliferating their properties throughout reality. Now, Vico's *NS* is itself an extended work of *fantasia*.<sup>45</sup> As a description of the origin and early development of a human mentality, *fantasia* operates collectively (almost cumulatively) by transmuting all the particulars of nature into necessary, universal entities. As a "recollective imaginative universal" the *NS* recounts the history of humanity grasped in the

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<sup>44</sup> Vico, "Reprehension of the Metaphysics of René Descartes," 2.

<sup>45</sup> This, of course, follows inevitably once one has made imagination the quintessential form of mind itself, as Vico has done--according to Verene.

whole as the ideal eternal history.<sup>46</sup>

Verene's conception of the ideal eternal history is derived from his account of the origin of mentality in Vico's philosophy. In the same way that the triadic form of memory gives rise to the working mind, there are a trio of stages through which any culture-mentality must advance in its movement toward maturity (which is at once the end of the development and the condition for the decay and re-emergence of the culture-cycle). These three stages are "fixed" by the providential wisdom of God for the preservation and growth of humankind. The name which Verene gives to that imaginative universal which grasps the meaning of the whole in the ideal eternal history is *Providence*. Providence

appears to consciousness as the sudden realization of a total sense of order to the human event. It is a sense that order in the human world cannot be understood as something built up step by step, but that it can be perceived, grasped in *fantasia*.<sup>47</sup>

The "human event" as a whole is tragic, as Vico sees it. Human impulses are,

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<sup>46</sup> "On the level of the *New Science*, the level of the work itself, *fantasia* is not 'collective' but 'recollective'. At the level of the origin of thought, that which is described in the work, Vico's three memories function 'collectively' to form sensation into the *universale fantastico*. In this way thought is itself begun" (Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 107). It is in this sense, I think, that we should understand Vico's dictum that "he who meditates this Science narrates to himself this ideal eternal history so far as he himself makes it for himself by that proof 'it had, has, and will have to be'" (*NS* § 349). In the order of Being, the providentially implanted and administered ideal eternal history determines the range of possible developments for human beings along a specified pattern. In the order of Knowing, human beings come to understand the organic unity of their cognition of their world, culminating in the realization that the world of humanity has been preserved by a Mind, the unity of which is similar to the unity which their own thought life has by virtue of its quintessential form as *fantasia*. Cf. on this the illuminating discussion in "Vico's Philosophy of Imagination," 417-422.

<sup>47</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 109f.

as such, self-destructive because destructive of community, and the community as the life of the whole is the necessary antecedent to the realization of the true human nature: the rational. There are, says Verene, two critical moments of "dissolution" in the movement of the ideal eternal history as it runs its course in the nations. The first comes when the *universale fantastico* which dominates in the age of the gods and the age of heroes, gives way to the *generii intelligibili*<sup>48</sup> of the age of humans. Vichian heroism is such by virtue of the heroes capacity to overcome the immediate circumstances of life, but the hero never overcomes the larger circumstance of time's movement in the ideal eternal history. "When connected with the conception of ideal eternal history as the the theory of the human event itself," says Verene, "the heroic is tragic. . . . The hero himself cannot surmount the plot of beginning, middle, and end which is within any human

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"The generic concepts of traditional Aristotelian logic are formed by the mind's power to select from a multiplicity of particular things those features that are common to them. . . . The essential function of thought in this regard is that comparing and differentiating the features of particular objects. By reflection the essential features of these objects are abstracted. As the mind rises from the perception of individual objects to the essential properties that constitute them as species and to the generic ordering of the species by omitting sensuous content from the original perceptions, so the mind can descend from genus to species to individual object by adding elements of specific content. According to this view, what is universal is that which can be conceived as a property common to the members of a given class and which can be predicated commonly of all the members in the class.

"Vico's theory of *imaginative universals* conceived as a transformation of the process of concept formation present in the Aristotelian logic of genus and species. Vico regards the *intelligible universal* as a development from the imaginative universal. . . . For Vico, this does not simply come about by internal modifications of the imaginative universal, so that the intelligible universal is produced. *This process is not accomplished simply as one of thought altering itself; instead it involves the alteration of social forms of life, specifically the movement from the age of heroes to that of men. The relationship between thought and society can be seen in Vico as one of co-determinative structures, wherein a certain type of thought is inconceivable without a certain social structure, and the reverse*" (Verene, "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals and the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms," 305, emphasis added).

event."<sup>49</sup> The point here is that it is only with the rise of the intelligible universal that the concept of time and measure is introduced into the mentality of that which forms the third age in decisive separation from the first two ages. With this distinction also comes the condition for the realization of the second moment of dissolution.

The second moment of dissolution in the ideal eternal history comes in the "struggle of recollective *fantasia* to produce the *New Science* in the memory-deficient world of the third age."<sup>50</sup> The struggle in this second moment is not one of action, but one of thought. It is the struggle to gain access to, and realize oneself in, the life of Spirit or mind. Since it is true that the rise of the rational self, governed by the intelligible universal, mitigates and weakens the operation of *fantasia*, the result is self-alienation and estrangement from the power of *fantasia* which originates every intelligible act.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 116f.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>51</sup> "*Fantasia* is the basis of self-knowledge. It gives us access to ourselves as makers of the true" (Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 117). Vico's first two ages, those of the gods and heroes, operate with a mentality organically connected to the imaginative universal. The difference between these ages is not in the *form* of thought, but in the substance. In the former age "it is the gods which portray the immediately experienced forces of nature, such as Jove, or human institutions, such as Juno. In the second age it is the hero which portrays various human qualities (Achilles--valiant fighting; Ulysses--cleverness)" (Verene, "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals and the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms," 304, n. 31.).

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROLE OF PROVIDENCE IN THE *New Science*

### (A) *A Christian Conception of Providence*

The Hebrew-Christian notion of providence confesses the faithfulness of God in the context of human suffering, offering a comfort to those who suffer that God cares for and governs creation *despite* how things appear. In the Bible, God directs nations unawares to achieve his purposes,<sup>1</sup> and yet also cares for the most delicate of creatures in his delicate creation.<sup>2</sup>

Theologians have taught that God's providence comprehends both his care for the individual and for the whole of humanity.<sup>3</sup> Providence is understood both as the eternal (transcendent) plan<sup>4</sup> by which God administers creation, as well as God's immanent power in sustaining creation.<sup>5</sup> Providence as the ultimate framework of human existence has been understood as

the expression of the divine will, power, and goodness, through which the Creator preserves creatures, cooperates with what is coming to pass through their actions, and guides creatures in their long-range purposes. . . . Hence classical Christian exegetes have thought of providence in three interrelated dimensions:

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Isaiah 10: 5-11, perhaps the oldest expression of the theory of heterogeneity of ends.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6: 25ff.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., St. Augustine, "On True Religion," *Augustine: Early Writings* ed., J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1953), 247f., 251.

<sup>4</sup> See on this the 1984-85 Gifford Lectures by Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 72-103, and passim.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Nature and Grace* ed. A. M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1954), 92-101. [This segment is First Part, I, Q. 22 of *Summa Theologia*.]

\*The unceasing activity of the Creator by which in overflowing bounty and good will . . . God *upholds* creatures in time and space in an ordered existence (Acts 17: 28; Col. 1: 17; Heb. 1: 3).

\*God *cooperates* with natural and secondary causes to employ fit means to good ends through orderly and intelligible processes of natural causes (Prov. 8: 29-31...); and

\*God *guides* and governs all events and circumstances, even free, self-determining agents, overruling the regrettable consequences of freedom and directing everything toward its appropriate end for the glory of God (Eph. 1: 9-12).<sup>6</sup>

Providence has always been on the periphery of Christian understandings of history, not at the center. At the center of the Christian notion of history is the event in which Jesus Christ becomes incarnate, and it is on account of this event that the mystery of providence has taken its course.

The question governing our considerations in this chapter will be: Can the transcendent aspect of Vichian providence be lost without loss to his system as a whole?

### (B). *Providence as Heterogony of Ends*

"The idea of divine providence," says James C. Morrison, "lies at the center of Vico's *New Science*. But it is also the most problematic and elusive aspect of that work and has been the source of radically different interpretations of Vico's thought."<sup>7</sup> Most contemporary treatments of Vico interpret him as attempting to

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<sup>6</sup> See Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: The Living God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 270f. This volume contains (270-315) the best treatment of providence by a contemporary Protestant theologian that I know of.

<sup>7</sup> "How to Interpret the Idea of Divine Providence in Vico's *New Science*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12 (1979), 256.

secularize providence.<sup>6</sup> A common approach to the problem of providence in Vico is to see his use of providence as a thin veneer of piety covering a fundamentally anti-Christian naturalism.<sup>9</sup>

There are aspects of Vico's conception of providence which may appear to lend support to a naturalistic reading of providence. However, Vico's duality between Hebrew-Christian and Pagan reality, with the announced intention to determine by a study of universal natural law how pagan culture arose and thrived, would mean a definite emphasis upon the "natural" movement of culture as a sign of providential governance and care of the world of human institutions. Nature--whatever it turns out to be--is not contradictory of divine presence and agency in human reality, as the naturalist interpreters seem to think. In Vico's conception natural means are instrumental for God's providential care of creation.<sup>10</sup> This is hardly naturalism.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, B. Mazlish, *The Riddle of History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 49; A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 279-289. Funkenstein notes that there is, for all its secular proclivities, still a certain "ambiguity" in Vico's treatment of certain key terms in the discussion, terms such as "natural law," and "ideal" (201f.). This ambiguity is exactly what comes of Vico's attempt to hold together the immanent and the transcendent aspects of divine providence.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., F. Vaughn, *The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1972), 44-53, for whom Vico's critique of the Homeric tradition is really an indirect criticism of the Biblical tradition; A. W. Salomone, "Pluralism and Universality in Vico's *Scienza nuova*," *Symposium I*, 529, who thinks that Vico's *NS* "banished transcendent deity" from the world; J. S. Preus, "Spinoza, Vico and the Imagination of Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989), 71-73, who thinks that Vico's *NS* is really a piece of crypto-Spinozistic criticism of religion. Preus expresses a more considered and, I think, accurate approach to the question of providence in his book *Explaining Religion* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987), 82, where we read that Vico's *NS* "can be read from a theological perspective as . . . a magnificent theodicy that would embrace the extra-Christian world of religions within a general account of providence fulfilled in revelation."

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *NS* § 2, where Vico confesses of God that "by his eternal counsel He has given us existence through nature, and through nature preserves it to us." This resembles the Roman Catholic doctrine of nature as a sacrament.

Vico's most explicit pronouncement on God's working in nature comes from a use he makes of three divine attributes. Divine Omnipotence, Wisdom, and Goodness stand as "proofs" that the "true" God is the operative agent behind the emergence and development of human civilization. Since "divine providence has omnipotence as minister, it must unfold its institutions by means as easy as the natural customs of men."<sup>11</sup> God's power is so superlative, Vico seems to be saying, that it requires as little effort for him to unfold his purposes as seems to be involved in the working of something as natural as the emergence and employment of human customs. Vico clearly links up providence closely with the operations of natural processes,<sup>12</sup> but cannot be considered a subscriber to naturalism.

Vico conceives of providence as generated by God's "immeasurable goodness," and as serving the "ineffable decrees of his grace."<sup>13</sup> Vico does not see the necessitarian features of his providence doctrine as contradicting human free choice. Freedom of choice is not autonomous self-determination, void of any contextualization for our decision-making processes. Humanity is fallen and vitiated, ~~thir~~ Vico, but does have sufficient free will to be able to translate its

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<sup>11</sup> *NS* § 343.

<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, if God is the *fons et origino* of all of reality, one would expect that in some sense God is the explanation of everything. And Vico often speaks of providence as the cause of a variety of events [providence initiates civilization (§ 629), establishes commonwealths (§ 599), establishes the natural law of the gentiles (§ 583), works in history (§ 382), awakens a confused notion of divinity in humans (§ 177-78), leads religious development to be receptive to Christianity (§ 366), causes early humans to classify things before explaining things (§ 498), brought about marriage (§ 629), etc.] On the other hand, from a philosophical point of view, "an explanation which explains everything explains nothing" (Preus, *Explaining Religion*, 75), and Vico's providence appears to run this risk. At a certain level Vico needs providence, to theoretically explain the *first* origins of humankind. More on this last point presently.

<sup>13</sup> See *NS* §§ 342 and 1046.

self-destructive tendencies into socially constructive virtues, but only if it is "aided by God, naturally by divine providence and supernaturally by divine grace."<sup>14</sup> There are then too many Catholic Christian elements in Vico's use of providence to denote it as naturalism. The assumption that naturalistic categories of explanation do not comport with theistic belief is assumed in many writers, and explicated in others. "Vico is like a Columbus," says Theodore Sumberg in Voltairian tones, "who came upon new continents of Christian experience, including pre-Christian and extra-European. But whatever the continent visited, Vico comes upon the contingent facts of history as the new basis of an edifice henceforth emptied of the fixed and necessary truths of divine revelation."<sup>15</sup> Against this one-sided perception, which ignores so much in Vico's text, must be stressed the habit of Vico as a thinker of the middle way, who often seeks the mediatory position. "Vico did not," says Joseph Mali, "analyse the civil world in strictly secular terms, nor in traditional theological ones, but rather . . . he practiced a kind of 'secular theology'."<sup>16</sup>

Most modern interpretations construe Vico's concept of providence in the *NS* as some sort of *heterogenesis of ends* theory. The concept of the heterogenesis of ends is, in Max Fisch's words, the perception of an "inherent logic transcending

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<sup>14</sup> *NS* § 136. Vico clearly accepts the Christian view that human nature is in itself *ambivalent* and flexible, when he says that "man is not unjust by nature *in the absolute sense*, but by nature fallen and weak" (*NS* § 310).

<sup>15</sup> T. A. Sumberg, "Reading Vico Three Times," *Interpretation* 17 (1990), 352. Sumberg thinks that the burden of the *NS* is to "liberate natural law from theology," and so vindicate Vico's "dazzled" "faith in science" (351).

<sup>16</sup> *The Rehabilitation of Myth*, 93f.

the conscious intentions of individual agents."<sup>17</sup>

Vico does have a sort of heterogony of ends, but the question arises as to what are the two agencies or ends which are coming to bear in his theory. "Herein is divine providence to be supremely admired, for *when men's intentions were quite otherwise*, it brought them first to fear the divinity . . ."<sup>18</sup> In Vico it is the disparity between human intention and action--both individual and collective<sup>19</sup> -- between what we intend our actions to produce and what they in fact produce which indicate the two agencies Vico refers to. Vico holds that our actions invariably are self-aggrandizing and that providence needs to act (continuously) to hold human society in place. This, however, is not a theme that emerges in the interpretations of Vichian providence.

James C. Morrison interprets Vico's concept of providence by way of Vico's own notion of irony.<sup>20</sup> Since Vico argues that the first humans came by their ideas

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<sup>17</sup> See Fisch's "Introduction" to *Autobiography*, 55. Fisch sees this problematic in Vico as an echo of Bossuet's "teleology above the level of the finite consciousness," and an anticipation of W. Wundt's concept of a "heterogony of ends" (Ibid., 54).

<sup>18</sup> *NS* § 629, emphasis added; cf. the important passage at § 1108.

<sup>19</sup> At *NS* § 341 Vico runs through the successive stages in which human being may act as agents in pursuit of their own desires, and these include the individual all the way through their membership in the family, city, and nation. In *all* of these capacities, humans act for their own self-interest without regard for the divine. It is therefore very difficult to see how the tension in the heterogony of ends, if this is the category under which we interpret Vico, could be between the individual and the social. Vico's view is that the human being at all levels of agency is self-seeking, yet providence transmutes this selfishness into a socially beneficial activity.

<sup>20</sup> "Irony," says Vico, "certainly could not have begun until the period of reflection, because it is fashioned of falsehood by dint of a reflection which wears the mask of truth" (*NS* § 408). Hayden White elaborates on this passage: "Irony represents a stage in the evolution of consciousness in which language itself has become an object of reflection, and the sensed inadequacy of language to the full representation of its object has become perceived as a problem. Ironic speech presupposes an awareness of the possibility of feigning or of lying or dissimulating" ("Tropics of History," 75). The first two ages of humanity were characterized by a *vera narratio* in which they embodied their experience of the world.

through imaginative universals which were had, not by understanding, but, on the contrary, by *mis* understanding their natural environment. In addition, since providence was one of the first notions had by primitive humanity, we are therefore justified in jettisoning the concept of providence as an *ironic* concept by which our progenitors really meant to say that the world *seems* to be governed by more-than-individual powers. Providence belongs to the pre-reflective (prescientific) period of human history and should not be taken seriously. Providence is ironic, presumably, because while humans for a time thought that God's providence makes the world, in *fact* human activity makes the world. Morrison concludes: "*The idea of divine providence is for Vico simply a metaphor for the irony of history.*"<sup>21</sup>

Morrison's view hinges on the assumption that Vico's belief that human nature is rational in conjunction with the fact that Vico is purportedly trying to give a "philosophical-scientific account--in terms of 'intelligible genera' (logical concepts)--of poetic-rhetorical thought and language--imaginative genera (metaphor)," mean that Vico was engaged in a sort of demythologizing of the classical tradition. We have seen, however, that Vico's attitude toward myth is ambivalent, and that he saw it as a wrong account of the divine, but a true

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<sup>21</sup> "How to Interpret the Idea of Divine Providence in Vico's *New Science*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 12 (1979), 259.

narration of experience. Morrison ignores Vico's ambivalence,<sup>22</sup> in the attempt to render Vico into a Spinozistic philosopher of history.

Sandra R. Luft has criticized Morrison's interpretation of Vico's providence for two reasons. Luft contends<sup>23</sup> that Morrison's interpretation is marred by his own rationalistic designs for Vico's text. Vico's method is "genetic" rather than "logical."<sup>24</sup> Morrison's "reduction of the intelligible genus of Vico's ironic metaphor of providence to the heterogeneity of ends does not . . . do justice to its genetic content."<sup>25</sup> Secondly, Morrison overlooks the fact that the same logic which describes natural objects and phenomena, cannot describe the history of human thought and institutions. There is need, as Vico clearly saw in his poetic wisdom, to discover a logic appropriate to the discerning of the origin and development of human institutions.

I believe . . . that by 'poetically' imagining the *verum* of human

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<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, Morrison makes clear how he perceives the new science as operating with purely anthropomorphic categories. "The chief accomplishment of the *New Science*," says Morrison, "is therefore the secularization of human history. The old Judaeo-Christian theocentric understanding of human things as guided providentially by a divine mind *is replaced* by a new anthropocentric doctrine according to which men themselves have made the world of nations" ("Vico and Spinoza," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (1980), 52). There certainly are difficulties with Vico's position, but this is not Vico's position, as a look at chapter V of book II, the title of which is "It Is Divine Providence That Institutes Commonwealths and at the Same Time the Natural Law of the Gentes," indicates (SS 629-633).

<sup>23</sup> See S. R. Luft, "A Genetic Interpretation of Providence in Vico's *New Science*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20 (1982), 153f.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 153, 164.

<sup>25</sup> Morrison's view of the development of mind in Vico appears to be that the reflective-rational is the teleological term toward which mind has evolved so that the roots of the rational in the poetic are disconnected. This is, I think, also Pompa's view of the development of mind in Vico. Luft's emphasis on a *genetic* interpretation of mind in Vico is, I think, closer to Verene's conception, as outlined in chapter four above. Every act of thought bears within it the whole character of mind: the three ages are a continuous present mode, rather than a successive series in a sequence. The stages of the formation of mind remain to characterize and constitute the mind of every human being. This is an important difference between Verene and Pompa's interpretation of Vico.

creativity--by acting out original poetic creativity--Vico was suggesting that, despite the difference, his own creative acts must be understood as genetically related to that original creativity. In its fullest sense, then, the genetic truth of Vico's ironic metaphor is that the new historical science had been made by a creative human mind *developmentally related* to those that had made a concrete and meaningful historical world: that indeed the *process* of self-knowing that produced that science was not solely an epistemological activity but was itself related to that original, concrete, poetic process by which the historical world had been made.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, Luft is able concede to Vico the application of his "master key" in the process by which we come to know our historical origins. This is an ostensible improvement on those who out and out deny any transcendence to Vichian providence. Yet, Luft makes almost the identical move to the one made by Morrison. She denies, despite Vico's own repeated assertions to the contrary, that he intended his *NS* to teach that God uses human instrumentality to realize his providential purpose in history.<sup>27</sup> Luft interprets Vico through a theory of metaphor in which the theological poets are to their *factum* of Jove, what Vico is to his concept of providence, namely, a creator.<sup>28</sup> The question though is not whether Vico thought human discourse about God or physics or poetry to be a creative process. He did. The question is whether he intended his conception of God as

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<sup>26</sup> Luft, "A Genetic Interpretation," 154, emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> "That Vico meant man's *entire* historical development, the subject of the *New Science*, to be understood as an anthropological process in which creative man made his human world and himself (rather than as a theological process in which God created through man) is suggested by the fact that he chose to write the *New Science* in metaphoric language, thereby acting out the *verum* of the original metaphor of divine providence--that man was a creator." Luft, *ibid.*, 156.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

operative in providence to be a metaphor for human creativity, i.e., a statement that it is really humans--ignorant of their power to generate themselves and their culture--who attributed such a task to God. Luft comes down on the side of a total humanizing interpretation. Luft notes that the theological poets called providence that 'mind' they discerned working in nature, while Vico called providence the mind at work in the origination and emergence of institutions, but in "*both cases 'providence' was a poetic expression for the truth that the divining human consciousness was a creator.*"<sup>29</sup>

Isaiah Berlin rejects any attempt to interpret Vico's providence along the line of a heterogeneity of ends theory. The concept of heterogeneity of ends which was prevalent in the enlightenment, such as Adam Smith's invisible hand theory, tends to do with history what Vico would not, namely, "dissolve it into an intelligible teleology."<sup>30</sup> On Berlin's reading of Vico, moreover, heterogenesis of ends theory fails to comprehend providence in Vico since there is in his conception of it an inextricably transcendent element, and it is this which distinguishes Vico from "Hegel and his followers of all schools, from Absolute Idealists to Marxists and materialists, whose theodicy or philosophy of history denies transcendence."<sup>31</sup>

All of these views, which I have included under the heading of providence as a heterogenesis of ends, assume that humans create themselves from scratch and

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 159, emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> I. Berlin, "Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment," *SR*, 653.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. See also Maria Goretti, "The Heterogenesis of Ends in Vico's Thought: Premises for a Comparison of Ideas," *Symposium* II, 213-219, who rejects a heterogenesis for reasons diametrically opposite those of Berlin: "... the 'divine providence' of which Vico speaks is the very nature of men, who know how to transform themselves from animals into civil beings and who know how to lose themselves once more in the shadows of a ferine existence" (216).

that providence is transformable into some aspect of anthropology. It is as if any knowledge *as knowledge*, including knowledge of providence, must be a human creation. This is certainly the position of Leon Pompa in his interpretation of divine providence in Vico's *NS*.

### (C). *Pompa on Vichian Providence*

Pompa approaches the question in Vico as a question about the nature of a specific sort of causal theory, and particularly a causal theory which will enable Vico to find a middle road between Stoic determinism and Epicurean indeterminism.<sup>32</sup>

Pompa starts his discussion by distinguishing three interpretive options (the historical, the Idealistic, and the Catholic).<sup>33</sup> These are three senses in which the term providence is used in the *NS*. Pompa thinks the difference between the Catholic and the Idealist interpretation is negligible. Both views equate providence with some sort of divine necessity, which thus involves Vico's view in a sort of

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<sup>32</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 51.

<sup>33</sup> The *historical* concept of providence is one in which people actually believed that God, a real God, *actually* does act in history (53) [cf. *NS* §§ 342, 374-80]. The *conceptual* or *Idealist* interpretation of providence is one in which we concede that there is a conceptual grasp of the whole--or some such equivalent idea--which we call providence (53f.) [cf. *NS* §§ 178, 1108, 1109]. There is the *Catholic* interpretation of providence according to which providence is construed--on the primary and secondary level--as an interpretation which seeks to account for human creativity as occurring in the larger context of divine creativity (54) [cf. *NS* §§ 629-633].

Spinozistic determinism.<sup>34</sup>

To avert this interpretation of Vico, Pompa offers his own, which involves rejecting the theological premis in Vico's use of divine providence. Pompa's argument is simply that providence has no explanatory power, and that rendering Vico's philosophy in strictly sociological terms is sufficient to understand what Vico *truly* wanted to communicate. What is interesting in Pompa is how he treats objections to rejecting the transcendent element in Vichian providence.

One such objection found in Vico's own repeated assertions that human nature is vitiated and marred to the point where it cannot, unaided by grace, remain in social cohesion. Pompa--and most immanentist interpreters--attempt to posit *social reality* as the constraining and curbing agency in the heterogenetic tension which produces human culture. However, in Vico's order of things, the power of providence must constrain human nature in order to make society possible. There is thus a sort of preveniency through which society is made possible (providential activity) and which cannot be explained by its consequent, the emergence and sustenance of social reality. Pompa's attempt to see the *social dimension* of human existence and a grasp of its logical integrity as rendering providence superfluous is thus fallacious, on Vico's understanding of things. Without God's constant, preserving activity in providence, social reality would not

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<sup>34</sup> "It is difficult therefore to see," explains Pompa, "how this account [Catholic] can fail to entail that, despite his own claims, Vico's view is fundamentally Spinozistic. There would be no room on this view for any free choice whatsoever in human history" (Ibid., 54). For a more subtle interpretation of the way in which God operates in human creativity, in Vico's thought, see J. Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico*, 153-228; "Theology and Philosophy in Vico's Account of Human Creativity," *History of European Ideas* 2 (1981), 299-314.

obtain.<sup>35</sup>

Pompa recognizes Vico's assertion of a vitiated human nature, but does not see the need to invoke a "superhuman agency."<sup>36</sup> Instead, the existence and development of socio-historical reality can be accounted for by "judgments common to people who share the same system of institutionalized beliefs,"<sup>37</sup> or, the concept of *common sense*. Vico's claim that providence insures a *long term* purposefulness in human development--its teleological function--is problematic. Pompa attempts to overcome this problem by showing how Vico thinks that knowledge of common sense and its contents *is* essential to human continuity while knowledge of providence is not. There is one part of his analysis in which the disengagement of transcendence from Vico's providence is clearly expressed.

At *NS* §§ 132f.<sup>38</sup> Vico makes an inference from the constraining influence of providentially implanted natural law (legislation), that the provident God--both

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<sup>35</sup> Social reality is, in a negative sense, necessary, but at the same time restrictive of human imaginative capacity. "The society in which each man lives," says Reinhold Niebuhr, "is at once the basis for, and the nemesis of, that fullness of life which each man seeks. However much human ingenuity may increase the treasures which nature provides for the satisfaction of human needs, they can never be sufficient to satisfy all human wants; for man, unlike other creatures, is gifted and cursed with an imagination which extends his appetites beyond the requirements of subsistence" (*Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribners, 1932), 1). Cf. 257-77 for a good discussion of the moral dimension of the individual/social conflict in human life.

<sup>36</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> "Legislation considers man as he is in order to turn him to good uses in society. Out of ferocity, avarice, and ambition, the three vices which run throughout the human race, it creates the military, merchant, and governing classes, and thus the strength, wisdom, and riches of commonwealths. Out of these three great vices, which could certainly destroy all mankind on the face of the earth, it makes civil happiness.

"*This axiom proves that there is divine providence and further that it is a divine legislative mind*. For out of the passions of men each bent on his own private advantage, for the sake of which they would live like wild beasts in the wilderness, it has made the civil institutions by which they may live in human society." *NS* §§ 132, 133, emphasis added.

immanent and transcendent at once--is a divine "legislative mind." It is this inference in Vico, from the existence of order in history to the postulate of an ordering being, to which Pompa objects. Pompa does not concede that the existence of a more-than-individual something shaping human life necessarily proves that there is a divine legislative mind whose purposes and plans are intimated in providence.<sup>39</sup> There is no argument from design, so there is no right inference from design to designer. There is, therefore, no possible natural theological argumentative procedure which could point to the possibility of providence.

Let me summarize Pompa's argument to this point. (1) Vico does distinguish an immanent and transcendent sense of the concept of providence. (2) Transcendent providence is an inference from the logically established principles of the Science (the design exhibited in society through common sense, embodied in natural law) of nations, but the science is in no way dependent upon these inferences; quite the contrary. Transcendent providence is thus an inference which could be rejected without harming the integrity of the Science which Vico promulgates. (3) If we allow for the term immanent providence, it must be stripped of any transcendentalist associations. Immanent providence must be interchangeable with common sense, understood as "involving man's inability to reach social decisions without doing so in a social capacity, and thus in his full relations with others."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 57f.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. This sounds very much like saying that humans cannot be fully social unless they relate and make collective decisions together. But what else *could* social decisions be but collective decisions? In any case, Pompa here clearly rules out any interpretation in which immanent providence is accounted for in terms of transcendent providence.

Pompa, then, sees both transcendent and immanent references to providence in Vico, but denies that there is any logical connection between these two aspects of God's dealings with the human world. By denying that the operations of immanent providence are "the necessary consequences of the nature of a transcendent and necessary God," Pompa seeks to save Vico from the "charge of metaphysical determinism to which this view would ultimately commit him."<sup>41</sup>

Later in his book, when considering the relationship between providence and law, Pompa develops his critique of Vichian providence in a more specific way, in that he attempts to account for social change in the rigidities of Vico's teaching on the course of nations and Pompa's own hopes for the concept of common sense. Providence is now understood as "communal wisdom or common sense in avoiding the destruction of the civilized life which would otherwise occur."<sup>42</sup>

In the absence of God as a transcendent referent, providence is now immanentized as the problem of the *individual* versus the *social* well being. The tension between human purposes and their divine transformation in Vico's text remains, but is transmuted in Pompa (though not, I think, in Vico) into a dialectical fusion of these two dimensions of human being. Pompa makes the negative *individual* human nature the "occasion" through which the institutionally fixed legal structures become dynamic and capable of change. Without the indeterminacy of the individual (a problem for Vico's system), social change could not come about, thinks Pompa, for "there would be nothing to activate a change

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 199.

which would call . . . social wisdom into play in such a way as to require its further development."<sup>43</sup> Pompa asserts further that "the individual desires, which are the occasion of change, and the ideals which arise from common sense, which are the basis of the causes of change, *are not merely contingently linked*."<sup>44</sup>

The link between self-interest and social preservation is manifested when each of these elements of human life recognizes in the other the basis of their mutual preservation and perfection. That is, the selfish instinct in individuals "can be satisfied only if *there is an expansion of their concept of the self and of their self interest*."<sup>45</sup> In this notion of an "expanded concept of the self" it is intended that the individual should see in the preservation and perfection of society the best avenue to the realization of their self-interest.<sup>46</sup>

In this leisurely (Hegelian) manoeuvre there is little left of Vichian providence. In Vico the culture cycle implodes upon itself through the dissolution of human nature--due to excessive dependence on reflection--and society is rebarbarized. In Pompa's version, though, humanity fuses its individual and social interests to form an ideal society. From the *NS* Pompa has removed the basic tension between human and divine agency. Pompa replaces Vico's tension with one of his own, between the individual and social aspects of the one human nature, which are then said each to be most properly expressed in the incorporation of the

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<sup>43</sup> Pompa, *Vico: A Study*, 199.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 200, emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> ". . . at a certain point one's self-interest should become wholly identical with one's social interest, as subsumed under common sense" (*Ibid.*, 216).

antinomous interests of the other into their own drive toward self-actualization.

#### **(D). Verene on Vichian Providence**

In Pompa's treatment of Vichian providence we see a truncation of Vico's thought brought about by the constraint of placing Vico's *MS* into a rationalist conception of scientific history.<sup>47</sup> Pompa rejects transcendent reference in Vico's providence concept because he rejects the possibility of a transcendent God. More amenable to a preservation of transcendent providence is the philosophical interpretation of Vichian providence provided by Donald Phillip Verene. Verene nowhere says that his interpretation is motivated by theological concerns. However, his linking of our knowledge of providence with our imaginative form of mind preserves Vico's presupposition of the God who is the model for human thinking. Verene, in other words, retains the theological premis. Not only this, but the theory of knowledge which he sees in Vico incorporates the many facets of Vico's thought, and breaks out of the procrustean bed of rationalism. Providence is not merely what comes of our grappling with the utilities of nature. It is the witnessing presence of the transcendent God to the struggle to be human against

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<sup>47</sup> James C. Morrison commits the same raticnalistic error, according to Sandra Luft.

the pull toward barbarism.<sup>48</sup>

Pompa brings to Vico a contemporary standard of science, with its own requirements for the validation of theory. Verene sees in Vichian epistemology, on the other hand, an alternative to contemporary philosophy with its one-sided emphasis on the idea and its method of validation. In some sense, the new science validates itself as it makes itself. Providence is not operative directly in Verene's account, but indirectly, as with Vico.

Verene interprets the primal act of thought in Vichian phenomenology as determinative of the shape of mind, and thus as the paradigm for all acts of thought. In that primal act humans transformed an amorphous *certum* (undifferentiated sensual awareness) into an object of knowledge, a *verum*. The process by which this transformation occurs is the *verum-factum* process.

The *verum-factum* principle is a first truth but not in the sense of a first premiss that could in Aristotle's terms give us a demonstrative syllogism. Aristotle's terms give us a demonstrative syllogism. It is first in the rhetorical sense of the syllogism, as the most powerful enthymeme from which a complete speech can be made, or in the fundamental *topoi* or 'middle term' from which a total metaphysics can be drawn

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<sup>48</sup> M. E. Albano, in a book of diffuse and interesting comparisons, has streamlined providence into that which comes of the search for intelligibility in the progressive march of humanity toward civilization. "Providence," says Albano, "is a principle of explanation of historical happenings at which men arrive when they seek *intelligibility* in the order of human events. It is empirically found out, but necessary in its operation. It is obscure to all but the most diligent and attentive. It illuminates human history, in Verene's words, as a light from behind, revealing a pattern of shadow not otherwise visible. It is a metaphysical principle which is accessible to us *only via our peculiar epistemology*, and so requires us to both exercise our own original historical imagination and to recreate that of others, both our contemporaries and those who preceded us." See Maeve Edith Albano, *Vico and Providence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 143f., emphasis added. This is a fine description of providence in the *NS*. I would only take exception to the notion that providence is something we aim at. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that providence is something we first presuppose and then look for in reality.

forth and made, a master key to the intelligibility of the world.<sup>49</sup>

Now Vico believes, as James Morrison indicates, that the primitives got the wrong notion of God. They were wrong, though, not because they were thinking imaginatively, but because they confused the "true God" with just about everything in their environment. They were not wrong about God because of their prescientific mind set or thought processes. In any case, Vico sees the True God providentially working in the "confused" notions of deity in these first humans.

In addition to the question of the substance of this early thought, there is the question of the role which God plays in it. Verene thinks that this mind-initiating event carries with it the awareness of God as the "Other" present to consciousness. Verene explains this metaphysical component in Vico by noting that the "science of the civil world

not only imitates the divine in its act of converting the true and the made, but the principles of humanity are themselves not made but must in some sense be *found* because they express what a human is, and humans are made by God. This simply means that there must in Vico's view be a kind of *coscienza* or awareness of the divine that is presupposed and necessary for human *scienza*.<sup>50</sup>

Verene stresses that this awareness cannot be had by suppositional thinking, but must be had by the power of *fantasia*.<sup>51</sup> The truth or intelligibility of this way of thinking emerges from the power of *fantasia* to posit an immediate *is* or existence in the image it generates. This primal act, says Verene, is metaphysical

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<sup>49</sup> Verene, "Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," 6.

<sup>50</sup> "Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

because it generates the first "being" for human thought, and produces a multiplication of being and an awareness of the possible relations among being.

The imaginative universal of Jove is an intelligibility or a true because it is made by the power of *fantasia*, but this first form of *scienza*, a *scienza in divinità*, imitates; that is, is based on a *coscienza* of the divine, a witnessing or awareness of an other. The form of this awareness is mimetic. The convertibility of the *verum* and *factum* in which the first *is* of human experience is made requires the transformation of a primordial *certum*, a sign, into a made intelligibility.<sup>52</sup>

The religious roots of rational thought are brought out by Verene in a paragraph in which he likens the *NS* itself to a sort of divination performed on history, rather than upon movements of the sky.

*Scienza in divinità*, when practiced not on the movements of a sky, but on the movements of history, gives us an understanding of providence. The science of providence is a science of true good and true evil. This science depends on our access to history through the recollective imaginative universal of the ideal eternal history, through a special combination of memory and imagination. Vico's science . . . is a *scienza in divinità* made possible by *scienza in fantasia*.<sup>53</sup>

I have argued that Verene's interpretation of Vico is more amenable than

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 12f. Vico uses the concept of divination to describe the 'divine' in divine providence with some of his most profound lines in the *NS*: "But they ought to have studied it [providence] in the economy of the civil institutions, in keeping with the full meaning of applying to providence the term 'divinity' . . . from *divinari*, to divine, which is to understand what is hidden *from* men--the future--or what is hidden *in* them--their consciousness" (§ 342). Joseph Mali sees in Vico's employment of the ancient notion of divination an instance of Vico's attempt to mediate between Christian and Pagan. The historian of religion's task is "not so much to demonstrate the act of *Revelation*--the action of a divine agency toward men, but rather that of *Divination*--the reaction of human beings toward God" (*The Rehabilitation of Myth*, 99).

<sup>53</sup> See Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 152.

Pompa's to an interpretation of Vichian providence which preserves the transcendent aspect of it. The main features in Verene's interpretation are: (1) The *initial* act of thought in which human mentality is created undifferentiated consciousness (*certum*) becomes transformed by an act of thought into a *verum* (Jove). (2) This act genetically conditions subsequent developments of human mentality. (3) The existence of God is presupposed as the model on which human intellectual activity is fashioned. (4) History becomes intelligible when recalled through the medium of the ideal eternal history, i.e., history as the expression in time of eternal ideal patterns set by providence for its development. These are the main features of Verene's treatment of divine providence in Vico.

Living as we do in the age of reflective thought we may well ask how it is that we may verify this conception of history. Vico's *NS* is more a methodology for historiographical reconstruction than it is an account of any particular history's birth and coming to be. Yet, it purports to be about the possibilities for development of any possible nation, and should thus be discernible in the processes of history itself. A serious difficulty emerges for the history of nations Vico presents over against contemporary scientific testing methods. In science we may test a concept or hypothesis against the reality it purports to describe, a procedure which presumes a clear distinction between thought and object. In the *NS* however, the *object* cannot be gotten without substantial contribution from the theoretical model (ideal eternal history), and back of that, divine providence. This means that the *standard proof-structure for contemporary science does not hold*

*good for the New Science*. The rules and axioms by which it is constituted, and its connection with providence, give it a *certainty* which cannot be had by way of models of knowledge appropriate to physical or life sciences.<sup>54</sup> We cannot have the elements of the things of nature, though we can approximate them. Buried within the modifications of our minds are those elements by which human history was made, and with the guidance of the elements, axioms, and method of Vico's new science we can recover the roots of our culture, and therewith our identity. While Vico holds his *NS* to be superior to all other sciences, he does not thereby deny their compatibility.<sup>55</sup>

There are two important aspects in which Vico sees his Science as a proof of its own claims. There is a "performative" or existential proof in which the reader sees the conceptual coherence of history by application of the new scientific principles and method. This proof, says Verene, involves starting where Vico starts his account: with a "theory of ignorance."<sup>56</sup> Vico's theory of ignorance assumes that

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<sup>54</sup> Vico's new science does not reject or deny the validity of the physical and life sciences. His epistemology in its mature phase simply subordinates knowledge of nature (appropriate to God) to knowledge of those institutions (things) which humans make. Just as God knows nature *because* he has made it, so humans know the things which they make. We do, however, have a proximate knowledge of nature through *experimentation*. Vico's new science demands a new criterion of validation, a criterion in which--provided we have used Vico's axioms--we are invited to invent or fabricate history, a history which will be true only if we do our fabricating according to the model by which providence created that which we are attempting to re-create.

<sup>55</sup> "Providence operates," says Ernan McMullin, "through the regularities of the world which God has brought into being. These regularities are his doing, but we grasp them because they *are* causal regularities of the world. What leads us to think of them as providential in the form in which they appear in the ideal eternal history is that, although they were not the product of human intention, they do serve long-range human utility. In a universe that is known in advance to be God's creation, this automatically makes them testimonies of providence. But it does *not* withdraw them from the domain of our common sense knowledge" ("Vico's Theory of Science," *SR*, 477f.).

<sup>56</sup> *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 156.

the extant science of his time cannot get at the origins of humanity since there are four barriers to such knowledge: the tendency to familiarize what is foreign, the tendency to anthropologize due to our ignorance of the property of things, and the two conceits.<sup>57</sup> Vico's thought is propelled by an awareness that the human mind tends to favour that which is certain (in the technical sense of mere but *immediate* consciousness), over that which is true (in the technical sense of that which has been rationally oriented to an *idea* which is assumed to be eternal). Out of this ignorance, which Vico's method reduces us to continually, "*Fantasia* must apprehend its own nature in relation to ignorance as its opposite," says Verene.<sup>58</sup> *Fantasia* thus realizes its validity in the thick night of ignorance out of which it formulates thought. *Fantasia* is thus seen to be foundational to knowledge, including knowledge of providence. Yet *fantasia* alone is not sufficient to the new scientist.

A second feature in which the *NS* proves itself is in its ability to act as a training for *fantasia*.<sup>59</sup> The problem of testability is stated succinctly in Verene.

There is not some criterion that exists independently of *fantasia* that guides *fantasia* toward truth. All that guides

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<sup>57</sup> See on these *NS* §§ 120-28.

<sup>58</sup> *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 157.

<sup>59</sup> It is not clear that Verene is saying that the rational aspect of human nature, with its *intelligible universal*, is that which trains and limits the operation of *fantasia*. This would be inconsistent with his attempt to redefine the rational in light of the imaginative operation of *fantasia*. The alternative might be that the training of *fantasia* comes about through the wisdom (*prudentia*) of a praxis which becomes more effective with time. M. E. Albano reads Verene as holding to a disjunct between the imaginative and intelligible universals, for which she is critical of him. She offers instead, an interpretation in which imagination is itself a mediation between the imaginative and intelligible universals. In this way she hopes to bring Vico into alignment with contemporary views of science. Moreover, on Verene's interpretation "the image" would be the "primary source of philosophizing;" an option Albano finds intolerable. See on this *Vico and Providence*, 144ff.

*fantasia* is the sense of ignorance, an unwillingness to reduce the mind's uncertainty by embracing what is familiar to the mind. . . . We must reconstruct the human world not through concepts and criteria but as something we can practically see.<sup>60</sup>

I take Verene to be saying here that the *NS* is a science *sui generis*, and that like all sciences, it must have its criteria for its own validation determined from within its own logical structure.<sup>61</sup>

Verene's definition of providence fits with his notion of imagination as the form of the human mind which grasps it.

The reader has before him both providence and the material of history. He is asked to see that what is before him is in fact providential. The pattern is not evidence of providence. It is not a proof of providence since both providence and history are givens. Providence is given not as a rational inference but as an act of imagination, a recollective *fantasia*. We obtain it when we grasp directly and suddenly the sense of the ideal eternal history.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 158.

<sup>61</sup> Lionel Rubinoff makes a similar point: "The principle that in the human studies knowledge presupposes knowledge is the principle that defines the limits of knowledge as such. The same logical symmetry must exist with respect to the relation between the structure of explanation, the *explicans*, and the structure of what is explained, the *explicandum*, since man acts and produces the world of *res gestae* by means of a logic of imagination and innovation, which is inventive and intuitive. The rationale of human conduct can be exhibited systematically and vigorously without deriving it from covering laws." See L. Rubinoff, "Vico and the Verification of Historical Interpretation," *JR*, 505. A consequence of this science in which explanation conforms to the object explained may well be that "if historians differ in their interpretations, their differences may themselves reflect, rather than hide the truth" (*Ibid.*, 510). Vico's metablastic tendencies could be interpreted in this light not as giving rise to contradiction, but as the discovery that science has many more aspects or disciplines within it than the classical categories allowed for.

<sup>62</sup> *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 146. See also "Imaginative Universals and Narrative Truth," *NVS* 6 (1988), 5f.

**(E). Summary**

In Pompa's treatment, he is wrong to assume that providence has no *explanatory role* in Vico's *NS*. Vico as a Catholic Christian confesses providence as an article of faith, but it serves an important role in the systematic integrity of the *NS*. Providence *explains* how humankind could emerge out of the primeval animal state our predecessors were in. Vico is assuming no ideas (proceeding as if no books had been written on his theme) and in the thick night of darkness, Vico invokes his belief in providence to get the human world started. This is not the self-making humanity of so much contemporary Vico interpretation.

Providence also functions as a systematic framework, an ultimate reference in which to unfold a view of the world. "In Vico's account," writes G. L. Lucente, ". . . the guiding force *underlying* and finally *organizing* human endeavour stems not from man's desires but from God's design, which shapes human events and their outcomes through the unseen yet absolutely essential agency of providence."<sup>63</sup>

There is a third aspect of providence which is not, it seems to me, dispensable in Vico's *NS*. It has to do with what one might call the dynamic of providence, providence as *constraint*. On Vico's account it is not merely enough that there be structures of a social sort to curb humanity's bent toward the self and

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<sup>63</sup> Gregory L Lucente, "Vico's Notion of 'Divine Providence' and the Limits of Human Knowledge, Freedom, and Will," *MLN* 97 (1982), 185. Lucente's essay exposes how Vico psychologizes providence without reducing it to psychologism. "Because of the intimate relationships between the workings of providence, the 'ineffable' nature of divine grace, the development of human knowledge, freedom, and especially will, the notion of divine providence is basic to Vico's system. Indeed, it is only through the agency of providence that Vico's 'New Science' functions *as* a system, as an account of the history of the 'gentile' world that is not only plausible but also true" (ibid.).

the dissolution of society it entails. Rather providence must itself hold human beings in these institutions in an ongoing manner.

In all . . . circumstances man desires principally his own utility. Therefore, it is only by *divine providence* that we can be *held within these institutions* to practice justice. . . . That which regulates human justice is therefore divine justice, which is administered by divine providence to preserve human society.<sup>64</sup>

It is in this sense that providence becomes more than a conceptual tool for giving some sort of teleological intelligibility to the vast array of human causes and effects. Any reduction of providence to a merely conceptual aspect of human cognition or reasoning activity, with no ontological orientation to God, will thus be un-Vichian.<sup>65</sup> We *do* of course have a concept of providence, a concept in which we approximate an immediate vision (*θεωρία*) of divine providential activity. Vico asserts that while this theory is present to us as *homo faber* (by way of the *verum-factum* principle) it does not lack an ontological priority in God. "The order of ideas follows the order of things."<sup>66</sup> The conceptual emphasis in philosophy

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<sup>64</sup> *NS* § 341; emphasis added.

<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting in this regard the reference which D. P. Verene makes to Kant's teleological theories. "Providence is not produced for the mind through a procedure of rationally developed presuppositions of historical experience. The mind comes to the notion of providence in an immediate fashion through its powers of *fantasia*, and it directs its vision toward apprehending the universality present in the particulars of history. As transcendental thinking, Vico's procedure has more in common with the type of subjective universality involved in Kant's conception of reflective judgment (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*) of the third *Critique* than with the determinant judgment (*bestimmende Urteilskraft*) which determines the particular through a cognitive rule or law of thought that Kant explores in the first *Critique*. Neither Kant's nor Vico's would convince a man of 'hardheaded facts'" (Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, 146). I have been at pains to show how Vico's work, coming as it does in the pre-Copernican revolution in epistemology, has *not only* a concept of providence, *but also* a transcendent God for its referent. In other words, I have sought to interpret Vico as an ontological realist, whose providence concept is a *signa* of the God to whom it refers us.

<sup>66</sup> *NS* § 238.

makes it suitable for contemplation, but religion, says Vico, has "power to make us practice virtue."<sup>67</sup> For these reasons, when viewed in the full range of Vico's thought, Pompa's interpretation--with its rejection of transcendent providence--is not credible.<sup>68</sup>

More amenable to Vico's assertion of the transcendent aspect of providence is D. P. Verene's interpretation of the role of providence in the *NS*. Verene underscores the paradigmatic role of Vico's appeal to God's 'thought processes' as the model or pattern for human intellection as such. Verene's treatment owes something to the Kant of the third *Critique*,<sup>69</sup> but seems at the same time to be

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<sup>67</sup> *NS* §503.

<sup>68</sup> Hayden White in his "Review" of Pompa's book (1976 edition) is sharply critical of Pompa's truncating of Vico's thought. "There is virtually nothing left of Vico the celebrator of the Orphic voice of poetry, the celebrator of the savage mind, the philosopher of empathy, the redeemer of *religio*, the apocalyptic herald of the rebirth of the gods, the ironist, seer, and *magus* of Naples" (*History and Theory* 17 (1976), 188). That Pompa's interpretation of Vico misses Vico's anti-modern critique, and seeks to translate Vico into strictly contemporary terms, has been underscored in a strong critique by Max Fisch: "In general Pompa likes to avoid the technicalities of Vico's time and substitute technicalities of our own. So far as I recall, he never mentions the transcendentals, and never uses the phrase *verum-factum*. For the latter he uses such phrases as the 'causal theory of knowledge' or 'the creative theory of knowledge'. He is quite aware of course that although Vico uses the nontechnical distinction between true and false, his technical distinction is that between true and certain, and that these are in the first place characters of the things we apprehend rather than of our apprehension of them. He is aware also that *scienza*, science or knowledge, as a technical term, is contrasted not with ignorance or error but with *coscienza*, consciousness. Yet Pompa sometimes uses 'true', 'truth', 'science' etc., as if he had forgotten these technicalities, or did not wish to trouble his readers with them" (see "Comment of Professor Pompa's Paper," *SR*, 446). Pompa, Vico might say, is guilty of the conceit of scholars.

<sup>69</sup> It seems to me that Vico's and Kant's arguments are similar as to their form or structure, but less so as regards substance. Kant's argument is influenced more by mechanistic models, while Vico's is influenced by vitalism--emphasizing the spontaneity of human thinking. In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant asserts that we cannot grasp the proper place and ordering of any particulars unless we know of its place in relation to the whole of which it is a part. While we cannot arrive at a conception of the whole, says Kant, by empirical deduction, it is a necessary presupposition of any science. The conception of the whole is linked by Kant to the conception of God--as teleological administrator of the world. Now, while we "may cognize such a being [God] in understanding by a reflective judgment, . . . we cannot attain such a being by a reflective act of thought" (*Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard, (New York: Hafner, 1951), §76; cf. §75).

original.

Providence also, says Vico, serves the "ineffable" grace of God. The systematic and comprehensive vitiation of human noetic capacity brought about by the Fall of humankind, is slowly reversed in the pagan world by the "naturally" implanted tendency in the human heart to form those laws necessary for the constitution of human society. The consequences of the Fall into sin and ignorance are overcome in paganism providentially through divination, and in the Hebrew-Christian tradition through grace by revelation.

Providence serves in Vico to explain the origination of humanity out of the thick night of darkness, its self-preservation in social institutions, and the possibility of conceiving of historical reality as a systematic and coherent whole. Providence is not so much a rational inference, as it is a structural presupposition, the ultimate frame of reference for human existence. The order of things and the order of thought have their original unity in the God who makes, and who illumines our making, which is an imitation of the divine making.

## CONCLUSION

The contrast between the views of Leon Pompa and Donald Verene bring out the rather startling variety with which Vico is capable of being interpreted. I contrasted these writers not because they are diametrically opposite interpretations of Vico (they are not), but because they present two mirrors in which to see our way into the *MS*. The differences between these two philosophers in their interpretation of Vico can be viewed as a difference in their understanding of how mind develops or evolves in Vichian phenomenology. Pompa wishes to preserve Vico for a rational science of humankind. In his interpretation Pompa denies that we have access to that original, primitive form of imaginative, sensuously dominated 'thinking'. We have evolved to the stage of being rational and are not fatalistically determined to regress to the barbarism of the poetic and heroic ages. This is to strip the theological premises of Vico's work, according to which human nature itself--including its noetic capabilities--is fallen and in need of gracious redemption.<sup>1</sup>

Verene's interpretation, on the other hand, derives from the imaginative

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<sup>1</sup> My point here is not that there are no secular conceptions of providence possible. Vico himself took inspiration from the "divine Plato" on the workings of providence, promoting Plato's views over against the Stoics and Epicureans. "Hence Epicurus, who believes in chance, is refuted by the facts, along with his followers Hobbes and Machiavelli; and so are Zeno and Spinoza, who believe in fate. The evidence clearly confirms the contrary position of the political philosophers, whose prince is the divine Plato, who shows that providence directs human institutions" (*MS* § 1109). My point is that Vico believed in transcendent providence as the ultimate explanation of immanent providence, which Pompa admits of provided it is cast in socio-historical terms.

core of the *MS* its central and determinative factor. The three aspects of mind are in some sense genetically present in the present stage (the human) of human development. Our tendency toward reflective thinking has suppressed the imaginative and thus creative forms in which mind was conceived and in which it has developed. The task Verene's Vico calls us to is not to a rebarbarization of our human natures, but to a recollection of the fact that we are *fully* human only as 'thinking' out of that originative, and creative faculty of *fantasia*.

On Verene's interpretation Vico's conception of divine providence is retainable in its transcendent dimension. For, the same event which originated mind, also guides (through the ideal eternal history) the development of culture, in which we see the activity of providence. There is thus, through the connection with ideal eternal history, a link between the origination of mind, and its capacity to see the historic realities before it as the work of providence. It is for this reason that I argued that Verene's interpretation is more amenable to reading Vico as basing his science on a transcendent providence.

There is something in the nature of providence as a confession of faith in God which philosophical reflection can only broach, but not penetrate. It is in this sense that Isaiah Berlin expresses the narrow confines within which Vico's thought may move.

If the attempt to prove the existence of God is, for him, absurd and blasphemous because all proof is creation, because to prove the existence of God is to create the very God whose existence one is purporting to demonstrate, then it must follow that to

attempt to demonstrate by logical or metaphysical argument the nature of the far off divine event, the new heaven and the new earth, the end of human history, is to claim to be able to construct by human means what God alone can create. For Vico as a Christian this can only be a matter of faith, not (even finite) reason: the beneficent ways of providence may be observed, described, believed in, but not demonstrated, without making man, not (man-made) Providence, the sole creative force in the universe. *Human history, or at least its most general characteristics, may for Vico be philosophically demonstrable, because creative human activity is the providentially ordained agency which causes societies to rise or fall; but its ultimate purpose must lie beyond human control. or, indeed, reason; else the purposes of God would be man-made.*<sup>2</sup>

Karl Löwith also picks up on the problem confronting Vico's desire to prove providence. Vico has placed himself outside of the Christian tradition. Vico's reading of history turns out to be unchristian for he "eliminates the Bible as an historical source."<sup>3</sup> Löwith underscores the deep *ambiguity* in Vico's doctrine of providence.

Vico's perspective is still a theological one, but the means of providence and salvation are in themselves historiconatural ones. History as seen by Vico has a prehistoric beginning, but no end and fulfilment, and yet is ruled by providence for the sake of mankind. . . . Vico's philosophy of history . . . [vindicates] God's providence directly in history. It is precisely on the border line of the critical transition from the theology to the philosophy of history and, therefore, *deeply ambiguous*.<sup>4</sup>

I have sought to highlight the transcendent in Vico as a way of making his

<sup>2</sup> I. Berlin, "Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment," *SR*, 653; cf. also *Vico and Herder*, 76f.

<sup>3</sup> K. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 131.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 135, emphasis added.

philosophy, in addition to its inherent value, valuable to a Christian philosophy with its own particular problematic. Vico's teaching on providence, while it can sustain a transcendental reading, is nonetheless ambiguous. Here, too, Vico is, I think, compatible with the Christian tradition. At *NS* § 1108 Vico makes an important statement on providence which discloses a deliberate ambiguity.

It is true that men have themselves made this world of nations (and we took this as the first incontestable principle of our Science, since we despaired of finding it from philosophers and philologists), but this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed to themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve wider ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth.

This central passage in the debate on the role of providence in Vico acts like a litmus paper. For, one can determine the school of Vichian interpretation to which one adheres by asking one to interpret the precise meaning of *mente* (mind)--whose mind is under consideration here--in this paragraph. I like the median interpretation given by Joseph Mali: "Faced with a dilemma concerning the creation of the civil world--either by divine or natural-human will--Vico looked for a solution that would mediate between, retain, and transcend both: he introduced a middle agency between God and man which he termed Mind (*mente*)."<sup>5</sup>

Finally: What is the role of providence in the *New Science* of G. B. Vico? Providence, as noted in chapter five, serves (at least) three important roles. (1) It makes possible the initial transition from bestial non-humanity, into the first

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<sup>5</sup> *The Rehabilitation of Myth*, 95.

stages of human development. I suggest that there is no *theoretical explanation* in the *NS* which could account for the inception of civilization without the agency of transcendent providence acting in history. (2) Providence offers an *ultimate framework* within which a coherent *act* of historical reconstruction (recollection) may take place. (3) Providence also takes us a step beyond the rational explanation of how social institutions could be caused by the human mind. The mind may cause the form of social structures to obtain, but only the power and presence of the God of history can suitably bend the will of fallen humanity *to keep us within* those institutions which our minds--responding to the utilities and exigencies of our natural environments--create. Providence is the presence of the God of "ineffable grace," whose workmanship humanity is.

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