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A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF GIAMBATTISTA VICO'S "NEW SCIENCE"

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A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF GIAMBATTISTA VICO'S NEW SCIENCE

by

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Abstract

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GIAMBATTISTA VICO'S NEW SCIENCE

by

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Giambattista Vico wrote his Second New Science (1744) over 250 years ago, but to date there have been few systematic treatments of his political ideas or of his place in the history of political thought. This study examines the ideas of Vico's New Science and seeks to evaluate his contributions to the tradition of political philosophy. His political ideas are considered in the context of his new method for establishing the true origins of civil society. Vico's intellectual background and the political and social climate of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Naples are explored, and the genesis of his method is traced. Particular emphasis is placed on Vico's rejection of both the Cartesian theory of knowledge and the state of nature concept of the seventeenth century political theorists. It was as a result of his criticisms of those theories that he came to his own creative theory of knowledge and his con-

cepts of both imagination and consciousness. The implications of his methodological accomplishment are discussed, and a thorough examination of his theory of the origins, growth and development of civil society, including the "corsi e ricorsi" of the nations, is undertaken. Finally, Vico's role as a political theorist is evaluated and his political insights are brought to bear on selected problems of contemporary political theory.

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joyful and playful ability to share have created in me a heartfelt intellectual commitment which I shall never lose. Finally, I dedicate this study to my husband Michael, who, in the face of my own doubts and frustrations, sustained me with humor, patience, confidence and love.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: VICO AND THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

On Interpreting Vico

It has been more than 250 years since Giambattista Vico published his second New Science, but to date there have been few systematic treatments of Vico's political ideas or of his contributions to the history of political thought. Of all the studies in English which deal with the history of political philosophy, only that of C.E. Vaughan, Studies in the History of Political Philosophy Before and After Rousseau (published in 1925), contains a section of some length on Vico, including an attempt to determine his place in the history of political philosophy.[1] While Vico certainly has been discussed in detail by scholars who have written about the history of political philosophy,[2] the political dimension of his thought has, for the most part, been neglected. Although there have been several studies which compare certain of Vico's ideas with those of political thinkers like Grotius, Bodin and DeMaistre,[3] what is lacking is an overview of Vico's political ideas and an evaluation of his role as a political theorist.[4] Vico's New Science is the culmination of his mature thought.

Accordingly, this study will both examine its central political ideas and assess their significance for the tradition of political philosophy.

Before addressing these issues, it is essential to consider the very real problem of interpreting Vico. Vico's thought presents interpretive difficulties for several reasons, and at least two distinct questions are of particular importance for understanding Vico's role as a political theorist. First, given the relatively small body of literature on Vico's political ideas, the obvious question which arises is why the New Science has not been regarded as a work of political theory in the past. To answer this question entails an examination of general trends in Vico scholarship as well as an explanation of the ways in which the structure and scope of the New Science generate specific problems of interpretation. The second question concerns the fact that when Vico's political ideas have been discussed, the focus has typically been on the extent to which Vico was aware of or involved in the politics of his own day. Clearly, and whether or not Vico reflected on the political events of hiw own day, whether or not he included those reflections in the New Science, is a separate question from assessing the theoretical value of the ideas themselves. The two questions are related, but ought to be treated independently.

With respect to the more general problem of interpreting Vico, it should be pointed out that despite the

fact that even today, Vico's thought and major works are often omitted from English studies of the history of philosophical thought, there is a growing literature in English--as well as in German and French--on the Neapolitan philosopher's contributions to a host of contemporary scholarly fields. These include history, the history of ideas, comparative literature, linguistic analysis, psychology and sociology.[5] Vico's Autobiography was not translated into English until 1944 and the New Science until 1948, but during the past fifteen years, an international scholarly community has acquired a newly awakened interest in this hitherto obscure eighteenth century philosopher. Vico's current appeal can be explained, at least in part, by the synthetic nature of his thought, by his broad vision, and by his goal of writing a "science of humanity." Sir Isaiah Berlin, one of the first to acquaint English-speaking scholars with the significance of Vico's work, has concluded that Vico's "major achievement was...an attempt to develop a theory of what it is to understand the development of mankind--to understand history as action perceived by actors--ways in which men interpret and thereby change their world..."[6] Vico's "science of humanity," which traces the development of human consciousness to the origins of language, religion and politics, offers a novel and at the same time integrated view of the nature of human understanding and experience. In an academic world of increased isolation and specialization, Vico's ideas suggest the

possibility of a unity of knowledge.

However, the very breadth of his theoretical expanse engenders a special kind of problem for students of Vico. Scholars from various disciplines who study a particular dimension of Vico's thought are often faced with the difficulty of trying to limit their discussions of his ideas to their own field of expertise, such as linguistics or history. They come to the realization that such an endeavor is almost impossible because Vico did not recognize or adhere to the boundaries that today are accepted as separating, defining and demarcating specific subject areas. In fact, Vico's New Science breaks our own modern rules that control the delineation of independent areas of study because it encompasses a broader subject matter than do our own more narrowly conceived, and often rigidly defended, scholarly disciplines. Yet, it is precisely the richness of Vico's ideas, concepts and principles which transcend our own exclusive categorizations, that accounts, to some extent, for the receptiveness of scholars to Vico today.

One consequence of the inclusive nature of his thought is that there is some risk involved in regarding Vico primarily as a linguist, as a historian, or as a political theorist. For example, to speak of Vico's theory of history necessitates a discussion of his metaphysics, his epistemology, his theory of language, and ultimately, his theory of the origins of social and political institutions. Similarly, if one wishes to discuss Vico's political

thought, one must also treat his ideas about history, philosophical method and poetry. Furthermore, given the almost overwhelming suggestiveness of his work as a whole, it is an arduous task to concentrate on one strand of Vico's thought and still remain true to his own goals and context. If one wishes to do justice to both, one must avoid the error of distorting his ideas by assuming they meant for him what they mean for us today, as well as resist the temptation of making him an exponent of specific scholarly disciplines which did not even exist in the eighteenth century. In this connection, B.A. Haddock has observed that

> The study of Vico, then, is fraught with methodological difficulties. On the one hand, we are faced with a series of interpretations that are strictly incompatible, a set of ideas that are said to have been derived from Vico but which have come to fruition very much later, and a group of disciplines of which he is said to have been the father but whose development has (in some cases) been a specifically twentieth century phenomenon.[7]

These general problems of interpretation are further complicated by the second set of questions which arise out of the failure of past commentators to regard the New Science as a work of political theory. The simplest explanation may well be that because the New Science is not exclusively devoted to the consideration of traditional problems and questions, it has been thought to fall outside the domain of political philosophy. It should also be mentioned that Vico's writings as a whole are difficult and often obscure, and the New Science itself is not a systematic treatise.[8] Even C.E. Vaughan, who very much admires Vico's

treatment of political problems, has commented that

> There is one point, however, and it would be idle to make light of it, in which [Vico] is woefully deficient: that is in the power of expression. The thread of his argument may have been perfectly clear to his own mind--the contrary opinion seems to me quite unwarranted--but he was perfectly incapable of making it clear to others.[9]

Another and more important explanation may derive from the fact that until the publication of several studies in recent years, Vico was dismissed as an "apolitical" philosopher--an anachronistic, isolated and displaced antiquarian scholar--who was untouched by and disinterested in the political events which transpired in his native city of Naples during his own lifetime. For example, Benedetto Croce, one of the most influential interpreters of Vico,[10] has described him in this way: "He was really an apolitical man...There was nothing in him of the combative spirit of an apostle, propagandist, agitator, or rebel."[11] This notion of an "apolitical" Vico went virtually uncontested for decades. A discussion of the controversy surrounding Vico's knowledge of and involvement in the politics of his own day will be taken up in the next chapter. However, for present purposes it is important to explain why the tendency of past commentators to consistently treat the New Science as a repository of Vico's views on the politics of eighteenth century Naples, rather than to evaluate it as a work of political theory, has precluded a systematic consideration of his contributions to the history of political thought.

One of the first Vichian scholars to attempt to reverse the "apolitical" view of Vico was Nicola Badaloni. In his Introduzione a G.B. Vico (1961), Badaloni argues that several of Vico's early works contain evidence which suggests that Vico possessed a good understanding of the factors which contributed to class conflict in Naples at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[12] An essential contribution in the effort to further document and expand upon Badaloni's thesis is Giuseppe Giarrizzo's lengthy article entitled "La Politica di Vico."[13] In it, Giarrizzo claims that he will "offer a new interpretation of Vichian thought..." and that he does "not hesitate to present his thesis which is of the substantial 'politicality' of Vichian reflections, following developmentally from the Orazioni Inaugurali to the De ratione, to the De antiquissima, to the Diritto Universale," and, ultimately to the Scienza Nuova.[14] As Giarrizzo traces the development of Vico's thought from the early Orazioni to the New Science, he attempts to demonstrate the extent to which Vico's ideas were influenced by the political and social changes occurring in Naples and across Europe during his lifetime.[15] Giarrizzo maintains that as early as Vico's sixth oration (1706), the Neapolitan had begun to make arguments which reveal the political purpose of all his work.[16] By carefully providing examples of Vico's tendency to address political problems from the past (especially the Roman past)

which had obvious parallels in eighteenth century Naples, Giarrizzo successfully counters the Crocian view of an "apolitical" Vico.[17]

It should be stressed, however, that despite the persuasiveness of Giarrizzo's thesis, his main point is to demonstrate that Vico's political considerations arose out of his sensitivity to the political struggles of his own day. He does not seek to place Vico's ideas in the context of the history of political thought. Responding to Giarrizzo's new interpretation of Vico, Pietro Piovani, an authoritative contemporary Vichian scholar, has raised certain questions about its validity. Piovani is impressed with Giarrizzo's historical documentation. However, Piovani cautions that "[t]he political key, if used with a delicate touch, can be one of the keys to the reading of Vico's difficult thought. But one ought not to exclude the use of other keys..."[18] In Piovani's view, if political interpretations are made in a carefully limited way, they can "reveal a side of Vico that it would be wrong to ignore."[19] At the same time, he warns against reducing all of Vico's thought to a set of politically motivated ideas such that he is proclaimed the unwitting ideologue for a particular point of view. Arguing the he is not "inclined to view Neapolitan philosophy as a forerunner of an ideology or of a political conception,"[20] Piovani emphasizes the need to distinguish between ideologically inspired uses of Vico's ideas and Vico's own political views. He says, "There is no

doubt that Vico--like all great philosophers--has been, according to the different assessments of his interpreters, an involuntary standardbearer of many ideals."[21] Piovani then cites several examples of interpreters, of varying political persuasions, who have made Vico an ideological ally in their causes.[22]

Clearly, Piovani's assertion that an examination of Vico's political ideas ought not to be approached in an ideological, simplistic or reductionist way is a correct one, and his cautions will be heeded here. The goal of this study is not the sudden "discovery" that when properly interpreted Vico reveals himself to be above all other things a political philosopher--a revelation hitherto unknown. Rather, the New Science will be examined as a work, which among its other diverse achievements, presents a theory of politics that makes original contributions to the tradition of political philosophy.

The Originality of Vico's Political Ideas

It is my contention that Vico's political ideas ought to be given serious consideration for two reasons. First, a careful study of Vico's educational background and of the intellectual climate of Naples in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries reveals that Vico was influenced by several different schools of thought. Although much of the literature on the genesis of Vico's thought has emphasized the importance of Cartesianism as the catalyst for the formation of Vico's original ideas, recent studies indicate

the extent to which Vico was also influenced by natural law and contract theorists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as by the Renaissance humanist tradition. A detailed discussion of all of these influences on the development of Vico's thought will be taken up in Chapters Two and Three of this study. The point to be made here is that Vico's thought as a whole cannot be properly understood apart from these natural law and humanist influences. Moreover, because Vico explicitly responds to thinkers like Bodin, Grotius and Pufendorf, he joins the debate about the subject matter of the tradition of political philosophy. By making a critique of their theories in the New Science, he employs their language and categories, modifies them according to his own criteria, and presents his own conclusions. In this process of rejection, synthesis and reconstruction, Vico introduces original solutions to perennial problems and so becomes part of the tradition of political philosophy.

A second and related rationale for considering Vico as a political theorist is that when both the method and content of the New Science are analyzed, as they are in Chapters Four and Five of this study, the extent to which he was preoccupied with political problems of the most fundamental sort will become apparent. At present it is sufficient to indicate that one of Vico's primary interests throughout his later works, and especially in the New Science, is to provide a proper and accurate explanation of the growth and

development of civil society. He says that his New Science studies "the common nature of nations"[23] so that the laws governing the creation, growth, and development of civil society can be established. Although Vico embarks upon numerous digressions and includes much tangential material, this thread, which seeks to discover the origins of mankind's civilizing experience, runs through the whole of the New Science. This is a theme which links him directly to a central concern of the tradition of political philosophy. Virtually every political theorist since Socrates has addressed some aspect of this question. What is unique about Vico's approach is its scope insofar as he hopes to account for the "common nature" of all nations.

Vico conceptualizes the "common nature" of nations historically by referring to the "corsi e ricorsi," the course the nations run. He devotes two chapters of his New Science to this problem of understanding the ways in which all nations or peoples pass through a parallel line of development. He postulates three "ages" or times that correspond to developmental stages in the lives of all nations and which include all spheres of human endeavor. According to Vico, it is only by studying the concrete historical evidence--customs, laws, political institutions, religion--that the characteristics which distinguish one age from the next can be understood. It is Vico's belief that by revealing the common development of the human race, he can establish not only the true origin of civil society, but also its

growth and decline. This effort may be viewed as a re-interpretation of a very old political tradition, prevalent in Greek political thought, continuing in Roman thought by way of Polybius and Cicero, regaining clear expression in Machiavelli and other Renaissance humanists, moving from Machiavelli to his English interpreters like Harrington, and finally reappearing in Vico's New Science. The notion that states, or in Vico's language, nations or peoples, pass through particular stages of development and follow an organic process has often been sustained by political theorists. Drawing on the historical evidence of the lives of states, they have hoped to establish laws of political change. This endeavor has been accompanied by a system of typologies--forms of government, kinds of rule, types of institutions--which are thought to account for variations among different political entities as well as for transformations within a given state. Vico enriches this way of understanding political change by introducing the idea that all nations undergo a similar developmental process because all nations pass through the same three "ages." Whereas the traditional approach to this problem had sought to determine the differences between the development of states, Vico seeks that which is common to them all.

Vico develops this thesis in a manner which differs dramatically from that of the political philosophers who preceded him. In seeking to discover the true origins of civil society, he argues that human institutions did not

come into being as a result of the decisions of rational men, but rather, they arose out of human need. Because Vico believes that each stage of human development is characterized by a specific relationship between human thought and the way in which reality is perceived, he insists that the first men were primitive, instinctual creatures whose most powerful emotion was fear. But, whereas Hobbes argues that fear gave birth to reason, Vico concludes that the fear experienced by the first men caused them to make use of another faculty of mind--imagination. For this reason, Vico says that the first human institutions corresponded to the imaginative ideas of the first men who were literally able to create things according to their own ideas. Vico's claim is that all institutions, at all stages of human development, are the visible embodiment of human ideas: To explain the history of those institutions is also to explain the history of human ideas. Vico believes that his New Science must be read as "a history of human ideas"[24] that describes "an ideal, eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, development, decline, and fall."[25] His great achievement is to have revealed that all change comes about as a consequence of the subtle interaction between human consciousness and human endeavor. Ultimately, the New Science offers a provocative and innovative set of theoretical perspectives with which to evaluate the nature of political reality. It is a framework which is not taken up by political philosophers again until the time of Hegel

and Marx. In Chapter Six, this study will assess the significance of Vico's view of political reality, suggest differences between his view and those of later political thinkers, most notably Marx, and consider the implications of his view for contemporary political thought.

Finally, it should be pointed out that underlying the whole question of Vico as a political theorist is more than the issue of what constitutes the proper reading of any philosopher. The question of who is included in the tradition of political philosophy, and according to what criteria, is also raised. How are the "members" of the "field" chosen or determined? Why does C.E. Vaughan include Vico within the tradition of political philosophy while virtually all other commentators do not? Since Vico does deal with matters that seem to be well within the traditionally defined areas which political philosophers claim to investigate, it is possible to view Vico as a case study in the process of the formation, constitution and maintenance of the tradition of political philosophy precisely because he has been omitted from it by later commentators. By understanding the nature of Vico's contributions to the field, by interpreting them in light of his intellectual sources and his Neapolitan milieu, and by placing his ideas in historical perspective, the reasons for his exclusion from the tradition ought to emerge. Thus, the task of interpreting Vico's role in, and contributions to, the history of political philosophy requires an interpretation of the

tradition itself. It is not sufficient to understand what Vico's contributions are; it is also necessary to understand why they have for so long been neglected by generations of philosophers and historians of political thought. Once this theoretical clarification of the character of the tradition itself has been achieved, it will then be possible to adequately assess Vico's place in it.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. C.E. Vaughan asserts that Vico merits "an abiding place, and a place with the foremost in the history of political philosophy" because

> "He was the first to revolt against the individualism which, from the Reformation onwards, had swept everything before it; the first to brush aside that initial error, to re-establish the elementary truth that man is by his very nature a civic being and that, for that reason his beginnings are to be sought not in the isolated individual, but in the Family and its necessary outgrowth, the State...
>
> But, if Vico is sworn foe to the individualists, he is no less to the utilitarians, as already represented by Spinoza...'A society of hucksters' is his verdict on the State as conceived by Spinoza. (Studies in Political Philosophy Before and After Rousseau, Vol. I [New York: Russell and Russell, 1960], p. 252.)

2. In this regard see, for example, Guido de Ruggiero, Da Vico a Kant (Bari: Laterza, 1973); Eugenio Garin, Dal Rinascimento all'Illuminismo (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi Editori, 1970); and Eugenio Garin, Storia della Filosofia Italiana (Torino: 1966). All of these provide valuable overviews of Vico's role in the history of philosophy.

3. See Elio Gianturco, Joseph De Maistre and Giambattista Vico: Italian Roots of De Maistre's Political Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937) and his "Bodin and Vico," Revue de Littérature Comparée, 22 (April-June, 1948), 272-290; Mario D'Addio, "Il problema della Politica in Bodin e Vico," Rivista di Studi Salernitani, 2 (1969), 3-100; Guido Fassò, Vico e Grozio (Naples: Guida Editori, 1971); Francesco Focher, Vico e Hobbes (Napoli: Giannini Editore, 1977); and Roberto Esposito, Vico e Rousseau e il Moderno Stato Borghese (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1976).

4. In this regard it should be pointed out that Frederick Vaughan has written a brief monograph entitled The Political Philosophy of Giambattista Vico: An Introduction to "La Scienza Nuova." (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972). Although the title suggests an extensive discussion of the political ideas of the New Science, Vaughan is primarily concerned with demonstrating that the New Science embodies two distinct levels of meaning and that Vico consciously wrote with two different audiences in mind. In effect, Vaughan argues that the New Science contains a hidden, unorthodox message which Vico could not explicitly state because of his fear of persecution by the Inquisition. He does not however, undertake a

systematic treatment of the political ideas of the New Science.

5. Three recent anthologies which were published as a result of the labors of Dr. Giorgio Tagliacozzo provide ample testimony to the diversity of Vico's appeal. See Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White, eds., Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene, eds., Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); and Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney and Donald Phillip Verene, eds., Vico and Contemporary Thought (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980). A similar collection of Italian essays is Omaggio a Vico (Napoli: Morano Editore, 1968).

6. Isaiah Berlin, "Corsi e Ricorsi," Journal of Modern History, 50 (September, 1978), 487. Berlin has been instrumental not only in introducing a new generation of English-speaking scholars to Vico but also in presenting provocative and suggestive interpretations of Vico's philosophical achievements. His most comprehensive treatment of Vico's philosophical originality with reference to his political ideas appears in Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976). Berlin does not, however, undertake a systematic explanation of the development of Vico's political ideas.

7. B.A. Haddock, "Vico and the Problem of Interpretation," in Vico and Contemporary Thought, ed. by Tagliacozzo, Mooney and Verene, p. 143.

8. Although Vico believed that he had written a systematic and methodical scientific work, his habit of misquoting, misrepresenting, and, above all, repeating material contributes to the impression that the New Science is disorganized and chaotic. As one becomes increasingly familiar with it, the thematic structure becomes more apparent.

9. C. E. Vaughan, Political Philosophy, p. 207.

10. Croce is often credited with having rediscovered Vico and with having introduced him into the mainstream of the European philosophical tradition. The Idealist interpretation of Vico which he offers in La Filosofia di Giambattista Vico (Bari: Laterza, 1911) has been the source of much controversy among Vichian scholars. One of Croce's enduring contributions to Vichian research is his Bibliografia Vichiana, 2 vols. (Napoli: Riccardo

Ricciardi Editore, 1948) which is an exhaustive compilation of Vichian scholarship through 1947.

11. Benedetto Croce, La Filosofia di G. B. Vico, terza edizione economica (Bari: Laterza, 1973), p. 256.

12. Nicola Badaloni, Introduzione a G. B. Vico (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1961), pp. 311-312.

13. Giuseppe Giarrizzo, "La Politica di Vico," Quaderni Contemporanei, 2 (1968).

14. Ibid., p. 63.

15. Ibid., p. 129.

16. Ibid., p. 83.

17. Ibid., pp. 128-129.

18. Pietro Piovani, "Apoliticality and Politicality in Vico," in Science of Humanity, ed. by Tagliacozzo and Verene, p. 402.

19. Ibid., p. 403.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., pp. 403-405.

23. For a clarification of Vico's use of the term "common nature" see the Introduction of the English translation of Vico's New Science by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. xxii-xxvii.

24. Ibid., [347], p. 104. All references to the Bergin and Fisch translation of the New Science will cite both the paragraph and page number.

25. Ibid., [349], p. 104.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Autobiography

Before turning to Vico's life and writings, it should be pointed out that he wrote an autobiography in which he documented his own intellectual development. However, when the Autobiography is used as a basis for understanding how Vico's thought was shaped and influenced, it is perhaps a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it provides an invaluable source of information about his early education and the authors who most impressed him as well as an explicit account of the genesis of his method. On the other hand, the Autobiography is notoriously inaccurate regarding names and dates, and, more important, in it Vico tends to portray himself as a lonely, secluded scholar who accomplished his philosophical achievements in something akin to an intellectual vacuum. While it is a relatively simple task to correct inaccurate names and dates (and the notes to the Bergin and Fisch translation of the Autobiography do an admirable job of this), it is more difficult to clarify the nature of Vico's intellectual influences. Due to the efforts of several scholars there now exist numerous studies of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Neapolitan intellectual

climate and Vico's exposure to it so that a more accurate assessment of the formation of his thought can be made.[1]

The Autobiography was written in two parts. By the time Vico came to write the first part in 1725, he had already completed the first New Science; in 1731, when he wrote the second part, he had published the first edition of the second New Science. Max Fisch says that "Vico's autobiography is thus to be read as the expression of his state of mind at the end of his two greatest creative efforts."[2] Vico was in effect looking back on his intellectual development and making a record of the steps involved in his progress toward the eventual writing of the New Science. In the first part of the Autobiography Vico explains:

> We shall not here feign what Rene Descartes craftily feigned as to the method of his studies simply in order to exhault his own philosophy and mathematics and degrade all the other studies included in divine and human erudition. Rather, with the candor proper to a historian, we shall narrate plainly and step by step the entire series of Vico's studies, in order that the proper and natural causes of his particular development might be known.[3]

As he differentiates his enterprise from that of Descartes, he stresses his desire to accurately, i.e. historically, record and thereby understand his own development. He returns to this theme in part two:

> ...[H]e [Vico] wrote it as a philosopher, meditating the causes, natural and moral, and the occasions of fortune; why even from childhood he felt an inclination for certain studies and an aversion from others; what opportunities and obstacles had advanced or retarded his progress; and lastly the effect of his own exertions in right directions, which were destined later to bear fruit in those reflections on which he built his final work, the New Science, which was to

> demonstrate that his intellectual life was bound to have been such as it was and not otherwise.[4]

This approach to autobiographical writing is unusual when we apply our own evaluative criteria to it. As Max Fisch has pointed out, "we are tempted to judge his performance by standards that are alien alike to the pedagogical undertaking that elicited it, and to Vico's own intentions."[5] Fisch is referring to the fact that Vico embarked upon the project of the Autobiography because he had been asked to do so by Count Gian Artico di Porcia whose original intention had been to publish a collection of autobiographies of living Italian scholars that would be representative of all the arts and sciences. The goal of the project was to have been to "provide a measure of the proficiency and advancement of learning, not by an idle onlooker but by those who had done the work, and at the same time a sure guide for the studies of young men ambitious to contribute to its further advancement."[6] Furthermore, it is important to note that when Vico wrote the Autobiography,

> ...there were few models by which he could have been guided, and of these he seems to have only one consciously in his mind. This was Descartes' Discourse on Method, and he thought of it not as a model to be followed, but as an example of faults to be avoided.[7]

When considered from this point of view, the Autobiography appears not as a simple, objective record of Vico's intellectual past, but as an attempt to understand the causes of his intellectual growth and the direction it had taken, and its deeper purpose becomes clear. As a pedagogical device, Vico documented the positive forces in-

volved in his intellectual development. Such an approach is necessarily one-sided in that, by design, it omits a discussion of the forces against which he reacted. This omission is evident in Vico's open admission that his autobiography was written in part to correct some of the faults of Descartes's Discourse although in the Autobiography itself he fails to account for the very important role played by Descartes in the formation of his own thought. Similarly, Vico makes no references to Bodin in the Autobiography despite the significance the Methodus had for the development of his historical ideas.[8] By our standards these problems of omission are meaningful, and the new literature on Vico's background is especially welcome. Nonetheless, the Autobiography is unique insofar as it allows us to reconstruct both Vico's overall intellectual growth and the genesis of his method with a degree of intimacy and depth that would not otherwise be possible. In this chapter on Vico's life and writings and in the next on his method, the Autobiography will be supplemented by the more recent scholarship on the social, political and intellectual environment of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Naples.

Vico's Life and Writings

Vico was born in Naples on June 23, 1668, the son of a small bookshop owner. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Vico's youth was his education. As he carefully documented in his autobiography, he was largely self-taught and his educational experience vacillated between relatively brief periods of formal training in school and several long interludes of solitude and study on his own. At the age of seven, Vico fell and fractured his skull, and for three years he was unable to continue in the grammar school he had been attending.[9] When he did return at the age of ten, he was judged by his teachers to be precocious and well ahead of his fellow students. After he complained to his father that the pace was too slow for him, he was taken out of the grammar school and sent directly to the Jesuits. According to his account, this too proved to be an unsatisfactory arrangement. He had not been with the Jesuits long when he was placed in a competition with two other students which he was unable to win, and feeling discouraged, he left to study on his own. In 1681 he returned to school to take up the next phase in the educational curriculum which centered on the study of philosophy and logic. He was made to study material that was essentially scholastic in nature, concentrating on Aquinas's interpretations of Aristotle and the writings of Suarez, and this time he became so discontented that "his despair made him desert his studies...and he strayed from them for a year and a half."[10]

In the fall of 1683 he entered the Jesuit College, where he studied with Father Giuseppe Ricci, also a scholastic. Once more he became bored and "impatient for new knowledge,"[11] and so again he left to study on his own, but his subject this time was Suarez. In 1684 his father, hoping that Vico would enter the legal profession, sent him for private lessons to a law professor, Don Francesco Verde, with whom he studied for only two months because he felt he was "learning nothing from him."[12] He continued to study law on his own, reading legal treatises by Hermann Vuletius and Henricus Canisius,[13] as well as scholastic, medieval and humanist interpreters of philosophy and law. Recognizing that "his spirit felt a deep abhorrence for the clamor of the law courts,"[14] he decided that he did not wish to become a lawyer.

Good fortune came to Vico when in 1686 by way of a family connection he was asked to become tutor to the sons of Domenico Rocca at his estate in the village of Vatolla, some 80 miles south of Naples. The job at Vatolla seems to have been the perfect opportunity to pursue his course of self-education. In the Autobiography he describes the series of philosophers, poets and authors he explored in the course of preparing his lessons for the Rocca sons. Typical of the Autobiography, Vico exaggerates the amount of time he spent alone at Vatolla, asserting that he was in virtual isolation for nine years.[15] It is now known that the Rocca family spent only part of its time at Vatolla and

that Vico certainly must have returned to Naples from time to time. In addition, news of Neapolitan cultural and intellectual life was sure to have reached Vatolla. Yet despite his tendency to overemphasize his intellectual solitude, it is also true that Vico did spend much of his time there alone, educating himself in the works of a vast array of poets, authors, philosophers, jurists and their interpreters. He read the fifteenth and sixteenth century Italian neo-Platonists and through them came to know Plato. He read Virgil and other Latin poets as well as authors like Cicero and Dante. "On successive days he would study Cicero side by side with Boccaccio, Virgil with Dante, and Horace with Petrarch, being curious to see and to judge for himself the differences between them."[16] He also turned to the Italian Renaissance philosophy of "such men as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Agostino Nifo and Agostino Steuchio, Giacopo Mazzoni, Alessandro Piccolomini, Matteo Acquaviva, and Francesco Patrizi"[17] from whom he received much of his idea of the theories of Plato and Aristotle since he read few of the Greek works first hand. Vico also claims to have been familiar with more contemporary philosophers like Pierre Gassendi, Locke, Bayle, Descartes and DuRoy, although he lamented the oblivion into which the Renaissance philosophers had fallen in his own day.

In 1695 he left Vatolla, and "[w]ith this learning and erudition Vico returned to Naples a stranger in his own land, and found the physics of Descartes at the height of

its renown among the established men of letters."[18] Reflecting on his experience at Vatolla thirty years later he says,

> ...Vico blessed his good fortune in having no teacher whose words he had sworn by, and he felt most grateful for those woods in which, guided by his genius, he had followed the main course of his studies untroubled by secretarian prejudice; for in the city tastes in letters changed every two or three years like styles of dress.[19]

Here again the Vico of 1725 found it necessary to stress his intellectual isolation, and he even went so far as to say "...Vico lived in his native city not only a stranger but quite unknown," making one concession that "his solitary tastes and habits did not prevent his venerating from afar as sages the older men who were recognized for their knowledge of letters..."[20]

Besides studying philosophy, poetry and literature while at Vatolla, Vico matriculated at the University of Salerno for his doctorate in law. He received the degree in 1694. In 1697 he competed for the secretaryship of Naples but he did not receive the appointment. However, later that year the professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples died, and urged by his friend Domenico Caravita, Vico competed for the seat, won it, and was appointed to the position in January 1699. He held the seat until 1741, three years before his death, when his son took it over. Although the position was poorly paid, Vico had at last found a profession. In the same year, he married Teresa Caterina Desito whose father was a clerk in the criminal court. It was

while he was professor of rhetoric that Vico wrote all of his major works, supplementing the meager income paid by the university by writing poetry, funeral orations, dedications and biographies.[21] He also engaged in some private teaching.

As is the case with his education, the best source for tracing the details of Vico's intellectual development and writings is to be found in his autobiography. Only a brief synopsis of his works will be presented below since a more complete account of his intellectual growth will be given in the next chapter on his method.

Vico's first important works are the six inaugural orations (written between 1699 and 1706) which survive in manuscript copy. His chief job as professor of rhetoric was to prepare students for admission to the law course but he was also required to deliver the inaugural address to faculty and students each year.[22] The orations are for the most part Cartesian in nature and deal with philosophical themes typical of those in vogue at the time.[23] It is not until the oration of 1708, De nostri temporis studorium ratione, that he began his critique of Descartes by way of a comparison of ancient and modern methods of study and theories of knowledge. It became his first published work in 1709. He continued the Cartesian critique in the De antiquissima Italorum sapientia of 1710 in which he rejects the Cogito in favor of his own creative theory of knowledge. In 1716 he wrote a biography De rebus gestis Antonii Caraphaei, a work for which he was commissioned, and in the process of

preparing it, he read Grotius and annotated an edition of On the Law of War and Peace.[24] His next major work was the Diritto Universale, published in three separate volumes in 1720, 1721 and 1722. The first volume called De uno universi iuris principio et fine uno was a statement of his new philosophy of history; the second, De constantia iurisprudentis, an answer to his critics of the De Uno; and the third consisted of notes and supplementary essays. In 1724 he wrote the first draft of what was to become his New Science. He called it "Scienza Nuova in Forma Negativa" and it was an attempt to present his own theories by means of criticizing those with whom he disagreed, particularly the natural law theorists Selden, Hobbes and Pufendorf.[25] This negative version was never published. Instead he reworked it, adopted a less negative style, and published the first edition of his Scienza Nuova in 1725. In the same year the first part of the Autobiography was written and submitted to Porcia. He completed part two in 1728. The remainder of his life was spent working and re-working the ideas of the Scienza Nuova. In 1730 a second edition was published, and a third in 1744. Aside from writing occasional commissioned works, the twenty years from 1724-1744 were years in which Vico devoted most of his energies to perfecting the ideas that constituted his science of humanity.

The Neapolitan Social and Political Background

Before examining Vico's intellectual milieu, it is necessary to become acquainted with some of the features of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century political and social life in Naples. One of the most important influences on virtually every facet of Neapolitan life was the presence of foreign rule. During Vico's lifetime Naples was dominated first by Spain, then Austria: from 1668-1707 control was in the hands of Spanish viceroys; from 1707-1734 Austria ruled through its viceroys; and in 1734, with the creation of an independent dynasty, Naples had its own king, Charles of Bourbon. Although much of Italy was under Spanish rule in the seventeenth century, one historian of the period contends that "Naples is the key to seventeenth century Italy, the center of Spanish rule and influence, and the headquarters of the Spanish army."[26] Spain had been given its vast holdings in Italy at the Treaty of Cateau-Cambréses in 1559, and most historians of Spanish rule agree that "Spain robbed rather than governed."[27] In the seventeenth century, Spain was challenged by other European powers, notably Austria and France, and in an effort to keep the sinking empire afloat, those in command in Italy employed a joint policy of raising taxes and depleting the economy which resulted in a socio-political situation marked by the utter corruption of the indigenous noble class and the extreme misery and poverty of both the vassals and the urban poor. "The bloodsucking

policy of Spain and her viceroys sapped the prosperity of the towns, encouraged brigandage in the countryside and piracy along the defenseless coast."[28]

Two critical factors contributed to the relative ease with which Spain was able to oppress the Neapolitans and achieve her own ends. The first grew out of longstanding rivalries among the Neapolitan nobility that date back to the thirteenth century and the rule of Charles of Anjou. The Spanish viceroys were able to exploit these rivalries by manipulating the ancient Neapolitan system of clan associations called *seggi* whose members were responsible for the making of all public appointments. The system was as old as the Byzantine Empire and originally there were a large number of *seggi*. Six survived, five of which were composed of nobles, one of the people. Under the rule of Charles of Anjou, the feudal nobility of the countryside had been joined with two of the noble *seggi* of Naples proper in order to consolidate the power of the viceroy. This arrangement "resulted in a triple jealousy between the two feudal *seggi*, the three of urban nobility and the one of the *popolo*."[29] Members of the *seggi* were given privileges and were bribed to pass new taxes, and this resulted in the corruption of officials, the decadence of nobility, and the misery of the vast numbers of urban poor in Naples and vassals in the countryside. In effect, the Spanish plan for systematic corruption achieved two ends: it perpetuated already existing divisions between the nobles of Naples and those of the

countryside while at the same time it encouraged greater divisions between the nobles and the people. All of this served to reduce the chance that any unified action would be directed against Spain. Furthermore, although Naples had been a thriving commercial center for silk and building materials, the Spanish insistence on overtaxation soon caused both industries to decline seriously, thereby creating economic dislocations and more discontent. And, like other Mediterranean ports, Naples was negatively affected by the shift of European commerce to the New World and the Atlantic.[30]

Yet despite Spain's success in humbling Naples, it would be incorrect to suggest that the Neapolitans stood idly by, offering no resistance to the oppression that they bore. In fact, there were several attempts to overthrow the Spanish yoke, some of which enlisted the efforts of intellectuals. In 1598 there was a revolt, the purpose of which was to separate Naples from Calabria. Tomasso Campanella took part in it and was imprisoned when the plot was discovered. There was an unsuccessful uprising against the Neapolitan viceroy Cardinal Zapata in 1622, and an attempt was made in 1636 to obtain French assistance in expelling Spain from Naples. This plot was also discovered before it was put into action, and so it, too, was a failure.

The most serious revolt occurred in 1647 when the viceroy, the Duke of Arcos, forced to raise money to man a fleet to defend Naples against the French, imposed a new tax

on fruit. "To tax fruit in Italy is to tax a necessity not a luxury; and so as the tax came to be enforced, feeling in the city soon reached the danger point."[31] A mob formed, tax collectors were hit with fruit by angry vendors, and "the viceroy himself was forced to seek refuge in a monestary."[32] Leadership was first assumed by an elderly man named Genovino but was soon transferred to a young fishmonger named Thomas Aniello but who was called Masaniello (hence the name Masaniello Revolt). He was able to arm and organize thousands of followers who demanded the removal of the tax and other reforms. The viceroy agreed to abolish the fruit tax and make reforms that would equalize the power of the popular and noble seggi. Just as the revolt was gaining strength, Masaniello began to act strangely, probably as a result of a poison administered to him at a banquet with the viceroy, and commenced to execute many individuals without the benefit of a trial. Masaniello himself was assassinated within a few days, apparently on orders from the viceroy.[33]

But throughout the summer the revolt spread to every province of the Kingdom of Naples and eventually the Neapolitans proclaimed themselves to be a Republic. Unfortunately, they did not know how else to battle Spain except by calling in a third party, and so they asked the French prince Henry of Guise to take command. He was not especially well-suited to the task since he was more concerned with furthering his own interests or those of France than with the viability of the newly formed Neapolitan

Republic, and when he was out of town in April of 1648, the Spanish returned to Naples, recovered it, and named a new viceroy, the Count of Ornate. Spanish rule was thus threatened but not dislodged.

The second great influence on Neapolitan life was the zealous Counter-Reformation activity of the Catholic Church. In the seventeenth century civil authorities were, to a large extent, still subservient to Rome so that "political oppression was aggravated...by the despotism of the Church."[34] The Counter-Reformation movement was very much alive in Naples as it attempted to squelch any new ideas that were suspected of being linked to Protestantism or that flew in the face of Catholic dogma. This work was carried out by the dual efforts of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Rome, which sent papal delegates to Naples, and the Jesuits, who believed that they could combat the dissemination of any new and potentially dangerous ideas by employing the techniques of their adversaries. Mounting an intellectual campaign of their own, they entered all phases of cultural life, founding academies, schools and theatres.[35] For a time the Inquisition succeeded in preventing the open dispersion of the new ideas that were brought to Naples, but by the middle of the seventeenth century, despite the continuation of the practice of persecuting intellectuals, an astonishing cultural revival took place. It was in the atmosphere of this intellectual renaissance that Vico's theories and ideas were developed. Neither the political oppression of Spain nor the

tactics of the Inquisition could prevent the Enlightenment from reaching Naples.

The Neapolitan Intellectual Climate

No description of the Naples into which Vico was born would be complete without some mention of the dramatic burst of intellectual activity that occurred in the seventeenth century. One simple fact to be considered is that because Naples had a long tradition as a major Italian intellectual center, home to the Renaissance philosophers Campanella, Bruno, and Telesio and seat of a famous university, intellectual life was able to persist even during the period of the Inquisition's most intensive activity. In fact, there had been another revival at the end of the fifteenth century but the viceroy had closed the academies which were the meeting places for scholars and scientists.[36] Some of these individuals associated with the academies maintained contact with European scholars and so kept abreast of new ideas. But the vast majority of Neapolitan scholars towed the scholastic line and avoided exposure to the explosion of scientific and philosophical work being done in countries like England, France and Holland as well as in the Italian cities of Florence, Genoa, Pisa and Venice. As a major Italian urban center, Naples was frequently visited by foreign intellectuals and scholars who brought with them a variety of new ideas. At the same time, Neapolitan scholars visited Europe and other parts of Italy where the new ideas were being openly and enthusiastically discussed.

The exchange of ideas was given impetus by the emergence of a new social class in the seventeenth century, a class which occupied a position midway between the nobles and the popolo. According to Benedetto Croce, when the landowning barons left their estates for the city, they were no longer able to supervise the administration of their property. He says that because of their "inertia and ignorance," the nobles transferred these administrative duties to the lawyers. As the wealth of the noble class was reduced during this time, the lawyers, who were able to buy both land and titles, grew more prosperous.[37] These lawyers were drawn from the ranks of the "ambitious and intelligent middle class youth of the popolo," and Salvo Mastellone, who has written extensively on the rise of this class, refers to it as the ceto civile.[38] Mastellone maintains that as this class began to perform its legal functions, it introduced "juridical formulas and ideas that accomplished a profound intellectual innovation."[39] Furthermore, there was also a parallel development of Neapolitan culture in general which established links between the government and the university, between jurisprudence and philosophy. The net effect was the creation of a new intellectual spirit which joined together lawyers, jurists, philosophers, literati and experimental scientists. Together this diverse group of men became aware of the need to reform Neapolitan cultural life which they perceived to have stagnated as a consequence of policies of both Spain and the Church. Groups of these men

met frequently as they actively and consciously worked toward the wide dissemination of the new scientific, philosophical and juridical ideas--including those of Grotius and Pufendorf. They argued in favor of intellectual freedom and legal reform, applying their new beliefs to the contemporary political and social situation. Mastellone points out that

> By 1690 the Neapolitan literati were affirmed in Italy and abroad as the promoters of a renewal of culture on the basis of the most modern tendencies in European thought. In the brief space of a little more than ten years they established contact with the intellectuals of all countries, they discussed the philological, juridical and scientific problems with a critical sense, and most importantly, they clarified their own socio-political ambitions.[40]

The ideas they discussed covered a wide range of interests, and Robert Flint characterizes Naples as "the freest thinking society in Italy."[41] As has already been pointed out, Naples was literally a city of lawyers, and "[p]robably in no other city were more treatises on legal subjects published during the last two decades of the seventeenth and the first three decades of the eighteenth century..."[42] Just as scientists, scholars, philosophers and lawyers constituted the new ceto civile, so too the ideas they discussed and wrote about were scientific, philosophical and juridical in nature. Their endeavors were both theoretical and practical, in the sense of commenting on events of their time. And, despite the dominance of Cartesian rationalism--Naples is often referred to as its

seventeenth century Italian center--no single school of thought held exclusive sway.

The study of the new ideas was carried out in bookshops, salons held in private homes, and in formal academies. Some of the most important meeting places of Neapolitan intellectuals were in the homes of their leading members. For example, they met in the homes of Tommaso Cornelio, an exponent of the Cartesian method; of Leonardo di Capua, a promoter of linguistic reform; of Paolo Mattia Doris, a mathematician and philosopher; of the jurists Francesco Ventura and Gaetano Argento; of the anti-baroquists and anti-curialists Nicola Caravita and his son Domenico; and, finally, of Giuseppe Valetta, a proponent of Cartesianism whose salon was the center of cultural exchange between Naples, other Italian cities and other countries. It is known that men such as Mabillon, Shaftesbury and Liebniz visited there.[43] The new ideas discussed in these salons included atomism; Gassendi's Epicurianism; the experimentalism of Galileo, Bacon and Boyle; the rationalism of Descartes and Hobbes; and the natural law and contract theories of Selden, Grotius and Pufendorf. The common ground for all of these theories was an opposition to Aristotle.[44]

One of the individuals most instrumental in originally bringing the new theories to Naples was Tommaso Cornelio, who after a trip abroad, returned in 1649 with the works of Galileo, Gassendi, Descartes, Bacon, Harvey, Bayle and

others. With his friends Leonardo di Capoa and Francesco D'Andrea he organized a group of young men who met in his house to discuss the new theories.[45] The group was formally organized as L'Academia degli Investiganti in 1663. The investiganti were in touch with experiments done at other scientific academies such as the Cimento in Florence, the Royal Society in London, and the Academy of Sciences in Paris, and visitors who came to Naples were impressed with the work being done by the Neapolitans.[46] "As foreign visitors did not fail to note, Naples was the only city in Italy, perhaps in Europe, in which the intellectual life of natural science was preeminent."[47] The academy underwent several transformations during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but in its most active and influential period, when the group met in Valletta's library (1683-1697), Vico is known to have been a frequent participant in the discussions.[48]

The investiganti did not limit their work to the study of natural science, and they were as eclectic in their interests as there were ideas in the Neapolitan intellectual air. As has been pointed out, they were also hopeful of political reform, especially with respect to the activities of the Church. Mastellone argues that "the anti-clerical spirit formed in the period 1681-1734 remained a theoretical premise, an underlying base of departure for every reform effort of southern society..."[49] During the time of in-

tense activity by the Inquisition, Valetta and others took it upon themselves to write tracts in defense of intellectual freedom and public right.[50] As the oppressive tactics of both the Church and Spain worsened, there developed a sense that the clerics and the landowning nobles constituted a privileged class and that both groups had to be combatted together. To make the attack successful, many intellectuals believed that it was necessary to know the laws and study their history so that true reform could be carried out.[51]

In conclusion, it can be seen that the new philosophical and scientific ideas that were brought to Naples in the seventeenth century found a particularly receptive atmosphere. The leading intellectuals, engaged in philosophical and scientific endeavors and inspired by the realities of Neapolitan social, political and economic life, believed that by applying the new ideas to their situation they could change the course of events. There was a desire to make new theoretical ideas practicable. Thus, Vico's intellectual development occurred in a context dominated by intense scholarly excitement as well as by political controversy. It is tempting to search in the New Science for Vico's own commentary on the times. Although he did write about some of the political events of his own day, he was not an active participant in them, and most of his attention was directed toward synthesizing the philosophical and scientific-methodological ideas that were everywhere in seventeenth century Naples with his own interest in legal and

juridical history. For this reason it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about Vico's personal political views. As was pointed out in Chapter One, the recent Italian debate concerning Vico's "politicality" or "apoliticality" has not unearthed a substantially new appraisal of Vico's own politics. Throughout his life he remained a scholar rather than a political activist. One commentator on Vico believes that the Neapolitan's preoccupation with achieving his philosophical synthesis offers an outstanding example of "the connecting links between Renaissance jurisprudence and Enlightenment philosophy."[53] Arguing that the significance of humanist thought and jurisprudence are often overlooked in favor of the great system builders like Descartes, Hobbes and Liebniz, he concludes that the continuous effect of the legal tradition, whose "categories are social rather than metaphysical,"[54] on philosophical thought have, to a large extent, been ignored. Considered from this perspective, Vico's intent was not to chronicle contemporary history as did Giannone but rather to create a new way of understanding the meaning of history as a whole. His vision went beyond the events he experienced to a new method of analyzing any and all historical periods. The task of the next chapter will be to describe the evolution of that method and to explain its significance.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

1. In addition to the works cited throughout this chapter see the following: Nicola Badaloni, Introduzione a G. B. Vico (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1961); Biagio De Giovanni, Filosofia e Diritto in Francesco D'Andrea--Contributo alla Storia del Previchismo (Milano: Giufre, 1958); Salvo Mastellone, "Vico, Giannone e La Cultura Napoletana della Fine del Seicento," Cultura e Scuola, 8 (1969), 63-69.

2. Giambattista Vico, The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico, translated by Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin, Great Seal Books (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 14.

3. Ibid., p. 113.

4. Ibid., p. 182.

5. Ibid., p. 5.

6. Ibid., pp. 5-6. The Autobiography is especially important because it demonstrates Vico's total commitment to his own method. One of the central themes of all his work, and especially of the New Science, is the significance of recovering origins. With the Autobiography Vico achieves a discovery of his own intellectual origins which he believes helps to explain the later development of his thought.

7. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

8. The way in which Vico's thought can be viewed as the product of both his acknowledged and unacknowledged influences will be discussed in Chapter Three.

9. For an interesting description of the educational system of eighteenth century Naples, see Henry Packwood Adams, The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), especially Chapters One and Two.

10. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 113.

11. Ibid., p. 114.

12. Ibid., p. 115.

13. The works to which Vico refers are: In institutiones iuris civilis a Iustiniano compositas commentarius by Hermann Vulteius and Summa iuris canonici in quatuor instiutionum libros contracta by Henricus Canisius.

14. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 118.

15. Ibid., p. 128.

16. Ibid., p. 120.

17. Ibid., p. 132. Several recent studies maintain that Vico was influenced as much by the tradition of Renaissance Humanism as he was by Descartes, Bacon or Grotius. A consideration of some of the evidence linking Vico to that tradition will be taken up in Chapters Three and Four.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 133.

20. Ibid., p. 134.

21. Although many of these works were of little note, one biography, The Life of Antonio Caraffa, written in 1716, offers some interesting observations on the role of a miltary leader. It is not, however, an exhaustive treatment of the subject.

22. Max H. Fisch, "Vico on Roman Law," in Essays in Political Theory Presented to George Sabine, ed. by Milton R. Konvitz and Arthur E. Murphy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), p. 64.

23. For a general description of the character of the early orations, see H. P. Adams, Life and Writings, Chapter Six.

24. This project was never completed by Vico, and he annotated only as far as the second book of On the Law of War and Peace because he could not reconcile some of Grotius's claims with his own religious beliefs.

25. The most complete version of Vico's criticisms of the natural law and contract theorists appears in some of his earlier works, especially in the unpublished "La Scienza Nuova in Forma Negativa" and in the First New Science rather than in the New Science of 1744. With respect to the approach of this study which focuses on the political ideas of the New Science of 1744, it should be pointed out that Vico regarded that edition as the final statement of his viewpoints. Moreover, most of the political ideas contained in the earlier versions of his work are transposed virtually unaltered to the 1744 edition of the New Science. A study of the overall development of Vico's political ideas, from the orations through the 1744 edition of the New Science has yet to be published.

26. Lacy Collison-Morley, Italy After the Renaissance (New York: Russell and Russell, 1972), p. 31.

27. David Ogg, Europe in the Seventeenth Century (London: A. C. Black and Co., 1948), p. 366.

28. Janet Penrose Trevelyan, A Short History of the Italian People (New York: Pitman Publishing Co., 1967), p. 270.

29. Ibid., p. 271. For a detailed explanation of the seggi, see Salvo Mastellone, Pensiero Politico e Vita Culturale a Napoli nella Seconda Meta del Seicento (Firenze: Casa Editrici G. D'Anna, 1965).

30. Giuseppe Galasso, "Napoli ai Tempi del Vico," in Giambattista Vico Nel Terzo Centenario della Nascita (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1971), p. 18.

31. David Ogg, Europe, p. 369.

32. Ibid.

33. There are conflicting accounts of how Masaniello acutally met his end. There are some who insist he was in fact poisoned while others maintain that he simply lost his mind.

34. Alfonsina Albini Grimaldi, The Universal Humanity of Giambattista Vico (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1958), p. 6.

35. Ibid.

36. H. P. Adams, Life and Writings, p. 6.

37. Benedetto Croce, On the History of the Kingdom of Naples (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
Maurice Vaussard reports that at the beginning of the eighteenth century the nobility of the Kingdom of Naples was constituted as follows: 119 princes, 56 dukes, 173 marquesses, 42 counts and 445 barons. He says that 500 additional families also possessed titles and were called the "nobilita di privilegio." For the most part they were lawyers who had positions in the civil service, bar and the various magistries. (Daily Life in Eighteenth Century Italy [New York: Macmillan, 1963], pp. 67-68.)

38. Salvo Mastellone, Pensiero Politico, p. 20.

39. Ibid.

40. Salvo Mastellone, Pensiero Politico, p. 120. In a later article, "Vico, Giannone e la cultura napoletana della fin del seicento," (in Cultura E Scuola, 1969, pp. 63-69) Mastellone argues that the exponents of the new liberalism consciously defined themselves as "moderns" and identified their work with the scientific method. Moreover, he asserts that Gassendi, Bayle, Galileo and Descartes all furnished a vision completely different from the static view which dominated Naples at the middle of the seventeenth century. (p. 66).

41. Robert Flint, Vico, p. 12.

42. H.P. Adams , Life and Writings, p. 39.

43. Alfonsonia Albini Grimaldi, Universal Humanity, p. 20.

44. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 32.

45. Max H. Fisch, "L'Accademia degli Investiganti," De Homine, 27-28 (Dicembre 1968), 20-24.

46. Ibid., p. 29.

47. Ibid., p. 63.

48. Ibid., p. 47. For a sketch of Vico's affiliation with the various phases of the Accademia and other academies, see pp. 55-58 of the same essay.

49. Salvo Mastellone, Pensiero Politico, p. 82.

50. General descriptions of some of these tracts are to be found in Salvo Mastellone, Pensiero Politico, pp. 121-145 and Max H. Fisch, "L'Accademia degli Investiganti," pp. 51-52.

51. Salvo Mastellone, Pensiero Politico, p. 83.

52. One of the few works of this kind is his Principum Neapolitanorum Coniurationis historia of 1703 which Mastellone regards as Vico's conscious effort to analyze the socio-political situation in the Kingdom of Naples during his lifetime. (Salvo Mastellone, "Vico, Giannone e la Cultura Napoletana," p. 66.)

53. Donald R. Kelley, "Vera Philosophia: The Philosophical Significance of Renaissance Jurisprudence," Journal of the History of Ideas, 14 (1976), 279.

54. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

VICO'S METHOD: THE SEARCH FOR ORIGINS

The Significance of Method for Vico

It is my contention that Vico becomes a part of the tradition of political philosophy by way of his critique of the tenets of the natural law and contract theorists such as Bodin, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke and Pufendorf. Vico arrived at a rejection of their theories on the basis of his critique of the methods they employed, methods judged by Vico to be so laden with inaccurate and incorrect principles and assumptions that they could not help but foster erroneous and incomplete theories about the nature of man and society. Only by exposing the flaws in their methods and then constructing a demonstrable foundation for his own alternative could Vico provide a valid rationale for his science of humanity. While it is certainly true that Vico wrote in an age when the problem of method reigned supreme, his treatment of methodological problems developed gradually as he came to oppose a variety of the epistemological as well as methodological claims which dominated the philosophy of his time. For this reason, it would be misleading to suggest that Vico's methodological concerns arose simply from a set of disagreements with the natural law and contract theorists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His

analysis of the failings of Cartesian theory is of considerable importance, and in fact, it was through his rejection of its principles that he was able to establish his own criteria for truth and knowledge with which he was then able to formulate a new theory of civil society and its origins.

The question of how to properly study and interpret Vico's method--and its genesis--is complicated by his propensity to revise his ideas. Although his method is certainly the underlying foundation for all of his subsequent conclusions and discoveries, it is the declaration of the method itself that marked the turning point in Vico's attempts to found a science of humanity. The creation of a method that was truly his own came about as he responded to the whole range of intellectual influences which were mentioned in the last chapter. He did not begin his philosophical writings in the possession of one method--nor was the problem of method always his central concern--and then consistently carry it through his entire opus. In fact, there are dramatic differences between the methodological principles presented in his early works and those applied later in the New Science. But, despite this lack of consistency, there is nonetheless a clear line of development in the methodological principles first enunciated in De nostri temporis studiorum ratione (1709) and those of his last version of the New Science (1744). It is as if Vico did not fully articulate and make use of his method until he came to write his New Science because prior to that time

he was still in the process of developing it. His method is perhaps best understood when viewed in terms of a process of influence, disagreement, criticism and synthesis such that the end result--the New Science--represents a culmination of all that had come before.

Keeping this idea in mind, it should be pointed out that Vico's method has been interpreted from a number of different points of view in the literature,[1] but the significance of his method with respect to his political thought has yet to be considered. In Vico's case the problem of understanding his method is of particular importance because it was as a result of his methodological criticisms that he eventually came to write his New Science in which he put forth his original theory of the beginnings of civil society. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process by which Vico arrived at his new method, to sort out its various sources and basic ideas, and to suggest why it is fundamental to the development of his political thought.

The Autobiography and Vico's "Four Authors"

As has already been mentioned in the last chapter, the account of the development of his method which Vico presents in His Autobiography must be regarded as incomplete, largely as a consequence of his failure to indicate the extent to which Cartesian modes of analysis were instrumental in the shaping of his own theory. There is much evidence to suggest that Vico was significantly influenced by Cartesian method and theory, particularly in his early works, and that

it is only later that he presents a theory of his own which is substantially different. By minimizing the importance of Cartesian theory, Vico was able to write an "ideal" history of his own intellectual progress, and, perhaps with the advantage of hindsight, he was able to recount that history so that it conformed to the theoretical framework which he possessed only later in life, when the Autobiography was actually written. There has been much speculation by students of Vico as to why he so downplayed the obvious influence of Descartes, and it is possible that his fear of the Inquisition or his inability to reconcile his ideas with his Christian faith prevented him from properly acknowledging his debt to Descartes.[2] But, as Max Fisch has pointed out, the truth of the matter is that "Vico became a Cartesian and remained so until his own original doctrine began to emerge; that is until about the age of forty. Indeed the greatest critic of Descartes was himself the greatest Cartesian of Italy."[3] In order to achieve a balanced account of the development of Vico's thought, it is essential to discuss both those theorists whom Vico explicitly mentions in the Autobiography as well as others who are known to have influenced him.

To the extent that he does document the genesis of his own philosophical ideas in the Autobiography, Vico portrays himself as having been influenced most by four authors: Plato, Tacitus, Bacon and Grotius. He says,

> ...Vico had admired two only above all other learned men: Plato and Tacitus, for with an incomparable metaphysical mind Tacitus contemplates man as he is, Plato as he should be. And as Plato with his universal knowledge explores the parts of nobility which constitute the man of intellectual wisdom, so Tacitus descends into all the counsels of utility whereby, among the infinite irregular chances of malice and fortune, the man of practical wisdom brings things to good issue.[4]

According to Vico, each of these "learned men" possessed a particular kind of knowledge, but "[t]he wise man should be formed both of esoteric wisdom such as Plato's and of common wisdom such as that of Tacitus."[5] Plato possessed knowledge of universal truths and Tacitus of the causes of acutal events and deeds, two categories which Vico later comes to identify in the New Science as philosophy and philology.[6] As was discussed in the previous chapter, Vico's own education included not only the study of philosophy and rhetoric but Roman law and jurisprudence as well. His familiarity with both of these subject areas made him aware that traditionally they were regarded as independent realms of knowledge, to be treated as discrete subjects. Gradually, he came to realize that there had yet to be established a set of principles that brought together these two realms of knowledge and treated them in a unified way. Progressively, he became devoted to the task of discovering those principles, and he acknowledges that he was assisted in his effort by Francis Bacon, whom Vico probably read in 1707.[7] Of Bacon Vico says:

> And now at length his attention was drawn to Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, a man of incomparable wisdom, both common and esoteric, at one and the same time a universal man in theory and practice, a rare philosopher and a great English minister of state...Vico concluded that, as Plato is the prince of Greek wisdom, and the Greeks have no Tacitus, so Romans and Greeks alike have no Bacon.[8]

Praising particularly the De augementis scientiorum, Vico approves of Bacon's attempts at creating a unity of knowledge, and he is amazed that "one sole man could see in the world of letters what studies remained to be discovered and developed, and how many and what kinds of defects must be corrected in those it already contained."[9] Thus, Bacon suggested to Vico the possibility of reconstituting the boundaries that traditionally had circumscribed fields of inquiry and even of establishing a completely new science. It was this possibility that encouraged him to leave the work of others behind in order to shape the principles of his own new science.[10]

Yet, despite Bacon's contributions to the development of Vico's thought, especially in such matters as the meaning of language and myth, Vico never undertook to investigate Bacon's induction per se. In the New Science "Vico tried to transfer Bacon's method from the study of physical facts to the phenomena of society"[11] without actually studying Bacon's empiricist assumptions. In fact, as Fausto Nicolini argues, Vico's New Science conforms to the rules of Bacon's inductive method only in the most general way, and "no book is [actually] farther removed from

Bacon's empiricism."[12] Ultimately, what Vico derives from Bacon is a general methodological justification for unifying particulars with universals on a grand scale. Bacon also provided Vico with a heightened awareness of mythology as a "unique philological resource and a unique source of understanding humanity."[13]

A fourth author was added to his list of influences when in 1716 Vico was commissioned to write the biography of Antonio Caraffa: "While preparing to write this life Vico found himself obliged to read Hugo Grotius On the Law of War and Peace."[14] Grotius's claim that there exists an all-encompassing system of universal law reinforced Vico's belief that a science which united philosophy with philology had yet to be written. Comparing Grotius to the three authors mentioned above, Vico says that

> ...here he found a fourth author to add to the three he had set before him. For Plato adorns rather than confirms his esoteric wisdom... Tacitus intersperses his metaphysics, ethics, and politics, with the facts as they have come down to himfrom the times, scattered and confused without a system. Bacon sees that the sum of human and divine knowledge of his time needs supplementing, and with his canons in compassing the universal of cities and the course of all times... Grotius, however, embraces in a system of universal law the whole of philosophy and philology, including both parts of the latter, the history on the one hand of facts and events, both fabulous and real, and on the other of the three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin.[15]

Vico praises Grotius for demonstrating a universal system of law, to which all nations are subject, and which applies both philosophical and philological principles to the his-

tory of human deeds and languages. But, despite the theoretical insights of Grotius, the religious implications of his ideas caused Vico to ultimately dismiss him as a "heretical author."[16] Although Vico set out to annotate and prepare a new edition of On the Law of War and Peace, he eventually abandoned the project because "it was unfitting for a man of Catholic faith" to pursue the task any further.[17] His chief reservation was that Grotius had claimed that his system of natural law would stand even if God did not exist. However, this work with Grotius did lead Vico to other natural law theorists like Selden and Pufendorf, and even to Pufendorf's critique of Hobbes.[18] In this way, almost by accident, he became familiar with the ideas of the leading natural law and contract theorists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Thus, all four of Vico's "authors" suggested to him new ideas that stimulated his own thinking, but none of their theories, when taken alone, satisfied all of his criteria for a science of humanity. Plato's knowledge of universal truths excluded the domain of history, and Tacitus's history of men's deed, actions and words lacked the context of a universal system. Both Bacon and Grotius approached the methodological integration of the two pillars of knowledge, philosophy and philology, but the former never applied his method to the phenomena of human social life, and the latter mistakenly regarded human

nature as fixed and unchanging. Consequently,

> Vico finally came to perceive that there was not yet in the world of letters a system so devised as to bring the best of philosophy, that of Plato made subordinate to Christian faith, into harmony with a philology exhibiting a scientific necessity in both its branches, that is in the two histories, that of languages and that of things, to give certainty to the history of languages by reference to the history of things; and to bring into accord the maxims of the academic sages and the practices of the political sages.[19]

Although Vico recognized the need for a new method as early as 1720, he says that it took him over twenty years to achieve the synthesis of philosophy and philology that he desired. As he explains it in the Autobiography, his new ideas developed slowly, emerging first in the De uno and the Diritto Universale of 1720. He says that his ideas gained more clarity in the De constantia iurisprudentis which was written in 1721. Still dissatisfied, he reshaped his conceptions in the Scienza Nuova in Forma Negativa but did not achieve acceptable results until the first edition of the Scienza Nuova of 1725. However, he continued to revise his work, and the final version of his lifelong project is the second New Science of 1744.

It is in the New Science that Vico defines the synthesis he hopes to bring about most clearly. He supports his claim that the study of human affairs has been bifurcated in such a way that philosophy and philology have been made separate and distinct areas of study with the following explanation: "Philosophy contemplates reason, whence

comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is author, whence comes consciousness of the certain."[20] Philosophy pursues knowledge of universal and eternal principles while philology studies the "certain," the record of actual historical experiences of men which are preserved in the different human languages. According to Vico, philologians are "all the grammarians, historians, critics, who have occupied themselves with the study of languages and deeds of the peoples; both at home, as in their customs and laws, and abroad as in their wars, peaces, alliances, travels and commerce."[21] He acknowledges that both of these branches of knowledge have made notable contributions to furthering man's understanding of the respective subject-matters involved, but because each field developed separately and independently, the knowledge achieved was only partial. Since philosophy had been separated from philology in this way, Vico concludes that "the philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty to their reasonings by appeal to the authority of the philologians, and likewise...the latter failed by half by not taking care to give the authority the truth by appeal to **the** reasoning of the philosophers."[22] In other words, what was lacking was a science that studies man as a whole and takes as its starting point the unity of knowledge. Vico observes that had the philosophers (like Plato) and the philologians (like Tacitus) recognized their omissions, "they would have been more useful to

their commonwealths and would have anticipated us in conceiving this science."[23]

By asserting that what was missing was a method, a science, that synthesized the two branches of knowledge which hitherto had been regarded as distinct, Vico argues that philosophy and philology are in fact part of the same enterprise. He therefore says that "with a new critical art...philosophy undertakes to examine philology...which because of the deplorable obscurity of causes and almost infinite variety of effects, philosophy has had almost a horror of treating..."[24] Philosophers have deliberately avoided treating history, regarding its subject matter as inaccessible and not suited to the kinds of rules that would permit it the status of a science. In Vico's view, when the synthesis he suggests comes about, the split between philosophy and philology will be dissolved: The certain, which he identifies with particular facts, deeds, institutions and customs (the domain of philology) will be united with the true, which he associates with rational, universal principles (the domain of philosophy). At the same time, authority, which refers to human actions issuing from the will, will be joined with reason, the human faculty guided by divine necessity. In this way, he believes that his science will apply philosophic principles to the concrete world of human affairs so that particular acts and deeds, formerly thought to lie outside the realm of logical reasoning, can be shown to conform to its own

set of universal laws. As Vico understands it, none of his predecessors had achieved this end.

Vico and the Rhetorical Tradition

In discussing the significance of Vico's method and his attempt to unite philosophy and philology, it is important to note the degree to which he was influenced by his study of the Renaissance Humanists and the tradition of which they were a part. Clearly, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, Vico was well educated in rhetoric, and as a professor in that discipline at the University of Naples, he was involved with its subject matter for his entire life. Curiously, despite Vico's longstanding relationship with this discipline, his major rhetorical work, Institutiones oratoriae (1711) has been largely neglected by Vico scholars. More often, the rhetorical implications of his De nostri have been studied. Typically the Institutiones has been regarded as a work of literary interest rather than as a fundamental contribution to his philosophical thought.[25] In general it has been the case that the rhetorical and Humanist strain of Vico's philosophical thought has received less detailed attention than have other aspects of his work.[26] The Institutiones itself constitutes Vico's course manual, and half of its contents examines problems of "elocution," meaning a "methodology for the application of words to things, a technique for the presentation of argumentative data."[27]

In writing about these issues for his students, Vico returned to the tradition of classical rhetoric--a tradition which had been revived by the Renaissance Humanists--as a way of offering criticisms of the rhetorical preoccupations of his own day.[28] As is well known, the Renaissance Humanists who "discovered" classical antiquity were drawn to the ancient rhetoricians who seemed to share the Humanist desire to formulate a theory of the proper conduct of civic life. According to Nancy Struever, for the Renaissance Humanists, "the rhetorical discipline was primary, a proto-science,"[29] which sought to link law, philosophy, history and language in one coherent theory. And, as Donald Kelley explains, the Renaissance Humanists in effect "raised the _studia humanitatis_, basically grammar and rhetoric, and history itself, to the level of an independent discipline" which they referred to as philology.[30]

Underlying the effort to define the discipline of philology and its mode of inquiry is the traditional rhetorical task of overcoming the dichotomy between eloquence and wisdom. Vico explicitly takes up this problem in the _De nostri_ and it will be discussed below. It is important to recognize that his consideration of this problem places him in a tradition that includes Isocrates, Polybius, Cicero and Quintilian as well as Renaissance Humanists like Petrarch, Bruni and Valla. All of these thinkers shared the common goal of seeking to unite eloquence with wisdom, rhetoric with philosophy. Since

the time of Isocrates, rhetoricians faced the task of reconciling the public and persuasive activity of eloquence with the private cultivation of inner excellence and wisdom. For the Renaissance Humanists, the thinker who became a model and ideal was Cicero, "a man of eloquence and a man of wisdom."[31] Robert Cumming argues that Cicero attached political importance "not just to rhetorical training, but to overcoming Platonic antagonism between the philosopher and the rhetorician."[32] Furthermore, "Cicero considers Socrates responsible for the 'divorce' of the 'science of thinking' from the 'science of speaking,' and thus for the traditional antithesis between the philosophical sphere of ideals and the public sphere of political action."[33] Many of the Renaissance Humanists who were active in the lives of their city-states as professional rhetoricians hoped to apply Ciceronian principles to their own situations.

This self-conscious revival of the Roman masters of eloquence like Cicero brought with it a renewed interest in other ancient rhetorical concerns as well. At the same time that the Humanists sought to make rhetoric a moral source of political action, they also became familiar with the ancient rhetorical concepts of mind, language and history, all of which were incorporated into the discipline of philology. It is against this background that Vico's methodological innovations must be understood. The Humanist desire to reassert the primacy of discourse and lan-

guage as central to solving the problems of public life is also present in Vico's search for a method adequate to explain the nature of civil society. His debt to this tradition is apparent not only in the criticisms he makes of seventeenth century notions of method but also in his own concept of mind. However, even though Vico took up the Humanist problem of uniting eloquence and wisdom on the theoretical level, he himself never attempted to follow the Ciceronian model as he did not become involved in the civic life of Naples. Thus, as has been noted previously, Vico did not actively bring his political insights to bear on the political conflicts of his own day.

Vico and the Cartesian Theory of Knowledge

Before turning to the "new critical art" which allowed Vico to accomplish his synthesis of philosophy and philology, his own accountof the process by which he formulated his new method should be supplemented by a discussion of the influence of the unacknowledged "author"--Descartes. It can be argued that the account provided by Vico of the influence of his four "authors" is made intelligible only against the background of the unacknowledged influence of Descartes, especially the Cartesian theory of knowledge which dominated Neapolitan intellectual life in the late seventeenth century. The theoretical achievements that Vico appreciates most in his four "authors" occur in precisely those areas which Cartesian theory dismisses or

neglects. If one traces the evolution of Vico's method from the point of view of his movement away from Cartesian theory, the objections he raises appear to be a primary component in the formulation of a set of scientific principles uniquely his own. Numerous commentators have pointed out that Vico's attempt to establish a true science was certainly in keeping with philosophical interests that permeated the thought of western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[34] Few Vichian scholars argue that Vico's claim to originality ought to be identified with his wish to produce a philosophical work that attained the status of a science since many philosophers of the period were engaged in essentially the same task. It is Vico's definition of his new science, which in his terms unifies philosophy and philology, that sets him apart from his predecessors and contemporaries alike.

It is a curious feature of the account of Vico's intellectual development presented in the Autobiography that it does not dwell on the problem of science as such. Clearly, his concern for establishing a new basis for scientific truth in the realm of human affairs motivated him to write his "science of humanity." Perhaps, by the time he came to write the Autobiography he may have so identified the concepts of knowledge and science that a criticism of the former also served as a criticism of the

latter. In the context of the present discussion, what is important is that as his thought developed, Vico came to reject the Cartesian theory of knowledge and the notion of science derived from it. Moreover, the ideas which he took from his four "authors" became intellectual ammunition in the anti-Cartesian battles he fought.

As was discussed above, while Vico's early works reflected an acceptance of Cartesian modes of analysis, by the time he wrote De nostri temporis studiorum ratione, he had begun to see certain very important flaws in the Cartesian view of what constituted scientific truth. As he explored epistemological questions like those dealing with the criteria for knowledge, truth and certainty, he came to reject the Cartesian position which equated truth with mathematical propositions, calculations and results, a truth which was a product of the geometric method. In the early orations Vico had echoed a Cartesian position on the nature of truth and the existence of God, but by 1709 he offered this criticism of the geometric method:

> Let us not deceive either others or ourselves. In the geometric field, [these] deductive methods, these sorites, are excellent ways and means of demonstrating mathematical truths. But, whenever the subject matter is unsuited to deductive treatment, the geometrical procedure may be a faulty and captious way of reasoning.[35]

Vico's obvious point is that although the geometrical method helps to demonstrate the truths of mathematics, the same method is incapable of demonstrating other kinds of

truths, truths about other kinds of subject matter. Consequently, the first step in judging the adequacy of a method is to determine whether or not it is appropriate to its subject matter. More important, Vico asserts that there cannot be one universal method, applicable in all domains of inquiry, because truth itself is not univocal.

At this point Vico denies the universal applicability of the deductive method of geometry, claiming that "[w]e are able to demonstrate geometric propositions because we create them; were it possible for us to supply demonstrations of propositions of physics, we would be capable of creating them ex nihilo as well.[36] According to Vico, the geometric method is capable of revealing truths because the entire system of propositions, assumptions and conclusions has been made, created, by man. Man therefore has knowledge of the subject matter of geometry because he is entirely responsible for its creation. But, because man has not created the subject matter of physics, he is unable to demonstrate its propositions. The key idea that Vico introduces in this work, but which he does not develop until a later point, is that only when man himself actually creates a subject matter is he able to demonstrate truths.

Vico also criticizes the Cartesian pretension to universal knowledge on other grounds as well. He argues that those who wished to banish from the realm of philosophical inquiry all subject matters which do not conform

to the deductive criteria of the geometric risked neglecting an important property of mind. He explains that

> [t]he geometrical method enables us to set forth matters in a purely geometrical, apodeictic form, and gives us the possibility of teaching them in a plain, unadorned way, devoid of any aesthetic charm... [This method] is apt to smother the student's specifically philosophic faculty, i.e. his capacities to perceive the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently most dissimilar. It is this capacity which constitutes the source and principle of all ingenious, acute and brilliant forms of expression. It should be emphasized that tenuity, subtlety, delicacy of thought, is not identical with the acuity of ideas.[37]

Given Vico's vocation as professor of rhetoric, it is not surprising to find him concerned with the problem of method as a pedagogical issue. What is perhaps unusual is his assertion that the "specifically philosophical faculty" is identical with one's "capacities to perceive the analogies existing between matter lying far apart and, apparently most dissimilar."[38] His point is that the Cartesians have not merely exaggerated the universal character of their method, but, more important, in their endeavors to purge philosophical inquiry of all nonrational elements, they have eliminated the property of mind upon which philosophy, in fact, depends. Here for the first time Vico articulates his idea that the mind itself has the special ability to make connections between events and ideas past and present, to discern what they might have in common. He declares that to school students in deductive reasoning alone is to deprive them of the chance to develop the capacity to interpret and give meaning to

phenomena occurring at different and dissimilar times. This is the faculty that Vico later identifies as ingenium and which becomes an important component in his concept of imagination or fantasia.[39]

Vico believes that exclusive reliance on the deductive method hasfar-reaching consequences. He says that

> ...the greatest drawback of our educational methods is that we pay an excessive amount of attention to the natural sciences and not enough to ethics. Our chief fault is that we disregard that part of ethics which treats of human character, of its dispositions, its passions, and of the manner of adjusting these factors to public life and eloquence. We neglect that discipline which deals with the differential features of the virtues and vices, with good and bad behavior patterns, with the typical characteristics of the various ages of man, of the two sexes, of social and economic class, race and nation, and with the art of seemly conduct in life, the most difficult of all arts. As a consequence of this neglect, a noble and important branch of studies, i.e., the science of politics, lies almost abandoned and untended.[40]

His conclusion is that an entire generation of young men will be "unable to engage in the life of the community, to conduct themselves with wisdom and prudence."[41] This explicit concern for the proper conduct of public life is a clear indication of Vico's dedication to the political principles of the rhetorical tradition. His desire to join the conduct of public life with an understanding of the basic tendencies of human nature finds a parallel in the works of Cicero and of the Renaissance Humanists. Vico's advice regarding the education of the statesman also echoes that of the classical and Renaissance rhetoricians.

Although it is clear that Vico does not consider himself to be a statesman, his recommendations for those who are active in public life are specific:

> [W]hosoever intends to devote his efforts, not to physics or mechanics, but to a political career, whether as a civil servant or as a member of the legal profession or of the judiciary, a political speaker or a pulpit orator, should not waste too much time...on those subjects which are taught by abstract geometry. Let him, instead, cultivate his mind with an ingenious method; let him study topics and defend both sides of a controversy... Let him not spurn reasons that wear a semblance of probability and versimilitude...[42]

According to Vico, only a grounding in these principles of rhetoric provides the student who might be a potential statesman with the possibility of developing the faculty that he will later require, ingenium.

Vico resumes this line of criticism in his only work devoted principally to metaphysics, the De antiquissima Italorum sapientia written in 1710. It is here that Vico directly attacks the heart of the Cartesian theory of knowledge, the Cogito, and the notion of the clear and distinct idea. What underlies his criticism at this point is his enunciation of the verum/factum principle, based upon his claim that in Latin the terms verum and factum have reciprocal meanings and are therefore convertible. His central arguments will be summarized below.

First, Vico defines knowing as the act of ordering or collecting all of the elements of a thing such that its perfect idea is expressed. He then explains the differences between human and divine knowledge, reiterating

the idea that the truth of a thing is identical with its making. According to Vico, God, as Maker and Creator of all things, has full understanding because He contains within Himself all the elements of a thing and because He gives order to those elements.[44] In other words, God knows not only what a thing is but how it came into being. God alone has perfect knowledge because He knows both the thing itself and the causes of the thing's being. The knowledge of causes is thus established as the criterion of truth, and knowledge of causes can exist only when the knower has been responsible for the genesis of the thing, i.e., when the knower has made the thing. On the basis of this line of reasoning, Vico concludes that although the human mind can never possess the kind of knowledge which belongs exclusively to God, it can nonetheless achieve truth in those instances when it has knowledge of causes, in those instances when it actually composes and gives form to something. Science, when defined in terms of knowledge per caussus, consists in a cognition of the genesis of things, a cognition of their making. The human mind most closely approximates knowledge per caussus (and therefore most closely approaches science) in mathematics and geometry because in the process of creating theorems, axioms and rules, the mind actually orders and generates all of the necessary component parts. Furthermore, mathematics and geometry, commonly believed to be incapable of provid-

ing proof per caussus, are, in fact, the only sciences truly capable of doing so. Only in mathematics and geometry are demonstration and the act of creating identical.[45] In contrast, physics, often thought to provide demonstration per caussus, has not been created by man, and so is unable to offer such proof.[46]

Having established the idea of knowledge per caussus, Vico turns to Descartes's notion of the clear and distinct idea. He argues that since the real criterion of truth is to have made it, the clear and distinct idea is neither the criterion of truth nor the standard by which the mind judges itself. Because God has created man, man cannot claim to have created his own mind. In fact, the mind is ignorant of the causes that produced it, and it does not know the causes that brought it into existence.[47] What Descartes has really achieved with the Cogito, in Vico's view, is not a criterion of truth but a declaration of the mind's awareness of itself. Vico calls this kind of certainty of thought coscienza, as distinct from scienza, which comes into being only with knowledge per caussus.[48]

It may seem that Vico's dismissal of Descartes's Cogito must inevitably lead to the conclusion that only mathematics and geometry can be said to achieve the status of knowledge since they alone are entirely the creations of man. But, as Sir.Isaiah Berlin has pointed out, Vico had no intention of taking such an extreme position. If

he had, "it would follow that not only natural, i.e. scientific, knowledge can no longer be called knowledge, but metaphysics and theology, if they are not to be regarded as man made fictions, fall too."[49] Rather, the purpose of Vico's critique of Descartes was to demonstrate "the inadequacies of his psychological criteria for truth" and to admonish him "for not realizing that mathematics is rigorous only because it is arbitrary, that is, consists in the use of conventions freely adopted as in the playing of a game; and is not, as had hitherto generally been supposed, a set of innate and objective rules about the structure of the world."[50]

It is perhaps the second of Sir Isaiah's points that is most important for the further development of Vico's own theory of knowledge. The process by which he arrived at his critique of the Cogito included an analysis of the various operations of the human mind. Vico came to see that a distinction must be made between the mind's ability to actually discover new things and its capacity to bring order to those things already known. He takes up this problem in Chapter Seven of the De antiquissima.

First, he defines a faculty as the "ability by which a power is converted into an act."[51] He argues that the senses of hearing, feeling and seeing are the faculties with which man, in effect, "creates" sounds, warmth, cold and colors. Imagination and the intellect are also de-

fined as faculties by Vico because with the former man creates images of things and with the latter he creates his understanding of anything. Vico further defines imagination (which he also refers to as the Greek word fantasia) as synonymous with the Latin term memoria, which originally meant the act of creating images as well as the faculty that records those things perceived by the senses. Vico contends that we can only imagine those things that we remember, and, that we remember only what we perceive through the senses.[52] But, there is yet another faculty of mind that plays a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge: ingenium, the faculty that, according to Vico, unifies separate things, by placing them in correspondence with one another. It is the faculty of ingenium which Vico believes is present only in man and which serves to distinguish man from the brutes.[53] Vico identifies ingenium as the specific faculty by which man acquires knowledge because it enables him to recognize things that are the same and then to make them by means of imitation. Without this capacity to place things in correspondence with one another, in other words, to develop relationships between things, man would be unable to discover anything new. Finally, Vico says that the faculties of fantasia and ingenium are directly related to one another: "Fantasia is the eye of ingenium."[54] Both faculties work together as fantasia creates images and records them so

that ingenium is able to place the images in correspondence with one another, establishing meaningful relationships between them. Since the geometric method makes use of neither of these faculties, "rather than discovering new things, it brings order to things already discovered."[55] Restating the position he had taken in the De nostri temporis studiorum ratione, Vico says that rather than facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, "when removed from its three dimensional world of numbers," the Cartesian method becomes "an obstacle to ingenium."[56]

Thus, making his point even more clearly and strongly than he had in the De Nostri, Vico here attacks Cartesian method not merely on pedagogical grounds, but on the most basic epistemological grounds as well. And, as much as his original criticisms grew out of his commitment to the principles of classical and Humanist rhetoric, this discussion of the various faculties of mind in the De antiquissima likewise owes a great deal to the rhetorical tradition. As Vincent Bevilacqua maintains, Vico's notion of ingenium has its source in the rhetorical concept of inventio which meant "a mental form or process whereby man creates an orderly rationale which governs his mental and conceptual world."[57] The emphasis on the creative power of ingenium stands in sharp contrast to the rationalist belief in the existence of a set of a priori objects of knowledge which are simply in need of demonstration.

According to Vico, without ingenium, there can be no demonstration because before something can be demonstrated it must first be created. In Bevilacqua's view, for Vico

> meaningful understanding of both rhetoric and epistemology must derive from a philosophical investigation of those native inclinations to creative thought and affective expression common to human nature--inclinations which, Vico believed, are in turn manifested in the precepts of rhetoric itself, most especially in man's native propensity to seek metaphorical resemblances, and in his conspicuous disposition to assimilate and invent (create) categorical patterns (topoi) of thought and arrangement... [For Vico] the study of rhetoric and the study of epsitemology reciprocally interrelate.[58]

When, therefore, Vico says that the Cartesian method necessarily becomes an obstacle to ingenium, he does so on the basis of the very rhetorical claims which Descartes had dismissed as irrelevant to epistemology. Ultimately, Vico makes his epistemological position the foundation for the method he will use to develop his entire theory of civil society.

The Implications of Vico's Methodological Critique

Clearly, Vico's critique of the Cartesian theory of knowledge directly influenced the subsequent development of his thought. It was only after he had established the limits of the Cogito and denied the universality of the geometric method that he was able to put forth his own theory of knowledge which became the foundation of his New Science. His rejection of Cartesian epistemological claims caused him to reformulate the question of what it is that man knows with certainty. He articulated the

essence of his answer to this question in the De antiquissima with an elaboration of the verum/factum principle. By proclaiming that man knows with certainty that which he creates, Vico made the problem one of determining what it is that man creates. In the New Science he provides a definite answer to this question: That which man creates, and can therefore know with certainty, is the world of civil society, which is man's past, his history. Vico says, "The world of civil society has certainly been made by men and it can be known within the modifications of our own human mind."[59] This single statement has rather extensive implications for the science of humanity which Vico hopes to elaborate.

First, this statement means that the world of civil society and of human affairs is the subject matter which is consistent with his verum/factum principle since it is the one subject matter that man actually creates. Second, Vico says that civil society is known to man within the modifications of the human mind. In other words, the structure of mind itself allows man to penetrate and know with certainty the world that he makes, civil society. Although others before Vico studied civil society, he believes that they failed to render an accurate description of it because they did not understand that a proper study of humanity begins with the structure of mind itself. In the Autobiography, Vico reports that he did not develop an original theory of his own until the New Science of 1725.

He says that it was only

> [i]n this work [that] he finally discovered in its full extent that principle which in his previous works he had understood only in a confused and indistinct way. For he now recognizes an indispensible and even human necessity to seek the first origins of this science in the beginnings of sacred history...For he discovers this new science by means of a new critical method for sifting the truth as to the founders of the nations from the popular traditions they founded. Whereas the writers to whose works criticism is usually applied came thousands of years after these founders.[60]

Vico contends that all previous interpreters had misunderstood both the nature of the first men and their point of origin because they lacked his "new critical method for sifting the truth."

The "new critical method" to which Vico refers is a method of historical inquiry. Clearly, Vico was not the first thinker to recognize the need for a new method to interpret history. It should be mentioned that although Vico fails to discuss Jean Bodin in the Autobiography, there is no doubt that he was acquainted with both the Republic and the Methodus, and that his reading of these works contributed to the formation of his own ideas. In the Methodus, which Vico probably read during the period when he composed his own De nostri, Bodin argued for the need to establish a method for reading history and studying the past which was comparative and universal in character. The evidence which Bodin believed to require critical evaluation was law and jurisprudence. One of Bodin's goals was to provide the student with a program

for reading history. As several commentators have noted, Vico certainly shared many of Bodin's preoccupations and interests. Nonetheless, the two thinkers also disagree on numerous points, including their evaluations of the extent to which Roman law ought to be regarded as universal. On the methodological level, the chief distinction between them is that whereas Bodin sought to understand how history could best be used and how it could instruct, Vico sought to elevate history to the status of a science. In other words, Vico and Bodin both hoped to establish a method for accurately reading and interpreting history. Vico departs from his predecessor because he also desires to make that method the foundation of a science of humanity.[61]

Vico's indictment of his predecessors' lack of a sufficient appreciation of history also echoes the Machiavellian notion of vera cognizione. Although Vico makes few positive references to Machiavelli in his works, it is well known that the Florentine was an important source for both Bacon and Bodin. Unfortuantely, little evidence has been uncovered to indicate whether or not Vico's knowledge of Machiavelli is first or second hand.[62] But, it seems that Vico's familiarity with the Renaissance Humanists, Bacon and Bodin must have brought him into contact with certain of Machiavelli's ideas and concepts even if a case for direct influence cannot be demonstrated. In the Preface to the Discourses Machiavelli says that

rulers of states fail to "repair to antiquity for examples" because of a "lack of proper appreciation of history [vera cognizione], owing to people failing to realize the significance of what they read, and their having no taste for the delicacies it comprises."[63] According to Machiavelli, the chief consequence of this failing is that rulers never think of imitating the acts of great rulers and princes of the past. Both Vico and Machiavelli agree that history provides a proper basis for understanding human activity and that in order to achieve such an understanding, the past must be correctly recovered and interpreted.

In the New Science Vico says that he arrived at his "new critical method" by means of one important discovery that he refers to as the "master-key" of his science. This discovery was that the founders of the human race were "poets who spoke in poetic characters."[64] By this he means that the first men, whom the natural law and contract theorists claimed to have accurately described in the state of nature as being rational and sage, in fact did not possess those qualities. As poets who spoke in a "poetic language," their thinking must have differed significantly from that of modern, rational man. Therefore, Vico argues that in order to accurately describe the character of civil society, it is necessary to identify, for the first time, what the minds of the men who founded it must have been like. Vico claims that this identification

can be made because within the modifications of the human mind man can gain access to and actually retrieve the "poetic" thought of the first men. Essentially, what he demands is a return to origins, to the point when man began to think humanly. He maintains that only by returning to these origins can his "metaphysics of the human race" be established.[65]

Thus, it can be seen that whereas Machiavelli's intention was the recovery of antiquity for the purpose of imitation, Vico is primarily interested in the recovery of the origins of man's past. When Machiavelli claims that vera cognizione is required in order to properly make sense of history, his criticism is of those rulers (or would be rulers) who do not read history with an eye to finding solutions to their own political crises in the acts of great leaders of the past, particularly the Roman past. Vico, too, maintains that the past must be correctly interpreted, but rather than regarding historical knowledge as the key to political action, Vico approaches history as the epistemological problem at the foundation of all human knowledge. Unlike Machiavelli, Vico does not seek to analyze the question of human action in the realm of politics as an issue distinct from his epistemological concerns.

At first glance, it may appear that Vico did not actually propose anything radically different from his seventeenth century predecessors. They also claimed to

have described the origins of civil society in their theories of the state of nature and the social contract. But, Vico explains the difference between his theory and the theories of thinkers who preceded him. First, he claims that the natural law and contract theorists failed to establish the true origins of civil society because they did not actually comprehend the meaning of the task. He points out that scholars have great difficulty extracting themselves and their ideas from the particular context in which they are embedded: "It is [a] property of the human mind that whenever men can form no idea of distant or unknown things that they judge them by what is familiar and at hand."[66] The result is that their ideas about things of the past are colored, perhaps distorted, by the factors that constitute their immediate condition. Vico argues that this insight

> ...points to the inexhaustible source of all the errors about the principles of humanity that have been adopted by entire nations and all scholars. For when the former began to take notice of them and the latter to investigate them, it was on the basis of their enlightened, cultivated, and magnificent times that they judge the origins of humanity, which by the nature of things must have been small, crude and quite obscure.[67]

Lacking the appropriate perspective, all the natural law and contract theorists--Hobbes, Selden, Grotius, Pufendorf--had invariably ascribed to primitive man a set of characteristics which in truth belong only to modern man. So, as the natural law and contract theorists proposed their own

descriptions of the state of nature, they made the serious error of endowing man in that state with both the power of reason and the virtue of wisdom, two human attributes which, on the basis of a proper identification of man's original condition, are found to have been totally absent in primitive man.[68] Given Vico's discovery of the poetic nature of the first men, he argues that primitive man, when placed in his true original condition, will exhibit characteristics that are demonstrably different from those possessed by modern man.

Consequently, the first step in the accurate reconstruction of man's origins is to identify the essential differences between primitive and modern man, a task which involves the rethinking of traditional definitions of human nature. All of this comes about only by making a serious effort to seek the true origins of human communal life, and it is for this reason that Vico's new science begins with the problem of origins itself. Vico argues that what is required is to go to the source of the subject matter in question, to "descend from these refined and human natures, which we cannot at all imagine and comprehend only with great effort."[69] He insists that the search for origins depends upon leaving behind the notion of rational man and instead considering the role of imagination (fantasia), the faculty of mind that permits man to actually discover his own past. It is by means of

his concept of imagination that Vico proposes an entirely new theory of the origin, growth and decline of civil society as well as a radically different concept of human nature.

Before turning to Vico's concept of imagination as it applies to his theories of human nature and civil society, one more methodological point should be made. There is one additional factor which Vico believes the natural law and contract theorists had overlooked. Not only did they fail to establish the true origins of civil society, but they also neglected to take into account the role of divine providence in human affairs. According to Vico, man's capacity to create and know the world of civil society is always given shape and direction by the activity of divine providence. He argues that only by the intervention of divine providence in human activity was man able to move from his original state to one that gradually became more civilized. Any science of humanity must recognize the extent to which divine providence oversees the growth and development of civil society. It is Vico's contention that a true explanation of the origins of civil society would have included a description of the role of divine providence as the invisible, but directing force in human history.[70] Although Vico never offers an elaborate argument to prove the existence of divine providence, it is clear that he believes it to be a real force in human

affairs which guides men, who would otherwise be led astray by their selfish passions and instincts. It is for this reason that he maintains that any theory of society that is based upon rational principles alone must be rejected: Human reason, in and of itself, is not the sole determinant of human activity.

The idea of divine providence is perhaps the one component of Vico's theory which is open to the widest range of interpretation. As a Catholic who was a religious man all of his life, Vico may have hoped to somehow synthesize his new discoveries with his religious beliefs. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that he recognized the radical implications of his theory of civil society and that he included the idea of divine providence in order to mute the potential opposition of the Neapolitan religious authorities, especially at a time when the Inquisition's power was still being felt in Naples. Whichever interpretation is correct, the fact remains that Vico does not dwell on the idea of divine providence and that, for the most part, his central theoretical claims stand on their own even if the religious implications of the idea of divine providence are eliminated entirely. More than anything else, his notion of divine providence resembles what a century later will be called the idea of unintended consequences in history. It is a significant concept in the overall context of Vico's methodological critique of

rationalism in that it again calls into question the belief that reason is the source of all human achievement.

In conclusion, Vico's own proposal for a method suitable to the study of man rests upon his basic idea that a new set of criteria must be applied to the world of human affairs. His method issues from his disputes with the rationalists--both the Cartesians themselves and the natural law and contract theorists whose writings were replete with rationalist assumptions--and centers on the idea that civil society is the one proper subject matter for human inquiry not only because man has himself created the world of human affairs, but also because man can know that world with a degree of certainty not possible in any other realm. By means of a synthesis of philosophy and philology, a true science of humanity can be established which will seek to reconstruct man's past and so for the first time identify the true origins of civil society.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1. For a recent discussion of Vico's method see Leon Pompa, Vico: A Study of the "New Science" (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Chapter Eight.

2. For a complete treatment of the various interpretations of Vico's failure to acknowledge Descartes see Fausto Nicolini, La Giovinezza di G. B. Vico (Bari: Laterza, 1932), pp. 116-124.

3. Giambattista Vico, The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico, translated by Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin, Great Seal Books (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 36.

4. Ibid., pp. 138-139. H. P. Adams has pointed out that when Vico uses the word "metaphysical" in this context he often means "psychological." (The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico [New York: Russell and Russell, 1970], p. 69).

5. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 139.

6. Giambattista Vico, The New Science, translated by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), [138-139], p. 63.

7. H. P. Adams, Life and Writings, p. 71.

8. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 139. On the problem of Vico's relationship to Bacon see two works by Enrico De Mas: Bacone e Vico (Torino: Filosofia, 1959); and "Vico's Four Authors," in Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 3-14.

9. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 139.

10. On the various ways in which Vico uses the term science see Max Fisch's introductory remarks to his translation of the New Science, pp. xxx-xxxii.

11. Enrico De Mas, "On the New Method of a New Science: A Study of Giambattista Vico," Journal of the History of Ideas, 32 (1971), 90.

12. Fausto Nicolini, Commentario Storico alla Seconda "Scienza Nuova" , (2 vols; Roma: Banco di Napoli, 1950), I, p. 80.

13. Enrico De Mas, "On the New Method," p. 93.

14. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, pp. 154-155. According to H. P. Adams, Vico had read Grotius before preparing Caraffa's biography since he thought a background ir international law would help him write the life of a general. For a general introduction to Vico's relationship to Grotius see Dario Faucci, "Vico and Grotius: Jurisconsults of Mankind," in An International Symposium, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White, pp. 61-76. Faucci believes that Vico read Grotius prior to the Caraffa biography and that there is evidence of his influence on Vico as early as the Orations.

15. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, pp. 154-155.

16. Ibid., p. 155.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 40. The question of whether or not Vico actually read Hobbes remains unanswered. In the Introduction to the Autobiography Max Fisch suggests that Vico did read Hobbes. But, Fisch also points out that Fausto Nicolini believes that Vico did not read Hobbes himself and that he instead relied on a version of Hobbes presented in the De novis inventis of George Pasch (Leipzig, 1700). Fisch also says, "Some of Vico's direct references to Hobbes are not in Pasch, and it would seem that he must have known Hobbes' Latin works." (Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 211).

19. Ibid., p. 155.

20. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [138], p. 63.

21. Ibid., [139], p. 63.

22. Ibid., [140], p. 63.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., [7], p. 6.

25. Alessandro Giuliani, "Vico's Rhetorical Philosophy and the New Rhetoric," in Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 31.

26. The major full length treatment of Vico's rhetoric is Andrea Sorrentino, La Rhetorica e Poetica di Vico,

ossia la Prima Concezione Estetica del Linguaggio (Torino: Boca, 1927).

27. Alessandro Giuliani, "Vico's Rhetorical Philosophy," p. 35.

28. Michael Mooney, "The Primacy of Language in Vico," in Vico and Contemporary Thought, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney and Donald Phillip Verene (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980) Part I, p. 200.

29. Nancy Streuver, "Vico, Valla and the Logic of Humanist Inquiry," in Vico's Science of Humanity, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene, p. 174.

30. Donald R. Kelley, Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 19. Kelley provides the following definition: "[B]y philology, a term which received wide currency in the sixteenth century, I mean the scholarly aspect of the studia humanitatis as they apply to scholarship and custom." (pp. 19-20).

31. Jerrald R. Seigel, Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Wisdom and Eloquence, Petrarch to Valla (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 5.

32. Robert Cumming, Human Nature and History (2 vols; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), I, p. 265.

33. Ibid., p. 267.

34. With regard to Vico's desire to found a true science see Ernan McMullan, "Vico's Theory of Science," in Vico and Contemporary Thought, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney and Donald Phillip Verene, Part I, pp. 60-90. For another point of view see in the same volume Leon Pompa, "Human Nature and the Concept of a Human Science," Part I, pp. 44-55.

35. Giambattista Vico, On the Study Methods of Our Time, translated by Elio Gianturco (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 22. For a definition of the term ratio studiorum see Ernan McMullan, "Vico's Theory of Science," p. 65, note 18. He says, "As the phrase was used in Vico's time, the ratio studiorum of a college could mean simply its curriculum, i.e., the division of studies actually proposed to its students. Or it could mean the educational theory underlying the curriculum. More often, perhaps, it was used to cover both of these. The phrase is still in use at

Jesuit colleges today as a convenient way of referring to 'curriculum and its theory.'"

36. Giambattista Vico, Study Methods, p. 23.

37. Ibid., p. 24.

38. Ibid.

39. For a detailed explanation of both of these concepts see the following articles: Ernesto Grassi, "Marxism, Humanism and the Problem of Imagination in Vico's Works," in Vico's Science of Humanity, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene, pp. 275-294. In the same volume see Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals," pp. 295-317. See also Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's Philosophy of Imagination," in Vico and Contemporary Thought, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney and Donald Phillip Verene, Part I, pp. 20-36. In the same volume see Ernesto Grassi, "The Priority of Common Sense and Imagination: Vico's Philosophical Relevance Today," Part I, pp. 163-185.

40. Giambattista Vico, Study Methods, p. 33.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid, p. 41.

43. Giambattista Vico, De antiquissima Italorum sapientia, in Opere, a cura di Fausto Nicolini (Milano: Ricciardi Editore, 1953), p. 248. The large literature on Vico and the verum/factum principle includes the following: In An International Symposium, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden White see: Yvon Belaval, "Vico and Anti-Cartesianism," pp. 77-91; Isaiah Berlin, "A Note on Vico's Concept of Knowledge," pp. 371-377; and Max H. Fisch, "Vico and Pragmatism," pp. 401-424. For a full length monograph on the problem see Rodolfo Mondolfo, Il "Verum-Factum" Prima di Vico (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1969).

44. Giambattista Vico, De antiquissima, in Opere, p. 248.

45. Ibid., p. 267.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 254.

48. Ibid., p. 258. In a discussion of the technical distinction which Vico makes between coscienza and scienza, Leon Pompa argues that the essential difference in the

two terms is "between two kinds of knowledge. In one we understand something because we have a full causal explanation of it, so that in knowing it is true we know why it is true (scienza). In the other we have certainty but we lack any causal knowledge." (Study of the New Science, p. 81).

49. Sir Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 20.

50. Ibid., p. 21.

51. Giambattista Vico, De antiquissima, in Opere, p. 292.

52. Ibid., p. 294.

53. Ibid., p. 295.

54. Ibid., p. 303.

55. Ibid., p. 302.

56. Ibid., p. 303.

57. Vincent Bevilacqua, "Vico, 'Process,' and the Nature of Rhetorical Investigation: An Epistemological Perspective," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 7 (1974), 170.

58. Ibid.

59. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [331], p. 96.

60. Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, p. 166.

61. For an excellent treatment of Vico's relationship to Bodin see Mario D'Addio, "Il Problema della Politica in Bodin e Vico," Rivista di Studi Salernitani, 2 (1969), 3-100.

62. On the possible influence of Machiavelli on Vico and certain parallels in their political ideas see two works by Fausto Nicolini: "Di alcuni Rapporti Ideali tra il Vico e il Hobbes con qualche Riferimento al Machiavelli," English Miscellany, 1 (1950), 43-70; and the many references to Machiavelli in Commentario Storico

63. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Discourses, ed. by Bernard Crick (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 98.

64. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [34], p. 21.

65. Ibid., [347], pp. 102-104.

66. Ibid., [122], p. 60.

67. Ibid., [123], p. 60.

68. Vico himself never uses the word "primitive," although it seems clear that this what he had in mind.

69. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [338], p. 100.

70. A more detailed explanation of Vico's concept of divine providence will be taken up in the next chapter. For an excellent analysis of the concept, as well as of the diverging interpretations of it, see Leon Pompa, Vico, Chapter Five.

CHAPTER IV

THE APPLICATION OF VICO'S METHOD: HIS THEORY OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Rationalism and Seventeenth Century Political Thought

Before considering Vico's specific objections to his predecessors' views of human nature and civil society, it is important to understand the extent to which seventeenth century political ideas had been influenced by both the Cartesian and Galilean revolutions in thought. Since geometry was understood to be the scientific method par excellence, the problem of understanding man required that the examination of human activity proceed according to the geometric method. The thrust of Vico's criticism is to point out that when the primarily rationalist philosophical assumptions underlying the seventeenth century view of man and society are carefully analyzed, they would in fact be shown to lack application in the world of human affairs.

Virtually every political philosopher of the seventeenth century--Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf, Spinoza--had, to some extent, attempted to systematically explain the nature of the political and social world. Despite the fact that their individual conclusions about the nature of that world differ in many significant ways, they tend to share a

common set of general assumptions, the most important of which identifies scientific objectivity as the ultimate end of human reason. Simply put, from the point of view of political theorists, the great philosophical achievement of both Galileo and Descartes was to have successfully demonstrated that human reason was, in and of itself, fully capable of making sense of the world once certain fundamental mathematical principles were understood and applied. The seventeenth century political theorists believed that "[b]y intellect alone, without appeal to superhuman authority and without relying upon nonrational and nonsensory faculties, man had created a rationally intelligible cosmos without mystery and occult qualities."[1] The geometric method appeared to be an incontestible example of the ability of the mind to create, demonstrate, and understand a set of assumptions, theorems and axioms that met all of the criteria of truth. The truths of geometry were not dependent upon the power of revelation or transcendence but were made available to man as a result of the mind's capacity to generate them according to the logic of deductive reasoning.

The adoption of the geometric paradigm necessiated a new conception of the universe and man's place in it. Essentially, the Galilean revolution challenged and ultimately overturned the prevailing Aristotelian view of the cosmos which had been teleological in nature. Thomas Spragens describes the implications of this shift

in the perception of the universe from a teleological to a geometric view as follows:

> The geometrization of the cosmos in the seventeenth century transformed the view of what was objective, eliminating the tension of existence in favor of a static view of existence...The world of existence was no longer a realm of growth, but a world in which one spatial configuration was just as fulfilled or unfulfilled as any other spatial configuration. Developmental concepts therefore had no objective grounding.[2]

Whereas the Aristotelian view had stressed the need to regard each thing in terms of its telos, or its potential to become what it was meant to be, the Galilean view regarded each thing as already given, as a fact, not as a potentiality. In this view of the world,

> an objective description of something need not be contextual at all. Strictly speaking, the context is quite irrelevant to the nature of the thing, in contrast to the earlier view that the context was literally definitive of anything's nature. Time, in a world of pure spatiality, exists only as an abstraction. It became in Hobbes's illuminating term, a "phantasm."[3]

Clearly, when this conception of the cosmos is applied to the world of civil society, the result is that categories like time and growth cease to be regarded as necessary for an adequate description of man and his political and social institutions.

Freed from any contextual strictures, the political theorists of the seventeenth century used the logical deductive method to arrive at a set of first principles about man and civil society. Rigorous analysis came to replace idealization, subjectivity and prescription. This approach

to the phenomena of the social and political world had the liberating effect of making reason itself, which was regarded as objective in the sense of being without prejudice rather than some mysterious force, the sole interpreter of reality. Given the objective, i.e., unprejudiced character of reason, it became possible to realistically appraise human nature, and from that appraisal to logically deduce the kinds of political and social arrangements best suited to man. The task of formulating an objective description of human nature required the invention of a hypothetical condition for man in which he was completely free of any particular historical context. Thus, the seventeenth century political theorists embarked upon the discovery of the origins of civil society in order to render an accurate picture of human nature. These origins were of consequence only insofar as they were the logical prerequisite to establishing the first principles of the social and political order.

The state of nature was the concept used by the seventeenth century political theorists for the purpose of returning man to his hypothetical original surroundings. Although the specific details of the original condition in which man found himself differ from one theorist to the next, there are certain underlying premises common to all descriptions of the state of nature. First, it is conceived as a pre-political condition, a time prior to the establishment of formal social and political arrangements.

As such, the state of nature was regarded as a condition in which there was always the potential for uncertainty, insecurity, and even chaos. Second, understood to be a logical rather than a chronological concept, the state of nature does not correspond to any verifiable historical moment. Nonetheless, despite the absence of an actual historical context, the state of nature is regarded as a stage prior to man's communal existence, however rudimentary a form that existence might take, and communal living itself is viewed as occurring on a continuum which extends from the state of nature into the seventeenth century and the future. Finally, the seventeenth century political theorists shared the belief that by postulating a time prior to formal social and political organization, they could come to know what man was like in his natural condition. This "natural" condition was identified with man's "true" nature--"true" in the sense of being free of any of the characteristics and qualities that man takes on only after entering society. Understood in this way, the state of nature concept served a dual purpose: first, it created a pristine setting (an imaginary laboratory) in which to deduce the nature of man; second, it provided a hypothetical pre-political state against which civil society could be measured and evaluated. In other words, the seventeenth century political theorists believed that stripped of all social conventions, the real, true "original" man could be

described. And, on the basis of that description it would be possible to deduce the kind of social and political order that would correspond to man "as he really was."

Clearly, the particular conclusions about human nature that follow from placing man in his original setting vary from theorist to theorist according to the description of the state of nature actually given. Even though these differences are of enormous importance, two unstated central assumptions seem to be held in common. First, for all of the seventeenth century political theorists the individual man is taken to be the unit of analysis. They were concerned with understanding how each individual, rather than the community as a whole, operated in the world, and their considerations about how and why social and political arrangements arose began with an explanation of the forces that motivated solitary individuals to join together. The analysis of human nature centered on the problem of motivation rather than on the problem of good and evil, and the picture of man that emerged was often more psychological than it was moral. Second, these theorists believed that human nature as such remains constant over time. The continuity in human experience that makes the state of nature a useful concept is due, at least in part, to the belief that human nature, understood as the set of basic characterists, tendencies and attributes which constitute the human essence, is not subject to change. From

this point of view, whatever qualities define the essence of man in his original condition are adequate to describe all succeeding generations of men. The human race is at all times taken to be essentially the same and it is precisely this fixed concept of human nature that permits the analysis of the origins of human institutions to be carried out. However much the character of human interaction may have changed as a consequence of men leaving the state of nature and moving to civil society, their essential attributes are not understood to have also undergone a corresponding series of changes. Therefore, any differences in human behavior that are detected in civil society, but which did not exist in the state of nature, are attributed to the effectiveness of the newly created social and political institutions rather than to fundamental changes in man himself. In this way, human nature is juxtaposed to, and set apart from, the flux of events that constitute social and political life, and the relationship between human nature and change remains unexamined. In general, the seventeenth century political theorists found the solitary individual in the state of nature to be motivated by the same two countervailing tendencies that had been used by philosophers to characterize man since the time of the Greeks: reason and the passions. The individual in the state of nature was viewed as a creature driven, often dominated by his passions (in varying degrees, depending upon the theorist), but saved from destruction by his extra-

ordinary rational faculties. This analysis is distinguished from that of classical political theorists like Plato or Aristotle by two ideas. First, the seventeenth century theorists argued that all men have equal access to the faculty of reason and all are therefore potentially responsible for the creation of political order. Second, the seventeenth century theorists also claimed that self-interest served as the critical factor mediating between reason and the passions.[4] Whereas Plato and Aristotle ultimately placed their faith in the capacity of those men who truly possessed reason to take the appropriate actions to achieve good ends for the entire community, the seventeenth century theorists were at once more egalitarian and more skeptical: although they believed that all men were essentially rational, they recognized that men were not motivated to act by reason alone. Only through the intervention of self-interest could reason be effectively realized. Reason was the faculty that allowed men to rise above the brutes and control passion or instinct, but self-interest provided the source of motivation to do so. Thus, in the state of nature, men, by means of reason, could analyze their situation, recognize its advantages and disadvantages, and then act accordingly. When they examined life in the state of nature, they found that because men were self-centered and egotistical, the individual encountered insecurity, danger, even violence, on a regular basis.

Clearly, such a condition is not in the individual's self-interest, which is identified with security, order and safety. So, self-interest informs reason of this fact, guiding men in their decision to exchange their apparent freedom in the state of nature for the more precious safety provided by civil society. Reason and self-interest combine to permit men both to figure their way out of a disadvantageous and unpleasant situation and to join together by means of agreements to form legitimate social and political arrangements. The entire process is rational, logical and legalistic. Furthermore, the same qualities characterize human beings both in and out of the state of nature.

The social contract, the concept which the seventeenth century theorists invented to understand the nature of transition from the state of nature to civil society, underscores their perception that men have always possessed a well-developed rational faculty. Clearly, the social contract, or series of contracts, that men are understood to have made in order to secure safety and order for themselves arises out of a highly complex set of agreements: the freedom and rights possessed by the individual in the state of nature are surrendered in exchange for the protection and security afforded by the creation of society and government. And, the adoption of the social contract as the linchpin in the development of civil society gives further evidence of the extent to which the Cartesian-Galilean metaphysic had been absorbed by the political thinkers of the seventeenth cen-

tury. As Ernst Cassirer has explained, the desire to rationalize and objectify the social and political world was achieved:

> [By reducing] the legal and social order to free individual acts, to a voluntary contractual submission, all mystery is gone... [By tracing] the state to such an origin, it becomes a perfectly clear and understandable fact.[5]

Only a conception which had completely dismissed all historical contexts could trace the origin of formal communal life to a hypothetical legal agreement. The result is that civil society acquires a legal (rather than moral) grounding which has the advantage of achieving universal validity. Discovering a legal basis for civil society means that theorists can disregard the unverifiable, particular evidence upon which historical explanation depends. The state itself is treated as a self-evident phenomenon, existing independent of any historical or theological considerations. And, not only does this idea of the social contract satisfy the metaphysical requirement of universal validity, but it provides a binding means by which men are able to bring the passions under the control of reason. As the freedom and rights surrendered in the creation of civil society are exchanged for safety, security and protection, self-interest achieves a legitimate status. The seventeenth century contribution to the reason-passion controversy was to insist that only by recognizing the legitimate claims of self-interest could the danger and chaos endemic to the state of nature be effectively eliminated. Much like

Machiavelli before them, the seventeenth century theorists demonstrated that the destructive passions were an essential component of human nature that could not be erased. Their solution to the problem was to create a situation in which destructive human desires were willingly given up or subdued for the purpose of achieving the greater end of security and self-preservation.

Given the abundance of political, social, economic and religious crises which confronted political theorists of the seventeenth century, it is not surprising that they sought to find a permanent solution to the problems of chaos and instability. If they could establish the grounds for the legitimate exercise of power and define the obligations to be assumed by the subject or citizen, they would then possess the theoretical ammunition to put an end to the various upheavals surrounding them. Thus, while their methodology demanded objectivity and logical deduction, the raison d'être for the application of the metaphysic to the social order was the (subjective) search for stability and legitimacy. As has been pointed out, one consequence of linking the underlying search for political stability and legitimacy to an identification of reason with logical analysis is that once the legitimate political and social institutions have been determined outside of an historical context, the problem of change ceases to be regarded as a fundamental force shaping political reality. What exists

is taken to be fact, past and future disappear, and the scope of political and social relationships is narrowed to a series of causes, effects and results.

Imagination and the Structure of Reality

Vico's discovery of the poetic character of the first men caused him to challenge the seventeenth century political theorists' conceptions of both human nature and civil society. One important implication of his assertion that the first men "were poets who spoke in poetic characters" is that they must have been significantly different from modern men who are not characterized by this poetic nature. To argue that there are meaningful differences between the first men and modern man is to suggest that the idea of human nature itself can no longer be regarded as descriptive of a set of a set of permanent, essential characteristics, attributable to all men at all times. Vico's point is that man changes, and an adequate theory of human nature must be able to account for both the kinds of changes man undergoes and the reasons why the changes occur. Moreover, by claiming that his discovery of the poetic mind is the key to rendering an accurate idea of human nature, he makes the analysis of mind itself the foundation of his study of man. In other words, before either human nature or civil society can be described, it is first necessary to explain how and why the human mind undergoes change.

As he turns to the problems of identifying the various forms of thought which have shaped the human mind, Vico

stresses in particular the original faculty of mind, imagination. For Vico, the faculty of imagination is of special importance because it is "original" in two senses: On the one hand imagination is the faculty which characterizes the mind of the first men, the founders of civil society. On the other hand, the faculty of imagination is original in the sense of being the most basic activity of mind and that which persists to some degree in all men. Vico's analysis of the poetic mind convinced him that it was the faculty of imagination that permitted the first men "to create things according to their own ideas."[6] It was the faculty of imagination which, in accordance with his creative theory of knowledge, enabled the founders of the human race to create and therefore know their own world. In the New Science, as in the De antiquissima, Vico distinguishes this human creative power from that of God, arguing that "God, in his purest intelligence, knows things, and by knowing them, creates them; but [the first men] in their robust ignorance, did it by virtue of a wholly corporeal imagination."[7] According to Vico, the first men were "entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by the passions and buried in the body."[8] Lacking any power of ratiocination, they knew nothing except what they experienced through their senses. Consequently, Vico claims that the most basic task which these primitive men faced--men who were barely distinguishable from the beasts--was to make sense of their world by means of their sense experience and imagination.

In effect, Vico's point is that the world does not simply present itself in a complete and inalterable form to man. Instead--and this is perhaps Vico's most radical claim--he argues that the primary activity of human beings is to structure reality for themselves. Clearly, this idea presents a dramatic challenge to the rationalist tradition which he inherited. One of the most fundamental assumptions of rationalist epistemology was that the structure of the world could be known to man because reality was a given. Reality could be known if man applied his reasoning powers to discovering its eternal laws. Neither the Cartesians nor the natural law theorists envisioned a role for man in the structuring of reality. So, Vico shifts the focus of the epistemological question in such a way that it merges with the ontological question: He moves from the problem of understanding the nature of reality to the problem of understanding man's role in the structuring of reality.

Vico approaches the problem of how human beings structure their world within the context of his theory of imagination. According to Vico, the faculty of imagination functions on two levels in the mind of man and therefore must be analyzed in two ways. First, imagination is the original, creative faculty that set men on a human course, enabling them to structure and make sense of their world. So, the faculty of imagination must be examined in terms of

this original creative activity of mind, which requires an analysis of the minds of the first men, the poets whose thoughts consisted of "certain imaginative genera."[9] What will thereby be established is the "time when men began to think humanly."[10] Second, because Vico believes that imagination is still present in modern man, albeit in a less powerful form, he argues that it is possible for modern man to recover this creative mode of thought, and in so doing, gain access to his past. It is Vico's contention that despite the fact that modern man is "detached from the senses,"[11] he nonetheless retains the capacity to activate his former modes of sensory experience. Because modern man is able to "descend from these refined and human natures,"[12] and so recover past modes of the mind's activity, he can actually reconstruct, re-create and so come to know his own past, his history. The second level of analysis of the faculty of imagination therefore becomes the return to the origins of human thought, which for Vico means the point at which man began to structure his world. Donald Phillip Verene argues that the process of recollecting and re-creating the past which Vico describes is one

> in which the origin is approached as if it were present to the senses. The grasping of this origin involves the mind attempting to enter into the original exercise of its powers.[13]

Once this original mode of the mind's activity has been grasped, man's history can be known.

On both levels, then, it is the faculty of imagi-

nation, rather than of reason, that allows man to undertake the journey into his origins and to know his history. And, the search for origins is not merely a logical procedure designed to locate a hypothetical starting point for an imaginary state of nature, but is the first step in understanding the meaning of all of human experience. In effect, Vico's claim is that human thought is intrinsically historical, that by its very nature it both changes over time and has the capacity to comprehend the meaning of the changes it undergoes. And since the human mind is the locus of all change, his study of man centers on the stages of development through which the mind has passed. Vico refers to this development as the "ideal, eternal history of the human race,"[14] a history which begins at the point when man began to think humanly and extends on infinitely into the present and future.

Although Vico believes that the human mind, in its effort to structure reality, continually undergoes change, he argues that the change itself submits to certain patterns or developmental stages which are common to the history of the entire human race. It is for this reason that he says that his science documents "an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, development, maturity, decline, and fall."[15] In the New Science he identifies three general historical periods, each of which is dominated by a different mode of human thought, but which is descriptive of an entire range of human cul-

tural experiences which Vico refers to as civil society. Therefore, when he says that "men make the world of civil society," he means that they structure reality by means of bringing into being all of the necessary components of human cultural life. These include language, religion and law as well as all of the specific social and political institutions that come about at any given time.

Vico believes that each of these facets of human experience cannot be studied as independent phenomena, but must instead be understood as the related and interdependent components of man's creation of his world. According to Vico, political and social institutions are neither given phenomena that simply exist in the world, nor do they come about as a result of rationally devised plans and arrangements. Rather, he argues that these institutions come into being as a consequence of man's creative power to forge "the human necessities or utilities of social life"[17] under the guidance and direction of divine providence. So, each age must be regarded as a whole, as a complete set of complex relationships, and each component of those relationships which make up cultural life at any particular time must be examined within the context of the combined forces of the human capacity to structure reality and the work of divine providence. A detailed explanation of these three ages and the differences between them will be taken up in the next chapter. But in order to understand Vico's concept of human nature, it is necessary to provide a general description of

the three modes of thought which he believes dominate each of the three ages.

Imagination, Language and Consciousness

Vico's theory of imagination and the origins of human thought is directly related to his theory of language. According to Vico, the only way in which man can express his thoughts is by means of some sort of language. He regards language as the creative expression of mind, in the sense that in the act of inventing words, men assign names to things and in so doing create meanings for themselves. It is in the act of inventing words that they therefore begin to structure their world. The actual assigning of names to things is accomplished by human speech, a record of which exists since the time when the first men collected their words in fables and myths. Insofar as these compilations of words are the records of the ways in which the first men gave structure and meaning to their world, they must be understood as the first concrete repositories of human history. In effect, Vico makes two rather innovative claims. First, he asserts that the history of the first men was recorded in an unconscious and unwitting way. History came about simultaneously with the invention of language itself. Second, he suggests that because man uses language to structure his world, an analysis of the changes which language itself has undergone must be made before the history of all subsequent periods can be comprehended. Consequently, his study of the changes in the modes of human thought must begin with an

analysis of the ancient fables and myths, which were expressed in the language of imagination. Vico's science proclaims both the original mythical nature of human thought as well as the historical validity of myth.[18]

Having established that myths are the "true and trustworthy histories of the ancient peoples,"[19] Vico concludes, contrary to traditional views, that poetry must have preceded prose because poetry issues from inagination, which is the earliest form of human thought. When Vico says that the first men "were poets who spoke in poetic characters," he means that their thoughts consisted of "certain imaginative genera (images for the most part of animate substances, of gods or heroes, formed by their imagination) to which they reduced all the species or all the particulars appertaining to each genus."[20] In other words, the first men "attributed senses and passions...to bodies, and to bodies as vast as the sky, sea and earth."[21] The attribution of human passions and senses to the outside world is originally expressed in figurative language which Vico calls tropes.[22] In his view, what is accomplished in the act of creating these figures of speech is that a relationship is established between man and the world around him which did not formerly exist. Thus, as man creates the first figures of speech, he simultaneously begins to structure, understand and become aware of his world, and it is for this reason that he says that man makes and knows his world. Essentially, in the moment of creating a figure of speech, man makes the unknown in-

telligible by attributing to it characteristics known and felt by the self. Vico says that "...when [man] does not understand he makes things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them."[23] Ignorant and fearful, but endowed with a powerful imagination, man "made himself and entire world."[24]

It is clear that for Vico the fundamental level on which the human mind is to be understood is on the level of its capacity to become aware, understand and so give meaning to the world it encounters. Although Vico does not use the word, which became an important concept in the nineteenth century, what in fact he has described is the origin of human consciousness. In his view, the original process by which consciousness arose can be grasped by analyzing tropological figures of speech because they are the valid record of man's struggle to make sense of the vast unknown world in which he originally found himself.[25]

Vico identifies four basic figures of speech--metaphor, synechdoche, metonymy and irony--and claims that each represents a particular way in which the mind mediates between the sensations of the body and the outside world. Each trope is more complex than the one it follows, and one trope is transformed into the next gradually, in a process governed by what Vico calls "poetic logic" which "considers things in all the forms by which they may be signified."[26] The essence of the rather technical series of transformations

which Vico describes is that the tropes are initially wholly concrete--as in the case of attributing human powers to the sea or sky--and only slowly do they become more abstract and reflective. Notwithstanding the technical differences between the four types of tropes which he identifies, Vico tends to refer to "metaphor" as the general category of primitive thought which is creative, inventive and concrete and which is the language of the ancient fables and myths.

Accordingly, the ancient myths and fables are not merely the first histories of the first men, but are the first concrete, experiential records of primitive man as he struggled to make sense of his world and thereby achieve consciousness. Viewed in this way, the history of man <u>is</u> the history of the struggle by which man gradually became aware of his surroundings and gained a greater capacity to make sense of the unknown. In effect, human history is the record of man continually apprehending a greater part of his world as ignorance gives way to consciousness. For Vico, transformations in language are not simply analogous to other changes in human experience at any given time, but as the unmediated expression of consciousness, are the most fundamental.[27]

Vico describes three forms of speech that arise in each of the three ages. In the first age, speech took the form of "a divine mental language" which was communicated by

"mute religious acts or divine ceremonies."[28] It was a language not "in accord with the nature of things it dealt with...but a fantastic speech making use of physical substances endowed with life."[29] The speech of the second age, the age of the heroes, was characterized by "heroic emblems, or similitudes, comparisons, images, metaphors, and natural descriptions..."[30] It was essentially a symbolic language, consisting of imaginative universals, but differing from the divine language of the first men in that it made use of more abstract ideas to put the phenomena of the world in relation to each other. Finally, in the third age, there developed vulgar or articulate speech, "composed of words"[31] and "suitable for expressing the needs of common everyday life in communication from a distance."[32] In summarizing the differences between these three types of languages, Vico says that "the language of the gods was almost entirely mute, only very slightly articulate; the language of the heroes, an equal mixture of articulate and mute,...the language of men, almost entirely articulate and only very slightly mute."[33] The significance of these differences in language in each of the three periods is that each corresponds to a difference in the structure of thought itself. In the age of the gods, the mind expressed itself by means of imaginative universals; in the age of the heroes, the imaginative universals gradually gave way to more "intelligible genera"; and, finally, in the age of man, thought became rational and reflective.[34] This process develops as follows: "Men at

first feel without perceiving, then they perceive with a troubled and agitated spirit, finally they reflect with a clear mind."[35]

The purpose of Vico's description of these three forms of language and modes of thought, each of which arises in its own period, is to identify the general progression and development of the human mind. However, in making the distinction between an earlier, middle and later stage of development, Vico does not claim that any one stage is more natural than any other. On the contrary, his implicit point is that because all three modes of language and thought are potentially present in man, even in primordial man, all are equally natural to man. The idea that man develops different mental faculties over time does not, for Vico, necessitate the view that man must therefore have "lost" or surrendered his natural capacities in order to achieve a new level of development. Consequently, there is no state of nature for Vico. Whereas the political theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries identified the state of nature with man in his truly natural condition for the purpose of contrasting the disadvantages of that state with the advantages of civil society, Vico dissolves the dichotomy that pits natural man against his civilized counterpart.

Vico rejects the notion that any one time in the history of the human race was any more "natural" than any other: human experience was not genuine, essential and true in one historical epoch and less so at a later time. None

of Vico's "ages" corresponds to the state of nature because Vico does not believe that man's past can be understood in terms of an abrupt break that delivers the human race from an original, primitive condition into a more civilized mode of existence. Instead, Vico maintains that every moment in human history is equally natural and that only as a result of a gradual process does one stage of human experience give way to the next.

Common Sense and Divine Providence

One of the most important consequences of Vico's claim that human thought both originates in, and is subject to, a developmental process is that he constructs new categories for understanding human nature. His point is that only by focusing on the problem of human consciousness, rather than on psychological attributes and motivations, can the meaning of human nature be grasped. For Vico, what distinguishes man from all other species is the human capacity to make sense of and give meaning to the world. Man does not passively experience his world, but he actively and continually interprets it. Because the process of interpretation is developmental, man comes to be understood and defined by change.

The process of change that Vico describes, of which the whole human race is a part, is a collective one. Human experiences, in the most general sense, are not individual but collective: mind itself is structured in such a way that consciousness arises out of a shared struggle to inter-

pret the world. Language, a creative activity of mind, is the primary collective human experience that binds men together and permits them to share their own individual experiences. And, not only do men of the same social community share a similar language with which they mutually understand their world, but, according to Vico, the entire human race is united by what he calls "common sense." He defines "common sense" as "judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race."[36] Common sense accounts for the existence of "uniform ideas, originating among entire peoples unknown to each other."[37] Vico refers to these uniform ideas as "a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life."[38] These uniform ideas constitute the most general categories by which men interpret the world, regardless of any differences between the specific languages spoken in particular nations. For this reason, man's social nature is to be derived not from his behavior, i.e. his tendency to live in society, but more importantly, from the structure of mind itself. The content of the "common mental language" develops according to the way in which human beings actually experience the world at any given time, but the general uniformity of the fundamental categories of interpretation is consistent for the entire human race. In other words, the concepts which men collectively create in order to structure reality can arise only at a particular

time and as a result of a particular set of social experiences. Therefore, when Vico says that his science "is a history of human ideas,"[39] he means that the concepts by which men interpret the world conform to a discernible pattern of development.

Finally, although Vico believes that the creative power of mind permits men to make their own history, he maintains that the course which history takes is governed by divine providence. Thus, the possibilities for human action are not infinite but restricted by the various interventions divine providence makes in human history. Vico therefore rejects the idea that human beings can--scientifically or otherwise--completely control their own destinies. To some extent, human activity is always subject to a force over which it has no control--and of which man is often completely unaware. In his view, human nature is incomprehensible outside of the relationship which he believes exists between man and divine providence. He says,

> Our new Science must therefore be a demonstration, so to speak, of what providence has wrought in history, for it must be a history of the institutions by which, without human discernment or counsel, and often against the designs of men, providence has ordered this city of the human race.[40]

The significance of Vico's insistence that human nature cannot be understood apart from the intervention of divine providence in human affairs is twofold. First, by giving divine providence a central role in the unfolding of human history, Vico again denies that reason is the decisive

force in the creation of civil society. In fact, in this context he defines divine providence as the application "to providence the term divinity [i.e., the power of divining], from divinari, to divine, which is to understand what is hidden from men--the future--or what is hidden in them, their consciousness."[41] Vico means that men, at the moment that they create the institutions of civil society, are never fully aware of the consequences of their actions because, limited by their immediate circumstances, they do not possess the capacity to know how their actions will affect events in the future. Furthermore, consciousness itself remains "hidden in them" until the moment when they act to create institutions. In Vico's view, consciousness comes into being at the same moment when men act to structure their world so that activity always precedes the formation of ideas.

Another consequence of acknowledging the role of divine providence in human affairs is that the prevailing psychological theories, which are based on a notion of rational, self-interested man, must be reformulated. Vico concurs with at least some of his predecessors in characterizing primordial man as an egocentric creature, driven by his passions. But, whereas his predecessors also endowed this self-interested creature with the power of reason, Vico does not. He describes him as being "all robust sense and vast imagination...[having] only the bare potentiality, and that torpid and stupid, of using human reason."[42] He

also says that in their original condition the first men

> are under the tyranny of self-love, which compels them to make private utility their chief guide. Seeking everything useful for themselves and nothing for their companions, they cannot bring their passions under control."[43]

Accordingly, since men in this condition lack a rational faculty, it is erroneous to suppose that they are embroiled in a psychological struggle in which passion is opposed by reason: quite simply, reason has not yet come into existence. Therefore, there must be another explanation for the means by which men have brought the passions under control. It is Vico's belief that if man functioned totally independently in the world, egotism would prevent him from ever achieving any sort of order, and that it is only by the intervention of divine providence in human history that human needs are satisfied. The social and political institutions that men create to satisfy their needs come about not as the product of rationally deduced individual choices and decisions. Instead, divine providence intervenes in human affairs so that as civil society is created, private self-interest gives way to a genuine communal experience. Vico says,

> ...God, has so ordained and disposed human institutions that, men, having fallen from complete justice by original sin, and while intending almost always to do something quite different and quite contrary--so that for private utility they would live alone like beasts--have been led by the same utility and along the aforesaid different contrary paths to live like men in justice and to keep themselves in society and thus to observe their social nature.[44]

In this way, man's social potential, which is rooted in the structure of mind itself, is actualized through the workings of divine providence.

Thus, both because of the poetic nature of the minds of the first men and because of the role divine providence plays in human history, Vico rejects the seventeenth and eighteenth century idea of the social contract. Clearly, men who lacked a well-developed capacity for reason could not have entered into the complex legal agreements that are needed to form a social contract. Vico, of course recognized that the seventeenth century theorists did not intend to suggest that an actual contract had ever been made, and it is not for this reason that he criticizes the social contract doctrine. Instead, he objects to the extent to which social contract theory had accounted for human activity in abstract rather than concrete terms. Only by pointing out the absurdity of making men who were devoid of reasoning powers enter into complicated legal agreements could a measure of reality be restored to the origin of human political activity. Moreover, to claim that men acted in an independent way and were solely responsible for the creation of civil society was to deny a proper role for divine providence.

On the basis of these conclusions, Vico argues that the problem of understanding the origin and development of man's social and political life requires more than a logical exercise that postulates certain human tendencies and then deduces a theory of institutions from them. Rather, Vico

maintains that what is needed is a dynamic explanation of all the factors that constitute the concrete evidence of man's activity in the world, and that those factors must be analyzed in terms of the capacity of the human mind to structure reality under the guidance of divine providence.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1. Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960), p. 245.

2. Thomas Spragens, The Dilemma of Contemporary Political Theory (New York: Dunnell Publishing Co., 1973), p. 29.
According to Ernst Cassirer, "The heliocentric system deprived man of his privileged condition. He became, as it were, an exile in an infinite universe." (The Myth of the State, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946], p. 169).

3. Thomas Spragens, The Dilemma of Contemporary Political Theory, p. 29.

4. For an interesting analysis of the relationship between the passions and self-interest, see Albert O. Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). Of the transformation in the relationship between reason, passion and self-interest in the seventeenth century, he says that traditionally two categories had been used by political theorists to explain human motivation, reason and the passions. He believes that it was

> against the background of this traditional dichotomy that the emergence of a third category in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century can be understood. Once passion was deemed destructive and reason ineffectual, the view that human action could be exhaustively described by attribution to either one or the other meant an exceedingly somber outlook for humanity. A message of hope was therefore conveyed by the wedging of interest in between the two traditional categories of human motivation. Interest was seen to partake in effect of the better nature of each, as the passion of self-love upgraded and contained by reason, and as reason given direction and force by that passion. The resulting hybrid form of human action was considered exempt from both the destructiveness of passion and the ineffectuality of reason. (pp. 43-44).

5. Ernst Cassirer also says, "The doctrine of the state contract becomes in the seventeenth century a self-evident axiom of political thought." (Myth of the State, pp. 173-174).

6. Giambattista Vico, New Science, translated by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), [376], p. 117.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., [378], p. 118.

9. Ibid., [34], p. 22.

10. Ibid., [338], p. 100.

11. Ibid., [378], p. 118.

12. Ibid., [338], p. 100.

13. Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals," in Vico and Contemporary Thought, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney and Donald Phillip Verene (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980), Part I, p. 26.

14. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [349], p. 104.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., [31], p. 20.

17. Ibid., [342], p. 102.

18. Hayden White says that "it is not enough to read these myths and fables as if they were simple allegories, for poetic logic has, by virtue of the original metaphorical nature of its contents, its own inner dynamic or...dialectic, so that the relationship between language and the world of things is not simply reflexive." (The Tropics of Discourse, [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978], p. 204).

19. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [7], p. 6.

20. Ibid., [34], p. 22.

21. Ibid., [402], p. 128.

22. For a detailed discussion of Vico's use of tropes, see Hayden White, The Tropics of Discourse, Chapter 6.

23. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [405], p. 130.

24. Ibid.

25. Hayden White says, "The theory of metaphorical transformations serves as the model for a theory of the auto-transformation of human consciousness in history." The Tropics of Discourse, p. 205.

26. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [400], p. 127.

27. For a comparison of Vico and Marx on consciousness, see Hayden White, The Tropics of Discourse, Chapter 6.

28. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [929], p. 340.

29. Ibid., [401], pp. 127-128.

30. Ibid., [32], p. 20.

31. Ibid., [934], p. 341.

32. Ibid., [439], p. 145.

33. Ibid., [446], p. 149.

34. Ibid., [933-935], p. 341.

35. Ibid., [218], p. 75.

36. Ibid., [142], p. 63.

37. Ibid., [144], p. 63.

38. Ibid., [161], p. 67.

39. Ibid., [347], p. 104.

40. Ibid., [342], p. 102.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., [6], p. 5.

43. Ibid., [341], p. 101.

44. Ibid., [2], pp. 3-4.

CHAPTER V

THE IDEAL, ETERNAL HISTORY: VICO'S THEORY OF THE ORIGIN, GROWTH AND DECLINE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Vico's Concept of Civil Society

The relationship between Vico's concept of mind and his ideas about the nature of political and social reality is direct but complex. His discovery of the origins of language permitted him to analyze the evidence of the mind's activity which others had ignored, so that early Greek poems and Roman law became essential sources of information for him. He regards these sources as the repositories of the original evidence concerning man's past, and it is for this reason that he says that the Roman Law of the Twelve Tables is to be read as a "serious poem" and the early Greek poems of Homer are the "civil histories" of the first people of Greece. This evidence, which his predecssors had deemed unreliable or useless, or had neglected entirely, becomes the foundation of his new theory of civil society, the focal point of which is the development of human consciousness. When Vico refers to the actual political and social institutions which give civil society its structure at any particular time, he regards them as concrete expressions of the collective human mind as it seeks to apprehend the

world it encounters. He believes that these institutions develop gradually over time but that they are part of an entire cultural experience. When he describes the growth and development of political and social institutions, he always accounts for analogous modes of development in all areas of human activity.

The New Science, which narrates the transformations that civil society has undergone, "sifts" the evidence of man's past so that the laws which guide the history of the human race can be set forth. Vico argues that the laws which he derives from the particular evidence of the early Greeks and Romans are not limited to those two specific nations, but, rather, are applicable to the history of all nations throughout time. In accordance with his epistemological premise that truth must always simultaneously explain the particular and the universal, Vico says that his New Science is both a particular history of the early Greeks and Romans as well as a narration of the stages through which all of civil society has passed in conformity with the laws of history. Not only are the laws that regulate man's "ideal, eternal history" universal, but the transformations which civil society undergoes are in all cases identical. So, the "ideal, eternal history" is descriptive of the development of each particular nation and of all the nations of the human race. Vico continually shifts back and forth between these two different histories, one individual, the other universal, but he always refers

back to the evidence derived form concrete experience to validate both.

Essentially what underlies Vico's attempt to universalize the Roman historical experience is his notion of jurisprudence. Already in the De nostri studiorium he argued that the Roman definition of jurisprudence corresponded to the Greek word for wisdom: "the knowledge of things divine and human."[1] He points out that in Rome the philosophers were jurists, and so were in a "better position than the Greeks to master the art of government and justice, not by talking about it, but by direct experience in public affairs."[2] In the New Science he refers to jurisprudence as "legal wisdom."[3] It is Vico's belief that by studying the laws of a particular nation, the history of that nation will come life. Moreover, Vico's idea of studying the laws of a nation means that the factors contributing to the formation of those laws will also be explained. By stressing that laws evolve out of concrete human experience, Vico refutes the idea of an abstract, natural law and demonstrates that laws arise as solutions to the concrete problems of human public life. Jurisprudence, in Vico's sense, becomes a universal science of human action and historical change.

Although Vico himself never makes the distinctions, it is clear that his concept of civil society (mondo civile) refers to at least four different, but related ideas. First, civil society refers to all of human culture,

the history of the human race. As was discussed above, it is Vico's belief that "common sense" unites all of mankind in one community which shares a fundamental set of concepts, ideas, customs and beliefs (a common mental language), and which passes through all of the stages of the "ideal, eternal history" as a whole. In this sense, civil society appears to be identical with human history itself. It is interesting to note, however, that Vico says that what men know is civil society, rather than history. History comes into being as such only in retrospect as the faculty of fantasia enables men to reflect upon the meaning of human experience. Civil society is the most basic structure in all of human history because it is the constant framework for organizing human collective experience. History records the changes in civil society, but some form of civil society is always present.

Second, Vico uses the term civil society to describe the total cultural experience of all of the individual nations which have come into existence and which individually pass through the stages of human history. Each nation creates its own distinctive cultural whole, the essential features of which are everywhere the same at any given phase of development. It is at this level that Vico demonstrates what all nations have in common and to what laws of history they all submit.

Third, by civil society Vico means the actual political and social institutions that appear at any given time, at any phase of development, within any particular nation.

In this sense of the word he describes specific forms of government as well as institutions like the family, religion and legal systems. This meaning is similar to the idea of civil society discussed by the natural law and contract theorists. But, whereas they understood civil society to be fixed, Vico argues that it continually undergoes a series of changes, as do all of the institutions which comprise it.

Finally, when Vico speaks of civil society he also means the ricorsi through which all nations pass. He maintains that just as all nations pass through an initial set of stages, the ages of the gods, heroes and men, each individual nation itself passes through more than one experience of each phase. In other words, human experience occurs in cycles of growth, development and decline. The idea of viewing human history in terms of cycles is as old as the Greeks, and both Plato and Aristotle believed that political institutions in general, and that forms of government in particular, were subject to an explicit developmental pattern. However, Vico does not adopt the traditional idea of historical cycles which described the circular way in which history was prone to repeat itself. Instead, Vico believes that historical cycles represent a repetition of specific modes of human experience, but that the cycles are spiral rather than circular. The history of any nation or of all nations consists in the repetition of mode, form and structure, not of actual substance.

In the tradition of political philosophy, the notion of an historical cycle, to which Polybius, Cicero and Machiavelli all refer, derives from Plato's explanation of the seven-fold decline of the state in Book Eight of the Republic. As distinct from the three later thinkers who had in mind Roman constitutional developments, Plato had no intention of providing a description of an actual or true historical progression, but was concerned instead with demonstrating the relationship between the decline of the soul (a psychological phenomenon) and the decline of the state (a political phenomenon). The transformation from one political form to the next was not meant to be historically accurate but was intended to establish a principle of constitutional classification based upon psychological criteria. In his Histories Polybius adapts the Platonic scheme, expressing his desire to make the description of the decline of the Roman constituion correspond to the actual historical evidence. He believes that if history can meet the criterion of truth it can serve the pedagogical end of guiding statesmen in their actions. As Robert Cumming has remarked, for Polybius "[s]ince history is cyclical, its study is training for both the ups and downs of a political career."[4] Cicero, who knew both Plato and Polybius, also identifies a cycle of Roman constitutional development in his De republica. Although he was not primarily concerned with the problem of historical accuracy, he did argue that history provides moral examples for the statesman. At the beginning of the

Discourses Machiavelli also returns to Polybius' idea of the historical cycle seeking both to account for the greatness of Rome and to make its constitutional development a basis for future political action. Despite their many differences, the views of Polybius, Cicero and Machiavelli on the nature of historical cycles share two central ideas in common. First, there is a belief that an understanding of the cyclical development of the Roman constitution will afford the statesman insight into the causes of political stability and decline, and that this insight can guide his own political actions. The Roman constitution and the changes it undergoes is regarded as universal in character. Second, the cycle itself takes the form of decline and degeneration. The decline occurs on a continuum, but the hope of regeneration and the beginning of a new cycle is always present.

For Polybius, the constitutional cycle operates like a machine, and the regeneration arises out of one of the forms of constitution itself, primitive monarchy, which appears at both the beginning and end of the cycle. In contrast to this position, both Cicero and Machiavelli argue that the cycle can be acted upon by an outside moral force--the great leader, statesman or lawmaker. This idea is clearly expressed in Cicero's reference to the "great statesman" who must "pilot the state..., direct its course, and keep it under control"[5] as well as in Machiavelli's concept of the great leader, possessed of *virtù*

and able to harness fortuna. All three ideas of the historical cycle provide a means of regenerating and restoring a fallen political order.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, Vico also insists on the indispensibility of historical knowledge, but his goal is not the political education of rulers or leaders. For Vico, the significance of history is that it is the foundation of all human knowledge. His concept of historical cycles differs from those of Polybius, Cicero and Machiavelli in several important ways. First, Vico does not view the process of cyclical change as one of degeneration or decline. Because he claims that political change comes about only at a given time, as a result of a specific set of social, economic and cultural conditions, Vico's theory does not include an "ideal" form against which all others are measured.[6] Second, although Vico clearly recognizes the role played by divine providence in human affairs, he does not believe that change can be brought about by the intervention of a leader or statesman. Vico's focus is not on constitutional transformations per se, nor on the role of any particular individual in generating them, but on the changes in collective consciousness which underlie all change. And, what Vico comes to describe is a progressive rather than a regressive series of cyclical changes. Each cycle occurs on a higher plane than the one which preceded it, and even within a given cycle, change is understood to be developmental. As will be discussed

below, despite Vico's belief that each cycle includes a phase of "barbarism," the transformations in culture are developmental but not "progressive" in the enlightenment sense of the word.

In the course of explaining the transformations in civil society and the actual political and social institutions that arise, Vico employs political terminology and descriptions of governmental forms to distinguish between them. One of the essential relationships he examines is that between groups of individuals who dominate in society and those who do not, those whose actions are of special significance in determining what kinds of transformations in institutions actually come about. This, too, is a mode of analysis that has its roots in the classical political theories of Plato and Aristotle who identified decline in the state with a change in the character of the men who ruled. Vico explains the transitions from one age to the next by referring to the changes in the relationships among the dominant groups in society. These changes are expressed in the forms of government that successively arise. The analysis of the dominant relationships within any given age is further broken down into the analysis of property ownership and the way in which the ownership of property determines who makes, and who is protected by, the law. According to Vico, those individuals who determine and therefore become the beneficiaries of the law become rulers by virtue of their dominance over those who have no

property. Since the propertyless members of the community are excluded from the law-making process, they have no choice but to be ruled. As will be shown below, Vico regards this entire process as a struggle between groups of individuals over the right to property and the legitimization of that right in the law. In his view, which to some extent parallels that of Rousseau in the Second Discourse, property is the means by which inequality, and, ultimately, domination and servitude, are institutionalized in the law. But, just as he believes that the cycles of history are developmental, he also believes that the concrete struggles over access to the law occur in stages. In accordance with his conception of three ages and three types of government which depict universal human development, he also posits three kinds of struggles that occur at specific times in human history. As the struggles are resolved, one age gives way to the next and a higher level of development in civil society is achieved. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the three ages of man, of the actual struggles among men that occur within each, and of the ricorsi of human history.

The Origin of Civil Society: The Age of the Gods

According to Vico, the "first men must have been without the power of ratiocination...all robust sense and vigorous imagination."[7] Initially, these men, or "giants", as Vico calls them, wandered the earth in a solitary fashion much like the beasts. He postulates that what

caused them to leave this condition of primordial, semi-bestial existence was the appearance of a thunderbolt in the sky which frightened them. Not knowing what the thunderbolt was, they attributed fantastic powers to the sky itself and called it "Jove," thereby creating both God and religion.[8] It is this creation of God and religion that Vico views as the first moment in human history, for it is at this point that men embark on the path that leads them away from their bestial beginnings and slowly into the world of man. The act is truly creative because men did not merely recognize that God existed, but in a moment of collective apprehension, they literally brought him into being by assigning him the name "Jove." This is the beginning of human history because it is the first act of collective consciousness. Out of their shared sense of fear of the unknown sound of thunder and sight of a lightning bolt, they attributed to the sky powers of control over themselves. In this way, they established the first relationship between themselves and the world around them.

These first men, who thus structured the world by means of their robust imaginations, created an idea of God which made them "God-fearing and was the source of their poetic morality."[9] Prior to this point, men lacked the capacity "to hold in check motions of the body"[10] which made them unable to control their bestial tendencies. In other words, only by reacting to their fear and creating Jove did the first men gain a measure of control over

their actions, and the control itself is the prerequisite to civilized living and morality. So, Vico concludes that "among all the peoples the civil world began with religion."[11] And, "poetic morality began with piety which is the mother of all moral, economic and civil virtues."[12]

The first concrete manifestation of this newly acquired "poetic morality" was the development of the feeling of shame. Human copulation, which prior to this point had occurred randomly and in the open, as with the animals, came to be practiced in private: "So it came about that each of the giants would drag one woman into his cave and would keep her there in perpetual company for the rest of their lives. Thus the act of human love was performed under cover, in hiding, that is to say, in shame."[13] In this way the first permanent human unions came about by accident--the accident of the first men interpreting the lightning bolt in the sky to be a powerful God, who in turn became the source of their morality. Vico regards the creation of religion as the first human institution and marriage the second.[14] The essence of the institution of marriage is that it required women "to enter the houses of the men they married" to form a union that was to last for life.[15] He says that "[i]n this guise marriage was introduced which is a chaste carnal union consummated under the fear of divinity."[16] The primary significance of this union is that it takes men out of their feral, solitary wandering, and, through marriage, places them in a permanent relationship that otherwise would not have existed.

What distinguishes Vico's view from that of other political theorists who also associate man's sociability with the establishment of the family is that he understands the movement from the feral state to a situation of permanent unions to be the consequence of a decidedly creative human act. Given their nature in the earliest times, men related to their world by sense experience and not by means of reason. Thus, what permitted the first men to exercise their free will and control their actions was not, as some would have it, their fear of each other. Instead, divine providence intervened in human affairs in such a way that they instilled a fear of God in themselves: "Thus, it was fear which created gods in the world; not fear awakened in men by other men, but fear awakened by men in themselves."[17] Furthermore, because "they gave up the bestial custom of wandering...and habituated themselves to the quite contrary custom of remaining settled and hidden for a long period in their field,"[18] they unintentionally subordinated desire and instinct to a set of inner controls. His point is that human history is replete with examples of the unintended consequences of human action, two of the most important of which, the creation of religion and marriage, occurred at the outset of human collective experience.

On the basis of this description, Vico believes that he establishes that the primordial stage was neither an age of innocence nor of war, but was instead characterized

by a superstition that kept the first men savage, proud and cruel. Given this constitution, any relationships of power that developed could not be attributed to the well-reasoned arguments or the esoteric wisdom of a select few. Vico claims that some men gained power over others because they were believed to be able to understand the language of the gods. He calls these individuals the first "theological poets."[19] The community thought that these men were "divine" because they could interpret the signs of the gods, by which it was believed Jove commanded.[20] The ability of these few individuals to render intelligible events which to the rest of the community were frightening and incomprehensible caused them to become concretely identified with the gods. More specifically, they were believed to speak the language of the gods. This removed them from the ranks of ordinary men, catapulting them to the level of gods themselves who were actually endowed with "divine authority."[21]

As these "theological poets" came to acquire "divine authority," they also achieved a form of power over the other members of the community. Since they were thought to be the exclusive interpreters of the gods, who constantly acted in the world of human affairs, of necessity the rest of the community relied on the theological poets to both explain the unknown and guide its activity. At this earliest stage, the gods were not perceived as abstract entities, but were real, concrete physical forces--as real

as the sensations primordial man felt in his own body. So, according to Vico, the first human power relationships in the world grew out of the beliefs, primitive as they were, that one group of people held to be true of another. The "diviners" were assumed to have an authoritative capacity and power based upon the possession of the ability to interpret the unknown in a way that others could not. According to Vico, this power of interpretation creates authority because it literally defines reality. The consciousness of the whole group is given a shape as these first interpreters attempt to make sense of the unknown actions of the gods. Vico identifies this original form of authority as the "authority of property ownership in virtue of which those from whom we derive title to property were called auctores..."[22]

In other words, Vico suggests that the acquisition of material things is derived from the power to construct reality: those who make sense of unknown things are able to take possession of them. Vico contends that the theological poets, who were able to interpret the signs of the gods, did not distinguish between the auspices of Jove and their own desires and interests, and "whatever these men saw, imagined, or even made or did themselves, they believed to be Jove."[23] The first laws, which were divine in the sense of being thought to issue directly from the gods, were therefore nothing more than the claim by the theological poets that because they possessed the

exclusive power to interpret the gods, because they possessed their language, they also could take possession of the auspices which were the first institutions of civil society. Accordingly, the very first class division among men is established when a distinction is made between those members of the community who possess the language and the auspices of the gods and those who do not. Vico says:

> We must begin our treatment of law...at the most ancient point of all times, at the moment when the idea of Jove was born in the minds of the founders of nations...Law...was originally the science of Jove's auspices, which were the divine institutions by which the nation regulated all human institutions...[24]

In effect, Vico argues that in this earliest stage the power of one group of individuals over another originates in the capacity of one group to gain exclusive access to the language, institutions, and, finally, the laws of the gods so that those individuals are virtually indistinguishable from the gods. Those who are able to do so are then believed to possess wisdom (in the earliest age called "poetic wisdom") which the other members of the community lack. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Vico sought to demonstrate that the kind of wisdom that existed at the dawn of the human race was not that of the philosophers, developed and rational, but that of primitive sensual men who were barely able to make sense of the world around them. But, primitive as this wisdom must have been, Vico concludes that those who were thought to possess it achieved a special status in society.

The power of these "theocratic poets" increased when they formalized their authority over the other members of society by becoming the fathers of the first families. Vico theorizes that once men ceased to copulate in the open, the also ceased to wander. As they moved into the caves for privacy and protection and married, families came into being. Since they no longer wandered and developed permanent attachments to their families, they also began to bury their dead, and by the graves of their dead "the giants showed their dominion over their land."[25] So, in Vico's view, at the same time that the institutions of religion and marriage arose, so too arose the institution of burying the dead. This institution established both "the universal belief in the immortality of human souls,"[26] and property boundaries as such. When men buried their dead, they became attached to the land, believed it to be their own, and guarded it against the invasions of others. According to Vico, land ownership does not originate in either a God-given right or as a consequence of a struggle, but, rather, as the result of a custom rooted in religion. The first fathers acquired authority over their families and over their land because of the human necessity of burying the dead.

Vico claims that the power exercised by these first fathers was often severe and harsh because "in passing from the bestial to human times the first fathers retained...much of the cruelty of the original state."[27]

However, their cruelty did not inspire the opposition of the other members of society because their wisdom was thought to be divine. So, any decisions they made regarding other members of the community were also believed to be divine, in the sense of coming directly from the gods. Vico says that "as there were no civil authorities ruling by law, the family fathers complained to the gods of the wrongs done them...and called the gods to bear witness to the justice of their causes..."[28] Within the context of the families the exercise of power was equated with the dispensing of justice. Punishments that were meted out, often in the most cruel fashion, were based upon solutions believed to be transmitted to the first fathers by the gods themselves. This first form of justice issued from "simple and rude people in the belief that they were heard by the gods."[29] This application of legal wisdom Vico calls "divine jurisprudence"[30] or the "interpretation of the divine laws declared by the auspices."[31]

Men in this condition were in every way informed by a belief in and a fear of the gods, who were taken to be real, active agents in the world, capable of directly intervening in the lives of men. In order to emphasize his belief that these gods were not abstractions in any sense, primarily because the first men thought only in specific, concrete concepts, Vico says that "they imagined that all institutions were gods."[32] By this he means that in the age of the gods everything which was incomprehensible and felt to be external to man was assumed to have greater

than human power and so elevated to a greater than human status. But, even though these first men willingly subjugated themselves to a vast array of gods, it was only by doing so that they could initiate the passing "from their bestial liberty into human society."[33] While men are in no way fully human at this point (in Vico's sense of the word), they have nonetheless begun to abandon their cruel, fierce natures. All of the developments described above occur in the age of the gods, and the first step in what later becomes "human" society, the formation of families, likewise also occurs in this age. However, the prevailing institutions at this time are "divine administrations" which do not correspond to the requirements of the three formal types of governments that come into being only at a later point, in human times. So, according to Vico, in the age of the gods there exist the following: a form of civil society, relationships of political power, and a system of justice. What has yet to be created is a formal governmental structure.

Essentially, Vico describes a typology within a typology: He explains the development of civil society in terms of three distinct ages, each of which has its own unique characteristics. And, in his discussion of the actual exercise of power and of the administration of law, he also refers to three specific forms of government, aristocracy, democracy and monarchy. But, each form of government does not correspond directly to one particular

stage in the development of civil society. All three ages are dominated by specific relationships of power, but true governments as such appear only in the last two ages. Without defining it as such, Vico clearly distinguishes between relationships of political power and formal governmental structures. In effect, his age of the gods is like the seventeenth century idea of the state of nature only insofar as it depicts a time prior to the formation of actual governments.[34] The basic difference between his and the seventeenth century view is that Vico finds in the power relationships of primordial man a prototype of government, albeit one that is far from being fully developed. For Vico, the crucial step is that men collectively acknowledge and accept the original power relationships and regard them as legitimate. Only after men have achieved a more abstract level of consciousness does that legitimacy acquire a formal legal status and do governmental institutions as such come into being.[35] In Vico's view, civil society is brought about as a result of a number of gradual transitions, corresponding to changes in consciousness, rather than as a result of one definitive and abrupt break with the past.

The Age of the Heroes

As the age of the gods gives way to the age of the heroes, "human" society comes into being. Vico explains that although "the first comers into human society were driven thereto by religion and by the natural instinct to

propagate the human race,"[36] this original group did not include all of the individuals living at the time. Some men "continued the infamous promiscuity of things and of woman,"[37] and conflicts arose among them. Eventually, "at the end of a long period of time...Grotius's simpletons and Pufendorf's abandoned men had recourse to the altars of the strong to save themselves from Hobbes's violent men..."[38] Vico's point is that only some of the first men were actually members of the first families which were governed by divine authority. There remained outside of the first primitive communities individuals who practiced neither matrimony nor religion and who continued to wander the earth. These individuals were of two kinds: men who were simple and weak and those who were violent and strong. Vico claims that ultimately these two kinds of men came into conflict with one another and the strong overpowered the weak. In order to save themselves, the weak sought refuge with the family fathers who "slew the violent who had violated their lands, and took under their protection the miserable creatures who had fled from them."[39] Vico calls these men who were forced to seek protection with the family fathers "the second comers."[40] They are to be distinguished from the first comers "since they came out of a necessity of saving their lives... and so gave a beginning to society in a proper sense with a view principally to utility..."[41]

Vico maintains that the second comers were, in effect, refugees, who "were received by the heroes under the just

law of protection, by which they sustained their natural lives under the obligation of serving the heroes as day laborers."[42] In return for the protection of the heroes (the family fathers), the second comers became slaves and thereby established the first real society as well as the first economic class relationships. The first human society was therefore based upon the existence of an economic relationship between the heroes on the one hand and the refugees, whom Vico calls famuli on the other.[43] When discussing the famuli in the context of their economic relationships with the heroes, Vico refers to them as clientes, signifying vassals or fiefs found in all ancient nations.[44] Given the nature of this economic relationship, he concludes that "[m]en come naturally to the feudal system."[45] Vico also refers to the second comers as socii or "companions associated for mutual advantage,"[46] who later became "the plebs of the heroic cities."[47] In characterizing the relationship between the famuli and the heroes, Vico admits that while there is some element of mutual advantage at the outset, "one cannot conceive an association more restricted from the side of those having abundance of goods nor more necessary for those who need them."[48]

These first human societies composed of socii and heroes Vico calls asylums.[49] Furthermore, the same utilitarian relationship which brought about the formation of the asylums became the basis for the subsequent creation

of the first cities" which received strangers and permitted them to "live secure from violence in them."[50] Although there were in fact two classes in the first cities, the heroes or nobles and the socii (in Roman times called plebs), initially only the nobles were citizens. The heroes were the priests of the heroic cities since they alone had command of the sacred institutions. Because the plebs were not allowed to command the sacred institutions, they were denied the benefits of citizenship.[51] Since the heroes had only recently emerged from their crude origins,

> by a certain nature of theirs, which they believed to be of divine origin, were led to say that the gods belonged to them, and consequently that the auspices of the gods were theirs also. By means of the auspices they kept within their own order all the public and private institutions of the heroic cities. To the plebs, whom they believed to be men without gods and hence without auspices, they conceded only the uses of natural liberty.[52]

So long as they were able to retain the exclusive right to the auspices and the public and private institutions, the nobles were able to prevent the plebs from acquiring any substantive power. The refugees or socii obtained protection of only their natural liberty (i.e. their right to survival), not their civil liberty when they made their appeal to the noble fathers.

Vico maintains that the founding of Rome supports his hypothesis. He says:

> In an asylum opened in a clearing, Romulus founded Rome on the clienteles, or protectorships, under which the fathers of families kept as day laborers in the fields those who had fled to this asylum. These refugees had no privilege of citizenship and thus no share of civil liberty.

> Since they had taken refuge with the fathers to save their lives, the fathers protected their liberty by setting them separately to the cultivation of their several fields.[53]

In Rome the withholding of civil liberties from the plebs was perpetuated because when the noble fathers died, the "famuli continued to live in a servile state."[54] Vico surmises that after a long period of time the famuli must have begun to feel oppressed, and that eventually they "must have revolted against the heroes."[55] In effect, the famuli imposed an emergency situation on the heroes, causing them to "unite themselves in orders so as to resist the multitudes of rebellious famuli."[56] So, it was this act of the noble fathers uniting together to oppose the revolt of the famuli that gave rise to the first aristocratic commonwealths or heroic kingdoms. Prior to the joint effort, the noble fathers had ruled independently and did not have any need to become united. Since each father was the head of his own family, there existed a true equality among them. When they did unite to put down the revolt of the famuli, "no one of them naturally would yield to another" and so "there sprang up of themselves the reigning senates, made up of so many family kings."[57] According to Vico, this entire process was guided by divine providence so that the noble fathers found that "without human discernment or counsel, they had united their private interests in a common interest..."[58] However, Vico insists that this common interest grew out of clear political necessity and in no way came about as the result of conscious,

rational agreements as the natural law and contract theorists would have it.

The first actual governments in the world were therefore aristocratic rather than monarchical (as Vico says political philosophers had previously supposed) because they were composed of groups of fathers, each of whom possessed his own independent domain of power and interest. These noble fathers did not enter into any formal agreements or contracts, but were forced to join together in order to survive the onslaught of the famuli. Likewise, the plebs themselves had united against the noble fathers only as a consequence of their felt need to lessen their oppressive condition. Each group or class shared a common perception or consciousness of the world which caused it to unite and take action. According to Vico, none of this activity was inspired by philosophical or rational discourse. And, even when the noble fathers decided to chose a leader, they did so out of necessity. The leader was a man who was "fiercer than all the rest and with greater presence of spirit."[59] These leaders were called "reges," kings, from regere, which properly means to sustain or direct."[60] It is for this reason that Vico says that aristocracy precedes monarchy as a form of government: only when the noble fathers had already united in aristocratic commonwealths did they chose a leader for themselves.

Clearly, the nobles were victorious in this first encounter with the famuli: "Privileged sovereign powers

remained intact in the hands of the family fathers as they had in the previous state of nature" and "the commonwealths were aristocratic so long as the fathers preserved the authority of ownership within the reigning orders..."[61] The first commonwealths in the proper sense arose then virtually simultaneously with the founding of the first cities. For Vico, cities as such come to be only in the age of the heroes, and their establishment signifies a first step in the development of truly human institutions. The cities themselves do not constitute a particular form of government, but, rather, they are the prerequisite for the eventual creation of the first formal political structure, the aristocratic commonwealth.

It is interesting to note that even in the move from the age of the gods where divine administration prevailed, the catalyst for the transition was a struggle among men, the result of which was an alteration in the social, economic, and political relationships among them. The initial struggle involved the simpletons and the violent men. It was then extended to the fathers who intervened, killed the violent, and entered into a relationship of protection with the simpletons, who became the famuli, and eventually the plebs. Once that relationship became increasingly formalized with the foundation of the cities, the seeds for the next struggle, that between the nobles and the plebs, were sown. While the first struggle was fought among men who were only a few steps removed from the bestial level and who, consequently, were much closer to the emotion of

pure fear, the second struggle was fought among men who were decidedly more human, and who were therefore far more capable of acting with intent and an awareness of the consequences of their actions. In this second struggle, the contradictory aims of each of the two groups became apparent and two antagonistic "eternal principles" emerged: "(1) That the plebs always want to change the form of government, as in fact, it is always they who change it, and (2) that the nobles always want to keep it the way it is."[62]

In effect, Vico has articulated a clear notion of the class struggle. On one level this maxim is reminiscent of Machiavelli's analysis of the relationship between the nobles and the plebs in Roman history which states that "...in every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them."[63] On another level, however, insofar as Vico claims that he has identified "two contrary <u>eternal</u> properties emerging from the nature of human civil institutions",[64] he believes that he has discovered a principle not merely limited to the struggle in Rome, but one that is true for all nations. Wherever there are grounds for conflict among two such groups, each of which is motivated by its own interests, the struggles they engage in will continue to shape the nature of civil institutions.

Vico believes that this first class struggle had several concrete results. First, once the fathers were united, they felt compelled "to satisfy these famuli and reduce them to obedience" by conceding to them "a sort of rustic fief."[65] In effect, the plebs served the nobles as impressed vassals who "fought at their own expense in war."[66] A second result of this struggle was that the sovereign power of the fathers themselves was "subjugated to the sovereign civil authority of the ruling orders..."[67] In other words, once the fathers united, they too became subject to a set of laws which applied to their own class. In order to remain united, they accepted restrictions which did not exist prior to their uniting. The significance of the ceding of a rustic fief or the distribution of some property rights to the plebs is that it became the foundation of all subsequent property rights. Vico calls the ceding of the rustic fiefs "the first agrarian law of the world."[68] This law distinguished three types of ownership "attached to three classes of persons: bonitary, to the plebs; quiritary, maintained by arms and consequently noble; and eminent, to the order itself, which is the Seigniory, or sovereign power, in aristocratic commonwealths."[69] The nature of the bonitary ownership permitted the plebs to work on the fields that belonged to the noble fathers. They also had to pay the census tax imposed on them and serve the nobles in war at their own expense. And, when the plebs could not meet the demands of the noble

fathers, "they were confined for life in private prisons to make them pay off their debts by work and toil."[70] Furthermore, the noble fathers "tyranically beat them...as if they were the most abject of slaves."[71] Although they gained minimal property rights, the plebs remained essentially oppressed by the family fathers.

Vico continues to draw on the historical experience of the Romans, which he believes is the prototype of the experience of all nations, in order to explain how this initial struggle between the nobles and the plebs over property rights gave birth to another related conflict. In the next phase, the plebs demanded two additional rights that once belonged exclusively to the noble fathers: the right to quiritary ownership of the fields and the right to solemnized marriages. Once these rights were granted, a new form of government came about.

Vico argues that there was a continuation of the struggle between the plebs and the nobles over the ownership of landed property because the first agrarian law had granted the plebs only bonitary ownership of the fields. Consequently, the nobles were able to "take back the fields from the plebs after they had cultivated them."[72] In granting the plebs the right to cultivation but not to ownership of the fields, "the nobles did not keep faith with the plebs."[73] In response, the plebs created the plebeian tribunes, the purpose of which was "to protect for the people that degree of natural liberty represented

by bonitary ownership of the fields."[74] In other words, the plebs demanded that their property rights be given a legal foundation, and they insisted that the Law of the Twelve Tables be created. Vico refers to the Law of the Twelve Tables as the second agrarian law of the world by which "the nobles conceded to the plebs the quiritary ownership of the fields."[75] According to Vico, the Law of the Twelve Tables was the "first law to be inscribed on a public tablet,"[76] and which formally protected their natural liberty. He says that gradually "the tribunes of the plebs by performing the function for which they were created, that of protecting the natural liberty of the plebs, were...led to secure for them a whole range of civil liberty as well...And by steady steps, the tribunes also progressed in the power of making laws."[77] In this way, the plebs were eventually able to wrest power away from the nobles by acquiring a greater control over the making of the laws. More important, as they did so, the law itself moved from the private to the public realm.[78] Although the plebs were merely acting in their own self-interest in making their demands, the unintended result of their actions was that greater civil liberty was achieved for the whole community. And, as was the case with the first agrarian law, this was accomplished by removing the exclusive right to the law from the group in power, the nobles.

Vico also claims that although the plebs had achieved the quiritary ownership of the fields, "they saw that

they could not transmit the fields intestate to their kin, because they had no heirs...since their marriages were not solemnized."[79] Furthermore, "they could not even dispose of their fields by testament because they did not have the rights of citizens."[80] So, even though they had obtained the second agrarian law, "the lands returned them by this law soon returned to the nobles."[81] Therefore, as the inadequacies of their victories became clear, they demanded the right of legal marriages as well. Vico says that "in making this demand, they were in effect asking for Roman citizenship, whose natural principle was solemn nuptials..."[82] Prior to the plebs making this demand, only the nobles could take the auspices which were "a great source of all Roman law, public and private."[83] And, for the nobles, the consequences of allowing the plebs to take the auspices were great indeed. As the institution of marriage was extended by the noble fathers to the plebs, the plebs did achieve citizenship because "marriage is by the definition of the jurisconsulate Modestinus..., the sharing of every divine and human right (omnis divini et humani juris communiciatio), and this is nothing less than citizenship itself."[84] Eventually, the plebs demanded all of the other institutions of private law that depended upon the auspices. When this was accomplished "aristocratic liberty" was transformed into "popular liberty."[85] As a consequence of this transition, government itself becomes "human" and so begins the age of man.

The Age of Man

The specific characteristics of the popular commonwealths are not described in great detail by Vico. He stresses that in the move from the aristocratic to the democratic commonwealths, there is a tendency toward greater equality. Once, however, the popular commonwealths have been established, there is always the danger that the people "will attempt to surpass their equals" or "put themselves above the laws."[86] The result is that "anarchies, or unlimited popular commonwealths" come into being, led by tyrants. In the case of Rome, Vico makes the following observation:

> Since the doors to honors in the popular commonwealths are wide open by law to the greedy multitude which is in command, in times of peace nothing remains but to struggle for power, not by law but by arms, and the use of power to make laws with a view to increase wealth. Such were the agrarian laws of the Gracchi of Rome. The result is civil wars at home and unjust wars abroad at the same time.[87]

The central defect of the popular commonwealths, in Vico's view, is that "all look out for their own private interests," and the majority of the citizens no longer concern themselves with the public welfare."[88] Eventually they reach a point at which they have an "ignorance of politics as of something alien."[89] Vico says that this was the case in Rome under the dictator Philo because "the free peoples, for the sake of private utilities, let themselves be seduced by the powerful into subjecting their public liberty to the ambitions of the latter, then there arose

factions, seditions and civil wars, ruinous to their very nations."[90]

In general, then, Vico believes that the democratic commonwealths are relatively short lived and incapable of sustaining themselves. They are given to excesses which ultimately spell their downfall. Vico's commentary is certainly reminiscent of other political philosophers, most notably Plato, who tended to view democracy as the stepping stone to tyranny and as an inherently unstable form of government.[91] Vico, however, does not propose the actual existence of a tyrannical form of government in the transformation of constitutions as did both Plato and Aristotle. As Norberto Bobbio has pointed out, "...a true and proper theory of tyranny, as a degenerate form of monarchy, in the double sense of the illegal exercise of power and of the illegitimate seizure of power, is not found in Vico."[92] Tyranny is not a particular form of government, but merely a stage in the change from the unstable popular commonwealths to the next stage which Vico calls the monarchical form. Vico claims that in the case of Rome, the plebs, having created an anarchic situation, were "warned by the ills which they suffer, and casting about for a remedy, [sought] shelter under the monarchies."[93] Monarchies are thus created because there is a need to prevent the destruction of the nation which would otherwise result from the pursuit of private interests in the popular commonwealths. Vico says that under these circumstances "a

single man must arise, as Augustus did at Rome, and take all public concerns by the force of arms into his own hands, leaving his subjects free to look after their private affairs and after just so much public business, and of just such kinds, as the monarch may entrust them."[94] The monarchies arise because the people are no longer able to govern themselves. Divine providence again intervenes in the world of human affairs so that the people are saved "when they would otherwise rush to their own destruction."[95]

Vico regards this transition as a positive step and concludes that "...monarchy is the form of government best adapted to human nature when reason is fully developed."[96] He maintains that monarchies which arise in this way are free commonwealths in the sense of being popularly governed because "if a powerful man is to become a monarch the people must take his side,"[97] i.e. he must be supported by the people. The monarchs are able to create laws which "make all their subjects equal," and they also "humble the powerful and thus keep the masses safe and free from their oppressions."[98] Vico says that the monarchs also are able to keep the multitude satisfied and content as regards the necessities of life and the enjoyment of natural liberty; and finally by the privileges conceded by monarchs to entire classes (called privileges of liberty) or to particular persons by awarding extraordinary civil honors to men of exceptional merit.[99] Vico argues that the governments of the monarchs who are able to achieve these ends

are truly "human" because of "the equality of the intelligent nature which is the proper nature of man, all are accounted equal under the laws, in as much as all are born free in their cities."[100] Vico regards the monarchy as the final, most fully human form of government which arises only when human nature has developed to the point that man is "intelligent and hence modest, benign, and reasonable, recognizing for laws conscience, reason and duty."[101]

It is significant that for Vico the transformation from the degenerate popular democracy to monarchy is not conceived in terms of a struggle between opposing classes. Rather, he regards the monarchy which ensures popular liberty, and, more important, which achieves order and an extended rule of law, as offering a resolution to the struggles which have previously characterized the development of human institutions. In this sense, his solution is closer to those of the classical political philosophers, than it is to his immediate predecessors or to those who later also viewed human history as a struggle, but one which finds its resolution in the abolition of all classes, as in the case of Marx. On the other hand, the fact that his solution to the problem of struggle in history rests upon the idea that a larger purpose is served, i.e. that the plan of divine providence is worked out, suggests a fundamental point of correspondence between his theories and those of both Hegel and Marx.

The "Ricorsi" of the Nations

Although at this point Vico no longer describes history in terms of a class struggle, he nonetheless argues that history moves in a cyclical fashion. In the last section of Book IV, entitled "The Course Nations Run," he concludes that

> All we have had to say in this fourth book is so much evidence to prove that in the course of the entire lifetime of nations they follow this order through these three kinds of commonwealths or civil constitutions, and no more...They all have their roots in the first, which were the divine administrations, and from this beginning all nations...must proceed through this sequence of human institutions: first becoming commonwealths of optimate, later free popular commonwealths, and finally monarchies.[102]

While all nations must pass through these three definitive stages, each of which has its special characteristics, the actual "succession admits of natural mixtures not of form with form (for such mixtures would be monsters), but of a succeeding form with a preceding administration."[103] Because "when men change they retain for a time the impressions of their previous customs,"[104] no single form of government is entirely pure or unique. Vico proposes this concept of mixed governmental forms as against the more traditional view taken by political philosophers which elaborated a true theory of mixed constitutions. Machiavelli, Aristotle and Polybius all agreed that the best, i.e. the most stable, form of government was one which was able to combine features of several "pure" forms. Aristotle favored the "polity" which combined features of democracy and aristocracy; Machiavelli believed the best commonwealth was the

republic that combined elements of nobility and the popular masses. In both cases, the underlying assumption is that when the right combination of features occurs, then it is possible to create a balanced constitution--one which is able to satisfy the interests of different groups so as to minimize destructive conflict between them. Vico, on the other hand, believes that constitutions "compounded of these three by human design are more to be desired by heaven than ever to be attained by effort, and if by chance any such exist they are not enduring."[105]

Vico's opposition to the idea of mixed constitutions in their traditional sense derives from his examination of the process by which they develop. He has demonstrated that each form grows out of a set of concrete human struggles and conflicts that men enact but without the benefit of foresight. At least in this initial explanation of the origins of the various governmental forms, there is no place for the idea of men thinking about what is the best or most enduring form. The kinds of mixed constitutions neatly conceived by previous political philosophers simply could not have existed because any mixtures or combinations of forms that occurred were the result of the human tendency to retain previous customs rather than of any conscious effort to create a mixed type. Thus Vico was unable to accept Machiavelli's assertion that one of the causes of Rome's greatness and longevity was its mixed constitution--at least

to the extent that Machiavelli understood it to be consciously devised. In this instance, Vico regards Machiavelli as having committed the error of attributing a level of reasoning to the early Romans that they could not have possessed.

On the basis of all that he has explained, Vico comes to the conclusion that "all ancient Roman law was a serious poem" and that Roman jurisprudence originally drew its principles from the ancient fables.[106] It was not until the "coming of the human times of the popular commonwealths" that "the intellect was brought into play in the great assemblies, and universal legal concepts abstracted by the intellect were thenceforth said to have their being in the understanding of the law..."[107] This progression is important because it demonstrates that the "laws certainly came first and philosophies later"[108] and that the "principles of metaphysics, logic, and morals issued from the marketplace of Athens."[109] In this way Vico establishes that all philosophy ultimately derives from law and that a valid history of philosophy must therefore include the study of law, which in its initial form was a poem. All of this provides further evidence for Vico's contention that reason only develops in the age of man.

The "Barbarism of Reflection"

The description of this progression which ends in human times and the attainment of human reason is given an additional historical dimension when Vico asserts that the

course the nations take includes a series of "ricorsi." In other words, the gradual development that occurs as humanity passes through each of the three ages is undergone by all nations, independently, and each nation undergoes the series of transformations more than once. Vico says, "we have observed the marvelous correspondence between the first and the returned barbarian times"[110] and he devotes the last book of the New Science to a discussion of the second age of barbarism.

The essence of Vico's argument is that the period following the fall of Rome, the Middle Ages, represents the second age of barbarism because religion was lost and wars of conquest were begun. He describes the various parallels between the three ages in the first cycle and those of the second, explaining the process by which institutions "returned" again, thereby giving each age its characteristic form. His conclusion is that in his own time "a complete humanity seems to be spread abroad through all nations, for a few great monarchs rule over the world of peoples."[111] This is especially true of Christian Europe where religion has provided for "monarchies most human in their customs."[112] Vico argues that the ricorsi of the civil human institutions, both ancient and modern, confirm that what has been discussed in the New Science is "not the particular history in time of the laws and deeds of the Romans and of the Greeks, but (by virtue of the identity of the intelligible substance in the diversity of their modes of development) the ideal history of

the eternal laws which are instanced by the deeds of all nations in their rise, progress, maturity, decadence and dissolution..."[113] Thus, the ricorsi serve to validate the universality of the ideal, eternal history by demonstrating that the same series of transformations occur, even in the second cycle.

However, in his discussion of the "ricorsi" of the nations, Vico also suggests that there is a second possibility. As the popular commonwealths became corrupt, so did their philosophies which "descended to skepticism."[114] And, there "arose a false eloquence, ready to uphold either of the opposed sides of a case indifferently,"[115] as in the case of Rome. The result was that liberty turned into the "perfect tyranny of anarchy."[116] Vico argues in the conclusion of the New Science that under these conditions providence provides one of three possible solutions and that there is no automatic transformation of popular commonwealths into monarchies. He says that the first solution provided by providence requires the existence of "a man like Augustus" who is able to establish himself as the monarch and "by force of arms", can "take in hand all the institutions and the laws"[117] which have descended into chaos. Providence also provides that the monarch will stay within the bounds of law and satisfy the people, and in this way restore them their liberty. The second solution occurs if "providence does not find a remedy within",[118] , i.e. if the appropriate hero or monarch does not exist. In this case, because the people are already

so corrupted that they have "become naturally the slaves of their unrestrained passions...providence decrees...that they become subject to better nations, which having conquered them by arms, preserve them as subject provinces."[119] Thus, popular commonwealths that are corrupt and in the process of undergoing decay find a resolution to their problems when they are conquered. Finally, "if the peoples are rotting in that ultimate disease and cannot agree on a monarch from within, and are not conquered and preserved by better nations from without, then providence for their extreme ill has its remedy at hand."[120] At this point, when the other two remedies are unavailable, "providence decrees that, through obstinate factions and desperate civil wars, they shall turn their cities into forests and th forests into dens and lairs of men."[121] Thus, out of the tyranny of popular commonwealths emerges the second age of barbarism, the "barbarism of reflection."[122] In this period, "rust will consume the misbegotten subtleties of malicious wits that have turned them into beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the first men had been by the barbarism of sense."[123]

In fact, Vico characterizes this second "barbarism of reflection" in a much more negative way than he does the first period of barbarism. The basic difference between the two "barbarisms" is that in the first age of barbarism men "displayed a generous savagery" whereas men in the latter age displayed a "base savagery" insofar as they have

"reached a point of premeditated malice," made possible by the development of reason.[124] Although men descend to these depths, as they did in the middle ages, they are not condemned to them because "providence brings back among them the piety, faith and truth which are the natural foundation of justice as well as the graces and beauties of the eternal order of God."[125]

Whether or not a "barbarism of reflection" necessarily occurs in the life of each nation seems to be a question left unanswered by Vico. While on the one hand he repeatedly says that all nations pass through an identical series of ages of gods, heroes, and men, and that the three forms of government which inevitably arise are aristocracy, popular commonwealths and monarchies, he does not say that every nation has in fact undergone a period of decline. It may be that Vico does not mean for the ricorsi, including the age of the barbarism of reflection, to apply to any single nation, but rather to the history of all nations understood as a whole. In several places, Vico says that he will describe at the same time the ideal, eternal history of each nation and of all nations: there are two patterns which develop in a parallel way but which are nonetheless distinct. What holds true for the development of each distinct nation also holds true for the entire history of all nations. And it is for this reason that Vico repeats, even at the end of the New Science, that he has narrated the "rise, progress, maturity, decadence, and dissolution" of

all nations.[126] However, it is only in the last book that Vico specifically adds the word "decadence."

At the root of Vico's theory of politics and society is the analysis of the types of human relationships that have existed among men and that have caused them to come into conflict with one another. He argues that these relationships grow out of the actual experiences men encounter in meeting the necessities of daily life. The relationships are not fixed, but change as men's needs change. Furthermore the relationships themselves depend upon the view that men have of themselves and others in the entire scheme of things. Power is held by those men who are able to convince others of their abilities to make sense of the world. But, they hold power over others only for as long as they retain the exclusive power of interpretation. Once that fundamental power is challenged, social relationships begin to change, and the institutions of civil society itself, including particular forms of government, are as a result altered.

The idea that changes in human relationships become the cause of changes in governmental forms or constitutions is an old one in the tradition of political philosophy. Vico's approach to this problem ties him to the classical past as much as it projects him beyond the theories of both his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. Insofar as he views the network of human relationships as the foundation of the political and social order, he echoes Plato

and Aristotle; but to the extent that he divorces his analysis from a discussion of the "best" kind of relationship among men and between men and the governments they create, he postulates a view of man and society which is not taken up again until the nineteenth century. In the next chapter, the significance of Vico's view will be considered.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1. Giambattista Vico, On the Study Methods of Our Time, trans. by Elio Gianturco (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 49.

2. Ibid.

3. Giambattista Vico, The New Science, trans. by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), [937], p. 343.

4. Robert Denoon Cumming, Human Nature and History (2 vols; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), I, p. 139. An interesting interpretation of Vico's notion of the historical cycle is made by Norberto Bobbio in "Vico e la Teoria della Forme di Governo," Bolletino di Centro di Studi Vichiani, 8 (1978), 5-27.

5. Cicero, On the Commonwealth (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), I. 29, 134.

6. Vico's explanation of the various forms of government does not include the notion of a "corrupt" form as was the case for Plato, Aristotle, Polybius and Cicero.

7. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [375], p. 116.

8. Ibid., [377], p. 117 and [379], p. 118.

9. Ibid., [502], p. 170. For the most part, when Vico uses the term "poetic" he means "primitive" in this context. See Fausto Nicolini, Commentario Storico alla Seconda "Scienza Nuova," (2 vols; Roma: Banco di Napoli, 1950), I, p. 493, note 4.

10. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [388], p. 122.

11. Ibid., [8], p. 7.

12. Ibid., [503], p. 170.

13. Ibid., [504], p. 171.

14. For a discussion of Vico's understanding of the term "institution" see Max Fisch's Introduction to the New Science, pp. xliii-xlv.

15. Ibid., [504], p. 171.

16. Ibid., [505], p. 171.

17. Ibid., [382], p. 120.

18. Ibid., [505], p. 171.

19. Ibid., [381], p. 119.

20. Ibid., [380], p. 119.

21. Ibid., [387], p. 121.

22. Ibid., [944], p. 345.

23. Ibid., [379], p. 118.

24. Ibid., [398], p. 125.

25. Ibid., [529], p. 184.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., [1005], p. 376.

28. Ibid., [955], p. 352.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., [938], p. 343.

31. Ibid., [448], p. 151.

32. Ibid., [956], p. 352.

33. Ibid., [554], p. 196.

34. As was pointed out in Chapter Four, there is some question as to whether or not Vico actually posits a true state of nature. Both Max Fisch and Norberto Bobbio claim that he does. See the Fisch Introduction to Giambattista Vico, Autobiography, trans. by Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin, Great Seal Books (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 49; and Norberto Bobbio, "Vico e Forme di Governo."

35. This view of the relationship between law and legitamacy is similar to that of Rousseau in the Second Discourse.

36. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [555], p. 196.

37. Ibid., [553], p. 195.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., [555], p. 196.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 197.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., [557], p. 198.

45. Ibid., [260], p. 81.

46. Ibid., [258], p. 81.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., [558], p. 198.

49. Ibid., [561], p. 200.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., [597], p. 218.

52. Ibid., [414], p. 133.

53. Ibid., [106], p. 53.

54. Ibid., [583], p. 210.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., [584], p. 210.

57. Ibid., p. 211.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., p. 210.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., [1005-1006], pp. 376-377.

62. Ibid., [609], p. 225.

63. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Discourses, ed. by Bernard Crick (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970), I. 4, p. 113.

64. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [609], p. 225.

65. Ibid., [264], p. 82.

66. Ibid., [618], p. 229.

67. Ibid., [264], p. 82.

68. Ibid., [265], p. 82.

69. Ibid., [266], p. 82.

70. Ibid., [272], p. 83.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., [109], p. 54.

73. Ibid., [108], p. 54.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid., [109], p. 54.

76. Ibid., [422], p. 135.

77. Ibid., [111], p. 55.

78. Max H. Fisch, "Vico on Roman Law," in Essays in Political Theory Presented to George H. Sabine, ed. by Milton R. Konwitz and Arthur E. Murphy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), p. 79.

79. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [110], p. 54.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., [598], p. 219.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., [110], p. 54.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., [111], p. 55.

86. Ibid., [292], p. 87.

87. Ibid., [288], p. 87.

88. Ibid., [1008], p. 378.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid., [1006], p. 377.

91. See the Republic, Chapters XXI, XXXII. Plato says, "How does despotism arise? That it comes out of democracy is fairly clear." (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 288.

92. Norberto Bobbio, "Vico e Forme di Governo," p. 17.

93. Giambattista Vico, New Science, [292], p. 87.

94. Ibid., [1008], p. 378.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., [927], p. 339.

101. Ibid., [918], p. 336.

102. Ibid., [1004], p. 376.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., [1037], p. 390.

107. Ibid., [1038], p. 390.

108. Ibid., [1040], p. 391.

109. Ibid., [1043], p. 392.

110. Ibid., [1046], p. 397.

111. Ibid., [1089], p. 412.

112. Ibid., [1092], p. 413.

113. Ibid., [1096], p. 415.

114. Ibid., [1102], p. 423.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid., [1104], p. 423.

118. Ibid., [1105], p. 423.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid., [1106], p. 423.

121. Ibid., p. 424.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid.

126. Ibid., [1096], p. 415.

CHAPTER VI

VICO AS A POLITICAL THEORIST

Vico and the Tradition of Political Philosophy

It can be argued that one of the dramatic achievements of Vico's New Science is that it calls into question the traditional subject matter of politics and radically alters the categories by which the political world is analyzed. In so doing Vico would seem to become part of the tradition of political philosophy. Yet, as was discussed in Chapter One, Vico's work has rarely been included in that tradition. Before Vico's contributions can be assessed some thought ought to be given to the meaning of the tradition of political philosophy since even political theorists themselves are not in agreement as to what constitutes the tradition, or if indeed such a tradition can be said to exist.[1] All of the dimensions of this controversy cannot be explored here, however, it is important to identify the concept of "tradition" which will underlie much of the discussion in this chapter.

The central problem of Vico's relationship to the tradition of political philosophy concerns the way in which the subject matter of that tradition has been defined. The failure of political theorists to acknowledge Vico as

a political theorist derives from the fact that much of the subject matter which he treats is not recognized as part of the tradition. One of the most subtle and comprehensive treatments of transformations in the subject matter of political philosophy appears in Robert Cumming's Human Nature and History.[2] Although Cumming deals primarily with the liberal tradition in political thought, he nonetheless makes several general observations which apply to the question of Vico's relationship to the tradition of political philosophy. Cumming, who believes in the first place that such a tradition exists, argues that it has its own history, a history of interpretation and reinterpretation. Individuals who address themselves to the subject matter of political philosophy do not do so in a vacuum: they speak to each other so that a dialogue is created between spokesmen of the past and present. To understand the ideas of political theorists requires that the process of dialogue, of interpretation and reinterpretation, be taken into account. He says, "The ideas composing a tradition are not simply related as an historical succession or accumulation of influences. A tradition by its very nature is something which has already been interpreted."[3] As political philosophers speak to one another, they transform the scope and content of the subject matter which is the object of their concern. Cumming maintains that the impetus to reinterpret the ideas of one's predecessors issues from the political theorist's desire to bring the methods of "other

studies" to bear on his own subject matter. Accordingly,

> the relations between the study of politics and 'other studies' cannot be pushed to one side as boundary relations; the extension and generalization of methods from 'other studies' is so inescapable that we can hardly identify a political philosophy simply as a treatment of political problems. Perhaps no other subject-matter worked over as long as that of political philosophy has yet remained so lacking in autonomy and so unstable. Any political philosophy is, implicitly at least, a relational structure... that determines what problems are eligible for treatment as political and how they are to be treated...[4]

Thus, not only does political philosophy incorporate into its own subject matter the methodologies of "other studies" on a continual basis, but it is precisely this process which ultimately defines what problems can be regarded as political.

For Cumming, the ongoing process of interpreting and redefining the subject matter of political philosophy is characterized by moments of "crisis and transition." These moments occur "when relations are dislocated which had previously sustained the selection and treatment of the set of problems composing the subject-matter of political theory."[5] Cumming does not mean to suggest that all political theorists write at periods of "crisis and transition," but that those who do, engage in a common task of "adjustment."

> Crises and transitions in the development of political thought can be analyzed as involving... adjustments in the relation between politics and 'other studies'...The 'method' a theorist applies 'to politics' never derives uniquely from the requirements of this subject, but has been 'extended and generalized' from its previous application to 'other studies.'[6]

The history of political thought is, therefore, a history of those adjustments. The function of the adjustments is to relocate "previous theories by reference to where the theorists went wrong. Comparison with the theorists therefore helps to expose for interpretation the adjustment that controls the later theorist's selection, not just of predecessors, but of a subject-matter for his political thought."[7]

Cumming's notion of tradition provides an excellent framework for understanding Vico as a political theorist. Vico responded to his predecessors and argued that a new approach and method ought to be adopted. He introduced "other studies"--history, language and myth--thereby transforming the subject matter of political thought. The fact that Vico has not been included in this tradition until recently does not reduce the significance of his contributions to it. The "adjustments" he proposed in the eighteenth century were made by other political theorists a century later. For this reason alone his ideas are worthy of attention.

Although Vico introduces a whole range of interesting political ideas in the New Science, perhaps his most original contribution is on the level of metatheory. His accomplishment is to demonstrate that the world of civil society is a coherent whole, the analysis of which requires a comprehensive set of integrated principles. Moreover, in opposition to the rationalist dogma of his day, Vico

contends that those principles are to be found within the "modifications" of the human mind, i.e., within the structure of mind itself. Vico's belief that the primary activity of the human mind is the creation of meaning and the establishment of relationships between things caused him to conclude that the study of man cannot be arbitrarily broken up into discrete subject areas. Thus, his basic conclusions are relevant not only to the analysis of politics and civil society but also to the prior problem of determining how and what to actually analyze. Despite the fact that he does not articulate a clear commentary on the political events of his own day, his theoretical formulations regarding what constitutes a proper study of civil society are striking.

As was pointed out earlier, Vico regarded his New Science as novel because it was both synthetic and scientific in character. On the basis of arguments he makes as early as On the Study Methods of Our Time, it is clear that he believed that in order to generate a true science of humanity it would be necessary to transcend the boundaries which separated the academic disciplines of his own time. For this reason it is obvious that Vico did not set out to write a systematic political theory or to address specific political problems such as the legitimate basis of government or the extent to which individuals are obliged to obey. In sharp contrast to the seventeenth century political theorists, for the most part, Vico tends

to neglect these sorts of problems entirely. Instead, his criticisms of the political ideas of both classical political theorists and his more immediate predecessors were directed to the question of whether or not they had properly identified their subject matter rather than to the specific content of their political arguments. Vico consistently maintains that the more general problem of determining the scope of the subject matter to be investigated must be made explicit and adequately resolved before a study of the phenomena themselves can be undertaken.

Vico's approach to defining the subject matter of politics distinguishes him from his seventeenth century predecessors not only because he hopes to accurately reconstruct the origins of civil society, but also because he regards the origins as the most essential source of information about man's past. Only by beginning with a historical description of man's origins can an accurate account of the meaning of civil society be given. In other words, Vico maintains that an objective account of civil society requires a recovery of historical contexts. Accordingly, Vico's notion of a scientific study of man centers on the question of what civil society is and has been rather than on the question of what civil society ought to be. To some extent this argument echoes Machiavelli's thesis made some 200 years earlier since Machiavelli, too, claimed to have freed himself of all prescriptive intentions and biases in his description of man and his social

and political institutions. However, one fundamental difference between Vico and Machiavelli is that Vico consciously raises the explicit prior question of what factors must be examined in order to render an accurate and truthful explanation of what is or has been.[8] One of Vico's strongest indictments of seventeenth century political thought is that it failed to even raise this question: Both man and civil society were conceived of as "facts" which existed in the universe and which simply needed to be penetrated by human reason. Vico's point is that whether or not they were aware of it, the seventeenth century political theorists chose to include certain categories in their studies of man and society and to exclude others. The categories did not suddenly present themselves in a self-evident way to the rational mind. Consequently, these theorists demarcated a particular subject matter for their investigations even if they did not specifically discuss the issue. What they failed to understand or acknowledge, according to Vico, was that their analyses of civil society did not constitute a completely objective description of man and his institutions because they in fact considered only those phenomena which they chose to examine. Furthermore, it is Vico's belief that the categories which they did include in their descriptions of civil society were too narrow and limited in scope.

Vico claims then that a fundamental source of their errors was their misunderstanding of what is required of a

science. He argues that any study which hopes to achieve the status of a science must meet the requirement of joining the universal with the particular (in his terms the joining of philosophy and philology). In applying this basic principle to the world of civil society, he insists that any universal statements about man or his institutions must be supported by the actual historical evidence of human experience. In other words, a valid characterization of human nature must be based upon a proper understanding of man's historical development. Therefore, a description of human nature cannot be divorced from an interpretation of the changing historical contexts in which men have always existed. Vico contends that such an interpretation can be accurate only if all aspects of human activity are regarded as potential sources of historical information. He was able to account for more of the components of human civil life than many of his predecessors primarily because he did not seek to shrink the world of civil society by limiting his discussion to a narrowly defined set of "political" categories. Vico asserts that all of the components of civil society, including aspects of human collective experience which his predecessors chose to ignore, made up a cultural whole and were related to one another in a particular way. To arbitrarily disregard any of these expressions of human social life was both to fail to grasp the meaning of the whole and to be unscientific.

Clearly, Vico is not the first theorist to conceive of civil society as an integrated whole. Both Plato and

Aristotle as well as political philosophers of the Middle Ages defined political phenomena as a set of interrelated parts which achieved meaning only within the context of the whole. However, Vico differs from the classical political theorists in two significant ways. First, one of their underlying goals was to ultimately arrive at a description of the best social and political order, best in the sense of enabling human potential to be realized. This preoccupation often colored their views of the nature of civil society because there was always an ideal against which various forms of human activity were measured. It is for this reason that Vico regards classical political theory as too abstract. Vico is more able to accurately depict civil society because he has no such ideal in mind. Secon although the classical political theorists broadly defined the realm of the political, they did not conceive of an entire cultural entity as did Vico. His notion of civil society extends beyond the variety of activities which constitute the life of the polis to a consideration of all of human history. But for Vico, whatever the shortcomings of classical political theory, natural law and contract theory was even less successful in defining the character of civil society. The seventeenth century theorists had entirely abandoned the idea of viewing civil society as a complex network of interconnected phenomena, committing themselves instead to the analysis of discrete domains of fact. Whereas they intentionally limited and

carefully circumscribed the categories for understanding man's social and political life, Vico hoped instead to expand the scope of phenomena to be examined.

Essentially Vico argues that all of the categories required to understand civil society are to be derived from the various forms which human collective activity takes. These forms include customs, laws, rituals, and language as well as more formal collective activities such as the creation of governments. Vico claims that each of these components is directly related to the others since all arise out of the primary human activity, the structuring of reality. It is for this reason that Vico makes human consciousness the pivotal category in his science of humanity: it is the collective and social nature of consciousness that makes human life comprehensible. Vico maintains that since the most fundamental form of human activity is the interpretation of the world, the problem of determining what constitutes knowledge and truth underlies, on the most basic level, all of human interaction, including the interaction which brings about the creation of civil society. But, when Vico argues that the study of man must consider all of the ways in which human consciousness is expressed, he recognizes that the forms of its expression require interpretation. His idea is that human activity can only be grasped in terms of its complex network of relationships. Consequently, for Vico, in the final analysis, to attempt to study politics qua

politics is impossible: politics has no meaning outside of the entire range of activities in which men engage and which must be placed in the appropriate historical context. Instead, Vico regards politics as an organizing force in the life of civil society, as the means by which men concretely place themselves in relation to one another. Vico's great achievement is to have recognized that the way men go about organizing themselves in relationships to each other is a product of their struggle to interpret and give meaning to their world.

Vico makes clear that the process of structuring the world is at the same time the process of coming to know it, and so the creation of meaning is the basis of all knowledge. He contends that this principle must be applied to the analysis of human nature because the structure of mind necessitates that epistemological and psychological questions be considered simultaneously. More specifically, for Vico human psychology must be regarded as dynamic in the sense that there exist several different levels on which the structuring of reality takes place. In effect, he describes a set of parallel relationships that are all part of the same process. On one level, men initially establish relationships between themselves as a collective whole and the outside world, thus creating a shared sense of reality. But, the experience of creating a shared sense of reality is shaped by the formal character

of the relationships that men set up with each other. Eventually those relationships culminate in struggles to determine whose view of reality will prevail. This idea is the basis for his interpretation of the various class struggles which have appeared at different points in history. Vico argues that those who are able to convince others of their capacities to rightly interpret reality--however unconsciously they do so--achieve power, and ultimately, authority over others.

This notion of the origin of all authority permits him to demonstrate that those individuals who are believed to rightly interpret reality are able to formalize their interpretations in the law, over which they maintain exclusive control. Ultimately, their interpretations of reality extend to all of the various components of collective life so that civil society comes to represent their point of view. But, they are able to retain this dominant position only for as long as those members of the community who have been excluded are willing to accept as legitimate the ruling members' claim to authority. As Vico's analysis of the evolution of the Law of the Twelve Tables shows, once the plebs refused to accept the exclusive right of the nobles to the law, they demanded and obtained greater access to the law which was accompanied by a greater degree of political power. Ultimately, it was their point of view which came to dominate the customs and institutions of civil society. According to Vico, political power depends upon the way in which different groups within the

community perceive themselves in relation to others. When, for whatever reasons, the perceptions begin to change, the classes come into conflict with one another. But, these perceptions grow out of a varied set of experiences, not all of which are necessarily uniquely "political" in nature. Political struggles come about only at particular points in the life of a community when these shifts in perception occur.

It should be mentioned that although in certain ways Vico's notion that a class struggle emerges out of the felt needs of different groups within the community parallels some ideas of Marx, there are fundamental differences in their points of view. First, Vico's analysis of economic relationships is essentially limited to the early Roman experience, and he does not offer a general theory of economic development. Second, in Vico's view, property, defined as ownership, is not as significant as the exclusive right of one group to the laws. In fact, he tends to regard property ownership as a measure of the success of one group in preventing the extension of legal protections. Third, the class struggle is not, for Vico, the driving force in history. Instead, he views it as a secondary phenomenon, as an indicator of the extent to which one group has control over another. Fourth, whereas for Marx the class struggle ultimately serves the purpose of bringing about the destruction of the bourgeoisie in favor of a classless society,

for Vico there is neither a vision of a classless society nor a belief that one class embodies the mandate of history. For the most part, Vico limits his discussion of class conflict to the case of Rome, often reiterating observations made by Roman historians and Machiavelli, and he says very little about the class struggles which occurred in more modern times. As was discussed previously, despite the situation in Naples during his lifetime, which was characterized by struggles among the nobles and common people,[9] he does not explicitly analyze it in his works. Finally, Vico's notion of the "barbarism of reflection" and his cyclical view of history preclude many of the possibilities suggested by Marx. Although for Vico the class struggle does bring about the hidden intentions of divine providence, the only valuative judgment he makes is that each struggle allows more members of the community to participate in the making of laws and in defining the character of civil society. But, because Vico believes that at any of those points in history at which men abandon religion and morality a "barbarism of reflection" can occur, the struggles among classes cannot be understood to culminate in any particular end.

In this regard it should also be pointed out that Vico's idea of consciousness itself differs from that of Marx in a significant way. Whereas Marx emphasizes the extent to which reality and consciousness are ultimately in opposition to one another, Vico does not share this perception. This difference is particularly important because

Marx argues that consciousness, which is a product of an individual's relationship to the modes of production as a member of his class, comes to reflect the key economic relationships in society. According to Marx, because different groups in society have different relationships to the modes of production, each must necessarily develop its own form of consciousness. Furthermore, Marx believes that because the dominant class in society attempts to universalize its own point of view, to make its claims valid for all regardless of the actual relationship to the modes of production, the consciousness of the dominant class is necessarily "false." From his idea of a "false" consciousness he develops his concept of ideology.

In contrast to this position, Vico maintains that consciousness is always a direct expression of the level of human development at any specific point in history, and as the creative product of collective human experience, consciousness is therefore shared. Even though Vico demonstrates that one group in society is often able to impose its own view of reality on the entire community, there cannot be any "false" consciousness in the Marxian sense. He does not conceive of the point of view of the dominant class as an "ideology" as Marx defines the term, i.e., as a distorted, incorrect or inaccurate view of the world. Likewise, although Vico regards the emergence of a period of "barbarism of reflection" as a response to men becoming

overly "refined" and out of touch with their creative imaginative faculty, he does not actually posit a concept of alienation. Because Vico does not juxtapose natural man to his civilized counterpart, there can be no natural self from which to become alienated.[10] His commitment to the natural development of human history is so deep that the age of "barbarism" is regarded as a necessary phase of human experience.

Vico and Contemporary Political Thought

Clearly, Vico's ideas have a great deal in common with those of a number of nineteenth and twentieth century political theorists, including Hegel and Marx, and a full comparative treatment is certainly merited. Such a project cannot be undertaken here. Nonetheless, in evaluating Vico's role as a political theorist, it is appropriate at this point to consider some of the basic principles of his science of humanity with respect to the attempts of contemporary political scientists to understand the nature of human collective experience. To the extent that the field of political science has been characterized as being in a state of "crisis" or needing to undergo a "restoration," Vico's notion of a science of humanity offers a provocative point of orientation.[11]

While it is obviously impossible to provide a comprehensive history of the factors contributing to the "crisis" in the state of contemporary political science, a brief

explanation of the central questions in dispute is in order. The argument can be made that as the analysis of the political world has moved away from its classical origins, there has been an increasing tendency toward the growth of specialized, isolated areas of inquiry. The study of political philosophy itself often has been neglected, obscured, and reduced to a position of inferior status (in some instances banished altogether) by the forces that have come to dominate the discipline of political science. It is not hyperbolic to suggest that one of the critical controversies which has led to the call for a "restoration" of the discipline centers on the perception that there is a valid distinction to be made between political philosophy and political science,[12] precisely the sort of distinction that Vico hoped to transcend in his New Science. The desire to focus on an independent set of principles about politics as such, divorced from metaphysical considerations, can be traced at least as far back as Machiavelli,[13] and this goal has persisted in one form or another into the present day, as testified to by the abundant literature in the field which debates the issues of the fact/value dichotomy. This tendency gained theoretical strength in the seventeenth century when rationalist notions of science were adopted by political philosophers. This approach achieved one of its clearest expressions in the theory of Hobbes which explicitly attempted to apply the rules of the geometric method and the laws of motion to the affairs of men. This is not to

suggest that there has been a lack of diversity in the discipline, nor that every thinker dealing with political problems has assumed this point of view.

Nonetheless, when the state of the discipline of political science (especially in the United States) has been scrutinized, it appears that during the past thirty years there has been an effort to make the study of politics more "scientific," and the term "scientific" has frequently served as shorthand for the goal of limiting the analysis of political phenomena to the observation and quantification of behavior. In fact, "behavioralism" has become a specialized area of study within the field. Underlying the interest in behavior is a development in method which is at least in part a product of the seventeenth century rationalist heritage. The assumptions upon which the "behavioralist" method rests have been described very clearly in the writings of two influential American political scientists, Almond and Verba, who say: "One of the most significant recent developments in the social sciences is the revolution in data gathering and data evaluation. This revolution depends upon the developments in technique by which data can be collected and analyzed..."[14] The identification of the best method in political science with the application of technique is significant for those members of the discipline who have dealt with the transmission of its tradition, in other words for political theorists.

One political theorist has said that "[t] here has in fact been a certain revolution in political science, one that reflects a tradition of politics that has prided itself on being pragmatic and concerned mainly with workable techniques..."[15] Thus, both the proponents and the critics of this development agree upon the identification of technique as one of the fundamental aspects of the new approach and revolution in method. According to Sheldon Wolin, the extent of this revolution

> ...is such as to suggest that the study of politics is not dominated by the belief that the main objective--acquiring scientific knowledge about politics --depends upon the adoption and refinement of specific techniques and that to be qualified or certified as a political scientist is tantamount to possessing prescribed techniques.16

With the adoption of this point of view, technique becomes the prerequisite for all knowledge and any truth that claims to be scientific in nature. And because this prescribed technique is designed to implement "data gathering" and "data evaluation," a further identification is established between the possession of data and the possession of truth: Guided by the proper technique, data become self-evident objects of knowledge, which, when collected and evaluated, constitute truth.

The pervasiveness of the preoccupation with technique in contemporary society has been well documented by Donald Phillip Verene. He says:

> All aspects of life are increasingly turned into procedures. Through a process of selection of the most efficient means technique becomes the medium

> of contemporary social life, in which all economic, political, and individual human activity is ordered into worked-out patterns and step-by-step processes, such that with every new structuring of a physical means or social relation there occurs a heightened sense of possibilities.17

It is not only theories about social and political reality that have acquired a technological character, but life itself increasingly becomes structured in accordance with technological rules. According to Verene, behind this "centrality of technique in all affairs of modern life... stands the Cartesian model of mind,"[18] the model of mind which Vico had already rejected in the eighteenth century. Although it is not possible to discuss the extent to which the Cartesian model of mind has contributed to the technological character of modern society here, the relationship between Cartesian rationalism and modern positivism is well known. Vico's early opposition to the Cartesian model of mind is original in that it seems to have offered a critique of positivism in anticipation of its development a century later.

Vico's fear that to adopt the Cartesian model of mind would, by definition, result in a more restricted set of criteria for determining what actually constitutes knowledge appears to predate what has actually happened. For this reason his critique has validity for political theorists today, who in their efforts to rejoin the world of facts with the world of values, seek an appropriate theoretical grounding. The trend to make of human experience

a set of limited "data" accountable to "scientific" criteria has resulted in the demand that areas of study adopt specialized techniques so that both within and among disciplines, domains of inquiry have become increasingly restricted, narrow and discrete.

It is this aspect of the seventeenth century legacy which today causes so much concern, and it is for this reason that scholars are desperately searching for some basic unifying principles. The current bourgeoning of interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary problems suggest that there is a growing awareness of the need to transcend the limitations of both technique and so called "scientific" criteria. In the field of political science, which traditionally has treated a broad range of issues and problems concerning the world of human affairs, the attempt to limit suitable subjects for study to those most readily convertible to "data" has had stultifying, sometimes absurd effects. The various sides of this controversy are well known and need not be documented or rehashed here. What is important to recognize is that there currently exists within the discipline of political science a desire to restore it

> ...to the dignity of a theoretical science...not by means of a literary renaissance of philosophical achievements of the past; rather the principles must be regained by a work of theoretization which starts with the concrete, historical situation of the age, taking into account the full amplitude of our empirical knowledge.19

Vico's science of humanity has the potential to assist political theorists in this task. Vico's insistence that the components of the world of human affairs constitute an integral whole, the meaning of which is derived from the structure of the human mind, precludes the possibility of investigating the phenomena of human collective experience as independent variables. His most basic epistemological principle, which stresses the fundamental unity of human knowledge, provides the necessary foundation for a valid theory of man and society, an enterprise that has engaged thoughtful men since the time of Plato.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

1. For example, see: J. G. A. Pocock, "The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Inquiry," *in* Philosophy, Politics and Society, Second Series, ed. by Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), pp. 183-202; John G. Gunnell, Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1979). Pocock and Gunnell engage in a direct dialogue on the problem of the tradition of political philosophy in Annals of Scholarship, 1 (Fall, 1980), 3-62. Another view is offered by Richard Ashcroft, "On the Problems of Methodology and the Nature of Political Theory," Political Theory, 3 (1975), 5-25.

2. Robert Denoon Cumming, Human Nature and History (2 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

3. Ibid., I, p. 7.

4. Ibid., I, p. 24.

5. Ibid., I, p. 26.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. On the similarities and differences between some central ideas of Vico and Machiavelli see James Morrison, "Vico and Machiavelli," in Vico: Past and Present, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo (2 vols.; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981), II, pp. 1-14.

9. For references on this point see the notes to Chapter Two.

10. Clearly, Vico had no notion of alienation with respect to the question of man's relationship to the modes of production, nor did he possess a particularly well developed theory of the economics of his own age.

11. Eric Voegelin says, "By restoration of political science is meant a return to the consciousness of principles, not perhaps a return to the specific content of an earlier attempt." (The New Science of Politics [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952], p. 2).

12. On this distinction see Thomas A. Spragens, The Dilemma of Contemporary Political Theory: Toward a Post-behavioral Science of Politics (New York: Dunellen

Publishing Co., 1973).

13. Sheldon Wolin has said of Machiavelli that "[h]is modernity...lay in the attempt to exclude from political theory whatever did not appear to be strictly political." (Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought [Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960], p. 199).

14. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 43.

15. Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," in Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought, ed. by Martin Fleisher (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 27.

16. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

17. Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico's Science of Imaginative Universals and the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms," in Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity, ed. by Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Donald Phillip Verene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 297.

18. Ibid., p. 298.

19. Eric Voegelin, Science of Politics, p. 2.

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