

On the Concept of Conatus in Vico's Philosophy

Tommaso Parducci



Laboratorio dell'ISPF, XV, 2018

DOI: 10.12862/Lab18PRT

SUMMARY

The article aims to show how, in Vico's thought, the concept of conatus undergoes a decisive change in the passage from *De antiquissima* to *Scienza nuova*. In the metaphysical work, the conatus is part of the metaphysical virtues that determine everything that belongs to the physical world and in particular it is that principle that gives movement to all real objects. In the *New Science*, the conatus acquires a more complex role: on the one hand, it still has to do with a beginning since it is what sets the mind of the giants in motion; on the other hand, it belongs only to men and carries out its function by acting in a lasting manner. Conatus becomes the principle that restrains the bestial passions of the giants, so as to move them towards the creation of a civil society.

With this study I would like to show how the concept of conatus, present within Vico's production starting from 1710, changes within the elaboration of the Neapolitan philosopher¹. In fact, I would like to show how, in the years ranging from the writing of *De antiquissima* to the latest edition of *The New Science*, the conatus comes to refer purely to man, starting, instead, from its previous application to the world of nature. To bring out this change, I will develop the exposition in chronological order by dividing it into three distinct moments which correspond to three different treatments of the conatus: the first is the exposition of this concept in the *Liber metaphysicus* of 1710 (*De antiquissima*), the second is that carried out in universal law and finally I will refer to the conatus as it is presented in the *New Science*².

1. Conatus is introduced by Vico in the fourth chapter of *De antiquissima* (*De Essentiis, seu de Virtutibus*) together with the “metaphysical point”³. “Conato” and “point” derive directly from God and are the “metaphysical virtues” that determine all the physical things that exist in reality. If we consider nature as characterized exclusively by motion and extension, we can identify the conatus and the “metaphysical point” as the essences that determine everything that belongs to the natural world. At the same time Vico warns against identifying these two “virtues” as having physical characteristics, since conatus and “point” are metaphysical essences, which determine motion and extension, but are neither one nor the other, because they are only the metaphysical cause that determines the existence of real objects. The “metaphysical virtues”, argues Vico, are “properties of the matter of bodies: of matter, I say, metaphysics, which is the substance, not of physical matter, which is the body, of which it is precisely the moving »⁴. Conatus and “metaphysical point” therefore become the medium that connects the metaphysical and physical worlds: they are those realities that are inexpensive and quiet but at the same time capable of extension and movement.. Conatus and “metaphysical point” therefore become the medium that connects the metaphysical and physical worlds: they are those realities that are inexpensive and quiet but at the same time capable of extension and movement.

Regarding the conatus and its characteristics, we can argue that it is the principle of motion but it is not movement. In fact, while movement is a phenomenon that belongs to the natural world, the conatus maintains its metaphysical nature which is characterized by a state of rest. In the pages dedicated to the argumentation of this principle, Vico adopts an ambivalent position that leads him to distance himself from both scholastic elaboration and from that of modern science. On the one hand, despite being aware that he is using a term used by scholastics, Vico explicitly distances himself from their elaborations in order to establish a “new” metaphysics, which is in discontinuity with the previous one. In this sense, by consciously separating his metaphysical treatment from the medieval ones, Vico shows his legitimate adherence to modernity. In fact, there is no doubt that the Neapolitan philosopher was influenced by scholastic philosophy⁵, but while he borrowed a medieval term, he reused it in a new sense, creating an evident break, as explicitly claimed, with the tradition that preceded him so as to build his analysis on new foundations⁶. On the other hand, the Neapolitan philosopher, with a view to making a metaphysical work that is the basis for physics, rehabilitates the state of rest as an exclusively divine condition, against what was affirming itself in those years with modern science. In fact, in the early modern age, starting with Galileo but with Descartes in a definitive way, the term “rest” lost its ontological conception⁷. Stillness and motion are now considered simple physical qualities characterized by a certain quantity that have nothing to do with metaphysics. Instead, Vico, contrary to the latest achievements obtained with the scientific revolution, claims the metaphysical nature of stillness and the physical nature of motion, insisting on several occasions that the objects that appear to be stationary in the real world are not really so, but that theirs is only an apparent stillness. It is on this basis that Vico affirms that

things are inside nature precisely because they are in motion, while everything that does not move is outside it and cannot be part of physics.

The world is created, that is, it is set in motion, by God (quiet), thanks to the conatus. Vico, to show the truthfulness of this statement, uses the example of a scale with balanced plates to which a grain of sand is added in one of the two. Using this example, Vico deduces that it is not the whole grain that tip the scales but only a part of it. In fact, if the grain is divided, the plate becomes unbalanced again, as with the whole grain, and so it will continue to do indefinitely. Therefore the principle of this motion should not be sought in the physical body of the grain of sand, but in the universe, that is, in its metaphysical part.

Therefore that, which is motion in particular bodies, is not motion in the universe, because the universe has no proximity to whom else can change, in which they place the essence of motion. Therefore it is a force that makes within itself: this effort in itself is one in itself to convert. This cannot be of the body, because each part of the body would have to turn against itself; so this would be as much as the parts of the body replicated. So, I say, the *conato* is not of the body, ¹8.

Conatus is a metaphysical force internal to every real body that acts through a continuous revolt in itself and should not, however, be identified with the body because in this sense every existing thing would overturn inside itself. Furthermore, insofar as it is internal to every body, we must speak of several conatuses and not just one. Conatus is the metaphysical part that is present in the creation of in every object and, consequently, also in men, but only to the extent that it is a principle that determines them as real beings that physically exist.²

Furthermore, arguing that all motions are compounded, Vico brings an additional element that serves to demonstrate the belonging of motion to the physical world only. Simple motion is in fact only rectilinear motion, but this motion is only a metaphysical concept. Therefore, if we have a passage from metaphysical to physical, from simple to compound, we can say that the starting point of conatus, as a metaphysical concept, is a rectilinear motion; but as soon as this movement becomes real, that is physical, it ceases to move in a rectilinear way and becomes composed⁹. In fact, in everyday life any movement is made up of many different motions and, even if those that fall in the air or move on the earth seem to move in a straight line, in reality they do not move like this. It is just an impression that can lead to wrong considerations. In this case, experience needs the help of reason, since each object comes into contact with so many materials that make it different in every moment than in the previous moment. Therefore, the rectilinear motion of a body is only apparent, because that body undergoes deviations at all

¹ Conatus sounds like projective geometry's virtuality.

² It is the cause of whatever appears, moves, and is physically interactive.

times. Imperfect things are only physical things, "outside of nature there is the concept of right, which is the rule of distorted things" 10. The gap between right and compound motion is not only a gap between metaphysical and physical, but also and above all between abstraction and experience: rectilinear motion can be thought of mentally, it is an a priori that cannot be derived from no way from experience. As for the "metaphysical points" it is again geometry, as the truest science of all because it is abstract and totally detached from what belongs to the sensible world, that makes the connection between the principle of movement in its metaphysical moment understandable (straight) and in the physical (composite) one. "As in fact distorted lines are composed of straight lines - which is why circular lines consist of indefinite straight lines, since they consist of indefinite points - so the compound motions of extended things are made up of simple concourses of points" 11 .

Finally, it is thanks to the metaphysical division between stillness and movement that we are able to avoid the problems that derive from the communication of motions, which, precisely, cannot be communicated from one body to another, since every object real from the moment it comes into being is in motion. Maintaining the ontological distance between stillness and motion allows Vico to declare the incommunicability of the different movements, because communicating (here understood as determining) the motions would be equivalent to penetrating a body, which is impossible. In this case, Vico proposes here the differentiation between knowledge and conscience made at the beginning of *De antiquissima*: penetrating a body is impossible because it would mean knowing it. The only thing that is possible to understand is that stillness does not exist in nature and that an object that moves from a situation of immobility is found only in a state of apparent stillness. So every body is always in motion and is only induced to a different movement than the one it was already making. This is why for Vico man is not the author of motion, but is only able to confer a determination of motion:

In beating, for example, the hand that strikes is in motion; the ball that seems quiet is in motion, which is why we reasoned not to be at rest in nature; the area that surrounds both the ball and the hand is in motion, and it is the space that stands between the ball and the hand; the air of the nearby space is in motion, and the other close to this up to the universe. Therefore, at the motion of the hand, because it is full, the universe is felt; and yes the motion of each part becomes the effort of the whole: the effort of the whole is in each part indefinite. Therefore, the blow serves only as an occasion for the effort of the universe, which was so weak in the ball, which seemed to be quiet, to the blow to explain itself more, and, the more it explains itself, it gives us the appearance of more sensitive motion¹².

To briefly summarize the Vichian elaboration, we can say that the natus has these characteristics: it is the mean between God and nature, it is what determines the movement in the

Googlish problem: really “several conatuses and not just one”

physical world but at the same time it is not motion, it is referable to all objects real, including men, and in this sense it is possible to speak of several **fetching** and not just one. Having said that, we can move on to see how this concept acquires, within Vico's thought, a partly new meaning in universal law.

2. The concept of conatus returns in the juridical works in a completely different context from that of the *De antiquissima*: here we are no longer dealing with the relationship between metaphysics and physics, but with law. At the same time, it will be seen that precisely on this theme Vico's explicit reference to the work of 1710 means that universal law must certainly be considered as the laboratory that leads to the birth of the new science, but also as a work that has strong affinities with *Liber metaphysicus*. The proximity to the metaphysical work will, however, be less marked in the *New Science*, also due to the absence of the term conatus in the first edition of 1725.

The main intent behind universal law is to analyze laws and how they are created by men. As we know, the man with whom we deal in the work has lost the ability to use the intellect and the will: “both have been corrupted by original sin; the mind has been deceived by errors and the soul torn apart by passions; from the errors of the mind the passions of the soul are born and both generate all kinds of unhappiness for man”¹³. Man, having distanced himself from God, has become like an animal, he has lost the road that leads to the truth and his instinct is turned only towards basic needs, which provide him with immediate and easy-to-enjoy pleasure. “If previously man through the contemplation of the eternal true carried out with a pure mind learned practical behavior directly from God, [...] because of sin, the certain replaced the true”¹⁴. Nevertheless, “in corrupt man there is nevertheless present the **conatus** of the mind understood to the truth”¹⁵. It is through this return to truth, says Vico, that it becomes possible to achieve that righteousness of mind, the only one that can lead man to the will of justice. On the way to a society founded on legal bases, natural law develops according to two different forms, one consequent to the other: the *ius prius* and the *ius posterius*. While the first is a purely “corporeal” right based on the protection of the senses and the freedom of affections, the second is a right based on rationality that makes use of laws developed and shared by all [16]. While the first form of law basically concerns **freedom, personal protection and that of the family unit**, the second, on the other hand, is formed in a broader context, that of **civil society**, which guarantees the preservation and development of states.

What is important to observe, in the light of what we are dealing with, is that the two types of law are based on conatus, which, in continuity with the *Liber Metaphysicus*, is not a corporeal but divine principle. And in fact, Vico writes in *De constantia* that

we have divided natural law into two parts: “first law” and “second law”. We have also said that they are based on “strength”, that is, on the “reticence”. However, we have denied that the body possesses the *conate*, since *conari* means resisting an external motion. [...] Therefore in our Metaphysics and in the Letters written on it, we have excluded from the field of physics the effort to introduce it in that of metaphysics. In fact, being able to resist the motion of some body belongs to those who can give this motion, that is, of the mind and of God. It is not a philosopher who denies that *conate* are the true motions of the body. In fact, the *conate* is of the body, but it does not come from the body; whoever attributes the origin of the *conate* to the bodies, in the same way can be induced to assign hidden designs, *indolence*, desires, likes and dislikes to nature¹⁷.

Conatus is therefore at the basis of the birth of civil society. Although it is a principle that derives from the mind, it somehow also has to do with the body since it is also strength. The mistake that should not be made is to identify conatus with an essentially and uniquely bodily characteristic, since it has to do with the body only to the extent that it is linked to the mind.³

In this case, the strong continuity with *De antiquissima* should be noted: in the work of 1710 conatus is a metaphysical concept that determines movement, but which is not motion; in universal law, in a similar way, “the *conato* is *yes* of the body, but it does not come from the body”. In both cases conatus nevertheless remains a metaphysical principle but, at the same time, it is necessary to underline the displacement that the “theory of *conato*” undergoes, because this concept “originally extrapolated from mechanics, extended to metaphysics as the principle of the action of a free agent like God, comes back here to mingle with human things”¹⁸. As a solely human principle, it is denied to animals:

For this reason we have denied to brute animals the first natural right: because it is a force of the body set in motion by the desire that brute animals do not have; they have only a certain image of desire, called “appetite”, which is not true desire, since the brutes **do not have a principle of freedom in support of their movements**. On the other hand, the second natural law consists in the force of truth and rationality, which has desire in the cone, that is, it governs the movement of desire. And we have said that the second natural law confers on the first the form of law as it gives it the character of immutability: in fact, nothing can happen by nature, which is not first lawful by nature¹⁹.

In a similar way Vico had previously expressed himself in *De Uno*:

But we, in our metaphysics, have given inanimate things and brutes effort, impulse, and physical reasons, for which physicists and mechanics say, together with the vulgar, the

³ Does this mean that *conatus* is like intentionality, formed out of reason? Is this reason considered individually or collectively, as in the idea of a political will?

efforts, the impulses of the bodies, we have opposed, to be simple motions, bringing the effort, the retreat, to the mind alone, which of the free will provided, can potentially subsist (according to the wise expression of the Latins attesting to us from the saying of Terentius: “I fear that the ‘guest do not resist’ ”), and the motion can equally subsist and be in the effort, therefore the primary natural law cannot extend to the brutes, in which sentence the Latins seem to agree, who by the name of *brutum* meant everything lacking in strength, *quidquid est sine vi*²⁰.

While animals and brutes are guided by appetite, men, through conatus, are governed by desire. Therefore, while the former have to do with a “bestial” instinct, the latter, on the other hand, with free will. This is why the “brutes” cannot be granted any kind of natural right: they do not have, and cannot have, the strength that derives from the conatus because this principle is strength, the only strength that contrasts human corruption: the conatus is *vis vero*, force of truth, essence of human reason and generator of virtue.

Also in this case, the stringent connection between conatus and truth, understood as what belongs and derives from God, makes universal law a work that for some of its fundamental concepts is much more in continuity with the *De antiquissima* than with the *New Science*. In this last work, as will be seen, the metaphysical dimension to which the conatus is connected up to 1722 disappears and this concept is presented as pertaining only to human things, thus becoming a concept pertaining to morality: “Moral[ity] from this it takes its first Principle, which is the retreat: which is proper to the Free Will, which is the Subjective of Virtue, and of Vizj”²¹.

3. As I have already written previously, the term conatus disappears in the *New Science* of 1725 and this, in my opinion, is an important sign of the difference that exists between Vico's masterpiece and universal law. The theme of free will in the first edition of the *New Science* remains central²² but, at the same time, the concept of conatus is no longer associated with it as it had happened in universal law. This principle is subsequently reused by Vico, with a first-rate role, in the last two editions of *Scienza Nuova* and it is the author himself, in the section “of the method,” who points out the definitive shift with respect to the role that the conatus performed in the previous works:

But these first men, who were later the Princes of the Gentile Nations, had to think of strong thrusts of very violent passions, which is beast thinking. So we must go to a Metaphysical Vulgar, which has warned itself in the Dignities, and we will find that it was the Theology of Poets; and from that repeating the frightening thought of some Divinity, who placed a way, and measure, of the benevolent passions of such lost men, and made them human passions. From this thought had to be born the retching, which is the human will to hold in check the motions impressed on the mind by the body, in order

to calm them at all, which is of the Knowing Man, or at least give their other direction for better uses, which is of Civilian Man. This restraining the motion of bodies is certainly an effect of the freedom of Human Will, and yes of the free Will; which is the domicile, and room of all the Virtues, and among others of Justice; from which informed the will is' the subject of all the Righteous, and of all the rights, which are dictated by the Righteous: because giving bodies is as much as giving them freedom to regulate their motions; when all bodies are necessary agents in nature: and those, which the Mechanics call powers, forces, attempts, are insensitive motions of these bodies, with which they either approach, as Ancient Mechanics wanted, to ' their centers of gravity; or they move away, as New Mechanics wants, from their centers of motion²³.

First of all, Vico re-proposes here the separation between animality and humanity that he had already expressed in universal law: the "violent passions" are to "thinking like beasts" just as the "measured passions" are to "thinking like men". Conatus becomes, Hegelian speaking, a kind of restrained vanish, because it is the principle of the mind that restrains the appetites of giants, which must be satisfied immediately, and transforms them into desires that are directed to the virtue and birth of man. civil. The conatus, as a principle of the mind, has within itself a sort of ideality that makes it possible to associate the will and freedom of human arbitrariness with it. In fact, thanks to the conatus, everyone is able to regulate their motions and thus act in the way that he deems most right for himself and for those around him. Therefore, acting on the basis of the action of this principle determines a disciplined movement that is still free because it is dictated by conscience. Vico is well aware that people are essentially moved by passions, which is why the conatus, the cause of motion, acquires a purely moral value: it is both a driving and a braking principle. In fact, it moves men on the path towards full rationality but to do this it brakes and limits irrational passions. Clearly the latter cannot be completely eliminated and only the wise are able to act without being determined by the passions. Vico, however, is well aware that the condition of the essay is attainable only by a few people. From the point of view of the creation and development of a civil society, however, we must refer to all men, who, even if not able to completely put aside their passions, may be able to consciously direct them towards those directions they believe more just and useful ²⁴. Therefore, conatus appears closely related to moral virtue:

Which **dee** began, the Moral Virtue from the retreat; with which the Giants of the terrifying Religion of lightning were chained under the mountains; and kept the bestial habit in check [...]. With *conatus* also the virtue of the soul began to emerge in them,

containing their bestial lust to exercise it in the face of Heaven, of which they were terrified²⁵.⁴

It can be seen that modesty plays a leading role together with conatus. Modesty, which acts in collaboration with the conatus, is the first passion that wandering beasts feel after the “very great fear” that was aroused by lightning. It is from conatus and modesty that a whole series of moral virtues are determined and, together with these, the three customs (religion, marriage, burials) that characterize society. Furthermore, modesty also plays a leading role in human development: it “presupposes that man, who is mind and body, is able, through the conatus, to give form, that is, meaning and human value, to what which comes from the body”²⁶. In fact, the conatus acts on men both as an educator and as an educator, where the first is of the body and the second of the soul. In this case, *educere* resumes its Latin meaning of *ex ducere*, because thanks to the *conatus* the contracted mind of the giants is “led out”, that is, it regains a predominant value with respect to the bodily faculties, thus helping to bring the giants back to a human build²⁷. Man returns to his original features because the soul and soul buried by the body are taken out of it, regaining a leading role. Therefore, given its relationship with the soul, it is the mind that comes out of the body²⁸, and it is only with its development that giants become men again physically as well. Therefore the mind, contracted and almost completely canceled due to the dominance of the body, through the conative effort generated by the lightning, is reactivated and slowly regains its own cognitive faculties.⁵

If we now return to the passage on the method cited above, we finally see that Vico establishes a parallelism between the conatus which acts in man from the moral point of view and that of metaphysics which acts on nature: as in the physical world the conatus is the principle of motion, in men it is the principle not only of civilization, but of man himself. In both cases this concept has to do with a well-defined momentum, since it is configured as an instant in time that determines a beginning. The continuity between the *De antiquissima* and the *New Science* therefore occurs to the extent that the conatus gives rise to something. It sets in motion a determined situation: in the first there is the creation of the world by God, in the second the sudden reactivation of the mind thanks to the physical phenomenon of lightning²⁹. At the same time, the nature of what is parallel imposes an unbridgeable and always equal distance between

⁴ ORIGINAL: Cominciò qual *dee*, la Moral virtù dal conato; col qual'i Giganti dalla spaventosa Religione de' fulmini furon' incatenati per sotto i monti; e tennero in freno il vezzo bestiale [...]. Col *Conato* altresì incominciò in essi a spuntare la virtù dell'animo, contenendo la loro libidine bestiale di esercitarla in faccia al Cielo, di cui avevano uno spavento grandissimo.²⁵

⁵ It seems that the conatus of lightning is the traumatic basis of the idempotency of the hearth and paralysis of Prometheus, also the precision required to repeat each ritual in perfect detail to assure authority, in the name of *instrumental cause*. Conatus is thus the idempotent principle, allied with projective geometry's “eigen-values,” that create the possibility of the unary trait and its alliance with idempotency, the two forms of $X + 1 = X$ (whatever is the object or situation, it is stabilized and insulated) and $1 + X = 1$ (the principle of repetition is preserved in the 1, which is not affected by any contingency). The former is the desiccated corpse, that has accomplished the interval of “between the two deaths,” the latter is the principle of growth, conatus as extension, but also authenticity that is portable, and can be extended, thus “heroic” society can develop.

two straight lines and in this case between the conatus described in *De antiquissima* and that in *Scienza Nuova*. And it is precisely in the analogy that the difference is hidden, because the conatus as outlined in the Vico masterpiece is something that starts in the form of a brake³⁰, since it stops the bestial passions to transform them into socially useful human passions. This characterization therefore sanctions the definitive shift that Vico had already made in part in universal law. Not only because the analysis is now entirely focused on human nature, but also because the conatus has now become an enduring principle. It no longer fulfills its function in determining the motion (of nature or of man) at a given moment, but it always remains present in the men who possess it [31] to orient them in the right direction.

In conclusion, compared to the purely metaphysical role it had in the *De antiquissima*, conatus that is exposed in the *New Science* becomes an incredibly richer and more complex principle, because it constantly moves between the abstractness and infinity of the human mind and the practical application of men's actions. In fact, the conatus contains the containedness of passions (brake), will and free will (motion) and all this makes the Vico conatus a principle that shows how man necessarily moves between the limit (the restrained passions that produce the three customs of society) and the unlimited (the multiple possibilities of free will), between the finite and the infinite.

NOTES

¹ Sul tema del *conatus* si trovano diversi contributi, in particolare segnalo: N. Badaloni, *Laici credenti all'alba del moderno. La linea Herbert-Vico*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2005, pp. 149-154; M. Papini, *Arbor humanae linguae. L'etimologico di G. B. Vico come chiave ermeneutica della storia del mondo*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1984, pp. 107-179; Id., *Uomini di sterco e di nitro*, in «Bollettino del Centro di studi vichiani», XX, 1990, pp. 7-76; Id., *Opzione barocca per il De antiquissima*, in A. Verri (a cura di), *Vico e il pensiero contemporaneo*, Lecce, Milella, 1991, pp. 350-376; N. Perullo, *Bestie e bestioni. Il problema dell'animale in Vico*, Napoli, Guida, 2002; B. Pinchard, *La Raison dédoublée: La Fabbrica della mente*, Paris, Aubier, 1992, pp. 325-336.

² Cito le opere vichiane dalle seguenti edizioni: G. Vico, *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*, a cura di M. Sanna, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, Roma, 2005 (d'ora in poi *De ant.*); Id., *Seconda risposta del Vico al «Giornale de' letterati d'Italia»*, in Id., *Metafisica e Metodo*, a cura di C. Faschilli, C. Greco, A. Murari, postfazione di M. Cacciari, Milano, Bompiani, 2008, pp. 353-384 (d'ora in poi *Risposta II*); Id., *Opere Giuridiche. Il Diritto Universale*, intr. di N. Badaloni, a cura di P. Cristofolini, Firenze, Sansoni, 1974 (d'ora in poi *Du*); Id., *Principj di una Scienza nuova (1725)*, a cura di P. Cristofolini, Pisa, ETS, 2016 (d'ora in poi *Sn25*); Id., *La Scienza nuova. 1730*, a cura di P. Cristofolini, con la coll. di M. Sanna, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2013 (d'ora in poi *Sn30*); Id., *La Scienza nuova. 1744*, a cura di P. Cristofolini e M. Sanna, Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2013 (d'ora in poi *Sn44*). Per l'edizione della *Scienza nuova* del 1744 indico fra parentesi anche il paragrafo corrispondente.

³ Su questo capitolo in particolare cfr. T. Uemura, *Vico's Zeno: reading Liber Metaphysicus, cap. IV: De Essentiis, seu de Virtutibus*, in «Bollettino del Centro di studi vichiani», XLVI, 2016, pp. 53-73.

⁴ *Risposta II*, p. 374.

⁵ Su ciò cfr. C. Vasoli, *Vico, Tommaso d'Aquino e il tomismo*, in «Bollettino del Centro di studi vichiani», IV, 1974, pp. 5-35.

⁶ Anche se non presenti pagine dedicate esplicitamente a Vico, sul tema della modernità e della sua autoaffermazione si veda H. Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1966, 1974 (tr. it. *La legittimità dell'età moderna*, a cura di C. Marelli, Genova, Marietti, 1992).

⁷ Su questo cfr. A. Koyré, *Etudes galiléennes*, Paris, Hermann, 1966 (tr. it. *Studi galileiani*, a cura di M. Torrini, Torino, Einaudi, 1976, pp. 161 sgg.).

⁸ *Risposta II*, p. 373.

⁹ Da notare, su questo tema, l'assonanza con l'elaborazione galileiana: infatti, questa idea riguardo al moto è molto simile al “mito platonico” che Salviati narra nella Prima Giornata del *Dialogo*. Tale mito serve a sostenere la tesi dell'assenza in natura del moto retto, poiché quest'ultimo serve solo a fabbricare l'opera, la quale, una volta creata, si muove solo circolarmente o resta immobile. Sostiene perciò Salviati, che possiamo «ragionevolmente dire che la natura, per conferire in un mobile, prima costituito in quiete, una determinata velocità, si serva del farlo muovere, per alcun tempo e per qualche spazio, di moto retto. [...] potremo con Platone dire che gli desse di muoversi da principio di moto retto ed accelerato, e che poi, giunto a quel tal grado di velocità, convertisse il suo moto retto in circolare» (G. Galilei, *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, 20 voll., Edizione nazionale sotto gli auspici di Sua Maestà il Re d'Italia pubblicata da A. Favaro, I. del Lungo, V. Cerruti, G. Govi, G. V. Schiaparelli, U. Marchesini, Firenze, Barbera, 1890-1909, vol. VII, pp. 44-45). Anche per Vico il moto retto appartiene alla sfera metafisica, ma se per il filosofo napoletano, al momento della creazione fisica dell'oggetto, il movimento passa da retto a composto, per Galilei si passa dal moto retto a quello circolare.

¹⁰ *De ant.*, p. 87. ¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Risposta II*, pp. 373-374. ¹³ *Du*, p. 348.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 360.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 348.

¹⁶ «La tutela dei sensi e la libertà degli affetti costituiscono dunque quel naturale diritto nominato *prius*, primario, dagli antichi interpreti, e dagli stoici “primi naturali diritti”. La signoria della ragione, l'equilibranza degli affetti, l'autorità tutelare del consiglio, formano quel diritto naturale detto “secondario” dagli interpreti, e “conseguenze della natura” dagli stoici» (*Ivi*, pp. 90-92).

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p.380.

¹⁸ N. Badaloni, *Laici credenti all'alba del moderno*, cit., p. 150.

19 Du, p. 380.

20 Ivi, p. 94.

21 Sn30, p. 435. Il fatto che adesso la situazione si sposti sulle “cose umane” non vuol dire, a mio avviso, che la filosofia di Vico, da questo momento in avanti, possa essere definita una “filosofia senza natura”. Tale espressione, coniata da Piovani nel secolo scorso (Id, Vico e la “filosofia senza natura”, in Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema: Campanella e Vico, Roma, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1969, pp. 247-268) suscitò un ampio dibattito tra i critici, con alcuni favorevoli (ad es. P. Rossi, *Le sterminate antichità e nuovi saggi vichiani*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1999) ed altri contrari (si veda N. Badaloni, *Introduzione a Vico*, Bari, Laterza, 1984, p. 41; ma anche E. Grassi, *Die Macht der Phantasie. Zur geschichte abendländischen Denkens*, Königstein, Althenäum Verlag, 1979, tr. it. *Potenza della fantasia. Per una storia del pensiero occidentale*, a cura di C. Gentili e M. Marassi, Napoli, Guida, 1990, p. 240). Per parte mia, reputo che questa formula si presti a rischi di fraintendimento, quali possono derivare dall'applicazione di una distinzione di stampo “storicistico” tra scienze della natura e dello spirito a un periodo storico e a un modello di sapere cui tale divisione era estranea. Per Vico, come per la maggior parte dei filosofi dell'età moderna, l'indagine sull'uomo è correlata a quella sulla natura. Infatti gran parte dell'opera vichiana è dedicata, da un lato, a mostrare come i primi uomini scoprono ed interpretano il mondo ad essi circostante, e dall'altro, ad indagare la natura umana, non solo da un punto di vista politico, ma anche secondo le sue capacità, potenzialità e possibilità conoscitive.

22 «Si fatta vana Scienza, dalla quale dovette incominciare la *Sapienza Volgare* di tutte le Nazioni gentili, nasconde però due gran Principj di vero; uno che vi sia *Provvedenza Divina* che governi le cose umane; l'altro, che negli huomini sia *Libertà d'arbitrio* per lo quale, se vogliono, e vi si adoperano, possono schivare ciò, che senza provvederlo, altramenti loro appartenerebbe» (Sn25, p. 15).

23 Sn44, p. 91 (§ 340).

24 Sull'utilità delle passioni cfr. A. O. Hirschman, *The passions and the interest. Political arguments for capitalism before his triumph*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977, tr. it., *Le passioni e gli interessi. Argomenti politici in favore del capitalismo prima del suo trionfo*, a cura di S. Gorresio, Milano Feltrinelli, 1979 e A. M. Iacono, *L'evento e l'osservatore. Ricerche sulla storicità della conoscenza*, Pisa, ETS, 2013, pp. 30-34.

25 Ivi, p. 150 (§ 504).

26 A. Pons, ... *Il rossore, di cui certamente fu mai al mondo nazione che non si tinse...*, in *Il corpo e le sue facoltà. G. B. Vico*, a cura di G. Cacciatore - V. Gessa Kurotschka - E. Nuzzo - M. Sanna - A. Scognamiglio, in «Laboratorio dell'ISPF» (www.ispf.cnr.it/ispf-lab), I, 2005, pp. 278-289, p. 281.

27 Sn44, pp. 156-157 (§520). Sul tema della mente contratta si veda il bel saggio di E. Nuzzo, *La “mente contratta”. Tra corpi smisurati e facoltà dell'indefinito*, in *Il corpo e le sue facoltà. G. B. Vico*, cit., pp. 106-119.

28 Cfr. Sn44, pp. 227-230 (§§ 692-701), ma anche *De ant.*, pp. 97-105.

29 «Finalmente fulminò il Cielo, e Giove diede principio al Mondo degli uomini dal poner questi in conato» (Ivi, p. 226, § 689).

³⁰ Questo era stato notato anche da Attila Fáj in Id., *Vico, il filosofo della metabasi*, in «Rivista critica di storia della filosofia», XXXI, 1976, 3, pp. 251-278.

³¹ Va tenuto presente anche che non tutti gli uomini sono in possesso del *conatus*, perché solo alcuni hanno assistito al fenomeno del fulmine. Però questo principio, come mostrato sopra, non è solo un *educere* ma anche un *educare* e in quanto tale può essere educato. Proprio questo avverrà con i famoli, i quali per imitazione impareranno a moderare le passioni dai padri di famiglia.

Tommaso Parducci

Lucca tommasoparducci@gmail.com

– Sul concetto di conatus nella filosofia di Vico

Citation standard:

PARDUCCI, Tommaso. Sul concetto di *conatus* nella filosofia di Vico. Laboratorio dell'ISPF. 2018, vol. XV (9). DOI: 10.12862/Lab18PRT.

Online: 21.12.2018

ABSTRACT

About the concept of conatus in Vico's philosophy. The aim of this study is to show how the concept of *conatus* changes statute in the passage from *De antiquissima* to the *New Science*. In the first work *conatus* is defined as the metaphysical virtue thanks to which the motion begins in the physical world. In the *New Science* *conatus* has a more complex role: on the one hand it has still to do with a beginning, because it reactivates the mind and the understanding of the first humans being; on the other hand, it is a permanent principle, because it restrains the irrational passions of the giants, putting in motion other more contained passions, useful to the birth of society.

KEYWORDS

G. Vico; Conatus; Metaphysics; Motion; Passions