

D. P. Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1981, 227 σελ.

The recent rediscovery of Vico as an original, prophetic and tragic philosopher of the eighteenth century has come to fruition. A clear indication of this is Professor Verene's new book titled *Vico's Science of Imagination*. The author of this provocative book intends to herald a new science based not on concepts and reflection but on recollection and images (φαντασία). He seems to belong to that group of sensitive spirits which, being both alive and alert, have felt deeply the bankruptcy of modern scientism, logical positivism and language analysis as methods of doing philosophy. These philosophers, who could not rest contented with any sort of structuralism, deconstructionism or hermeneutics, have turned to Vico with a sense of great relief. There they have found a refreshing fountain of wisdom, a truly new philosophy of the human world (its origin, course and tragic recourse). Judging from the number, quality and international appeal of the recently published books on Vico, one may say without exaggeration that the 80's will witness a revival of Vichian studies. This revival may lead eventually to a recovery of the ailing philosophy of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world. The recovery may also be accompanied by a redirection of the course of contemporary philosophical thought, so that from *ancilla scientiae* philosophy will become once again a *scienza nuova* (new science) as Vico envisioned.

Towards such a heroic goal, the contribution of Verene's book is considerable at least for two reasons. First, the author has succeeded in providing us with a comprehensive exposition of Vico's original but difficult to understand philosophy of culture. Unlike other important Vichian scholars, such as Michelet and Croce or Flint and Fisch, who have been preoccupied with sources, influences, comparisons and history, Verene endeavors to «interpret the central theses of Vico's thought and at the same time to develop the problems of Vico's philosophy themselves» (p. 19). Second, and more important, Verene's new philosophical approach to Vico is based on what he calls «recollective imagination», which enables him to offer an original interpretation of the message of *New Science* in its philological and philosophical aspects considered as a «vision of the whole». He wishes to see Vico «as a guide to the ideas of wisdom, heroism, tragedy, barbarism, memory, providence, imagination and ingenuity — ideas that have fallen by the wayside in modern philosophy» (pp. 21-22). It is perhaps here, in these ideas «that have fallen by the wayside», that one should seek for an explanation of the fascination and worldwide appeal of Vico today. Faced with the predicament of his technological age, the sensitive philosopher of the twentieth century tries to find ways to overcome «the barbarism of reflective thought, of the intellect that has lost its connection with the imagination of the whole, which is the flower of wisdom» (p. 28). So he turns to Vico, for whom the true and the made are convertible (*verum-factum*). Man can know only what he has made, that is history and mathematics. Since man has not made nature, Vico claims, he cannot hope to have knowledge of it except insofar as nature

can be captured and rendered intelligible by the net of his mathematical equations. Man must search for truth not in the natural but in the historical world, his own world. For such a search man needs the new science of «*fantasia*» discovered by Vico and revived by Verene.

«*Fantasia*», which is rendered into English as «imagination», plays the central role in Vico's philosophy of man. It is, so to speak, the master key (*chiave maestra*, p. 128) needed to unlock *The Principles of New Science of Giambattista Vico Concerning the Common Nature of the Nations*, to use the complete title of his book. In an attempt to clarify the meaning of this important term and at the same time to justify both his own approach to Vico's philosophy and the title of his book, Verene states that «Vico's ideas constitute a philosophy of recollective universals which generates philosophical understanding from the image not from the rational category» (p. 19). In other words, Vico's work should not be seen as an alternative theory of knowledge or epistemology, but as a new science of wisdom, that is a new way of speaking about the ἀρχαί, «of recollecting and articulating in language the common sense of humanity» (p. 183). This is not the «wisdom» of the hair-splitting logician, nor that of the system-building dialectician. Rather it is the *sapienza poetica*, i. e., the wisdom of the poet or seer who, inspired by the Muses, can read the signs and divine the «truth» of the *storia ideale eterna*. Evidently Vico prefers Homer to Plato. For him the prudent poet using his *sensus communis* may discern the working of divine providence in human history, which moves from the age of gods through the age of heroes to the age of men and back again endlessly and tragically. By *fantasia*, which is one of the forms of memory (the other two being *memoria* and *ingenio*), the first men (*giganti*) created the imaginative universals (*universali fantastici*), such as Jove, Juno, Neptune, and in so doing they gave form and order to their fleeting experiences and to the everchanging world around them. By recollective *fantasia* the new philosopher can re-create and re-live in memory and narrate in verse the true story (μῦθος) of humanity. This is the purpose of Vico's *arte critica or metaphysica*, i.e., his *New Science*. Verene concludes, correctly I think, that Vico is neither the philosopher of *Geist* (e.g., Hegel) nor the philosopher of *Leben* (e.g., Dilthey,) but the philosopher of *fantasia par excellance* (p. 33).

However, this interesting book is not entirely without flaws. It seems that Verene's enthusiasm about Vico's new science of imagination and his determination to stick to the Vichian text, without historical references and comparisons, leaves several points unclear for the uninitiated reader. For example, it is misleading (a problem that stems from Vico himself) to mention the thrice-great Hermes as a *locus classicus* of the imaginative universal created by the wisdom of the Egyptians (pp. 69, 213), in light of the fact that Hermes Trismegistos was a product of the later Hellenistic religious syncretism. Also it seems unfair to portray Aristotle as the representative of the scientific mentality constantly (pp. 30, 203-6), in spite of the evidence which suggests that some important Vichian doctrines, such as *topoi*, *dictionary mentale*, and *fantasia* (at least in its aspect as sudden, intuitive grasping of the universal) owe something to Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica*, *Organon*, and *De Anima* all of which Vico had studied. Furthermore, the uninitiated reader would

have found it helpful to know how much of such Vichian doctrines as the eternal ideal history, the divine providence and the conception of the world as a theater derives from Stoic, Platonic or Neo-Platonic sources, in view of the fact that Vico mentions Plato as one of his four authors (*Autobiography*, pp. 138-9). It is true that some of these problems have been explored by other Vichian scholars, but occasional reference to their solutions would have helped the reader of Verene's book to form a more complete view about Vico's achievement and his place in the history of philosophy as a philosopher of history.

To conclude, there is no doubt that this book has been written with the intention of starting a war against the philosophical establishment, that is, against the way philosophy has been practiced since Descartes' time and more recently by the so-called «philosophers of science». It is expected that these practical-minded practitioners will react to Verene's challenge furiously, if not fearfully, since fear follows thunder for Vico. That, on the other hand, there will be many, especially among the younger philosophers, who will welcome the revival of Vico's heroic vision is also very likely and promising.

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Christos Evangeliou

John P. Anton, *Critical Humanism as a Philosophy of Culture: the Case of E. P. Papanoutsos*, Edited and with an Introduction by Theofanis G. Stavrou, Minneapolis/Minn., The North Central Publishing Company, 1981, 45 σελίδες.

Στις 16 Μαΐου του 1980 στο πανεπιστήμιο της Minnesota οργανώθηκε μία τιμητική εκδήλωση για τον Ε. Π. Παπανούτσο. Κύριος όμιλητής ήταν ο καθηγητής της Έλληνικής Φιλοσοφίας John Anton. Το κείμενο της ομιλίας του καλύπτει τις σελίδες 11-39 του μικρού αλλά περιεκτικού βιβλίου που παρουσιάζουμε. Τις πρώτες 9 σελίδες καλύπτει μία καλογραμμένη Εισαγωγή από τον Θεοφάνη Γ. Σταύρου. Στο τέλος του βιβλίου έχει καταχωριστεί κατάλογος των βασικών συγγραμμάτων του Ε. Π. Παπανούτσου.

Ο Θεοφάνης Γ. Σταύρου αρχίζει την Εισαγωγή του για τη ζωή και το έργο του Παπανούτσου με μία θεμελιακή παρατήρηση: Ο Παπανούτσος άρχισε τη συγγραφική του δραστηριότητα με την επιθυμία να ασχοληθεί με τα προβλήματα της μεταφυσικής, αλλά συνέχισε με ό,τι ονομάζουμε «Φιλοσοφική Ανθρωπολογία». Και μία τέτοια πνευματική πορεία δεν είναι ασυνήθιστη στη ζωή των νέων έθνων-κρατών. Οί πνευματικοί άνθρωποι εκεί θεωρούνται ως διαφωτιστές των συμπατριωτών τους και κριτικοί της πολιτικής, κοινωνικής και πολιτισμικής ζωής, ως παιδαγωγοί και μεταρρυθμιστές. Άσχολούνται δηλαδή οί πνευματικοί άνθρωποι σε αυτές τις περιπτώσεις με έρωτήματα όπως: τί είναι και τί μπορεί να κάνει ο άνθρωπος, με ποιούς θεσμούς και τρόπους σκέψης και δράσης μπορούν να προσδεύσουν οί λαοί. Έτσι, συνειδητά ή όχι στρέφονται στην ανθρωπολογία και γίνονται κριτικοί, συντηρητικοί ή προοδευτικοί. Τέτοια ήταν και ή περίπτωση του