

Giambattista Vico
The Art of Rhetoric

(*Institutiones Oratoriae, 1711-1741*). From the Definitive Latin Text and Notes, Italian Commentary and Introduction by Giuliano Crifò

Ed. and trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee.

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xxx, 311 p.

This volume is a significant addition to the body of works by Giambattista Vico currently available in English: the *New Science*, the *Autobiographies* and the treatises *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* and *On the Study Methods of Our Times*. The American editors of the present work had already published a translation of six of Vico's academic discourses under the title *On Humanistic Education*.

The Art of Rhetoric consists of a translation of Vico's Latin lectures on rhetoric, preparatory to the study of jurisprudence. These were never published in his lifetime, and Crifò's critical edition of the Latin texts (Vico 1989), which is the basis of this English edition, was based on students' lecture notes or transcriptions of them.

To get a cavil out of the way, it is striking that the name of the Italian editor should be absent from the book's cover. From the translators' preface, it appears that their editorial role has been to translate the Latin text into English and to adapt (i.e. drastically summarize) the Italian introduction of Giuliano Crifò for an English-speaking reading public. The title page gives a more accurate weight to each of the editors' cumulative labour, as it notes that this is a "translation and edition" of Crifò's "definitive Latin text and notes, Italian commentary and Introduction." The fact that Crifò's name does not appear on the cover is obviously due to an oversight, perhaps not even the American editors', probably the publisher's. The volume also contains Crifò's chapter-by-chapter commentary to the *Institutiones*, a list of sources cited and an index of proper names.

Giambattista Vico, a thinker well-nigh ignored in his own time, acquired his current status as a major philosopher largely due to his promotion by Benedetto Croce and other late Romantic or idealist aestheticians, who saluted him as the advocate of *sapienza poetica*, the "science of imagination" (Verene 1981). It is of course the Vico of *The New Science* that Croce and his school were primarily thinking of: here they found a key work in the theorization of cultural productions, and one which inspired their own

expressivist theories about the simultaneous development of language and culture. Still, it is arguable that Vico's influence on his contemporaries was negligible, and that the work became seminal only to those already converted by German idealism.

Crifò's argument is part of a widespread reaction which qualifies the Crocean view of Vico, and stresses instead Vico's work as a humanist and a classical scholar, a more traditional Vico, whose notion of language is more communicative and interpersonal than expressive, a rhetorical Vico for short, the author of the *Institutiones Oratoriae* as well as of the *New Science*. To be more precise, Crifò's main contention in the introduction to this work is that the two sides of Vico are not polar opposites, as they might appear, but rather different sides (and phases) of a work which consistently tries to focus on the use and development of language as a socially and culturally meaningful process. To quote from Crifò's foreword to the English edition, "It is difficult to believe that the cultural tradition which is preserved in classical rhetoric and in Roman jurisprudence, both of which form the most profound foundation of Western jurisprudence and political thought and in which Vico was both teacher and an active participant, would have had no impact on his thought" (1996: xv). For Crifò, "the most profound concepts which appear in his most mature works are easily found in seed in the earliest expressions of his genius"—in words quoted from Righi (1928: 481) Vico's lectures on rhetoric have become according to Crifò "the indisputable point of reference for much of the formulation of Vico's thought" (1996: xv). This is a far cry from Croce's characterization of the *Institutiones* as "a dry rhetorical manual written for the use of his school (in which one looks in vain or a shadow of his own personal ideas)" (Croce 1967: 230). Crifò's introduction sketches the way in which the *Institutiones*, read as a hermeneutics of law (whose task is "coordinating the norm with a decision substantially correct", according to his quotation of Haft's *Juristische Rhetorik*) would help to bring into focus the specifically Vichian nature of this work. Unfortunately, Crifò's lengthy introduction has been reduced to reasonable proportions in this edition, perhaps making the argument less convincing than it should be. It appears nonetheless that the result of this reevaluation of the work would result in its greater significance to the Vico specialist, not in a reassessment of the main tradition in rhetorical studies or in the promotion of Vico as the author of a revolutionary treatise on hermeneutic rhetoric. Although it seems likely that the impact of the critical edition of the *Institutiones* will remain confined to Vico specialists, this is not to say that the present work is lacking in interest to readers interested in rhetoric at large. Vico's style (seen here through a glass, or several) varies

rather unevenly between pregnant compression and rather diffuse collections of examples, but there are many chapters which reward rereading—for instance those on the opposition between the letter and the spirit of the law (22), on conceits and wit (37), which interestingly emphasizes the activity and expectations of the listener, or ch. 39 on the genus of tropes, which defines synecdoche, metonymy, metaphor and irony as the four primary tropes under which all others may be grouped, as expounded in the following chapters.

The underlying tropological and rhetorical basis of Vico's theory of culture is revealed by Hayden White in a structuralist analysis of *The New Science* (White 1976). And an excellent treatment of Vico's defense of classical rhetoric, and of his adherence to Cicero's ideal of civilization, wisdom and eloquence, can be found in Mooney (1994). Mooney shows that Vico's humanist rhetoric is fully coherent with his theory of social responsibility exerted through active citizenship, and therefore with the *New Science's* theory of the growth of humanity first through mythopoeics and then through critical and ironic demythologization.

The bridge between rhetoric and the poetics of culture is therefore not in question. It is difficult to disagree with the centrality of classical humanism in Vico's thought, or with the notion that classical rhetoric contains a theory of cultural poetics (albeit an implicit one which requires a good deal of teasing out). What is at issue concerning the *Institutiones Oratoriae* is rather whether Vico's rhetorical treatise effects some of the teasing out—whether these lectures afford some kind of bridge between *ars rhetorica* and *sapientia poetica*. Whether, that is, Vico's work on rhetoric expands the classical humanist tradition of the discipline, emphasizing the elements of creative imagination and the organic link between figurative language and thought. That Vico's rhetoric should be innovative in this sense was not obvious to his early commentators; in his preface to the edition of the *Institutiones* in vol. 8 of Vico's *Opere*, Fausto Nicolini is at pains to deny a contradiction between Vico's actual teaching and his theoretical work; I have already quoted Croce's view. Crifòs preface points out Vico's self-reference to the *New Science* on the matter of poetic wisdom (1996: xx). But any presence of the "new science" is much less prominent than the overwhelming sense of continuity between Vico's treatise and the classical tradition. Indeed, Vico is straightforwardly traditional in many respects, for instance in his disregard of modern sources and authors. Only a few "moderns"—Beni, Scaliger, Pallavicino—are discussed (in the section on wit), and very few moderns appear in the list of sources cited provided by the editors (incidentally, the

American editors of the *Art of Rhetoric* have helpfully added the original references to the classics contained in the notes to the *Institutiones*).

As an instance of the quite moderately Vichian nature of this Vichian treatise and of its clearly neoclassical bent, we may examine the definition of "trope," one of the cornerstones of Vico's thought about language in the *New Science*. Here (ch. 39 of the *Institutiones*) we find that

Tropes are those figures of speech which turn a word from its proper and native meaning to an improper and strange one which Terence in Latin calls the inversion of words (*verba inversa*). There seem to be two causes of this mutation—necessity and ornamentation. (1996: 137)

The origin of "necessity" is, according to Vico, the following:

Given that words are characters of things . . . and there are many more things in nature than words for them and since every language lacks its proper words for many things, other words must be found, and this is termed necessity. (1996: 137)

It might be argued that the notions of "proper and native meaning" and "ornamentation" are the more neoclassical side of this definition, and "necessity" the more pre-romantic or specifically Vichian innovation. But this passage may be usefully compared to Aristotle's definition of metaphor as a proportional relationship between four terms, not all of which need be existing words:

for some of the terms of the proportion there is at times no word in existence; still the metaphor may be used. For instance, to scatter seed is called sowing; but the action of the sun scattering his rays is nameless. Still this process bears to the sun the same relation as sowing to the seed. Hence the expression of the poet "sowing the god-created light." (*Poetics* XXI.8)

Aristotle is a well-known logic-chopper, but even he comes closer to Vico on the matter of metaphor, which apparently is recalcitrant to method: the making of good metaphors cannot be taught, because it implies an eye for resemblances, it is the mark of genius (*Poetics* XXII.9).

My point is that a study of any elements of *sapientia poetica* discerned in Vico's *Institutiones* should also be aware of the ways in which that *sapientia* is also sometimes foreshadowed in elements of classical doctrine. Think for instance of Strabo's notion that the first writings were poetical in nature,

and that prose derives from poetry, or of Horace's description of the fluidity of language and the coining of new words. I am aware that, like Borges said on the subject of Kafka, Vico also creates his own precursors, making us see in them what was not readily visible before. Vico himself warned us against the "conceit of scholars" (Mooney 1994: 194)—that is, trying to read contemporary cultural developments in their imperfect foreshadowings (such as philosophical doctrines in the myths of Homer). His whole doctrine is a theory of the construction of culture through linguistic and civil activity. Therefore perhaps we should not read too much into these classical "precursors" of Vico. But then neither should we expect to find a fully-fledged *sapienza poetica* in Vico's lectures on rhetoric. The methodical and formal academic approach to classical rhetoric is to be found prominently here, sometimes at odds with another side of Vico's thought, the anti-methodical emphasis on context, values, ingenuity and process thought.

A few final cavils. There is a mistake in the caption to Figure 6 (p. 208), which describes it as the end page of ms. b of the *Institutiones Oratoriae*. As p. xix and p. 207 of this edition make clear, it is the title page of that manuscript which is reproduced. There are likewise a few (very few) mistranslations (e.g. p. 137, "man is hard and dour" from Quintilian's *hominem durum atque asperum*, should be "a hard and dour man"). Or, on p. 255, in a quotation from *On the Study Methods*, "It is therefore important to access human affairs by the inflexible standard of absolute right," the logic of the passage demands rather that we read "not to access". There are also a few misspellings (Rodopi do not seem to employ an in-house editor or proofreader) but on the whole the volume is carefully prepared, and abounds in scholarly details. Beyond the question of the status of rhetoric in Vichian studies, and the valuable scholarly apparatus provided by Crifò, there are interesting facets in many of Vico's explications of specific rhetorical points, enough to make the book rewarding reading for any student of rhetoric.

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La prensa en los orígenes de la enseñanza del español en los Estados Unidos (1823-1833)

Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1996. 272 p.

Though primarily addressing the close links between Spanish-language newspapers and the teaching or learning of the language in the United States during the last ten years of Fernando VII's reign, this study is far more