

GIAMBATTISTA VICO AND THE PRINCIPLES OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

VICO E A PSICOLOGIA CULTURAL

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Who was Giambattista Vico?

Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) was a philosopher, rhetorician, historian, and jurist from Naples, South Italy. Though his name can be nowadays unfamiliar to psychology students, he exerted a tremendous influence in the social sciences.



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Forms of knowledge: a story

In Greek philosophy inherited by western culture, there were hierarchies in the different forms of knowledge in relation to experience and to interpersonal, as we would say today, or shared knowledge.

FIGURE 1: PLATO'S SCHEME OF KNOWLEDGE (DIVIDED LINE)

| Knowledge (Episteme) | | Opinion (Doxa) | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A | B | C | D |
| Pure thought (<i>gnosis</i>) | Reason (<i>dianoia</i>) | Belief (<i>pistis</i>) | Illusion (<i>eikasia</i>) |
| Intelligible Realm (Forms) | | Visible Realm (Substance) | |
| ONE Immutable Truth and Reality | | MANY Mutable Truth and Reality | |



Forms of knowledge

Aristotle
develops
Plato's
epistemology
in three
different types
of knowledge:

- knowledge from experience (praxis),
- knowledge from art (techne),
- knowledge from science (episteme).



Forms of knowledge

- Doxa is a good-working truth, which is commonly confirmed by others' agreement and by successful experience.
- Episteme is about causes, and namely first causes, or real essences of things.
- True knowledge must go beyond phenomena, everyday language and common sense. It must be somehow formalized, mathematized and follow logic rather than practical rules.
- Then Galileo Galilei comes out, reconciling the realm of experience and the realm of abstract speculation, that of physical and that of non-physical.
- The way was paved to modern techno-scientific mode of thought and natural philosophy.



Vico's criticism to Descartes

When Descartes became mainstream, the human products of social and practical life in general that could be referred to the domain of natural language rather than of technology (e.g. arts, myths, etc.) were considered out of scientific discourse, as they could not be understood and represented by the only rigorous method of knowledge: mathematic.



Vico's new system

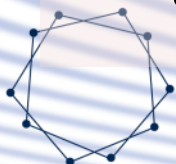
Vico tried to develop a whole philosophical system in which mind and culture are put in a co-constitutive relationship. In particular, Vico “hoped to find almost a compendium of that inductive method which he attempted to ‘transfer from natural things to human and civil things’” (De Mas and Houck, 1971).



Vico's quest

Developing a general methodology and a general epistemology of the human sciences, replacing the philosophical universals with a new kind, based on the study of the products of human ingegno.

1. human nature and society are not fixed or stationary, but rather are in a state of continuous change;
2. changes occur in evolutionary cycles influenced by human events;
3. it is scientifically possible to investigate social behavior across eras in order to reveal events that influence the recursive evolution of society, as well as the genesis of theories of human behavior and society (Rosnow, 1978)



Basic principles

building an epistemological system more geometrico (in a geometric way) that was made for studying the product of human social activity, culture and history.

topical (positive, given) and critical (rational, truth-oriented) are interrelated elements within every branch of science

the relationship between knowing and making

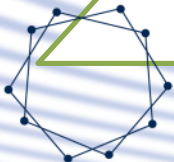


Different kinds of truth

“Truth” (verum),
which only pertains
to God

“common sense” (verum
certum) which is the practical
knowledge and belief achieved
through practices and consent

“truth through making” (verum factum),
which is the scientific knowledge about all the
products of human activity



New Science



Vico aimed at developing an epistemological and methodological framework to the study of products of culture and to understand human mind and human activity, according to the criteria outlined in “De nostri temporis”. In this sense, Vico can be considered the ancestor of cultural psychology.



New Science



The 3rd and final edition of the New Science (1744) in 5 books.

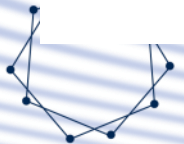
1st book is about principles of the new science, the system of axioms, principles, and methods of study of civilizations.

2nd book is about the concept of poetic wisdom, that generated its own metaphysics, logic, physics, ethics, politics, geography and astronomy.



Le Dignità

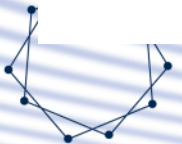
These theoretical principles represent the first systematic and comprehensive formulation of the ideas that will be later developed by cultural psychology. Vico elaborates 114 axioms derived from the discussion of the development of ancient cultures, that he will use in return to analyze the whole chronology of civilization.



Examples

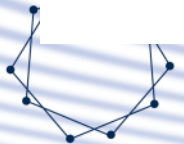
Axiom I opens with: “Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance, man makes himself the measure of all things”.

Axiom II is: “It is another property of the human mind that whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand”.



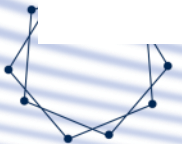
Examples

Axioms III and IV deal with cultural continuity and ethnocentrism. “Every nation, according to him, whether Greek or barbarian, has had the same conceit that it before all other nations invented the comforts of human life and that its remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world”. And “To this conceit of the nations there may be added that of the scholars, who will have it that whatever they know is as old as the world”.



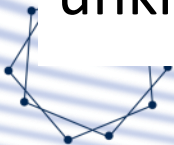
Examples

Axiom X defines the domains of knowledge with respect to verum and certum. “Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes the authority of human choice, whence comes consciousness of the certain.... This same axiom shows how the philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty to their reasonings by appeal to the authority of the philologians, and likewise how the latter failed by half in not taking care to give their authority the sanction of truth by appeal to the reasoning of the philosophers. If they had both done this they would have been more useful to their commonwealths and they would have anticipated us in conceiving this Science”.



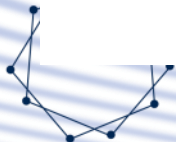
Examples

The combination of **axioms XI, XII and XII** specifies the idea of common sense. “Human choice, by its nature most uncertain, is made certain and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human needs or utilities, which are the two origins of the natural law of nations”. “Common sense is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the whole human race”. And “Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth.



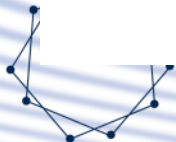
Examples

Axiom XV develops the genetic method: “The inseparable properties of things must be due to the mode or fashion in which they are born. By these properties we may therefore tell that the nature or birth (natura o nascimento) was thus and not otherwise”



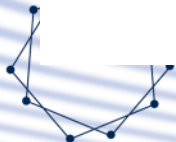
Examples

Axiom XV develops the mind-language-culture relationship. “Vulgar traditions must have had public grounds of truth, by virtue of which they came into being and were preserved by entire peoples over long periods of time. It will be another great labor of this Science to recover these grounds of truth which, in the passage of years and the changes in languages and customs, has come down to us enveloped in falsehood”



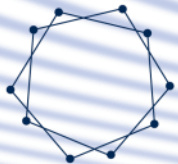
Examples

Axiom LXIII, “The human mind is naturally inclined by the senses to see itself externally in the body, and only with great difficulty does it come to attend to itself by means of reflection. This axiom gives us the universal principle of etymology in all languages: words are carried over from bodies and from the properties of bodies to express the things of the mind and spirit”



Genetic, generative and generated

The **genetic dimension** is related to the historical and concrete conditions in which psychological processes take place, but also to the whole, from its genesis to his transformation in something different.



Genetic, generative and generated

Cognition, affection and action are always linked into a whole, that is an act upon the situation. This is the **generative** dimension, that is the fact that experiencing is always changing, to the extent that the relationship between mind and culture, or mind and reality, is always co-generative.



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Genetic, generative and generated

Generated means that once an experience occurs in irreversible time (Valsiner, 2014) it can never be deleted, something new has been created. Thus, psychological phenomena cannot be treated as an alternation of activation and equilibrium states, they are rather a continuous production of novelty from the structural tension of our dealing and making sense of life experiences (Tateo and Marsico, 2013).

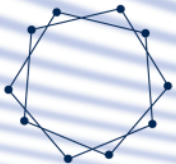
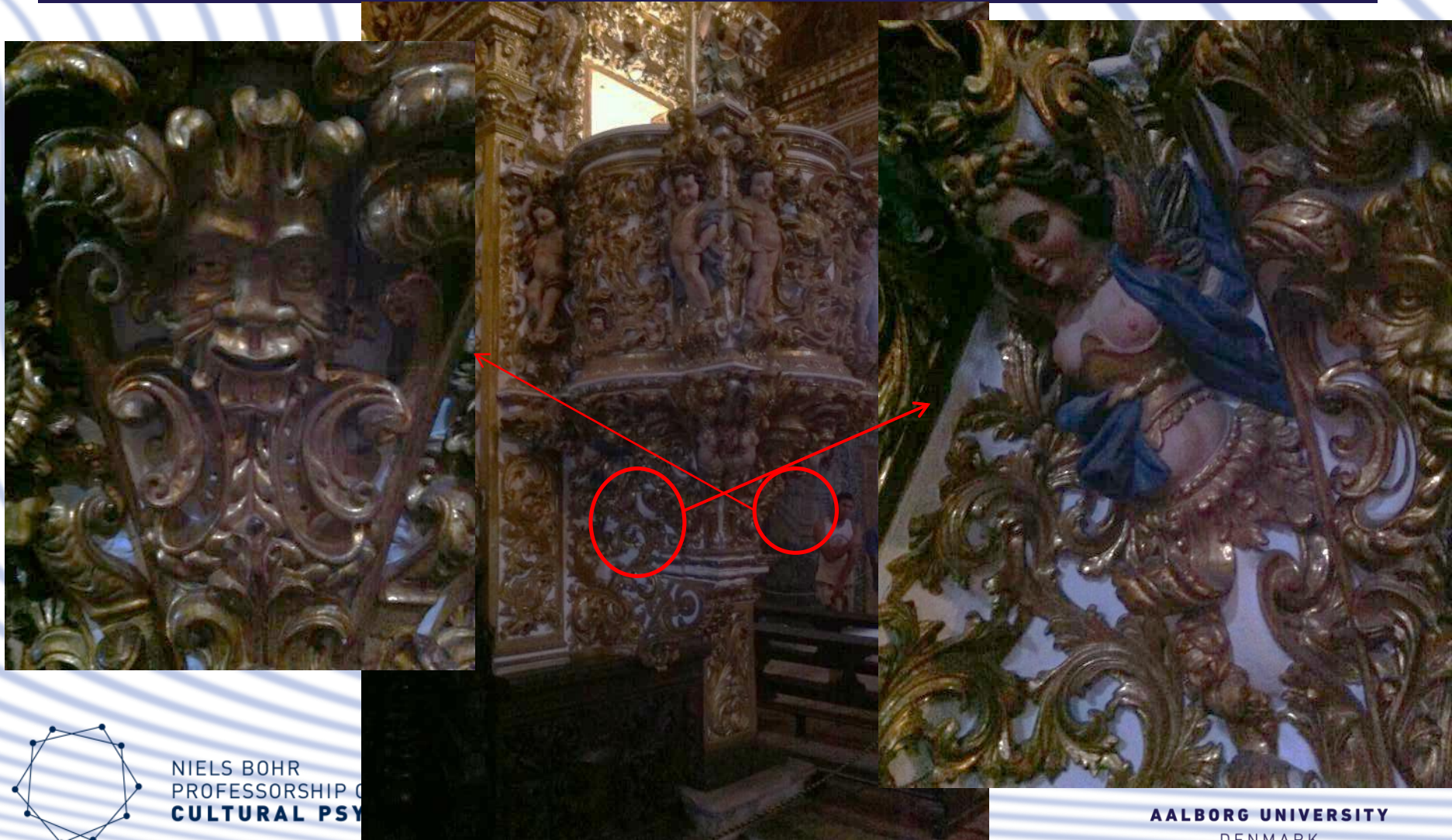


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Mind and culture



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