Poetry against Torture

Criticism, History, and the Human

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— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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1
Vico and Philological Criticism

> Those who occupy the heights of power yearn for the immense and the infinite.
>
> — Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*

Beginning in 1699, the Neapolitan thinker and critic, Giambattista Vico, opened each academic year at the University of Naples with an "Inaugural Oration" delivered on October 18, the Feast Day of St. Luke. As Professor of Rhetoric, it was his job to introduce new university students to the nature, aims, and traditions of education while at the same time elaborating his own ever-deepening sense of its components, purposes, and ideals.

His speech of 1708 was special for several reasons and in many ways. It was lengthier, more formal, and more elaborate because he aimed it not only at his students but also directly to those in power. In 1707, as part of the Europe-wide "War of Spanish Succession" (1701–14), Austria had driven Spain from control of Naples — a mark of the Spanish Empire's decline — and the University's administration had decided to dedicate the opening academic ceremonies of 1708 to the new imperial ruler. Vico delivered his lecture, *On the Study Methods of Our Time,* before the Austrian Emperor's representative who embodied the all too secular competition between Joseph 1 and the Vatican. The Austrian Viceroy and Captain General of Naples was Vincenzo Cardinal Grimani, whom Pope Clement XI considered excommunicating for representing the Habsburgs' interests with too much enthusiasm.[1] Keeping this setting in mind steadies our sense of Vico's political interests in this lecture that is so evidently concerned with educational theory and human anthropology. Vico laid out for the city's political as well as intellectual and academic elites a daring and expansive prospect of the pedagogic and civil purposes of intellectual method within the university and the city to which it belonged.[2]

Nearly three hundred years later, faced with the welcome opportunity to speak under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts to an audience including post-graduates whose auditing credits them with study in method, I start a series of lectures by invoking Vico's grand accomplishment. I do so not because we are older and wiser and more modern than he — that is, not to correct or admonish — but also not because we should or can only be his poor echo, merely an anxious shadow of his original greatness. I bring Vico before you to start this series of talks because he is an essential figure in supporting and elaborating the small cadre of loving intellectual workers who study criticism, poesis, and power hoping to make something permanent of humanity's historical potential. The cadre is small but impressive, including Plato, Machiavelli, Aristotle, and Bacon for Vico and, for us, as I will suggest in succeeding talks, Erich Auerbach, Edward Said, William Empson, and others.

Although Vico's great work is the final edition of *The New Science* (1744), an exceedingly original, inventive, and difficult expression of a lifetime's reflection on poetry, education, law, philosophy, and politics, I will speak mostly about the 1708 oration, *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (*On the Study Methods of Our Time*).[3] I have two reasons for this choice: first, Vico's lecture is an excellent model and second, it anticipates a great deal of what follows in his career. With some additions and qualifications, we can maintain faith with his accomplishments.

All critical humanists must study Vico so they might decide if they will embrace not all the details of his program but the basic historical and aesthetic principles of his method and thinking. My aim is to encourage you to take him very seriously as an interlocutor in our collective work on and with literatures and literary cultures. I will contend throughout these lectures that literary humanists, scholars, and critics devoted to the *litterae humaniores* should think of themselves in ways that are now rather uncommon, unfashionable, and institutionally difficult to imagine and maintain. If we literary humanists do not know Vico well, we diminish our capacities and contribute to a cultural amnesia the effect of which is nothing less than barbarism. Vico himself and the tradition of work he exemplifies offer moral, intellectual, and political resources that our societies need and that, for the most part, academic professionals and their extramural contemporaries do not provide.

"Crisis" is a very overworked word in recent literary and cultural studies and its pervasiveness in the media's accounts of political and social events wears it thin. Cheapened language supports the dominant powers of the status quo, shielding them from suitable discussion, undermining the commonplaces, the topics, that thriving polities possess. Literary history suggests this has always

been the case, from Thucydides' description of linguistic decay during the plague years of *The Peloponnesian Wars* to Camus's echo of that trope in *La Peste*. Writing in 1929, Samuel Beckett gave us to understand that cheapened or as he put it when speaking of global English, "polite language," becomes available again with new force in its very putrefaction and, he adds, this is a perfectly Vichian insight.[4]

If the media and political speech have hollowed out this essential word, "crisis," which like so many other words we will discuss became common in English during the Renaissance, then not only academic careerist repetition but also more grievous Gnostic forms of intellection further its undermining. Historically, the very conditions and practice that damaged this word bring it back. The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows that usage confirms what Beckett understood, that "crisis" has now become a vacuous gesture of repetition that as a plain placeholder in people's speech more than ironically, viciously, creates the familiar: "now applied esp. to times of difficulty, insecurity, and suspense in politics or commerce." Merely historical consciousness notes this contextualized usage and proposes various analyses of its causes. Vichian historical humanism, however, not only contextualizes, conceptualizes, and "historicizes" — but it remembers and releases the results of human labor, the commonplaces, embedded in the material language we inherit and should preserve. What has died in the anti-human, historical reading can recover, aiming to preserve not only past human work as a resource and tradition, but the very idea of the species as historically human. Beckett, speaking of the Vichian elements in Joyce's renewal of language, puts it this way: "There is an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction, the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate. This reduction of various expressive media to their primitive economic directness, and the fusion of these primal essences into an assimilated medium for the exteriorization of thought, is pure Vico, and Vico, applied to the problem of style."[5]

We will return to the question of style at several points in these lectures, especially when we approach Vico's heir, Erich Auerbach's reading of Dante. For now, we follow Beckett's Joycean and Vichian authority to recover "crisis" for our usage, not only about our moment, but for the entire set of threats that Vico's work helps us see confront not only humanistic historicism but criticism and so our cultural polities, themselves. From the putrefaction of media and academic abuse, we dare to call the need societies and academic humanists face "critical," to designate the present configuration of intellectual and political forces a life-threatening crux in the fate of the human and its productions. Just what this threat is we can only begin to say until we follow Vico through his

analyses. It involves the alignment of anti-humanistic, indeed Gnostic intellectual ambitions, with now common political authoritarianism that increasingly relies upon not only capital investment in new forms of corporatism, but persistent transformations in the nature and function of knowledge, and especially their effects upon education.

I find myself using the term "Gnostic" in this Vichian context in a way similar to Slavoj Žižek in an interview, "On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love," from 2004.[6] Žižek's remarks work as a criticism of the contemporary heir to Desartes, Alain Badiou, and I allude to them here precisely for that reason. In substance, Žižek and I agree on what we mean by Gnosticism but we part ways over its value. Žižek fits his own anti-humanism and anti-historicism into an anti-secularism that warns against conceiving of the Western God of Jewish and Christian monotheism anthropocentrically.

Žižek embraces a kind of weak Gnosticism that, setting aside for the moment his claim of its Jewish origins, repeatedly appears in habits of mind that typify modern philosophy and physical science. We will see the second of these points later when we touch on remarks by great physicists. The Gnostic habit of mind is, however, much more pervasive in the humanities than it should be, common even among those who have little idea of its persistence in their work. In the Vichian context, not only do ancient thinkers such as the Stoics and moderns like Descartes and his heirs fall within this practice, but so do the many intellectuals who have faith in various sorts of anti-historicist practices to liberate us from the fallen ruined time of political limits.

Žižek states the matter simply at first: "The basic message of religion, to put it in a nutshell, is that humanity cannot stand on its own." A good Baconian, Žižek expresses his admiration for what he calls "Jewish iconoclasm," which he insists is not antagonistic to Christianity. Indeed, iconoclastic destructions of anthropocentrism find their fulfillment, he contends, in Christianity. Žižek's thinking has about it, though, a strange residue of perhaps Kierkegaardian meditation. His iconoclasm morphs into a familiar Protestant Incarnationalism so habitual and assuring, one presumes, as to be at home now in the Vatican. "Images of God," he writes, are not proscribed "because God is *tout autre*, beyond, and every image betrays him, but because the space of the divine is not up there, it's here, in human interactions, and I think this is perhaps only brought to a conclusion in Christianity."

Žižek recognizes at least one danger on the surface of his position, Gnosticism. He insists his pose only approaches Gnosticism, a fact that interests me much less than his definition of the Gnostic and his rather extraordinary naïveté that denial does not reveal truth.

> Here I may be approaching not so much Gnosticism as certain not a little bit heretical twists [*sic*], because I want to say not only that humanity only knows God through Christ but also that only through Christ does God know himself. We all know that this is a well-known gnostic, or not so much gnostic as a certain mystic tradition or heretical move, this idea that our knowledge of God is divine self-knowledge, and so on.

This is so pathetic that we can only laugh at it. Importantly, though, it tells us a great deal about the motivation of the anti-historicism, anti-humanism of our times and Vico's. This new wave of Gnostic or near-Gnostic ambitions, coming after a generation that took seriously the idea that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz, that ruin was inevitable, reflects nothing less than an inability to stand in the face of human self-knowledge stripped of the comforting error of divine infusion. Politics seems unable to redeem time, and so the Christ appears, ready at hand to those with certain kinds of partial memories, ready to comfort us once more. The great courage of Vico's work, as I hope to make clear, is that the human is always without the divine; that the Incarnation — whether or not cast as religion — is a diversion from the human responsibility for civilization and the ecosystem.

Having invoked Adorno, I must mention his remarkable essay on commitment to sharpen my own objection to Žižek and those like him. (I will, however, follow Vico and warn against intellectual models.) Adorno carefully distinguished the crudities of engagement — closely identified with Sartre and elements in Brecht — to make clear the critical indeed utopian possibilities of art that honors its own highest formal obligations. Although Adorno carefully discriminated between his position and the traditional French value of art for art's sake, readers sometimes confuse the two. Art for art is not the alternative to engagement; rather, form manifests those human capacities that negate by the evidence of their very existence both the truth of existing norms and their necessity. The same kind of claim might be made for Gnostic ambitions such as Žižek's or even Badiou's. One way in which Vico helps us is to elaborate Adorno's position to discriminate those acts of mind, apparently true to themselves as counter to what they take to be "the dominant," which nonetheless willfully destroy the historical project of a humanity self-responsible and self-made, free of illusion and coveting divine reflection. Within the modern, in other words, are fully "modernized" tendencies to reversion, to religion, to supposed origins more authentic than the historicist humanism Vico's studies traced and theorized.

Vico opened his lecture of 1708, standing before the assembly of church, empire, and university, with a clear critique of the profound similarities between

Baconian intellectual ambition and the tyrannical potential of modern politics — and of the professors who evaded their responsibility to examine this alignment while practicing, narcissistically, in their own domains. Vico stands forth as an avatar of the *litterae humaniores* who transforms his tradition into the highest form of modernity, conceiving the human as having come into being historically and as having its best chance to fulfill its limited historical possibilities only within the consciousness, knowledge, and patience of finitude's humility.

Vico's thinking is historicist in at least three ways. First, it knows itself as emerging from his profound and patient study of Western civilizations' various stages, formations, and transformations. Second, it knows itself as having come into being as a mark of humanity's modernity, its movement from spiritualism, mere naturalism, and superstition. It knows this movement was a struggle against persistent pre-modern formations as well as their persistence in modern practices, especially as arrogant aspirations to infinitude of power and theory. Third, and finally, it transforms this historical modernity into the active memory of a modern humanist thinker who never forgets the finite, malleable, and imperfect nature of the species that always only inhabits history as its own product — indeed, despite its worst dishonest and murderous phantasms, as its only possible habitation.

Vico's humanistic legacy demands that literary intellectuals celebrate and honor human historicism and humans as historical. Moreover, it vivifies the persistent threats to the achievement of the human as historical. It characterizes them for us as not only anti-historical and anti-humanist but also as anti-human, doing this, again moreover, within an altogether historical human account of all the errors that immaturely hope to find redemptive infinitude, certainty, or permanent authoritarian rule. In other words, the close alignment between certain interesting intellectual and institutional practices in the domains of knowledge and education appear in all too clear relations with tyrannical state power that not only has no respect for historical memory and qualification, but little if any respect, at least in potential, for the human itself.[7] We will see evidence for this conjunction later on when we address directly the realities of "psychological torture," a regime of knowledge and power that in essence is anti-human and anti-historicist in the most profound sense. As we will see, Vico finds the best approaches to human possibilities in poetry, in poesis as the very form of human being, that is, in making or creating. Torture emerges as precisely the antithesis of poesis (what I will sometimes call poesy), that is, as the destruction of the historical humanity of a person who falls within its grasp. Torture exists as this

horrible possibility as the result of a particular but long-time looming alignment between modern intellectual ambition and state authority. It is in the horrendous context of putrefied civil life for the species that the word "crisis" recovers its force. It had never lost it for those such as Auerbach and Said,[8] who knew that Vico's historical studies presented far too many cases of such arrogant "human" aspirations and their dreadful consequences to relapse into either indifferent professionalism or Gnostic servitude to the anti-human. Following Vico, such intellectuals saw, measured, and understood the disadvantages for life in those rejected options and chose instead to work within the historical traditions that formed them and the human to elaborate poesy, the creative, laborious, finite life of culture and civility. A combination of arrogant intellectual error and authoritarian violence, especially as together they destroy the very possibility of finite humanity and its limited perfectibility, threatens both as fact and as possibility all that poesy represents.

Vico starts his lecture expressing admiration for Francis Bacon's "small but priceless treatise" (*De dignitate et de augmentis scientiarum*) for emphasizing the value of knowledge production in modernity and specifying the particular disciplines and practices we should add to our tradition to "enlarge our stock of knowledge" (*SM* 3–4). Bacon and Vico share the classical and liberal ideal of perfectibility, but Bacon dreams of achieving this by expanding the domain of knowledge, indeed, by producing knowledge as a necessary and sufficient domain for human aspiration and activity: "so that human wisdom may be brought to complete perfection" (*SM* 4). Vico does not share Bacon's vision of the modern for two reasons. First, its totalizing ambition is reductive in a way that leaves behind all that tradition and older forms of life might offer to imagine and fulfill the aspiration to and practices of human wisdom. Second, it is not only willfully amnesiac but also violently arrogant and uncomfortably close in kind and ambition to then new forms of imperial and authoritarian political ambition. Vico's language, always precise, rewards the sort of attention that literary readers properly learn from the study of poems — this is a point which Vico himself insists upon later in his lecture.

Vico's lecture is closely critical of several classical as well as modern lines of thought, so it is wrong to try to place him simply on one side or the other of the debate between ancients and moderns.[9] Nonetheless, he has densely specific profound objections to certain forms of (amnesiac) modernity, not least their ignorant repetition of classical errors, and his analysis of their disadvantages begins with his remarks on Bacon:

> But, while he discovers a new cosmos of sciences, the great Chancellor proves to be rather a pioneer of a completely new universe than a prospector of this world of ours. His vast demands so exceed the utmost extent of man's effort that he seems to have indicated how we fall short of achieving an absolutely complete system of sciences rather than how we may remedy our cultural gaps. (*SM* 4)
>
> [Sed dum *novum Scientiarium* retegit *Orbem*, novo magis, quam nostro Terrarum Orbe se dignum probat. Etenim eius vasta desideria adeo humanum industriam exuperant, ut potius quid nobis ad absolutissimam Sapientiam nesessario desit, quam quod suppleri posit, ostendisse videatur.[10]]

Gianturco translates "retegit" with "pioneer" as he renders "probat" as prospect. His excellent notes do not record that the trope, "retegit Orbem," opens up or discloses a new world, derives from the *Aeneid*, in a line spoken by Juno to Venus, in conflict over Dido's fate and the fate of empires. Specifically, Juno says, "Venatum Aeneas unaque miserrima Dido / in nemus ire parant, ubi primos crastinus ortus extulerit Titan, radiisque retexerit orbem."[11] ["When tomorrow's Titan / first shows his rays of light, reveals the world, / Aeneas and unhappy Dido plan to hunt together in the forest."[12]] The great Chancellor's ambitions are, indeed, Titanic, placed in the echo of disaster, figured in a classical trope, and marked with a worry about the human aspiration to divine clarity and imperial power. This last is the first soft sounding of Vico's objections to those moderns who substitute totalizing regimes of knowledge for a more complex, nuanced, and entangling poetics that forestalls these ambitions with historical and practical experience and values other than analytic power — specifically, value associated with memory, language, imagination, poetry, eloquence, and prudence.

Gianturco's translation renders perfectly Vico's sense of the dangers inherent in Baconian ambitions. Throughout this lecture, Vico weighs the advantages and disadvantages of classical and modern study methods, which requires him to specify terms of measurement by comparison between practice, idea, and context. Bacon's grand ambition, totalizing, as it seems, has disadvantages inherent in its own values. Gianturco's "rather than" [*quam quod*] indicates a divide in history and human effort, a choice (even if it seems impersonal) to abandon the effort to supplement our culture, which alludes back to "this world of ours" [*nostro Terrarum Orbe*]. Bacon's project has the advantage of defining its own impossibility, given the finitude of human capacities in producing a complete and defining knowledge system, but it has the disadvantage of

obscuring what is humanly possible, namely achievement as supplement within human activity.[13] Human effort is inadequate to the Baconian ambition but not to the process of cultural supplementation. The human, quite clearly, has its place in the cultural and has the cultural as its place. Vico's quick gesture in producing this figure that ties the human to work as and in culture anticipates the sonority of his epistemological claim that humans can only know what they make — a claim upon which all historical humanism comes to rest.

Baconian ambition not only has the disadvantage of turning mind, labor, and love away from culture as the needed and appropriate sphere of human achievement — disproving with its ambition its own legitimacy — but it has definite, unavoidable, and dire consequences as a subversion of what the human has made. This is an important moment in Vico and an important moment for those who would learn to isolate those claims to modernity that are themselves destructive of its very possibility. Vico's profound and long-lasting disagreements with Descartes derive both from his fear of Descartes's blindness to the consequences of his advocacy for analytic practices as the modern and from the regressive nature of Cartesian ambitions that repeat past errors and would reverse the emergent achievements of the historically human. Of course, Vico understands the modern to be the historical result of human effort to produce the human as historical, to produce wisdom of the human's foundational modern achievement, achieving and knowing its own historicality. That Cartesians claim to be modern, especially in the battle with the ancients, is obvious. Vico, as we shall see, indicts their claim with the charge that they ignorantly reproduce earlier moments of thought and practice and that they share a genealogy with political authoritarianism and with pre-modern anti-historicist practices of the sort modern historical humanity constantly struggled to survive.

Gianturco gives us "retegit" as pioneer because of the philological complexities involved in Vico's original, which this English nicely carries. "Pioneer" is not only a military term — fitting to the Virgilian echoes — that suggests a going ahead, a scouting out, and so an uncovering or disclosing in the sense of being among the first to clear or investigate a space or "world." The English also gives us the military sense so right to this context, of a sapper, an underminer — a Baconian who destroys the fortifications to conquer and displace. To replace an old world with a new — this is the apparent if repetitive paradigm of modernity.[14] Vico's point is not nostalgic, but proleptic, a dire warning. Not only is the Baconian regime of knowledge not compensatory or fit to the human but it is quite precisely conjoined with the Machiavellian politics

that conflicting empires enact. "Thus Bacon acted in the intellectual field like the potentates of mighty empires, who, having gained supremacy in human affairs, squander great wealth in attempts against the order of Nature herself, by paving the seas with stones, mastering mountains with sail, and other vain exploits forbidden by nature" (*SM* 4). Vichian criticism is profoundly ethical as well as political: profligacy joined with arrogance indicts this model of self-described modernity. It is not that Bacon is "against" nature, against the finitude of human nature that is his greatest crime, or that he turns the human away from the constructive projects of supplementation. The Baconian exhausts both the inherited resources of human achievement by denying them care and transformation by perverting their results into a project, the very possibility of which depends upon the processes of human historical emergence that it would destroy. Stupidly, the Baconian project is self-consuming as well as destructive of the species' achievements. Its sin or error is in not recognizing itself either through its similarities to its own predecessors or judging accurately its own consequences — its advantages and disadvantages. Because the imperium of knowledge knows nothing of losses but only gains, it abhors comparative historicism that does not reduce merely to the taxonomy of contemporary power. Above all, since it does not understand that the relevance of human achievements is to the civility and vitality of human life and history and not to the tyranny of knowledge, it fails the test comparison should adduce, namely, which cultural practices and ways of knowing form the best mode of life. Moreover, arresting history in its own auto-telos, it reverses the emergence of the historically human, so denies the species its greatest accomplishment, and closes the future, as such, as a possibility for imagination and continued self-making. This arrogant ambition is a reversion that threatens barbarism, a point Vico makes by associating it with imperial power's ambitions, and that I will make here by disclosing the figure it forms with torture.

Vico contrasts "retegit Orbem" with "probat," as Gianturco contrasts pioneer with prospect. (Later in the lecture, Vico claims he would admire these pioneers if their predictions held, which he feels they will not.) Giving "nostro Terrarum Orbe se dignum probat" as prospect discloses several themes that sound valuably in Vico's work. Prospect is not only to look forward but also to look into, as prospectors do for minerals. More to the point, prospect means to turn in a certain way, to have a face turned toward "a specified direction; outlook, aspect, exposure." (Looking ahead to Auerbach on Dante, we will see that prospect involves a looking down and into.) To prospect is not only a verb but also something like a gerund; it adds to action's force the weight

of a substantive, of an established attitude or fixed position that creates the very horizon it explores. The *OED* puts it this way: "A place which affords an open and extensive view; a look-out." It examines what is and establishes the possibility of probing, makes it a permanent way of being alert and thinking, of doing intellectual work. We know the trope from poetry, from Milton's prospect moments in *Paradise Lost* to Walt Whitman's grandly entitled *Democratic Vistas*. To view, or in terms that echo recent criticism, to enframe or spatialize is inherently different from the pioneering ambitions that align themselves with the profligacy of imperial powers.[15] Vico makes a sharp contrast between pioneering the effort to displace the prospective by the substitution of a new world for ours, and the project he describes, of placing knowledge and state ambitions within a larger ethical and political set of judgments and practices more likely to sustain historical humanity's admittedly limited efforts to supplement its cultural needs. "No doubt," Vico concludes following these opening remarks on Bacon, "all that man is given to know is, like man himself, limited and imperfect" (*SM* 4). It is inhuman and unreasonable to have expectations that go against these prospects, so much so that they come into being as violent barbarisms and uncaring fantasies of the type common among those who plan to substitute their worlds for ours. Rather than the anticipatory work of prospect or prolepsis, Bacon and Descartes undermine and pioneer. The difference appears subtle, but in Vico's historical thinking, it is the difference between regression to barbarism and serving the species' ambition to have a historical future as the field of its imagination and will.

As you can see, I have read Vico's opening paragraphs as a staging of the very complex human historicality and desire that education, the principle topic of this lecture, must address. From this subtly contrived literary set piece, Vico elaborates his carefully historicized and balanced analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of different life regimes as a set of choices confronting humans and especially intellectuals within the developments of human capacities called modernity. Vico claims that "Every study method may be said to be made up of three things: instruments, complementary aids, and the aim envisaged" (*SM* 6), and while his point is that it is an error to confuse the most recently invented technique or aim with a human advantage, he makes good use of these categories to do comparative period analyses.

We can approach Vico's main argument from either of two foci: his antagonism toward Cartesianism or his own set of important human values. Since these two structure his lecture in tandem, we must talk about them together.

Vico begins with a simple but basic point that he addresses not only to those in power but also to students: scholars and researchers must accept that study has aims — it is and never can be purposeless. Students and scholars might deny knowledge of or care for their work's aims or the effects of the practices they acquire, but that does not deny their existence and consequence. "Aims" always exist; the problem is to bring them under some sort of conscious intent. Indeed, Vico's comments stand as a prolepsis against conformism, inertia, and willessness. Above all, they start out from the judgment that study and scholarly work are inseparable from the civil world of prudence and eloquence, of politics and culture, and put in perspective the continuing and now all too common defenses of ideological disinterest or detachment of the sort associated with Stanley Fish and his disciples.[16] Michel Foucault used to describe the great majority of work done in disciplines as anonymous. Not only was Foucault interested in the regularities of power systems beyond the categories of myths of individualized creativity, but he also analyzed the persistence of power in projects not begun but carried out by the fields themselves, especially by the Baconian regimes of knowledge/power. For Vico, not admitting to or knowing of the central and necessary part aims play in all research and study is willful ignorance, self-serving embrace of the status quo, and an irresponsible because fundamental betrayal of self-preparation as a humanistic intellectual, indeed, as a historical human being. Vico puts the issue in a quite modern metaphor: "As for the aim, it should circulate, like a blood-stream, through the entire body of the learning process. Consequently, just as the blood's pulsation may best be studied at the spot where the arterial beat is most perceptible, so the aim of our study methods shall be treated at the point where it assumes the greatest prominence" (*SM* 6). Not only does Vico's "should" remind us that there is dead study and research but it tells us how uninteresting that is. It is not the same as anonymous work because it has no heartbeat, which alone makes the work interesting for any educator or humanist who wants to compare its values and prospects.

If we are to instruct students as to the need for work to have aims and alert them to the fact that anonymous work has aims not their own, then we must find a way to work out what seems to be a contradiction. Students cannot know the aims of certain disciplines or regimes of life without study and yet at the heart of study lay those aims. How are students to know prior to or even in the course of study? This question Vico answers simply: "As for the aim envisaged, although its attainment is subsequent to the process of learning, it should never be lost sight of by the learner, neither at the beginning nor during the entire learning

process" (*SM* 6). Keeping the aim in sight during the learning is a specific instance of how the student, properly trained, probes our world, prospects, if you will — Vico's word here is "*spectare*." All study has intention and purpose almost, as it were, independently of those who develop from apprentices to masters; proper education must, however, from the beginning (*principio*) and throughout both form a sense of purposes' necessity and of the specific purposes structurally enabled by a living course of work. Mastery involves control more than rote — hence, as we will see, Vico's later dissatisfaction with modern philosophy's reenactment of the Pythagorean relation between master and auditor. Teachers, however, play a fundamental role in preparing students, that is, teachers must alert the students to the purposes coursing through the methods and positions they profess. This in turn requires that the professors know and understand what they do, not merely in terms of the other two aspects of method, namely instrumentalities and bibliographies, but in terms of the aims that they themselves embody and, almost virally, transmit.

Later in his lecture, Vico compares ancient education under a master philosopher — Aristotle and Socrates are differing paradigms — with the chaoses of modern university education. Entire faculties teach within a Baconian regime of knowledge but often from completely incoherent and competitive points of view. Rather than celebrate the supposed pleasures of liberal pluralism, Vico worries the consequences of an intellectual incoherence that, we might say, makes choices of method and purpose seem to be merely life or taste choices among a range of authorized positions. In other words, Vico worries about what now seems so common in and among literary studies, choosing a "research paradigm," which is merely only a licensed way of speaking, among competing modes. The lifeblood, so to speak, of this model is the cacophony among competitors.[17]

It is a given that each method of learning and each form of knowledge emerges from the even more important historical decision to subordinate — in Bacon's dream — human life to a domain of knowledge production and power. By contrast, the critical, ethical, and political task of educated, eloquent, and prudent citizens must be to know and judge the prospects and alliances inherent in all methods of study. Educators must prepare students to turn in the direction contemporary forces project to anticipate their outcomes and must do so by comparing the contemporary with what humans have already done, so that citizens can judge proposed and hidden but likely outcomes.

When Vico puts his thumb on the arteries of the most powerful contemporary methods, he finds "analysis" and "critique" beating there. In a word, Vico shows

that despite the great technical power that derive from these techniques, which are so deeply rooted in Descartes's works as their philosophical and methodological bases, they diminish human capacities to educate citizen intellectuals in the tasks needed to create vibrant societies. Let me assure you that my interest in this part of Vico's work is not merely antiquarian. His thinking has persistent value precisely because he reveals that the anti-humanistic and anti-historicist errors active in Descartes's methods repeat earlier projects, especially those of the Greek Stoics, and establish the continuing Gnostic ambitions of philosophers and "critics" working now.

Vico's worries about Descartes find their strongest expression in a few pages from his book of 1710, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*,[18] upon which he worked when writing his 1709 oration on study methods. Not surprisingly, he makes similar political and civil objections to Descartes's project as he does to Bacon's, linking them both to excesses of power: "Descartes has done what those who become tyrants have always wanted to do."[19] Vico believes Bacon's ambitions are imperial whereas Descartes's are tyrannical. Who can separate or rank these horrors now? Vico's indictment of Descartes was relentless and although he sometimes expressed admiration for Descartes's achievements in mathematics and study, he never expressed sympathy for or alliance with any aspect of the Cartesian techniques of analysis and critique.

Bacon's overweening ambition to substitute a regime of knowledge for the prudence of history at least taught the limits of human capacity — it came to the acknowledged truth of human finitude — and despite its critique of the tribes' idols, it did not roll about in the glories of ignorance or the hatred of reading. Descartes, by contrast, and despite his own formation — we might say, betraying his own formation — advocated, taught, a line of work that misled the young, found followers whose repetitions of the master Descartes did not dismiss, and figurally urged the burning of libraries and the relegation of languages to the domain of the serving classes. Edward Said's book, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*,[20] rests upon Vico's thinking at no point more than in Said's critique of "filiations," the genealogical model represented by the English novel of imperial culture and by the lines of authority and influence that create filial relations between masters and ephebes. Vico's assault on Descartes is not only a critique of the master's methods and consequences, but also the (unethical and perhaps immoral) modalities of authority that inhere in their practices and assumptions. These last explain Vico's willingness to hurl the charge of tyranny.

Like Descartes, tyrants

> came to power by proclaiming the cause of freedom. But once they are assured of power, they become worse tyrants than the original oppressors. In fact, Descartes has caused the reading of other philosophers to be neglected by claiming that, through the force of natural light, any man can know as much as others ever knew. Young simpletons readily fall under his spell because the long labor of much reading is tiresome, and it is a great pleasure to the mind to learn so much so quickly. (184)

Later, Vico will insist on the likeness between the proper forms of prudent education and reading, which it turns out share qualities with the very processes of poesy. In this essay, however, his concerns are more mundane: Descartes authorized ignorance; his authority both indulges the rather beastly form of mental pleasure that comes with confident license in one's own methods, and it destroys not merely historical understanding but the essential prospect of comparison. Cartesians care not to know by comparison and cannot since their assumption of "natural light," properly trained, throws a basket not only over all other work but also over the very possibility that others' works might throw their own light!

Having aligned the Cartesian practice with tyranny and ignorance, Vico had no hesitation in painting Descartes as a liar who deceived the young. Not only were his ideas foods for simpletons,

> But Descartes himself, although he can dissimulate the fact with the greatest art in what he says, was versatile in every sort of philosophy; he was celebrated the world over as a mathematician, solitary in a very lonely life, and what matters most of all, he had a mind the likes of which not every century can produce. A man of such parts can follow his own judgment if he will, but others cannot. Let them read as much as Descartes read in Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Augustine, Bacon, and Galileo. Let them meditate as hard as Descartes did in those long retreats of his. Then the world will have philosophers of equal worth. But though there is a Descartes and a natural light, there will always be lesser men than he. Descartes will reign among them and gather the fruit of that plan of wicked politics, to destroy completely those men through whom one has reached the peak of power. And here I protest that . . . I have said all these things a bit too clearly and at some length. (184–85)

Descartes achieved authority by charismatically inducing his interlocutors to become auditors, in the process drowning out the acoustical complexities of tradition, libraries, and languages. Moreover, he aspired to authority as if that

were the highest virtue and did so not only by obscuring the past but also by narrowing the prospects of the future.

Vico makes these harsh charges because he cannot imagine a society in which it is worth living, in which people should live, or would want to live, unless that society values memory and imagination and the futures it builds out of them. He loathes intellectuals who would displace historical human ambiguities with the coups d'états of such tyrannical gestures as Descartes. We might say that of all Vico's thinking, what matters most to students and those affiliated with his work is the need for enduring humility over and against ambition, especially the ambition for self-originating authority or its political simulacrum. Descartes's complex artificial gestures erased all evidence of his own derivative self-creation, of the conditions for the possibility of his own being, and in so doing, committed multiple crimes, not least of which is to deny the possibility for others to do the continuing work of self and civil formation except along the lines authoritarian doctrines pioneer.

Vico and Descartes have fundamentally different understandings of the history and role of philosophy. Vico always historicizes philosophy and the philosopher whereas the Cartesian project is actively anti-historical and anti-historicist, substituting analytic and critical modalities for the active study of history. Vico thinks about, judges the relationship between different societies and their philosophers, and weighs the consequences to society of the philosophers' practices and self-conception. Given that Vico is not simply on the side of the ancients, he has a carefully differentiated history of the Greek and Roman forms of philosophical practice that specifies their advantages and disadvantages. Vico does the history of philosophy in a way that challenges "philosophy"'s arrogant assertion to be alone capable of judging itself. The comparative historical method constellates philosophical practices and ideals not only by reference to historical context but also by reference to function, aims, values, and effects. Vico does the history of philosophy from the prospect of its effects upon the social world and the sort of work it enables humans to do in perfecting their finite selves.

"Philosophers," Vico writes, "have had no function in the world except to make the nations among whom they flourished affluent, skillful, able, acute, and reflective, so that men became open-minded, quick, magnanimous, imaginative, and prudent in their active life."[21] It might surprise us that Vico introduces mathematics into our discussion. Of course, there is good historical reason for this, since he lived through one of the greatest flourishings of mathematics in Western history. Descartes contributed immensely to the period's work, along with Leibniz, Newton, and others who imagined what Leibniz called a *mathesis*

universalis. In his historical studies, Vico noted that nations flourished when philosophers sharply separated themselves from such projects: "When the community of letters was first established, philosophers contented themselves with probabilities and left it to the mathematicians to treat truth. While this scheme, of which we have evidence, was maintained in the world, Greece laid all the foundations of the sciences and arts. Those most happy centuries fostered plenty of incomparable republics, enterprises, works, and great words and deeds."[22]

Philosophers' concern with probabilities had a corollary in their interest in "topics," the value of which Vico derives from Aristotle. Aristotle opens his book, *Topics*, with this goal:

> Our treatise proposes to find a line of inquiry whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted about every problem propounded to us, and also shall ourselves, when standing up to an argument, avoid saying anything that will obstruct us. First, then, we must say what reasoning is, and what its varieties are, in order to grasp dialectical deduction: for this is the object of our search in the treatise before us. . . . Things are true and primitive which are convincing on the strength not of anything else but of themselves; for in regard to the first principles of science it is improper to ask any further for the why and wherefore of them; each of the first principles should command belief in and by itself. On the other hand, those opinions are reputable which are accepted by everyone or the majority or by the wise — i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them.[23]

Dialectical thinking does not aspire to the certainties of truth mathematics identified as "first principles." These are self-evident, unavailable for genetic inquiry. Mathematics had, according to Vico, "promoted in men a sense of order and developed a sense of beauty, fitness, and consistency." Stoicism, however, misapplied the rules and standards of mathematics to philosophy, sapping dialectical thinking by calling its results into question as socially constructed rather than epistemologically certain. The Stoics sloganeered their pioneering efforts into what Vico calls "their pompous maxim: 'The wise man has no mere opinions.'"[24] Vico reads the Stoics symptomatically as what we might call the first appearance of an impossible-to-eradicate virus that parasitically nourishes itself upon the "community of letters" by repeatedly emerging with a bag of powerful weapons that are dangerous threats. In this case, the Stoics' ambitions not only undermined the topical philosophies but also prepared the ground for their own subversion by the skeptics, a point that matters profoundly to Vico because to modern skeptics Cartesians have no response.

In his debates with Cartesians in Italy and elsewhere, Vico produced a historicized account of the consequences of differing philosophical authority and ambition. While the classical philosophers produced the best possible conditions for art, intelligence, beauty, and "incomparable republics," the Stoics epitomized an aggressive mentality that both reduced the complexities of reason to one dimension and cleared the way for even more destructive thought practices to follow.

If Aristotle had conceded the existence of several forms of reason and variously valuable outcomes to their implementation, the Stoics had grievously assaulted the traditional and social nature of the topics, of reason based on commonplaces that enjoyed consent, by specializing philosophy within the project of establishing and thinking from first principles. This proto *mathesis universalis* seemingly paradoxically displaced mathematics by co-opting its functions into general philosophy. As Vico puts it, "The school of the Stoics arose, and in its ambition, it aimed to disrupt the established order and to replace mathematics with their pompous maxim. . . . And the republic of the learned had nothing better to benefit by." The Stoic displacement of mathematics into philosophy destroyed dialectical reason and abrogated education in the topics, so that memory and imagination — learning and poesy — lost status and influence. Moreover, their intellectual ambition, by undermining the authority of the topics, created the ground of their own defeat by skeptics who offered critiques of Stoic truth claims that the latter could not defend. In the triple succession among dialectics/topics, Stoicism, and skepticism, Vico sees both cultural tragedy and the infection that persists in Cartesianism despite the human labor that created the consciousness and fact of human historicality. That last in the resumption of societies that sustain and depend upon a community of letters, a possibility that Descartes's assault on learning, as we will see, shows to be fragile, never assured.

If "the republic of the learned" had nothing better than Stoicism to benefit from, then its tragedy lay in the parricidal heirs Stoicism summoned into being: "a quite opposite order [of philosophers], the skeptics, arose who were completely useless to society. They found occasion for scandal in the Stoics, since they saw the latter were asserting doubtful propositions as true, so they set themselves to doubt everything. The republic of the learned was destroyed by the barbarians, and only after long centuries was it restored on the same basis, so that the domain of philosophers was the probable, whereas truth was the domain of the mathematicians."[25] We can easily read Vico as proleptic, as prefiguring Nietzsche and Foucault's analyses of the power of truth-discourse,

but accurate as that belated reading might seem, it does some injustice to Vico's determination to indict intellectuals for the choice to indulge ambition barbarically by corrupting the proper attitude toward the truth.

Vico does not resolve "truth" into a domain of inescapable games of power or efficacy. Rather, he insists that "truth" has a dignity that the assaults, in truth's name, on the topical, the probabilities, and the dialectical have destroyed with horrendous consequences. Vico insists that societies flourish by properly venerating "truth" within thoughtful institutional structures and practices that, as in Aristotle's *Topics,* admit its multifaceted, multifunctional existence. There is "truth" in probability but philosophers, technicians, and politicians can and do instrumentalize "truth" as science, mathesis, or first principles to sap the authority of probability not to allow truth and freedom to flourish — no matter how often claimed — but to enable those games of tyranny that Vico recognizes in Bacon and Descartes. Moreover, that tyranny comes at the expense not only of particular memories and traditions, but also of the very possibility of their existence and function since mathesis replaces them with supposedly higher goals and imperium over-rules them by producing "new traditions."[26]

Vico did not believe that Descartes had successfully defended his position from skeptical criticism, and so Vico warned that modern historical humanity faced consequences similar to those visited by the barbarians in the ancient world. "Barbarians," in this case, refers neither to ethnically non-Greeks nor to those who ended the Roman Empire from the north. "Barbarian" refers to those pioneering intellectuals who visited "independence" and ignorance upon truth and the social world. Vico's short historical narrative makes clear his understanding and lays out the values underpinning the foundations of his 1708 oration. Above all, his extraordinary commitment to truth stands out.

Ancient and modern barbarians alike cheapened truth by applying in its name devices that were out of place. The Stoics made *sorites*[27] a symptom of their abuse as Cartesians did *demonstration*. As the first is an abuse of logic, the second, "extended to include probable reasoning and sometimes what is plainly false, has profaned the veneration for truth." Vico continually indicts his interlocutors for not weighing the outcomes, the advantages and disadvantages, resulting from "innovation." In itself, this failure of judgment characterizes the imperial ambitions of the pioneering class. More important, it brings into sharp focus the nature of intellectual arrogance and its human cost: "Now we can see the advances, but we do not reckon the great loss that accrues to it, not to speak of the much greater loss that will shortly accrue because our own good sense has been made the regulator of truth." If the instrumentalization

of truth, the habitual frequency of its invocation in the testing of every merely probable — only to show, of course, that it *is* merely without epistemological or mathematical foundation — destroys truth's dignity by making it the engine in an all-too-familiar gambit of de-authorization, that immediate loss prepares for worse. What is that "worse," for Vico? Nothing less than the loss of those skills essential to renewing the republic of the learned, which will leave each of our generations dependent only upon itself:

> Now we can see the advances, but we do not reckon the great loss that accrues to it, not to speak of the much greater loss that will shortly accrue because our own good sense has been made the regulator of the truth. For now, the ancient philosophers are not read, or very seldom read. This will be costly because the mind is like a soil that though it may be fertile with mother wit, becomes barren in a short time if it is not fertilized with varied reading. And if it at times an ancient philosopher is read, he is read in translation, because today, on the authority of Descartes, the study of languages is considered useless. For Descartes used to say, "To know Latin is to know no more than Cicero's servant girl."[28]

Of course, those "in power" have good reason to obstruct the comparative knowledge, the historical knowledge, that might make dominant assumptions and practices seem to be arbitrary. Therefore, Cartesianism appears as an early version of the official discourse an emerging dominant always requires to assure its own position. The consequences of such self-interest, though, are relatively minor compared with the effect of such amnesia on the species itself. The structural consequences are much worse, threatening a reversion to barbarism.

All the human effort that went into the elaboration of the species as historical humanity disappears in this forgetting. The loss of languages is metonymically the loss of memory, of knowledge, of interest in the deposited processes of human transformation, and the impossibility of prospecting in the shared labor of human culture. Language is the enduring depository of achievement, of possibility, and, most important, of human reconciliation to its own finitude. The politics of such reconciliation is the opposite of imperium and its Baconian or Cartesian modes of intellectual arrogance.

Notes

Preface

1. Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Recent American 'Left' Literary Criticism," *boundary 2*, Vol. 8, No. 1, The Problems of Reading in Contemporary American Criticism: A Symposium. (Autumn, 1979), pp. 11–30.
2. Lindsay Waters has persistently criticized Fish and his followers for adopting what Waters calls "market criticism," for turning to a career professionalism and away from a serious critical engagement either with aesthetic issues or cultural politics. See Waters, *Enemies of Promise* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2000), passim; Waters, "Aesthetics, The Very Idea," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December, 2005; and Waters, "Market Criticism," *Context*, 2007.
3. Rather than weigh academic influence abstractly, consult "Google Trends" that shows how in 2007 Stanley Fish searches have at times exceeded those for Edward Said. There are very few non-English language searches for Fish in contrast to Said and searches for Fish are in a higher proportion to those for Said in the United States than elsewhere. Of course, the fact that Fish is an American academic who recently has also become a blogger for *The New York Times* explains much of what these results show. That Said has status outside the United States and among non-English speakers, we should also expect, for complex historical and political reasons. We should keep in mind that Said was a profoundly important American academic whose intellectual, professional, and writerly accomplishments should have placed him outside comparison with Fish. That Fish holds up so well suggests his academic influence is proportionate to his professional normality, for which his role as a person related to legal studies is a buttress visible whenever he derives models for critical professionalism from legal professionalism. Cf. the following URL effective as of October 15, 2007: http://www.google.com/trends?q=%22Stanley+Fish%22%2C+%22Edward+Said%22&ctab=0&geo=all&geor=all&date=all&sort=1.

Chapter 1

1. Cf. *The Biographical Dictionary of the Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church*, at http://www.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios1697.htm as of July 26, 2006. Among the Papal interests, which the Spanish King had happily shared, was the Inquisition that had threatened several of Vico's friends.
2. H.P. Adams, *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935), pp. 88–91, "A Treatise on Method." Adams in this chapter makes two important

errors. Acknowledging Vico's growing distaste for Cartesian analysis and his preference for poetry, Adams nonetheless ignores the political aspects of Vico's thinking here; he claims nothing had changed in Naples despite a rupture with Spain and he ignores Vico's developed reservations about Bacon as well. I mention this study here since as we will see later, Wallace Stevens takes his Vico from Adams in writing "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," his great World War II meditation on poetics and modernity.

3. Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans. Elio Gianturco, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), hereafter referred to in my text by page number as *SM*.
4. Samuel Beckett, "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce," *Samuel Beckett: Poems, Short Fiction, Criticism*, ed. Paul Auster (New York: The Grove Centenary Edition, 2006), Vol. 4, pp. 504–10.
5. "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce," p. 505.
6. Slavoj Žižek, "On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love," *Journal of Philosophy & Scripture*, Spring, 2004: http://www.philosophyandscripture.org/Issue1-2/Slavoj_Zizek/slavoj_zizek.html. All citations from this interview refer to this website.
7. Cf. Edward W. Said, "'We' know who 'we' are," *London Review of Books*, October 17, 2002: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n20/said01_.html.
8. See Edward W. Said's objections to Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations?" in which Said speaks of the need to oppose the alignment between such intellectuals and state power as a "crisis of conscience." "The Clash of Definitions," *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 569–90.
9. Joseph M. Levine, "Giambattista Vico and the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51, No. 1, pp. 55–79.
10. *De Nostri Temporis Ratione Dissertation a Joh. Baptista A Vico Neapolitano* (Neapoli: Felicis Mosca, 1709), p. 9.
11. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book 4, ll. 119f.
12. *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 85.
13. Henry Adams's so-called pessimism about history stems from the American embrace of this Baconian model within the practices of industrial capital and its centralization in anti-democratic institutions of power. Cf. *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), pp. 1153 ff.
14. See Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," *Blindness and Insight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 142–65.
15. When the *OED* cites Bacon on the use of prospect, it does so tellingly, quoting Bacon using the term as a means to see errors humans have made. From this point of view, as it were, such criticisms of modern enframing as that offered by Heidegger reappear as pioneering efforts in precisely the Baconian sense.
16. See Stanley Fish's extended debate with Edward W. Said in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* — for example, "Profession Despise Thyself: Fear and Self-Loathing in Literary Studies," *CI*, December, 1983, Vol. 10, No. 2 and Said's piece in the same issue: "Response to Stanley Fish." For some evidence of Fish's rather open serving of the status quo, see his effort publicly to narrow the range of academic freedom in a thoroughly conservative and anti-intellectual moment in U.S. history, "Conspiracy Theories 101," *New York Times*, July 23, 2006 Late Edition Section 4, Page 13, Column 1.
17. I have given some example of how this works in my essay, "The Crisis of Editing," *ADE Bulletin*, 131, Spring, 2002, pp. 34–40. As an example of this idea at work, cf. Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992).

18. Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L.M. Palmer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).
19. "Second Response," *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, p. 184.
20. *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (NY: Basic Books, 1975).
21. *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, p. 182.
22. *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, p. 182.
23. *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series LXXI– 2, 1984), *Topics*, trans. W.A. Pickard, Vol. 1, p. 167.
24. *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, p. 182.
25. *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, pp. 182–83.
26. It is here that we would place modern policy experts and game theorists in think tanks and universities.
27. For an introductory discussion of the sorites, see the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sorites-paradox/ (as of August 8, 2006).
28. *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, p. 183.

Chapter 2

1. For the U.S. context, see Chalmers Johnson, "Republic or Empire," *Harper's Magazine*, January 2007. See as well the ubiquitous but now discredited best seller, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
2. Take as an example, Carl Boggs, *The End of Politics* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999).
3. From a different context but with a relevant set of "heirs," see J-F Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
4. While Vico's influence on late eighteenth-century thinkers of culture is well-known and Coleridge's interest in his work remarkable and influential, and even though we find Vico in Joyce and Beckett, we must agree that the most recent Vico resurgence dates from the 1960s. See *Giambattista Vico; An International Symposium*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo; Hayden V. White, co-editor. Consulting editors: Isaiah Berlin, Max H. Fisch, [and] Elio Gianturco (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969) and Edward W. Said, "Vico, Autodidact and Humanist," *Centennial Review*, 1967, 11, pp. 336–52. Said's work on Vico reaches an early culmination in *Beginnings* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).
5. William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," line 28, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 109.
6. Aristotle, *Topics*, p. 167.
7. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 2: "Supposing truth is a woman — what then?" In essence, Jacques Derrida attempts to recast Nietzsche's complex answer to this question with his own multivalent meditation on truth's value. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
8. Vico's translator makes this point obliquely in note 4, p. 9 of *SM*: "Vico's allusion is to the Cartesian *cogito*, by which the certainty of existence is to be found in the depths of the doubting consciousness itself; be it noted that Vico did not believe that Descartes had put to flight, had 'routed' skepticism."

9. Admittedly, there is controversy over the exact nature of Bacon's understanding of the King's notorious use of torture. David Jardine holds that torture was explicitly part of the royal prerogative while John H. Langbein denies it. Langbein does, however, show documentary proof that Bacon was five times "a commissioner to examine under torture." Cf. Jardine, *A Reading On The Use Of Torture In The Criminal Law Of England Previously To The Commonwealth: Delivered At New Inn Hall In Michaelmas Term, 1836, By Appointment Of The Honourable Society Of The Middle Temple* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1837) and Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 129. See also, John Parry, "Finding a Right to be Tortured," *Law and Literature*, 2007, Vol. 19, No. 5, pp. 207–28. Thanks to Professor Penelope Pether for showing me this essay.
10. Quoted in Henry C. Lea, *Superstition and Force: Essays on the Wager of Law — the Wager of Battle — The Ordeal — Torture* (Philadelphia: Collins, Printer, 1866), p. 379.
11. We should distinguish between critique and criticism in a way that the philosopher Raymond Geuss fails to do in his recent book, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), especially in his ninth and tenth chapters.
12. As quoted from "Einstein's Unfinished Symphony," BBC, http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/horizon/einstein_symphony_prog_summary.shtml, as of May 17, 2006.
13. Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 193.
14. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), pp. 83–84.
15. The editors of the Internet Movie Database sum up the film in this way: "Elmer Gantry, salesman, teams up with Sister Sharon Falconer, evangelist, to sell religion to America in the 1920's. They make enough money to build a temple, and Sister Sharon falls for Elmer. Elmer is tested by temptation and almost capitulates, but is then wrongly accused by the jilted temptress. But Sharon stands by her man and truth prevails, until both are seduced by fame and blind faith over common sense, and fate deals them a crushing blow." http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053793/plotsummary. See forthcoming, Jason Stevens's introduction to the new Signet edition of this classic novel.
16. Suspicion of populist ineloquence abounds as well. A good deal of intellectuals' hostility to George W. Bush rests on his stylistic abuse of verbal eloquence, especially in contrast to his predecessor, William J. Clinton. Cf. Michael Kinsley, "The Limits of Eloquence: Did Bush mean a word of his speech about democracy?" *Slate*, November 13, 2003: "President Bush's recent speech . . . is being heralded as eloquent. Which it is. Some of the finest eloquence that money can buy. . . . The eloquence would be more impressive if there were any reason to suppose that Bush thinks words have meaning." http://www.slate.com/id/2091185/.
17. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts. http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/desub013.htm.
18. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts. *Critical Theory Since Plato*, 3rd Edition, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Boston: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005), p. 95.
19. Longinus, http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/desub001.htm#i3.
20. William Walters Sargant, *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing* (London: Heinemann, 1957). This book has been reprinted as recently as 1997.
21. G. Seaborn Jones, *Treatment or Torture: The Philosophy, Techniques, and Future of Psychodynamics* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1968).
22. Seaborn Jones, p. 244.
23. Seaborn Jones, p. 213.
24. Sargant, p. 282.
25. Sargant, p. 213.

26. See Eric Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), for an account of this science.

Chapter 3

1. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der Abendlandischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Francke AG. Verlag, 1946). In these lectures I cite from *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask. *Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, intro. Edward W. Said (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
2. *Mimesis*, pp. 174–202. I will hereafter refer to *Mimesis* parenthetically in my text.
3. Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), hereafter referred to parenthetically in my text.
4. Cf. Jerome Roche, *The Madrigal* (London: Hutchinson, 1972).
5. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 15. There is no translator listed.
6. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno: Text and Commentary*, trans. with commentary, Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 100–101.

Chapter 4

1. We understand that there are intellectuals of left and right who would dispute Mill's asserted necessity of the primacy of individual freedom. To consider their arguments in any detail is not only beyond the scope of these talks but would represent a critical history of modern political thought and practice. Mill's own writings in defense of the British Empire mar his career and show important limits to the development of his thinking. Postcolonial criticism has revealed the depths of English liberalism's involvement with the Empire and recent criticism reveals the painful irony of a liberalism that determines the value of freedom for white Europeans at the cost of suppression of non-European peoples of color.
2. Indeed, Mill's legitimation of empire was inseparable from a counter-Hegelian desire to bring historicality to the non-white. Abominable as is this practice, it is of one piece with Mill's career ambitions.
3. Some in the audience for previous lectures have asked if "pure literary criticism" is not merely textual explication of meaning and form. To this assumption and other forms of academic disinterested practice, these lectures are refutations that show such questions emerge from habits that are reductive, passive, and anti-humanistic — in a word, ignorant or cynical, but in either case of a sort that puts them on the side of those whom Mill, at least, designates as enemies of freedom and the human.
4. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 14, hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.
5. Isaiah Berlin, "John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life," *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 218–51; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.
6. See two recent books that discuss these questions. Linda C. Raeder, *John Stuart Mill and the Religion of Humanity* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002). Joseph Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Readers interested in an excellent historical introduction to this question might read Allan D. Megill, "J.S. Mill's Religion of Humanity and the Second Justification for the Writing of *On Liberty*," *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism*, ed. Eldon J. Eisenach (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 301–16.

7. See Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 37–49.
8. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988). See also, Paul A. Bové, "Intellectual Arrogance and Scholarly Carelessness, or, Why One Can't Read Alan Bloom," *In the Wake of Theory* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1992).
9. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 125; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.
10. "Coleridge," *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–1991), Vol. 10, pp. 119–20.
11. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 13.
12. Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).
13. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 226–47.
14. A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies* (London: Macmillan, 1959); reprinted (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), p. 252.
15. J.S. Mill, "Of the Government of Dependencies by a Free State," Chapter 18, *Representative Government*, paragraph 15, originally written in 1862.
16. Note that those American neo-conservatives who argue for imperialism to spread democracy by force do not favor popular democracy at home. For some quick evidence of my contention, see "Without a Doubt," by Ron Suskind: October 17, 2004, *New York Times Magazine*.
17. Richard J. Arneson, "Perfectionism and Politics," *Ethics*, Vol. 111, No. 1, October, 2000, p. 38.
18. Alfonso J. Damico, "What's Wrong with Liberal Perfectionism?" *Polity*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Spring, 1997, pp. 397–98. Damico points out that Rawls has begun to modify his early and influential position. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); these modifications seem to me rather minor.
19. "Top General Explains Remarks on Gays," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2007: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/washington/14pace.html.
20. See once more the exemplary book by Eric Kandel, *In Search of Memory*.
21. That such figures are still among us, see the recent books by Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) and *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004). Cf. also, Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Definitions, on Samuel Huntington," *Reflections on Exile* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 569–90.
22. Cf. Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt."

Chapter 5

1. Saul Bellow, "FACTS THAT PUT FANCY TO FLIGHT; A Novelist-Critic Discusses the Role of Reality in the Creation of Fiction," *The New York Times*, February 11, 1962, International Economic Survey, p. 218.
2. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovonavich, new edition, 1973), pp. 474ff.
3. Michael Wood, "Don't You Care?", *LRB*, February 22, 2007, p. 8.
4. See, for example, Paul A. Bové, "A Free, Varied, and Unwasteful Life: I.A. Richards' Speculative Instruments," *Intellectuals in Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 39–78.

5. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*.
6. The best or worst representative of this attitude is, of course, the American anti-philosopher philosopher and professional anti-liberal liberal pragmatist whose alazonic writings in defense of irony achieve a market success that announces their fitness to the age.
7. See the *OED* entry on aesthetic for a brief etymology and any good history of classical philosophy for clarification.
8. As astonishing at it seems, the current U.S. government is guilty of even worse Protestant repressions than this that outrages Mill. General William G. Boykin, a deputy undersecretary for defense in charge of intelligence, is a fervent evangelical protestant who has "described the fight against Islamic militants as a struggle against Satan and declared that it can be won only 'if we come at them in the name of Jesus.' General Boykin asserted his views in speeches that he delivered in his military uniform at religious functions around the country. In one speech, referring to a Muslim fighter in Somalia, the general said: 'Well, you know what I knew — that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol.'" Cf. *The New York Times*, Bob Herbert, "Shopping for War," December 27, 2004.
9. "Coleridge," *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 10, p. 125. Hereinafter cited parenthetically in my text.
10. Bernard Knox, "Introduction," *Homer, The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. 7.
11. M.H. Fisch, "The Coleridges, Dr. Prati, and Vico," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 41, No. 2, November, 1943, pp. 113–14. Fisch's article contains detailed source citations.

Chapter 6

1. "The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom," trans. J.D. Gauthier, S.J. *The Final Foucault*, James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), pp. 1–20; hereinafter cited parenthetically in my text.
2. The still fundamental text in this discussion is Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
3. As a sign that the attitude toward Foucault and humanism has begun to change, see Richard Wolin, "Foucault the Neohumanist?", *The Chronicle Review*, September 1, 2006: http://chronicle.com/temp/reprint.php?id=k7jgcs3s0cv7rw48sr0hl65xzsnfvl7d. Wolin hopes that by reading Foucault as an ally of the French New Philosophers, he can appropriate him for the moral work of human rights: "The alliance with Kouchner and Glucksmann transformed Foucault into a passionate advocate of humanitarian intervention, or *le droit d'ingérance*: the moral imperative to intervene in the domestic affairs of a nation where human rights are being systematically violated."
4. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, "Essay on Descartes," *The Meditations and Selections from the Principles of René Descartes*, trans. John Veitch (New York: Open Court, 1968), p. xii.
5. Lévy-Bruhl, "Essay on Descartes," p. xii.
6. Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982).
7. María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002).
8. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, p. 87.
9. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, p. 35.
10. Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, p. 80.
11. Alvarus, *The Unmistakable Sign*, trans. and cited in Menocal, p. 75.

12. Today's newspapers express how Al-Andalus echoes in the minds of competitors for real power, ironically without any understanding of the Umayyads' own vision. See "Les terroristes islamistes viseraient les enclaves espagnoles au Maroc," *Le Monde*, April 13, 2007: "Surtout, le mythe d'Al-Andalus — lié à la domination arabe d'une bonne partie de la péninsule entre le VIIIe et le XVe siècle — apparaît de plus en plus comme un argument central pour justifier des attentats sur le sol espagnol. Aux yeux des djihadistes, ce *'territoire perdu'* doit être récupéré, coûte que coûte, au même titre que Jérusalem."

Chapter 7

1. Orhan Pamuk, "My Father's Suitcase: The Nobel Lecture, 2006," trans. Maureen Freely. *The New Yorker*, December 25, 2006 & January 1, 2007, p. 88.
2. The New Statesman Profile — Adam Phillips, *Nicholas Fearn*, published April 23, 2001: http://www.newstatesman.com/200104230011.
3. Adam Phillips, "No Reason for Not Asking," *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 15, August 3, 2006.
4. Frank Kermode, "'Disgusting,'" *LRB*, Vol. 28, No. 22, November 16, 2006.
5. Paul Dean, "The Critic as Poet: Empson's Contradictions," *The New Criterion*, October 20, 2001, (2), pp. 23–30. See as well Roger Sale's chapter on Empson in *Modern Heroism: Essays on D.H. Lawrence, William Empson, and J.R.R. Tolkien* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).
6. David Mikics, "Miltonic Marriage and the Challenge to History in *Paradise Lost*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Spring, 2004, p. 30.
7. Allen W. Dulles, "MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable J. Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation. SUBJECT: Brainwashing," 25 APR 1956, from DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS 1984 microfilms under MKULTRA (84) 002258, published by Research Publication Woodbridge, CT 06525. Reproduced at the following URL: http://pw1.netcom.com/~ncoic/brainwsh.htm as of April 2007.
8. H.R. 1217, cf. http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:h.r.01217. This is the official website of the U.S. legislature.
9. See *The Torture Papers*, ed. Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). This 1249-page-long book "consists of the so-called 'torture memos' and reports that the U. S. government officials wrote to authorize and to document coercive interrogation and torture in Afghanistan, Guantánamo, and Abu Ghraib."
10. Among the many admirable intellectual and political contributions made to this study see as exemplary Page Dubois, *Torture and Truth* (NY: Routledge, 1991) and Marianne Hirsch, "Editor's Column: The First Blow-Torture and Close Reading," *Publications of the Modern, Language Association of America*, March, 2006, 121 (2), pp. 361–70.
11. *A Variorum Commentary On the Poems of John Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush and A.S.P. Woodhouse (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Douglas Bush, *John Milton* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964); Douglas Bush, *Milton* (New York: Viking Adult, 1949); and Douglas Bush, *The Portable Milton* (New York: Viking Adult, 1969).
12. Douglas Bush, *Paradise Lost in Our Time: Some Comments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1945).
13. William Wordsworth, "It is not to be thought of," "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty," *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, revsd. Ernest de Selincourt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 244.

14. See Norman Podhoretz, "Henry Adams: The 'Powerless' Intellectual in America," *The Bloody Crossroads: Where Literature and Politics Meet* (New York: Holiday House, 1987). See also Cynthia Ozick's approving review of Podhoretz which identifies his critical alignment of Adams with those "adversarial elitists" making up the New Class of the present age. "Hypnotized by Totalitarian Poesy," *New York Times Book Review,* May 18, 1986; cited from this URL: http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/02/21/specials/podhoretz-bloody.html.
15. Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," *The Necessary Angel* in *Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose,* ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), hereinafter cited parenthetically in my text.
16. *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), hereinafter cited parenthetically in my text.

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