



### 1. Introduction

The seminal importance of *Liber metaphysicus* (1710), the first volume of the projected three-volume *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*<sup>1</sup>, for Vico's later work, especially his magnum opus, *The New Science*, in its various editions, has been fully recognized, largely due to his articulation of the *verum-factum* nexus in it. On the other hand, the question of literary structure, however understood<sup>2</sup>, has received much less, if any, attention. And when it did, the result has not always been affirmative of the existence of an underlying well-thought out design. A case in point is the view that *Metaphysics* consists of «a hodgepodge of [...] ideas drawn from a score or more sources and served up as a finished metaphysics», and it «being a ramshackle work»<sup>3</sup>. If it is in actually a confused, disorganized, inchoate text, both in content and presentation, any search for evidence of deliberate design and structure would seem to be a fool's errand. Such negative assessments need to be taken seriously, and if, nonetheless, the search for answers is pursued, a considerable measure of caution needs to be exercised<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, references in both English and Latin will be from G. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, trans. by J. Taylor, with an *Introduction* by R. Miner, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2010. It will be referred to as *Metaphysics*, followed by its page numbers and chapter and section.

<sup>2</sup> The subject of literary structure in its full generality and diversity cannot be engaged in here. It is present at all levels of literary imagination and creation, including, in a Vichian context, for example, in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*; Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (see F. Bonaparte, *Reading the Deadly Text of Modernism: Vico's Philosophy of History and Max Beerbohm's Zuleika Dobson*, in «Clio», XXVII, 1998, 3, pp. 335-361), the play *New Science*, Theater for the New City, New York City, by Jessica Slote, directed by Martin Reckhaus (see <www.newsciencetheater.com>, and L. Pica Ciamarra, *New Science Theater. Intervista a Martin Reckhaus*, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», VII, 2010, 1-2, pp. 181-190). Furthermore, the notion of "structure" itself is taken here in a naïve sense, as a more or less primitive entity without subjecting it to further qualification, either in the context of the history of ideas, or modern structuralist theory ("Structure" in its most basic sense has been defined as «proper relationships between the parts that make up a unit»: see J. Beekman et al., *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*, 5<sup>th</sup> Revision, Dallas, Academic Publications, Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981, p. 22 ). It is of an entirely different kind than the internal "logic" or development of Vico's thoughts and concepts that could be described, for example, as the "structure" of the *New Science*: C. Vasoli, *Note sul "Metodo" e la "Struttura" della Scienza Nuova Prima*, in «Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani» (hereafter referred to as BCSV), XIV-XV, 1984-1985, pp. 21-37; H. White, *The Tropics of History: The Deep Structure of the New Science*, in G. Tagliacozzo (ed. by), *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, Baltimore-London, John Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 65-85. In terms of dimension, metaphorically, the literary structure under consideration qualifies more as "surface" than as "deep" structure. It is closer in meaning to the use of the term in L. Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the "New Science"*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1990, pp. 1-6.

<sup>3</sup> M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 191-196 (italics added). G. Cerchiai (*Consciousness and Faculties in De antiquissima Italorum sapientia by Vico*, in F. Paglieri (ed. by), *Consciousness in Interaction: The Role of the Natural and Social Context in shaping Consciousness*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2012, p. 338), was left with a similar sense of disjointness: «Though characterized by obscure, and often convoluted, archaic ideas, it at times appears to *stumble around* in the *maze* of the same questions» (italics added).

<sup>4</sup> For this reason, the essay is termed an "inquiry", an investigation. The sense of *inquiry* intended here is essentially the same as employed by David Marshall who defined it as «an

Apart from these overall concerns, something else should be stated *ab ovo*, having to do with the so-called "literary structure" that is advanced in this thesis. The literary structure that is in view is situated at a certain "compositional" level, and it is chosen here as the level of extended, larger sections of the text. The literary structure of the book is then described as the place of individual sections within the whole work, and the relationship among sections. That this constitutes a narrow focus is undeniable, and it is not immediately obvious whether it might bring hermeneutical gains. In certain ways, this approach is reminiscent of Vico's own approach as a young man in studying classical and Renaissance literature, as he described it in his autobiography:

And he learned how far [...] the Latin tongue surpasses the Italian, by reading their most cultivated writers always three times each on the following plan [*con questo ordine*]: the first time to grasp each composition as a whole, the second to note the transitions and the sequence of things, the third in greater detail to collect the fine turns of thought and expression<sup>5</sup>.

This methodological outline stays merely at the phenomenological level (of «composition as a whole», «sequence of things», «turns of thought»), as it does not elucidate in detail what each level of scrutiny and interpretation involved, in general, and what it meant for each author and work, in particular. However, its interest lies in the fact that it tells us something about Vico's intuitive approach to literature: admittedly, his disclosure relates to his *reading* of literary works; however, it begs the question why he would not be guided by the same mindset in the *writing/composing* of his own works, impelled by a quest for shaping the material as fits its nature. This question can only be answered on the strength, or weakness, of internal evidence.

In the case of *Metaphysics*, the working hypothesis at the heart of this exploration is that the book not only has structure – rather than being a loose as-

intellectual response to doubt» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric in Early Modern Europe*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 20). In this case, there is also mixed-in a goodly portion of curiosity piqued upon experiencing, in reading *Metaphysics*, similar initial impressions as those described above. But *inquiry* in the present case also is meant to suggest that its result or outcome may not necessarily be conclusive or definitive, thus falling short of achieving the natural aim of any inquiry.

<sup>5</sup> *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. by M. H. Fisch - T. Goddard Bergin, Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press, 1944, pp. 120; the original Italian phrase is online at *Portale Vico* <<http://www.giambattistavico.it>>; full citation: G. Vico, *L'autobiografia, il carteggio e le poesie varie*, a cura di B. Croce - F. Nicolini, Bari, Laterza, 1929, p. 11; the following gloss is by M. Gigante (*Le Orazioni inaugurali di Vico: lingua e contenuti*, in «Filosofia. International Studies in Philosophy», XXIX, 1978, 3, p. 401): «Non era una lettura superficiale, perché il Vico leggeva i suoi autori tre volte e a tre livelli convergenti: la prima volta, per comprenderne l'unità dei componimenti, la seconda per veder gli attacchi e il séguito delle cose, la terza per raccoglierne le forme del concepire e dello spiegarsi traendole dal contesto vivo dell'opera che leggeva». Gigante is right in pointing out that Vico's literary study, although taking place at three distinct levels, nevertheless "converged", that is, the different strands came together to form a coherent structured complex.

semblage of reflections on various topics – but furthermore displays a rather special, and specialized, literary structure, namely, “ring composition”<sup>6</sup>. Such a claim immediately must confront basic objections. The most immediate objection is that Vico actually never gave any explicit indication that he employed ring composition. His silence on such a fundamental issue of literary style is not easily explained, and provides reason for caution<sup>7</sup>.

A more fundamental objection would be that attributing to Vico a preoccupation with a compositional “technique” represents a misguided and radically mistaken interpretation and presentation of his thought<sup>8</sup>. Understandably, the focus on literary “style” rather than the nature and substance of the material, is apt to promote such an impression. It is therefore worth noting that what should be significant is not the fact itself that Vico used a particular “technique” but rather how he used, and what he accomplished with it<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Ring composition itself will be described in more detail below.

<sup>7</sup> In view of Vico’s silence on the subject, but at the same time maintaining the working hypothesis, the question arises whether there may be writings other than *Metaphysics* that could be brought to bear in support of ring composition, writings where the presence or absence of ring structure possibly could be more directly evident. To that end, Vico’s *Inaugural Orations* are being used as a “test case”, and the result is presented in the appendix. Of course, the fact that the *Inaugural Orations* may have ring structure does not say anything about the structure of *Metaphysics*; it would, however, if proven to be the case, go a long way toward not having to take Vico’s silence as conclusive evidence of its absence. A similar phenomenon as been noted in the *New Science*, of which Nancy Struever (*Rhetoric, Modality, Modernity*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 46) observed: «In the *New Science* Vico does not mention, but uses rhetoric».

<sup>8</sup> This important and necessary contention is clearly articulated and documented by David Marshall in *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*. (Strictly speaking, ring composition is not a prominent subject in the typical compendium of classical rhetoric; however, Vico makes brief mention of a prototypical form, *epanodos*, or chiasm, in his handbook on rhetoric, for a discussion of which see the appendix. The reason for referring to ring composition and rhetoric together is that both could be viewed as being merely “external” forms, as distinguished from their content, and more matters of superficial literary technique than of more important concern for the substance of arguments). Despite the fact that Vico during his whole academic life was an instructor in classical rhetorical method, he had a deeper, or rather higher, understanding and view of “rhetoric”. Marshall felicitously calls it “sublimation” of rhetoric, whereby Vico discerned underlying qualities or principles in the formalities of rhetoric that could and needed to be raised to their true and full expression (see for example section II. *Rhetoric and Semiosis*, pp. 128-139, but it pervades the entire book). At the same time, rhetoric in the standard sense is not denied its well-deserved place in the scheme of things: «Ultimately, I would argue, the basic “fount” from which both the best orators and the best observers of nature spring is *ingenium*» (p. 120). See also D. L. Marshall, *The Current State of Vico Scholarship*, in «Journal of the History of Ideas», LXXII, 2011, 1, pp. 141-160.

<sup>9</sup> Within classical rhetoric itself, distinctions have been pointed out between its original nature and purpose, and its later development into a more procedural direction. Kennedy explained: «Primary rhetoric is the conception of rhetoric as held by the Greeks [...]. Rhetoric was “primarily” an art of persuasion [...]. “Secondary” rhetoric, on the other hand, is the apparatus of rhetorical techniques clustering around discourse or art forms when those techniques are not being used for their primary oral purpose» (G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, Chapel Hill (NC), The University of North Carolina Press, 1980, pp. 4-5). Vico’s ability and penchant for

Reference was made already to Vico's own explanation – albeit short and leaving one wishing for more – of the three-step process by which he endeavored to grasp the structure and meaning of the works he studied. He concluded by highlighting the requirement of always recalling any particular expressions «in their contexts» (*ne' luoghi loro*). In attributing the use of ring composition to Vico, the issue of context also arises, i.e. is there a larger context in which his surmised ring composition could be situated and, to some extent at least, made intelligible as a compositional strategy that is neither accidental nor capricious? As the name “ring composition” itself suggests, it displays or embodies aspects of circularity, figuratively speaking, in which the narrative proceeds in such a manner that it ends up with saying something that relates to the beginning. The “circle” as an emblem of roundedness, wholeness, is thus the underlying intuitive idea; ring composition is thus a particular instantiation of the aspiration to achieve completeness, limited to the literary realm. Circularity also may denote cyclicity when stepping out of the realm of philology, into the outside world of physical processes and human/social/historical developments.

It is not difficult to find examples of Vico's thinking in terms of circular or cyclical modalities, and the vast contrasts between them underline that Vico did not see the metaphor narrowly or archetypically. A good starting point could be Vico's statement in his autobiography that «the first simple figure is the circle [*la prima semplice è 'l cerchio*], symbol of God's perfection». This referred to geometry, but circularity as a metaphor could also be drafted into service of illustrating aspects of his theory of knowledge: «Three further matters concerning [...] knowledge [...] I shall also treat: its origin, circularity [*de circolo*], and constancy; [...] all return to God by a circle [*circolo ad Deum redire omnes*]»<sup>10</sup>. Vico found the circle/cycle metaphor also congenial in the completely unrelated

transforming a particular *genre* (in this case, Sallust's historical work, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*) has been also noted in his report on the failed plot against Spanish rule (1701), *De contumatione*, of which Marshall said: «Vico becomes a [...] telling example of how rhetorical [...] commitments could be redirected into a decisively modern historical consciousness» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 39; see also B. A. Nadeo, *Vico and Naples. The Urban Origins of Modern Social Theory*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 2011, pp. 25-49).

<sup>10</sup> *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, cit., pp. 152, 156; G. Vico, *L'autobiografia*, cit., pp. 37, 40. Here, the circle is called “simple” as opposed to being “composite”, i.e. piecewise-linear, like the triangle; while, mathematically, there is no basis for viewing the circle as the «symbol of [...] perfection»; however, the circle does have the “special” property, from the standpoint of Leibniz' infinitesimal calculus, of being «continuous at every point», a property that the triangle violates at its vertices (see G. Buskes - A. van Rooij, *Topological Spaces: From Distance to Neighborhood*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1997, p. 8). Andrea Battistini called attention to the notion of “continuity” in the *New Science*: «Their [the axioms'] intermittent appearance [...] is controlled by the circular conception of time and, therefore, by a continuous system of interdependent internal references». And «In the dialectic between the continuity of the “ideal eternal history” and the specificity of each age [...], Vico seems to distinguish two sublime types» (A. Battistini, *The Idea of Totality in Vico*, in «New Vico Studies», XV, 1997, pp. 43, 45).



field of pedagogy, as he argued in his fifth Inaugural Oration, by acknowledging the objection:

But if it is necessary that the future commander completes a cycle of so many and such important sciences [*Sed, si tot tantarumque orbem scientiarum absolvere*], [...] his talent for war [...] would be [...] diminished<sup>11</sup>.

And in his last inaugural oration, he exhorted:

let the eyes of your mind rove widely, exercise your talents full circle [*quoquoversus ingenia circumagite*] [...]. After you have traversed the whole circle of knowledge [*Ita, universo scientiarum orbe circumacto*], you must pursue whatever discipline you have chosen<sup>12</sup>.

It would seem that Vico's favorite mode of reasoning and argumentation is bound up with coming back at the end, to the issue raised at the beginning, thus never losing sight of it until bringing matters to a degree of closure<sup>13</sup>.

However, the place where metaphorical circularity and cyclicity figure most prominently is in the *New Science*<sup>14</sup>. It is encapsulated in the phrase *corso/corsi* and *ricorso/ricorsi* (usually left untranslated as there evidently are no terms, at least in English, to capture the Vichian meaning), applied to the scale or level of world/cultural history. The essential notion is, metaphorically speaking, of a cyclical movement, in which one series of developments runs its course, to be followed by a new set of developments which, according to Vico, nevertheless share structural similarities at their core and thus justify being considered a *ricorso*. This scheme has been interpreted in radically different

<sup>11</sup> The text of the *Orations* is online at *Portale Vico*; full citation: G. Vico, *Le orazioni inaugurali I-VI*, a cura di G. G. Visconti, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1982, edizione elettronica a cura di L. Pica Ciamarra, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», II, 2005, 2. In English, in *On Humanistic Education (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707). From the definitive Latin Text*, Introduction, and Notes of G. G. Visconti, trans. by G. A. Pinton - A. W. Shippee, with an *Introduction* by D. Ph. Verene, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> G. Vico, *On the Heroic Mind*, trans. by E. Sewell - A. C. Sirignano, in G. Tagliacozzo et al., *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, Atlantic Highlands (NJ), Humanities Press, 1976, p. 241; online at *Portale Vico*, XII, paragraphs 19-20; full citation G. Vico, *De Mente Heroica*, in Id., *Il De Mente Heroica e gli scritti latini minori*, a cura di G. G. Visconti, Napoli, Guida, 1996, edizione elettronica a cura di L. Pica Ciamarra - A. Sansone, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», V, 2008, 1.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Mooney remarked about Vico's final response to the reviewer(s) of his *Metaphysics*: «With this Vico comes full circle in his argument». And at another point: «Again Vico brings his argument around, by circling back [...], as he does routinely» (M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 135, 153).

<sup>14</sup> Since this information is only supportive or ancillary to the main topic and argument, it will be limited to secondary sources, without a substantive discussion of the original. The main sources drawn on, and to which the reader is referred to for a fuller discussion, are G. Mazzotta, *The New Map of the World: The Poetic Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, ch. 9, *The "Ricorso": A New Way of Seeing*, pp. 206-233; M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 245-254; M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern*, Cambridge (Ma), Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 218-231; D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 246-262.

ways; on the one hand, it was seen as evidence of an «anti-modern» streak in Vico as it could be considered a «fatalistic theory» (Lilla)<sup>15</sup>. But the dominant interpretation is nuanced by understanding the cyclical metaphor in terms of a symbolic “spiral”, the endpoints of which do not simply match the beginnings, but constitute a different level, whatever that might mean concretely in specific areas of human culture<sup>16</sup>.

To bring this thumbnail sketch of the metaphor in Vico's oeuvre to a close, it remains to cite Mazzotta's description of the style of writing itself of the *New Science*<sup>17</sup>, by way of the following excerpts: «the *ricorso* is for Vico also a mode of writing and reading [...], it is itself a new way of thinking and seeing». «Vico connects the periodic, recursive movement of history to the style of his writing». «Together with the *ricorso*, the *cursus* suggests Vico's spiral style of writing and spiral style of thinking». «Tied as it is to Vico's style of writing, the *ricorso* comes through as a rhetorical contrivance, as a perspective rhetorically [...] produced by the very *New Sciences*»<sup>18</sup>.

If one were to review the metaphor usage in the various contexts mentioned here, it becomes obvious that it was Vico's choice to do so, since none of the subject matters inherently presuppose it. For example, that knowledge is said to return to God, in some sense, does not in itself engender a circular view of matters; nor does an educational vision that encompasses both the humanities and science and technology have an intrinsically circular structure. The same could be said about any large-scale historical *corsi* and *ricorsi*. The circular/cyclical paradigm(s) is/are, therefore, Vico's way of imposing a certain structure on phenomena in diverse areas of human endeavor.

Earlier it was recognized that in Vico, that which otherwise could be merely utilitarian rhetorical technical skills, became “sublimated”, by recovering the originally intended modes of cognition and thought in classical rhetoric, and elevating them to the highest possible levels. Such recognition can serve as a proper backdrop against which to place the present thesis. In a manner of speaking, it points and goes in the opposite direction: in this case, instead of attributing to Vico “sublimation,” “subliminal” might be the term applicable to Vico's use of the circular/cyclical metaphor in his style of writing. As sublimi-

<sup>15</sup> Mooney calls attention to thinkers prior to the early modern age that held to a “cyclical” view of history, and how such views were considered anathema to “modernity” in their day also (M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 95-97). With respect to Lilla's view, his assessment of Vichian cyclicity is only a moment in his larger Vichian critique, and should be placed in this overall context. Lilla's critical view of Vico has been challenged by others, including G. Cacciatore - S. Caianiello, *Vico Anti-Moderno?*, in BCSV, XXVI-XXVII, 1996-1997, pp. 205-218; online at *Portale Vico*. See also the more recent discussion in M. Vanzulli (a cura di), *Razionalità e modernità in Vico*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> G. Mazzotta interestingly points out the serpentine, helical shape of Mercury's caduceus (actually “double-helical”) on the frontispiece of the *New Science*, which, by coincidence, in the double helix of DNA has become the icon of modern life sciences, too.

<sup>17</sup> G. Mazzotta, *New Map of the World*, cit., pp. 141, 228.

<sup>18</sup> J. O'Neill speaks of a «hermeneutical cyle» (*Vico on the Natural Workings of the Mind*, in «Phenomenology and the Human Sciences», Supplement to «Philosophical Topics», XII, 1981, pp. 117).

nal phenomena do not automatically register perceptually, cognitively, since they occur below a certain threshold, so Vico's ring composition of *Metaphysics*, it is suggested, is the subliminal counterpart of Vico's determination to present his thinking as well-rounded, as a self-contained whole<sup>19</sup>. Literary form becomes the handmaiden to conceptual aspiration. As literal subliminal stimuli require concerted effort to create, and to detect, so ring structure does not come about without expenditure of appreciable editorial resources, nor can it be uncovered or recovered without sustained focus and concentration.

This then may be the larger context in which to view ring composition on Vico's part.

## 2. Ring Composition

A starting point for sketching basic features of ring composition could be the following epigram from *Metaphysics*:

Norunt id verum sapientes linguae latinae Auctores, recta metaphysica, physica prava esse; cum latini religionis cussa *nihil* ab opposition *recte* dicant: a – quasi nihilo opponantur b – rectum, exactum, perfectum, c – infinitum; & c' – finita, b' – prava, imperfecta a' – sint pene nihil.

[The wise authors of the Latin language were aware of this truth, that things which are straight (*recta*) are metaphysical, things which are irregular (*prava*) are physical, because the Latins, for religious reasons, use the expression *not at all* (*nihil*) as the opposite of *correctly* (*recte*), as if to say that the opposite of nothing (*nihil*) are the straight (*rectum*), the complete, the perfect, the infinite, [and] the finite, irregular, imperfect things, are almost nothing]<sup>20</sup>.

The pattern a-b-c-c'-b'-a' at this scale is a rudimentary form of ring composition, and at first glance might add little if anything to the thought expressed, except possibly in the asymmetry amidst symmetry, due to the missing counterpart to *exactum* (in b) in the second half of the chiasmus (i.e. in b'). This elementary example, however, illustrates already certain basic features of this type of literary structuring that are also present in larger-scale texts of this nature. At the same time one bears in mind that this small-scale example is akin to like a

<sup>19</sup> See A. Battistini, *The Idea of Totality in Vico*, cit., pp. 38, 43. There is an interplay between three epistemological realms: *metaphysics* is where the intuitive notion of completeness and a sense of unity originate; in the middle, mediating position is *mathematics* with its creation of circle/spiral; and the external phenomena studied are found in the *world of humans*. (In mathematics, the pairing of circle and spiral is not without justification. In algebraic topology, the spiral is considered a “universal cover” of the circle; in algebraic geometry, the circle is the “projection” of the spiral, the spiral the “blow-up” of the circle. S. Mac Lane, *Mathematics: Form and Function*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1986, p. 344; V. I. Danilov - V. V. Shokurov, *Algebraic Curves, Algebraic Manifolds and Schemes*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1994, pp. 242-243, 253; K. E. Smith et al., *An Invitation to Algebraic Geometry*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 2010, pp. 99-106).

<sup>20</sup> *Metaphysics*, pp. 78-79 (IV, 3). I have taken the liberty of rearranging the English clauses to bring them in alignment with the Latin order, at the price of awkwardness.



simple molecule of a few dozen atoms, while ring construction on the scale of an entire work might be comparable to a large protein consisting of hundreds of aminoacids, folded in unpredictable ways<sup>21</sup>.

These basic features<sup>22</sup> can be summarized as follows:

- The first basic characteristic of chiasmus displayed here is that the whole composition, consisting in this case of a single, short saying, can be divided in two halves. This feature can be expected of any ring, whatever its extent. Thus, there is already a minimal degree of structure, providing a necessary but not sufficient condition, as any number of literary structures may be bipartite. The special property of rings is that material in the second

<sup>21</sup> A comment on terminology might be in order at this point. It is certainly useful, and often also necessary, to distinguish between different forms of chiasmus, such A-B-A', A-B-B'-A', or A-B-C-B'-A', or expanded groupings, and reflect these distinctions in terminology, for example, by speaking of "ring", "chiastic", or "concentric" constructions. Since this paper, however, is not a treatise on chiasmus *per se*, no effort will be made to draw such distinctions, on the premise that all of them share the same fundamentals. Even more importantly, it would be grossly misguided to attempt approaching Vico's work through a rigidly defined framework. The descriptions *ring*, *chiastic/chiasmus*, and *concentric* will therefore be employed interchangeably. At the time, it would not be amiss to highlight the degree of separation between an epigrammatic chiasmus and a more extensive text by, informally, referring to "micro-chiasmus" and "macro-chiasmus". – It seems that in recent years, interest in, and study of, ring structure has particularly flourished in the field of biblical/theological studies. While any specific results and debates of the role of chiasmus in this discipline itself are not relevant to Vico studies, the general insights gained on the nature of chiasmus and its scope of application can be transferred without much loss or modification to other kinds of literature. This is the case of the following main sources of information on rings used for the present purposes: (1) M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2007, containing a general discussion (also from a cultural anthropologist's point of view), and specific compositional studies of the Hebrew Bible's *Numbers* (volume four of the Pentateuch); Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Homer's *Iliad*; (2) D. A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*, Grand Rapids (Mi), Baker Academic, 1999, containing a detailed introduction to ring construction (pp. 15-44, from which the above terminology is adopted), as well as an extensive bibliography. The bulk of the book (pp. 42-324) provides rationales for the extraordinary proposition that each and every "book" of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) canon displays ring structure at the level of the whole text; (3) I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, containing a critical evaluation of criteria commonly adduced for the presence of chiasmus (pp. 13-45, 213-232), and unlike Dorsey, limiting the study of ring structure to selected, relatively short sections of epistles, considered of "intermediate" length. In light of the continued lack of consensus with regard to various aspects of ring composition, and often unconvincing proposals for particular texts, other workers have taken the decidedly opposite view of negating ring composition in classical times. See S. E. Porter - J. T. Reed, *Philippians as a Macro-Chiasm and Its Exegetical Significance*, in «New Testament Studies», XLIV, 1998, pp. 213-231.

<sup>22</sup> No claim is made here as being a nuanced exposition of ring structure; this rudimentary outline, in particular, does not address the intricate issues revolving around "subjective" and "objective" ways of recognizing the boundaries of the assumed text units on which reconstruction of a text in concentric from hinges. They are discussed in the sources in footnote 21; further resource material referenced in J. W. Welch - D. B. McKinley (eds.), *Chiasmus Bibliography*, Provo (Ut), Research Press, 1999.

half bears a relationship to the first half, or is intended by the author to be seen in relation to it.

- The next basic aspect is a correlation or coordination between the beginning and ending of the text. In Vico's statement, this connection is established by «the opposite of nothing» and «almost nothing». It would be futile and counterproductive to attempt any more specific elucidation of how an ending should relate to the beginning. When a text, however, ends in this manner, it has the initial makings of a ring; it is as though it is coming full circle.
- Another essential, general requirement is a center which is represented above by segments b and b', i.e. the words «the infinite» and «the finite». In the ring A-B-A', segment B would play that role.
- Finally, there is a certain order observed in the sequence of material in the second half which motivated the nomenclature of ring, chiasmic, concentric in the first place: individual sections or blocks of material appear in reverse order of their initial appearance<sup>23</sup>.

Before considering certain ways in which these merely “surface” aspects of chiasmic construction function in, or contribute meaning to, the composition, a few reflections on ring composition as such can be made. It has been speculated that the symmetry and balance of chiasmus has to do with the way the brain works. On the other hand, it may have a cultural anthropological explanation<sup>24</sup>. Since we are not concerned with its historic origins and development, but with its actualization, likely it can best be appreciated as an art form<sup>25</sup>. The aesthetic moment experienced in absorbing the composition also merits recognition<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, summarized ring composition as follows: Ring form is the basis for a consciously contrived literary form, ring composition, used in antiquity to construct longer pieces. In ring composition, the conclusion matches the start and so encloses the piece as in a ring. The opening unit, thus matched by the conclusion, is repeated in the mid-term. This puts the main idea, the central thesis, at the turning point or centre of the literary work, splitting it into two halves which frame the middle: «All we have to do is open the book to its middle and read. This reveals the book's focal concepts» (p. 50).

<sup>24</sup> Id., *Thinking in Circles*, cit., pp. 139-148.

<sup>25</sup> Thomson's view is that chiasmus is «a *tool of rhetorical composition*, capable of functioning as an art form, an *aide-memoire*, acting as a structuring device» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., pp. 34-35, 223; italics in the original).

<sup>26</sup> D. A. Dorsey (*Literary Structure*, cit., p. 31) observed: «*Beauty*: humans appreciate the esthetic quality of balanced presentation, whether it be in the art, music, architecture, or literature». That “beauty” can be expressed in many other and different ways, goes without saying (M. Kinzie, *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999). About ring composition as a cross-cultural phenomenon, see M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, cit., pp. 6-13.

However, there is another level of significance meriting attention, namely, the sense of closure and completeness<sup>27</sup>.

It is the unusual reverse or inverse order of the material that is essential and which contributes greatly to the effect of "circular" movement, resulting in the "ring"-like shape of the text, as observed above. However, more than being a formulaic device, it provides a window on the author's movement of thought or argument<sup>28</sup>.

Hermeneutically, text in the central position is understood to take on special significance<sup>29</sup>. If, and when, the material at the center of a ring is correctly identified, clearly there is hermeneutical gain, as it aids in revealing a key theme or topic on the author's mind, irrespective of other relevant topics and thoughts in the same work. It also may force a reading of the rest of the text from a particular perspective<sup>30</sup>. This already can be the case at the "micro-chiastic" level as exemplified in the introductory example. Both key concepts in the middle, the «infinite», and the «finite», can be semantically, conceptually related to the ideas of «almost nothing» and «opposite of nothing» that form the beginning and ending.

When the ending creates an *inclusio* with the beginning, what is achieved is not merely a well-rounded composition formally, by coming full circle, but especially a connection of thoughts that cohere with each other, if placed next to each other, in the first place, and, surprisingly, gain vividness and significance by their very separation from each other<sup>31</sup>.

Ring structure also adds a new dimension to study and analysis of a text due to its inherent parallelism; not only do the individual sections have their own interpretational import, they must furthermore be considered in relation to their counterparts in the overall structure. As with a wave interference pattern, allowing two separate lines of thought to interact with each other, has the potential of generating nuances or connotations that might otherwise be overlooked<sup>32</sup>. At a different hermeneutical level, they have the potential of engen-

<sup>27</sup> Douglas stated: «The ring composition does something to fill the interpretative gap by virtue of its symmetry, its completeness» (*ivi*, p. 13).

<sup>28</sup> As Thomson explained: «what it produces is a pattern that describes primarily the *movement of thought rather than the thought itself*, it is a dynamic, fluid concept that provides the framework» (author's italics). Also: «Of considerable importance, too, is the way that a chiasmus reveals the author's movement of thought as a case is built» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., pp. 38, 224).

<sup>29</sup> «The central unit often represents the highlight [...] or most important point» (D. A. Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, cit., p. 41). «The center often contains the focus of the author's thought. [...] this is a particularly powerful feature with obvious implications for exegesis» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., p. 27).

<sup>30</sup> «The other prime test of a [...] ring is the loading of meaning on the center and the connections made between the center and the beginning; in other words, the center [...] integrates the whole» (M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, cit., pp. 31-32). See also I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Thomson speaks of «sequentially distant elements» (*ivi*, pp. 223-224).

<sup>32</sup> Thomson concluded: «The symmetries that emerge in a chiasmus have the effect of making the combined impact of element X with its chiastic partner X' more than the impact

dering the sense that, not just one part, but the totality of the subject matter has been dealt with<sup>33</sup>.

Returning to the Vichian chiasmus above, its ostensible paucity of substantive material notwithstanding, it is still striking in drawing attention to one of the key themes running through *Metaphysics*, the epistemological *Stellenwert*, positional value, of the «infinite», that never leaves us from its first occurrence in the work in chapter one until its conclusion<sup>34</sup>. The curious appearance of asymmetry in an otherwise balanced composition also calls for further consideration<sup>35</sup>. It may not be farfetched to take the term *exactum*<sup>36</sup> as a gloss of the Cartesian *clear and distinct* idea; if this is indeed the case, Vico's assignment of it to the realm of *metaphysics*, the realm of first principles and intuitive concepts, could be understood as a thinly disguised argumentative point in his overall polemic with Descartes who had laid claim to it for the realm of knowledge of the *physical* world. Its disruptive insertion in the well-rounded construction could be interpreted as deliberately designed to draw attention to it.

### 3. Liber metaphysicus: *Complete or Fragmentary?*

The present working hypothesis, as stated earlier, is that *Metaphysics* displays strong evidence of ring structure. For this proposition to be valid, the first essential requirement is for the work to exhibit evidence of internal *completeness*, a sense of being well-rounded, when viewed in the light of certain criteria. The first order of the day, therefore, is the study of the work as a whole, without intensive attention at this stage to every fine turn of thought and expression, which would not be unlike the way Vico himself approached his chosen authors according to his autobiography.

If one approaches *Metaphysics* as if reading it for the first time, and, if possible, also pretending being unfamiliar with the (early modern) historical context, one cannot help but sympathize, or agree, with the reactions mentioned in the introduction, reactions that are directly relevant to the question before us, namely, their doubts about its overall coherence. This comes to the fore al-

of X and X'' taken in isolation» (*ivi*, p. 39). Thomson, also, described several pragmatic ways that parallel material in the second half may relate to the first half: «repetition (better described as recapitulation), contrast and expansion (in which one element may complete or complement a partner)» (*ivi*, p. 42); see also Dorsey: «such things as compare, contrast, reiterate, emphasize, explain, and illustrate» (D. A. Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, cit., p. 31). This certainly rings true, but doesn't exhaust creative possibilities, in general, and Vico's literary artistry, in particular.

<sup>33</sup> According to Dorsey: «*Totality*: matching units may convey the idea of the totality of a phenomenon by featuring both halves of a merism» (*ivi*, p. 39).

<sup>34</sup> *Metaphysics*, pp. 16-17 (I, *Introduction*); pp. 134-135 (*Conclusion*).

<sup>35</sup> Thomson observed: «[...] paradoxically, in a device which depends for its definition on symmetry, it is often the asymmetries that emerge from the pattern that drive the argument forward» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., p. 39).

<sup>36</sup> Translated "exact" in G. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, trans. by L. M. Palmer, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 81; the German translation «das Genau» is in G. Vico, *Liber metaphysicus, Risposte*, trans. by S. Otto and H. Viechtbauer, München, Wilhelm Fink, 1979, p. 95.

ready at the beginning of the book. It starts with what appears to be an excursus in philology, by tracing back the so-called *verum-factum* principle<sup>37</sup> to the ancient Latin language. Only later will it become clear that this actually is the key concept in Vico's thought, and thus, looking back from that vantage point, the brief highlight of this notion at the very beginning can be better understood. But then the subject switches to theology, in a very direct sense, by describing God not only as the first maker, but also the only one who has infinite knowledge and understanding of everything, by virtue of having "made" the world<sup>38</sup>. The operative term «infinite»<sup>39</sup> recurs throughout the book, as a favorite designation to mark the (unbridgeable) gap between divine knowledge and human knowledge which is merely finite. Terms such as «perfect» and «imperfect» can be employed as synonyms; however, they do not carry the same connotation of magnitude. This is, in effect, metaphysics in the traditional sense<sup>40</sup>, but, disconcertingly, Vico later appropriates the term for something entirely different. These theological reflections are followed by a "philosophy of science", if that is the proper term, since it, more than anything else, emphasizes the inadequacy of all natural sciences to achieve perfect understanding, with one exception, mathematics, in which sphere, «man [...] effects infinite works, because he knows within himself infinite truths»<sup>41</sup>. The next topic is dogmatism and skepticism which are fundamentally "propositional attitudes", rather than theories of knowledge in themselves, and here is where Vico makes his first explicit reference to Descartes (*Cogito: Ergo sum*). These are the diverse subject matters touched on the first chapter. Chapter II takes a theoretical turn by introducing the notion of «metaphysical forms», claiming that «physical forms are

<sup>37</sup> «*Verum (the true)* and (*factum*) (*the made*) are interchangeable or [...] convertible» (*Metaphysics*, p. 17; I, *Introduction*).

<sup>38</sup> Vico's theological language has been traced back to various earlier thinkers, particularly Augustine and Nicolas of Cusa (A. Sabetta, *Fuentes Cristianas del "De Antiquissima Italarum Sapientia"*, trans. by J. Sánchez Espillaque, in «Cuadernos sobre Vico», XIX-XX, 2006-2007, pp. 73-118). However, Vico's assumed reliance on Nicolas of Cusa has been challenged by other scholars, including E. Garin, *Vico e Cusano*, in BCSV, VII, 1977, pp. 138-141, and G. Santinello, *Cusano e Vico: a proposito di una tesi di K. O. Apel*, in BCSV, VII, 1977, pp. 141-150. Santinello, in particular, points out the completely different contexts in which Vico uses his terminology, compared to Nicolas of Cusa; while the undeniable similarity of language of the two thinkers may have something to do with a common underlying body of thought (*un sottofondo commune*). I thank the reviewer for bringing this to my attention. – On the question of Vico's "orthodoxy" against the background of the rise of deism in various forms among the intelligentsia of the early modern age, see the bibliography in M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, cit., pp. 243-245; for a Catholic point of view, see F. Amerio, *Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1947, pp. 216-246; as well as more recently G. Mazzotta, *New Map of the World*, cit., pp. 234-255; N. Perullo, *L'umano e il bestiale. Ingegno, metafisica e religione nel "De antiquissima"*, in G. Matteucci (a cura di), *Studi sul "De antiquissima Italarum sapientia" di Vico*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2002, pp. 70, 84.

<sup>39</sup> M. Lollini, *Vico e il pensiero dell'infinito*, in G. Matteucci (a cura di), *Studi sul "De antiquissima Italarum sapientia"*, cit., pp. 49-68.

<sup>40</sup> He refers himself to "the Christian metaphysicians" (*Metaphysics*, p. 23; I, 1).

<sup>41</sup> *Ivi*, p. 25 (I, 1).



formed from metaphysical forms»<sup>42</sup>. Nothing is said at this point what such metaphysical forms might consist of, it is just “about” metaphysical forms phenomenologically, thus confusingly *meta*-metaphysical. Chapter III proceeds in a similar vein of meta-level discussion of the language of cause and effect, showing that only mathematics («arithmetic and geometry») can properly speak of causing its elements, as another way of referring to their making.

It is only at this point that Vico presents the core, and the substance, of his knowledge-theoretical thesis: the “metaphysical points and *conatus*”. His choice of the adjective «metaphysical» has not aided in immediately signaling its difference from traditional metaphysics<sup>43</sup>. The «metaphysical» entities in question, points and *conatus*, play essential roles in the theory of knowledge, epistemology, as practiced by humans, and are to be absolutely distinguished from both mathematical and physical entities. Vico indeed is at pains setting «metaphysical things» (such as absolute rest, or perfect straightness of lines) strictly apart from the other two spheres or realms, and does so in particular by engagement with Cartesianism. They are metaphysical in the sense of belonging to the realm of intuitively formed concepts, core ideas, on the basis of which, first, mathematical entities can be developed, and subsequently, physical theories by the incorporation of physical factors<sup>44</sup>.

The last three chapters, on the face of it, again seem to “jump” from the subject matter at hand, to something entirely unrelated. Chapter V deals with the “physiology” of the human body, with focus on respiration («air is the vehicle of life, which, when breathed in and breathed out, moves the heart and the arteries»), the cardiovascular system («the blood in the heart and arteries, and the motion of blood is life itself»)<sup>45</sup>, and the brain («the nerves are observed to spread throughout the entire body from the brain as though from the base of a trunk»)<sup>46</sup>. These observations are embedded in an anthropology<sup>47</sup> that is based on contrasting humans and animals.

Chapter VI is partly about “human psychology”, calling the human mind «so crooked, so wicked, so false, so full of vice», on the one hand, but, on the other hand, «it happens that even in our errors we never lose sight of God [...], intuiting concerning created things – whether unwittingly or falsely – God in the imitations themselves»<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39 (II); Chapters II, III, and VI have neither introductions nor multiple sections.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Miner (*Introduction*, in *Metaphysics*, p. VII) observed: «In confronting the *Metaphysics*, the modern reader soon finds herself in unfamiliar territory. That Vico’s metaphysics diverge sharply from what recent Anglo-American discourses mean by “metaphysics” is clear».

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the complexity of Vico’s epistemology, see my article *Vico’s Three Realms. From “Liber Metaphysicus” to Category Theory*, in «Laboratorio dell’ISPF», IX, 2012, 1-2, pp. 51-88, online at <[http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/2012\\_1-2\\_301.pdf](http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/2012_1-2_301.pdf)>.

<sup>45</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 87 (V, *Introduction*).

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*, p. 93 (V, 2).

<sup>47</sup> M. Lollini, *Vico e il pensiero dell’infinito*, cit., p. 61; A. Sabetta, *Fuentes Cristianas*, cit., pp. 109-110, relates Vico’s “anthropology” also to human “finiteness”.

<sup>48</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 101 (VI).

Chapter VII discusses a "theory of cognition", or "cognitive psychology". It revolves around the «faculties» of *memory, fantasy/imagination, ingenuity, perception, judgment, reasoning*. But this chapter also ventures into the field of logic by contrasting «topics» and «syllogisms».

The final chapter focuses again on "theology", as did the beginning of the book.

In view of the many apparently disparate topics covered in the book<sup>49</sup>, it would seem indeed contraindicated to keep dwelling on its postulated unity for the sake of clinging to a tenuous hypothesis. Already early readers of *Metaphysics* had difficulties accepting it as an internally coherent and overall satisfying exposition. This can be seen in the exchange between the reviewers of the book in the *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia*, and Vico shortly after its publication<sup>50</sup>. While the reviewers<sup>51</sup> debate a number of individual issues and assertions made by Vico, matters of substance, it is also evident that they wanted to make an issue of the scope of the book on the whole:

that makes one think that [...] the author meant to give us only an outline and a specimen of his metaphysics, not the metaphysics itself. [...] And it is to be hoped that one day we shall have it, when the author gives us the whole work completed in print<sup>52</sup>.

The forcefulness of Vico's response to this criticism is telling<sup>53</sup>. He devoted the main, central section of the *First Response* to it, under its own subheading: «II. That Our Metaphysics is Complete» (*Che la nostra metafisica è compita sopra*

<sup>49</sup> It is not intended to claim that the disciplines highlighted, including philology, theology, epistemology, physiology, anthropology, psychology, theory of cognition, logic, exhaust the range of subject matters in the work; for example, Vico's views on the history of ideas (IV,1), or rhetoric (VII,4), have not been considered.

<sup>50</sup> Since Taylor's edition of *Metaphysics* does not include the exchange, reference will be made to L. M. Palmer's translation (G. Vico, *On the Ancient Wisdom*, cit.), pp. 113-187; the original language text can be found online at *Portale Vico*; full citation: G. Vico, *Le polemiche relative al De antiquissima italorum sapientia*, edizione elettronica a cura di A. Stile, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», III, 2006, 2.

<sup>51</sup> A single reviewer initially, who wrote the *First Article*, leading to Vico's *First Response*; in turn, Vico's response elicited a counter-response, the *Second Article*, apparently by a group of interlocutors, and Vico took the opportunity of writing a further defense, the *Second Response*, twice as lengthy as the first. According to Miner, «in the two responses to his critics [...], Vico provides an invaluable key to understanding the structure of the *Metaphysics*» (R. Miner, *Introduction*, in *Metaphysics*, p. XIII). With respect to the identification of the initial reviewer, it seems that a measure of caution continues to be advisable. While Croce named Bernardo Trevisano, Nicolini suspected that the critic came from the Cartesian *milieu* of Naples. See M. Veneziani, "Machina" negli *Scritti di Vico*, in M. Veneziani (a cura di), *Machina: XI Colloquio Internazionale, Roma, 8-10 gennaio 2004*, Firenze, Olschki, 2005, p. 474, n. 34.

<sup>52</sup> *Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, p. 117. «L'obiezione del recensore che avanzava l'ipotesi dell'assenza nel "Liber metaphysicus" di un compiuto sistema metafisico» (M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno". La questione della verità e della sua rappresentazione in Vico*, Napoli, Guida, 2001, p. 111).

<sup>53</sup> See *ivi*, pp. 121-129.

*tutta la sua idea*). It is not only the arguments that he marshals, but also the rhetorical style itself, which conveys his own conviction of the unity of his work. He casts the organization of *Metaphysics* into a framework of continuous movement, undisrupted by any incongruities, as this excerpt demonstrates:

First, I establish [*Primieramente stabilisco*] that the true is convertible with the made. [...] Then I surmise [*e quindi raccolgo*] that the unique Truth is in God [...]. Having molded this criterion of truth, I lead all [*a quella riduco l'origine*] human sciences to this criterion [...]. Then I turn against the skeptics [*Poi mi volgo contro gli scettici*] and lead them [*e li meno*] to where they are forced to concede that the comprehension of all the causes from which the effects result is possible. [...] I go on to discuss genera [*Passo quindi a ragionare de' generi*] [...]. I pursue my course [*Prosieguo il cammino*] to prove that the truly unique cause is the one that needs nothing else to produce its effect, [...]. Thus far, I have molded the head [*Infin qua si è formato il capo*] of my metaphysics. Now the body follows [*ora succede il corpo*][...]. Having reasoned about “extended substance” [...], I pass on to “thinking substance” [*passo alla “cogitante”*] [...]. So having completed [*così, compita*] the doctrine of both substances, I go on to consider [*passo a vedere*] mind or thought. [...] Finally, I come to a halt [*Finalmente mi fermo*] in the contemplation of the supreme Creator.

To Vico's mind, his theory of knowledge as presented in the book was not only seamless but also dealt with all essential aspects from beginning to end.

Vico's sensitivity on this point of critique is also apparent by his coming back again to it before ending the section, saying: «any learned man<sup>54</sup> can readily form an adequate concept of how everything fits together in a system of metaphysics that is already complete» (*come tutte le cose cospirino in un sistema di metafisica già compiuta*). If Vico expected this to settle the issue, the response in the form of *SA* would indicate otherwise. The respondents at the *Giornale* were not prepared to drop the subject, and wrote back: «We insist [...], that his booklet has deservedly appeared to us to be, rather than a metaphysics perfect and complete, a sketch of the plan for a metaphysics». Vico responded by a greatly expanded exposition of the same ground he had already covered in the *First Response*<sup>55</sup>.

Given Vico's protestations when the “integrity” of the work, its holism, was called into question, the query arises, are there any criteria, or a point of view and perspective, in the light of which Vico would have considered the highly diverse content to be interrelated and indispensable to the formulation of this theory? A partial answer, at least, to this question can be found in *Metaphysics* itself. It can be identified, first of all, as even a cursory reading shows, in Vico's

<sup>54</sup> This looks like «the fallacy of authority», so unlike the spirit of scholarly discourse Vico advocated in his *Inaugural Orations* (see J. Hintikka - J. Bachman, *What If...?: Toward Excellence in Reasoning*, Mountain View (Ca), Mayfield Publishing, 1991, pp. 226-227).

<sup>55</sup> The preoccupation with “completeness” comes again to the fore at the end of the *Second Article*, where the reviewers claimed to have contributed to achieving the objective, proposing to consider the exchange with Vico as being integral to the work (*una metafisica intiera e in tutte le sue parti perfetta*), to which Vico agreed. (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 143).

own explicit engagement with Descartes and Cartesianism<sup>56</sup>. Above, a number of subject matters have been singled out as one proceeds reading through *Metaphysics*. Vichian studies are replete with elucidations of Vico's differences, often sharp, with Cartesianism, and recapitulating the many points of contact, or rather friction, is not necessary here<sup>57</sup>. But a few examples of Vico's decision to present his own theory of knowledge in the form of a *quasi* point-by-point indictment of Descartes' system should serve to add some substance to the assertion that there is in fact unity to the work despite the wide range of topics included<sup>58</sup>.

The very beginning of the book, in the introductory section of the first chapter, about how Latin speakers in antiquity used terms for *the true, the made, to understand, to think, reason*, seems, at first glance, removed from issues raised by Descartes, and the problem is compounded by referring to etymology, which if taken in the narrow philological sense<sup>59</sup>, could discredit his line of rea-

<sup>56</sup> «Vico thought of it [*Metaphysics*], it seems plain, as an answer to the *Meditations* of Descartes [...]» (M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 192); «col *De antiquissima* (1710), il V. spiegherà risolutamente la bandiera anticartesiana» (G. Gentile, *Studi vichiani*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1968, p. 99). This is not to suggest that Vico was "fixated" on anti-Cartesianism; as is well-known, Vico interacted with a broad spectrum of intellectual currents and thinkers of the early modern age; if considered in alphabetical order, it might start with Antoine Arnauld, and end with Thomas Willis, Locke's teacher, and would include not a few other Enlightenment luminaries in between (L. M. Palmer, *Introduction*, in G. Vico, *On the Ancient Wisdom*, cit., p. 4; N. Perullo, *L'umano e il bestiale*, cit., p. 74). If Vico's originality needs to be contextualized within the intellectual climate of his age, and by doing so, thrown into relief, so Descartes, too, cannot be considered in a vacuum; such background, particularly the Scholastics, is beyond the present scope. Vico's overall "anti-Cartesianism" furthermore does not preclude or rule out affinities of any kind whatsoever; for example, on the specific question of the source(s) of human error, their positions may not have been far apart: «Il fatto che Vico faccia proprie alcune concezioni tipicamente cartesiane non può venir ridotto ad una semplice constatazione; infatti il tener conto dell'ambiente culturale in cui le formulava, implica necessariamente che egli prendesse posizione nella polemica pervasiva ed onnicomprensiva tra novatori e tradizionalisti». P. Fabiani, *Classificazione delle scienze e principio dell'errore*, in G. Matteucci (a cura di), *Studi sul "De antiquissima Italorum sapientia"*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>57</sup> For example, in her *Introduction to Ancient Wisdom*, Palmer focused on relating key parts of *Metaphysics* to Cartesianism, highlighting their nexus in the subheadings «The *Verum-Factum* and Descartes's Rule and Criteria of Clarity and Distinctness», «The Metaphysical Points and Descartes's *Res Extensa*», and «*Ingenium* and Descartes's *Res Cogitans*» (M. Palmer, *Introduction*, cit., pp. 17-34); cfr. G. Amerio, *Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico*, cit., pp. 1-36; B. Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico* (1911), Bari, Laterza, 1962, pp. 1-19; L. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism. A Study in the Early Vico and His Idea of Rhetoric and Ingenuity*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 77-94.

<sup>58</sup> The thesis proposed here is not that everything in *Metaphysics* can be explained or understood in relation to Cartesianism, by way of a form of "reductionism"; the hypothesis, however, is that predominantly, it is Vico's engagement with Cartesianism, that animates *Metaphysics*. Cartesianism, in a way, became for Vico a "straw man", a target of opportunity, proxy for larger cultural/civilizational ills – real or perceived – that were his true concerns. This does not detract, however, from the force of this counterarguments or positions which can, analogously, be "sublimated" to a higher conceptual plane.

<sup>59</sup> «Etymology is the compounding of usages that are thrown together over time by circumstance and necessity» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 138; G. Ame-

soning. But the latently present force of these claims is a repudiation of the linchpin of Descartes' *Meditations*, the *cogito, ergo sum*. This internal process or activity of thinking is solipsistic and self-referential<sup>60</sup>. By contrast, Vico's search for truth and understanding embraces the external world, including the ways in which such knowledge finds expression in words. To this must be added the polarity of *factum* (*the made*), something created or produced, and *sum* (*I am*), merely personal existence<sup>61</sup>.

With the introduction of *verum-factum*<sup>62</sup>, the die is cast, so to speak, for the rest of the book, or rather Vico's fundamental epistemology. What follows, running through the entire treatise, is an exposition of how knowledge and understanding are inextricably linked to the process of their subject matters or entities being "made", brought into existence, consisting of multiple variations on this theme. The "theological" reflections that follow immediately, are, in fact, closely related to the progressive development and unfolding of Vico's core thesis, by speaking of God as «the first maker», and «the maker of all things»<sup>63</sup>. As the creator of things, he has complete knowledge of them, and the favorite term Vico employs time and again for such complete, exhaustive knowledge is infinite. This allows him to contrast it memorably with the asso-

rio, *Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico*, cit., p. 474, explains: «Il concetto vichiano di etimologia è alquanto più vasto di quello comunemente inteso, estendendosi in generale alla "*historia verborum*", anche se il momento essenziale e suggestivo rimanga quello della nascita e del nativo significato delle parole. Quella del Vico vuol essere una etimologia scientifica, anzi filosofica, in opposizione con l'etimologia puramente filologica, anzi grammaticale, del suo tempo». – Perhaps Vico's view of word derivation as a window into the history of ideas, even in the presence of irreducible historical contingency, becomes more understandable when juxtaposed with current «case studies» of the development of certain early-modern – and modern – terminology, such as "conscience" and "consciousness". Etymology, in this instance, too, has been put to use as a way to trace and elucidate the ideas themselves. See R. Palaia, *Theories of consciousness in early-modern philosophy*, and A. Lamarra, *Experience and identity of the self: The emergence of consciousness as a cognitive concept in the early modern age*, in F. Paglieri (ed. by), *Consciousness in Interaction. The Role of the Natural and Social Context in Shaping Consciousness*, London, John Benjamins, 2012, pp. 289-326. Where these studies differ from Vico is that they proceed from the past to the present, while Vico moved into the opposite direction, from present to past usage.

<sup>60</sup> N. Perullo, *L'umano e il bestiale*, cit., p. 72. This fundamental situation does not change if *cogito* is taken in a "performative" sense: «Descartes literally produces the evidence for his existence by doing something, viz., thinking». J. Hintikka, *Reply to Karl-Otto Apel*, in R. E. Auxier - L. E. Hahn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Jaakko Hintikka*, Chicago-La Salle (Ill), Open Court Publishing, 2006, p. 369, as well as K.-O. Apel, *Speculative-Hermeneutic Remarks on Hintikka's Performatory Interpretation of Descartes' Cogito, Ergo Sum*, in the same volume, at pp. 357-367. See also L. M. Palmer, *Introduction*, cit., p. 23, n. 53.

<sup>61</sup> Shortly later in the first chapter, Vico stoops to ridiculing Cartesian self-reflection as the ultimate grounds of knowledge, by claiming that even simpleminded Sosia, a character in a comedy by Plautus, was able to arrive at self-awareness of his existence without the benefit of «the meditation of a great philosopher to invent». *Metaphysics*, p. 33 (I, 2); M. Palmer, *Introduction*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> «Verum esse ipsum factum»; «The true is itself made», is one of the phrases used in Ch. I, *Introduction*. «It connects [Vico] to a much longer tradition of thinking» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 114).

<sup>63</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 17 (I, 1).



nant finite. However, this positioning of the divine maker is far more than the gravitational pull of the weight of historical context, under the influence of which Vico was unable to generate sufficient escape velocity to leave it behind. In the first place, it represents a not-so-thinly disguised departure from Descartes' attempt in the *Meditations* to produce a new, non-Scholastic, "proof" of God's existence<sup>64</sup>. Rather than fabricate his own, superior, "proof", according to Vico, it is theoretically, in principle, impossible to do so. And furthermore, the apparently theological tenor is not merely a vestige of early modern discourse, but has a "structural" function in Vico's theoretical edifice. It gives explicit recognition to the world at-large, external to man, and which, by the *verum-factum* principle can be fully intelligible only to its "maker". Vico is then able to relate human knowledge coherently and consistently, through qualification by means of contrast and comparison, to such ultimate, "infinite" knowledge<sup>65</sup>.

The various strands of Vico's thoughts, implicitly or explicitly presented contrariwise to Descartes, come together in chapter IV. Whereas the previous chapters discoursed about the three spheres of knowledge in view, that is, the external physical world, mathematics, and metaphysics, in overall terms, particularly their differentiation, this chapter, and particularly section 1 (*Concerning Metaphysical Points and Conatus*) fills the theoretical framework with concrete content, by way of the «metaphysics» of the «point» and «motion». For our narrative, what is relevant is that Vico asserts that Descartes has no concept of the nature of «first principles», which are *meta*-physical in a basic sense of the word<sup>66</sup>, and therefore, indiscriminately and consequently erroneously mixes-and-matches the physical and metaphysical: «René does not see this because he raised physics straight into metaphysics, and he thinks about metaphysical things in the manner of physicists»<sup>67</sup>. The entire chapter indeed repeatedly circles around this particular contention. Vico also manages to sideswipe the central Cartesian notion of «clear and distinct» ideas<sup>68</sup>. Contrary to Descartes, it is

<sup>64</sup> Later, Vico would come out more directly against such presumptive "proofs", drawing inescapable conclusions from the *verum-factum* presupposition: «Hence, for this reason, those who strive to prove God *a priori* have a remarkably impious curiosity. For such a proof would be tantamount to making oneself the god of God and denying the God they seek» (*Metaphysics*, p. 53; III).

<sup>65</sup> Already here, Vico introduces the paradigmatic nature of mathematics, its embodiment of *verum-factum* (*Metaphysics*, p. 25; I, 1).

<sup>66</sup> «With respect to the first principles and powers, shape does not apply [...] and mechanism does not apply» (*Metaphysics*, p. 61; IV, 1).

<sup>67</sup> *Ivi*, p. 69 (IV, 1).

<sup>68</sup> Sanna pointed out that this indicates the primacy given by Descartes to the visual dimension in acquiring knowledge, or the principle of truth, with precedents in antiquity, formulating it as a micro-chiasmus: «[a] È come se l'immaginazione si muovesse in luogo della sensazione, determinando così una distanza radicale tra immaginare e sentire, [b] analoga a quella che esiste tra *lumen* [c] e *lux*, [c'] l'antica distinzione tra *lux* in quanto luce come fenomeno visivo, [b'] e *lumen* in quanto luce come elemento fisico: [a'] l'immagine, cioè, si sostituisce alla sensazione ed esprime insieme la natura della realtà esterna e la natura dell'occhio che vede, denunciando nello stesso tempo come il ruolo dell'immaginazione sia ipotizzabile solo attraverso uno stretto

«metaphysical truth», the body of intuitive concepts formed separately from either real physical phenomena or mathematical constructs<sup>69</sup> that possess the «clarity of light», whereas «physical things [if taken as immediate grounds of knowledge by Descartes' rule] are darkened things»<sup>70</sup>.

The last part of *Metaphysics*, particularly chapter VII (*Concerning Faculty*), takes up more influential Cartesian propositions, and posits Vico's views as direct opposites. This can be shown in connection with the concepts of *imagination* (*fantasia*) and *ingenuity*<sup>71</sup> (*ingenium*) that occupy a prominent place in Vico's exposition<sup>72</sup>. Ingenuity, for Vico, is not a privileged ability of a few talented, or highly-skilled individuals, but the fundamental human cognitive faculty, consisting

legame con la vista» (M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 40). Two aspects of "light" are highlighted here, *lumen*, the physical sunlight, and *lux*, the visual appearance of objects. In Graeco-Roman antiquity, the theory of vision included a third major aspect, the idea that light also emanated from the eye itself, almost like a beam of light emitted by a headlamp, a view that has been noted in Plato's *Timaeus*. H. Dieter Betz, *Matthew VI.22f and Ancient Greek Theories of Vision*, in E. Best - R. McL. Wilson (eds.), *Text and Interpretation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 50-53. «Platon übernimmt die Vorstellung des Empedokles, daß vom Auge ein Licht ausgehe» (W. Beierwaltes, *Lux Intelligibilis. Untersuchung zur Lichtmetaphysik der Griechen*, München, Uni-Druck Novotny & Söllner, 1957, p. 41). This third component, in particular, imparted to vision special piquancy, and, without it, the primacy of vision would lose much of its epistemological potency. Apparently, Descartes adhered to the superlative status of vision without being cognizant of the concomitant original physiological presupposition.

<sup>69</sup> In Vico's "metaphysics", *metaphysical* points are also *meta-mathematical*: it intersects with the fundamental Platonic insight that the grounds of mathematical entities must be sought *outside* mathematics. Not to belabor the point, but it might be added that Descartes' usage of the term "metaphysics" different categorically: for him, it meant «the most general conditions [...] of mathematical procedures», that is, principles to follow *inside* mathematics (D. R. Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 191).

<sup>70</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 71 (IV, 1). The poignancy of Vico's position is apparent. It has been said: «Descartes is the bringer of light. The master metaphor of light, illumination, dominates modernity and its epistemologies» (D. Ph. Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 25). Rather than taking aim at the metaphor itself, Vico appropriates it: «[...] la luce – e l'immagine della luce è ricorrente nel *De antiquissima*, e proprio per spiegare la suprema verità, la verità della metafisica». V. Vitiello, *Il medio assente. Sul concetto di verità nel "De antiquissima"*, in G. Matteucci (a cura di), *Studi sul "De antiquissima Italarum sapientia"*, cit., p. 97.

<sup>71</sup> Using the English term "ingenuity" is not intended to suggest semantic equivalence with Vichian "ingenium" or "ingegno". In "ingenuity", connoting today inventiveness and/or cleverness, there is at best a trace left of Vichian "ingenium". (Vico himself, in a different context, referred to «trace in language [*linguae vestigium*]», *Metaphysics*, pp. 118-119). For further discussion of the translation problem(s), see M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 66, n. 139. Something analogous could be said about the English "imagination" for the original "fantasia". See especially the monograph by M. Sanna, *Immaginazione*, Napoli, Guida, 2007.

<sup>72</sup> On the importance of this dispute: «Vico infatti attaccava la tesi centrale di Descartes, secondo cui l'ingegno avrebbe bisogno della direzione attraverso regole. [...] Tutto parla a favore del fatto che i critici nel *Giornale dei Letterati d'Italia* attaccavano la teoria vichiana dello *ingenium* [...], sapevano ciò che qui era in gioco meglio di quanto lo sappiano gli odierni lettori di Descartes» (S. Otto, *Giambattista Vico: razionalità e fantasia*, trans. by A. Giugliano - G. Cacciatore, in BCSV, XVII-XVIII, 1987-1988, p. 23).

of relating hitherto unconnected ideas and matters<sup>73</sup>. In itself, this may not look controversial, however, the contention that it is ingenuity that is the epistemic guiding or driving force constitutes a direct affront to the Cartesian elevation of «reason» and «intellect» (as defined by Cartesians, of course). Thus, Vico turned Descartes' subordination of all other mental faculties and activities under the supremacy of his rules upside-down<sup>74</sup>. Vico further asserts that ingenuity is dependent on the art of "topics", which comes up with, discovers, generates, the pertinent subject matter(s) in the first place, whether they be new ideas, arguments, or scientific experiments (which are analogous to questions never asked before, addressed to «Nature»). Compared to this "creative" epistemic activity, Cartesian rationality is merely derivative, since it focuses on deduction, and, therefore, can merely have a subservient role<sup>75</sup>. These differences, and others not touched on here, are not simply the result of considering matters from multiple perspectives that ultimately could be correlated and amalgamated into a single, consistent description. Rather, they are the consequences of deeply divergent anthropologies.

These brief highlights of the Vichian-Cartesian *querelle* may suffice as pointers to the abundant evidence explaining why Vico felt so strongly that his treatise constituted as much a complete theoretical system as Descartes's. In a sense, therefore, Descartes had set or determined the "agenda" at this stage of Vico's development of his ideas<sup>76</sup>, but it turned out to be a crucial, clarifying

<sup>73</sup> «Ingenuity is the faculty of joining together into one things which are scattered, diverse» (*Metaphysics*, p. 111; VII, 3).

<sup>74</sup> S. Otto, *Giambattista Vico: razionalità e fantasia*, cit., p. 23; Croce described the Cartesian strategy as follows: «Ma [...] tutto quel sapere non ancora ridotto o non riducibile a percezione chiara e distinta e a deduzione geometrica, perdeva ai suoi occhi valore e importanza. Tale la storia [...]; l'osservazione naturalistica [...]; la saggezza pratica e l'eloquenza [...]; la poesia» (B. Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, cit., p. 2); similarly E. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, cit., p. 74: «His [Descartes'] vision of a unitary science is, therefore a reduction of science to those fields which are characterized by the kind of certainty found in mathematics».

<sup>75</sup> Id., *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, cit., p. 84, includes the statement: «Vico does not regard topics as such a mechanical and exterior means, but as a theory of cognition [...] guiding man's inventive apprehension. This radical move [...] astonished the critics who took note of it in *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia*, and Vico was consequently forced to explain his original conception». This veritable clash of opposites is also expressed by Sanna: «Per Cartesio senso, immaginazione e memoria hanno soprattutto un significato corporeo, materiale e per questo motivo condiviso anche dagli animali, mentre solo quando rivestono i panni delle funzioni mentali sono facoltà della *mens humana*» (M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 13); see also D. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 89-101, including the reference to «Descartes's disparaging remarks about the *studia humanitatis* generally».

<sup>76</sup> This is obviously a somewhat one-dimensional way of characterizing the actual state of affairs. Cartesianism, more fairly, could and should be accorded a positive role and place in the early modern age, if viewed in dialectical perspective; furthermore, Vico's engagement with Cartesianism was just his own response to the swirling intellectual currents of his time, joined in by many other citizens of the *republic of letters*. See the full-fledged account in V. Ferrone, *The Intellectual Roots of the Italian Enlightenment: Newtonian Science, Religion, and Politics in the Early Eighteenth Century*, trans. by S. Brotherton, Atlantic Highlands (NJ), Humanities Press, 1995, originally published as *Scienza natura religione: Mondo newtoniano e cultura italiana nel primo Settecento*,

exercise in laying the foundation for the originality and idiosyncresy of the *New Science*, by which time the shadow of Cartesianism no longer loomed large, at least where Vico was concerned. Our contextualizing *Metaphysics* predominantly against the backdrop of Cartesianism unavoidably leads to reciprocal questions about Descartes' own historical context (and, of course, of other contemporaneous thinkers). A recent thesis has focused on intellectual disillusionment in the wake, not only of wrenching political violence in Christendom and what today would be termed egregious human rights violations, but especially on irreconcilable Catholic and Protestant theological controversies that were perceived as making the old certainties untenable<sup>77</sup>. In this light, it is difficult not to read Descartes' response to the intellectual climate without sympathy, even if, ultimately, history has not necessarily been kind to Cartesianism, as a whole<sup>78</sup>. But actually this is not the primary aspect of our interest in Descartes' historical-cultural situation. Rather, it is certain facets of the early modern *Zeitgeist* that may underlie Descartes' aspiration of developing a comprehensive, "universal", ergo "complete" theory of knowledge, after which, as we have seen, Vico felt compelled to contour his own, only to infill the outlines with virtually diametrically opposed detail and specifics. The facets that are particularly relevant from our point of view are generally subsumed under the terms *univocation/unequivocation* and *homogeneity*<sup>79</sup>. Univocation as a presupposition assumes the world around us and human affairs to be explainable by identical methods, concepts and language, while homogeneity referred to their uniformity, categorical sameness, including postulating God's ubiquitous presence everywhere. These speculative approaches gestated in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, but finally found unique, and in a sense, coherent expression, giv-

Napoli, Jovene, 1982. Of special interest is the story of the little-known Celestino Galiani (pp. 122-182).

<sup>77</sup> B. S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012, esp. pp. 44-49: «What was left as a means for understanding the natural world? Only reason-understood and exercised in ways that did not depend on any contested Christian doctrines. [...] Descartes made the demonstrative certainties of mathematics the methodological foundation of his entire philosophy». Historian Philip Benedict, in his book review, offers a corrective note: «I think the Protestant-Catholic controversies in this era receive too much weight in the account of the origins of modern secular rationalism». As a basis for such nuancing, he cites ideological developments within Catholicism itself (Ph. Benedict, *The Protestant-Catholic controversies*, in «American Historical Review», February 2013, pp. 144-146). See also E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 193-195. In the face of Protestant-Catholic controversies, fractious Protestantism itself, and Catholic intramural turmoil, it seemed to inquiring minds in the early modern age that no ideological safe harbor were to be found anywhere (S. E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> As Amos Funkenstein observed: «Descartes captures the imagination of his and later generations with a vision of a new method of scientific inquiry. [...] The new method purported to be universal, a canon of principles and procedures overarching all disciplines». A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 296.

<sup>79</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 28-31, 57-68, 72-76.

en the confluence of political, religious, social, and ideological currents in the early modern period, and foremost, of course, in Descartes' conceptual framework, in general, and the elevation of mathematics as the unifying and equalizing language/theory of everything, including natural science, philosophy, physiology, and psychology<sup>80</sup>. This would account, then, – not necessarily fully, but at least to a significant extent – at a deeper level for its widespread, if not universal, ready reception. Its genesis, at the same time, testifies to its historicity, especially if juxtaposed to the prevailing conceptual paradigm of prior historical periods, such as late antiquity (patristics) and the early Middle Ages (Scholastics), when «radical distinction» rather than univocity ruled speculative philosophy<sup>81</sup>. In these ages, in principle, it would have been inconceivable to pursue the project of a «complete» metaphysics.

#### 4. Proposal for a ring structure of Metaphysics

The foregoing was designed to address the question whether *Metaphysics* had the hallmarks of a work that is well-rounded, complete, in some sense, a characteristic that would be expected under ring composition. It was done at some length since, unless this essential condition could be shown to be met, consideration of further criteria would be obviated. Another reason, of course, are the legitimate objections to the inclusion of topics which – objectively – are extraneous to a theory of knowledge, in a strict sense. Likely the most relevant evidence in support of the thesis are Vico's own assertions to that effect, and their intelligibility in the historical context.

The next step consists of determining the organization of the text, and how various parts or segments, in terms of text, but more crucially in content, relate to each other, or as Vico said, «the transitions and the sequence of things»<sup>82</sup>. To

<sup>80</sup> *Ivi*, 296.

<sup>81</sup> B. S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, cit., p. 34: «The radical distinction between God and creation, however, and the correlative incomprehensibility of God have the strange consequence that no philosophical framework or system of thought can be adequate to theology's subject matter». See also A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, cit., p. 4, on the separation of theology and other disciplines. Here it could be added that Vico in *Metaphysics*, propounded something structurally (not content-wise) analogous, namely the «radical distinction» between *physics* [the physical world] and *metaphysics*, to quote P. Fabiani: «Fisico e metafisico devono quindi essere tenuti ben distinti: il rifiuto passa [...] attraverso il riferimento all'univocità della logica scientifica, al riconoscimento dell'errore nell'applicare alla scienza, ma pure alla metafisica, l'imperfezione di forme particolari o di generi inappropriati» (P. Fabiani, *Classificazione delle scienze e principio dell'errore*, cit., p. 41. This goes to the «existential presuppositions» of Cartesianism, *univocation* and *homogeneity*, vis-à-vis which Cartesianism can be apprehended as an epiphenomenon. Since Vico did not address the underlying assumptions head-on, the point will not be pursued further here. For more on the fortunes of *univocation* and *homogeneity* in the early modern era, see A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, cit., pp. 72-116.

<sup>82</sup> It might be called its «compositional architecture», to borrow Mario Agrimi's term «architettura compositiva del «discorso» vichiano». *Interventi*, in G. Crifò (a cura di), *Retorica e filosofia in Giambattista Vico: Le «Institutiones Oratoriae»*. *Un bilancio critico*, Napoli, Guida, 1994, p. 38. With addressing this aspect, the present examination of *Metaphysics* will come to a halt, so to



reach this stage, certain preparatory groundwork will need to be laid. As outlined above for ring composition, in general, this involves (a) establishing a center, representing the key message of the work; (b) showing that the beginning and ending form an *inclusio*; and (c) being able to divide the work into two halves. These tasks will now be addressed in *Metaphysics*, in reverse order, starting with the question of whether the book, in fact, displays a bipartite organization.

#### 4.1. *The division of Metaphysics in two halves*

Following the above argumentation for the coherence of the book, *prima facie* it may not appear entirely consistent to turn around and now argue for the apparent opposite, separation in two distinct parts. The relationship can best be described as dialectical, and it is only at the final phase of interrelating the building blocks that the issue can be resolved.

Seeing a basic shift from one subject matter to another in the course of the work is not a new claim by any means. Flint (1884) felt that chapters V through VII did not continue the line of thought expounded in chapter IV: «in the three chapters devoted to them [“psychological things”], metaphysics, in his own sense of the word, seems to have little place. The theory of points is not applied to explain the psychical world, nor is it supplemented by any kindred theory»<sup>83</sup>. So, Flint detected a definite caesura between chapters IV and V. It appears that Badaloni (1961) essentially had the same impression<sup>84</sup>.

On the other hand, Palmer (1988) drew the lines differently: chapters I through III as a group, chapter IV by itself, and then chapters V through VIII grouped together<sup>85</sup>. It is of interest that Miner (2010) also draws a dividing line between chapters III and IV, and groups chapters IV through VII together<sup>86</sup>. Miner’s compositional structure has the merit of taking its cues from Vico’s own outline in the *First Response*. The key indicator of potential textual organization above the chapter level is Vico’s statement: «Thus far [in chapters I-III], I have molded *the head (il capo)* of my metaphysics. Now *the body (il corpo)* follows»<sup>87</sup>. This also shows that Vico had in mind a certain subdivision of the

work, and thus not continue on to «the third [reading] in greater detail to collect the fine turns of thought and expression», which is the province of specific, in-depth Vichian studies, some of which are cited in the references.

<sup>83</sup> R. Flint, *Vico*, cit., p. 129.

<sup>84</sup> N. Badaloni, *Introduzione a G. B. Vico*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1961, p. 347. In fact, he uses the term «first part» for chapters I through IV, and uses other marked language: «Si conclude così, quella che potremmo definire come *la prima parte* del *De Antiquissima* [...]. La discussione riprende per chiarire in via definitiva la natura della mente umana» (P. Fabiani, *Classificazione delle scienze e principio dell’errore*, cit.).

<sup>85</sup> L. M. Palmer, *Introduction*, cit., pp. 12-13. For Palmer, the first three chapters are held together by their arguments against Descartes’ principle of clarity and distinctness; chapter IV concentrates on the metaphysical points, while the remaining chapters present a theory of mind at variance with Cartesian ideas.

<sup>86</sup> R. Miner, *Introduction*, cit., p. IX. Chapter VIII is placed by itself.

<sup>87</sup> *Ivi*, VIII; *Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, p. 124. Vico added «per così dire», «so to speak», which is not reflected in Palmer’s translation. Miner’s placement of chapter VIII by itself is

book, although it remains to be seen whether these are the only indications thereto. At this point, the ambiguity about the place of chapter IV, the key subject of which is the metaphysical point, is to be noted, which however cannot be resolved, or at least addressed, until the question of the presence, if any, of a "central" section is discussed below. While both Flint and Badaloni do not adduce textual evidence for their differentiation of chapters V to VIII from the preceding chapters, their assessment of the content of the final chapters can be considered to be right on the mark: in contrast to the earlier discussion of the theoretical possibility, and conditions, of knowledge acquisition, these chapters change the subject to aspects of human nature, the mind, and especially a theory of cognition, or cognitive psychology (in the Vichian mold, giving pride of place to ingenuity, *ingenium*, and imagination, *fantasia*).

It seems therefore that there are indeed two parts to the work, in accord with the working hypothesis suggested here.

#### 4.2. *Inclusio formed by the beginning and ending*

This test can be done in a fairly straightforward manner, by turning to the first and last chapters. As has been commented above, chapter I begins with *theology*, in that God is held up as the standard of perfect or "infinite" knowledge, exemplifying the fundamental principle of *knowing by making*. Chapter VIII (entitled "Concerning the Supreme Artificer"), in a marked departure from the previous chapter on human cognitive faculties, turns again to theology: «Four words in Latin – *Deity* and *Fate*, *Chance* and *Fortune* – are in agreement with the things which we have discussed concerning the *true* and the *made*, that the true is a gathering together of the elements of the thing itself, of all the elements of God»<sup>88</sup>. The return to the theological theme struck at the beginning of the work, furthermore takes place in the same epistemological context in which it first appeared. The *inclusio* that was postulated thus is not simply a matter of simplistic, superficial lexical correspondence. It is the entire thrust of the beginning of the book that is replicated, from a different perspective, to be sure, at its conclusion<sup>89</sup>.

#### 4.3. *The center of Metaphysics*

In connection with discussing the conjectured bipartite division of the work, the ambiguity of chapter IV in relation to what precedes and follows it was noted. Does chapter IV belong to the first (according to Flint and Badaloni) or second (Palmer; Miner) half of the book? Good reasons can be given for both ways of placing it in the whole composition. But it is here proposed that the

based on Vico's concluding statement: «Finally, I come to a halt in the contemplation of the Supreme Creator». (R. Miner, *Introduction*, cit., p. IX; *Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, p. 127).

<sup>88</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 127 (VIII, *Introduction*).

<sup>89</sup> Miner also took note of the *inclusio* phenomenon: «Vico's *Metaphysics* [...] embodies [...] an *exitus-reditus* structure. Like the entities it describes, the metaphysics begins with the true being, moves to things regarded as dispositions of the true being, and concludes by returning to what is first» (R. Miner, *Introduction*, cit., p. IX).

aforementioned ambiguity stems from the fact that it properly belongs neither to the first nor second half of the work but stands on its own at the center. This may appear not to take into account Vico's own division of the book into head and body. The head section comprised chapters I to III, and the body was understood to be chapters IV to VII. A close reading of the relevant part of the *First Response*, however, could suggest that this may not be necessarily so, and he meant chapter IV to be considered by itself. Besides the fact that his comments on this chapter are longer than on any other chapter, we find the following textual markers or cues:

as I enter the vast field of essences [*ed entro nel vasto campo dell' <essenze>*]. The sequence leads me [*La serie di queste cose mi mena a*] to discuss *momenta* and motions too [...]. Finally [*Finalmente*], [I prove] that motions are not communicated<sup>90</sup>.

By explicitly marking off beginning and ending, Vico gives the chapter definition and distinction, something that he does not do for other chapters, the transitions of which are handled in a fluid manner, without calling special attention to an individual chapter. The alternative way of interpreting the term body would be therefore to apply it to chapter IV only, not the rest of the book.

This in itself does not go very far in singling out chapter IV as the central focus of the book, and correspondingly of Vico's theory of knowledge, beyond addressing the objection that could be raised. Rather, it is the content that needs to determine, or, alternatively, rule out, its position of prominence in the work. One way of correlating the parts of the work is to use the key concepts in chapter IV as a kind of probe to highlight and throw into relief the commonalities and sharp differences, if any, of the text that both precede and follow the chapter. It has already been pointed out how the following chapters mark an obvious switch in material from knowledge-theoretic discourse to matters of the human mind, so that the current problem or topic can be reduced or limited to an examination of the first three chapters. If our probe tests for the presence of the two key concepts of Chapter IV, *metaphysical points* and *metaphysical principle of motion* (conatus), what do we find? At the beginning of the book (I, 1), Vico already discourses about the *point*, but as part of mathematics, not metaphysics, and «the rule of truth is to have made it»<sup>91</sup>, in mathematics, is positioned as the human counterpart of God's infinite knowledge of the physical world due to his creatorship<sup>92</sup>. The subsequent excursus on dogmatism and skepticism explores the role of metaphysics as such, showing that both attitudes miss the nature of the foundation of scientific truth and

<sup>90</sup> *Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, pp. 124-126.

<sup>91</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 27 (I, 1).

<sup>92</sup> «Like God, he creates point, line, and surface [...], as if out of nothing: by the name point, he understands something which has no parts; by [...] line [...] the extension of a point or length without width and depth; by [...] surface [...] the joining of two separate lines at one point or length with width, but without depth» (*ibid.*).

knowledge (which Vico would later develop into a theory of civilization and culture)<sup>93</sup>. Chapter II is crucial to Vico's delineation of metaphysics as a realm or sphere that is separate and distinct from both physics and mathematics, by going to considerable length in explaining «metaphysical forms [*genera*]», that he had introduced at the end of chapter I. He compares them to creative, original works of art (painting, sculpture, molding, architecture)<sup>94</sup>. Thus, the very same creative, generative process or activity that he had first attributed to God as the Creator, then to mathematics, now is also claimed for metaphysics. Chapter III looks at metaphysics from an additional, but closely related, perspective: «if the true is to be made, then to prove through causes is the same as to effect». Thus, bringing about (that is, causing) something is equivalent to making it, and vice versa. It also provides another occasion to highlight arithmetic and geometry as disciplines that «demonstrate by means of causes», which is the same as saying that «the human mind contains the elements of these truths, which it can arrange and compose»<sup>95</sup>. In contrast, the physical world is external to humans, in connection with which Vico makes the statement that «no less motion is conferred in the forming of an ant than in the genesis of this world»<sup>96</sup>.

In summary, the first three chapters have much to say about both metaphysics and mathematics. However, there is not a single mention of *metaphysical points* and *conatus*. This is noteworthy since there appear to be a number of places or junctures where it would not have been amiss to include a reference to these core ideas<sup>97</sup>. From this point of view, the silence about metaphysical points and *conatus* in this part of the work might be taken as deliberate and intentional. The first half of the work stays well within the bounds of (neo)-Platonic paradigms and conditions of truth-seeking<sup>98</sup>. The lengthy, and exten-

<sup>93</sup> «Human truths are those whose elements we feign for ourselves, contain within ourselves, extend into the infinite through postulates, and when we compose these elements, we make the truths which we know in the composing, and on account of all this, we possess the genus, or form, by which we make them» (*ibid.*).

<sup>94</sup> Miner explained: «The genera are simple ideas, modes or dispositions that elude propositional formulation» (*ibid.*). Vico himself uses the expression «simple ideas of things [*simplices rerum ideas*]» (*Metaphysics*, pp. 44-45). «Simple», in this context, has the connotation of basic, foundational, non-derivative, irreducible, not unlike the technical term «simple» in mathematics (e.g. group theory).

<sup>95</sup> *Ivi*, p. 51 (III)

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, earlier, «motion» is referred to in the context of «mechanics», «physics», and «ethics» (*Metaphysics*, p. 27).

<sup>97</sup> For example «And metaphysics contemplates being; arithmetic [...] the unit and its multiplication; geometry, shape and its measure; mechanics, motion from an orbit; physics motion from a center». It would appear that, under «metaphysics», it would not have been out of place to cite metaphysical points and *conatus* as examples of «being», just as he illustrated the other disciplines (*ivi*, p. 21). It is also to be noted that metaphysical points and *conatus* are not mentioned either in the remaining chapters despite various opportunities to do so, which makes chapter IV stand out even further.

<sup>98</sup> L. Pompa (ed. and trans. by), *Vico: Selected Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 6. Pompa evidently considers Vico's «metaphysics» to be adequately presented in chapters I to III (as implied by his *Introduction*, pp. 4-9), since chapter IV is omitted in its

sive, treatment of metaphysical points and *conatus* that follows, on the other hand, fills the space beyond generalities and meta-theoretical constructs, with substance directly relevant to (physical) science and mathematics. It also provides a platform for engaging critically with the fundamental Cartesian stance that mathematics rules reality, that these are interchangeable<sup>99</sup>. He shows the fallacy of such mathematization, or rather of this particular type of mathematization, since he advances, after all, an alternative form of “mathematization”, that dispenses with isomorphism of mathematics and physical reality.

If chapter IV is assumed to be the centerpiece of the work’s ring structure, it should be expected that it also serves to pull together the various strands of thought that course through the book. As mentioned before, the chapter first deals with the metaphysical point, that is, the intuitive idea of something that is indivisible, which takes up section 1, followed by the equally intuitive notion of *motion* as a generative principle, not any kind of actual physical motion in itself<sup>100</sup>, comprising section 2 through 5. And right at the juncture of segueing from metaphysical points to *conatus*, Vico inserted a succinct summary of the thrust of his book:

But on what basis the infinite has descended into these finite things, even if God were to show us, we would not be able to follow because this truth belongs to the divine mind, in which to have known something and to have made it are the same thing. The human mind is finite and formed, and therefore cannot understand indefinite and unformed things, even though it can think them. [...]  
And on account of this, to know distinctly is a vice rather than virtue of the human mind, for it involves knowing of the limits of things. [...] The human mind, when

entirety in his translation of *Liber metaphysicus*. The present inquiry into the structure of the work is, of course, pointing to a rather different assessment.

<sup>99</sup> The contrast between the first part of the book and chapter IV has also been observed by R. Miner: «the “fictionalist” account of mathematics in the first chapter of *De antiquissima* must be read alongside the more “realist” account given by its fourth chapter» (R. Miner, *Vico. Genealogist of Modernity*, Notre Dame (In), University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, p. 23).

<sup>100</sup> That Vico uses the Scholastic term “conatus” in his own idiosyncratic sense, inseparable from his epistemology as a system, is also evident from the examples of types of “motions” he gives at the very end of the chapter, namely «the motion by which water goes up in a siphon», «the motion by which a projectile moves forward», as well as «the motion by which a flame burns, a plant grows, or a beast gambols through the meadows» (*Metaphysics*, pp. 83-85). These types of “motion” have nothing on common in the physical world, ranging from the mechanical to the dynamic, from fluid dynamics to thermodynamics, to plant morphology and animal physiology, in increasing order of complexity. However, all of these phenomena can be studied with the aid of using as a starting point, the *metaphysical* intuitive idea that there is such a thing as “motion” (movement, variation, alteration, transformation, as well as their possibility in principle), undefined, nay undefinable, *qua* metaphysical notion. This is also why Vico is able to use the term when speaking of «motion [...] in the forming of an ant», «motions of the soul», and «the mind is moved by God» (*ivi*, p. 51). The study of its *specific and concrete expressions* lies outside Vichian metaphysics, with the aid of discipline-specific mathematics that properly operates in a “synthetic” manner. On Vico’s choice of metaphors, here and elsewhere, of “fluidity” vs. Cartesian “mechanicism”, see P. Cristofolini, *La metafora del fiume e la metafisica*, in G. Matteucci (a cura di), *Studi sul “De antiquissima italorum sapientia”*, cit., pp. 13-19. On Vico’s view of “mechanics”, see also M. Veneziani, “*Machina*”, cit., pp. 461-475.



it knows a thing distinctly, sees it at night by torchlight, and when it sees it, it loses sight of the things nearby.

While Vico here restates what he had, more than once, said throughout the book, the first paragraph of this summary can be recognized as looking backward to the beginning of the work, including the *verum-factum* principle, and the absolute standard of perfect knowledge that is to be located in the creator of the world. The second paragraph, which is part of his anti-Cartesian polemic, has also a forward looking function, connecting it with chapter VII<sup>101</sup>.

#### 4.4 *Chiastic order of segments of Metaphysics*

Twenty-five years ago, it could be said that it was controversial to claim that the first and second halves of *Metaphysics* were related<sup>102</sup>. More recently, it is not uncommon to connect elements of Vico's theory of cognition (not understood in a more narrow modern technical sense) with his theory of knowledge. This section will make use of these interrelations, while going a step further, and proposing that their order of appearance in the text supports and reinforces these connections. As described earlier, the order in view is chiasmic, or inverted in the second half from the order of the first half. To make this most clearly evident, the approach will be to delineate the individual parts or segments of the work as concisely as possible, even just sketchily, thus mostly foregoing engagement with «the fine turns of [Vico's] thought and expression» throughout the book<sup>103</sup>.

If ring structure is viewed, metaphorically, as concentric, the discussion that follows is from the outside in, in the sense, that it starts with relating the beginning of the work with its end; takes up the next part, as determined by internal evidence, in relation to the next-to-last segment, and so on, up to reaching the central segment which, above, has been argued as comprising chapter IV.

We will therefore start with the *inclusio* already referred to above<sup>104</sup>. Both the beginning and end of *Metaphysics*<sup>105</sup> focus on God as the ultimate standard or

<sup>101</sup> «In point of fact, on what basis could a clear and distinct idea of our mind be the rule of truth unless one had already perceived all that is involved in some thing, all that is connected with it?». «Alternatively, if someone trusts that he has completely examined something based on a clear and distinct idea of the mind, he is easily mistaken» (*Metaphysics*, pp. 115, 117; VII, 4).

<sup>102</sup> Palmer commented: «Contrary to what several commentators have argued, there is a strong relation between the *verum-factum* principle, the metaphysics of Zenonian points, and the psychology» (*Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, cit., p. 31).

<sup>103</sup> Such selectivity is not without risks. If taken to the extreme, in the form of «chiasmus by headings», i.e. summarizing the material in a few words, it likely will result in misrepresentation. As Thomson cautioned: «The key question is how well the chosen heading reflects the *author's* focus of interest rather than the *commentator's*. This produces a potentially circular argument» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., pp. 30-31, his italics).

<sup>104</sup> We are denoting it as A / A'.

<sup>105</sup> Comprising chapters I through VIII, excluding the dedication to Doria and the "Conclusion" which is merely a short synopsis of the whole book, rather than a continuation and contribution to the book's argument.

benchmark of truth and knowledge. In the beginning, the focus is on the actor – «He is the maker of all things»; – in the end, there is a (chiastic) switch in perspective, to the result of his action, «this universe of things established by God»<sup>106</sup>. But in order to delineate segments, the question is, where does the first part of the *inclusio* end? How much of chapter I does it cover? It is proposed that it includes just the introduction of the chapter. This delimitation is based on the observation that beginning with section 1, what follows represents a major change of subject: against the larger-than-life backdrop, so to speak, of the divine mind, now the human mind becomes the center of attention. In section 1 in particular, first of all, Vico is at pains pointing out the limitations of human thinking<sup>107</sup>.

While the renewed focus on the uniqueness and superiority of the divine mind provides the key linkage to the beginning of the book, the last chapter is far more than a virtually verbatim recapitulation lacking anything new. While staying on message, of God as the ultimate maker, Vico, now – in a surprising move – adds the world of humans to the natural world as a proper subject of study. But also in this world, as in the world of nature, man is not the one in total command and control<sup>108</sup>.

In view of the material change of topic, it is suggested that chapter I, sections 1 to 3 belong to a new chiastic pair<sup>109</sup>. While sections 2 and 3 on thematic grounds alone tie in with section 1, turning all three sections into an coherent block of material<sup>110</sup>, Vico further provided textual indication on how he wanted these sections to be read, by concluding section 1 with the following statement: «But, to better fortify this position, it must be defended against the dogmatists and the skeptics»<sup>111</sup>, thus strongly implying that the subsequent *defense* is part and parcel of the argument in this segment of the work. In the last two sections of chapter I, there are references to «genus/genera, or form[s]»<sup>112</sup>. This is new terminology in the book, succinct nouns functioning as catchwords for the process «by which something comes to be», «by which we make them [the truths]»<sup>113</sup>. Beyond introducing the terminology, and serving as a transition,

<sup>106</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 17 (I, *Introduction*), p. 133 (VIII, 3).

<sup>107</sup> For example: «Human science seems to be a sort of anatomy of the works of nature [...] in comparison with God, we are nothing [...] our human reason perishes [...] this is the result of the limited scope of his mind [...] human science comes from a vice of our mind, namely, from its limited scope» (*ivi*, pp. 21-27; I, 1); D. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 148.

<sup>108</sup> «The world is a sort of republic of nature» (*Metaphysics*, p. 133; VIII, 3). For a discussion of «fate, chance, fortune», see D. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 62-65. For possible biographical resonance of fortune and misfortune, going back to Vico's brush with mortality at a young age, see J. O'Neill, *Vico on the Natural Workings of the Mind*, cit., p. 119.

<sup>109</sup> Denoted B/B'.

<sup>110</sup> Toward the end of section 1, Vico explicitly takes up Cartesianism («the clear and distinct idea»), and lays out his response, polemically, in sections 2 and 3, relative to «dogmatism» and «skepticism».

<sup>111</sup> *Ivi*, p. 29 (I, 1).

<sup>112</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 33, 35, 39 (I, 2; I, 3).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

however, nothing further is explained. On the other hand, chapter II consists, from beginning to end, of an in-depth exposition of *genera/forms*. Segment B, therefore, is best limited to chapter I, sections 1 to 3.

To identify the corresponding segment B', if it exists, a closer look at this part of the first chapter is in order. In highlighting the «limited scope» of the human mind, it states as reason that «all things [of the physical world] are outside that mind»<sup>114</sup>, a reason that does not reflect on the capabilities and nature of the mind as such. On the contrary, «man turns this vice of his mind to good use», by practicing the *verum-factum* principle himself, in imitation of God, of which mathematics is a case in point<sup>115</sup>.

If there is any part later in the work that relates naturally to this key Vichian thesis, it is chapter VII (*Concerning Faculty*). The *faculties* specially highlighted are the *senses, memory, imagination, ingenuity*. How are they intimately related to *verum-factum*?

First, Vico depicts the *senses*, not as more-or-less passive recipient organs of physical phenomena, but rather as actively engaged in producing experiences: «For if the senses are faculties, then we *make* the colors of things in the seeing, their flavors in the tasting, their sounds in the hearing, their coolness and warmth in the touching»<sup>116</sup>.

Vico also directly associates *memory* with the creative operation of the human mind that he spoke of in the first chapter<sup>117</sup>. *Memory* plays an essential role in the process: «we cannot feign for ourselves anything except from what we remember»<sup>118</sup>.

Vico called *imagination* «the eye of ingenuity (*phantasia ingenii oculus*)»<sup>119</sup>. It works multidimensionally, and as the name suggests, includes counterfactual moments<sup>120</sup>. However, this should not be overstated<sup>121</sup>. The outstanding characteristic of *imagination*, in Vico's system, is its ability to come up with some-

<sup>114</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 23, 25, 27 (I, 1).

<sup>115</sup> «Like God, he creates point, line, and surface out of no substrate, as if out of nothing» (*ivi*, p. 25; I, 1).

<sup>116</sup> *Ivi*, p. 103 (VII, *Introduction*), italics added; D. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 125-126; see also M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 57, n. 117. Quoting F. Botturi: «La sensibilità percettiva esterna è sempre in vitale connessione con la sensibilità interna (memoria, fantasia, ingegno)».

<sup>117</sup> «Man turns this vice of his mind to good use and [...] feigns for himself two things» (*ivi*, p. 25; I, 1).

<sup>118</sup> *Ivi*, p. 109 (VII, 2): «Memory [...] is not a passive repository but rather an active and dialectical mode of establishing similarities». D. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 83; M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 151.

<sup>119</sup> *Metaphysics* p. 122 (VII, 4).

<sup>120</sup> M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 60. D. Marshall describes it as «A capacity to remove oneself from the contexts of the here and how – but only partially» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 129).

<sup>121</sup> Catana remarked: «Fantasy is important – not as an ability to evoke far fetched ideas, but as an ability to penetrate into reality and its less obvious connections» (L. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, cit., p. 49).

thing new<sup>122</sup>. It provides *ingenuity* with source material, and so must be distinguished from it<sup>123</sup>. It is closely related to *topics*, the art of discovery<sup>124</sup>, and when Vico speaks of «feigning» the point and a unit, in chapter I, it becomes clear in chapter VII that the faculty of *imagination* is responsible for this result<sup>125</sup>.

Finally, *ingenuity* is the faculty that connects everything together, «all the variety, interconnectedness, and disparity of things»<sup>126</sup>. This has vast implications which will, however, not be explored here in any depth<sup>127</sup>; our main interest lies in the possibility, or rather necessity, for argument's sake, of establishing a close nexus, if it exists, between this faculty and the *verum-factum* rule back at the beginning of the work. In this context, it seems that Vico's own view of *ingenuity* is directly relevant:

Furthermore, *ingenuity* and *nature* for the Latins are the same thing [...]. [I]s it because just as nature begets physical things, so human ingenuity produces mechanical things, such that God is the artificer of nature, man is the god of artifacts?<sup>128</sup>

It is reminiscent of Vico's earlier declaration that man, *like God*, is in a position to be creative, when it comes to mathematical entities<sup>129</sup>. All the *faculties* that are the subject of chapter VII, including ingenuity, are understood by Vico to be far more than properties or qualities that are just latently present, rather to be capabilities in action, productively engaged: «*Faculty* [*Facultas*] is said in Latin as if it were *faculty* [*facilitas*] – whence, later come the word *facility* [*facilitas*] – that is, as if to say it was an unimpeded or spontaneous competence at making»<sup>130</sup>.

<sup>122</sup> «Nella facoltà il movimento interno, che rende possibile l'attuazione di un prodotto in sé nuovo» (M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 58).

<sup>123</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 58, 67.

<sup>124</sup> L. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, cit., pp. 86-88.

<sup>125</sup> M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 57: «Quando *finjiamo* il punto e l'unità, costruiamo delle immagini per mezzo della facoltà immaginativa che, [...], è necessaria all'uomo per esprimere qualsiasi idea; l'immaginazione è facoltà della *finzione* perché costruisce immagini nuove».

<sup>126</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 123 (VII, 4).

<sup>127</sup> M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., pp. 10, 48, 66; N. Perullo, *L'umano e il bestiale*, cit., p. 70; D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 114, 130, 151; G. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 152; L. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, cit., pp. 46, 83; T. Gilbhard, *Vicos Denkbild: Studien zur "Dipintura" der "Scienza Nuova" und der Lehre vom Ingenium*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2012, pp. 123-140. The anti-Cartesian edge to Vico's conception of ingenuity has been referred to earlier.

<sup>128</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 111 (VII, 3). «*Ingenium* is the faculty through which human beings generate a world of artifacts just as God created the world of nature» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 122).

<sup>129</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 25 (I, 1).

<sup>130</sup> *Ivi*, p. 103 (VII, *Introduction*). «The notion of *facultas* is consonant with that "operational" feature of consciousness that is manifested through the "principle of *verum is factum*"» (G. Cerchiai, *Consciousness and faculties*, cit., p. 350); Sanna went as far as saying: «L'ingegno parrebbe in questo senso il movimento finale del "*verum-factum*"» (M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 71).

In summary, the content of chapter VII, the faculties in its varied manifestations, can be closely related to the initial exposition of the *verum-factum* principle in the first chapter; it is even natural to read both segments together despite the wide separation between their locations in the work. In chapter I, the *making* is shown to be possible in principle, using mathematics as the paradigm, but the human mind is at this point treated as a *black box*, together with its outputs of mathematical objects, the point, the number one, line, surface, and more numbers. It is in chapter VII that the inner workings of the mind are described that makes this possible. Epistemology is embedded, if not encoded, in cognitive psychology.

Chapter I, sections 1 to 3, introduced *verum-factum* as the principle, and condition of possibility, of the kind of knowledge that does justice to its name; it is conspicuous, however, that the principle is applied only to, and elucidated by, mathematics at this stage, and the terms «genus» and «form» also are used in this restricted context<sup>131</sup>. Vico's movement of thought has not yet advanced to metaphysics proper. This critical step is taken in chapter II (*Concerning Genera, or concerning Ideas/De Generibus, sive de Ideis*), when he says: «But, by forms I understand metaphysical forms [*Formas autem intelligo metaphysicas*]»<sup>132</sup>. The genera/forms are the fundamental underlying ideas, concepts, notions<sup>133</sup> that are present in all spheres of human endeavor, including science and technology<sup>134</sup> and the humanities<sup>135</sup>. What distinguishes these ideas, or realizations, is that they are «new and surprising»<sup>136</sup>, not derivative of pre-existing ideas or productions. Vico concludes the chapter with an example of a *metaphysical form* relevant to mathematics, the idea of a triangle: «because I have the form of a triangle impressed on my mind, [...] it can be the archetype of other triangles for me»<sup>137</sup>.

Which part or chapter later in the work specially resonates with this topic? Chapter VI (*Concerning Mind/De Mente*) offers itself as a strong candidate. It virtually reads as a continuation of chapter II. Not only does it further develop the theme of "ideas" in the human mind, but provides some very important

<sup>131</sup> «Man [...] feigns for himself [...] a point [...] and a unit [...]. Human truths are those elements we feign for ourselves [...], extend into the infinite through postulates [...], and on account of all this, we possess the genus, or form, by which we make them» (*Metaphysics*, p. 25, I, 1; p. 39, I, 3).

<sup>132</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 40-41 (II).

<sup>133</sup> «Someone who has the genera, or simple ideas of things, perceives more easily deeds and circumstances as they ought to be perceived [...]; [b]ut metaphysical matter [...] contains the best form with respect to the genus itself, or idea» (*ivi*, p. 45, II).

<sup>134</sup> «The human race has been enriched with countless new truths by means of fire and machines, the instruments used by modern physics, an operative physics which produces works resembling the particular works of nature» (*ivi*, p. 43, II).

<sup>135</sup> Art, architecture, jurisprudence, rhetoric, historiography, philosophy.

<sup>136</sup> Referring to *topics* by another name.

<sup>137</sup> *Ivi*, p. 49 (II). Vico also carefully distinguishes here between the *mathematical* definition of a triangle as the sum of «angles equal to two right angles», and the *metaphysical* "form" as a mental image only.



examples of metaphysical entities<sup>138</sup>. Similar to chapter I, sections 1-3, vis-a-vis its suggested counterpart, chapter VII, chapter II deals with the impersonal concept of *ideas* while chapter VI attributes them to the God-given human mind, with all its imperfections<sup>139</sup>. Chapter II ended with the single example of a metaphysical idea, the triangle, while chapter VI concludes with a dense assemblage of meta-mathematical and meta-physical intuitive first principles: *the notion of excitation, the notion of communication, straightness, unity, sameness, rest*. These metaphysical entities are «indubitable truth»<sup>140</sup>.

In Vico's movement of thought toward the central subject of «metaphysical points» and «metaphysical motion (*conatus*)», there is still a further universal aspect of the realm of metaphysical entities, without which the theoretical framework for what follows in chapter IV would not be complete. It involves the notion of *causality*, as reflected in the title of chapter III, *Concerning Causes/De Caussis*. Sidestepping any explicit engagement with the history of the idea, Vico directly associates *cause* to *verum-factum*: «to prove through causes is the same as to effect, in which case, cause and business (*negotium*) would be the same, namely operation (*operatio*); and the made and the true would be the same, namely the effect (*effectus*)»<sup>141</sup>. Since metaphysical points and *conatus* have not yet been brought into the discussion of all things metaphysical, Vico again resorts to mathematics to illustrate this aspect of metaphysics – correctly, because mathematical entities, while they are definable and defined, unlike metaphysical entities, share with metaphysics the property of being created by the human mind. By contrast, «elements of natural things», the objects of the physical world, «cannot be proved by means of causes», that is, humans cannot cause them to come into existence<sup>142</sup>.

<sup>138</sup> For Vico's engagement with Malebranche in this chapter, see D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 147-148; G. Cerchiai, *Consciousness and faculties*, cit., pp. 347-349.

<sup>139</sup> «Ideas are created and excited in the souls of men by God [...] the human mind is endowed by God with knowledge not only of the body [...], but also of the mind itself [...] when that mind is so crooked, so wicked, so false, so full of vice?» (*Ivi*, pp. 99, 101, VI).

<sup>140</sup> *Ivi*, p. 101, VI. There also appears to be commonality, as well as a certain parallelism, in the way the examples are prefaced, when both the appearance of the terms “infinite” and “finite”, on the one hand, and their order of appearance – corresponding in the original and in the translation – on the other hand, are noted: in chapter II, it reads: «This is why man cannot think about nothing except through negating something, nor can he think about the *infinite* except through sensing the *finite*». In chapter VI, the topic is again the contrast between the finite and infinite, but stated in reverse: «We see *finite* things, we sense ourselves as *finite*, but this itself is because we think the *infinite*» (*ivi*, pp. 47, 101). The inversion is not merely stylistic but indicative of a change of contextual perspective.

<sup>141</sup> *Ivi*, p. 51, III. In his *First Response*, Vico explained the strict sense in which he used the term: «The truly unique cause is the one that needs nothing else to produce the effect» (*Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, p. 124). See also M. Miner, *Introduction*, cit., p. XIX; N. Bhattacharya, *Knowledge “Per Caussas”: Vico's Theory of Natural Science*, in G. Tagliacozzo (ed.), *Vico: Past and Present*, Atlantic Highlands (NJ), Humanities Press, 1981, pp. 188-190.

<sup>142</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 51 (III). The conclusion of chapter III provides confirmation that the discussion of *cause* is intended to round out the conceptual framework of “metaphysics” that

In terms of parallelism, the only part of the second half left for consideration is chapter V (*Concerning the Soul and the Life-Breath/De Animo, & Anima*), so it might be tempting to establish the connection by process of elimination, an unacceptable proposition, as any postulated correspondence must be motivated by specific evidence, not indirectly inferred textual location. The chapter, on the face of it, seems to be about human physiology (cardiovascular and nervous systems), bearing no relationship to the topic of *cause* of chapter III. However, the purpose of the physiological speculations is to throw into relief human free will<sup>143</sup>. In Vico's exposition it is associated to, and equated with, the *soul* (*animus/ animo*), rather than the *life-breath* (*anima*)<sup>144</sup>.

started out with describing its peculiar genera/forms (chapter II), by means of exalting the status of «the light of metaphysical truth» (*ivi*, p. 53, III).

<sup>143</sup> This becomes especially evident if the entire introduction is read as an (intermediate-length) chiasmus. The following is one way of structuring the text. For space reasons, only the initial and final words of separate segments are provided, except in the designated center segments, shown here as d, e;e" and d': «[a] Elegancia [...] definivisse. [b] Et vero vitae [...] vita. [c] Sensus autem [...] contorquet. [d] Nunc in scholis aër, qui in corde & arteriis sanguinem movet, *spiritus vitales*; [e] qui autem nervos, eorumque succum, & filamenta, *spiritus animales* appellantur. [e'] Atqui longe celerior est animalis, quam vitalis spiritus motus: ubi enim velis, statim digitum moveas: [d'] sed multo tempore, saltem horae trientis, ut quidam Physici rationem ineunt, a corde ad digitum sanguis circulatione perveniat. [c'] A nervis [...] debet. [b'] Igitur hunc [...] dixerunt. [a'] Cum autem [...] infinitum». The corresponding English text with this structure superimposed reads as follows: «[a] The elegance [...] air. [b] Indeed air [...] life itself. [c] Air is also [...] fibers. [d] Now, in the Schools, the air which moves the blood in the heart and arteries is called *the vital spirits*; [e] the air which moves the nerves, and their fluids and filaments, is called *the animal spirits*. [e'] Animal spirits are much faster than vital spirits: your finger moves as soon as you will it, [d'] but it is only after some time – as much as a third of an hour by the account of some physicists – that the blood completely circulates from the heart to the finger. [c'] Furthermore, the muscles [...] nerves. [b'] Accordingly, they [...] the *life-breath*. [a'] Moreover, when [...] the infinite». The main reason, or result, of this "exercise" is to facilitate identification, if possible, of the central message; in fact, the center segments do serve to confirm the focus on human free will: in segment e', the statement «as soon as you will it [*ubi enim velis*]» is found; *spiritus animales* can be understood as another reference to human free will, when the intended etymology of *animales/ animalis*, in this specific context, is considered to be possessing "soul" (*animus*) rather than "breath" (*anima*). In that case, *spiritus animales* describe the "soulful" *spirits*, "soulful" as synonymous with "willful", in a neutral sense. While this can only be offered as a conjecture at this time, both co-textual and contextual supporting factors should be briefly mentioned. In terms of co-text, it needs to be noted that the material in the introduction of chapter V is strictly about *human* nature; it is only in section 1 that a contrast with animals is introduced. *Vita* and *spiritus vitales* are paired, and, if there is a play on words present, it is *animus* (soul) that has been merged into *spiritus animales*. Remaining at the lexical level, in section 1, animals are not called *animalis* but *animantia* and *bruta*. These, and their cognates, are the terms Vico consistently employs throughout *Metaphysics*, as in chapter I (Introduction): «dotem hominis propriam, qua brutis animantibus differt & praestat: hominem autem vulgo describebant animantem *rationis participem*»; «the endowment proper to man, by which he differs from and is superior to brute animals, but they also commonly described man as the animal *who participates in reason*» (pp. 16-17); in chapter VII, section 3: «ingenii [...] quod brutis negatum?»; «Is this because human ingenuity is [...] something which is denied to brutes?»; (pp. 110, 111); as well as in chapter VII, section 4: «quam vel bruta animantia commonstrant»; «which even brute animals could have pointed out» (pp. 118, 119). As far as context is concerned, the thrust of Vico's argument is the unbridgeable gap between human

The key statements are the following:

motions of the soul are free and from our own choices [...] the soul moves freely [...] freedom of choice [...] distinguishes man from brutes [...] man, however, has an internal principle of motion, namely, the soul, which moves freely [...] the mind as dependent upon the soul because as goes one's soul, so go one's thoughts<sup>145</sup>.

What could be seen as the relationship, the arc of thought, between *cause* in chapter III and *human free will* in chapter V? It is here suggested that it is isomorphic, i.e. structurally similar, to the relationship between the previously encountered pairings of segments from the two halves of the work. In those instances, the earlier segments dealt with impersonal concepts while the later segments brought to the fore their source in the human mind. Analogously, the *cause* of original metaphysical entities is not any kind of external circumstance, but none other than *free human will*.

At this point, the ring structure of the entire work can be outlined as follows, using a “wedge” format, by means of excerpts from *Metaphysics* itself :

A I, Introduction: *Verum* and *factum* are the same. – First truth is in God because God is the first maker. – It is infinite because He is the maker of all things.

B I, 1-3: We can seek after the origin of the human sciences, and can have a standard for distinguishing what things are true. – Objects of the sciences are different in God from what they are in man. – Man turns the vice of his mind to good use and feigns for himself a point and a unit, creates point, line, surface as if out of nothing. – Dogmatists hold all truths as subject to doubt prior to metaphysics, even in mathematics. – The boundary line which separates dogmatists from skeptics will be first truth. – Human truths are those elements we feign for ourselves, contain within ourselves.

C II: *Genera* are *forms* infinite not in range, but in perfection. – By forms I understand metaphysical forms. – Geometry by the synthetic method (by means of forms) is most certain, it shows the mode of composing the elements in accordance with which the truths which it demonstrates are formed. – The genera are simple ideas of things.

and animals in terms of the former having free will, and the latter not acting «unless moved by things present before them», that is, purely external stimuli: *Ibid.*, 91 (V, 1). At the very least, any reference to “animal spirits” as involved in expressions of human will is at odds with the overall exposition.

<sup>144</sup> M. Lollini, *Vico e il pensiero dell'infinito*, cit., p. 61; G. Cerchiai, *Consciouness and faculties*, cit., p. 347. Vico's views need to be seen, of course, in the context of speculations about the body, soul, and mind, throughout the early modern age. Examples of such speculation can be found in J. Sutton, *Soul and Body in Seventeenth-Century British Philosophy*, in P. Anstey (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, online at <[www.academia.edu/342409/Soul\\_and\\_Body\\_in\\_Seventeenth\\_Century\\_British\\_Philosophy](http://www.academia.edu/342409/Soul_and_Body_in_Seventeenth_Century_British_Philosophy)>.

<sup>145</sup> *Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 87, 89, 91, 95 (V, *Introduction*, 1, 2). For the debate about the differences between humans and animals in the early modern age, see N. Perullo, *L'umano e il bestiale*, cit., pp. 73-76.

D III: An *effect* is that which comes from a cause, to prove through *causes* is the same as to *effect*. – The made and true would be the same, namely, the *effect*.

(E) IV: Concerning metaphysical points and *conatus*: geometry assumes the power of extension from metaphysics (the metaphysical point) which is prior to extension, arithmetic assumes from metaphysics the power of number, the unit which is not a number. – *Conatus* is the indefinite power of moving, a metaphysical thing. – The physical world concerns imperfect and indefinitely divisible things, while the metaphysical world concerns the ideas, or best things, that is, individual powers which are indefinitely efficacious. – Physical motions come from circumpulsion of air. – On no basis can these motions be simple and straight, for *straight* and *same* are metaphysical things.

D' V: Motions of the soul are free and from our own choices. – Because the soul moves freely, it longs for the infinite and immortality. – Christian metaphysicians regarded freedom of choice to be what distinguishes man from brutes. – Ancient philosophers of Italy were of the opinion that the heart is the seat and residence of the soul, prudence as located in the heart, plans and concerns, acumen at invention (ingenuity) as being in the breast. – Yet opinion about origin of the nerves in the heart found to be false.

C' VI: Latins were of the opinion that ideas are created and excited in the souls of men by God. – The idea of God alone is true because He alone truly is. – Human mind is endowed by God with knowledge not only of the body to which mind belongs, but also of the mind itself. – We see finite things, sense ourselves as finite, but this itself is because we think the infinite. – We discern irregular things as straight, multiplicities as one, differences as the same, restless things as at rest.

B' VII: Man, by focusing the attention of his mind, begets the modes of things and their images and human truth. – We cannot feign for ourselves anything except from what we remember, and we do not remember anything except what we perceive through the senses. – Ingenuity is the nature of man, required to see symmetry in things, the beautiful, the ugly. – On what basis could a clear and distinct idea of our mind be the rule of truth unless one had already perceived all that is involved, all that is connected? – Geometry sharpens ingenuity when it is deduced by the force of ingenuity through the interconnectness and disparity of things. – Imagination is the eye of ingenuity.

A' VIII: Four words – *Deity* and *Fate*, *Chance* and *Fortune* – are in agreement with the things discussed concerning the *true* and the *made*. – *Fate* is the eternal order of causes, *chance* is the outcome of this order of causes. – *Fortune* is a "god" who works in accordance with certain causes contrary to our expectations. – The conservation of the universe comes before the particular good of each.

##### 5. Conclusion

Since Vico was silent about employing chiasmus or ring structure in any of his writings, leaving detection of its presence up to inference and conjecture, such

as attempted in this paper, it begs the question of potential indirect influences, inspiration, or sources. There are at least three categories of literature that, to a varying degree, might lurk in the background, and therefore be of some interest in this context. In decreasing order of likelihood<sup>146</sup>, these include: (a) Homer; (b) classical works; and (c) the Bible.

Starting with the least likely influence, the (Hebrew) Bible, the basis for taking it into consideration is Vico's own acknowledgment of his familiarity with biblical studies in his early writings<sup>147</sup>, as well as Biblical allusions in *Metaphysics*<sup>148</sup>. Such biblical studies also touched on the poetic, literary structure of the Hebrew text, including parallelism<sup>149</sup>.

Perhaps a more likely inspiration, due to more documented evidence thereof, could have been the Graeco-Roman classics. In his manual on rhetoric, *Institutiones Oratoriae*, Vico explains the prevalent Greek term for chiasmus, *epanodos*, illustrating it with examples from Virgil and Cicero<sup>150</sup>. In his Platonic studies, Vico must have been confronted with ring structure<sup>151</sup>. Chiastic patterns have been noted in Cicero, Pindar and Herodotus, among others, however, there was no consistent terminology, leading some to cast doubt on the practice itself<sup>152</sup>.

Possibly the best candidate, however, are Homer's works. As has been amply discussed, Vico did not approach Homer's works as the product of a liter-

<sup>146</sup> This order of likelihood is of course rather conjectural itself.

<sup>147</sup> In the third of his *Inaugural Orations*, he states an opinion on the accuracy of the Masoretic text, the Vulgate, and the Septuagint. G. Vico, *On Humanistic Education*, cit., pp. 86-87. Vico was exposed to the contemporary ferment in biblical studies through contacts with scholars such as Biagio Garafalo (cfr. F. Bregoli, *Biblical Poetry, Spinozist Hermeneutics, and Critical Scholarship: The polemical activities of Raffaele Rabeni in early eighteenth century Italy*, in «Journal of Modern Jewish Studies» VIII, 2, 2009, p. 176; see also S. Caianiello - M. Sanna, *Una lettera inedita di G. B. Vico a B. Garofalo del 4 Ottobre 1721*, in BCSV, XXVI-XXVII, 1996-1997, pp. 325-331).

<sup>148</sup> L. Amoroso, *Vico e l'antichissima sapienza degli Ebrei*, in G. Matteucci, *Studi sul De antiquissima italorum sapientia*, cit., pp. 101-113; G. Mazzotta dedicated a chapter to Vico and the Bible in *New Map of the World*, but its focus is on the *New Science*, and thus not directly relevant (G. Mazzotta, *New Map of the World*, cit., pp. 234-255).

<sup>149</sup> In the late 1400s, Moses ibn Habib «planted the first seeds of the theory of biblical parallelism, which would be developed centuries later by Robert Lowth [1753]» (F. Bregoli, *Biblical Poetry*, cit., p. 180). A full historical account can be found in J. L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*, New Haven, Yale University, 1981.

<sup>150</sup> G. Vico, *The Art of Rhetoric*, tr. and ed. by G. A. Pinton - A. W. Shippee, including Commentary by G. Crifò, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, 1996, p. 161.

<sup>151</sup> Referring to the dialogue *Charmides*, Vittorio Hösle speaks of it as one of numerous examples of the technique of ring composition regularly used by Plato. V. Hösle, *Der Philosophische Dialog: Eine Poetik und Hermeneutik*, München, C. H. Beck, 2006, p. 245; published in English as *The Philosophical Dialogue: A Poetics and a Hermeneutics*, trans. by S. Rendall, Notre Dame (In.), University of Notre Dame Press, 2012, p. 249.

<sup>152</sup> Thomson provides an overview of classical terminology related to the current term «chiasmus» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., pp. 14-17). According to him, «[t]he most notable, perhaps, are *commutatio* and its allied *figurae*».



ary genius, but as extant documents of ancient cultures and by-gone ages<sup>153</sup>. At the same time, in his close reading of Homer<sup>154</sup>, first «to grasp each composition as a whole, [secondly] to note the transitions and the sequence of things», would he have missed the *Iliad's* ring structure?<sup>155</sup> It is true, in the *New Science*, Vico used Homer as a case study for a new hermeneutical theory, but in his early writings, he was acutely attuned to literary qualities<sup>156</sup>. Thus, Vico's literary inspiration for employing ring structure remains obscure and speculative. What is far more important is how this literary framework fits in and relates to Vico's "Gedankenwelt", his universe and mode of thought<sup>157</sup>. In the introduction, a few selective references were made to circularity and cyclicity<sup>158</sup>. More could be added, and very importantly, directly from Vico's theory of knowledge in *Metaphysics*, the conceptual circularities between the spheres, or realms, of mathematics and metaphysics, on the one hand, and mathematics and "physics" on the other hand<sup>159</sup>. However, more accumulation does not in itself tell us necessarily why Vico gravitated to this mode of thinking, and structuring reality, unless we consider the fundamental principle that underlies them all. This

<sup>153</sup> B. A. Haddock, *Vico's "Discovery of the true Homer": A Case Study of Historical Reconstruction*, in «Journal of the History of Ideas», XL, 1979, 4, pp. 583-602; G. Mazzotta, *New Map of the World*, cit., pp. 140-161. Vico's approach to Homer is worlds apart from «the quest for the real Homer» by Aristarchus, head of the Library of Alexandria in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, who sought to reconstruct the assumed original Homeric text (cfr. G. Nagy, *Poetry as performance: Homer and beyond*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 107-152).

<sup>154</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 129 (VIII, 1).

<sup>155</sup> M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, cit., pp. 101-124: «Many scholars would now agree that the *Iliad* is highly structured and that the form is annular». See also an earlier appraisal in C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1958, pp. 249-284.

<sup>156</sup> In *Inaugural Oration III*, he engaged in literary criticism: «Authors of our times [...] claim that Homer, compared to [...] Virgil, is sordid and inept. [...] Homer is not sordid, nor Demosthenes stale. [...] Do we [...] dare to pronounce those judgments upon Homer and Demosthenes?» (G. Vico, *On Humanistic Education*, cit., pp. 85-86).

<sup>157</sup> Sanna compared it to a «round trip journey»: «percorso non sempre lineare che, partendo dalla definizione di *Vero* in linguaggio metafisico [...] arriva di nuovo, circolarmente e inevitabilmente, a definire il *Vero* in un nuovo sostrato metafisico» (M. Sanna, *La "Fantasia, che è l'occhio dell'ingegno"*, cit., p. 17).

<sup>158</sup> The traditional character of certain uses of the metaphor is clear, going back to neoplatonism (A. Funkenstein, *Theology*, cit., p. 31).

<sup>159</sup> On the "circularity" between mathematics and metaphysics, see *Ancient Wisdom*, trans. Palmer, p. 27; V. Vitiello, *Medio assente*, cit., p. 91. I wish to thank the reviewer for pointing out that already Benedetto Croce identified such circularity, as follows: «[Vico ammette] una specie di circolo tra geometria e metafisica, la prima delle quali riceverebbe il suo vero dalla seconda e, ricevutolo, lo rifonderebbe nella stessa metafisica, confermando reciprocamente la scienza umana con la divina» (*La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, a cura di F. Audisio, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1997, pp. 22-23). See also G. Cerchiai, *Il "padre divino di ogni ritrovato". Aspetti dell'idea vichiana di ingegno*, in M. Vanzulli, *Razionalità e modernità in Vico*, cit., p. 44. Also relevant to Vico's epistemology is Sanna's observation: «Synthetic geometry achieves a true circularity between *cogitare* and *videre*, in the linking of which Vico grasps the essential in Bacon's experimental method». M. Sanna, *Consciousness and Imagination in the Anthropological View of G. Vico*, in F. Paglieri (ed. by), *Consciousness in Interaction: The role of the natural and social context in shaping consciousness*, cit., p. 331.

principle is *connectedness*, if understood as a first principle, as a simple idea, that is not a product<sup>160</sup> of other, prior, concepts. From this point of view, the circle is the paradigm of connectedness, from a given point on it, it departs, and after traversing a finite path, it returns to the point of origin<sup>161</sup>. And, more generally, the faculty of ingenuity<sup>162</sup> is the embodiment of connectivity, or at least, the potentiality thereof, powered by imagination, the eye of ingenuity, for discovering, or coming up with, new and surprising *topics*<sup>163</sup>. And with respect to *Metaphysics* as a whole, it could be said that it is «a very powerful critique of the notion that anything in isolation is meaningful»<sup>164</sup>.

If the argued ring structure of *Metaphysics* is placed against this background, it can be appreciated not only as a literary device, one of many others at the disposal of a writer, but as a means of expression that matches form to content, as it (re)enacts in narrative structure the epistemological thesis of the intricate «interconnectness»<sup>165</sup> of physics, mathematics, and metaphysics, on the one hand, and the workings of cognition, on the other hand, and, necessarily, of the theories of knowledge and cognition themselves also. While some students of literary structure would place structure at the center of hermeneutics,

<sup>160</sup> The term “product” is used here in the conceptual mathematical sense of the *interaction* between given factors (F. W. Lawvere - S. H. Schanuel, *Conceptual Mathematics: A first introduction to categories*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 218).

<sup>161</sup> «The circle is “symbol of God’s perfection” [...], figuring the cycle of departure and return» (R. Miner, *Introduction*, cit., p. IX). «Quello circolo e perfetto – compiuto, dacchè in esso principio e fine si congiungono in un medesimo punto» (V. Vitiello, *Vico e la topologia*, Napoli, Cronopio, 2000, p. 66).

<sup>162</sup> As always, the term is referred to here with the Vichian meaning.

<sup>163</sup> «*Ingenium*, thus, permits beings to overcome their radical situatedness in the here and now so that connections between here and there, past, present, and future become possible» (D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 129). Vincenzo Vitiello uses the felicitous analogy of *topology* to emphasize the need of never losing sight of the connectedness of things. As an octagon, or polygon, in general, cannot be understood by just looking at a single face or segment, without seeing it in its entirety, so a historical fact can only be understood in relation to the totality of historical developments. So, in Vico’s historical reconstruction, the ages of the “gods”, “heroes”, and “men” cannot correctly understood without their relationship to the entire «ideal eternal history». «Ogni età [...] deve rappresentare una prospettiva sull’intera storia ideal eterna. Ed è questa la tesi della topologia» (V. Vitiello, *Vico e la topologia*, cit., pp. 22-28). The relationship of the parts to the whole implies their connectedness. Vitiello’s illustration is in accord with two key characteristics of mathematical topology, namely, the focus on how things are *connected*, and on their *global* properties. The standard topological example is the *Möbius band* which “locally”, at any given point, looks like any other band, but, when viewed “globally”, in its entirety, displays a twist, making it one-sided, “non-orientable”, in topological language. H. Sato, *Algebraic Topology: An Intuitive Approach*, trans. by K. Hudson, Providence (RI), American Mathematical Society, 1999, p. 1; T. Kaczynski et al., *Computational Homology*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 2004, p. 3; G. Buskes - A. van Rooij, *Topological Spaces: From Distance to Neighborhood*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1997, p. 221. The “topological” metaphor resonates furthermore by virtue of its reliance on “cycles” in the investigation of spaces of interest (as part of homology/cohomology).

<sup>164</sup> D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 149.

<sup>165</sup> *Metaphysics*, 123 (VII, 4)

others tend to downplay structure as formulaic<sup>166</sup>. In view of the issues involved in conclusively "proving" the presence of ring composition<sup>167</sup>, it seems advisable to take a middle path in the matter of its significance for interpretation and evaluation. Borrowing a phrase by Vico (out of context), the ring structure of *Metaphysics*, if that is in fact the case, is «neither nothing nor is [it] everything»<sup>168</sup>. At a minimum, it is a testament to Vico's literary artistry<sup>169</sup>.

<sup>166</sup> D. L. Marshall, *Vico and the Transformation of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 233, speaks of «the formulaic structure of Homeric epic».

<sup>167</sup> Douglas observed: «A really good ring composition hides the machinery of its construction» (M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, cit., p. 76). Thomson commented: «The debate about chiasmus has been polarized between the incautious enthusiasm of its exponents and the legitimate skepticism of their critics» (I. H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, cit., p. 44-45).

<sup>168</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 47 (II): «Man is neither nothing nor is he everything». See R. Miner, *Vico Genealogist*, cit., p. 28.

<sup>169</sup> Dorsey's comment might be *apropos* here: «A book that initially seems chaotically arranged may turn out to be, upon further study of its internal structure, a masterpiece of literary architecture» (D. A. Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, cit., p. 42).

## Appendix

### Notes on Vico's *Inaugural Orations*, their proposed chiasmic composition, and some hermeneutical implications

#### *Introduction*

In this appendix, an effort will be made to conduct a test of the presence of ring composition in the Inaugural Orations delivered by Vico from 1699 to 1707, before faculty and students at the start of the academic year<sup>1</sup>. There are two main reasons for choosing these six speeches as test cases. First, in general terms, specimens of material to be tested are, by definition, relatively small; the relatively compact length of these Orations (in comparison with *De ratione*, in particular) would therefore seem to present, from a purely pragmatic standpoint, a suitable opportunity to examine Vico's conjectured use of ring-like compositional structures. Apart from this decidedly extrinsic and arbitrary reason, a more important and germane reason is that these Orations fall into the general time period of the early Vico to which also *Liber metaphysicus* (1710) belongs. While this chronological circumstance in itself cannot in any way be adduced as evidence on behalf of the proposed thesis, at a minimum, it is not incompatible when matters are viewed in light of the entire arc of Vico's development as a thinker.

While this discussion is framed in terms of testing, it would equally be in order to speak of experimentation, in order to suggest its tentative, provisional character. And it would need to be taken into account that, if there is any literary structure at all embedded in the Orations, it may have more affinity with the conventions of classical rhetoric than the more esoteric ring-like structure espoused here<sup>2</sup>. In the final analysis, however, the best evidence has to be ac-

<sup>1</sup> Only the first six Orations will be considered here; the seventh Oration (1708) was expanded for publication into his first major work, *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*; online at *Portale Vico*, Ristampe anastatiche, a cura di R. Mazzola; published in English in *On the Study Methods of our Time*, translated with an introduction and notes by E. Gianturco (Ithaca-London, Cornell University, 1990). Another oration took place in 1719 (*Inaugural oration on "Universal law"*), and the final inaugural address (1732) is known as *De mente heroica*, online at *Portale Vico*; full citation: G. Vico, *De Mente Heroica*, in Id., *Il De Mente Heroica e gli scritti latini minori*, a cura di G. G. Visconti, Napoli, Guida, 1996, edizione elettronica a cura di L. Pica Ciamarra - A. Sansone, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», V, 2008, 1; published in English as *On the Heroic Mind*, trans. by E. Sewell - A. C. Serignano, in G. Tagliacozzo - M. Mooney - D. Ph. Verene (eds.), *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, Atlantic Highlands (NJ), Humanities Press, 1979, Part 2, pp. 228-245; and in «New Vico Studies», 22, 2004, trans. by P. J. Archambault.

<sup>2</sup> Classical rhetorical arrangements, in a summarized form, consist of Introduction (*exordium*), Statement of Facts (*narratio*), Argumentation (*argumentatio*), and Conclusion

cepted as being the text itself, in other words, the internal evidence<sup>3</sup>. For Gigante, it was clear that Vico had an organic concept of these six Orations, as

(*conclusio/peroratio*). In fact, Andrea Battistini found this type of «ripartizione tetrastica» in Vico's funeral oration for Angela Cimmino (1727): *La Struttura Retorica dell'Orazione di Vico in Morte di Angela Cimmino*, in BCSV, IX, 1979, pp. 76-88; the text of the oration appears in English as Vico's "On the death of Donn'Angela Cimmino, Marchesa of Petrella", with an Introduction by A. Battistini, in «New Vico Studies» 25, 2007, pp. 5-33, trans. by R. L. Thomas. Thus, Vico used classical rhetorical conventions at his discretion, which in the case of this funeral oration belonged to the epideictic type of oratory rather than to forensic or political speech (see M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 32-33). – Here it would be remiss not to make at least a brief reference also to Vico's *Institutiones oratoriae* (1711-1741), the compendium of Vico's lectures as professor of rhetoric (see G. Vico, *Institutiones Oratoriae*, testo critico versione e commento di G. Crifò, Napoli, Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa, 1989; in English as G. Vico, *The Art of Rhetoric*, tr. and ed. G. A. Pinton - A. W. Shippee, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Editions Rodopi, 1996, including Commentary by G. Crifò, pp. 229-286. Should one be inclined to dismiss this edited collection of "lecture notes" as so much elementary resource material on antiquarian, classical rhetorical techniques, we will find it useful to consider the observations of various Vico specialists in G. Crifò (a cura di), *Retorica e filosofia in Giambattista Vico. Le Institutiones Oratoriae, Un bilancio critico*, Napoli, Guida, 1994. Marcello Gigante, for example, points to the relationship between Vico's rhetorical teaching and all his other works until the final *New Science* (pp. 23, 32), while Alessandro Giuliani observes that, in fact, notwithstanding the apparent adherence to the traditional organization of the material in classical rhetoric, the *I. o.* is profoundly innovative (p. 108). See also A. Giuliani, *La Filosofia de Vico y la Nueva Retórica*, trans. by J. M. Sevilla Fernandez, in «Cuadernos sobre Vico», XI-XII, 1999-2000, pp. 33-46. As has been elucidated in Vico scholarship, what Vico thought and was concerned about, never revolved around technique, or surface phenomena; this is not to say, however, that he did not master rhetorical techniques, and, furthermore, did not press them into service for higher goals. This recognition that Vico took (creative) liberties with classical rhetorical structures is one of the reasons or justifications (or, admittedly, perhaps an excuse) for not seeking to find literary structure in the writings being examined, in terms of classical rhetorical management of thoughts and material, but in a different type of overall compositional approach. As Nancy Struever observed: «What is intriguing is how little rhetoric as discipline is permitted to invade the *New Science*. Vico, as professor of rhetoric, is perfectly aware of the richness and usefulness of the classical rhetorical program as pedagogy, as instruction capable of rendering the serious inquirer sensitive to language as evidence of human activity» (N. Struever, *Reviews and Abstracts*, in «New Vico Studies», VII, 1989, p. 105).

<sup>3</sup> The text of the Orations is online at *Portale Vico*, full citation: G. Vico, *Le orazioni inaugurali I-VI*, a cura di G. G. Visconti, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1982, edizione elettronica a cura di L. Pica Ciamarra, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», II, 2005, 2. In English, in G. Vico, *On Humanistic Education (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707). From the definitive Latin Text, Introduction, and Notes of G. G. Visconti*, trans. by G. A. Pinton-A. W. Shippee, with an Introduction by D. Ph. Verene, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1993. – The following secondary literature has been valuable in understanding and appreciating these obviously "minor" works by Vico (in chronological order): R. Flint, *Vico*, Edinburgh-London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1884, pp. 50-72; G. Gentile, *Studi vichiani*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1968, pp. 41-99; material appeared first in print in 1912; N. Badaloni, *Introduzione a G. B. Vico*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1961, pp. 310-326; S. Monti, *Sulla tradizione e sul testo delle orazioni inaugurali di Vico*, Napoli, Guida, 1977; M. Gigante, *Le Orazioni inaugurali di Vico: lingua e contenuti*, in «Filosofia, International Studies in Philosophy», XXIX, 1978, 3, pp. 399-410; M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition in Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 106-114; M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico. The Making of an Anti-Modern*, Cambridge (Ma), Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 17-23; D. Ph. Verene, *Introduction* in G. Vico, *On Humanistic Education*, cit., pp. 1-27; L. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, New York, Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 51-59, focused on



distinct from the seventh oration (*De ratione*)<sup>4</sup>, and Gentile felt that among them were to be found some of the most beautiful pages in all of Vico's *oeuvre*<sup>5</sup>. And even Nancy Struever's reference to them as «harangues in evoking virtuous rhetorical-political behavior» implicitly attests to their rhetorical force<sup>6</sup>.

In spite of the relative brevity of each Oration compared to *De ratione* or *Liber metaphysicus*, it still poses significant challenges to recognize or identify the individual parts of the speech in relation to the other parts to which they relate or contrast. But it seems that the same phenomenon can also be found in Vico's writings at a smaller, more immediately accessible scale. This will be illustrated at the end of this appendix from a text in his autobiography.

What follows is therefore a suggested *parsing* of each of the six Inaugural Orations in terms of parallel statements or expositions arranged symmetrically, and in inverse order (ring structure).

### 1. Oration I

As befits a skilled pedagogue, Vico has in mind a main point for each Oration, serving as a kernel around which, and out of which, his thoughts develop; in the first oration, the subject is the potential of the human mind that he termed “knowledge of oneself”, as a result of which the students should not hold back in its pursuit.

*Oration I*; G. Mazzotta, *The New Map of the World: The Poetic Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 46-52; N. du Bois Marcus, *Vico and Plato*, New York, Peter Lang, 2001, pp. 48-57; F. Navarro Gómez, *Las Oraciones Inaugurales y la Sabiduría Primitiva de los Italianos*, in «Cuadernos sobre Vico», XIII-XIV, 2001-2002, pp. 327-333; B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples. The Urban Origins of Modern Social Theory*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 2011, pp. 53-89; Naddeo's discussion is particularly valuable in setting or embedding Vico's speeches not only into their intellectual context, as others have done, but more concretely into their social-political context, thus adding new dimensions to our understanding. – None of these studies of the Orations however touch on, or suggest «literary structure» in the sense theorized here, with the exception of Gómez' brief reference to the ring composition of *Oration VI* (*Las Oraciones Inaugurales*, cit., p. 328). The thesis is being advanced, therefore, without strong support from these studies; conversely, the discussion is not intended to be a recapitulation of other studies, as a result of which a wealth of insightful commentary will unfortunately not be able to be dealt with here.

<sup>4</sup> M. Gigante, *Le Orazioni inaugurali di Vico*, cit., p. 404; B. Naddeo gives content to this claim by speaking of the «thematic structure» of the *Orations*, as they «progressively examined [...] spheres of association, beginning with [...] the human mind and concluding with that of the world order» (B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., p. 54).

<sup>5</sup> G. Gentile, *Studi vichiani*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> N. Struever, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Vichian Inquiry*, in «New Vico Studies», III, 1985, p. 137; it should be noted that the context is Struever's engagement with M. Mooney in *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, and Mooney's gloss of the meaning and use(s) of rhetoric on Vico's part. The characterization as “harangues” nonetheless usefully calls attention to the fact that the limited space of the *Orations* present Vico's thoughts in a compressed, intensified format, in conjunction with directly addressing the audience. Their unrelentingly paraenetic tenor evidently did nothing to dissuade students from flocking to his (classical) rhetoric course which reportedly enjoyed considerable popularity.

What follows is a synopsis of the Oration, arranged in ring-compositional form<sup>7</sup>:

A [1] Strive with discipline, diligence to acquire clearer, deeper, manifold understanding of things.

B [2] Passion for knowledge is shared among you. – Consider no one a scholar who is not learned in the entire universe of studies.

C [3] Knowledge of oneself is greatest incentive to acquire the universe of learning in the shortest possible time. – [4] Among the wisest precepts stands “Know thyself”; it means “Know your own spirit”. – Know thyself so that you can attain wisdom.

D [5] Great successes only products of equally great efforts. – In effort to know yourself, perceive the divinity of your own spirit, by its sagacity, ability, memory, ingenuity. – The mind is the god of the arts.

(E) [6] Power that fashions images of things, called phantasy, originates, produces new things; differentiates forms of things, separating, at times mixing them together; makes present to eyes lands far away; unites things separated; overcomes the inaccessible; discloses the hidden. – [7] How keen the faculty of perceiving, how active composing, discriminating, how swift reasoning.

D” [8] Power by which the human mind compares things or distinguishes one from another is great. – With single act of perception, can see deformity in things, can inspect members of human body, compare, order, see how related.

C” [9] Man, from knowledge of itself gradually ascends to that of God. – [10] Human mind by reflection upon itself brings us to knowledge of supreme good, God. [11] Someone will swear that as young man, or child, never arrived at knowledge of God; indeed, he had arrived at it but paid no attention to it. – [12] By age of two or three acquired words, ideas that constitute all that is necessary for daily life. – Divine is faculty that sees, hears, conceives ideas, perceives, judges, reasons, remembers.

B’ [13] Nature made us for truth, natural disposition guides us, wonder keeps us persistent. – All sciences are yours if you know yourselves.

A” [14] Total accumulation of knowledge discovered, passed on by distinguished scholars. – What remains? Your will.

The above layout is, in some respects, self-explanatory, but a few comments, nonetheless, should be made. The main issue, or point of debate, of

<sup>7</sup> Using Pinton-Shippee edition (G. Vico, *On Humanistic Education*, cit.) including paragraph numbering in square brackets; quotations in Latin throughout are from the online text at *Portale Vico*. – In order to make the alleged parallelisms visible that are the crux of the present hypothesis, the synopses will rely predominantly on actual statements in the text rather than on paraphrases or glosses, and to stay within synoptical constraints, usually only sentence fragments will be reproduced. This seemingly straightforward methodology, nevertheless, is not unproblematic, either. Epistemologically, there are two separate and distinct bodies of thought present here, the full Oration text, on the one hand, and the highly selective condensed version, on the other hand. It is anything but trivial to go from one to the other, if their integrity is to be preserved.

course, is whether pairs of segments that have been indicated as being parallel to each other, indeed are related by content<sup>8</sup>.

The first set of segments A and A' has in common that it is an address to individuals on a personal level: the introduction starts with commendation, while the conclusion ends on a motivational note. It is easy to see that segments A and A' form an *inclusio*.

In the next parallel segments, B and B', it stands out that Vico lays emphasis on what should be the scope of human knowledge, with particular application to the students' university education. In paragraph 2, he emphasized the need to engage with "the entire universe of studies" and in paragraph 13 he followed this up with rhetorical flourish: «All sciences, yes, all of them, O most fortunate young men, are yours». There are other similarities, or complementarities, between these segments; while initially, the youth are praised for their academic commitments, later on, Vico cannot help but profess astonishment, disingenuously, at how they are impeded, and held back, from the highly valuable studies of the liberal arts and sciences.

In segments C and C', Vico takes up the precept know yourself, in the sense of self-confidence «to undertake great and sublime [intellectual] endeavors for which he [the student] has more than ample capacity». While in the first segment, Vico introduces the subject, in the second segment, spanning four paragraphs, he outlines the specific mental and intellectual abilities that they possess, and that provide the backbone for such confidence. Actually, already children are endowed in this manner, but to become philosophers, historians, orators, or poets it will require hard work and diligence.

In the following pair of segments, D and D', Vico first waxes poetic about man's intellectual abilities (sagacity, memory, ingenuity), subsumed under the term «spirit», in its counterpart, he turns to actual ways in which «the spirit» operates.

According to this presentation, it should be possible, therefore, to read the paired segments together in such a way that the first part segues seamlessly, as it were, into the second. Such coherence is not dependent on specific semantic markers connecting the segments, such as reference to «the activity of the spirit» at the beginning of section D', pointing back to «the attributes of the spirit» at the end of D; or reintroduction of «the knowledge of himself» and «the divinity of our mind» at the beginning of segment C' as ties, in reverse order, to the earlier concluding statement in section C how «man [...] constrains his divine mind», followed by «know, thyself, O youth, so you can attain wisdom» or coming back, at the beginning of part B', to «the most excellent studies of the liberal arts and sciences» that he had spoken of at the end of B as «the entire universe of studies».

<sup>8</sup> These comments are deliberately intended to stay at the "surface level" of the text, by focusing on pragmatic discourse markers, while mostly ignoring the deeper hermeneutics to be found in these Vichian texts, and it is acknowledged that this undialectical approach falls very much short of doing justice to them.

But there must also be present contrast in content from one member of a pair to the other, otherwise expenditure of mental resources («sagacity, keenness, cleverness, capability, ingenuity, and swiftness») of such magnitude as ring composition demands, would hardly be justified. While a close study of this relationship cannot be undertaken now, nevertheless a few general observations can be made, impressionistic though they may be. In comparing the first with the second half of the Oration, the first-half segments (A through D) have a generally positive, self-congratulatory flavor; they provide reassurance and motivation. Things change in the second half, some of the concepts Vico introduced in the first half, such as “self-knowledge”, “divinity of the [human] spirit”, human intellectual abilities, are brought into sharper focus, and the student is challenged to make the necessary effort to rise to a high level of achievement. In each specific pair of segments, the contrast can be perceived in its particular context.

This brings us to the part of the Oration that has not yet been addressed: the very center, denoted (E). While this section fits in well within Vico's development of ideas in the entire speech, it stands out in various ways. Immediately prior to this segment he professed his inability to «explain with my words the attributes of the spirit», but then, incongruously, unexpectedly, continues: «I will, therefore, only briefly mention them and you will be judge of how wonderfully great they are». This brief mention then turns into a lengthy excursus (relative to the Oration as a whole, and other subjects) on the power of imagination, *phantasy* (*phantasia*), which underlies the creation of metaphors<sup>9</sup>. If the present theory is correct, it begs the question of the significance of this special placement of the topic. It is certainly not a subject that is at home in pedagogy in general, or in the jurisprudence-centered university studies of Vico's day, in particular. Is it possible to suppose that the rest of the Oration has the role of acting as a foil for Vico's more profound interests and concerns?

## 2. Oration II

This oration has been called a «rhetorical tour de force»<sup>10</sup>, and for a good reason: the topic is the “fool”, someone not interested in knowledge, not a uniquely Vichian concern by any means, but what distinguishes the Oration is its stark, unflinching war imagery.

It can be outlined as follows:

A [1] Man's interests are foreign, abhorrent to his nature, each man, in a hour, becomes dissatisfied, loves truth but surrounded by error, gifted with reason but subservient to passions, admires virtue but full of vices, searching for happiness but oppressed by miseries, desires immortality but languishes in idleness. – [2] Life of fool is a punishment, for acting against eternal law. – [3]

<sup>9</sup> L. Catana, *Vico and Literary Mannerism*, cit., pp. 53-57, states: «Vico refers to metaphors extensively throughout his writings, but he never offers such a precise description again, for which reason the passage is worth attention».

<sup>10</sup> B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., pp. 58-59.

Topic: no enemy more dangerous to adversary than fool to himself. – [4] Shall cover topic so importance and brevity compensate for annoyance provoked.

B [5] From any epoch of ancient history, terrible massacres of enemies. – [6] Form in imagination terrible vision of battle. – When battle over, devastation of countryside, pillaging of cities. – Wherever you turn, barbarism.

C [7] Compare devastation, pain of battle with that which fool inflicts upon himself. – Fool's suffering greater. – [8] The truth: weapon of fool is unrestrained passion, power that overcomes him is conscience, homeland deprived of is whole world, wealth he loses is happiness, dungeon is own body, tyrant is adverse fortune.

B'' [9] Consider what terrible enemies, weapons fool prepares against himself. – [10] Joys of fool are ephemeral. – [11] Man's citizenship is only by possession of wisdom. – Law on which community founded is divine reason/wisdom. – [12] Fool will lose untold riches: happiness. – Why? He lacks perfect virtue, harmonious, constant course of life, acquired through knowledge, practice of wisdom. – [13] Fool also deprived of freedom. – [14] Dungeon is our body, wardens are opinion, falsity, error. – Guards are the senses, throughout life impaired by perverse passions. – Surrenders himself into hands of fortune.

A'' [15] As Plato said, man who is a fool is among animals the most ferocious. – Savagery to wage unnatural war against oneself. – Let us obey law of nature, each to be true of himself

As above, a few comments on the way in which the Oration is divided and organized into segments are in order. Starting with the first and last segments, A and A'', it can be seen that what connects the introduction and conclusion is the highlighting of true human nature, eternal law, and wisdom. These are the key concepts that stand out in these segments.

In the next pair of segments, B and B'', first graphically relates the horrors of actual war<sup>11</sup>, and then, in its counterpart, shows how the failure of the fool to seek reason, truth, and virtue leads to manifold consequences that are no less dire and tragic than being a victim of war.

The central section stands out by proposing to make a "comparison" of the destructiveness and pain caused by war, on the one hand, with what the "fool" inflicts on himself, on the other hand, and then, articulating it in a small literary masterpiece. The thread that holds this central segment together, and gives it its own *Gestalt*, is the treatment of the specific aspects of the terrors of war that he had identified earlier; they are six in number, and consist of the following: (1) pain of battle, (2) powerlessness, (3) loss of homeland, (4) loss of wealth, (5) loss of freedom, and (6) slavery. In these two short paragraphs, Vico addresses them three times in a row, in what one might call breathless fashion. In the first series of comparisons, reminds his listeners of similar painful experiences, literally, not just in war, but in ordinary life and circumstances familiar to

<sup>11</sup> M. Lilla wrote: «Nothing in the *City of God* outdoes this Oration in terrifying metaphorical power» (M. Lilla, G. B. Vico: *The Making of an Anti-Modern*, cit., p. 20).



everyone: the pain of the surgeon's knife; suicidal tendencies of those who lost all hope; a criminal's flight to escape arrest; drunkards and gluttons wasting riches; and desperate individuals, to survive, selling themselves into bondage<sup>12</sup>.

Having made the transition from the admittedly exceptional, extreme experience of war to common, ordinary life, Vico now has a basis for a claim on their attention to the application of the six aspects metaphorically: O listeners, your attention! This is of great importance! Take heed! This concerns you directly!

First, in the following second series on the six aspects, he continues the comparison by pointing out the *degree* of the fool's self-infliction, involving the *most excruciating* torture, *none greater* power, homeland that is *unique*, wealth *kings* have wished, *darkest and harshest* dungeons, *most ruthless* of tyrants. But the true objective of Vico's argument is still to come. In the third series, he finally states directly what the metaphors meant: (1) unrestrained passion; (2) the fool's conscience; (3) the whole world; (4) human happiness; (5) own body; and (6) adverse fortune.

In the context of the entire Oration, paragraphs 7 and 8 also would have made a fitting conclusion; their placement in the middle of the text therefore has significance. On one level, they function as a transition from the real war imagery in segment B to its functional equivalents in the fool's experiences described with gusto in segment B'; on another level, by their succinct wording, they bring the subject of the entire Oration into unmistakable focus.

The argument for turning these two paragraphs into the central component of the Oration's ring structure relies, thus, on seeing coherence in the three series as, rapidly, without further intervening text, one follows another. It can nonetheless not be ruled out, discerning, alternatively, another compositional blueprint in them. This alternative view would take the first half of paragraph 7 as still pertaining to segment B, and paragraph 8 as introductory to segment B'. The literal pain and suffering described in the first part of paragraph 7 would seem to fit, in terms of pragmatics, as a continuation of the theme of literal suffering caused by wars. Similarly, the individual meanings of the six metaphorical scourges of war identified in paragraph 8, are then discussed in detail in segment B'. In fact, at the end of paragraph 8, he informs his listeners, epexegetically, that he will «elaborate each of these themes». This leaves the second half of paragraph 7 to be understood in relation to the rest of the oration segments. As noted above, Vico issues an emphatic appeal for the audience's attention, followed by a hyperbolic statement of the fool's adversities. It is clearly set apart from what precedes and succeeds it, and thus could be considered the central segment, its extreme brevity notwithstanding.

<sup>12</sup> Although barely noticeable, Vico left out a real-world example of the fifth aspect, loss of freedom through imprisonment. If this omission is considered to be a deliberate choice, one is left wondering why; was it repugnance at the mere mention of practices also associated with the Inquisition, or simply literary constraints brought on by having referred to criminals before?

### 3. *Oration III*

In the third *Oration*, Vico turns to the social, intersubjective dimensions of being part of the academic world and wider community by outlining a code of conduct and standards of behaviour. He calls it «a kind of practical appendix to the two preceding ones»<sup>13</sup>.

It can be seen as having the following structure:

A [1] Free will is wondrous gift. – Man alone is whatever he chooses to be. – [2] Freedom of choice of human spirit is reason for all evil. – [3] Spurn from studies all intentional deception.

B [4] Powerful force in man to associate, join together with others. – [5] Necessary that scholarship bring together professors of liberal arts and that inquiry into nature of things unite philosophers. – Rhetorician, philosopher, physician, jurisconsult. – Accept challenges, persist; challenge errors of others not with insults

C [6] Nature of society founded on mutual good faith. – Honor Plautus, Terence, Virgil, Cicero, Livy, Sallust, Ovid, Lucan, Martial. – Listen to Plato, Stoics, Aristotle, Democritus, Descartes. – Medicine, search Galen. – Jurisprudence, pore over Accursius. – Take counsel with the just and good, behave well.

(D) [7] Do not judge anyone without a hearing, like fair, honest judge. – Learn how to relate humanely to others.

C” [8] Man so tied to beliefs that no possible reason, however powerful, causes him to give them up, is that good faith? – [9] No shame in changing beliefs; be of open mind.

B” [10] Good faith excludes all deceit, to do one thing, pretend to do another. –Rhetoricians pretentious. – Make effort to master them, but not pretend to know what we do not know. – [11] Philosopher acts with deception when he disguises ignorance with ambiguous words, to conceal ignorance with pretended knowledge. – [12] Rhetorician, in what do you feel superior?

<sup>13</sup> The term “appendix” cannot be without significance. The third *Oration* was given after the attempted overthrow of Spanish rule in 1701; Naddeo sees in it a change of attitude compared to the first two *Orations*: «In the orations predating the revolt of 1701, then, Vico shared the Ciceronian assumptions regarding the intrinsic morality and, indeed, justice of human reason and the naturalness of Roman civil law. In his very first address after the revolt [...], however, Vico abandoned the anthropological premises underlying the moral realism of the prior ones, making necessary a new definition of natural law». (B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., pp. 67-68). Against this background, then, the exegetical term “appendix” would signal that the earlier orations needed to be understood in conjunction with the third one, and to allow the latter to function as corrective to the previous ones. At the same time, Vico added the qualification “practical”; this invites a further comparison. Indeed, compared to the highly intellectual level of the first orations, the present *Oration* is decidedly down-to-earth. It is therefore also a “practical appendix” in the sense of making real-life application of the principles that Vico wanted to espouse. These points of view need not be disjunctive, but participants in a movement from the psychological, intellectual, theoretical to the practical, behavioral, social.

A'' [13] Educated person knows that he does not know. – Maintain society from which all deceit removed. – Count as gain abilities of authors, balance deficiencies with talents, bring something of our own to common store of knowledge. – With all deceit overcome, live honestly, sincerely.

A comparison of segments shows the following:

Both in segments A and A', the theme is an appeal to avoid deception, and one can read them together as an *inclusio*, without sensing any dissonance.

In both segments B and B', what relates or unites them is not so much the subject matters discussed, but the professions and professionals addressed: in segment B, it includes the rhetorician, philosopher, physician, and lawyer; in segment B', it is again the rhetorician and the philosopher, although no mention is made of the medical or legal profession.

Coming to segments C and C', the topic common to both is good faith.

It will again be revealing to consider the fundamental tenor of the first vs. the second half of the speech. In segments B and C, Vico castigates and admonishes aspiring rhetoricians and philosophers, members of the intellectual elite, but still in a manner that we might call civil; comparing his tone in these segments with the tone in the second half – addressing the same class and themes – one cannot fail to sense a certain abrasiveness, to put it mildly. This comes out especially strongly through his insertion of fictional dialogue (glossing Socratic dialogue) in both segments B'' and C', resulting in turning his interlocutors into laughingstocks. When the Oration is studied under the working hypothesis of ring composition, the similarities and differences between its constituent discourse parts can be seen to have an internal logic: the first half of the address is to lay the groundwork in terms that are generally acceptable; once such assent is achieved, it is easier to present particular, relevant consequences, especially when they involve sensitive issues. While the second half of this Oration has a critical edge to it, it cannot be said that Vico committed the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

What remains is to consider the purpose of the central segment (D). How does it highlight and drive home the overall theme, as the central segment should? To recall, the basic theme of the Oration is to resist any tendency of deceit and deceptiveness. Throughout the speech, Vico has much to say about it, but he does so mainly at the level of attitudes. The central segment is very different in this respect. It explains how writers and scholars need to behave in word and deed, in specific situations and circumstances. If this ring-structural reading is justified, placing these points at the center of the Oration could say something about what was uppermost on Vico's mind at the time<sup>14</sup>.

#### 4. *Oration IV*

<sup>14</sup> As Naddeo explained, the primary focus on the proper conventions of the intellectual community should not be taken as precluding a larger concern, namely using it «as a platform from which to state what he associated with that term [“society”] and what practical significance it bore for the governance of human communities» (B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., p. 69).

In this Oration, Vico continued directing the minds of his listeners to a wider circle of stakeholders in their professional formation: in the third Oration, it was ostensibly the (still exclusive) «society of the men of letters», now the ambit encompasses the «good of the republic, [...] the common good of the citizenry».

The Oration can be outlined as follows:

A [1] Past two years interrupted solemn occasion. – [2] Liberal arts and sciences mastered only with effort. – [3] This exhortation to study of liberal arts and sciences hardly arranged for ostentation.

B [4] Why interrupted for two years. – [5] You are brothers, nurture common civic relationship with fraternal love.

C [6] Learn importance of serving needs of fellow citizens. – Fitting that education be for benefit of motherland.

D [7] Laws condemn thankless freeman who does not come to aid of liberator, household. – Example from Rome; wisdom acquired in service of state be rendered clearly for good of its citizens.

C” [8] Never is the useful in conflict with the honorable. – In liberal arts and sciences, none can generate greatest utility unless directed toward the honorable. – What goal more honorable than help greatest number of men.

B” [9] Man dedicated to public life must be concerned about all things for all people. – When honored, not think of it as reward for life of activity but as pledge of what he intends to accomplish in performance of duty.

A” [10] How useless liberal studies when aimed only to achieve titles of honor, material gain, position. – Sciences of government reached extent that one must master the humane letters. – Their handmaidens are theology, jurisprudence, medicine, languages, history, eloquence. – Direct studies to common good.

A few highlights will suffice to characterize the overall pragmatics of the Oration. As in the previous speeches, the first half, segments A through C, have a decidedly positive, upbeat, spirit, which changes in the second half into sobering, unvarnished depictions of common pitfalls in the pursuit of higher education and careers (in the Neapolitan historical context).

In paragraph 8, Vico negatively characterizes the distinction of “the useful” and “the honorable” as “dangerous”, “false opinions”, as an “error [that] has put down such deep roots in the minds of men”. Furthermore, the liberal professions are not like life, properties, or buildings (twice driving the point home chiasmatically),

so that those who abuse them  
do not profit from them and  
those who profit from them  
do not abuse them.

But such professions as these are of a different and wonderful sort,

so that those who hoard [hold] them	ut qui eas tenent
do not have them, but	non habeant;
those who give them away	qui donant
[in the very act of giving]	hoc ipso quod donant,
enrich themselves [keep them]. <sup>15</sup>	conservent.

In paragraph 9, Vico becomes even more strident, railing against purely self-centered politicians.

The next step is to consider paired segments side-by-side, or, equivalently, in succession, and, while dispensing with details here, it is apparent that they complement each other. The central section D sounds the key notes of the Oration, on the one hand, castigates lack of gratitude, and, conversely holds up the sterling example of Roman nobles who selflessly devoted themselves to public service.

##### 5. *Oration V*

The fifth Oration constitutes an argument for the value of, and need for, the humanities, especially jurisprudence, in military affairs and the conduct of war. In relation to the previous Oration, a further enlargement of Vico's purview can be observed: since war is *inter*-national, the discussion now extends beyond the boundaries of the "homeland" which figured so prominently in Oration IV.

In ring-structural format, the Oration has the following order:

A [1] Propose that nations most celebrated for battles, obtained greatest power when excelled in letters. – [2] Have proposed that arms benefited by letters; wisdom is improvement of man, man is mind and spirit. – [3] Where wisdom in high regard, equally great esteem for military power. – Soldiers defend law of nations, inherent rights of peoples.

B [4] By own natures arms and letters do not conflict. – Sparta. – [5] Carthaginians. – Rome. – [6] Turkish empire. – Arabs.

<sup>15</sup> The source of the underlying thought of the second chiasm is Cicero, *Pro Plancio*, on debts of gratitude; Vico used Cicero's saying itself («Gratiam [...] [a] qui refert, [b] habet; et [b'] qui habet, [a'] in eo ipso quod habet, refert / But in a moral debt, [a] when I pay, [b] I keep, and [b'] when I keep, [a'] I pay by the very act of keeping») also as an example of *epanodos* in *Rhetoric* (161), *Institutiones Oratoriae* (348-349). It is worth noting that in defining *epanodos*, Vico employed *epanodos* (chiasm) itself: «Epanodos est, / cum quae priore sita loco erant / posteriori, / et quae posteriori / priore loco repetimus». The English translation in *Rhetoric* does not preserve the chiasmic form: «*Epanodos* / repeats at the end of the sentence / what is said at the beginning of the sentence, / and what is at the end is represented / in the beginning of the following sentence». However, the Italian translation in *Institutiones Oratoriae* adheres to the original inverse parallelism: «L'*epanodos* si ha quando / quel che era al primo posto / lo ripetiamo nell'ultimo / e quel che era all'ultimo posto, / nel primo». Both Gentile and Mooney cite the lengthy passage in which both chiasms appear (G. Gentile, *Studi vichiani*, cit., pp. 80-81; M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 109-110).

C [7] Study of liberal arts contributes to military arts. – Wars are kind of judgment of laws. – Man has dual citizenship. – Military art is science of human rights.

(D) [8] Necessary that commander of army crowned with virtues of spirit: justice, moderation, restraint, clemency. – Virtues of the mind: dialectic, geometry, arithmetic, optics, architecture, mechanics, moral philosophy, lessons of past, eloquence, natural sciences. – Virtues of mind and spirit established by wisest, conserved by cultivation of letters.

C' [9] People uncultivated in letters like herd of cattle. – If by chance overcome nations more cultured, either master arts and letters or destroy arts and letters.

B' [10] People cultured in letters, detesting war, as long as secured by natural or manmade protections, prevented by nothing from setting up prosperous dominion. – Unlettered people can amass dominions through war only for short time or never at all.

A' [11] Neither peace or war could achieve highest glory and establishment of monarchies without pursuit of letters. [12] This university is where military disposition cultivated, wisdom necessary to the military.

The rationale for superimposing this layout on the text of the Oration consists of the following.

In the first and last segments, A and A', the question is the relationship between military power and cultural achievements, for which Vico, at the beginning of the Oration simply uses the term «letters»<sup>16</sup>. He conjoined the seemingly contradictory notions of «nations most celebrated for battles» and those who «excelled in letters». While in the introduction, reference is made to such nations in general, in the conclusion, specific examples of such nations are given, not limited to Greece and Rome. In fact, in the conclusion, he turns the tables on the original topic prominence: at the beginning, the subject of military success was given priority, reflected rhetorically in the order in which these two notions appear in the statement (at the end of paragraph 1): «nations have been most celebrated in glory for battles [...] when they have excelled in letters». In paragraph 11, the order is reversed so that repeatedly and consistently, «the sciences and arts» are mentioned first, and thus bestowed topic prominence, introduced by the sweeping statement: «we perceive that in the flow of history there is an order such that where the literary arts have flourished so too have the glories of the military arts»<sup>17</sup>.

In the following pair of segments, B and B', Vico takes up potential counter-examples to his thesis, nations that apparently were powerful without the benefit of an advanced culture (as Vico presents it), namely Sparta, Carthage, and the Turkish empire. In these segments, which can be taken or read together, he claims that such nations will only enjoy success for a short time, at best.

<sup>16</sup> M. Mooney spoke of «[t]he absorption of apparently conflicting terms within a moral vision that can embrace them both» (M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 110).

<sup>17</sup> The result is a chiasmic construction that produces a well-balanced *inclusio*: [a] military glory, [b] study of letters, [b'] sciences and arts, [a'] military power.



In the next set of segments, C and C', Vico's depiction of war as an instrument of international law has received much attention<sup>18</sup>. Here another aspect will be highlighted, an aspect that has a place in Vico's overall argument about the liberal arts and sciences. It is encapsulated in the statement (in paragraph 7): «the legitimate commonwealths are only those which are founded on laws *that the wise have created*». (Italics added) In the corresponding segment C', he is ready to add more bluntly that «people uncultivated in letters» are like «a herd of cattle», and, should they conquer a more civilized nation, would have to adopt their achievements. Both segments are thus seen as dealing with the same line of thought.

The central segment (D) immediately stands out by its change from the impersonal national and international level to the benefits and value of knowledge and education at the personal level. The individual that Vico singles out as such beneficiary, in the context of the Oration theme, is the military commander, but it is clear that he has a larger audience in mind. It is also significant that here, for the first time in the Orations, he becomes more specific about what he considers «liberal arts and sciences», «letters», and similar expressions. Whereas up to this point, the impression could be conveyed that «the study of letters» in contrast to the «military arts» referred to literary excellence and/or philosophical education<sup>19</sup>, he now clarifies that he was not referring only to the humanities but also to science and technology, starting with mathematics: *geometry, arithmetic, optics, architecture, mechanics, natural sciences*, and at the beginning of the next paragraph, as a transition to the next segment, he sums up all the disciplines he has mentioned as «a cycle of many and [...] important studies [*orbem scientiarum*]».

## 6. Oration VI

In the sixth Oration, Vico further expands the horizon of the aim of studies to the whole of human society, to be conducted holistically, comprising the entire universe of liberal arts and sciences, and in the correct order of progression.

The Oration can be outlined as follows<sup>20</sup>:

<sup>18</sup> G. Gentile, *Studi vichiani*, cit., p. 83; M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., pp. 111-112; B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., pp. 78-79.

<sup>19</sup> M. Mooney, *Vico in the Tradition of Rhetoric*, cit., p. 111; B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., p. 78; G. Gentile acknowledges «ogni cultura letteraria, scientifica, filosofica» (G. Gentile, *Studi vichiani*, cit., p. 83).

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, among commentators on the *Inaugural Orations*, Gomez appears to be the only one making reference to ring composition. Gomez' reference is to *Oration VI* only, and does not spell out in detail how he would subdivide the text. It cannot be determined therefore whether he would agree with the present proposal. Gomez stated: «Recoge la *Oratio VI*, en una estructura cíclica – *Ringkomposition* – argumentos derivados de la *Oratio I* – Γνώθη σεαυτῶν – para, en función de la autoconsciencia así adquirida, determinar la necesidad del saber, a fin de corregir y enmendar nuestra propia naturaleza, así como el orden en que deben ser atendidas las diversas disciplinas, en un prelude de lo que será el *De nostris*» (*Las Oraciones Inaugurales*, cit., p. 328; his italics).

A [1] Parents push youth to study arts and sciences on grounds of own desires. – [2] If we contemplate human nature, we discover not only those studies we must cultivate but also the order by which approach them; two important topics.

B [3] Man thoroughly corrupted, by inadequacy of language, by mind cluttered with opinions, spirit polluted by vice. – [4] Supreme Will inflicted punishments. – [5] Remedies: eloquence, knowledge, virtue, three points around which orb of arts and sciences encircles (*quae sunt tria veluti puncta quae totus atrium scientiarumque circumagitur orbis*). – [6] Three duties of wisdom: eloquence, prudence, virtue. – [7] Greatest goal of studies: inform mind with truth, spirit with virtue, speech with eloquence.

( C ) [8] Embrace whole sphere of human arts and sciences, explain wisdom, means toward its end. – [9] Wisdom consists in knowledge of things divine, prudent judgment in human affairs, speech that is true, proper. – Knowledge: first of natural things, namely geometric figures, numbers, causes. – Under physics, include anatomy, art of medicine; mechanics, integration of physics and mathematics. – Human mind and God, metaphysics studies both to contribute to science, theology contributes to religion. – Wise judgment requires each perform duties as man, citizen: moral doctrine, civil doctrine, moral theology. – These three unite in jurisprudence. – Rhetoric teaches appealing way of speaking. – [10] Almost all arts and sciences have own written histories, general principles, specific examples. – Pure mathematics by contrast has no history because specific examples unnecessary, neither logic. – Even less metaphysics because it studies human mind and God as purest, simplest natures and nothing else

B'' [11] Esoteric disciplines must be heard from teachers. – Exoteric, each of us capable of learning by himself. – [12] Must follow nature as guide: no age better than childhood for learning languages. – [13] Adolescents must apply themselves to mathematics, aided by ability to construct images. – From mathematics to physics. – Human mind led from known facts of mathematics to the doubtful in physics to metaphysics. – [14] Wise judgment concerning human affairs follows acquisition of knowledge. – All principles of arts, doctrines of sciences judged to be esoteric, to be learned from teachers. – Histories of sciences and arts are exoteric.

A'' [15] Follow goal and method of studies – By light of honesty; by light of utility; for ease of learning.

A brief overview of the segments of the Oration and how they interrelate is in order:

Segment A sets out the Oration's two-fold content, namely, first, a description of subjects to be included in the education of young people, and secondly, the order and path of study to be followed. The concluding segment A'' reiterates this twofold aim in terms of the goal and method of studies.

Segments B and B'' are the pair of segments immediately preceding / following the central segment. These are the segments that directly deal with and address the two topics that Vico promised to consider. In the first segment, it

is the type of studies that are needed; according to Vico, they must respond to human nature, consisting of mind, spirit, and the capacity for language, by conveying knowledge, virtue, and eloquence<sup>21</sup>. In the parallel segment, Vico again pleads from human nature, specifically the development of cognitive and learning abilities from childhood on, but now to determine the correct order and stages in which certain disciplines should be broached<sup>22</sup>. It was Vico himself who had stipulated their connectedness.

Turning now to the central segment (C), it is of interest to note first that Vico himself introduces the segment as a break in the flow of the material. As he stated at the beginning of paragraph 8, he had just established the content and scope of studies, i.e. the first of his topics, and was now ready to proceed to the second topic, the order of studies. But instead of doing just that, he switches to a different topic, not unrelated, to be sure, nevertheless out of sequence, so to speak, namely, «what constitutes wisdom and the means toward its end». This central segment also stands out by its discussion of three topics that would take center stage in *Liber metaphysicus*, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics, in a manner that has no parallel in the rest of the Oration<sup>23</sup>.

This concludes the overview and compositional analysis of the first six Inaugural Orations. Its thesis, the presence of ring composition, stands or falls on the internal evidence. Part of such an essay could be furthermore bringing to bear the alternative model of classical rhetoric with a view toward a comparison of which literary structure fits the data best. The view presented here is

<sup>21</sup> Vico, metaphorically, seems to be speaking of an imaginary system of celestial mechanics of four bodies, significantly more complex than just the three bodies of Newton's *Principia* (1687), the moon, earth, and sun. While seeming to illustrate his point with commonly known facts from physics, he gives these facts a counterfactual twist, thus highlighting the exceptional status of the things spoken of.

<sup>22</sup> Segment B" comprises paragraphs 11 through 14; its coherence as segment can be seen in this instance also by the way it opens and closes: it starts with referring to "esoteric" (*acroamaticae*) and "exoteric" (*exotericae*) disciplines, and it also ends with an almost word-for-word repetition. This repetition at the end also deserves note as it actually would not have been indispensable in relation or apposition to the immediately preceding context; it therefore seems to have been appended for a more formal purpose. This may also be detectable in a subtle change in syntax from the initial occurrence to the final statement. In both places, definitions of the terms are given. At the segment inception, the definiendum is stated first, then the definiens; at the close, in a transposition, the definiens precedes the definiendum. (The English translation in *Humanistic Education* is felicitous in preserving this distinction). These factors, taken together, would seem to point to the designated literary role of these statements of marking off, frame-like, the top and bottom of the segment. The implication is unavoidable that the rest of the *Oration* also consists of distinct segments, although one would not need to expect the same stylistic means in every instance. – Matters of style, of course, are secondary to content and substance, but it is well-known that Vico struggled with wording, and in the case of *Orations I to V*, leaving text-critical evidence of both "stylistic" and material revisions (B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., p. 53; S. Monti, *Sulla tradizione*, cit., pp. 69-90). In other words, literary style has a supporting role to play. See also G. Nencioni, *Corso e ricorso linguistico nella Scienza Nuova*, in BCSV, XIV-XV, 1984-1985, pp. 39-62; online at *Portale Vico*.

<sup>23</sup> Another noteworthy aspect of the central section is the fact itself that Vico here, as he did also in *Oration V*, does not limit the scope of what he terms "wisdom" to the humanities, but embraces mathematics, science and technology, in fact, discusses the latter first.

that it would be quite difficult to squeeze the material we have considered into the mold of classical rhetoric. Oration VI may be taken as a case-in-point. In one respect, it resembles classical rhetoric, namely in segments A and A'. It would not be amiss seeing them as *exordium* and *peroratio*. On the other hand, if one approaches the body of the Oration with a mental matrix imprinted in terms of the two fundamental requirements of statement of the facts, followed by proofs, inconsistencies arise. Vico announced two topics, but actually presented three topics, which do not follow each other according to the classical arrangement (*dispositio*). And in treating each topic, statements of "facts" and arguments are intermixed, or rather, each topic constitutes a continuous argument, the parts of which cannot be neatly categorized.



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### ABSTRACT

This essay examines Vico's *De Antiquissima (Liber metaphysicus)* from a literary, that is, compositional, point of view. In this examination, the proposal is advanced that Vico's first major work is written in the form of a *ring*, or *chiasmus*, rather than a thematically "linear" exposition. Based on this hypothesis, the different parts of the work are then related for the purpose of reflection on certain hermeneutical implications. The article contains an Appendix that presents notes on the possible ring structure of Vico's earlier *Inaugural Orations*.

### KEYWORDS

Vico; De Antiquissima; Circularity; Chiasmus; Inaugural Orations

### SOMMARIO

*Il "Liber metaphysicus" di Vico: un'indagine sulla sua struttura letteraria. Con una Appendice: Note sulle "Orazioni inaugurali" di Vico, la loro composizione chiasmica e alcune implicazioni ermeneutiche.* Il saggio prende in esame il *De Antiquissima (Liber metaphysicus)* di Vico da un punto di vista letterario, cioè attinente alla composizione del testo. L'ipotesi proposta è che la prima importante opera vichiana sia scritta in forma di *anello* o di *chiasmo*, piuttosto che seguire una esposizione "lineare". Le diverse parti dell'opera sono quindi collegate tra loro secondo questa ipotesi e di qui sono sviluppate alcune implicazioni ermeneutiche. L'articolo comprende un'appendice, che presenta note sulla possibile struttura ad anello delle *Orazioni inaugurali*.

### PAROLE CHIAVE

Vico; De Antiquissima; Circolarità; Chiasmo; Orazioni inaugurali

