

## USING GIAMBATTISTA VICO TO PONDER TRUTH AND REALITY IN THE DONALD TRUMP ERA

Steve Mackey

**ABSTRACT:** Writers including Arran Gare and Mikhail Epstein are calling for a return to the humanities to tackle contemporary impotence against globally disasterous neoliberal ideas. This paper uses the thesis of Giambattista Vico to take their call a step further. Rather than asking present thinkers to change their perspectives, what is needed is the creation of new thinkers. According to Vico in the past there have been three ages in which people have thought on the bases of very different *sensus communis* or *archai*. That is: since pre-history humanity has used three entirely different, if somewhat overlapping schema for understanding. These are superstition, hero myths and logical reasoning. As will be explained, logical reasoning is no longer adequate. But the seeds of a radically different fourth basis of understanding lie hidden within logical reasoning's body. This forgotten potential is a proper grasp of Aristotle's and others' insightful conceptions of rhetoric, conceptions which have been suppressed by logicians. This paper calls for a paradigm shift in thinking to retrieve these ideas and align philosophy closer to what was once termed the queen of the humanities.

**KEYWORDS:** Rhetoric; Ramus; Ong; Aristotle; Trump; Post-truth

### INTRODUCTION

Philologist, historian and rhetorician Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) theorized that pre-humans left that state of nature by crafting ways of cooperating with each other based on superstitions that mysterious gods and spirits manipulated the world<sup>1</sup>. They concocted elaborate shared beliefs in the supernatural and they invented verbal, visual

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<sup>1</sup> Giambattista Vico and David Marsh, *New science : principles of the new science concerning the common nature of nations*, 3rd. ed., London, Penguin, 1999.

and behavioural representations to give their conceptions concrete form. This advent of mutual mental images enabled classifications of the hard to understand workings of nature. These were classifications which could be held in common. Consequently, and most importantly these communal notions and observances knitted them together in ways which differed from the more simple bonds they had experienced as herd animals. Ever more sophisticated mental conceptualisations could now be coordinated and promulgated. Nothing like this had ever been seen on the planet before. For Vico it was amid these repeatedly elaborating cultural taxonomies that the first true humans were born. It is not clear if this process applied only to the species *homo sapiens*. Perhaps this honour was shared with Neanderthals and maybe with other hominids which also initially achieved the facility to cognise and cooperate in ways vastly superior than had ever been possible in the pre-cultural state. In the millennia which followed this initial leap from animal-life to cultural conception-life, social representations became more to do with the earth than the heavens. Notions were devised of quasi-human mythological heroes who operated in both realms. Poems linked thinking about gods and nature spirits to thinking in the here and now about everyday human lives. This was a modernisation of how humans could conceptualise their societies. There was now only partial dependence on the guidance and rules of superstition. Lastly people began to reason linguistically in the ways which we are familiar with. But are the ultimate social truths of linguistic reality any more or less real than the truths which were obtained from superstitions or hero myths? Were the old ways any less effective? Did societies collapse because their archaic thinking divorced them from reality? Well Egyptian and Greco-Roman culture proved effective for longer than modernism has so far. Vico also refers to long lasting empires in Mesopotamia and the tribes of ancient Sythia in the Eurasian Steppes. Contemporary vehicles of culture may be efficient at sharing scientific and technical cognitions. But realist theory can be used to problematise whether we are any more directly in touch with social reality than the pre-historic humans who attempted that connection via myths and superstitions. Perhaps the peoples of previous eras were just as convinced as we are today that the ways they were thinking put them in touch with what life was and is really all about. Perhaps archaic realities seemed just as vivid, tangible and intellectually sound and just as functional for ordering society. If this realist perspective is considered, might it also be possible to conceive of a future development where another manifestation of symbolism – a fourth generation of human cultural representation distinct from the present one and from the previous two – might be achievable? This would be an era of representations which are no more or less *true* in terms of always ultimately ungraspable realities. But it might be an era where different depiction systems give us better insights into that most ungraspable of all – how to alleviate contemporary planetary crises. These are crises of which the election of

Donald Trump as President of the United States of America would appear to be a symptom<sup>2</sup>. They are crises which some say pose a threat to our very existence.

### USING VICO AND VICHIANISM

Vico's 20-year research project investigated the types of understandings which language and other cultural representations made it possible to conceive of and express. As part of this study he sought out written and sculptured fragments from as far back towards pre-history as possible. His resulting thesis implied a criticism of the then contemporary ideas of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Vico's point was that a theory of reality was not valid if it claimed direct connection between reality and the intuitive expression of the here-and-now thoughts of an individual. Reality could only ever be expressed indirectly in terms of the thinking tools which existed in the *sensus communis*. What was thought of as reality was always only the specific conceptions which were able to be expressed via the ways people were able to communicate with each other. Reality *per se* was never directly contactable. This view contradicted the principle of the Cartesian cogito. In *Discourse on method* Descartes gave his anchor point from which reality could be understood and elaborated as: 'I think, therefore I am ... so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the sceptics'<sup>3</sup>. This was like the previous individualistic grounding of reality in the cogito of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430): In *On The Trinity* Augustine wrote: '...every mind knows and is certain concerning itself ... For even if he doubts, he lives...'<sup>4</sup>. But Vico was not just challenging Descartes and Augustine. His work questioned the millennia-old Platonic certainty implicit in the Socratic Method. This method was premised on the assumption that the *forms* and more concrete manifestations of reality could be apprehended by individuals reflecting critically on the conclusions of their own individual here-and-now thoughts. Unlike Plato, Descartes and Augustine, what Vico was trying to do was to get to the very basis of how people in any era were *able* to think. Unlike the other three Vico did not take thinking for granted. His point was that before one could understand and validate mental claims whether empirical or abstract, one had to understand *how* homo sapiens – and by implication how any other hominid was

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Senior, 'Richard Rorty's 1998 Book Suggested Election 2016 Was Coming', *The New York Times*, New York, The New York Times, 2016., Edward Helmore, 'Something will crack': supposed prophecy of Donald Trump goes viral', *The Guardian*, Guardian Newspapers, 2016., Rupert Read, 'Richard Rorty and How Postmodernism Helped Elect Trump', *The Philosophers' Magazine online*, 2016., Stanley Fish, 'Don't Blame Nietzsche for Donald Trump', *Foreign Policy*, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> René Descartes and F. E. Sutcliffe, *Discourse on method ; and the Meditations*, Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books, 1968. (part iv)

<sup>4</sup> Augustine and G. B. Matthews, *On the Trinity* Vol. Books 8-15, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2002. (bk10 ch10)

able to think. What was the nature of their thinking? What was the mechanism of their thinking? Understanding how they and we are able to think would surely shine a light on the limitations, triumphs and errors of the thinking processes of various individuals and various eras.

### THREE OVERLAPPING THOUGHT ERAS PLUS A NEW ONE

The backbone of Vico's schema was the three different eras of types of thinking referred to above. According to Vico, Herodotus (484-426 b.c.e.) recorded that the Egyptians called these eras: The Age of the Gods, The Age of Heroes, and The Age of Man<sup>5</sup>. For stylistic reasons I will subsequently refer to The Age of Man as The Human Age. As we have said, these cannot be hermetically sealed eras. Their overlaps are obvious - particularly because of widespread religiosity. The UK and Australia which are direct heirs of the Enlightenment even hold Christian prayers in both chambers of their Parliaments at the start of every sitting day<sup>6</sup>. Article 2 section 1 clause 8 of the constitution of another Enlightenment beneficiary, the United States of America, requires a new president to swear an oath or affirm that they will carry out their duties<sup>7</sup>. Overwhelmingly the incomer chooses to swear on one or two bibles. Few have been thought of as atheistic<sup>8</sup>. In fiction, comic book heroes abound. In real life national heroes are recognised annually at events such as the (UK) Queen's Birthday and Australia Day. The USA bestows various medals on its heroes<sup>9</sup>. Statues of national heroes are common in important public squares the world over<sup>10</sup>. But, setting religious and heroic inflections aside what the present article is more interested to critique is the way Trump is thought about in the apparently more rational context of the Human Age. This is the age extending from at least the Egyptians, when reasoning with reference to ordinary people was seemingly not overwhelmed by obeisance to the

<sup>5</sup> Vico and Marsh, *New science : principles of the new science concerning the common nature of nations*, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Anon, *About Parliament: How Parliament works, Prayers* UK Parliament, 2017a. Accessed 27 March 2017, Available from <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/prayers/>., Anne Twomey, *Prayers in Parliament and the Constitution*, Sydney University, 2015. Accessed 27 March 2017, Available from [http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/cru/2012/08/prayers\\_in\\_parliament\\_and\\_the\\_1.html](http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/cru/2012/08/prayers_in_parliament_and_the_1.html).

<sup>7</sup> Founding Fathers, *The Constitution*, The White House, 2017. Accessed 2 April 2017, Available from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/constitution>.

<sup>8</sup> David Masci, 'Almost all U.S. presidents, including Trump, have been Christians', Pew Research Centre, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Anon, *The medal of honor Congressional medal of \_honor\_society*, 2017b. Accessed 27 March 2017, Available from <http://www.cmohs.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> contributors Wikipedia, *Equestrian statues* Wikipediacomunity, 2017. Accessed 28 March 2017, Available from

[https://www.google.com.au/webhp?hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi37tKRjPjSAhVJObwKHbTFB2kQPAgD#hl=en&q=war+hero+statues+on+horses&\\*&spf=1](https://www.google.com.au/webhp?hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi37tKRjPjSAhVJObwKHbTFB2kQPAgD#hl=en&q=war+hero+statues+on+horses&*&spf=1).

supernatural. Later this thesis will make the bold suggestion that in Vichian terms a fourth Age, a forth approach to thinking, has to and probably *is* evolving – although it may not be evolving fast enough. This is an Age which Vico would have had no inkling about, but which none the less must steadily come to overlay and replace the Human Age as the dominant mode of thought globally. The thesis will trace the following progression: First, for Vico, the emergence from primordial to initial humanity involved outright superstition which literally miraculously created the first cultural conceiving mechanisms. Secondly the Age of Heroes myths facilitated a more sophisticated milieu organised around more earthly, proto-rational notions of what people are and how they could operate. Heroes here on earth had an existence separate from and sometimes in antagonism to previously all powerful superstition and religiosity. For instance the latterly Phoenician princess Europa was abducted by the god Zeus. The heroes Achilles, Ajax and Hector fought in a bloodbath precipitated by quarrelling gods Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. Thirdly the Human Age developed out of the Age of Heroes. This third age accelerated rapidly during the Classical period. It intensified in the Renaissance and culminated in the Enlightenment and modernism. Many people, however atheistic, remain inflected by religion, superstition, and myth. Who has not either touched wood, thrown a pinch of spilt salt over their left shoulder, avoided walking under a ladder, been curious about their star sign, regarded the number 13 and black cats quizzically, cheered a sporting hero, respected war veterans commemorations, attended, or had to excuse themselves from attending religious worship, or similar? Vico himself appears to have been, rather contradictorily, a devout Christian and many people might agree that there is no harm in retaining compassionate values wherever they come from. But even allowing for all positive archaic and contemporary mental impulses, are the present ways that most of us think capable of fostering the cognitions needed for planetary survival? We are living in a time of mass human tragedies and looming environmental suicide. Yet amid this crisis dominant ways of conceiving political processes have proved compatible with the election of Donald Trump as president of the world's super power.

#### THE 45<sup>TH</sup> PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Donald John Trump is now the democratically chosen leader, the single most important personality of the nation which overwhelmingly influences the culture, the politics and the economic fortune of the rest of the world<sup>11</sup>. Other recent expressions of

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<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Tunstall, *The media are American : Anglo-American media in the world*, 2nd ed., London, Constable, 1994., G. John Ikenberry, *America unrivaled : the future of the balance of power*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002., Robert J. Jackson and Philip Towle, *Temptations of power The United States in global politics after 9/11*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

apparent democracy are similarly worrying. For instance many would say that the debates leading to Brexit have not covered the UK political process with glory<sup>12</sup>. Then there are the massive migrations of people caused by war, unrest and hunger in the Middle East and Africa. There is the rise of the far right in Europe, and other worrying presidencies such as those in Russia, the Philippines and Turkey. This is all going on amid the failure of measures against global warming and thus planetary extinction. Might not the election of Trump be seen as akin to the dropping dead of a canary – the bird with delicate respiratory needs which traditional miners took underground to warn them when a poisonous atmosphere was about to kill them? With supreme prescience, in 1998 in a book about the decline of the United States political left Richard Rorty wrote:

Many writers on socioeconomic policy have warned that the old industrialised democracies are heading into a Weimar-like period, one in which populist movements are likely to overturn constitutional governments...members of labor unions, and unorganised unskilled workers, will sooner or later realise that their government is not even trying to prevent wages from sinking or prevent jobs from being exported. Around the same time, they will realise that suburban white-collar workers – themselves desperately afraid of being downsized, are not going to let themselves be taxed to provide social benefits for anyone else.

At that point something will crack. The non-suburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for – someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots...once a strongman takes office, nobody can predict what will happen. In 1932, most of the predictions made about what would happen if Hindenburg named Hitler chancellor were wildly overoptimistic.

One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out. Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion. The words ‘nigger’ and ‘kike’ will once again be heard in the workplace. All the sadism which the academic left has tried to make unacceptable to its students will come flooding back. All the resentment which badly educated Americans feel about having their manners dictated to them by college graduates will find an outlet<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Harry Mount, *Summer madness : how Brexit split the Tories, destroyed Labour and divided the country*, London, Biteback Publishing, 2017., Craig Oliver, *Unleashing demons : the inside story of Brexit*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2016., Tim Shipman, *All out war : Brexit and the sinking of Britain's political class*, EPub edition. ed., London, William Collins, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Rorty, *Achieving our country : leftist thought in twentieth-century America*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 89-90.

Rorty died in 2007. His prediction joins those of many marginalised analysts who continue to warn about the ill effects of neoliberalism. But why are they marginalised? Why do their warnings fall on ears which at best are hard of hearing? The answer to that question is the central thesis of this paper. Claiming affiliation to a Vichian perspective this paper will argue that Human Age conceiving systems are no longer fit for purpose. If they ever were fully fit they certainly seem to be incapable of enabling people to sufficiently understand the political and cultural events which are leading to the possible close down of human life on Planet Earth. We will claim that this fundamentally, insufficient cognitive ability of the Human Age is principally why the intellectual investment of hundreds of authors seems to be of little consequence. These are authors such as: Steffen Mau who charts European middle class collaboration in the rise of neoliberalism<sup>14</sup>, Wendy Brown who ponders whether democracy can survive this cultural form<sup>15</sup> and Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell. The latter's edited book<sup>16</sup> brings together a fearsome battery of trenchant and erudite critics of this political/economic form. But to what effect? Arran Gare's *Manifesto for the future*<sup>17</sup> is at risk of joining these underused tomes. Gare suggests that increased outrage over the destruction of the biosphere and fear for human survival has the best hope of turning hearts and minds against current pathological ideologies. The below will end with a reference to Gare's latest contribution to suggest that it shows a hint of the necessary new form of thinking which this present paper argues for. The thesis will be that Gare's manifesto-style polemic and his recommendation of a return to the humanities, signal, whether he intends this or not, a recognition that the mainstream conceiving mechanisms of the Human Age are nearing exhaustion. Can a case be made that Gare is either deliberately, or by default hinting that a different paradigm of cognitive ability is overdue if people are to fully understand what is at stake?

## RHETORIC IN THE AGE OF TRUMPISM

We will return to these questions with a discussion of Gare's text near the end. For the meantime we will conclude arguments to do with the implications of the election of Trump. This paper suggests that those who abhor this development might be interested

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<sup>14</sup> Steffen Mau, *Inequality, marketization and the majority class : why did the European middle classes accept neo-liberalism?*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the demos : neoliberalism's stealth revolution*, New York, Zone Books, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell, 'Alternatives to neoliberalism : Towards equality and democracy', Policy Press, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Arran Gare, *The philosophical foundations of ecological civilization : a manifesto for the future*, London, Routledge, 2017.

in the following proposition which is claimed to be in line with Vichian ideas. Might we compare the embarrassment, puzzlement, astonishment, the *incredulity* even of the cognoscenti on election night as tantamount to an encounter with a new and alien way of thinking? Could what was experienced by many thought leaders and respected commentators be seen as requiring a whole new way of seeing the world? The argument will be made below that this close encounter of the third kind might be more usefully analogised as mainstream intellectualism coming face to face with a lithopedion phenomenon. A lithopedion, or stone baby as it was called by the Ancient Greeks, is a calcified dead fetus which may be carried for many years unnoticed before some perturbation reveals its presence. In this analogy this ugly lithopedion was the at-last-discovered fate of what Aristotle conceived as the counterpart or *antistrophos* to dialectic - dialectic in the sense of logical reasoning<sup>18</sup>. *Antistrophos* was a Greek term for how different sounds harmonise with each other to bring about music. Aristotle used *antistrophos* to emphasise the importance of rhetoric as the indispensable counterpart to dialectic in the discursive process. Discourse is meant here as the conveyance and enabling of thought via internal images, external speech, writing and so on. Early Arabic philosophers who commentated on Aristotle recognised that his descriptions of rhetoric marked it as a fundamental component of how thought is produced. Because of this al-Farabi (died 951), Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198) among others categorised Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as among his *Organon* of logical works<sup>19</sup>. However in the pre-modern Occident *Rhetoric* was not listed among those six books: *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Categories*, *Topics*, *On Interpretation*, *Sophistical Refutations*. Rhetoric at Cicero's time (106-43 b.c.e.) was fundamental to the way Roman politics, law and thus society in general operated. The Romans developed the rhetoric which was taught in Ancient Greece. The main Greek texts on this subject were Aristotle's *Rhetoric* – a still useful manual of how to use this art and Plato's *Gorgias* which decried it as propagandistic trickery taught by deceiving sophists. Irrespective of these mixed views rhetoric became central to Roman education and a main plank of European education throughout the Middle Ages into the Renaissance and beyond. It was fundamental to the curriculum in schools, home-schooling, universities, cathedrals and monasteries<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Plato and Joe Sachs, 'Gorgias and Rhetoric', *Focus Philosophical Library*, Newburyport, Focus Publishing/R. Pullins Co., 2012, p. 17., Aristotle and Hugh Lawson-Tancred, *The art of rhetoric*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 66. 1354a

<sup>19</sup> Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in medieval Arabic philosophy*, Leiden ; New York, E.J. Brill, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> John Ward, *Ciceronian rhetoric in treatise, scholion, and commentary*, Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols, 1995, p. 56., James Jerome Murphy, et al., *A synoptic history of classical rhetoric*, 3rd ed., Mahwah, N.J., Hermagoras Press, 2003, pp. 206-26., Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Renaissance debates on rhetoric*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 1., Laurent Pernot, *Rhetoric in antiquity*, Catholic University of America Press, 2005. Accessed, Available from <http://purl.oclc.org/DLF/benchreproo212>



Herrick tells us that: ‘...perhaps rhetoric’s greatest influence over a civilisation was achieved in Europe during the period known as the Renaissance...Skill in rhetoric then became the hallmark of the educated person in the Renaissance, much as it had been in Cicero’s Rome’<sup>21</sup>. Bizzell and Herzberg tell us that: ‘The study of rhetoric dominated formal education in most of Europe and the United States well into the nineteenth century’<sup>22</sup>. However the particular conception which Aristotle had of rhetoric did not make it to full term. The potential for a full academic gestation of this once Europe-wide primary academic subject was always under threat. It laboured under Plato’s and presumably Socrates’ condemnation that it was the art of sophists who trained people in deception<sup>23</sup>. But it was when the modern age became enamored with mathematical and technological ways of reasoning<sup>24</sup> that a fully formed understanding of rhetoric was curtailed from mainstream education. Rhetorical scholars of the modern era are catalogued by Bizzell and Herzberg to include Nietzsche. Nietzsche remarked on rhetoric’s downfall at the start of a series of lectures on rhetoric to a small study group at the University of Basel in 1872:

The extraordinary development of the concept of rhetoric belongs to the specific differences between the ancients and the moderns: in recent times this art stands in some dispute, and even when it is used, the best application to which it is put by our moderns is nothing short of dilettantism and crude empiricism.<sup>25</sup>

Foucault and Derrida along with Stanley Fish are listed by Bizzell and Herzberg as more recent scholars of the rhetorical tradition. But these four are predominantly

<http://ezproxy.deakin.edu.au/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctt284x1w>

<http://ezproxy.deakin.edu.au/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/deakin/detail.action?docID=3134764>

<http://ezproxy.deakin.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=sit&db=e000xww&AN=500944.>, Walter Ong, *Ramus, method and the decay of dialogue : from the art of discourse to the art of reason*, London, University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 275-7., Robert Black, *Humanism and education in medieval and Renaissance Italy : tradition and innovation in Latin schools from the twelfth to the fifteenth century*, Cambridge, UK ; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001., Christopher Carlsmith, *A Renaissance education schooling in Bergamo and the Venetian Republic, 1500-1650*, Toronto [Ont.], University of Toronto Press, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> James Herrick, *The history and theory of rhetoric : an introduction*, 3rd ed., Boston, Allyn and Beacon, 2005, pp. 148-50.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, *The rhetorical tradition : readings from classical times to the present*, 2nd ed., Boston, Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. W. D. Woodhead, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, *The cultural meaning of the scientific revolution*, 1st ed., New York, A.A. Knopf, 1988., Michael E. Hobart and Zachary Sayre Schiffman, *Information ages : literacy, numeracy, and the computer revolution*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche in Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair and David J. Parent (eds.), *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 3.

thought of not as resurrecting an old, but rather as founding and developing a radically *new* intellectual tradition which goes under the broad heading of post-modern theory. Why and where this rift started, when rhetoric proper began its eclipse from the mainstream intellectual agenda is most clearly marked in the ideas and writings of Peter Ramus (1515-1572). At the end of Ramus's century the early Enlightenment salons became enthralled by mathematicians like Galileo (1564-1642), Descartes (1596-1650) and later Newton (1642-1726). Discursive approaches to describing reality where persuasive arguments were important lost status and favour to more calculable, more apparently demonstrable scientific processes. Aristotle's *antistrophos*-balanced music of reasoning became tone deaf and one sided<sup>26</sup>. The eighteenth and nineteenth century versions of rhetoric which Nietzsche calls dilettante were almost conceptually unrecognizable compared with what rhetoric meant in earlier periods. Under the influence of Ramus in particular the first three fundamental parts of classical rhetorical theory had been stripped out<sup>27</sup>. These were: (1) invention – that is deciding what to say, (2) judgment of how best to express matters and (3) memory in the sense of the recall of the mind's most important knowledges. These three parts were to be only the province of dialectic, that is of what we might now call non-specialist logical thought or reasoning. With this stripping out came a diminution of the art and science of examining how, irrespective of logic, persuasion also harnesses our minds. From the eighteenth century onward, when it was not simply a derogatory term to do with sophistry, the notion *rhetoric* came to be associated only with the other two parts of the traditional rhetoric theory schema. These were (4) the style of language, (we might now say style of texts), which were appropriate to the purpose of the communication and (5) the way the communication was delivered – body language in an orator or we might refer to the visual, oral and so on media choices available today. In the nineteenth century rhetoric was largely about elocution and *belles lettres* – i.e. about how to speak and write well and effectively<sup>28</sup>. Rhetoric became less of an intellectual consideration. No longer did believability demand a tri-partite balance between (a) logos or logic with

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<sup>26</sup> Ong, *Ramus, method and the decay of dialogue : from the art of discourse to the art of reason.*, Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis : the hidden agenda of modernity*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Petrus Ramus, James Jerome Murphy and Carole Elizabeth Newlands, *Arguments in rhetoric against Quintilian : translation and text of Peter Ramus's Rhetoricae distinctiones in Quintilianum (1549)*, Pbk. ed., Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2010., Petrus Ramus and Rollo MacIlmaine, *The logike of the most excellent philosopher P. Ramus martyr: newly translated, and in diuers places corrected, after the minde of the author. Per M. Roll. Makylmeneum Scotum, rogatu viri honestissimi, M. AEgidij Hamlini (1581)*, 1581., Ong, *Ramus, method and the decay of dialogue : from the art of discourse to the art of reason.*

<sup>28</sup> James A. Herrick, *The history and theory of rhetoric : an introduction*, 4th ed., Boston, Mass., Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2009.

(b) ethos - the moral standing of the communicator and (c) pathos i.e. consideration or critique of the affectual influences on the audience. Instead a fact, was a fact, was a fact. Logos and the dialectic it conveyed clinically and dispassionately was regarded as the most important element of modern thought. Henceforth people were taught that the world worked and could be understood logically and technologically. Attention to the personal elements and implication of reasoning were sidelined. But as with any valuable items cast off at the side of the road the obvious broader worth of rhetoric was soon taken up by others. However these others tended not to be those with a philosophical vocation. Instead, rather like Plato's loathed sophists, they tended to be people who are out to make money and a name for themselves. The unwanted gift of the power of rhetoric was appropriated by the self-interested forces of big business and the political elite. In processes described implicitly by the titles of such books as *The unseen power: public relations, a history*<sup>29</sup>, *PR: A social history of spin*<sup>30</sup> and *Creating the corporate soul: the rise of public relations and corporate imagery in American big business*<sup>31</sup> these forces used this giveaway extensively and sophisticatedly to develop the predominant approaches to how we thought in the twentieth century and think in the twenty-first. Of course psychology has since sprung up as a discipline in the gap between the scientific and the human. But whether it is part of the post-Ramus dialectical branch of understanding or the withered more humanistic rhetorical branch is still being debated<sup>32</sup>. The retreat from rhetoric was a retreat from millennia-old debates about the human workings of the conceptual field. It was not a revolution or a struggle over the actual content of thought in the psyche – i.e. this was not a political or ideological struggle *per se*. This difference can be expressed with respect to Marxism: In *The German ideology* Marx and Engels wrote:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production.<sup>33</sup>

The thesis of the present paper is that this class-based, materialist approach does not account for the underlying *nature* of, or the *ways* of thinking. Marx and Engels deal

<sup>29</sup> Scott M. Cutlip, *The unseen power : public relations, a history*, Hillsdale, N.J., Erlbaum Associates, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart Ewen, *PR! : a social history of spin*, 1st ed., New York, Basic Books, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Marchand, *Creating the corporate soul : the rise of public relations and corporate imagery in American big business*, Berkeley, Calif. ; London, University of California Press, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Gregg Henriques, 'The "Is Psychology a Science?" Debate', *Psychology Today*, 2016., Scott Lilienfeld, 'Is psychology a science?', *The Conversation*, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology', in Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org), Progress Publishers, 2000.

with the things which are thought and why those particular things are thought, but they do not provide a philosophy of how thinking itself operates. In a discussion of the distinction between Marx's materially based approach and Vico's concern with conceiving reality communicatively Terence Ball points out that:

Vico's doctrine that we can know civil society because we ourselves have made it rests, I contend, upon a communicative conception of making (as when we 'make' an agreement or 'make sense'), while Marx's version of this doctrine relies upon 'making' in the technical-productive sense of fabrication or manufacture and applies, moreover, not only to human society but to nature as well.<sup>34</sup>

In other words Marx was concerned with the *means* of giving voice to certain ideas over others in a way which entrenched inequality. For Marx domination or counter domination involved material processes such as access to education and the media. Vico on the other hand was more concerned with the psychic processes of thinking itself. His *The New Science*<sup>35</sup> is about how thinking came about in the first place and then about how *sensus communis* shapes and supports all thinking. His is not a theory which deals with whether aspects of thinking are suppressed or promoted. Instead it is concerned with *how* we come to think what we think rather than what we think about. The position of this present paper is that now in most advanced countries Marx and Engel's complaint of ideological domination is hard to maintain. The material conditions are available to educate and promulgate ideas which are different to ruling class ideas. The real problem is that since an Aristotelian conception of how people think was dismissed, the mainstream of society has been hamstrung in its search for an effective philosophy of social reality because it does not know *how* to think. On the other hand those who *do* know how people's thinking works tend to shun a vocational engagement with philosophy. The Philistines among these are people with power and money who, besides having no prejudice against the full embrace of theories, designs and deployment of rhetoric also have no scruples about how to exploit it. It was this privatised desecration of this body of knowledge, this shocking distortion, which jumped out like a long mis-gestated *lithopedion* on the night Trump was declared the winner.

## KUHN'S PARADIGM AND THE SHOCK AND HORROR OF TRUMP'S ELECTION

If sufficient of the above argument is allowed, might the thesis continue along the lines

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<sup>34</sup> Terence Ball, 'Vico and Marx on 'Making' History', *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Vico and Marsh, *New science : principles of the new science concerning the common nature of nations*.

that: The intellectual impact of Trump's election, this encounter of the third kind, might justify some level of analogy to the shocks which we might presume would be felt if the type of thinking in The Age of Gods suddenly came up against thinking in terms of The Age of Heroes. Or when the latter form of thinking came up against its contradictions in The Human Age? If this is too florid an analogy – how about the clash of thought when nineteenth century Christianity encountered Darwinism? The point being made here is that rather as in the case of Kuhn's Paradigm, might an entire way of looking at the world – in this case the US political world and its consequences – now be vulnerable to being flipped? If we consider this proposition for a while, how are we to characterise the nature or the dimensions of this flipping? Should this flipping be seen as just a rude waking up or a kind of harsh zig zag in inevitable and undeniable Human Age ways of thinking our reality? Or are we at a tipping point? Are we seeing the addition of some of the last straws on a creaky camel's back – a back already labouring under incredulity about our present reasoning modes? Are we at a time when so many domestic and international emergencies are breaking out that the existing substantive *ways* of social and political thought are no longer sufficient and can no longer be relied upon? Are we at a point where current ways of thinking are beginning to lose devotees in a more substantial ways to when hippies took what turned out to be a short holiday from mainstream culture? Are we seeing the beginning of a more concrete flipping like the flip from nature spirits and pantheons towards Jason and the Argonauts? Or a flip after The Age of Heroes lost its relevance, to the comparative brilliance of classical, renaissance and Enlightenment ways of thinking? Might a shattering of faith in contemporary social organisation and its politics precipitate people out of the Age of Human-style thinking into something else? Might a welling up of current fears and intellectual frustrations supply the impetus for such a shift? The thesis of this paper is that in each of Vico's three distinguishable but not entirely separate eras, revolutionary new paradigms of how it was possible to think developed for a specific reason. They developed as survival mechanisms. That is humanity or sections of humanity in competition for survival vis-a-vis a threatening environment – environments perhaps orchestrated by other sections of humanity – evolved or had to evolve, had to in fact quantum leap forward in their ways of thinking. If such a thesis can be considered perhaps we can speculate that another fundamental change in the basis of thinking is now due or overdue. With respect to Vico's schema we will call this hypothetical new age: The Age of Planetary Survival and partly characterise it as the age in which a scholarly appreciation of rhetorical theory and practice is at last taken seriously.

#### GARE'S PARADIGM AND THE AGE OF PLANETARY SURVIVAL

I would suggest that the realisation of the need for a change to the Age of Planetary

Survival thinking is becoming daily more obvious. One of the reasons is the embarrassment about the lack of potency of current intellectualism<sup>36</sup>. Orthodox philosophical attacks on the toxicity of neoliberalism and the increasing proximity of its dangers seems insufficient to incentivise large numbers of people to take notice. The thesis of this essay is that this lack of potency is to do with a distorted intellectual culture which started under the influence of Ramism and which continued in subsequent mainstream politics and academia. A heritage of wrong ideas has made it difficult to conceptualise what it means to be human. Consequently efforts to attain the full potentialities of a truly human civilisations has not been prioritised. Instead we have headed towards the post-human *One-dimensional man* society which Marcuse warns about:

The scientific method led to the ever-more-effective domination of nature [and] thus came to provide the pure concepts as well as the instrumentalities for the ever-more-effective domination of man by man through the domination of nature.<sup>37</sup>

Vichians Ernesto Grassi (1902-1991) and Donald Verene point to a way out of this logico-rationalistic exclusion of wider human imagination. They attack thinking aimed at producing a purportedly efficient society which is deficient in, and disrespectful to, personal wisdom<sup>38</sup>. Grassi advocates a rhetorical logic inspired by the illustrative metaphors used in everyday discourse. This art of imaginative descriptive language should be given priority over the pseudo-mathematical codes of modern formal logic. Hobart & Schiffman<sup>39</sup> chart how modern calculus-style formal logic ascended from Descartes via the Enlightenment mathematical tradition. Ong compares modern formal logic to the very wordy medieval formal logic which had been an attempt to develop the work of Aristotle's *Organon*<sup>40</sup>. But between these medieval and modern

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<sup>36</sup> Dane S. Claussen, *Anti-intellectualism in American media : magazines & higher education*, New York, P. Lang, 2004., Donald N. Wood, *Post-intellectualism and the decline of democracy : the failure of reason and responsibility in the twentieth century*, Westport, Conn., Praeger, 1996., Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American life*, London, Cape, 1964., John Elder, 'Is anti-intellectualism killing the national conversation?', *The Age* Melbourne, Fairfax, 2015., Ray Williams, 'Anti-Intellectualism and the "Dumbing Down" of America', *Psychology Today*, HealthProfessionals.com, 2014., Alex Berezow, 'Anti-Intellectualism Is Biggest Threat to Modern Society', American Council on Science and Health, 2016., Saffron Huang, 'A departure from truth', *Harvard Political Review*, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One dimensional man*, London, Abacus, 1972, p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico's science of imagination*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981, pp. 195-203.

<sup>39</sup> Hobart and Schiffman, *Information ages : literacy, numeracy, and the computer revolution*.

<sup>40</sup> Medieval formal logic was replete with arguments descending from Aristotle's *Categories* and *Topics* involving conceptual terms such as: '...supposition (*supposito*), relative terms (*relata*), extension (*ampliatio*), appellation (*appellatio*), restriction (*restrictio*), distribution (*distributio*), exponible (*eponibilia*).' Ong, *Ramus, method and the decay of dialogue : from the art of discourse to the art of reason*, p. 54; '...definition, genus, species,

periods notions of logic were marked by an alternative approach. This interlude spanned from Peter of Spain's 13<sup>th</sup> century *Summulae logicales*<sup>41</sup>, through Rudolph Agricola's 15<sup>th</sup> century *De inventione dialectica*<sup>42</sup> to Ramus's 16<sup>th</sup> century *The Logike*<sup>43</sup> and his *Method*<sup>44</sup>. Ong explains how Peter of Spain and his contemporaries created a popularised form of logic which was simpler to understand by disinterested students (see note <sup>40</sup>). This was: “the art of arts and the science of sciences,” which was traditionally referred to as *dialectic*.<sup>45</sup> This less rigorous form was developed by Rudolph Agricola (1444-1485) into a sort of dialectic/rhetoric hybrid:

...the goal of dialectic is to speak in a plausible manner about the subject proposed...if a person teaches with the intention of awakening belief by means of his speech and in order to draw the mind of the auditor to him through words,

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property, whole, parts, conjugates, adjacents, act, subjects, efficient agents, end, consequences, intended effects, place, time, connections, contingents, name, pronunciation, compared things, like things, opposites, differences.’ *ibid.*, p. 122.

Modern formal logic contains expressions such as: ‘Specifically, we need to suppose that the Equivalence Schema,

(i) It is true that P iff\* P,

may validly be inferred from the truth/assertion platitude (on which matter see discussion note I);

that we may affirm each relevant instance of the schema,

(ii) “P” says that P,

(iii) that a sentence may be characterised as true just in case the proposition it expresses is true,

(iv) the validity of modus tollens, and that it is harmless to characterise “ ‘P’ corresponds to the facts” as, e.g., “Things are as ‘P’ says they are”.<sup>46</sup>

(Crispin Wright, *Truth and objectivity*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 34.)

When contemplating either the above medieval or the modern expressions of logic, (the latter is copied and formatted faithfully), one might be forgiven the sentiment that life simply is not long enough for one to precisely figure out what these people are trying to convey.

\*[sic]

<sup>41</sup> Pedro and Joseph Patrick Michael Mullally, *The Summulae logicales of Peter of Spain*, Notre Dame, Ind, University of Notre Dame Press, 1960.

<sup>42</sup> Rudolf Agricola, ‘Rodolphi Agricolae,... de Inventione dialectica libri tres, cum scholiis Joannis Matthaei Phrissemii’, *Electronic reproduction, ProQuest, Cambridge, UK. Early European Books: Printed sources to 1700*, Paris, apud S. Colinaeum, 1529.

<sup>43</sup> Ramus and MacIlmaine, *The logike of the most excellent philosopher P. Ramus martyr: newly translated, and in diuers places corrected, after the minde of the author. Per M. Roll. Makybmeneum Scotum, rogatu viri honestissimi, M. AEGidij Hamlini (1581)*.

<sup>44</sup> Petrus Ramus, *Quod Sit Unica Doctrinae Instituendae Methodus [That there is one only of the doctrine of a method is to be instituted]*, Wechel [the Bavarian State Library 2009], 1557.

<sup>45</sup> Ong, *Ramus, method and the decay of dialogue : from the art of discourse to the art of reason*, p. 101.

then insofar as he does this, he is carrying on the business of the dialectician.<sup>46</sup>

Ramus developed these precursors' thoughts with a spatial-geometric approach to reasoning or ratiocination while insisting that Aristotle had been wrong about rhetoric<sup>47</sup>. The new book and woodcut technology enabled *inventio* and *disposito* to be more easily presented as cold hard facts and therefore to do with dialectic or logic rather than with the emotions of oratorical rhetoric<sup>48</sup>. Horizontal hierarchy diagrams set out knowledge such as genus, then species, then sub-species, then sub-sub species and so on in a systematic manner from left to right across the pages. Much of the complexity and critique of the *Organon* was jettisoned. The new approach caused controversies among scholastic logicians. It was however welcomed by a burgeoning publishing industry and readership and by rapidly expanding universities, particularly in protestant North Europe. Moving invention and disposition out of rhetoric undermined its two millennia-old status. Rhetoric ceased to be a vital assistant to reasoning and popularising particular understandings. It became only to do with ornamental eloquence. It became about how to talk and write in a clear, attractive or emotionally moving manner. The practice and critique of ordinary human persuasion in reaching pragmatic understandings was side-lined by the mainstream. In the twentieth century, opposing this trend away from contemplative and human to human communication Grassi wrote:

A logic that holds “conveying meanings” and metaphors as the origin and basis of the interpretation of sensory phenomena is, in contrast to rational logic, a logic of images and metaphors. It will claim to be a logic of invention and not deduction...The primacy of such a logic and ingenious imagistic language lies in the fact that it is only from this field that the meanings of phenomena can be conveyed with regard to their human connotation.<sup>49</sup>

This quote from Grassi can be compared to the sentiment on page 165 in Gare (2017). Here Epstein presents this metaphorical conveyance of meaning as the very construction of the human being:

The crucial distinction between the humanities and sciences is that in the humanities the subject and the object of the study coincide; in the sciences,

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<sup>46</sup> Rudolph Agricola, ‘Three books concerning dialectical invention (extract)’, in Wayne A. Rebhorn (ed.), *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn, London, Cornell University Press, 2000, pp. 42-56, pp. 48-9.

<sup>47</sup> Ong, *Ramus, method and the decay of dialogue : from the art of discourse to the art of reason*, p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as philosophy : the humanist tradition*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980, p. 99.



humans are studied by humans and for humans. Therefore, to study the human being also means to create humanness itself: every act of the description of a human is, by the same token, an event of one's self-construction. In a wholly practical sense, the humanities create the human, as human beings are transformed by the study of literature, art, languages, history and philosophy: the humanities humanize.<sup>50</sup>

Neither Epstein nor Gare engage directly with notions of rhetoric in the ways discussed above. None the less a case might be made that they share some of the concerns of this present essay. They both refer to either the liberal arts or the humanities. These are fields which the Oxford English Dictionary gives as interchangeable and both at one time centrally involved with rhetoric. In *Renaissance debates on rhetoric*<sup>51</sup> Wayne Rebhorn writes: 'Displacing dialectic, which had reigned supreme during the late Middle Ages, rhetoric became the queen of the liberal arts.'<sup>52</sup> While there have been other claims to this crown, including at various times philosophy and even theology, rhetoric's credible claim to this title remains.<sup>53</sup> Could it be that the apparently *new* way to break the stranglehold of neoliberal ideology which Epstein and Gare advocate in is in fact a very old one?

## CONCLUSION

This essay suggests that an overdue correction from a wrong philosophical turn in the past is possibly coming, that this turn is overdue and that it will probably be too late. Another project would be needed to properly describe this potential paradigm shift in detail. All that this essay has tried to do is to put such a project on the agenda. This agenda would involve re-capturing Renaissance understandings to equip people with the ability to think in the human terms which Gare and Epstein call for. It would open up another front in the criticism of Cartesianism and the critique of modern philosophy in general. In particular it would detail the legacy which venerable rhetorical traditions have left to postmodern theories. It would also ponder why postmodern theories appear coy to admit this origin. Perhaps most importantly this project would help to better conceive how contemporary thinking has been manipulated by the co-option and abomination of rhetoric in consumerist marketing

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<sup>50</sup> Mikhail Epstein and Igor Klyukanov, *The transformative humanities : a manifesto*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Rebhorn, *Renaissance debates on rhetoric*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Sloan , *Encyclopedia of rhetoric*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. ix., Pernot *Rhetoric in antiquity*, Accessed., Satterlee , *Ambrose of Milan's method of mystagogical preaching*, Collegeville, Minn., Liturgical Press, 2002, p. 36.

processes. Along the way it might lessen the present level of scorn about the workings of rhetoric and associated fields like public relations, a scorn which hinders a proper study of the way these fields have been colonised by the powerful. In a wider sense this agenda might go some of the way towards quelling anti-intellectualism and raising the status of philosophy. The study would start back at that major fork in the road at the beginning of modernism. It would choose the direction which was not taken by mainstream intellectualism. Instead of the route which led from forms of dialectic and early mathematics to analytic philosophy it would chose the route which led from Renaissance rhetoric into a fog. At the other side of the fog were the disjointed side roads of various postmodern theories which rarely admit their starting point and thus their true nature and potential.

truthsmith3282@gmail.com  
Deakin University

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