

# Vico and Jaynes: Neurocultural and Cognitive Operations in the Origin of Consciousness

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In the time of the beginning of the human species it is possible there "existed a race of men who spoke, judged, reasoned, solved problems, indeed did most of the things that we do but who were not conscious at all" (47); that "most men at one time, throughout the day, were hearing poetry . . . composed and spoken within their own minds" (361), and that "poetry . . . was the language of the gods" (364). These words may seem to be from Vico's *New Science*; they are, however, from *The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, by Julian Jaynes, a psychologist who has become widely known for his theory of consciousness since the book appeared in 1976.<sup>1</sup> Giambattista Vico, however, was never one of his authors. A review of the literature on Vico in English shows occasional citations of Jaynes (Danesi, 1986, 1987, 1989; Gardner, 1976; Haskell, 1978, 1987b; Singer, 1976), usually with the suggestion that his ideas on consciousness and on language may be pertinent to Vico's work.

This paper will first explore significant parallels between Vico and Jaynes; second, suggest the equivalence of the mind of Vico's "first men" with Jaynes's bicameral mind; third, and what is perhaps more important, it will suggest that Jaynes's theory of consciousness and its evidential base generally support Vico's historical theory of mental development.<sup>2</sup>

Jaynes's theory of the origin of consciousness and the breakdown of the bicameral mind can be outlined as follows: (1) Humans were not always conscious beings; (2) prior to the origin of consciousness the "mind" was bicameral, i.e., by analogy with the term as it is used in political science, divided into two "houses" or parts; (3) consciousness (as we understand it) arose from interaction with culture and