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978-0-521-19388-7 - Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue: Creating the Foundations of Classical Civilization

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Excerpt

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Introduction

Homer has always been celebrated as one of the greatest poets – “the best and most divine of the poets,” according to Socrates (*Ion* 530b9–10)¹ – but it is forgotten today that such philosophers as Plato, Montaigne, and Nietzsche considered him to be a foundational political, moral, and philosophic *thinker* as well. In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates identifies Homer not only as “the first teacher and leader” of all the tragic poets (595b9–c2) but also as a man widely believed to know “all the human things that have to do with virtue and vice and also the divine things” (598d7–e5) and to teach about “the governance of cities and the education of a human being” (599c6–d2).² In his *Essays*, Montaigne goes so far as to claim that Homer “laid the foundations equally for all schools of philosophy” (1976, 377; see also 371, 455).³ According to the eighteenth-century political philosopher Giambattista Vico, all philosophers from Plato up to his own time regarded Homer as a philosophic thinker

¹ Consider also, for example, Rousseau 1979, 453; Nietzsche 1967, 63–64. Even Vico, who denies Homer’s existence as a single individual (1999, 363, 381), nonetheless declares him to be “the most sublime of all the sublime heroic poets” (364; see also 149, 318, 370, 372). On this point, see Porter 2004, 329–330. See also Wolf 1985, 47, 210.

² Consider also, for example, Horace *Epistles* 1.2, where Horace compares Homer favorably with the philosophers Chrysippus and Cantor. In Griffin’s words: “Homer, says Horace, is the best of all moral philosophers at teaching the bad consequences of the passions” (1995, 28).

³ It is also noteworthy that in the concluding chapter of his *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke presents Homer’s Odysseus as the model of a man who righteously but prudently resists oppression (1998, 416–417).

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who founded Greek civilization and as “the source of all Greek philosophies [*il fonte di tutte le greche filosofie*].”⁴ And in *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche contends that Homer constitutes *the* fundamental theoretical alternative to the entire tradition of Platonic philosophy: “Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism” (1969a, 154).⁵ It is the goal of this book to restore Homer to his rightful place among the principal figures in the history of political and moral philosophy and to do so by elucidating, in particular, his education of the Greeks.

According to Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, as well as Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Nietzsche, Homer was the educator of the Greeks, the theoretical founder of classical civilization.⁶ Herodotus judges that it was Homer, together with Hesiod, who created the gods in the form in which the Greeks worshipped them (2.53), a judgment reiterated by Nietzsche, who declares that Homer is the man who “gave the Greeks their gods – no, who invented his own gods for himself!” (1974, 242).⁷ Socrates proclaims that Homer taught the Greeks about such great and

⁴ Vico 1999, 355–387, especially 355–356, 386. For the passages in Italian, see Vico 1977, 543–584, especially 583.

⁵ Consider also the identification of Homer with the origin of Enlightenment made by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972, xvi, 13–20, 32–36, 43–80; see also Ruderman 1999, 145–150). See as well Lukàcs’s treatment of Homer as a theoretical figure of capital importance: “if no one has equalled Homer, nor even approached him . . . it is because he found the answer [to the question: how can life become essence?] before the progress of the human mind through history had allowed the question to be asked” (1977, 30; see also 47). On the identification of the *Odyssey* in particular with philosophy, see Hall 2008, 147–159. Hall contends, “The *Odyssey* and philosophy have been inseparable since antiquity” (147).

⁶ Plato *Republic* 606e1–607a5; see also 376e2–377e4. See also Herodotus 2.53; Thucydides 1.2–11; Xenophon *Symposium* 3.5; Machiavelli 1998, 58–60, 68–71; Montaigne 1976, 569–571, 442–443; Nietzsche 1974, 242–243; 1968, 205; 1969a, 154; 1984, 161.

⁷ Consider as well Nietzsche 1984, 88; Montaigne 1976, 701. Herodotus also claims that the Greeks received many of their religious beliefs from the Egyptians (2.41–51). On the significance of Homer as a religious teacher of the Greeks, consider as well Hegel 1956, 237; Voeglin 1957, 72; and Manent 2010, 42–48. Manent goes so far as to say, “It is, in the first place, inasmuch as he was a ‘theologian,’ or a poet who authored ‘theologies,’ that Homer was the educator of the Greeks” (2010, 42–43 – my translation). Burkert notes, “Only an authority could create order amid such a confusion of [religious] tradition. The authority to whom the Greeks appealed was the poetry of Hesiod and, above all, of Homer” (1985, 120). See also Bowra 1977, 215; Finley 1978, 135–136.

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noble matters as generalship, statesmanship, and human virtue (*Republic* 599c6–d2), a claim echoed by Alexander the Great, who – possibly because of the influence of Aristotle – deemed the *Iliad* a portable treasure of “military virtue” (Plutarch *Alexander* 15.4–5).⁸ In his essay celebrating Homer as one of the three “most outstanding men” who ever lived, Montaigne declares: “It was against the order of nature that he created the most excellent production that can be. For things at birth are ordinarily imperfect; they gain in size and strength as they grow. He made the infancy of poetry and of several other sciences mature, perfect, and accomplished” (1976, 570 – emphasis added). As all these thinkers testify, it was Homer who provided the Greeks with a common moral understanding by providing them with vivid and compelling models of human excellence. It was Homer who revealed to the Greeks the nature of the gods and illuminated their relations to humans. It was Homer who guided the Greeks in their reflections about human nature and in their imaginings of human and divine greatness.⁹

These thinkers also stress that Homer presented his teaching in a distinctively poetic, artful, and oblique manner. As Socrates suggests, in both Plato (*Republic* 378d3–e1) and Xenophon (*Symposium* 3.6, *Memorabilia* 1.2.58–59), Homer’s teaching is not always immediately accessible, for it is “composed among hidden thoughts [ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας]” (*Republic* 378d6). Similarly, in Plato’s *Protagoras*, Protagoras identifies Homer as a sophist, that is, as one of those who both possessed and taught wisdom, but who also sought “to make a disguise for themselves and to cover themselves with it [πρόσχημα ποιείσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι]” out of fear of hostility (316d3–9). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli points to Homer as a wise teacher of

⁸ According to Richardson, “There was a strong ancient tradition that Aristotle gave his pupil Alexander the Great a special text of the *Iliad*.” Richardson surmises, “Alexander’s own passion for Homer must derive in part from Aristotle’s influence.” At any rate, Aristotle himself “quotes Homer some 114 times, with a strong bias towards the *Iliad*” and evinces “a close and sensitive psychological reading of the text” (1992, 36; see also 37–40).

⁹ In the words of Burkert, “To be a Greek was to be educated, and the foundation of all education was Homer” (1985, 120). According to Scott, “Homer was the greatest single force in making of the Greeks a kindred people and in giving them a mutually understandable language and common ideals” (1963, 98). See also Hunter 2004, 246. For the didactic role played by Homer in the later classical world, consider Farrell 2004; Long 1992; Browning 1992.

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princes who taught subtly and “covertly [*copertamente*]” such heterodox but vital lessons as the need for rulers to imitate the harsher qualities of beasts as well as the finer qualities of men.¹⁰ In the preface to his translation of Homer’s poems, Hobbes praises Homer especially for his “discretion” (1894, iii–x). In *The New Science*, Vico claims that all philosophers until his day characterized Homer’s wisdom as an “esoteric wisdom” – or “hidden wisdom [*sapienza riposta*]” – one that can only be uncovered after considerable intellectual exertion by his students.¹¹ As these thinkers emphasize, Homer conveys his theoretical teaching about, for example, the nature of the divine or the character of human excellence with circumspection, indirection, and even misdirection. Although Homer is not as reticent as such thinkers as Plato – who never speaks in his own name in his dialogues except for the titles¹² – Homer does primarily address us indirectly, through the speeches of his characters rather than in his own name.¹³ Moreover, Homer’s narrative is far from straightforward, for its structure is exceedingly complex and its roughly 450 similes¹⁴ – almost none of which are repeated¹⁵ – can be as perplexing and thought provoking as they are arresting and moving.¹⁶

¹⁰ Machiavelli 1998, 60, 68–70, 77–79. For the Italian text cited, see Machiavelli 1966, 107.

¹¹ Vico 1999, 355–356; 1977, 543–545.

¹² Strauss 1964, 50–62.

¹³ As Griffin notes, “More than half of the Homeric epics consists of speech by characters, not narrative by the narrator . . . some 55 per cent of the total of the two epics” (2004, 156). In the *Iliad*, almost 45 percent of the lines (7,018 of 15, 690) are in direct speech; in the *Odyssey*, almost 70 percent of the lines (8,225 of 12,103) are in direct speech. Consider also Richardson 1990, 70–82.

¹⁴ Moulton 1977, 18. On the challenge of counting Homeric similes, see Buxton 2004, 146–147; Edwards 1991, 24; 1987, 102–103. See also Scott 1974, 190–212; 2009, 189–205.

¹⁵ See Edwards 1991, 24; 1987, 102–103; Buxton 2004, 146; Redfield 1975, 188.

¹⁶ As Buxton observes, “the Homeric narrator himself intervenes in order to point out likenesses through the medium of similes” (2004, 148; see also Clay 2010, 21–22). Similarly, as Edwards points out when speaking of the *Iliad*, “The Homeric long simile is a masterpiece of poetic art, and brings us as close as we can hope to get to the perceptions and sensitivities of the genius who constructed the monumental poem” (1991, 41; see also 34, 39 on the didactic function of the similes, as well as Edwards 1987, 104–105). Consider especially such extremely surprising, so-called reversal similes as in *Iliad* 22.93–97, 24.477–484, and *Odyssey* 8.523–531, 16.16–21, 23.233–240. See Moulton 1977, 114–116, 128–132, 134; Felson and Slatkin 2004, 105; Silk 2004, 38–39. See also Buxton 2004, 153–154; Stanley 1993, 216–217; Schein 1984, 107.

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Just as Homer's Odysseus is a crafty, artful figure, a man of many ways, so is Homer himself an artful teacher, whose poems possess many layers of meaning, whose plots and characters undergo many changes, and who leads us through many stages of reflection before we may arrive at the heart of his teaching.¹⁷ By prompting us to identify and to strip away the many layers of his presentation of, for example, the gods and the heroes, Homer prompts us to consider and reconsider our initial beliefs about the nature of the divine and the character of human excellence. In this way, Homer invites us to embark on an intellectual odyssey of our own.

The greatness of Homer as a thinker is, however, overlooked in our times. Prominent scholars of Homer identify illuminating insights concerning such themes as the nature of the divine or the character of human excellence in the epic poems, but they tend to treat those insights as inherited cultural beliefs or as flashes of naive, poetic inspiration rather than as the cohesive political, moral, and theological teachings of a theoretical mind. Beginning with the publication of *Prologomena to Homer* (1795) by Friedrich August Wolf and culminating with the work of Milman Parry and Gregory Nagy, the so-called Analyst/Oralist thesis that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were a collection of stories, composed by multiple generations of "illiterate," "simple," "primitive"¹⁸ bards and later written down in various forms by various hands, has tended to prevail. Wolf's key contention is that, since the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* emerged in illiterate, primitive times – at "the slender beginnings" of Greece – they must themselves be intellectually and artistically primitive works simply offered for the entertainment and applause of the immediate audience and continuously altered by different bards for different audiences (consider, e.g., Wolf 1985, 75, 104, 209). As Wolf puts it, "whether I contemplate the progress of the Greeks themselves or that of other races, I find it

¹⁷ As Griffin notes, Homer's characters "express strong and clear moral judgments, which the narration does not. . . We are meant to judge, but not to be bullied into judgment by the poet" (2004, 162).

¹⁸ Fowler 2004, 220. See also Moulton 1977, 16. Parry uses the term "primitive" only with some reservation (1971, 377), whereas Nagy emphatically avoids it, possibly in favor of the adjective "young" (1996, 149–150). Nagy does acknowledge, however, that modern Homeric scholarship tends to view Homer as "primitive": "In terms of such ideas, Homer was not really classical or preclassical: he was primordial. Such a primordial Homer, whether or not his name was Homer, was some kind of primitive; if he was a genius, he was a primitive genius" (2009, 3).

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impossible to accept the belief to which we have become accustomed: that these two works of a single genius burst forth suddenly from the darkness in all their brilliance” (1985, 148). This “historicist approach” – based on the historicist thesis that the human mind is fundamentally shaped by its historical circumstances and is consequently incapable of rising above and even shaping those circumstances – “swept the field” of classical scholarship.¹⁹ As James Porter observes,

Instantly, the timeless Homer of popular and literary imagination became an object of scientific historical analysis and damning critique, albeit on a somewhat irrational basis²⁰ . . . Henceforth, the Homeric texts themselves began to appear as something like an archaeological site, with layers of history built into them in a palpable stratiagraphy: the disparate effects of multiple compositional layers (some, including, Jebb would actually call them “strata”) and the intrusive hands of editors could all be felt in the poems. (2004, 336)

So powerful is the influence of Wolf today that even though, to cite one example, Robert Fowler acknowledges that Wolf’s fundamental “premise that Homer lived in an illiterate age” is one “we now know to be false,”²¹ Fowler nonetheless insists that the poems “had to be the creation of tradition, not of any one bard” and hence “it is retrograde to argue that we can go on reading him [Homer] like Virgil or Shakespeare” (2004, 220–222).²²

The natural, though possibly unintended, effect of the Analyst/Oralist triumph has been to discourage students from seeking in Homer’s poems the

¹⁹ Porter 2004, 336; see also Grafton 1985, 26–28; Whitman 1958, 1–9; Clay 1983, 4–5. For an account of the overall impact of Wolf and also of the criticisms of Wolf made by Goethe and Schiller, see Reinhardt 1997b, 217–220. See also Myres 1958, 75–76, 83–93.

²⁰ Porter explains the “somewhat irrational basis” of Wolf’s Homeric scholarship as follows: “Wolf was at bottom an intuitionist whose touchstone was his philological *sensus* (‘feeling’), while his science was an *ars nesciendi*, or ‘art of ignorance’” (2004, 336).

²¹ See Wolf 1985, 75–102. For Nagy’s convincing argument “that Homeric poetry does indeed refer to the technology of writing” at *Iliad* 6.168, 6.176, 6.178, and most emphatically at 7.89–90, see 1996 14, 36.

²² But consider Griffin: “Romantic scholars used to believe that the [Homeric] epics were created by the whole people (Volkspiele); now institutions and rituals get the credit. It is as if we argued that the plays of Shakespeare were the product of the circumstances of his time: of course the artist is influenced by his period and himself influences it, but we are left with the question why (if we have ruled out individual genius) the plays of Shakespeare are so much better than those of his contemporaries” (1995, 8).

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wisdom attributed to him by thinkers from Plato to Nietzsche.²³ As Wolf declares, “The Homer that we hold in our hands now is not the one who flourished in the mouths of the Greeks of his own day, but one variously altered, interpolated, corrected, and emended from the times of Solon down to those of the Alexandrians” (1985, 209). Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff – perhaps “the most important analyst” and “Wolfian” (Reinhardt 1997b, 219) – went so far as to judge the *Iliad* as it stands “a wretched patchwork” (Whitman 1958, 2; consider also Reinhardt 1997a, 173, 177–183). Parry’s monumental effort to prove, on the basis of his analysis of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and his studies of Yugoslav oral poets, that Homer’s poems were composed in the manner of “the illiterate bards of Yugoslavia” had the understandable effect of seeming, at least, “to bring Homeric art down to the level of the quasi-mechanical” (Whitman 1958, 5–6). For even though Parry himself evidently felt great affection for the Homeric poems – he declares with evident enthusiasm, “When one hears the Southern Slavs sing their tales he has the overwhelming feeling that, in some way, he is hearing Homer” – he nonetheless suggests that those poems are not fundamentally different from the tales of Yugoslav singers, since their artistry and even their very ideas are “the same” (Parry 1971, 378; consider also, e.g., 375). As Adam Parry says of his father’s scholarship on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, “What holds Parry’s attention in all his writing is the tradition, never the poems in themselves” and again, “The poet, then, is essentially subordinate to the tradition; and it never occurs to him to depart from it, or even to fashion it so as to produce any personal vision of the world” (1971, liii, lii). In Milman Parry’s own words regarding Homer, “The poet is thinking in terms of formulas. Unlike the poets who wrote, he can put into verse only those ideas which are to be found in the phrases which are on his tongue, or at the most he will express ideas so like those of the traditional formulas that he

²³ Wolf, with apparent inconsistency, on occasion seemingly praises Homer’s individual “genius” (1985, 47; see also 210). Grafton, Most, and Zetzel argue that Wolf’s ambiguity was “deliberate,” for it “allowed him to bring off two crucial tours de force. In the first place, he was able to sit on both sides of the fence – that is, to continue to maintain the beauty, the artistry, the coherence of the poems he was chopping to bits. . . . In the second place, Wolf’s deliberate ambiguity had a preservative effect on the bulk of what he wrote . . . he invited the reader time and again to join his revolution; but he did not spell out its exact nature” (1985, 34). For his part, Nagy lauds the “rich, complex, and, yes, subtle . . . Homeric tradition” (1996, 144–146).

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himself would not know them apart” (1971, 324). It is therefore not surprising that Henry Theodore Wade-Gery went so far as to claim that Parry may be called “the Darwin of Homeric Studies,” for just as “Darwin seemed to many to have removed the finger of God from the creation of the world and of man, so Milman Parry has seemed to some to remove the creative poet from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*” (Wade-Gery 1952, 38–39).

More recently, Nagy has followed in the footsteps of Parry, of Parry’s student Albert Bates Lord, and ultimately of Wolf himself,²⁴ first by contending that with regard to the question of the intent of the creator of the Homeric poems, “this intent must be assigned not simply to one poet but also to *countless* generations of previous poets steeped in the same tradition” (Nagy 1979, 3 – my emphasis), and later by going “as far as urging scholars to avoid expressions in which ‘Homer’ is used as the name of an individual” lest they “start thinking of ‘Homer’ in overly personalized terms” (Graziosi 2002, 16; Nagy 1996, 21; see also 25–26).²⁵ For, as Nagy maintains – repeating a claim made by Wolf himself²⁶ – just as the Greeks commonly attributed “any major achievement, even if this achievement may have been realized only through a lengthy period of social evolution, to the episodic and personal accomplishment of a culture hero who is pictured as having made his monumental contribution in an earlier era of the given society,” so the Greeks “retrojected” Homer “as the original genius of epic” (Nagy 1996, 21).²⁷ In words that echo Wolf (1985, 209), Nagy sums up his approach to Homer as follows: “The textual tradition as we have it, in all its variations of form and content, defies a unified explanation in terms of one single person’s great achievements of observation, in terms of one ‘big bang’ from “a single creative mind of a single person called Homer or whatever his name might be” (2010, 312–313; see also 1996, 92–93). Accordingly, the study of the theoretically rich and profound

²⁴ As Nagy observes admiringly: “For Wolf, there was no Homer to recover. He argued that the Homeric text had emerged out of oral traditions, which could not be traced all the way back to some ‘original’ single author” (2004, 41–42).

²⁵ For Nagy’s debt to Parry and Lord (especially Lord 1960, 1991), see, for example, Nagy 1979, 1–3; 1996, 10–11.

²⁶ “The Greek race always had the reprehensible desire to trace each of its most notable institutions back to the earliest times, and to attribute virtually every useful component of later culture to the discoveries of its own heroes” (Wolf 1985, 78).

²⁷ Fowler suggests that Nagy “stakes out an extreme oralist position” (2004, 230). See also Graziosi’s very qualified reservations (2002, 16–17).

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philosophic poet Homer has given way to the study of a primitive, nameless tradition that produced the poems.

In opposition to the Analysts and Oralists, the so-called Unitarians have arisen to defend the grandeur of Homer as an individual artist.²⁸ Jasper Griffin, for instance, insists that “the *Iliad* did not arise spontaneously from the mere existence of an epic tradition” but “must have been the creation, essentially, of a singer of great powers, . . . whom the people of later antiquity, who knew nothing about him, called Homer” (1995, 7). But, notwithstanding their extremely valuable and helpful insights into Homer’s poems, even the Unitarians have tended to concede that Homer was not a great thinker, that he did not fundamentally shape and enlighten ancient Greece, but rather that, in an admittedly imaginative and creative fashion, he simply reflected and transmitted the cultural beliefs of his time. For example, even though Cedric Whitman considers the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to be “wonders of the poetic world,” he also judges Homer’s mind to be “the archaic mind, prephilosophic, primarily synthetic rather than analytical, whose content is myths, symbols, and paradigms” (1958, 13–14). Ruth Scodel elucidates the moving character and “exceptional sophistication” of Homer’s narrative, but she ultimately deems him a “tradition-bearer,” albeit an “exceptionally strong” one, rather than a foundational thinker and poet (2004, 45–46). Charles Segal points out that, “Whether or not the *Iliad* was composed with the aid of writing, it is certainly not the naive or primitive voice of Volk, nature, or the pure warrior spirit, in the way that eighteenth and nineteenth century critics from Vico and F. A. Wolf to Ruskin and even Gilbert Murray would claim” (1992, 14). Yet, while he celebrates Homer’s “narrative self-consciousness” and “control of the narrative,” Segal goes on to conclude that far from being an enlightened teacher of the Greeks, the “Homeric bard . . . is the voice and the vehicle of an ancient wisdom” and “remains, above all . . . a purveyor of pleasure . . . and a preserver of traditions” (1992, 27–28; see also 23).²⁹

To discover the fundamental arguments against the traditional view that Homer was a philosophic poet and therewith the principal cause of the

²⁸ Consider, for example, Bowra (1977: originally published 1930); Whitman (1958); and Griffin (1980, 1995, 2004), whom Nagy calls a “neo-unitarian” (1996, 134).

²⁹ Griffin does, however, claim that the *Iliad*, at least, embodies “a clear and *unique* vision of the world, of heroism, and of life and death” (1980, xvi – my emphasis).

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dramatic decline in Homer's reputation as a thinker, we must look beyond the philologist Wolf to the political philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744): the author of *The Principles of a New Science of the Common Nature of Nations*, “the true father of historicism” – in the judgment of Isaiah Berlin and possibly R. G. Collingwood and Leo Strauss as well³⁰ – and the thinker who may justly be considered the founding figure of modern Homeric scholarship.³¹ George Grote identifies Vico as “that eminently original thinker” and the “profound” “precursor of F. A. Wolf in regard to the Homeric poems” (1861, 351–353; see also Michelet 1971, 340–341). Berlin points out that, “Three-quarters of a century before Wolf and his school, Vico saw in Homer not an individual who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but the national genius of the Greek people itself, as it articulates its vision of its own experience over centuries” (2000, 76).³² According to Benedetto Croce (1964, 270), Collingwood (1956, 259–260), and Max Fisch and Thomas Bergin (1963, 69), Vico exerted a direct and indirect influence on Wolf and through him all subsequent Homeric scholarship. Indeed, although Wolf himself never explicitly refers to Vico in his *Prologemena to Homer*, Wolf later published an article entitled, “G. B. Vico on Homer,” “grudgingly acknowledging Vico's priority” (Fisch and Bergin 1963, 69). Even Nagy himself remarks, “If we adopt a teleological view of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the culmination of a long tradition, then the intuitions of Giambattista Vico on Homer will prove to be more fruitful than the labors of early analysts like l'abbé d'Aubignac or even F. A. Wolf” (1974, 11; see also Grafton 1999, xxi). As Porter observes, “it was Giambattista Vico who first articulated the view . . . that Homer was not a person but an idea . . . created

³⁰ Berlin 2002, 66; Collingwood 1956, 63–71; Strauss 1971, vii. Consider as well Berlin's remark with regard to Vico's thought: “This is the whole doctrine of historicism in embryo” (2000, 58). See also Berlin 2002, 7–8, 53–67; Ambler 2009, 167–168, 170–172.

³¹ For Vico's broad theoretical influence, see especially Croce 1964, 236–244, 268–278; Fisch and Bergin 1963, 61–107; Berlin 2000, 8–12, 112–121; Lilla 1993, 1–6; Grafton 1999, xii–xiii.

³² Consider as well Jullien's remark, in her fascinating essay on Jorge Luis Borges's two stories about Homer – “El hacedor” (Borges 1971) and “El inmortal” (Borges 1974) – the latter of which refers as well to Vico (1974, 24–26): “Giambattista Vico, who preceded F. A. Wolf in seeing the *Iliad* as an amalgamation of composite fragments, appears as a character in the story . . . Vico's theory . . . de-individualizes Homer, making him a ‘symbolic character’ of the Greek people” (Jullien 1995, 143).