



## *Interpretations of Giambattista Vico's Works from Naples to Zagreb*

### **Introductory**

The oeuvre of the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) – highly praised in Italian humanities thanks to the contributions of Benedetto Croce and Fausto Nicolini in the first half of the 20th century, and worldwide after works based on new philosophical, sociological, linguistic, literary, and other approaches in Europe, North and South America on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of his birth in 1968 – was the subject of research, examination, and critical discussion at the conference held on 15 and 16 July 2014 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb.

The Neapolitan philosopher is not unknown in Croatia: Croatian translation of the *New Science* was published in 1982 in the book series “Filozofska biblioteka” (Naprijed, Zagreb), Vico’s *Autobiography* enriched with contributions relevant to Croatian historiography was also translated in 1993 (Grafički zavod Hrvatske, Zagreb), and the Croatian Philosophical Society published two monographies on Vico in the book series “Filozofska istraživanja” as well as a number of papers and reviews in its journals authored by Croatian and foreign authors.

The international scientific conference titled *Metaphysics, Law, and History: Research and Perspectives on Giambattista Vico's Works* was organised by prof. Lino Veljak from the Department of Philosophy and prof. Sanja Roić from the Department of Italian Language and Literature of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, with participation of Croatian, Italian, Russian, and Brazilian scientists. Besides presentations of papers in English and Italian, as well as following discussions between participants and the audience, a special part was dedicated to the annual prize *Premio Vico 2014* awarded by the Department of Philosophy of the University of Naples Federico II (one of the three oldest Italian universities besides Bologna and Padova). It is a contest that involves about 300 high school seniors each year with papers regarding Vico’s oeuvre. The contest committee selects and proclaims the best papers, and the prize is participation at a scientific conference (so far in Moscow, Zagreb, and Leipzig). Two young Neapolitans and future students of philosophy Vincenzo Piscopo and Francesco Velotto, who had been awarded in 2014, participated at the Zagreb conference. The praiseworthy initiative of the University of Naples is also supported by the Centre for Vico Studies (Centro di studi Vichiani), which has been operating since few years ago within the Institute for Modern Philosophical and Scientific Thought of the National Research Council (Istituto per il pensiero filosofico

e scientifico moderno del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche), and already since the 1960's has been promoting research and dissemination of Vico's works and thought throughout the world. The Department of Philosophy and the Department of Humanities of the Federico II University, together with two Neapolitan interuniversity centres and the County of Bacoli have promoted the initiative "Philosophical Contest on Giambattista Vico" (Certame filosofico su Giambattista Vico) which includes high school seniors of the city and suburban gymnasiums. The whole generation of students first attends lectures of Neapolitan and foreign professors, who transfer topics related to the philosopher's oeuvre and reconstruction of the so-called "Vico's itinerary", a map that marks the key places in the old town where Vico lived and worked, connecting them with other important 17th- and 18th-century monuments and places in the historic centre of Naples. In 2014 the students had the task of commenting a fragment from Vico's *First New Science* (the first edition of *Scienza nuova* published in 1725; the final version was published in 1744). The initiative was presented at the Zagreb conference by one of the participants, prof. Fabrizio Lomonaco from the Federico II University, with the following words:

"Philosophy can open possibilities for critical reflection of our 'practical' action in the most noble sense of praxis within a polis, in order to re-establish man's life made of action and ideas, facts in ideas and ideas in facts. Therefore, today we need 'philosophy' more than ever, i.e. 'philosophies' that aim to examine historical and political relationships of human facts and ideas within the positive sciences, without dissolving in the framework of just one of them, or being blindly obedient to just one of them, by which – although in a negative sense – confirm the ancient wish of philosophy to be a queen of all sciences in the form of metaphysics. This is closely related to formation and transfer of knowledge (in its various forms, both digital and non-digital 'readings', but surely programmatic, antischolastic, and antidogmatic), the knowledge that is not reduced only to keywords of our times, and which starts with didactic plan in elementary and secondary schools all the way to university curricula. An effort has been made to include teachers and students, to articulate the dimension of intellectual 'trade' that aims to measure quantity and quality of knowledge, which is a paradox of our times, on the one hand measurable and 'relative' (Einstein) and on the other opposed to it due to the crisis of meanings. Modernised study of Vico's philosophy – free from outdated schemes, imposed by Croce and Nicolini, according to which he was an alleged forerunner and a preromantic hero in the context of idealist philosophy foreign to his times – can contribute to realisation of the need for philosophical knowledge and research. Vico's works are the starting point of student's philosophical contest in Naples, which welcomes teachers and students, in a beautiful ambience rich with archaeological findings and historical monuments, with the aim to understand and accept the relevance and contemporaneity of Vico's thesis from 1709 on the public role of education: 'university teachers should form a unified system of all disciplines (...) to achieve a balance between teachings and then passed publicly in the education system'."

Prof. Lomonaco's theses could inspire a similar reappraisal of Croatian philosophy within Croatian secondary and university education system.

The following is a selection of papers based on presentations from the Zagreb conference *Metaphysics, Law, and History: Research and Perspectives on Giambattista Vico's Works*.

**Sanja Roić**