

**Proß, Wolfgang, 'Herder und Vico: Wissenssoziologische Voraussetzungen des historischen Denkens', in Gerhard Sauder (ed.), Johann Gottfried Herder 1744–1803 (Hamburg, 1987: Felix Meiner), 88–113**

**The economist Prof. Dr. Steffen W. Groß, of Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus, summarises thus:**

Proß takes issue with IB in two areas. First, he calls into question IB's concept of the Counter-Enlightenment; secondly, he is in some respects sceptical about the quality of his work on Vico and Herder, primarily in Vico and Herder. His questioning of the concept of Counter-Enlightenment provides a framework for discussion of the latter issue.

Proß accepts the concept of Counter-Enlightenment as a kind of analytic tool, as a 'heuristic construct' which is a necessary part of the processes of forming scientific concepts (p. 89). But there is always the danger that such constructs begin to live a life of their own, that they gain a separate, independent existence. Proß thinks that exactly this is the case with IB's concept of the Counter-Enlightenment, of which, in IB's version, Vico and Herder appear as the 'great exponents' (p. 89).

Proß goes on to compare IB's studies on Vico and Herder with his earlier work on Hume and Hume's influence on German Idealism, and says that IB's work on Hume is much more deeply considered than his studies on Vico and Herder (pp. 89–90). Proß says that IB has not caught up with the ideas of Friedrich Meinecke in *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich and Berlin, 1936) – translated by J. G. Anderson as *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (London, 1972) – and even Meinecke is out of date, at any rate since the appearance of more advanced studies about the topic (p. 90, note 7). Proß refers with great enthusiasm to Panajotis Kondylis's *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus* ('The Enlightenment within the Framework of Modern Rationalism').

Proß's main objection to IB's treatment of Vico is that he has only a partial perception of Vico and takes the part for the whole. He seems to see only the older Vico of the *Scienza nuova*, and neglects the works and achievements of the younger man. Furthermore, Berlin neglects the research done on Vico that Proß calls 'Vico-philology', and claims the right to decide which of Vico's thoughts and writings should be regarded as important and which not (p. 90).

IB doesn't see that the division between natural sciences and cultural sciences still did not exist for Vico and Herder, despite their insight that it would be highly problematic to apply the Cartesian Method to social life and its historical development.

Thirdly, Proß's opinion is that IB overestimates the trend towards historical individualisation and the perception (and reflection) of that tendency in the eighteenth century (p. 91). Rather, Vico's interest in the individuality of historical forms was driven by his search for a scientific method or framework that could be applied to all variants of historical phenomena and their succession. If one needs a formula, one could say that the *Zeitgeist* of the eighteenth century was primarily 'No Plurality without Unity'. Both Vico and Herder devoted themselves to their heterogeneous material and its contradictions, but they did so before the establishment of a radically systematic vanishing-point (p. 92).

Steffen Groß adds on his own account: I should say that I regard the concept of Counter-Enlightenment as substantial, not only heuristic. There was indeed a Counter-Enlightenment, but it was led by figures such as the pietist Professor of Divinity Joachim Lange (who achieved the

dismissal of Christian Wolff), certainly not by Vico and Herder. Vico and Herder are much more exponents of the self-critical forces within the Enlightenment. Moreover, it seems to me intellectually unserious to restrict 'The Enlightenment' to its rationalistic stream (even if that was its most powerful element). The Enlightenment was a highly diverse movement, certainly including and uniting such different authors as Kant and Hamann, Vico and Herder – but certainly not Lange.