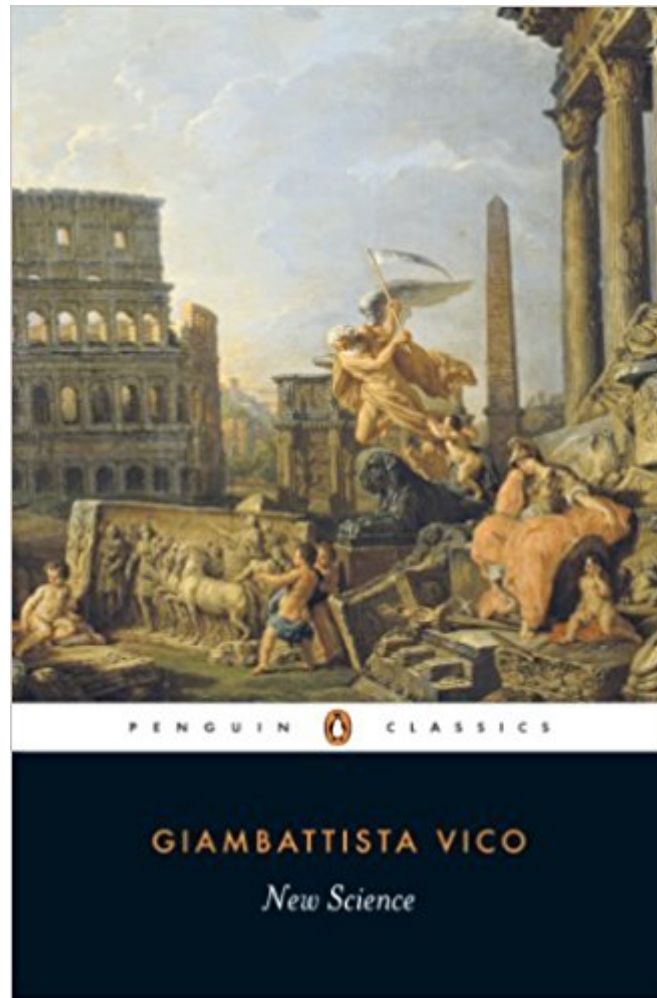




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New Science (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Barely acknowledged in his lifetime, the New Science of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is an astonishingly perceptive and ambitious attempt to decipher the history, mythology and laws of the ancient world. Discarding the Renaissance notion of the classical as an idealised model for the modern, it argues that the key to true understanding of the past lies in accepting that the customs and emotional lives of ancient Greeks and Romans, Egyptians, Jews and Babylonians were radically different from our own. Along the way, Vico explores a huge variety of topics, ranging from physics to poetics, money to monsters, and family structures to the Flood. Marking a crucial turning-point in humanist thinking, New Science has remained deeply influential since the dawn of Romanticism, inspiring the work of Karl Marx and even influencing the framework for Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This new edition of the famous Bergin and Fisch translation of Vico's *Scienza nuova*, originally published in 1948 and reissued in a revised edition in 1968, includes a translation of a piece of Vico's work called the *Practica* . . . It is a great advantage to have [the "Practic of the New Science"] reprinted with the text of the *New Science* as it offers some of Vico's views on the application of his science. . . . Cornell University Press is to be congratulated for . . . this new full edition." •Review of *Metaphysics* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this

title.

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Italian

There aren't many books like this one. Vico mines history in his own unique method and style to compose a theory of civilizations, or what today is called the Philosophy of History. Several people asked where Vico is taught/who studies Vico. The Graduate Institute at St. John's College (Great Books program) studies Vico at length in the History segment, which is really Philosophy of History. The Great Books curriculum designers thought Vico was worth reading, and they were right. Also, the late philosopher Eric Voegelin wrote an essay in "Order and History" singling out Vico's work and advocating his "New Science." At Emory University Donald Philip Verene runs the Institute for Vico studies. There are also many collections of essays on Vico by both American and European scholars. St. John's College library in Annapolis contains a good number of them. Vico writes in numbered axioms and conclusions so he can refer to ideas numerically and connect them. The numbered ideas are not necessarily sequential but are connected around themes. There is a definite ending (in the Conclusion) regarding the culmination of civilization, which is what you want to get to, but without understanding how you got there it is significantly more hollow, so at least understand the trajectory of the earlier chapters first. To avoid getting bogged down or disoriented I would suggest doing the reading sequence listed on the St. John's College Grad Institute website. You can download the Graduate Reading List for History free. Remember to get to the end, otherwise you missed the big picture.

That Vico is largely unknown, even by the so-called experts teaching in our universities, while mediocrities and worse of the past half century are lauded and taught widely is yet another indication that our educational standards are dumbed down considerably. Vico is difficult to read, and we are increasingly an intellectually lazy people who prefer simplistic platitudes that sooth our postmodernist prejudices. I give this Penguin edition only a 4 not because New Science is not itself a 5 or because the translation itself is weak, but because Vico requires copious notes. Most who read this work will do so on their own, and they need considerable help unless they are already as well read in the Classics and works of the Medieval and Renaissance eras as was Vico himself. Perhaps soon we will see an edition that meets that need, which also might encourage a few more to teach Vico, before we fall into the re-barbarism.

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*** IMPORTANT *** This review is intended as a criticism, NOT of the Bergin and Fisch translation or of Vico's master work as a whole, but rather ONLY of the Penguin Edition of the New Science. It has come to my attention that my comments have been attached to BOTH the Penguin edition and the classic translation by Bergin and Fisch. This is an problem, and one that I would ask the reader to bear in mind. Thank you to commentators on this review for bringing this problem to my attention.--Professor Donald Phillip Verene, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy at Emory University, and Director of the Institute for Vico Studies has written a devastating review of the Penguin translation (by David Marsh) and its introduction (by Anthony Grafton), both of which are fraught with egregious errors. These errors betray an inattention to Vico's life and writing as a whole, as well as a near-total ignorance of the field of Vico studies which has blossomed in the 20th century. Although this edition is attractive on account of its price, it was an unnecessary endeavor (Isaiah Berlin hailed the Bergin and Fisch edition as exceptional, and a role model for translation practice in general), a botched effort that is likely to do more harm to Vico's reputation in the English-speaking world than good. For those with a serious interest in Vico, the Penguin Edition of the New Science should be absolutely avoided. Instead, purchase *The New Science of Giambattista Vico: Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744) with the Addition of Practice of the New Science* (Cornell Paperbacks). For the fulltext of Verene's thorough review and criticism of Marsh's translation, please see Verene, Donald Phillip, "Critical Discussion on Translating Vico: The Penguin Classics Edition of the New Science," In *New Vico Studies*, Vol 17, 1999, pp. 85 - 107.

Bergin & Fisch provide a comprehensive, but non-exhaustive, introduction to Vico's work. Their

contributions are as object as possible and do not interpret the work according to any opinion other than that Vico's attention to language should not be overlooked. Vico's text is presented in a clear and readable manner. Whether a reader agrees or disagrees with Vico, the New Science must be considered in any sincere study of metaphysics. To paraphrase Joyce: Vico makes me think, and imagine, when other sciences do not.

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