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SACRED HISTORY AND POLITICAL THOUGHT: NEAPOLITAN RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM OF SOCIABILITY AFTER HOBBES*

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ABSTRACT. *From the mid-seventeenth century, the problem of human sociability, long a staple of natural jurisprudence, became even more central to political thought. Faced with Hobbes's insistence on man's natural unsociability, Protestant thinkers continued to treat the question from within natural law. For reasons we do not yet understand, however, Catholic thinkers did not. Instead, it is argued here, they turned to sacred history, and in particular to the Old Testament, as the earliest record of the formation of human societies, Hebrew and gentile. The materials for this enquiry were provided by new critical scholarship on the Bible and the peoples of the ancient Near East. Despite the hostility of the authorities in Rome to its findings, this scholarship was widely available in the Catholic world, notably so in contemporary Naples. Two of the most remarkable applications of sacred history to the problem of sociability were by the Neapolitans Pietro Giannone, in his 'Triregno' (1731–3), and Giambattista Vico, in the Scienza nuova (1725–44). These works explored the ways in which family relations, religious practices, and war enabled the ancient Hebrews and their gentile neighbours to form and maintain societies, notwithstanding the unsocial tendency of human passions.*

I

Between 1650 and 1800 the scope of political thought widened dramatically. Until then, the concerns of political thinkers had clustered more or less closely around the subject of the state. Central topics of political enquiry were the

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nature of legitimate authority, the origins and subject-matter of justice, the location of supreme or sovereign power, the existence and extent of a right of resistance, the scope of reason of state. In the mid-seventeenth century, all these were explored in the works of Thomas Hobbes, who made the securing of peace his priority, and a concept of the state the focus of his response. The traditional concerns did not suddenly disappear from political enquiry after 1650; but they were revised and re-cast as political thinkers turned increasingly to address the implications of geographical diversity, of social hierarchies, and of the growing competition for economic resources. The new interests may be explained as responses to major developments in the European political order: the end of religious wars, consolidation of a more stable states system at the Peace of Utrecht in 1714, increased contact with non-European political systems, and the growing political importance of commercial interests. But extending the scope of political thought was not simply a matter of adding to the topics of enquiry. The underlying conceptual framework of political thought also altered and expanded, making it possible to extend the scope of the political. To explain how this occurred, we need to identify the questions, new or re-formulated, which enabled and even entailed this transformation of the field of enquiry. One such transformative question, I wish to argue, was that of sociability: how men and women came to form enduring, stable societies.

Viewed from the period before 1650, the persistence, or recurrence, of the problem of sociability may present a puzzle. It was certainly not a new problem. Annabel Brett has reminded us that sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Aristotelians, both Humanist and Scholastic, treated their master's famous proposition that man is naturally political not as a given but as a premise to be clarified. Where the boundaries of the *civitas*, the city, were to be drawn and how its membership should be determined were open questions: civil society could not be taken for granted. If anything, Catholic Scholastics, exercised by the problem of the will, were less confident of human sociability than Protestants, for whom justice *ad alterum* was a key tenet of natural law.[1] But the Protestant Grotius was also aware that the thesis of natural sociability needed reinforcement: it is this, Chris Brooke has argued, which explains his invocation of the Stoic concept of *Oikeiosis*.[2] With the breakdown of the political order in England in the 1640s, a number of thinkers took these doubts still further, to the point of supposing that ungoverned man would naturally put self-preservation before sociability. The Epicurean thought that men were originally indistinguishable from beasts, reinforced in several cases by the

[1] Annabel Brett, *Changes of state: nature and the limits of the city in early modern natural law* (Princeton, NJ, 2011), esp. pp. 38–50, 62–75, 115–22; idem, '"The matter, forme, and power of a Commonwealth": Thomas Hobbes and late Renaissance commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*', *Hobbes Studies*, 23 (2010), pp. 72–102.

[2] Christopher Brooke, 'Grotius, Stoicism and *Oikeiosis*', *Grotiana*, 29 (2008), pp. 25–50.

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Socinian thesis that Christ had taught man a new moral law, encouraged the reduction of man's natural moral attributes to a minimal set of natural rights, whose surrender in return for subordination to political authority would secure peace.[3]

But the starkest formulation of the problem was that of Hobbes, who in the second paragraph of his major Latin work of political thought *De cive* (1642, 1647) dismissed as 'false' Aristotle's axiom that man is born fit for society.[4] In *Leviathan* (1651) the crucial discussion comes later, in Chapter 13, on 'the natural condition of mankind'.[5] Several features of Hobbes's argument may be underlined. At issue was the natural condition of mankind, not the state of nature in general: even if a mechanistic account of all nature as matter in motion applied equally to men and beasts, the problem of sociability was formulated only with reference to humans.[6] The problem, moreover, was not confined to the desire for self-preservation, for there were three causes of quarrel between men: competition, diffidence, and glory. Hobbes illustrated the working of these causes by examples both historical and contemporary. These suggest that Hobbes envisaged some forms of social interaction as occurring in the natural condition of mankind, including family life, exchange of goods, and opportunities for men to distinguish themselves one from another. Although they are unmentioned, sources for Hobbes's illustrations of primitive human behaviour might be found in Lucretius and Diodorus Siculus.[7] Moreover, the chapter on the natural condition of man was preceded by one on religion, where Hobbes had characterized men, unlike beasts, as naturally religious, out of a fear of invisible powers and ignorance of the causes of visible effects. In their fear, he added, men naturally worship gods with the same expressions of reverence as they show towards men, an observation which seems

[3] Richard Tuck, *Natural rights theories: their origin and development* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 101–18; Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and religion in the English Revolution: the challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 89–104.

[4] Thomas Hobbes, *De cive: the Latin version*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford 1983), I.2: pp. 90–3; English translation as *On the citizen* by Michael Silverthorne ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 21–5.

[5] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ch. XIII: 'Of the natural condition of mankind, as concerning their felicity, and misery', in the edition by Noel Malcolm (3 vols., Oxford, 2012), II: *The English and Latin texts (i)*, pp. 188–97.

[6] No natural superiority was thereby implied, as the solitary man would discover when he met a hungry lion: Brett, *Changes of state*, pp. 59–61.

[7] Kinch Hoekstra, 'Hobbes on the natural condition of mankind', in Patricia Springborg, ed., *The Cambridge companion to Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 109–27. For more extended discussion of the extent to which Hobbes thought men in the state of nature would exist in groups, S.J. [Kinch] Hoekstra, 'The savage, the citizen, and the foole: the compulsion for civil society in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1998), Part I. The classical references are to Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, V.925–1027, and Diodorus Siculus, *Library of history*, I.8.

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to confirm that religion naturally has a social aspect.[8] That there was more to Hobbes's account of unsociability than simple self-preservation, that several forms of unsociability are displayed in social contexts, does not, however, compromise their naturalness. Hobbes was insistent that the natural condition of mankind was a conceptual not a historical conjecture, depicting individual human beings to whom could be attributed certain natural rights, and of whom could be expected an intention to adhere to the minimum requirements of the Law of Nature. This conjecture Hobbes presented as the only coherent basis on which to understand how sociability could be secured by the institution of (or submission to) an authorized, representative sovereign power.

Hobbes had formulated the problem of man's natural unsociability so starkly the better to offer his new and apparently definitive solution – his theory of sovereign power and the state. As Quentin Skinner has argued in a series of studies, the theory of the state as a fictional 'person', represented by the sovereign power acting on its behalf, can be regarded as Hobbes's crowning achievement.[9] Skinner emphasizes the modernity of this conception of the state; this may be so, but it should also be observed that Hobbes himself showed more concern to demonstrate its compatibility with the existing evidence of the Bible and the history of the church. He devoted the final chapters of *De cive* to arguing that the authority of the civil sovereign was not compromised under either the Old or the New Covenants – and then recast the argument in Part III of *Leviathan*, to insist that doubts about the canon of scripture re-inforced the need for authority in all matters religious as well as civil to lie with the civil sovereign.[10]

Yet, for all its ingenuity, its suggested modernity, even its demonstrated compatibility with sacred history, Hobbes's theory of the state did not persuade his contemporaries and immediate successors that the problem of man's natural unsociability had been solved. The conceptual sophistication of Hobbes's theory of the state was quickly grasped by Pufendorf, and appreciated by a number of his followers.[11] It attracted the attention of Montesquieu and,

[8] Hobbes , *Leviathan*, ch. XII: 'Of religion', in Malcolm , ed., *The English and Latin texts*, pp. 164–87.

[9] Q. R. D. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1978), esp. II: *The age of reformation*, pp. 349–58: 'Conclusion'; and his reflections on that work, 'Surveying *The foundations*: a retrospect and reassessment', in Annabel Brett and James Tully, with Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, eds., *Rethinking the foundations of modern political thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 236–61, esp. 248–56. On the conceptual implications of the theory: 'Hobbes and the purely artificial person of the state' (originally published in 1999), in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of politics*, III: *Hobbes and civil science* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 177–208; and most recently, 'A genealogy of the modern state', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 162 (2009), pp. 325–70.

[10] Hobbes, *De cive*, cap. XVI–XVII; *Leviathan*, part III, esp. chs. XXIII, XLII. On Hobbes's engagement with sacred history, the remarkable early essay by John Pocock, 'Time, history and eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes', in J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, language and time: essays on political thought and history* (London, 1971), pp. 148–201.

[11] Skinner, 'A genealogy of the modern state', pp. 348–54.

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more profoundly, of Rousseau. But it was not generally accepted, least of all as a solution to the problem of sociability. There were many reasons for rejecting Hobbes's conception of the state. It defied powerful, long-established understandings of political liberty.[12] It was excessively abstract, offering no account of where the sovereign would find the armies required to maintain its power of the sword.[13] It lacked the flexibility offered by the ancient account of the forms of government, which made it possible to relate the distribution of political authority to the distribution of ranks and values within historically given societies. Above all, it was too drastic in its Erastianism, a vulnerability only enhanced by Hobbes's radically heterodox treatment of sacred history.[14] Even when the criticism was misguided, it was corrosive; by the eighteenth century, interest in Hobbes's theory of the state was the exception, not the norm.

By contrast, there was no such decline in interest in the problem of sociability. If anything, the problem only became more prominent. That it was widely associated with Hobbes, however, did not mean that his particular formulation of it was generally accepted. Directly or indirectly, reference continued to be made to the classical sources for its discussion, Lucretius, Diodorus Siculus, and Cicero. To these were added their Renaissance popularizers, and the observers and historians of the newly discovered peoples of the Indies and the Americas.[15] Together, these sources gave several reasons to believe that the problem of sociability was less straightforward than Hobbes's reductive formulation suggested. Although Hobbes had considered family relations and, more fully, men's natural propensity for religion, there was much more to be said under both heads. For all the importance of language to his political theory, Hobbes had neglected its history. Likewise, he may have been aware that men's economic rivalry extended far beyond goods of subsistence, but he had paid too little attention to its consequences, not least for relations between sovereign states.[16] In short, not only was Hobbes's solution to the problem of

[12] Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and republican liberty* (Cambridge, 2008).

[13] Harrington's criticism of Hobbes, on which Arihiro Fukuda, *Sovereignty and the sword: Harrington, Hobbes, and mixed government in the English Civil Wars* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 75–82.

[14] Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: the reception of the political and religious ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2007) – although, as Parkin demonstrates, it was the flagrancy of Hobbes's Erastianism which offended many, not the doctrine itself.

[15] On the Renaissance popularizers of the classical sources, such as Johannes Boemus, and on the observations and histories of travellers and missionaries to the Indies and Americas, Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'Ethnography, philosophy and the rise of natural man 1500–1750', in Guido Abbattista, ed., *Encountering otherness: diversities and transcultural experiences in early modern European culture* (Trieste, 2011), pp. 97–127. Rubiés emphasizes the uneven use of these sources, depending upon the intellectual, religious, and political purposes of those who had recourse to them.

[16] As Istvan Hont has pointed out, Hobbes failed to grasp the extent to which there were 'economic limits to modern politics', as international commerce set bounds to national sovereignty: Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of trade: international competition and the nation state in historical perspective* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2005), especially pp. 1–156: 'Jealousy of trade: an introduction'.

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sociability open to objection; the problem itself was more complex – and more interesting – than his deliberately conceptual, unhistorical presentation of it had allowed. Hobbes dramatized the issue, but after him the debate over it intensified and ramified.

The preoccupation with sociability in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is now the subject of growing scholarly attention. A key early contributor to the discussion, Istvan Hont and T. J. Hochstrasser have argued, was Samuel Pufendorf. It was explicitly in response to the second paragraph of *De cive* that Pufendorf framed his fundamental law of nature, that every man ought to preserve and promote a peaceful 'sociableness' with others (*socialitas, sociabilité*).[17] The subsequent use of Pufendorf's texts in the teaching of natural law in Protestant universities ensured that the issue remained central to this tradition well into the eighteenth century. Versions of natural sociability continued to be strenuously defended, by Christian Thomasius in Germany and Frances Hutcheson in Scotland.[18] But the problem could not be contained in the way that Hutcheson hoped, becoming instead foundational to wider discussion of the nature and working of commercial society. In the *Fable of the bees* Mandeville demonstrated that the polite sociability of the modern city was anything but natural, being the fruit of the infinite human capacity for artifice.[19] Although anxious to avoid the one-sidedness of the Hobbesian and Mandevillian conceptions of natural unsociability, David Hume conceded that the justice required to secure society was not of natural institution.[20] Rousseau complicated the discussion still further. His contrast of the natural

[17] Samuel Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo: editio ultima, auctior multo, & emendatior* (Amsterdam, 1698), Lib. II, Cap. I, xv, also xvi–xvii; trans.: *Of the law of nature and nations*, by Basil Kennet (3rd edn, Amsterdam, 1712). On which, Istvan Hont, 'The language of sociability and commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the theoretical foundations of the "four-stages" theory' (originally published 1986), now in Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, pp. 159–84; see also the 'Introduction' to the volume, pp. 37–51. T. J. Hochstrasser, *Natural law theories in the early Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 40–71. Also Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: civil and metaphysical philosophy in early modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 170–85.

[18] On Thomasius, Hochstrasser, *Natural law theories*, pp. 115, 118–21. For Hutcheson, the key text is *De naturali hominum socialitate oratio inauguralis* (1730), trans. as 'On the natural sociability of mankind', by Michael Silverthorne, in James Moore and Michael Silverthorne, eds., *Francis Hutcheson: logic, metaphysics and natural sociability* (Indianapolis, IN, 2005), pp. 189–216, with the editors' introduction, pp. xvii–xxii. For a recent overview and interpretation of the importance of natural jurisprudence to the Scots, Knud Haakonssen, 'Natural jurisprudence and the identity of the Scottish Enlightenment', in Ruth Savage, ed., *Philosophy and religion in Enlightenment Britain* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 258–77.

[19] Bernard Mandeville, *The fable of the bees* (1723), *Volume II* (1728), edited in two volumes by F. B. Kaye (Oxford, 1924; repr. Indianapolis, IN, 1988). E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's fable: Bernard Mandeville and the discovery of society* (Cambridge, 1994); John Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 256–80.

[20] David Hume, *A treatise of human nature* (1739–40), ed. D. F. and M. J. Norton (Oxford, 2000), Book III 'Of morals', Part II 'Of justice and injustice'. On which, James Moore, 'Hume's theory of justice and property', *Political Studies*, 24 (1976), pp. 103–19; Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 296–302.

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self-sufficiency of the savage with the self-deceiving artifice of civilized man provoked responses across Europe, not least from Adam Smith; equally provocative was his remark that it was impossible to tell which had come first, language or society.[21] The problem was still exercising Kant in the 1780s, when he gave it its definitive formulation as the problem of 'unsocial sociability'.[22] By then, it had permeated discussion of topics as diverse as the origins of language, political economy, and possibility of establishing an international political order.[23] No serious political philosopher of the eighteenth century, it seems, could afford to take sociability for granted.

There is, however, a feature of this story which has been insufficiently noticed: all the thinkers mentioned above were Protestants, or from Protestant intellectual contexts. We clearly should not assume that Catholic thinkers were uninterested in the problem of sociability. The example of Pascal, Nicole, and other Augustinians is evidence to the contrary. Nevertheless, between the Protestant and the Catholic intellectual worlds of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there was one difference which might explain why Catholic thinkers have seemed less attuned to the problem of sociability.

As we have just seen, in Protestant contexts the problem continued to be addressed through the study of natural law. Many even of those without pedagogic obligations, such as Hume and Rousseau, framed their discussions of sociability in ways which were more or less related to the discourse of natural jurisprudence. We might expect the same to have been the case on the Catholic side. Not only were the conditions of sociability a long-standing preoccupation of Catholic jurists; many of their preoccupations had been picked up by Hobbes.[24] Yet, that discussion does not appear to have taken place. Why Catholic scholastic natural law, still so vibrant in the first half of the seventeenth century, should have lost its way after 1650 is a question which has not (to my knowledge) been addressed by historians of political thought. Perhaps it did

[21] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les homes* (1755), in *Oeuvres complètes*, III: *Du contrat social, écrits politiques*, ed. B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris 1964), esp. pp. 146–51 (on the origin of language) and 192–3 (on savage and civilized man); for Rousseau's critique of natural sociability, Robert Wokler, 'Rousseau's Pufendorf: natural law and the foundations of commercial society', repr. in *Rousseau, the age of Enlightenment, and their legacies* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2012), pp. 88–112.

[22] Immanuel Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), trans. as 'Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose', in *Kant's political writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (rev. edn, Cambridge, 1991), p. 44.

[23] On the language debate: Avi Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment: the Berlin debates of the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2012); on political economy and the international order, Isaac Nakhimovsky, *The closed commercial state: perpetual peace and commercial society from Rousseau to Fichte* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

[24] A recurring observation of Brett, *Changes of state*, pp. 3–7, 10, 61, 83, 88–9, 114, 167–8.

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not, and we do not yet know enough to appreciate its survival.[25] But at least two plausible reasons for a loss of confidence among Catholic natural lawyers can be identified.

One was the revival within Catholicism of a rigorist version of Augustinianism, spearheaded by Pascal. On the Augustinian understanding of the human condition after the Fall, re-stated in the sixteenth century by Baius and Jansenius, scholastic natural law could yield a dangerously presumptuous estimate of men and women's moral capacity. Yet, the later Scholastics, Suarez above all, had actually enlarged the scope of natural morality by their introduction of the concept of a state of 'pure nature', distinct from fallen nature and thus hypothetically independent of grace.[26] In response, Pascal and the Augustinians of Port-Royal insisted that only the gift of grace could compensate for natural human concupiscence. In so far as men and women had achieved a measure of sociability, the Port-Royal Augustinians argued, it was the unintended outcome of their self-interest, as they deceived each other into satisfying their mutual needs.

A second source of pressure on Catholic natural law was the mounting controversy over the Chinese rites. To sustain their mission to China, the Jesuits insisted on interpreting Confucianism as a benign form of natural religion, whose rites were purely civil, and whose adherents could be expected shortly to convert to Christianity.[27] To their critics among the other missionary orders, such confidence in a seamless progression from nature to grace defied all theological credibility.[28] In this context of Augustinian moral rigorism and the Jesuits' excessive naturalism, the intellectual viability of natural law may well have been compromised.

I want to suggest, however, that Catholic philosophers had an alternative resource on which to draw: sacred history. Sacred history may be defined as the history of God's relations with his people, as recounted in the Old and New Testaments and other relevant texts, and later as embodied in the history of the Christian church. The Testaments themselves were of course the Word of God; even if the meaning of that appellation had become a matter of scholarly interpretation, scripture provided a defined textual basis for sacred history. But

[25] An eighteenth-century exponent of natural law is mentioned by Annabel Brett, 'Natural right and civil community: the civil philosophy of Hugo Grotius', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 31–51, on pp. 50–1, referring to the Sicilian Jesuit, Giovanni Guarino.

[26] On the Augustinian–Scholastic debate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the Scholastic elaboration of a concept of 'pure nature': Henri de Lubac, *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (Paris, 1965), chs. v–vi, viii.

[27] See J.-P. Rubiés, 'The concept of cultural dialogue and the Jesuit method of accommodation: between idolatry and civilisation', *Archivium historicum Societas Jesu*, 74 (2005), pp. 237–79; D. E. Mungello, *Curious land: Jesuit accommodation and the origins of sinology* (Honolulu, HI, 1989).

[28] Girolamo Imbruglia, 'Le Lettere provinciali e la critica di Pascal all'idolatria gesuita: tra propaganda e opinione pubblica', in M. Donattini, G. Marcocci and S. Pastore, eds., *L'Europa divisa e i nuovi mondi: per Adriano Prosperi* (Pisa, 2011), pp. 217–26.

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since God's relations with his peoples had continued after the Apostolic period, sacred history extended to include ecclesiastical history well beyond the Bible, and formed a distinct tradition in ancient and modern historiography.[29] In what follows, my focus is limited to the sacred history recorded in the Old Testament, and primarily in the Pentateuch: I shall argue that as developments in textual scholarship complicated the sense in which the Old Testament was understood as the Word of God, its value as a historical source for study of the Hebrews and their ancient contemporaries was enhanced. An increasing ability to understand the content of the Bible historically made it possible to use its evidence to answer new questions. Prominent among these was the question of how humans became sociable. I shall contend that such an application of sacred history to the problem of sociability was the object, and the distinguishing achievement, of the Neapolitans Pietro Giannone and Giambattista Vico.

II

The second half of the seventeenth century was a period of radical upheaval in the study of sacred history. At the heart of the upheaval was biblical criticism, scholarship devoted to the Word of God in the strict sense. The destabilizing of accepted assumptions about the coherence of scripture can no longer be attributed simply to three mischief-makers: Hobbes, Isaac la Peyrère, and Benedict Spinoza. Hobbes was notorious for questioning in *Leviathan* whether Moses could have been the author of the Pentateuch. Similar notoriety attached to La Peyrère, for suggesting in a work published four years later that there must have been men and women in the world before Adam, and that the Flood had been a local event.[30] Most provocative of all, Spinoza argued in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670) that the Hebrew Bible was indeed both late in its composition and particular in its focus, being compiled by the high priest Ezra to confirm the Hebrews' obedience to the Mosaic Law after their Babylonian captivity.[31] As Noel Malcolm has pointed out, however, the three *provocateurs*

[29] See John G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion,* V*: Religion: the first triumph* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 2; and, for the genesis of ecclesiastical history, the earlier article by Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian historiography in the fourth century AD', in Momigliano , ed., *The conflict between paganism and Christianity in the fourth century* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 79–99.

[30] For Hobbes, see above, n. 10; Isaac La Peyrère, *Prae-adamitae* [with] *Systema theologicum, ex Praeadamitarum hypothesis* (1655). On La Peyrère, Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1594–1676): his life, work and influence* (Leiden, 1987), and, with a light touch, Anthony Grafton, 'Isaac La Peyrère and the Old Testament', in idem, *Defenders of the text: the traditions of scholarship in an age of science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1991), pp. 204–13.

[31] Benedict Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), parallel Latin and French edition and trans. F. Akkerman, J. Lagrée and P.-F. Moreau, as vol. III of the edition of *Spinoza Oeuvres*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Paris, 1999); English trans. by Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, *Theological-political treatise* (Cambridge, 2007). Commentary by Richard H. Popkin, 'Spinoza and Bible scholarship', in Don Garrett, ed., *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 383–407; J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the irrelevance of biblical authority* (Cambridge, 2001).

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took their cue from earlier work by professional scholars, both Jewish and Christian: they publicized, but did not cause, the upheaval already taking place in biblical scholarship.[32]

If the issues were long-standing, debate over them nevertheless intensified in the mid- and later seventeenth century. The protagonists came from both sides of the main confessional divide, and the lines of disagreement did not always follow those of confessional allegiance. In the mid-century, the Catholic Oratorian Jean Morin found common ground with the Protestant Louis Cappel in criticism of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible. Readier to engage in controversy were Richard Simon, also a member of the Paris Oratory, and the Huguenot Jean Le Clerc; but here too there was common ground. In his great *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678), Simon argued that its several books had been composed by public 'scribes' who worked under the direction of Moses and the Prophets, and thus on God's authority. The Old Testament, therefore, was both divinely inspired and founded on the historical record; but it was a composite text, and could not be expected to be entirely consistent, least of all in its chronologies.[33] Le Clerc rejected the argument from the scribes, preferring to establish when and by whom the books of the Old Testament were written on the evidence of language and authorial purpose. Initially denying Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, he later changed his mind to allow that Moses had written the accounts of events before and during his life, but continued to deny that Moses was divinely inspired.[34] Through the twists and turns of their controversy, however, common ground remained: Simon and Le Clerc were at one in treating the Bible as a historical construction, a full understanding of which depended on reading it in conjunction with other ancient histories.

Supplementing biblical criticism was a further wealth of new scholarship in ancillary fields. Central to such enquiry in the seventeenth century was chronology: the attempt to render the biblical chronologies consistent in themselves and compatible with the chronologies derived from other ancient peoples, including the Chinese. The difficulties involved had been thoroughly explored by the great early seventeenth-century Protestant scholar, Joseph Scaliger; later in the century they were further elaborated by the English

[32] Noel Malcolm, 'Hobbes, Ezra, and the Bible: the history of a subversive idea', in idem, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 383–431.

[33] Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (first published Paris, 1678, an edition almost all of whose copies were destroyed on the orders of Bishop Bossuet; republished by Reinier Leers, Amsterdam, 1685). See especially 'Preface de l'auteur' and Book I.

[34] [Jean Le Clerc], *Sentiments de quelques théologiens d'Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament par le P. Rich. Simon de l'Oratoire VIe lettre* (Amsterdam, 1685); *Prolegomena in Vet. Foederis...III dissertatio: de scriptore Pentateuchi Mose* (c. 1693–6). On Le Clerc's method, Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, V, pp. 89–114: 'Jean Le Clerc and the history of language', albeit more concerned with Le Clerc's criticism of the New Testament.

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gentleman-scholar, Sir John Marsham.[35] Other scholars investigated the peoples and religions of the ancient Near and Middle East, the Assyrians or Chaldeans and the Egyptians. A critical question, explored by John Spencer, Master of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, was whether the Hebrews had taken their sacred rites from the Egyptians – and had as a result been tainted by their idolatry. Another question, raised by study of the Assyrians and their successors the Persians, concerned the possibility that their philosophers had belatedly supplied the Hebrews with the metaphysics necessary for the doctrine of the immortal soul.[36]

Almost all these scholars professed their theological orthodoxy. But given the importance of the scriptures to all the churches – to Protestants professing a *sola Scriptura* basis for their faith, to Catholics bound by the decrees of the Council of Trent affirming the authority of the Latin Vulgate – any scholarly enquiry concerned with the Bible was venturing onto contested ground. Heterodoxy in someone's eyes was almost impossible to avoid.[37] It was here, moreover, that Hobbes and Spinoza did real damage: if not by the scholarly findings they appropriated, then in the conclusions they derived from these findings. Hobbes, as we have seen, exploited textual uncertainties as well as the history contained in the Testaments to argue that it was the civil sovereign who by divine right should determine the public content and practice of Christian belief.[38] Spinoza's conclusions were still more insidious. The Hebrew Bible might be Ezra's compilation, but it and the Christian Bible were still the Word of God: as such, they taught 'piety and obedience', the first of these texts to the Hebrews alone, the second, potentially, to all peoples. The scriptures thus revealed the moral basis of human society, whose laws would then be enforced by a civil sovereign; but they did so on behalf of a God who was of the same substance as Nature, and inseparable from it.[39] With such potential implications, it is not surprising that the intensifying scholarly discussion of the Bible

[35] Anthony Grafton, 'Joseph Scaliger and historical chronology: the rise and fall of a discipline', *History and Theory*, 14 (1975), pp. 156–85; more generally: Paolo Rossi, *The dark abyss of time: the history of the earth and the history of nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. from the Italian by Lydia Cochrane (Chicago, IL, and London, 1984).

[36] On Spencer: Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the memory of Egypt in Western monotheism* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), esp. ch. 3; Daniel Stolzenberg, 'John Spencer and the perils of sacred philology', *Past and Present*, 214 (2012), pp. 129–63; and, matching Spencer for erudition as well as insight, Dmitri Levitin, 'John Spencer's *De legibus Hebraeorum* (1683–5) and "enlightened" sacred history: a new interpretation', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 76 (2013). More generally, although its teleological perspective invites reservations, Guy G. Stroumsa, *A new science: the discovery of religion in the age of reason* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 95–100 (on Spencer), 101–13 (on the Persian cult of Zoroaster).

[37] Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson, 'Nature, Revelation, History: intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy c. 1600–1750', in idem, eds., *The intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy, 1600–1750* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 1–46, esp. 26–39.

[38] See esp. *Leviathan*, ch. 42; and further references in n. 10 above.

[39] Spinoza, *Theological-political treatise*, esp. chs. 7–16; for an introduction, Steven Nadler, *A book forged in Hell: Spinoza's scandalous treatise and the birth of the secular age* (Princeton, NJ, and

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and its historical setting attracted the attention of the guardians of orthodoxy, Protestant and Catholic. As we shall see in a moment, the authorities in Rome were particularly keen to set terms to the debate. But just as the scholarship was inter-confessional, so interest in it crossed confessional borders, and the debate was eagerly followed in at least parts of Catholic as well as Protestant Europe, nowhere more so than in Catholic Naples.

III

By 1700, Naples was the third city of Europe, after London and Paris, with a population of c. 300,000 – roughly the same level that in the sixteenth century had made it the largest city in Europe. A major intellectual and cultural centre in 1600, it was still that in 1700.[40] It had all the requisites of intellectual activity, including printers, booksellers, two large libraries open to scholars, academies, and access to the review journals and correspondence networks of the European republic of letters. The image of Naples as an isolated backwater, fostered by Vico's self-pitying *Autobiography*, is simply not true.[41]

Prominent among the interests of Neapolitan men of letters was sacred history. Their libraries were up-to-date in biblical criticism, chronology, and the religion and philosophy of the ancient world; works by Capel, Spinoza, Simon, Le Clerc, Marsham, Spencer were all available, alongside those of their many more orthodox critics.[42] A manuscript now held in the Girolamini Library, dating probably from the 1690s, attests to knowledge particularly of the recent debate between Simon and Le Clerc over the authorship of the Pentateuch: the issues are fully and calmly discussed, with the minimum necessary deference to the requirement to accept the authority of the church.[43]

Oxford, 2011); and for thorough commentary, Susan James, *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the Theologico-political treatise* (Oxford, 2012).

[40] A recent study of Neapolitan intellectual and artistic culture in the centuries of Spanish rule is John A. Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: citizen culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore, MD, 2011).

[41] Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment*, ch. 3, for a rebuttal of this image.

[42] The two major libraries were those of Cardinal Brancaccio, donated to the public, and Giuseppe Valletta, kept in his house, and open to fellow men of letters. Valletta's collection was catalogued on its transfer to the Oratorian Convent of the Girolamini: 'Antico Catalogo della Biblioteca dei Girolamini, attribuito a Giambattista Vico', Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini, Naples, MS consulted on microfilm: 27.1.10. Vico was involved in the acquisition of the books from Valletta's heirs, but the attribution to him of the catalogue is uncertain. On Valletta and the significance of his collection, V. I. Comparato, *Giuseppe Valletta: un intellettuale napoletano della fine del Seicento* (Naples, 1970).

[43] Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini, Naples, MS 28.4.1.(2), fos. 13r–30r: The untitled MS consists of 18 folios (35 sides), and begins 'Il P. Simon, vuol che il Pentateuco, almeno nel modo, come oggi l'habbiamo, non sia fatto scritto da Mosè, ma che sia stato scritto del suo ordine da gli scribi, e Profeti.' In the following paragraph, there is a reference to 'L'autor del libro de Sentimenti de' theologi d'Ollanda, circa il libro del P. Simone'. The MS is included in a vellum-bound volume of manuscripts with the title on the spine 'L. Porzio Lettere ed altri miscellanei'. The contents of the volume are described, not altogether accurately, in Enrico

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Sacred history was likewise to the fore in the city's leading learned academy, the Medina Coeli (1698–1701), where the political and natural history, religion, and philosophy of the Assyrian and Persian empires and of the Hebrew Republic, from Moses to Herod, were the subject of courses of lectures. Vico was a member of this academy; though Giannone was too young to be elected to it, he later recalled the interest aroused by its activities.[44] In addition, Giannone was the pupil of the jurist Domenico Aulisio, from whom he learned to think historically about Roman Law, but who was also a scholar of sacred history, and the posthumous author of a work on the 'sacred schools'. Since it was through these schools that the ancient Hebrews had preserved their history and the early Christians had constructed their theology, their study raised many of the critical questions facing sacred historians.[45]

Even so, there is no denying that a shadow hung over Neapolitan intellectual life – the shadow cast by Rome. It was not just that the papacy continued to assert its long-held claim to feudal over-lordship over the kingdom. It was even more vigilant of its ecclesiastical authority. A direct attempt by the archbishop and Inquisition to stifle the spread of the new ideas of Cartesianism and Epicureanism by putting several alleged 'atheists' on trial in the 1680s was defeated by an alliance of jurists and men of letters.[46] But in the case of sacred history, Rome possessed more subtle ways of shaping the agenda of discussion.

Two institutions were responsible for the intellectual agenda of the Catholic church, the Congregations of the Holy Office (the Inquisition), reconstituted in

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Mandarini, *I codici manoscritti della Biblioteca Oratoriana di Napoli* (Naples and Rome, 1897), pp. 285–6. That Lucantonio Porzio, a natural philosopher interested in atomist theories of nature, was the author of the MS cannot be ascertained; but the hand in which it is written resembles that in another MS in the collection (fos. 126–43), of a work more probably by Porzio. The similarity of the hands may at least strengthen the likelihood of a date before 1700. I am grateful to the staff of the Girolamini for making the MS available to me during a particularly difficult period for the Library, a state institution within the confines of a religious order.

[44] Michele Rak with Maria Conforti and Carmela Lombardi, eds., *Lezioni dell'Accademia di Palazzo del Duca di Medinaceli (Napoli 1698–1701)* (5 vols., Naples 2000–5); vol. V contains introductory material on the history and significance of the Academy, on which there is a considerable literature. The lectures on the Assyrians, by Emmanuele Cicatelli and Giuseppe Lucina, on the republic of the Hebrews, by Niccolò Caravita, and on the Persians, by Giuseppe Valletta, are all in vol. I. Rak believes that they are likely to have been among the first to be given, in 1698. On these and other historical lectures: Maria Conforti, 'Scienza, erudizione e storia nell'Accademia di Medina Coeli: spunti provisori', *Studi filosofici*, 8–9 (1985–6), pp. 101–27. For Giannone's memories of the Academy: Pietro Giannone, *Vita scritta da lui medesimo*, ed. S. Bertelli (Milan, 1960), pp. 36–9.

[45] Domenico Aulisio, *Delle scuole sacre: libri due postumi* (Naples, 1723); on the significance of the work, Giuseppe Ricuperati, *L'esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone* (Milan and Naples, 1970), pp. 47–78. Giannone paid warm tribute to the importance of Aulisio's legal teaching in his *Vita*, pp. 9–10, 14–15, 17, 21. Vico too recalled Aulisio with respect, describing him as 'uomo universale delle lingue e delle scienze': *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo* (c. 1723–8), in *Giambattista Vico: opere*, ed. Andrea Battistini (2 vols., continuously paginated, Milan, 1990), pp. 37–8.

[46] Luciano Osbat, *L'Inquisizione a Napoli: il processo degli ateisti, 1688–1697* (Rome, 1974).

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1542, and its younger, junior partner, the Index of Prohibited Books, whose independent existence dated from 1572. Particularly important to these was the integrity of the Bible, since the Council of Trent committed the church to using the Vulgate (St Jerome's Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible), and had strictly prohibited translations into the vernacular.[47] The new biblical scholarship therefore caused considerable alarm. Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was condemned on the instruction of the Holy Office in 1678; Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* followed it on to the Index in 1682. The report which recommended the latter's prohibition noted that Simon had questioned the unique authenticity of the Vulgate as well as Moses' sole authorship of the Pentateuch; the second error was compounded by the 'temerity' with which Simon expressed himself, 'more Galilei'.[48] The comparison was resonant: the reader would have the cardinals of the Index take as hard a line against the new biblical scholarship as their predecessors had taken against Copernicanism.

But it was not only by specific decisions that the Index influenced debate; as important was its *modus operandi*.[49] Authors were not summoned in person; indeed, they were not supposed to know that proceedings were under way. Instead, the Index functioned as a continuous, secretive, and infinitely slow-moving exercise in peer review. Books brought to its notice were sent out to readers, the Index Consultores; months later (in some cases many months later) these reported back to the Congregation with their recommendations – to condemn, to condemn until corrected, or (very rarely) to take no further action. Books which cardinals wished to spare, they sent out for yet more readings. It was a system not so much punitive, though it could be, especially when the Holy Office became involved, as a permanent force for intellectual inertia.

The pressure which this system exerted was cumulative. Before writing their own works, Giannone and Vico are likely to have been aware of the cases of two fellow Neapolitans who had risen to prominence in clerical-intellectual circles in Rome: Celestino Galiani and Biagio Garofalo. Despite enjoying the patronage of prominent cardinals, and even papal favour, both men were enmeshed in reviews by the Index in the 1710s, Galiani for a set of moderately

[47] Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo: la censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura (1471–1605)* (Bologna, 1997).

[48] The processes against Spinoza and Simon are recorded in documents in the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, the Vatican, Index Diarii, vol. VII (1665–82), fo. 126: Dec. 1678, and fos. 159–61: Apr., June, Dec. 1682; Index Protocolli RR, fo. 556 and fos. 410–12: report of the Consultor, Laurentius Bulbul, on Simon's *Histoire critique*. On the broader context of Simon's condemnation, Scott Mandelbrote, 'Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint', in Eric Jorink and Dirk van Miert, eds., *Isaac Vossius (1618–1698) between science and scholarship* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 85–117.

[49] See Gigliola Fragnito, ed., *Church, censorship and culture in early modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. the contribution by Fragnito, 'The central and peripheral organisation of censorship', pp. 13–49.

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modernizing theses on the Bible, and Garofalo for a monograph comparing biblical Hebrew and ancient Greek poetry (including Homer).[50]

It was soon after this that both Giannone and Vico were made directly aware of Rome's power. Giannone most directly, since his first great work, the *Storia civile del regno di Napoli* (1723) caused immediate uproar among the Neapolitan clergy, and was banned at their instigation by the Holy Office. Giannone himself left hurriedly for exile in Vienna.[51] Vico initially sought to take advantage of Giannone's fate, writing to well-placed friends and potential patrons in Rome to claim that his new work would refute the heretics Hobbes, Spinoza, and Bayle.[52] But, despite his pleading, Vico was rebuffed, and eventually even he came to the notice of the Inquisition, which prevented the appearance of a second, Venetian publication of the *Scienza nuova prima* in 1729.[53]

Nevertheless, the implications of this situation need to be teased out. I do not think that they necessitate an esoteric reading of Giannone's and Vico's works, on the assumption that they must have been hiding their real message.[54] It is too easy to make this assumption, without investigating either the intentions or the local effectiveness of the censorial regime. Giannone turned to sacred history in the relative freedom of exile in Vienna, where he had access to new libraries, which contained more Protestant heterodoxy than had been available to him in Naples. But he still wrote for a Catholic audience, addressing himself to the Catholic princes of Italy; he clearly hoped that his work would be

[50] Celestino Galiani, *Conclusiones selectae ex historia veteris testamenti: ab orbe condito ad Abrahae in Chananaeam profectionem* (Rome, 1708); with a second, expanded version, without title, but catalogued by the Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma as *Assertationes theologica: disputabuntur praeside D. Coelistino Galiano in Monasterio Sancti Eusebii Sacrae Theologiae Praelectore* (n.p., 1710); on this drawn-out process, which lasted over three years from August 1710 to January 1714, Gustavo Costa, 'Celestini e inquisitori: Galiani, la Bibbia e la cultura napoletana', *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, 5th ser., 2 (2009), pp. 593–620, although the author gives no references for the archival sources, including the Index records in the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede. Biagio Garofalo, *Considerazioni di Biagio Garofalo intorno alla poesia degli Ebrei e dei Greci* (Rome, 1707). Garofalo's work provoked an extended controversy with a Jewish writer from Padua before it was referred to the Index in 1711. Garofalo's case is mentioned at several points in Barbara Ann Naddeo's recent monograph, *Vico and Naples: the urban origins of modern social theory* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2011). I intend to discuss these cases and their wider implications elsewhere.

[51] For his own account, Giannone, *Vita*, pp. 63–80.

[52] Vico to Filippo Maria Monti, 18 Nov. 1724, to Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini (future Pope Clement XII), 20 Nov. 1725, to the Abbate Esperti, [early 1726], in M. Sanna, ed., *Giambattista Vico: epistole, con aggiunte le epistole dei suoi corrispondenti, Opere di Giambattista Vico*, xi (Naples, 1992), pp. 108–10, 117–18, 126–9.

[53] Gustavo Costa, 'Vico e la Sacra Scrittura alla luce di un fascicolo dell'Inqusizione', in E . Hidalgo-Serna, M. Marassi, J. M. Sevilla and J. Villalobos, eds., *Pensar para el nuevo siglo: Giambattista Vico y la cultura europea* (Naples, 2001), pp. 253–73; and 'Monsignor Celestino Galiani e G. B. Vico', *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani*, 40 (2010), pp. 23–36.

[54] For such readings in the case of Vico: Gino Bedani, *Vico revisited: orthodoxy, naturalism and science in the Scienza nuova* (Oxford, 1989), chs. 1–2 – but modified and informed by 'years of study as a Dominican'; more simplistically, Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 665–6.

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published.[55] What he did, I want to suggest, was frame his work in terms which took the Roman agenda in sacred history as a starting point, the better to exploit the opportunities it provided.

While Vico's personal situation was rather different, he may be seen to have done something similar. Although his efforts to secure patronage in Rome were rebuffed, there is no good reason to doubt his orthodox intentions. When he told a correspondent in 1724 that he would draw the principles of his 'new science' 'from within those of sacred history' ('dentro quelli della sacra storia'), this was not a cover.[56] Rather, he would work within the prescribed framework – and exploit its possibilities. In short, I want to argue that in both cases the intellectual preoccupations of the Roman authorities framed the enquiry, but could not determine how it would proceed.

IV

Giannone composed his meditation on sacred history, the 'Triregno', between 1731 and 1733, on summer vacations in the country outside Vienna. The work could not be published in the eighteenth century, but survives in manuscript copies, one of which was printed in 1940.[57] It is in three parts, dealing in turn with the Earthly, the Celestial and the papal kingdoms. (Hence the 'tri-kingdom' of the title, which also alludes to the papal tiara.) A few years later, Giannone gave an account of the conception of the work in his *Autobiography*. Stepping back from the study of modern realms and empires to resume his philosophical studies, he had set out

> with the aid of history to investigate more closely the making of the world and its ancient inhabitants: the condition and end of man, and how by speech and reflection he had ... inaugurated civil society (*la società civile*) ... leaving the beastly life (*la vita ferale*) to the other animals who had not been granted the wit, industry or intelligence to advance beyond it.[58]

For this purpose, Giannone had had recourse to the two oldest accounts of human history, the Pentateuch of Moses and (from a few centuries later) the poems of Homer. To these he had added Josephus, for the history of the

[55] The recently discovered 'prefazione' to the 'Triregno', addressed 'Alle Alte, Potenti e Sovrane Potestà della Terra', dated 18 July 1735, makes this clear. It is reprinted by Giuseppe Ricuperati as an appendix to his article 'Dopo la *Giannoniana*: problemi di edizione, nuovi reperimenti di fonti e l'introduzione perduta del Triregno', included in his collection, *Nella costellazione del 'Triregno': testi e contesti Giannoniani*, ed. Duccio Canestri (San Marco in Lamis, 2004), pp. 195–202.

[56] Vico to Filippo Maria Monti, 18 Nov. 1724, in Sanna, ed., *Epistole*, p. 109.

[57] Pietro Giannone, *Il Triregno: I Del regno terreno, II Del regno celeste, III Del regno papale*, ed. Alfredo Parente (3 vols., Naples, 1940). For a *résumé* of the surviving manuscripts and related material, Sergio Bertelli, *Giannoniana: autografi, manoscritti e documenti della fortuna di Pietro Giannone* (Milan and Naples 1968); for material discovered more recently, including the 'prefazione' of 1735, Ricuperati, 'Dopo la *Giannoniana*', in idem, *Nella costellazione del'Triregno'*, pp. 169–94.

[58] Giannone, *Vita*, p. 183.

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Hebrews, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and Strabo. From the Pentateuch, along with the equally old Book of Job, Giannone had been able to reconstruct man in his first 'state of nature', when he had no other object but worldly felicity.[59] Set off against this 'earthly kingdom' was the second, 'heavenly kingdom', which represented the 'state of grace'. This was the kingdom Christ had preached, in which the souls of men would live immortally in their resurrected bodies. But when the heavenly kingdom proved less imminent than Christ's followers expected, the church had established instead its own 'papal kingdom', a kingdom as earthly as its ancient predecessor, but in which the clergy had usurped civil power.[60]

Giannone began the 'Triregno' itself by clarifying the sources and framework of his enquiry into the 'Regno terreno'. In doing so, he demonstrated just how well he understood the agenda of sacred history – and how he meant to exploit it. In the first place, he was happy to work within the chronology provided by the Vulgate, knowing that consistency between the various available chronologies was impossible. What was important was that profane as well as sacred history could be contained within the 4,000 years of the Vulgate, a supposition supported by James Ussher. A certain time span was required in order to treat events in succession, and in the end it mattered little whether it was exactly true, truth being impossible to establish in those 'dark abysses of time'.[61]

Giannone was likewise content to work from the Pentateuch, as the oldest of the books of this world, and a better record of the 'earthly kingdom' than that offered by any profane writer. This was not to suppose that Moses had been the master of all the arts and sciences, and the archetype of all later philosophers and lawgivers. Giannone was contemptuous of claims to this effect by Eusebius, and, in his own time, by Bochart and Huet. Moses' learning, as Luke had remarked in Acts (7:22), was the wisdom of the Egyptians.[62] Giannone also acknowledged that Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch had been doubted by a succession of commentators from Ibn-Ezra to Le Clerc. But he rejected the negative criticism of Hobbes, Peyrère, and Spinoza in favour of 'the system of Richard Simon', which he regarded as 'the most plausible'. If it was very unlikely that Moses had written the five books in the form in which they survived, it was still probable that they derived from originals spoken by him. The Pentateuch was like the poems of Homer: we should not expect either to be preserved exactly as Moses and Homer had recited them.[63]

It was a further question whether Moses could be regarded as divinely inspired. Giannone examined and dismissed all the usual grounds for this claim. Arguments from the New Testament or the authority of the church begged the question, while the contention of the Fathers that divine inspiration was proved by the miracles Moses recorded could equally apply to the profane

[59] Ibid., pp. 183–5.
[60] Ibid., pp. 200–8, 210–21.
[61] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, 'Introduzione', pp. 3–7.
[62] Ibid., I, pp. 9–13.
[63] Ibid., I, pp. 14–19.

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historians whose works were full of every kind of miracle. Even Spinoza's claim that divine inspiration was inherent in Moses' teaching of true virtue could be applied to gentile authors. Alluding to Grotius, Pascal, and others, Giannone hinted that better proofs of the divinity of the books of Moses might yet be found; but in the end he concluded that the question did not need his answer.[64] What mattered were Moses' intentions, and it was clear that he had written as a historian, not as a philosopher ('non come filosofo, ma come istorico'), in order to teach and render governable a simple, primitive people. To this end, he had provided the ancient Hebrews with an account of the creation of the world and of their own genealogy, enabling them to believe that they were the oldest people in the world. The same belief was evident in the histories of every other ancient people; the value of the Pentateuch was that it was the oldest such history to survive.[65]

Having set out the terms on which he would investigate sacred history, Giannone devoted the first part of the 'Triregno' to the evidence it yielded of man's earliest life in his natural, earthly kingdom. The bulk of this evidence he derived from the Pentateuch and the closely related Book of Job,[66] which covered the explanation of the world's beginnings, its peopling and the earliest development of languages, and more specifically the wanderings of the Patriarchs and the return of the Israelites from Egypt under Moses' leadership. But evidence little less important was to be derived from the books of Judges, Kings, and the Prophets. Much of what Giannone wrote was devoted to issues of interpretation: repeatedly, he was obliged to clear away the often ridiculous errors of his predecessors, from Eusebius to Bochart, Huet, and even Grotius. For Giannone, however, the interpretation of sacred history was not an end in itself: what he sought to uncover were the conditions which had made it possible for early men to live in 'a civil society' ('una società civile'). The 'laws' or 'dictates' of nature which had to be observed by those who would live in society rather than return to 'the feral life' ('la vita ferina e brutale') were few and simple, amounting to the preservation of society, the safety of the people, and their greater ease and commodity. Precisely because they were few, however, the dictates of nature were liable to great variation in their expression. What the Bible recorded was a striking diversity in the customs of the peoples with which it was concerned, in no case more so than that of the Hebrews. Customs which would later seem damnable were perfectly in accord with the basic laws of

[64] Ibid., I, pp. 19–27.

[65] Ibid., I, pp. 33–8. (The argument of these pages seems to be continuous with that printed as the 'Introduzione'.) There are two excellent studies of Giannone's approach to sacred history in the context of contemporary scholarship and speculation: Ricuperati, *L'esperienza civile e religiosa*, pp. 437–92; and Lina Mannarino, *Le mille favole degli antichi: ebraismo e cultura europea nel pensiero religioso di Pietro Giannone* (Florence, 1999). See in particular chs. I–II of the latter for commentary on the issues discussed in this and the previous two paragraphs.

[66] For the dating and interpretation of the Book of Job, Giannone referred explicitly to the work of his Neapolitan teacher, Domenico Aulisio: *Triregno*, I, pp. 121–5.

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nature and social survival.[67] Three aspects of the life of the Hebrews and their ancient contemporaries were identified by Giannone as crucial to such survival.

The first concerned their reproduction as a people. To this end, the Hebrews had availed themselves of every means available. Polygamy, incest, prostitution, and concubinage had been practised by the Patriarchs, the Judges, and the Kings of Israel alike, as many examples attested.[68] The Hebrews had made both marriage and divorce easy, while treating widowhood and virginity as shameful. A poignant example of the last was the daughter of Jepthah, one of the Judges, who had begged her father for a postponement of her sacrificial death so that she might lament her virginity with her friends.[69] By contrast, promiscuity was encouraged; Giannone also suggested that the practice of circumcision had been maintained to facilitate coitus. Prominent among the heroes of Hebrew promiscuity was Samson, one of the Judges, who had sought a wife among the Philistines, saw a harlot in Gaza, and loved Delilah in Sorek. But those who simply took concubines from among their servants, like Jacob, or the kings David, Solomon, and Reheboam, were no less commendable. (Solomon, it will be recalled, had 700 wives and 300 concubines at his death.)[70] What were damnable were practices which frustrated procreation, coupling between men and with beasts, and the abuse to which Onan subjected Tamar.[71]

Equally necessary to the survival of society were the acquisition and possession of territory. Here too the Hebrews had set an extreme example. The modern law of nations might prohibit dispossession on religious grounds, but the Hebrews would not only attack without warning; they used the utmost cruelty to secure the land they needed. Whole cities had been massacred, sacked, and burned, the corpses of their inhabitants left as food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth – all because the God of Heaven and Earth had promised the land to Abraham and his seed.[72] Among the Judges, Ehud, whose knife disappeared into the fat belly of the king of Moab, and Jael, who drove a nail through Sisera's temples and fastened it to the ground, had set fine examples of righteous slaughter, only to be outdone by the mass killings of Samson. And when the people decided that kings would do an even better job, only to find that Saul let them down and spared the Amalekites, Samuel had stepped up and 'hewed' the Amalekite king Agag in pieces.[73] Of course, what the Hebrews suffered at the hands of their neighbours and rivals for the territory of Palestine was little less extreme. Nevertheless, the lengths to which the Hebrews were prepared to go exemplified how the earliest societies had sought to survive and flourish in this world.

[67] Ibid., I, pp. 125–7.

[68] Ibid., I, pp. 126–36.

[69] Ibid., I, pp. 197–9; for the daughter of Jepthah, Judges 11:30–40.

[70] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, pp. 198–9; for Samson, Judges, 14–16; for Solomon, 1 Kings, 11:1–3.

[71] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, pp. 135–6.

[72] Ibid., I, pp. 200–1.

[73] Ibid., I, p. 202; for Ehud and Jael, Judges, 3:15–30, 4:17–22; for Samuel's slaying of Agag, 1 Samuel 15:32–3.

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The third requisite of civil society had been religious worship. More specifically, the survival of an individual people had depended on its distinguishing its religious practices from those of others. For this purpose, Moses had provided the Israelites with an account of the world's creation by their God, telling the story in a way which clearly separated God from his creation, and obviated any suggestion of pantheism.[74] As presented in the Book of Genesis, the religion of Noah had been one of the utmost simplicity, without rites, ceremonies, priests, temples, or altars.[75] But it could not be disguised that this original simplicity had proved impossible to sustain. No more than any other ancient people had the Hebrews remained uncontaminated by the religious practices of their neighbours. The inlet was the practice of circumcision, which Abraham had learned in Egypt. Giannone saw no point in denying the Egyptian origins of circumcision, which had been attested by ancient and confirmed by modern authorities, notably Marsham and Spencer. The practice was adopted, as we have seen, for physical and natural reasons. It was imposed by Abraham upon his son Ishmael, from whom were descended the Arabs, as well as upon Isaac. If Moses had nonetheless insisted that the practice was initiated by Abraham in his covenant with God, in return for the promised birth of his second son Isaac, it was because he needed to present a rite which Abraham and later the Hebrews as a whole had learned while in exile among the Egyptians as one original to themselves.[76] It was no paradox that idolatry, the worship of other gods and the adoption of their rites, was the first of the prohibitions which Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, even as accommodation to it lay at the heart of the Israelites' religious practice. It was by acquiring and practising a composite of rites, and telling themselves that they were original, that ancient peoples like the Hebrews sealed their identity.

The fear of idolatry inculcated by Moses would only be aggravated by the prophets. As Giannone observed, just as many doctors bring many illnesses, many prophets signal much idolatry. The 'audacity' and 'temerity' of these men knew no bounds.[77] Because every cult had its prophets, false prophets had to be eliminated. Elijah set the standard when he had the 450 prophets of Baal put to death at Kishon.[78] By the same token, a true prophet's dignity had to be maintained, even against children. Mocked by little children after claiming to watch the ascent of Elijah in his chariot of fire – 'Go up, thou bald head, go up' – Elisha had summoned two she-bears to 'tare' forty-two of the young

[74] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, p. 115. [75] Ibid., I, p. 111.

[76] Ibid., I, pp. 161–78. The story of Abraham's adoption of circumcision is in Genesis 17. The ancient authorities cited by Giannone included Herodotus, Diodorus, and Strabo. On Giannone's treatment of the religions of the Hebrews and gentiles, see Mannarino, *Le mille favole*, ch. III, esp. pp. 139–45, on circumcision.

[77] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, p. 221: we may suppose that Giannone used these terms wittingly, aware of their significance in the Inquisitors' lexicon.

[78] Ibid., I, p. 224: 1 Kings 18.

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miscreants apart.[79] For all the mayhem they caused, however, the prophets had not altered the end of their people's religion. The benefits they promised to worshippers of the true God were not other-worldly, but survival and prosperity on earth.[80] Not until after the return from Babylonian captivity was there the first intimation of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of reward in a future life.[81] Until then, the religion of the Old Testament remained an earthly, natural, or civil religion, whose purpose was to maintain the existence and the identity of the Hebrew people.

Out of the evidence of sacred history, as the oldest documented history available, Giannone thus reconstructed man's passage from 'the feral life' to 'civil society'. In doing so, he addressed and offered an historical answer to the problem of sociability. He did not frame the problem in specifically Hobbesian terms, or even in those of Pufendorf: the language of a passage from the beastly to the civil is Ciceronian,[82] while the association of society with families and religious worship was common to all the ancient sources, Lucretius, Diodorus, and Cicero as well as the Pentateuch. But what Giannone found in the Old Testament was the first recorded account of the formation of society. What had mattered above all to the Hebrews as to the other peoples of ancient sacred and profane history were the propagation of families and the possession of territory. These were the indispensable conditions of survival and happiness in the earthly kingdom. These goals in turn were justified and reinforced by the adoption of religious beliefs and forms of worship supposed to be exclusive to each people. That it had been impossible to avoid borrowing the practices of others, and falling into idolatry, had only intensified the insistence on exclusiveness, exemplified in the Hebrews' determination to fasten their identity as the people of the God of Abraham and of Moses. Such was the natural historical state of man (as distinct from the state of grace), and it was from that natural state that civil society had been formed: as Giannone interpreted it, sacred history showed how the peoples of the Bible had learned sociability in the hardest, most earthly of ways.[83]

[79] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, pp. 220–2: 2 Kings 2:23–4.

[80] Giannone, *Triregno*, I, pp. 232–41, 244–8. Giannone specifically criticized Spencer for distinguishing between a heavenly reward for moral justice and the earthly benefits of ceremonial observance (p. 237).

[81] Ibid., I, pp. 377–91: Parte Terza, 'Della resurrezione de' morti secondo il sentimento degli ultimi Ebrei'. The suggestion in the title, and in the titles of several chapters in this Part is, however, undeveloped in the surviving text, which consists of little more than a series of historical notes.

[82] Cicero, *De inventione*, I.ii (in the Loeb edition: Cambridge, MA, and London, 2006, pp. 4–7). Ricuperati, *L'esperienza civile e religiosa*, p. 440, suggests that the earthly kingdom does have a Hobbesian character, while Mannarino, *Le mille favole*, pp. 131–9, emphasizes rather Giannone's proximity to Pufendorf. But both in the 'Triregno' and in the (later) summary in his *Vita*, Giannone explicitly frames the problem as a passage from the beastly to the civil.

[83] Giannone's account of the biblical Hebrews thus bears no resemblance to that recently identified in a number of seventeenth-century writers by Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish sources and the transformation of European political thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2010). Giannone did

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V

Vico, as we have seen, also set out to draw his principles from 'within' sacred history.[84] The work in which he would do so was the *Scienza nuova*, published in three successive editions, in 1725, 1730, and 1744.[85] In keeping with his professions of orthodox intent, the *First new science* began by refuting Bayle's thesis that a society of atheists was as plausible as a society of idolaters; it also gave prominence to the Fall.[86] For the second *New science* of 1730, however, Vico completely altered the structure of the work, and gave it a very different introduction. Following a preface in which he explained the iconographical significance of his frontispiece, he inserted a 'Chronological Table', accompanied by a lengthy commentary. The significance of these alterations has, I think, been underestimated.[87]

Ostensibly, the Table proclaimed Vico's chronological orthodoxy by adhering to the dates of the Vulgate; it also affirmed the priority of the Hebrews over the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and the Chinese, notwithstanding the scholarship of Marsham and Spencer, which Vico dismissed.[88] In the commentary, however, it quickly becomes clear that Vico is using the same scholarship to show that

use the term 'Hebrew republic' ('la repubblica ebrea') to refer to the period of government by the Judges: see, for example, *Triregno*, I, p. 185, but political authority, in any form, was not central to his account of the formation of civil society.

[84] He did so, however, after first attempting to formulate his principles within a work of universal jurisprudence: *De universi iuris uno principio et fine uno*, in two parts, *I De uno universi iuris principio et fine uno, II De constantia iurisprudentis*, with a third part of *Notae in duos libros* (1720–2), reprinted with facing Italian translation in Giambattista Vico, *Opere giuridiche: il diritto universale*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini (Florence, 1974). The jurisprudence with which Vico engaged was predominantly Humanist rather than Scholastic; sacred history is discussed within this framework, notably in *De constantia*, but is not the starting point. Consideration of the work, essential for a full account of Vico's decision to draw his principles from sacred history rather than jurisprudence, has been set aside here: I shall return to it elsewhere. See, however, Enrico Nuzzo, 'L'umanità di Vico tra le selve e le città: agli inizi della storia della civiltà nel *Diritto universale*', in his *Tra ordine di storia e storicità: saggi sui saperi della storia in Vico* (Rome, 2001), pp. 109–64, for discussion of the relation between the *Diritto universale* and the *Scienza nuova*.

[85] For the 1725 and the 1744 editions, I have used the *Opere*, ed. Battistini. For the 1730 edition, I have used *La scienza nuova 1730*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini, in the (still incomplete) *Opere di Giambattista Vico*, VIII (Naples, 2002). There is a translation of the 1725 edition as *The first new science*, ed. Leon Pompa (Cambridge, 2002); of the two available translations of the 1744 edition I prefer *The new science of Giambattista Vico*, unabridged translation of the 3rd edn, by T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1948; repr. 1991). References will be given in the form *Scienza nuova* followed by *1725, 1730* (or) *1744*, followed in the case of the 1730 edition by page numbers, but in the cases of the 1725 and 1744 editions by paragraph numbers (§), to permit the reader's use of any edition or translation which adopts these.

[86] Vico, *Scienza nuova 1725, Opere*, §§ 8–9, 58; see Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 226–32.

[87] Notwithstanding the comment of Grafton, 'Joseph Scaliger and historical chronology', p. 156, and the detailed notes by Nicolini on Vico's sources: F. Nicolini, *Commento storico alla seconda Scienza nuova* (2 vols., Rome 1949–50), I, pp. 28–9.

[88] *Scienza nuova 1730*, pp. 61–2: Bk I, Sect. i: 'Annotazioni alla tavola cronologica'; *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 43–4.

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every date in gentile history is 'highly uncertain' ('tutto incertissimo'). Key figures in the history of the gentile nations – the Egyptian Hermes, the Chaldean Zoroaster – are, in Vico's words, 'chronological monsters'. They can only be regarded as poetic or mythic archetypes. Precisely as such, however, they are the keys to the histories of their nations, for myths, according to Vico, are the earliest evidence of popular beliefs and practices.[89] Like Giannone, in other words, Vico accepted the Vulgate chronology on his own terms: what was important was that it allowed him to include the histories of the profane or gentile nations within the same framework. In the case of the latter, he was then free to hollow out their chronologies, thereby enabling himself to rewrite their history from their myths.

Vico's history begins following the one secure date in his Table, the Flood of the year 1656 after Creation. Upon leaving the Ark, the children of Noah had divided. As Vico imagined it, men and women had spread out across the soggy earth, and were soon reduced to a state of feral isolation, wandering aimlessly and coupling at random; wallowing in their own faeces, they grew to the stature of giants. They became, as Vico put it, Hobbes's 'fierce and violent men'. At some point, the offspring of Shem, the Hebrews, had broken away, and by keeping to ritual laws of cleanliness, had reduced themselves to normal size. Having done so, the Hebrews leave Vico's story, while the gentile giants pursue a different path to society.

As the earth gradually dried out, the exhalations caused thunderstorms. These terrified the giants, who supposed that the thunder must be a god, whom they worshipped and called Jove. Now ashamed of coupling in the open in front of Jove, they took their women off into caves, where they settled, married, and were able to identify their own children, forming families. When members of the family died, they were buried, a practice indicative of a belief in the immortality of the soul, as well as the basis of a claim to territory. Through these three institutions of idolatrous worship, family, and burial, accordingly, the giants were socialized. In due course, the families descended from the mountains to the coasts, where contact would be made with others. Even so, Vico insisted that nations first developed independently: only very gradually did they realize that they shared a 'common sense' of what is required for social life. Through that 'common sense' they in due course recognized the existence of a common 'natural law' of sociability.[90]

The device of re-starting the history of mankind from the Flood, adopted explicitly in the second *New science*, which, unlike the first, contained only

[89] *Scienza nuova 1730*, pp. 67, 72–3, 75–6; *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 59, 74, 79, 81–2, 118.

[90] Vico's adaptation of sacred history is nowhere told as a continuous story: the most connected version is in the *Scienza nuova 1725*, §§ 94–116. In the *Scienza nuova 1730*, see pp. 139–46, elements of which are anticipated at pp. 94–5, 98–100, 121–5; and in *Scienza nuova 1744*, see §§ 369–73, along with the earlier passages §§ 142–6, 165–79, 330–7. The reference to Hobbes's 'fieri, e violenti' is in *Scienza nuova 1730*, p. 100 (comment on Degnità xxix), also p. 207; and *Scienza nuova 1744*, § 179 (comment on Degnità xxxi), also § 553.

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passing allusions of the earlier period, was not of course original to Vico. Since the Renaissance, the hiatus of the Flood had provided an opportunity to merge the history found in Genesis with the surviving histories of other ancient peoples, in particular those collected by Diodorus Siculus.[91] Vico likewise combined 'la Storia Sagra' (Genesis) with 'le [storie] profane', as reported by Diodorus; but he was confident, as was Giannone, that the former was older than any of the profane histories,

> because it narrates with the utmost clarity, for a long period of more than 800 years, the state of nature under the patriarchs, or the time of the families, from which subsequently, as all political writers agree, were to arise peoples and cities; but about that state Profane History has nothing or very little to narrate, and that little is very confused.[92]

The claims of the profane histories to unique antiquity were examples of the 'conceit' of nations; only the Hebrews had clearly preserved a memory of themselves since the beginning of the world.[93] Vico supplemented the sacred and profane sources with references to more recent, late Renaissance studies of particular episodes: among these were Scoockio (Marten Schook) on the Flood, Cassanione (Jean Chassagnon) on giants, Linschotano (Hugo van Linschooten) on the practice of burial in Guinea.[94] He was likewise aware of the characterizations of the 'state of nature' found in Grotius, Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Bayle, even if we cannot be sure that he had read either Hobbes or Bayle directly.[95] But what Vico made of these sources was a story very much his own, a wonderfully imaginative adaptation of sacred history.

[91] Rubiés, 'Ethnography, philosophy and the rise of natural man', pp. 114–16. However, there is nothing in Vico's re-telling of the story which would confirm the significance attached by Rubiés to the work by Joannes Boemus, *Mores, leges et ritus omnium gentium* (1520, in the edition of Leiden, 1541).

[92] *Scienza nuova 1730*, p. 98 (Degnità xxi): 'La Storia Sagra è più antica di tutte le profane che ci son pervenute, perché narra tanto spiegatamente e per lungo tratto di più d'ottocento anni lo stato di natura sotto i Patriarchi, o sia il tempo delle famiglie, sopra le quali tutti i Politici convengono, che poi sursero i popoli, e le città: del quale stato la Storia Profana ce ne ha o nulla, o poco, e molto confusamente narrato.' The translation is mine. Cf. the very similar wording in *Scienza nuova 1744* § 165 (Degnità xxiii), except that the later version has 'lo stato delle famiglie' rather than 'il tempo delle famiglie'. There was an interval of 800 years between the Flood and the Hebrews' Exodus from Israel; see the 'Tavola cronologica'.

[93] *Scienza nuova 1744*, § 166 (not in the 1730 edition). For the 'conceit' of nations, *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 125–6 (Degnità iii); *Scienza nuova 1730*, p. 92.

[94] *Scienza nuova 1730*, pp. 65, 140, 125, 161; *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 169, 170, 337. The references are to: Marten Schoock (1614–59), *Diluvium Noachi universale* (1692); Jean Chassagnon (1531–98), *De gigantibus eorumque reliquiis* (1580); and Hugo van Linschooten (1563–1611), *Descriptio totius Guineae tractus, Congi, Angolae et Monomopotae* (1599). These three works by no means exhaust Vico's modern sources. More such works are cited in the 1744 than in the 1730 edition, but most had been added by Vico in MS alterations to copies of the 1730 edition; these have been included in an appendix to the critical edition of the *Scienza nuova 1730* as 'Correzioni, miglioramenti ed aggiunte'.

[95] Vico's knowledge of Hobbes's argument seems to have been derived from Georg Pasch, *De eruditis huius saeculi inventis* (Leipzig, 1700); on whom, Noel Malcolm, 'Hobbes and the

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On the face of it, Vico's adaptation of sacred history was rather more orthodox than Giannone's. Not only did he loudly proclaim his intention to refute Hobbes, Spinoza, and above all Bayle. There was no hint of equivocation in Vico's adoption of the Vulgate chronology, even as he took full advantage of its intervals. By his immediate separation of the Hebrew offspring of Shem from the gentile descendants of his brothers, he also ensured against any suggestion that the Hebrews' worship had been contaminated by Egyptian or other gentile idolatry. Finally, he was at pains to demonstrate that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was universal to men, and by no means the later invention of philosophers. On closer inspection, however, Vico's 'orthodoxy' was not all that it seemed. Along with the Hebrews into the wings of Vico's story went the kingdom of grace itself: Christ is mentioned only twice and in passing in the *New science*,[96] while the history of the early church is subsumed within the 'ricorso' of the nations following the fall of the Roman Empire, instead of being treated apart, as the subject-matter of post-biblical sacred history.[97] Still more radical were the implications of Vico's ultimate characterization of his 'new science' as a 'reasoned civil theology of divine providence' – *una teologia civile ragionata della provvedenza divina*.[98] A theology of divine providence which was 'civil' rather than natural, 'reasoned' rather than revealed, suggests that Vico conceived of the *Scienza nuova* as independent of the realms both of Nature and of Grace.

To make Vico's 'orthodoxy' the issue, however, is to miss the point. Unlike Giannone, Vico did everything he could to avoid it becoming the issue, with relative success.[99] Much more important is what he was doing when he began the *Scienza nuova* from 'within sacred history', and proceeded to construct his 'reasoned civil theology of divine providence'. What Vico was doing, I wish to argue, was similar to the task Giannone set himself in the 'Triregno': he was confronting the problem of human sociability, by exploiting the resources of

European republic of letters', in *Aspects of Hobbes*, pp. 480, 511–12 n. 202. On the vexed question of the extent of his reading of Bayle, Enrico Nuzzo, 'Attorno a Vico e Bayle', in idem, *Tra ordine della storia e storicità*, pp. 165–239; also Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 216–17. There seems little reason to doubt that he had read the major works of Grotius and Pufendorf.

[96] *Scienza nuova 1733*, pp. 303, 326; *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 816, 948. On neither occasion is Christ identified with divine grace; on the second, he is, rather, mentioned as revealing divine reason to the Apostles.

[97] *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 1046–56; not in the 1730 edition. On this point, Enrico Nuzzo, 'Between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Italian culture in the early 1700s: Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria', in Mortimer and Robertson, eds., *Intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy*, pp. 205–34, esp. p. 228.

[98] *Scienza nuova 1744*, §§ 2, 342. The formula of a 'teologia civile ragionata della provvedenza divina' was used for the first time in print in 1744, but it features among Vico's MS additions to the 1730 edition.

[99] Other than in the case of the proposed Venetian reprinting of the first, 1725, edition (see above, n. 53), the *Scienza nuova* avoided censure by the Index. More generally, see Nuzzo's balanced assessment of Vico 'Between orthodoxy and heterodoxy', n. 97 above.

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sacred history in order to reconstruct the earliest history of mankind. As he put it at the outset of the second *New science,* God by his providence

has so ordered and disposed of human affairs, that men, despite having fallen from natural justice by original sin, ... and meeting their needs (*utilità*) by living in solitude as wild beasts, have nevertheless been brought, out of those same needs and by ways different from and often contrary to their intentions, to live justly and to preserve themselves in society, and thus to celebrate their sociable nature (*la loro natura socievole*).[100]

If anything, Vico was more up-to-date than Giannone in his grasp of the problem. He knew that it was Hobbes who had dramatized its formulation with his solitary 'fierce and violent men'. He knew too that the problem had been reformulated by Bayle, in even more provocative terms, when he suggested that a society formed out of atheists was at least as plausible a hypothesis as a society of idolaters.[101] Faced with these new versions of the problem, Vico did not seek to defend a conventional, Aristotelian assertion of man's natural sociability: on the contrary, sacred history confirmed that the condition of man after the Flood had been one of natural unsociability, in which men and women had roamed alone, living in a manner very similar to beasts. But if this was the natural condition of mankind, it was a historical condition; and the history of the gentile peoples of the world, as well as of the Hebrews, showed how men had learned, whether by idolatry or by revealed religion, to form families, to lay claim to portions of the earth in order to bury their dead, and, in due course, to constitute societies. From 'within' sacred history Vico would thus answer Hobbes and Bayle with a strictly historical, civil account of man's socialization through idolatry and the institutions of the family and burial, all under the aegis of a divine providence which was explicitly distinguished from divine grace, while operating on man separately from nature. Like Giannone, but on different and in some respects even more radical terms, Vico had taken the Roman Catholic agenda of sacred history and re-worked it in the cause of answering one of the most pressing problems in contemporary political thought.

VI

The significance of Giannone's achievement in the 'Triregno' and Vico's in the *Scienza nuova* needs to be kept in perspective. It is tempting to suggest that they

[100] *Scienza nuova 1730*, pp. 27–8: 'Iddio provvedendo, ha così ordinate, e disposte le cose umane, che gli huomini caduti dalla natural giustizia per lo peccato originale, intendendo di fare quasi sempre tutto il diverso, e sovente anco tutto il contrario, onde per servir' all'utilità, vivessero in solitudine da fiere bestie, per quelle loro stesse diverse, e contrarie cose, essi dall'utilità medesima sien tratti da huomini a vivere con giustizia, e conservarsi in società, e sì a celebrare la loro natura socievole.' The wording is similar in *Scienza nuova 1744*, § 2, except that for 'natural' justice has been substituted 'entire' justice.

[101] On this theme, see further Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 225–55.

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carry us to the threshold of Enlightenment – or, in Vico's case, Counter-Enlightenment. But the tendency to suppose that every intellectual innovation of the eighteenth century should be associated with one or the other should be resisted. Enlightenment needs precise intellectual definition if it is to be useful as a category of historical enquiry; it is not a portmanteau. In the case of Giannone, a good case may be made for situating him within the early or radical Enlightenment of the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries (as long as radical Enlightenment is not reduced to Spinozism).[102] By contrast, the identification of Vico with Counter-Enlightenment is an anachronism, since the emergence of an anti-*philosophe* movement lay some decades in the future.[103] As it was, through using all their intellectual ingenuity to adapt Rome's agenda for sacred history, Giannone and Vico produced histories quite different from, for example, Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs* (1756), whose starting point lay outwith sacred history altogether.

The study of sacred history continued later in the eighteenth century, in Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews* (1753), and in the scholarship which Johann David Michaelis would devote to the languages and history of the Hebrews and the other peoples of the ancient Near East. These have made it possible to tell a story of 'the Enlightenment Bible'.[104] The second phase of sacred history, the history of the early church, was a similarly persistent preoccupation, not least in England, and most of all for Edward Gibbon.[105] But there was, perforce, no connection between the sacred historical interests of the Enlightenment and the work of either Giannone or Vico. The 'Triregno' remained in manuscript, the few copies which were not confiscated circulating more or less clandestinely; the *Scienza nuova* was left untranslated, shown to, but not read by visitors to Naples, and virtually unknown outside Italy until the very end of the century.

[102] For Giannone's 'Triregno' as a product of the 'crise de la conscience européenne' and radical Enlightenment, Giuseppe Ricuperati, *La città terrena di Pietro Giannone: un itinerario tra 'crisi della coscienza europea' e illuminismo radicale* (Florence, 2001), pp. 165–85; cf. his more cautious judgement in *L'esperienza civile e religiosa*, pp. 620–1.

[103] The classic treatment of Vico as a Counter-Enlightenment thinker is of course that of Isaiah Berlin, albeit in essays, 'The Counter-Enlightenment' and 'Vico and the ideal of the Enlightenment', both in Isaiah Berlin, *Against the current: essays in the history of ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, 1981), pp. 1–24, 120–9, rather than in *Vico and Herder: two studies in the history of ideas* (London, 1976). In a similar vein, Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico: the making of an anti-modern* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1993). For the later anti-*philosophes*, Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: the French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford and New York, NY, 2001).

[104] Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2005); on Michaelis in particular, Michael C. Legaspi, *The death of scripture and the rise of biblical studies* (Oxford, 2010).

[105] Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, v, passim; also Brian Young, 'Conyers Middleton: the historical consequences of heterodoxy', in Mortimer and Robertson , eds., *Intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy*, pp. 235–65.

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Nevertheless, I have sought to show that the intellectual achievement of Giannone and Vico was remarkable in itself, and that it embodied a distinctive response to the problem of sociability, as one of the transformative questions facing political thinkers in the 150 years after the publication of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. As such, the achievement of Giannone and Vico was all the more significant because it came from within Catholic intellectual culture. However enriched the two authors were by the access to Protestant philosophy and scholarship afforded them by the libraries of Naples and (in Giannone's case) Vienna, both worked under the shadow of Rome, and had to adapt to the intellectual agenda propagated by the Congregations of the Holy Office and the Index. Both faced an obstacle their Protestant contemporaries did not, and whose power even over Catholic thinkers was much less in France or central Europe than it was in Italy. Yet, Giannone and Vico found ways to turn the Roman agenda to intellectual advantage, deploying sacred history to investigate anew the formation of human society. By giving Giannone, Vico, and Naples their due, we can begin to correct the tunnel vision which has allowed the story of political thought after Hobbes to become an exclusively Protestant one – and thence, all too easily, a secular one.

VII

This article began life as an inaugural lecture in Cambridge, an occasion on which a methodological observation seemed *de rigueur*. I would like to end by adapting what I said then. It seems to me that while what is loosely called 'the Cambridge approach' to the history of political thought has been widely, if not quite universally, endorsed, it now faces a fork in the road. On the one hand, the desire to broaden the perspective in which political thought is studied is taking many scholars, especially younger ones, off into the broader pastures of intellectual history, there to absorb, and sometimes submerge, political thought within concurrent developments in scholarship, in other fields of philosophy, in theology, and, from the eighteenth century, in political economy.[106] On the other hand, the conviction often associated with the Cambridge School that the history of political thought should inform the study of problems in modern politics may now be encountering more resistance than before from the political theorists.[107] A historian who has no qualification as a political theorist or philosopher, such as this author, is in no position to overcome this divide;

[106] An excellent recent conspectus, offering a succinct, rigorous account of what intellectual historians do, is Annabel Brett's contribution, 'What is intellectual history now?', to David Cannadine, ed., *What is history now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 113–31; see also the contributions of several authors to Richard Whatmore and Brian Young, eds., *Intellectual history* (Basingstoke, 2006).

[107] The recent volume edited by Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears, *Political philosophy versus history? Contextualism and real politics in contemporary political thought* (Cambridge, 2011), many of whose more sceptical contributors are from Oxford, represents a case in point.

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indeed, this article may well be read as exemplary of the first tendency, dragging the history of political thought down into the abyss of sacred history.

In spite – or because – of this, I would still emphasize how important it is for intellectual historians and historians of political thought to remind ourselves of what we have in common with political theorists and philosophers. For them, the currency of intellectual endeavour is good argument. For us, the subject of enquiry is also argument: we seek to do justice to the persistence and depth of the human effort, using what seem to be the best-developed intellectual resources at the time, to understand and conceptualize the way we live in societies and political communities. As intellectual historians, we need to affirm the importance of studying arguments if we are to resist those who would now treat ideas as but the 'representations' of something else, and envelop them in an all-encompassing 'cultural history'. Increasingly fashionable, cultural history framed in these terms bids fair to be the new reductionism. Intellectual history cannot of course be confined to the superstructure of argument; we also need to explore the political, social, and institutional infrastructure which in any period has sustained intellectual life. But the superstructure of argument remains our central focus, and we need to insist, against the reductionists, on its relative autonomy.

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