

# Introduction

Joseph Ratzinger and the Anglican scholar John Milbank have written extensively on the social and political order from a theological perspective. Despite both having a favorable view toward democratic socialism, they differ in how they describe socialism's relationship to faith as expressed by the church. For Ratzinger, democratic socialism, as distinct from totalitarian socialism,<sup>1</sup> is a legitimate political expression, yet he does not think the church is to advocate any political model as a practical expression of theological faith. In contrast, Milbank proposes an ecclesial and democratic socialism as the political form of Christian faith, in which the church is to function as its site of origin.<sup>2</sup> His ecclesial socialism is supported by a political theology<sup>3</sup> in which politics and theology are wedded together. Milbank's political theology differs from Ratzinger's

1. Joseph Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 28. Ratzinger distinguishes democratic socialism from totalitarian socialism. Totalitarian socialism, in contrast with democratic socialism, is "rigidly materialistic and atheistic."(28) The former USSR was an example of this totalitarian variant in which the state presents itself as the totality of its citizens' existence. According to Ratzinger, this form of socialism failed not simply because of its "false economic dogmatism" (29) but more fundamentally due to its "contempt for human rights"and by "their subjection of morality to the demands of the system and to their promises for the future." (29) By making morality subordinate to the political system of communism, "man's primordial certainties about God, about himself, and about the universe" were, argues Ratzinger, lost (28).
2. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 196, 228.
3. *Ibid.*, 228. He uses this term in order to distinguish his political theology from German political theology as especially represented by Johannes Baptist Metz. See Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith*

theological concept of politics in that, according to Ratzinger's theology of politics,<sup>4</sup> politics and faith are considered relevant to one another but, nonetheless, distinct.

The key factor that distinguishes Ratzinger's theology of politics from Milbank's political theology is how each theologian orients his thought on the question of truth, and most specifically how each theologian understands and relocates Vico's claim that *verum est factum* (the truth is made). While Ratzinger is critical of Vico's account of the socially constructed nature of truth, Milbank, on the other hand, embraces Vico in a way that validates it. The political consequences that logically follow from these two approaches to Vico illustrate a central difference between Ratzinger and Milbank. As will be shown, Ratzinger's critical appreciation of socialism, but final rejection of all political ideology when it is presented as best representative of Trinitarian faith and Milbank's promotion of socialism as integral to Trinitarian faith in practice are rooted in their response to Vico. In turn, this rejection is reflected in how each theologian understands physics, metaphysics, theology, and finally social and political reality in the light of physics, metaphysics, theology.

Their two approaches to Vico, as made evident in how each defines truth ascending from physics and descending from theology is, in turn, practically illustrated in their two conceptions of socialism in relationship to truths descending from faith. In the first chapter, accordingly, I will determine how Ratzinger's reaction to Vico's definition of truth is reflected in Ratzinger's description of humanity's natural, metaphysical, and theological correspondence to truth. As defended by Ratzinger, truth is essentially uncreated, and human

*in History and Society: Toward a Foundational Political Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

4. D. Vincent Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 72–73.

beings' relationship to truth is not primarily one of activity but of correspondence to truth as uncreated. This leads Ratzinger to promote a metaphysics of the analogy of being, which upholds a receptive (from the human perspective) manner of perceiving truth. This chapter will be followed by a chapter on how Ratzinger's response to Vico shapes his understanding of truth as illuminated and mediated by natural, metaphysical, and theological truth. For Ratzinger, in accordance with his correspondence theory of truth and metaphysics of the analogy of being, humans receives truth through illumination by way of reason, beauty, and faith, and are mediated truth sacramentally through the church. In chapter three, I will then turn to Milbank in order to determine how his reaction to Vico's definition of truth shapes his view of humanity's correspondence to natural, metaphysical, and theological truth. As influenced by Vico, Milbank argues that truth is essentially created, and human beings' relationship to truth is not primarily one of receptivity but of activity. This leads Milbank to promote a metaphysics of the analogy of creation, which upholds an active manner of conceiving truth. Chapter four will focus on Milbank's response to Vico with respect to truth as illuminated and mediated. Since Milbank distances himself from a correspondence theory of truth, and in place of an analogy of being proposes an analogy of creation, he locates the illumination and mediation of truth in what humans create, specifically within the church as the city of God. Chapter five will compare Ratzinger's and Milbank's contrasting views on truth, concentrating in particular on their differing analogies, one of being and the other of creation. Their differing takes, which flow from their two differing metaphysics, on truth as illuminated and mediated, and on the role of nature and grace with respect to truth will then be discussed. Finally, in chapter six I will explain how their differences lead to two ways of presenting socialism, one a democratic socialism in accordance

with the contemporary German model, and the other an ecclesial socialism. Unlike Milbank, Ratzinger, in accordance with his understanding of the church's role of mediating uncreated, stable truth, only indicates a preference for democratic socialism, while not advocating it as best expressive of Roman Catholic belief and practices. In contrast, Milbank, in accordance with his description of the church as illuminating and mediating created truth, promotes an ecclesially based socialism that is best expressive of a political form of Christian belief.

To better situate Ratzinger's and Milbank's thought in relationship to Vico's concept of truth, it is important to briefly introduce the principle ways that Vico developed his thought. This will be followed by a brief presentation of differing interpretations of his thought. In this introduction to Vico, it will become evident that what becomes essential to his philosophical outlook is his location of truth in historical processes that humans take as guided by providence. His upholding of change, as represented by history, and direction and stability, as represented by providence, has led to differing attempts in categorizing Vico's philosophy within the broad trends of philosophy.

### **Vico's Early Life and Introduction to Nominalism and Metaphysics**

The Italian Catholic political philosopher and historian Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744) was born in Naples, Italy in a room over his father's bookstore. His father, Antonio di Vico of Maddaloni, the son of a farmer, took up residence in Naples around 1656. Vico's mother, Candida Masullo, was Antonio's second wife and daughter of a carriage maker. Giambattista Vico was the sixth of eight children.<sup>5</sup>

5. Giambattista Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1944), 216.

He was born near the end of the Protestant Reformation, commonly dated from 1517, when Martin Luther published *The Ninety-Five Theses*, to 1648, the year of the Treaty of Westphalia, which brought to a conclusion the series of at least semireligious wars in Europe.<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin, the pillaging of monasteries and their libraries during these wars introduced many to previously little-known manuscripts and documents. This newly acquired knowledge awoke a greater awareness of history, especially among the Protestants who added many of the monastic books to their libraries.<sup>7</sup> In opposition to the variety of explanations of history put forth by Protestants after studying these documents and manuscripts, Catholics, in their Counter-Reformation, strove to correct Protestant interpretations of history with their own versions of history. This struggle over the interpretation of history, explain Fisch and Bergin, “had not yet abated in Vico’s day. Indeed its finest fruits matured within his own lifetime in the collections of the Bollandist Fathers and the Congregation of St. Maur.”<sup>8</sup>

Within this historical context, Vico was educated by the Jesuits, first in one of their grammar schools and then, beginning with third grade, privately by the Jesuit priest Antonio del Balzo, a noted nominalist philosopher of his time.<sup>9</sup> After a year and a half break from studies in 1683, he returned to his philosophical education under the guidance of another Jesuit priest, Giuseppe Ricci, who, as described

6. For an in-depth discussion on to what degree the wars during the time of the Reformation can be properly defined as religious, see William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

7. Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, 21.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 113. As explained by Fisch and Bergin, “In the Jesuit schools the ‘lower studies’ comprised three grades of grammar (chiefly Latin, with some Greek) and two of ‘humanity’ and rhetoric; the ‘higher studies’ included two or three years of philosophy (beginning with logic) and four of theology,” 216.

by Vico, was “a Scotist by sect but at bottom a Zenonist.”<sup>10</sup> From Ricci, writes Vico, “he was greatly pleased to learn that ‘abstract substances’ had more reality than the ‘modes’ of the nominalist Balzo.”<sup>11</sup> However, Vico soon began to tire of Ricci’s instruction due his “[lingering] too long over explanations of being and substance in their distinctions as metaphysical degrees.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, in 1684 he left Ricci’s instruction to study at his home the metaphysics of the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548–1617).<sup>13</sup>

### Study of Law, Poetry, Moral Philosophy, and Back to Metaphysics

During that year of private study, he attended a lecture given by Don Felice Aquadia, the head lecturer on law at the Royal University of Studies.<sup>14</sup> This lecture, along with the encouragement of his father, motivated Vico to devote himself to the study of law, both civil and canonical. In 1689, he graduated from the university’s school of law. During his studies of law, he took an interest in poetry, in particular Horace’s *On the Art of Poetry*.<sup>15</sup> The reference to ideal truths in poetry and moral philosophy helped him, writes Vico, “to realize that the legal discipline is less than half learned by the method of study which is commonly observed.”<sup>16</sup> This moved him once again to study metaphysics. In doing so, he began to align himself more with Platonic metaphysics and less with Aristotelian metaphysics, “for,” he explains, “the metaphysics of Aristotle leads to a physical principle, which is matter, from which the particular forms are drawn. . . . But the metaphysics of Plato leads to a metaphysical

10. *Ibid.*, 114.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 114–15.

15. *Ibid.*, 118, 120.

16. *Ibid.*, 121.

principle, which is the eternal idea, drawing out and creating matter from itself, like a seminal spirit that forms its own egg.”<sup>17</sup> Due to the influence of the ideal metaphysics of Plato, Vico began to develop a moral philosophy that was not primarily defined with reference to specific concrete laws, but rather by “an ideal or architectonic virtue of justice.”<sup>18</sup> This also led him “to [devote] himself to meditating an ideal commonwealth, to which he gave, in his laws, an equally ideal justice.”<sup>19</sup>

Not only did Vico align himself with Platonic idealism in opposition to Aristotle’s more concrete metaphysics; but he also, as evident in his writings, developed a science of reasoning in opposition to René Descartes’s exaltation of mathematics and the scientific observation of nature.<sup>20</sup> According to his new science, the study of the historical development of language is more certain than knowledge gained through mathematics and the study of nature. In his original autobiography of 1725, Vico explicitly states his opposition to Descartes’ method by writing,

We shall not here feign what René Descartes craftily feigned as to the method of his studies simply in order to exalt 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 as a man of letters may be known.<sup>21</sup>

For humanity, according to Vico, historical knowledge is surer than knowledge gained through the scientific observation of nature since we only truly know what we make. Consequently, since God made

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1998).

21. Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, 113.

the natural world only he, and not humanity, really knows it. Humanity, however, knows civic history since they wrote it.<sup>22</sup>

### Prioritizing Historical Experienced Knowledge over Empirical Observation of Nature

In his book *The New Science*,<sup>23</sup> Vico envisions a new science in which historical knowledge is privileged over scientific knowledge. In his new historically based science, he presents a set of general principles that, according to Vico, when correctly understood and applied explain recurring phases within human history.<sup>24</sup> The understanding gained through the study of human history is unlike theological, metaphysical, deductive, or inductive knowledge, since, unlike the just-mentioned kinds of knowledge, human beings know history by having caused it themselves.<sup>25</sup> By maintaining that “the criterion and rule of truth is to have made it,”<sup>26</sup> Vico argues that

22. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), bk. 1, sec. 3, 331, p. 85: “But in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never-failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations or civil world, which, since man had made it, men could hope to know.”

23. Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, trans. Leon Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xlii–xliv. Vico wrote multiple versions of the *The New Science*. His first version was never published and was later lost. It is currently known as *The New Science in Negative Form*. In 1725, he was able to publish a condensed version of this work. This is ordinarily referred to as *The First New Science*. In 1730, Vico then published a second version of *The New Science* that differs significantly in form and content from the previous edition. This is often referred to as *The Second New Science*. Finally, in 1743 Vico wrote a third version of *The New Science* that incorporated into *The Second New Science* his earlier work. This was published after Vico died in 1744. At times, it is referred to as *The Second New Science* and at other times as *The Third New Science*. In this book, I will be referencing, due to its conciseness, Leon Pompa’s edition of Vico’s *First New Science* and, when there is a need for a more in-depth quote, Thomas Goddard Bergin’s edition of Vico’s *The Third New Science*, titled simply as *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*.

24. Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), xx–xxi.

25. *Ibid.*, 24.



this latter form of knowledge is greater than previous kinds, since in all the others human beings do not know from within (*per causas*). Consequently, in opposition to Descartes's exaltation of knowledge gained through observation of nature, Vico asserts that since one can only know what a dog looks like and not what it is like to be a dog, therefore this knowledge, as with all empirically based scientific data, is inferior to the knowledge of human history as expressed in language.<sup>27</sup>

In describing historical knowledge gained through causing it, Vico both explicitly rejects the Epicurean view that history is totally haphazard and the Stoic outlook in which history is controlled mechanically by fate.<sup>28</sup> Rather, Vico argues, this knowledge through causes is directed by providence whereby humanity, in freely collaborating with providence by developing its capacities, is given an ever greater comprehension of itself.<sup>29</sup> Due to Vico's conception of humanity as causing history while, at the same time, being directed by providence, he denies that human nature is unchangeable and that humanity knows it in an a priori manner.<sup>30</sup> Rather than viewing

26. Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, trans. Jason Taylor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), chap 1, 26, p. 27.

27. *Ibid.*, chap 1, 26–28, pgs. 27–29.

28. Vico, *The First New Science*, bk. 1, chap. 3, 12, p. 12: "For the Epicureans taught that chance rules blindly over human affairs; that the human soul dies with the body; that, since only body exists, the bodily senses must regulate the passions through pleasure; and that utility, which changes by the hour, is the rule of justice. The Stoics, on the contrary, decreed that everything, including human will, is dragged along by a fatal necessity. . . . Hence, the Epicureans, with their ever-varying utility, would destroy the first and most important foundation of this science, the immutability of the natural law of the gentes [people]; and the Stoics, with their iron severity, would dismiss the benign interpretation [of law], in which interests and punishments are adjusted in accordance with the three celebrated categories of fault."

29. Vico, *The First New Science*, bk. 2, chap. 1, pgs. 38–39: "We begin our principles with the idea that is the first in any work whatsoever: divine Providence, who is the architect of this world of nations. . . . Providence disposes the things that particular men or peoples order for their own particular ends, things that would lead them principally to their own ruin, toward a universal end, beyond, and very often contrary to, their every intention; and how, through this universal end, but using these same particular ends [of men and peoples] as her means, she preserves them."

human nature as unalterable, Vico describes it as undergoing incremental changes as humanity progresses through history. These changes are not haphazard, since they are directed by providence and, due to human free will, neither are they entirely predictable. Vico, particularly in his various versions of *The New Science*, attempts to uncover the logic behind human history that is principally due neither to fate, nor to self-interest, as he describes Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677) maintaining,<sup>31</sup> but rather to a divine spark within humanity that moves it to collaborate with God by transitioning from a brutish state of nature to a more civilized and cultured one.<sup>32</sup>

### Vico's Historical Concept of Natural Law and Human Nature

Along with opposing the concept of a fixed human nature, Vico also, in opposition to Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), John Selden (1584–1645), and Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), denies a static

30. Vico, *The New Science*, section 1, chap. 1, 374, p. 104: “For, as we have said above, since this world of nations has certainly been made by men, it is within these modifications that its principles should have been sought. And human nature, so far as it is like that of animals, carries with it this property, that the senses are its sole way of knowing things.” Cf. *ibid.*, bk. 1, sect. 2, pg. 78.
31. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, sect. 3, 335, p. 87: “And so neither the Epicureans who attribute to God body alone, and chance together with body, nor the Stoics who (in this respect Spinozists of their day) make God an infinite mind, subject to fate, in an infinite body, could reason of commonwealths or laws; and Benedict Spinoza speaks of the commonwealth as a society of shopkeepers.”
32. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, sect. 4, 342, pgs. 90–91: “In one of its principle aspects, this Science must therefore be a rational civil theology of divine providence, which seems hitherto to have been lacking. For the philosophers have either been altogether ignorant of it, as the Stoics and the Epicureans were, the latter asserting that human affairs are agitated by a blind concourse of atoms, the former that they are drawn by a deaf [inexorable] chain of cause and effect; or they have considered it solely in the order of natural things, giving the name of natural theology to the metaphysics in which they contemplate this attribute [i.e., the providence] of God, and in which they confirm it by the physical order observed in the motions of such bodies as the spheres and the elements and in the final cause observed in other and minor natural things. But they ought to have studied it in the economy of civil things, in keeping with the full meaning of applying to providence the term divinity, from *divinari*, to divine; that is, to understand what is hidden from men, the future, or what is hidden in them, their consciousness. It is this that makes up the first and principle part of the subject matter of jurisprudence, namely the divine things on which depend the human things which make up its other and complementary part.” Cf. *ibid.*, bk. 2, sect. 1, 378–379, pgs. 106–7.

presentation of natural law.<sup>33</sup> According to Vico, the content of natural law is dependent on how humanity chooses to collaborate with providence in the creation of human history. The truth of human nature and the truths contained in natural law that govern human nature, therefore, are not stationary and timeless in a metaphysical manner, but rather are dynamic and change as humanity, directed by providence, makes its history. Finally, Vico differentiates how natural law developed among the Hebrew people from how it developed among the gentiles. In the following passage from *The First New Science*, these elements making up his concept of natural law are succinctly stated:

The natural law of the gentes is an eternal law that proceeds through time. But, just as within us lie buried a few eternal seeds of the true, which are gradually cultivated from childhood until, with age and through the various disciplines, the fully clarified notions that belong to the sciences arise, so within mankind, as a result of our sin, the eternal seeds of justice were buried, which, as the human mind gradually developed from the childhood of the world in accordance with its true nature, developed into demonstrated maxims of justice. But the following difference must always be preserved: that this proceeded in

33. Vico, *The First New Science*, bk. 2, chap. 4, 49, p. 41: “As for the first, the natural law of the gentes is an eternal law that proceeds through time. But, just as within us lie buried a few eternal seeds of the true, which are gradually cultivated from childhood until, with age and through the various disciplines, the fully clarified notions that belong to the sciences arise, so within mankind, as a result of our sin, the eternal seeds of justice were buried, which, as the human mind gradually developed from the childhood of the world in accordance with its true nature, developed into demonstrated maxims of justice. But the following difference must always be preserved: that this proceeded in one, distinctive way among the people of God, and in a different, normal way among the gentile nations.” *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 8, 90, p. 66: “Through the forgoing properties [48–9, 55] we have established the eternity and universality of the natural law of the nations. But since this law arose with the common customs of people, which are invariable creations of nations, and since human customs are the practices or habits of a human nature that does not change all at once but always retains an impression of some former practice or habit, this Science must provide, at one and the same time, a philosophy and a history of human customs, which are the two parts required to complete the kind of jurisprudence which is our concern, i.e., the jurisprudence of mankind.” *Cf. ibid.*, bk. 1, chaps. 5–6, 15–24, pgs. 14–20.

one, distinctive way among the people of God, and in a different, normal way among the gentile nations.<sup>34</sup>

In the passage above, Vico, by naming natural law as “the natural law of the gentes,” brings out the historical and changing aspect of natural law. He does this by contrasting evolving natural law of the people (gentes) with the supposedly, stationary, abstract “natural law of the philosophers”<sup>35</sup> as proposed by Grotius, Selden, and Pufendorf, who all “claim, on the basis of their systems of the natural law of the philosophers, that, from the beginning of the world, the customs of the natural law of the gentes has been constantly uniform.”<sup>36</sup>

As is evident in his views on human nature and the law that governs it, Vico prioritizes what is historically made over what is propositionally true. This does not mean that he completely relativizes natural law. Rather, he attempts to place his view between the Epicureans who, as described by Vico, viewed the formulation of law as due to pure chance, and the Stoics who, claims Vico, viewed law as unchanging.<sup>37</sup> He develops his middle position by integrating his assertion that a “few eternal seeds of the true”<sup>38</sup> have been providentially buried in humankind with his anti-Cartesian position that “to know distinctly is a vice rather than virtue of the human mind.”<sup>39</sup> Natural law, therefore, does have a universal dimension to it that, due to providence, transcends history, but human beings’ knowledge of this universal dimension will always be vague and indistinct.

34. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 4, 49, p. 41.

35. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 47, 194, p. 118.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 3, 12, p. 12:

38. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 4, 49, p. 41.

39. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, bk. 1, chap. 4, I, 72, p. 69. For further discussion on this, see Robert Miner, *Vico, Genealogist of Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 47–54.

## Vico's Prioritization of History as Underpinned by a Hylozoistic Metaphysics

Vico's anti-Cartesian stance is rooted in his hylozoistic metaphysical theory. Although the term *hylozoism* (Greek *hylo*, matter, *zoe*, life) originates from Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688),<sup>40</sup> the concept has its origin in early Greek philosophers, most notably Heraclitus (500 BCE).<sup>41</sup> According to Heraclitus, all material objects (*hyle*) contain a principle of life (*zoe*) that is not a constant, stable element, but rather is dynamic and ever in motion. In contrast, Aristotle, with hishylomorphism (Greek *hylo*, matter, *morphe*, form), acknowledged constant, actualized stable elements within the universe in the shape of forms. For Aristotle, “matter is potentiality, while form is actuality.”<sup>42</sup> Medieval philosophers, such as Aquinas, further distinguished between substantial forms and accidental forms.<sup>43</sup> The substantial form of a human, explains Aquinas, is “the intellectual principle,”<sup>44</sup> in other words, his or her soul, which subsists even apart from physical matter. An example of an accidental form would be if a human is white or black. According to this understanding, forms, in particular substantial forms, organize matter and give it intelligibility.<sup>45</sup> The truth of creation that humanity can know,

40. Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The first part, wherein all the reason and philosophy of atheism is confuted and its impossibility demonstrated* (London: Printed for Richard Royston, 1678), n19, n20, n21, 62, 101–9, 123, 131–32, 143–46.

41. John Burnett, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Kila, MT: Kessinger, 2003), 57–63. Ralph Cudworth was part of a group called the Cambridge Platonists who were associated with University of Cambridge. The Cambridge Platonists, and Cudworth in particular, have exerted a decisive influence upon the thought of John Milbank, who has sought to champion their Platonic “participationist” metaphysics against what he takes to be the nominalism of modernity. Cf. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xxvi.

42. Aristotle, “On the Soul,” in *The New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J. L. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), bk. 2, chap. 1, 412a, p. 165.

43. Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, trans. A. A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 16–17, 109–10.

44. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia, q. 76, art. 1.

therefore, is understood as present in how various substantial forms are ordered and related to one another. The hylomorphic theory stemming from Aristotle was appropriated by Christianity, and is most notably present in how the Catholic Church understands the Eucharist.<sup>46</sup> This manner of conceiving reality contrasts with the hylozoistic theory, stemming from Heraclitus and further developed by Vico, in which the truth humanity encounters is defined not by stable forms but rather by the constantly flowing energy of life present within the fundamental elements of the universe.

According to the hylozoism of Vico, this active energy is made up of metaphysical points operating by a divine *conatus* (Latin for impulse, inclination, tendency, striving) principle.<sup>47</sup> The building blocks of creation, therefore, are not understood as connected to forms, in accordance with the hylomorphism theory, but rather, in line with the hylozoistic theory, connected to ever-changing, active principles. For Vico, these active principles are governed by

45. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae q. 85, art 4: “As stated in the First Part (q. 5, A. 5), mode, species, and order are consequent upon every created good, as such, and also upon every being. Because every being and every good as such depends on its form from which it derives its *species*. Again, any kind form, whether substantial or accidental, or anything whatever, is according to some measure, wherefore it is stated in *Metaph. viii.* that *the forms of things are like numbers*, so that a form has a certain mode corresponding to its measure. Lastly, owing to its form, each thing has a relation of *order* to something else.” Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q 76, art. 1; Ia, q. 5, art. 5.

46. Even though the Catholic Church does not officially adopt one philosophical system, it does, at times, affirm certain perennial philosophical principles as nonnegotiable. This is evident in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, which states, “The sacramental re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection, in the Mass involves a most special presence which—in the words of Paul VI—“is called ‘real’ not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were ‘not real’, but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present.” This sets forth once more the perennially valid teaching of the Council of Trent: “The consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called this change transubstantiation.” Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/special\\_features/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_ecclesia\\_eucharistia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html), 15.

47. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, bk. 1, 4, 1, 55, p. 57; bk. 1, chap. 4, 1, 66, p. 65; bk. 1, chap. 5, 2, 75, p. 74.

a *conatus* principle. *Conatus* is an active force in constant tension understood in accordance with Heraclitus's view "that things are constantly changing (universal flux)."<sup>48</sup> Cratylus of Athens, a follower of Heraclitus in the late fifth century, further developed this concept by claiming that since everything is in flux, therefore there can be no knowledge of the world.<sup>49</sup> This radicalized expression of Heraclitus's views is consistent with the hylozoism of Vico, in which knowledge is ultimately not defined by forms that can be abstracted by an agent intellect but rather by humanity's interaction with ever-evolving points of energy in constant motion.

### Truth Is What Humans Make in History

Vico also grounds his anti-Cartesian stance, which leads him to reject a static concept of nature and law, in his simple axiom that "the true is itself made (*verum esse ipsum factum*),"<sup>50</sup> which is often shortened as *verum est factum*. For Vico, therefore, in contrast with Descartes, truth is not to be discovered by humankind in examining nature, but rather through the study of human language, laws, and history that humans themselves create. This, as explained by José Faur, distances Vico's approach to truth from Greek philosophers who "saw the highest criterion of truth and ethics in nature."<sup>51</sup> Instead, akin to the indifference of the Romans and Hebrews to science and the study of nature, Vico maintains that the study of language and not nature is the highest standard of truth for humanity.<sup>52</sup> Vico's exaltation of

48. Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/heraclitus/>.

49. Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 322.

50. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, chap. 1, 15, p. 17.

51. José Faur, "Vico, Religious Humanism and the Sephardic Tradition," *Judaism* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 64.

52. *Ibid.*, 64. For Vico's writings on language, see Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*; Vico, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Amsterdam:

rhetoric over empirical sciences is also rooted in his *verum-factum* principle. As previously explained, according to Vico, since human beings create language and the laws that govern their civil life, this is where they will know truth, not by reflecting, in a Greek manner, upon nature, since only God knows nature, as its Creator. Vico additionally establishes his *verum-factum* principle in God himself by identifying the generation of the second person of the Trinity as the ultimate paradigm of truth's convertibility with the made.<sup>53</sup>

By focusing on language and laws present in various political forms in history, Vico claims to have discovered a new science that is based upon a few basic principles. In describing how social and political institutions have developed, Vico rejects the social contract theorists' view that governments arose after people in a moment of time rationally chose to bind themselves to a contract (a rejection consistent with his rejection of Cartesian rationalism).<sup>54</sup> According to

Editions Rodopi B.V., 1984); Vico, *Universal Right*, trans. Giorgio Pinton and Margaret Diehl (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2000).

53. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, chap. 1, 17, p. 19: "This is why, in our religion, in which we profess that the world is created out of nothing in time, there needs to be real distinction between created truth, which is convertible with what is made, and uncreated truth, which is convertible with what is begotten. In the same way, the Holy Scriptures, with truly divine eloquence, have called the wisdom of God (which contains in itself the ideas of all things, and therefore, the elements of all ideas) the *Word*, since in this *Word*, the true is the same as the comprehension of all elements, which composes this universe of things and can establish countless worlds, if He so wills; and from these elements, known in His divine omnipotence, there exists a word most complete and real which, because it is known by the Father from eternity, is similarly begotten by Him from eternity." *Ibid.*, chap. 1, 28, pgs. 27–29: "If I might dispatch the matter in a word: the true is thus convertible with the good when the truth which is also known has its very being from the mind by which it is known, and so human science is an imitator of divine science, in which God, insofar as He knows the truth generates it *ad intra* (inwardly) from eternity, makes it *ad extra* (outwardly) in time. As for the criterion of the true, in the same way that for God, it is to have communicated goodness to His thoughts in the midst of creating—*God saw that they were good*—so for men, by comparison, it is to have effected the truths which we know. But, to better fortify this position, it must be defended against the dogmatists and the skeptics."
54. Vico, *The New Science*, bk. 1, sec. 4, 342, p. 91: "Our new Science must therefore be a demonstration, so to speak, of the historical fact of providence, for it must be a history of the forms of order which, without human discernment or intent, and often against the designs of men, providence has given to this great city of the human race."



Vico, this theory is overly simplistic, since it overlooks the natural historical development of humankind. Instead of political institutions having their origins in a rationally chosen contract between people, Vico argues, they arose out of natural, nonrational aspects of human nature. Vico's emphasis on a nonrational component in the origins of political institutions does not mean, however, that he does not recognize any logic in the historical development of governance. Rather, he attempts to steer a middle ground between two deterministic accounts of history: the Epicureans' account of history as governed by chance and the Stoic account of history governed by fate.<sup>55</sup>

### Vico's Historically Based Science as Shaped by Providence

In this middle position Vico establishes his science. He bases his science on one general principle and three human institutions.<sup>56</sup> His general principle, common for all humankind, is the belief in providence that naturally rose in the human psyche.<sup>57</sup> This belief in providence in turn led to the institution of normative religious beliefs. These religious beliefs influenced how humans instituted the practice of marriage. Out of this second institution, political forms developed and were formed around hereditary claims, and the formation of clans and influential families. The third institution that Vico identifies is the burial of the dead, which first began out a simple revulsion of unburied bodies and was later shaped by religious beliefs.<sup>58</sup> The erection of monuments, the burial of the dead, and the subsequent genealogies represent, for Vico, the earliest form of historical data.<sup>59</sup>

55. Vico, *The First New Science*, bk. 1, chap. 3, 12, p. 12.

56. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 74–75, pgs. 53–54.

57. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 45, p. 38.

58. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 1, 10, p. 10; bk. 2, chap. 7, 75, p. 54.

59. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 28, 144–45, p. 90.

Vico categorizes the various forms of political expressions that arose out of these three foundational institutions in four ways. The first was simply isolated family units. These disparate family units then gradually came together as a primitive priestly society. Vico names this society *the theological or poetic age*. This first age, as explained by Vico, was based on the religious belief that in the sky is a God, Jove, who communicates to humanity through thunder and lightning.<sup>60</sup> Priests ensured the continuation of this primitive political form by offering sacrifices in order to appease Jove.<sup>61</sup> Eventually, though, priests lost their prestige and were replaced by the heads of aristocratic families. Vico names this *the heroic age*.<sup>62</sup> This age was based on the belief that the aristocratic leaders and their families were of semidivine origins. However, the aristocrats suffered a similar fate as the priests of the theological age once the lower classes no longer believed in the semidivinity of the aristocrats. This led, explains Vico, to *the third age of humanity* in the form of democracies.<sup>63</sup> It is evident, according to Vico, that as humankind progresses through history, more rational governing principles prevail over more superstitious ones.<sup>64</sup>

60. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 12, 105, p. 73.

61. Vico, *The New Science*, prol., 25, p. 13; bk. 1, chap. 72, 250, p. 71; bk. 1, chap. 75, 254, p. 72.

62. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, sec. 5, chap. 6, 634–61, pgs. 212–22.

63. *Ibid.*, prol., 29, p. 16: “The balance next to the purse is meant to indicate that, after the aristocratic governments, which were heroic governments, there came human governments, at first popular in character. The people had finally come to understand that the rational nature (which is the true human nature) is equal in all men. From this natural equality (by occasions conceived in the ideal eternal history and encountered exactly in Roman history) they gradually brought the heroes in civil equality in popular commonwealths.”

64. *Ibid.*, prol., 31, p. 18. In succinctly describing this progression, Vico writes, “1. The age of the gods, in which the gentiles believed they lived under divine governments, and everything was commanded them by auspices and oracles, which are the oldest things in profane history. 2. The age of the heroes, in which they reigned everywhere in aristocratic commonwealths, on account of a certain superiority of nature which they held themselves to have over the plebs. 3. The age of men, in which all men recognized themselves as equal in human nature, and therefore there were established first the popular commonwealths and then the monarchies, both of which are forms of human governments, as we observed a short while ago.”

However, this progression is not, as described by Vico, only linear but also can be cyclical. The rational democratic age of humanity in which “the people had finally come to understand that the rational nature (which is the true human nature) is equal in all men”<sup>65</sup> eventually, due to the “dissolute life”<sup>66</sup> of the people, became depraved and irrational. Providence first remedied this by allowing monarchs to arise in order to govern the unruly people.<sup>67</sup> However, if, “providence does not find such a remedy within, it seeks it outside”<sup>68</sup> by allowing the nation “to become subject to better nations which, having conquered them by arms, preserve them as subject provinces.”<sup>69</sup> Finally, Vico writes, “if the peoples are rotting in this last civil illness and cannot agree upon a monarch from within, and are not conquered and preserved by better nations from without, then providence for their extreme ill has its extreme remedy at hand.”<sup>70</sup> This extreme measure of providence allows the people to revert back to the first primitive age.<sup>71</sup> To what extent Vico’s cyclical understanding of history is fatalistic is not clear from his writings and,

65. *Ibid.*, prolog., 29, p. 16.

66. *Ibid.*, concl., 1105, p. 380.

67. *Ibid.*, concl., 1103, p. 380: “It first ordains that there be found among these peoples a man like Augustus to arise and establish himself as a monarch and, by force of arms, take in hand all the orders and all the laws, which, though sprung from liberty, no longer avail to regulate and hold it within bounds. On the other hand providence ordains that the very form of the monarchic state shall confine the will of the monarchs, in spite of their unlimited sovereignty, within the natural order of keeping the peoples content and satisfied with both their religion and their natural liberty.”

68. *Ibid.*, concl., 1105, p. 380.

69. *Ibid.*, concl., 1105, p. 381.

70. *Ibid.*, concl., 1106, p. 381.

71. *Ibid.*: “For such peoples, like so many beasts, have fallen into the custom of each man thinking only of his own private interests and have reached the extreme of delicacy, or better of pride, in which like wild animals they bristle and lash out at the slightest displeasure. Thus in the midst of their greatest festivities, though physically thronging together, they live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and will, scarcely any two being able to agree since each follows his own pleasure or caprice. By reason of all this, providence decrees that, through obstinate factions and desperate civil wars, they shall turn their cities into forests and the forests into dens and lairs of men. In this way, through long centuries of barbarism, 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 made by the barbarism of sense.”

consequently, is debated among scholars.<sup>72</sup> It is, though, important to notice that Vico describes the cyclical nature of history contingently and conditionally (If/then). The progression from one historical stage to another depends on the degree of decay or progress that people collectively cause.

How Vico chooses to name his three-stage cyclical concept of contingent history reveals another aspect of his thought. He calls it the “ideal eternal history.”<sup>73</sup> By this, he indicates that according to his science human history follows the order of ideas in a Platonic manner. The ideas refer both to the eternal mind of God, who providentially directs history, and how humans, in responding to providence, both nonrationally and rationally work out eternal ideas in history.<sup>74</sup> For Vico, humanity encounters in history the eternal ideals of God in a non-Aristotelian, Platonic manner,<sup>75</sup> which, in accordance with Plato’s cave analogy, are only perceived dimly and indistinctly.<sup>76</sup> This anti-Aristotelian and pro-Platonic metaphysics is related to his previously explained anti-Cartesian stance. According to Vico, both Aristotle and Descartes make the error of assuming that knowing distinctly is a virtue of the mind. On the one hand, Aristotle does this by bringing “metaphysics straight down into physics.”<sup>77</sup> Descartes, on the other hand, achieves this by bringing “physics straight up into metaphysics.”<sup>78</sup> Vico argues against both these

72. Miner, *Vico, Genealogist of Modernity*, 128–31.

73. Vico, *The First New Science*, bk. 2, chap. 8, 90, p. 66.

74. *Ibid.*, xxviii–xxix; bk. 2, chap. 8, 90, p. 66.

75. Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, 121: “Only after he had made considerable progress did he understand why the metaphysics of Aristotle had been of no avail to him in the study of moral philosophy . . . For the metaphysics of Aristotle leads to a physical principle, which is matter, from which the particular forms are drawn; and indeed makes God a potter who works at things outside himself. But the metaphysics of Plato leads to a metaphysical principle, which is the eternal idea, drawing out and creating matter from itself, like a seminal spirit that forms its own eggs.”

76. Plato, *Republic*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: The Dial Press, 1956), 265–69.

77. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, bk. 1, chap. 4, 1, 72, p. 69.

78. *Ibid.*

approaches by stating that “metaphysics transcends physics because it treats of powers and the infinite; physics is a part of metaphysics because it treats of forms and bounded things.”<sup>79</sup>

Consequently, since metaphysics transcends physics and does not equal physics, whatever humankind knows of the eternal ideas through his senses will always be more indistinct than distinct. Vico explains this by writing:

And yet thinking itself is an admission that what you think is unformed and has no limits. And on account of this, to know distinctly is a vice rather than virtue of the human mind, for it involves knowing of the limits of things. The divine mind sees things in the sunlight of its own truth, that is to say, when it sees a thing, it knows infinite things besides the thing which it sees; the human mind, when it knows a thing distinctly, sees it at night by torchlight, and when it sees it, it loses sight of the things nearby. . . . But, the clarity of metaphysical truth is identical to the clarity of light which we do not see distinctly except through things which are darkened: metaphysical things are illuminating because they can be confined by no limit, can be seen distinctly in nothing formed; but physical things are darkened things, by which we see distinctly the light of metaphysical things.<sup>80</sup>

Due to his Platonic metaphysics, in which ideas are truly known by humanity only indistinctly, Vico rejects Aristotle’s universals, while upholding the validity of Platonic forms.<sup>81</sup> Aristotle’s universals are useless, according to Vico, since in an attempt to bring clarity to the human mind with abstract categories, they neither do justice to particular cases from which they are abstracted from, nor do justice

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 4, 72–73, pgs. 69–71.

81. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 2, 40–41, p. 43: “And because forms are individual . . . it follows that the more the sciences and the arts aspire to the Aristotelian rather than Platonic genera, the more they confound the forms, and that the more encompassing they become, the less useful they turn out to be. It is from this reputation that the physics of Aristotle is so little taught today, namely, that it is far too universal; while, on the other hand, the human race has been enriched with countless new truths by means of fire and machines, the instruments used by modern physics, an operative physics which produces works resembling the particular works of nature.”

to eternal ideas in God to which humankind only has vague, general access.<sup>82</sup> In contrasting Platonic forms with Aristotelian universals, Vico writes,

The reason that physical matter produces the best form, regardless of the particular form it produces, is that the way that it produced that form was the only one of all. But metaphysical matter, because all particular forms are imperfect, contains the best form with respect to the genus itself, or idea. We have seen why forms are useful; now let us take up why universal are harmful. To speak in universal terms is characteristic of infants or barbarians. . . . All errors in philosophy come from homonyms (commonly called equivocations, an equivocation being nothing other than a term common to many things), for without genera, there would be no equivocations, since men are naturally averse to homonyms. Here is proof of this: when a child is ordered, without distinction, to fetch Titus when there are two people of this name, because by nature he inclines to particulars, he will immediately ask, “Which Titus do you want me to fetch?”<sup>83</sup>

The description given above on Vico’s thought is clearly stated in his writings and is not subject to debate among most scholars when interpreting Vico. However, like many great thinkers, the more nebulous aspects of his writings have been interpreted in a variety of ways that at times contradict one another.

### **Competing Interpretations of Vico’s Thought**

David L. Marshall, in *The Current State of Vico Scholarship*, divides these approaches in three basic ways: scientifically, religiously, and linguistically.<sup>84</sup> These ways can be further distinguished by whether one maintains that Vico was a supporter of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on rationalism, universalism, and empiricism or whether,

82. *Ibid.*, xv; bk. 1, chap. 2, 38–48, pgs. 41–49.

83. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 2, 44–46, pgs. 45–47.

84. David L. Marshall, “The Current State of Vico Scholarship,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 1 (January 2011): 142.

as expressed in his opposition to Descartes, he opposed the Enlightenment project.<sup>85</sup>

Two current historians disagree on how to categorize Vico in precisely this manner. On the one hand, according to Jonathan Israel, a noted historian on the Enlightenment, Vico is situated within the Enlightenment/modern way of thought.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, according to the historian Mark Lilla, Vico is an antimodern, or in other words, opposed to the Enlightenment.<sup>87</sup> Mark Lilla's view is a further development of Isaiah Berlin's categorization of Vico as part of the Counter-Enlightenment. According to Berlin (1909–1997), a recently deceased historian and Vico scholar, the term Counter-Enlightenment refers to an eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century movement that arose in opposition to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which was characterized by a strong emphasis on rationality and science. Berlin describes the Counter-Enlightenment movement, in which he places Vico, as relativist, antirationalist, romantic, intuitionist, vitalist, and organic.<sup>88</sup> According to Berlin,

85. *Ibid.*, 142.

86. Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 664–70; Marshall, “The Current State of Vico Scholarship,” 141.

87. Mark Lilla, *G.B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15. “Vico was an anti-modern. He distrusted the motives of modern philosophy and feared its political teaching. Whereas the moderns saw the lamp of man's reason covered by the basket of dogma and superstition, Vico saw a fallen creature whose irrational drives would always dominate his weak reason. The moderns believed error could and must be refuted through analysis; Vico believed that certain errors were useful and should be preserved, since God used them indirectly to develop the faculties. And while the moderns distrusted all order and authority that could not be rationally justified, Vico saw in them the hand of a benevolent Father drawing his weak and fallen children back to him over time. Vico's dissent from the moderns is based on this profoundly unmodern reading of human nature, and is animated by a fear that the moderns' studied ignorance of it would unleash powerful psychological and social forces that could render man a beast to himself and to others”; Mark Lilla, “G.B. Vico: The Antimodernist,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (July 1993): 32–39; cf. Marshall, *The Current State of Vico Scholarship*, 146.

88. Isaiah Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Despotism to Law, Common*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 101, 102, 106; Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, 8–12.

Vico found his inspiration not from eighteenth-century thinkers, with their emphasis on rationality and empiricism, but rather in ancient Greek and Roman thought, which focused on language, law, and history.<sup>89</sup>

Since in this book it will be shown that Ratzinger's and Milbank's natural (in reference to physics classically understood), metaphysical, theological, and political differences are rooted in their two approaches to Vico's *verum-factum* principle as present in both humanity's and God's knowledge of the truth, it will be helpful to locate their two approaches to Vico within this continuum of interpretations. In *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger describes Vico not as a Counter-Enlightenment thinker, but, more in accordance with Jonathan Israel, as one who brought the Enlightenment to its full development.<sup>90</sup> He does this by dividing the basic historical attitudes to reality in three ways: magical, metaphysical, and scientific.<sup>91</sup> For Ratzinger, the metaphysical approach to reality was present in ancient Greek thought, notably Aristotle and Plato, which was later providentially joined with biblical faith, as evident in Scripture and in the writings of the church fathers.<sup>92</sup>

As described by Ratzinger, Vico, along with Descartes and Kant, rejected the metaphysical approach to reality and instead, after having "given up seeking the hidden 'in-itselfness' of things and sounding the nature of being itself,"<sup>93</sup> advanced a scientific manner of conceiving reality by restricting himself to what is seen and visibly evident. Vico did this, argues Ratzinger, by substituting the scholastic

89. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, 8.

90. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 31.

91. *Ibid.*, 30. Ratzinger clarifies his use of *scientific* by writing, "'scientific' here being used in the sense in which we speak of the natural sciences."

92. Joseph Ratzinger, *Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen* (Bonn: Paulinus, 2006), 29.

93. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 30.



axiom *verum est ens* with *verum est factum*.<sup>94</sup> As described by Ratzinger, this led Vico to describe reality historically, after “scientifically” examining the data of language, law, and culture, and not metaphysically.

In contrast with Ratzinger, Milbank, more in accordance with Berlin’s approach, describes Vico as a postmodern, Counter-Enlightenment thinker who did not intend to bring modern thought to its fulfillment, but rather attempted to recapture an ancient appreciation for language, rhetoric, and history in opposition to Descartes’s modern fascination with mathematics and with clear and distinct universal ideas.<sup>95</sup> Milbank, though, distinguishes himself from Berlin and other similar readers of Vico by interpreting in a unique manner Vico’s identification of the generation of the second person of the Trinity as the ultimate paradigm of truth’s convertibility with the made. According to Milbank, when Vico’s axiom is understood in light of Nicholas Cusa’s description of the second person of the Trinity as the “Art” of God, this means that the second person of the Trinity is the inner creation of God, thus making creation rather than being the foremost metaphysical concept.<sup>96</sup>

As this book will demonstrate, the thought of Giambattista Vico is crucial for understanding how Joseph Ratzinger’s and John Milbank’s approaches to truth and politics relate to one another. While the following chapters are dedicated to the comparison of these two contemporary theologians, their distinct relationship to Vico provides a helpful backdrop for this comparative study.

94. *Ibid.*, 31.

95. John Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico*. Part 1, *The Early Metaphysics* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 48–62.

96. *Ibid.*, 22, 117–49.