

**Goran Sunajko**

Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, Frankopanska 26, HR-10000 Zagreb  
goran.sunajko@lzmk.hr

**Vico's New Science as a Political Theology**

**Abstract**

*The paper considers that Vico's philosophy developed in the New Science is a position of what would later be labelled as a political theology. Therefore, paper starts from the definition of the concept of political theology and demonstrates the principles that will put Vico into that specific tradition of philosophical thought. In this meaning Vico's philosophy is based on the metaphysical tradition and it is clear that it can be characterized as the political theology. Vico's analysis is based on the classical typology of political community (rule) set by Plato and Aristotle, but it includes the philosophy of history aiming to show, contrary to usual considerations, that the political forms of government moved from the metaphysical principle of the one (monarchy), the fewness (aristocracy), the all (democracy) and finally ended in a metaphysical postulate of the one that is best expressed again in the monarchy. For this method Vico uses the classical pattern of political theology with the principle of divine providence in forming the political community, because it is a central concept of the political theology. That is why Vico shows that the first communities were based on religious postulates, and afterword on the philosophical. The author concludes that Vico's New Science can be defined as an important piece on political philosophy based on political theology, which, in today's conditions of material globalization, once more becomes an important position in overcoming the crisis of modern materialism of the world.*

**Keywords**

Giambattista Vico, political philosophy, political theology, state, providence, metaphysics, sovereignty

**1. The Concept of Political Theology**

Political theology is a theoretical concept originated in the 20th century to draw attention to the merits of the civil orders with the help of theological (metaphysical) postulate. In that way political theology combines and connects metaphysics with political philosophy and it is a unique philosophical position. Founder of the idea was Carl Schmitt, but it seems he only created the concept because the meaning existed much earlier under the influence of the metaphysical postulates of Plato and Aristotle, through Augustine and Thomas Aquinas up till Bodin, Hobbes, and Rousseau in the modern sense. But no one before Vico had not, in such a systematic, historical-philosophical way of explaining, pointed out the impact of metaphysics on the foundation of human societies through their historical development. Therefore, in this paper, we prove that it was Vico who was forerunner of modern political theology.

The approach which characterizes the concept of political theology is a hermeneutic as well as philosophy-historical one. It is based on content analysis method in favour of the sovereign position of deity and his reign in the present political orders as well as historical overview of events that testify. Herme-

neutical approach is applied by some of the contemporary interpreters of the political theology: first of all, Dorothee Sölle in the chapter “Political Theology as Hermeneutics”,<sup>1</sup> then John B. Cobb, who shows how “hermeneutics means interpretation”,<sup>2</sup> especially for Biblical texts, and Jürgen Moltmann, who shows how to display political theology by hermeneutic approach which is an art of interpretation of the text and that the political theology is important as the art of “translation of the past into the present”.<sup>3</sup> According to Marder,

“Political hermeneutics is, at once, political and theological; its acts of interpretation discover that the referent is deferred, drawn back to the traditional object of hermeneutical concern, the ‘prehistory,’ in Gadamer’s terms, of philosophical hermeneutics. Aside from the divine connotations of concepts such as sovereignty shimmering with the borrowed light of the supreme power of God, political hermeneutics is shored up by ‘an ethos of belief’ and, therefore, by a thoroughly Christian theology, wherein the problems of psychic interiority, subjectivity, and belief first take root.”<sup>4</sup>

Historicist approach, on the other hand, is used by Johann Baptist Metz,<sup>5</sup> Carl Schmitt,<sup>6</sup> and also Moltmann which puts him alongside with the hermeneutical approach when he concludes that hermeneutics seeks witnesses reviews, and historicism is hope in form of memories.<sup>7</sup> And, finally, Mark Philp, who states that political theory “should look to the past in order to understand events, create explanations and models of political order and developed a sense of what is politically possible and desirable”.<sup>8</sup> Jacques Maritain emphasizes the historical relativity of modern orders in a way that we have to go deep into the past and have a look for the roots of the first germs of ideas that govern today’s world.<sup>9</sup> Both of these approaches to political theology will be the base of Vico’s Science – historical (philosophy), showing the development of human societies from tribe to civilized society, and hermeneutic (philology) within the meaning of language for the establishment of human societies.<sup>10</sup>

It should be further noted that, in addition to the dominant form which we have shown, political theology is very present in contemporary studies and presents a much wider field of its application. Thus, study of political theology always begins traditionally from the Old Testament of Israel’s considerations, as Walter Brueggemann claims,<sup>11</sup> and the New Testament considerations of Christian policy as it is indicated by Christopher Rowland.<sup>12</sup> Except the Bible, study on political theology is related to the philosophy of St. Aurelius Augustine (Elshtain)<sup>13</sup> and Thomas Aquinas (Bauerschmidt),<sup>14</sup> and then in the context of the Reformation, particularly Martin Luther and his understanding of the two kingdoms (Moltmann).<sup>15</sup> Political theology is also discussed in the context of access to relation between the state and civil society, which shows that every theology is also the political (Bell),<sup>16</sup> then within access to democracy, the analysis which shows that the theological thought has increasingly conceived democracy as one that meets Christian values (de Gruchy),<sup>17</sup> also through critical theory, which shows how the notion of “political theology” is ambivalent and can be directed in the wrong direction, because it assumes that there is a theology that is not political (Hewitt),<sup>18</sup> and further in the context of the Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology based on the relationship of the Christian faith and social justice and concrete action of God in specific historical situations in order to release man from the political, economic, and social oppression (Goizueta).<sup>19</sup> Finally, political theology considers new approaches to postmodernism, with possibilities of overcoming political theology as a product of the modernity and its setting to postmodern base (Pickstock),<sup>20</sup> then within feminism, which deals with the position of woman in the Church that led to her position in society (Graham),<sup>21</sup> and finally in the approach to

globalization in the context of which it deals with the relationship of the local and global Christian authority, when Christianity, regardless of its universalism, is becoming more and extra-monitored dissolution of nation-states, and

1  
See: Dorothee Sölle, *Political Theology*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1974, pp. 55–70.

2  
Johann B. Cobb, *Process Theology as Political Theology*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1982, p. 45.

3  
Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1984, p. 105.

4  
See: Michael Marder, *Groundless Existence. The Political Ontology of Carl Schmitt*, Continuum, London 2010, p. 183.

5  
See: Johann Baptist Metz, *Politička teologija, Kršćanska sadašnjost*, Zagreb 2004.

6  
See: Carl Schmitt, *Political Theory II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2008. But political theology in Schmitt's arguments is also hermeneutical. Much of the discussion of political-theological hermeneutics in Schmitt revolves around the notion of the world that connotes much more than its theological sense referring to the secular, non-transcendent realm. As in the philosophy of Gadamer, for whom language is the experience of the world, Schmitt's "world" is intimately tied to speech and, therefore, to the insuperable horizon of sociality, so much so that, whoever speaks is no longer alone in the world. See: M. Marder, *Groundless Existence*, p. 184.

7  
J. Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*, p. 105.

8  
Mark Philp, "Political Theory and History", in: David Leopold, Marc Stears (eds.), *Political Theory: Methods and Approach*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008., pp. 128–150, here p. 130.

9  
See: Jacques Maritain, *Čovjek i država*, Škol-ska knjiga, Zagreb 1992.

10  
Lino Veljak argues that Vico is the predecessor of philosophy of history, and that it is a human created history (*verum et factum convertuntur*). See: Lino Veljak, "Ibn Haldun i Vico. O mediteranskom utemeljenju cikličkog poimanja povijesti", *Filozofska istraživanja* 29 (4/2010), p. 719–724.

11  
Walter Brueggeman, "Scripture: Old Testament", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford 2004, pp. 7–21, here p. 7.

12  
Christopher Rowland, "Scripture: New Testament", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 21–35, here p. 21.

13  
Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Augustine", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 35–48, here p. 35.

14  
Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "Aquinas", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 48–62, here p. 48.

15  
See: J. Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*.

16  
Daniel M. Bell, "State and civil Society", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 423–439., here p. 423.

17  
John W. De Gruchy, "Democracy", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 439–455, here p. 439.

18  
Marsha Aileen Hewitt, "Critical Theory", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 455–471, here p. 455.

19  
Roberto S. Goizueta, "Gustavo Gutiérrez", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 288–302, here p. 293.

20  
Catherine Pickstock, "Postmodernism", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 471–486, here p. 471.

21  
Elaine Graham, "Feminist Theology, Northern", in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 210–227, here p. 210.

hence political theology and the question of authority that it establishes become fluid (Sedgwick).<sup>22</sup>

In his considerations Vico starts from most of the above mentioned understandings of political theology, especially those who have shown the Greek, Roman, Judeo-Biblical and Christian tradition, but also through philosophical systems of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Grotius, etc., which are considered to be the theological postulates within political philosophy. Ante Pažanin considered that Vico's new science should be understood precisely as a "minded political theology" that is based on God as a philosophical rather than a theological concept.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Vico's Concept of Political Theology

Vico's concept of political theology is primarily a philosophical and historical one. It starts from the very beginning of human associations and distinguishes three basic stages (age of gods, the age of heroes and age of people) deriving from God's providence as an essential characteristic of political theology and the fundamental Vico's term.<sup>24</sup> According to Vico, religion precedes philosophy and thus philosophy essentially relies on religion. Philosophy and philology are just words and concepts which determine what religion really did. Thus, the basis of all later civilized societies is metaphysics as a presumption of political theology.<sup>25</sup> The last sentence of the *New Science* is: "this Science carries inseparably with it the study of piety, and that if one be not pious he cannot really be wise".<sup>26</sup> Vico shows that his New Science managed in disproving postulates of Epicurus, Zenon, Hobbes, Machiavelli, and also Pufendorf, Grotius, and Selden who did not realize that God's providence was the basis of human societies and their law. In this sense Pierre Bayle's and Polybius' claims that there may exist nations and states without the concept of God are unsustainable, which proves Vico's position of political theology.

"For in this work it has been fully demonstrated that through providence the first governments of the world had as their entire form religion, on which alone the state of the families was based; and passing thence to the heroic or aristocratic civil governments, religion must have been their principal firm basis. Advancing then to the popular governments, it was again religion that served the peoples as means for attaining them. And coming to rest at last in monarchic governments, this same religion must be the shield of princes. Hence, if religion is lost among the peoples, they have nothing left to enable them to live in society: no shield of defense, nor means of counsel, nor basis of support, nor even a form by which they may exist in the world at all."<sup>27</sup>

### 2.1. *Metaphysics as the Basis of the New Science*

Vico starts from metaphysics and its principles which have established human community, because the idea of good, virtue, fairness, and providence resulting from the metaphysical considerations of God were established in the original human community and all others that followed. Croce argued that the reason why Vico was bound to miss the idea of progress and why his studies in history were inevitably one-sided is his metaphysics. "By 'metaphysics' we understood Vico's conception of reality as a whole, not of the world of man by itself."<sup>28</sup> But also, "the Science which with divine pleasure contemplated the eternal cycle of the mind, elevated as it was to such a height, necessarily tended to interpret the whole of reality, both Nature and God, as Mind."<sup>29</sup>

Vico concludes that all the philosophers and philologists had to begin its consideration with metaphysics, because metaphysics seeks its proofs not in the

external world, but within the modifications of the mind of him who meditates it.<sup>30</sup> Hence, at the very beginning of his consideration of the *New Science*, Vico shows the key role of metaphysics, which is directed to God and providence. “Through this aspect of metaphysic in the attitude of ecstasy contemplates Him above the order of natural things through which philosophers have hitherto contemplated Him.” In this *Science* Vico shows that metaphysics

“... contemplates in God the world of human minds, which is the metaphysical world, in order to show His providence in the world of human spirits, which is the civil world or the world of nations. (...) His providence in respect to that part of it which is most proper to men, whose nature has the principal property: that of being social. In providing for this property, God has so ordained and disposed human affairs that men, having fallen from complete justice by original sin, and while intending almost always to do something quite different and often quite the contrary so that for private utility they would live alone like wild beasts, have been led by this same utility and along the aforesaid different and contrary paths to live like men in justice and to keep themselves in society and thus to observe their social nature. It will be shown in the present work that this is the true civil nature of man, and thus that law exists in nature. The conduct of divine providence in this matter is one of the things whose rationale is a chief business of our *Science*, which becomes in this respect a rational civil theology of divine providence.”<sup>31</sup>

This “rational civil theology of divine providence” can be identified precisely as a political theology because he designates his *New Science* as a “philosophy of authority”.<sup>32</sup> It starts from the paternal authority in families and ending in developed republics supported by the authority of God. Through these principles, Vico shows, “all the virtues have their roots in piety and religion, by which alone the virtues are made effective in action, and by reason of which men propose to themselves as good whatever God wills.”<sup>33</sup> According to Vico, it means that the new principles of political theology as philosophy of authority are given, by which sons,

“... by which sons, so long as they are in the power of their fathers, must be considered to be in the family state, and consequently are in no other way to be formed and confirmed in all their studies besides in piety and religion. Since they are not yet capable of understanding commonwealth and laws, they are to reverence and fear their fathers as living images of God, so as to be naturally disposed to follow the religion of their fathers and to defend their fatherland, which

22

Peter Sedgwick, “Globalization”, in: William T. Cavanaugh, Peter Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, pp. 486–501, here p. 486.

23

Ante Pažanin, *Um i povijest*, Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, Zagreb 1992, p. 121.

24

According to Sanja Roić, Vico’s concept of providence is crucial because he had initially rejected it but later he returned to it. It is the epistemological assumption which does not affect his method. See: Sanja Roić, *Filozof u zrcalu. Ogleđi o Giambattisti Vico*, Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, Zagreb 1996, p. 72.

25

Pažanin also highlights Vico’s orientation towards political theology in the process of historical nation-building. Ante Pažanin, “Povijesni i ‘nepovijesni’ narodi”, *Politička misao* 31 (1/1994), pp. 87–92.

26

Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, Cornell University Press, New York 1948, p. 383.

27

*Ibid.*, 302–383.

28

Benedetto Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, Howard Latimer, London 1913, p. 134.

29

*Ibid.*, 135.

30

See G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 104.

31

*Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

32

*Ibid.*, p. 6.

33

*Ibid.*, p. 9.

preserves their families for them, and so to obey the laws ordained for the preservation of their religion and fatherland.”<sup>34</sup>

In this sense Vico concludes by arguments of a developed political theology:

“For divine providence ordained human things with this eternal counsel; that families should first be founded by means of religions, and that upon the families commonwealths should then arise by means of laws.”<sup>35</sup>

That metaphysics is the true foundation of the *New Science* Vico shows in the chapter on *wisdom* where he claims that man is pure mind and spirit.

“Man, in his proper being as man, consists of mind and spirit, or of intellect and will. It is the function of wisdom to fulfil both these parts in man, the second by way of the first, to the end that with a mind illuminated by knowledge of the highest things the spirit may be led to choose the best. The highest things in the universe are those turned toward and conversant with God; the best are those which look to the good of all mankind. The former are called divine things, the latter human. True wisdom, then, should teach the knowledge of divine things in order to conduct human things to the highest good. (...) Wisdom was later attributed to men renowned for useful counsels given to mankind. (...) The attribution was afterwards extended to men who for the good of peoples and nations wisely ordered and governed commonwealths. Still later the word wisdom came to mean knowledge of natural divine things; that is, metaphysics, called for that reason the divine science, which, seeking knowledge of man’s mind in God and recognizing God as the source of all truth, must recognize him as the regulator of all good. So that metaphysics must essentially work for the good of the human race, whose preservation depends on the universal belief in a provident divinity.”<sup>36</sup>

In accordance with the metaphysical principles, Vico distinguishes three types of theology.

“First, poetic theology, that of the theological poets, which was the civil theology of all the gentile nations. Second, natural theology, that of the metaphysicians. Third, Christian theology, a mixture of civil and natural with the loftiest revealed theology; all three united in contemplation of the divine providence. The divine providence has conducted human affairs that – starting from the poetic theology which regulated them by certain sensible signs believed to be divine counsels sent to men by the gods, and by means of the natural theology which demonstrates providence by eternal reasons which do not fall under the senses – the nations were disposed to receive revealed theology in virtue of a supernatural faith, superior not only to the senses but to human reason itself.”<sup>37</sup>

But, Vico continues,

“... because metaphysics is the sublime science which distributes their determinate subject matters to all the so-called subaltern sciences, and because the wisdom of the ancients was that of the theological poets, who were without doubt the first sages of the gentile world, and because the origins of all things must by nature have been crude, for all these reasons, Vico considered, we must trace the beginnings of poetic wisdom to a crude metaphysics. From this, as from a trunk, there branch out from one limb logic, morals, economics, and politics, all poetic, and from another physics, the mother of their cosmography and hence of astronomy, which gives their certainty to its two daughters, chronology and geography, all likewise poetic. We shall show clearly and distinctly how the founders of gentile humanity by means of their natural theology (or metaphysics) imagined the gods; how by means of their logic they invented languages; by morals, created heroes; by economics, founded families, and by politics, cities; by their physics, established the beginnings of things as all divine. Thus our Science comes to be at once a history of the ideas, the customs, and the deeds of mankind.”<sup>38</sup>

Spiritual position that is emphasized by Vico shows another classic pattern of metaphysics – the mind-body relation through which is clear the ruler’s position of spiritual in all properly constituted states.

“This plan of commonwealths is founded on the two eternal principles of this world of nations, namely the mind and the body of the men who compose it. For men consist of these two parts, one of which is noble and should therefore command, and the other of which is base and should

serve. But because of the corruption of human nature, the generic character of men cannot without the help of philosophy (which can aid but few) bring it about that every individual's mind should command and not serve his body. Therefore divine providence ordained human things with this eternal order: that, in commonwealths, those who use their minds should command and those who use their bodies should obey."<sup>39</sup>

From the above we can see that the foundation of every constituted nation is metaphysics and that is the reason why the *New Science* is defined as metaphysics that enables political theology through which all developed nations were constituted.

"So this New Science or metaphysic, pondering the common nature of nations in the light of divine providence, having discovered such origins of divine and human things among the gentile nations, establishes thence a system of the natural law of nations, which proceeds with the greatest equality and constancy through the three ages which the Egyptians handed down to us as the three periods through which the world had passed up to their time."<sup>40</sup>

## 2.2. *The New Science as a Political Theology*

These three periods of nations on which Vico writes are also the basis of his elaboration of political theology that, in accordance with the interpretation of the concept, naturally ends in a monarchical type of government. Unlike most philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Bodin, and almost all modern philosophers) Vico is genuine because he shows the reverse order of development of governmental forms. Instead of the usual opinion that first was established the rule of one (monarchy), then a few virtuous (aristocracy), and in the end the rule of all (democracy), Vico believes monarchy was a form of government for which the nations have finally decided to be by their own will after the experience of democracy. Development is followed in such a way that first was "the age of the gods, in which the gentiles believed they lived under divine governments, and everything was commanded them by auspices and oracles, which are the oldest things in profane history". The second was "the age of the heroes, in which they reigned everywhere in aristocratic commonwealths, on account of a certain superiority of nature which they held themselves to have over the plebs". And the third was "the age of men, in which all men recognized themselves as equal in human nature, and therefore there were established first the popular commonwealths and then the monarchies, both of which are forms of human government". Vico considers that the whole historical movement of nations went toward monarchy as ideal form of government.

"At first men desire to be free of subjection and attain equality; witness the plebs in the aristocratic commonwealths, which finally turn popular. Then they attempt to surpass their equals; witness the plebs in the popular commonwealths, later corrupted into commonwealths of the powerful. Finally they wish to put themselves above the laws; witness the anarchies or unlimited popular commonwealths, than which there is no greater tyranny, for in them there are as many

34  
Ibid., p. 32.

35  
Ibid., p. 9.

36  
Ibid., p. 99.

37  
See: *ibid.*, p. 100.

38  
Ibid.

39  
Ibid., p. 11.

40  
Ibid., pp. 17–18.

tyrants as there are bold and dissolute men in the cities. At this juncture the plebs, warned by the ills they suffer, and casting about for a remedy, seek shelter under monarchies."<sup>41</sup>

The position of political theology arguments Vico proves in the *Elements* together with axioms through which he shows the task of philosophy as a political philosophy which includes God's providence.

"To be useful to the human race, philosophy must raise and direct weak and fallen man, not rend his nature or abandon him in his corruption. This axiom dismisses from the school of Science the Stoics who seek to mortify the senses and the Epicureans who make them the criterion. For both deny providence, the former chaining themselves to fate, the latter abandoning themselves to chance. The latter moreover affirm that the human soul dies with the body. According to Vico both should be called monastic or solitary philosophers. On the other hand admits School the political philosophers, and first of all the Platonists, who agree with all the lawgivers on these three main points: that there is divine providence, that human passions should be moderated and made into human virtues, and that the human soul is immortal. Thus from this axiom are derived the three principles of Vico's Science."<sup>42</sup>

The task of philosophy as a new science is to turn the negative into positive passions and that can be done by turning toward metaphysics.

"This axiom proves that there is divine providence and further that it is a divine legislative mind. For out of the passions of men each bent on his private advantage, for the sake of which they would live like wild beasts in the wilderness, it has made the civil orders by which they may live in human society."<sup>43</sup>

According to Vico, man has by God's providence received the power to convert negative passions into the positive. This same axiom proves that man has free choice, however weak, to make virtues of his passions; but that he is aided by God, naturally by divine providence, and supernaturally by divine grace. The procedure of passion transformation is given to men in the form of reason which is common to the human race. So the common sense is "judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the whole human race" because it is derived from God as a general principle:

"This axiom is a great principle which establishes the common sense of the human race as the criterion taught to the nations by divine providence to define what is certain in the natural law of nations. And the nations reach this certainty by recognizing the underlying agreements which, despite variations of detail, obtain among them all in respect of this law."<sup>44</sup>

Vico starts from opposing Hobbes' intention of eliminating the concept of divine providence in "state of nature" concept because he seeks attributable events to mere accident (contingence) like the Epicureans did.<sup>45</sup> According to Vico, the divine providence was exactly what managed to get people to create any kind of political system before they entered into a social contract. This axiom establishes the fact that divine providence initiated the process by which the fierce and violent were brought from their outlaw state to humanity and entered upon national life. It did so, Vico concludes,

"... by awaking in them a confused idea of divinity, which they in their ignorance attributed to that to which it did not belong. Thus through the terror of this imagined divinity, they began to put themselves in some order. From this point begins the refutation of the false dictum of Polybius that if the world had philosophers there would be no need of religions. The truth is quite opposite: For if there were in the world no commonwealths, which cannot arise without religions, it would have no philosophers."<sup>46</sup>

Because of that, Vico considers that

"... we must start from some notion of God such as even the most savage, wild and monstrous men do not lack. That notion we show to be this: that man, fallen into despair of all the succors

of nature, desires something superior to save him. But something superior to nature is God, and this is the light that God has shed on all men. Confirmation may be found in a common human custom, that libertines grown old, feeling their natural forces fail, turn naturally to religion.”<sup>47</sup>

In the basis of human association was God or metaphysical position of the spirit (free will) by which people originated from a primitive state and created the concept of justice modelled on metaphysical principles of first motion (impulse).

“[T]hese first men, who later became the princes of the gentile nations, must have done their thinking under the strong impulsion of violent passions, as beasts do. We must therefore proceed from a vulgar metaphysics, (...) such as we shall find the theology of the poets to have been, and seek by its aid that frightful thought of some divinity which imposed form and measure on the bestial passions of these lost men and thus transformed them into human passions. From this thought must have sprung the impulse proper to the human will, to hold in check the motions impressed on the mind by the body, so as either to quiet them altogether, as becomes the sage, or at least to direct them to better use, as becomes the civil man. This control over the motion of their bodies is certainly an effect of the freedom of the human will, and thus of free will, which is the home and seat of all the virtues, and among the other of justice. When informed by justice, the will is the fount of all that is just and of all the laws dictated by justice. But to endow bodies with impulse amounts to giving them freedom to regulate their motions, whereas all bodies are by nature necessary agents. And what the theorists of mechanics call powers, forces, impulses, are insensible motions of bodies, by which they approach their centers of gravity, as ancient mechanics had it, or depart from their centers of motion, as modern mechanics.”<sup>48</sup>

The problem which is seen by Vico is that of human natural self-love in the “state of nature”. The people,

“... because of their corrupted nature, are under the tyranny of self-love which compels them to make private utility their chief guide. Seeking everything useful for themselves and nothing for their companions, they cannot bring their passions under control to direct them toward justice. We thereby establish the fact that man in the bestial state desires only his own welfare; having

41

See: *ibid.*, p. 78.

42

*Ibid.*, p. 55.

43

*Ibid.*, p. 56.

44

“When the first cities were established on the basis of the families, the nobles, by reason of their native lawless liberty, were opposed to checks and burdens; witness the aristocratic commonwealths in which the nobles are lords. Later they are forced by the plebs, greatly increased in numbers and trained in war, to submit to laws and burdens equally with their plebeians; witness the nobles in the popular commonwealths. Finally, in order to preserve their comfortable existence, they are naturally inclined to accept the supremacy of one ruler; witness the nobles under the monarchies. These two axioms with the others preceding, from the sixty-sixth on, are the principles of the ideal eternal history above referred to”. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

45

Vico is not quite right, because Hobbes’ political philosophy will start from some key

metaphysical arguments by which he formulated the theory of sovereignty as a position of political theology, in the same way that Vico did it by himself. According to Hobbes: “Lastely, seeing in hath been already proved out of divers evident places of Scripture, in chap. 35 of this book, that the kingdom of God is a civil commonwealth, where God himself is sovereign, by virtue first of the old, and since of the new covenant, wherein he reigneth by his vicar, or liutenant; the same places do therefore also prove, that after the coming again of our Saviour in high majesty, and glory, to reign actually, and eternally, the kingdom of God in to be on earth”, Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, Or The Matter, Forme and Power of A Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, Oxford University Press. New York 2008, p. 301.

46

G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 63.

47

*Ibid.*, p. 89.

48

See: *ibid.*, p. 90.

taken wife and begotten children, he desires his own welfare along with that of his family; having entered upon civil life, he desires his own welfare along with that of his city; when its rule is extended over several peoples, he desires his own welfare along with that of the nation; when the nations are united by wars, treaties of peace, alliances and commerce, he desires his own welfare along with that of the entire human race. In all these conditions man desires principally his own utility. Therefore it is only by divine providence that he can be held within these orders to practice justice as a member of the society of the family, the state, and finally of mankind. Unable to attain all the utilities he wishes, he is constrained by these orders to seek those which are his due; and this is called just. That which regulates all human justice is therefore divine justice, which is administered by divine providence to preserve human society.”<sup>49</sup>

That is why Vico sets his *New Science* as a political theology: “this Science must therefore be a rational civil theology of divine providence”.<sup>50</sup> According to Vico, *The New Science* must therefore be a demonstration of the historical fact of providence,<sup>51</sup>

“... for it must be a history of the forms of order which, without human discernment or intent, and often against the designs of men, providence has given to this community of the human race. For though this world has been created in time and particular, the orders established therein by providence are universal and eternal. In contemplation of this infinite and eternal providence our Science finds certain divine proofs by which it is confirmed and demonstrated. Since divine providence has omnipotence as minister, it develops its orders by means as easy as the natural customs of men. Since it has infinite wisdom as counsellor, whatever it establishes is order. Since it has for its end its own immeasurable goodness, whatever it ordains must be directed to a good always superior to that which men have proposed to themselves.”<sup>52</sup>

Hence, from this Vico’s consideration, metaphysics is the foundation of *New Science* as a political theology and, as he claims himself, this

“... Science proceeds by a severe analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or utilities of social life, which are the, two perennial springs of the natural law of nations (...) In its second principal aspect, the Science is therefore a history of human ideas, on which it seems the metaphysics of the human mind must proceed. This queen of the sciences, took its start when the first men began to think humanly, and not when the philosophers began to reflect on human ideas. (...) To determine the times and places for such a history, that is, when and where these human thoughts were born, and thus to give it certainty by means of its own metaphysical chronology and geography, the Science applies a likewise metaphysical art of criticism with regard to the founders of these same nations (...) And the criterion our criticism employs (...) is that taught by divine providence and common to all nations, namely the common sense of the human race, determined by the necessary harmony of human things, in which all the beauty of the civil world consists. The decisive sort of proof in our Science is therefore this: that, once these orders were established by divine providence, the course of the affairs of the nations had to be, must now be and will have to be such as our Science demonstrates, even if infinite worlds were produced from time to time through eternity, which is certainly not the case.”<sup>53</sup>

“Our Science therefore comes to describe an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, progress, maturity, decline and fall. (...) By the definitions of truth and certitude men were for a long period incapable of truth and of reason, which is the fount of that inner justice by which the intellect is satisfied. This justice was practiced by the Hebrews, who, illuminated by the true God, were by his divine law forbidden even to have unjust thoughts, about which no mortal lawgiver ever troubled himself. (For the Hebrews believed in a God all mind who searches the hearts of men, and the gentiles believed in gods composed of bodies and mind who could not do so.) This same inner justice was later reasoned out by the philosophers, who did not arise until two thousand years after the nations were founded. In the meantime the nations were governed by the certitude of authority, that is, by the same criterion which is used by our metaphysical criticism; namely the common sense of the human race and on which the conscience of all nations reposes. So that, in this principal regard, our Science comes to be a philosophy of authority, which is the fount of the outer justice of which the moral theologians speak. Of such authority account should have been taken by the three princes of the doctrine of the natural law [Grotius, Selden, Pufendorf] of nations, and not of that drawn from passages in the writers. For the authority of which we speak reigned among the nations for more than a thousand years before writers could arise, and they could have taken no cognizance of it.”<sup>54</sup>

That kind of authority of which Vico writes is a political theology again because

“... the divine providence watches over the welfare of all mankind. So that this Science becomes, in this principal aspect, a rational civil theology of divine providence, which began in the vulgar wisdom of the lawgivers who founded the nations by contemplating God under the attribute of providence, and which is completed by the esoteric wisdom of the philosophers who give a rational demonstration of it in their natural theology.”<sup>55</sup>

Thus begins what we are trying to show in this paper and which is also a key Vico’s position. “Here begins also a philosophy of authority, a second principal aspect of this Science, taking the word authority in its original meaning of property.”<sup>56</sup> Political theology is recognizable by transforming divine authority to human (civil) authority.

“Authority was at first divine; the authority by which divinity appropriated to itself the few giants by properly casting them into the depths and recesses of the caves under the mountains. (...) Upon this divine authority followed human authority in the full philosophic sense of the term, that is, the property of human nature which not even God can take from man without destroying him. (...) This authority is the free use of the will, the intellect on the other hand being a passive power subject to truth. For from this first point of all human things, men began to exercise the freedom of the human will to hold in check the motions of the body, either to subdue them entirely or to give them better direction. This authority of human nature was followed by the authority of natural law; for, having occupied and remained settled for a long time in the places where they chanced to find themselves at the time of the first thunderbolts, they became lords of them by occupation and long possession, the source of all dominion in the world. These are those (...) whom the philosophers later metamorphosed into men favored by God with natural aptitudes for science and virtue. “This philosophy of authority follows the rational civil theology of providence because by means of the former’s theological proofs the latter with its philosophical ones makes clear and distinct the philosophical ones.”<sup>57</sup>

This is why Vico criticizes Grotius, Selden and Pufendorf – because of their rejection of divine providence in political (law) order.

“First Grotius, just because of the great love he bears the truth, sets aside divine providence and professes that his system will stand even if all knowledge of God be left out of account. Thus all the reproofs which in a great number of matters he brings against the Roman jurists, do not touch them at all, since they took divine providence for their first principle and proposed to treat of the natural law of nations, not that of the philosophers and moral theologians. Then Selden assumes providence, Vico continues, but without paying any attention to the inhospitableness of the first peoples, or to the division the people of God made of the whole world of nations at that time into Hebrews and gentiles. Or to the fact that, since the Hebrews had lost sight of their natural law during their slavery in Egypt, God himself must have reestablished it for them by the law he gave Moses on Sinai. Or to the further fact that God in his law forbids even thoughts that are less than just, with which no mortal lawgiver has ever troubled himself. (...) And finally

49

Ibid.

50

Ibid.

51

Throughout the entire book Vico argues against the Epicureans and Stoics who rejected the idea of god and thought wrongly how accident (Epicureans) or the chain of causes (Stoics) governs the world. It depends “upon the omnipotent, wise and beneficent will of the best and greatest God”, *ibid.*, p. 92.

52

*Ibid.*, p. 91.

53

*Ibid.*

54

*Ibid.*, p. 93.

55

*Ibid.*, p. 108–109.

56

*Ibid.*, p. 109.

57

*Ibid.*, p. 110.

Pufendorf begins with an Epicurean hypothesis, supposing man to have been cast into this world without any help or care from God. Reproved for this, he defends himself in a special dissertation, but, because he does not admit providence as his first principle, he cannot even begin to speak of law.<sup>58</sup>

Vico concludes:

“Thus our treatment of natural law begins with the idea of divine providence, in the same birth with which was born the idea of law. For law began naturally to be observed, in the manner examined above, by the founders of the gentes properly so called, those of the most ancient order, which were called gentes maiores, whose first god was Jove.”<sup>59</sup>

Political theology based on metaphysical principles Vico tries to exemplify in real socio-political frameworks with three types of feudal orders, whereby the divine providence as a political theology is reflected in the third type, that of civil ownership. The first was bonitary ownership, the second one was quiritary ownership of noble, heroic or armed fiefs. The third, called civil ownership

“... was that which the heroic cities, composed in the beginning of heroes only, had over the lands by certain divine fiefs which the family fathers had previously received from the provident divinity (in virtue of which they had found themselves sovereigns in the state of the families, and had united themselves in reigning orders in the state of the cities); and thus they became sovereign civil kingdoms subject to the supreme sovereign God, whose providence is recognized by all sovereign civil powers. This is made plain to human understanding by the explicit avowal of sovereign powers in adding to their titles of majesty such phrases as ‘by divine providence’ or ‘by the grace of God,’ through which they must publicly profess to have received their kingdoms. So that if worship of providence were forbidden, the natural consequence would be their fall, for a nation of fatalists or casualists or atheists never existed in the world, and we saw above that all the nations of the world, through four primary religions and no more [paganism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam], believe in a provident divinity.”<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

We have tried to show that Giambattista Vico belongs to a specific tradition of thought – political theology – because he uses metaphysical arguments for the development of civil society (nations) and political orders. That introduces Vico, at the same time, as a pioneer of the concept of political theology that will be formulated in the 20th century. It is important to see that Vico combines several fundamental principles of political theology, like providence, God’s sovereignty, the historical approach to the development of societies and monarchical order as a form of traditional understanding of political theology. Vico’s importance is that it shows how behind of social or political order must exist a spiritual strength which means good, justice and morality. Vico showed how all governments in all phases of their development arise from the metaphysical postulates that manifest themselves as political theology.

Thus, there are three types of nature (the nature of the theological poets, heroic nature, human nature); three types of customs; three kinds of natural laws (divine, heroic, human), three kinds of governments (divine or theocratic, heroic or aristocratic, human); three kinds of languages (divine mental language, heroic blazonings, articulate speech); three kinds of characters (divine or hieroglyphics, heroic characters, vulgar characters); three kinds of jurisprudence (divine or mystic theology, heroic jurisprudence, human jurisprudence); three kinds of authority (divine, heroic, human), three kinds of reason (divine, reason of state, natural reason); three kinds of judgments (divine judgments, ordinary judgments, human judgments). Each of these structural segments, which are developed by Vico, is derived from the metaphysical principles of

providence that enabled human social and political community to base itself on the principle of the political theology looking toward God.

The main thesis of the *New Science* is the separation of the natural world, which is metaphysically determined, and the world of history created by man, but regardless of this separation, man makes history modelled on God's attributes transformed into the nation's historical progress. The crucial point is that everything begins in the metaphysical concept of God and ends in the human community modelled on metaphysical principles applied to political communities, which is a unique concept of political theology. It proves that Vico's *New Science* is a masterpiece of political theology based on metaphysical principles that allow people to create their own world.

### Goran Sunajko

#### Vicova Nova znanost kao politička teologija

##### **Sažetak**

*Rad pokazuje kako je Vicova filozofija razrađena u Novoj znanosti pozicija onoga što će se kasnije odrediti političkom teologijom. Time rad polazi od određenja pojma političke teologije i prikazuje načela koja će Vica svrstati u tu specifičnu tradiciju filozofijskoga mišljenja. U tom smislu Vicova je filozofija utemeljena na metafizičkoj tradiciji i time postaje jasno kako može biti određena kao politička teologija. Vicova analiza je utemeljena na klasičnoj tipologiji oblika vladavine koju su razmatrali Platon i Aristotel, ali uključuje i filozofiju povijesti kako bi pokazala, suprotno uobičajenim razmatranjima, da se politički oblici vladavine kreću od metafizičkoga načela jednoga (monarhija), nekolicine (aristokracija) i svih (demokracija) i konačno završavaju u metafizičkome postulatima jednoga koji je ponovno najbolje izražen u monarhiji. Za tu metodu Vico koristi klasični obrazac političke teologije s principom božanske providnosti u formiranju političkih zajednica, jer je to središnji koncept političke teologije. Razlog je to zbog kojeg Vico pokazuje kako su prve zajednice bile utemeljene na religijskim postulatima, a tek kasnije na filozofskima. Autor zaključuje kako Vicova Nova znanost može biti određena kao važno djelo filozofije politike utemeljeno na političkoj teologiji koje danas, u uvjetima materijalizirane globalizacije ponovno postaje važna pozicija u prevladavanju krize modernoga materijalizma svijeta.*

##### **Ključne riječi**

Giambattista Vico, filozofija politike, politička teologija, država, providnost, metafizika, suverenost

### Goran Sunajko

#### Vicos Neue Wissenschaft als politische Theologie

##### **Zusammenfassung**

*Die Arbeit vertritt die Ansicht, die in der Neuen Wissenschaft erarbeitete Philosophie Vicos sei eine Position dessen, was später als politische Theologie bezeichnet wird. Daher fängt das Paper von der Definition des Begriffs der politischen Theologie an und zeigt die Prinzipien, die Vico in diese spezifische Tradition des philosophischen Denkens einordnen. In diesem Sinne gründet sich Vicos Philosophie auf die metaphysische Tradition und es ist klar, dass sie als politische Theologie charakterisiert werden kann. Vicos Analyse basiert auf der klassischen Typologie der politischen (Herrschafts)form, wie sie von Platon und Aristoteles aufgestellt wurde, schließt jedoch die Philosophie der Geschichte ein, um im Gegensatz zu üblichen Überlegungen*

58  
Ibid., p. 111.

60  
Ibid, p. 197.

59  
Ibid., p. 112.

zu zeigen, dass sich die politischen Regierungsformen von dem metaphysischen Prinzip des einen (Monarchie), der einigen (Aristokratie) und der allen (Demokratie) verschoben und letztendlich im metaphysischen Postulat des einen endeten, das wieder am besten in der Monarchie zum Ausdruck kommt. Für diese Methode verwendet Vico das klassische Muster der politischen Theologie mit dem Prinzip der göttlichen Vorsehung in der Bildung politischer Gemeinschaften, weil dies ein zentrales Konzept der politischen Theologie ist. Und dies ist der Grund, aus dem Vico zeigt, dass die ersten Gemeinschaften auf Religionspostulaten fußten und erst nachträglich auf philosophischen. Der Autor kommt zu dem Schluss, Vicos Neue Wissenschaft könne als ein bedeutendes Werk der auf die politische Theologie sich stützenden politischen Philosophie definiert werden, das in heutigen Bedingungen der materiellen Globalisierung einmal mehr eine wichtige Position einnimmt in der Bewältigung der Krise des modernen Materialismus in der Welt.

#### Schlüsselwörter

Giambattista Vico, politische Philosophie, politische Theologie, Staat, Vorsehung, Metaphysik, Souveränität

### Goran Sunajko

#### La science nouvelle de Vico comme théologie politique

#### Résumé

*Cet article montre que la philosophie de Vico, élaborée dans La science nouvelle, est la position de ce qui va plus tard être considérée comme une théologie politique. Ainsi, ce travail commence par la définition du concept de théologie politique et démontre les principes à partir desquels on peut classer Vico dans cette tradition philosophique de pensée spécifique. En ce sens la philosophie de Vico se fonde sur une tradition métaphysique et il est clair qu'elle peut être caractérisée de théologie politique. L'analyse de Vico trouve sa source dans la typologie classique des régimes politiques que Platon et Aristote ont étudié. Elle inclut aussi une philosophie de l'histoire dans le but de montrer, contrairement aux considérations habituelles, que les formes politiques de gouvernement partent du principe de l'un (monarchie), de plusieurs (aristocratie), de tous (démocratie), et enfin se terminent dans le postulat métaphysique de l'un, à nouveau exprimé dans la monarchie. Pour cette méthode Vico se sert du modèle classique de théologie politique et de son principe de providence divine dans la formation des communautés politiques, concept central en théologie politique. C'est la raison pour laquelle Vico montre que les premières communautés ont été fondées sur des postulats religieux, et seulement plus tard sur des postulats philosophiques. L'auteur conclut que La science nouvelle de Vico peut être définie comme une œuvre majeure de philosophie politique fondée sur une théologie politique, qui aujourd'hui, dans des conditions de globalisation matérielle, reprend une position importante dans le dépassement de la crise du matérialisme moderne.*

#### Mots-clés

Giambattista Vico, philosophie politique, théologie politique, État, providence, métaphysique, souveraineté