

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Vico, Giambattista. *The New Science*. Trans. and ed. Jason Taylor and Robert C. Miner. With an intro. by Giuseppe Mazzotta

Jonathan Locke Hart

Volume 45, numéro 2, printemps 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1094856ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39799>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Hart, J. (2022). Compte rendu de [Vico, Giambattista. *The New Science*. Trans. and ed. Jason Taylor and Robert C. Miner. With an intro. by Giuseppe Mazzotta]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 45(2), 368–371. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39799>



Vico, Giambattista.

***The New Science*. Trans. and ed. Jason Taylor and Robert C. Miner. With an intro. by Giuseppe Mazzotta.**

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. Pp. xxvi, 451 + 1 b/w ill. ISBN: 978-0-3001-9113-4 (paperback) US\$25.

In recent decades, interest in the work of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), which was already influential, has intensified. In 1725, the first edition of *New Science* appeared, with revised editions in 1730 and 1744. The edition discussed here is a great contribution to the study of Vico and is among a number of important contributions in the past decade, such as Donald Phillip Verene’s *Vico’s “New Science”: A Philosophical Commentary* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), which discusses, among many things, Vico’s influence on Vincenzo Cuoco, Gioacchino de’ Prati, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ugo Foscolo, and the Risorgimento; in Germany, on Hamann, Herder, and Goethe; in France, on Victor Cousin and Jules Michelet; in the twentieth century, on Benedetto Croce and James Joyce. Montesquieu, Marx, and Gadamer also read Vico. Verene’s commentary on the *New Science* (*Scienza nuova*), which explores the principles and stages of development or history of humanity, was much needed, and so is this new edition, well edited, introduced and annotated effectively, discussing scholarship and the highly allusive work of Vico. The edition also pays close attention to representing Vico’s typography. Jason Taylor’s and Robert C. Miner’s translation of Vico’s book is the third one into English and provides a clear and readable rendition of his intricate style while including features of the edition of 1744. Giuseppe Mazzotta, author of *The New Map of the World: The Poetic Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), provides an elegant introduction that examines Vico’s thought and places it in context in a way that is instructive to scholars, students, and general readers alike.

In the editors’ preface, Taylor and Miner say that their “translation aims to become the standard English-language edition of Vico’s magnum opus” (ix). They acknowledge their debt to the Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch translation of this text (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948) and the David Marsh translation (London: Penguin, 1999) and they say why a new translation is necessary. As Taylor and Miner maintain, “Any translation is a compromise between literalness and readability, aiming at the elusive goal of

fidelity” (ix). They view Bergen and Fisch as tending to the literal and Marsh to readability. Marsh, according to Taylor and Miner, is readable but “at the price of fracturing the unity of the text’s distinctive vocabulary—as, for example, by using six different English words to render the key term *ingegno*,” yet they admit that Verene thinks that readers should adhere to Marsh’s translation because it is reliable and readable. Still, Taylor and Miner persisted in their translation. They provide a sample of some of the defects of the Bergin and Fisch translations, such as omissions and mistakes, misleading literalism, and simple inconsistencies in key terms (ix–x). Taylor and Miner say they will remain faithful to Vico’s “narrative technique” by mainly refraining from breaking up Vico’s longer sentences, including parataxis and Ciceronian periods, while keeping Vico’s paragraphing (placing the paragraph numbers in the margins) (x). According to Taylor and Miner, their edition has more annotations than those two earlier translations and they talk about Vico’s “erudition” as “breathtaking” (x). They add: “Our aim is to enhance the reader’s awareness of the many voices with which he is in dialogue” (x).

Taylor and Miner speak about Vico’s allusions, explicit and implicit, ancient and modern, and they refer to reproducing “a range of attributes that appear on the surface of the text printed in 1744” (xi). They include the way Vico quotes classical texts in Latin, the use of the Greek alphabet and not transliteration, preserving his emphasis “on words designating components,” his use of capital letters for stress, his arrangement of selected words in an inverted pyramid, his “styling of the titles of the five Books” (xi). The editors do this to try to make the experience of the reader like that of Vico’s readers of the edition of 1744 and defend this choice as part of Vico’s view of the imagination and the senses as not being separate from the intellect, what the editors call “noetic reality” (xi, see xii). Taylor and Miner say their “translation restores these signaling phrases, even as it preserves the system of referring to places in the text by paragraph number,” which Bergin and Fisch pioneered (xii). The editor-translators “refrain from intruding some divisions into the text that modern editions introduce” (xii). They also put their design succinctly: “We have sought to be spare where Vico is spare, and baroque where Vico is baroque” (xii). Taylor and Miner see book 3 as the central one in *The New Science* in which Vico views poets after Homer as being Cyclic poets and tragic poets, and book 3 inspires the translators to set out three aspects of advice: not to confuse translation with interpretation, fidelity with literalness, humility with

servility. Taylor and Miner see their task as translators to be spirited, generous, and aspiring (xiii). In the acknowledgments they thank Andrea Battistini for permission to draw from his extensive footnotes in *Giambattista Vico: Opere* (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), especially regarding Vico's allusions and references to classical and modern works (xv).

Mazzotta's introduction is another strength of the edition. He says that the new philosophy was the central concern for Vico and he engaged with many schools of thought (xviii). Mazzotta states that history is a key for Vico: "His rigorous introduction of history as the supreme principle, in the light of which a possible knowledge of reality could be reached, depends on his familiarity with Roman and Greek traditions that converge in Augustine, a figure crucial to Vico's thought" (xviii). For Mazzotta, Vico wrote his book mainly "to gauge, with remarkable clarity, the depth of the intellectual, moral, and political crisis of his time" and he explores this crisis in terms of education, "the productive nexus of philosophy and culture" (xix). Mazzotta notes that in Vico's autobiography he chooses Socrates as an intellectual model in seeking self-knowledge (xx). Rather than see philosophy as supreme, Vico views poetry as central: according to Mazzotta, "Poetry for Vico comes to mean the spirit of memory of the imagination and passions" and involves questions concerning "traditions, origins, visions of the future, and the wisdom hidden in the fold and archives of language" (xxi). Vico teaches us to read, including seemingly secondary details that "can bring unexpected illumination of a text's hidden intensions" (xxii). For Mazzotta, "Vico radically reverses the intellectual premises of the classical world" and understands poetry and philosophy as interlocutors in seeking out wisdom in a movement from *episteme* to *sophia* or *scientia* to *sapientia* (xxiv). *The New Science* is "an epic whose hero is Vico himself" (xxiv). His universal history has three ages, of gods, heroes, humankind, and the book is novelistic and encyclopedic (encyclopedia as "a circle of knowledge," xxiv-xxv). Plato, Tacitus, Bacon, and Grotius are his guides on the journey to the education of the soul (*paideia*) and political philosophy is the *telos* of this book (xxv). Vico opposes atheistic politics or philosophy and prefers Plato and Cicero and their moral and political conversation while he sees a connection between rhetoric and politics, a trust in language, ending with being pious to be wise (xxvi).

Vico is a significant author, who has a poetic sense and makes poetry a key to thought and culture, society and politics, philosophy and rhetoric. He is a fertile writer and sensitive reader and prompts us to be in history and to

understand its value. Words matter to Vico and Vico should matter to us. This edition, thanks to Taylor, Miner, and Mazzotta, will matter for some time and help us to be sensitive to Vico's words and to this, his most considered book.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Shandong University

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39799>