

Which hero, which story? René Descartes and Giambattista Vico on the humanities and leadership education

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This essay explores the debate currently taking place about the role of the humanities in higher education in general and management and leadership education in particular. This debate is not new, but begins with the writings of René Descartes and Giambattista Vico who have very different views of the value of the humanities. Descartes attempts to reduce education to a narrow rational method while Vico, who certainly valued math and science, also included the humanities, and provides a far richer model for higher education in general and leadership education in particular. The essay also reviews the renewed interest in narrative in a number of disciplines, which harks back to Vico's understanding of the importance of history and narrative and has enjoyed a revival of interest among psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers as well as among management and leadership educators. Finally, the essay argues for the importance of a contemporary commitment to the arts and humanities as critical for the development of curricula for management and leadership programs.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The contemporary debate about the place of the humanities in business and professional institutions of higher education seems to have begun in the mid-1980s with writers like Robert Goddard arguing in the *Personnel Journal* that personnel departments ought to hire humanities graduates because they are able to think clearly and imaginatively and write well (Goddard 1986, *passim*). The debate continues to this day with, for example, William Major's recent article in *Inside Higher Ed*, entitled 'Essay Calling for a New Perspective on Business Schools and the Humanities,' where Major argues, quite simply, that we ought to 'close the business schools' and 'save the humanities' (Major 2014). The essay follows on the heels of reports in *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* of the elimination of language, classics, and philosophy departments in large universities and the financial distress and closing of small liberal arts colleges (*ibid.*, para 1). Major decries the 'philistinism' of governors Rick Scott of Florida and Patrick McCrory of North Carolina, 'who apparently see in the humanities a waste of time and taxpayer subsidies' (*ibid.*, para 1).

Why save the humanities and close business schools? Major notes that the 2013 Report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences argued that the humanities 'go beyond the immediate and instrumental to help us understand the past and the future' (*ibid.*, para 14). He also notes that *The New York Times* published three reports in 2013 on

the humanities, which featured David Brooks, Verlyn Klinkenborg, and Stanley Fish decrying the disappearance of humanities courses and departments, but concluding that there is not much to be done, because humanities courses have been taught badly by some professors and that writing well apparently is not valued any longer by the market-driven, vocational trajectory of higher education. Major's own argument is 'that one of the beauties of the liberal arts degree is that it is meant to do nothing' (ibid., para 17), but that it brings a certain pleasure and teaches the student contemplation, which prepares him or her for a good life even if it does not further the student vocationally: 'Making a living rather than living is a sign of desperation' (ibid., para 24).

A similar debate has taken place about the role of the humanities in management and leadership education. In 'Relationality in the Humanities: A Perspective on Leadership' (1990), Maxine Greene garners insights about women in leadership from three classic novels and hopes that 'more of those trying to clarify what women's leadership may come to mean, who women in leadership may come to be, will hold in mind the landscapes in the arts and humanities, in their density, ambiguity and disturbing depth' (ibid., p. 377). In 2008, Praeger published a three-volume series entitled *Leadership at the Crossroads* and devoted a single volume to leadership and the humanities, which features eleven essays discussing leadership issues that arise in texts like *Moby Dick*, *Don Quijote*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, as well as topical essays on the role of art, music, and language studies in leadership education and development (Ciulla et al. 2008).

John Hendry, in 'Educating Managers for Post-Bureaucracy' (2006, p. 269), makes the case that the predominant economic model for the manager – that of the 'morally neutral technician engaged in a world of purely rational problem solving in the pursuit of efficiency' – is deeply flawed. Hendry cites a number of scholars who call for the use of history and novels in management courses, but believes that 'histories, biographies, myths, plays, novels and ethnographies can also help people explore the human condition, and ... help them understand their fellow humans as individual and idiosyncratic characters' (ibid., p. 277). More importantly, Hendry argues for a new identity for the manager and that the 'underlying task is surely historical – By taking people away from the messy immediacy of the present, history can bring distance and clarity to the nature of the managerial role ...' (ibid., p. 279).

Finally, the creation of the journal *Leadership and the Humanities* in 2013 signals a strong interest in the insights from the humanities in leadership studies and education. In 'The Making of *Leadership and the Humanities*,' Antonio Marturano, J. Thomas Wren, and Michael Harvey (2013, p. 2) argue that while the social sciences have made significant contributions to our understanding of leadership, nevertheless a 'significant gap remains in how leadership is explored, engaged with, and understood' and 'this gap requires bringing the humanities in as a full partner in leadership studies.' The variegated historical and contemporary essays published in this journal since its inception indeed reflect a commitment to leadership and the humanities broadly conceived. As the editors note, many of the essays do not have 'leadership' included in the title of the essays or as a 'primary theme'; rather, the 'overriding aim' of the journal is to bring insights from the humanities into leadership studies as 'the leadership phenomenon engages all aspects of the human condition ...' (ibid., p. 2).

The debate about the role of the humanities in education and leadership is not new; rather, in my estimation, it begins in the Modern period with the writings of René Descartes (1596–1650), the oft acknowledged father of modern philosophy, more recently anointed the 'first modern man' and the modern Prometheus who 'supplies fire in the form of method' to the modern world (Verene 1997, p. 2). Descartes presented himself as an isolated individual in search of 'truth,' apart from his fellow humans, a view of the

individual antithetical to the arts and humanities, which build human bridges and relationships. Descartes describes himself using two central metaphors: that of a master-builder and a solitary traveler along life's road. This story of the isolated, rational individual (in search of truth in science and mathematics) – that is, not rooted in a particular society – coupled with Descartes's deductive methodology, very quickly became the model for education in Europe and eventually the United States (Vico 1990a, p. xxv).

Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), born 18 years after Descartes's death, presented himself as engaged in a struggle against Cartesian metaphysics and methodology, because for Vico, a teacher of rhetoric committed to the humanities, Descartes had succeeded in cutting people off from their own cultural and historical traditions, and, finally, from each other. Vico defends the importance of the humanities in education, and, in his autobiography, presents himself as actively involved in the civic life of Naples – in the church, at home, and at the university. He presents himself as a leader who is connected to others in his community and to the traditions of the community, unlike Descartes, who, in his *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1993), presents himself as a solitary, rational figure, much like the 'neutral technician' of contemporary management theory.

In this essay, I first describe the different philosophical and educational starting points for Vico and Descartes, because I demonstrate that Descartes's attempt to reduce education to a narrow rational method is deeply flawed and that Vico's approach to education, which certainly included math and science, also included the humanities, and is a far richer model for higher education in general and leadership education in particular. I then discuss the renewed interest in narrative in a number of disciplines, which harks back to Vico's understanding of the importance of history and narrative and has enjoyed a revival of interest among psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers as well as among management and leadership educators (see above). As I retell the stories of these early enlightenment thinkers, primarily in their own words, I illustrate the importance of a contemporary commitment to the arts and humanities as critical for the development of curricula for management and leadership programs.

Descartes's profound contribution to philosophy, science, and mathematics is well known and need not be recounted here. What is less well known is Vico's contribution to history and rhetoric, principally articulated in *The New Science* (1991), which attempts to trace the development of the human race and the origin of culture through a three-age schema: the age of gods, heroes, and humans. As fanciful and speculative as it may be, Vico's attempt to identify the stages of development of human cultures constitutes one of the first attempts at critical history in the West. In addition, his attempt to describe the first theological poets and their creation of 'imaginative universals,' which become the foundation myths for all cultures, is one of the first attempts to think critically about myth and its function in the formation and maintenance of culture. The 'Jove Conceit' is an imaginative leap on the part of the theological poets which creates language, religion, and culture with the utterance of a single word. While Hans Blumenberg is no doubt correct when he notes that when it comes to the origin of myth – *ignorabimus* – we will never know; Vico remains one of the first scholars to think about the profound connections among language, religion, and culture.

2 DIFFERENT STARTING POINTS FOR EDUCATION

Descartes in all likelihood never conceived of himself as a hero in any traditional sense of the word, yet in the *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1993), he tells his own story, which is that of a solitary hero in quest of truth obtained by the 'unaided reason,'

a quest wherein Descartes pictures himself as a master-builder and a solitary traveler along life's road. Vico clearly viewed himself as engaged in an heroic struggle – against Cartesian metaphysics and methodology.¹ Both Descartes and Vico are candidates for the heroic, according to Elizabeth Sewell, because both were involved in the 'unmaking' and 'remaking' of their intellectual worlds, and both sought the 'discovery' or 'retrieval' of the lost.² Descartes's solitary story, told in the *Discourse on Method* (ibid.), is that of a lone philosopher on a quest for truth who must sweep away the philosophical and historical clutter of the age. Vico's story, told in his *Autobiography* (1990b), is that of a communalistic Renaissance man, who starts with the clutter of his own age (and life) and attempts to make sense of it. Descartes's starting point for philosophy, as articulated in the *Meditations* and the *Discourse* (both Descartes 1993), is his own conscious existence – *cogito ergo sum* – and the building of a new house of knowledge by way of 'clear and distinct' ideas. These differing starting points for philosophy and education are similar to the divide between contemporary scholars like Albert Carr (1984) and Milton Friedman (1984) who see a manager or leader as a neutral technician whose main, if not only, concern is with the bottom line and stockholders as opposed to scholars like Peter Drucker (1989) and Edwin Hartman (1996) who believe that a leader or manager is responsible to all the stakeholders in an organization.

Vico begins his search for truth (in both *The Study Methods* (1990a) and *The New Science* (1991)) with the ancient texts of Homer, Hesiod, and Thucydides, and from their attempts to reconstruct historically how and what human beings have actually created in terms of culture. Descartes's analytic view of language requires the possibility of 'clear and distinct ideas,' which are then employed deductively to construct his new house of knowledge. In the *The Study Methods* and *The New Science*, Vico critiques the Cartesian rationalistic and analytic view of language and presents a synthetic view of language, wherein metaphors actually couch arguments. Descartes was articulating an early version of the windowpane view of language – words are

1. In a letter written to Fr. Bernardo Maria Giacco in 1725 he writes: 'I no longer bewail my hard lot and ... denounce the corruption of letters that has caused that lot; for this corruption and this lot have strengthened me and enabled me to perfect this work. Moreover (if it be not true, I like to think it is) this work has filled me with a certain heroic spirit, so that I am no longer troubled by any fear of death, nor have I any mind to speak of rivals' (Vico 1990b, p. 16).

2. Elizabeth Sewell presents Vico, Bacon, and Coleridge as heroes of their particular ages as they all attempt to unmake and remake the intellectual worlds they inhabit, and as they all seek the 'discovery' or 'retrieval' of what has been lost through the ages. In 'Bacon, Vico, Coleridge and the Poetic Method' (1969), she argues that what Bacon, Vico, and Coleridge have in common is a sense of the heroic, both in terms of self-perception and in terms of their particular vocations. Though all three are noted for their 'remarkable universality of interest and knowledge,' the idea of the hero, according to Sewell, 'keeps recurring in connection with these three great men' (ibid., p. 125). Sewell applies Rachel Levy's (1953, pp. 85–86) categories for epic poetry, which include three principal types of heroic struggle, to answer how these three men could be conceived as heroes (Sewell 1969, p. 129). These categories include, according to Sewell, 'the struggle for creation, that is to say, the ordering and making of the world out of some primeval chaos; the discovery or quest for the lost; and military conquest and the wars of migration' (ibid., pp. 129–130). Sewell applies the first two categories to the lives of Bacon, Vico, and Coleridge, all three of whom were involved in the unmaking of worlds given them and the remaking, or 'making anew,' of the same (ibid., p. 131). All three also embarked on a quest in terms of 'discovery, and retrieval of the lost' (ibid., p. 130).

transparent and one simply peers through them to their corresponding ideational or empirical referents.

Vico, on the other hand, anticipates social constructionism – one cannot ‘see’ through language; rather, it is through language that human beings construct social reality. This constructionist view of language provides Vico with ‘imaginative universals,’ the first of which is the *Jove Conceit*, an imaginative attempt to explain the origin of religion, language, and community.³ Further, Vico’s *verum ipsum factum* principle – *we only know that which we do or make* – attacks Cartesian rationalism, which pictures knowledge as purely intellectual.⁴ These radically different stories, starting points, and methodologies have serious implications for leadership studies and leadership education.

For Descartes education is a solitary experience – the learner alone cutting through the clutter of language to clear and distinct ideas, then putting these unambiguous ideas together deductively to arrive at mathematical and scientific truth, much like a modern manager with his or her big data. This view of education has as its goal the development of a narrow, sharp rationality based on ‘clear and distinct ideas,’ a view of education which has contributed to the model of the manager or leader as a neutral and objective technician responsible exclusively for the bottom line of the organization. For Vico, especially as he articulates it in ‘On the Heroic Mind’ (1979), education is a communal affair involving the new sciences certainly, but also the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy), which had come to constitute the seven liberal arts in the Middle Ages. The goal of education for Vico, and for his students who would become scholars, statesmen, and lawyers in Naples, was to develop an heroic mind, which had a grasp of all the disciplines and of the human condition itself. As noted above, a number of leadership scholars are currently calling for a ‘full partnership’ for the humanities in leadership studies and education, because of the ability of the humanities to expose people fully to the complexities, ambiguities, and messiness of the human condition and human relationships.

3 TWO VERY DIFFERENT STORIES

3.1 A note on narrative

Before turning to Descartes’s and Vico’s stories, I would like to turn to the issue of the place of narrative in contemporary research and scholarship. Philosophers, rhetoricians, historians, social scientists, and literary critics have been engaged in a lively discussion about the epistemological value of myth and story. Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, has argued that humans, above all else, are storytelling animals. We all

3. For a detailed account of how the theological poets created imaginative universals, see Grant (2000).

4. Gianturco notes the importance of this principle in *On the Study Methods of Our Time* (Vico 1990a): ‘An important feature in the *De nostri* is the *verum ipsum factum* – “knowledge is equipollent to operation” – the epistemological criterion consciously set up in opposition to the Cartesian standard of clear and distinct perception. Croce calls the aggregate of ideas contained in the *verum ipsum factum* the initial form of Vico’s theory of cognition. According to Vico, we have true knowledge when the thinking and the doing are performed by the same person. Man, who is the maker of his own history, can “cognize” it: knowledge is tantamount to operation’ (ibid., p. xlii).

participate in a number of stories and know how to act by referencing (both consciously and unconsciously) the stories we inhabit: ‘I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “Of what stories do I find myself a part?”’ (MacIntyre 1984, p. 216).

A number of contemporary literary critics and philosophers argue that changes in our perception of myth, story, and narrative provide clear indicators of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. In *The Illusion of the End* (1994), Jean Baudrillard declares that the notion of a final end (*telos*) – as set forth in the stabilizing myths of the western religions – has disappeared. ‘The happy consciousness of eternity and immortality is ended. The problem of the end becomes crucial and insoluble. *There will no longer be an end*. We enter upon a kind of radical indeterminacy’ (ibid., p. 91, author’s emphasis). Jean-Francois Lyotard (‘simplifying to the extreme’) defines postmodernism as ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1979, p. xxiv). In short, according to Baudrillard and Lyotard, and other postmodern critics, the big stories with the big endings have disappeared largely because they seem incredulous to postmodern sensibility. Against these claims, University of Chicago historian Martin Marty presents the big stories as alive and well, and in fact growing, at least in terms of the numbers who embrace them around the globe. The five volumes of his *Fundamentalisms Project* (Marty 1994), the most recent of which was published in 1995, attempt to describe and detail the rise and consolidation of modern fundamentalist movements among the world religions since the 1970s. Within these groups a great deal of ‘remythification’ occurs as the disparate groups encounter the ‘secular’ world around them: ‘Fundamentalists set and maintain boundaries, identify and mythologize their enemies, seek converts, and create and sustain an array of institutions in pursuit of a comprehensive reconstruction of society’ (ibid., p. 2). Along similar lines, Harvard professor of Political Science Samuel P. Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, has argued that a single, new world order based on democracy and capitalism is not currently in the making, rather eight ancient civilizations – Western European, Japanese, Islamic, Orthodox, Hindu, Sinic, African, and Latin American – steeped in clashing values, beliefs, and myths – are remaking the world order since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Even if the metanarratives are now no longer viable to the postmodern sensibility, we all participate in stories – respond to, react to, and rewrite them perhaps – but we finally perceive our lives in terms of our own stories and the stories of others. They may be the smaller, individual *petit recits* and *petit histoires* of Lyotard and Baudrillard, but they are stories nonetheless, and this is not surprising either, since, as Hans Blumenberg (1985) has pointed out, stories *kill* – they kill both time and fear, and make the world a little less frightening and a little more familiar (ibid., p. 34). Further, according to Blumenberg, stories ameliorate and quell ‘panic and paralysis ... the two extremes of anxiety behavior’ (ibid., p. 6).

The place of narrative is germane to this essay, because what emerges from the *Discourse* (Descartes 1993), in spite of Descartes’s assertion that ‘fables make one imagine many events possible which in reality are not so’ (ibid., p. 110), is a new fable about a new kind of hero: a solitary hero – in quest of truth obtained through social isolation and ‘unaided reason’ – a hero beset by social and political criticism that stands in the way of his life’s work, a hero who travels alone along life’s path, a hero who has swept away the old house of knowledge and laid a sure foundation for a new house. Descartes considers that he had ‘already given sufficient time to languages and likewise to the reading of the literature of the ancients, both their histories and their fables,’ then goes on to argue that reading history is like traveling in another

country, which could cause one to become a ‘stranger in one’s own country’ and potentially ignorant of what is happening in one’s own time as well (ibid., p. 110). Further, ‘fables make one imagine many events possible which in reality are not so, and even the most accurate of histories, if they do not exactly misrepresent’ their subject matter, ‘are liable to fall into the extravagances of the knight-errant of Romance, and form projects beyond their power of performance’ (ibid., p. 110). Descartes here articulates what would become the standard Enlightenment view of *logos* and *mythos* (see O’Banion 1992). *Logos*, as a mature epistemological strategy developed especially in the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* (both Descartes 1993), must displace the inaccurate and immature epistemology of *mythos*. While Descartes’s first person narration throughout the *Discourse* creates an illusion of closeness and familiarity, it still gives us nothing close to a history of his life: no names, dates, institutions, or important events. To this story we now turn.

3.2 Descartes’s story

Descartes has in mind the task of unmaking and remaking the intellectual world within which he lived, as, for him, the whole building of ancient knowledge, including at least five of the seven liberal arts, needs to be razed, and a new building, based on the master-builder’s ‘rational method,’ must be erected in its place:

But as regards all the opinions which up to this time I had embraced, I thought I could not do better than endeavor once for all to sweep them completely away, so that they might later on be replaced, either by others which were better, or by the same, when I had made them conform to a rational scheme. (Descartes 1993, p. 115)

Descartes finds nothing in history, philosophy, or rhetoric worth preserving, consequently the unmaking of his intellectual world involves the complete annihilation of what, in previous ages, passed for knowledge. And even though Descartes eschews ‘fables’ and ‘histories’ as inimical to truth, in the *Discourse* he employs two controlling metaphors – that of the master-builder of a new house of knowledge and that of a wise traveler along life’s road – to tell his story. As a master-builder of a new intellectual system, Descartes decides that it is far better to simply level the old building of ancient learning and start all over (ibid., p. 115), rather than muddle through the messiness and clutter of the ages brought to us through the seven liberal arts. Descartes, in fact, envisions in the immediate future a group of artisans who will adopt and follow his method, building upon the secure foundation laid by the master-builder himself (ibid., p. 152).

But Descartes also pictures himself as a wise traveler who takes a straight line through the forest of life in one direction hoping that he will at least arrive somewhere in the end:

In this I should be following the example of travelers, who, finding themselves lost in a forest, know that they ought not to wander first to one side and then to the other, nor, still less, to stop in one place, but understand that they should continue to walk as straight as they can in any one direction, not diverging for any slight reason, even though it was possibly chance alone that first determined them in their choice. By this means if they do not go exactly where they wish, they will at least arrive somewhere at the end, where probably they will be better off than in the middle of the forest. (ibid., p. 122)

The ‘straight line,’ of course includes ‘unaided reason’ and the deductive methodology developed in the *Discourse* and the *Meditations*. This set of methods is to be applied to

all human endeavors. The metaphors of wise traveler and master-builder, coupled with his claims to having laid a new foundation for the sciences in the *Discourse* and the *Meditations*, demonstrate that Descartes envisioned nothing less than the complete unmaking and remaking of the intellectual world he inhabited.

The metaphors of the true path or road and the safe and secure house within which to dwell have a long history, a history with which Descartes was only too familiar, having studied, beginning at age ten, at the Jesuit college of La Flèche. He studied there for four years until 1614, and then in 1615 entered the University of Poitiers, where a year later he received a Baccalaureate and License in Canon and Civil Law. In short, he was no stranger to the bible and theology. The *Tanach* and the New Testament consistently call one to follow the true path, veering neither to the right nor the left and to dwell safely in the house of the Lord. Jesus, in fact, puts the two together in the Gospel of John where he claims to be going away to his father's house to 'prepare a place' for his disciples. When Thomas claims not to know the way (*hodos*), Jesus answers, 'I am the way (*hodos*), the truth and the life' (Jn. 14.1–6, NIV). Faith in Jesus as the true road or path to the Father insures one of finding safe haven in the house of God. While Descartes would certainly not claim to have displaced the Christian revelation – he is always careful to claim fidelity to Catholic orthodoxy – still, the refiguration of these biblical metaphors to apply to himself and his task seem audacious to put it mildly.

While both the title of the *Discourse* and its Preface suggest that Descartes will line out a procedure for study, *the* procedure for study in all academic fields, the *Discourse itself* turns out to be a carefully crafted *apologia* for his life and *oeuvre*, connected not just to two standard biblical metaphors, but also to biblical numerology. The rhetorical structure of the *Rules*, the *Discourse on the Method*, and the *Meditations* (all Descartes 1993) all show an awareness of important biblical numbers. The *Rules*, as originally conceived by Descartes, were to consist of three major parts with twelve sections in each part. One can hardly miss the allusion to the trinity in the number three, or the allusion to the perfection of the number twelve (twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles, etc.) for the sub-sections. Even more fascinating is the six-part structure of both the *Discourse* and the *Meditations*. Even as God created the heavens and earth in six days and rested on the seventh, so René Descartes, *ex nihilo* (save his 'unaided reason'), creates a new scientific method and foundation for philosophy in six short meditations. The metaphor of the master builder found in the *Discourse*, and the related metaphors of foundation, building, and house suggest that Descartes saw his task as nothing less than the complete renovation of all human knowledge based on his unique, rational method.

It is curious that within the six-part structure of the *Discourse* Descartes utilizes six of the seven classical components of a good speech, including introduction, thesis, confirmation, confutation, peroration, and narrative. One *could* argue that all the narrative sections are digressions, but Descartes clarifies his thesis as not teaching *the Method* (as his title suggests), but to 'show in what manner' he has conducted his own reason (Descartes 1993, p. 108). In the *Preface* Descartes gives the reader an outline of the six major parts of the discourse (*ibid.*, p. 106), while in the introduction (*ibid.*, pp. 107–108) he praises himself and (implicitly) blames others for choosing a less than adequate path to true knowledge. The first five sections of the *Discourse* contain a series of confirmations that his thinking is right, with brief sketches of his conclusions and short narrative windows into his own travels and experiences. Throughout these sections Descartes 'confutes' the thinking of earlier philosophers, yet never actually names a single philosopher, nor explicitly attacks a single error of the philosophers; rather, he steers a careful course between the church and science,

always careful to assert his theological orthodoxy and a general openness to enlightenment science. Part VI could be labeled a peroration, yet Descartes actually spends the majority of this section explaining why he withheld his *Dioptrics* from publication. Again, this section contains careful statements that steer a safe course between church, state, and scientific community. Of the three sources of oral persuasion, Descartes primarily uses appeals to *logos* and *ethos* and rarely uses the appeal to *pathos*. His claim for truth throughout the *Discourse* is to ‘simple reasoning which a man of common sense can quite naturally carry out’ (ibid., p. 114). Descartes also labors at length to establish that he has been a morally upright person throughout his life; in fact, the whole of Part III is devoted to the explication of an interim ethic of moderation he has adopted until his whole house of knowledge has been built (ibid., pp. 121–133). Apart from these regular appeals to *logos* and *ethos*, Descartes does not evoke images of fear or delight or anger or joy – the tone of the discourse remains clear, rational, and unemotional. The only emotion he comes close to exhibiting is anger – in Part VI – but this is carefully controlled by a continuation of the lengthy, compound, and complex sentences that have carried his arguments throughout the *Discourse*. Jeanette Bicknell rightly notes that the *Discourse* is a ‘highly sophisticated and carefully constructed literary work’ (Bicknell 2003, p. 25).

Though Descartes is reticent to describe in detail the actual ‘foundation’ of his new intellectual house in the *Discourse*, for fear of being misunderstood, he finally takes five pages to set forth the *cogito*, his proofs for the existence of God, and his proofs for the existence of the material world (Descartes 1993, pp. 127–132). His starting point has been established by methodical doubt, as the one thing Descartes cannot doubt, even while doubting, is his existence, which is predicated on the intellectual activity of doubting itself. Thus his new starting point for philosophy is the individual, who, while engaged in thinking, cannot finally doubt his own existence. With this ‘sure’ foundation in place Descartes can now proceed by way of ‘clear and distinct’ ideas to deductively ‘prove’ the existence of God and the material world.

An important methodical shift has occurred here in terms of the history of ideas and Vico will be quick to point it out. While one may be certain of the existence of the self, one becomes less certain of the existence of God, other selves, and the material world, as the existence of these substances are deduced from the ‘sure’ foundation of the *cogito*. Descartes’s starting point and deductive method, if followed, introduce a new subjectivism into philosophy and education – the self alone, meditating in isolation on its own existence, and by deduction ‘proving’ the existence of other substances. Descartes has unmade the ancient communal world of myths, history, and philosophy, and remade it into a solipsistic world of ‘clear and distinct’ ideas and deductive reasoning. The humanities have no place in this new world of mathematics and deductive reasoning, yet Descartes has utilized history, rhetoric, and theology to construct his argument. How consciously he employs these old devices for his new method is anyone’s guess. But it is similar to a Bill O’Reilly developing a ‘no spin’ zone, which is nothing but spin. And the lesson for leadership studies is to beware of the person claiming to be neutral, objective, and free of any biases. This, of course, is the fallacy of the ‘neutral technician’ model for management and leadership.

3.3 Vico’s story

Though narrated in the third person, Vico’s *Autobiography* seeks to tell his life story as an historian would, identifying ‘step by step’ the ‘natural causes’ which account for his development as a teacher, scholar, and leader. Here we have names, dates,

and institutions – all understood in terms of the impact they had on the life and work of Vico. Contrasting the tone and content of Vico's opening paragraph with that of Descartes is telling:

Giambattista Vico was born in Naples in the year 1670 of upright parents who left a good name after them. His father was of a cheerful disposition, his mother of a quite melancholy temper; both contributed to the character of their child. He was a boy of high spirits and impatient of rest; but at the age of seven he fell head first from the top of a ladder to the floor below, and remained a good five hours without motion or consciousness. The right side of the cranium was fractured, but the skin was not broken. The fracture gave rise to a large tumor, and the child suffered much loss of blood ... The surgeon, indeed, observing the broken cranium and considering the long period of unconsciousness, predicted that he would either die of it or grow up an idiot. (Vico 1990b, p. 111)

Vico actually writes an autobiography, anecdotes like the cracked cranium included, whereas Descartes begins the *Discourse* with an excursus on the fact that all people possess 'good sense' (*bon sens*), but need to learn how to apply this sense well, and even if they are slow learners, will get very far in knowledge if they 'proceed slowly' and 'always follow the straight road.' In the second and third paragraphs Descartes moves into this first person narration:

For myself I have never ventured to presume that my mind was in any way more perfect than that of the ordinary man; I have even longed to possess thought as quick, or an imagination as accurate and distinct, or a memory as comprehensive or ready, as some others ... But I shall not hesitate to say that I have had great fortune from my youth up, in lighting upon and pursuing certain paths which have conducted me to considerations and maxims from which I have formed a Method, by whose assistance it appears to me I have the means of gradually increasing my knowledge and of little by little raising it to the highest possible point which the mediocrity of my talents and the brief duration of my life can permit me to reach. (Descartes 1993, pp. 107, 108)

Early in his own story, Vico accuses Descartes of insincerity, suggesting that Descartes's plain and chatty style actually concealed an attack on the particular arts and sciences which could not be reduced to his deductive method.

We shall not here feign what René Descartes craftily feigned as to the method of his studies simply in order to exalt his own philosophy and mathematics and degrade all the other studies included in divine and human erudition. Rather, with the candor proper to a historian, we shall narrate plainly and step by step the entire series of Vico's studies, in order that the proper and natural causes of his particular development as a man of letters may be known. (Vico 1990b, p. 113)

Vico, I think, is complaining here of the fact that Descartes's *Discourse* is neither a discourse on method, nor an autobiography, but an unsubstantiated and thickly veiled attack on the humanities. While both the title of the *Discourse* and the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (Descartes 1993) suggest that Descartes will develop a procedure for study, the procedure for study in all academic fields, the *Discourse* itself turns out to be an *apologia* for his life and works.

3.4 Vico's alternative to Cartesianism

Vico, who saw himself living in the 'age of men,' felt that scholarly activity comprised the better part of what it meant to be a hero in an 'age of reason' and that a foundation in the liberal arts was essential to be a person of letters or a civic leader as Vico most

certainly was. In his address entitled ‘On the Heroic Mind,’ presented to the Royal Academy of Naples in 1732, Vico (1979) argues that the heroic mind has as its goal comprehensive knowledge, which selects the best to read in all the disciplines, then seeks to integrate this knowledge into a comprehensive whole, which should result in the ‘healing’ of the mind, body, and soul of its possessor (*passim*). Though comprehensive knowledge is certainly not possible in this information age, the pursuit is a worthy goal for all leaders who wish to understand the ambiguities and complexities of the human condition. It is within this interdisciplinary quest for comprehensive knowledge that Sewell (1969) finds Vico engaged in an heroic attempt to unmake the Cartesian world of his day and remake it in terms of both the new sciences and the humanities. Vico seeks a different starting point and method than Descartes, which was taking the European universities by storm in Vico’s day. Vico creates a nascent, historical, critical method in order to discover the origins of myth, language, and human community. In *The New Science* (1991), particularly in the ‘Jove conceit,’ Vico can be found discovering his starting point and displaying his method for unmaking and remaking the intellectual world that is quickly converting to Descartes’s rationalistic methodology.

Vico saw the task of the poet and his own task as the unmaking (except in the case of the first poets, gods, and heroes) of a given world and the remaking of the same. In this connection, Sewell (1969, pp. 128–129) points out that Vico clearly sees the poetic and the heroic as closely aligned, if not identical. She notes that Vico harks back to the Greek *poiien* (to make) in order to argue that the early heroes ‘were called “poets” which is Greek for “creators”’ (Vico 1991, section 376). Further, when Vico develops his seven philological proofs in Book I of *The New Science*, he notes that the first people were ‘everywhere naturally poets’ (*ibid.*, section 352). In the next section Vico continues: ‘The heroic phrases, as here explained in the full truth of the sentiments and the full propriety of the expressions, also agree’ (*ibid.*, section 353). Clearly, for Vico, the first peoples were poets who constructed their first experiences in ‘heroic phrases’ in an attempt to make or create their world.

The unmaking and remaking of the world for Vico involved going back to the first people who as heroes and poets made the world (of culture) for the first time. Sewell (1969, p. 134) points out that the first people made sense of the world through divination, which is the task of poets (Vico 1991, section 342). This task, according to Vico, is ‘not rational ... but felt and imagined’ (*ibid.*, section 381). Sewell quotes Vico at length:

[A]s rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*), this imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by *not* understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*); and perhaps the latter proposition is truer than the former, for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them. (*ibid.*, section 405)

In short, when the theological poets could not make sense of the cosmos, they created god, language, and community in one brilliant metaphoric leap. This ‘creation’ transforms humans into social creatures with beliefs and laws. Thus Vico, in temperament, principle, and method embraces the heroic spirit described by Rachel Levy (1953), and, further, Vico’s radical anti-Cartesian epistemology suggests that a narrow rationality cannot begin to explain the world as we know it, even as the objective ‘neutral technician’ manager cannot begin to explain the complexity of organizations, leaders, and followers. It is not so much what humans understand, but what they do *not*

understand that accounts for a large part of what we call culture. And if we were all quite honest we would admit that there is still much about human activity that befuddles philosophers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists. Vico's theory of knowledge seeks to include the sciences *and* the humanities in an attempt to account for *all* human activity including myths, legends, laws, and institutions. This is the very same connection a number of scholars in leadership studies are attempting to remake today. The editors of the *Leadership and the Humanities* journal, for example, seek to connect the insights about leadership brought by the social sciences with the insights brought from the humanities. They are attempting to bridge the 'gap' between the arts and sciences which Descartes was instrumental in opening 400 years ago.

Vico claims that he spent 20 years thinking through how to remake the Cartesian world which he inherited. Employing his imagination, he attempts to reconstruct that first moment when the first humans created their respective 'Joves.' The creation of Jove by the first theological poets is the first 'imaginative universal,' and accounts for the 'origin of language, religion and community in a metaphor that organizes and interprets sense data' (Schaeffer 1990, p. 90). This common origin for all of the ancient civilizations provides the basis for community (*sensus communis*) since discreet cultures share a common set of beliefs, rituals, and customs, what Schaeffer calls the 'underlying agreements' and 'mental dictionary' of a culture (ibid., p. 90). Apart from this kind of connectedness, provided largely by the humanities, it is difficult to imagine a cohesive culture or a way for a leader to make sense of a culture. Science and technology alone, the twin fiery gods brought to us as 'method' by Descartes, the modern Prometheus, are unable to provide the meaning and significance to understand human relationships and organizations. Science and technology are, in fact, insufficient gods (Postman 1996, pp. 37–50) and have done much to create and sustain the postmodern sense of fragmentation, isolation, and alienation discussed by so many postmodern writers.

We live in a Cartesian world, chained to our computers and smartphones, connecting to each other through cyberspace, office doors closed, landline phones rarely used and personal face-to-face connections with colleagues and students kept to a bare minimum. The humanities open us up to our past and the past opens us up to the same or similar problems faced by humans throughout the ages. The humanities possess the potential to *humanize* us in the face of the ever-encroaching depersonalization of mediated and simulated living and communication. John Naisbitt, in *Megatrends* (1982), argued 32 years ago that our new 'High Tech' culture required a reciprocal 'High Touch' dimension, in order for us to remain human. Martin Buber (1937) named this sense of human touch and connectivity 'I-Thou' relationships as opposed to the Modern 'I-It' relationships where humans viewed other humans as objects rather than feeling, thinking subjects. While a leadership curriculum which includes the humanities does not insure that we will be more humane nor will the reading of the classics make more humane leaders, the possibility of producing more humane leaders is nevertheless greatly enhanced by exposure to these subjects.

Thus Vico, employing a nascent, critical, historical method attempts to unmake the new 'rational' world created by René Descartes, and, ostensibly, has uncovered that moment when the first theological poets created the first myths, languages, and communities. This remaking and discovery of Vico's has three immediate implications. First, Vico has both unmade contemporary eighteenth century understandings of human origins and remade them through a metaphoric application of his historical method. The first people, in response to thunder and lightning, conceive of Jove by way of a metaphoric leap and subsequently form the first communities out of fear

and awe. Second, Vico, ostensibly, has discovered the lost beginnings that scholars long for and despair of. Finally, Vico has found that the first people were heroes and poets. These people, in creating their 'Joves,' exhibit the true poetic spirit in that they 'made' their worlds; that is, they forged a stay against the terror and wonder of sense experience by creating language and community.

4 CONCLUSION

The starting point of education for Vico, then, is human community in the fullest sense of the word, which includes all the stories, myths, values, and institutions that are passed along from generation to generation in every culture. In short, one must study history, philosophy, literature, art, and music as well as the sciences in order to make sense of the contemporary world. The true scholar and leader does not sit alone silently in contemplation; rather, he or she is actively engaged in the educational, social, and political institutions of his or her day. Further, the method for a true education, which is lined out most clearly in 'On the Heroic Mind' (Vico 1979), resurrects the ancient Ciceronian ideal of the learned person speaking well. Whether or not this is possible or even desirable today is an open question, but we have seen the havoc wrought by Wall Street financiers, graduating top in their classes from Ivy League schools, using big data and 'high frequency trading' to destroy the stock and housing markets in 2008, yet walk away themselves with millions. I wonder if they had ethics courses in their MBAs or if they felt, like so many of the business students at my university, that the ethics, literature, and humanities courses they are required to take for graduation are distractions from the real goal – getting a job and making a lot of money.

For Vico, the 'heroic mind' sets as its goal comprehensive knowledge in the divine, human, and natural worlds. As an educational leader, he urges his students to select the best to read, and to seek to integrate all that is read into a comprehensive whole. Moreover, Vico sees this process of liberal education as a kind of healing for the body and soul of its possessor. Unlike Descartes, Vico starts with the community rather than the individual, and inculcates an oral and written mode of learning, which cannot be reduced to a rationalistic method built upon 'clear and distinct ideas.' Education for Vico is much more than the employment of a neat method – education, like life, is complex and messy and has to be waded into and slogged through, not just for four or five years, but for its duration.

I have attempted to show that one of the largest impediments to re-integrating the humanities into higher education in general and leadership studies in particular, is the notion of the isolated individual in search of 'truth,' apart from his or her fellow humans, a view of the individual that undermines the humanities and which can be traced back to René Descartes (1596–1650), the father of modern philosophy and the 'first modern man' (Verene 1997). Descartes's story is that of a solitary enlightenment hero in quest of truth obtained by the 'unaided reason,' a quest wherein Descartes pictured himself as a master-builder and a solitary traveler along life's road. This story of the isolated individual in search of truth, coupled with Descartes's deductive methodology, very quickly became the model for education in Europe and eventually the United States (Vico 1990a, p. xxv). Though Descartes and Vico were both educated in Catholic universities and received the same exposure to ancient languages, history, philosophy, rhetoric, etc., Descartes felt the path forward was clarified by math, science, and technology and, as the Modern Prometheus, he did provide a scientific method and the language necessary to move forward. He also struck a modern pose

with his emphasis on the individual rather than the group, which when coupled with notions of human freedom voiced in the French revolution two centuries later, paved the way for modern notions of individuality and freedom absolutely essential to the rise of capitalism.

Vico, on the other hand, saw himself engaged in a struggle against Cartesian metaphysics and methodology, because he believed that Descartes had succeeded in cutting people off from their culture and history, from the humanities, and from one another. Descartes's view is deeply flawed. The way forward for leadership and management studies as well as the development of 'good' leaders in this scientific and technological age should begin with a refusal to accept Descartes's rejection of the humanities and, rather, to seek to integrate them fully into all of our graduate and undergraduate programs in leadership studies, a view suggested by Vico. And this is happening – quite a number of contemporary scholars and educators *are* seeking to integrate the humanities into leadership curricula and courses, even as classics, language, and philosophy departments are being closed in higher education institutions throughout the world.

I confess to agreeing with William Major's (2014) hyperbolic call to close business schools and save the humanities, but this is neither feasible nor sensible. I still believe that the best education for a young person is an undergraduate liberal arts degree, but I continue to meet bright yet disillusioned humanities students, five to ten years past graduation, eking out an existence with poverty-level wages, attempting to pay off student loans that have crippled them for life. Quite frankly, I have trouble these days recommending college itself, especially if student loans are involved.

As colleges and universities will continue to draw students into technologized and commercialized institutions that cater to the individual tastes and needs of students, those of us who teach the liberal arts to undergraduate students, as well as those of us who teach graduate courses in leadership and management, need to fight the trend towards vocational education and computer-based training, which have become the cash cows of so many colleges and universities. Liberal arts colleges, schools, divisions, and departments need to articulate the continued relevance and indispensability of the liberal arts for all students. Those of us who teach in leadership and management programs and/or hail from liberal arts backgrounds need to continue to develop curricula and courses that integrate the liberal arts with the professional disciplines in order to create and sustain more humane organizations, leaders, and followers. Vico's vision of a liberal education, which places the liberal arts on an equal footing with the new sciences of his day, is worth contemplating, debating, and integrating into our philosophies of education. The stakes are high, and Major could not have stated them more succinctly: 'Making a living rather than living is a sign of desperation' (ibid., para 24).

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"Giambattista Vico ABSTRACT This paper presents the contribution of the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico to the theoretical line known as Cultural History. Featuring mainly his vision of the validity of knowledge as per the causes of paramount importance to the humanities and appreciation of mythic sources for historical studies. Keywords: Vico, Cultural History, Myth. In answering this question is necessary to consider the philosophy of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) in studies Vico. Vico addition to identifying these three principles of univocal humanity, will also establish their ages or three times: "The age of gods, heroes of the age and the age of men" (1999, p. 102). View Giambattista Vico Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. On the strength of these claims, I advocate for the rehabilitation of Boethius's typology as a living philosophical framework, arguing that its viability rests in the mutual evolution of social and harmonic theory. I demonstrate the viability of these claims through an analysis of *The Tempest*, in which I argue that the play's musical episodes illustrate tensions in the social sphere of the drama. I explore these tensions further in the analysis of two modern productions of *The Tempest*, in which I illustrate that the philosophical framework of Boethius equally informs the management of music in