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**Religion, Marriage, and Burial
in Vico's *Scienza nuova*: A Reappraisal**



Laboratorio dell'ISPF, XIX, 2022

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DOI: 10.12862/Lab22STH

1. Introduction

In *Scienza nuova*, Vico identifies religion, marriage, and the burial of the deceased as fundamental “customs” or constants of human civilization¹. Their initial and most detailed exposition is found in the section on *Principles* in *Book One. On the Establishment of Principles*, including the programmatic statement: «We observe that all the nations – whether barbarous or humane, and in spite of being founded in vastly different ways on account of immense distances from one another in place and time – are guardians of three human customs. They all have some religion, they all contract solemn marriages, and they all bury their dead» (333-337)². These three fundamental practices are also represented on the frontispiece, in the form of an altar, a torch, and an urn, respectively, and commented in the *Explication of the Frontispiece*, placed in front of the book proper as a synopsis of *Scienza nuova* (8-13). Vico thus introduces religion, marriage, and burial as part of human culture and the social world, the study of which belongs to social and cultural anthropology³.

In this article these three practices, and what *Scienza nuova* says about them in different passages, will be examined from a different perspective which might be considered complementary to the anthropological approach. Rather than examining these practices in an essentialist manner, they will be explored in terms of their instrumentalization. These are two different levels and domains of analysis; it would be a fallacy to take their posited instrumentality as reflection on their substantive or intrinsic content⁴. Such differentiation calls for clarification. Rather than articulating the differences within the framework of a fully worked-out theory, they will be manifested by examples from a range of domains and

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, in this article *Scienza nuova* refers to the 1744 edition. The English edition used is *The New Science*, trans. and ed. J. Taylor – R. Miner, intro. G. Mazzotta, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2020. Paragraph numbers will appear in the text in parentheses. Other translations consulted include: G. Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Th. G. Bergin – M. H. Fisch, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1968; *New Science*, trans. D. Marsh, London, Penguin, 2001; *La Science Nouvelle*, trans. A. Pons, Paris, Fayard, 2001; *Prinzipien einer neuen Wissenschaft über die gemeinsame Natur der Völker*, trans. V. Höhle – Ch. Jermann, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1990; *Ciencia nueva*, trans. R. de la Villa, Madrid, Editorial Tecnos, 2006. Original language quotations are from G. B. Vico, *La Scienza nuova nell'edizione del 1744*, in Id., *La Scienza nuova. Le tre edizioni del 1725, 1730 e 1744*, ed. M. Sanna – V. Vitiello, Milan, Bompiani, 2012-2013. We are adhering to Vico's typography, such as capital letters and italics, restored in this edition «per sentire nella scrittura di Vico la sua voce. La sua più autentica voce» (M. Sanna – V. Vitiello, *Nota editoriale*, in G. B. Vico, *La Scienza nuova. Le tre edizioni*, cit., pp. CLXXIX-CLXXX, p. CLXXX).

² For a succinct summary, see P. König, *Giambattista Vico*, Munich, Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005, pp. 108-110.

³ The material has also been categorized in terms of social and cultural psychology (L. Tatteeo, *The Providence of Associated Minds: Agency in the Thought of Giambattista Vico and the Origins of Social and Cultural Psychology*, in *Constraints of Agency: Explorations of Theory in Everyday Life*, ed. C. W. Gruber – M. G. Clark – S. H. Klempe – J. Valsiner, Cham, Springer, 2015, pp. 31-43).

⁴ Therefore, as will become clear, *instrumentalism* in the Marxian sense or in other philosophical currents is not intended here, and, in effect, is itself taken, not as purported second-order discourse, but merely as a special case of instrumentalization.

levels of abstraction, including art, culture, language, science and technology, and institutions.

2. Modes of instrumentalization

Throughout history, art supplies a ready-at-hand illustration of a human and social activity and process that can, and has been, practiced at both levels, without self-contradiction. Our first example is the artistic patronage of Archduchess Margaret of Austria (1480-1530) daughter of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, and aunt of Charles V. On the one hand, the works Margaret commissioned (tapestries, woodcuts, paintings, architecture) were artistic masterpieces in themselves, and it was also the case that Margaret appreciated aesthetic objects. At the same time, «Margaret instrumentalized art for political ends»⁵. In approximately the same period falls the arch of bishop Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal in the cathedral of Cuenca, Spain, which is profusely decorated, and designed to be the gateway to a space of meditation about virtue, wisdom, and the eternal life. At the same time, by representing the entrance architecturally as a Roman triumphal arch, it was used as an *instrumentum regni* to exalt the rule of Charles V⁶. Of course, the instrumentalization of art is not an invention of the Renaissance. Centuries earlier, Romanesque art, apart from its art-immanent aesthetic qualities, was promoted as means of legitimation of a change in dynastic rule⁷.

Literature has not been exempt from being used to serve an extrinsic “agenda”. In the second half of the seventeenth century literary critics advocated a literary style consisting of “plain, or natural” verse against the “excess” and “extravagance” of the baroque. These polemics were properly about the nature of literature, especially poetry; however, the critiques emanated from French and English writers and were directed at the baroque style because – apart from aesthetics – it was associated to Spanish and Italian culture, and coinciding with the

⁵ D. Eichberger, *Instrumentalising Art for Political Ends. Margaret of Austria, regente et gouvernante des Pays Bas de l'empereur*, in *Femmes de pouvoir, femmes politiques durant les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge et au cours de la première Renaissance*, ed. E. Bousmar – J. Dumont – A. Marchandise – B. Schnerb, Brussels, De Boeck, 2012, pp. 571-584.

⁶ L. M. Palacios Méndez, *El Arco de Sebastián Ramírez de Fuenleal, obra de Étienne Jamet (1546-1550)*. *Propaganda católica en la catedral de Cuenca en tiempos de Carlos V*, in *El Imperio y las Hispanias de Trajano a Carlos V. Clasicismo y poder en el arte español*, ed. S. De María – M. Parada López de Corselas, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2014, pp. 112-124. The conflation of the substance or intrinsic qualities of art and its instrumentalization can be seen in E. Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004; see the review by H. Hills, *Too Much Propaganda*, «Oxford Art Journal», 29, 2006, 3, pp. 446-453.

⁷ M. Poza Yagüe, *Arte e ideología. Roma y Aragón a finales del siglo XI: la antigüedad clásica como mecanismo de legitimación de un nuevo reino*, in *El Imperio y las Hispanias de Trajano a Carlos V*, cit., pp. 185-197. The instrumentalization of art has continued in modern times: American abstract expressionism was deployed for political purposes during the Cold War (*Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. F. Frascina, London, Routledge, 2010); the avantgarde art of the 1960s was promoted for its own interests by corporate America (A. J. Taylor, *Forms of Persuasion: Art and Corporate Image in the 1960s*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022). While the political and commercial uses of the art in question are of historical interest, the aesthetic values are a separate matter, and have survived their instrumentalization.

historical juncture of increasing challenges to Spain as a preeminent power⁸. More recently, Wilhelmine Germany illustrates the exogenous nature of instrumentalization of literature. On the one hand, «[...] *Bildung* and *Kultur* were here instrumentalized in the service of the state». In the case of Einstein who attended the upper school (*Gymnasium*) in the 1890s, on the other hand, instrumentalization of literature took another form. His family customarily spent evenings reading the works of the famous German writers, concerned with their “intrinsic” value of «the uplifting of mind, character, and spirit [...]». However, they also had in mind an extrinsic “instrumental” benefit: «*Kultur* advocated and legitimized emancipation, and also provided a vehicle of social assimilation»⁹. There were thus two heterogeneous instrumentalizations of the same material, both of which were unrelated to its contents.

The instrumentalization of language can take, and has taken, many forms, only a few of which will be highlighted here, and which should be sufficient to illustrate the categorical divide between the phenomenon of language *per se* and its appropriation for distinctly other purposes. Our first example is from the third century A.D., reflected in the views of Porphyry of Tyre whose anti-Christian polemics laid ideological foundations for the Great Persecution (303-311 A. D.) under Emperor Diocletian¹⁰. Part of Porphyry’s philosophy was the promulgation of three kinds of “languages”: the language of rituals for the common people; the language of oracles for the educated, and the language of philosophers in advising and guiding the emperor. This subdivision was leveraged in the existing competitive ideological and political developments.

In the early modern period, language was not only investigated as an instrument of thought, but also – above and beyond its mediating role – as having institution-like character. In an age of both religious and political European conflicts, and concomitant wars, the idea and prospect of the development of a universal language was not only considered essential for science but also an effective instrument for bringing religious and political upheavals to an end¹¹.

Finally, Sanskrit can be cited as a particularly salient case of language alienated from its natural and normal use as a language like any other. In the archaic period, the first millennium B.C., it was designated as “language of the gods”, and reserved exclusively for use in Vedic ritual and liturgy. Access to Sanskrit Vedic texts was restricted to its priests and intellectual elite. This underwent a radical change at the beginning of the first millennium A.D.; however, it retained its fundamental sociolinguistic function of social monopolization: its past exclusivity and prestige were now placed in the service of (worldly) political rulers, with

⁸ R. H. Vincent, *The English Baroque: The Logic of Excess in Early Modern Literature*, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2020, pp. 45-46.

⁹ G. Holton, *The Advancement of Science and Its Burdens*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 1998, p. XXVII.

¹⁰ E. DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2012.

¹¹ C. Stancati, *Dal linguaggio-azione al linguaggio-istituzione. Natura e artificio nella riflessione linguistica e giuridica del Seicento e Settecento*, «Scienza & Politica. Per una storia delle dottrine», 8, 14, 1996, pp. 57-80, p. 64; L. Formigari, *Linguistica e antropologia nel secondo Settecento*, Messina, La libra, 1972.

the same claim to exclusivity previously held in the Vedic culture, prevailing for another thousand years¹².

The last general area to be mentioned to illustrate both various ways in which “instrumentalization” may occur and its difference with the underlying subject matter is science. Its instrumentalization begins at the metalevel, by way of turning science *per se* into a means of defining knowledge itself: scientism excludes any claims to knowledge or worthiness that do not satisfy experimental procedures, and quantifiable results¹³. At the next (lower) level, that of the practice of science, one current in the philosophy of science is «Instrumentalism – which treats theory as a tool and only a tool for computation, thereby favoring pragmatism and antirealism while dispensing entirely with the project of realism and truth seeking»¹⁴. In effect, the instrument, in the limit, becomes the only thing that matters, and thus this type of instrumentalization goes even beyond registers of instrumentalization noted earlier – with respect to art, literature, and language – that nevertheless did not question their autonomy. Apparently, this approach to instruments or tools is not necessarily a unique characteristic of modernity, in view of ethnographic findings about hunter-gatherer and other indigenous communities. Rather than treating tools merely in terms of functionality, «[t]ools are also active agents, means of interactions with various elements in the world and a way to form and keep relationships with them»; they were attributed, and acquired, aesthetic, cultural, and ontological properties, thus having the disposition, realized or not at all times, of overshadowing and marginalizing their purely “utilitarian” purpose¹⁵. Tool making of this sort has an antirealist worldview in common with philosophical instrumentalism.

¹² S. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, pp. 39-50, 67-74. The three examples of the instrumentalization of language cited here are therefore different in kind from the classification of “languages” made by Vico (language of the gods, heroes, and men) which deals with their specific content; cf. J. Kelemen, *Storia e Lingua. Vico nella storia del pensiero linguistico*, in *Giambattista Vico e l'enciclopedia dei saperi*, ed. A. Battistini – P. Guaragnella, Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2007, pp. 141-154, pp. 150, 153: «Ma a parte la “lingua” dei miti, Vico considera anche i principali tipi delle lingue come espressioni di contenuti sociali analoghi o come prodotti e strumenti dei singoli gruppi sociali».

¹³ S. Ahmari, *They Blinded Us with Science: The History of a Delusion*, «Commentary», May 2020, pp. 23-29; S. Hossenfelder, *Existential Physics: A Scientist's Guide to Life's Biggest Questions*, New York, Viking, 2022. Parenthetically, it can be said that scientism is in direct conflict with Vico's reliance on (non-quantifiable) *degnità* in *Scienza nuova*.

¹⁴ J. J. Chriss, *Vico and the Divine Drama*, «Berlin Journal of Critical Theory», 2, 3, 2018, pp. 31-58, pp. 42; for a defense of realism, see M. Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015; Id., *Il senso dell'esistenza. Per un nuovo realismo ontologico*, trans. S. L. Maestroni, Rome, Carocci, 2012.

¹⁵ E. Assaf – F. Romagnoli, *Beyond Tools and Function: The Selection of Materials and the Ontology of Hunter-Gatherers. Ethnographic Evidences and Implications for Palaeolithic Archaeology*, «Cambridge Archaeological Journal», published online on 5 February 2021, no pagination; <www.cambridge.org/core/journals/cambridge-archaeological-journal/article/beyond-tools-and-function-the-selection-of-materials-and-the-ontology-of-huntergatherers-ethnographic-evidences-and-implications-for-palaeolithic-archaeology/C2D3DAC209A66164E2A94A1F0C7674D3> (last accessed 15 August 2022).

This worldview may be contrasted with other approaches that give equal weight to ontic and epistemic/ideational dimensions. For example, in a proposed theory of classification, that is, a meta-scientific account of what constitutes a *kind*, the ontic desideratum is met by *grounding* in the world, while at the epistemic level, it is recognized that there exist particular, non-identical, motivations, interests, and purposes¹⁶.

3. Outline of thesis

This brief survey obviously is far from comprehensive but should suffice to help outline the contours of the thesis developed in this paper¹⁷. The thesis proposes that Vico in *Scienza nuova* does something analogous to the case just mentioned from the philosophy of science: Vico shows how – grounded in the realities of religion, marriage, and burial – early civilizations made them function in various “transcendent” ways, and furthermore in ways that had to do principally and primarily with the *mondo civile*. In the context of *Scienza nuova*, the “civil world” is the sphere of rights and laws informed by fairness (*equità*) and an innate sense (*senso comune*) of justice (*il giusto*), in general terms. However, more concretely, it particularly concerns issues of rights of ownership. Vico “drilled down” to an even lower level of analysis, the issue of ownership rights to real estate. Thus, while taking these three human institutions realistically as points of departure, the thesis also claims that Vico’s main interest and focus is their instrumentalization in modalities illustrated earlier – with the exception of (anti-realist) instrumentalism. The few examples cited serve as a caution both in linking the contents of Vico’s chosen anthropology with its instrumentalization, on the one hand, and with respect to attitudes toward instrumentalization itself, on the other hand. There is no *a priori* basis for a critical view of instrumentalization.

Our thesis attributes to *Scienza nuova* another methodological feature which is not unrelated to Vico’s essentially “neutral”, unjudgmental, view of instrumentalization. It concerns the impression left by Vico’s extensive and detailed expositions of certain topics: pagan religion and rituals, ancient “heroes”, the tropes of classical rhetoric, and others. The question is, do these descriptions throughout *Scienza nuova* mean to “praise” or commend them, and could the mere fact of their degree of elaboration – acting as a kind of existential presupposition –

¹⁶ Th. A. C. Reydon – M. Ereshefsky, *How to Incorporate Non-Epistemic Values into a Theory of Classification*, «European Journal for Philosophy of Science», 12, 4, 2022, pp. 1-28; cf. M. Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, cit., *passim*.

¹⁷ The complexity of the phenomenon of *instrumentalization* can also be seen in the context of the life sciences, such as Darwin’s theory of evolution, as studied in the history of science. See J. Browne, *Charles Darwin and Ideology: Rethinking the Darwinian Revolution*, «Métode. Science Studies Journal», 7, 2016, pp. 1-7, p. 7; doi:10.7203/metode.7.7887 (last accessed 1 July 2022): «Darwin drew his ideas from Malthusian political ideology and turned them into biology. Then, after Darwin published his two greatest works, *On the origin of species* and *The descent of man*, these biological ideas moved back into Victorian political economy in the form of social Darwinism».

even mean to advocate them¹⁸? In this thesis, the tendency of seeing things in this manner is being resisted. Instead, the working hypothesis will be close to that suggested by Joseph Strayer, historian of the development of modern states. Strayer did not believe that the state was the only or most desirable way of social organization, nevertheless he devoted his work to explaining the origin and development of European states. He therefore found it opportune to remind his readers: «The reader should remember that to describe a phenomenon is not to praise it»¹⁹. The methodology in this paper will assume that Vico took a similar approach in *Scienza nuova*²⁰. For example, in his intellectual autobiography, Vico acknowledged the influence of thinkers both from classical times and the modern period (Plato, Tacitus, Bacon, Grotius), while at the same time finding all of them deeply flawed²¹.

¹⁸ This seems to be the case for P. Cristofolini, *Vico pagano e barbaro*, Pisa, ETS, 2001, pp. 67, 71, 81, 91, 96. G. DiRusso, *Vico's Idiosyncratic History of Idolatry: Engagement with Magical and Pagan Practices in the New Science*, thesis, Williamstown, Williams College, 2019, <https://librarysearch.williams.edu/discovery/delivery/01WIL_INST:01WIL_SPECIAL/12288926720002786> (last accessed 7 September 2022), goes as far as proposing that Vico wanted to restore magic. B. Pinchard concluded that Vico advocated a «*spaganisme contemplatif*» («*Auspicia et Sacra*»: *Enquête sur la "religion des auspices" selon Vico*, in *Eroi ed età eroiche attorno a Vico*, ed. E. Nuzzo, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004, pp. 227-244, p. 243; italics original). An entirely different conclusion is arrived at by A. Sabetta, *L'illuminismo Cristiano di Vico*, «Rassegna di Teologia», 46, 2005, pp. 547-585, based on Vico's copious references to Augustine. Cf. J. Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico 1668-1744*, Part 2, *Language, Law and History*, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, p. 272: «If, by contrast, to most recent scholarship, *verum-factum* is related always to the Trinity, and *scienza nuova* always to the City of God, then one has the double key to a better reading of Vico». In a different vein, the frequent references to *order* has P. G. Pandimakil make (antihumanist) structural aspects of human society in opposition to the individual the centerpiece of Vico's worldview (P. G. Pandimakil, *Das Ordnungsdenken bei Giambattista Vico als philosophische Anthropologie, Kulturentstehungstheorie, soziale Ordnung und politische Ethik*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1995). Vico's exposition of the main tropes of classical rhetoric (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony) was sublimated by Hayden White to a theory of history (*The Tropics of History: The Deep Structure of the New Science*, in *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, ed. G. Tagliacozzo – D. Ph. Verene, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 65-85, pp. 72-84).

¹⁹ J. R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970, p. VI.

²⁰ Cf. E. Nuzzo, *Tra religione e prudenza. La "filosofia pratica" di Giambattista Vico*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007, p. 261: «Dal che appare chiaro come il configurantesi "storicismo" di Vico resulti un pensiero che sempre spiega e comprende, ma è ben lungi dal legittimare sempre le figure storiche da esso illuminate: proprio in quanto figure storiche mutevoli, innanzitutto quanto ai loro titoli di "merito"». P. König concurs: «Nichts könnte Vico fremder sein als eine romantische Schwärmerei für die göttlichen und heroischen Zeiten der Völkergeschichte» (*Giambattista Vico*, cit., p. 132).

²¹ Th. Fulton, Book Review (T. Rosendale, *Theology and Agency in Early Modern Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018), «*Modern Philology*», 118, 2020, 3, pp. E193-E197, p. E196, in another context, cautions: «Assent to an idea should not mean assent to a figurehead, or to the larger cluster of ideas that figurehead represents [...]». In fact, these four exemplary thinkers and their body of ideas end up serving as foil for profiling Vico's own approach, *pace* G. Mazzotta, *Introduction*, in *The New Science*, trans. and ed. J. Taylor – R. Miner, cit., pp. VII-XXVI, pp. XX, XXV. As the *Editors' Preface* of *The New Science*, trans. and ed. J.

The three spheres of religion, marriage, and burial of the dead claimed in *Scienza nuova* to be constitutive of human society will be now examined in more detail with these two hermeneutical commitments in mind. The topic of religion is not only the first one in order, but also the most extensively covered in Vico's work, and as a result, is commensurately treated here, too²².

4. Religion “instrumentalized”

Vico brings up religion throughout *Scienza nuova*. He does so in contexts that vary; understanding Vico in this matter is therefore context-dependent, and resists a generalizing definition. Nor does Vico himself provide a definition in an ontological sense in the part of the work where we might expect it, in *Elements, Principles, and Method of Book One*. On the other hand, toward the end of *Scienza nuova* we find a succinct synopsis of all he had said about religion throughout the volume, in *Book Four. On the Course that the Nations Make*. Here he correlates religion to eleven rubrics or kinds (*specie*) of phenomena of human life: natures (916), customs (919), natural law (922), governance (925), languages (929), characters (933), jurisprudence (938), authority (942), reason (948), judgments (955), and sects of time (976). We will forgo discussing these topics individually, and instead focus on their overall thrust. Several of them are explicit about their “non-religious” character, including natural law, governance, jurisprudence, authority, judgments, thus circumscribing the *mondo civile* mentioned earlier. Other kinds are “non-spiritual” by their contents, for example, *natures* deal with matters of cognitive psychology; *languages* are seen in terms of parallels between religious ceremonies and Roman legal conventions, and *sects of time* are a periodization according to which «the first were times belonging to the religious», as if religion ceased to be practiced thereafter, rather than undergoing a major change with respect to its relationship to «governance».

Our present thesis takes its guiding notion from this frame of reference in which everything stated by Vico about religion in *Scienza nuova* becomes refracted through the prism of its connection to and relationship with aspects of the “civil world” under Vico's purview²³. Vico's frame of reference can be made more

Taylor – R. Miner, cit., pp. X-XI, points out, «Vico's erudition is breathtaking», and is incorporated in *Scienza nuova* in countless explicit and implicit references to classical and modern sources. The same caution applies to these citations. A case in point is Vico's expression *modifications of our mind* adopted from Malebranche (A. Del Noce, *The Problem of Atheism*, ed. and trans. C. Lancellotti, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021, pp. 413-414).

²² As will be apparent, it will not sublimate them to the philosophical levels of F. Fellmann: «So stehen Religion für Überweltlichkeit, Ehe für Intersubjektivität und Begräbnisse für Kontinuität des geschichtlichen Lebens» (*Der Ursprung der Geschichtsphilosophie aus der Metaphysik in Vicos "Neuer Wissenschaft"*, «Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung», 41, 1, January-March 1987, pp. 43-60, p. 55). Alternatively, P. König interprets the three basic institutions as representing Vico's *ideal eternal history* in its *beginning* as religion, its *course* as marriage, and its *persistence* as burial of the dead (*Giambattista Vico*, cit., p. 110).

²³ The expression “civil world” for *mondo civile* is not entirely satisfactory since “civil” in current usage (such as *civil society*; *civil* vs. *criminal* justice; *civil* vs. *ecclesiastical* or *military*) has little, if anything, to do with Vico's intended field of sense. (On *civil society*, in particular, see J. Viterna –

clearly visible by a glance at alternative ways of studying and discoursing about religion. For example, one of these approaches is anthropology and ethnography (in contrast to general religious studies, sociology, history, philosophy, and others), and is concerned with problems and questions such as «religious mediation, how individuals and communities use visible, material, and visceral resources to engage the immateriality of religion. [...] the problem of religious world-making – that is, the ways in which religion provides a reality that adherents live within. [...] the problem of religious authority [...]. [...] the problem of agency [...]»²⁴. None of such matters pertinent to religion are considered by Vico; they are in fact falling outside the scope of the conceptual framework that Vico established for *Scienza nuova*²⁵.

Certain statements and assumptions about religion made by Vico need to be seen in this perspective. In Vico's account, after the "universal flood" the early "gentile humanity" «gradually renounced the true religion of their common father, Noah» (369), and explicitly names «false religions» (1110). *Prima facie*, these and similar critical statements throughout *Scienza nuova* seem to smack of confessionally-motivated religious polemics²⁶. If this were a crucial aspect of *Scienza nuova*, what would it imply for the claim inherent in its (grandiloquent) book title (1096)? However, more fundamentally, these seemingly determinative statements need to be seen in the context of Vico's framework which, as stated before, is the genesis and development of the civil world in early civilizations. For an understanding and explanation of the place and role of religion in this context, it does not matter that from an outside observer's vantage point, these belief-systems can be declared erroneous, even egregiously so (191, 516-517). What matters is the attitude of the people involved. Vico described this attitude as follows: «In this fashion, the earliest theological poets devised the first divine myth greater than any other devised after, the myth of Jove, king and father of men and god, in the act of casting lightning bolts, a myth so popular, so

E. Clough – K. Clarke, *Reclaiming the "Third Sector" from "Civil Society"*, «Sociology of Development», 1, 2015, 1, pp. 173-207, p. 177: «The original idea of civil society encompassed the definition of the *polis*, or the political order of a city-state»; K. Kumar, *Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term*, «British Journal of Sociology», 44, 1993, 3, pp. 375-395). Since *civil world* is commonly used in Vico studies, however, we will employ it, too. *Civilization*, on the other hand, seems to come fairly close to Vico's *nation*. See the Chronological Table in *Scienza nuova* and the comment: «This Chronological Table puts on display the world of ancient nations [...] the Hebrews through to the Chaldeans, the Scythians, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans» (43; emphasis added). *Civil world* and *civilization* therefore should not be conflated. Cf. the identity of *Europe* as *nation* in Vico's sense in A. García Marqués, *Una relectura de la historia de Europa en dos ciclos viquianos*, «Cuadernos sobre Vico», 35, 2021, pp. 31-63.

²⁴ J. S. Bielo, *Anthropology of Religion: The Basics*, London, Routledge, 2015, pp. XI-XIV.

²⁵ G. Giarrizzo noted: «[...] ma la religione in quanto tale, l'esperienza religiosa in senso stretto dell'uomo medioevale non sollecita l'attenzione di Vico» (*Vico, la politica e la storia*, Naples, Guida Editori, 1981, p. 24).

²⁶ In the view of D. Canaris, «Vico is not an "anti-modern" [...] nor a secular thinker [...] but a creative, original Christian thinker who seeks new ways to respond to the most pressing theological issues of his day» (*Vico and China*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2020, p. 220).

disturbing, so instructive that even those who devised it *believed it*» (379, 1098; emphasis added); «For false religions did not come into being from the imposture of someone else, but from the *credulity of oneself* » (192; emphasis added); «Whenever men, starting from times that are primitive, ferocious, and savage, *domesticate themselves* with religion, they start, proceed, and end along the continuous stages upon which we meditate [...] » (393; emphasis added).

Vico's attribution of sincerity in their belief-systems seems to be validated by what is known of some early civilizations²⁷. Numerous examples or case studies could be cited, across cultures and eras. Likely one of the earliest documented cases of “devising a divine myth” is the deification of certain rulers in ancient Mesopotamia, such that as the result of the associated efforts, «[t]he populace as a whole seems to have taken the claims of the king's divinity seriously» (cf. 449)²⁸. As in all major early civilizations, as Vico acknowledged, rule by force loomed large (923); however, it always needed to be imbedded in a cultural system (permeated by religion) that «co-created the system of rule»²⁹.

Vico, therefore, differs fundamentally from other thinkers throughout history who have studied and presented religion in a far more critical light. Thomas Hobbes is well-known for his scathing remarks in *Leviathan* which well encapsulate this current of thought: «The Designes Of The Authors Of The Religion Of The Heathen And therefore the first Founders, and Legislators of Commonwealths among the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience, and peace, have in all places taken care [...] that the common people in their misfortunes, laying the fault on neglect, or error in their Ceremonies, or on their own disobedience to the lawes, were the lesse apt to mutiny against their Governors»³⁰. However, from Vico's recognition of the sincerity of the people

²⁷ B. G. Trigger, *Understanding Early Civilizations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 409-443; H. S. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, p. 552, pointed out that «the fact that Greek religion was basically a matter of ritual action in no way implies the consequence that Greeks did not believe in (the existence) of their gods». See also N. P. Roubekas, *An Ancient Theory of Religion: Euhemerism from Antiquity to the Present*, New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ A. Pitts, *The Cult of the Deified King in Ur III Mesopotamia*, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2015, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/17467243>>, pp. 289-290 (last accessed 3 September 2022).

²⁹ As stated in another context, in M. Keliher, *The Manchu Transformation of Li: Ritual, Politics, and Law in the Making of Qing China, 1631-1690*, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2015, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/17467208>>, p. 414 n. 5 (last accessed 3 September 2022). Relevant to our thesis of “instrumentalization” in a “non-instrumental” and “non-functional” sense is also I. MacCormack, *Buddhism and State in Seventeenth-Century Tibet: Cosmology and Theology in the Works of Sangyé Gyatso*, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2018, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/40050144>> (last accessed 3 September 2022). MacCormack repeatedly emphasizes that religion/religious practices should not be taken *ab initio* as tools of a political agenda and as a means of acquiring and exercising power; see especially pp. 33, 45, 54, 78-79, 95 n. 98, 105, 113, 123, 154, 162, 166-169, and 259.

³⁰ Th. Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civill*, 1651, Project Gutenberg eBook, 2021, no pagination, Chapter XII, subheading *The Absurd Opinion of Gentilisme*. Hobbes also identified an underlying cynical, manipulative attitude: «That which taketh away the reputation of Sincerity, is the doing, or saying of such things, as appeare

in early civilizations it does not follow that he neglected or denied that there were the kinds of social and political pathologies that Hobbes and others justifiably castigated (and Machiavelli approved). He is merely silent about them by virtue of his framework of the equally real nexus between religion and the civil world on the basis of a shared worldview³¹.

This is viewing Vico's account of religion from an overarching perspective, and what follows will try to show that his discussion of the pagan pantheon is modeled within the same frame of reference, including what he said about Jove (Jupiter), Juno, and a host of lesser deities³².

5. *Jove and auspices*

The intentionality of Vico's frame of reference in which he views ancient religion becomes apparent when it is seen in the light of a more general and systematic description of (Indo-European) religion:

The principal elements and the machinery of the world and of society are here divided into three harmoniously adjusted domains. These are, in descending order of dignity, [1] sovereignty with its magical and juridical aspects, and a kind of maximal expression of the sacred; [2] physical power and bravery, the most obvious manifestation of which

to be signes, that what they require other men to believe, is not believed by themselves [...]» (Chapter XII, subheading *Doing Contrary To The Religion They Establish*). Cf. B. Latour, *Fetish-factish*, «Material Religion», 7, 2011, 1, pp. 42-49, p. 47: «[...] the Moderns [...] see all other people as naïve believers, skillful manipulators, or self-deluding cynics»; P. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. P. Wissing, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1988; T. Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

³¹ *Contra* G. Giarrizzo, *Vico, la politica e la storia*, cit., p. 24: «Di fatto la religione pare abbia esaurito la sua funzione psicologica nell'età degli dei, e nell'età successiva è ridotta ormai a strumento del potere ecclesiastico, che se ne serve per custodire attraverso gli auspici la propria supremazia politica»; P. Rossi, *Le sterminate antichità: studi vichiani*, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1969, pp. 81-131. Cf. the nuanced interpretation in F. Fellmann, *Das Vico-Axiom: Der Mensch macht die Geschichte*, Freiburg, Karl Alber, 1976, p. 89: «Es ist sicher zutreffend, daß in der *Neuen Wissenschaft* die Wahrheit der Mythen letztlich in ihrer sozialen Nützlichkeit gesehen wird. Doch handelt es sich um eine sekundäre Zweckmäßigkeit, die über die Intention der Hervorbringenden hinausgeht»; see also G. Anderson, *Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past: The Case for an Ontological Turn*, «American Historical Review», 2015, pp. 787-810; Id., *The Realness of Things Past: Ancient Greece and Ontological History*, Kettering, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 149-158, 240-241.

³² This reading has implications for the exegesis of a variety of topics appearing in *Scienza nuova*: «[...] del mito, del linguaggio, della poesia, delle facoltà umane, delle forme economico-sociali [...], giuridiche e politiche, del costume, artistiche, e così via» (E. Nuzzo, *Religione e "ortodossia" in Vico. I fondamenti teologici della razionalità storica*, «Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani» (hereafter «BCSV»), XLVI, 2016, pp. 9-52, p. 45). In this summary, the civil world (*forme giuridiche e politiche*) is treated as just one of several other subject matters – paratactically, without apparent deep connection with them – and essentially on merely equal footing with the rest. On the other hand, in this thesis a hypotactic reading will be employed according to which the *civil world* is privileged as overarching framework such that all other subjects are subordinated and appear only insofar as they relate in certain aspects to the civil world, and such that those aspects are considered through the lens of the civil world.

is victory in war; [3] fertility and prosperity with all kinds of conditions and consequences [...] represented by a great number of related but different divinities [...].³³

In *Scienza nuova* we read about all three of these “functions”; indeed, the major part of *Book Two. On Poetic Wisdom*, in the sections *On Poetic Metaphysics*, *On Poetic Logic*, *On Poetic Morals*, and *On Poetic Politics*, revolves around the cast of Greek-Roman divinities (374-678). However, this is done in ways that significantly narrow their scope and application. Jove/Jupiter is the most important divinity for which this is the case: «they devised a heaven which is one great animated body and which, in this aspect, they called JOVE – the first god of the so-called *gentes maiores* – who, in the sizzle of his lightning and the crash of his thunder, intended to say something to them» (377). There are a number of aspects imputed to Jove, but the particular aspect that Vico chooses to focus on mostly is Jove’s association with the thunderstorm. Vico pointed out that this was a case of “instrumentalization” because this “heaven” and JOVE were “devised” by «men who, being all robust bodily strength, express their quite violent passions through shouts and grunts» (377), analogous to thunder and lightning in their peremptory effect. By calling Jove/Jupiter «the first god of the so-called *gentes maiores*» who are the patricians, Vico shows that he is viewing Jove through the lens of the civil world. With the foregrounding of the *gentes maiores*, the most ancient clans of the patriciate, Vico implicitly also has the *gentes minores*, the relatively more recently established aristocratic houses, as well as the plebeians, hover in the background³⁴. What Vico, therefore, has in view is an ancient complex society.

Jupiter’s lightning and thunder, similarly, is related by Vico to the regulatory aspects of human society. As noted, lightning and thunder are interpreted as expressions of anger and menace, producing bouts of fear³⁵: «Thus it was fear that devised gods in the world, but [...] men were not made fearful by other men, but were themselves made fearful themselves» (382). But fear plays a significant role in the civil world in the fear of punishment or other sanctions for real or alleged violations, or displeasure by authority³⁶.

³³ G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, trans. Ph. Krapp, foreword M. Eliade, 2 vols., Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970 (originally published as *La Religion romaine archaïque suivie d’un appendice sur la religion des Etrusques*, Paris, Editions Payot, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 161; numbering added.

³⁴ Ivi, Vol. 2, p. 621: «The *gentes*, at least the great patrician *gentes*, had traditional cults, the ritual formulas of which belonged to them».

³⁵ As stated in D. M. Gross, *Metaphor and Definition in Vico’s New Science*, «Rhetorica», 14, 1996, 4, pp. 359-381, p. 379: «amorphous fear gains an object when thunder is identified as an angry voice». Among several words for fear in ancient Greek, *ekplexis* (initial “panic”, “terror”) might come closest to the primal fear described by Vico (G. Nagy, *The Subjectivity of Fear as Reflected in Ancient Greek Wording*, «Dialogues», 5, 2010, pp. 29-45).

³⁶ G. Cantelli observed: «I gesti di Giove sono essenzialmente degli atti di comando. Al cenno, al gesto della divinità corrisponde, come risposta, il gesto dell’uomo; ma i gesti e i cenni con i quali l’uomo risponde sono cenni e gesti di ubbidienza, di sottomissione» (*Gestualità e mito: i due caratteri distintivi della lingua originaria secondo Vico*, «BCSV», XX, 1990, pp. 77-116, p. 95). This “fear factor” theory of the belief in gods was already held in antiquity by Democritus. It has been attributed as Vico’s source along with the assumption that Vico himself subscribed to this theory

Representations or manifestations of the divine or supernatural are underdetermined. This is also true with respect to Jove/Jupiter. It is not universally the case that thunder and lightning are associated to reactions of fear and trembling. Georges Dumézil's studies have shown that Jupiter's lightning flashes first and foremost demonstrate his imputed *sovereignty*, to be expressed in matters of law, power, and justice, to the point of «his role as witness, as guarantor, as avenger of oaths and pacts, in private as well as in public life, in commerce between citizens or with foreigners»³⁷. His sovereignty is further evidenced by his beneficent goodness or his generosity³⁸. Even within the same Indo-European cultural context, an entirely different representation or construct of thunder and lightning arose. The “thunder-god” was apprehended as engaged in creative activity in the process of striking trees and rocks, and as a result, of kindling fire³⁹. In Greece, Zeus was also believed to be the god of the bright sky, the bringer of light, in contrast to the darkness of night⁴⁰. In another Indo-European culture, the Scythians, Zeus-Papaios was regarded as either “father”, “guardian”, or “protector”⁴¹. Such underdetermination is also notable in other depictions of the Storm God. In Iron Age Anatolia, for example, the same Storm God was represented in two monumental statues in divergent ways: the motive for differentiation was assertion of distinct (geopolitical) identities, which, in one monument, proclaimed national independence, and in the other, the very opposite, subservience to the Assyrian overlord⁴².

Vico himself does not limit Jove/Jupiter's role to an object of fear: «From this first benefit done for humankind came the title *soter*, or “savior,” because he did not strike them with lightning, which is the first of the three principles we have taken for this science; and the title, *stator*, or “stayer (*Fermatore*),” came to him because he stayed (*fermò*) those few giants from their feral wandering, from which came to pass the beginning of the gentiles» (379); in other words, they quickly overcame their initial fears, and began to see Jove in a different, positive, light⁴³. The metaphorical “feral wandering” is associated with the genesis and

(P. Harrison, “Religion” and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 15; N. P. Roubekas, *An Ancient Theory of Religion*, cit., pp. 36-37). However, as argued in this essay, Vico's descriptions are not to be taken necessarily as implying assent.

³⁷ G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 1, p. 179.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 181.

³⁹ G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 181-201.

⁴⁰ Id., *Longinus and the theological view of Zeus as god of the sky*, «Classical Inquiries», 5, 2016, no pagination.

⁴¹ D. Raevskiy, *Scythian Mythology*, Sofia, Secor Publishers, 1993, p. 19.

⁴² N. Lovejoy, *Ambiguity of Divine and Royal Portraiture and the Hiyawan Image of Kindship: Political Identity through the Monuments of ÇİNEKÖY and KARATEPE*, «Bulletin of ASOR», 387, 2022, pp. 113-138.

⁴³ F. Fellmann commented: «Die Vorstellung der Vorsorge entspringt nicht der Furcht des Menschen vor der Bedrohung, sondern ist schon Resultat der Überwindung von Furcht» (*Das Vico-Axiom*, cit., p. 46).

development of the civil world (“the beginning of the gentiles”)⁴⁴. In the later section of *On Poetic Morals* where Vico again refers to Jove (Jupiter) *Stator*, he is more specific in tying Jove to the civil world: «the giants [...] took on the completely contrary custom of staying hidden and settled (*fermi*) on those grounds (hence, they later became the authors of nations and lords in the earliest republics) [...] (hence, Jove was given the title *Stator* – that is, the “One Who Settles (*Fermatore*)” [...]» (504). His source for this title of Jupiter is what Jove was believed to have done in a legendary battle between the Romans and the Sabines, namely, “staying” or stopping the Romans’ disgraceful retreat⁴⁵. Thus, Vico turned the mythological discourse into a discourse about the civic sphere, consonant with his core concerns.

Finally, it might be appropriate also to take note that Vico does not limit affective reaction or interaction with the supernatural to the emotion of fear. He also allows for “curiosity” and “wonder”: «Wonder is the daughter of ignorance, and the greater the effect admitted, the more the wonder grows in proportion. [...] whenever wonder makes our minds open, curiosity takes as its custom to ask straightaway [...] what such a thing means or signifies. [...] those who are ignorant of all things have a strong sense of wonder at them [...]» (184, Axiom 35; 189, Axiom 39; 375)⁴⁶.

These considerations allow us to “relativize” fear in relation to religion, or more accurately, Vico’s treatment of fear in this connection. Is it the case that «Vico shares with Hume and many other Enlightenment thinkers the conviction that fear was the motivating force behind primitive religion»⁴⁷? The preceding discussion is meant to show that this question itself misses the thrust of Vico’s argument: fear of the divine, as part of religion, is seen through the prism of the phenomenon of fear in the civic realm, and is therefore merely one of a variety of attitudes involved⁴⁸. In this context, Vico’s discussions of fear do not relate

⁴⁴ M. Lollini interprets the “feral wandering” as involving literal wilderness, forests, or nature in general, which obviously is diametrically opposite to our thesis (*Vico’s Wilderness and the Places of Humanity*, «Romance Studies», 29, 2011, 2, pp. 119-131; *Natura, ragione e modernità nella Scienza nuova di Vico*, in *Razionalità e modernità in Vico*, ed. M. Vanzulli, Milano, Mimesis Edizioni, 2012, pp. 219-243).

⁴⁵ Livy, *History of Rome (Ab urbe condita)*, 1.12.4-6; G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 1, p. 187, also refers to two later (historical) battles, in 294 BC and 207 BC, during which Jupiter *Stator* was invoked; see Livy, *History of Rome*, 10.36.11; 27.37.7.

⁴⁶ D. Giugliano, *Lo stupore, l’ottundimento, la differenza. Primi appunti per una teoria della meraviglia a partire da Vico*, «I castelli di Yale online», VII, 2019, 1-2, pp. 65-82, pp. 71-75.

⁴⁷ J. Schaeffer, *From Natural Religion to Natural Law in Vico: Rhetoric, Poetic, and Vico’s Imaginative Universals*, «Rhetorica», 15, 1997, 1, pp. 41-51, p. 48; similarly P. Ciccarelli, *De iure Romano ex ratione civili interpretando. Zur Wende der politischen Philosophie zur Geschichtsphilosophie bei Vico*, in *Ars Iuris. Festschrift für Okko Behrends zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Avenarius – R. Meyer-Pritzel – C. Möller, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2009, pp. 87-118, p. 117 n. 96.

⁴⁸ S. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, cit., p. 521, cautions against the view «that premodern polity in South Asia was pure despotism, functioning entirely through dominance (“fear”) and hence able to forego all attempts at manufacturing consent». See also P. G. Pandimakil, *Das Ordnungsdenken bei Giambattista Vico als philosophische Anthropologie, Kulturentstehungstheorie, soziale Ordnung und politische Ethik*, cit., p. 166 n. 540. G. Bedani, *Vico Revisited: Orthodoxy, Naturalism and Science in the Scienza Nuova*, Oxford, Berg, 1989, p. 83, notes:

to what motivates or constitutes religion as such. Strictly speaking, Vico's framework not only precludes inferring fear as the grounds of religion, but also inferring as not being it⁴⁹.

We will now turn to Vico's account of the ancient practice of auspices and divination and try to show that he interpreted the practice through the lens of his conceptual framework rather than as part of a general study of religion and mythology⁵⁰. Consideration will be given to two aspects. The first aspect concerns Vico's focus on auspices and divination itself, as though these were the only practices involved in religious ritual. However, according to Georges Dumézil, «[t]he sum of the cultic relations between men and gods is composed of two sections: the offerings which men make to the gods, and the information which the gods send to them»⁵¹. Vico's choice of turning his attention to the

«The “fear” Vico attributes to early men, therefore, is a conflation of two different types of emotion. One is certainly the instinctive, protective response of a creature faced with what must have appeared as menacing signs of displeasure [...]. The other, however, [...] would be better described as “awe” or even “reverence”».

⁴⁹ Vico's level of analysis is implicit in B. G. Trigger, *Understanding Early Civilizations*, cit., p. 493: «Thus in early civilizations the struggle to protect local and individual rights of subjects against increasing exploitation [...] was conducted primarily in a religious idiom. [...] Religious concepts thus supplied a constitution phrased in terms that were intelligible to people in early civilizations». G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 1, pp. 193-194, mentions what happened in 215 BC that illustrates Vico's approach to fear inspired by Jove: after the election of plebeian consuls it thundered, and as a result the election was deemed invalid, thus manipulating the divine sign into a blatantly anti-plebeian manifestation (Livy, *History of Rome*, 23.31.12-14; J. Linderski, *The Auspices and the Struggle of the Orders*, in *Staat und Staatlichkeit in der Frühen Römischen Republik*, ed. W. Eder, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990, pp. 34-48, pp. 42-43). For the interpretation of thunder and lightning (brontoscopy) in Etruscan religion, see J. M. Turfa, *Divining the Etruscan World: The Brontoscopic Calendar and Religious Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

In a manner of speaking, Vico (historically) would have been in a relatively good position to be familiar with the entanglement of religion, the civil world, and “geopolitics”, given its continued prevalence in the early modern period. See, for example, W. Telesko, *The Pietas Austriaca. A political myth? On the instrumentalization of Piety towards the Cross at the Viennese Court in the Seventeenth Century*, in *The Habsburgs and their Courts in Europe, 1400-1700. Between Cosmopolitanism and Regionalism*, ed. H. Karner – I. Ciulisová – B. J. García García, Palatium e-Publication, 2014, pp. 159-175; M. O. Moragues, *Algunas claves geopolíticas de la devoción y el dogma de la Inmaculada Concepción*, «Magallánica», 3-5, 2016, pp. 48-67; P. González Tornel, *Arte y dogma. La fabricación de la causa de la Inmaculada Concepción en la España del siglo XVII*, «Magallánica», 3-5, 2016, pp. 68-98; Id., *The immaculate conception controversy and the accusation of scandal. Public conflict and religious devotion in seventeenth-century Spain*, «Renaissance Studies», 34, 2020, 2, pp. 156-172. Entanglement can be understood as involving «reciprocal dynamics» or «complex dynamics of (mutual) production, enablement, constraint, and limitation» (F. LeRon Shults – W. J. Wildman, *Simulating Religious Entanglement and Social Investment in the Neolithic*, in *Religion, History, and Place in the Origin of Settled Life*, ed. I. Hodder, Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2018, pp. 33-63, p. 37).

⁵⁰ Cf. Vico's exposition, for example, with G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., in terms of a general study.

⁵¹ Ivi, Vol. 1, p. 118.

second component is understandable in that it directly has to do with ordering, if not managing, the human world, in general, and the civil sphere, in particular⁵².

The second aspect concerns the context in which Vico embeds auspices and divination. This context is not mythology *per se*, but ancient Roman social history, and specifically the relationship between the patriciate and plebeians. It is not our task here to assess the accuracy of Vico's reading and interpretation of this fraught relationship, and of its changes in the course of Roman history⁵³. Our interest lies in the fact that auspices and divination (being essentially synonyms) appear as being integral to the civil world, not as "otherworldly". First, they are depicted in the general setting of law and jurisprudence: «It is from here [from the moment when the idea of Jove came to be in the minds of the princes of the gentiles] that we take our start in reasoning about law, which first came into being as a divine law because of the property expressed in the word "divination" – that is, the science of the auspices of Jove, which were the divine things (*cose divine*) by which the gentiles would regulate all the human things (*cose umane*) – and these two together comprise for jurisprudence the subject matter adequate to it» (398)⁵⁴.

Vico does not stop at this general insight of the crucial place of auspices in "regulating", establishing the strict rules of, Roman society, as expressed here and elsewhere in *Scienza nuova* (365, 374, 391, 727, 739, 938, 948, 964). Rather, he then shows that the auspices were "instrumentalized" by the elites (the Roman patriciate) to their advantage by arrogating them to themselves as their exclusive right: «the Roman patricians in all the heroic contests they had with the plebs [...] so as to preserve for themselves their heroic rights, opposed the plebs with the claim, *AUSPICIA ESSE SUA* ["the auspices were theirs"]» (488, 490, 508, 525, 598, 604, 985). Here, Vico is succinctly stating the key point of Appius Claudius Crassus's lecture (mid fourth-century BC) on the issue of participation of the plebeians in the consulate which reads in part:

Who is there who does not know that this city was built on auspices, that all things are conducted by auspices during war and peace, at home and abroad? In whom therefore are the auspices vested according to the usage of our forefathers? In the patricians, no doubt; for no plebeian magistrate is ever elected by auspices. [...] What else then does

⁵² Ivi, pp. 118-128. This is the thrust of M. Scalercio, *La teologia politica vichiana. La figura della divinazione nella teologia civile della Scienza nuova*, in *Razionalità e modernità in Vico*, cit., pp. 197-217; Id., *Il futuro come problema politico. Francis Bacon e Giambattista Vico come matrici del moderno*, «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», XV, 2018, pp. 1-16, pp. 12-16. Scalercio also places Vico's disquisition on religion in the context of early modern natural law theorists and contractualists, especially Grotius, Selden, Pufendorf. In the present essay, this second-order discourse will not be taken up.

⁵³ For example, as done critically by A. Momigliano, *Vico's Scienza nuova: Roman "Bestioni" and Roman "Eroi"*, «History and Theory», 5, 1966, 1, pp. 3-23; but cf. G. Crifò, *I romani «eroi del mondo» e la «giurisprudenza eroica». Alcune considerazioni*, in *Eroi ed età eroiche attorno a Vico*, cit., pp. 309-317; S. Mazzarino, *Vico e Roma*, in *Campanella e Vico*, Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969, pp. 303-314.

⁵⁴ In *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Th. G. Bergin – M. H. Fisch, cit., *cose* is translated as "institutions".

he do, than abolish auspices out of the state, who by creating plebeian consuls, takes them away from the patricians who alone can hold them?⁵⁵

A compromise was reached: the plebeians were admitted to the consulate, but the auspices remained an exclusive patrician prerogative, held by the patriciate as a class⁵⁶. This stands out all the more in view of the attempts of the plebeians to claim their own auspices, *auspicia privata* as distinct from patrician *auspicia publica*, as duly noted by Vico: «this [the use of doves in divination] is to signify that the plebeians held private, or minor auspices, different from the auspices of eagles and lightning bolts which were noble and which Varro and Messala called “the major or public auspices”, upon which depended all the heroic rights of the nobles [...]» (568, see also 525). To no avail: in the view of the patricians, these “minor” auspices did not count as auspices at all. The social and legal regulatory import of this putatively religious conflict is apparent in the fact that at the time it revolved around the validity of marriage between plebeians and patricians⁵⁷.

As noted earlier, a significant portion of *Book Two* is built around the Roman pantheon so that what follows is a brief exploration that focuses on aspects having to do with Vico’s basic frame of reference, the *mondo civile*.

6. *The twelve Great Gods of the Roman pantheon*

It is well-known in Vico studies that Vico presents a “socio-political” or “socio-institutional” interpretation of the Roman divinities⁵⁸. This finds support in certain aspects of Vico’s commentary⁵⁹. For example, *Scienza nuova* includes not just a more or less arbitrary listing of the twelve characters; rather it imposes a particular structure on them. This structure is generated by, and follows, the internal composition of *Book Two* of *Scienza nuova*: Jove makes his appearance in *On Poetic Metaphysics* (377), while Juno is considered under *On Poetic Morals* (511)⁶⁰. The remaining ten figures are also categorized separately: Diana (528), Apollo (533), Vulcan (549), Saturn (549), Cybele/Berecynthia/Vesta (549), Mars (562), Venus (562, 565), are made part of *On Poetic Economics* whereas Minerva (589), Mercury (604) and Neptune (634) are discussed in *On Poetic Politics*. Thus, the Roman pantheon is mapped onto Vico’s configuration of the civil world, and so the civil

⁵⁵ Livy, *History of Rome*, 6.40-41, Project Gutenberg eBook #19725, 2006; G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion* cit., Vol. 1, pp. 191-192.

⁵⁶ J. Linderski, *The Auspices and the Struggle of the Orders*, cit., p. 41; J. Rüpke, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*, trans. D. M. B. Richardson, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018, pp. 152-156.

⁵⁷ J. Linderski, *The Auspices and the Struggle of the Orders*, cit., p. 47.

⁵⁸ G. A. Gualtieri, *The Socio-Political View about the Primitive World in Giambattista Vico’s Thought*, «Araucaria», 41, 2019, pp. 97-116, p. 102; G. Bedani, *Vico Revisited*, cit., p. 80. E. Mazzoleni, *Universali fantastici giuridici. Narrazioni normative in Giambattista Vico*, «DPU – Diritto Penale e Uomo», 2019, 9, pp. 1-22, pp. 11-16, interprets Vesta and Mercury as “fantastic legal universals”.

⁵⁹ For seventeenth-century compendia of Roman mythology available to Vico, see R. Bassi, *Canon di mitologia. Materiali per lo studio delle fonti vichiane*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2005.

⁶⁰ Paragraphs indicate the passages where the names are capitalized.

world determines or guides how the individual deities are to be interpreted, both individually and how they are to be grouped.

The connection that Vico makes with the civil world could be outlined as follows: *establishment of the family*: Jove/Jupiter – religion; Juno – marriage; *establishment of property*: Diana – sedentary life; Apollo – burial of the dead; Vulcan, Saturn, Vesta – agriculture; *establishment of the polity*: Minerva – the aristocratic class, Mercury – the first (bonitary) agrarian law, Neptune – war and colonization⁶¹. A glance at how Roman mythology is commonly understood brings to the fore the idiosyncrasy of Vico's approach, some overlap notwithstanding⁶². Juno, as Jupiter's wife, was the protectress of Rome, and embodied sovereignty and fecundity as well⁶³. Diana had power over procreation and the birth of children; Apollo was the god of healing; Vulcan is the fire, for good or evil; Saturn is associated with a dangerous but sometimes useful force, for example, by the destruction of enemy arms on the battlefield; Vesta's temple's permanent fire was meant to ensure Rome's permanence; Mars was the warrior god, and the god of warriors; Venus was a complex, even a composite goddess; she was a giver of victory, and the tutelary power of the Roman nation founded by Aeneas; Minerva is the goddess of arts and trades and of those who practice them; the cult of Mercury is linked to commerce, but also to the provisioning of Rome, and, finally, Neptune represented the general qualities of all water in the ground, and over time became the patron god of the sea.

Vico's account also is conspicuous by the absence of another major divinity, Ceres. This does not appear to be an oversight since Vico included Ceres in his Roman mythology in *De constantia*. There Ceres is part of the triad of Vulcan, Ceres, Saturn, «pro iis qui invenerunt ignem, frumentum, sata»⁶⁴. However, in *Scienza*

⁶¹ P. G. Pandimakil, *Das Ordnungsdenken bei Giambattista Vico als philosophische Anthropologie, Kulturentstehungstheorie, soziale Ordnung und politische Ethik*, cit., p. 212; J. Milbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico*, cit., pp. 211-212. See also J. Schaeffer, *Giambattista Vico on Natural Law: Religion, Rhetoric, and Sensus Communis*, New York, Routledge, 2019, pp. 31-35; G. A. Gualtieri, *The Socio-Political View about the Primitive World in Giambattista Vico's Thought*, cit., pp. 102-111; E. Mazzoleni, *Universali fantastici giuridici*, cit., pp. 11-16; P. König, *Giambattista Vico*, cit., p. 131; G. Bedani, *Vico Revisited*, cit., p. 80; D. L. Marshall, *The Current State of Vico Scholarship*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 72, 1, 2011, pp. 141-160, p. 152: «In Vico's gloss, Minerva, Pallas, and Mercury were sublimations of (respectively) the elite in council, the elite gathered before the masses in assembly, and the elite communicating with the masses in time of crisis».

⁶² G. Bedani, *Vico Revisited*, cit., p. 80, also refers to certain «etymological absurdities».

⁶³ For Jupiter, see the earlier comments. These characterizations are from G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 1, p. 302, Vol. 2, p. 463 (Juno); Vol. 2, p. 408 (Diana); Vol. 2, p. 442 (Apollo); Vol. 1, p. 320 (Vulcan); Vol. 1, p. 272 (Saturn); Vol. 1, p. 315 (Vesta); Vol. 1, p. 245 (Mars); Vol. 2, pp. 471-472, 477 (Venus); Vol. 1, p. 303 (Minerva); Vol. 2, p. 440 (Mercury); Vol. 1, p. 389 (Neptune); see also M. L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 166-173, 247-249 (Jupiter); 148-150 (Apollo); 168 (Vulcan); 144-145 (Vesta); 147-148 (Mars); 135 (Venus); 283 (Mercury); 276-277 (Neptune).

⁶⁴ *Universal Law (Diritto universale)*, Book Two, *De constantia*, Second Part, *On the Constancy of Philology*, Chapter 31, *A Summary of this History*, subsection in Latin, *Ad Historiam Temporis Obscuri Amplificandum*, [IV]; this section does not appear in *A Translation from Latin into English of*

nuova, Ceres is replaced by Vesta which in certain respects is consistent since Vesta «guarded over the fire and the spelt, which was the grain of the ancient Romans» (549)⁶⁵. On the other hand, the cult of Ceres also had “political” dimensions. Her temple on the Aventine slopes was erected and patronized in celebration of plebeian success(es) in gradually wresting rights from the patriciate⁶⁶. This would have made Ceres an obvious candidate for inclusion in *Poetic Politics*, rather than *Poetic Economics* in the company of Vulcan and Saturn. To make Vico’s scheme of Roman mythology work within the framework of the development of the civil world, Ceres needed to be substituted⁶⁷.

Vico’s concluding comments on religion in *Scienza nuova* can and should be read (chiastically) from this perspective:

For in this work it has been fully demonstrated that [a] the earliest governance (i *primi Governi*) in the world (Mondo) had as its *entire form* (*intiera forma*) a religion based on providence (*Provvedenzà*), and the familial state (lo *Stato delle Famiglie*) rested on this religion alone. [b] Passing on from there to heroic civil, or aristocratic, governments (*Governi Civili Eroici*, ovvero *Aristocratici*), that religion must have been its principal *basis* (*pianta*) of stability. [c] Subsequently advancing on to popular governments (*Governi popolari*), this same religion served as a *means* (*mezzo*) for such governance coming to pass. [d] Settling at last upon monarchical governance (*Governi Monarchici*), this religion must have been the *shield* (lo *scudo*) of princes (*Principi*).

[e] Hence, when religion is lost for a people, nothing remains for them to live in society (Società): [d’] no *shield* (*scudo*) for defending themselves; [c’] no *means* (*mezzo*) for taking counsel; [b’] no *basis* (*pianta*) that must support them; [a’] no *form* (*forma*) for them actually to be in the world (Mondo) (1109, emphasis added).

In this maximally condensed statement, devoid of any “baroque” elaboration, the general *mondo civile*, referred to both in the beginning and conclusion (Mondo), as well as the center of the chiasmus (Società), takes on a particular aspect which is that of *governance* (*Governi*), in the background of which lies the section on *Three Kinds of Governance* in *Book Four* (925-927). Religion is therefore viewed within this frame of reference, which is further elucidated by the four

Giambattista Vico’ Il Diritto Universale/Universal Law, Book 2, trans. J. D. Schaeffer, «New Vico Studies», 23, 2005.

⁶⁵ In G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 2, p. 613, Ceres is called «the goddess of vegetable processes».

⁶⁶ Ivi, Vol. 1, p. 379. In *Universal Law (Diritto universale)*, Book Two, *De constantia*, Second Part, *On the Constancy of Philology*, Chapter 23, *The Mythology of the Greater Gentes according to our Principles*, [17], Vico referred to this “political” aspect: «She was called “*Legifera*” [“law-bearer”] to indicate that the first laws were agrarian laws. The first agrarian law concerned bondage to the fields; the second concerned bonitary ownership, or tribute» (*A Translation from Latin into English of Giambattista Vico’s Il Diritto Universale/Universal Law*, Book 2, cit., p. 192); cf. J. D. Schaeffer, *Giambattista Vico on Natural Law*, cit., p. 33.

⁶⁷ Livy, *History of Rome*, 22.10.9, recounts the *lectisternium*, the ritual banquet of the twelve Great Gods, in 217 BC; in the description, Ceres is paired with Mercury who in *Scienza nuova* comes in under *Poetic Politics*. Ceres, therefore, apparently was not a good “fit” for Vico’s overall framework (G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 1, p. 305; Vol. 2, p. 476). Ceres is mentioned in *Scienza nuova* incidentally (541, 597).

complex and changing, and decidedly non-“spiritual”, ways that religion may relate to the four different governmental systems that Vico broadly identified⁶⁸. Thus, this framing of religion represents a “hermeneutical restructuring” of the position of other early modern thinkers⁶⁹. Instead of arguing the nature or truth or falsity of religion itself, as Pierre Bayle and others did (1110), Vico, innovatively, developed a fundamentally different explanatory framework, thus enabling and necessitating a non-critical approach to the “instrumentalization” of religion befitting a work of science (1096)⁷⁰.

In the passage just quoted, Vico not only refers to religion but also to another term found throughout *Scienza nuova*, which is *providence* (*Provvidenza*) which requires an explanation. A discussion of it will be deferred until the other two fundamental customs that are the subject of the essay – marriage and the burial of the dead – are dealt with first.

7. Marriage in *Scienza nuova*

Vico has less to say about the institution of marriage than about religion, but in all three key sections of *Book Two*, that is, *Poetic Morals*, *Poetic Economics*, and *Poetic Politics*, and even *Poetic Physics*, he deals with the subject⁷¹.

Almost all of *Poetic Morals* is about marriage, beginning with an apparently anthropological account of the beginnings of monogamy: «And each of them [the giants] was given to dragging off into the caves for himself one woman and keeping her within in continuous companionship for his life. In this fashion, marriages were introduced – that is, chaste carnal unions made in fear of some divinity [...]. And, consequently, even from its start, marriage must have been,

⁶⁸ For a modern example of such complexity, see J. A. Stephens, *Governing Islam: Law and Religion in Colonial India*, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2013. For the sake of sovereign colonial power, Britain pursued a strategy of marginalizing religious law in the spheres of criminal, commercial, and procedural law, nonetheless leading to complex interactions and outcomes.

⁶⁹ “Hermeneutical restructuring” has been said of Aristotle’s approach to Anaxagoras (L. A. Kosman, *What does the Maker Mind Make?*, in *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, ed. M. C. Nussbaum – A. Oksenberg Rorty, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, pp. 343-358, p. 352).

⁷⁰ Cf. M. Lilla, G. B. *Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 13, 233: «Vico proposes a union of modern science with religion»; «Religious wisdom and modern social science were Vico’s proposed alternatives to the political liberty and free philosophical reflection offered by the modern age». Lilla thus directed his critique at Vico on the understanding that religion as such was Vico’s topic and ideological agenda; according to our thesis, however, his critique was aimed at a wrong target. With respect to Bayle’s proposal for “philosophers” to supplant religion in matters of governance, it would have to wait until the twentieth century to be realized.

⁷¹ As noted in *The New Science*, trans. and ed. J. Taylor – R. Miner, cit., pp. 203-204 n. 293, Vico’s term *iconomica* in *Poetic Economics* is close to the old sense of “household management”; it might be even closer to “household governance” as it emphasizes “authority” in the (extended) family or clan, in general, and the aristocratic “house”, in particular; or, as defined in V. Hölsle, *Vico’s Science of the Intersubjective World*, trans. and ed. F. R. Hittinger IV, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2016, p. 41-42: «“Economics” is the doctrine of the ordering of the family, the latter understood as the institution that mediates between the individual and the state [...]».

on the one hand, with one woman only [...], and, on the other hand, a continuous companionship for their whole lives, as it remains in the customs of many, many peoples» (504-505, 507)⁷². However, these statements are merely introductory general comments to the actual subject matter already alluded to at the end of § 505: «and marriage came with three solemnities (solennità)», followed by: «The first of these solemnities of marriage were the auspices of Jove taken from the lightning bolts, when the giants were induced to celebrate the auspices» (506). The right to the auspices places marriage in the context of the contest between the patriciate and the plebeians, as discussed earlier in connection with religion. Vico is explicit on this point: «Consequently, so as to signify that *connubium* – that is, the right to contract solemn nuptials, whose major solemnity was the auspices of Jove – was the property of the heroes [the patricians] they made *noble* Love out to be winged [...]

(508, emphasis added). In Vico's account there are no transitional stages or developments between the time of the introduction of marriage and the time of the establishment of the Roman patriciate and its marriage rituals; such an account is, in fact, unnecessary since Vico is not writing the phenomenology of marriage but its socio-politics in ancient Rome⁷³.

The issue Vico focused on was not marriage itself since non-patricians were able to be joined in matrimonial union by way of *usus* governed by the *ius civile*⁷⁴. Rather, in Vico's interpretation of Roman legal history, the plebeians wanted the same kind of formal, high-status, marriages that the patricians enjoyed – *connubium* (567), or *solemn nuptials* pursuant to the *auspicia publica* (598). Later, in *Book Four*, Vico expressly pointed out the issue involved: «the Roman plebeians contracted natural marriages (*matrimonj naturale*) up until Year 309 of Rome, when the patricians finally shared the *connubium* – that is, the right to contract solemnized nuptials» (986, 987, see also 513). As noted earlier, the *auspicia privata* claimed by the plebeians were rejected out of hand by the patricians as no auspices at all (568). Patriciate marriages were *confarreate marriages*, based on the ancient ritual of *confarreatio*, originally reserved for the highest priests, and

⁷² R. Scruton, *Sacrilege and Sacrament*, in *The Meaning of Marriage: Family, State, Market, and Morals*, ed. R. P. George – J. B. Elshtain, New York, Scepter Publishers, 2010, pp. 3-28, p. 5, remarks: «In all observed societies some form of marriage exists, as the means whereby the work of one generation is dedicated to the well-being of the next. Marriage does not merely protect and nurture children; it is a shield against sexual jealousy and a unique form of social and economic cooperation, with a mutually supportive division of roles that more than doubles the effectiveness of each partner in their shared bid for security». Cf. *Scienza nuova*: «From this nature of human things remains this eternal property: that the true natural friendship is marriage, in which naturally all three final goods are shared in common, namely, the honorable, the advantageous, and the pleasurable, whence husband and wife share, by nature, all the prosperity and adversity of their lot in life [...]

(554).
⁷³ In the compound term *socio-politics* as used here, the emphasis is on its first part, in line with B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples: The Urban Origins of Modern Social Theory*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 163: «Vico exclusively underscored the private rights and duties that accrued to the citizen, severing the juridical condition of citizenship from its political one». On marriage from different perspectives from “outside”, as anthropology or sociology, or the “inside”, as participants, see R. Scruton, *Sacrilege and Sacrament*, cit., pp. 3-28.

⁷⁴ G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, cit., Vol. 2, p. 615.

subsequently arrogated to themselves by the patricians as a class (549)⁷⁵. The plebeian push for the right to *connubium*, therefore, was not about a right-to-marriage *per se* but a radical attempt at achieving socio-political equality with the patricians⁷⁶.

This was Vico's version of events. As Vico polemically points out himself, he begged to differ from Livy's account: «He [Livy] shows his lack of knowledge insofar as he reports it as though it meant “if the nobles intermarry with the plebeians” » (567)⁷⁷. This deliberate “correction” of received Roman history speaks volumes about the conceptual framework in which Vico embeds customary marriage. As has been posited, in *Scienza nuova* Vico essentially is only interested in, and concerned with, the institution of marriage as being another (key) part of a particular socio-political framework of the civil world. This focus is stated in the most direct manner: «Later, in the city with nuptials, are seen *parliaments, laws, judges, penalties*, which is exactly how the Roman patricians responded in the heroic contests to the plebs, that nuptials and political power and the priesthood [...] were legitimately their own property» (684, emphasis added).

This theme is further developed in *Poetic Politics* from a related, but separate angle of approach. This approach has a socio-economic thrust since it involves economic interests in the form of real estate and inheritance of property. Vico explained how essential *solemn nuptials* were for the legal ability of owning and passing on real estate at death: «the plebeians were still not citizens so that, when they died, they were not able to leave the fields intestate to their relatives because they did not have familial relations [...], which depend completely on solemnized nuptials, and they were not able to dispose of the fields by testament because they were not citizens» (598, see also 110, 987). All the plebeians could aspire to was *quiritary dominion*, a form of temporary leasehold of fields, rather than *bonitary dominion*, a form of freehold which was the patrician prerogative⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; J. Linderski, *The Auspices and the Struggle of the Orders*, cit., pp. 47-48; E. Mazzoleni, *Universali fantastici giuridici*, cit., pp. 12-13. A faint echo in Vico's time may be seen in the old Neapolitan aristocracy who «defended within their own ranks, against the matrimonial pollution of their descendants, who were assiduously courted by those desiring to enter the nobility» (G. Montroni, *The Court: Power Relations and Forms of Social Life*, trans. M. Rogers, in *Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State*, ed. G. Imbruglia, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 23-43, p. 25).

⁷⁶ G. Zanetti, *Equality and Marriage in Vico*, «Ratio Juris», 24, 2011, 4, pp. 461-470, p. 468: «the issue of basic equality comes to the fore again»; P. A. Brienza, *Vico and the Social Theory of Law: The Structure of Legal Communication*, foreword G. Mazzotta, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2014, pp. 264-265; note also A. M. Damiani, *La secolarizzazione politica nella Scienza nuova*, «BCSV», XXX, 2000, pp. 213-230, p. 22: «Per ottenere diritti testamentari, i plebei esigono dai patrizi il diritto di contrarre matrimoni legittimi; nel momento in cui i patrizi “comunicano” ai plebei i matrimoni solenni, perdono due dei tre privilegi su cui si fonda il loro potere: la custodia dei confine e degli ordini».

⁷⁷ Livy, *History of Rome*, 4.1.2. For other instances of representing events of Roman history differently than Livy, see B. A. Naddeo, *Vico and Naples*, cit., pp. 140-145.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of “property rights” in a broader sense and context in ancient Rome, see *ivi*, pp. 142-145. In this passage, a keyword is *citizens*; it is essentially synonymous with having full legal rights in the community (*ivi*, pp. 145, 162-163); G. Cacciatore, *Il concetto di cittadinanza*

In the *Conclusion of Scienza nuova*, Vico circles back to «a beginning to marriage», previously discussed in *Poetic Morals*, however, by adding new information that places Vico's treatment of monogamy squarely into the sphere of the *mondo civile*. The new information is that unlike «having intercourse chastely with only one woman taken under divine auspices in continuous lifetime companionship», there was «infamous sharing in common of [...] women» (1099). Rather than inventing for rhetorical purposes a fanciful account of an imagined remote past, Vico had a basis in sources about actual marriage customs in antiquity, including Herodotus, Julius Caesar, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and others, and these accounts are useful in providing background information to Vico's statements⁷⁹. These sources describe the practice of *collective marriage* or *group marriage* in various cultures of the ancient world. A few excerpts of their writings may suffice in support of Vico's contention:

These are the customs which they have: – Each marries a wife, but they have their wives in common; [...] whatever woman a man of the Massagetai may desire he hangs up his quiver in front of the waggon and has commerce with her freely⁸⁰.

The Agathyrsians are the most luxurious of men [...]; also they have promiscuous intercourse with their women, in order that they may be brethren to one another and being all nearly related may not feel envy or malice against another⁸¹.

Their [the Nasamonians] custom is for each man to have many wives [...]. When a Nasamonian man marries his first wife, the custom is for the bride on the first night to go through the whole number of the guests having intercourse with them [...]⁸².

[...] they [the Machiyans] have their intercourse with women in common, [...] and when the child of any woman has grown big, he is brought before a meeting of the men [...] and whomsoever of the men the child resembles, his son he is accounted to be⁸³.

Ten and even twelve [Britons] have wives common to them, and particularly brothers among brothers, and parents among their children; but if there be any issue by these wives, they are reputed to be the children of those by whom respectively each was first espoused when a virgin⁸⁴.

Then when Marcus Claudius proceeded to seize the maiden [Virginius' daughter] [...], Virginius, menacingly extending his hands towards Appius, says, To Icilius, and not to you, Appius, have I betrothed my daughter, and for matrimony, not prostitution, have I brought her up. Do you wish to gratify their lust promiscuously, like cattle and wild beasts⁸⁵?

For example, in the matter of marriage and commerce with women [...], some, taking their example from the beasts, have allowed men to have intercourse with women freely

in Vico come manifestazione del nesso tra universalità della legge e storicità empirica della civitas, «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», XIII, 2016, pp. 1-10.

⁷⁹ A more extensive account, on which our comments are based, can be found in G. Franciosi, *Clan gentilizio e strutture monogamiche. Contributo alla storia della famiglia romana*, Naples, Jovene, 1999, Chapter 8, *Il matrimonio collettivo*, pp. 157-177.

⁸⁰ Herodotus, 1.216.

⁸¹ Ivi, 4.104.

⁸² Ivi, 4.172.

⁸³ Ivi, 4.180.

⁸⁴ Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 5.14.

⁸⁵ Livy, *History of Rome*, 4.47.

and promiscuously, thinking thus to free their lives from the frenzies of love, to save them from murderous jealousy, and to deliver them from many other evils which come upon both private houses and whole States through women⁸⁶.

Vico does not hold back from excoriating “collective marriage” as «bestial lust», «intercourse in the manner of the bestial Venus», «infamous sharing» (1098, 1099); in doing so, he proceeded analogously to expressing his view of the ancient Roman pantheon as «false religion», which, however, did not preclude a scientific study of how it was related to the (Roman) civil world⁸⁷. Similarly, he places collective/group marriage marked by endemic uncertainty with regard to fatherhood and paternity of children within the frame of reference of the (Roman) *mondo civile* by contrasting it with monogamous marriage as an institution «through which they make *certain children* (*certi figliuoli*) with *certain wives* (*certe mogli*) and so become *certain fathers* (*certi padri*) [...]», so that with the later rise of the cities men were found to be well disposed to fearing civil power (*Imperj Civili*) » (1098, emphasis added). In his commentary on the frontispiece, he made a similar statement: «marriages, as all the political theorists agree, are the seedbed from which families emerge, just as families are the seedbed from which republics emerge» (11)⁸⁸.

8. Burial of the dead in *Scienza nuova*

The most cohesive or sustained discussion of burial of the dead in *Scienza nuova* is found in *Poetic Economics* in the section on the goddess Diana, «the third major deity» (528-531). The discussion of burial in this section is embedded in a larger narrative that has to do with the «giants after they settled in *certain lands* and joined in marriage with *certain women*» (528, emphasis added). This alerts us to view what Vico has to say about burial within a certain framework: the “giants” Vico has in mind are primarily nobles, in general, and Roman patricians, in particular, as most of this section is about them⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 2.24.

⁸⁷ Analogously, neither do Vico’s references to “true religion” stand in the way of a “scientific” approach. J. C. Morrison, *How to Interpret the Idea of Divine Providence in Vico’s “New Science”*, «Philosophy & Rhetoric», 12, 1979, 4, pp. 256-261, p. 260 n. 1: «It should be emphasized that the question of Vico’s personal religious beliefs is ultimately irrelevant to the task of giving a proper interpretation of his writings, except to the extent that these beliefs form some part of their meaning and content. Otherwise, the question is of merely biographical interest».

⁸⁸ The “political theorists” Vico had in mind likely included Jean Bodin, Grotius, Hobbes, and Locke (R. Koganzon, *Fathers and Sovereigns: The Uses of Paternal Authority in Early Modern Thought*, dissertation, Cambridge [Ma.], Harvard University, 2016, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/33493417>> [last accessed 21 October 2022]; Sh. Achinstein, *Hugo Grotius and Marriage’s Global Past: Conjugal Thinking in Early Modern Political Thought*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 81, 2020, 2, pp. 195-215).

⁸⁹ For a comprehensive study of Vico’s trope of *giants*, see R. Mazzola, *I giganti in Vico*, «BCSV», XXIV-XXV, 1994-1995, pp. 49-78; see also L. Buschetto, *Vico e i figliuoli di Dio. Ricerche sui giganti nel Diritto Universale e nella Scienza Nuova Prima*, «BCSV», XXIV-XXV, 1994-1995, pp. 79-95. A glance at representations of gigantomachy is also illuminating, for which see, for example, S. Pierguidi, *Gigantomachia and the Wheel of Fortune in Giulio Romano, Vincenzo Cartari and*

As in his introduction to marriage, Vico introduces burial of the dead rhetorically by describing a stark contrast, which in this case is «the stench which came from the cadavers of those belonging to them who passed away and were rotting upon the land near them» (529, see also 337)⁹⁰. This is immediately followed – without any further discussion or explanation – by asserting not only that «hence, they must have buried their dead», but furthermore that «these pious giants imbued these graves with so much religion [...] that *religiosa loca* remained primarily [...] an expression for places where there were graves»⁹¹. And, even more radically, that the (fundamental) belief in the immortality of the soul arose from the custom of burying the dead⁹².

It is therefore startling that the next thing that Vico has to say is not anything theological but seemingly “utilitarian”, namely, about «some marker for the

Anton Francesco Doni, and the Authorship of the Asinesca Gloria, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 67, 2004, 1, pp. 275-284; A. Mayor, *Giants in Ancient Warfare*, «MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History», 2, 1999, 2, pp. 98-105; *Géants et géantomachies entre Orient et Occident*, ed. F. H. Massa-Pairault – C. Pouzadoux, Naples, OpenEdition Books, 2020. The socio-political connotation of the term, and similar terms, is highlighted in J. Řídký, et al., *Big Men or Chiefs? Rondel Builders of Neolithic Europe*, Oxford, Oxbow, 2019; M. Godelier, *The Making of Great Men: Male Domination and Power among the New Guinea Baruya*, trans. R. Swyer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

⁹⁰ In *De constantia*, Vico speaks of burial in two contexts: first, the offspring of men and “unknown partners” «who could not know their fathers, left their dead bodies unburied», and secondly, the burial of slain enemies on the battlefield (*De constantia*, Second Part, *On the Constancy of Philology*, Chapter 20, *The First Epoch of the Dark Age*, [17] *On Marriage*, and Chapter 30, *The Fifth and Last Epoch of the Dark Time* [...], [17] *The burial of enemies*, respectively). Both contexts are obviously “abnormal” or extreme situations, and therefore not necessarily meant to represent general or typical practices of treatment of the dead, real or hypothesized. It begs the question what or who Vico had in mind in the first sentence of § 529. However, it is known that executed criminals, gladiators, battle victims, or victims of personal revenge were left to decompose without burial (V. Mariotti – D. Labate – L. Mainati – M. G. Belcastro, *I resti umani delle discariche di epoca romana dello scavo ex Parco Novi Sad (Modena)*, in *Il diritto alla sepoltura nel Mediterraneo antico*, ed. R. M. Bérard, Rome, École française de Rome, 2021, pp. 281-299; D. Labate – G. Gruppioni – V. Milani – C. Simonini, *Corpi smembrati non sepolti di età romana dal Modenese*, *ivi*, pp. 301-320). Roman jurists are also known to discuss the withholding of burial, by leaving corpses exposed to birds and dogs, and thus denying the humanity and dignity of the deceased as a form of punishment (J. D. Rodríguez Martín, *Consegna nossale del cadaver e privazione di sepoltura in diritto romano*, *ivi*, pp. 321-341).

⁹¹ It seems that Vico is referring to the attempts of Roman landowners to place tombs on their land in order to convey the legal status of *locus religiosus*, which under Roman law would render their property off limits to tax collectors and creditors (S. Lazzarini, *Sepulture in prediis e abuso del diritto in frode ai creditori*, in *Il diritto alla sepoltura nel Mediterraneo antico*, *cit.*, pp. 223-244).

⁹² G. Severino, *Principi e modificazioni della mente in Vico*, Genua, Il Melangolo, 1981, p. 44: «La fede nell’immortalità d’altra parte, non è una premessa ma una conseguenza della religione e nell’ultima redazione della *Scienza nuova* è detto che solo dopo che “I giganti pii” si diedero a seppellire i loro morti cominciò sulla terra “l’universale credenza ... dell’immortalità dell’anime umane”». N. Badaloni, *Discussione*, in *Campanella e Vico*, *cit.*, pp. 333-334, p. 333, expresses a more sublimated point of view: «Così pure l’origine della immortalità dell’anima è vista in relazione allo sviluppo del Diritto, cioè l’idea della immortalità dell’anima nasce quando le persone diventano persone giuridiche e le proprietà si trasmettono. Le persone, in quanto giuridiche, diventano metastoriche».

grave». The reason for the change in subject, and the real reason for the topic of burial in *Scienza nuova* in the first place, is then stated: «the marker for the grave (what we call in Italian a *ceppo*) [...]; and for Italians, *ceppo* signifies the base of a genealogical tree (*pianta d'albero genealogico*)». Thus, Vico contextualizes the apparently fundamental anthropological constant of treatment of the remains of the dead through a variety of mortuary customs. He does so according to two aspects, first, “socio-politically”, and then “socio-economically”.

The socio-political dimension is made obvious by describing burials and graves in the context of the Roman nobility, not the populace in general: only the nobles «described their genealogies by placing, in the halls of their households (case), statues of their ancestors in lines [...] which they called *stemmata* [...] and subsequently, down to our times, *stemmata* have retained their significance as insignia of noble households (*Insigne Gentilizie*). As a result, [...] the earliest lands (*terre*) containing these graves were the earliest family shields (*scudi delle Famiglie*) [...]. And since these graves were on the ground of the first fields to be planted, a shield [...] later was called the background of the coats of arms» (529). Vico further confirms his focus on the Roman nobility by referring back to genealogical «lines (*filii*)» (529) as the origin of the word *filius* [“son”] as a member of a patrician clan (530).

In this socio-political perspective on the burial of the dead, Vico makes two intriguing parenthetical remarks: «subsequently down to our times», and «to this day in Naples» (529). Vico thus connects contemporaneous practices with his reconstruction of the past, a (not unproblematic) use of ethnography that appears in *Scienza nuova* in other contexts, too. With respect to mortuary customs of the aristocracy, both in Naples itself and elsewhere, in the Renaissance and early modern period, it can be said that their funerary monuments constitute a major part of artistic and cultural production of the age, and of special interest due to the importance that Vico gave them⁹³. A few examples will serve to illustrate this (all located in Naples): the tomb of Ser Gianni Caracciolo in the Caracciolo del Sole chapel in the church of San Giovanni a Carbonara⁹⁴; the funerary monuments in the chapel of Caracciolo di Vico in the same church⁹⁵; the

⁹³ For a wide-ranging study of the socio-political dimensions of aristocratic funerary monuments in Naples, see G. Heidemann-Schirmer, *Adelsgrabmäler des Quattrocento in Neapel: Gruppenbewusstsein und Selbstinszenierung*, dissertation, Berlin, Universität der Künste, 2013; see also G. Heidemann – E. Scirocco, *Die Kirchen Santa Chiara und Santa Maria di Monteoliveto als Bestattungsorte der Adligen in Neapel*, Berlin, Universität der Künste, 2010; T. Michalsky, *Memoria und Repräsentation. Die Grabmäler des Königshauses Anjou in Italien*, Göttingen, Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte, 2000; B. Paul, *The Venetian Doges and Their Tombs in the Early Modern Period: Observations on Self-Representation in a Republic*, in *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice from the Beginning of the Serenissima to 1907*, ed. B. Paul, Rome, Viella, 2016, pp. 13-28; D. Romano, *Ducal Tombs as Family Concerns*, *ivi*, pp. 29-44.

⁹⁴ N. Bock, *The King and His Court. Social Distinction and Role Models in 15th Century Naples: the Caracciolo and Miroballo Families*, in *Courts and Courtly Cultures in Early Modern Italy and Europe*, ed. S. Albonico – S. Romano, Rome, Viella, 2016, pp. 419-433, pp. 423-428.

⁹⁵ Ch. Nichols, *The Caracciolo di Vico chapel and early cinquecento architecture*, dissertation, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1988.

funerary objects and symbology in the church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio⁹⁶, and the tombs in the San Severo chapel⁹⁷.

Vico is using Roman antiquity throughout *Scienza nuova* as a template or paradigm through which to come to grips with early civilizations in general, an undertaking that raises methodological issues⁹⁸; however, as far as his identification of ancient burial customs with the interests of the elites is concerned, he seems to have, in the main, arrived at an accurate historical understanding, despite lacking the benefit of the findings of modern archaeology in different parts of the world that could be brought to bear on the issue⁹⁹.

Having first viewed burial in its socio-political dimension, as a putatively fundamental human custom transformed into an exclusive social marker, Vico proceeded to viewing aristocratic burials from a socio-economic perspective: «Thus, with the graves of their buried, the giants demonstrated lordship (*signoria*) over their lands (*terre*), which is retained in the Roman legal code in the burying of the dead in their proper place so as to make the burial a religious one» (531). In this way, graves became proxies in the contest of the patricians (elites) and plebeians (commoners) over ownership rights of agriculturally productive real estate, this

⁹⁶ L. Marinucci – L. Pica Ciamarra, *Mappatura semantica di un percorso nella Napoli vichiana*, «Laboratorio dell'ISPF», XVIII, 2021, pp. 1-18, p. 6.

⁹⁷ C. Donato, *The Prince of San Severo's Esoteric Baroque. Body and Soul in the Museum and Cappella di San Severo*, in *Corporeality and Performativity in Baroque Naples: The Body of Naples*, ed. A. Giardino, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2017, pp. 93-112.

⁹⁸ On the socio-political implications of burials in ancient Rome, see also G. Franciosi, *Clan gentilizio e strutture monogamiche*, cit., p. 302: «Il divieto di *mortuum alienum inferre* (seppellire un morto estraneo) mostra l'esclusivismo del diritto di sepoltura dei gentili che trova un parallelo nell'esclusivismo della religione di clan, dei *sacra gentilicia*». For more on Roman burials, see B. E. Borg, *Crisis and Ambition: Tombs and Burial Customs in Third-Century CE Rome*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; S. Birk, *Depicting the Dead: Self-Representation and Commemoration on Roman Sarcophagi with Portraits*, Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2013.

⁹⁹ J. Rüpke, *Pantheon*, cit., pp. 39-47; Sh. Cohen, *Finding a middle ground in the burial ground: Mortuary behaviour at Populonia and Vetulonia in the Early Iron Age*, in *The Archaeology of Death*, ed. E. Herring – E. O'Donoghue, Oxford, Archaeopress Publishing, 2018, pp. 181-188; G. Vavouranakis, *The Mechanics of Cultural Hybridization in the Southern Aegean during the Third Millennium BC*, «Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies», 8, 3-4, 2020, pp. 299-313, p. 310; A. Stevens, *Death and the City: The Cemeteries of Amarna in Their Urban Context*, «Cambridge Archaeological Journal», 28, 1, 2018, pp. 103-126; C. Cavazzuti, et al., *Human Mobility in a Bronze Age Vatya 'Urnfield' and the Life History of a High-Status Woman*, «PLoS ONE», 16, 2021, 7, pp. 1-32; Ch. M. Monroe, *Scales of Fate: Trade, Tradition and Transformation in the Eastern Mediterranean ca. 1350-1175 BCE*, Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2009, p. 198; C. Chang, *Rethinking Prehistoric Central Asia: Shepherds, Farmers, and Nomads*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 39; M. Benz, et al., *Burying Power: New Insights into Incipient Leadership in the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic from an Outstanding Burial at Ba'ja, Southern Jordan*, «PLoS ONE», 14, 2019, 8, pp. 1-34; A. Augereau, *Funerary Practices as a Testimony of Ideology in Western Linearbandkeramik Culture*, «Open Archaeology», 7, 2021, pp. 953-971; E. L. Baysal – H. Sağlamtimur, *Sacrificial Status and Prestige Burials: Negotiating Life, Death, and Identity Through Personal Adornment at Early Bronze Age I Başur Höyük, Turkey*, «American Journal of Archaeology», 125, 2021, 1, pp. 3-28; T. B. Wilkinson, *Tying the Threads of Eurasia*, Leiden, Sidestone Press, 2014, p. 314; *Death and Changing Rituals: Function and Meaning in Ancient Funerary Practices*, ed. J. R. Brandt – M. Prusac – H. Roland, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2015; G. F. M. Rakita, *Ancestors and Elites: Emergent Complexity and Ritual Practices in the Casas Grandes Polity*, Lanham, AltaMira Press, 2009.

being the principal basis and source of sustenance in antiquity¹⁰⁰. Furthermore, the patrician ethos was to preserve their patrimony in perpetuity: «And the giants [the Roman patricians] would truthfully speak the heroic phrases, “we are sons of this earth (*Terra*), we were born from these oaks”; just as the heads of families, in Latin, were called *stirpes* [“stems”] and *stipites* [“root stock”], and the descendant of one of them was called *propago* [“offshoot”], and such families in Italian, are called *legnaggi* [“lineages”] [...]» (531)¹⁰¹. *Il bisogno di eternità* on the part of the nobility was still alive in early modern Naples¹⁰².

Concomitantly, it became of utmost importance to trace one’s roots as far back into the past as possible: «certainly, in Latin, *indigenae* [“the indigenous”] retains its significance as “those born from the land”, and *dii indigetes* were, by definition, the gods native to a land, who must have been the nobles of the heroic cities [...] because the earliest cities belonged only to the nobles» (531)¹⁰³.

Vico’s inclusion of burial among his three essential features of early civilizations was not an arbitrary or obvious choice, but accords well with his overall framework of the civil world (*il mondo civile*). It has been argued that in antiquity proper burials were «necessary to establish correct boundaries for family owned property», and that marriage «would have had a similar significance in terms or

¹⁰⁰ M. Scalercio, *La teologia politica vichiana. La figura della divinazione nella teologia civile della Scienza nuova*, in *Razionalità e modernità in Vico*, ed. M. Vanzulli, Milan, Mimesis, 2012, pp. 197-217, pp. 200, 204; M. Montanari, *Vico e la politica del moderno*, Bari, Palomar, 1995, p. 193.

¹⁰¹ *New Science*, trans. D. Marsh, cit., p. 225, adds «as if from *legno*, wood» after «*legnaggi*». Cf. M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, cit., p. 162: «Burial, then, represents less the immortality of the human soul than the immortality of the family that “lives” eternally through the cultivation and defense of the family domain, which has been religiously sanctified with the graves of the ancestors. This extremely important principle, generally slighted by Vico’s interpreters who fail to see the connection between burial and property, is perhaps the most political of the three common customs of the nations».

¹⁰² M. A. Visceglia, *Il bisogno di eternità. I comportamenti aristocratici a Napoli in età moderna*, Naples, Guida, 1988. For the “strategy” of the Acquaviva clan to perpetuate its lineage, biologically, socially, and economically, for example, see C. Lavarra, *Premessa. Gli Acquaviva d’Aragona tra Medioevo e prima età moderna. Valori, strategie familiari, “tenuta” del potere feudale*, in *Stato e Baronaggio. Cultura e società nel Mezzogiorno: La casa Acquaviva nella crisi del Seicento*, ed. C. Lavarra, intro. F. Tateo, Galatina, Congedo, 2008, pp. 1-16, p. 9.

¹⁰³ In the late fifteenth century, the epithet *indigenae* was still being used for the self-representation of the oldest nobility of Naples: «Tra le *indigene* si distinguono quelle che vantano “ante reges” un’origine dignitosa e l’esercizio della preminenza municipale, e quelle che da un’origine oscura [...] conquistano uno *status nobiliare*» (M. Santangelo, *I Seggi di Napoli: logiche di distinzione sociale e controllo politico dello spazio urbano*, in *Linguaggi e ideologie del Rinascimento monarchico aragonese (1442-1503). Forme della legittimazione e sistemi di governi*, ed. F. Delle Donne – A. Iacono, Naples, Federico II University Press, 2018, pp. 101-114, p. 106); M. A. Visceglia, *Identità sociali. La nobiltà napoletana nella prima età moderna*, Milan, Unicopli, 1998, p. 99. A case in point is the Caracciolo clan who traced its ancestry back to Byzantine times (T. Astarita, *The Continuity of Feudal Power: The Caracciolo di Brienza in Spanish Naples*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 21-27). See also G. Heidemann-Schirmer, *Adelsgrabmäler des Quattrocento in Neapel*, cit., pp. 24-25, speaking of «*antiquità e splendore*» as characteristics of the highest Neapolitan nobility. See also R. Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili. Scritti di storia nell’Europa moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009.

property»¹⁰⁴. Be this as it may, Vico, however, took the matters of religion, marriage, and burial to a different level of analysis. As already pointed out earlier in this paper, the level of inquiry that he set and pursued was the sphere of rights and laws informed by fairness (*equità*) and the *senso comune* of justice (*il giusto*). It is actually the lack thereof in Roman society, and by extension other early civilizations, that is the main topic, mapped onto the “age of gods” and “age of heroes”, before finally giving way to the “age of men”. And the main reason, for Vico, is the “instrumentalization” of religion, marriage, and burial of the dead by the elite segments of the populations; this is the crucial phenomenon, not religion, marriage, burial as such.

Vico’s perspective is also reflected in a statement that goes beyond the three fundamental customs, when he spoke of «the four elements, as it were, of the civil universe: namely, religion, marriage, asylum, and the earliest agrarian law [...]» (630). Anthropologically, Roman asylum and agrarian laws are categorically distinct from religion and marriage, but since for Vico religion and marriage were instrumentalized in the civil world, they belonged together with asylum and the agrarian law. By this statement, Vico also helps to show his heuristics of arriving at religion, marriage, and burial as fundamental practices. In blaming the patricians for depriving the plebeians of their rights, Vico traced the problem to their stances on religion, marriage, and burial. Heuristically, this is therefore the opposite of presupposing anthropological constants, and then deriving certain implications¹⁰⁵. Other studies of human civilization have identified other constitutive properties or practices; however, they usually involve different frames of analysis which are not aligned with Vico’s aim(s) and purpose(s), and thus cannot be considered equivalent, or mutually exclusive¹⁰⁶.

The view of the “instrumentalized” connotation of religion in *Scienza nuova* argued here raises an important question. It is the fact that throughout his work Vico endorses *divine providence*. *Prima facie*, does this not contradict and invalidate

¹⁰⁴ C. Miller, *Giambattista Vico: Imagination and Historical Knowledge*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1993, p. 84. C. W. Wiersma, *House (Centric) Societies on the Prehistoric Greek Mainland*, «Oxford Journal of Archaeology», 39, 2020, 2, pp. 141-158, p. 147: «The dead were placed within plots of land as markers of traditional property».

¹⁰⁵ For an anthropological approach, see M. Scalercio, *Vico e le strutture antropologiche delle storia*, «Consecutio Temporum», 3, 2013, 5, no pagination.

¹⁰⁶ For example, it has been suggested that there are five elements in human civilization: industry (including agriculture, commerce, writing); knowledge; art; conduct (including morality and law); religion (J. J. Chriss, *Vico and the Divine Drama*, «Berlin Journal of Critical Theory», 2, 3, 2018, pp. 31-58, pp. 51-52). Other studies have framed human civilization in terms of responses or solutions to problems of human social life, and identified a different body of principles – family values, group loyalty, reciprocity, bravery, respect, fairness, property rights (O. S. Curry – D. A. Mullins – H. Whitehouse, *Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies*, «Current Anthropology», 60, 2019, 1, pp. 47-69). Modern studies of inequality in ancient societies, also, diverge in their approach from Vico, for which see B. Fix, *Energy, Hierarchy and the Origin of Inequality*, «PLoS ONE», 14, 2019, 4, pp. 1-32. Given these divergent theoretical frameworks and interests, it is not unexpected that any points of contact or commonalities between Vico and these studies are merely coincidental, not systematic.

the thesis that has been presented¹⁰⁷? What follows will an attempt to grapple with this issue.

9. *Divine providence in Scienza nuova*

In spite of the fact that *providence*, with and without the adjective *divine*, figures so prominently in *Scienza nuova*, «no one has been able to settle the issue of whether Providence in Vico is immanent or transcendent or whether Providence is anti-modern or pro-modern»¹⁰⁸, or, we might add, Adam Smith's "invisible hand", Hegel's "cunning of reason", *heterogeneity of ends*, or *unintended consequences*¹⁰⁹. The continuing unresolved debate suggests that all these various exegetical proposals contain valid heuristic moments, each in its own way. Broadly speaking, most of the interpretations view providence *objectively* as dealing with historical developments¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁷ R. Mazzola, *Religione e provvidenza in Vico*, «BCSV», XXVI-XXVII, 1996-1997, pp.101-126.

¹⁰⁸ D. Marshall, *Prophecy and Poetry in Vico's Scienza Nuova: Towards the Manifold Quality of Time*, «Bruniana & Campanelliana», 11, 2005, 2, pp. 518-549, p. 537; D. Canaris, *Vico and China*, cit., pp. 40-46.

¹⁰⁹ V. Hösle, *Vico's New Science of the Intersubjective World*, cit., pp. 61-63; J. Sheehan – D. Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015. On Adam Smith's "invisible hand", see also M. T. Stuart – D. Wilkenfeld, *Understanding Metaphorical Understanding (Literally)*, «European Journal for Philosophy of Science», 12, 2022, 49, pp. 1-20, p. 11, in the *metaphorical* sense *as if* the market, involving the decisions of large numbers of individuals, guided the process, without anyone in particular intentionally directing it.

¹¹⁰ R. Flint, *Vico*, Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1884, p. 194; B. Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, Bari, Laterza, 1911, p. 110; F. Amerio, *Introduzione allo studio di G. B. Vico*, Turin, SEI, 1947; Id., *Sulla vichiana dialettica della storia*, in *Omaggio a Vico*, ed. A. Corsano, Naples, Morano, 1968, pp. 113-140, p. 133; Th. G. Bergin – M. H. Fisch, *Introduction*, in *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Th. G. Bergin – M. H. Fisch, cit., pp. XIX-XLV, p. XXXII; L. Bellofiore, *Morale e storia in G. B. Vico*, Padua, Cedam, 1972, p. 149; A. Funkenstein, *Natural Science and Social Theory: Hobbes, Spinoza, and Vico*, in *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, ed. G. Tagliacozzo – D. Ph. Verene, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 187-212, p. 210; M. Goretta, *The Heterogenesis of Ends in Vico's Thought: Premises for a Comparison of Ideas*, trans. M. Brose, in *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, cit., pp. 213-219; A. Pons, *Prudence and Providence. The Pratica della Scienza Nuova and the Problem of Theory and Practice in Vico*, in *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity*, cit., pp. 431-448; J. C. Morrison, *How to Interpret the Idea of Divine Providence in Vico's "New Science"*, cit., pp. 256-261; G. L. Lucente, *Vico's Notion of "Divine Providence" and the Limits of Human Knowledge, Freedom, and Will*, «MLN», 97, 1982, 1, pp. 183-191; L. Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the "New Science"*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 60; M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, cit., pp. 144-151; P. G. Pandimakil, *Das Ordnungsdenken bei Giambattista Vico*, cit., pp. 121-125; R. Mazzola, *Religione e provvidenza in Vico*, cit., pp. 101-126; M. Pia, *La filosofia del paradosso nel mondo civile delle nazioni: Vico, Pascal e Domat*, «BCSV», XXVIII-XXIX, 1998-1999, pp. 121-149; J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 664-670; N. du Bois Marcus, *Vico and Plato*, New York, Peter Lang, 2001, pp. 103-127; G. G. Visconti, *Vico. I "corsi" e i "ricorsi". La Provvidenza storica e umana*, «BCSV», XXXVII, 2007, pp. 105-112; P. Ciccirelli, *De iure Romano ex ratione civili interpretando*, cit., pp. 115-117; D. O'Connell, "Providential Divining": Heresies and Controversies in Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, in *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy, Mysticism, and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, ed. F. De Donno – S. Gilson, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 125-144; A. Sabetta, *Ciò che rende l'uomo persona. Dall'erramento ferino alla ricostituzione dell'humanitas nella Scienza nuova di G. Vico*, in *Natura umana, persona, libertà. Prospettive di antropologia filosofica ed orientamenti etico-*

However, providence has also been understood *subjectively* as referring to the philosopher-historian and his attitude toward historical processes. In Sandra Rudnick Luft's view, divine providence is an ironic appellation in the sense that the "divine" in divine providence actually denotes «human creativity», so that «the philosopher-historian knew that mind [the poetic consciousness which created the gods and projected them onto nature] as human and acted out the knowledge of man as creator by creating the ironic image of divine providence»¹¹¹. A different subjective sense of divine providence has been proposed by Pierre Girard. For Girard, Vico's use of providence in *Scienza nuova* is focused on methodological, heuristic, and epistemological functions¹¹².

The thesis that will be argued here might incorporate certain heuristic moments of these earlier attempts at interpretation, however, fundamentally, it will identify Vico's meaning of divine providence as another case of "hermeneutical restructuring", and arguably the most significant and far-reaching of such cases in *Scienza nuova*. Briefly stated, divine providence in *Scienza nuova* will be suggested to contain basic attributes and features that are part of, and resemble, the modern concept of *path dependence*.

The concept of path dependence is of recent provenance: it was introduced in historical economics to deal with economic phenomena that defied classic economic theory, by way of a study of the seemingly banal universal (that is, Western) use of the QWERTY keyboard. Paul A. David asked: «Why does the topmost row of letters on your personal computer keyboard spell out QWERTYUIOP, rather than something else [arguably superior keyboard arrangements]?»¹¹³. It turns out that it was the outcome of a process of «an *essentially historical character*»¹¹⁴. Path dependence gave new meaning to the adage that "history matters", and benefitted historical sociology, in particular.

politici, ed. T. Valentini – A. Velardi, Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, pp. 59-82, pp. 79-82; L. Tateo, *The Providence of Associated Minds: Agency in the Thought of Giambattista Vico and the Origins of Social and Cultural Psychology*, in *Constraints of Agency: Explorations of Theory in Everyday Life*, ed. C. W. Gruber – M. G. Clark – S. H. Klempe – J. Valsiner, Cham, Springer, 2015, pp. 31-43; E. Nuzzo, *Religione e "ortodossia" in Vico. I fondamenti teologici della razionalità storica*, «BCSV», XLVI, 2016, pp. 11-52; R. K. Sherwin, *Vico's Providence Today*, in *La "attualità nuova" di Vico e la clinica legale della disabilità*, ed. F. De Donato – P. Heritier, Milan, Mimesis, 2018, pp. 11-32. R. H. Armstrong, *From Hypochoira to Paranoia: On the Secular Co-optation of Homeric Religion in Vico, Feuerbach, and Freud*, «Classics@», 3, 2006, pp. 1-42, p. 35, calls Vico, due to his treatment of "Divine Providence", «a compelling figure of transition (or compromise?) between the dogmatically theological and the rabidly secular worldviews».

¹¹¹ S. Rudnick Luft, *A Genetic Interpretation of Divine Providence in Vico's New Science*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», 20, 1982, 2, pp. 151-169, p. 159.

¹¹² P. Girard, *Giambattista Vico. Rationalité et politique. Une lecture de la Scienza nuova*, Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008, pp. 171-188; see p. 172 n. 102 for additional bibliography on providence in Vico.

¹¹³ P. A. David, *Clio and the Economics of QWERTY*, «American Economic Review», 75, 1985, 2, pp. 332-337, p. 332; Id., *Path dependence, its critics and the quest for "historical economics"*, in *Evolution and Path Dependence in Economic Ideas: Past and Present*, ed. P. Garrouste – S. Ioannides, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2001, pp. 15-40.

¹¹⁴ P. A. David, *Clio and the Economics of QWERTY*, cit., p. 332; italics original.

The study of path dependence is complex, reflecting the complexity of the phenomena involved, but there are a number of characteristics that differentiate it from other approaches to historical developments. As the term “path” implies, the phenomenon in view is not seen as an abstract proposition but as possessing a historical beginning, and that individual parts or developments are connected, and thus to be apprehended as a sequence¹¹⁵. By *beginning*, however, it is not meant the initial conditions that prevailed but the choices that were made in response. Social historians have been able in some cases to specifically identify such divergent choices by their comparison in very similar initial conditions¹¹⁶. Since there are always alternative ways of proceeding, this creates contingency, a key consequence of which is that the outcome cannot be predicted, despite being a matter of intentionality. Contingency in this sense belongs to an entirely different conceptual and ontological framework than random chance or fixed

¹¹⁵ This brief, and oversimplified, sketch of path dependence is largely based on J. Mahoney, *Path Dependence in Historical Sociology*, «Theory and Society», 29, 2000, 4, pp. 507-548; see also A. Jolink – J. J. Vromen, *Path Dependence in Scientific Evolution*, in *Evolution and Path Dependence in Economic Ideas: Past and Present*, cit., pp. 205-224; D. Puffert, *Path Dependence*, in *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. R. Whaples, 2003; S. E. Page, *Path Dependence*, «Quarterly Journal of Political Science», 1, 2006, pp. 87-115; J.-Ph. Vergne – R. Durand, *The Missing Link Between the Theory and Empirics of Path Dependence: Conceptual Clarification, Testability Issue, and Methodological Implications*, «Journal of Management Studies», 47, 2010, 4, pp. 736-759. The following are examples of path dependence across a spectrum of phenomena: R. Butterwick, *Introduction*, in *The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, c. 1500-1795*, ed. R. Butterwick, New York, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 1-25; A. Alesino – P. Giuliano, *Culture and Institutions*, «Journal of Economic Literature», 53, 2015, 4, pp. 898-944; Ph. Aghion – A. Dechezleprêtre – D. Hémous – R. Martin – J. Van Reenen, *Carbon Taxes, Path Dependency, and Directed Technical Change: Evidence from the Auto Industry*, «Journal of Political Economy», 124, 2016, 1, pp. 1-51; H. Mei, “Nation” and Empire as Two Trends of Political Organization in Iron Age Levant, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2020, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/37365105>> (last accessed 26 November 2022); A. S. Green, *Killing the Priest-King: Addressing Egalitarianism in the Indus Civilization*, «Journal of Archaeological Research», 29, 2021, pp. 153-202; A. Bolinska – J. D. Martin, *The Tragedy of the Canon; or, Path Dependence in the History and Philosophy of Science*, «Studies in History and Philosophy of Science», 89, 2021, pp. 63-73; B. M. Henn, *Hunter-Gatherer Genomes reveal Diverse Demographic Trajectories during the Rise of Farming in Eastern Africa*, «Current Biology», 2022, no pagination; J. Feigenbaum – M. Palmer – B. Scheer, “Descended from Immigrants and Revolutionists”: How Family History Shapes Immigration Policymaking, HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP19-028, 2022, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/37371270>> (last accessed 26 November 2022), pp. 1-31; P. Kang-P. Daniels-E. Schweitzer, *The Streak-End Rule: How Past Experiences shape Decisions about Future Behaviors in a Large-Scale Natural Field Experiment with Colunteer Crisis Counselors*, «PNAS», 119, 2022, 45, no pagination.

¹¹⁶ J. Mahoney, *Path Dependence in Historical Sociology*, cit., pp. 532, 538. S. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, cit., p. 515, provides historical examples of different outcomes of ostensibly similar initial conditions.

necessity¹¹⁷. And James Mahoney points out: «the very definition of path dependence stresses the importance of early events for later occurrences»¹¹⁸.

In addition to the critical importance of events that take place early in the history of particular developments, and the contingent nature of these early turns of events, another key characteristic of path dependence is the tendency for the process(es) once set in place or “motion” to stay in place and become self-reinforcing, and thus to «reproduce a particular institutional pattern over time»¹¹⁹. There are often several effective mechanisms, singly or jointly, operative that underpin the institutional reproduction, described in broad terms as utilitarian (benefits), functional (it serves or supports), power (elite interests), and legitimation (values)¹²⁰.

It then becomes difficult “to change course”, but not impossible. There are also ever-present, although not necessarily simultaneous, mechanisms of change: competitive pressures, shocks to the “system” from outside, problems between elites and subordinate populations, as well as changes in values¹²¹. Any of these mechanisms could “trigger” a *reactive sequence* «marked by backlash processes that *transform* and perhaps *reverse* early events», leading to a series of reactions and counterreactions¹²². If they are tightly linked, they could be spoken of as path-dependent. Another fundamental characteristic of path dependence is that the *order* of events or developments matters greatly.

A recent history of Rome and Europe after the disintegration of the Roman empire provides an in-depth case study in terms of key features of path dependence, Walter Scheidel’s *Escape from Rome: The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity*¹²³. Already the book title with the metaphors *escape* and *road* alludes to path-like historic developments. In fact, the central and overarching subject of the work is «the path to modernity in parts of Europe»¹²⁴. Scheidel’s thesis is that this *path* was embarked on due to the demise of the Roman empire, and that the

¹¹⁷ In-depth studies of the multifaceted concept of contingency, in antiquity and modernity, can be found in J. Seifen, *Der Zufall – eine Chimäre? Untersuchungen zum Zufallsbegriff in der philosophischen Tradition und bei Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 1992; D. Wootton, *From Fortune to Feedback: Contingency and the Birth of Modern Political Science*, in *Political Contingency: Studying the Unexpected, the Accidental, and the Unforeseen*, ed. I. Shapiro – S. Bedi, New York, New York University Press, 2007, pp. 21-53; A. Schedler, *Mapping Contingency*, in *Political Contingency*, cit., pp. 55-78; Ph. Pettit, *Resilience as the Explanandum of Social Theory*, in *Political Contingency*, cit., pp. 79-96; L. Pompa, *Reflections on the Ideal Eternal History*, «BCSV», XVI, 2011, pp. 15-32, p. 29; K. L. Einstein – J. Hochschild, *Studying Contingency Systematically*, in *Governing in a Polarized Age: Elections, Parties, and Political Representation in America*, ed. A. S. Gerber – E. Schickler, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 304-327; J. Bouterse, *Contingentism for Historians*, «Studies in History and Philosophy of Science», 96, 2022, pp. 27-34.

¹¹⁸ J. Mahoney, *Path Dependence in Historical Sociology*, cit., p. 536.

¹¹⁹ Ivi, p. 511; emphasis original.

¹²⁰ Ivi, p. 517.

¹²¹ Ivi, pp. 517-525.

¹²² Ivi, p. 526-527; emphasis original.

¹²³ W. Scheidel, *Escape from Rome: The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019.

¹²⁴ Ivi, p. 22.

fragmented political landscape (competitive polycentrism) in Western or Latin Europe (and certain underlying factors) was instrumental in Europe's "divergencies" from other parts of the world¹²⁵. Just as early events tend to be decisive in setting a certain course, Scheidel's approach is «resolutely an analysis of origins» and focused on «foundational features»¹²⁶. This applies equally to the genesis of Rome's power and of Europe's path to economic growth and social development in a broad sense. In both cases there are unique circumstances involved, as well as junctures and contingencies allowing for alternative outcomes. Path-dependence set in as Rome exploited initial advantages for aggressive expansion, not only "reproducing" its position as a power, but also making it resilient in times of stress: «The odds of Rome's failing to build a mighty empire steadily declined as time went by: whereas early changes could have derailed it from this trajectory, at later junctures it becomes more challenging to devise plausible pathways to a significantly alternative reality»¹²⁷. Something similar could be said about post-Roman Europe: «trends that up to 1500 might quite readily have been aborted became more difficult to change during the following two centuries»¹²⁸. Path dependence, thus, is a categorically distinct phenomenon from events viewed as occurring by pure chance or inevitability. It does not represent a middle ground between the ostensible extremes of chance and fate, but a phenomenon *sui generis*. This is reflected in the modal language used to describe developments: «factors that favored [...]», «the likelihood of [...]», «reinforced divergent trends [...]», «features that were conducive or antithetical [...]», «help account for [...]», «conditions that were favorable to [...]», «a greater anomaly [...]», «critically depend on [...]», «possible, though by no means inevitable [...]», «mediated [...]», «may indeed have [...]», «factors that mattered most [...]», «not a product of mere chance [...]», «inadvertent but not accidental [...]»¹²⁹. Path dependence also is subject and responsive to "countervailing forces" at certain junctures to unpredictable degrees¹³⁰.

To explore Vico's "providence" in the sense of path dependence, we will begin with a consideration of his language. It has modal character as can be seen from the following excerpts (emphasis added): «God *aided* man, naturally, with divine providence» (136). «In all these circumstances, man principally loves his own advantage. Therefore, it must be by nothing except divine providence that he *is held* within these orders to pay homage, [...] to the orders of familial, civil, and finally human society. [...] divine justice, which is *administered* by divine providence so as to *preserve* (conservare) human society (*l'Umana Società*)» (341). «[...] the orders which providence *has posited* (ha posto) [...] are nevertheless universal

¹²⁵ Ivi, p. 501, disavows Eurocentrism. Scheidel follows the same explanatory framework for China, Europe, Rome, and other parts of the Old World, and in relation to each other.

¹²⁶ Ivi, p. 17.

¹²⁷ Ivi, p. 25; see also p. 11: «Roman state formation thus turns out to have been both highly contingent (in terms of its foundational preconditions) and highly robust (once these preconditions were in place)».

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ivi, pp. 12-15, 21-22, 501.

¹³⁰ Ivi, pp. 114, 134.

and eternal» (342). «[...] it *ought to articulate* its orders in ways as easy as natural human customs. [...] whatever it *disposes ought to be* perfectly ordered. [...] whatever it orders *ought to be directed toward* a good which is always superior to any good proposed by men» (343). «These are the orders providence posited (pose) in the familial state [...], not the legal orders of a tyrant, but the *customary (costumanze)* orders of a queen, the queen of the human things [...]» (525). «[...] it was not yet counsel, but a nature that *served* providence» (532). «[...] divine providence [...] *brought them*, from the first, to a fear of divinity [...]». «[...] *disposed* that they would discover places healthy [...]». [...] *disposed* them to unite with certain women [...]». [...] *makes it that* republics come into being (fa nascere le Republiche) in an aristocratic form [...]. [...] providence *led them* to unite themselves to their fatherland [...]» (629)¹³¹.

The language used is modal in the sense that it allows for multiple ways to be or become true. Saying that providence *aids* humans suggests a variety or range of ways in which this might transpire. Divine justice that is *administered* by divine providence leaves the matter open to many alternatives. Providence *ought to articulate and direct* its ordering of the civil world in certain ways, which gainsays both chance and fate, and at the same time, provides providence with multiple valid ways to proceed in the process of articulating and directing. Repeatedly, Vico stated that providence *disposed* men to a certain course of action; the desired course was not forced upon men, it was still contingent on their choice. Similar observations could be made about other terms Vico used. In § 630, Vico expresses this sense of contingency in non-metaphorical language: «And then go on to inquire among all the human possibilities if so many things so varied and so different could have had in some other fashion a starting point». Similarly in § 345: «reflecting upon whether the human mind, within the series of possibilities [...], can think of a greater or lesser or alternative number of causes than that from which issue the effects of the civil world». In the *Conclusion of Scienza nuova*, Vico's modal vocabulary in connection with providence is on full display: «conducted» (1097), «institute(d) (ordinò)» (1098, 1101), «led», «made come into being», «made for the emergence (fece surgere)», «made for the coming-into-being (fece nascere)» (1100), «permitted» (1101), «works with (adopera)» (1103, 1106), «disposes» (1104), «does not find (non truova)» (1105), «rules (regola)» (1109), «makes itself plainly sensible (si fa apertamente sentire)» (1111). The semantics range from the passive (“does not find”) to varying degrees of active involvement or effectiveness (“permitted”, “works with”, “makes itself sensible”, “made come-into-being”, “conducted”, “disposes”, “led”, “instituted”, “rules”).

This terminology is thus, in its own way, as diametrically opposed to notions of both chance and necessity as Scheidel's choice of words in describing path dependence of ancient Roman and post-Roman (Western) European history. In *Scienza nuova*, Vico repeatedly and explicitly contrasts his understanding of the genesis and development of the *mondo civile* with both ancient and modern philosophical currents in terms of chance and fate that were the hallmarks of the

¹³¹ Cf. P. Girard, *Giambattista Vico. Rationalité et politique*, cit., pp. 179-180.

Stoic and Epicurean schools of thought (130, 335, 342, 345, 602, 630, 1108, 1109)¹³². His thinking in the matter manifests itself most extendedly in the section *On Method* of *Book One* (341-350, divided into two thematic subsections, 341-345 and 346-350, respectively).

Both subsections deal with divine providence, however, from different points of view; they are complementary, not mutually exclusive. In the first subsection, Vico first repudiates the Epicureans' «blind concurrence of roiling atoms» and the Stoics' «deaf chain of cause and effect» (342, 345)¹³³. After this brief digression, he reiterates that the area of study of his “science” (*Scienza*) is the «economy of the civil things» (*Iconomia delle cose civili*) (342) which he had introduced earlier as «the orders of familial, civil, and finally human society» (*la familiare, la civile, e finalmente l'Umana Società*) (341), in other words, the *mondo civile* as a whole. And he then identifies it specifically with «the subject of jurisprudence» (*subbietto della Giurisprudenza*)¹³⁴.

Vico also lays out his twofold treatment of divine providence: «This – the *divine* things – is what properly occupies the first part of the subject of jurisprudence, upon which the other, accompanying part – the *human* things – depends» (342, emphasis added). In the first subsection, the topic is the so-called “divine” aspect of divine providence. Vico's term *divine providence* evidently has Augustinian origins¹³⁵. However, Vico gives the qualifier “divine” an entirely “un-Augustinian” meaning, by deriving it from “divining”, that is to say, attempting to understand things that are hidden, such as the course of events (342, also 9, 365, 381)¹³⁶. The practice of divination through reading the auspices is such a case of the “divine”, in concordance with Vico's focus on «gentile antiquity» (346) in his

¹³² R. Evangelista delineates Vico's stance in relation to other major early modern views in *Un difficile rapporto con la legge naturale. Vico legge Locke e Spinoza*, in *Giambattista Vico et les savoirs de la modernité*, ed. R. Ruggiero, Aix-en-Provence, Presse Universitaire de Provence, 2022, pp. 103-131.

¹³³ Some commentators have suggested that Vico attempted to reconcile both positions: I. Uribe, *Giambattista Vico: Ażar y divina providencia*, «Acta Philosophica», 1, 2015, 24, pp. 157-170, p. 162; D. L. Marshall, *The Impersonal Character of Action in Vico's De Coniuratione Principum Neapolitanorum*, «New Vico Studies», 24, 2006, pp. 81-128, p. 110: «Vico's ironic providence is produced by the intersection of these two premises [macro-historical and micro-historical perspectives]. He is overcoming the dogmatic opposition between fate and chance».

¹³⁴ N. du Bois Marcus, *Vico and Plato*, cit., p. 114, makes the claim: «The insight that “the certain is part of the true” has its origin in his jurisprudential work. The unique application beyond law makes the *New Science* innovative». As noted earlier, Vico stayed focused on (the history of) justice and law throughout *Scienza nuova*, such that other topics or ideas, hypotactically, are only derivative or epiphenomenal.

¹³⁵ Ivi, pp. 104-111; D. Canaris, *Vico and China*, cit., pp. 72-74, 221-226. On the other hand, M. Lilla, *G. B. Vico*, cit., pp. 144-151, associates Vico to Eusebius. Cf. references to Augustine in §§ 38, 80, 88, 366, 425, 668.

¹³⁶ D. Kunze, *Thought and Place: The Architecture of Imagination in the Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, New York, Peter Lang, 1987, pp. 33-54, p. 49: «Modern usage places the word “divine” too close to theology to understand what Vico meant by divine providence. He did not mean the role of God in history in the usual Judeo-Christian sense. Rather, he defined providence as something hidden in appearance – particularly as that which signifies the future».

work¹³⁷. Vico adds further to the polysemy of “divine” by referring to «divine pleasure» (345, 349), «proofs that are of a divine kind» (349), and Plato as deserving the title “divine” since he “demonstrated” the existence of divine providence (365)¹³⁸. Vico then expounds on three particular ways that providence is “divine”: (1) «the facility (*facilità*) by which these things come into being (*nascono*) and upon the occasions (often quite far apart and sometimes completely contrary to what men propose) from which these things come and harmonize among themselves [...]»; (2) «[...] the order in which the things [...] now do come into being (*nascono*) at their proper times and in their proper places and by other things defer their coming into being (*si differiscono nascere*) until their time and place [...]», and (3) «[...] whether by those occasions, places, and times, it would have been possible for different divine benefits to have come into being (*nascere*) [...]» (344).

The common denominator in these modes of “providence” is that they are not the direct result of human intentionality and agency¹³⁹. At the same time, they have nothing to do with chance or fate, as there are various factors or parameters involved (temporal, spatial, and circumstantial, a few of which Vico identifies in connections with the Carthaginians, Capuans, and Numantians [1088]) affecting developments (their coming into being). They are best described as path-dependent. Providence is also associated with the “ordering” of the civil world, «this great city of humankind», «without any human discernment or counsel, and often contrary to what human beings have proposed» (342, see also 629). Outcomes that may be interpreted as unintended consequences or heterogeneity of ends are in reality the result of countervailing forces or “reactionary sequences” (1006, 1108).

¹³⁷ M. Scalerio, *La teologia politica vichiana*, cit., pp. 203-206, makes divination the centerpiece of Vico’s philosophy.

¹³⁸ Vico’s acknowledgment of Plato’s views on providence gains salience when they are compared and contrasted with the Stoics; see D. Frede, *Theodicy and Providential Care in Stoicism*, in *Tradition of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, its Background and Aftermath*, ed. D. Frede – A. Laks, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 85-117; A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 163-170; M. J. Osler, *Divine will and the mechanical philosophy: Gassendi and Descartes on contingency and necessity in the created world*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 81; M. Ch. Sanchez, *Providence: From pronoiā to Immanent Affirmation in John Calvin’s Institutes of 1559*, dissertation, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University, 2014, <<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/12274125>> (last accessed 25 November 2022), pp. 108-116.

¹³⁹ Cf. J. Schaeffer, *From Natural Religion to Natural Law in Vico*, cit., p. 50: «Providence figures as the cause of that part of our cultural history that we cannot explain as the result of our conscious action». Cf. the translation of *coscienza* in § 342 in *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Th. G. Bergin – M. H. Fisch, cit., p. 102, as *consciousness*, and in *Ciencia nueva*, cit., p. 188, as *conciencia*, whereas the other translations consulted say *conscience*, *la conscience*, *das Gewissen*, respectively.

Path dependence accounts for what David Marshall called «the impersonal character of action» (D. L. Marshall, *The Impersonal Character of Action in Vico’s De Coniuratione Principum Neapolitanorum*, cit., p. 86); see also N. S. Struever, *Rhetoric, Modality, Modernity*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 45-53.

The next subsection considers “providence” at the level of the human experience, showing the outworking of human *things, thoughts, and ideas*, relative to the civil world including «the human necessities and advantages of social life, which are the two perennial sources of the natural law of the gentile peoples» (347). Since it has to do with the actual historical experience, it involves a historical beginning at a certain time and place, located chronologically and geographically, and as is crucial in path dependence, Vico highlights the early stage(s) «where these earliest men started to think in a human way». What follows is not a random series of events but «nations [...] must have had to *run a course* (correre) of more than a thousand years so as to bring forth the writers» (347-348, emphasis added), and «there was a long period of time when men could not be capable of the true or of reason» (350). Vico describes this «temporal course (corron’ *in tempo*)» schematically and conceptually as «emergence, progress, maturity, decadence, and end» (349). These “stages” are conceived and arranged in a certain order, with each “stage” being shaped by its predecessors. Vico’s phrase «that they [the things of the nations] HAD TO BE, HAVE TO BE, AND WILL HAVE TO BE (DOVETTERO, DEBBONO e DOVRANNO)» (348), and «that it [the fashion in which this world comes into being] HAD TO BE, HAS TO BE, AND WILL HAVE TO BE (DOVETTE, DEVE, DOVRÀ)» (349), can therefore be given a path-dependent meaning. In the *Conclusion* (1097-1106), Vico provides a succinct summary of the “path” from “emergence” (the «time a state was formed» [1098]) to “decadence” («ease, refinement, pleasure, and ostentation» [1106]), and the “end” («with the small number of men who in the end remain» [1106]).

Vico perceived path dependence also at another level of analysis: «THE COURSE THAT THE NATIONS MAKE (IL CORSO CHE FANNO LE NAZIONI)» in terms of «the THREE AGES [...] the ages of GODS, of HEROES, and of MEN» (915). In this perspective, path dependence is implied in stating that different kinds of “republics” «stand upon the first – that is, divine governance – and *taking their start* from divine governance [...], they *must run through* this series of human things [...]. [...] when men change, they *retain for some time* an impression of what they were previously wont to do. Accordingly [...], they *retained much* of the savagery and brutality of their recent origins [...]. Thus, during the forming of the earliest aristocratic republics, they *retained intact* the sovereign private power which the paterfamilias has in the state of nature [...].» (1004, 1005, emphasis added).

To conclude this discussion of divine providence in *Scienza nuova*, we will return to § 342 of the section on providence in *On Method*. It starts with the programmatic statement: «Therefore, this science, in one of its principal aspects, must be a rational civil theology of divine providence, which seems to have been lacking up until now (Perciò questa Scienza per uno de’ suoi principali aspetti dev’ essere una *Teologia Civile Ragionata della Provvidenza Divina*; la quale sembra aver mancato finora)». The concept of *civil theology* is attributed by Vico to Varro, as transmitted in Augustine’s *City of God* (366). In Varro, *civil theology* is part of

a *theologia tripartita* together with “mythical” and “physical” theologies¹⁴⁰. For Vico, «ogni ordine costitutivo del mondo politico ha la propria espressione simbolica in una *theologia civilis*»¹⁴¹. It is common practice to use the compound phrase “rational civil theology” on the unstated assumption that the qualifier “rational” applies to “civil theology”¹⁴². However, this is not necessarily so. In terms of “topic prominence”, another term in the sentence deserves pride of place, that is, the term “this science” (questa Scienza), since it is the central subject of *On Method* (338, 342, 347, 348, 349, 350, 360). The “rational” discourse or “reasoning” taking place is constitutive of “this science” rather than of “civil theology”: «Consequently, the following kind of proof rules in this science: the things of the nations that are *reasoned about by this science* (*le cose delle Nazioni*, quali da questa Scienza son ragionate) [...] (348, emphasis added)»¹⁴³. In the previous edition of *Scienza nuova* (1730), the word *ragionata* does not appear¹⁴⁴. Since “scienza”, in Italian, means both “knowledge” and “science”¹⁴⁵, the addition of *ragionata* serves to disambiguate the term; therefore, what Vico meant was “Scienza ragionata”. Whenever the expression “teologia civile ragionata” occurs in the text, it has an *objective* meaning, in the sense that it is the subject or target of rational investigation, and not in the sense of itself being “rational”, or argued philosophically and scientifically.

A similar reading can be made of the phrase “civil theology of divine providence”. When divine providence is understood as path dependence, an *objective* reading makes civil theology the subject of providence, not the other way around¹⁴⁶.

In summary, the whole phrase “this science, in one of its principal aspects, must be a rational civil theology of divine providence” can be paraphrased as *the scientific study or explanation of the path dependence of the dynamics and history of the civil world*.

10. Conclusion

This essay had a seemingly disparate number of topics, including religion, marriage, burial of the dead, civil theology, and divine providence. However, they

¹⁴⁰ For discussion of the “theologies” of Varro (and Augustine), see N. du Bois Marcus, *Vico and Plato*, cit., pp. 81-102; St. Woidich, *Vico und die Hermeneutik. Eine rezeptionsgeschichtliche Annäherung*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2007, pp. 101-104; D. Canaris, *Vico and China*, cit., pp. 223-233.

¹⁴¹ J. Gebhardt, *Sensus communis: Vico e la tradizione europea antica*, trans. B. Giordano, «BCSV», XXII, 1992, pp. 43-64, p. 63.

¹⁴² Cf. *La Science Nouvelle*, cit., p. 137: «une théologie civile raisonnée»; *Ciencia nueva*, cit., p. 188: «una teologia civil razonada».

¹⁴³ Pace M. Scalerio, *La teologia politica vichiana*, cit., p. 205: «La teologia civile vichiana è dunque lo studio degli elementi che costituiscono la fondazione dello stare insieme».

¹⁴⁴ *La Scienza nuova. Le tre edizioni del 1725, 1730 e 1744*, cit., p. 488.

¹⁴⁵ M. Lilla, G. B. Vico: *The Making of an Anti-Modern*, cit., p. 126.

¹⁴⁶ N. du Bois Marcus, *Vico and Plato*, cit., p. 103, reads “divine providence” *subjectively*: «The subject of Vico’s “rational civil theology”, his metaphysics and his unique type of theology, is “divine providence”» (emphasis original).

are interrelated. They can be conceived as hierarchically, or at least partially, ordered. As suggested, path dependence can be assumed as the overarching concept such that the civil world, as denoted here, is the particular sphere in and through which Vico perceived the reality of path dependence. And within the civil world, he found that religion, marriage, and burial played significant roles due to their “instrumentalization” by elite segments of society. For path dependence, in general, the start and early developments are crucially important. This lends support to, and helps explain, Vico’s special interest in *Scienza nuova* in tracing phenomena and developments, as much as possible, back to their founding or early stage(s).



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– Religion, Marriage, and Burial in Vico’s *Scienza nuova*: A Reappraisal

Citation standard:

STEINKE, Horst, Religion, Marriage, and Burial in Vico’s *Scienza nuova*: A Reappraisal. *Laboratorio dell’ISPF*. 2022, vol. XIX [8]. DOI: 10.12862/Lab22STH.

Online: 31.12.2022

ABSTRACT

This essay proposes a reading of Vico’s discussion of religion, marriage, and burial of the dead in the context in which these entities or human institutions appear in *Scienza nuova*. As a result of this inquiry – with Roman history at its center, and Rome made into a paradigm – it is argued that Vico views them as “instrumentalized” by the elite segment of Roman society, the patricians, rather than as “anthropological” constants. This is followed by a study of “divine providence” in *Scienza nuova*, pursuant to the thesis that for Vico divine providence comes close to the modern concept of “path dependence” in a number of respects. Finally, the relationship between these various concepts is pointed out.

KEYWORDS

G.Vico; Divine providence; Civil theology; Path dependence

SOMMARIO

Religione, matrimonio e sepoltura nella Scienza nuova di Vico: una riconsiderazione. Il presente saggio propone una lettura delle nozioni vichiane di religione, matrimonio e sepoltura dei morti nel contesto della *Scienza nuova*. Assumendo al centro dell’indagine la storia romana e Roma come paradigma, si ricava che Vico vede queste entità o istituzioni umane come “strumentalizzate” dal segmento elitario della società romana, i patrizi, anziché come costanti “antropologiche”. Segue uno studio della “divina provvidenza” nella *Scienza nuova*, che sviluppa la tesi secondo cui questa nozione vichiana si avvicina sotto diversi aspetti al concetto contemporaneo di “path dependence”. Infine, si mette in luce la relazione tra queste diverse nozioni.

PAROLE CHIAVE

G.Vico; Divina Provvidenza; Teologia civile; Path dependence

Laboratorio dell’ISPF

ISSN 1824-9817

www.ispf-lab.cnr.it