

telligibility of interlinguistic synonymy makes sense only if meaning and confirmation are somehow linked as in the verifiability principle.

So what then of this link between semantic and epistemic issues? At least there is much to be said for it. A theory of meaning should give accounts of meaningfulness (having a meaning), of synonymy (having the same meaning), and of understanding (knowing the meaning). The verifiability principle provides a way of doing these things not provided by simply identifying various entities as “the meanings” of expressions. Moreover, it provides a defense against wholesale skepticism by tying what we know to how we know. And finally, it provides a way of dealing with the so-called a priori by making those claims knowable in virtue of knowing the meanings of the expressions involved. No doubt there are others ways, perhaps even equally systematic ways, of accomplishing these ends, and no doubt these other paths should be investigated as well. But the basic idea behind the verifiability principle, namely that semantical and epistemic questions should be linked, is far from refuted, and its promise is far from exhausted.

See also Analyticity; Ayer, Alfred Jules; Carnap, Rudolf; Empiricism; Epistemology; Hempel, Carl Gustav; Language; Meaning; Philosophy; Philosophy of Science, History of; Philosophy of Science, Problems of; Quine, Willard Van Orman; Russell, Bertrand Arthur William; Semantics; Skepticism, History of; Verifiability Principle; Wittgenstein, Ludwig Josef Johann.

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VICO, GIAMBATTISTA

(1668–1744)

Born in Naples, Italy, in 1668, Giambattista Vico is best known for his critique of the Cartesian method and his philosophy of history. Beyond these areas, he is also known for contributions to linguistic theory, legal history, and cultural anthropology. Many have construed Vico as an eighteenth-century thinker who expressed the germ of ideas more fully developed in the nineteenth century. Thus, for example, Karl Löwith understands Vico’s master work *The New Science* to anticipate “not only fundamental ideas of Herder and Hegel, Dilthey and Spengler, but also the more particular discoveries of Roman

history by Niebuhr and Mommsen, the theory of Homer by Wolf, the interpretation of mythology by Bachofen, the reconstruction of ancient life through etymology by Grimm, the historical understanding of laws by Savigny, of the ancient city and of feudalism by Fustel de Coulanges, and of the class struggles by Marx and Sorel” (1949, p. 115).

The familiar picture of Vico as the “great anticipator” contains some truth. More recent scholarship, in contrast, has tried to understand Vico as a thinker in his own right. The result has been a proliferation of different and often incompatible interpretations. These include views of Vico as a pioneer of contemporary hermeneutics; a creator of the modern social sciences; an architect of a uniquely Christian synthesis of philosophy and poetry; an advocate of a naturalistic Epicureanism thinly disguised as orthodox piety; a proponent of a Counter-Enlightenment approach to politics; and an author of a “genealogy of morals” that exposes the roots of modern secularism in pagan idolatry, divination, and sacrifice.

Rather than comment on rival interpretations of Vico, I here invite the reader to consider some aspects of what Vico himself regards as a continuous project of thought. This project begins with the works he published in 1709 and 1710 (*On the Study Methods of Our Time* and *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*), runs through his jurisprudential writings from 1720 to 1722 (*Universal Right*), and concludes with the three major versions of *The New Science* (1725, 1730, 1744).

ANTI-CARTESIAN WRITINGS

In 1709 Vico published a version of the inaugural oration he delivered at the University of Naples in the preceding year, under the title *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (*On the Study Methods of Our Time*). In that work, which does not mention Descartes by name, Vico considered the art of “criticism” (*critica*), juxtaposing it with the art of “topics” (*topica*). Characteristic of criticism, in Vico’s sense of the term, is a “dry and attenuated method of argumentation” that he associated with the Stoics and their then contemporary counterparts. Vico chided critics for wanting to purify, from even the suspicion of falsehood, their first truths, which they took to exist “above, outside of and beyond all images of bodies” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 104). His argument against criticism involves two main claims. The first claim is that to prioritize criticism in the education of children is unwise. Youths taught not to accept anything unless it can be certified by a rationalistic standard will have bad memories, impoverished imaginations, and a knack for rashly entering into “astonishing

and unaccustomed ventures” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 104). The second claim is that criticism is poorly suited to discover truth. Because “the invention of arguments is prior by nature in the judgment of truth” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 106), criticism has no work to do unless the mind has investigated and brought to light the full range of relevant possibilities. The success of this prior investigation, Vico thought, depends upon the exercise of memory and imagination, especially in assisting the mind as it runs through the commonplaces. These mental capacities, Vico argued, are smothered by premature indoctrination in criticism, but can be developed through an immersion in topics.

In *On the Study Methods of Our Time* (1709/1988), Vico protests against what he regards as the domination of Cartesian criticism, but he does not oppose it as such. In *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, a work published a year later, 1710, he became more explicit in his opposition to Descartes. In that work, Vico charged Descartes with dogmatism, attributing to him the desire to consider all truths doubtful until metaphysically established by the principle “*Cogito, ergo sum*” (“I think; therefore I am”). Vico argued that, contrary to how he presented himself, Descartes is far from original. He noted that the use of the evil genius was anticipated by the Stoic in Cicero’s *Academia* (45 BCE), and that the *cogito* principle was already enunciated by the slave Sosia in Plautus’s *Amphitryo* (186 BCE). Vico does not claim that the *cogito* principle is false; he merely holds, “It is an ordinary cognition that happens to any unlearned person such as Sosia, not a rare and exquisite truth that requires such deep meditation by the greatest of philosophers to discover it” (1971, p. 73). The *cogito* principle is not only hackneyed, according to Vico; it is also unable to meet the skeptic’s argument. For the *cogito* principle to provide knowledge of the nature of the mind, it would have to grasp the causes of thought (for Vico, as for Aristotle, knowledge is knowledge of causes). According to Vico, the *cogito* principle furnishes only consciousness (*conscientia*) of thinking, without illuminating its causes, and thereby fails to provide knowledge (*scientia*).

Like Francis Bacon before him and Immanuel Kant after him, Vico sought a middle path between dogmatism and skepticism. Against the skeptics, whom he represented as tracing absence of knowledge to a universal ignorance of causes, Vico pointed to domains in which we possess knowledge of the causes of things, because we originate them ourselves. His examples were synthetic geometry, painting, sculpture, ceramics, architecture—crafts in which skepticism has no application, unlike

those of rhetoric, politics, and medicine, which are “conjectural” arts in that they do not teach the forms by which their subject matter is created. Vico formulated a second argument, more theological in character, against the skeptics. Although skeptics properly observe that we do not know the causes of things that we are merely acquainted with (here we have consciousness or awareness, but not knowledge), it does not follow that these things lack causes. The pertinent question, according to Vico, is not “Do they have causes?” but “Where are the causes located?” If the causes are truly unknown, as the skeptic argues, they cannot be within us. But they must exist somewhere, in some locus or receptacle outside the self. This locus Vico named the “comprehension of causes, in which is contained all genera, or all forms, through which all effects are given” (1971, p. 75). Since this “comprehension” is infinite and necessarily prior to finite body, it is nothing other than God, “and indeed the God whom we Christians profess” (1971, p. 75).

In place of the *cogito* principle, Vico proposed his own version of a first truth, crystallized in his principle “Verum et factum convertuntur” (“The true and the made are convertible”) (1971, p. 63). Although Vico claimed to derive the *verum-factum* principle philologically, he also understood it to be the core of a new anti-Cartesian epistemology and metaphysics. The core of the new metaphysics was that to know something is to make it, where making is collecting or gathering elements into a whole. Strictly speaking, only God conforms to the *verum-factum* principle, because he uniquely contains “the elements of things, extrinsic and intrinsic alike” (1971, p. 63). Because God makes elements and contains them within himself, he can arrange them perfectly, with utter precision and control. God’s understanding of the elements of things is self-knowledge. Human beings, by contrast, do not possess such understanding of the elements. Since the human mind does not contain the elements of things within itself, it thinks about them through representations, at one remove, as it were. “Thought [*cogitatio*] is therefore proper to the human mind, but understanding [*intelligentia*] proper to the divine mind” (1971, p. 63). Human thinking, Vico concluded, should be understood as “participation in reason” (1971, p. 63). Thus, in contrast to the dogmatists, who exalt human truth, Vico downgraded it. Unlike the skeptics, however, he did not intend to deny its claims altogether: “Humanity is neither nothing, nor everything” (1971, p. 81).

A final dimension of Vico’s early polemic is what might be called his “genealogical” critique of Descartes. In

the second of two responses to Cartesian critics, Vico suggested that Descartes maliciously neglected ancient philosophers to promote his own doctrines. He was even so bold as to suggest that Descartes was an intellectual tyrant: “Descartes has done what those who have become tyrants have always been wont to do. They came to power proclaiming the cause of freedom. But once they are assured of power, they become worse tyrants than their original oppressors” (1971, p. 167). Vico unmasked Descartes’s appeal to the natural light of reason as an excuse to avoid the labor of erudition and to avoid reading texts in the original languages. Vico also indicted Descartes for concealing the nature of his sources. In wanting his readers to believe that he had no significant predecessors or important teachers, Descartes “gathers the fruit of that plan of wicked politics, to destroy completely those men through whom one has reached the peak of power” (1971, p. 167). Descartes’s Machiavellian cunning inspired him to lie about his origins: “Although he can dissimulate the fact with the greatest art in what he says, he was versatile in every sort of philosophy” (1971, p. 167). As an alternative to what he regarded as the uncandid fable of Descartes’s *Discourse on the Method*, Vico proposed his own *Autobiography* where he sought to “narrate plainly and step by step the entire series of Vico’s studies with the candor proper to a historian” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 7).

THE TURN TO HISTORY

In 1716, Vico began producing philosophical history, composing (though hampered by a severe cramp in his left arm) *The Life of Antonio Carafa* (which only appears in the eight-volume collection of Vico’s work published by Laterza called *Opere di G. B. Vico*). At that time he discovered *On the Law of War and Peace*, by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Impressed with Grotius’s work, Vico made him the last of his “four authors.” The first three authors whom Vico privileged in his *Autobiography* were Plato, Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56–c. 120), and Francis Bacon. Vico associates Plato with “universal knowledge” that contemplates “man as he ought to be” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 29). The Roman historian Tacitus, by contrast, offered “counsels of utility” pertaining to “man as he is” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 29). Uniting Platonic “esoteric wisdom” and Tacitean “vulgar wisdom” is Bacon, “at one and the same time a universal man in theory and in practice” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 30). Despite his ambition, Bacon failed intellectually to encompass “the universe of cities and the course of all times, or the extent of all nations” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 44). Grotius, however, “embraces in a system of uni-

versal law the whole of philosophy and philology” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 44). Vico described his own ambition in similar terms. He sought to reconcile “the best philosophy, that of Plato made subordinate to the Christian religion,” with a type of philology that “contains within itself the history of languages and the history of things “ (1990, Vol. 1, p. 45).

To bring this reconciliation about, Vico began researching the history of Roman law after reading and annotating Grotius. The first fruit of this inquiry was several volumes collected under the title of *Diritto Universale* (*Universal Right*; 1720–1722/2000). Vico’s occasion for writing this work was his desire to demonstrate his qualifications for a chair in law at the University of Naples paying six times as much as his position in rhetoric, which he would hold for most of his life. The intellectual wellspring for the work was Vico’s desire to address the question whether justice is natural or merely conventional. Vico reduced contemporary answers to this question to two positions. First, there was the stance that he associated with “the skeptics,” a category that included Epicurus, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Benedict de Spinoza, and Pierre Bayle. Their common argument is that justice is not natural, but rooted in fear, chance, or necessity. Second, Vico considered the possibility that justice is grounded in the social nature of humans as a necessary condition for maintaining social order. This was the strategy of Grotius, who claimed to treat the rational basis of law in a quasi-mathematical manner, abstracting from particulars. Vico faults Grotius for excessive abstraction. Rather than bring his profound philological learning to bear in his attempt to counter the reduction of justice to expediency, Grotius depended on abstract and rationalistic arguments that are not persuasive against the skeptics. The positive aim of the *Universal Right* is to replace Grotius’s system with a new conception that places particular facts and universal truths in a more illuminating relationship.

This attempt required Vico to turn his attention to the history of legal concepts, particularly the law of nations. Against Grotius’s tendency to treat the law of nations (*ius gentium*) and natural law (*ius naturale*) as if they were not only distinct but also separate and autonomous, Vico attempted to exhibit natural law as present within the law of nations, which in time becomes civil law (*ius civile*). This attempt required Vico to argue that natural law has a dual origin: a metaphysical origin in eternal truth and a historical origin in the customs of human society. These dual sources can ultimately be traced to a single origin, God, whom the work identified

as the “one principle and one end of universal law” (1974, p. 341). Vico ordered the volumes of the *Universal Right* according to a tripartite scheme intended to reflect the “origin” of divine and human things, their “cycle” (progress and return), and their “constancy.”

Vico began the *Universal Right* with a brief consideration of trinitarian theology, followed by an exploration of the virtue possible for fallen humanity. In terms reminiscent of Augustine, Vico made the following identifications: “The force of truth [*vis veri*], or human reason is virtue insofar as it fights self-love [*cupiditas*]; the same virtue is justice insofar as it directs and equalizes utilities” (1974, p. 57). To support his antiskeptical contention that “right is in nature,” Vico argued that humans are naturally social, despite their love of self. Although humanity is fallen, it possesses certain “affections” that manifest themselves in facial expressions, which are the beginnings of “expressive language” (1974, p. 59). To recognize distress in the face of another and to acknowledge this pain are natural to humans: “Man differs from animate brutes not only by reason and language, but also by his countenance” (1974, p. 59). From such commiseration in humankind, Vico infers that prior to any calculation of self-interest, “man will bring help to men” (1974, p. 59). Hence, society is natural to human beings and is made possible by sharing advantages.

Here one can perceive how historical consciousness enters into Vico’s thinking about justice. The question “Does right exist in nature?” becomes a question about the social nature of humankind, which in turn Vico resolves into a historical inquiry about human nature in the primal state. To anchor in history his conviction that justice is natural, and thereby remedy what he regards as the chief failing of Grotius’s natural law, Vico is driven to a philosophical and philological investigation of human origins.

How can Vico reconcile the claim that our concept of justice is, in some sense, subject to historical development, with an affirmation of its eternity and immutability? Vico addresses this question in the chapter of the *Universal Right* with the long title “Utility [*utilitas*] Is the Occasion, Nobility [*honestas*] Is the Cause, of Right [*ius*] and Human Society” (1974, p. 61). Historical occasions are not the cause or sufficient reason of the idea of justice, because “flux cannot generate the eternal, as bodies cannot generate anything above body” (1974, p. 61). Hence justice cannot be reduced to what promotes the advantage or interest of particular individuals; neither the first nor final cause of justice is utility. Yet occasions when issues of advantage and interest arise arouse the “will to

justice.” Through the pursuit of their own advantage, “men, naturally social and divided, weak and needy from original sin, are brought to cultivate society, that is, to celebrate their social nature” (1974, p. 61). Vico concludes, “As the body is not the cause but the occasion by which the idea of truth is aroused in the mind of men, so utility of the body is not the cause but the occasion by which the will to justice is aroused in the soul” (1974, p. 61).

Vico’s use of Nicolas de Malebranche’s distinction between cause and occasion protects him from reducing justice to the merely conventional. It does so, however, by elevating instances that would strike some as mere historical accident to the rank of the philosophically significant “occasions” on which human knowledge of justice depends. If Vico is to make this high valuation of occasion and custom plausible, he must construct a historical narrative that depicts how equity (*aequum bonum*) expanded over time, and yet maintain the eternity of the concept. Vico attempted this task in the long section of the first part of the *Universal Right*, which purports to describe the cycle of universal right. To provide additional confirmation of his findings, both philosophical and philological, he added a second volume to the work, titled *De constantia jurisprudentis* (On the Constancy of the Jurisprudent). The first chapter of this work begins with the declaration “a new science is attempted” (*nova scientia tentatur*), and marks the transition to the final phase of his thought, contained in *The New Science*.

VICO’S NEW SCIENCE

The composition of the *Universal Right* established Vico as an erudite scholar, but it did not win him the law chair that he sought. Deciding to compose in the language of his countrymen, rather than that of the university, Vico wrote, in 1725, the first part of his autobiography and a first draft of *The New Science*. Now lost, this draft assumed the form of a negative critique of the “improbabilities, absurdities, and impossibilities that his predecessors had rather imagined than thought out” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 54). Because Vico could not afford to print the work as it stood, he decided to rewrite it using a “positive method that would be more concise and thus more efficacious” (1990, Vol. 1, p. 54). The result of this effort is the first version of *The New Science* (1725/1984). Its full title indicates the continuity with his previous work: *Principles of a New Science of the Nature of Nations, from Which Are Derived New Principles of the Natural Law of Peoples*.

In the subsequent versions of *The New Science* (1730, 1744), Vico placed less emphasis on the specifically political problematic. His larger aim was to achieve a new

understanding of the origins of human culture. Vico thought that prior attempts to achieve this goal were vitiated by methodological errors characteristic of both philosophers and philologists. Philosophers, Vico argued, confuse their own refined natures with that of the first humans, who were necessarily simple and crude. They project their own “esoteric wisdom” and mental habits onto the primitive mind, which is not capable of advanced conceptual thinking. This projection is rooted in the “conceit of scholars,” the habit of supposing that what contemporary thinkers know “is as old as the world” (*The New Science*, para. 127). Yet philologists (poets, historians, orators, grammarians) are no more helpful for understanding human origins, according to Vico. This is not only because they lack access to relevant data, but also because they are susceptible to the “conceit of nations”—the prejudice that “before all other nations, [one’s own nation] invented the comforts of human life and that its remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world” (*The New Science*, para. 125). Against the background of this twin failure, Vico concluded, “We must reckon as if there were no books in the world” (*The New Science*, para. 330).

Vico’s attempt to transcend philosophy and philology assumed the form of a system that aspires to contain the virtues and avoid the vices of each. In its final exposition in 1744, the system began with a chronological table that outlines “the world of the ancient nations,” followed by an enumeration of 114 “axioms” that purport to organize the material of the chronological table into a coherent whole. Against the inclination to despair that any recovery of remote human origins is possible, Vico proposed “the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind” (*The New Science*, para. 331). Vico was pessimistic about the ultimate intelligibility of the world of nature, “which since God made it, He alone knows” (*The New Science*, para. 330). The civil world, however, is eminently knowable: “Since men made it, men could come to know it” (*The New Science*, para. 331). Here Vico reformulated the *verum-factum* principle that he articulated in the *Ancient Wisdom* of 1710. From the *verum-factum* principle, Vico went on to identify three “universal and eternal principles (such as every science must have) on which all nations were founded and still preserve themselves” (*The New Science*, para. 332). These are religion, marriage, and burial. The core of *The New Science* is the attempt to read human culture as the exhibition of these principles in a variety of guises, mutually ordered

by what Vico called a “divine legislative mind” and, more simply, “Providence” (*The New Science*, para. 133).

Vico’s emphasis on Providence is appropriate, because it is the first and principal “aspect” of the final version of *The New Science*. Vico lists seven aspects of his total conception: (1) “a rational civil theology of divine providence,” (2) a “philosophy of authority,” (3) a “history of human ideas,” (4) “a philosophical criticism that grows out of the history of ideas,” (5) “an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the histories of all nations,” (6) “a system of the natural law of the peoples,” (7) “principles of universal history” (*The New Science*, paras. 385–399).

The New Science is known both for its method of investigation and its substantive conclusions. Regarding method, Vico proclaimed his desire to begin where his subject matter begins, with the assumption that the nature (*natura*) of civil phenomena is intelligible only through their birth (*nascimento*). If there are several possible ways of conceiving the history of an idea or institution, Vico argued that we should focus on the possibility whose manner is most orderly and conducive to the preservation of the human race. Such an “order of things cannot be approached directly, but must be sought through the “order of ideas” and “order of language.” As a preliminary to accomplishing the goal of the new science, to disclose the necessary substructure of the civil world, Vico asked the reader whether he can imagine more, fewer, or different causes than the ones he finds. Near the end of the section “Method” of Book 1, Vico declared that his aim was to clean, piece together, and restore “the great fragments of antiquity, hitherto useless to science because they lay begrimed, broken, and scattered” (*The New Science*, para. 357). The light shed by excavation and reconstruction would enable him, Vico thought, to trace “all the effects narrated by certain history” to their originating institutions, “as to their necessary causes” (*The New Science*, para. 358). Not all readers have found persuasive Vico’s claim to strict logical necessity. Rather than defend the claim, many contemporary interpreters have advanced the weaker argument that a Viconian perspective is able to render intelligible aspects of the civil world (especially myth, custom, law, poetry) that would otherwise remain obscure.

The content of Vico’s new science resists summary description. Its basic scheme is the division of human history into three periods: the age of gods, the age of heroes, and the age of humankind. In the age of gods, “every gentile nation had its Jove” (*The New Science*, para. 193). In every pagan culture, the sky came to be identified as a god

who speaks in the language of lightning and thunder. “Jove” was the work of the “theological poets,” who created the “first divine fable” and believed it themselves. The practical effect of Jove was to settle the wandering first humans and to set up a system of primitive religion based on divination and sacrifice. Vico’s attitude toward primitive religion was complex. The fables created (or “feigned”) by the theological poets were based on a “credible impossibility: it is impossible that bodies should be minds, yet it was believed that the thundering sky was Jove” (*The New Science*, para. 383). Yet Vico’s attitude toward pagan religion is not one of enlightened condescension. “Through the thick clouds of those first tempests, intermittently lit by those flashes, they made out this great truth: that divine providence watches over the welfare of all mankind” (*The New Science*, para. 385). Thus ran Vico’s partial defense of the primitive mind: It apprehended a truth, even if in distorted fashion, that later philosophers (especially the Epicureans and their then contemporary counterparts) altogether missed.

In the age of gods, primitive humans are incapable of proper political organization. There were no cities, only families governed by the “cyclopean paternal authority” of the fathers. The heroic age began with the founding of the cities, prompted by the need of family fathers to unite for the sake of self-defense against their increasingly resentful slaves (the “*famuli*”). Nominating one of their number as king, the fathers generated “severe aristocratic commonwealths” (*The New Science*, para. 663). Vico’s narrative of the genesis of heroic commonwealths from the “state of the families” was a polemic directed against Hobbes and “the three princes of natural law,” whom he identified as Grotius, the English jurist John Selden (1584–1654), and the German natural-law philosopher Samuel von Pufendorf. Based on neither contract nor self-interest, heroic commonwealths were essentially religious in character. Viewing themselves as descendants of the gods, the heroes secure their dominance through myths that define the plebeians as less than fully human (because they were not of divine descent), and thereby exclude them from citizenship. Toward heroic civil institutions as well, Vico’s attitude was complex. On the one hand, he appreciated the gravity and reverence characteristic of aristocratic virtue, especially as expressed in Roman jurisprudence. On the other hand, he sympathized with the plebeians and their struggle for liberty and equality. As with the age of gods, determining Vico’s judgment about the merits of the heroic age is a difficult matter of interpretation.

What prompted the transition from the heroic to the human age was the increase in self-knowledge on the part of the plebeians, as encoded in the poetic character of the Athenian lawgiver Solon (c. 630–c. 560 BCE). Once they came to fully recognize their equal humanity, the plebeians began to demand participation in civil society. At this point human nature became “benign,” as exemplified by the Roman general Scipio Africanus (236–184 or 183 BCE), the Athenian statesman Aristides the Just (c. 530–c. 468 BCE), and Socrates. The form of government changed from aristocratic to democratic, issuing in “free popular commonwealths.” Initially, this appeared to be progress. Philosophy (enabled by the trope of irony) came onto the scene, leading to a purification of the “vulgar wisdom” that developed in the divine and heroic ages. But the “political philosophy” of Plato and Aristotle, of which Vico approved, gave way to “monastic or solitary philosophy,” as represented by the Stoics and the Epicureans. “As the popular states become corrupt, so also did the philosophies. They descended to skepticism. Learned fools fell to calumniating the truth” (*The New Science*, para. 1102). In the first phase of the human age, humans were “benign,” but their quest for pleasure and luxury led them to become “delicate” and finally “dissolute” (*The New Science*, para. 242). Under the influence of radically antitraditional philosophy that sets itself against “common sense,” the citizens, growing ever more atomistic, eventually become “aliens in their own nations” (*The New Science*, para. 1008). Vico indicated three remedies to the problem of social fragmentation: monarchy, conquest by more unified nations, and destruction followed by a return to the age of gods.

Vico’s philosophy of decline appears inextricably linked to the decline of philosophy. According to one twentieth-century student of Vico, the last phase of the age of men is a condition where “thought still rules, but a thought which has exhausted its creative power and only constructs meaningless networks of artificial and pedantic distinctions” (Collingwood 1946, p. 67). This is the condition of “beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the first men had been made by the barbarism of sense” (*The New Science*, para. 1006). Yet along with the fatalistic strain of Vico’s view of history, one must consider his evident belief in the power of his new science to inspire a rapprochement between philology and philosophy, tradition and reason, politicians and academics. Is such an equilibrium possible? If so, what form would it take? For both students of Vico and social philosophers, these questions remain.

See also Aristotle; Bachofen, Johann Jakob; Bacon, Francis; Bayle, Pierre; Cartesianism; Cicero, Marcus Tullius; Dilthey, Wilhelm; Epicureanism and the Epicurean School; Grotius, Hugo; Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich; Herder, Johann Gottfried; Hobbes, Thomas; Homer; Kant, Immanuel; Machiavelli, Niccolò; Malebranche, Nicolas; Marx, Karl; Myth; Niebuhr, Reinhold; Philosophy of History; Philosophy of Language; Plato; Pufendorf, Samuel von; Savigny, Friedrich Karl von; Sociology of Knowledge; Socrates; Sorel, Georges; Spengler, Oswald; Stoicism.

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Robert C. Miner (2005)

VIENNA CIRCLE, THE

See *Logical Positivism*

VIOLENCE

“Violence” is derived from the Latin *violentia*, “vehemence,” which itself comes from *vis* (force) + *latus* (to carry) and means, literally, intense force. Violence shares its etymology with violate, “injure.” *Violence* is used to refer to swift, extreme force (e.g., a violent storm) and to forceful injurious violation (e.g., rape, terrorism, war).

Violence has received some philosophical consideration since ancient times, but only since the twentieth century has the concept of violence itself been of particular concern to philosophers. Perhaps this is due to the exponential growth in the efficiency of and access to the means of violence in the modern era, to the unprecedented carnage the twentieth century saw, or to the emergence of champions of nonviolence such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Beyond clarifying the concept of violence, philosophical argument has turned to the moral and cultural justifiability of violence to achieve personal, social, or political ends.

Philosophers do not achieve consensus about the concept. Often, violence is taken to consist in overt phys-

ical manifestations of force. These may be on the scale of individuals (e.g., mugging) or of nations (e.g., war). In its primary use *violence* refers to swift, extreme physical force typically involving injury and violation to persons or property. There is increasing philosophical interest in a wider use of the term extending beyond the overtly physical to covert, psychological, and institutional violence. In this broader sense racism, sexism, economic exploitation, and ethnic and religious persecution all are possible examples of violence; that is, all involve constraints that injure and violate persons, even if not always physically.

Concerning the moral and political justifiability of using violence to achieve personal or social ends, again philosophers disagree. Some have taken violence to be inherently wrong (e.g., murder), while most have taken it to be an open question whether violence is normatively justifiable. Terrorism presents a special case. It is aimed at randomly selected innocent victims in an effort to create general fear, thus sharpening focus on the terrorists’ cause or demands. This random targeting of innocents accounts for the near universal moral condemnation of terrorism, despite the dominant view that violence in general is not inherently wrong.

Arguments purporting to justify violence do not value it in itself but as a means to an end sufficiently good to outweigh the evils of the injury or violation involved. Often, such justifiable violence is seen as a necessary means to important ends; that is, the good achieved by justifiable violence could not be achieved without it. Arguments challenging the justifiability of violence tend to reject the claim to necessity, arguing for nonviolent means, or to deny the claim that violation and injury are outweighed by the ends achieved. Such arguments may be against violence per se or merely against particular violent acts.

Georges Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence* (1908) is the earliest extensive philosophical work devoted to the subject. While Karl Marx saw a role for violence in history, it was secondary to the contradictions inherent in collapsing systems. Sorel synthesizes Marx’s proletarianism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s anarchism and Henri Bergson’s voluntarism, defending revolutionary trade unionism in its efforts to destroy the existing institutional order. Sorel advocates the violent general strike as the means of class warfare against the state and owners of industry.

In *On Violence* (1970) Hannah Arendt reviews the twentieth-century apologists for violence in an effort to explain the increasing advocacy of violence, especially by the new left. She questions Mao Zedong’s “Power grows out of the barrel of a gun” and articulates the position that