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The New Map of the World: The Poetic Philosophy of Giambattista Vico. By Giuseppe Mazzotta. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Pp. xviii + 267. \$45.00.

Having written illuminating books on Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, among others, Mazzotta is in a perfect position to offer an account of the philosophical thought of Vico in its historical context. In this first book since 1911 to discuss the entire *corpus* of Vico's writings, Mazzotta provides us with a sure guide to an allusive thinker. Moreover, by placing Vico in conversation with modernity, Mazzotta offers a way to unify his varied concerns. Space does not allow me the luxury of detailing Mazzotta's many fascinating discussions. Instead, I shall briefly describe the contents of each chapter and then turn my

attention to Mazzotta's central claim about Vico's relation to modernity.

Chapter 1 provides an acute analysis of Vico's *Autobiography* and suggests that the central concept for Vico is "honor" (*onore*). At once, Mazzotta claims, Vico is at odds with the subjectivity of modern thought since honor is a public recognition and an emphasis on how one appears to others. Chapter 2 turns to Vico's discussion of education. Vico stresses the role of the university in stark contrast to the standing of the major figures of modern philosophy who worked outside university structures. Vico's central claim is that the university, at its best, provides a place apart from and combative of the political realm. Chapter 3 concerns Vico's historical writings, and Mazzotta tells us that one key component of Vico's histories is both to augment Machiavelli's treatises about power and to show their limits in the figure of the intellectual who can play a role in the state by reminding us of utopian possibilities. Chapter 4 begins Mazzotta's discussion of the *New Science* and situates that text within the genre of encyclopedia, thereby showing Vico's commitment to a universal account of knowledge against the partial accounts of individual disciplines. Chapter 5 moves to the issue of myth. At issue in this discussion is the status of Egypt. Vico rejects one strand of Renaissance thought that finds in Egypt a primordial wisdom, opting instead for the priority of the Hebrews. However, at the same time, Mazzotta interprets Vico as showing how the new sciences in fact have at their core the mythological understandings of antiquity. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 explore the ways in which Vico links poetry and politics by treating in turn Homer, Grotius, and Machiavelli and by concluding that it is poetry and rhetoric that unify the fragmentary political and legal experiences generated throughout history. Finally, chapters 9 and 10 provide us with Mazzotta's core understanding of the status of Vico's thought. It is to that core notion that I now turn.

In chapter 9 Mazzotta discusses book V of the *New Science* and finds there the resources for a "counter-discourse" to modernity. This counter-discourse proceeds in three ways. Modernity, beginning for Vico with Machiavelli and continuing to his own time with Spinoza, is characterized as a displacement of antiquity in favor of the present. Thus, modern thinkers believe themselves superior to ancient thinkers

and view themselves as "sovereign subjects" because they find in the past insufficient resources for living in the present. By contrast, Mazzotta convincingly demonstrates that Vico believed that ancient thought was the basis for understanding the new age ushered in by Machiavelli and company. Most pointedly, the basic claim is that the roots of the modern age lie in the origins of Christianity insofar as it brought a newness to the direction of history. Unlike Machiavelli and Bacon, for example, Vico does not attempt to construct a secular understanding of Christianity and its origins, but instead, in Mazzotta's words, he "theologizes politics and politicizes theology." Vico makes two very interesting moves here by first insisting on Christianity's divine origins and then, in a clear rejoinder to Machiavelli, attributing *virtu* to the Christian martyrs. After all, these martyrs ultimately overthrew the Roman political order, and to think of them as powerless in a Machiavellian sense is to misconstrue the result of their actions. Thus, this first element of the counter-discourse refuses a secular reduction of history in favor of an understanding of the origins of the modern age in the establishment of Christianity.

The second element in the counter-discourse continues the reflection on the significance of a Christianity that made explicit the problem of the relation between philosophy and theology. Vico straightforwardly calls the wisdom of the ancients "vain" (*vana*). Moreover, he spends much time discussing miracles and refuses to reduce them to mere subjective beliefs. Indeed, Vico finds a contradiction at the center of modern thinkers: in their refusal to admit the possibility of miracles, they deny that any freedom is possible within nature. Only the existence of miracles, Vico believes, points towards the possibility of freedom. In trying to be autonomous subjects, the moderns have in fact "made God an infinite mind subject to fate" (216).

The third element of the counter-discourse springs from the aridness of the moderns' deterministic rationalism. Vico posits a new science, one that is a kind of poetry. This poetry stands at the base of all sciences. Mazzotta shows the roots of Vico's ideas on poetry in earlier scholastic thought. We must not confuse such poetry with some esoteric realm of reference; rather, it is the flip-side of prudence. Both poetry and prudence are virtues of the practical intellect, and for its

part, poetry is concerned with making. The conclusion is that the founding of any science is possible only because we participate in God's creative activity.

Finally, chapter 10 treats Vico's biblical hermeneutics in line with the concerns of the preceding chapters. We again see here Vico's refusal to treat the biblical narrative as an immanent account of human rationality, as Spinoza does. Instead, by bringing to the foreground the notion of God's creation, Vico once again restores the notion of freedom that modernity had threatened. The outcome of his reading of the Bible is a renewed sense of the "underlying and unifying force of history" (254).

Mazzotta has presented us with a fascinating portrait of a complex philosopher. By focusing on Vico's questioning of the stance taken by modern thinkers, we come to a greater awareness of the complexities of 17th- and 18th-century philosophy and its roots in ancient, medieval, and renaissance thought. Mazzotta's sure understanding of the texts at issue, coupled with a forceful prose style, makes this book required reading for anyone trying to understand Vico's encyclopedic thought.