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The Course That Vico Ran: The Significance of the Completed Critical Edition of the *Scienza Nuova*

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As interest in the thought of Giambattista Vico increases worldwide, the completion of the critical edition of his Scienza Nuova, in its successive versions of 1725, 1730, and 1744, provides an opportunity to reassess the compositional, textual, and editorial history of the work, and to ask further questions about the work's evolution. This article first outlines the course of the work's composition, highlighting the complex history of the 1725 version, and the rapidity and extent of the rewriting which resulted in the version of 1730. It reviews the earlier editions of the Scienza Nuova by Ferrari and Nicolini, both of whom subordinated the 1730 version to that of 1744. The critical edition, by contrast, affirms the independence of all three versions: the article outlines the problems involved in editing each of them. It ends by opening up the question: what was Vico doing when he rewrote the work in 1730?

Interest in the thought of the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, and in particular in his final work, the *New Science*, has never been more extensive.¹ In addition to the long tradition of Italian Vico scholarship led by the Centro di Studi Vichiani in Naples, substantial contributions to the understanding of Vico's work have come from France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, North America, and, increasingly, Latin America and East Asia. Comprehensive bibliographies of this literature have been published as supplements to the *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* since the journal's inception in 1971.² Three further bibliographies of works on Vico in English

¹[Giambattista Vico], *Principj di una Scienza Nuova intorno alla Natura delle Nazioni per la quale si ritrovano i Principj di altro Sistema del Diritto Naturale delle Genti* (Naples, 1725); *Cinque libri di Giambattista Vico De' Principj d'una Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni in questa seconda impressione* (Naples, 1730); *Principj di Scienza Nuova di Giambattista Vico d'intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni in questa terza impressione dal medesimo autore in gran numero di luoghi corretta, schiarita, e notabilmente accresciuta* (Naples, 1744).

²Volumes of the *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* have been published annually since 1971, along with, so far, nine *Contributi alla Bibliografia Vichiana* (1973–2018), covering works published in all languages between 1948 and 2015, and recording the global expansion of interest in Vico. Since 2002, the Centro di Studi Vichiani has been folded into the Istituto per la Storia del Pensiero Filosofico e Scientifico a Napoli. For

were issued in association with *New Vico Studies* (1983–2009) and the Institute of Vico Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.³ A third journal, the *Cuadernos sobre Vico* (1991–), based at the University of Seville, continues to publish studies on Vico in Spanish.⁴ As a result of all this attention, Vico has long since ceased to be an eccentric in the history of thought, somehow an anachronism in his own time, of importance only for his impact on a variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers, writers, and scholars. He was, on his own distinctive terms, a major contributor to European philosophical and historical thinking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In this context, the completion in 2023 of the critical edition of Vico's *Scienza Nuova* is a significant moment in Vico scholarship. In separate volumes, the edition includes all three published versions of the work, dating from 1725, 1730, and 1744. The first to appear in the critical edition was *La Scienza Nuova 1730*, edited by Paolo Cristofolini with the collaboration of Manuela Sanna, and published in Naples by Alfredo Guida in 2004. *La Scienza Nuova 1744*, now edited jointly by Paolo Cristofolini and Manuela Sanna and published by Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura in Rome, followed in 2013, alongside a reprint of *La Scienza Nuova 1730*. The set was completed by *La Scienza Nuova 1725*, edited by Enrico Nuzzo for the same publisher in 2023. All three are therefore now available in the handsome large octavo format and within the distinctive covers of Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.⁵ The three versions form volumes 7, 8, and 9 of the critical edition of all Vico's works and correspondence, undertaken by the Centro di Studi Vichiani. The project was inspired by Pietro Piovani, and has been overseen by Fulvio Tessitore and Manuela Sanna, successively the centre's directors.⁶

The critical edition has two distinctive features, the significance of which it is the purpose of this article to discuss. The first is that the editors conceive of their purpose as, in a certain sense of the term, "philological." Their object has been to reconstruct the best possible version of the original texts, annotated with variants, the most important of which were Vico's own. As will be seen, there are reasons specific to the printing

further information and resources on the "Portale Vico" see www.giambattistavico.it/progetto (consulted 7 Oct. 2025).

³*New Vico Studies*, edited by D. P. Verene, published from 1983 to 2009, with separate bibliographies of *Works on Giambattista Vico in English* in 2009, 2018, and 2024. See www.pdcnet.org/newvico/New-Vico-Studies (consulted 7 Oct. 2025)

⁴*Cuadernos sobre Vico*, 1991–. See <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/revista?codigo=1913> (consulted 7 Oct. 2025)

⁵Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova 1730*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini with the assistance of Manuela Sanna (Naples, 2004; 2nd edn, Rome, 2013); Vico, *La Scienza Nuova 1744*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini and Manuela Sanna (Rome, 2013); Vico, *La Scienza Nuova 1725*, ed. Enrico Nuzzo (Rome, 2023). These editions will be cited in the notes as SN25, SN30, and SN44. For reasons to be made clear, they are not referred to as the "first," "second" and "third" versions of the work. Use of the definite article in these titles—it was not present in Vico's own titles—serves to distinguish the successive versions; it has been common in the titles of previous editions and translations.

⁶The *Opere di Giambattista Vico* consists of twelve volumes, two in more than one part; only the *Vita di Giambattista Vico* remains to be added (as vol. 6). Protocols for the edition were set out by Pietro Piovani in "Per l'edizione nazionale di Vico," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 3 (1973), 5–6. All volumes are now published by Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura in Rome (as also are the *Contributi alla Bibliografia Vichiana* and the monograph series *Studi Vichiani*).

of the original works which explain this focus, and how the texts have been reconstructed will be described in more detail below. The focus has meant, however, that the editors have minimized or even excluded matter which critical editions of other major texts have covered in considerable detail. Excluded are contextual information concerning the writing of the successive versions of the text, the publication and “book history” of these versions, and the vicissitudes of their editorial history prior to the critical edition. The critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* thus differs, for example, from Noel Malcolm’s edition of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* in its English and Latin versions. There the texts are explicitly established according to the canons of the Greg-Bowers method of textual criticism. The texts are also prefaced by a separate volume containing two introductions: a “General Introduction” covers the writing of *Leviathan*, placing it deep in its contemporary political context, as well as aspects of its printing history, while a “Textual Introduction” covers description of the original printed texts of both the English and the Latin *Leviathan*, their previous editorial history, and the editorial principles of the new edition.⁷ That the critical editions of *Leviathan* and the *Scienza Nuova* differ so markedly is not a failing of Vico’s editors; it reflects different conceptions of editorial purpose. But in the absence of contextual information, the significance of the critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* for understanding Vico’s achievement is harder to appreciate. Rather than a conventional review, therefore, the initial purpose of this article is informative: not only to report what the critical edition does, but to outline the missing contexts which help to explain why the critical edition matters.⁸

A second feature of the critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* is the attention it draws to the second published version, that of 1730. For reasons that will likewise become clear, the decision to begin with this version was not arbitrary. Not only has this version been slighted by previous editors, but it marked a radical recasting of Vico’s presentation of his “new science”: in the space of a few months, Vico produced a new and quite different version of his work. Why he did so is a question whose full answer would exceed the bounds of an article, but three new features in the 1730 version are immediately apparent: the frontispiece and its “Explanation, serving as an Introduction to the work,” the chronological table and accompanying “Annotations,” and the “Axioms, philosophical and philological,” which establish “the Elements of this Science of Humanity.” The final section of this article will look briefly at each of these, in particular at the purpose of the one hitherto least studied, the chronological table, the better to understand what Vico was doing in writing a new “New Science.”

⁷Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, in three vols., vol. 1, *Introduction*; vols. 2–3, the English and Latin texts, in the Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes, vols. 3–5 (Oxford, 2012).

⁸For comparison see Jeffrey Collins’s review of Malcolm’s edition of *Leviathan* in this journal: “Malcolm’s *Leviathan*, Hobbes’s “Thing,” *Modern Intellectual History* 12/1 (2015), 95–120. Like this author, Collins does not undertake a critical evaluation of the edition’s textual scholarship. Collins does, however, contest Malcolm’s account of *Leviathan*’s context, where I seek to provide missing context.

Composition of the successive published (and unpublished) versions of the *Scienza Nuova*

To appreciate why the critical edition is so important, it is essential to know the course of the *Scienza Nuova*'s composition. It did not run smooth. In the case of the first two published versions, those of 1725 and 1730, their tangled genesis was recounted by Vico himself in his *Autobiography*, written over the same period from the early 1720s to 1731.⁹ Until then, Vico (born in Naples in 1668) was known as a gifted man of letters, a professor of rhetoric who could turn his hand to celebratory verse, funeral orations, biography, history, pedagogy, and the history of philosophy.¹⁰ The last interest yielded a study in Latin, *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia* (1710), within which Vico made clear his own metaphysical commitments, and his hostility to Descartes in particular.¹¹ In the following decade he undertook an intensive course of reading in jurisprudence, including close study of Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis*. The outcome of this reading was *De universi juris uno principio, et fine uno*, published in 1720, in which he set out the metaphysical principles which should underlie a universal jurisprudence. A second volume, *De constantia jurisprudentis*, followed in 1721, outlining a historical account of the development of law from sacred and early Roman history. It was in the course of the latter that Vico first voiced his intention to construct a "new science." The work was completed by a third volume of *Notae*, including his thoughts on Homer, in 1722.¹² Vico was able to have all three volumes printed in Naples by Felice Mosca in quarto, and dispatched presentation copies to Rome and further abroad. The effort (and expense) bore fruit in a favorable review from Jean Le Clerc in his *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne* (1722), which delighted Vico. Shortly before he received it, however, Vico had been rudely disappointed to be denied the academic reward he sought, appointment to a superior chair in civil law at his own university. Perhaps as a result, he seems to have decided that there was no point in continuing to adhere to academic form, and that he should now make his claim to have conceived of a "new science" in his vernacular language, Italian.¹³

On Vico's account, he initially drafted the "New Science" in two parts, the first a critique of previous treatments of the natural law of nations, the second an account

⁹Giambattista Vico, *Vita di Giambattista Vico, scritta da se medesimo*, in the edition by Andrea Battistini, *Giambattista Vico Opere*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1990), 1: 3–85; English translation Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. M. H. Fisch and T. G. Bergin (Ithaca, 1944). Hereafter cited in these editions as *Vita* and *Autobiography*.

¹⁰A characterization nicely delineated by Raffaele Ruggiero, *Jean-Baptiste Vico: La carrière d'un homme de lettres dans la Naples des Lumières* (Paris, 2023).

¹¹Giambattista Vico, *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia* (Naples, 1710), now vol. 4 of the critical edition, *con le risposte al "Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia"* (Rome, 2020); English translation Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians. Drawn Out from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. Jason Taylor (New Haven and London, 2010).

¹²Together the three volumes are known under the Italian title *Diritto universale*, and are published under this title, edited by Marco Veneziani, as vol. 5 of the critical edition of Vico's *Opere* (Rome, 2019). English translations Giambattista Vico, *Universal Right*, trans. Giorgio A. Pinton and Margaret Diehl (Amsterdam, 2000); and Vico, *Universal Law*, trans. John D. Shaeffer (Lewiston, NY, c.2011).

¹³*Vita*, 44–54; *Autobiography*, 154–65.

of the generation, according to a “certain” chronology, of human customs in the fabulous periods of Greek antiquity—the Greeks standing for all gentile antiquity. These, he believed, would have made two well-proportioned volumes in quarto, and he set about securing support for their publication by corresponding with friends in Rome. To one, Filippo Monti, he wrote enclosing a small box of his published books, along with a draft dedication of the new work to Monti’s patron, Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini, from whom Vico clearly hoped for financial support.¹⁴ Probably because that support was not forthcoming, Vico concluded that the form of exposition he had chosen did not make his own principles easy to understand. He therefore abandoned this draft, which he referred to as his “*Principi per via negativa*,” his “Principles in negative form,” and rewrote the work in a more positive and succinct form. The rewriting was intensive, and in little more than a month, between 20 July and the first days of September 1725, he had the new text ready for publication. Absent a subsidy, Vico had to abandon hopes for publication in a quarto, and accept that the book would be a much smaller duodecimo. His Neapolitan publisher, Felice Mosca, printed a thousand copies of 288 pages each on plain paper, with a further twelve on finer paper for presentation copies. Vico nevertheless persisted in dedicating the published work to Cardinal Corsini, quite likely in the hope not only of future patronage, but also of protection from ecclesiastical enemies. To this he added a more general dedication “to the Academies of Europe.”¹⁵

The version of the *Scienza Nuova* published in 1725 had five *capi* or chapters, the first of which, on “The Necessity of the End and the Difficulty of the Means of Discovering a New Science,” did set off Vico’s aims against those whose thinking he regarded as an obstacle to their fulfilment, including Grotius and Pufendorf, Hobbes and Bayle. Instead, Vico would seek the origins of such a science in “sacred history.” The second and third chapters then set out at length the “principles” of the new science, respectively in “ideas” historical, political, and moral, and in the “languages” of poetry and fable. The final, much shorter fourth and fifth chapters, a brief Conclusion, and two longer Indexes headed “Vulgar Traditions” and “General Discoveries” sought to summarize the findings and develop some implications.¹⁶ For all the striking coherence of the result, however, it was not long before Vico was expressing the desire to correct and improve his work.

An opportunity to do so arose two years later, in the form of an invitation from Venice to reissue the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 in a better format with “additions and corrections.” The invitation came from one Count Gianartico di Porcia, who had already asked Vico to contribute to a planned series of intellectual autobiographies of men of letters. Porcia’s invitation was seconded by further letters from Father Carlo Lodoli, who was to manage the publication, and the Abbé Antonio Conti, who told Vico that he wanted to draw the work to the attention of his friends in France. Conti added that the

¹⁴ Giambattista Vico, *Epistole, con aggiunte le epistole dei suoi corrispondenti*, ed. Manuela Sanna, in Vico, *Opere*, vol. 11 (hereafter cited as *Epistole*) (Naples, 1993; now published in Rome by Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura), 108–10, [a Filippo Monti], Naples, 18 Nov. 1724.

¹⁵ For Vico’s account of the composition and content of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 see *Vita*, 54–60; *Autobiography*, 165–73.

¹⁶ *Scienza Nuova* (1725), *passim*; English translation Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, trans. Leon Pompa (Cambridge, 2002), with the title of “Book I” at 7.

interests of these friends—he is likely to have had in mind members of the Académie des inscriptions in Paris—would enable them to appreciate what Vico had written about chronology and mythology as well as morals, and that he had already sent them “a small extract” from the work.¹⁷ (In other words, Conti had taken a liberty similar to the one he had earlier taken with the “Abridgement” of Newton’s *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms*, whose unauthorized translation into French in 1725 from a manuscript supplied by Conti had enraged Newton.)¹⁸ Vico was initially flattered and favorably inclined, the more so as he was increasingly disappointed by his work’s reception in Naples. But matters soon became more complicated. For one thing, Porcia now proposed to publish Vico’s autobiography on its own, to advertise the series, thereby giving it a prominence that Vico feared would expose him to envy. It also appeared that the Venetians wished to publish other works by Vico, preceding the *Scienza Nuova*. Vico wanted only the *Scienza Nuova* published, but now saw an opportunity also to publish the initial version of the work, the “*Principi per via negativa*,” and sent the manuscript of nearly a thousand pages to Lodoli. Finally, in October 1729, Vico sent Lodoli what he had originally asked for: the corrections to the published version of 1725, with his annotations and additional comments, a manuscript of nearly three hundred folios (six hundred pages). Soon afterwards, however, the arrangement broke down completely, and Vico asked Lodoli to return everything he had been sent.¹⁹ While Vico described his decision as a matter of pride, there had been other serious complications.

One, which Vico recalled in indignant detail, was an exasperating notice of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 which had appeared in 1727 in the *Acta Eruditorum*, the learned journal published in Leipzig by J. B. Mencke. Only learning of the notice in 1729, Vico was particularly angry that it appeared to have been prompted by an informer from Naples. Besides writing to Mencke, he published a tract, the *Vici Vindiciae*, in which

¹⁷*Epistole*, 136–9: letters from Giovan Artico di Porcia, 14 Dec. 1727, 2 April 1728, from Carlo Lodoli, [15 Jan. 1728], and from Antonio Conti, 3 Jan., 10 March 1728. To which should be added Vico’s recently discovered reply to Conti’s first letter, dated 9 March 1728, and printed by Mark A. Youssim as “Una lettera di Vico inedita tra gli autografi della collezione del Museo Storico Statale a Mosca,” in Fabrizio Lomonaco, ed., *Studi sull’ Epistolario Vichiano: Con una lettera inedita del 1728 e un autografo in Appendice* (Rome, 2025), 171–5. Conti’s role as intermediary between Vico and the Académie des inscriptions was noted by Gustavo Costa, “Vico, Camille Falconet e gli Enciclopedisti,” *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 3 (1973), 147–62, at 156. Conti’s “extract” must have been from the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725; Falconet himself possessed a copy of the edition of 1730.

¹⁸On this episode, see Jed Z. Buchwald and Mordechai Feingold, *Newton and the Origin of Civilization* (Princeton and Oxford, 2013), 307–30.

¹⁹Vico gave his account of these exchanges and his reactions in his *Vita*, 68–79; *Autobiography*, 182–94; see also his account of the negotiation in the “Occasione di meditarsi quest’Opera,” which would be prefixed to the *Scienza nuova* of 1730: SN30, 21–6. Further light on this episode, derived from dedication copies, is in Enrico Nuzzo, “Per la storia della ricezione della *Scienza Nuova* del 1725: Gli esemplari corredati di dediche autografe,” forthcoming in *Alvearium* 18 (2025).

he denounced the “unknown vagabond” whom he held responsible.²⁰ Another complication, which Vico did not mention in any of his accounts of the genesis of the new *Scienza Nuova* of 1730, and may not have known about, was a belated reference of the 1725 version to the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome. The reference occurred when the ecclesiastical authorities in Padua, where printing was to take place, became aware of the impending republication. The reference was received by the Holy Office in July 1729, and a copy of the 1725 version was assigned for review, first to a hostile reader, then to one more sympathetic. The initial reading prompted the Congregation to instruct its Paduan officer to withhold consent to the new publication, while the second, received in September 1730, simply led to the commissioning of a third reading.²¹ But by then both the Venetians and Vico had given up on publishing any version of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725. Instead, Vico had set to work on a quite new version, beginning it on Christmas Day 1729 and completing it on Easter Sunday of 1730, a space of just four months. This was the *Scienza Nuova* published later in 1730, once again in a duodecimo, “at the expense of Felice Mosca.”²²

The *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 differed radically in structure from the version of 1725. The work now carried a specially commissioned engraved frontispiece, another dedication to Lorenzo Corsini—except that the cardinal had since become Pope Clement XII—and a brief prefatory account of the “Occasion of the work’s being conceived.” These were followed by a longer “Explanation of the Engraving proposed as frontispiece, which serves as the introduction to the work,” and by a chronological table in which key dates in the history of seven ancient nations were arranged in columns, with the left-hand column providing the base dates from the Hebrew Bible. The substance of the work was now divided into five “books.” Book One was to establish the “principles” of the new science, and consisted of “Annotations” to the chronological table, a set of 109 philosophical and philological “axioms” or *degnità* which were to constitute the “elements” of “this science of humanity,” and two shorter sections on the “principles” of the science and the “method” which it would employ. Book Two, on “Poetic Wisdom,” offered extended interpretations of ancient biblical, Greek, and Roman myths as containing not, as often argued, esoteric philosophy, but the simple belief systems of the earliest recorded nations. Book Three, on “The discovery of the True Homer,” argued

²⁰ *Vita*, 73–6, *Autobiography*, 187–91; *Epistole*, 154: “a Johann Burchard Mencken,” 14 Nov. 1729 (here following Vico’s spelling of the name); Giambattista Vico, *Vici vindiciae* (Naples, 1729), Latin text with Italian translation in *Varia. Il “De mente heroica” e gli scritti latini minori*, ed. Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Vico, *Opere*, vol. 12/1 (Naples, 1996), 25–109, with an English translation in *Giambattista Vico. Keys to the New Science. Translations, Commentaries, and Essays*, ed. Thora Ilin Bayer and Donald Philip Verene (Ithaca and London, 2009), 107–35. The absence of evidence has not prevented repeated speculation (as by Verene in his Commentary on the *Vici vindiciae*, 89–93) that the “unknown vagabond” might have been Pietro Giannone.

²¹ The episode was brought to light by Girolamo de Miranda, “Nihil decisum fuit. Il Sant’Ufficio e la *Scienza Nuova* di Vico: un’irrealizzata edizione patavina tra l’imprimatur del 1725 e quello del 1730,” *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 28–9 (1998–9), 5–71; see also Gustavo Costa, “Vico e la Sacra Scrittura alla luce di un fascicolo dell’Inquisizione,” in E. Hidalgo-Serna, M. Marassi, J. M. Sevilla, and J. Villalobos, eds., *Pensar para el nuevo siglo: Giambattista Vico y la cultura europea* (Naples, 2001), 253–73. The delays in receiving readers’ reports and the recourse to yet another report in a case of disagreement were entirely normal practice for the Holy Office and the Index.

²² *Vita*, 80; *Autobiography*, 194. The phrase “a spese di Felice Mosca” appeared on the title page of the 1730 edition.

not only that “Homer” was the sum of many authors, but also that the great poems should be read as expressions of the violence and moral coarseness of the culture from which they derived. The final books, Four and Five, traced what Vico called the *corso* (course) typically followed in the history of nations, as they moved through the three ages of “gods,” “heroes” and “men,” and the *ricorso*, the new beginning, which had actually followed the collapse of ancient Rome. The work ended with a “Conclusion” on “the several species of natural and eternal republic ordained by Divine Providence,” followed by a specimen Index for the subject “Jove.”

Having composed the new work with such rapidity, Vico and his printer were made to wait for the requisite permissions to publish. Perhaps because of that delay, Vico does not seem to have put the same effort into distributing presentation copies as he had in 1725 (other than to send a copy to Rome for the dedicatee).²³ While he waited for printing to finish, however, Vico set to work on “Corrections, Improvements, and Additions” to the text. In all, he composed four sets of these, two printed with the edition, and two more in manuscript. The last of these was matched by a corrected copy of the printed text, set up for a new edition. But as it happened, an opportunity for a new edition did not arise until shortly before Vico’s death in January 1744.

This, the final version of the *Scienza Nuova*, was published from a new autograph manuscript six months later, in July 1744. It was printed not by Mosca, but at the Muziana press, “at the expense of Gaetano, and Steffano Elia,” as an octavo, a size up from the previous two versions. This version was dedicated to Cardinal Prince Trojano Acquaviva, a subsidy from whom may have made possible the larger size. It also carried an engraved portrait of Vico as well as the frontispiece. In structure, it followed the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730, with revisions taken or adapted from the final set of “Corrections, Improvements, and Additions,” and with a further tightening of several other passages, and shorter section titles.

In all, therefore, we know of five versions of the *Scienza Nuova*. Two were not published, and both manuscripts were subsequently lost: the “*Scienza Nuova in forma negativa*” of 1722–5, and the 1725 version with “additions and corrections” drawn up between 1728 and 1729, which Vico sent to and apparently recovered from the Venetians. Three versions, however, were published: the *Scienza Nuova* in the successive, separate editions of 1725, 1730, and 1744.

Editions of the *Scienza Nuova* prior to the critical edition

The first to attempt an edition of the *Scienza Nuova* in more than one of its published versions was the nineteenth-century Milanese political philosopher Giuseppe Ferrari (1811–76). While still in his mid-twenties, Ferrari edited the works of Vico in six volumes as the *Opere di Giambattista Vico*, “ordered and illustrated with the historical analysis of the mind of Vico in relation to the science of civilisation [*civiltà*].”²⁴ Included in the *Opere* as volumes 4 and 5 were editions of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 and

²³A gift discreetly acknowledged on the Pope’s behalf by his nephew, Cardinal Neri Corsini, in a letter to Vico of 6 Jan. 1731: *Epistole*, 161. Vico’s autobiography makes no mention of other presentation copies.

²⁴*Opere di Giambattista Vico ordinate ed illustrate coll’analisi storica della mente di Vico in relazione alla scienza della civiltà da Giuseppe Ferrarri*, 6 vols. (Milan, 1835–7).

1744, the latter with “variants” from the version of 1730. Ferrari introduced the *Opere* with an essay of his own, “The Mind of Giambattista Vico,” in which he explained the importance of understanding the arc of Vico’s intellectual evolution, from the *Diritto universale*, through the 1725 *Scienza Nuova*, to that of 1744.²⁵ As editor, Ferrari devoted the apparatus of his *Scienza Nuova* 1725 almost entirely to identifying, with precise references, the passages in the version which were anticipated in the *Diritto universale*.²⁶ His approach to using the 1730 version as a source of “variants” from the “third edition” of 1744 was likewise precise. He identified both passages in the 1730 version which were excluded from the third edition and which he treated as “variants,” and “additions” to the third edition which had not featured in the version of 1730.²⁷

Ferrari’s editing may have been designed to underpin his own interpretation of Vico’s philosophy; it was also limited in its philological ambition, although he did utilize the autograph manuscript of the 1744 version. But his edition was nonetheless a remarkable achievement, the only one to try to show the textual connections with the *Diritto universale* and between the successive versions of the *Scienza Nuova*. Ferrari revised and reissued his edition in the 1850s, by which time he had decided that the 1730 and 1744 versions should be referred to together as the “second edition,” the better to underline their difference from the first *Scienza Nuova* of 1725. But his preface still provided a clear account of the writing and publication of each version (as well as of the failed 1729 reedition of the first version), and kept the distinction between the 1730 and 1744 versions to the extent of describing both as “editions,” that of 1744 being a “reprint” of that of 1730. He also continued to record the specific differences between the two versions of 1730 and 1744.²⁸ Reinforced by Ferrari’s reputation as a philosopher and latterly as a politician in Risorgimento Italy, his edition maintained its

²⁵Giuseppe Ferrari, *Opere*, vol. 1: *La Mente di Giambattista Vico di Giuseppe Ferrari, aggiuntovi il primo scritto storico di Vico* (1837).

²⁶Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, vol. 4: *Principj di una Scienza Nuova d’intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni, secondo l’edizione del MDCCXXV*, con note da Giuseppe Ferrari (1836). The footnotes identifying the preceding passages in the *Diritto universale* were introduced with a phrase such as, “ciò fu dimostrato nel *Diritto Universale* ...” with the specific Latin title and a page reference to Ferrari’s own edition of the work in the *Opere*, vol. 3: *J. B. Vici, Opera Latina, recensuit et illustravit Joseph Ferrari, Tomus II* (1835). Vico’s other Latin works constituted Tomus I of the *Opera Latina*, i.e. vol. 2 of the *Opere* (also 1835).

²⁷Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, vol. 5: *Principj di una Scienza Nuova d’intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni, secondo la terza impressione del MDCCXLIV, con le varianti di quella del MDCCXXX, e con note di Giuseppe Ferrari* (1836). Following his editor’s “Preface,” Ferrari included two tables listing the pages and lines on which his variants were noted: “Tavola dei brani esclusi dalla Terza Edizione della *Scienza Nuova* e qui riportati come varianti,” and “Tavola delle Aggiunte alla Terza Edizione dell’anno MDCCXLIV.”

²⁸Giuseppe Ferrari, “Prefazione dell’editore,” in Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, vol. 5: *Principj di Scienza Nuova ... secondo la Terza Impressione di MDCCXLIV* (Milan, 1854), xviii–xxiv, followed by the “Tables” of variants and additions.

standing until early in the twentieth century, when it was superseded by that of Fausto Nicolini.²⁹

Fausto Nicolini (1879–1965), a philosopher–scholar close to Benedetto Croce, first edited the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744 in 1911–16, and then again as *La Scienza Nuova giusta l'edizione del 1744; con le varianti dell'edizione del 1730 e di due redazioni intermedie inedite*, published in two volumes for Laterza in 1928. He followed this with *La Scienza Nuova Prima: Con la polemica contro gli "Atti degli eruditi" di Lipsia*, also published by Laterza in 1931.³⁰ These quickly became the standard editions for scholarly use, Nicolini's decisions determining the editing and translation of Vico's texts until the end of the twentieth century. It was from Nicolini's 1928 edition that the first and most widely read English translation of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744 was made, by T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch, in 1948.³¹

One of Nicolini's decisions was to double down on Ferrari's judgment that the versions of 1730 and 1744 could be combined, with passages from the former (and from "Corrections" which Vico subsequently added in manuscript) treated as "variants" of the latter. Believing that Vico had made a major contribution to modern philosophy, Nicolini supposed it incumbent on an editor to establish the text of the *Scienza Nuova* which expressed Vico's philosophy in its most developed and exemplary form. But Nicolini did so in a way which diminished the significance of the 1730 version. In place of Ferrari's attempt to identify, in the text, where passages from the 1730 edition had been omitted from the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744, and where the latter had added to the former, Nicolini simply kept the 1744 version as an integral text, and printed the variants after it, as "Brani delle redazioni del 1730, 1731 e 1733 circa soppressi o sostanzialmente mutati nella redazione definitiva."³² He also subsequently reprinted the 1744 text on its own, without the "variants."³³ The outcome of these decisions was lasting confusion about the relation between the versions of 1730 and 1744, a confusion reinforced by Nicolini's inclination to follow Ferrari's second thought in referring

²⁹There is a considerable scholarship on Ferrari, who moved to France in 1838, shortly after completing his edition, and held chairs at the University of Strasbourg between 1842 and 1849, before returning to Italy in 1859 to participate in Risorgimento politics. On his editing of the *Scienza Nuova* see Maurizio Martirano, *Giuseppe Ferrari editore e interprete di Vico* (Naples, 2001); and Enrico Nuzzo, "Attorno all'edizione e interpretazione della *Scienza Nuova Prima* di Giuseppe Ferrari. I: Il genio di Vico nella storia progressiva delle epoche," in G. Cerchiai, ed., *Vico e la filosofia civile in Lombardia* (Milan, 2020), 125–52.

³⁰Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova giusta l'edizione del 1744; con le varianti dell'edizione del 1730 e di due redazioni intermedie inedite*, ed. Fausto Nicolini, 2 vols. (Bari, 1928); and Vico, *La Scienza Nuova Prima. Con la polemica contro gli "Atti degli Eruditi" di Lipsia* (Bari, 1931). These in turn formed volumes within Nicolini's eleven-volume "critical edition" of the *Opere di G. B. Vico* (Bari, 1911–41). Fausto Nicolini was a prolific scholar, whose interests extended beyond Vico to include Pietro Giannone and more generally the whole intellectual world of early eighteenth-century Naples. But it is his scholarship on Vico which has had the greatest impact.

³¹Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, unabridged translation by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Frisch (Ithaca and London, 1948; revised edn 1968; with the "Practic of the New Science," 1984).

³²Vico, *La Scienza Nuova del 1744*, ed. Nicolini, 167–271: "Passages from the versions of 1730, 1731 and c.1733 which were suppressed or substantially altered in the definitive version."

³³As in *Giambattista Vico Opere*, ed. Fausto Nicolini, in the series *La Letteratura Italiana: Storia e Testi*, vol. 43 (Milan and Naples, 1953); reprinted in a three-volume paperback by Einaudi, Turin, 1976.

to the two together as “*La Scienza Nuova Seconda*”—and further compounded by his inability to be consistent in doing so.

A second set of decisions by Nicolini determined how the texts of the *Scienza Nuova* were to be read. In the interests of “readability,” he altered spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing, and adopted a system of enumerating the paragraphs (*capoversi*, indicated in references by the sign §) as he determined them. In addition, Nicolini inserted chapter and section divisions of his own, along with numbers and titles of his devising—albeit indicated within square brackets. These changes were quickly accepted as standard, being adopted in whole or part by other editors, such as Paolo Rossi,³⁴ and incorporated into translations, including the English translation by Bergin and Fisch. Nicolini’s paragraph numbers in particular were almost universally adopted by scholars as a referencing system. Further to enhance the texts’ readability, Nicolini did not encumber his editions with the identification of sources; instead, he compiled a separate two-volume *Commento storico alla Seconda Scienza Nuova* (1949–50). But while this might help readability, it sowed further editorial confusion, beginning with a title which reinforced the elision of the versions of 1730 and 1744.³⁵ In the *Commento storico* Nicolini offered modern paraphrases of Vico’s more difficult passages, and set himself to identify passages where Vico’s thinking could be seen to have derived from the greatest “philosophers” and “philologists” of the past and among his “contemporaries.” The latter category Nicolini stretched forward to include later authors, notably the mid-eighteenth-century French oriental scholar Antoine Goguet, whose works Nicolini used to assess whether the conclusions Vico drew from his sources were accurate. In doing so Nicolini created a new source of confusion over who should count as Vico’s “contemporaries.”³⁶ Both the editions and the commentary were achievements of great industry and devoted scholarship, but they were also hostages to Nicolini’s ambition to be the editorial agent and intellectual arbiter of Vico’s “genius.”³⁷

Small steps in a better editorial direction were taken by Francesco Flora in an edition of *Tutte le opere* in 1957,³⁸ larger ones by Andrea Battistini in his two-volume edition of *Giambattista Vico Opere* in 1990.³⁹ The beneficiary of discussions during the early years of the Centro di Studi Vichiani over the need for new editions, Battistini sought to “restore” the texts as originally printed, especially that of 1725, while setting aside the

³⁴ Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova*, ed. Paolo Rossi (Milan, 1977). Reproducing the text of Nicolini’s 1953 edition of the *Scienza nuova* of 1744, Rossi maintained Nicolini’s division of the text into sections and chapters, but omitted Nicolini’s titles. Rossi also retained Nicolini’s paragraph divisions, but (without explanation) dispensed with his numbering. This edition is still cited by some scholars.

³⁵ Fausto Nicolini, *Commento storico alla Seconda Scienza Nuova*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1949–50).

³⁶ The confusion provoked the classic, exasperated article of Paolo Rossi, “Chi sono i contemporanei di Vico?,” *Rivista di Filosofia* 62 (1981), 51–82.

³⁷ Nicolini, *Commento storico*, 1: 12, for the characterization of Vico as “quel genio che era” (“the genius he was”).

³⁸ Giambattista Vico, *Tutte le opere di Giambattista Vico*, ed. Francesco Flora (Milan, 1957).

³⁹ Giambattista Vico, *Giambattista Vico Opere*, ed. Andrea Battistini, 2 vols. (Milan, 1990). The texts were preceded by an “Introduzione,” a detailed “Cronologia” of Vico’s life and publications, and a “Nota al testo e al commento,” 1: ix–lxi. Besides the *Vita* and the 1744 and 1725 versions of the *Scienza Nuova*, the *Opere* included selections from Vico’s early academic works, his poetry, and his letters.

problem of the relation between the 1730 and 1744 versions by including only the latter. He also provided extensive notes on all the texts he included in the *Opere*, including cross-references, paraphrases, and discussions of possible sources. There was, however, a limit to what Battistini could do in an edition designed to be accessible to readers general as well as scholarly, and he retained Nicolini's paragraphing and its enumeration, and continued to "modernize" the punctuation. The result was a convenient, finely produced and commercially published edition which replaced Nicolini's as the standard text of both the 1725 and 1744 versions for the purposes of scholarly reference and of translation, but which did not aspire to meet the standards of a critical edition.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the gap between the modern editions and the originals was bridged with facsimile reproductions of the latter. A facsimile of a (now lost) copy of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 was edited by Tullio Gregory and published in 1979;⁴¹ this was followed by two separate facsimiles of copies of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730.⁴² These enabled readers to "see" the *Scienza Nuova* as originally printed, but since they reproduced only the corrections added to the individual copies chosen for reproduction, they were not a substitute for a critical edition. Further to underline the importance of recognizing that there were three, not two, published versions of the *Scienza Nuova*, a combined (non-facsimile) edition of all three was published in a limited edition in the year 2000, and in a commercial edition in 2012.⁴³

The critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova*

The now completed critical edition was designed to reconstitute the text of the original edition of each successive published version of the *Scienza Nuova*, accompanied by the variants recorded in autograph manuscript corrections to extant copies of the 1725 and 1730 versions, and between the surviving autograph manuscript and the printed text of the version of 1744. The conception of the editorial task is explicitly "philological," within the scholarly discipline for which the Italian term is *lecdotica*, the reconstruction of the original texts. The materials for each reconstruction and the criteria used to establish texts and variants are set out in the volumes' respective introductions, which concentrate on the technical issues.

Reconstituting the original text of each version of the *Scienza Nuova* has meant abandoning all the changes introduced by Nicolini in order to make the texts more

⁴⁰Battistini's edition provided the basis for the English translations of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 by Leon Pompa (see above, note 16), and of 1744 by David Marsh, with an introduction by Anthony Grafton (London, 1999), and by Jason Taylor and Robert Miner, with an introduction by Giuseppe Mazzotta (New Haven and London, 2020). The helpfulness of Battistini's notes was gratefully acknowledged by both Pompa and Taylor and Miner.

⁴¹Giambattista Vico, *Principi di una Scienza Nuova intorno all natura delle nazioni*, Ristampa anastatica dell'edizione Napoli: Mosca 1725, ed. Tullio Gregory (Rome and Florence, 1979)

⁴²Giambattista Vico, *Principj di una Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni* (1730), ed. F. Tessitore and M. Sanna (Naples, 1991); Vico, *Principj d'una scienza nuova d'intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni* (Napoli 1730, con postilli autografe, ms XIII H 59, ed. F. Lomonaco and F. Tessitore, with a "Nota al testo" by M. Sanna (Naples: Liguori, 2002). The latter was a facsimile of one of the copies of the original in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples, with autograph manuscript annotations and additions.

⁴³F. Tessitore and M. Sanna, eds., *Giambattista Vico* (Rome, 2000); Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova. Le tre edizioni del 1725, 1730 e 1744*, ed. M. Sanna and V. Vitiello (Milan, 2012).

“readable.” Thus the original division of the 1725 version into “chapters” and the versions of 1730 and 1744 into “books” has been restored, along with the numbers and titles used for these and for further divisions within the chapters or books. Nicolini’s additional sectional divisions, numbering, and titles have been removed. Likewise restored is the original paragraphing. This has meant abandoning the additional paragraph divisions introduced by Nicolini to reduce their (sometimes considerable) length, along with his paragraph numbers, retained by Battistini and widely used by scholars. Finally, the original spelling and punctuation are restored. While the original pagination could not be reproduced, those page numbers are indicated within the texts between slashes, as /number/. The variants are now those specific to each version; the idea that the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 should be regarded as a source of variants for the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744 has been definitively repudiated. The variants are printed at the foot of each page of text, with the source of the variant identified by an abbreviation. A list of these abbreviations and the extant copies of the printed text or the manuscripts to which they refer (and their locations) is appended to the editorial introductions to *La Scienza Nuova 1725 and 1730*. For *La Scienza Nuova 1744*, the only source of variants (other than a few editorial corrections) is the autograph manuscript of the complete text. In addition, the critical editors of the texts of 1725 and 1730 identify what they take to be Vico’s sources, ancient and modern, referencing these in abbreviated form at the foot of the page, above the variants. The abbreviations and the sources they identify are then listed separately, and there are separate indexes to the pages at which the ancient and the modern sources are identified.

These editorial procedures are common to the critical editions of all three versions. But each version has also presented specific textual challenges, the editors’ responses to which not only enhance appreciation of the achievement of the critical edition as a whole, but also point to the fresh questions it raises.

La Scienza Nuova 1730

The choice of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 as the first subject of a critical edition was deliberate. Not only was this the edition with which scholars were least familiar, but Nicolini’s conviction that extracts from it and from manuscripts associated with it should be printed as supplements to the version of 1744 had positively obscured its independent existence and therefore its potential significance. By editing the *Scienza Nuova 1730* first, therefore, the critical editors were able to restore its textual independence alongside the versions of 1725 and 1744; they would give scholars access to the whole work, while also giving themselves the opportunity to sort out the confusions regarding the additional manuscript material, both Vico’s “corrections” to the printed copies and his “Corrections, Improvements, and Additions.”

The challenge facing them began with the interventions which Vico continued to make in the text as it was printed. The first such intervention was the abandonment, after printing had begun, of a lengthy preface, entitled “Novella Letteraria.” This has not survived, but in it Vico apparently rehearsed at length both the provocation of the Leipzig review (perhaps including matter like that in his *Vici Vindiciae*), and the course of his dealings with the Venetians, including all their correspondence. The “Novella Letteraria” was replaced by a much shorter account of the Venetian episode, “Occasione

di meditarasi quest'opera" ("Circumstances of This Work's Conception"). This left Vico with the remaining eighty-six pages occupied by the "Novella Letteraria" to replace with new text. To do so, he commissioned the engraved frontispiece, and accompanied it with the "Spiegazione" ("Explanation"), serving as an introduction to the work. The graft was successful, apart from leaving an apparently stray contents page, entitled "Trascelto dell' Annotazioni, e dell'Opera dintorno alla natura commune delle nazioni," placed awkwardly between the chronological table and the "Annotazioni" following it.⁴⁴

If the substitution of text created few problems for the critical editors, Vico's corrections are another matter. While the printer waited for the official "approvals" on behalf of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, Vico added a first set of "Correzioni, Miglioramenti, ed Aggiunte"—"Corrections, Improvements, and Additions." These were appended to the text after the "Tavola D'Indici," with the approvals, when they arrived, after them. A second impression created the opportunity for a second set of "Corrections, Improvements, and Additions," these preceded by a "Letter from the author to Don Francesco Spinelli, Prince of Scalea," thanking the prince for his praise and for having identified three errors himself. Meanwhile Vico took advantage of the delay caused by waiting for the approvals, and began correcting printed copies by hand. Sixty-three copies of the original print run are known to survive, all with manuscript interventions by Vico. Once printing was complete, and copies were distributed, sold, or retained, he drafted two further, much longer, sets of "Corrections, Improvements, and Additions" in manuscript, both numbered "third" by Vico, but separated as "third" and "fourth" by the critical editors (as by Nicolini before them). The "third" set the critical editors date to 1731, the "fourth" to 1732–4 (at the latest). Both of these autograph manuscripts are in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, and are clearly connected to two printed copies also in the Biblioteca Nazionale, which are marked up as if for a future reprinting. Nicolini suggested that one copy (H_1) was marked up with the "third" set of corrections, the other (H_2) with the "fourth." The critical editors, by contrast, believe that in H_1 the "fourth" set of corrections was superimposed on the "third," with results both confusing and barely legible; H_2 , by contrast, was marked up with only the "fourth" set of corrections, resulting in a much clearer text for the prospective printer.⁴⁵

Faced with all this, the critical editors made two decisions.⁴⁶ The first was to include Vico's manuscript corrections in the sixty-three surviving printed copies as variants, and to provide them at the foot of the page of their printed text. There they are identified by the abbreviations assigned to each printed copy. To these are added a very few "in-press" variants and editorial corrections. Altogether there are over three thousand variants in *Scienza Nuova 1730*, so identifying them and enumerating the copies in which they occur was no mean editorial labor. Almost all are corrections for errors of typography, including punctuation, along with misspellings and misdatings. In each case, the editors have decided whether to incorporate the correction, or let the original stand; occasionally, they correct an obvious error themselves. Thus on the opening

⁴⁴For the editors' comments on these changes, *SN30*, "Introduzione," 1–2. "Trascelto" might be translated as "Select" or "Principal" Contents—but nothing followed.

⁴⁵*SN30*, "Introduzione," 3–7.

⁴⁶Discussed and explained in *SN30*, "Introduzione," 8–10, 11–12.

page of text (page 21 of the critical edition), original printed capitalizations are left to stand, but a name and a date are corrected (Vico's correction of "Leibnizio" for the original "Leibrizio"; the editors' correction of 1728 for the original 1729). In every case all the possible variants are given at the foot of the page, so that readers can see and judge the choice that has been made.

The second decision was to reprint the successive "Correzioni, Miglioramenti, ed Aggiunte" in their entirety as "Appendices" to the text itself. They are printed under the running heads CMA1, CMA2, CMA3, and CMA4. These are accompanied by the *aggiunte*—additions—which they called for. Thus the CMA2 are preceded by the Letter to Spinelli. The CMA3 are followed by the "Pratica di questa Scienza"; by two "Ragionamenti," one on the Roman Law of the Twelve Tables, the other on the Tribonian Laws; and finally by a set of "Other additions." The CMA4 are followed by the three passages which Vico now wished to see reprinted from Chapter 3 of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, numbers XXIX, XXXVI, and XLI.

Making these decisions, the critical editors clearly separate the "variants" from the successive "Correzioni, Miglioramenti, ed Aggiunte." The corrections inserted in manuscript into the printed copies H₁ and H₂ from CMA3 and 4 are included as variants, but the successive sets of corrections, improvements, and additions are not themselves treated as the basis for editing the text. In particular, the CMA4 are not used to create a text of the *Scienza Nuova* revised as Vico apparently wished it to be for a reedition. For all that he sought to combine the versions of 1730 and 1744 to create a summative *Scienza Nuova*, Nicolini did not do this either; but the critical editors underline the importance of leaving the CMA to be read as they stood, in the printed copies (CMA1 and CMA2) and in manuscript (CMA3 and CMA4). Only by doing so are scholars enabled to assess the several stages in Vico's thinking about how his text should change and develop. Some of his revisions pass forward and are developed through the successive CMA, but others are dropped. A case in point is the noninclusion of the "Pratica di questa scienza" in CMA4 after it was attached to CMA3, which would seem to indicate that Vico had thought better of the idea, leaving the "Pratica" as an expression of one phase of Vico's thinking only, associating it directly neither with the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 nor with the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744.⁴⁷

What emerges from the carefully curated detail of the critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 is a story of a striking transformation. Here is a Vico who, after trying and failing between 1727 and 1729 to publish two different versions of his "New Science" (versions related to the *Scienza Nuova* actually published in 1725 in ways we cannot now know), abruptly and with astonishing rapidity conceived and composed a new version, the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730, and then spent the next four years repeatedly attempting to correct, improve, and add to that new edition. Bringing this Vico to light through the mass of texts that this produced is the cardinal achievement of Cristofolini and Sanna as editor and collaborator, and made their critical edition of *La Scienza Nuova 1730* a breakthrough in Vico scholarship.

⁴⁷Following Nicolini's inclusion of the "Pratica" among the variants of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744, it was from 1984 included in the Bergin and Fisch translation of *The New Science*, pp. 427–30, as the "Practic of the New Science." But it was never more than a proposed, then discarded, "addition" to the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730.

La Scienza Nuova 1744

By contrast with the challenges presented by the *Scienza Nuova 1730*, the editing of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744, now undertaken jointly by Cristofolini and Sanna, was more straightforward. For the *Scienza Nuova 1744* represents almost the ideal type of a critical edition, being based on a published *editio princeps* which can be checked against a contemporary autograph manuscript, marked up (by another) for printing. Vico having died before printing, there are no autograph (or other) manuscript corrections to printed copies. The task of identifying variants is accordingly much simpler than in the cases of either the *Scienza Nuova 1730* or (as we shall see) *Scienza Nuova 1725*, and there are no more than 264 in *Scienza Nuova 1744*. The editors mostly—but not always—prefer the manuscript to the published reading; in some cases, they offer their own. Occasionally they note and prefer the readings of Ferrari or Nicolini. No in-press variants are identified. The text itself they reproduce with title page, Vico's portrait, and frontispiece together at the start (they were not always so placed in bound copies of the first edition), followed by the dedication to Cardinal Acquaviva and the formal approvals. They do not include Vico's letter of thanks to Jean Le Clerc of 1722, present in the original, on the ground that it has been printed in the critical edition of Vico's *Epistole*. In their brief "Premessa dei curatori" (Editors' Introduction), Cristofolini and Sanna note some of the continuities and differences from the *Scienza Nuova 1730*, including the addition of five new axioms and fifteen chapters, and the absorption of material from the "Ragionamenti" included in the CMA3 of 1731 (but not the "Pratica"). But they do not identify or annotate these changes in the text itself, thus rigorously separating the versions of 1730 and 1744. The separation is reinforced by an explicit injunction to abandon reference to the "*Scienza nuova prima, seconda o terza*" (first, second or third), despite Vico's own occasional use of this enumeration, and to distinguish the texts strictly by date of publication.⁴⁸

The very sparseness, the unencumbered character, of the critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova 1744* highlights the text's finality. This is the text of the *Scienza Nuova* as the editors believe Vico wished it to be read in its final form, his very last word (which is not the same as saying that it constitutes the "summa" of his philosophy, a matter of interpretive judgment).

La Scienza Nuova 1725

Last to appear in the critical edition was the first version of the *Scienza Nuova* to be published, *La Scienza Nuova 1725*. The irony, however, only serves to underline the independence of this text—and therefore, as its editor, Enrico Nuzzo, notes in his Introduction, the desirability of referring to it by its date rather than enumerating it as the first in a continuous sequence.⁴⁹ While following the editorial protocols established by Cristofolini and Sanna, Nuzzo also faced several new challenges specific to his text; not for nothing is his Introduction the longest of the three.

⁴⁸SN44, Premessa dei curatori, xvii–xxi. For a (favorable) comment on the editors' textual readings see Andrea Battistini, "La *Scienza Nuova 1744* in Edizione Critica," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 45 (2015), 23–41.

⁴⁹SN25, "Introduzione," vii.

The text itself of the *Scienza Nuova* 1725 has a clear structure, straightforward to reproduce. The editorial challenge facing Nuzzo lay in the textual variants. For in 1725 Vico corrected the printed copies immediately, as they came from the press. Doing so, he made it possible for the printer to include the corrections in later copies as printing continued, turning authorial into in-press corrections. This in turn has enabled his critical editor to identify individual copies with distinct phases of printing. At the time of editing, Nuzzo was aware of thirty-six surviving copies, of which he was able to inspect thirty-five; another copy, now unavailable, was inspected by Benedetto Croce, who recorded eight autograph corrections. Vico made autograph manuscript corrections to twenty-four copies, almost all of misprints, while in twenty-eight of the thirty-six copies three lines of the final page have been corrected with a printed slip of paper pasted over them. Only five copies contain no interventions, and one of these Nuzzo denominated as the *editio princeps*, or copy text. Having done so, he identified and recorded the variants in other copies, suggesting that there may have been as many as seven states of printing, as manuscript and unannounced in-press corrections were adopted in subsequent printed copies.⁵⁰ To these variants Nuzzo has added a good many small editorial corrections of his own: typical examples include substituting “e” (and) for “&,” correcting word endings, adding or removing apostrophes, and so on. Nuzzo defends his changes as adhering to strictly “conservative” principles, which he discusses in the Introduction, and differentiates from the “liberties” taken by Nicolini and even Battistini in the interests of clarifying the text. He occasionally corrects Vico’s Greek, but not his Latin, holding that correction even on the grounds of “impossibility” should be very rare.⁵¹ In total, there are some two hundred variants and editorial corrections, all but a very few of them minor, and all indicated at the foot of the page.

The variant of most significance, to which Nuzzo devotes several pages of comment, was the substitution of nine lines (in the original printing, four in the critical edition) of the dedication to Cardinal Corsini. This variant has gone unnoticed hitherto, and requires explanation both elaborate and cautious, since it occurred in only four copies, and appears to represent a weakening of the celebratory tone of the dedication. Nuzzo suggests that the variant was an earlier form of the dedication, and may have derived from the now unavailable “*Scienza nuova in forma negativa*.”⁵² The problem is further complicated by the variant occurring in a copy (“H,” now at Harvard) which appears to have been used as a copy text for the projected 1729 reissue of the 1725 version with Vico’s additions and corrections. Nuzzo speculates that for this purpose Vico used a discarded copy of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, whose weaker dedication he had had to correct. In the critical edition itself, Nuzzo prints the strong version, with the weaker

⁵⁰ SN25, “Introduzione,” ix–xiii, with the list of the copies examined with their abbreviations, followed by the copies tentatively identified with the seven different states of printing, at li–lii.

⁵¹ SN25, “Introduzione,” xxviii–xli. Nuzzo sets his caution off against Malcolm’s distinction between Hobbes’s “bad” and “impossible” Latin, and Malcolm’s decision to correct the not infrequent instances of the latter.

⁵² As Nuzzo observes, the variant may even have been the draft dedication Vico had sent to Filippo Monti for comment in November 1724. See above, note 14.

as the variant at the foot of the page.⁵³ As well as attesting to the delicacy of dedications, the variant underlines the complexity of the process of revision between 1724 and 1729, and the extent to which that process can be marked off from the rewriting of 1730. This is not incompatible with Nuzzo's observation that the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 is distinguished by "writing of great linearity and striking beauty." The very limited time available between composition, printing, and circulation of the published text; the failure of the Venetian reedition; and the decision, late in 1729, to start again ensured that the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 remained a work sufficient unto itself.⁵⁴

Sources for the *Scienza Nuova*

In his edition of *Leviathan*, Noel Malcolm decided to set strict limits on the identification of Hobbes's "sources," likening the pursuit of allusions, particularly to those with whom Hobbes disagreed, to "opening flood-gates ... very difficult to close."⁵⁵ In the case of the *Scienza Nuova*, however, the attempt was harder for its editors to resist. Not only was there an editorial tradition of doing so, Nicolini and Battistini having put their considerable scholarly resources into the effort (even if Nicolini's *Commento storico* in particular might be regarded as a prime example of opened floodgates). But Vico himself frequently identified his sources, both by alluding to the poets and historians of antiquity who had recorded the myths he interpreted, and by naming the modern scholars and philosophers from whom he drew information or with whose arguments he wanted to take issue. The problem facing Vico's editors is that he did so, as the critical editors put it, in a manner "eruditissimo e al tempo stesso spericolato," at once erudite and reckless.⁵⁶

In editing the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730, Cristofolini and Sanna deliberately sought to be less speculative in the identification of sources than either Nicolini or Battistini allowed themselves to be. On the advice of their publishers (presumably Tessitore, director of the Centro di Studi Vichiani), they decided that only authors and/or works explicitly referenced by Vico in the text were to be identified, while names—"Epicurus," for example—which were used as emblematic of philosophical positions were excluded. "Modern" works they listed in editions published prior to 1730, on the ground that these were potentially available to Vico.⁵⁷ The resulting choice of edition is nonetheless sometimes puzzling. For example, Grotius's *De iure pacis ac belli* (the title

⁵³SN25, "Introduzione," xx–xxv; the dedication with the footnoted variant is on pages 3–4 of the main text.

⁵⁴SN25, "Introduzione," xxv–xxviii, where Nuzzo adds that he will expand upon several of the detailed editorial issues raised but not resolved in his introduction, including those associated with the Harvard copy, in a supplement of *Paralipomeni*, in preparation. Professor Nuzzo also informs me that (as is always a possibility) three further copies of the original printing have come to light following publication of the critical edition. These will be discussed in forthcoming articles in the *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 55 (2025). It is unlikely that these newly discovered copies will alter the substance of his conclusions regarding the variants.

⁵⁵Malcolm, *Introduction*, to Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 324–5.

⁵⁶SN30, "Introduzione," 10; SN25, "Introduzione," xlii.

⁵⁷SN30, "Introduzione," 10–11, and 647–59; Bibliografia delle opere moderne citate; Indice delle fonti antiche; Indice delle opere moderne citate.

as listed) is identified in the first, Paris edition of 1625, and in Jean Barbeyrac's French translation with the notes of J. F. Gronovius, Amsterdam, 1726, when Vico had read it with Gronovius's notes in the 1710s, in Latin. Hobbes's *De Cive* is listed in its first, privately printed, Paris edition of 1642, rather than in the more widely available edition published by Elzevier in Amsterdam in 1647, which Hobbes had revised and extended, and which was reprinted in later editions and collections of Hobbes's works.⁵⁸ Perhaps aware of the difficulties they had faced with the 1730 version, the same editors decided not to undertake a fresh identification of Vico's sources for the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744, and simply referred readers to the *Scienza Nuova 1730* for its indexes of ancient and modern sources, and the accompanying Bibliography. Given the differences between the two versions, readers may not find such cross-referencing easy.

In some contrast, Nuzzo's approach to the identification of the "sources" of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 is of a piece with the thoroughness of his approach to the text. While acknowledging the problems created by Vico's cavalier attitude to references, he would go further than Cristofolini and Sanna. Particularly valuable is the detail of Nuzzo's identification of Vico's ancient and medieval sources, where he is alert to the "chains" of references created by the survival of texts within texts, and wherever possible identifies the passages within a work to which Vico was alluding. The learning here is impressive. In the case of Vico's "modern" sources, the choice of editions is narrowed not only to those published before 1725, but also by reference to copies known to have been available to him in Neapolitan libraries, notably that of Giuseppe Valletta, whose rich collection was open to Vico and subsequently acquired by the library of the Oratorian Convent of the Girolamini.⁵⁹ This results in a more likely choice of a Latin edition of Grotius's *De jure belli ac pacis* with the notes of J. F. Gronovius, published in Utrecht, 1696, along with a 1664 edition of J. H. Boeckler's Latin Commentary on Grotius's work.⁶⁰ That Vico had access to Hobbes's *De Cive* in the 1642 Paris edition remains, however, unlikely.⁶¹

These missteps are from one point of view serious: users of the critical edition of Vico's *Scienza Nuova* cannot assume that the editions of works listed in the "Bibliography of Cited Modern Works" (*Scienza Nuova 1730*) and the "List of Sources" (*Scienza Nuova 1725*) were those used by Vico. From another viewpoint, however, identification of a particular edition is unlikely often to be critical to understanding Vico's use of its author's arguments. Especially in relation to philosophers whom Vico identified as his targets—Grotius, Selden, Pufendorf, Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle—what mattered to Vico was the arguments he attributed to them, not any particular passage in

⁵⁸On the publication history of *De Cive* see Howard Warrender, "Editor's Introduction," in Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive: The Latin Version*, ed. Warrender (Oxford, 1983), 1–29.

⁵⁹On which see Fabrizio Lomonaco, "Valletta, Vico e i Girolamini," in Lomonaco, *Traversie e opportunità: Studi su Giambattista Vico nel 350° anniversario della nascita* (Milan, 2019), 219–42.

⁶⁰SN25, "Introduzione," xli–xlv, and Elenco delle Fonti, lv–lxv.

⁶¹See Emilio Sergio, "Hobbes a Napoli (1661–1744): note sulla ricezione della vita e dell'opera di Hobbes nel previchiano napoletano e nell'opera di Vico," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 37 (2007), 113–41; subsequently "The *Leviathan* in Naples: Vico's Response to Hobbes's Life and Work," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33/2 (2010), 227–44. Sergio suggests that the copies of *De Cive* available in the Valletta collection were printed in Amsterdam in 1696. Earlier editions, including that of 1647, appear to have been added to the library of the Girolamini after 1726.

their texts, a fortiori as those attributed arguments frequently combined tropes generically identified with their author with specific implications of Vico's own deducing. To take an obvious example, it is not clear that Vico needed to have read Pierre Bayle's *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (1680) to grasp that the hypothesis of a society of atheists was one he must refute.⁶² A more specific and revealing case is Vico's comment on Hobbes's failure to see that his "*fieri, e violenti*" ("*fierce and violent men*") could only have been tamed and socialized by religion. Accusing Hobbes of being led astray by Epicurus' doctrine of chance, Vico referred to the *de Eruditio hujus saeculi inventis* of Georg Pasch for the suggestion that Hobbes had sought to go beyond Greek philosophy by studying "l'Uomo in tutta la società del Gener'Umano" ("man in the whole society of the human race"), before adding that the ambition would have been unthinkable without the inspiration of Christianity.⁶³ As the point is phrased, there was no need for Vico to have read *De Cive* (or the Latin *Leviathan*): Pasch provided a full account (with extensive quotation from *De Cive*) of Hobbes's "state of nature," and of his likely debts to Epicurus, Lucretius, Horace, Diodorus Siculus, and Cicero, debts confirmed with a long quotation from Samuel Parker. The assertion that Hobbes sought to study man in the whole "society" of the human race was, however, Vico's own, as was the observation that it was Christianity which had made the ambition possible.⁶⁴ Even when he cited the names of scholars (rather than philosophers), such as those evoked in the "Annotations" to the chronological table, it was the claim with which the scholar was associated which interested Vico, not a specific passage in their work.

The achievement of the critical edition—and its limits

Setting aside the identification of "sources," the critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* puts philological understanding of the texts on a new level. This is the *Scienza Nuova* reconstituted as close to its original published versions, with Vico's own corrections, as the editors can achieve. The value of the critical edition extends to form as well as content: not only Vico's choice of words, with variants to show how he corrected them, but also the layout of the work, its division into "chapters" or "books," the enumeration or subtitling of its subdivisions, and its paragraphing. In relation to the last, respect for the texts as they present themselves in the critical edition entails that scholars should no longer use the paragraph enumeration of Nicolini and Battistini as their primary reference system. There will be downsides to this, since citation of the numbered paragraphs has been ubiquitous in Vico scholarship since the mid-twentieth century, and

⁶²As in the opening sentence and again later in the same opening paragraph of SN25, 9–10. Nuzzo supplies the reference to the *Pensées diverses*, but Vico does not name Bayle until the work's very last sentence: SN25, 195.

⁶³SN30, 100: Degnità XXIX, with the draft additions to this passage in CMA3, at 421–2, and CMA4, at 560, which add conceptual detail which would not be included in SN44, 68: Degnità XXXI (Battistini §179).

⁶⁴The work is identified by Cristofolini and Sanna (SN30, 650, 658) by the title Vico gave it, as published in Leipzig in 1700. Its actual title was *De novis inventis, quorum accuratiori cultui facem praetulit antiquitas, tractatus* (Leipzig, 1700), with the passage on Hobbes's state of nature at 197–203.

the numbering is reproduced in the translations.⁶⁵ For this reason (in addition to its convenience and rich apparatus of notes), scholars may wish to refer also to the enumerated paragraphs of the versions of 1725 and 1744 included in Battistini's edition of the *Opere*. But they should now acknowledge the primacy of Vico's own paragraphing.

It is no disrespect to the critical edition, however, to combine gratitude for the project's realization with recalling what it does not attempt to do. The editors' introductions do not rehearse the story of each text's composition, as told above, but assume that it will already be familiar from Vico's letters and autobiography. Given that the critical edition of the *Opere* already includes the former and will include the latter, the decision was understandable, but without that story the dynamic of composition and rewriting of the successive versions of the *Scienza Nuova* is obscured. The drama of 1729–30 in particular is discounted.

In the absence of readily available sources or scholarship, knowledge of the publishing and book history of the *Scienza Nuova* could not similarly be taken for granted by the critical editors. Subordinated to the editors' philological priorities, however, it remains underdeveloped. One feature of the publication process they could not ignore was the remarkable scale of Vico's intervention in individual printed copies of both the 1725 and 1730 editions. That the early modern printing process enabled such intervention, creating multiple opportunities for authors to follow Erasmus's example in revising, rededicating, and substituting copy, is familiar ground, but the extent to which Vico exploited those opportunities was almost certainly unusual by the early eighteenth century. The consequences were particularly dramatic in 1725, when Vico both rewrote his dedication and corrected individual copies as they were printed, yielding Nuzzo's hypothesis of seven successive states of printing as the manuscript corrections were incorporated into subsequent printed copies. In 1730 Vico was able to substitute copy during printing and to enter his corrections after printing was completed and while the publisher waited for the necessary approvals. That all surviving copies contain corrections suggests that he corrected the entire print run, again quite unusual.

Format was another aspect of publishing of intense concern to Vico himself. Since books were printed 'at the expense' of the printer (as Mosca and Gaetano and Steffano Elia explicitly stated on the title pages of the 1730 and 1744 versions), their choice of size would prevail, unless the author could obtain subvention from a patron. In the absence of archives for Mosca and Elia, the prospects of learning more about the finances of publishing Vico are limited. But Vico clearly sought the patronage which would make possible a format better than the duodecimo printed by Mosca in 1725 and 1730, and he believed that his best prospect of such patronage lay in Rome. A precedent had been set by his fellow Neapolitan, Biagio Garofalo (born 1676), who had moved to Rome in 1704, and whose *Considerazioni intorno alla poesia degli Ebrei e dei Greci* was printed there in 1707 by Francesco Gonzaga as a very handsome quarto. The work carried an "approval" by Giusto Fontanini, librarian and aide to Cardinal Imperiali, along with the imprimatur of the Master of the Sacred Palace and a dedication to the Holy

⁶⁵ As well as providing Nicolini and Battistini's paragraph numbering, the most recent English translation of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744, by Taylor and Miner, uses indentation to indicate the original paragraphing—but then divides even Nicolini's paragraphs in the interest of readability, disrupting the text still further.

Father himself, Clement XI.⁶⁶ Vico's correspondence attests to a personal connection with Garofalo by 1710, and a warm exchange of letters and books in 1721 confirms their mutual esteem.⁶⁷ With patrons such as Garofalo enjoyed, Vico might well reason, the *Scienza Nuova* could be just as handsomely printed. In the event, he was disappointed, Lorenzo Corsini's successive refusals, first as cardinal and then as Pope, to subsidize the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 and of 1730 condemning both to a duodecimo.⁶⁸ That Vico and his printers were able to add the frontispiece to the editions of 1730 and 1744, and presumably to pay the artists involved, suggests that they had some resources, while a subsidy from the new dedicatee in 1744, Cardinal Acquaviva, may have made possible publication in an octavo. But there appears to be no surviving evidence to support these inferences.

Beyond Vico's control, by contrast, was the possibility of a reference to the Holy Office or Index. In the case of the proposed Venetian reedition of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, the intervention came from an ecclesiastical authority, but a reference could easily have been made by a hostile individual. There is no evidence that Vico knew of the reference in 1729, but it is highly unlikely that he was unaware of the danger in general: his approaches to Cardinal Corsini may well have had the additional motive of securing his protection. But even that would have carried no guarantee: for all the patronage it enjoyed, Garofalo's *Considerazioni* had been referred to the Index in 1713, and the process had only concluded in 1718.⁶⁹ In all the circumstances, and in spite of Vico's efforts to secure Roman patronage, the obscurity of a duodecimo published in Naples may, after all, have provided the *Scienza Nuova* with a better protection from the attentions of the Index and the Holy Office. By 1744, the election of Prospero Lambertini as Pope Benedict XIV in 1740 would have reduced the danger of a reference of the octavo edition.⁷⁰

⁶⁶Biagio Garofalo, *Considerazioni intorno alla poesia degli Ebrei e dei Greci: Al Santissimo, e Beatissimo Padre Clemente Undecimo Pontefice Massimo* (Rome, 1707), v–xv (Dedication “Santissimo Padre”), xvi (“Approvazione”, “Imprimatur”).

⁶⁷*Epistole*, 83–4, Vico to [Apostolo Zeno], 31 Oct. 1710, asking Zeno to provide Garofalo with a copy of Vico's *de Antiquissima Italarum Sapientia* and expressing obligations to him; 94–5, Biagio Garofalo to Vico, 13 Sept. 1721, thanking Vico for the present of his *De constantia* and announcing delivery to Vico of the first volume of Garofalo's *Dissertationum Miscellanearum Pars Prima* (Rome, 1718); and Silvia Caianello and Manuela Sanna, eds., “Una lettera inedita di G. B. Vico a B. Garofalo del 4 Ottobre 1721,” *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 26–7 (1996–7), 325–31, in which Vico lamented to Garofalo the contemporary neglect of the ancient and oriental languages.

⁶⁸Even so, Vico would make a virtue of the size when in the *Vici Vindiciae* he repeatedly chastised the “unknown vagabond” for enlarging the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 into an octavo. Exactitude over format evidently trumped disappointment.

⁶⁹This episode has yet to be fully explored. The decision, of which Garofalo was informed, was that he might publish a second edition having removed certain passages. The sources in the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede (ACDF) in the Vatican are Index Diarii vol. 14 and Index Protocolli CCCC and DDDD. For general accounts of Garofalo, and the public controversy his work had provoked (on which there is a literature), see Manuela Sanna's edition of the *Considerazioni* (Milan, 2014), “Introduzione”; and Elisabeth Garms-Cornides, “Zur Geschichte der geistigen Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und Italien im 18. Jahrhundert: Der Abate Biagio Garofalo,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 75 (1977), 77–99.

⁷⁰As an index consultor Lambertini had acted as a reader of Garofalo's *Considerazioni* in 1714, doing his best to avert its censure. Once Pope, he instituted a cautious reform of the Index, shifting the emphasis onto

If the editors of the critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* address its publishing and book history only tangentially, they abstain altogether from any discussion of the development of Vico's conception of his "new science" across the three published versions of the work. There is no attempt to follow or expand upon Giuseppe Ferrari's precocious example in cross-referencing the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725 with the *Diritto universale*, and in identifying passages which the *Scienza Nuova* of 1744 subtracted from or added to the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730. A still larger question, however, is one which Ferrari and after him Nicolini effectively precluded by treating the 1730 edition as a draft of the definitive version of 1744—but which the critical edition of *La Scienza Nuova 1730* has at last brought into focus: how and why did Vico so abruptly and radically reframe the presentation of his "new science" in 1730? This was not simply a matter of reorganizing the material already contained in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, of adding the iconoclastic analysis of Homer's poems, and of developing the account of the ideal historical *corso* followed by all nations. For in 1730 Vico introduced three new steps into the presentation of his "new science": a complex pictorial image, whose explanation amounted to an abridgment of his argument as a whole; a chronological table with a commentary purporting to explain why all chronologies other than the sacred were fables; and a set of 109 (eventually 114) axioms with brief explanatory corollaries in which he set out the key principles of his science. Why did he choose these three means of presenting his science—what were they designed to do?

While the philological priorities of the critical edition may have excluded any attempt to answer these questions, it does seem surprising that—as far as I am aware—no study since the first publication of the *Scienza Nuova 1730* in 2004 has attempted to address the three new features together.⁷¹ What Vico was doing in 1730 thus remains underexplained.⁷² Despite declaring that he had adopted another approach, Vico himself gave no indication where the new features had come from, apart from suggesting that he reused and reordered material from the "additions" he had drawn up for the aborted Venetian reedition of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725.⁷³ To conclude this article, therefore, I shall briefly examine the three new ways in which Vico introduced the work in 1730, and offer an interpretation of their connecting thread. As the least studied of the three, the chronological table, I shall suggest, repays particular examination.

guidance in advance of publication, on which see Patrizia Delpiano, *Il governo della letteratura: Chiesa e libri nell'Italia del Settecento* (Bologna, 2007).

⁷¹As early as 2004, Rossi remarked that the literature devoted to Vico was *sterminata*, too extensive for anyone to be aware of it all. Paolo Rossi, "Che tipo di scienza è la *Scienza Nuova* di Vico?", *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 59/2 (2004), 409–33, at 413. The present writer's observation is all the more subject to this qualification, and open to correction.

⁷²Two suggestive, short accounts of the development of the *Scienza Nuova* which do include reflections on the novelty of the 1730 edition are Paolo Cristofolini, *La Scienza Nuova di Vico: Introduzione alla lettura* (Rome, 1995); and Ruggiero, *Jean-Baptiste Vico*.

⁷³*Vita*, 77–8: "il Vico si die' a meditarne un'altra condotta"; freely translated by Fisch and Bergin in the *Autobiography*, 192, as "Vico hit upon a new plan."

A new “new science” in 1730?

The first of his innovations in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 was the frontispiece, accompanied by the “Explanation” which Vico explicitly intended to be “the introduction to the work.” Commissioning the frontispiece is unlikely to have been simple, especially as Vico and his printer did so after printing had begun, and Vico needed the image and its explanation to fill the specific number of pages left after his decision to drop the “Novella Letteraria.” The chosen artists, Domenico Antonio Vaccaro and engraver Antonio Baldi, were not minor practitioners, both being associates of the leading painter in Naples at the time, Francesco Solimena.⁷⁴ Given the detail of the explanation which followed, they must have worked to Vico’s precise instructions. The idea of a frontispiece illustrating the major themes of the work to follow was by this time well established. In his *Commento storico* on the text of 1744, Nicolini suggested that Vico’s immediate inspiration may have been the Earl of Shaftesbury, who came to Naples in 1711, dying there in 1713, just before publication of the second edition of his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* in 1714, with a set of engravings and an account of “The tablatore of the Judgement of Hercules.” Always keen to put Vico in the company of the greatest philosophers among his predecessors, Nicolini also suggested that Shaftesbury might have shown him the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, and recommended him to give the figure of Metaphysics the same stature as Leviathan.⁷⁵ A much more precise context for Vico’s image has recently been suggested by Genoveffa Palumbo, who places the frontispiece of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 alongside those in the works of the historians Bianchini, Muratori, and Mabillon, all of which depicted “historical,” archaeological materials. In Vico’s case, however, Palumbo underlines the unusual detail in both image and succeeding explanation: for Vico the objects depicted were not simply evidences of particular places or moments in the past, but representative of concepts between which he would draw connections. The distinctively conceptual ambition of the *Scienza Nuova* was what Vico wanted the frontispiece to convey.⁷⁶

Even on its own terms, the accompanying “Explanation” is not easy to follow: dense and uneven, it is an “introduction” which requires a good knowledge of the work to come in order to be understood. It must be likely that Vico expanded—and perhaps also, in places, contracted—what he planned to say in order to fit the “Explanation” into the pages he had to fill. Nevertheless, it is clear that Vico now meant to equip the *Scienza Nuova* with an introduction which set out its conceptual structure. As the variants and “Corrections” to the 1730 edition illustrate, Vico continued to give it his close attention, beginning with the addition to the second paragraph of his most ambitious conceptual claim, that his science was to be understood as “*una Teologia Civile*”

⁷⁴Rodney Palmer, “I nomi di ‘chi le ha fatte’ sulle incisioni nei libri stampati a Napoli intorno al 1700,” in Anna Maria Rao, ed., *Editoria e cultura a Napoli nel XVIII secolo* (Naples, 1998), 117–53, esp. 145–53, specifically contradicts the assumption that Vaccaro and Baldi were minor artists, and wonders whether Vico may have consulted Solimena himself.

⁷⁵Nicolini, *Commento storico*, 1: 21.

⁷⁶Genoveffa Palumbo, *Le porte della storia: Letà moderna attraverso antiporte e frontespizi figurati* (Rome, 2012), 139–41, 174–84.

della Divina Provvidenza,” expanded in the fourth set of “Corrections” (and in the published version of 1744), into “una *Teologia Civile Ragionata della Divina Provvidenza*.”⁷⁷ The formulation has been straightforwardly translated as “a rational civil theology of divine providence,”⁷⁸ but since the significance of the individual terms was neither obvious nor immediately explained—was it “rational” rather than natural, “civil” rather than Christian, a “theology” rather than a philosophy?—and it was only occasionally repeated later in the work, it was not a simple key to what was to follow. Even so, it was a striking declaration of conceptual intent.⁷⁹

Considerable scholarly attention has also been directed to the third of Vico’s presentational innovations in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730, his recourse to “axioms” to set down the “elements” of his science. The full range of terms which Vico deployed to characterize his propositions—“axioms,” *degnità*, “definitions,” “questions”;⁸⁰ elsewhere he also used the term “postulates”⁸¹—is hard to parse; and the accompanying “corollaries” can be difficult to distinguish from the axioms or *degnità*, since they are often as brief and gnomic as the axioms themselves. *Degnità* has proved particularly difficult to translate; Battistini noted that its antecedents were in medieval philosophy and theology, where it stood for an “immediately evident truth.”⁸² Precedents for the presentation of key propositions as “axioms” have been identified in Bacon, Descartes, and Spinoza.⁸³ Of these, Spinoza’s use of axioms in the *Ethics* least resembles Vico’s, since Spinoza’s Axioms were presented within a specific hierarchy of analytical headings, between Definitions and Propositions, with the latter being followed by Proofs, Corollaries, and Scholia.⁸⁴ More scholarly ink has been spilled over the relative debts of Vico to Bacon and Descartes. In a characteristically acerbic intervention, “What type of science is the *New Science* of Vico?,” Paolo Rossi cautioned against reading too much into Vico’s references to specific works of Bacon, in particular *Cogita et visa*, which he did not believe Vico had read, since he clearly misunderstood its title. Close analysis of Vico’s texts—Rossi still concentrated on the “First” and the “Third” versions of the *Scienza Nuova*, paying no attention to that of 1730—suggested that there were both

⁷⁷ SN30, 28 (the text and footnoted variants), 383 (CMA1), 407 (CMA3), 549 (CMA4); and SN44, 14.

⁷⁸ All three English translations of SN44 have “a rational civil theology of divine providence.” An alternative translation of *ragionata* would be “reasoned.”

⁷⁹ The formula (without *ragionata*) was already present later in the printed original of SN30 at 128, 148, in Book One, “Del metodo,” and in Book Two, “Aspetti di questa scienza.” He added “ragionata” to the two printed copies annotated for a new edition (H₁ and H₂), and the full formula was adopted consistently in 1744, SN44, 14, 92, 108 and 109 (Battistini §§2, 342, 385, 390) In SN25, 113, Vico had characterized the fable of Jove’s thunderbolts as a *teologia civile* taught by the first men to themselves, and containing idolatry and divination.

⁸⁰ SN30, 91: “ASSIOMI, o Degnità Filosofiche, e Filologiche, Diffinizioni, e poche discrete Domande, Che devon’ essere gli Elementi di questa Scienza dell’Umanità” (the title of the new section of Libro I).

⁸¹ In SN44, 35 (Battistini §41): not in SN30 or in any of CMA 1-4.

⁸² Vico, *Opere*, ed. Battistini, 2: 1518, note 1 to 1: 494, referring to §41 of the *Scienza Nuova* 1744. There and later when Vico writes “Assiomi, o Degnità” in SN44, 35, 60, (Battistini, §§41, 119), all three English translations simply give “axioms,” eliminating *degnità*.

⁸³ Nicolini, *Commento storico*, 1: 74, note on §119 of SN44.

⁸⁴ The suggestion, however, remains common: see the note by Taylor and Miner in their translation of *The New Science*, 74 n. 128.

Cartesian and Baconian threads to Vico's attempt to formulate a science through a combination of philosophical and philological *degnità*.⁸⁵ The debate continues, particularly over Vico's debt to Bacon.⁸⁶ But the best general conclusion to draw would seem to be Rossi's: that whatever the precise reading of Vico's account of the intersection of philosophy and philology, his recourse to presentation of the "elements" of his science in the form of axioms was an expression of his remarkably early intuition that the transformations in natural philosophy in the preceding century amounted to envisaging a "new science" of nature, a science that he would now match or even improve upon in the separate sphere of human affairs. Vico did not, of course, think in terms of a "Scientific Revolution"—*scienza*, *scientia* having different meanings from those that "science" had assumed by the twentieth century. But he clearly supposed that there had been a transformation in the possibilities of "science" as the goal of human enquiry. His recourse in 1730 to "axioms or *degnità*" to foreground his principal conceptual claims was the clearest possible statement of his determination that his work too be recognized as "a New Science."

Why, then, did he separate his "Explanation of the Picture ... serving as an Introduction to the Work," from the "Axioms" by inserting between them a chronological table with its own lengthy commentary? It was not the first time that he had drawn up a chronological table and associated it with a "new science": he introduced one into *De Constantia* (the second volume of the *Diritto universale*), in the opening chapter of its latter part, entitled "Nova scientia tentatur." Here the idea of a "new science" was specifically related to "philology," and the chronology he provided was described as a foundation of the discussion of history.⁸⁷ In the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730, by contrast, the chronological table and accompanying commentary were placed at the beginning of Book One, "The Establishment of Principles," immediately following the explanation of the frontispiece, and before Vico introduced the distinction between philosophy and philology through the "Axioms." In the light of his earlier deployment of a chronology, the question is what he was now doing in reintroducing it into the *Scienza Nuova*. It is not a question to which scholars have offered many answers. Nicolini displayed his scholarship by devoting many pages of his *Commento storico* to identifying the authorities which Vico invoked or criticized, as well as the myths which Vico identified behind all the ancient chronologies bar that of the Hebrews.⁸⁸ But the point of discussing chronology at this stage of the *Scienza Nuova* was left unexplored.

A simple answer would be that a historically conceived science of "the common nature of nations" needed to be certain of its chronological framework. As a friendly Neapolitan reader, the Dominican ecclesiastical historian Tommaso Alfano, put it in

⁸⁵Rossi, "Che tipo di scienza è la *Scienza Nuova* di Vico?"; see above, note 71.

⁸⁶Recent contributions include Tommaso Parducci, "Ancora su Vico e Bacon: la ripresa dell'induzione e il ruolo della memoria nella *Scienza Nuova*," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 54 (2024); and Manuela Sanna, *La "necessità del filo": Vico e la conquista della humanitas* (Rome, 2025), 1, "Il problema Bacone."

⁸⁷Vico, *Diritto universale*, 222–31: *De Constantia Philologiae—Pars Posterior*, Cap. I *Nova Scientia tentatur*. The chronological table is introduced thus: "Sed antequam de Re Historica quicquam libemus, juvat *Programma Chronologicum* heic proponere, in quod omnes consentiunt, quantum nobis ea exhibeat, quae ad nostra Historiae Principia statuminanda conducant."

⁸⁸Nicolini, *Commento storico*, 1: 28–74, covering §§43–117 of his edition of *SN44*.

a letter to Vico, the table and accompanying “Annotations” put history on a firm chronological footing, resolving the doubts raised by the leading scholars of chronology, including Scaliger, Petau, and Ussher. Doing so, Vico had removed the danger of confusing events which happened at different times, and thus of drawing mistaken political conclusions from the past.⁸⁹ A further answer would be that by making clear at the outset his adherence to the chronology of the Vulgate, which allowed for no more than 4,000 years between the Creation and the birth of Jesus, and by repudiating the claims of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Chinese, and even of the Septuagint, to older and longer chronologies, Vico was affirming his Catholic orthodoxy. He had no intention, it would seem, of following the lead of the French biblical scholar Richard Simon, who had admitted the uncertainties in the biblical chronologies in his *Histoire critique du Vieux testament* (1678), or that of his fellow Neapolitan Celestino Galiani, who had encouraged his students to debate the problems of the Vulgate text—both initiatives which had attracted the attention of the authorities in Rome, and resulted in their books being referred to the Congregation of the Index.⁹⁰

While these explanations for Vico’s introduction of the chronological table and accompanying commentary into the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 have force, however, they are hardly sufficient. One dimension of the problem which has received attention is Vico’s treatment of the Hebrews. Adopting the chronology of the Vulgate, which was based on the Hebrew Bible, meant accepting the certainty of the Hebrews’ historical record. Yet Vico also accorded significant conceptual status to the Egyptians’ scheme of three historical “ages,” of gods, heroes, and men, organizing the “course” of human history under these heads in Book Four of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730. More generally, Vico showed far less interest, in any version of the *Scienza Nuova*, in the Hebrews (the offspring of Shem) than in the gentile nations descended from Noah’s other two sons, Ham and Japhet, whose immediate offspring had become the feral giants of the post-diluvian swamp, who had only returned to human society out of fear of a (pagan) God. Why, then, continue to adhere to the Hebrew chronology?

Among several studies of the place of the Hebrews in Vico’s “new science,”⁹¹ one in particular, by Giovanni Paoletti, has suggested reasons for the status Vico accorded

⁸⁹ *Epistole*, 176–7: “Di Tommaso Maria Alfani, 17 June 1734.” Alfano (c.1680–1742) was the author of several documentary works of ecclesiastical history; he also served as a “corrector” of the press for Felice Mosca, and founded two academies devoted to erudition. See his entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, at [www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tommaso-maria-alfano_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tommaso-maria-alfano_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (consulted 23 Oct. 2025).

⁹⁰ On Richard Simon, the first edition of whose *Histoire critique du Vieux testament* (1678) was destroyed on the orders of Bishop Bossuet, and its publication later prohibited (subject to correction) by the Congregation of the Index in 1682, see Timothy Twining, *The Limits of Erudition: The Old Testament in Post-Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2024), 245–90. On Celestino Galiani, another Neapolitan in Rome, whose *Theses ex Sacra Scriptura* (1708, 1710) were the subject of an investigation by the Index between 1710 and 1712, see Gustavo Costa, *Celestino Galiani e la Sacra Scrittura: Alle radici del pensiero napoletano del Settecento* (Rome, 2011). While the deliberations of the Index Congregation were not public, Vico could hardly have been unaware of the Church’s increasing sensitivity over the text of the Vulgate.

⁹¹ For a résumé and assessment of these see Andrea Battistini, “La difesa Vichiana della veridicità del racconto Biblico,” in Monica Riccio, Manuela Sanna, and Levent Yilmaz, eds., *The Vico Road: Nuovi percorsi Vichiani* (Rome, 2015), 57–69. In addition see Iolanda Anna Richichi’s suggestive discussion of “Giambattista Vico e la *respublica Hebraeorum*,” Ch. 3 of her *La Teocrazia: Crisi e trasformazione di un modello politico nell’Europa del XVIII secolo* (Florence, 2016), 91–114. The misunderstandings in Richichi’s referencing of the

to their chronology.⁹² The Hebrews were special, Paoletti argues, not simply because their knowledge of God was by revelation, mediated by prophecy, where gentiles had to interrogate their god through the ritual practice of divination. What marked out the Hebrews was the constancy of their memory, which justified placing the key dates of their recorded history in the first column of the table, and ascribing dates to events in other ancient nations within the biblical time span, setting aside the different chronologies offered by those nations. That Vico's table recorded only four events in the history of the Hebrews after the Creation—the Flood in 1656, the calling of Abraham in 1857, God's giving the written law to Moses in 2491, and the start of Saul's kingship in 2909 (all dates after Creation)—when there were many more significant occurrences in Greek history, was no obstacle to the choice of the former as the bench mark. This was why, in the very first of his annotations on the table, Vico rejected the alternative chronology lately proposed by the English scholar John Marsham, who with the support of John Spencer had accepted the primacy of the Egyptians among the nations of the world.⁹³

Suggestive as Paoletti's reading is, it perhaps understates the conceptual implication of Vico's "construction of the Hebrews." First, it downplays the conceptual significance of the opposition between revelation and divination: the latter was not simply a ritual practice, but, as the form of all pagan, gentile religions, the antithesis of revelation, which alone guaranteed the truth of God's communications with his people, and of the existence and operation of divine providence. Second, it is significant that, with the exception of the Flood, the dates Vico chose to record in Hebrew history were moments in their civil history, when specific revelations of God's will determined their continued existence and survival.⁹⁴ In other words, chronology as Vico presented it in his table and annotations was an expression not just of a theological commitment, but of a distinctively "civil" theology—the formula he had added at the very first opportunity to the end of the opening paragraph of his "Explanation" of the frontispiece, when he defined his "science" as "a civil theology of divine providence."⁹⁵ It was for a conceptual reason that the chronological table was presented as the precondition of a "new science" of the nations; the table was not simply a philological aide-memoire.

There is, I suggest, a further conceptual explanation for the placing of the chronological table at the head of Book One of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730. The suggestion

Scienza Nuova, however, underline the need to adopt the critical edition as standard. (I owe this reference to Michael Sonenscher.)

⁹²Giovanni Paoletti, "La costruzione degli Ebrei nella *Scienza Nuova*," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 52 (2022), 37–63.

⁹³SN30, 58–65: "Tavola Cronologica" and "Annotazione A." Cristofolini, *La Scienza nuova di Vico*, 35–57, suggests that Vico could have drawn on an unacknowledged Protestant source (not identified by Nicolini) for the rejection of Egyptian primacy, in Perizonius, *Aegyptiarum originum et temporum antiquissimorum investigatio* (Leiden, 1711).

⁹⁴See Paoletti's discussion of the passages in SN30 at 278–9 ("Supplimento della Storia Avantidiluviana") and 354 (on Saul's kingship as introducing the form of monarchy which would pass from the Hebrews to the Romans, from the Romans to the Turks and eventually to the French): "La costruzione degli Ebrei," 56–80, where he also observes (56 n. 58) that the references to the Hebrews in the chronological table align more closely with the arguments in SN30 than with those in SN44.

⁹⁵See above, note 77.

follows from the Abbé Conti's efforts to inform his French correspondents, first of Isaac Newton's work on ancient chronology, then of Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (of 1725), on the ground that they would be interested in Vico's treatment of chronology and mythology.⁹⁶ There is no evidence that Vico was aware (via Conti or any other channel) of Newton's *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (1728), or of the "Abridgement" whose translation into French Conti had made possible. But a connection is not necessary to make a comparison possible and revealing. After all, Newton and Vico faced the same problem: how to defend and continue to utilize biblical chronology when scholars had exposed its manifest inconsistencies. Newton would have recourse to better, much more rigorous, astronomical and mathematical calculations: specifically, he recalculated the lengths of the reigns of the ancient Assyrian and Egyptian kings, realigning them with Hebrew chronology.⁹⁷ Vico, by contrast, dismissed such calculation as misconceived. Bar that of the Hebrews, all the ancient chronologies were fabulous—and that was precisely their interest. They were temporal projections, along which the nations organized their histories according to the fabulous division into ages of gods, heroes, and men. That the timeline of the Hebrews was distinct in being true was for Vico a proposition in civil theology; if that proposition were denied, then the Hebrews' chronology also would be fabulous. Vico did not and could not take that step, affirming that one nation's timeline must be accepted as true for the others to count as "fabulous." But the implication that all chronologies might be arbitrary was only suppressed by the theological insistence on the revealed truth of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, *even if* the arbitrariness of chronology were to be allowed, although (theologically) it never should be,⁹⁸ it would not obviate its conceptual necessity to a "science" of "the common nature of nations," since for Vico a "common nature" presupposed the nations' coexistence within a temporal and historical framework, ordered by an agreed chronology. In other words, the concept of a chronology, whether as biblical truth or even, were it to be permissible, as an arbitrary construction, was essential to Vico's construction of his "New Science." Placing the chronological table and accompanying commentary at the beginning of Book One, immediately after the introductory "Explanation" of the frontispiece, made that crucial point.

Conclusion

Drawing on recent scholarship concerned with aspects of each of the three opening sections of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730—the frontispiece and its "Explanation," the chronological table and the ensuing "Annotations," and the "Axioms or *degnità*"—I have sought to provide the outline of a possible answer to the question, what was Vico

⁹⁶See above, notes 17 and 18 and text thereat.

⁹⁷On Newton's calculations see Buchwald and Feingold, *Newton and the Origin of Civilization*, esp. Chs. 6–8.

⁹⁸Vico did not evoke Grotius's notorious "etiamsi daremus" clause in relation to chronology—but he did (and he surely did so wittingly) in relation to the possibility of infinite worlds: SN30, 131, 369; SN44, 94, 339 (Battistini §§348, 1096). In other words, Vico was perfectly familiar with the argumentative possibilities of such a hypothetical conditional.

doing when he recast his work so radically? The thread running through this answer is conceptual: he was, in sequence, (1) depicting the conceptual structure of the “new science” and summarizing the connections which, in his eyes, rendered the structure coherent; (2) establishing the conceptual necessity of a chronology to the historical dimension of his science, and explaining why the chronology of the Hebrew Bible served that purpose; and (3) rendering his philosophical and philological principles in the form of axioms, as the recognized conceptual preliminary to demonstrating how they combined into a “science.” To focus on these three features of the *Scienza Nuova* of 1730 is not to overlook the continued presence of many of the arguments and supporting material found in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, or in several cases in the *Diritto universale*. Vico’s arguments need to be followed from the *Diritto universale* through all three surviving versions of the *Scienza Nuova*. But explanation of the new ways in which Vico introduced the *Scienza Nuova* in 1730 goes some way to answering the obvious question raised by the critical edition, and by the painstaking editorial work devoted to *La Scienza Nuova 1730* in particular. What Vico did in the four months it took him to write the new version was to set aside the still partially “negative” presentation of his principles in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, a presentation he was still trying to make work in 1729, and replace it, at pace, with a new, positive statement of the conceptual premises and argumentative claims which justified presenting the work as a “New Science.” These premises, and the arguments Vico developed from them, will continue to challenge our understanding, as they did the comprehension of Vico’s contemporaries. But given the existence of the complete text-critical edition of the *Scienza Nuova* in its three published versions, we are now in a much better position to explain how and why the work developed as it did.

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