

On the History of Rhetoric and Psychology

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The rise of modernity saw both the demise of rhetoric and the emergence of psychology as a natural science. In this paper, I will develop a brief sketch of the historical movements of each discipline, show how they are deeply related to one another, and, finally, how they are also needful of one another. The primary focus, however, will be on the history of rhetoric rather than psychology. In particular, Giambattista Vico's work retrieves, and in a sense revives, a history and tradition that is otherwise obliterated by the Port Royal Logicians' preoccupation with Cartesian linguistics. Psychology, in its modern incarnation, would deny having any relation whatsoever with rhetoric. However, once Vico's revival of the pre-Cartesian rhetorical tradition is sketched out, it will become possible to situate modern, natural science psychology within the post-Cartesian tradition as a withholding containment of the heart of the rhetorical tradition defended by Vico. Modern thought, that is, gave rise to the separation of the disciplines of psychology and rhetoric, but with a reading of Grassi's work, informed by Vico and Heidegger, I hope to show the possibility of a historical retrieval of the rhetorical ground of psychology.

If we look to the curriculum of the medieval university, we find it segregated into two spheres of learning, the trivium and the quadrivium. The former was concerned with the disciplines of grammar, logic and rhetoric, while the latter enveloped the scientific enterprises of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy (Murray, 1984). The disciplines of the trivium did not have equal priority with the disciplines of the quadrivium. While grammar, "having to do with the good order of signs and their relationship to one another," was seen as somewhat superficial, logic and rhetoric were seen as holding a priority over it (Garver, 1973). Yet debates existed at the time which quarreled over which discipline should have priority over the others. Generally, however, the order of priority became more rigidly identified as belonging to logic: "In the history of Western philosophy," Murray (1984) writes, "the philosophy of language was invariably based on logic rather than rhetoric." While some exceptions to this rule have included Vico, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and possibly even Kant, the dominant academic paradigm grew more closely aligned with Locke's (1959) disparaging attitude toward rhetoric:

Since wit and fancy find easier entertainment in the world than dry truth and real knowledge, figurative speech and allusion in language will hardly be admitted as an imperception or abuse of it. I confess, in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight, than information and improvement, such ornaments as are borrowed from them can scarce

pass for faults. But yet if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness; all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats: and therefore, however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault, either of the language or person that makes use of them. (Locke, 1959, p. 146)

While the 19th century Romantic poets attempted to preserve the virtues of figurative, rhetorical discourse, logic reigned supreme into the beginning of the 20th century. This trend began, at least, with Galileo's experimentation and fully blossomed with Descartes' philosophical method in the 15th century. By the 15th and 16th century, the recognition of the fruits offered by the mechanization of nature showed itself in the emerging powers of human beings in industry and its products. Descartes split the world into mind (*res cogitans*) and substance (*res extensa*) to make way for the full emergence of a logico-mathematization of nature. That is, the world as *res extensa* is seen as an object to be manipulated and bent to the will of the human being. Descartes (1637), writing of his discoveries, boasted of the great utility of his method so to "make ourselves masters and possessors of nature" (Berman, 1981, p. 25). By the 17th century, the Enlightenment saw the rise of modern science in all its glory. Ironically, as Murray (1984) tells the tale, "What is true of the philosophers was a fortiori true of the scientists who, however, went the philosophers one better. Not only did they dismiss the truth claims of rhetoric, but they also questioned at times the ultimate claims of logic" (p. 174). It is, perhaps, a supreme irony that philosophy should hang itself by its own noose, and, thus, scholastic logic, too, as well as rhetoric, would give way to logico-mathematical analysis.

The giving over of scholastic logic to mathematical logic took place over a span of three centuries, roughly from the mid-15th century to the early 19th century (Murray, 1984). With the holding sway of logico-mathematical analysis, what was not mathematically expressible was simply ignored, and, most of all, such omissions were most evident in terms of the human world. This posed a unique problem for the philosophy of language, and figures such as Frege, Husserl, Whitehead, Russell and Wittgenstein rose to prominence: "all tied the problems of logic in some form or other with the problems of mathematics; and all gave support to the view that language at heart is logical in nature and that its principal characteristics were to be understood in terms of that logic" (Murray, 1984, p. 178). Even language, a phenomenon belonging to the human world, could not escape the mathematization of modernity.

It should then be no surprise that psychology as a natural science emerged during the 19th century. Again, another irony is revealed, for the "masters and possessors of nature," as Descartes had heralded the human in the age of science, became subservient to the very mathematical method which promised redemption (the "inversion of mastery," as Adorno and Horkheimer have pointed out). With Descartes, the "clearing" of the human place became encased in the skull, the *cogito*, while the world became 'de-souled,' mere extension in space. The birth of the experimental tradition in psychology, most notably with Herbart and Beneke, saw the mathematization of the world turned against the *cogito*, which was now, like the world, given over to a mathematical model (Murray, 1988). As Romanyshyn (1990) has stated, "the science of psychology is a historical appearance of human psychological life, of humanity's soul if you will, which is inseparable from a new physics of nature (Galileo, Newton, et al.) and a new physiology of the body (Vesalius, Harvey, et al.)" (p. 236).

Among the many consequences of this 'new vision' of the world is a severing of the human being from community, from the *polis*. Historically, the political domain has focused on the individual as the constitutive source of social life (Dallmyr, 1993). Human beings are conceptualized as discrete, individual subjects initially opposed to one another prior to the forging of a social contract. The certainty of the *cogito sum* in Cartesian metaphysics necessitates a political foundation which rests upon a subject who is prior to the world. The result of such a conception of the human being is a human being who is severed from the world and things, and, finally, from community.

As Sampson (1983) has argued, psychology itself, which emerges within this historical context, is also responsible for the perpetuation of this imagined human subject. "The problem," he writes, "is that psychology has uncritically adopted the atomistic individual as the world creator and has ignored the social forms that are essential in shaping the concept of the actual life of that individual" (p. 97). If, however, psychology is to extricate itself from the Cartesian metaphysics which gave it birth, it must ultimately return to the historical antecedents from which it arose. If so, a psychology which wishes to return the 'encapsulated individual' to the world should take rhetoric very seriously. As mentioned previously, it is the demise of rhetoric as part of the trilogy of the medieval trivium curriculum, along with logic and grammar, which gives rise to the necessity for a natural science psychology. In fact, I would argue, the post-Cartesian criticisms of modern psychology, such as Sampson's, are likely to discover the possibility of a historical retrieval of a *human* science psychology as the partial re-emergence of the lost rhetorical tradition.

The last defender of the rhetorical tradition against the Port Royal Logicians at the apex of Renaissance Humanism is the oft-neglected Giambattista Vico (1668-1744).

Most of all, Vico rigorously attacked Descartes' contempt for the *litterae humaniores* and, specifically, the languages. As Verene (1990) notes:

Vico's originality in the history of anti-Cartesianism manifests itself in five points. The first is Vico's dissent from Descartes' view of the Discourse as a method of invention. The second is Vico's opposition to Descartes' methodological monism (Pascal has already voiced this opposition). The third is Vico's endeavor to demonstrate the superiority of "synthetic" or Euclidian geometry over Cartesian, analytical geometry. The fourth is the attempt to expose the weakness of Cartesian medicine and cosmology, and to declare the inadmissibility of the reduction of physics to mathematics. (One of the most persistent of Cartesian "themes" is the mathematization of physics). Finally -- and this is the aspect that establishes the characteristic note of Vico's criticism of Descartes within the history of anti-Cartesianism -- we have Vico's emphasis on man as an integrality (not sheer rationality, not merely intellect, but also fantasy, passion, and emotion), and his insistence on the historical and social dimension. (pp. xxvii-xxviii)

Vico's (1990) stand against Descartes is evident in his *On the Study Methods of Our Time*. In this text, Vico compares the advantages and disadvantages of the study methods of his age in comparison to antiquity. He develops a method which compares "study method" based on three aspects: instruments, complementary aids, and the aim envisaged (p. 6). While instruments provide the tools for "a systematic, orderly manner of proceeding," complementary aids are the procedures which are "concomitant with the task" (p. 6). Finally, the aim envisaged by the learner is present from the beginning to the end of the task of learning.

In terms of the instruments of his age, Vico most of all criticizes the method of teaching youth first to use philosophical criticism, which he feels is detrimental to a training in common sense. For Vico, such a method leads to the instilling of abstract intellectualism at the expense of the practice of eloquence (p. 13). The educators of his day, Vico felt, failed to hone the strengths of the youth in imagination, and this is nowhere more the case than in the neglect of teaching the "art of topics." As Vico asserts, "the invention of arguments are by nature prior to the judgment of their validity, so that, in teaching, that invention should be given priority over philosophical criticisms" (p. 14). It is clear, in this case, that Vico is asserting that rhetoric, as opposed to scholastic logic, must be the centerpiece of education. For, as he argues, "nature and life are full of incertitude," and thus we teach our youth well when we give them the tools of the *ars topica*-- the art of true speech, of eloquence -- such that they may utilize the *loci*, or lines of arguments, "to grasp the elements of persuasion in any question or case" (p. 15). When scholastic logic takes precedence over rhetoric,

Vico argues, it results in a loss of eloquence, and, vice versa, "the specialist in topics fall in with falsehood" (p. 19). Logic and rhetoric belong together. But eloquence, through the cultivation of common sense, imagination and memory, must come first, and, "at a later stage let them learn criticism, so that they can apply the fullness of their personal judgment to what they have been taught" (p. 19).

The imaginative, rhetorical dimension has primacy for Vico in another way. When priority is given to the modern application of the geometrical method of Descartes to physics, "it is impossible to discard any part of the deductive process unless one attacks that method's basic principle" (p. 21). Vico uses the metaphor of a house and its furniture. Once the house of first principles is built, the deductive process allows only for the arrangement of the furniture. The rhetorical dimension, however, holds the possibility of discovery, of *inventio*, through the rhetors. "capacity to perceive the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently, most dissimilar," and this involves metaphorical activity (p. 24). This process, known as *ingenium*, is the very building of the house, and, thus, has priority over the deductive approach of logic. Finally, and perhaps most important, the eloquence of the orator is the art which cultivates the speaker's ability to be attuned to the mood of the audience.

It follows, Vico shows, that the primacy of deductive logic leads to an excessive focus on the natural sciences while ethics is neglected. Vico (1990) writes:

Since, in our time, the only target of our intellectual endeavors is truth, we devote all our efforts to the investigation of physical phenomena, because their nature seems unambiguous; but we fail to inquire into human nature which, because of the freedom of man's will, is difficult to determine. A serious drawback arises from the uncontrasted preponderance of our interest in the natural sciences. (p. 33)

Vico, it is clear, foresaw the loss of the human ethical dimension with the rise of modern science (ethics as in "ethos," the human dwelling). And, further, he foretold that this neglect would inevitably result in a loss of community, and, ultimately, a loss of wisdom and prudence, as well as loss of "a familiarity with human psychology" (p. 34). Such a cultivation of abstract reasoning at the expense of the topics would result, said Vico, in one who is learned but destitute of prudence: one who "deduces the lowest truths from the highest." Yet, he continues, "it is an error to apply to the prudent conduct of life the abstract criterion of reasoning that obtains in the domain of science" (p. 35). Nevertheless, as Vico predicted, our modern, natural science psychology is just such a project. In fact, based on Vico's assertions, it seems as if modern psychology is itself a cultivation of "common sense," but an errant kind which has forgotten its roots in the rhetorical tradition.

It is interesting that philosophers of science such as Kuhn (1970) and Boyd (1983) have increasingly turned to psychology in order to understand the epistemological dimensions of science. Kuhn turns to Gestalt principles of perception to understand the paradigmatic shifts of scientific revolutions. Boyd, on the other hand, resorts to physiological theories of perception to argue for a scientific realism by arguing that the visual apparatus is a reliable detector of external events. As the philosophy of science comes closer to the realization of the human dimension of science, it is psychology to which the philosophers turn to discover the rhetorical, human dimension at the heart of the scientific enterprise (Robbins, 1998). I would argue that the turn to psychology is an implicit move toward recovering the rhetorical dimension which lies embedded as possibility in the unstable discipline of psychology. Rhetoric, historically, has been predicated on psychology -- the capacity to know the psychology of one's audience in order to tailor a discourse to meet the needs of the audience -- "setting things before their eyes" so they can make informed judgments about matters of law and state. The scientific disciplines, severed from the rhetorical roots of their projects, lack unity and suffer from incoherence. The turn to psychology is an effort to reconstitute a synthetic unity among the disciplines, and, yet, natural science psychology cannot bear such a weight.

Vico (1990) writes:

In the past, all arts and disciplines were interconnected and rested in the lap of philosophy; subsequently, they were sundered apart. Those responsible for this separation can be compared to a tyrannical ruler who, having seized mastery of a great, populous, and opulent city, should, in order to secure his own safety, destroy the city and scatter its inhabitants into a number of widely strewn villages. (p. 47)

The "philosophy" of which Vico speaks is closely tied to the cultivation of eloquence in the rhetorical tradition. Without it, the disciplines fall prey to a systemization in preceptive form. Reliance upon general maxims in the place of a cultivation of eloquence, for Vico, is entirely useless and "always insufficient when applied to countless peculiarities of events" (p. 46). If the sciences wish to discover unity, they must give over the priority of logico-mathematical reasoning to the cultivation, first, of wisdom. And "what is eloquence, in effect, but wisdom, ornately and copiously delivered in words appropriate to the common opinion of mankind?" (Vico, 1990, p. 78).

At the heart of Vico's push for the rhetorical is a respect for language, which, in the medieval tradition, occupied all three subjects of the trivium. It is significant, therefore, as mentioned previously, that language, too, would become subject to the trend of mathematization. At the turn of the century, however, this trend began to reverse itself. Two of the philosophers of language, Husserl and Wittgenstein, would

ultimately turn to a more rhetorical dimension. Husserl turned toward issues of the life-world, while Wittgenstein's later work, "such as the *Philosophical Investigations*, left the realm of ideality for that of the originary world caught up in its language games" (Murray, 1984, p. 178). With this trend, the 20th century has seen a growing appreciation of rhetoric. An understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of language is essential, as Murray (1984) asserts, "in a world of human living where ambiguity abounds and emotionality hovers all around us" and we must "deal with viewpoints, opinions, perspectives that shed light upon but never exhaust the subject at hand" (p. 191). Within this trend is the vital emergence, from out of Husserl's phenomenological tradition, of the hermeneutic, ontological phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, whose thought over the years turned increasingly to the issue of language.

Language, for Heidegger, "is the house of Being in which man ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of Being, guarding it" (p. 213). Language, then, is not a mere tool which is created and used by human beings. Rather, language is the Saying of Being which discloses beings as beings. Thus, by listening to the Saying of Being, the human being may disclose a world as a clearing in which beings can presence. In the "Nature of Language," Heidegger (1971) writes:

Language, Saying of the world's fourfold, is no longer only such that we speaking human beings are related to it in the sense of a nexus existing between man and language. Language is, as world-moving Saying, the relation of all relations. It relates, maintains, proffers, and enriches the face-to-face encounter of the world's regions, holds and keeps them, in that it holds itself 'Saying' in reserve. (p. 107)

Thus, for Heidegger, it is language which gives the world over for unconcealment by human beings. In the speaking of Language, the human being listens to the Saying of Language such that the four-fold relations of the world -- earth, sky, mortals, and gods -- may emerge as the clearing of the human place. When we forget language, then, we forget Being -- we forget that the worldhood of the world is a gift of Saying, without which world nor human existence would be possible.

Grassi (1983), an Italian who was a student of Heidegger, became disconcerted with Heidegger's claim that Italian philosophy has little to offer to contemporary continental philosophy. In turn, Grassi became determined to confront critically German idealism in both Heidegger's work and Italian humanism, the work of Vico, in particular. Heidegger's ontological phenomenology, similar to Vico's work, stems from a fundamental criticism of Cartesian metaphysics. As we have seen, following Descartes, Renaissance humanism came to be understood as an insufficient attempt to achieve the conceptual clarity of Cartesian thought -- that is, to achieve a ground of absolute certainty, which for Descartes is the *cogito sum*. From there on, all rhetorical

thought, poetic thinking in particular, has been rejected as being something other than philosophy. Returning to Vico, Grassi concurs that "nature appears to us only in its meaning with reference to satisfying our existential needs" (p. 45). Turning to Vico's use of the myth of Hercules to demonstrate this fundamental assertion, he writes:

The clearing of the primeval forest in order to delimit the first human place is the beginning of human history. No theory, no abstract philosophy is the origin of the human world, and every time that man loses contact with the original needs and the questions that arise out of them, he falls into the barbarism of *ratio*. (p. 51)

Descartes' entire project, of course, is based on *ratio*, a process of inference. Yet, as Grassi shows, "insight into relationships is not possible through a process of inference." Rather, *inventio* holds primacy over that which Vico called 'critical' or purely rational thought. Grassi, drawing on Heidegger, asserts that for things to appear (*phainesthai*) in a way that is human, they must initially be expressed through fantasy as metaphors, in the figurative lending of meanings. "The metaphor is, therefore, the original form of the interpretive act itself, which raises itself from the particular to the general through representation in an image" (p. 67). The upshot for Grassi is that, for human beings, "truth" is fundamentally rhetorical, based on probability and born out of "topical philosophy" as the finding of arguments rather than "rational" philosophy. Unlike rational speech, which is a monologue, Grassi and Vico give primacy to rhetoric, as imagistic and effective speech and thereby dialogue. Rhetorical activity makes no sense outside of a dialogue between speaker and audience -- it already implies a community, an other who shares meaning with the speaker. Thus, rational philosophy is both incapable of *inventio* and incapable of building and dwelling within the human world. Instead, rationality always begins with fundamental presuppositions which, by itself, it is unable to account for since the very foundation of *ratio* is *inventio*. Drawing on Cicero, Grassi shows that the human world is built from *ingenium* which "consists in catching sight of relationships, of *similitudes* among things." This is essentially metaphorical activity. It is not and cannot be deductive, but rather consists of the art of invention. Such relationships are born out of work and language.

If *ingenium* is the human dwelling, the "clearing" in which beings as beings, given by Saying, presence as world-gatherers, then psychology as a discipline belongs to the tradition of rhetoric on the side of the medieval curriculum of the trivium. If so, the ascendance of cognitive science psychology is a failed attempt to disclose the destiny of psychology. Cognitive science is the latest trend of a psychology as a natural science which would have the human being entirely given over to the mechanico-mathematical paradigm of modernity.

Returning to the turn of the 20th century, psychology opened for itself another potential destiny with the emergence of depth psychology exemplified by the psychoanalytic tradition beginning with Freud. I do not think it is a coincidence that Husserl's turn to the life-world and Wittgenstein's turn to everyday language games emerge concurrently with the birth of psychoanalysis. Like phenomenology and the linguistic tradition (e.g., Speech Act theory of Wittgenstein, as well as Austin and Searle), contemporary psychoanalysis can be understood as a movement toward returning the human being to the world and to language, which, as we have seen with Heidegger, are deeply intertwined.

As Romanyshyn (1990) has pointed out, both phenomenology and psychoanalysis are related to a fundamental rejection of the "*style of vision*," the "*way of experiencing the world*" characterized by the new physics of nature and the new physiology of the body of Galileo, Descartes and Newton. Such an experiencing of the world, per Romanyshyn, is exemplified by the metaphor of the seeing eye as a camera that becomes literalized in the invention of linear perspective, a vision that allows for the Cartesian *cogito*'s primacy over the social and historical dimensions of existence. And, in general, the modern paradigm, which gives primacy to deductive reasoning over the rhetorical, is, on the whole, characterized by the general literalization of its metaphorical activity. In the case of phenomenology, there is a move to return "humanity to the world from that distance, infinite in the ideal, from which we practice a scientific vision" (p. 238). To do so, one must de-literalize the metaphors which give rise to such a vision. The task of a depth psychology, then, is such a de-literalization of the image.

As Romanyshyn (1990) writes:

Psychoanalysis has sensitized us to our own multiplicity. It has cautioned us never to assume the who or the what of experience. It has taught us to suspend the claim of the ego to be the locus of action and to suspend the claim of the past to be an empirical history. As a science of remembering, it brackets the prejudice of the ego as the agent of psychology life, and the prejudice of fact...as the datum of psychological life. In doing so it recovers the multiple figurations of psychological life . . . ; it also recovers the historical past as an imaginal story that one creates or makes in re-remembering it as much as it is a story already made, waiting to be discovered. (pp. 240-241)

In this sense, both phenomenology and psychoanalysis are a cultural therapeutics: an effort to return the subject to the world and, ultimately, as I have argued here, an implicit return to the rhetorical.

There is a kinship between the traditions of phenomenology and psychoanalysis and the sophistic strand of rhetoric. In each case there is a recognition of the essential role of language for the human being and the world. The sophists, too, denied the possibility of an absolute knowledge of reality, and, further, asserted that all statements about what seems to be the case will necessarily fall short of their goal. And, yet, also like phenomenology and psychoanalysis, the limitations of language do not necessarily lead to nihilism, but rather to a humility which gives over to the complexity and richness of language and the world. Rather than cause for despair, one can revel in "the possibility of revealing insights into that which exists" which is afforded by such a rich conception of language. Finally, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and sophistic rhetoric move toward giving a primacy to metaphor and imagination, as well as language, and afford a place from which to de-literalize and move beyond the literalized metaphors out of which modernity has struggled to free itself. Essentially, re-remembering the rhetorical tradition, we may go backward such that we may go forward, endeavoring to retrieve what has been lost in the service of humanity, or, better yet, in the service of humanity's gratitude toward the Saying of Being.

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