

**An Assessment of The View of Gabiatista Vico and Johann  
Gottfried Herder on History**

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**Abstract**

**T**his paper assesses the view of Gabiatista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder on history. The study relies on documentary sources in carrying out the assessment. Review method was used to appraise information gotten from documented literatures. According to traditional accounts, man and his deeds are defined as historical because they are swallowed in the stream of history which Vico and Herder contend with. The main tendency in their work is the attempt to prove the possibility of reason in history and the conformity of history to laws of teleological development intelligible to the human mind. This tendency finds its most classical expression in the rationalization of history which at the same time involves the radical historicalization of reason. For Vico, the history of his time were conceived in their belief that they could reach the truth of a particular epoch but for Herder he propounds a pluralism not elaborated in terms of all encompassing universalities nor an abliterating of differences, but rather a pluralism that celebrates differences while simultaneously enabling people to work together towards a better world.

**Keywords:** *Rationalization, Historicalization, Teleological, Pluralism, Documentary, Hermeneutical*

**Introduction**

The question of how we come to understand others is a perennial one. Two possible methods have been advanced to answer this question. The first method is based upon explanation and in accordance with naturalism, it argues that the method of the natural sciences can be

applied to the human sciences. The crux of this method is scientific and it attempts, through the application of conceptual schemes, to understand the actions or motivations of others. The motivation of this paper stems from the agitation to assess Vico and Herder's view with the possibility of bringing out where their position differs from the traditional account. As Kogler and Stueber object.

To characterize a person from twelfth-century Europe in terms of the conceptual repertoire available to us today would be a pure anachronism. Even if we could rationalize actions in such a way, such a rationalization could not provide the reasons that moved the agents that is, it would be a purely external characterization of the agent's perspective.<sup>1</sup>

The second method is based upon understanding. It argues that the human sciences necessitate a specific methodology in order to understand the motivations of human actions. This method should facilitate the understanding of radically different cultures with radically different ways of reasoning and conceptual schemes. It centers on an understanding of human actions as a result of inclinations and desires influenced by social, historical, and cultural embeddedness. The emphasis on an interpretation of context makes this method hermeneutic.

These two methods underscore the work of Vico and Herder and shall be applied in our assessment of their view as it regards history. Following the introduction immediately is an assessment of Giovanni Battista Vico. This is followed by that of Johann Gottfried Herder and subsequently, the conclusion of the study.

### **Giovanni Battista Vico 1668-1774**

Vico's project is inherently connected to what we would today label the problem of the hermeneutical interpretation of history. Vico's problem in the *New science* is twofold, namely the twin problems of anachronism and relativism. Historians investigating the past import to a considerable

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<sup>1</sup>. H. H. Kogler et al, *Empathy and Agency: The Problem of Understanding in the Human Sciences* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 17.

degree their own contemporary framework into their interpretation. Conversely, if there is no appropriate way to work our back into a previous epoch we are doomed to historical relativism. For Vico, the historians of his time were conceited in their belief that they could reach the truth of a particular epoch. As he says:

Whenever man can form no ideas of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand. This axiom points to the inexhaustible source of all errors about the principles of humanity that have been adopted by entire nations and by all the scholars.<sup>2</sup>

Again he writes:

We must guard against scribal garbling, plagiarisms, forgeries, interpolations of alien hands through which it is difficult for us to recognize the originals [...] These books contain allusions to custom often unknown, in corrupted codice; therefore, the attainment of any science r art has become difficult for us.<sup>3</sup>

Vico argues not only that historians often import anachronisms, but also that historians import the detached methods of the natural sciences into the domain of history where it is appropriate. His ambition with his new science is to introduce a new scientific method in order for the historian to be able to feel himself into these past remote cultures while avoiding the tendency to be able to import his own cultural and historical conditioning and also, the tendency to analyze foreign cultures and behaviours along abstract universal lines, uninfluenced by the geographical or cultural contexts in which they lived.

Vico was dissatisfied with the way the presuppositions of the physical sciences were applied to the human sciences. The originality of Vico's position was that unlike the philosophy of the modern period,

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<sup>2</sup>. G. Vicoet'al, *On Humanistic Education: (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, trans, Giogio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1993), .43.

<sup>3</sup>. G Vicoet'al, *Ibid*, .48

which, for him, overemphasized the clarity and distinctiveness of conceptual or rational categories, Vico propounded retrieving a wide variety of ancient texts, fables, allegories, myths and poetry. In doing this, his objective was to reconcile philosophy and philology.

In his introduction to Isaiah Berlin's *Against the current*, Roger Hausheer,, assessing the position of the the thinkers of the French Enlightenment, a group so critical of Vico and Herder, underlines that

Despite their many differences, the thinkers of the French Enlightenment held in common a stock of fundamentalPresuppositions which went almost unchallenged: that nature is the same in all times and place; that universalhuman goals, true end and effective means, are at leastin principle discoverable; that a method similar to thoseof Newtonian science...should be discovered and appliedin the field of moral, politics, economics, and in the sphereof human relationships in general...<sup>4</sup>

Such a method, however, was not what Vico was looking for. On the contrary, and flying in the face of contemporaries, Vico contended that such is a carefully folded ham-sandwich. He could not resist the attractiveness of such coincidence of gesture but, insisted on complete identification between the philosophical abstraction and the empirical illustration thereby annulling the absolutism of each conception-hoisting the real unjustifiably clear of its dimensional limits, temporalizing that which is extra-temporal. In Tagliacozzo's words:

Vico returned to the humanists' discussions of letters and sciences and of poetry. Such a discussion and comparison brought about a reduction of the supremacy of the sciences [...]of nature, it was, rather, a new grounding, not conceiving them any longer as a structure existing in

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<sup>4</sup> I. Berlin et'al, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, New York; Viking Press, 1980.

reality, but rather a construction made by man.<sup>5</sup>

Vico's resounding rejection of a historical abstract theories that discount the concrete lived reality of social and political life is significant. For him, man can be studied in his concrete historical situation. He claims that men can come to know past civil societies because men make their own history. As he rightly opined:

But the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the word of nature which since God made it, he alone knows and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations, or civil world which since men had made it, men could come to know.<sup>6</sup>

To some extent, Vico espouses something akin to what we would call today a valued-centred historicism. The specificity that concrete historical situations bring with themselves accounts for the distinctive nature of every age and culture, and that is what historians need to heed. Vico's was an audacious position at the time, since the fundamental rationale behind his method went against most of the tenets of the enlightenment. His new method of investigation-his new science-was supposed to avoid the pitfalls of reason merely reflecting upon itself.

The structure of this new science-a human science-should not be patterned after a system designed to obtain objective truth about the material universe. The quest for objective knowledge, typical of the

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<sup>5</sup>. G.Tagliacozzo et al., *Vico and Contemporary Thought: And for the first time in English Translation, Vico's Essay in the Heroic Mind Atlantic Highlands*: Humanities Press, 1979, 95-96.

<sup>6</sup>. D. P. Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981, .33.

“Age of Reason”, and specifically developed into a method by Descartes is, at this time, opposed vehemently by Vico. In contradistinction to such a method, Vico argues that understanding should be favoured over deductive procedures. Human affairs should not be reduced to a set of measurements exemplifying pre-established laws. Following Vico, a reconstruction of human affairs along those lines is worthless since it ignores the lived reality of social and cultural structure and discounts the roles they play.

The conditions of possibility for historical reconstruction are dependent upon one's ability to enter a specific age or culture, while simultaneously extracting oneself from one's own. Isaiah Berlin contends that Vico was perhaps influenced by the theories of “becoming one” with the object that were widespread in magical theories in the Renaissance. In his opinion:

Vico is one of the true fathers of the doctrine of the unity of theory and practice, which was afterwards developed so richly in various directions by Hegel and his disciples and, in new directions, by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. He believed that in principle we could re-react in our minds- 'enter' by sympathetic imagination-into what a class, a society [...] individuals were at; what frustrated them in their search to satisfy their needs-the demands of social necessities and utilities in this or that situation; how they were affected by their own creation-cultural and historical. He supposes that we can, by a species of imaginative insight, turn everyman into a *fur sich* (to use Hegelian language)-an entity observed from outside by the agent (even if it is his own state of mind or body) into a *fur sich*, an element in assimilated to, his purposive, 'spiritual' activity.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, while the agent of this historical reconstruction is “asked” to perform a kind of emptying of the self in order to suspend her beliefs and, so to

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<sup>7</sup>. C. Miller, Giambattista Vico: *Imagination and Historical Knowledge*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, 4.

speak, extracts herself out of her culture, out of her tradition, out of her community, this act of distancing is not proposed as a way to achieve the kind of dry aridness that natural sciences applies to its object. Vico in fact, contrasted the scientific knowledge of objects to the possibility and specificity of knowledge of man. Vico reasons that, since we can understand ourselves, therefore, we can understand others, their predicaments and how they saw themselves. Vico thus, proposed a non-detached detachment, a new type of critical involvement, an involvement that centers on a quasi-aesthetic capacity for discrimination and integration; a capacity that alternates between projection and identification.

Even if the principles of civil society are “to be found within the modifications of our own human mind”, the knowledge afforded will need to be on a different footing that the usual Cartesian one if by “knowing” Vico understands only a rational reflection upon the “modifications of our minds”, then his recurrent attacks on the enlightenment's systematicity is general, and on Cartesian method, in particular, seems at best self-defeating. And if, as Vico asserts a knowledge can still be gained that does not include presuppositions and misconceptions imported by the historian, then Vico must supplement his definition of knowledge with another faculty—a faculty that embraces knowledge. As we will see this faculty is the imagination. Vico's use of the faculty of imagination not only offers an alternative methodology to the Cartesian analysis, but also an alternative to the later Romantic approach to life. In contradistinction to the philosophy of the modern later Romantic approach to life.<sup>8</sup> In contradistinction to the philosophy of the modern period which presents us with a disjunct because we are asked to pursue philosophical understanding either in terms of the principles of evidence, the concept and the argument, or to reject these and think directly from the situation of life, to 'transvaluate values' introspect or await being. Vico offers us another possibility. His thoughts begin outside of this disjunct. It begins neither with Geist nor with Leben. It begins instead with the imagination which fantasia, as an

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<sup>8</sup>. J. M. Edie, “Expression of Metaphor”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23, no 4, 1963, 51.

original and independent power of mind.

The faculty of imagination allows us to recollect and re-enter the world of civil society. This is possible in so far as it has been created by men, and because as humans, we follow the patterns of the previous modifications of the mind that gave rise to these other “worlds”. But for these possible worlds, not only to be simply imaginary for them to be the portrait of a society or an age we need to work backwards from our present to the past, we need a sense of historical perspective. The central idea at the heart of Vico's thought as Berlin put it.

Is that, in the individual and society alike, phase follows phase not haphazardly (as the Epicureans thought), nor in a sequence of mechanical causes or effects (as the stoics taught), but as stages in the pursuit of an intelligent purpose—Man's effort to understand himself and his world, and to realize his capacities in it. History for him is the orderly procession [...] of ever deepening types of apprehension of the world, of ways of feeling, acting, expressing, each of which grows out, and supersedes its predecessor, [...]. So, begins the conception of the 'phenomenology' of human experience and activity of men's history and life as determined by their own, at first unconscious, then progressively more conscious creative molding.<sup>9</sup>

Vico maintains that we can think ourselves into cultures “diverse from the one's own” through an investigation into the history of words, i.e., through the practice of etymology. Vico's primary concern was to develop what he calls *unacritica flosoca*—a critical philosophy based on a critical examination of the history of ideas. Vico's critical approach examines the history of words—a philological and etymological inquiry into concept formation—because it is not the mind that forms the words but rather the words are what form the mind.

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<sup>9</sup>. J. G. Herder, “On Cognition and Sensation, the Two Main Forces of the Human Soul ,1775,” in *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 183.

The Vico emphatic imagination allows one to feel oneself into, “entrare,” past or foreign civilizations. “Entrare” is the process underlying Vico's new science and the crux of his method for historical recollection. Empathy allows us to access what he calls a mental dictionary of primordial imaginative universals. Vico's example of perhaps the primordial imaginative universal is the experience of love expressing himself in thunder. Once a first imaginative universal occurs, it gives rise to further imaginative universals through metaphor. Metaphor enables the expansion of bodily related expressions into more abstract concepts. When the metaphorical structure underlying abstract concepts is forgotten over time they become “intelligible universal”, i.e., general terms with a supposed literal meaning. For Vico, what enables us to enter into other cultures and to understand what underpins historical changes is the ability to feel ourselves back into this primordial metaphorical structure and to hence retrieve the primordial images and connections underlying the intelligible universals.

### **Johann Gottfried Herder 1744-1803**

In this section, I expound on Herder's hermeneutic and the role played by *Einführung* in Herder's genetic method, especially in the section on his '*This too a Philosophy of History for the formation of Humanity*'. For now, suffice it to say that the progressive elaboration of the concept of “feeling oneself into is dependent upon and thus runs parallel to the elaboration of the genetic method. As the elaboration of Herder's genetic method's technically increases, his concept of *Einführung* itself gains in complexity.

Vico's process of imaginative recollection can be seen as a forerunner of the concept of “*sich einführen*” coined by Herder some thirty years later. For Vico, the phenomenon of recollection enabled by the “imaginative universals” was dependent upon all men and all nations having a commonality of vocabulary, a commonality of the first terms that gave rise to the mind's activity. The phenomenon of feeling oneself into depends upon sharing a mental dictionary. Because we share symbols and images, we can effect a metaphorical displacement into the perceptual or effective contexts of others. Herder's theory of historical

and language development also tries to reconcile the opposing positions of universalism and singularity. This position has been described by Berlin, Taylor and Bernard as a forerunner of political pluralism. Herder's "pluralism" stems from his criticism of his contemporaries for the ways in which they abstract the living human being from its environment (*klima*) and because they tend to

Toss around words and formulas in the midst of Which  
all forceful distinctions and individual beings disappear  
bind contractions with general words and daub over with  
loose whitewash. [Because they] know so Much about  
the human soul in general that they know Nothing about  
each individual human souls.<sup>10</sup>

Herder's theory of history and language propounds a pluralism not elaborated in terms of all-encompassing universalities, nor an obliterating of differences, but rather a pluralism that celebrates differences while simultaneously enabling people to work together towards a better world, so Herder rightly opined that "will I therefore, ever be able to feel apart, and together, i.e, to explain, the harmony of our being, the mutually attuned and yet and yet to diverse concert of our thoughts and sensation".<sup>11</sup>

Herder is the first one to coin the verb "*scheinflulen*" (a process by which we will be). Following unknowingly in the steps of Vico through Hemann's influence, analyzes language hermeneutically in the steps in terms of its history. Language for Herder should not be understood in terms of static structures, but, rather, in terms of *Werdegang* (climate), in terms of its development. This *Werdegang* of language usage is defined by Herder in terms of what he calls *Klima*, or climate. The climate of a time is the background context that informs our practices and gives them meaning. To understand a text, its time, and the motivations of the author on her own terms requires that we "feel ourselves into" the text and the language used. Herder's genetic method consists of three steps. First, a feeling of oneself into the embeddedness of the author's corpus, second, a

<sup>10.</sup> S. W. Herder, Excerpts in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 2, 33-64.

<sup>11.</sup> J. G. Herder Op. Cit, 133.

feeling oneself in the author's perceptual and effective world-the *Klima* of her time of her time, and third, a bracketing of one's own history. Empathy is crucial to all of these steps. Empathy is essential to how we use and understand language, and thus, in part, underpins our experience of intersubjectivity.

*Einflufen*( a verb coined by Herder)is the process by which we will be, in Herder's system, able to feel apart while feeling together. Through *Einflufen*, we will be able to access the similarities due not only to shared embodiment, corporeal experiences, and concept formation, but also due to a careful and critical analysis of the social interactions and of the *Klimas* in which specific languages develop and by which they are shaped. The recollecting of the commonalities among differences in human experience that are at the heart of our ability to work towards a common goal is, for Herder, facilitate by the process of feeling oneself into.

For Herder, thought is itself necessarily dependent upon language. Language and concept formation are the necessary tools enabling, first, an access to and, second, an interpretation of human values since language and concept formation are dependent upon human usage of words, for Herder, as for Vico before him. To sum it up, Herder's philosophy of history is a philosophy of the history of languages, not understood in terms of structures, but rather, in terms of *Werdegang*, "in terms of development, herder's philosophical history for mankind is a history of mankind's language's development embedded in a particular "climate" Herder does not see mankind's historical "here" as a mathematical coordinate, nor mankind's "now" as a historical moment, but rather, for Herder, the here and now are embodied and embedded in a particular context. Human products, like natural things, are not eternal-they originate, they grow, and finally, they decay. Human products must thus be understood as historically determined. The contention that human products have a history, while echoing Vico, is due to an acquaintance with Kant's early 1755 essay entitled *Universal History and Theory of the Heavens*.

Incorporating Kant's insight into his own methodology, Herder writes:

Just as a tree grows from its roots, so art, language, and Science grow from their origins. In the seed, there lies the Creature with all its members; and in the origin of phenomenon there lies all the treasure of its interpretation, through which our explanation of it becomes genetic.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in the early introduction to his *'This Too a Philosophy of History for the formation of Humanity'*, published in 1774, Herder furthered his inquiry into human activities and introduces historicity. As the title indicates, this essay treats of the dynamics of the historical development of humanity and was written in part as a reaction to essays from Voltaire, Montesquieu, Boulanger and Halventius. What irritates Herder to the point of rendering him polemical, as seen by the choice of title for his essay. This too..." is that the historical analysis of his peers disregarded the climate of the time they were observing. Hume, for instance, wrote "Mankind are so much the same in all times and places that history informs us of nothing new or strange." The observations of contemporary historians are compromised. Herder writes; "because they judge, on the basis of the spirit and heard of our time". Moreover, "we mock, we deny, we misinterpret" because "we are so incapable of understanding of feeling". In reaction, Herder propounds a historical analysis that respects time, place and culture, i.e, a history embedded in particularity. We need to work not from our own perspective, he continues, but rather with

The criterion of another time! [...]. In order to understand the Historical or cultural other, [...] it really ought to be one's first Thought to see him merely in his place, otherwise, one sees, Especially looking hither from Europe, the most distorted cari-Capture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> S. W. Herder, Excerpts in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 2, 33-64.

<sup>13</sup> J. G. Herder, "On Cognition and Sensation, the Two Main Forces of the Human Soul ,1775," in *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 183.

Here, Herder introduces context or “climate” into his method. He writes:

That, there is a certain creation and influence by the  
clime, Hence certain national and provincial vices, forces  
and virtues; that in some regions and climates, some  
inclinations, like some plants, must develop only weakly  
and shapelessly, but in others Strive upwards with whole  
full nature-I may presuppose this Physic of history,  
science of the soul, and politics as conceded On the  
whole [...].<sup>14</sup>

Herder's problematic is the difficulty of understanding other cultures as well as our past. On the one hand, if we assume that we can judge others by our own standards we assume similarity and do not understand their specificity. On the other, if we assume that they are utterly foreign to us, we consign ourselves to relativism and incomprehension. For him, empathy along with a hermeneutical approach are supposed to navigate between both of these objectionable extremes. Herder is the first to use the term as a technical philosophical one, although, it appears in the writings of his teacher

Herder seeks to give a special importance to what he terms “climate”. Climate here is not to be understood as the horizon, since it also includes perceptual and psychological components without a feeling into the climate, there is no access to the word of a people. Again, since thought is dependent upon language and concepts are dependent upon word usages, addressing the “climate” will be the first necessary step towards the possibility of feeling oneself into the thought of an epoch. Herder writes

Whoever has noticed what an inexpressible thing one is  
dealing With, in the distinctive individuality of a human  
being-to be able to say what distinguishes him in a  
distinguishing way, how he feels and lives, how different  
and idiosyncratic all things become for him once his eye  
sees them, his soul measures them, his heart feels them-

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<sup>14</sup>. S. W. Herder, Excerpts in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 2, 33-64.

[...] and feels along.<sup>15</sup>

Herder is now concerned with an understanding of other cultures and other people's through the process of "feeling oneself into" the climate specific to a particular life. In his words;

The whole living painting of mode of life, habits, needs, peculiarities of land and climate would have to be added [...] go into the age, into the clime, the whole history, feel yourself into everything-only now are you on the way towards understanding. Here to "feel oneself interpretation of the foreign or as Heinz Kohut would aptly write letter: Empathy is the mode of which one gathers psychological data About other people and [...] imagines their inner experiences."<sup>16</sup>

Even though it is not open to direct observation. Herder's genetic method is not only relies on first "feeling oneself into" the literary work, but it is also dependent upon a dynamic interpretation of the context of the author-the second stage of *Einfühlung*. The critic's methodological framework will hence become archeological in nature-the critic unearths meanings and discovers of values through an imaginative displacement into the context of the author. This context, in turn, will be analyzed in terms of human productions and associations. This addition of a diachronic dimension is the second stage of Herder's genetic method.

The conceptual elaboration of the genetic method so far runs as follows: firstly, The method includes the concepts of the following and identifying with. It calls for a movement on the part of the critic into the literary text of the author. This metamorphical displacement occurs first at the level of the text embeddedness in the whole corpus of the author, and further into the author's perceptual and effective world. Secondly, inclusion of the concept of history. Human products are historically determined. Thus in order to have access to the perceptual and effective

<sup>15</sup>. J. G. Herder, "On Cognition and Sensation, the Two Main Forces of the Human Soul ,1775," in *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 156.

<sup>16</sup>. J. G. Herder, Op Cit. 177.

world of the author, one needs to consider the historical context in which it took place and feel oneself into it. Access to understanding is thus facilitated by “*sich einfühlen*”, by reproducing in imagination the perceptions/sensations of the targeted 'other'. The historian thus actively interprets and “feels himself into the other cultural and/or emotional framework, yet one caveat remains.

In the third step, the historian needs to suspend his moral standards, he needs to bracket himself in order to avoid anachronism, in order to mitigate the tendency to infuse the past civilization with values and preconceptions of our own. Herder writes “It is completely necessary that one be able to leave one's time and one's own people in order to judge about remote times and peoples”. Herder warns the historian saying that only then “will you (the historian) lose the thought 'as though you too are all taken individually or collectively'. You taken collectively?

*Quintessence of all times and peoples?* That really shows stupidity!” The historian needs to relegate his situatedness to the background in order for the interpretation to be valid. In this way, Herder brings attention to the problem inherent with the object studied.

Only when the historian succeeds in removing herself and her sets of beliefs, balancing herself between subject and object, can he achieve an understanding of the intentions underlying the behaviours observed in different cultures (or past civilizations)-why was something done, and for what reasons? Only once this is done can the historian recognize and follow the motives that caused a specific action, or understand how a set of traditions originated and perdured. One needs to enter the world of values and beliefs which provide the climate against which a culture unfolded.

Summarizing Herder's hermeneutic project, Isaiah Berlin writes that:

One must not judge one culture by the criteria of another that different civilizations have different growths, pursue different goals, embody different ways of living, are dominated by different attitudes to life; so that to understand them, one must perform an imaginative act of empathy into their essence, understand them 'from

within' as far as possible and see the world through their eyes.<sup>17</sup>

### **Reason and Teleology in Giambattista Vico's Works**

Vico challenged the Cartesian notion of reason as a purely abstract and universal faculty. Instead, he argued that human reason is historically and culturally situated, shaped by the specific contexts and experiences of different societies. For Vico, reason emerges within the historical development of human civilizations, evolving through stages characterized by different modes of thought and social organization. He proposed a cyclical view of history, known as the "corsi e ricorsi" (cycles and recurrences), in which societies progress through distinct phases of development, from a primitive "age of gods" to a rational "age of men" and eventually a "barbaric" age marked by decline and chaos. This cyclical view reflects Vico's belief in the organic growth of human societies and the recurrence of certain patterns in history.<sup>18</sup>

Vico introduced the concept of "providence" (providenza) as a guiding principle in history, suggesting that there is a divine plan or purpose behind the unfolding of human civilization. Unlike the teleology of classical philosophy, which often emphasized a linear progression towards a predetermined end, Vico's teleology is more dynamic and dialectical. He saw history as a creative process driven by human agency and cultural innovation, rather than a preordained march towards a fixed goal. Vico believed that providence operates through the collective actions and aspirations of humanity, guiding the course of history towards the fulfillment of its underlying purpose.

### **Reason and Teleology in Johann Gottfried Herder's Works**

Like Vico, Herder rejected the idea of reason as a transcendent and ahistorical faculty, emphasizing its embeddedness in specific cultural and historical contexts. Herder emphasized the diversity of human

<sup>17</sup>. I. Berlin et'al, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*. New York Viking Press, 1980.

<sup>18</sup>. G. Vico et'al, *On Humanistic Education: (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, trans, Giggio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1993), .43.

cultures and languages, arguing that each possesses its own unique mode of expression and rationality. He championed the idea of "cultural relativism," which asserts that different cultures should be understood on their own terms, rather than judged according to universal standards. Unlike the Enlightenment thinkers who sought to impose a single rational framework on all of humanity, Herder celebrated the richness of cultural diversity and the plurality of rationalities that exist within the world.<sup>19</sup>

Herder shared Vico's belief in the providential guidance of history, but he approached teleology from a more humanistic and naturalistic perspective. Herder saw history as a progressive unfolding of human potentialities, driven by the creative energies of individuals and communities. He rejected the idea of a predetermined end or goal towards which history is moving, instead emphasizing the open-ended and contingent nature of historical development. For Herder, teleology operates not through divine providence but through the immanent dynamics of human culture and society. He viewed history as a continuous process of becoming, in which each generation contributes to the ongoing evolution of humanity.

### **A Comparison of Vico and Herders reason and teleology**

Both Vico and Herder challenged the dominant rationalist paradigms of their respective eras, offering rich and nuanced accounts of the relationship between reason, teleology, and history. While Vico emphasized the cyclical nature of historical development and the role of divine providence, Herder celebrated the diversity of human cultures and the creative potentialities inherent in historical change. Together, their works laid the foundation for a more nuanced and historically informed understanding of human rationality and the dynamics of historical change.

### **Rationalization of History by Vico and Herder**

In the works of Vico and Herder, the rationalization of history involves understanding the development and progression of human societies

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<sup>19.</sup> S. W. Herder, Excerpts in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 2, 33-64.

through rational analysis and interpretation. Both philosophers sought to uncover the underlying principles and patterns that govern historical change, albeit through different lenses.

### **Vico's Perspective**

Vico rejected the Cartesian notion of reason as a purely abstract and universal faculty divorced from historical and cultural contexts. Instead, he argued for a historical and cultural relativism, asserting that reason emerges within specific socio-historical conditions. Vico's concept of the "New Science" aimed to provide a rational explanation for the development of human civilization. He proposed a cyclical view of history, where societies progress through distinct stages characterized by different modes of thought and social organization. Through his analysis of myths, language, and institutions, Vico sought to uncover the rational principles underlying historical phenomena. He believed that by understanding the historical origins of society, one could gain insights into the nature of human reason itself.<sup>20</sup>

### **Herder's Perspective**

Herder similarly rejected the idea of a universal and ahistorical reason, arguing instead for the importance of cultural particularity and diversity in shaping human rationality. For Herder, each culture possesses its own unique mode of rationality, embedded within its language, customs, and traditions. He emphasized the need to understand history from the perspective of the people who lived it, rather than imposing external rational frameworks onto past societies. Herder's concept of "cultural pluralism" celebrated the richness of human diversity and the myriad ways in which different cultures have expressed their rationality throughout history.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>. G. Vico et al, *On Humanistic Education: (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, trans, Giogio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1993), .66.

<sup>21</sup>. S. W. Herder, Excerpts in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 2, 64 -73.

## **Historicization of Reason by Vico and Herder**

The historicization of reason involves recognizing the contingent and situated nature of human rationality, understanding it as a product of specific historical and cultural contexts rather than a universal and timeless faculty.

### **Vico's Perspective**

Vico's historicization of reason is evident in his rejection of the Cartesian emphasis on abstract and deductive reasoning. Instead, he emphasized the role of historical experience and cultural traditions in shaping human thought and rationality. Through his analysis of language, Vico argued that human reason emerges through the collective efforts of societies to make sense of their world and communicate with one another. He saw language as a key expression of the historical development of human rationality.<sup>22</sup> Vico's cyclical view of history reflects his belief in the historical contingency of human reason, suggesting that different epochs give rise to different forms of rationality based on the social and cultural conditions of the time.

### **Herder's Perspective**

Herder's historicization of reason builds upon Vico's insights, emphasizing the diversity of human cultures and the plurality of rationalities that exist within the world. Herder rejected the idea of a single, universal standard of reason, arguing instead for the importance of understanding reason within its specific historical and cultural contexts. He believed that each culture's mode of rationality is valid within its own framework and should be respected as such.<sup>23</sup> Through his comparative studies of different cultures and languages, Herder sought to uncover the historical roots of human reason and to appreciate the unique contributions of each culture to the collective tapestry of human knowledge and understanding.

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<sup>22</sup> G. Vico et al, *On Humanistic Education: (Six Inaugural Orations, 1699-1707)*, trans, Giogio A. Pinton and Arthur W. Shippee (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1993), .66.

<sup>23</sup> S. W. Herder, Excerpts in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 2, 64 -73.

### A Comparison of Vico and Herders Rationalization of History

Both Vico and Herder contributed to the rationalization of history by providing rich and nuanced analyses of the development of human societies. Through their works, they challenged the idea of a universal and ahistorical reason, instead emphasizing the importance of understanding reason within its specific historical and cultural contexts.

### Conclusion

Historicity is, as the classical conceptions of history developed by Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried Herder. The main tendency in their work is the attempt to prove the possibility of reason in history and the conformity of history to laws of teleological development intelligible to the human mind. This tendency finds its most classical expression in the radical rationalization of history, which at the same time involves the radical historicalization of reason. For Vico, the history of his time were conceived in their belief that they could reach the truth of a particular epoch but for Herder, he propounds a pluralism not elaborated in terms of all encompassing universalities, nor an obliterating of differences, but rather a pluralism that celebrates differences while simultaneously enabling people to work together towards a better world.

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