Abstract: “Giambattista Vico and Democratic Pluralism: Lessons for Deliberative Democracy”

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Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) offered one of the first thoroughgoing criticisms of the particular brand of Enlightenment thinking that tended to overvalue abstract rationalism at the expense of the historical and imaginative dimensions of human understanding. Vico concluded that imagination rather than reason creates order and civilization, and it is through that same faculty of mind that human beings can gain genuine and certain knowledge. Applying Vico’s criticism of Cartesian rationalism to a contemporary school of thought within political science, deliberative democracy, helps to shed light on the extent to which a major area of research in modern political science and democratic thought relies on the Enlightenment paradigm of which Vico was so critical. By examining this school of thought in conjunction with Vico’s philosophy, I hope to elucidate Vico’s historical and epistemological insights and analyze some of the normative assumptions of deliberative democracy that often go unchallenged.