

The New Science

Giambattista Vico

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PRINCIPLES
OF THE
NEW SCIENCE
OF
GIAMBATTISTA VICO
ABOUT THE COMMON NATURE
OF THE NATIONS
IN THIS THIRD EDITION

**Corrected, clarified, and notably expanded
by the Author himself in a great number of places.**

Chronological Table

A description based on the three epochs of the Egyptians, who said the whole world had previously

Hebrews ^B	Chaldeans ^C	Scythians ^D	Phoenicians ^E	Egyptians ^F
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Universal Flood.

Zoroaster, or
the rule of the
Chaldeans.^G
Nimrod, or
the confusion
of languages.^I

The calling of
Abraham.

Dynasties
in Egypt.
Hermes
Trismegistus
the Elder,
or the age
of gods in
Egypt.^M

God gives written
laws to Moses.

Hermes
Trismegistus
the Younger,
or the age
of heroes in
Egypt. ^S

Ninus rules
with the
Assyrians.

Dido of Tyre
leaves to found
Carthage.^X

run its course through three ages: the age of gods, of heroes, and of human beings.^A

Greeks	Romans	The Year of the World	The Year in Rome
		1656 1756	
Iapetus, from whom come the giants. ^H One of these giants, Prometheus, steals fire from the sun. ^K Deucalion. ^L		1856	
The golden age—that is, the age of gods in Greece. ^N			
Hellenus—son of Deucalion, grandson of Prometheus, great grandson of Iapetus—through his sons spreads three dialects in Greece. ^O		2082	
Cecrops the Egyptian brings twelve colonies into Attica, out of which Theseus later composes Athens. ^P Cadmus the Phoenician founds Thebes in Boetia and introduces common alphabetic letters into Greece. ^Q		2448	
	Saturn, or the age of the gods in Latium. ^R	2491	
Danaus the Egyptian expels the Inachids from their rule in Argos. ^T Pelops the Phrygian rules in the Peloponnesus.		2553	
The Heraclids spread throughout the whole of Greece and make there the age of heroes. ^V The Curetes in Crete, in Saturnia—that is, in Italy—and in Asia establish the rule of priests. ^V	Aboriginal peoples.	2682	
		2737	

Chronological Table (*continued*)

Hebrews^B

Chaldeans^C

Scythians^D

Phoenicians^E

Egyptians^F

Tyre is renowned for its skill in sailing and for its colonies.

Sancuniates writes histories in common alphabetic letters.^{Aa}

The rule of Saul.

Seostris rules in Thebes.^{Cc}

Psammeticus opens Egypt only to Greeks from Ionia and Caria.^{Hh}

Cyrus rules in Assyria with the Persians.

		The Year of the World	The Year in Rome
	Greeks		
	Romans		
Minos, the first legislator among the gentile peoples and first pirate of the Aegean.		2752	
Orpheus, and with him the age of the theological poets. ^Y	The Arcadians.		
Hercules, with whom the heroic times in Greece culminate. ^Z			
Jason begins naval warfare with the war in Pontus.	Hercules with	2800	
Theseus founds Athens, and establishes the orders of the Areopagus.	Evander in Latium, or the age of heroes in Italy.		
The Trojan War. ^{Bb}		2820	
The wandering of heroes, especially of Odysseus and Aeneas.			
	Rule in Alba.	2830	
		2909	
Greek colonies in Asia, Sicily, and Italy. ^{Dd}		2949	
Lycurgus gives laws to the Lacedaemonians.		3120	
The Olympic games, first instituted as an order by Hercules, then, after being interrupted, reestablished by Isiphilus. ^{Ee}		3223	
	The founding of Rome. ^{Ff}		1
Homer, who came at a time when common alphabetic letters had not yet been found and who did not see Egypt. ^{Gg}	Numa is king.	3290	37
Aesop, vulgar ethical philosopher. ^{Ii}		3334	
The Seven Sages of Greece, one of whom, Solon, institutes orders of popular liberty in Athens; another of whom, Thales the Milesian, starts philosophy with physics. ^{Kk}		3406	
Pythagoras, about whom, while he was living, Livy says not even his name would have been in known in Rome. ^{Ll}	Servius Tullius is king. ^{Mm}	3468	225
The Peisistratid tyrants are expelled from Athens.		3491	

Chronological Table (*continued*)

Hebrews^B

Chaldeans^C

Scythians^D

Phoenicians^E

Egyptians^F

Idanthyrus
is king of
Scythia.^{Pp}

Note: In the 1744 edition, Vico marks the first twenty-three sections of the notes on the Chronological Table with a letter, from A to Z (omitting J, U, and W), and the remaining twenty-two sections with two letters, Aa to Yy (again, omitting Jj, Uu, and Ww). Nicolini substituted Roman numerals for Vico's letters.

Greeks	Romans	The Year of the World	The Year in Rome
	The Tarquin tyrants are expelled from Rome.	3499	245
Hesiod. ^{Nh} Herodotus.		3500	
Hippocrates. ^{Oo}			
The Peloponnesian War.		3530	
Thucydides, who writes that up until his father, the Greeks knew nothing of their own antiquities, and hence he proposed to writing about this war. ^{Qq}			
Socrates begins rational moral philosophy.	Law of the Twelve Tables.	3553	303
Plato flourishes in the field of metaphysics.			
Athens shines in all the arts of cultivated humanity. ^{Rr}			
Xenophon brings Greek arms into the heart of Persia and is the first to know with any certainty about things of the Persians. ^{Ss}		3583	333
	The Publilian law. ^{Tt}	3658	416
Alexander the Great in Macedonia overthrows the Persian monarchy, and Aristotle conducts himself to the Near East to observe in person what the Greeks had previously said about things were myths.		3660	
	The Petelian law. ^{Vv}	3661	419
	The war at Tarentum, where the Latins started to become familiar with the Greeks. ^{Xx}	3708	489
	The second Carthaginian War, from which Livy starts a Roman his- tory which is certain, although he con- fesses not knowing about three major circumstances. ^{Yy}	3849	552

BOOK ONE

ON

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PRINCIPLES¹

¹ Vico's use of the word *principi* recalls the Latin *principia* generally and invites a comparison to works by Descartes (*Principia philosophiae*, 1644) and Newton (*Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*, 1687). But Vico's *principi* should not be construed simply as abstract formulae, as suggested by his own words much later in the text: "For this is the nature of principles, that they give the first things their start and bring the last things to their end" (§1093).

ANNOTATIONS
FOR THE CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE,
IN WHICH IS MADE AN ARRANGEMENT
OF MATERIALS

A.² This Chronological Table puts on display the world of ancient nations, which winds its way down from the Universal Flood of the Hebrews through to the Chaldeans, the Scythians, the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans up until their second Carthaginian war. And on the table appear greatly renowned men or deeds determined to have been at certain times or in certain places by the community of learned: in fact, either these men or deeds did not exist at the times or in the places in which they were commonly determined to have been or they never existed in the world at all. And out of the deep, dense shadows where they have lain buried emerge significant men and the most important deeds from whom and by which have come to pass the greatest moments of human affairs. All this is demonstrated in these ANNOTATIONS so as to allow for an understanding of how much the humanity of the nations has beginnings that are uncertain or misplaced or faulty or foolish. 43

Moreover, this table proposes something entirely contrary to the *Canon of Egyptian, Hebrew and Greek Chronology* by John Marsham:³ there, he wishes to prove that the Egyptians preceded all the nations of the world in their polity and their religion and that the sacred rites and civil orders which they passed on to other peoples were received with some few emendations by the Hebrews. 44

In this opinion, Marsham is followed by Spencer⁴ in his treatise, *On the Urim and Thummim*: there he opines that the Israelites had learned from the Egyptians the whole of their science of divine things by means of the sacred kabbalah.

Finally, Van Heurn⁵ praises Marsham in his *Antiquities of Barbarian Philosophy*: there, in the book entitled *On Chaldea*, he writes that Moses, learned in the science of divine things because of the Egyptians, passed on this learning to the Hebrews in his laws.

² See the note on the Chronological Table for an explanation of the letter coding presented in Book One.

³ John Marsham (1602–1683), English chronologist and politician. The reference is to his 1672 work *Canon chronicus aegyptiacus, hebraicus graecus*.

⁴ John Spencer (1630–1695), English cleric and author of *Dissertatio de Urim et Thummim*, published in Cambridge in 1670.

⁵ Otto van Heurn (1577–1648), Dutch theologian and author of *Barbaricae philosophiae antiquitatum libri duo*, published in 1600. What Vico calls the “Chaldaicus” is the first part of the work.

Standing in contrast to this is Hermann Wits,⁶ in a work entitled *Aegyptiaca, sive de Aegyptiacorum Sacrorum cum Hebraicis Collatione*. He deems the first gentile author to give the first certain observations about the Egyptians to have been Dio Cassius,⁷ who flourished under the philosopher Marcus Antonius.⁸ In this, he can be confuted by the *Annals* of Tacitus⁹: there, Tacitus tells us that Germanicus went to the Near East and, after that, to Egypt so as to see the famous antiquities of Thebes; once there, he made one of their priests explain the hieroglyphs written on some monuments, which the priest foolishly related to him, foolishly in that he related that these characters preserved a recorded memory of the limitless power which their king, Ramses, had in Africa, in the Near East, and in Asia Minor, a power equal to that of the Romans, which at that time was very great. On this passage (perhaps because it runs contrary to his argument) Wits is silent.

45 But, certainly, the fruit of such limitless antiquity was not much recondite wisdom among the inland Egyptians.

We say this because at the time of Clement of Alexandria,¹⁰ as he tells us in his *Stromata*, were circulating what were called their priestly books (some forty-two in number), and these contained the greatest of errors in philosophy and astronomy; because of these myths, Chaeremon, the teacher of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, is often exposed by Strabo.¹¹ The things pertaining to Egyptian medicine are found by Galen, in his book *On Hermetic Medicine*, to be obvious prattle and pure imposture.¹² Their morals were dissolute: they not only tolerated—that is, permitted—harlots, but even made them honorable. Their theology was full of superstition, trickery, and witchcraft.

And even the magnificence of their monuments and pyramids could well have been a function of their barbarousness, which comports well with greatness; indeed, Egyptian sculpting and casting is even today accused of being quite unpolished. For refinement is the fruit of philosophy; hence, Greece, a nation of philosophers, is alone in shining forth in all the fine arts which human ingenuity has ever found: painting, sculpture,

⁶ Hermann Wits (1636–1708), Dutch theologian and author of *Aegyptiaca*, published in 1683.

⁷ Dio Cassius (155–235 CE), Roman administrator and historian, author of an eighty-volume history of Rome.

⁸ Here Vico's pen has slipped—he means Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), Roman emperor whose reign began in 161 and lasted until his death.

⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.60.

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 CE), Christian theologian.

¹¹ Strabo (64 BCE–23 CE), Greek historian and geographer whose *Geographica* is an important text for Vico. The reference to Dionysius the Areopagite is incorrect; Chaeremon was in fact the teacher of another Dionysius, perhaps a first-century grammarian from Alexandria.

¹² Galen of Pergamon (129–201 CE), Greek physician in the Roman Empire.

casting, and the art of engraving (the most refined of all the arts because it must abstract from the surfaces of the objects it imitates).

On the coast, however, this ancient wisdom of the Egyptians was raised to the stars by Alexander the Great by the founding of Alexandria: this city united African acuity with Greek refinement and produced philosophers who were brilliant about divinity; from this, Alexandria became so famous for the splendor of lofty divine wisdom that the Museum of Alexandria was more celebrated than previously were the Academy, the Lyceum, the Stoa, and the Cynosarges combined,¹³ and it was called the mother of sciences. On account of such excellence, it was named by the Greeks πόλις [*polis*], just as Athens was named Ἄστυ [*Astu*] and Rome *urbs*. 46

As a consequence of this came Manetho—that is, Manethone¹⁴—the high priest of Egypt, who translated all of Egyptian history into a sublime natural theology, in exactly the same way that Greek philosophers had previously done with their myths, which will be found herein to have been their most ancient histories. Hence, one can understand that what came to pass for Greek myths also came to pass for Egyptian hieroglyphs.

In addition to such ostentation concerning its lofty wisdom, grant also that this was a nation which, because of its own natural vanity, was taunted with being *gloriae animalia* [“animals for glory”]; and grant that it was in a city which was the great emporium of the Mediterranean and, via the Red Sea, of the Ocean and the Indies; grant also that among their disgraceful customs was (as Tacitus tells us in a golden passage) *novarum religionum avida* [“an avidity for new religious practices”];¹⁵ and grant that this was on account of their prejudiced opinion about, first, their boundless antiquity, of which they vainly boasted over all other nations of the world and about, consequently, their having had ancient mastery over a greater portion of the world. Granting all this, and that they did not know of the fashion in which uniform ideas about the gods and heroes came into being in different places among the gentiles without one people having any knowledge of another—this will be fully demonstrated below [§§196–198])—when such a nation heard from the nations who came to them for coastal trade about all the false divinities spread through the rest of the world, they believed, first, that those divinities arose in their own Egypt and that their own Jove Ammon was the most ancient of all (even though every gentile nation had one) and, second, 47

¹³ The Cynosarges was a public gymnasium and sanctuary of Hercules, just outside Athens. Antisthenes, disciple of Socrates and reputed founder of Cynicism, lectured there.

¹⁴ Manetho, reputed Egyptian priest who lived in the third century BCE, author of *Aegyptiaca*.

¹⁵ The phrase does not seem to appear in Tacitus.

that the different versions of Hercules in all the other nations (Varro counts forty of them¹⁶) took the name from their Egyptian Hercules (so Tacitus tells us of both the first and the second belief¹⁷).

And with all the favorable judgments with which Diodorus Siculus,¹⁸ who lived in the times of Augustus, showers the Egyptians, even he does not allow them more than two thousand years of antiquity, and all those judgments have been overturned by Jacques Cappel¹⁹ in his *Sacred and Foreign History*: Cappel deems them similar to those which Xenophon had previously connected with Cyrus and which (we would add) Plato²⁰ often devised about the Persians.

Finally, this foolishness concerning the most profound wisdom of the Egyptians is confirmed by the imposture of that *Poimandres*, passed off as part of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but discovered by Casaubon²¹ to contain learning which was no more ancient than that of the Platonists and was articulated in the same idiom used by the Platonists; and this remnant was judged by Saumaise to be a disordered and badly composed collection of things.

48 What made for this false opinion of Egyptians—that they were of such great antiquity—is a property of the human mind—namely, its being indefinite—and on account of this, it often believes without bounds, concerning the things which it does not know, that they are greater than things as they actually are.

On account of this, the Egyptians were similar in this respect to the Chinese, who grew to be such a great nation while they were closed off from all foreign nations, just as the Egyptians, up until Psammeticus,²² had been closed off and just as the Scythians, up until Idanthyus,²³ had been: concerning those Scythians, there is a folk tradition that they bested the Egyptians in the prize of greatest antiquity.

And such a folk tradition is necessary, and must have had its impetus at the point where universal profane history starts; according to

¹⁶ The reference to forty Herculesees appears not in Varro but in Marcus Servius Honoratus's commentary on *Aeneid* 8.564.

¹⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.60.2. In the passage Tacitus speaks only of Hercules, not of Jove Ammon. Compare *Scienza nuova prima* §458, which speaks only of Hercules.

¹⁸ Diodorus Siculus (80 BCE–20 BCE), Greek historian and author of *Historical Library*.

¹⁹ Jacques Cappel (1570–1624), French theologian and student of the relations between Homer and Hebraic culture. Cappel was the author of *Historia sacra et exotica ab Adamo usque ad Augustum*, printed in 1613.

²⁰ See Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 120e–122c, and *Laws* 3, 694e–695e.

²¹ Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), French philologist and author of *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis*.

²² An Egyptian pharaoh.

²³ Scythian king mentioned by Strabo and Herodotus.

Justin,²⁴ this tradition proposes, as a rival beginning prior to the monarchy of the Assyrians, two powerful kings—King Tanaus the Scythian and King Sesostris the Egyptian—who up until now have made the world appear much more ancient than it actually is. The tradition has it that, first, Tanaus went through the Near East with a great army to subjugate Egypt, a country which, by its nature, is not easily prone to armed invasion; and then, Sesostris with forces correspondingly great went to subjugate Scythia, a country which lived unknown to the Persians (they had extended their monarchy to the Medes on the Scythian border) up until the times of the one called Darius the Great, who declared war on King Idanthyrus (this Idanthyrus is found to have been so barbarous that, in an age when Persia was at its most humane, he responded to Darius with the five real words of five objects, since he did not even know how to write with hieroglyphics).

And these two kings, in all their power, traversed Asia with the two great armies and did not make a province of either Scythia or Egypt, but instead left Asia in such liberty that later there arose there the first of the four most famous monarchies in the world, that of Assyria.

It is on account of this, perhaps, that the Chaldeans did not fail to enter into the midst of this dispute over the greatest antiquity, also an inland nation and, as we will demonstrate [§55], more ancient than the other two; the Chaldeans foolishly boasted about their preserving astronomical observations going back well over twenty thousand years. This perhaps was the impetus for Flavius Josephus the Jew²⁵ believing erroneously that the observations described on two columns (one made of marble, the other of brick) were antediluvian and erected against two floods and for his having seen the one in Syria made of marble. Such was the great importance for ancient nations of preserving memories of astronomical observations, the meaning of which was completely dead to the nations that came after them! Hence, this column has been consigned to the museum of credulity.

49

However, it has been found that the Chinese write with hieroglyphs just as anciently the Egyptians did and just as, even more than the Egyptians, the Scythians did, who did not even know how to write. And, since they did not have an exchange with other nations for many thousands of years by which they could have been informed about the true antiquity of the world, just like a man who, while sleeping, is closed up in a small, dark room and, in horror at the darkness, believes with certainty that the room is much larger than what he can touch with his hands, so the Chinese (and the Egyptians, and the Chaldeans too) did the same in the darkness of their chronology.

50

²⁴ Marcus Iunianus Iustinus, second-century Latin historian who lived in the Roman Empire, author of *Historiarum Philippicarum libri XLIV*.

²⁵ Titus Flavius Josephus (37–c. 100 CE), Roman-Jewish scholar and author of *Jewish Antiquities*.

Moreover, grant that the Jesuit father Michele Ruggieri²⁶ declares that he himself has read books printed in China before the coming of Jesus Christ and grant too that Father Martini,²⁷ also a Jesuit, in his *History of the Chinese*, confers a very great antiquity upon Confucius, which has induced in many the atheism related by Marten Schoock²⁸ in his treatise *The Universal Flood* (on account of which, perhaps, Isaac de La Peyrère,²⁹ author of *History before Adam*, abandoned the Catholic faith and subsequently wrote that the flood spread only over the lands of the Hebrews). Nevertheless, Nicolas Trigault,³⁰ who is better informed than Ruggieri and Martini, writes in his *Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* that printing among the Chinese was discovered not more than two centuries before it was in Europe and that Confucius flourished not more than five hundred years before Christ. And the Confucian philosophy is consistent with the priestly books of the Egyptians in that its few points on things of nature are rude and gullish, and also it completely revolves around a commonplace morality—that is, a morality which commands a people by the laws.

51

It is from reasoning of this sort concerning the empty opinion which these gentile nations had about their antiquity (and the Egyptians, above all, had this opinion) that we must start investigations into all that is knowable about gentile nations. It is, first, so as to know with science that all-important beginning—namely, where and when the gentile nations had their start in the world—and, second, so as to assist with reasoning which is still human all that is believable in Christianity. So, it starts from the fact that the Hebrew people were the earliest in the world, a people whose prince, Adam,³¹ was created by the true God at the creation of the world. And so, the first science that ought to be learned is mythology³²—that is, the interpretation of myths—because, as we will see, all of the gentile histories have mythical beginnings and because myths were the earliest histories of the gentile nations. And it is with a method of this

²⁶ Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), Jesuit from Naples and author of *Nuovi avvisi del Giappone con altri della Cina del LXXXIII e del LXXXIV*, printed in 1586.

²⁷ Martino Martini (1614–1661), author of *Sinicae historiae decas prima*, printed in 1658.

²⁸ Marten Schoock (1614–1659), Dutch author of *Diluvium Noachi universale*.

²⁹ Isaac de La Peyrère (1596–1676), French author of *Systema theologicum ex Preadamitarum hypothesis* (1655). Known for claiming that there were humans before Adam, and thereby doubting the antiquity of the Jews, La Peyrère is an important figure for Spinoza and modern biblical criticism.

³⁰ Nicholas Trigault of Douay (1577–1628), Jesuit missionary and author of *De christiana expeditione*, printed in 1615.

³¹ The description of Adam as *principe* may be an allusion to Machiavelli's striking description of Moses as a prince (*The Prince* 6).

³² As Giuseppe Mazzotta notes, Vico defines mythology in the way that traditional discussions of the liberal arts define grammar, *The New Map of the World: The Poetic Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 114–115.

sort that we must recover the beginnings of both the nations and the sciences which emerged from these nations and from nowhere else, as will be demonstrated throughout this entire work [§§239–245]; it is in the public necessities or advantages of peoples that the sciences had to have their starting points, and it is only later, by particular men of acuity applying reflection to them, that the sciences were perfected. And from here must start the universal history which all the learned say is lacking in its proper beginnings.

And, in doing this, the antiquity of the Egyptians will be a great help to us in that they have saved two great fragments no less wondrous than their pyramids—that is, two great philological truths. The first (told by Herodotus³³) is that the Egyptians reduced the whole of time that previously ran its course to THREE AGES: first, the age of GODS; second, the age of HEROES; and, third, the age of MEN. The second of these truths is that, throughout this whole time, there were THREE LANGUAGES spoken, corresponding in number and order to these three ages: first, HIEROGLYPHIC, or speaking through sacred characters; second, SYMBOLIC, or speaking through heroic characters; and, third, EPISTOLARY, or speaking through characters of popular convention (as reported by Scheffer³⁴ in *De Philosophia Italica*).

52

Concerning this division of times, about Marcus Terentius Varro (because of his limitless erudition, he is deserving of the title by which he was called, “most learned of the Romans,”³⁵ and was called this at the time when the Romans were most enlightened—that is, in the time of Cicero) it is necessary to say not that he did not know to follow this division, but that he did not wish to follow it: perhaps this is because he understood about Rome what will be found through these principles to be true for all ancient nations—namely, that all the things divine and human were native to Latium—and hence he inquired into the Latin origins of all these things in his great work, *Rerum Divinarum et Humanarum*, of which the injustice of time has deprived us (this shows how much Varro believed in the myth of the Law of the Twelve Tables having come from Athens to Rome!³⁶). And Varro himself divided the whole time of the world into three periods, namely, dark times, which is the age of gods of which the Egyptians spoke; next, mythical times, which is the Egyptians’ age of heroes; and, finally, historic times, which is the Egyptians’ age of men.

³³ Herodotus, *Histories* 2.36.

³⁴ Johannes Scheffer (1621–1679), Swedish humanist born in Strasbourg, professor of eloquence and government at Uppsala University. The text to which Vico refers (full title *De natura et constitutione philosophica Italica*) was published in Uppsala in 1664.

³⁵ For this title, see Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.95 and Augustine, *City of God* 6.2.

³⁶ As Battistini observes, the exclamation mark consistently signals an “ironic utterance” about a position that Vico takes himself to have overthrown.

53 Furthermore, the antiquity of the Egyptians will help us with those two vain memories, memories themselves derived from the vanity of nations observed by Diodorus Siculus³⁷—namely, that every nation, whether they were barbarian or human, considered itself to be the most ancient of all and preserved memories of their antiquity back to the beginning of the world (this, we will see, was the privilege only of the Hebrews). The first of these two memories, as we observed [§47], is that the Egyptian Jove Ammon was the oldest of all the other Joves of the world; the second is that all the other versions of Hercules of the other nations had taken their name from their Egyptian Hercules: this says that all nations, first, passed through an AGE OF THE GODS whose king was believed by all nations to be Jove and, later, passed through an AGE OF HEROES who considered themselves the children of gods, the greatest of whom was believed to be Hercules.

54 B. The first column in the Chronological Table is erected for the Hebrews who (through the very weighty authority of Flavius Josephus the Jew³⁸ and Lactantius Firmianus,³⁹ which they will reach later [§94]) lived unknown to all the gentile nations and yet reckoned correctly an account of the times through which the world runs, an account which today is accepted as true by the strictest textual critics in keeping with the calculation of Philo the Jew;⁴⁰ if it varies from that of Eusebius,⁴¹ the difference is not more than one thousand, five hundred years (a very small period of time compared to the great differences among the Chaldeans, the Scythians, the Egyptians and, in our own day, the Chinese). This ought to be an unassailable argument for the Hebrews being the earliest people of our world and for their having preserved, in sacred history, truthful memories of their antiquity back to the beginning of the world.

55 C. The second column is planted for the Chaldeans. This is both because geography shows that the most inland monarchy in all the habitable world was in Assyria; and because this work demonstrates that inland nations are populated first and, later, maritime nations.

And, certainly, the Chaldeans were the wise men of gentile antiquity, whose prince is accepted by the community of philologists to be Zoroaster the Chaldean. And we have no scruples about saying that universal history takes its beginning from the monarchy of the Assyrians: the Assyrians must have started in forming themselves from the Chaldean

³⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 1.9.

³⁸ On Flavius Josephus, see the note to §49.

³⁹ Lactantius Firmianus (c. 250–c. 325), Christian author of *Institutiones Divinae* and advisor to Constantine I, the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity.

⁴⁰ Philo the Jew (c. 25 BCE–50 CE), Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria.

⁴¹ Eusebius of Caesarea (265–339), Roman historian and so-called father of Church history. Eusebius places the date of the world's creation at 5202 BCE.

times determined by this Table is altogether most uncertain. Hence, we enter upon all this as we would upon things called *nullius* ["belonging to no one"], for which the rule for a legitimate claim is *occupanti concedentur* ["it goes to the first occupant"]. And, given this, we believe that we are violating the rights of no one if we reason in a way which is different from, and at times entirely contrary to, the opinions which have been held up until now about the BEGINNINGS OF THE HUMANITY OF THE NATIONS, and, in doing so, we reduce them to principles of science; through these principles, the deeds of certain history are traced to their earliest origins, origins by which these deeds are sustained and through which they are brought into agreement with one another; these deeds up until now have seemed to have no common foundation nor any continuity of sequence—that is, no coherence among themselves.

ON THE ELEMENTS

119 So as to give form, then, to the materials previously arranged herein in the Chronological Table, we now propose here the following Axioms,¹²⁷ both philosophical and philological, and some few reasonable and discrete postulates along with some clarificatory definitions: these, like blood in a living body, must course through and animate those materials in all the reasoning which this science does about the common nature of the nations.

120 1. Man, on account of the indefinite nature of the human mind, whenever that mind is overthrown by ignorance, makes himself the measure of all things.¹²⁸

121 This Axiom is the cause for two common human customs: first, that *fama crescit eundo* ["fame increases as it goes along"]; and, second, that *minuit praesentia famam* ["the presence of something decreases the fame it has"].¹²⁹ Fame has, indeed, made quite a long journey since the beginning of the world and is the perennial spring of all the grandiose opinions that have been held up until now about a most distant antiquity, unknown to us on account of that property of the human mind noticed by

¹²⁷ Since Vico identifies the procedure of *The New Science* with geometry at §349, it is appropriate to take Spinoza's *Ethics* as a textual model for Vico's axioms. Noting this does not settle, but merely opens, a host of interpretive questions about Vico's relation to both geometry and Spinoza.

¹²⁸ This first Axiom is unique to the text published in 1744; it does not appear in the 1730 edition. Here Vico alludes to the *homo mensura* doctrine, attributed to Protagoras at Plato, *Theaetetus* 152a. Later texts also suggest themselves for comparison, e.g., Hobbes's *Leviathan*: "For men measure, not only other men, but all other things, by themselves" (chapter 2).

¹²⁹ Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.174–75 and Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 6.341.

Tacitus in his *Life of Agricola* in the phrase *omne ignotum pro magnifico est* [“everything unknown is taken for something great”].¹³⁰

2. It is a second property of the human mind that, whenever men are unable to make out some idea of things that are distant and unknown, they evaluate them relative to things that are known and present.¹³¹ 122

This Axiom points to the inexhaustible source of all the errors taken up by whole nations and all the learned concerning the beginnings of humanity, insofar as it is during their own enlightened, cultivated, and grand times, when the nations started to notice and the learned started to reason about these beginnings, that they evaluated the origins of humanity, which must have been modest, rude, and most obscure.¹³² 123

Within the genus of vanity are the two species indicated above [§§53, 59], first, the vanity of the nations, and, second, the vanity of the learned. 124

3. Concerning the vanity of the nations, we have learned that golden saying of Diodorus Siculus,¹³³ that every nation, whether Greek or barbarian, has had the vanity to consider itself earlier than all other nations in discovering the conveniences of human life and of preserving a memory of the things of their own back to the beginning of the world.¹³⁴ 125

This Axiom dispels, by fiat, the vainglory of the Chaldeans, the Scythians, the Egyptians, the Chinese, that they were the founders of humanity in the ancient world. 126

However, Flavius Josephus the Jew cleanses his own nation of this with that magnanimous confession we heard above [§94], that the Hebrews had lived hidden from all the gentiles. And sacred history renders certain that the world is, as it were, a youth in comparison with the old age it is

¹³⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola* 30.3.

¹³¹ Compare to Bacon’s “Idols of the Cave” (see *Novum Organum* 1.42).

¹³² The 1730 edition adds: “This same Axiom demonstrates that vanity is the daughter of ignorance and self-love; it swells us insofar as we are so possessed by the ideas we have of our own selves and of our things and, because of them, we regard, like madmen, things that we do not understand.” Given its origins in self-love and ignorance, *boria* is aptly translated (here and throughout) by “vanity,” a term used in English by Bacon, with similar resonances.

¹³³ See Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 1.9.

¹³⁴ Vico’s polemic against the “vanity of nations” should be understood as a rejection of two claims: (1) Cultural institutions must have originated with a single nation, older than the others and (2) Later nations must have acquired their institutions from the older nation by a process of diffusion. Against diffusion theories, Vico will argue that nations develop independently, though in parallel fashion, thanks to the “common nature of the nations.” Vico’s idea of autonomous parallel development suggests that two nations will exhibit a similar succession of customs, without requiring the assumption that one nation must have “borrowed” from the other.

believed to have by the Chaldeans, by the Egyptians, and, even to this day, by the Chinese; this is a great proof of the truth of sacred history.

127 4. To this vanity of the nations is here joined the vanity of the learned, who want what they know to be as ancient as the world.

128 This Axiom dispels all the opinions of the learned concerning the unaccountable wisdom of the ancients.¹³⁵ It convicts of imposture the oracles of Zoroaster the Chaldean and Anacharsis the Scythian which have not come down to us; and also the *Poimander* of Hermes Trismegistus, the *Orphics*—that is, the poems of Orpheus—and the *Golden Hymns of Pythagoras*, as all the more discerning textual critics agree. And it rebukes as impertinent all the mystical meanings given by the learned to Egyptian hieroglyphics and the philosophical allegories given to Greek myths.

129 5. Philosophy, so as to benefit humankind, must raise up and support fallen and weak man, not uproot nature or abandon him in his corruption.¹³⁶

130 This Axiom dismisses from the school of this science the Stoics, who wished to deaden the senses, and the Epicureans, who make the senses the rule of judgment; and both deny providence, the former making it so that they are drawn along by fate, the latter abandoning themselves to chance; and the latter hold the opinion that the human soul dies with the body; both ought to be called monastic—or solitary—philosophers. And this Axiom admits to the school of this science the political philosophers,¹³⁷ and principally the Platonists, who agree with all the lawgivers on three principal points: that there is divine providence; that the human passions should be moderated and made into human virtues; and that the human soul is immortal. As a consequence, this Axiom will give the three principles of this science.

131 6. Philosophy considers man as he ought to be and so cannot be fruitful except to the very few, who wish to live in the republic of Plato and not to return to the dregs of Romulus.¹³⁸

132 7. Lawgiving considers man as he is so as to make good use of him in human society, as from ferocity, avarice, ambition—the three vices which carry across the whole of humankind—it makes the military, the market, and the court and so the strength, the wealth, and the wisdom of

¹³⁵ Here Vico rejects a position associated with the *prisca theologia* tradition, found both in Bacon's *On the Wisdom of the Ancients* (see §328) and his own *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*.

¹³⁶ Axioms 5 through 15 treat philosophy, as is clear from §163.

¹³⁷ Here Vico speaks of *i filosofi politici* ("the political philosophers"), and not simply *i politici* ("the political theorists"), as he so often does elsewhere.

¹³⁸ See Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 2.1.8.

republics. And out of three great vices that would lay waste to the entire human race upon the earth, it makes civil felicity.

This Axiom proves that there is divine providence, and that it is a divine, lawgiving mind which from the passions of men (all of whom are intent upon their own private advantages, through which they would live like wild beasts in their separate solitudes) makes the civil orders, by which they live in human society. 133

8. Things outside their natural state do not adapt or persist there. 134

This Axiom alone, given that humankind has lived, since all recorded memory, of the world, and continues to live tolerably well in society, puts an end to the great dispute in which the best philosophers and moral theologians have contended with the skeptic Carneades and with Epicurus, a dispute which even Grotius did not settle, namely, whether law exists in nature, or whether human nature is sociable, which mean the same thing.¹³⁹ 135

This same Axiom, combined with Axiom 7 and its corollary, proves that man has free choice, however weak, to make virtues out of the passions. However, God aided man, naturally, with divine providence and, supernaturally, with divine grace. 136

9. Men who do not know the truth of things take care to hold fast to the certain, for if the intellect cannot be satisfied with knowledge [*scienza*], the will, at least, can repose in consciousness [*coscienza*].¹⁴⁰ 137

10. Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes science about the true. Philology observes authority in human choice, whence comes consciousness of the certain. 138

This Axiom, by its second part, defines as philologists all the grammarians, historians, textual critics who are occupied with knowledge of the languages and deeds of peoples, both internally, in their customs and laws, and externally, in their wars, peace treaties, alliances, travels, commerce. 139

This same Axiom demonstrates that just as the philosophers, who did not give certainty to their reasoning with the authority of the 140

¹³⁹ It may appear that in the quarrel of Hobbes and Aristotle on natural sociability (compare *Leviathan* 17 with *Politics* 1.1, 1253a), Vico simply takes Aristotle's side. But such a judgment needs to be complicated by considering the possibility that for Vico, human origins are nonsocial, even as humans appear necessarily, without any conscious calculation, to become social. In that case, Vico's position would be that of neither Aristotle nor Hobbes.

¹⁴⁰ At *De antiquissima* 1.3, Vico contrasts *scientia* with *conscientia*. *Scientia* involves a grasp of the genus or form by which a thing is made; *conscientia* belongs to things whose genus or form we cannot demonstrate, and so is less certain. In the present text, *coscienza* may be translated by either "conscience" or "consciousness."

philologists, have fallen short by half, so too have the philosophers, who did not care to give truth to their authority with the reason of the philosophers. If they had done this, they would have been more advantageous to republics and would have preceded us in meditating upon this science.

141 11. Human choice, which by its nature is most uncertain, is given certainty and made determinate by the common sense of men concerning human necessities or advantages, which are the two sources of the natural law of the gentile peoples.¹⁴¹

142 12. The common sense is a judgment without reflection sensed in common by a whole order, a whole people, a whole nation, or the whole of humankind.

143 This Axiom together with the following definition will give a new art of criticism, concerning the authors of nations; these nations must have had to run a course of more than a thousand years so as to bring forth the writers with whom criticism up until now has been occupied.

144 13. Uniform ideas, coming into being among entire peoples unknown to one another, must have some common impetus for what is true.

145 This Axiom is a great principle which establishes the common sense of humankind as the criterion of judgment taught to nations by divine providence so as to define what is certain concerning the natural law of the gentile peoples; the nations give certainty to this law by understanding the underlying unities in this law, upon which they all agree even with the different variations. Hence comes a mental dictionary for giving the origins of all the differently articulated languages; by it is conceived the ideal eternal history, which gives the temporal histories of all the nations. The axioms proper to this dictionary and to this history are proposed below [§§161–162, 239–245].

146 This same Axiom overturns all the ideas that have been held up until now concerning the natural law of the gentile peoples, which was believed to have emerged from some first nation, from which the others received it. Of this error, the Egyptian and the Greeks offer their own bad example, emptily boasting that they disseminated humanity throughout

¹⁴¹ “The natural law of the gentile peoples” consistently translates Vico’s phrase *il diritto natural delle genti*. As the reader encounters Vico’s “natural law of the gentile peoples,” she will want to keep three things in mind: (1) It bears the closest of relations to custom; “it amounts to orders instituted by means of what is customary” (§309); (2) Though customary, it is neither “mere custom” nor “positive law” in contrast to “natural law.” Vico means to subvert traditional distinctions between *ius naturale* and *ius gentium*; (3) It is not the same as, and sometimes contrasted with, both “the natural law of the Hebrews” (§9 and §313) and the “natural law of the philosophers, or of the moral theologians” (§1084).

the world. This error certainly must have made for the coming of the Law of the Twelve Tables to Rome from Greece.¹⁴²

However, in this fashion, it would have been a civil law shared with other peoples through a human provision and not a law which, by means of those customs of human life, was ordered naturally by divine providence in all nations.

This will be the first of the continuous labors to be made in these books: to demonstrate that the natural law of the gentile peoples came into being privately for each people without one knowing anything of the other; and that later, by the occasions of wars, embassies, alliances, and commerce, it was recognized as common to all of humankind.

14. The nature [*natura*] of things is nothing other than their coming-into-being [*nascimento*] at certain times and in certain fashions; these times and fashions always being of such a kind, it follows that the things will come to be in such a way and not otherwise.¹⁴³ 147

15. The intrinsic properties of subjects must be produced by the modifications or fashions by which the things come into being; it is through this that we are able to establish as true that the nature—or the coming-into-being—of those things is of such a kind and not otherwise. 148

16. Folk traditions must have a public impetus for what is true, whence these traditions came into being and are preserved by entire peoples over long periods of time.¹⁴⁴ 149

This will be the second great labor of this science: to find this impetus for the true, which, with the passing of years and the changing of languages and customs, becomes covered over by the false. 150

17. Common ways of speaking should be thought to offer the weightiest of testimony about the ancient customs of peoples, which had currency at the time when their languages were formed. 151

18. The language of an ancient nation that preserves itself as regnant until it arrives at its perfection should be a great testimony about the customs of the earliest times of the world. 152

¹⁴² Vico's claim that the Law of the Twelve Tables is purely of Roman origin, rather than having been imported to Rome from Athens, is one instance of his general aim to provide an alternative to "diffusion" theories (on which see the note at §125).

¹⁴³ Vico makes a strong connection between a thing's "nature" (*natura*) and its "coming-to-be" (*nascimento*). It may be useful to compare Vico's claim to a statement of Aristotle: "He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a city or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them" (*Politics* 1.2, 1252a24–25).

¹⁴⁴ Axioms 16 through 22 treat philology, as is clear from §163.

153 This Axiom assures us that with regard to the natural law of the gentile peoples (a law at which, without contention, there were none wiser of all the nations in the world than the Romans), philological proofs drawn from ways of speaking Latin are the weightiest. For the same reason, those learned in the German language are able to do the same since German retains the same property as the ancient Roman language.

154 19. If the Law of the Twelve Tables were the customs of the gentiles of Latium (which started to gain currency in the age of Saturn and which, although they changed elsewhere, were inscribed in bronze by the Romans and guarded religiously by the Roman jurists), then this law offers a great testimony about the ancient natural law of the gentiles of Latium.

155 That this is so, we demonstrated to be actually true many years ago in my *Principles of Universal Law*;¹⁴⁵ it will be seen with even greater illumination in these books.

156 20. If the poems of Homer are civil histories of the ancient Greek customs, then they will be the two great treasuries of the natural law of the gentile peoples of Greece.

157 This Axiom is for now assumed; herein¹⁴⁶ it will be demonstrated by what is actual.

158 21. The Greek philosophers hastened the natural course that their nation must make, a nation that was still crudely barbaric when the philosophers arrived; because of this arrival, the nation passed immediately to the peak of refinement and kept safe and intact their mythical history, both divine and heroic. Whereas the Romans, who in their customs advanced at the correct pace, completely lost sight of the history of their gods (hence, what the Egyptians speak of as the age of gods, Varro calls the dark times for the Romans), and the Romans preserved in commonplace speech their heroic history, extending from Romulus up to the Publilian and Petelian laws, which will be found to be a mythological history in continuity with the age of heroes in Greece.

159 That this is the nature of the human civil things is confirmed by the French nation, for, in the midst of the barbarism of the twelfth century, there opened the famous Parisian school, where the celebrated teacher of the *Sentences*, Peter Lombard,¹⁴⁷ offered teachings on the most subtle scholastic theology; and there remains, like a Homeric poem, the history by Turpin, Bishop of Paris, abounding in all the myths about those heroes of France called paladins, who filled those later romances and

¹⁴⁵ See Vico, *De constantia iurisprudentis* 2.36–37 (Cristofolini 706–727).

¹⁴⁶ In Book Three, “Discovery of the True Homer.”

¹⁴⁷ Peter Lombard (1096–1150), author of the *Sentences*, a four-volume compilation of theology commented upon by later masters, including Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Scotus, and Ockham.

poems; and, through this premature passage from barbarism to the most subtle science, French remains a most refined language, so refined that of all the living languages, it seems to have restored in our times the Atticism of the Greeks and, moreover, is better than any other language at the reasoning of science, just as Greek was. And both Greek and French retain those diphthongs proper to a barbarian language, still rigid and unable to combine consonants with vowels.¹⁴⁸

As confirmation of all that we have said about both languages, we would add an observation which I am able to make all the time about the young (who are at the age when memory is vigorous, imagination is lively, and ingenuity is on fire, faculties fruitfully exercised by the study of languages and plane geometry without dominating, by such exercises, the acerbity of minds connected to the body, which one can say is the barbarism of the intellect): if the young, at this crude stage, pass on to the too-subtle study of a metaphysical art of criticism and algebra, they become too attenuated in their manner of thinking for the full scope of life and are rendered incapable of great labor.¹⁴⁹

However, by meditating further on this work, we discovered another cause for this effect, one that is perhaps is more proper to it. Romulus founded Rome in the midst of other more ancient cities in Latium and founded it by opening the asylum, which Livy defines in general terms as *vetus urbes condentium consilium* [“the age-old counsel of founders of cities”];¹⁵⁰ for while violence still persisted, he naturally ordered the Roman city on the same basis on which the earliest cities of the world were founded.

160

Hence, since Roman customs developed from these same beginnings in times when the vernacular languages of Latium had become quite advanced, it must have come to pass that Roman civil things (the likes of which Greek peoples articulated in heroic language) were articulated in vernacular language. Hence, Roman history has been found to be a mythology in continuity with the heroic history of the Greeks.

And this must be the cause of the above effect, for the Romans were the heroes of the world insofar as Rome subdued the cities of Latium, then Italy, and lastly the world (heroism being forever young among the Romans) whereas, among the other peoples of Latium from whose

¹⁴⁸ Vico’s claims about Greek and French here recalls a discussion in chapter 7 of his early work *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (1709), contrasting the subtlety of the French language in ratiocination with the power of the Italian language to arouse images (Battistini 138–143).

¹⁴⁹ Similar reflections, inviting comparison to what we would now call “developmental psychology,” may be found in the earlier writings. See particularly *De ratione* 3–5 (Battistini 104–125) and *De antiquissima* 7.4 (Taylor 112–125), as well as the pedagogical digression found within the first part of his autobiography, published in 1725 (Battistini 16–18).

¹⁵⁰ Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.8.5.

conquest came the greatness of Rome, that heroism must have started to grow old.

161 22. It is necessary that there be, in the nature of human things, a mental language common to all the nations which uniformly attends to the substance of the things achievable within the sociability of human life and articulates that substance with as many different modifications as these things are able to have throughout their many different aspects. This is what we experience as true in proverbs—that is, with the maxims of commonplace wisdom—which are understood to be the same in substance even though they have as many different aspects as there are nations, ancient and modern.

162 This language is proper to this science, by whose light, if they attend to it, those learned in languages will be able to form a mental dictionary common to all the differently expressed languages, living and dead. We offered a test of this dictionary in a particular case in the first edition of *The New Science*¹⁵¹ where we proved that the names of the earliest paterfamilias in a great number of languages, dead and living, were given to him on account of the different properties that he had in the familial state and the first republics, at a time when languages were formed. We will, to the extent our spare erudition permits, make use herein of this dictionary in all the things upon which we reason.

163 Of the propositions stated above, Axioms 1, 2, 3, and 4 offer the foundations for refutations of all the opinions held up until now concerning the beginnings of humanity. These refutations depend upon the lack of verisimilitude, absurdity, contradiction, and impossibility in these opinions.

The next propositions, from Axiom 5 to 15, offer foundations for the true, and serve to meditate upon that world of nations in its eternal idea through that property, noted by Aristotle, of any kind of science—namely, that science must be concerned with what is universal and what is eternal.¹⁵²

The last propositions, from Axiom 15 to 22, offer the foundations for the certain and do the work of seeing actualized in deeds this world of nations upon which we have meditated in idea, the correct method of philosophizing made certain by Francis Bacon and transferred to human civil things from the natural things upon which he labored in his book *Cogitata visa*.¹⁵³

164 The propositions proposed until now are general and establish this science as a whole; those which follow are particular and establish this science in the parts which, in its different materials, it treats.

¹⁵¹ See *Scienza nuova prima* §389.

¹⁵² See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 3.6, 1003a12.

¹⁵³ The full title of Bacon's text is *Cogitata et visa de interpretatione naturae*, composed from 1607 to 1609.

23. Sacred history is more ancient than all of the most ancient profane history which comes down to us, for it tells, most articulately and over a long period of more than eight hundred years, of the state of nature under the Patriarchs—that is, in the familial state—upon which, it is agreed by all the political theorists, peoples and cities arose later. Of this state, profane history has little or nothing to tell, and much of that is confused. 165

This Axiom proves the truth of sacred history, contrary to the vanity of the nations of which Diodorus Siculus speaks above [§125]. This is insofar as the Hebrews have preserved so articulately their memory back to the beginning of the world. 166

24. The Hebraic religion was founded by the true God upon a prohibition against divination, the divination upon which arose all the gentile nations. 167

This Axiom is one of the principal causes for dividing the entire world of ancient nations into the Hebrews and the gentiles.¹⁵⁴ 168

25. The Universal Flood is demonstrated not through the philological proofs of Marten Schoock (for these are too slight) nor through the astrological proofs of Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, who is followed by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (these are too uncertain, or rather false, since they are derived from the *Alphonsine Tables*,¹⁵⁵ refuted by the Hebrews and now by Christians, who have disproved the calculations of Eusebius and Bede and who today follow the calculations of Philo the Jew). Instead, the Universal Flood is demonstrated by means of physical proofs observed in the myths, as will be perceived herein in later Axioms.¹⁵⁶ 169

26. The giants had, by nature, huge bodies (those whom travelers at the foot of America in the country of the so-called Patagonians have found to be gullish and most savage). Leaving to one side, as empty or inappropriate or false, the reasons for these bodies which the philosophers adduced (collected and followed by Jean Chassagnon¹⁵⁷ in his *De gigantibus*), we, instead, adduce causes, partly physical and partly moral, observed by Julius Caesar and by Cornelius Tacitus¹⁵⁸ where they tell of the gigantic stature of the ancient Germans; and we connect those causes to the feral education of their children. 170

27. Greek history, from which we have everything that we do have of the rest of gentile antiquity except for that of Rome, takes its beginnings from the flood and from the giants. 171

¹⁵⁴ The distinction between the Hebrews and the gentiles runs through *The New Science*. Assessing Vico's handling of the distinction is a primary challenge for his readers.

¹⁵⁵ Astronomical tables compiled under Alfonso X of Castile (1221–1284).

¹⁵⁶ Axioms 41–42.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Chassagnon (1531–1598), Protestant writer and author of *De gigantibus eorumque reliquiis*, published in 1580.

¹⁵⁸ Caesar, *De bello gallico* 4.1; Tacitus, *Germania* 20.1.

172 These two Axioms display that all of earliest humankind was divided into two species, first, that of the giants and, second, that of men of correct bodily stature; the former were the gentiles, the latter the Hebrews. This distinction cannot have arisen from anything other than the feral education of the former and the human education of the latter; consequently, the Hebrews had an origin different from the one all the gentiles had.

173 28. Two great fragments from Egyptian antiquity, which were observed above [§53], have reached us. The first of these is that the Egyptians reduced the whole of time prior to them to three ages: namely, the age of gods, the age of heroes, and the age of men. The second is that throughout these three ages, there arose three spoken languages corresponding to the aforementioned three ages: hieroglyphic—or sacred, language; symbolic language—or language using likenesses—which is the heroic language; and epistolary language—or the vernacular [*volgare*] language of men using conventional signs for sharing the common [*volgari*] needs of their life.

174 29. Homer, in five passages from his two poems which will be cited herein [§437], mentions a language more ancient than his own, which was certainly heroic language; and he calls this “the language of the gods.”

175 30. Varro had the diligence to gather up thirty thousand names of gods¹⁵⁹ (this is, indeed, how many the Greeks counted); these names correspond to the many different needs of life—whether natural or moral or economic or, eventually, civil—from those earliest times.

176 These three Axioms establish that the world of peoples everywhere started from religions, which will be the first of the three principles of this science.

177 31. Whenever peoples have become so savage because of arms that human laws no longer have a place among them, the only means powerful enough to reduce them is religion.¹⁶⁰

178 This Axiom establishes that, in a state of lawlessness, divine providence offered a beginning from which the savage and violent might be led to humanity and the nations might be ordered among them by awakening in them a confused idea of divinity which, in their ignorance, they attributed to something with which it did not fit; and so, by means of terror at this imagined divinity, they started to put themselves back into some order.

¹⁵⁹ The source of this claim (made also at *Scienza prima nuova* §303) appears to be Augustine, *City of God* 3.12 and 7.6, though Augustine does not mention “thirty thousand.” The source of the claim that the Greeks counted thirty thousand gods is likely Hesiod, *Works and Days* 253.

¹⁶⁰ Compare Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 1.11.

Such a beginning of things among his own savage and violent men is something Thomas Hobbes did not know how to see, for he went looking to find such beginnings, going astray into the chance of his Epicurus. Hence, with an effort as magnanimous as its result was unhappy, he believed he would augment Greek philosophy with that great portion which it certainly was missing (as George Pasch¹⁶¹ reports in his *De eruditio huius saeculi inventis*), that of considering men from the perspective of whole society of humankind.

179

And while it is the case that Hobbes would not have thought of this unless the Christian religion had given him the impetus, what that religion decrees for the whole of humankind is not only justice, but also charity. And, consequently, here begins the refutation of that false statement of Polybius,¹⁶² that had philosophers arisen in the world, there would have been no need for religions: for if republics had not arisen in the world (republics which could not have coming into being without religion), there would not have been philosophers in the world.

32. Men ignorant about the natural causes that produce things, when they cannot explain them, even by similar things, give those things their own nature. So, for example, the common run¹⁶³ [*il volgo*] say that the magnet is in love with the iron.

180

This Axiom is a small part of Axiom 1: that the human mind, on account of its indefinite nature, whenever it is overthrown by ignorance, makes itself the measure of all of which it is ignorant.

181

33. The physics of the ignorant is a commonplace metaphysics, by which they render the causes of things of which they are ignorant unto the will of God without considering the means by which the divine will is served.¹⁶⁴

182

34. A true property of human nature is that one noticed by Tacitus,¹⁶⁵ where he says *mobiles ad superstitionem percussae semel mentes* ["minds

183

¹⁶¹ Georg Pasch (1661–1707), native of Danzig and teacher of ethics at Kiel.

¹⁶² See Polybius, *Histories* 6.56.10–11. What Polybius actually says in this passage is more complicated. The founders of the Roman republic, he claims, wisely introduced religion into every aspect of life for the sake of the multitude, which is "fickle, full of lawless desires, unreasoned passion, and violent anger" and so must be restrained by "invisible terrors and suchlike pageantry." Though Polybius does allow that such a course would "perhaps have not been necessary had it been possible to form a city of wise men," he does not actually claim that a state of philosophers would eliminate the need for religion as such.

¹⁶³ "Common run" translates *il volgo*. See the note at §14 on *volgo* and *volgare*.

¹⁶⁴ This Axiom invites comparison to Spinoza's claim (in the Appendix of Part 1 of the *Ethics*) about those who "will not stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in the will of God, that is, the sanctuary of ignorance" (trans. Curley, *A Spinoza Reader*, pp. 112–113).

¹⁶⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 1.28.2.

once struck by fear are prone to superstition”]; so once men have been startled by some terrifying superstition, they invoke it in everything that they imagine, see, and even do.

184 35. Wonder is the daughter of ignorance, and the greater the effect admired, the more the wonder grows in proportion.¹⁶⁶

185 36. The more vigorous the imagination, the weaker reasoning is.¹⁶⁷

186 37. The most sublime labor of poetry is to give sense and passions to things without sense; and it is a property of children to take inanimate things in their hands and, playing with them, to talk with them as if they were living persons.

187 This philological-philosophical Axiom proves that men in the childhood of the world were by their nature sublime poets.

188 38. There is a golden passage in Lactantius Firmianus¹⁶⁸ where, in reasoning about the origins of idolatry, he says *rudes initio homines Deos appellarunt sive ob miraculum virtutis (hoc vero putabant rudes adhuc et simplices), sive, ut fieri solet, in admirationem praesentis potentiae, sive ob beneficia quibus errant ad humanitatem compositi* [“human beings, in their crude beginnings, called someone a god either on account of the wondrousness at his virtue (primitive and simple human beings truly thought virtue to be wondrous) or, as is wont to happen, out of admiration for the power of the one present, or on account of the benefits which brought them together in their humanity”].

189 39. Curiosity is a property connatural to man, the daughter of ignorance who begets knowledge [*scienza*], and whenever wonder makes our minds open, curiosity takes as its custom to ask straightaway, whenever it observes an extraordinary effect in nature (like a comet, a parhelion or a midday star), what such a thing means or signifies.

190 40. Witches are at the one and the same time replete with terrifying superstitions and exceedingly savage and brutal; as a result, if need be, so as to solemnize their witchcraft, they will commit impious murders and dismember the loveliest of innocent infants.

191 All the propositions starting from 28 up until 38 uncover the beginnings of divine poetry—that is, poetic theology—and those from 31 on give the beginnings of idolatry, and those from 39 on give the beginnings

¹⁶⁶ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.2, 982b.

¹⁶⁷ Compare Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* 2 (“De prophetis”): “Those especially strong in imagination are less suited for purely understanding things, whereas those who are strong in intellect and especially cultivate it, keep their power of imagining under greater control.”

¹⁶⁸ See Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.15.

of divination; and, finally, Axiom 40 gives the beginnings of sacrifice in bloody religions, which started from the earliest crude and most savage men with oaths and human victims who, as we have in Plautus,¹⁶⁹ continued to be commonly called *saturni hostiae* [“victims of Saturn”]. And there were sacrifices to Moloch among the Phoenicians, who cast into the midst of flames infants consecrated to the false divinity. Some of these consecrations are preserved in the Law of the Twelve Tables.

These are the things which give the correct sense to the phrase:

*primos in orbe deos fecit timor*¹⁷⁰
[“fear has made the earliest gods on Earth”]

For false religions did not come into being from the imposture of someone else, but from the credulity of oneself; this is so with the unfortunate oath and the sacrifice which Agamemnon made of his pious daughter, Iphigenia, about which Lucretius impiously exclaims:

*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum!*¹⁷¹
[“such are the evils religion enjoins!”]

The oath and sacrifice revolve towards the counsel of providence, which thus intends to domesticate the sons of Polyphemus and reduce them to the humanity of Aristides, Socrates, Laelius, and Scipio Africanus.

41. It is postulated (and it is a discrete postulate) that for many hundreds of years, the earth was saturated with the dampness of the Universal Flood and could not emit dry exhalations—that is, the materials igniting in the air to generate lightning.¹⁷² 192

42. Jove flashes lightning and fells to the ground the giants, and every gentile nation has a Jove. 193

This Axiom contains the physical history, preserved in myths, that there was a Universal Flood over the entire earth. 194

This same Axiom, together with the preceding postulate, must make determinate that within the course of so many years, the impious races of the sons of Noah had arrived at a feral state; and by a feral wandering, they were scattered and dispersed throughout the great forest of the earth; and by a feral education, giants came and were found among them at a time when heaven first flashed lightning after the flood. 195

¹⁶⁹ The phrase *Saturni hostiae* does not appear in modern editions of Plautus. It is likely, as Battistini suggests, that Vico took it from a 1684 edition of Plautus that included the commentary of German philologist Johann Gronow (1611–1678).

¹⁷⁰ Statius, *Thebaid* 3.661; Voss, *Etymologicon*, p. 209.

¹⁷¹ Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.101.

¹⁷² See Aristotle, *Meteorology* 2.9, 369b and Seneca, *Natural Questions* 2 and *De Ventis* 12.2.

196 43. Every gentile nation has its own Hercules, who was the son of Jove.
And Varro, most learned in antiquities, in counting them arrives at forty.

197 This Axiom is the principle pertaining to the heroism of the earliest
peoples, a heroism born of the false opinion that the heroes come from
a divine origin.

198 This same Axiom together with the preceding one (the first Axiom
gives so many versions of Jove, the second so many versions of Hercu-
les among the gentile nations) in addition demonstrates that they could
not be founders without religion nor become great without virtue. Grant
that when they were starting out, these nations were wild and closed off
from one another and, accordingly, they knew nothing of one another.
Therefore, with a view to the Axiom¹⁷³ that “uniform ideas, coming into
being among peoples unknown to one another, must have a common im-
petus for what is true,” these Axioms give us another great principle: that
the first myths must have contained truths of civil life and, accordingly,
must have been histories of these earliest peoples.

199 44. The first wise men of the Greek world were the theological poets,
who undoubtedly flourished prior to the heroic poets, just as Jove was
the father of Hercules.

200 This Axiom, together with the two preceding ones, establishes that
the gentile nations, given that they all had their own versions of Jove,
their own versions of Hercules, were all poetic in their beginnings; and it
establishes that among them, first a divine poetry came to be and, later,
a heroic poetry.

201 45. Men naturally tend to preserve memories of the laws and of the or-
ders which hold them within their own society.

202 46. All barbarian histories have mythical beginnings.

203 All the axioms from Axiom 42 on give the principle pertaining to our
historical mythology.

204 47. The human mind naturally tends to take delight in uniformity.¹⁷⁴

205 This Axiom, when proposed for myths, is confirmed by the custom
of the common run: in devising myths suited to men who are famous
for something or other and who are situated in such and such circum-
stances, they devise these myths so as to fit the condition of those human
beings.¹⁷⁵ These myths are ideal truths conforming to the merit of those
for whom the common run devises such myths, and these ideal truths are

¹⁷³ Axiom 13.

¹⁷⁴ Compare Bacon, *New Organon* 1.45.

¹⁷⁵ See Aristotle, *Poetics* 9, 1451a and Bacon, *Cogitata et visa* 13.

false to what is actually the case only to the extent that they do not give those men as much as they fully merit. As a result, if one reflects well on this, poetic truth is metaphysical truth and, in comparison with this, physical truth that does not conform with it should be considered false.

From this comes the following important consideration on poetic reasoning: the true captain of war is, for example, the Godfrey whom Torquato Tasso devises, and all the captains who do not in every respect conform with Godfrey are not true captains of war.

48. It is the nature of children that it is by the ideas and names of men, women, and things which they have known first that they later apprehend and name all the men, women, and things which have some similarity or relationship to the first ones. 206

49. There is a golden passage (the one drawn upon above [§68] from Iamblichus in his *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*) which says that the Egyptians declared all discoveries advantageous or necessary for human life to come from Hermes Trismegistus. 207

This statement, assisted by the preceding Axiom, will return, back to the divine philosopher, Iamblichus, that whole sense of sublime natural theology which he gave to the mysteries of the Egyptians. 208

And these three Axioms give the principles pertaining to poetic characters, which constitute the essence of myths. The first demonstrates the natural inclination of the common run to devise them, and to devise them with decorum. The second demonstrates that the earliest men—as the children of humankind who were not capable of forming intelligible genera of things—had by natural necessity to devise poetic characters—which are imaginative genera, or universals—to which they could reduce the particular species resembling each genus; on account of this resemblance, the ancient myths could not devise anything except with decorum. Exactly in this way did the Egyptians reduce all their discoveries advantageous or necessary for human life—that is, the particular effects of civil wisdom—to the genus of the “civil wise man” which they imagined as Hermes Trismegistus; for they did not know how to abstract the intelligible genus, “civil wise man,” much less how to abstract the form, “civil wisdom,” in which these Egyptians were wise. 209

This is how much the Egyptians at that time, who had so enriched the world by their discovering what is necessary or advantageous for humankind, were philosophers, and how much they understood of universals—that is, of intelligible genera!

This last Axiom, in following the preceding ones, is the principle pertaining to true poetic allegories, which, for myths, gives a univocal, not analogical, significance to the different particulars comprehended under their poetic genera. Accordingly, these allegories are called *diversiloquia*— 210

namely, speech which comprehends, in a general concept, different species of men or deeds or things.

211 50. In children, memory is most vivacious; consequently, their imagination is exceedingly lively, since the imagination is nothing other than memory extended or composed.

212 This Axiom is the principle pertaining to the vividness of the poetic images, which the earliest world in its childhood must have formed.

213 51. For every faculty that men do not have by nature, they can succeed by the persistent study of an art. However, in poetry, success by means of art is completely denied to someone who does not already have the faculty by nature.

214 This Axiom demonstrates that, since poetry finds the gentile humanity from which, and from nowhere else, come all the arts, the earliest poets were poets by nature.

215 52. Children avail themselves of imitation quite capably, for we observe that they mostly play at mimicking whatever they are capable of apprehending.

216 This Axiom demonstrates that the world in its childhood was one of poetic nations since poetry is nothing other than imitation.

217 This Axiom gives the principle for the following: that all the arts—concerning the necessary, the advantageous, the convenient, and even, in good part, the humanly pleasant—were discovered in the poetic centuries prior to the coming of the philosophers. For the arts are nothing other than imitations of nature and, in a certain way, real poems.

218 53. At first, men sense without noticing; then, they notice with a troubled and agitated spirit; finally, they reflect with a clear mind.

219 This Axiom is the principle pertaining to poetic sentiments, which are formed by passionate and affective sensation; these are different from philosophic sentiments, which are formed by the rational reflection. Hence, the more the latter rise to the level of universals, the more they apprehend the true; the more the former appropriate particulars, the more certain they are.

220 54. Men, confronted by things which are doubtful or obscure, but pertinent to them, naturally interpret them in keeping with their own natures and, consequently, in keeping with the resultant passions and customs.

221 This Axiom is the great canon for our mythology: with it, the myths of the earliest wild and crude human beings are found completely strict, a quality well suited to the founding of nations emerging out of a savage bestial liberty; afterwards, with the passage of many years and changes

to customs, these myths were distorted from their proper meaning or form,¹⁷⁶ were altered or were darkened during times that were dissolute and corrupt, even prior to Homer. For although religion was, in those times, still important to men in Greece, they were afraid of having gods as opposed to their prayers as they were to their customs, and so they attached their customs to the gods and gave a sense to those myths that was incongruous, befouled, and most obscene.

55. There is a golden passage in Eusebius¹⁷⁷—particular to the wisdom of the Egyptians, but rising to a level of generality applicable to the wisdom of all the other gentiles—where he says *primam Aegyptiorum theologiam mere historiam fuisse fabulis interpolatum; quarum quum postea puderet posteros, sensim coeperunt mysticos iis significatus affingere* [“the first theology of the Egyptians was simply a history dressed up with myths, for which later generations, subsequently becoming ashamed of them, gradually started to devise a mystical significance”]; this is what was done by Manetho—that is, Manethon—the high priest of Egypt, who translated all of Egyptian history into a sublime natural theology, as was said above [§46]. 222

These two Axioms are the two great proofs pertaining to our historical mythology; while they are the two great whirlwinds for refuting opinions about the unaccountable wisdom of the ancients,¹⁷⁸ they are, at the same time, the two great foundations for the truth of the Christian religion, which in its sacred history tells us nothing about which to be ashamed. 223

56. The first authors among the peoples in the Near East, in Egypt, in Greece, and in Latium and, in the return to barbarism, the first writers in the new languages of Europe are found to have been poets. 224

57. Those who are mute explain themselves through gestures and objects which have a natural correspondence to the ideas they wish to signify. 225

This Axiom is the principle pertaining to the hieroglyphs, with which all the nations in their earliest barbarism are found to have spoken. 226

This same Axiom is the principle pertaining to the natural speech, which Plato in his *Cratylus*,¹⁷⁹ and after him Iamblichus¹⁸⁰ in his *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, conjectured was spoken at one time in the world; and with them, the Stoics and Origen¹⁸¹ in his *Contra Celsum* are in 227

¹⁷⁶ Translating *improprie* as “distorted from their proper meaning or form,” as suggested by Elio Gianturco’s 1950 review of Bergin and Fisch’s translation.

¹⁷⁷ See Eusebius, *Preparatio evangelica* 1.2.

¹⁷⁸ On the “unaccountable wisdom of the ancients,” see the note at §128.

¹⁷⁹ See Plato, *Cratylus* 423c–e.

¹⁸⁰ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* 7.4.

¹⁸¹ Origen, *Contra Celso* 1.24 (PG 11:702–706), 5.4 (PG 11:1186).

agreement. And because they are speaking like diviners, they were opposed by Aristotle in his *Periermenia*¹⁸² and by Galen¹⁸³ in his *De decretis Hippocratis et Platonis*, and this dispute is discussed by Publius Nigidius in Aulus Gellius.¹⁸⁴

This natural speech must have been succeeded by poetic locutions: images, similes, metaphors, and natural properties.

228 58. Those who are mute issue unformed sounds while singing. And those who stutter, also while singing, loosen their tongues enough to enunciate.

229 59. Men vent great passions by expressing them in song such as we experience in the depths of sorrow and the peaks of joy.

230 These two Axioms allow for the supposition that the authors of the gentile nations—since they had come to the feral state of mute beasts and, as a consequence of that same bewilderment, only returned to their senses under the spur of the most violent passions—must have formed their earliest languages in singing.

231 60. Languages must have started with monosyllabic words since, in the present abundance of articulate tongues into which they today are born, children still start with monosyllabic words, even though the tissues of the organ necessary for articulating speech is quite supple in children.

232 61. Heroic verse is the most ancient of all, and spondaic verse is the slowest; and it will be found herein [§449] that when heroic verse came into being, it was spondaic.

233 62. Iambic verse is the one most similar to prose, and the iamb is the “swift foot,” as it comes to be defined by Horace.¹⁸⁵

234 These two last Axioms allow one to conjecture that ideas and languages went along, quickening at the same pace.

235 All these Axioms—starting from Axiom 47, together with those proposed as principles for all the others¹⁸⁶—complete the account of poetic reason in all its parts: myth; custom and the decorum belonging to it; sentiments; expression and the vividness belonging to it; allegory; song; and, lastly, verse. And the last seven Axioms, in addition, persuade us that speech was first in verse and that later speech was in prose for all the nations.

¹⁸² Aristotle, *On Interpretation* 2, 16a. Vico’s orthography is a departure from the more usual *Peri Hermeneias*.

¹⁸³ Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis libri noveni* 1.

¹⁸⁴ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 10.4. Publius Nigidius (98–45 BCE), author of the *Commentarii grammatici*, was a friend of Cicero, as well as a Pythagorean.

¹⁸⁵ Horace, *Ars poetica* 252.

¹⁸⁶ Axioms 1–22.

63. The human mind is naturally inclined to see itself with the senses, from without and embodied; only with great difficulty, and by means of reflection, does it come to understand itself in itself. 236

This Axiom gives the universal principle pertaining to etymology in all languages: names are taken from physical objects and the properties of physical objects in order to signify things pertaining to the mind and the spirit. 237

64. The order of ideas must proceed in accordance with the order of things.¹⁸⁷ 238

65. The order of human things proceeds so that, first, there are forests; later, lodges; thereafter, villages; then, cities; and finally, academies. 239

This Axiom is a great principle pertaining to etymology: it is in accordance with this series of human things that the history of words in native languages must be told. So, we observe in the Latin language that almost the entire corpus of its terms has origins pertaining to forest life or rustic life. So, for example, the word *lex* [“law”] must at first have been a gathering together of acorns, from which we believe is derived the word *ilex*—that is to say *illex*, meaning “an oak tree” in Latin—for just as it is certain that an *aquilex* is “someone gathering together water,” the oak tree produces the acorns for which the swine come together. Later, *lex* was a gathering together of vegetables, from which these vegetables were called *legumina*. Then, at a time when the common alphabetic letters with which one would write down laws had not yet been found, the necessity of civil nature dictates that *lex* must have been a gathering together of citizens—that is, the public assembly in which the presence of people was the law which solemnized the *testamenti* [“the last testaments”] which were made *calatis comitiis* [“when the assembly was convened”]. Finally, the gathering together of letters and making with each word, as it were, a sheaf of letters was called *legere* [“reading”].¹⁸⁸ 240

66. Men, at first, sense what is necessary; later, they tarry with what is advantageous; then, they notice what is convenient; later still, they delight 241

¹⁸⁷ Compare Spinoza, *Ethics* 2.7: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” For an earlier (and perhaps clearer) statement of the claim, one may consider the following passage from the *Diritto Universale*: “Philology is the study of speech and concerns itself with whatever deals with words while recounting their history and narrating their origin and progress. It classifies them according to the various stages of the language, so as to grasp their proper and figurative meanings and their usage. But since the ideas of things are depicted in words, philology must first look to grasp the history of things. Thus, philologists justly write commentaries on republics, the customs of nations and peoples, the laws, institutions, branches of learning, and artifacts” (*De constantia iurisprudientis* 2.1 [Cristofolini 387, BV 46]).

¹⁸⁸ See Vico’s extension of this etymology to *intelligere* at §363.

in what is pleasurable; subsequently, they become dissolute in what is luxurious, and finally they go mad wasting their substance.

242 67. The nature of peoples, at first, is crude; later, strict; subsequently, benign; then, refined; finally, dissolute.

243 68. Within humankind, the first to arise are the huge and gullish (those like Polyphemus); later arise the magnanimous and haughty (those like Achilles); thereafter arise either the valorous and just (those like Aristides and Scipio Africanus) or, closer to ourselves, those who make an appearance with a great show of virtue accompanied by great vices and who make a reputation among the common run for true glory (those like Alexander and Caesar); later still arise the morose, the reflective (those like Tiberius); and finally arise the mad, the dissolute, the impudent (those like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian).

244 This Axiom demonstrates that those first to arise were needed for man to obey man in the familial state and for disposing him to obey the laws in the state to come, the civil state; the second ones, who naturally did not cede to their equals, were needed for establishing, upon those families, republics in their aristocratic form; the third ones were needed for opening the path to popular liberty; the fourth ones were needed for introducing monarchy; the fifth were needed for establishing it; the sixth ones were needed for overturning it.

245 This Axiom, with the preceding ones,¹⁸⁹ gives the first part of the principles pertaining to the ideal eternal history upon which all nations run their temporal course in their springing forth, progress, maturity, decadence, and end.

246 69. Governments must conform to the nature of the men governed.

247 This Axiom demonstrates that, by the nature of human civil things, the public school of princes is the morality of peoples.

248 70. Let us concede something which is not repugnant to nature and which herein later [§§520–521, 553] will be found to be true in actuality: in the profane state of a lawless world, only a very few at first—those who were more vigorous—retreated to form the families by which and for which the fields were brought under cultivation. And many others, in a much later age, afterwards retreated, taking refuge in the lands cultivated by these Fathers.

249 71. Native custom (and, above all, the custom of natural liberty) does not change all at once, but in stages and over a long period of time.

250 72. If, as has been posited, all nations started from the worship of some divinity, then the Fathers in the familial state must have been wise men in

¹⁸⁹ Axioms 25–27.

the art of divining from auspices; and priests who made sacrifices in order to procure the auspices—that is, to understand them well; and kings who brought the divine laws to their families.

3. There is a folk tradition that the first ones to govern the world were kings. 251

74. There is another folk tradition that those worthiest by nature were created as the first kings. 252

75. There is still another folk tradition that the first kings were wise men. Hence, Plato, in an empty prayer, had a desire for those most ancient times when philosophers ruled or when kings philosophized.¹⁹⁰ 253

All these Axioms demonstrate that united in the persons of the first Fathers were wisdom, priesthood, and ruling, and that ruling and priesthood were dependent on wisdom, although not the recondite wisdom of philosophers but the commonplace wisdom of lawgivers.¹⁹¹ And, therefore, later the priests in all nations were crowned. 254

76. There is a folk tradition that the first form of government in the world was monarchy. 255

77. However, Axiom 67, along with the others that follow, particularly the corollary to Axiom 64, allows that the Fathers in the familial state must have exercised a monarchical power subject only to God, not only over the persons but also the possessions of their children, and even more so over the familial servants who had sought refuge in their lands; and so, they were the first monarchs of the world, which sacred history allows us to understand were called patriarchs—that is to say, fathers who were princes. This monarchical law was preserved for them by the Law of the Twelve Tables for the entire time of the Roman republic. They say: *PATRIFAMILIAS IUS VITAE ET NECIS IN LIBEROS ESTOS* [“the paterfamilias had the right of life and death over his children”]. As a consequence of this, *quicquid filius acquirit, patri acquirit* [“whatever the son acquires, he acquires for his father”]. 256

78. The families could not have been so-called, with the proper meaning of their origin, except as derived from those familial servants of the Fathers in what was then the state of nature. 257

¹⁹⁰ See Plato, *Republic* 5, 473c–d.

¹⁹¹ The distinction between “recondite wisdom” (*sapienza riposta*) and “commonplace wisdom” (*sapienza volgare*), along with the challenge of attaining a truthful reconciliation of the two, is a major theme of *The New Science*. Particularly relevant to the theme are §§14, 37, 360, 779, as well the whole of Book Three—an extended attempt to deny that the Homeric poems contain recondite wisdom, contrary to the assumptions of many readers (then and now).

258 79. The earliest *socii*—associates who, in the proper sense of the word, are companions whose goal was the sharing of advantage among themselves—cannot be imagined nor understood prior to those who, so as to have a safe life, sought refuge from the earliest Fathers and who, having received life by taking refuge, were obliged to sustain it by cultivating the fields of those Fathers.

259 These are found to be the true associates of the heroes, those who, later, were the plebeians of heroic cities and, eventually, were the provinces of sovereign [*principi*] peoples.

260 80. Men come naturally to a system of benefits whenever they discern that through it, they might either maintain or gain a good and great part of their advantage—that is, of the benefits which they can hope for in civil life.

261 81. It is a property of men of fortitude not to relinquish through idleness what they have gained by virtue. Rather, they yield because of either necessity or advantage, but little by little, and as little as possible.

262 From these two Axioms are perceived the perennial springs of fealties, which are called, with Roman elegance, *beneficia* [“benefices”].

263 82. Scattered throughout all the ancient nations are found *clienti* [“clients”] and *clientele* [“clientships”], which we understand with terms no more congruent than “vassals” and “fealties”; nor do those who are erudite about fealties find more congruent terms for explaining these than the Roman ones, *clienti* and *clientelae*.

264 These last three Axioms along with the preceding twelve starting from Axiom 70¹⁹² uncover the principles pertaining to republics coming into being out of some great necessity, determined herein [§§582–598] to be the necessity that the familial servants made for each paterfamilias; and on account of this, those same republics naturally came to take their aristocratic form. Insofar as the Fathers united in order so as to resist those familial servants revolting against them, and insofar as they remained united so as to contain those servants and to reduce them to obedience, they conceded to the familial servants a kind of rustic fealty and themselves found the sovereign power they had within the family (this cannot be understood except in terms of a system of noble fealties) subject to the sovereign power they had in civil life from their very ruling orders; the heads of these orders were called kings, and the most spirited must have been made heads during the revolts of the familial servants.

Such an origin for cities, even if it were offered only as a hypothesis—it is herein [§§553–569] discovered to be actual—must, of necessity, be ac-

¹⁹² In fact, from Axiom 68.

cepted as true on account of its naturalness and simplicity, and on account of the infinite number of effects in civil life which are supported by it as their proper cause. For in no other fashion can one understand, in the world, how from powers in families was formed civil power; or how from private patrimonies was formed the public patrimony; or how is it found that the materials for republics are arranged into orders—first, the order of the few, who command, second, the order of the many plebeians, who obey—the two parts which, together, comprise the subject of politics. The generation of the civil state from families containing only children will be demonstrated herein [§§553–569] to have been impossible.

83. That law concerning the fields establishes the first agrarian law of the world, and it is not possible to imagine or understand another law which could have been more restricted by nature. 265

This agrarian law distinguishes the three domains which can exist in the nature of civil life for three kinds of persons: the bonitary domain for the plebeians; the quiritary domain—preserved by arms and consequently noble—for the Fathers; and eminent domain for the order which is lord—that is, sovereign power in aristocratic republics. 266

84. There is a golden passage in Aristotle¹⁹³ in his *Politics* where he counts as one of the different republics the heroic regime, the regimen in which kings administered the laws at home, administered wars abroad, and were the heads of religion. 267

This Axiom squares completely with two heroic regimes of Theseus and of Romulus (as one can observe, of the former, in Plutarch's¹⁹⁴ biography of Theseus and, of the latter, in Roman history) if one supplements Greek history with the point in Roman history when Tullus Hostilius administers the law in his accusation against Horatius.¹⁹⁵ And the Roman kings were also kings of the sacred things, the so-called *reges sacrorum* ["kings of sacred things"]; hence, once the kings were expelled from Rome, for the sake of certainty in the divine ceremonies, they created someone also called *rex sacrorum*, who was the head of the *fetiales*—that is, "the heralds." 268

85. There is a golden passage in Aristotle in the same book¹⁹⁶ which reports that ancient republics did not have laws for punishing offences or for correcting private damages. And he says such were the customs of barbarian peoples, for peoples have their start in barbarism because they have not yet been domesticated by laws. 269

¹⁹³ Aristotle, *Politics* 3.14, 1285a.

¹⁹⁴ See Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 24.

¹⁹⁵ Horatius was accused of treason by Tullus, the third king of Rome, but acquitted by the people. For the episode, see Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.26.5.

¹⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* 2.8, 1268b.

Given this, wisdom, in its full amplitude, is nothing other than the science of making use of things, the use which they have in nature.

This Axiom, along with the other two definitions following it, constitutes the principle pertaining to benign reason, ruled by natural equity, which is connatural to gentile nations. From this public school, it will be demonstrated, come the philosophers. 327

These last six propositions together confirm that providence was the institutor [*l'ordinatrice*] of the natural law of the gentile peoples; it is providence that permits that because the nations, during the course of many centuries, had to live without any capacity for the true and for natural equity (philosophers later gave greater clarity to this), they instead attended to the certain and to civil equity, which scrupulously guards the words of the orders and the laws, and by these words would be led to observe the orders and laws in a general way, even in cases where they seem harsh, for nations are thus preserved. 328

And these same six propositions, unknown to the three princes²²⁹ of the doctrine of the natural law of the gentile peoples, made that all three err together when establishing their systems. For they believed that natural equity in its ideal perfection had been understood by the gentile nations from their earliest starting points, and they believed this without reflecting that it took two thousand years for philosophers to arrive in any of these nations and without granting one people the privilege of the particular assistance of the true God. 329

ON THE PRINCIPLES

Now, so as to make an experiment testing whether the propositions enumerated so far as ELEMENTS of this science should give form to the MATERIALS arranged at the beginning in the Chronological Table, we beseech the reader to reflect upon all that has been written concerning the principles pertaining to any subject matter whatsoever from the whole of what may be known about things divine and human in gentile antiquity; and, in combining all this, to reflect whether it makes for any incongruity with these propositions, either in the whole of them, or in a majority, or even in a single proposition (for if so much as one proposition is incongruent, then all of them are, for each is congruous with all the others). It is certain that the reader who makes such a comparison will perceive that the things written up until now are, all and all, the commonplaces of a confused memory, the fancies of a poorly regulated imagination having no share in the intellect, which itself has been made idle by the two kinds of vanity enumerated in the Axioms above.²³⁰ 330

²²⁹ That is, Grotius, Selden, and Pufendorf.

²³⁰ Axioms 3 and 4.

For, on the one hand, the vanity of the nations (each of them thinks that it was the earliest in the world) makes us dispirited about discovering the principles of this science among the philologists. On the other hand, the vanity of the learned (who want their wisdom to have been fully understood since the beginning of the world) puts us in despair about discovering these principles among the philosophers. Consequently, for this inquiry we must reckon as if there were no books in the world.

331 However, in this dense night of shadows, which cover over the earliest antiquity so distant from ourselves, there appears an eternal light which cannot be extinguished because of a truth which cannot, in any way, be called into doubt: that this civil world has certainly been made by men. Hence, these principles can be discovered, because they must be discovered, within the modifications of our own human mind.²³¹

The following must induce wonder in anyone who reflects upon it: all the philosophers have so studiously pursued science of the natural world (since God made it, only God has science of the natural world) and have given no care to meditating upon this world of nations—that is, the civil world—about which, since men have made it, men can pursue science.²³² This extravagance is the effect of the wretchedness we noticed in the Axiom²³³ concerning the human mind, that this mind, immersed and buried in a body, is naturally inclined towards sensing bodily things and must employ great strength and toil so as to understand itself as itself, in the same way that the bodily eye, which sees all the objects outside of itself, has need of a mirror so as to see itself.

332 Now, given that this world of nations has been made by men, let us see upon what things men from perpetuity have agreed and always do agree. For such things can give us the universal and eternal principles that must belong to every science, upon which everything arises, and which preserves everything in nations.

333 We observe that all the nations—whether barbarous or humane, and in spite of being founded in vastly different ways on account of immense

²³¹ Because human beings have made the civil world, they can know its principles, discovering them within the modifications “of our own human mind.” This claim by Vico is recognizably an application of the *verum/factum* principle that he announces in his 1710 metaphysical book: “the true and the made are convertible” (*verum et factum convertuntur*). (See *De antiquissima* 1.1; *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, p. 16[14].) In the 1710 work, Vico deploys the *verum-factum* principle to elaborate a hierarchy of sciences, ordered from “most constructed” to “least constructed”—but stops short of applying the principle directly to the civil world.

²³² Here and throughout, the key term *scienza* is translated by “science,” reserving “knowledge” for *cognizione*. Readers will want to look for both genuine continuities and deep differences between Vico’s use of the term *scienza* and the connotations of present-day “science.”

²³³ Axiom 63.

distances from one another in place and time—are guardians of three human customs. They all have some religion, they all contract solemn marriages, and they all bury their dead. Nor among the nations—no matter how wild and crude—are any human actions observed with more searching ceremonies or with more sacred solemnities than religions, marriages, and burials. With a view to the Axiom²³⁴ that uniform ideas coming into being among peoples unknown to one another must have some common beginning in the true, it must have been stated to all of them that in these three things is the start of all humanity and that they, accordingly, must guard over them in the most sacred way lest the world become savage and return anew to wilderness.

Accordingly, we have taken these three eternal and universal customs as the three first principles of this science.

And do not let modern travelers accuse the first of our three principles of being false, those who tell us of the peoples of Brazil, of the Kaffir of Africa, and other nations of the New World (and Antoine Arnauld²³⁵ believes the same of those who inhabit the island called Antilles) that they live in society without any knowledge of God. Persuaded, perhaps, by them, Bayle²³⁶ affirms in his treatise, *On Comets*, that it is possible for peoples to live in keeping with justice without the light of God, which is more than Polybius affirmed in that statement for which he is praised, that had philosophers arisen in the world who lived by the strength of reason and not that of laws, there would have been no need for religion.²³⁷

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These are the tales of travelers promoting their books with prodigious accounts.

Certainly, in the case of Andreas Rüdiger²³⁸ (in his pompously entitled *Divine Physics*, which intends to find that one middle way between atheism and superstition), it was suggested by the censors at the University of Geneva (a quite weighty suggestion in that it comes from a place where, because it is a popular free republic, there must have been somewhat greater freedom in writing) that in expressing such sentiments Rüdiger spoke with too great an assurance, which is to say, with no small audacity.

²³⁴ Axiom 13, inexactly quoted.

²³⁵ Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694), Jansenist theologian and mathematician, member of Port-Royal.

²³⁶ Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), author of *Pensées Diverses sur l'Occasion de la Comète* (1681), as well as the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697).

²³⁷ On the attribution of this claim to Polybius, see the note at §179.

²³⁸ Johannes Andreas Rüdiger (1673–1731), German philosopher and physicist. Author of *Philosophica synthetica* (1707), *De sensu veri et falsi* (1709), and *Physica divina* (1716), among other works. Vico's description of the book's intention is a paraphrase of the book's full title: *Physica divina: recta via, eademque inter superstitionem et atheismum media, ad utramque hominis felicitatem ducens*.

For all nations believe in a providential divinity; hence, one can find no more than four primary religions throughout the entire course of the time and throughout the breadth of this civil world. The first of these is that of the Hebrews and, consequently, the second is that of the Christians, both of whom believe in a divinity who is an infinite free mind. The third is that of the gentiles, who believe in many gods, each of whom is imagined to be composed of a body and a free mind; hence, when they intend to signify the divinity which rules over and conserves the world they say *deos immortales* ["the immortal gods"]. The fourth and last is that of the Mohammedans, who believe in a God who is an infinite free mind in an infinite body, for they look forward to the pleasures of the senses as rewards in the next life.

335 No nation has believed in a god who is all body, or in a god who is all mind, but which is not free.

Consequently, neither the Epicureans (who allowed for a god who is only body and, along with this body, allowed for chance) nor the Stoics (who allowed for a god who is an infinite mind subject to fate in an infinite body and, in this respect, would have been followers of Spinoza) are able to reason about republics and their laws (Spinoza himself talks about the republic as if it were a society of merchants).²³⁹

On account of this, Cicero was right, in speaking to Atticus as an Epicurean, when he told him that he could not reason with Atticus about the laws unless he conceded that there is divine providence.²⁴⁰

This shows how poorly these two sects, the Stoics and Epicureans, comport with Roman jurisprudence, which puts divine providence first among its first principles.

336 Next, there is the opinion that the actual, certain couplings of free men with free women outside of the solemnity of marriages do not contain any natural harm: this has been reprov'd by all nations in the customs by which they religiously celebrate marriages and in the customs of defining couplings outside of marriage as a bestial sin, albeit one of a lesser rank.

Insofar as such parents are not held in kinship by the necessary bond of law, they come to forsake their natural children. These children, whose parents can separate at any time, are abandoned by both and lie exposed to be devoured by dogs. And unless either a public or private humanity raises them up, they must grow without having anyone to teach them religion or language or any other human custom. Hence, inasmuch as this is what becomes of these children, they make this world of nations—one

²³⁹ This might be a general allusion to Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). It may also be a more specific reference to Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus* 7.8, published posthumously in 1677.

²⁴⁰ Vico's interpretation of Cicero, *De legibus* 1.7.21.

enriched and adorned with the fine arts of humanity—into the great forest of antiquity, the one through which the savage brutes of Orpheus wandered in profane, feral error when sons exercised a bestial lust upon their mothers and fathers upon their daughters; this is the infamy of a profane, lawless world which Socrates tried to prove is forbidden by human nature (but with reasoning from natural causes hardly proper to such proofs, for such couplings are naturally abhorrent to all nations and are not practiced by any save those, like the ancient Persians, in their final stage of corruption).

Finally, as for the great principle of humanity which is burial, imagine a feral state in which human cadavers lie unburied upon the earth as food for crows or dogs: it is certain that, together with such bestial customs, there must come to be fields which are uncultivated, to say nothing of cities which are uninhabited; men would live in the fashion of pigs, coming to eat acorns gathered from the midst of the rotting of their own dead kin. Hence and with great reason, burials were defined with that sublime expression *FOEDERA GENERIS HUMANI*²⁴¹ [“the covenants of humankind”], and, with less grandeur, were described to us by Tacitus²⁴² as *HUMANITATIS COMMERCIA* [“the transactions of our humanity”].

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Furthermore, the following is a tenet with which all gentile nations certainly agree, that souls will remain upon the earth restless and come to wander around their unburied bodies; consequently, souls do not die with their bodies, but are immortal (we are persuaded that such was once the consensus of the peoples of barbarian antiquity by the peoples of Guinea, as Hugo von Linschooten²⁴³ attests; by the peoples of Peru and Mexico, as Acosta²⁴⁴ attests in his *De indicis*; by the peoples who inhabit Virginia, as Thomas Harriot²⁴⁵ attests; by the peoples who inhabit New England, as Richard Whitbourne²⁴⁶ attests; by the peoples who inhabit the kingdom of Siam, as Joost Schouten²⁴⁷ attests).

Hence, Seneca concludes *quum de immortalitate loquimur non leve momentum apud nos habet consensus hominum aut timentium inferos aut colentium; hac persuasione publica utor*²⁴⁸ [“when we are speaking about immortality, it is of great weight for us that this immortality is the

²⁴¹ See Florus, *Epitome* 1.41.1; Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 4.19.3.

²⁴² See Tacitus, *Annals* 6.19.3.

²⁴³ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten (1563–1611), Dutch merchant, trader, and historian.

²⁴⁴ José de Acosta (c. 1539–1600), Spanish Jesuit and author of *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590). Vico’s reference is to p. 107 of a 1596 edition of the text published in Venice.

²⁴⁵ Thomas Harriot (1560–1621), English astronomer and physicist, sometimes credited with the introduction of the potato to the British Isles.

²⁴⁶ Richard Whitbourne (1579–1626), discoverer of Newfoundland.

²⁴⁷ Joost Schouten (c. 1600–1644), Dutch administrator in present-day Indonesia, burned at the stake for alleged homosexual activity.

²⁴⁸ An inexact rendering of Seneca, *Moral Letters* 117.6.

consensus of human beings, who either fear or worship those under the earth; I myself employ this public conviction”].

ON METHOD

338 In order for the ESTABLISHMENT OF PRINCIPLES that have been taken up by this science to be complete, it remains for us in Book One to reason about the METHOD this science must use.

For grant that this science must start where the subject matter starts, just as was proposed in the Axiom above:²⁴⁹ we have thus sought for this starting point, following the philologists, among the stones of Deucalion and Pyrrha, among the rocks of Amphion,²⁵⁰ among men born from the furrows of Cadmus²⁵¹ or the hard oak of Virgil;²⁵² and we have sought for it, following the philosophers, among the frogs of Epicurus, among the cicadas of Hobbes, among the simpletons of Grotius,²⁵³ among those of Pufendorf²⁵⁴ who are cast into the world without care or aid from God, as gullish and savage as the giants called Patagonians who they say have been discovered on the strait of Magellan—that is to say, we sought for it among the sons of Polyphemus of Homer, in whom Plato²⁵⁵ recognizes the first Fathers in the familial state. Such are the beginnings of humanity that the philologists and philosophers have offered this science! And grant that we must take our starting point in reasoning from the place where these men started to think in a human way and where, in their brutal savagery and unrestrained bestial liberty, there was no other means for domesticating the former and restraining the latter than some terrifying thought of some divinity, the fear of which, as was said in the Axiom above,²⁵⁶ is the only means powerful enough to reduce a ferocious liberty to duty. Granted all this, so as to retrieve the fashion in which this earliest of human thinking came into being in the world of gentile antiquity, we have encountered difficulties so harsh that it has cost us well over twenty years of research²⁵⁷ to descend from this gentle human nature of ours to a human nature so completely savage and brutal that

²⁴⁹ Axiom 16.

²⁵⁰ See §81.

²⁵¹ For the legend of Cadmus as founder of Thebes, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.1–130.

²⁵² See Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.315.

²⁵³ See Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* 2.2.

²⁵⁴ See Pufendorf, *De iure naturae et gentium* 2.2.

²⁵⁵ Plato, *Laws* 678c–681e.

²⁵⁶ Axiom 31.

²⁵⁷ This passage, which first appears in the 1730 *New Science*, is likely an allusion to Vico’s *On the Most Ancient of Wisdom of the Italians*, published twenty years earlier. Though this text resists any simple summary, part of its explicit intention is to discover recondite wisdom in the origins of the Latin language.

we are completely forbidden from imagining it and only with great toil are we permitted to understand it.²⁵⁸

It is because of all this that we have to begin from the sort of knowledge of God of which no men are deprived, no matter how wild, savage, and brutal. Such knowledge, we will demonstrate, is the following: fallen man, in despair of all succor from nature, desires for a thing superior to nature which will save him. But this thing which is superior to nature is God. And this is the light which God has cast over all men.

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This is confirmed by the following common human custom: aging libertine men, because they sense the loss of their natural strength, naturally return to religion.²⁵⁹

But these earliest men, who were later the princes of the gentile nations, must have engaged in thinking driven by the strong spurs of the most violent passions, which is the thinking of beasts.

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Consequently, we must proceed from a commonplace metaphysics—the one noted in the Axioms above²⁶⁰—and we will find that it was the theology of the poets. From this, we will seek that terrified thinking about some divinity which put some mode and measure upon the bestial passions of these forlorn men and rendered those passions human.

From such thinking must have come into being the *conatus*²⁶¹ proper to the human will, that of keeping under restraint the motions which the body imposes on the mind, either by completely quieting these motions, as a wise man does, or by at least directing them to better uses, as a civil man does.

This restraint of the motion of bodies is certainly the effect of the freedom of human choice, and so of the free will, which is the house and home of all the virtues and, above all, of justice; when informed by justice, the will is subject to all that is just and to all the laws dictated by the just. For to give *conatus* to bodies would be tantamount to giving them

²⁵⁸ Here Vico rejects the claim (sometimes attributed to him) that the historian's task is to empathetically "imagine" her way into the mentality of earlier times and nations. On the contrary, gentile antiquity *cannot* be imagined, even if it can be understood (but only with much difficulty). Vico repeats the claim at §378 and §700, calling it an "important observation" in the latter passage.

²⁵⁹ Compare to what the aged Cephalus tells Socrates, near the beginning of Plato's *Republic*. The *mythoi* told about Hades, once laughed at, "now make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true" (330d–e).

²⁶⁰ Axiom 33.

²⁶¹ Vico would certainly know the doctrine of *conatus* from Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part 3, Proposition 6: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere (*conatur*) in its being." It is possible that he also knows the doctrine from the Latin writings of Hobbes; see, e.g., *De corpore* 15.2. Also relevant are the occurrences of "endeavor" throughout *Leviathan*, particularly chapter 6.

freedom to regulate their own motions, whereas it is the case that all bodies are agents of necessity in nature. And the things which the mechanists call “power,” “force,” and “conatus” are the insensate motions of bodies, by which they approach their center of gravity (as ancient mechanics would say) or by which they depart from their center of motion (as modern mechanics would say).

341 However, men, on account of their corrupted nature, are tyrannized by self-love, on account of which they pursue principally their own advantage. Hence, when they intend to keep everything advantageous for themselves and no share for companionship, it is not possible for them to place their passions under conatus so as to direct them towards justice.

Consequently, we establish that man in the bestial state loves only his own safety; when he takes on a spouse and has children, he loves his own safety along with the safety of families; when he arrives at civil life, he loves his own safety along with the safety of the city; when he extends power over people other than his own, he loves his own safety along with the safety of those nations; and when nations unite in war, peace, alliances, or commerce, he loves his own safety along with the safety of the whole of humankind. In all these circumstances, man principally loves his own advantage. Therefore, it must be by nothing except divine providence that he is held within these orders to pay homage, in keeping with justice, to the orders of familial, civil, and finally human society. When, with a view to these orders, man cannot pursue what he wills, he wills, at least, to pursue that portion of the advantageous which is his due, that which is what is called “the just.”

Hence, the rule for everything just among men is divine justice, which is administered by divine providence so as to preserve human society.

342 Therefore, this science, in one of its principal aspects, must be a rational civil theology of divine providence, which seems to have been lacking up until now. For either philosophers have completely failed to recognize divine providence (as is the case with the Stoics and the Epicureans, the latter of whom say that it is the blind concurrence of roiling atoms, the former of whom say that it is a deaf chain of cause and effect dragging along everything that men do) or philosophers have considered divine providence only in the order of natural things (from here comes the natural theology they call metaphysics, in which they contemplate this attribute of God and confirm it in the physical order in which is observed the motions of bodies, such as the motion of the spheres and the elements, and in the final cause beyond the other lesser natural things observed).

And philosophers also ought to have reasoned about divine providence in the economy of the civil things and by means of the term which properly specifies providence, “divine,” derived from *divinari* [“to divine”]—that is, to understand either “what is hidden to men” (hidden in the sense of “what is to come”) or “what is hidden within men” (in the sense of

the conscience [*coscienza*]²⁶²). This—the divine things—is what properly occupies the first part of the subject of jurisprudence, upon which the other, accompanying part—the human things—depends.

Hence, this science must be a demonstration, so to speak, of the history of providence in what is actual, for it must be a history of the orders which providence has given (without any human discernment or counsel, and often contrary to what human beings have proposed) to this great city of humankind; the orders which providence has posited, although this world was created in time and is particular, are nevertheless universal and eternal.

Because of all this, within the contemplation of that infinite and eternal providence, this science discovers certain divine proofs by which it is confirmed and demonstrated.

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Insofar as divine providence has omnipotence as its minister, it ought to articulate its orders in ways as easy as natural human customs. Insofar as it has infinite wisdom as its counselor, whatever it disposes ought to be perfectly ordered. Insofar as it has its own immeasurable goodness as its end, whatever it orders ought to be directed towards a good which is always superior to any good proposed by men.

Because of all this, in the deplorable obscurity of the beginnings of nations and in the countless variety of their customs and on the basis of a divine argument which contains all the human things, no more sublime proofs are possible than these, which give us the naturalness, the order, and the end that are the preservation of humankind. These proofs turn out to be luminous and distinct²⁶³ when we reflect upon how great is the facility by which these things come into being and upon the occasions (often quite far apart and sometimes completely contrary to what men propose) from which these things come and harmonize among themselves: such are the proofs to which omnipotence ministers. In combination with this reflection, look upon the order in which the things which ought to come into being now do come into being at their proper times and in their proper places and by other things defer their coming into being until their time and place, in which consists, as Horace²⁶⁴ revealed, the beauty of order: such are the proofs which eternal wisdom arranges. And, finally, consider whether we are capable of understanding whether by those occasions, places, and times, it would have been possible for different divine benefits to have come into being by which, the needs and infirmities of men such as they are, it would have been possible to conduct

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²⁶² See the note at §137 on *coscienza*. In the present context, “conscience” is more appropriate than “consciousness.”

²⁶³ *Luminose e distinte*—an echo of Descartes’s “clear and distinct.” Similar echoes can be heard at §§367, 390, 444, 502, 905.

²⁶⁴ Horace, *Ars poetica* 42–45.

human society in a better way toward the good and to preserve it: such are the proofs which the eternal goodness of God will give.

345 Hence the proof proper to this work will be the one made continuously herein by combining such considerations and reflecting upon whether the human mind, within the series of possibilities which it is permitted to understand and to the extent that it is permitted to understand, can think of a greater or lesser or alternative number of causes than that from which issue the effects of this civil world. Doing this will prove for the reader to be a divine pleasure²⁶⁵ in this mortal body, that of contemplating, in the divine ideas, this world of nations throughout the whole extent of its places, times, and varieties. And the reader will find the Epicureans convinced by what is actual that their chance cannot wander about madly and always find a way out; and the Stoics convinced that the eternal chain of causes with which they want to bind the world itself hangs from the omnipotence, wisdom, and benevolence of a good and great God.

346 These sublime natural theological proofs will be confirmed for us by the subsequent kinds of logical proofs which, in reasoning about the origins of things divine and human in gentile antiquity, will reach those earliest origins beyond which it is foolish curiosity to ask after ones which are earlier. This is the characteristic proper to principles. These proofs articulate the particular fashions of their coming-into-being [*il nascimento*], what is called “nature” [*natura*], which is the most proper mark of science. Finally, these proofs are confirmed by the eternal properties which preserve things that could not have come to be [*nate*] except by such and not other comings-into-being [*nascimenti*], at such times and places and in such fashions—that is, by such natures, as was proposed in the two Axioms above.²⁶⁶

347 So as to come to find such natures for human things, this science proceeds by a strict analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or advantages of social life, which are the two perennial sources of the natural law of the gentile peoples, as also noted in an Axiom above.²⁶⁷

Hence, for its second principal aspect, this science is a history of human ideas, upon which, it seems, must proceed the metaphysics of the human mind. This metaphysics, queen of the sciences, on account of the Axiom²⁶⁸ stating that the sciences must take their starting points from the place where the subject matter starts, takes its starting point, then, from the place where these earliest men started to think in a human way, not yet from the place when philosophers started to reflect on human ideas, as was recently brought to light in an erudite and learned little

²⁶⁵ On the “divine pleasure,” see Longinus, *On the Sublime* 36.1; Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.28; Dante, *Paradiso* 33.33.

²⁶⁶ Axioms 14 and 15.

²⁶⁷ Axiom 11.

²⁶⁸ Axiom 106.

book entitled *Historia de ideis*,²⁶⁹ which proceeds all the way up to the recent controversies between Leibniz and Newton, the two foremost geniuses of our age.

And so as to make determinate the times and places of a history of this sort, namely, when and where those human thoughts came into being, and so to give certainty to them by means of a chronology and a geography which are, so to speak, metaphysical, this science uses an art of criticism which is also metaphysical, applied to the authors of these same nations, nations which must have had to run a course of more than a thousand years so as to be able to bring forth the writers with whom philological criticism has up until now been occupied. 348

And the criterion which serves this art of criticism, as was proposed in the Axiom above,²⁷⁰ is what is taught by divine providence in common to all nations—that is, the common sense of humankind itself, made determinate by their necessary agreement about these same human things, an agreement which makes for all the beauty in this civil world.

Consequently, the following kind of proof rules in this science: the things of the nations that are reasoned about by this science are such that they HAD TO BE, HAVE TO BE, AND WILL HAVE TO BE, posited as such orders by divine providence, even if from one time to the next, infinite worlds came to be from eternity (in actuality, this is certainly false).²⁷¹

Hence, this science, at the same time, comes to describe an ideal eternal history upon which the histories of all the nations run their temporal course in their emergence, progress, maturity, decadence, and end. 349

Indeed, we would hasten to affirm that the one who meditates upon this science tells himself this entire eternal history: since this world of nations has certainly been made by men—that indubitable first principle proposed above [§331]—and since, accordingly, the fashion in which this world comes into being must be discovered within the modifications of our own human mind, therefore, in the proof that it HAD TO BE, HAS TO BE, AND WILL HAVE TO BE, he makes this world himself; for when the one who makes the things is also the one who tells their history, there can be no history more certain.

So, this science proceeds exactly in the way that geometry, in constructing a world upon its elements and contemplating it, makes that world of quantity; however, this science makes a world all the more real inasmuch as the orders concerning the deeds of men have more reality than do

²⁶⁹ That is, the 1723 book by Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), *Historia philosophica doctrinae de ideis, qua tum veterum imprimis graecorum tum recentiorum philosophorum placita enarrantur*.

²⁷⁰ Axiom 12.

²⁷¹ An allusion to Giordano Bruno's dialogue *De l'infinito universo et mondi*, published in Venice in 1584.

points, lines, planes, and figures.²⁷² And this itself is an argument that such proofs are of a divine kind and should, O reader, bring about a divine pleasure, since, in God, the knowing and the making are one and the same thing.

350 Furthermore, through the definitions of the true and the certain proposed above,²⁷³ there was a long period of time when men could not be capable of the true or of reason—that is, of the source of inner justice by which they satisfy the intellect. This inner justice was practiced by the Hebrews who, illuminated by the true God, were prohibited by divine laws from even having thoughts that were less than just, about which no mortal lawgiver ever troubled himself. For the Hebrews believed in a God who is all mind, searching the hearts of men, whereas the gentiles believed in gods composed of body and mind who could not do this. Later, this inner justice was reasoned upon by philosophers, but these philosophers did not arrive until two thousand years after their nations were founded. Therefore, throughout this long period of time, men were governed by what is certain in authority, namely, by that same criterion which the metaphysical art of criticism uses—that is, the common sense of humankind itself—the source of the definition proposed above in the Elements,²⁷⁴ upon which rests the consciences of all the nations.

As a result, from another principal perspective, this science comes to be a philosophy of authority, which is the source of the “external justice” of which the moral theologians speak.

It is about this authority that the three princes of the doctrine of natural law of the gentile peoples ought to have had some account, not about an authority drawn from the commonplaces of writers who could have no reckoning of it: such authority ruled among nations for more than a thousand years before writers arrived.

Hence, Grotius (more learned and more erudite than the other two) fights with the Roman jurists on almost every particular subject of his teaching on natural law,²⁷⁵ but all his blows fall short because the jurists establish their principles concerning the just upon what is certain from the authority of humankind, not upon the authority of the learned.

²⁷² Here Vico’s claim is that human beings can know the civil world, precisely because they make it. In this way, *The New Science* seems to endow history with the same intelligibility that his 1710 *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* attributes to geometry. One may compare Vico’s conception to Hobbes: “Geometry therefore is demonstrable, for the lines and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves; and civil philosophy is demonstrable, because we make the commonwealth” (*Six Lessons to the Savilian Professors of the Mathematics*, in W. Molesworth, ed., *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 7 [London, 1845], 184).

²⁷³ Axiom 10.

²⁷⁴ Axiom 12.

²⁷⁵ See Grotius, *De iure belli ac pacis*, Prolegomena §53.

These are the philosophical proofs that this science will use and, consequently, the ones absolutely necessary so as to pursue this science. 351

The philological proofs ought to have the last place. They can all be traced back to the following kinds.

First, the things upon which we meditate agree with our account of various myths, an agreement which is not forced or contorted, but straightforward, easily obtained, and natural; these myths will be seen to be the civil histories of the earliest peoples, who are found everywhere to have naturally been poets. 352

Second, these things also agree with the heroic turns of phrase, which are explained by the full truth of their sentiments and the full propriety of their expression. 353

Third, these things also agree with the etymologies of native languages, which tell the histories of the things which terms signify, starting with the properties they had at their origins and following from there the natural progress of their movement according to the order of ideas, upon which the history of languages must proceed, as was premised in the Axioms.²⁷⁶ 354

Fourth, a mental dictionary of the human things pertaining to our sociability is articulated, things sensed as the same in substance by all nations and articulated by as many different modifications as there are different languages, as discussed in the Axiom above.²⁷⁷ 355

Fifth, the true is sifted from the false in everything that has been guarded over the period of many centuries by folk traditions; these folk traditions, insofar as they themselves have been guarded over a long age and by entire peoples, must have had some public foundation in the true, as the Axiom above²⁷⁸ proposes. 356

Sixth, the great fragments of antiquity—useless to science up until now because they lay squalid, broken, and out of place—draw out a great light when polished, put together, and put back in place. 357

Seventh and last, upon all these things, as upon their necessary causes, rest all of the effects which are told to us by certain history. 358

These philological proofs serve to make us able to see, in what is actual, the things meditated upon in idea concerning this world of nations; this is in accordance with the method of philosophizing of Lord Verulam—that is, the method of *cogitare videre* [“to think, to see”].²⁷⁹ Hence, it is through the philosophical proofs which were previously made that the philological proofs which come after are, at the same time, confirmed by the authority of reason and confirm reason by an authority of their own. 359

²⁷⁶ Axioms 17, 18, 64, and 65.

²⁷⁷ Axiom 22.

²⁷⁸ Axiom 16.

²⁷⁹ On Bacon’s *Cogitata et visa*, see the note at §163.

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Let us conclude, from all that has been discussed concerning the ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES of this science, that given that its principles are divine providence, the moderation of the passions in connection with marriage, and the immortality of the human soul in connection with burial; and given that it uses the criterion of judgment that what is sensed to be just by all, or the greater part, of men ought to be the rule of sociable life; and given that, on such principles and criterion, there is agreement between the commonplace wisdom of all the lawgivers and the recondite wisdom of the best-reputed philosophers, then these ought to be the boundaries of human reason: let anyone who should wish to pass beyond them see to it that he does not pass beyond all humanity.