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## **The Language of Giove: Reason and Religion in Vico's New Science**

### **Abstract**

*A discovery of The New Science, of which Vico became proud, was that of religion as the “principle” of the world of nations. In it Vico sounded out his doctrine concerning the natural law, but this research would still have allowed him the encounter with a metaphysics of the human mind, with a rational human nature, beyond sociability. The divination of ancient people, coeval to their first fables and myths, would suppose a fundamental conception of the human being as endowed with soul and language, allowing us to think over the traditional marks of the Vichian history of nations. In the present paper and starting from a new path, we will reconstruct the central aspects of this Vichian anthropology, trying to find the origins of the native religion of the founders of people and nations.*

### **Keywords**

Giambattista Vico, reason, mute language, genius, religion, world of the nations

A discovery by *The New Science* of which Vico became proud, was that of religion as “principle” of the civil or world of nations. In the very beginning of the first edition of the work, in 1725, Vico evoked the evidence that

“The natural law of the nations was certainly born with the common customs of the nations. Furthermore, there has never been a nation of atheists in the world, because all nations began in some single religion.”<sup>1</sup>

He thought keeping to the facts, because the Greek habits narrated by Homer and that the Romans observed in the history of their laws and institutions were philological proofs of the fact that civil and public things were born and remained for a long time combined with those divine.<sup>2</sup> According to Vico, in ancient times not only Greeks and Romans, but Scythians and Egyptians too, and Amerindians in the seventeenth century, created and made available their rudimentary habits, that is, marriages, parental responsibility for sons and clients, entombments, farming and possession of fields, to and depending on a “force superior to nature (...) an infinite and eternal mind”,<sup>3</sup> of a providing

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Giambattista Vico. *The First New Science*. Edited and translated by Leon Pompa. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002, p. 9.

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Vico had already proved the same principle years before, in the *Oration* of 1708, in the specific field of Roman jurisprudence, defined

by himself *divinarum, humanarumque rerum notitia* (Cf. Giambattista Vico. *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*. Edited by and with the Introduction of Fabrizio Lomonaco. Diogene Edizioni, Napoli, 2014, p. 131–205).

3

G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 9.

*Dio* imagined with the features of various *Giovi*. That is the *factual data* on which the Neapolitan spent himself to investigate the *common nature of nations* and on which his new doctrine concerning the natural law settled, but this same research would still have allowed him the encounter with a “metaphysics of the human mind”, with a *rational* human nature, beyond sociable, peculiarity of the Vichian idea of religion we intend to discuss in this paper.

It is clear that *The New Science* does not repeat the orthodox habits of the concept of religion; it is worth highlighting that, in the first plan of Vico's Science, there is not in evidence the “true religion” *revealed* by angels and prophets, but that “false” of the pagan people revealed in the essence of the historical *factum*, that is, in the postdiluvian, dense and terrible forest, by the erratic generation of Noah, sons of Ham, Japheth and Shem, and through the magic-mystic play of *revelation* and *concealing*.

An opinion Vico repeated in the following editions of *The New Science* is that religion would have been arisen in the world of nations, and this many centuries before the coming of the “Son”, as “science” of the “theological poets” or “vulgar wisdom of nations” methodologically characterized by the typical operation of the ancient ministers of “divination, which was a vain science of the future, through which men believed that the gods sent them certain sensory warnings”,<sup>4</sup> and, as Vico the philologist notes, determining our common habit to call gods *divinities*, a term originated from the Latin *divinari*, “to foretell the future”.<sup>5</sup> If we take a careful look at the definition of *divination* above, we will perceive that, according to Vico, there is a matter of a rudimentary science of the *reading* and *deciphering of linguistic symbols*.<sup>6</sup> The data of the senses lead the theological poets to know the future only if they are collected as linguistic symbols, or as the eagle getting hold of a snake (Homer), a comet or a star are already symbols of the *explanation* of Jupiter, a so deep-rooted condition in the first mentality that came to us in the usual form: “wherever it sees some extraordinary phenomenon of nature, a comet for example, a dog-star, or a midday star, of asking straightway what it means”,<sup>7</sup> as they really were words and not arbitrary physical events.

Divinity, a free mind, infinite and superior to nature, in order to be heard, was herself obliged to talk to the huge pagan people through natural phenomena, completing a transubstantiation of the physical world identical to that realized in fables or myths with the help of metaphors and that we can call *animism*, “when it gives sense and passion to insensate things (...) by which the first poets attributed to bodies the being of animate substances”<sup>8</sup>. In this sense, Vico assured that “wholly ideal”<sup>9</sup> it has to be the excellent fable, that is, able to show ideas, desires and passions into the arbitrary events of nature and to presume every intuition of object as a *symptom* of an ideal, interior and animistic reality, different from the sheer chance of matter, this way inseparably tying *divinari* and myth in his philosophical lecture, ordinary knowledge and poetry of the first theologians.

As Vico explains, this knowledge is not the truth, it is neither the science of philosophers nor the holy, Revealed truth, but it realizes the impossible, that is, it thinks that the forest has got a soul, the *substantial form*, but it does this, at the same time, with gravitas and solemnity, so it gives reliability to what it is saying. Referring to Aristotle, it has the property of the poetic “being the credible impossibility”,<sup>10</sup> and particularly because *it gives mind to the body*. Explaining this in a better way, it is “*impossible*”, because nature is inanimate *by itself*, it is pure matter and movements of matter, but it is “credible” as poetry generally tries to be, it is convincing since it is possible, as man shows, there

exists a body provided with mind, idea and language. Aristotle (*Poetics*, Book IX) sees in this property one of the principles of the Greek tragedy: it needs to be “credible” and its recipe for poets is narrating “things that have happened” and, being those already occurred, to be possible to occur: “we do not yet trust that things that have not happened are possible, but it is obvious that things that have happened are possible”.<sup>11</sup> Aristotle’s explanation helps us to reveal a central aspect of the mythological divinity: its credibility comes from its similarity to man, namely from the fact that it had existed and exists too animated beings and, for this reason, they are possible. What would be wrong to imagine nature as an animated body? Because it was possible, the pagan divinities were imagined to be formed by a free body and a free mind. And so children play this way, as Vico literally shows us in a passage of *The New Science* where he says that “it is characteristic of children to take inanimate things in their hands and talk to them in play as if they were living persons”.<sup>12</sup> The same way children talk to toys, believing that they have souls – because it is possible to occur – the childhood of time was of men who talked to the forest.

The divination of the ancient pagan people, coeval to their first fables or myths, would therefore suppose a certain anthropology in their origins and constitution. Although nations are born with the reading of auspices and *humanitas* with them, the order of the reasons or demonstrations of *The New Science* needs the admission, properly before establishing the principles, of a fundamental conception of the human being as provided with soul and language, allowing us to rethink the traditional marks of the Vichian history of nations. In the following pages we will reconstruct the central aspects of such Vichian anthropology, which allow us to find in the conclusion and starting from a new path the origins of the native religion which founded peoples and nations.

## 1. Missing the language

A Category of *The New Science* able to make explicit animism from primordial religiousness is that of *mute language*. Coeval to the very birth of the

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G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 10.

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Giambattista Vico. *The New Science*. Translated by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Cornell University Press, New York, 1948, p. 7, § 9.

6

A conception of knowledge as “reading” had been already developed by Vico, first of all in *De ratione*, in order to illustrate its topical method which, according to the right order of studies, it should be precedent the critical or Cartesian one. Topics would teach mind to travel all over the *loci* of subjects, writes Vico, “as they would travel the elements of writing” (G. Vico, *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, p. 39). The act of reading, or collecting and grouping the elements which form words, comes back to the centre of the topics of the metaphysical book of 1710 helping to describe his (Vico’s) synthetic theory of knowledge, his conception of science as

*intelligere* (Cf. Giambattista Vico. *De antiquissima Italorum Sapientia*. Edited by and with the Introduction of Fabrizio Lomonaco and afterword by Claudia Megale. Diogene Edizioni, Napoli, 2013, p. 23–31).

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G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 64, § 189.

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G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 116, § 404.

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G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 152.

10

Ibid., p. 153.

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Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated, with introduction and notes by Joe Sachs. Focus, Newburyport, 2006, p. 32.

12

G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 64, § 186.

pagan nations, its principles have to be found “in the ferine wandering of Thomas Hobbes’s licentious, violent men, or Hugo Grotius’s simpletons, solitary, weak and lacking all their needs, or Samuel Pufendorf’s men, thrown into this world without divine care or assistance”,<sup>13</sup> hence, in a representation of the *natural man* which in a concept only – that of *beast* – conjugates the characteristics of modern Jusnaturalism unsociable people earlier to Rousseau. Although he validates an important part of this Jusnaturalism, recognizing in the principle of nations a selfish man because of nature, a stupid, uninhibited and violent man, an *apolitical* man in the sense of not prospering in the *polis*, Vico radically takes position against him in so far as he sets this truth with impiety or without the cognition of God.<sup>14</sup> Vico, in turn, will find there one more favourable occasion to reaffirm the truth of the *sacred history*, “which is older than any profane history”.<sup>15</sup> Being more ancient, the first in chronological terms, the sacred history is suitable for offering a cause and explaining the reasons of such unsociability; in this sense, Vico’s *natural man* will also have an “historical” origin: the *fall*, first of all “of the two great originators of mankind”,<sup>16</sup> and later, of the sons of Ham, Japheth and Shem, because of whose impiety and disregard for the religion of their common father Noah had as a “punishment” the exile of the *humanitas* and found themselves obliged to adopt a lifestyle close to the animal nomadism, that of *beasts*.<sup>17</sup> Alienated from religion and from the parental authority of Noah, and, in the end, from the fear of God and of the Father, they hence moved according to the physical meccanicism, seemingly dismissed from any free will, that is, wandering through the dense forest of the earth because hunger lead them to food and fear put them to flight. Ham, Japheth e Shem descents, as Vico explains:

“When, with the sole aim of liberating themselves from the servitude of religion, which alone could preserve them in society, and, lacking any other restraint, they turned their backs upon the true God of their fathers, Adam and Noah, and descended into a bestial liberty in which, dispersed throughout the great forest of the earth, they *lost their language* and weakened every social custom”.<sup>18</sup>

They forgot human habits, religion, marriage, but, as Vico highlights, they also *lost the language*, or better, the expertise to articulate voice sounds in vowels and consonants – they “came to forget the language of Adam”.<sup>19</sup> Inside *The New Science* this is not a loss of no importance. According to the narrative buildup order, *lost language* is a fact coeval to degeneration of the habits and of the lone wandering through the Forest; it is an important effect of the “ferine education” of the children left to their fate in the Forest, as Romulus, without family.

The *beast* is not mute because of the disease of his vocal organ, but first due to an involution – infantile regress – of the organ because of lack of use. Antonino Pennisi insisted on the topicality of the Vichian hypothesis recovering from psycholinguistics the understanding about the importance of listening to a language not only to learn speaking, but in order to develop and model the vocal organ, too: “a child (...) easily understands the meaning of many words but he can’t pronounce them, he focuses himself on mechanically improving the articulating organs by reproducing sounds he heard”.<sup>20</sup> Vico comes to a similar conclusion in *The New Science*. Raised like wild beasts and left by their mothers soon after weaning, those children “who in time must have come to grow up without ever hearing a human voice, much less learning any human custom”,<sup>21</sup> that is, grow up wild and deprived of social cohabitation. Isolated, they mature without hearing human voices and without forcing themselves to reproduce them during childhood, this way atrophying their vo-

cal organs and falling into the silence of articulate languages. The sounds they produce by their atrophied organs cannot be compared to voices anymore, but they are *roars*, *grunts*, similar to the sounds of nature. The insult of having repudiated the religion of the true God of their father Noah had a *lack of words* too, forcing the descents of Adam to live like beasts without language.

However, to the author of *The New Science*, besides the similarities, Noah's sons, even in this way, are not rude people, or beasts, but men. This seems to be another good reason to Vico for the christianization of the *beast*, because the biblical "history" of the fall is full of reminiscences of the beginning of time and offers some protection under the majestic "genealogical tree" of Adam. The *beast*, subdued to the parental authority's punishment, receives the exclusion as penalty and is alienated by the *humanitas*. In Vico's reasoning it is interesting that, although the *beast* is living on the margin, it maintains itself as a chapter of mankind's history, able to show better than everyone else the risks of a human life adverse to the authority figure. They are human beings, even when they behave themselves like beasts. To Vico, the *beast* decreases the boundary line between human and natural, without ever transposing it.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. The mute language

That of the animal is not a Vichian problem, as reminds the *title-page* globe of *The New Science* sustained by the Altar on one side only. The unstained side of the globe is that more interesting to the Neapolitan, it is the "world of

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G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 4.

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According to Vico, "none of them took account of Providence when establishing his principles (...) and stand firm even were all knowledge of God" (*ibid.*, p. 14–15).

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*Ibid.*, p. 72.

16

*Ibid.*, p. 10.

17

The idea of *fall* of the *sacred history* allows Vico to conceive the first mankind by the decrease/subtraction of a group of characteristics. Its egoism and violence results from the loss of certain restraints and controls: they lost sight of the fear of God, the true religion, and of the Father, the parental responsibility, the paternal authority, that cools the less noble passions, and they dissolved their marriages with "unsteady concubinage", with carnal unions without decency, extraneous to the family institution and without generating legitimate sons. This strategy is continuous in the following editions of *The New Science*; however, some changes in the exposition of the topics from one to another edition tend, to place different emphasis on the characteristics of that decline, as in the case of the first

edition of 1725 and its emphasis on the *loss of the language*.

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G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 40 – my own emphasis.

19

*Ibid.*, p. 30.

20

Antonino Pennisi, "L'ingenium e i segni muti", in: Martone Arturo, Gensini Stefano (éds.), *Ingenium propria hominis natura. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi (Napoli, 22–24 maggio 1997)*, Liguori, Napoli, 2002, p. 291.

21

G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 101, § 369.

22

Cfr. Nicola Perullo. *Bestie e Bestioni: il problema dell'animale in Vico*. Guida, Napoli, 2002. The author shows here Vico's permanent exercise of distinguishing brute men (*savages*) from *beast* starting from the separation between *spirit* and *soul*, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, or more, as in Perullo's words, between "active, voluntary and deliberate sensitivity" and "a not voluntary, merely 'passive' living" (*ibid.*, p. 101).

human spirits (...) the civil world or world of nations".<sup>23</sup> Until then, according to his evaluation, philosophers only had studied the physical and natural world, paying attention to a side of the created matter only: that of physical and material bodies, subdued to mechanical laws. Nevertheless, they did not pay enough attention to the *human bodies*, that of creatures which are very different to the entirely material beings. This is the field of Vichian science even when it is referring to the *beast*. This way, it is not possible to reduce it to the condition of the *res estensa*, it is not the *beast* whose movements are caused by the encounter of bodies in the space, but it is basically *res cogitans*, a thing that thinks, that is, paraphrasing Descartes, a thing that wants, imagines and hears, that is why he will define the civil world or world of nations as "the world of human minds, which is the metaphysical world".<sup>24</sup> In a work previous to *The New Science*, we read: "*Duo summa rerum genera summe diversa existere, substantiam intelligentem et substantiam corpoream, et ex utraque constare hominem*".<sup>25</sup> This passage, in the same way which distinguishes, it indicates the reunion of the two substances in a unique being. Man distinguishes himself from brute man for having mind, but the aspect Vico emphasizes is that of the composition, so he will take again the distinction body-soul beyond the dualism, as he had already touched on in *De antiquissima*, "*Quin quia corpore et mente consto, ea propter cogito: ita ut corpus et mens unita sint cogitationes causa*".<sup>26</sup> Even existing in gigantic, monstrous bodies removed from the equilibrate human shape, the *res cogitans* or *spirit*, as Vico preferred, impresses to such material disproportion the thin features of a human lineament, and even in sensations, when bodies are affected and respond to the external objects, movements are here different from those strictly physical, so that is why we can talk about a *philosophy without nature* in Vico (Piovani).

Known by his thesis on *Vichian sematology*, Jürgen Trabant notes that, in that case, "missing language" would be equivalent to missing voice, arbitrary phonetic signs, that is, articulated language, but not the language as a *sema*.<sup>27</sup> To restate the question, Noah's sons lose the control of the disciplined vocal signs, without never losing the ability of *formulating signs* and, with them, of thinking and knowing. Trabant saw in *The New Science* a *theory of the linguistic signs* in the modern style, according to which signs would correspond to the urgency of *knowing* and not to that of communicating or socializing. Its utility would originally be of cognitive type, its function to explain and orient the unlimited curiosity, "the misuse of which caused them to sin".<sup>28</sup>

It is clear the familiarity of the Vichian theory with a Cartesian conception of the language, as we find in the *Part Five* of the *Discourse on the Method*. Descartes notes there that men are always able, even the weak, to gather words, to put them together in speech and to communicate thoughts, but he insists that the characteristic which defines that competence as human is not in the exclusivity of the vocal organ, starting from which articulated sounds are emitted, being that this similar organ and competence is found in such sparrows like the "parrot". Men, instead of this, give evidence with the language that they "think what they are saying".<sup>29</sup> The emission of sounds is not the main feature of human language, and Descartes proves this considering the deaf-mutes from birth, that is, they are missing the organ and they cannot emit sounds, but they do not omit, for this cause, of "saying" what they are thinking, since, as also Vico says, they are used to inventing certain signs themselves through which they let themselves be understood.<sup>30</sup> The same way they think, mute persons have a language and they express themselves by written signs. What states human language and makes it different from other animals is giving

body and matter, voice and action, the *res cogitans*, literally it is seeing or hearing (realize) a soul or a reason, a metaphysical substance that, present into language, is distinct from *physical* and mechanical body, and is not a product of the organs mere stimulation.

The language of mute persons arises from the impetus itself of the rational being. Let us see here how Vico described it in the 1725 edition of *The New Science*:

“The necessity to express themselves for communicating their ideas to others, at a time when, because of a lack of words, the spirit is wholly engaged in finding a way to express itself, makes such mute men naturally ingenious. Hence they express themselves by means of things and actions that have natural relations with the ideas they want to signify.”<sup>31</sup>

The *beasts*, whose “natural curiosity awakens in them a desire to know what this thing wants to signify to them”,<sup>32</sup> when faced with their silence of vulgar language, they naturally invent a language of signs, from which they *give meaning* to their ideas through *things* or *acts* (gestures) that maintain relationships with these *ideas*.

The trademark of primitive speaking is the close identity between signs and “ideas”, named by Vico “natural relationships”, according to what we read in the above mentioned passage. Such “natural relations” of signs with ideas are different to those we found in the language of Adam or in the naturalistic thesis of Plato’s Cratylus. Vico transfers this concept from the philosophical field of abstract essences and substances, to that poetic and vulgar of the *similarities*. First of all, it is about natural language, because its signs come to be, in certain cases, the conceived things themselves, or gestures of the body which remember and let us immediately think these things. The so named natural relationship existing between the two terms of the barbaric language is that of *similarity*. It is about “*quia elementa rerum naturalium extra nos sunt*”,<sup>33</sup> about the easy act of highlighting from the external substratum the elements we want to significate, and how it is possible to find, in some cases, the complete identity of significant and significance. It is correct to call it natural language, we say this because it is unequivocal, independent from the conventionality of the linguistic signs based in a ability of coexistence of men which was inexistent in the beginning of times. Inside this field of forces, the properly poetic features

23  
G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 3, § 2.

24  
Ibid., p. 3, § 2.

25  
Giambattista Vico. *Opere Giuridiche. Il Diritto Universale*. By Paolo Cristofolini. Sansoni, Firenze, 1974, p. 37.

26  
G. Vico, *De antiquissima Italarum Sapientia*, p. 64.

27  
Jürgen Trabandt. *Cenni e Voci. Saggi di semantologia vichiana*. Arte Tipografica Editrice, Napoli, 2007, p. 52. In Vico’s philosophy, he writes, “language is cognitive matter (...) it is, at the same time, corporeal and mental”, that is, “in *sema* idea and material significant are closely connected” (*Ibid.*, p. 64–65)

28  
G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 236.

29  
René Descartes. *Discorso sul Metodo*. Translation by Maria Garin, Laterza, Bari, 2014, p. 79.

30  
Ibid.

31  
G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 150.

32  
Ibid., p. 75.

33  
G. Vico, *De antiquissima Italarum Sapientia*, p. 94.

of the Vichian principles arises: mute persons are poets in an etymological sense, they are *poietes*, makers of signs, but also because they use *mind*, the common faculty of poets, which has got the virtue of composing things by similarity, as with metaphors and metonymies is. Aristotle, first of anyone else, had proved (*Poetics*, Book XXII) the necessary implication between creating good metaphors and how to see this which is similar. Considerations on metaphor in Aristotle's *Poetic* allow us to find again the Vichian poetic. Aristotle observes that the ability of creating metaphors is not dependant on the technique of the poem, because it is a poet's gift: "for this alone cannot be grasped from anyone else and is a sign of natural gifts, since to use metaphors well is to have insight into what is alike".<sup>34</sup> If, on the one hand, there is here the recognition of *mind*, such knowing how to see the similar, as an important faculty of poetic creation,<sup>35</sup> on the other hand, being a gift, *mind* logically comes before its language training and, for this, it is a credible poetic faculty even to those mute people. This way, *mind* would allow imagining an unusual situation, surely apt to Vico's philosophy: that of the poet without language.

### 3. The fable of Jupiter

Another significant aspect of the above mentioned passage from *The New Science*, is the use of the verb *to explain* in the reflexive form (*to explain oneself*) denoting the action which reflects itself in the own subject who is acting. In this aspect, there is a rift between Vico and Descartes' theorizations on language. Thus, Vico suggests that primordial thinking was basically desire to express sentiments and passions, absorbing them in a significant body (or sign) and so explaining them. The reflexivity of *to explain* reappears in another central passage of *The New Science* where he talks about the cognition of Jupiter, a cognition which generates the vulgar knowledge of the theological poets: the divination of pagan people, allowing us to find again, at the end of the subjects, our starting point. Vico's loners "expressed their passions by shouting, grunting and murmuring, which they did only under the impulse of the most violent passions".<sup>36</sup> The men of *brutal solitude* are the wide world, they are self-sufficient. Closed into their egoism, they only represent the external world, "the great forest of the earth", or because the forest can satisfy their basic needs or put their life at risk, while they find there "shy and indocile women (...) pasture and water" or they have to "flee from the wild animals".<sup>37</sup> Until then, the forest was not as a cognitive challenge to the primordial thought, it continued in a sort of sleep, as something still to be discovered. What seems to be invalid for a whole animic bubbling universe, *under the impulse of the most violent passions*, sufficient to activate in the *beast* the rational transport to explain, to mean – literally, to give sign – to an internal world, closed to eyes, but that let its voice to be heard and expresses itself into the body; the example of the child who cries and throws himself to the ground to express frustration and do this also without the presence of adults, mainly to give *expression* to that sentiment.<sup>38</sup> The context of the Vichian non-verbal language is solitude and egoism of the first mankind, and that Adam's rational need of *explaining*. Vico's theorizations concerning the nature of primordial language are not secondary to *The New Science* crucial discovery that "among all people the civil world began with religion" – principle indicated into the title-page painting by the figure of the *lituus*, "the staff with which the augurs took auguries and observed the auspices"<sup>39</sup> –, on the contrary, they are presumed and reconstructed there in full details, as we think to show. The language of the *beast* without language, with which it reaffirms,

despite the fall, its rational nature, allowed the form, the archetype, starting from which Jupiter was generated, the religion of auspices reading was made possible and, for the first time, the post-diluvium forest was thought about and explained. Vico lets us know that the ability of the *beast* to explain its passions by roaring, grumbling, gabbling and shaking the body, is something preceding and conditioning that which he would consider the first human cognition or fable, depicted in broad terms in the following passage of the 1725 edition of *The New Science*:

“Thus we reveal the first fable of all, explaining the mode of its birth and determining its time. It was born when, living in bestial solitude, men were all force and, like so many children, expressed their passions by shouting, grunting and murmuring, which they did only under the impulse of the most violent passions. In this state in which they were ignorant of the causes of thunderbolts that they had never heard before, at least those of them who were more roused from their stupor imagined that the sky was a vast, animate body which, by shouting, grunting and murmuring, spoke and wanted to communicate with them.”<sup>40</sup>

In the first part of the quotation, we see that an awakening occurs: that of the thunder, never heard before with such intensity. When the thunder roared in the sky after the Flood, the brutal lonely man, with unquestionable topic force, roused towards nature and, finally, became curious of those phenomena beyond the passions of his own body. The movement of looking up and inclining the head to the sky became from then on the symbolic action of the contemplation of the universe by the ancient astronomers. The thunder which breaks the sleeping of experience transforms that *explaining oneself*, expression of wild states of mind, into the own explanation of natural phenomena, starting from the shouting nature. It is a matter of a second stage of history as reason, source of people's first knowledge; but, its realization and results completely depend on that process of creation of a *natural language*.

If we pay attention to the passage above, we can clearly perceive an *ingenious*, poetic operation. In the same way “with only the most miserable ability to explain themselves, men will unite things wholesale”,<sup>41</sup> this own man also collected things in order to explain the surprising natural effect the cause of which he did not know, or better, brutal lonely man joined to himself and to the natural universe, starting the first fable of history, on Jupiter. Trying to write again the Vichian passage: hearing such thunder, the *beast* feels itself confused, as something expressing/explaining its inner world, will and passions, anger and fear, with the help of bodies and of its own body, with gestures and emitting disharmonic sounds, because of disjointment, so it is

34 Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 56.

35 Stefano Gensini, justifying Aristotelian reminiscences of the Vichian concept of mind, notes the tendency of literatures on the *Sixteenth Century* mind to translate the term *euphyia* in Aristotle's *Poetics* with “natural disposition of mind”. (Cfr. Stefano Gensini, “Ingenium/ingegno fra Huarte, Persio e Vico. Le basi naturali dell'inventività umana”. in: Martone Arturo, Gensini Stefano (éds.), *Ingenium propria hominis natura. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi (Napoli, 22–24 maggio 1997)*, Liguori, Napoli, 2002, p. 48).

36 G. Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 152.

37 Ibid., p. 8, § 13.

38 The internal senses “*autem natura homini inditos, ut brevibus ac praesentibus voluptatis dolorisve notis utilia et noxia vitae discernat*”, and while they pre-exist in the thinking substance, “*de voluptatis et doloris veritate ipse mentis esse iudicium*” (G. Vico, *Opere Giuridiche. Il Diritto Universale*, p. 37).

39 G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 7, § 8–9.

40 Ibid., p. 152.

41 Ibid., p. 157.

speaking a *mute language*; immediately it notes *what is alike*,<sup>42</sup> that is, it captured the similarities existing between it and the thundering forest, with its unnatural and inarticulate sounds and extreme weather phenomena, falling trees and flooding rivers, and collects ingeniously the two things far from one another, as in a metaphor. So, poetics comes before “language”, as hearing and imagining are previous to thought and judgment.

The natural language of mute persons, on one side, was responsible for giving to a primitive an idea of his being, so he could feel himself similar to post-diluvian nature. Paraphrasing the famous *Dignity LIII* of *The New Science* of 1744, it is correct to say that the idea the *beast* has got of its being is not absolutely the result of “reflection with a clear mind”, because it is under the impulse of the most violent passions, but this does not mean, nevertheless, that the beast only “feels, without observing”. As Vico would say, with its spirit pervaded with passions and sensations, “they observe with a troubled and agitated spirit”<sup>43</sup> The beast does not really imagine itself with clear brain, otherwise, it cannot be reduced to a simple “hearing”; this condition, which is in Vico’s axiom as the first of mankind, is from the historical point of view as much abstract as it is in the Adamic origin of the *beasts*. In certain assertion of *The New Science*, whose meaning and formulation keep themselves alike in the following writings, this abstract character is clear. It is clear in the above mentioned passage, evident in it, that Jupiter’s fable is the case of that natural inclination of our mind, many times and in different ways evoked by Vico: “When men want to create ideas of things of which they are ignorant, they are naturally led to conceive them through resemblances with things that they know”.<sup>44</sup> Thunder and storms, the unknown, in order to lead the Vichian *beast* to create an imaginative religion, it cannot simply “feel without observing”, but it has necessity to suppose some previous knowledge and, as Vico writes, “since the nature that we know best consists in our own properties, men attribute to things that are insensate and inanimate, movement, sense and reason”.<sup>45</sup> Similarity is established here starting from an already known thing: one that *explains* its passions by shouting, grunting, growling and shaking body, the *beast* itself. Because, first a being existed which explained itself through the body and gave life to the expressive dimension inside which, as we saw, formed a “confused idea” of its own being; then the invention of a divinity became possible with a gigantic and expressive body (nature), gesticulating and shouting in order to *explain itself*. “Naturally ingenious” mute beings come up to the things, collect them, creating a Sublime divinity, which speaks through gestures and things, and personifying the natural universe, whose phenomena turn into “the characters of corporeal substances which were imagined as being intelligent”.<sup>46</sup>

The poetic operation of dotting bodies of a mind is an action of double feature in Vico’s themes: on one side, it represents the creation of the natural language, based on the similar relationship between ideas and things; on the other side, it means the animism of divination, too, this is deep-rooted into the similarity between the forest (the thing) and the brute man (the idea). The loner represented, with bodies and body’s gestures, his passions; later, with the forest and the thundering sky, he represented a confuse idea of his own being thinking thing. To Vico’s *beasts*, bodies hide ideas and give substance to an inner, animic world, which is open to reading and deciphering, this way merging the domain of language and knowledge and helping to extend the humanistic and civic feature of Poetry.

To Vico, the knowledge of theologian poets was mainly constituted as a linguistic experience, first of all signs being deciphered, or because of the act

of reading which defines it (the *divinari*), but also because it fantastically supposes the alterity of an emitting subject, or because of the communicative action supposed here. The *thinking thing*, in this case, is not the cause of entertaining the truth in sciences, but also of the fact of men living socially and with justice in the world of nations. The *divinari* carries with itself the sentiment of alterity, of not being alone in the world: the presence of another being that, like it, can speak and communicate, expressing desires and frustrations, wanting to understand and be understood, creating consents. This alterity, whether it is called Jupiter, Zeus or Amon, breaks the isolation and puts an end to the solitude of the *natural man*, giving shape to a first expression of socialization inside the fabulous conversation which characterizes people's paganism. The communication with Jupiter – *beast's* personification into nature – set the stage to the wide human conversation made by the first family men with their wives and sons and, finally, with their clients. False religion based on false gods, such paganism would be responsible for the reintegration of Noah's rebel sons into the condition of family and the process of re-appropriation of lost *humanitas*, in a time "that Heaven had reigned on earth over men and had left great blessings to mankind".<sup>47</sup>

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42

Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 56.

43

G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 67, § 218.

44

Ibid., p. 151.

45

Ibid.

46

Ibid., p. 151–152.

47

Ibid., p. 4, § 4.

**Sertório de Amorim e Silva Neto**

**Jezik *Giovea*: Razum i religija u Vicovoj *Novoj znanosti***

**Sažetak**

*Otkriće u Novoj znanosti, na koje je Vico bio ponosan, bilo je ono o religiji kao »načelu« svijeta naroda. U tom je djelu Vico artikulirao učenje o prirodnom zakonu, koje će mu omogućiti susret s metafizikom ljudskog uma, s racionalnom ljudskom prirodom, onkraj društvenosti. Proricanje drevnih ljudi, istovremeno s njihovim prvim bajkama i mitovima, pretpostavlja temeljnu koncepciju ljudskog bića kao obdarenog dušom i jezikom, što omogućuje ponovno promišljanje tradicionalnih obilježja vikovske povijesti naroda. U ovome radu, polazeći novim putem, rekonstruirat ćemo središnje aspekte ove vikovske antropologije, u pokušaju pronalaska izvora religije osnivača naroda.*

**Ključne riječi**

Giambattista Vico, razum, nijemi jezik, genij, religija, svijet naroda

**Sertório de Amorim e Silva Neto**

**Die Sprache des *Giove*: Verstand und Religion in Vicos *Neuer Wissenschaft***

**Zusammenfassung**

*Die Entdeckung in der Neuen Wissenschaft, auf die Vico stolz wurde, war jene über die Religion als das „Prinzip“ der Völkerwelt. Darin sondierte Vico seine Doktrin bezüglich des Naturgesetzes; dennoch wird ihm diese Forschung die Begegnung mit der Metaphysik des menschlichen Geistes ermöglichen, mit der rationalen menschlichen Natur, jenseits der Geselligkeit. Die Weissagung der uralten Menschen, zeitgleich mit deren ersten Märgen und Mythen, setzt eine grundlegende Konzeption des Menschenwesens voraus als eines mit Seele und Sprache ausgestatteten Wesens, was uns eine erneute Erwägung der traditionellen Züge der vicoschen Völkergeschichte ermöglicht. In der vorliegenden Arbeit rekonstruieren wir, neue Wege einschlagend, die zentralen Aspekte dieser vicoschen Anthropologie, indem wir die Ursprünge der einheimischen Religion der Menschen- und Völkerschöpfer zu finden versuchen.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

Giambattista Vico, Verstand, stumme Sprache, Genie, Religion, Völkerwelt

**Sertório de Amorim e Silva Neto**

**Le langage de *Giove* : la raison et la religion dans *La science nouvelle de Vico***

**Résumé**

*La découverte de Vico dans La science nouvelle dont il fut fier est celle de la religion comme « principe » du monde des nations. Dans cette œuvre, Vico a élaboré une doctrine de la loi naturelle qui lui permettra la rencontre avec une métaphysique de la raison humaine, à savoir une nature humaine rationnelle en-deçà de toute sociabilité. La divinisation des anciens peuples, ainsi que de leurs fables et de leurs mythes, suppose une conception fondamentale de l'être humain en tant qu'être doté d'esprit et de langage et permet de penser à nouveau les caractéristiques traditionnelles de l'histoire des peuples de Vico. Partant sur une nouvelle voie, nous reconstruirons dans le présent article les aspects centraux de cette anthropologie vichienne en essayant de trouver les sources de la religion des fondateurs des peuples.*

**Mots-clés**

Giambattista Vico, raison, langage muet, génie, religion, monde des nations