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**SCIENTIFIC FACT BETWEEN
NEW SCIENCE AND *SCIENZA
NUOVA*: GIAMBATTISTA VICO'S
FACTUM AND JOHN TOLAND'S
MATTER OF FACT**

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**SCIENTIFIC FACT BETWEEN NEW SCIENCE
AND *SCIENZA NUOVA*: GIAMBATTISTA VICO'S *FACTUM*
AND JOHN TOLAND'S MATTER OF FACT²**

The article deals with the syncretic construction of fact which took shape in Early Modern Times at an intersection of biblical exegesis, political science, esthetics, historiography and natural sciences epistemology. The study attempts a comparative analysis of Giambattista Vico's 'new science' and John Toland's 'travesty philosophy', outlining shared reference points and structural similarities in their political epistemology: procedure of the authorization of facts, modal implications of the fact, economy of political dissimulation.

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Tautological notion of the *certainty of fact* is one the self-evident fundamentals or ontological prejudices whose revision, according to phenomenological tradition, constitutes the true aim of philosophy. However, properly philosophical – phenomenological – analytics of the ‘naïveté of positing’ outlined by Hans-Georg Gadamer in the ‘Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century’ [Gadamer, 2008: 119] do not represent the one and the only possible approach to the fact; studies of ontological prejudices do not belong exclusively to philosophy but to the history of science as well. We have obviously gone a long way since the time when the university colleagues of Thomas Kuhn, who believed subconsciously in metaphysical realism, doubted the very possibility of the ‘history of fact’. Kuhn himself in his foreword to the ‘Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact’ by Lüdwig Fleck referred to his friends’ skepticism with irony [Kuhn, 1981: VIII]. A new scholarly tradition has already emerged; it uses the genesis of fact as a means of historical relativization of the foundations of Modern science in the spirit of Kuhn or Lorraine Daston [Daston; Galison, 2007]. Thus, Barbara Shapiro in her well-known book [Shapiro, 2003] presented a parallel study of the category of fact and the principle of factual authenticity in historiography and in the natural science of the 16th century, while the work by Mary Poovey [Poovey, 1998] showed the genesis of modern fact as an indicator of the transformation of the techniques of power, on the one hand, and as an effect of the assimilation of Tacitean ‘plain’ language in the writings by the English mercantilists, on the other. Yet in other respects the notion of fact remains a true promise land: the sheer range of the concepts of fact developed in the Early Modern period (*factum* as a transcendental, *factum* as *res gestae*, the matter of fact as term of literary theory) turns the study of this category seen in wide context of genres and disciplines and on the basis of various sources into one of the most urgent topics of research. I find exegetic literature to be a fruitful source for analysis – for in the Early Modern period in general, and especially during the period that is of great interest here, in 1680-1740s, Biblical commentary became an exceptionally fertile territory of interaction of different disciplines, and in the same time – a laboratory which produced new theoretical languages and conceptual frameworks. Another, no less promising task, is the study of the political implications of fact: in the period when the question of certainty was seen as central for science and philosophy, and radical reform of political reasoning was the order of the day (projects of *scientia civilis* and *mahtesis politica*, the emergence of statistics, ‘political architectonics’ and *jus publicum universale*), epistemological innovations could not but have consequences for political theory even against the will of those thinkers who initiated the innovations (the obvious example here is the political career of the Cartesian category of *prejudice*).

In order to achieve these desiderata I will study one of the important – although not always noticeable – power lines of the intellectual world of the Early Modern Europe, bridging the gaps between the two great ‘new sciences’: Newtonian mathematized natural science (new science) and *scienza nuova* of G. Vico. First of all, I will analyze the correlation between the notion of fact that came out of the inductive science and the hermeneutical category of factuality in the works by ‘Newtonian’ thinkers, Thomas Burnet and William Whiston. Such study will help to view the interaction of the fact as ontological category, the object of experimental science, and the fact as a narrative construction, an element of the theory of esthetics in the field of the commentaries to the Book of Genesis³. I will also study the way this syncretic construction of fact as formed at the intersection of the sciences of nature, Biblical hermeneutics and esthetics was assimilated by an Irish philosopher John Toland, a deist, an advocate of toleration and the equality of sexes, and, at the same time, *also* a Newtonian, and how this construction was turned into the basis of his sociology and political theory. Finally, I will turn to the opposite geographical end of Europe, to Italy, and will look into the writings by an author who, it has been thought, was not familiar with travesty philosophy by Toland – Giambattista Vico. Justification for this risky rapprochement is to be found in the specific of the communicative world of the early Modern Republic of letters: the space was so condensed that allowed the rise of the most intricate *discursive formations* and syncretisms that did not depend either on immediate influences or borrowings, or on customary limitations set by genre and discipline, or on declared adherence to a philosophical school. It is exactly the reason why I allow myself to disagree with such authoritative Vichian scholar as Donald Philipp Verene who has argued in his monograph ‘Vico’s Science of Imagination’ that “none of the questions of Vico’s science can be answered in terms of the thought of ‘hardheaded facts’” [Verene, 1991: 144]. I think that, in fact, a substantial number of obscure places in the ‘Vichian ‘new science’ could be clarified through the references to the author who turned the thesis of the ‘obstinate facts’⁴ into a motto of his science and philosophy – namely, to the above-mentioned John Toland.

A classic of the history of the early Modern science, Arnaldo Momigliano expressed his doubts that Vico had known the works by Toland but still thought it appropriate to place the writings by the Neapolitan philosopher into the context of European polemics against English and Dutch deists [Momigliano, 1966: 156]. Momigliano’s intuition has recently been confirmed

³ Bacon, traditionally considered as a founder of experimental science, in LXV aphorism of his *Novum Organum* obviously rejected the basic principles of mosaic philosophy: ‘For nothing is so mischievous as the apotheosis of error; and it is a very plague of the understanding for vanity to become the object of veneration. Yet in this vanity some of the moderns have with extreme levity indulged so far as to attempt to found a system of natural philosophy on the first chapter of Genesis, on the book of Job, and other parts of the sacred writings, seeking for the dead among the living; which also makes the inhibition and repression of it the more important, because from this unwholesome mixture of things human and divine there arises not only a fantastic philosophy but also a heretical religion. Very meet it is therefore that we be sober-minded, and give to faith that only which is faith’s’ [Bacon, 1999: 106].

⁴ ‘Facts are obstinate things’, as Toland wrote in *Mangoneutes*, part three of *Tetradymus* (1720).

by Harold S. Stone in his study of the range of books produced by Neapolitan and Venetian publishers who belonged to Vico's circle. In 1728 Felice Mosca, the publisher of the majority of Vico's works, printed a treatise *Astro-Theology* by William Derham, an English theologian and a friend of Newton. The *Astro-Theology* was based on Derham's 'Boyle lectures'. It was one of numerous manifestoes of Newtonian rational theology that was viewed by Boyle and his scholars as a powerful weapon against deism that in England was symbolized, first of all, by Toland. The *Astro-Theology* was translated into Italian by Thomas Dereham. Apart from the 'Astro-Theology' Derham also translated the *Philosophical Principles of Religion, Natural and Revealed* by George Cheyne. This work was published in 1705 when the controversy provoked by the 'atheistic' writings by Toland was in full swing, and Cheyne's criticism was focused on the *Letters to Serena* (translated into Italian at about this time). In Harold's opinion, it was the intense presence of Newtonian anti-deist literature in Naples that stimulated some fundamental correctives made by Vico in the text of his *New Science* of 1730 (in Harold's words, "Vico had learned the lesson from English Deism and Newton's thought") [Stone, 1997: 278 – 281].

Regardless of the Harold's hypothesis however the 'travesty metaphysics' of Toland and the 'new science' of Vico reveal a number of shared characteristics. First of all, Vico and Toland were united in their opposition to what Nancy Struever has called the 'Wiggish account of progress from fiction to fact' [Struever, 2009: 50]. This opposition to the trend that was growing in importance during the period in focus, acquired particular forms in the works by both authors. In case of Toland the construction of fact as a result of observations and experiments looked quite Modern at the first glance but acquired an unexpected *esthetic* dimension. However, this syncretism could not be called unprecedented. The literature of the early Enlightenment included genres that occupied the borderline between fiction, historiography, and the exegetics of natural sciences and the Bible; one is referring here to the so-called 'theories' (or histories) of the Earth. The first eponymous work of this genre was a treatise *Sacred Theory of the Earth* by Thomas Burnet (1680), and the best known one – the *History and Theory of the Earth* by George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1749). A short period of time that separated Burnet and Buffon evidenced a true revolution in the Earth sciences: before Buffon could formulate his discourse of the 'epochs of the history of the Earth' on the basis of the five facts established empirically and mathematically (*cinq faits*) [Buffon, 1753: 6-8], and set the disciplinary limits of geology and the ones of the genre of geogonic study, the 'theories' of such authors as Burnet had represented a blend of the commentaries on the Hexameron, a novel, a millenary pamphlet and a treatise on natural science. If one studies the treatise *Sacred Theory of the Earth* by Burnet, the work that set the genre, in the context of the contemporary English scientific literature it is hard to avoid the impression of intellectual provocation. Indeed, if one analyses the views of the English scholarly

audience of the late 17th – early 18th centuries it will become evident that the theorists of natural sciences, historians and writers were united in their opposition to the use of allegories and fiction in the historical narrative. The opinions of historians have been cited *in extenso* in the monograph by Barbara Shapiro [Shapiro, 2003: 41]; I would only cite the most telling of them. John Rushworth saw the task of historiography in the ‘bare Narration of matter of Fact’, or, to be more precise, - ‘plain matters of fact’ [Rushworth, 1721: IX-XV], while John Selden in his famous *History of Tithes* used the syntagma of ‘historical fact’ (historical fact, history which is only fact). The English advocates of ‘perfect history’ were no less categorical on the question of the stability of the limits of genre: historical work should not have anything in common with a novel or a romance. White Kenett (1660 – 1728), bishop and author of the *Register and Chronicle of the Restoration*, was quite unambiguous in his contraposition of ‘Historical Register and Chronicle’ to ‘feigned Orations, Poems, Apologies, personated Plays, <...> Romances, Novels, and every idle work’. A novel was seen as inversion, or, if you will, perversion of historical work: ‘History without Truth, or with a Mixture of Falsehood, degenerates into Romance’ (John Nalson); turning history into its opposition: ‘disguise Matter of Fact, and make history Romantic’, said the same Nalson. A famous historian of the Royal society, and one of the main propagators of Baconian model of science, Thomas Sprat stated that the way of Romance is to be exploded both in civil and in natural history. At the same time the patriarch of experimental science, Francis Bacon, who had not been just a historian, had warned against ‘fabulous accounts of the origins of nations’ produced both by historians and natural scientists.

But the prohibition to use allegories, fictions and fantasies in the story of the beginning of the history of the world was not absolute. An alternative cosmogonical tradition was established by Descartes, in the fifth chapter of *Le monde* where he called his narration of the origin of the world a *fable*⁵. If Descartes was consistently within the limits of hypothetical reasoning, stating that the subject of his thoughts was not the real Earth we are all living on, but a some possible world⁶, a number of his followers decided to cross the line that separated a mental experiment from historical reconstruction. One of the models of the historization of the cosmology by Descartes could be found in the treatise *Cartesius Mosaizans* by Joannes Amerpoel (1669) that presented a reader with mechanical compilation of the citations from *Le monde* and the Book of Genesis [Amerpoel, 1669]. But real potential of Cartesian geogony was revealed in the above-mentioned scandalous treatise *Sacred Theory of the Earth* by Thomas Burnet. In this work the author often declared his adherence to experimental science and set the rule to use only the facts

⁵ ‘In order, however, to make the length of this discourse less boring for you, I want to wrap part of it in the cloak of a fable, in the course of which I hope that the truth will not fail to appear sufficiently and that it will be no less agreeable to see than if I were to set it forth wholly naked’ [Descartes, 1633].

⁶ ‘For a short time, then, allow your thought to wander beyond this world to view another, wholly new one, which I shall cause to unfold before it in imaginary spaces’ [Ibid.].

that were based on observation and were consistent with reason and experience (*ex observationibus in ratione, scientiis et experientia fundatis*). But the thesis of the importance of experiment and science (suggesting, among other things, the reconstruction of the history of the Earth through fossils) contradicted the principles of Biblical exegesis and esthetic preferences declared by Burnet in the same text. Burnet cited the number of traditional arguments for the necessity of the *interpretations of allegories*: apology of the Christian doctrine against gentiles and atheists ('Poisoned arrows of Julian and Celsus'); the argument of anthropomorphism, well-known through the influence of the *The Guide for the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides; inadequacy of grammatical interpretation for the reconstruction of the meaning of a sacred text; finally, the contradiction between the literal meaning of the Book of Genesis and rational cosmology [Burnet, 1729: 21]. However Burnet emphasized that for him allegory was not fiction but rather what he called "vulgar" or "Plebeian hypothesis", i.e., the accommodation of the Mosaic account of the origin of the world to the intellectual level of the first readers of the Book of Genesis. This reservation notwithstanding, Burnet used allegorical method, perhaps, too frequently, provoking critical response of William Whiston – an author who thought himself to be the heir of the model of the literal exegesis of the Scripture designed by Isaac Newton. The priority of literal meaning and inadmissibility of the allegorical interpretation of the Hexameron was turned into one of the fundamental principles of the *New Theory of the Earth* by Whiston: 'The Obvious or Literal Sense of Scripture is the true and Real one, where no evident Reason can be given to the contrary' [Whiston, 1737: 95]. Paradoxically the same thesis is to be found in the work by Burnet, in the pamphlet *An Answer to the Exceptions made against the Theory of the Earth*: 'The Rule we go by, and I think all good Interpreters, is this, that we are not to leave the literal Sense, unless there be a Necessity from the Subject-Matter' [Burnet, 1722: 27]. The misunderstanding should not be blamed on the author of the *Sacred history of the earth* but rather on a deist Charles Blount, the author of a foreword to one of its editions, and to another publication, *The Oracles of Reason* (1692) that contained *ex integro* two chapters from the *Philosophical Archaeology*, another well-known treatise by Burnet [Force, 1985: 39]. It was this contextualization of Burnet's writings that is thought to provoke negative reaction of his critics; however, even if one admits that Burnet's exegetic principles did not differ greatly from those of Newtonian literalists, his story of the origin of the world was still in evident contradiction to Whiston's views of scientific cosmogony as the 'Historical and True Representation of the formation of our single Earth'. First of all, Burnet's text was full of sentences derived from Baroque esthetics, unacceptable for the Whiston-style scientific natural history. When giving a characteristic to the economy and style of the 'sacred Theory' Burnet said that its text was 'clearly discover'd, well digested, and well reason'd in every Part, there is, methinks, more of

Beauty in such a Theory, at least a more masculine Beauty, than in any Poem or Romance'. Explaining the choice of epithet 'Sacred' for the title, Burnet wrote:

'This Theory of the Earth may be call'd Sacred, because it is not the common Physiology of the Earth, or of the Bodies that compose it, but respects only the great Turns of Fate, and the Revolutions of our Natural World; such as are taken notice of in the Sacred Writings, and are truly the Hinges upon which the Providence of this Earth moves; or whereby it opens and shuts the several successive Scenes whereof it is made up' [Burnet, 1722: xxxvii].

One often finds the *topoi* of the esthetics of the sublime in the text: for example, the images of imposing ruins, or awe-inspiring mountain peaks (*quam immanes res sit grandissimorum montium congeries*) [cf.: Pasini, 1981: 39]. All these passages could have been taken for stylistic embellishments, and no theoretical approach could have been found there, were it not for one place where Burnet, although in polemical context, wrote quite unambiguously that any theory – of Nature or Providence alike – necessarily took the shape of a 'Philosophick Romance'⁷. Burnet's investigation, in his own words, aimed at discovering in the Nature 'a *Plot* or *Mystery*', 'made by the Great Author and Governour of the Universe'. In a well-turned phrase by Michael B. Prince, 'although admittedly dependent upon the support of fiction, design discovers and does not merely construct the true order of nature. Within this system, which Richard Rorty discussed under the heading 'philosophy and the mirror of nature', the romance of realism and the realism of romance exist in perfect reciprocity' [Prince, 2005: 400]. Paradoxical combination of declared adherence to experimental method and the admission of esthetic character of any scientific theory under the aegis of this theoretical romanticism, view of the study of nature as, in Bernstein's words, 'constructive, pragmatic in a radical sense', was neither invented by Burnet nor was a unique characteristic of Cartesian science of nature. It is not a coincidence that Leibniz who called the cosmogony of Descartes *roman de physique*, put the label of romance on another work that evidently claimed the right to be called an authentic history – on *Christianity not mysterious* by John Toland.

Biblical hermeneutics of Toland was rooted in his epistemology; its fundamental principle he found during his visit to the Netherlands in 1693 when he met John Locke. The Irish freethinker never managed to get recommendations – the main reason for his visit to the disgraced English philosopher in his self-imposed exile – but upon his return to England Toland

⁷ 'Short Thoughts, and little Meditations, and that are apt to distrust every thing for a Fancy or Fiction that is not the dictate of Sense, or made out immediately to their Senses. Men of such Humour or Character call such Theories as these, Philosophick Romances...Where there is variety of Parts in a due Contexture, with something of surprizing aptness in the harmony and correspondency of them, this they call a Romance; but such Romances must all Theories of Nature, and of Providence be, and must have every part of that Character with advantage, if they be well represented' [Burnet, 1729: Preface, s. p.]. Burnet's philosophical romanticism could not but come in for almost unanimous criticism on the part of the defenders of literalist exegesis and realistic philosophy: thus, John Keill ranked Burnet among the 'Philosophers, who have maintained opinions more absurd than can be found in any of the most Fabulous Poets, or Romantick Writers', who 'only cultivated their own wild imaginations, which seldom produce any thing but what is extravagant and unaccountable' [Keill, 1734: 1 - 2].

immediately declared himself to be an adept of the philosophy of Locke (such declarations of an inveterate ‘deist’ – or pantheist, or even an atheist – did not please Locke and the latter preferred not to maintain relations). First of all, Toland reproduced the Locke’s definition of reason in the *Christianity not mysterious*: ‘Every one experiences in himself a Power or Faculty of various Ideas or Perceptions of things: Of affirming or denying, according as he sees them to agree or disagree: And so of loving and desiring what seems good unto him; and of hating and avoiding what he thinks evil. The right Use of all these Faculties is what we call Common Sense, or Reason in general’. It was in the use of reason that Toland saw the chance to set himself free from all problems of interpretation of the Scripture: rational interpretation made senseless the cumbersome machinery of Protestant hermeneutics⁸. Moreover, according to Toland, ‘We hold that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude; and that nothing reveal’d, whether as to its Manner or Existence, is more exempted from its Disquisitions, than the ordinary Phenomena of Nature’⁹. The project of rational hermeneutics, i.e., the way of textual interpretation that was based on reason as the ultimate authority of interpretation (*norma expositio*), was very popular among the Cartesians, both on the continent, and in England: it would be enough to name Lodewijk Meyer, Élie Saurin, and Jean Leclerc [Popkin, 1982: 70].

Another central epistemological principle, the difference between nominal and real essences, was taken by Toland once more out of a work by Locke, namely, his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [Wigelsworth, 2003]. According to this principle science could only be concerned with names: real essences that made things what they were could not be known by us. The knowledge of real essences of things was not only impossible it was also useless: it was called by Toland a useless knowledge. In order to acquire ‘useful properties’ of things it was enough to learn their names. Thus both the science of nature and political science turned into the science of names. This understanding of the nature of human knowledge led to the problem of the instance of the imposition of signs. Toland defined this instance as individual author; but one should not see his arguments as an apology of private language. On the one hand, ‘none ought to be slave of any set of words’: Toland dedicated dozens of eloquent pages to criticism of historical sociolects. It is a job for an individual author to ‘new Terms produce, / Or old Expressions bring again in use’; the main task of an individual author is to be original, to produce novelty. On the other hand, individual author is not identical to the author of speech who can give meanings to words on his own will. Author’s inventions ought to be persuasive for the community of reasoners, that functions as an intersubjective guarantee of truth. This

⁸ ‘O! blessed and commodious System, that dischargest at one stroak those troublesome Remarks about History, Language, figurative and literal Senses, Scope of the Writer, Circumstances, and other Helps of Interpretation!’ [Toland, 1696: 34]; ‘But he that comprehend a thing, is as sure of it as if he were himself the Author’ [Ibid., 37].

⁹ ‘We hold that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude; and that nothing reveal’d, whether as to its Manner or Existence, is more exempted from its Disquisitions, than the ordinary Phenomena of Nature’ [Ibid., 6].

polemical, dialogical dimension of the production of meanings enables Toland to avoid the solipsist trap and to justify both general importance and pragmatic effectiveness of the terms invented by an individual author. Here lays the key difference in the understanding of the nature of semiosis, and, as we shall see, also the *arcana imperii*, by Toland and Vico. However, in order to approach the problem of authorization of language by Toland and Vico it seems to be necessary to analyze the relationship between authority and *fact*.

Vichian *filosofia dell'autorità* and Toland's concept of the authorization of facts reveal striking structural similarity. Rational perception of the universe of human things, *corpi opachi dei fatti*, or else, making certain human arbitrariness¹⁰ (a reader should be reminded that in a letter the Neapolitan philosopher defined his science as the 'most certain critics of human arbitrariness') after Vico, and the certain study of the universe of natural and historical matter of facts after Toland equally require the mediating procedure of authorization. Vico defined authority as 'free use of will' that served to curb corporal movements¹¹; it was the use of authority that put in action the mechanism of conatus¹². I will not go into the detailed analysis of the relation of Vichian *conato* to Epicurean physics (παρέγκλισις or clinamen of Lucretius) or Newtonian mechanics; what is important here is, first, that authorization is defined by Vico as free action at the time of indeterminacy (it is the reason why authority is set in opposition to intellect), and second, that this action results in *fact*. The concept of fact is explicitly placed into the context of Baconian epistemology; Vico referred directly to the *Cogitata visa* by Bacon. According to Vico, the truths of the world of nations seen as ideas – set out in 'philosophical' axioms I – XIV of the *New science* and called by a Baconian term 'hypothesis' – should then be seen in facts (axioms XV-XXII)¹³. Facts clearly form a substrata of Vichian philology¹⁴; and the perception of the universe of facts is one of regulative principles of the 'new science'¹⁵. But are

¹⁰ 'And with reference to the things of the most obscure antiquity of the nations it reduces to certitude the human will, which is by its nature most uncertain, as noted in the Axioms. Which is as much as to say that it reduces philology to the form of a science' [Vico, 1948: 110].

¹¹ 'This authority is the free use of the will, the intellect on the other hand being a passive power subject to truth. For from the first point of all human things, men began to exercise the freedom of the human will to hold in check the motions of the body, either to subdue them entirely or to give them better direction (this being the impulse proper to free agents, as we have said above in the Method)' [Vico, 1948: 109].

¹² 'But to endow bodies with impulse amounts to giving them freedom to regulate their motions, whereas all bodies are by nature necessary agents. And what the theorists of mechanics call powers, forces, impulses, are insensible motions of bodies, by which they approach their centers of gravity, as ancient mechanics had it, or depart from their centers of motion, as modern mechanics has it' [Vico, 1948: 114].

¹³ 'The last propositions, from the fifteenth to the twenty-second, will give us the basis of certitude. By their use we shall be able to see in fact this world of nations which we have studied in idea, following the method of philosophizing made most certain by Francis Bacon, Lord of Verulam, but carrying it over from the things of nature, on which he composed his book *Cogitata [et] visa*, to the civil affairs of mankind' [Vico, 1948: 60 – 61].

¹⁴ Cf. X Axiom.

¹⁵ Cf. the famous passage, transferred from the second book of *De Constantia jurisprudentis* to the fourth book of the *New Science*: 'To sum up, a man is properly only mind, body and speech, and speech stands as it were midway between mind and body. Hence the certitude of law began in mute times with the body. Then when the so-called articulate languages were invented, it passed to certain ideas or verbal formulae. And finally, when our human reason was fully developed, it reached its end in the truth of ideas concerning justice, determined by reason from the detailed circumstances of the facts. This is a formula devoid of any particular form, called by the learned Varro *formula naturae*, which, like light, of itself informs in all the minutest details of

fact and authority linked in Vichian philosophy? Is it possible to refer to the ‘authorization of facts’ in connection to Vico? It seems that in both cases the answer is ‘yes’. As it has already been said, facts were the subject of philology that was defined by Vico as the science of everything that depends on human will. In another place Vico said that the philosophy of authority ‘reduces philology to the form of a science’. How did it happen? Firstly, authority – the authority of philologists and philosophers – demonstrated legitimacy of the proposed hypothesis¹⁶. Secondly, authority as ‘appropriation’ or the ‘authorization of possession (see the chapter *Three Kinds of Authority*) demonstrated the ‘historical fact of Providence’ for it was the use of authority (the establishment of the institute of property, and the courts of law) that showed us how free human will set limits to its own arbitrariness. Thus authority mediates between philosophy and philology, human arbitrariness and Providence. Thence it is clear why it was the authorization of facts that made philology possible (‘reduces philology to the form of a science’); in other words, it made facts certain (*certi*), and turned philology into the *coscienza del certo*.

It is extremely important that both in the ‘new science’, and Toland’s theory of knowledge the mechanism of authorization implied a particular modality: the authorization of fact meant the passage from potentiality to actuality. Thus Toland wrote in *Christianity not mysterious*: ‘Such is the Nature of a Matter of Fact that though it may be conceiv’d possible enough, yet he only can with Assurance assert its Existence who is himself the Author, or by some Means of Information comes first to the certain Knowledge of it’ [Toland, 1696: 40]. Authorization of facts is a way of actualizing underlying possibilities: divine ideas in Vico’s case or natural/historical truths in Toland’s. Stephan Otto, following in Nicola Badaloni’s footsteps, praises Vico for having introduced a “regulative modal idea” into the modern inquiry – a novelty of far-reaching importance, surprisingly overlooked by the majority of Vichian scholars [Otto, 1992: 131 – 132]. However not all Vichian scholars are so unreceptive to his ‘modal rhetoric’. Nancy S. Struever in her monograph *Rhetoric, Modality, Modernity* (2009) described the main types of possible plots that had their prototypes in the Divine Mind and were exploited by Vichian rhetorical inquiry: legal fiction of Roman law, myths as ‘archetypes of impersonal agency’ [Struever, 2009: 53], and etymologies in their ancient, original meaning of semantic potential of a word’s root. As it has been shown by D. L. Marshall, already the early text by Vico – *De antiquissima italorum sapientia* – did not draw on demonstrative, necessitarian model of scientific knowledge but rather on rhetorical inquiry [Marshall, 2010: 115]. However Vico’s mode towards this universe of possibility is rather contemplative; in this sense a place from the

their surface the opaque bodies of the facts over which it is diffused, as we have fully indicated in the Elements’ [Vico, 1948: 353].

¹⁶ About one of the most representative examples of this epistemological strategy, the Vichian analysis of Publilius’ law cf.: [Pompa, 1975: 148 - 149].

forth part of the first book of the *New science* seems to be quite typical; there Vico described the task of the 'new science' as contemplation of the series of possible events that had prototypes in the Divine Reason¹⁷. This contemplation of divine ideas was, for Vico, a theological transcription of the travels to adjacent worlds of political reasoning that had become fashionable thanks to Machiavelli.

Toland, on the contrary, viewed the universe of possibility from a radical activist position: possible plots should not constitute just an object of contemplation; they should be conceived and brought into being through the efforts of a philosopher. In the *Letters to Serena* Toland wrote: 'Authority is to decide matters of Fact'. In his letter to reverend dr. Hooper, quoted in *Vindicius liberus*, he said: 'And indeed He trifles extremely with the World, who is not convinc'd, that, at least, he makes Things clearer than they were; if He explodes no vulgar Errors, detects no dangerous Fallacies, nor adds any stronger Light or Proof to what was generally receiv'd before. Those and such like are the real or pretended Motives of all Authors, of Divines as well as others; and they actually advance new *Notions, Expositions, and Hypotheses* in their Books every Day' [Toland, 1702: 16]. Vichian hermeneutics of human things that reveals the 'historical fact of Providence' to a contemplator is replaced here with the spontaneity of the generation of meanings: the design of Providence should not be revealed but created.

This interpretation of Toland's epistemology could seem arbitrary: for he declared in the *Christianity not mysterious* that true interpreter should 'acquaint themselves before hand with the Observation and Facts ... as Mr. NEWTON justly observes' [Toland, 1704: 177]. Seeming contradiction between inductive adherence to facts and the esthetics of originality is removed through theurgic acts of a genius who, in Toland's words, 'able and ready to assist Nature in her Pangs, and to help into the World those heroic Births and surprizing Discoveries, which would bring Mankind to a clearer knowledg of themselves and other things'¹⁸. Toland saw himself as this oracle of nature and called himself none other but the 'Divine of the Church of the First-Born'.

The mechanism of the authorization of facts based on the contamination of 'Newtonian' inductivist epistemology and the esthetics of genius was, for Toland, a necessary condition for the exposure of prejudices. In his famous first letter to Sophia-Charlotte of Prussia ('Serena')

¹⁷ 'Thus the proper and consecutive proof here adduced will consist in comparing and reflecting whether our human mind, in the series of possibilities it is permitted to understand, and so far as it is permitted to do so, can conceive more or fewer or different causes than those from which issue the effects of this civil world. In doing this the reader will experience in his mortal body a divine pleasure as he contemplates in the divine ideas this world of nations in all the extent of its places, times and varieties' [Vico, 1948: 91 – 92].

¹⁸ Quoted in: [Daniel, 1984: 65].

Toland traced the genealogy of prejudices from mother's womb and wet nurses' admonitions¹⁹ to university. The course of life of an average man was presented as mechanic learning of the passwords of social integration necessary for survival in a society spoiled by prejudices but lacking any sense for him: for example, 'There is scarce any thing learnt at the University, but what a man must forget, if he would be understood, or not appear ridiculous and troublesome, when he comes into other Company' [Toland, 1704: 7 – 8]. Notions and judgments accepted dogmatically would be naturalized at the end: 'so that not remembering when, or where, or how he came by many of his Notions, he's tempted to believe that they proceed from Nature it self' [Ibid., 4]. The final result of socialization was, in Toland's opinion, a kind of chaos: emergence of numerous vernacular languages, professional jargons, sociolects, idiosyncratic dialects spoken by the adepts of various religious sects and political parties. Tragic and almost unavoidable sinking of man into the world of prejudice resulted in perverted communication, an antithesis to Toland's ideal of Conversation: human interaction was reduced to the exchange of 'mutual mistakes and vicious Habits' [Ibid., 5 – 6]. Thus Civilization was turned into the realm of 'Pedantry' and 'Ceremony'. Political consequences of the break-up of communications were presented, on the one hand, by the pullulation of political parties, and with the emergence of the *arcana imperii* – mysteries of state that hid impotence and fanciful imagination, on the other: 'In most Professions (especially in those they repute Mechanick) the Members are sworn not to discover the Mystery of their Trade... and your Mysteries of State... are sometimes as airy and imaginary, as slight and ridiculous as any others' [Ibid., 12 – 13]²⁰. The juxtaposition, at the beginning of this citation, of political language and the jargon of artisans (masters in mechanics) creates the image of political machinery – the art of political 'machinations' in the literal sense of the word. In another place Toland directly linked this art with Machiavellianism, criticizing 'certain mungrel Divines who study Machiavell more than the Bible, and who have an admirable project of telling only half truths, which makes them consider'd but as half-politicians, by those who are for telling no truth at all' [Toland, 1720b: 144]. Way out of this communicative dead end offered by Toland could seem truly paradoxical: firstly (and evidently), one should 'authorize', i.e., check and appropriate the notions and judgments by others; secondly, one should develop the institute of public debates by all means²¹. Here Toland departed from Cartesian – subject-oriented and introspective – epistemology: both Descartes' 'rules for the

¹⁹ 'Passions that are predominant in the Blood of the Family' [Toland, 1704: 2].

²⁰ 'Mysteries of State, Sciences and Trades run all in the same Notion' [Ibid., 72].

²¹ 'I therefore hear and see every thing. I have the pleasure very often by cross questions, or a seeming compliance, to draw that out of some people, for which they wou'd be ready to hang themselves, if they thought I rightly understood them; tho', after starting their designs, to the best of my ability, their persons for me shall be always safe. Bantering and fooling, indifference and doubtfulness, are successful engines in this art of disburthening, which you know the French call *tirer les vers du nez*, and we English *pumping*. In short, I set up not pretendedly, but in downright earnest, for conversing with all men and about all things', - says Toland in a letter to an anonymous addressee designated as Mr*** [Toland, 1726: 403].

direction of the *ingenium*' and Spinoza's *emendatio intellectus* were turned into objects of criticism [Daniel, 1984: 156]. According to Toland, philosophy was nothing but 'the Art of Making Study a help to Conversation, of reading to good purpose by practicing the World, of distinguishing Pedantry from Learning, and Ceremony from Civility' [Toland, 1704: Preface (s.p.)]. Toland was consistent in emphasizing the social commitments of his philosophy and science: 'Mere Scholars, when they meddle with anything that requires Reasoning or Thought, are but mere Asses: For being wholly occupy'd about frivolous Etymologies, or the bare sound of words, and living most of their time excluded from Conversation, bury'd in dust among Worms and mouldy Records, they have no exact Knowledge of things, and are perfect strangers to all the useful business of the World' [Toland, 1761: 83]. The paradox is that in the *Clidophorus*, the second part of his *Tetradymus*, Toland formulated a 'two-fold doctrine' that implied the differentiation between exoteric and esoteric discourse that addresses a very narrow audience, the 'Club of freethinkers':

'The Philosophers therefore, and other well-wishers of mankind in most nations, were constrain'd by this holy tyranny to make use of 'a two-fold doctrine; the one *Popular*, accommodated to the PREJUDICES of the vulgar, and to the receiv'd CUSTOMS and RELIGIONS: the other *Philosophical*, conformable to the nature of things, and consequently to TRUTH; which, with doors fast shut and under all other precautions, they communicated onely to friends of known probity, prudence, and capacity. These they generally call'd the *Exoteric* and *Esoteric*, or the *External* and *Internal Doctrines*' [Toland, 1720a: 65 – 66].

In *Clidophorus* this differentiation acquired a strong historical and metaphysical foundation: according to Toland, the differentiation of the spheres of truth and opinion, paradigmatic for all Western philosophy, first found in the famous poem by Parmenides was nothing but the opposition of exoteric and esoteric discourse [Ibid., 69 – 70]. Thus public sphere of debates was reduced to an esoteric company of the elect who spoke the language understood by the initiated only; elsewhere Toland called this company a pantheist sodality and even offered a fixed number of its members, justified numerologically (3 or 9, according to the number of Graces or Muses respectively). Paradoxically the break-up of communication described in the letter to Serena (on prejudices) as a result of socialization was reproduced here, although instead of various 'barbarous tongues' that could not be reduced to each other one deals now with just two types of discourse, esoteric and exoteric. The sphere of uncorrupted communication (esoteric discourse) turns to be dangerously small, while ironic (exoteric) discourse addressed to the majority is intended more to disseminate doubt and skepticism than to communicate some truths. At least twice Toland refuted the idea that the aim of disputational activity should be a positive doctrine. In one place he urged 'not to lay any new Foundations, where there has been

too much building already'²², or, in other words, not to formulate dogmatic statements in science; in other passage he declared that the criterion of rightfulness in the debate between adept of false and true religion was not in truth but rather in its 'sincere examination'²³. Debate – scientific, religious or political – is not subject-oriented but rather aims at its social and communicative impact, or, to be more precise, at provocation, shaking the pillars of society – it was for a reason that Toland characterized his philosophy as a 'philosophy of an Upstart'²⁴ – and at the same time establishing useful conversation. According to Toland, an act of communication implied a particular regime of authenticity: an individual storyteller, bringing on stage of the public dispute his original plot, produced ideas in his mind; these acquired a status of truthful by necessity. They could be perceived as hypothetical only by external observers – and only because these ideas were produced by somebody else's mind. Here the 'travesty'²⁵ nature of Toland's philosophy revealed itself in full measure: when localizing authenticity in the mind of an author, Toland referred to the famous thesis by Isaac Newton 'I banish all hypotheses from my Philosophy' [Toland, 1696: 180]. Paradoxical 'Newtonianism' of Toland set him aside from 'Romanist' Burnet who saw his cosmology, following Descartes, as a kind of *hypothetical* reasoning and was criticized for it by Whiston the Newtonian.

Together with high priest metaphors, exploited by Toland (let us remember: he called himself the 'Divine of the First-Born'), the elitist idea of a 'pantheistic sodality' and the differentiation between esoteric and exoteric language the idea of useful conversation based on an esthetic construction acquired a completely new outlook: one did not refer to the transformation of the mechanisms of socialization, enlightening or surmounting the barrier of communication but rather to replacing one kind of priestcraft by another, the sodality of worshipers of the God Nature. In was the membership in this club of freethinkers that Toland offered to 'Serena', his Royal correspondent.

The problem of esoteric language, mechanisms of socialization and *ragion di Stato*, - the 'Mysteries of state' to use a Toland's phrase, emerged in Vichian philosophy as well. However Toland saw esoteric language as a result of the conspiracy of priests and politicians whereas Vico rejected this conspirological version: 'then, in order to give an explanation of some kind, they put forward one which is very offensive to Roman generosity, for they say that the rigors, the solemnities, the scruples, the verbal subtleties and finally the secrecy of the laws themselves were impostures on the part of the nobles (imposture de' nobili) in order to keep the laws in their

²² Quoted in: [Daniel, 1984: 121].

²³ 'If two persons profess different Religions, one the true, the other a false one, yet if they have been equally sincere in their examination, they are equally in the way to Heaven; because in following their Reason, they both have done what God requires... So that 'tis not what a Man professeth, but how, that justifies or condemns him before God' [Ibid., 81].

²⁴ 'That any Upstart, but of Yesterday, should pretend to overthrow what cost the Ancients so much Time and Breath to establish, and themselves so great Pains and Charges to learn, is of hard Digestion to some' [Toland, 1696: x-xi].

²⁵ Cf.: [Fouke, 2007]; [Lund, 2012].

own hands, for the reason that the laws make up a great part of civil power' [Vico, 1948: 315 – 316]. In opposition to the Enlightenment model of historical process (shared by Toland, among others) that saw the contradiction between the clarity of legal language of the earliest epochs and its obscurity in the more enlightened periods as an insoluble aporia, Vico thought hermetism of legal language to be its normal function derived from social processes: laws correlate with the condition of a society. At the heroic stage of human history when the earliest laws 'were protected by mute languages' and were expressed in mysteries, the need to conceal the meaning of legal ceremonies and formulas from the profanes was motivated by the coarseness of human nature, which was unable to accept any other form of discourse. At the age of monarchies, i.e., the form of government that, in Vico's opinion, represented the climax of the evolution of political institutes, the emergence of the esoteric language of the 'reason of state' was connected to the divergence of the two branches of law: while civil equity (*aequitas civilis*) was destined for a small number of wise men who discussed the matters of state in the tranquility of their offices, the majority of people knew only their own rights in detail (*aequitas naturalis*)²⁶. It is not difficult to find an echo of European debates on the reason of State (*ragion di Stato*) in these conclusions by Vico. It is interesting to note that for all difference in starting points both Vico and Toland remained within the framework of the tradition of *ragion di Stato* as far as the *economy of dissimulation* was concerned: both political models implied the existence of the arcana in equal measure, whether in the form of the 'gabinetto' (Vico) or the exclusive club of freethinkers (Toland).

This study could be defined as an outline of the history of Early Modern *political epistemology*: I attempted to demonstrate that different concepts of fact developed by Toland and Vico resulted in different social and political theories. The mechanisms of the 'authorization of facts' of both authors were immediately linked to their views of the ways to reveal minimal foundations of communication and the first elements of sociality: Vico saw the way to acquire the principles of common nature of nations in the archaeology of ideas and the hermeneutics of historical facts whereas Toland realized the ideal of conversation in the esthetic act of 'pure and original Reason' that destroyed all prejudice and initiated communal endeavor of the search for truth. It follows that the subject of political act was understood by the philosophers in not just different but in absolutely contradictory terms. Vico turned heroic individuals of Classical mythology into the symbols of impersonal social processes and presented history as a theatre of

²⁶ 'And in monarchies there are needed a few men skilled in statecraft (*pochi sappienti di Stato*) to give counsel according to civil equity on public emergencies in the cabinets, and a great many jurists of private jurisprudence to administer justice to the peoples by professing natural equity' [Vico, 1948: 315].

unexpected consequences, while Toland distributed political act between an author-novelist, launching a social *conatus*²⁷, and the community of like-minded scholars who turned this impulse from an individual act into social action.

²⁷ 'The Collective body of the Government is made up of many individuals, so whatever is propos'd for the Honor, Profit, or Safety of the whole, must still originally proceed from som one Man'. Quoted in: [Daniel, 1984: 64].

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