

## THE PRIMACY OF RHETORIC: ERNESTO GRASSI'S RECOVERY OF HUMANISM AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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The past decade or so has witnessed the reemergence of interest in humanism. One of the principal places where this interest has become pronounced is in pedagogical concerns about the nature of liberal education; across disciplines, there is renewed discussion of the importance of the humanities and the role of interdisciplinarity in the pedagogical process. Happily, this renewal of interest in humanism and the humanist tradition has also begun to filter into specific disciplines, and particularly in philosophy and religious studies. Happily, I say, because I take this to be a good thing; post-humanist dreams of cyborg existence and the uploading of minds into computers aside (I decline to weigh in here on whether or not such dreams are blissful or nightmarish), we are, for the time being, stuck in the human condition, with all its frailty, limitation, and fallibility. Exploration in how we might negotiate this condition in personally fulfilling and morally productive ways can only be a positive development.

One aspect that has been lacking in much of this emerging exploration, however, is any deep treatment of the centrality of rhetoric in the humanist tradition. While rhetoric has for some time occupied an important place in certain subdisciplines in philosophy and religious studies, e.g., aesthetics and biblical studies, philosophers and scholars of religion who are interested in humanism as such have yet to give an adequate account of its place in the tradition or in their retrieval of it. (Incidentally, many, if not most, of the treatments of rhetoric in philosophy and religious studies have, in turn, failed to appreciate the manner in which rhetoric entails certain humanistic sensibilities about the nature of proof, the human engagement with the world, or the processes in which meaning comes to fruition in language.) I hope to provide some small remedy to this lack of attention by engaging the ideas of Ernesto Grassi.

Grassi's is hardly a household name in discussions of contemporary philosophy, even less so in religious studies. He is most well-known for his contributions to rhetorical theory, for his studies of Renaissance humanism, and for his interpretation of the early modern humanist Giambattista Vico. What I hope to show in this essay is that Grassi was a strikingly original thinker whose ideas continue to be relevant not just for scholars of rhetoric, but for philosophers and scholars of religion, as well. The importance of Grassi's work lies in his attempt to defend the philosophical significance of humanism against what he believed to be a traditional misconception of Renaissance humanist philosophy as either a naive anthropocentrism or a simple Christian reflection on Platonism. Indeed, I would suggest that part of the reason his importance for contemporary thought has not been better recognized lies in the fact that some of his more significant ideas were couched in terms of commentary on other figures, be they Renaissance, early modern, or Romantic. Against the grain of contemporary assessments of the Renaissance, Grassi sought to articulate the philosophical significance of that strand of humanist thought concerned with literature, poetry, and rhetoric rather than Platonism; his primary referents were not Marcilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, those typically viewed as the representatives of Renaissance philosophy, but the humanist literary tradition represented by thinkers like Dante, Leonardo Bruni, Juan Luis Vives, and, above all, Vico.

Grassi placed primary emphasis on rhetoric, and his retrieval of the humanist tradition attempted to highlight what rhetoric brings to philosophy. As such, his project was twofold: to defend the philosophical significance of humanism *and* to offer new avenues in the study of philosophy. I hope to do for Grassi what he hoped to do for humanism; my endeavors are, thus, twofold: I will explore his particular retrieval of the humanist tradition and gesture in the direction of new avenues in philosophy and religious studies.

### ***The Recovery of Humanism***

Grassi's project was driven by a polemic against the modern philosophical tradition initiated by Descartes. Beside Vico, Grassi's principal modern philosophical influences came from post-

Heideggerian phenomenology. Some biographical information is in order here to indicate how Grassi came under Heidegger's influence. Grassi was born in Milan, Italy in 1902 and completed doctoral studies at the University of Milan in 1925. His doctoral studies were dominated by German Idealism which was influential in the Italian academy in the early century. Shortly after completing his studies, Grassi moved to Freiburg to work with Edmund Husserl and Heidegger. Grassi remained active in the German academy until forced to flee for fear of Nazi persecution near the end of World War II. After the war, Grassi returned to teach at the University of Munich where he stayed until his retirement. Grassi died in Munich in 1991.

But the scant biographical information available tells us less about the influence of phenomenology on his thought than his own anecdotes. In several places, Grassi speaks of his first meeting with Husserl:

Finally, the meeting with the master took place. I was allowed to ask questions and I received helpful hints for my work. All of a sudden, Husserl passed the following verdict: 'Young man, as an Italian you are particularly predestined for philosophy. Work on steadily, without haste, and you will succeed.'

I was surprised and asked Husserl what made him come to that conclusion. He answered: 'Because you Italians approach the phenomenon itself; because of your sense for the concrete in philosophy; you do not start from abstract, *apriori* thinking and systematic historic schemata as do we German philosophers.' Upon my reply that contemporary Italian philosophy was mainly concerned with a renewal of the systematic and historic philosophy of Hegel, because of the idealistic tradition of Spaventa, Croce and Gentile, in which I had been educated, the master retorted: 'Young man, if you have been brought up within the frame of such a problematic then you are lost and there is no hope for you.'<sup>1</sup>

When Heidegger succeeded Husserl to the chair of philosophy at Freiburg, Grassi began an intensive period of study with Heidegger, but eventually broke with him for both political and philosophical reasons. While the political break is not insignificant, our interest here is the philosophical one.

Grassi felt that Heidegger had simply adopted the "traditional interpretations" of Humanism advanced by figures like Ernst Cassirer and Paul Oskar Kristeller. Grassi argued that these views "permit such questions as the relationship of *res* and *verba*, the philosophical significance of poetry, or the importance of rhetoric to fall into the background. . . . The traditional interpretation of Humanism, either as the new affirmation of man and, therefore, as an anthropology involving

particular epistemological problems, or as a renewal of Platonism or Neo-Platonism and so of Western metaphysics, is what led Heidegger to his negative judgment about the philosophical importance of that tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Grassi sought to show the similarities between the non-Platonic strand of Renaissance humanism and Heidegger’s own rethinking of philosophy outside the bounds of traditional metaphysics.

Bearing this concern in mind, I suggest that there are four principal themes that govern Grassi’s recovery of the humanist tradition: 1) the relationship between *res* and *verba*, i.e., things and words, or beings and language; 2) the importance of imagination in philosophical exploration and the concomitant need for a rhetorical, *topical* philosophy; 3) the centrality of metaphor in conceptuality and in grounding the *sensus communis* of the moral life; 4) the “ontological difference” between Being and beings and the poetic/rhetorical manifestation of an appeal of Being which demands our passionate response. These will be the principle headings under which I contemplate Grassi’s recovery of humanism. I will be less concerned in this essay with his treatment of particular Renaissance and other figures than with the scope of his own ideas.

### Res *and* Verba

Grassi consistently opposed the strand of humanist thought that he wished to defend against a purely rational philosophy that for him was represented in the Medieval period by the Platonic tradition and in the modern period by the Cartesian heritage. The structure of Medieval metaphysics was, for Grassi, governed by the Platonic project, and it was against this project that the humanists struggled. On this accounting, the goal of Medieval philosophy is the deduction of essential nature that exists “behind” or “above” individual instances of existence. “Accordingly, the principal task of philosophical reasoning is the definition of being, and this can only be achieved through a rational process of thought. By way of the concept (*χωροπος*) and the definition (*χωρισμος*), rational thought claims to ‘grasp’ the essence (*ουσια*) of being. . . . All empirical variations -- to which, by definition, no universality can be ascribed -- are proved inessential.”<sup>3</sup> This project of defining essential nature had two affects that were of principal interest to Grassi: 1) the conception of true

essential nature as existing outside the space and time within which beings exist and according to which they manifest themselves, and 2) a conception of the relationship between *res* and *verba*, things and words, or more broadly between beings and language. The second of these affects is the place where Grassi began his reclamation of the humanist tradition, so it will be worthwhile to focus on it for a moment.

“For medieval philosophy,” Grassi argued, “it is reason that determines the ‘res,’ and the ‘verbum’ has to be proved by reason, which establishes its meaning once and for all.”

The human grasp of the ‘res’ is consequently the starting point of traditional philosophy. It assumes that the ‘res’ exist in and for themselves and are defined in their existence by reason so that language must express the non-historical nature of beings. The verification of what is said (*verbum*) takes place with regard to a being which has been established rationally: ontology is a prerequisite for language.<sup>4</sup>

So conceived, the goal of philosophical speculation is the delimitation of essential nature which is transcendent and timeless; the language that is used to express that essential nature is conceived as a neutral medium, and frequently an imperfect and inadequate one, for the elaboration of essence. This demands that our words be as precise and immune to changing meanings as possible. For this reason, Medieval metaphysics devalued rhetoric: philosophy aims at necessary truths, rhetoric at mere probabilities; philosophy aims to articulate essential realities, rhetoric aims to move changeable attitudes; philosophy seeks the eternal, rhetoric is bound to the historical situation. Rhetorical language was dismissed as philosophically irrelevant because it is imprecise, ornamental, and imagistic, hardly the appropriate medium for expressing the unchanging nature of essences.

The humanist thought that Grassi wished to defend mounted its criticism of the inherited tradition precisely on this ground of the relationship of *res* and *verba* and its first representative was Dante Alighieri. In truth, Dante stood on the cusp between the Medieval tradition and the emerging humanist critique. When discussing the nature of truth and knowledge, Dante tended to defend traditional metaphysics, but when he turned to issues of poetry and oratory, he reversed the relationship between language and being. As poet and rhetor, Dante sought not a language of timeless truths but one that disclosed the truths of his own historical epoch. “Through his poetry and rhetoric [Dante] aims at disclosing a world, the world of his own time and country, his own

'here and now,' a task which had never been acknowledged as the function of poetry in traditional philosophy. . . . The everyday language of the 'here and now' -- not the logical, abstract, timeless language of eternity -- is the 'fire' with which man forges the instrument to create *his own* world."<sup>5</sup>

The break with a purely rational determination of the relationship between beings and language initiated by the poet Dante was, for all intents and purposes, according to Grassi, completed by the philologue and translator Leonardo Bruni. In the act of translating, Bruni came to realize that the meaning of words is governed not by an abstract and static relationship to essence, but rather by the context in which they are used. Words take their meanings depending upon the situation of their appearance, the here and now of usage. "Bruni no longer attributes meaning to being through rational determination; he does this through the context within which the word stands in a work. This *context* within which the philologue is confronted is the original horizon in which a word receives its different meanings and can, therefore, be used variably: '*usus* ergo, qui tunc dominus fuit, etiam hodie dominus est . . . Nos vero haec omnia variamus *usu* iubente. Neither in translation nor in everyday life does 'logical' significance have preeminence."<sup>6</sup> This preeminence of the historical and the contextual signaled, for Grassi, not just a shift in understanding of the source of the significance of words but a complete reversal of the relationship between *res* and *verba*.

If linguistic meaning is governed by context rather than the abstract determination of essence, then it is no longer appropriate to think of language as a neutral medium. Meanings are bound to time and place, and the role of the philologue is to trace the historical unfolding of the meaning of the word. This change entails, as well, a reevaluation of the human relationship to reality. Again, if language is composed not of abstract, logical determinations, but the here and now of historical life, then language itself becomes the bearer of the human encounter with reality, an encounter that is itself contextual and historical. This move, then, signals the need for a radical redefinition of the nature of philosophy and philosophical method. If the historicity of the word is viewed as the bearer of our encounter with being, then ontology is no longer the prerequisite for language, but quite the opposite; the historicity of language becomes the prerequisite for the determination of being. This move to redefine the philosophical enterprise, to make philosophy

answerable to philology, and finally to rhetoric, is what Grassi found so valuable in the humanist tradition. Thus, it is important to attend to this move.

### *Topical Philosophy*

For the philologue, Grassi argued, the historicity of language represents the historicity of human *ingenium*. This term is difficult to translate, but might best be thought in terms of ingenuity, invention, or creativity. In this sense, the philologue traces the historicity of human ingenuity in the creation of meaning. *Ingenium*, therefore, is the means through which the human encounter with reality becomes manifest in linguistic meaning. Grassi traced the emergence of this term in the Latin tradition from the poets to the classical rhetoricians. It is with Cicero that the primary influence of the classical Latin world upon humanism is most pronounced:

In the Latin tradition, ‘ingenium’ is used concerning the behavior of animals in general and human activity. . . . Cicero describes the ingenium as an ‘archaic,’ that is, a primal, non-reducible, and dominant power: as such, ingenium lifts man above the habitual forms of thinking and feeling: ‘Magni autem est ingenii sevocare mentem a sensibus et cognitionem ab consuetudine abducere.’ It unites man with the Divine and, therefore, enables him to recognize the laws of the universe which are an expression of the godhead.<sup>7</sup>

*Ingenium* operates on two levels. As a principle of life in general, it represents the animal drive to perpetuate existence in the face of the exigencies of reality. The animal response to the realities of the here and now is, therefore, ingenious, inventive; the drive to maintain existence is creative. In the human, however, *ingenium* reaches a higher pitch. In the human, *ingenium* represents the ability to rise above mere drives and habitual modes of behavior in order to contemplate the very structure of reality. In both cases, the spur that mobilizes ingenious activity is *necessitates*.

For the humanists, as Grassi conceived them, necessity is, in a very immediate sense, the mother of invention. For brute animal life, *ingenium* takes the form of instinctual and habitual forms of behavior necessitated by the struggle to perpetuate existence. In human life, however, *ingenium* takes on more complex forms. In commenting on these human forms of ingenuity and invention, Grassi turned to the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives: “Vives speaks constantly of the demands made by nature: when they respond to these demands in the *artes*, humans elevate themselves to

something higher. . . . The ethical, economic, and political disciplines -- as responses to nature -- are dis-covered by the ingenium: without these responses man would neither live nor lead a human existence. His life would be a feral life.”<sup>8</sup> All forms of human life are, therefore, the effect of human ingenuity in response to the necessities of nature, including philosophy. Indeed, philosophy, that form of life in which humanity lifts itself to contemplation of the laws governing reality, is ingenious activity *par excellence*. With this assertion, Grassi argued, the humanists most starkly drew the boundaries between their own approach and medieval scholasticism, and even more the modern philosophical tradition initiated by Descartes. It is necessary then to return to the differences between a purely rational philosophy and the sort of philosophical position that Grassi found among the humanists, but this time at the higher register of method.

The place where the differences between rationalist philosophy and humanist “topical” philosophy became most pronounced was, for Grassi, Giambattista Vico’s criticism of the Cartesian method. Descartes represented for Grassi both the epitome of the rationalist philosophy that undergirded scholasticism and the source of the idealistic philosophy with which he finally broke in exploring the interface of Renaissance humanism and phenomenology. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that in Vico, consummate polemicist against the Cartesian method, Grassi found a kindred spirit. As is well known, Descartes asserted that if the philosopher as scientist were able to locate a single indubitable first principle, he should be able to rationally reconstruct an entire system of clear and distinct ideas about reality. The Cartesian philosophical enterprise is, therefore, the attempt to locate such a first principle, the “cogito,” and a rational method by which to move from the first principle to an understanding of the world. Descartes described the method as such:

. . . I believed the following four rules would be sufficient, provided I made a firm and constant resolution not even once to fail to observe them: The first was never to accept anything as true that I did not know evidently to be so; that is, carefully to avoid precipitous judgment and prejudice; and to include nothing more in my judgments than what presented itself to my mind with such clarity and distinctness that I would have no occasion to put it to doubt. The second, to divide each of the difficulties I was examining into as many parts as possible and as is required to solve them best. The third, to conduct my thoughts in an orderly fashion commencing with the simplest and easiest to know objects, to rise gradually, as by degrees, to the knowledge of the most composite things, and even supposing an order among those things that do not naturally precede one another. And last, everywhere to make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that I would be sure of having omitted nothing.<sup>9</sup>

It must be emphasized that this is a rational method; Descartes was famously dismissive of poetry and rhetoric in the work of philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Grassi summed up the Cartesian attitude toward the humanist project as such: “If the problem of philosophy is identical with that of rational knowledge, if this knowledge in its turn consists of tracing back our assertions to a ‘first truth,’ then emotive elements and with them the influence of images, of fantasy, of rhetoric play no role whatsoever in the process. They even appear as elements which interfere with the rational process.”<sup>11</sup>

Vico was deeply suspicious of the Cartesian method, especially as concerns Descartes’ dismissal of rhetoric as irrelevant to philosophy. He was discouraged by what he saw as the growing dominance of Cartesian “critical philosophy.” “In our days . . . philosophical criticism alone is honored. The art of ‘topics,’ far from being given first place in the curriculum is utterly disregarded. . . . We hear people affirming that if individuals are critically endowed, it is sufficient to teach them a certain subject, and they will have the capacity to discover whether there is any truth in that subject.”<sup>12</sup> Vico, a professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, argued instead for the primacy of rhetorical education in the University’s curriculum, and especially the teaching of rhetorical topics.

. . . I think young men should be taught the totality of science and arts, and their intellectual powers should be developed to the full; thus they will become familiar with the art of argument, drawn from the *ars topica*. At the very outset, their common sense should be strengthened so that they can grow in prudence and eloquence. Let their imagination and memory be fortified so that they may be effective in those arts in which fantasy and the mnemonic faculty are predominant. At a later stage let them learn criticism, so that they can apply the fullness of personal judgment to what they have been taught. . . . Were this done, young students, I think, would become exact in science, clever in practical matters, fluent in eloquence, imaginative in understanding poetry or painting, and strong in memorizing what they have learned in their legal studies.<sup>13</sup>

Topics was of paramount importance for Vico because it feeds the imagination and makes the mind acute and inventive (*ingegno*). Topics (*topoi* in Greek, *loci* in Latin) are standard lines of argumentation that serve to ground arguments. Aristotle distinguished twenty eight such *topoi* in the *Rhetoric* (bk. II, ch. 23), ranging from seemingly empirical principles, e.g., relations of cause and effect, temporal succession, to purely impressionistic inferences, e.g., similitude, possible motive for action. The catalogue of topics changed throughout the classical, Medieval, and Renaissance traditions, but the basic understanding of what they are and how they function remained largely the same: topics maps

the “places” (topography or location) where the initial means of mounting an argument, whether dialectical or rhetorical, are found. The mind schooled in the topics is able to “find” the proper argument. Thus, Vico, against Descartes, reestablished the connection between rhetoric and critical philosophy, but on grounds much different than traditionally understood, for instance, in Aristotle.

Aristotle viewed rhetoric as a companion to dialectic, i.e., philosophy proper. While dialectic is concerned with logical proofs, rhetoric is concerned with probabilities and means of persuasion. Both partake of topics, but for different purposes: dialectic adopts topics as first principles from which to derive rational proofs, rhetoric to discover persuasive arguments. Both use syllogistic reasoning: dialectic employs true syllogisms to articulate necessary truths; rhetoric employs enthymemes, practical syllogisms, to articulate probable truths. So conceived, rhetoric is a secondary discipline concerned either to elicit non-philosophical appeal among the uneducated for purely rational knowledge, or to articulate probabilities where necessity cannot be determined.

In important ways, Vico reversed the order of priority between dialectic and rhetoric, between critical philosophy and topics. His treatment of the problem is much more in line with the Latin rhetorical tradition embodied most clearly in Cicero. In *Topics*, Cicero argued that there are two interrelated aspects of argumentation: invention and judgment. “Aristotle was the founder of both in my opinion. The Stoics have worked in only one of the two fields. That is to say, they have followed diligently the ways of judgment by means of the science which they call *διαλεκτικη* (dialectic), but they have totally neglected the art which is called *τοπικη* (topics), an art which is more useful and certainly prior in the order of nature.”<sup>14</sup> Both dialectic and topics contribute to wisdom, and while wisdom lacks virtue without judgment, it lacks eloquence and appeal without invention.

Part of the reason for the shift of emphasis in the Latin rhetorical tradition is that argumentation was more firmly grounded in oratory than in the Greek tradition. In a context where argumentation is primarily performative, a firm command of topics is paramount in order to be able to construct arguments extempore. Thus, invention precedes proof, and topics takes precedence over dialectic. John D. Schaeffer has argued that Vico’s Naples had more in common with classical

Rome than with modernity in this sense; it was a society governed in important ways by oral practices: “The University of Naples and the law courts were the two focuses of that practice, and these two institutions formed the immediate context of Vico’s rhetorical theory. . . . The university and the law courts continued to feature oral performance and adversarial thinking in ways that decisively shaped their practices -- and their supporting theories. Because they were arenas of social conflict, the university and the courts were also the focal points of reform, and reformers competed for their control.”<sup>15</sup> The exigencies of oral performance shaped Vico’s understanding of rhetorical theory and university education. He emphasized the importance of *memorization* of the topics in order to make the mind inventive in argumentation, but he suggested further that education in topics shaped the mind in its capacities to engage the world. It instilled both an imaginative wonder about things in general and an ingenuity in making sense of them. Naples was also a society in transition; reform brought with it attempts to discipline the practices of the university and the courts. One form this discipline took was the introduction of the Cartesian method.

Grassi was less interested in the topics as such than in the capacities they instill. It is in this sense that Grassi spoke of a topical philosophy as opposed to a purely logical, rationalistic philosophy. Commenting on Vico’s criticism of the Cartesian method, Grassi states:

Vico’s rejection of the critical method, and of the rationalism connected with it, is based on the recognition that the original premises as such are nondeducible and that the *rational process* hence cannot ‘find’ them; that, moreover, rational knowledge cannot be a determining factor for rhetorical or poetic speech because it cannot comprehend the particular, the individual, i.e., the concrete situation; and since the critical method always starts with a premise, its final conclusions are necessarily valid only generally. . . . Vico repeatedly defends topics against the prevalence of rational activity on the grounds that the premises from which conclusions are drawn have to be ‘perceived’ to begin with. This perception is the function of topics because, and here the new important term appears, they come from the *ingenium* and not from the *ratio*. . . . *Ingenium* is the source of the creative activity of the topics.<sup>16</sup>

In articulating the idea of a topical philosophy, Grassi intended to indicate the creative, inventive faculty of mind that gives rise to, that ‘finds,’ the first premises upon which the deductive process can then proceed. This finding is an activity of *ingenium* not *ratio*, of invention and ingenuity, not reason and deduction.

In the end, philosophy, like all human activities and institutions, is the labor of ingenuity; it is work in Karl Marx's sense: human labor with the goal of wresting culture from nature. Work is the process through which humans "humanize" nature, i.e., adjust nature to human need. But for Grassi, as for Marx in his more humanistic moments, human work, especially philosophical work, is not just mechanical manipulation of the natural world. Human work is profoundly symbolic: "Work . . . is to be understood as a function both of conferring a meaning and making use of a meaning, never as a purely mechanical activity or a purely technical alteration of nature detached from the general context of human functions. Otherwise it would consist merely of an inexplicable act of violence to devastate nature."<sup>17</sup> Grassi was clear to indicate that this labor, the ingenious human response to necessity, is not a rational act, not founded in *ratio*, but in something more original, an act of imagination:

But how does this 'humanization of nature' take place if not through *ratio*? We already said that nature possesses a meaning only in regard to human needs. This presupposes that we discover a relationship, a *similitudo*, between what the senses reveal to us and our needs. . . . Insight into the relationships basically is not possible through a process of inference, but rather only through an original *in-sight* as invention and discovery [*inventio*]. . . . Since such a capacity is characteristic of fantasy, it is this, therefore which lets the human world appear. For this reason it is expressed originally in metaphors, i.e., in the figurative lending of meanings.<sup>18</sup>

The first acts, the first human works, through which the human world comes into existence are metaphorical interpretations, the yoking together of sensual experience and need. The faculty through which these metaphors come to light is not reason, but *fantasia*, imagination. Imagination is our most basic commerce with the world; it provides the basic materials upon which human ingenuity builds. Grassi, citing Vico, characterized imagination as the "eyes of *ingenium*."

Philosophy, like all human works, is grounded, according to Grassi, not in rational deduction, but in facility with metaphors, in imagination and invention. Metaphor was a centrally important category for Grassi, so it is worth spending some time exploring the function it holds in his thought.

*Primordial Metaphorization and the Logic of the Imagination*

To get some sense of the centrality of metaphor in Grassi's thought, it is useful to return to his continual touchstone, Vico. In *The New Science*, Vico asserted that the first wisdom of the nations, i.e., the gentile peoples, was a poetic wisdom: ". . . the first wisdom of the gentile world, must have begun with a metaphysics not rational and abstract like that of learned men now, but felt and imagined as that of the first men must have been, who, without power of ratiocination, were all robust sense and vigorous feeling. This metaphysics was their poetry, a faculty born with them . . . born of their ignorance of causes, for ignorance, the mother of wonder, made everything wonderful to men who were ignorant of everything."<sup>19</sup> On Vico's account the first act by which humanity elevated itself out of the flux of sensation that characterizes bestial nature was an imaginative one. The first humans were thrown into reflective consciousness through fear of the thunderclap; they came to conceive thunder as a primordial sign of Jove. But it is important to be clear what he meant by this scene. Vico asserted that Jove is not conceived as the source of thunder, rather Jove *is* thunder. Or, more accurately, thunder, as it rumbles in the sky, *is* the voice of Jove. Further, in this primordial scene, the sky from which thunder rumbles is not the abode of Jove, the sky *is* Jove. Jove becomes for the first humans the first *universale fantastico*, the first imaginative universal by which humanity *makes* the world intelligible. Imaginative universals functioned for the first humans, according to Vico, the same way that abstract categories function in rational metaphysics: they serve as exemplars that establish genera by which the world is organized. Unlike rational genera, they are not abstracted from particulars, rather the reverse: particulars are aggregated under the imaginative universal and become meaningful through it. (It is worth pointing out, in passing, the remarkable semblance between Vico's idea of imaginative universals and Mircea Eliade's understanding of the manner in which archetypes function in pre-historical, "archaic" societies.)

On Vico's understanding, imaginative universals are themselves relayed poetically through narration, through myths or fables (*vera narrativa*). Fables, then, narrate the coming to be of human understanding of the world. Donald Phillip Verene describes the relationship between imaginative universal and fable as such:

Vico defines fables as ‘imaginative class concepts’ (*generi fantastici*). For Vico, fables are not embellishments of actual events or historical figures. . . . Events themselves are given form through fables. . . . The *universale fantastico* is a way of making intelligibility. It is a conception of how intelligibility takes place at the origin of human mentality, at the beginning of the human world. The fable, which depends upon the mind’s power of *fantasia*, is the means by which the world first takes on a shape for the human.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, for Vico, the first human acts, i.e., works which eventually lead to the formation of the institutions that compose the human world, were imaginative, metaphorical acts eventually narrated in the form of myths.

Vico’s account of imaginative universals is at the heart of the importance Grassi ascribed to metaphor. Metaphorical activity is, he asserted, the basis of human thought about and understanding of the world. Such metaphorical cognition is neither abstracted from the time and place of life, as in traditional metaphysics, nor is it merely subjective. Metaphor has its own type of objectivity grounded in the realities of labor and work: “Work alone is capable of proving the objectivity of ingenious and imaginative activities; it makes it evident whether the relationships established have proved subjective, by their failure, or objective, by their success in leading to a result.”<sup>21</sup> Imagination possesses its own logic, the objectivity of which must be shown in the successful imaginative connection of experience and need and the ingenious invention of possibilities for satisfaction. But on what basis shall we judge success and satisfaction? To answer this question, Grassi turned to the notion, so important in Vico’s work, of *sensus communis*, common sense.

One might assess the success of human ingenuity on the basis of the degree to which the individual is able to secure resources for her own needs and wishes. But for both Vico and Grassi, such a life would be barely a human one, hardly above the status of bare nature. And as Thomas Hobbes has famously argued, life in the state of nature is “nasty, poor, brutish and short.” Work rather must be judged on the basis of whether it is consonant with and to what extent it contributes to the *sensus communis*, understood both in terms of a common sensibility and common sense making carried out in institutions. For Vico, *sensus communis* stabilizes work: “Human choice, by its nature most uncertain, is made certain and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human

needs or utilities, which are the two sources of the natural law of the gentes. Common sense is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, and entire nation, or the entire human race.”<sup>22</sup> *Sensus communis* is unreflective judgment; in other words, it is not abstract, rational judgment. As such it falls outside of what Vico called the critical philosophy espoused by the Cartesians. At the same time it is not subjective, because it is shared. Grassi characterized it as the human response to an appeal that Being makes on humanity. To some extent, all human work is such a response. It is necessary, as a final step in my analysis of Grassi’s thought, to address how he conceived the appeal of Being and the nature of human response. At this point, the originality of Grassi’s ideas becomes evident.

#### *The Appeal of Being and the Passionate Response*

I want to pause and recount briefly what has been covered so far in order to regain our bearings. Grassi’s recovery of the humanist philosophical tradition began with the reversal of priority between *res* and *verba*. Contrary to the Medieval tradition, which began with the rational determination of timeless essence and the conception of language as the neutral medium for the expression of essence, the humanists, started with the word. As most represented in Leonardo Bruni’s philological studies, the meaning of the word is hardly determined by the rational delimitation of essence; rather the context of usage is what governs meaning. As such, the historical unfolding of the word’s meaning becomes, at the same time, the historical unfolding of human engagement with reality. The reversal of priority between word and being calls for a radical redefinition of the nature of philosophy.

In accord with philology, then, philosophy is rethought in terms of the unfolding of *ingenium*. The word is the site where human genius, ingenuity, and creativity, characteristics that govern all human works, becomes manifest. Thus, philosophy, itself a human work, partakes of the same human ingenuity. Philosophy is one of the works by which humanity lifts itself out of brute animal existence in order to seek higher possibilities in human institutions. This work is both ingenious, i.e., a human response to necessity, and imaginative, i.e., it results from the metaphorical transfer of

meanings from sense experiences to human needs. In this sense, then, the basis for philosophy, indeed for all human work is metaphor. At the same time the ingenious and imaginative character of work discloses the reality of a common sense that governs all human work. This *sensus communis*, both a common sensibility and a common stock of meanings, guides the common life in human institutions.

In some sense, all three of the themes that have so far directed my treatment of Grassi's thought are specific configurations of a broader reality that Grassi designated the appeal of Being. Key to understanding what Grassi meant by the appeal of Being is Heidegger's assertion of an ontological difference between Being and beings. This idea, of course, constituted Heidegger's judgment of the failure of Western metaphysics and was the reason for his dismissal of the humanist tradition. With this distinction, he meant to indicate the difference between individual instances of existence, i.e., beings, and the groundless ground, the "abyss," of existence as such, the power of existence in its dynamic unfolding, the force that founds beings, i.e., Being. Heidegger suggested that the Western philosophical tradition since Plato had lost track of the question of Being, focusing instead on beings:

Yet Being -- what is Being? The thinking that is to come must learn to experience that and to say it. 'Being' -- that is not God and not a cosmic ground. . . . Man clings first and always and only to beings. But when thinking represents beings as beings it no doubt relates itself to Being. In truth, however, it always thinks only of beings as such; precisely not, and never Being as such. The 'question of Being' always remains a question about beings. It is still not at all what its elusive name indicates: the question in the direction of Being. Philosophy, even when it becomes 'critical' through Descartes and Kant, always follows the course of metaphysical representation. It thinks from beings back to beings with a glance in passing toward Being. For every departure from beings and every return to them stands already in the light of Being.

But metaphysics recognizes the clearing of Being either solely as the view to what is present in 'outward appearance' (idea) or critically as what is seen as a result of categorial representation on the part of subjectivity. This means that the truth of Being as the clearing itself remains concealed for metaphysics.<sup>23</sup>

Metaphysics, Heidegger asserted, has forgotten the question of Being because it starts from beings (individual instances of existence) and conceives their meaning in terms of beings (ideas, God, subjective categories, etc.). As such, it cannot conceive the clearing of Being within which beings appear.

For Grassi, as for Heidegger, Being makes its appeal to *Dasein* (being-there, or the thrown existence that constitutes the human being) as the clearing within which, abyss out of which, or background against which the meaning of beings is manifest. The three guiding themes of the historicity of the word, necessity, and metaphor represent, in Grassi's thought, the manner in which Being makes its appeal; and, he argued, the humanist critique of scholasticism is the location where this philosophy of Being makes its first appearance. So, we need to look back to these guiding themes paying particular attention to the notion of the appeal.

It is not difficult to see how the humanist reversal of primacy between words and things represents an initial place where Being makes its appeal. Recall the importance for Grassi of Leonardo Bruni's discovery that the meaning of words is established not through the rational determination of essence, but the contexts within which the word appears. The place that the word holds in the work as a whole and the connection it establishes with other words determines its meaning, and as such determines the meaning of its referent, the thing to which it refers. Because context determines meaning, the time and place of usage, i.e., history, represents the first appeal that Being makes to humanity. Grassi explained the significance of the reversal of priority between *res* and *verba* as such:

When Bruni speaks of 'rozzi e grossi e senza perizia de lettere, dotti . . . al modo fratesco scolastico,' we should not take this criticism of the scholastics to indicate incompetence in a particular discipline; rather he is referring to something much more fundamental: ignorance of the 'litterae' is ignorance of the philosophy out of which arises the problem of the word. Without a consciousness of this problem, one overlooks the historicity of the word: 'Imperita . . . verborum omnia in hac temporum nostrorum faece confudit.' A knowledge of the litterae coincides with the experience of the changeable meaning of reality. Whoever has not made this experience through philology, and afterwards in life through the claims made by the historic situation, fails to interpret correctly the appeals in which every human finds himself . . . .<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the context in which the word becomes meaningful, and hence designates a being in its historical manifestation, represents the first appeal of Being toward the human.

This appeal is necessarily rhetorical and poetic because it is ornamental in the most original of senses: "'Ornatus' has the same meaning as the Greek  $\chi\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\sigma$  in the sense that it refers to a unity of a complex whole which results from relationships. If we start from the problem of the rationally

determined beings, we arrive necessarily at the ‘ornatus’ as a static togetherness of parts; however, if we start instead from the problem of the appeal in which humans find themselves and to which they respond through the word in varying situations, then the ‘ornatus’ of rhetorical language is the form of original language as realized in the ‘here’ and ‘now’ . . . .”<sup>25</sup> Neither scholastic Platonism nor Cartesian rationalism can adequately conceive the togetherness of things that constitutes cosmos because both conceive the truth of beings, i.e., essence, in static terms. Only the philological engagement with the historicity of the word, as referring to the dynamic unfolding of Being, captures the reality of the appeal. Philology, or more broadly, interpretation and translation *is* the human response to the appeal of Being. The reversal of priority between language and being, therefore, sets the basis for the following two designations of the appeal. Necessity becomes the manner in which Being makes its appeal, and *ingenium*, the manner in which the human responds. Metaphor, ornamental language *par excellence*, represents the form in which Being beckons through beings, and *sensus communis* the form in which humanity makes its answer.

Recall, that Grassi discussed *ingenium* as the effort that life exerts in its efforts to perpetuate itself amid the exigencies of existence. *Ingenium* is the animal response to necessity. In the human being, this ingenious response takes the form of labor by which the human world, i.e., life in human institutions -- language, economics, law, etc. -- is constituted. As such, necessity becomes the immediate manner in which Being makes its appeal, ingenuity and creativity the manner in which humans most immediately respond.

Recall as well, that the driving force of this ingenuity is imagination; imagination makes nature intelligible as a realm of possibilities for “humanization.” Such humanization is a process of adjusting nature to human need and takes place on the basis of a metaphorical transfer of meanings between experience and need. Understood this way, however, it is too easy to assume that Grassi held metaphor to be merely a human tool; far from conceiving it so, Grassi spoke of metaphor as the primordial and originary form in which Being makes its appeal to humanity:

No *phoné*, no sensory perception hovers isolated in mid-air, in abstract, rarefied space. On the contrary, it becomes crystallized in various situations, in the signification of individual beings which appear within an ordered system in accordance with principles of measure. There arises a *kosmos* that is in no way a human creation, but which dawns and sets in a

temporal *phyein* to the rhythm of the warning signals of an underivable absolute. . . . In the *phonai*, these perceptible indicative signs emerge not as functions of individual beings but rather from the call of the abyss, whose organs are our senses. . . . The elements of language are not metaphors merely in the sense that a certain meaning is transferred onto meaningless phenomena that are mechanically explained. Rather, they constitute already an originary revelation of the forces that exhort us here and now and herald the elements of our world. . . . Originary emotion is passionately experienced through the indicative signs of the senses within the limits of pleasure and pain. We exist and function in a passionately experienced world granted to us by the signs that direct us and caution us. The act of appearance of these signs, which bind us and compel us, marks the beginning of the game that discloses our possibilities. The confrontation with the reality of such originary experience constitutes the act that generates our world.<sup>26</sup>

Metaphor thus constitutes the originary form in which Being confronts us and makes its appeal. It is less a capability that humans possess than a primordial reality that speaks to us. *Sensus communis*, the unreflective judgment that spurs the construction of human institutions that ground the human world is the passionate human response to this originary appeal.

At the end of this itinerary, then, we are able to see the originality of Grassi's contributions. The whole of the analysis reveals at the end that the three guiding themes are, themselves, figurations of the appeal and response. The historicity of the word, necessity, and metaphor represent the various ways in which Being makes its appeal to humanity. Being calls us back to the clearing in which the meaning of beings is manifest. Philological interpretation, *ingenium*, and *sensus communis* represent the various ways humanity answers the call. This response is a passionate one, that is to say, is it more felt than thought; the response finds its primordial sources in passionate experience in the face of the clearing of Being.

### ***Conclusion: Is Grassi still relevant?***

While Grassi's ideas have been appreciated by rhetorical theorists and those involved in Vico studies, they have yet to be adequately engaged by philosophers or scholars of religion. I want to conclude, therefore, by discussing the relevance of Grassi's thought for contemporary philosophical enquiry and its possibilities for religious studies. I have argued that Grassi was far more than a commentator on Renaissance humanism, but was also a strikingly original thinker whose ideas remain relevant. The last section of my analysis revealed how striking those ideas are. Given the

space at hand, my efforts here will necessarily be gestural rather than decisive. I will spend comparatively little time discussing his significance for philosophy, as I believe this is a relatively easy case to make. I will devote the majority of my time to discussing his importance for religious studies.

I believe that Grassi's distinctive contributions to contemporary philosophy lie in two areas. The first and foremost is the interface of humanism and phenomenology that he strove to demarcate -- sometimes in explicit, sometimes in veiled ways. In important ways, this endeavor is an answer and complement to Heidegger's own criticism of Husserl's Cartesian turn. Grassi's own efforts, while consonant with Heidegger's, are very different, however. Of paramount importance in his work was the philosophical significance of rhetoric, imagination, and *ingenium* and the manner in which they permit appropriate response to the appeal of Being. In my estimation, these moves have never been adequately explored nor appreciated by practitioners and historians of phenomenology.

Grassi's second contribution lies in the importance he placed on the notion of *sensus communis*. An abiding concern in reception of Heidegger's work is the yawning lack of any sense of ethical possibility, and the difficulty in conceiving how there *could be* any such possibility. Heidegger's fundamental ontology completely disvalues the public and communal as a realm of inauthenticity, *das Mann*, the speech and thought of the 'they-self' and the forgetfulness of Being. Grassi's retrieval of the humanist tradition, and specifically the idea of the *sensus communis*, offers an important critique of Heidegger's tendency to devalue the life with others. While Grassi never, to my knowledge, explicitly posed this dimension of his work in these terms, I argue that it offers an important corrective, one that is distinct from others of Grassi's generation who were students and eventual critics of Heidegger, e.g., Hans Georg Gadamer and Karl-Otto Apel.

The argument for Grassi's significance for religious studies is a more difficult one to make. While he frequently showed interest in religious texts and while he recognized analogues between his own thought and that of the apophatic theological tradition represented by Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa,<sup>27</sup> Grassi consistently offered a strictly secular interpretation of humanism, the appeal of Being, and the labor of human striving, one that is more often couched in Marxist and

phenomenological terms than any others. On the surface then, his relevance for the study of religion is difficult to defend. Nonetheless, I think there are important avenues where Grassi's thought offers important clarifications. While I believe that there are many such avenues, I will restrict myself to the constructive endeavors of theology, and explicitly to another, more recent attempt to retrieve the humanist tradition from a distinctly theological perspective, that of David Klemm and William Schweiker to articulate a "theological humanism."

Again, given space, my treatment of Klemm's and Schweiker's position will be cursory at best and must presuppose some familiarity with the ideas. Broadly speaking, however, Klemm and Schweiker seek to articulate a position that avoids what they take to be the two primary ideological threats to human and non-human life in the global age: *overhumanization*, i.e., the tendency to restrict moral concern strictly to the human realm and to reduce concern for the non-human world to utilitarian means of satisfying human wants and needs, and *hypertheism*, i.e., the reemergence of neotribalism in what we might call a "post-secular" age and the tendency to restrict claims to truth and value to narrative resources of one's own insular community.<sup>28</sup> This position attempts to offer a third way that conceives of the human *and* non-human world as possessing an inherent value that is sanctioned by the divine, and that resists the reduction of life to utilitarian calculation (the *theological* in theological humanism). At the same time this position resists the drift toward neotribalism, arguing instead that the religious (and other) traditions offer distinctive, but not uniquely legitimate, articulations of the human and non-human worlds and their value, and that seeks to locate means for discussion from within and across traditions (the *humanism* in theological humanism).

As I cannot hope to deal with the complexities of Klemm's and Schweiker's ideas *in toto*, I will focus on the moral imperative that grounds their position: "The imperative of responsibility at the heart of theological humanism is this: *in all actions and relations respect and enhance the integrity of life before God.*"<sup>29</sup> In what follows, I will briefly discuss the contours and appeal of this imperative and its fundamental problem as Klemm and Schweiker present it: given that the "integrity of life" is the object of moral concern, how can this reality become an object for consciousness? Here, I think Grassi's ideas offer important possibilities. In turn, I will show that Klemm's and Schweiker's ideas

serve as an important corrective to some short comings in Grassi's thought that I have not yet touched upon.

Klemm and Schweiker's formulation of the imperative is particularly appealing for two reasons. First, it affirms human capability and freedom within limits. In all actions and relations we are to *respect* and enhance the integrity of life. The imperative directs us to use freedom to enhance wherever possible and whenever appropriate, but always under the primary aim of respect; if enhancement of any form of life (ours or others) works contrary to our respect for life in its integrity, we should not so act: "Enhancing without or before respect too easily becomes paternalistic where those with power intervene and change things unmindful or unresponsive to the will and wishes of others. . . . The point is that respect draws the map of moral community; enhancement aims to further the goods of that community."<sup>30</sup> In all cases we ought to aim at enhancement within the bounds of respect.

Second, the imperative offers a complex and dynamic view of the realm of moral concern; it is not life *qua* life that is to be respected and enhanced, but the *integrity* of life, i.e., the complex and dynamic interrelation of life forms. The complex understanding of the integrity of life militates against an overly simplistic notion that we ought in all cases respect and enhance whatever life forms we encounter. Besides its naivete, the fulfilling of such an imperative would simply be impossible: to eat is to destroy life (whether animal or vegetable) in the service of preserving and enhancing life; to practice medicine is to destroy life (viral, bacterial, parasitical) in the service of preserving and enhancing life; to build a house is to kill and/or displace life in the service of preserving and enhancing life. Klemm and Schweiker argue that it is not life, but the complex interdynamic of life forms and their continued possibilities for greater integrity that is to be respected and enhanced: "There are situations in which life can and may and must tragically be sacrificed precisely to respect and enhance its integrity. . . . Against those who deny the sanctity of life this ethics insists that life has great dignity and intrinsic worth. Against those who insist on the sacredness of life, this ethics argues the integrity of life, and not life itself, bears intrinsic value."<sup>31</sup> In all our actions, then, we

ought to aim to secure certain intrinsic goods (basic, social, reflexive, natural, and spiritual) that promise to promote the continued integrity of life.

But, the complexity with which Klemm and Schweiker map the moral realm and the capacity and limits of human freedom, which is its strength as a moral position, encounters problems in another sense, at least as they have discussed it: How can we know the integrity of life? How can we determine which actions will enhance while still respecting? How do we know which forms of life can and must be legitimately sacrificed in the interest of preserving integrity? This is a question of moral epistemology. Given that the moral realm is complex, interdynamic, and, as such, continually changing, it is not clear how we can know it, and, without knowledge, it is not clear how we ought to act toward it in specific circumstances. Klemm and Schweiker suggest that claims of the integrity of life are recognized in *conscience*, conceived as a “primary mode of being human as an agent in the world.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, conscience is the manner in which an agent recognizes the claims of particular life forms to the intrinsic goods that ground integrity. But, it is not clear that conscience can itself articulate the *integrity* of life, make it intelligible as an object of respect, and explain *how* we ought to strive to meet claims to intrinsic goods where appropriate, or when we ought to *sacrifice* life in the service of life. Grassi’s ideas provide important possibilities for answering these questions.

First, I would assert that the difference between life and the integrity of life, as Klemm and Schweiker articulate it, is at least analogous to the ontological difference between beings and Being. Indeed, thinking the difference this way, i.e., in terms of *life* rather than *Being*, may be more beneficial to the project that Grassi engaged. (I will return to this later.) If we think of it this way, then we can conceive of the integrity of life as the clearing in which, or the background against which life, i.e., the manifold of life forms, becomes meaningful. The meaning and value of life is grounded in the integrity of life. Additionally, thinking the relationship this way gives us some purchase on the scope and limitation of conscience. So conceived, conscience functions in a manner similar to Heidegger’s presentation: conscience is the place where the integrity of life imposes itself on consciousness, where it claims our attention or impinges on experience. The important difference between Klemm and Schweiker’s understanding of conscience and Heidegger’s is that for them the call of conscience

directs us toward the claim of integrity rather than authenticity. Theirs is an account of *moral* conscience and not merely *existential* conscience. This is a critical (and positive) difference.

But, conscience does not itself articulate the integrity of life; it gestures toward it. The claim demands a response. Here, Grassi's treatments of imagination and *ingenium* offer themselves for consideration. The claim of the integrity of life demands a response, a work of ingenuity in the face of necessity. But, as Grassi so elegantly explained, such response is always mounted on the basis of intelligibility that is achieved through imagination. Klemm and Schweiker speak about hermeneutical imagination and metaphorical representation, but they do not, on my reading, adequately tie these aspects to moral epistemology. A more robust treatment of imagination as the place where the claim of integrity is made intelligible, thus empowering possibilities for adequate response, would help here. Clearly, the idea of the integrity of life designates something more than the simple aggregate of life. Klemm and Schweiker continue to speak of the integrity of life as the complex, dynamic, interrelation of forms of life. But, as complex and dynamic, the integrity of life can never be grasped analytically; we are only ever confronted with the question of the integrity of life in moments where we are confronted by the claim it makes upon us. Our grasp of it can never be strictly rational and deductive; what is needed is an "originary insight" that Grassi reserved for *fantasy*, for the imaginative construction of intelligibility. Of course, our insight into the situation will always be partial, momentary, and imperfect. Our creative response will always reflect this partial, momentary, and imperfect insight. But this the price of all moral action. Agency is fraught with risk; the best we can hope for is fitting response in the situations where we are confronted by the claims of integrity.

But a very genuine criticism might be leveled here: how is this imaginative, non-analytic account of moral epistemology anything more than subjective impression? Here, Grassi's presentation of *sensus communis* offers some answer, though my reflections here are extremely speculative and will not get the exploration they deserve. Recall that Vico spoke of the *sensus communis* as an unreflective judgment that founds a people, nation, and eventually the whole human race. As such, it is non-analytical, but not subjective. Might we conceive of the *sensus communis* as an

innate capacity within the human, a governing principle, grounded by nothing outside the human condition, guiding responses to the claims of integrity? Again, this is highly speculative and will have to await further articulation.

I want to conclude by suggesting briefly that Klemm and Schweiker offer two important insights that might direct further exploration of Grassi's thought. The first I already alluded to: casting the ontological difference in terms of life rather than Being may be more amenable to Grassi's project. Recall that a primary motive in his attempt to reclaim the humanist tradition was its criticism of the abstraction of a purely rational scholasticism. Grassi characterized Vico as the high point of humanism because Vico was able to articulate comprehensively the insights of the Renaissance humanist tradition and turn them against the Cartesian rationalism of his day. But, given this the concern with abstraction, and hence the inability to address the concrete here and now, it is not clear that "Being" is any less an abstraction than essence. The notion of the integrity of life has much more traction in this area. We are never really confronted with the abyss of Being, but we are confronted with momentary appearances of the integrity of life; thus, the integrity of life is a more existentially/phenomenologically basic reality. Secondly, there exists in Grassi's thought a subtle drift toward what Klemm and Schweiker would call overhumanization. While he asserted that the work through which humans humanize nature is not mere mechanical manipulation and violence, it is difficult to see what mechanisms there are in his thought to conceive humanization as anything but a reduction of the non-human to a realm of human utilization. In this sense, the theism espoused by Klemm and Schweiker may be helpful.

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Ernesto Grassi has been largely ignored by philosophers and scholars of religion. He has typically been looked upon, where he *has* been looked upon, as a historian of rhetoric and a commentator on Renaissance humanism. I have shown however, that he was an original thinker whose ideas deserve more attention in philosophy and religious studies. I hope that my colleagues in philosophy and religion will follow my lead.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Ernesto Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism: Studies in Philosophy and Poetics*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton, NY: SUNY Binghamton, 1988), xi-xii.
- <sup>2</sup>Ernesto Grassi, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton, NY: SUNY, Binghamton, 1983), 31.
- <sup>3</sup>Ernesto Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism: Studies in Philosophy and Poetics*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton, NY: SUNY Binghamton, 1988), 5.
- <sup>4</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 6.
- <sup>5</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 8.
- <sup>6</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 21.
- <sup>7</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 68.
- <sup>8</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 69.
- <sup>9</sup>Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), 11.
- <sup>10</sup>"I held eloquence in high regard and I loved poetry, but I believed that they were both gifts of the mind -- not fruits of study. Those who possess the most forceful power of reasoning and who best order their thoughts so as to render them clear and intelligible can always best persuade one of what they are proposing, even if they speak only the dialect of Lower Brittany and have never learned rhetoric" (Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993], 4).
- <sup>11</sup>Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*, trans. John Michael Kois and Azizeh Azodi (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 37.
- <sup>12</sup>Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans. Elio Gianturco (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 14.
- <sup>13</sup>Giambattista Vico, *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, trans. Elio Gianturco (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 19.
- <sup>14</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Topica*, Loeb Classic Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1949), 2.6–7.
- <sup>15</sup>John D. Schaeffer, *Sensus Communis: Vico, Rhetoric, and the Limits of Relativism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 35.
- <sup>16</sup>Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*, trans. John Michael Kois and Azizeh Azodi (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 44–45.
- <sup>17</sup>Ernesto Grassi, "The Priority of Common Sense and Imagination: Vico's Philosophical Relevance Today," in *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney, and Donald Phillip Verene (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976), 174–75.
- <sup>18</sup>Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, 6–7.
- <sup>19</sup>Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), par. 375.
- <sup>20</sup>Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico's Science of the Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 71.
- <sup>21</sup>Ernesto Grassi, "The Priority of Common Sense and Imagination: Vico's Philosophical Relevance Today," in *Vico and Contemporary Thought*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Michael Mooney, and Donald Phillip Verene (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976), 175.
- <sup>22</sup>Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), par. 141–42.
- <sup>23</sup>Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1993), 234–35.
- <sup>24</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 24.

<sup>25</sup>Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism*, 25.

<sup>26</sup>Ernesto Grassi, *The Primordial Metaphor*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Binghamton, NY: SUNY, Binghamton, 1994), 134, 136–37.

<sup>27</sup>Grassi, *The Primordial Metaphor*, 55–60.

<sup>28</sup>By the term “post-secular” I mean to indicate the empirical invalidation of the “secularization thesis” proposed by late 19th and early 20th century sociologists, the idea that religious belief would continue to decline and eventually be overtaken by scientific-technological rationality and a purely secular world view.

<sup>29</sup>David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 82.

<sup>30</sup>David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 83.

<sup>31</sup>Klemm and Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future*, 84.

<sup>32</sup>Klemm and Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future*, 85.

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