

# THE TWO ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGES FOR A DECISIVE GENERATION

Translation by Achille Cattaneo

**I walk among men as between fragments of the future.**

Friedrich Nietzsche

## 1. The two knowledges of the world of causes

In the last contribution<sup>(1)</sup> I re-examined the relationship between the mission of our time and generations. We left wondering how to prepare a *decisive generation*, that is, that generation made up of members who have formed their existence as the ‘open space’ in which an aspect of the future *can be heard and voiced*. We concluded that there are two indispensable fundamentals that this generation must master:

**1) WORLD-OF-LIFE.** The first knowledge reveals the access to the possibility of *self-transformation*. It is the indispensable starting point, since no authentic creation can exist if one does not first concentrate in himself, if one cannot meet and abide authentically in himself. Like the individual, a generation must first of all resume the contacts with itself. And to do this, nothing less than a bracketing of the whole ‘world’ is required, to re-start *looking at* things starting from the criterion of one’s own ‘being’.

**2) WORLD-OF-HISTORY.** The second knowledge reveals the access to the possibility of *transforming history*, that is to create it intentionally, mediating the expression of this rediscovered ‘being’ in the forms of space and time. After the first revolutionary act of coming back into oneself, in order to reinvent the world a generation must be able to relate to it (to the ‘received world’) not as a *real* world, but as a *created* world. The

moment history is again perceived as *malleable*, and oneself as the subject it has something *to say* about it, you can continue to create it on the foundation of your being.

Here we will examine these two knowledges more in depth, which, taken together, reveal the possibility of a frontier formation. The articulation of our exposition into two ‘insights’ (Husserl’s insight and Vico’s insight) has a didactic function, and we need it for display convenience. In reality these two knowledges are by no means limited - neither philosophically, nor more generally as regards the human sciences - to these two enormous thinkers. Here, however, we want to offer the keys to the *philosophical and humanistic foundations* that made them available. Furthermore, these two knowledges - one ‘internal’ and one ‘external’ - have something essential in common. This something is what Sergio Bartoli (1929-2009), in his report to the 1977 SIPT Symposium, called the “world of causes”. Speaking of *self-awareness* in relation to the *will*, he argued that both pertain to the “world of causes”, distinct from the “world of effects”:

But the use of the will is generally hindered by the attitude of inertia that is too often congenial to man [...] which makes him tend to accept as real all that is evident, thus making him renounce to operate a ‘true choice’ in the choices, linking him to the world of effects rather than to the understanding of that of causes.<sup>(2)</sup>

Now this plane of causes is articulated precisely in two dimensions: the *internal one* (world-of-life) and the *external one* (world-of-history). And therefore the common denominator between these two knowledges is the access they offer to the plane of causes, whether internal or external.

## 2. Husserl’s insight: the world-of-life

The first great knowledge reveals the possibility of the *human transformation*. It - if understood and mastered - contains the exceptional promise of being able to alter the world of the causes of our ‘existence’ (how we find

ourselves existing) to adapt it to the 'essence' (what we are). The philosophical foundation of this knowledge is found in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). At the beginning of the twentieth century he began a real Copernican revolution in the way of looking at and encountering man and life, inaugurating a new discipline which he called *phenomenology*. As I anticipated in a previous article<sup>(3)</sup>, I believe that phenomenology - which has influenced a large part of humanistic psychology - is still not fully understood, nor interpreted as a methodology proper to 'self-training'. Husserl declared that the different sciences (mathematics, logic, philosophy, psychology, biology, etc.) *could* not reach an ultimate knowledge on the real, as they approached their objects of investigation directly, without considering the *structures* of consciousness for which objects exist. Here, then, is the point of the error: it is impossible to do research on the being of things if not starting from the consciousness that considers them and its *structures* (the structures of the world-of-life).

The different sciences, both of the nature and of the spirit, are then insufficient because their knowledge is unable to reach, to 'touch', the first evidences of the world-of-life, that is, they are unable to open the tissue of experience, what is more properly ours: *the human structure of experience*. Only one science could therefore, for Husserl, validate and guarantee the reality of all the others. It is a "science of experience", the phenomenology. This cannot therefore treat man as an *object* to be studied, as did the psychologies of Freud, Adler, Jung, etc. (of which Husserl was aware), nor the positivistic psychologies of the Wundtians and Pavlovians. The latter 'encounter' psychic phenomena as objective facts: in their opinion, the structure of an individual's conscience could only be established a posteriori, from the *observation* of his behavior or from the *analysis* of his motivations. As if human conscience could result from the *sum* of particular facts isolated from each other, where what it is, in the end, results from the evidence of these facts.

Obviously, psychoanalysis itself did not escape this radical criticism because, rather than encountering the human being from the point of view of the causal structures of consciousness, it follows the psychodynamics *in* consciousness. But both the observed facts and the psychological interpretations of the facts, when considered *regardless* of what constitutes them, the conscience, in fact reduce the latter to a series of anatomical parts, rather than considering it the reality unitary and indivisible interior against the *background* of which all phenomena exist and which possesses its *universal structures* (the structures, in fact, of the "world-of-life"). In this regard Sartre (1905-1980) observed that it is *absurd* to try to understand the nature of human experience in this way, just as it is *impossible*

to try to derive *unity* by adding an indefinite number of digits to the right of 0.99 :

Waiting for the fact is by definition, waiting for the isolated, is to prefer, by positivism, the accidental to the essential, the contingent to the necessary, the disorder to the order, is to reject, in principle, the essential in the future : we will do it later - when we have gathered a sufficient number of facts.<sup>(4)</sup>

Husserl did not conceive the consciousness as a succession, sum, elaboration or organization of facts, but as the *primary unifying and constitutive reality of all psychic facts*. His knowledge differed from both positive-factual psychology and psychoanalytic psychology, putting them to the test on the territory of the essences of the world-of-life. He taught *that to penetrate into the universe of consciousness one must grasp not the empirical facts or psychic events, but the 'essential forms' (from the Greek "eidos"), that is, the structures on which the entire experiential universe is based*. The phenomenology was born on the observation that no knowledge then available was able to isolate these extra-temporal forms, getting lost in the objects (and dynamics) of the historical-phenomenal self. And if only the 'conscientious essences' allow us to classify and examine the infinite facts and understand their nature, the phenomenology appears above all as that knowledge, that method, by which man can learn something about his just 'being'.

To grasp what Husserl means when he speaks of the essences of consciousness, it is necessary to dust off and keep in mind the distinction between "accident" (*accidens*) and "substance" (*substantia*) of the Scholastica. While accidents are apparent phenomena, ways of existing, effects, representations, etc. the substance or the essence is what lies beneath the visible, and is part of the plane of causes. To find these essences, therefore, it is first necessary to recognize and overcome all these appearances, through a *suspension of the judgment* on every encountered appearance (epochè). In other words, the conscience must *purify itself* of its appearances through what Husserl calls "eidetic reduction", which consists in making a series of 'cuts'

so that, from the appearances of a certain phenomenon being investigated, we come to *the evidence first (or last) of its nature*.

But the suspension of judgment is not limited to suspending the appearances of *one thing* in particular. Instead, it extends to the entire *suspension of the world*. Husserl calls it “transcendental reduction”: an act that proceeds not only to suspend the judgment on the existence of the entire objective world, but also to reduce it to a ‘phenomenon’ of pure or absolute subjectivity. In this real cognitive revolution, the ego puts everything in parentheses, even the ‘me’, the ‘phenomenon’ of myself or the way in which I come to know myself. What remains is that I am (“transcendental Ego”) for which the world is given in which the empirical, concrete, situated ‘myself’ is given. This represents a real *conversion or transformation* of the experience that one has of oneself, proceeding from identification with the phenomenal Ego to the intuition of the real Ego.<sup>(13)</sup> This total alteration of one’s *sense of self*, from the existential Ego to the ‘a priori’ Ego, corresponds to a *turning point* in one’s own experience of oneself. Therefore Husserl can say:

Perhaps it will even turn out that the total phenomenological attitude and the epochè that they experience are destined to produce above all a complete personal transformation which at first could be compared to a conversion, but which, beyond that, is the greatest existential evolution that is conceded to humanity as such.<sup>(5)</sup>

But that’s just the beginning. This reversal of the Ego *transforms our ability to experience life, our entire experience of living*. This rediscovered Ego is the real Ego, that is the same intelligent principle that is also in any ‘real’ we encounter. There is an ontological link between the Ego and the external reality: from this Ego, from what is more real of us, we can see *inside* the real outside of us (the other, a situation, a problem, etc.). We see it, so to speak, “from being to being”. In other words, from the ‘first cause’ of ourselves we can see the ‘first causes’ in things, that is to isolate the *formal aspects, the evidences, substances, or essences* from the contents or appearances. This substance of phenomena (whether internal or external) makes our knowledge rigorous, and can be recovered on the condition that consciousness has

made several ‘subtractions’ of what is apparent: images, behaviors, effects, etc. Only after many purifications we reach the essence (which means “action with being”). The ultimate substance is an intelligent information that can only be grasped by that Ego ‘a priori’ is that the maximum expression of the intelligence of reality.

‘Transcendental phenomenology’ is therefore the study and research of essential forms (noemata) that reveal themselves to pure consciousness, to the consciousness that can see, that is, to the gaze of the real Ego. Now we understand well why this knowledge gives access to a vast territory of the “world of causes”. The information that we reach in things, with a pure look, is that intelligence which is cause-in-matter and which produces effects while remaining invisible, which - to put it with Husserl - acts *within* phenomena, *within* effects, *between* the inner and outer dynamics, and which is not visible to any way of subjectivity except the real Ego. This is why Sergio Bartoli taught that it is only this that allows us to ‘take causality’. Phenomenology is the radical knowledge that gives access to the world of internal causes, allowing us to get our hands on the tissue of the world-of-life project. We understand well that the *turning point* in the way of being and in the experience of living involved in it makes it the radical methodology for human transformation. At the same time it is evident that it is indispensable for the decisive generation to master this knowledge. It is only from the foundation of the continuous *event* of this transformation that it can start over and make start over. Looking at the world from our own eyes is Husserl’s insight, and it is where the first knowledge ends and the second begins.

### **Vico’s insight: the world-of-history**

The second knowledge concerns the *transformation of history*. It is therefore that knowledge that supports, frees, empowers and allows the possibility of expressing that *being* that we have found in the human forms of space and time. It is the second knowledge of the ‘realization of being’

If the first leads us to the possibility of *being* real, the second allows us to *make reality*. “Real” is a strong term. One of the possible etymological ways refers to

the word *res* (“thing”) and *alea* (Roman game of dice). Real is a *possibility* which, among many, collapses into reality, which is actualized; in our case, that the decisive generation leads into reality, transforming it into “thing”, into “fact”, into “event”, into “history”. Here we trace this great knowledge to the great thinker Giambattista Vico (1668-1744).

In every great thinker there is a central heart, a generating epicenter from which the other ramifications and the various implications of his decisive intuition branch out. Vico’s insight can be traced back to the formula *verum ipsum factum*, which means “truth is in the same doing”, that is, it is something accessible only to those who *produce* it. In the midst of the age in love with science and while the modern man was born, the Cartesian man, this great and authentic Neapolitan humanist, in controversy with Descartes, in his *De antiquissima italorum sapientia* began to put radical objections to the philosophy of the French thinker. Objections that would have marked the history of thought. Descartes - who, after all, was one of Husserl’s influences - put the whole world in parentheses to find the *point of certainty* of all knowledge, which he identified in the principle of “evidence of one’s own existence”, in “I think therefore I am» (I can doubt everything, but not to think). For Descartes, *this* was the fundamental point of *knowledge*, of the *truth*, of the *certain*. To this, Vico replied that having the evidence of one’s own existence does not at all mean having *knowledge* of one’s own nature, since we ‘find ourselves made up’ and are not the ‘producers’ of ourselves. On the contrary, man can only fully know what he creates.

And since man has neither created his *thinking substance*, nor the *physical nature* that he seeks to understand with science, he cannot have a knowledge of the ‘ultimate causes’ of these domains at all. He can truly know, and master, only the causes of what he produces, that is, of “history”. For that specific being that is the human being, the true, the certain and the knowable are in the domain of history, of which he is the inevitable author, the subject, the writer. And if “we only know what can be done”, Vico continued, then we

need a “new science”, the science of man and of history. Thus, also the one inaugurated (declared) by Vico was a new *research project*, which had as its primary objective to lay the foundations of a new science. This, beyond the simple jumble of “brute facts” that appear at first hand, is capable of looking *within* them to intuit and establish those universal “laws” and “principles” that describe the relationship between human and history.

It is therefore a research that contains the promise of supporting man in “making history happen” in a conscious way, that is, as much as possible in accordance with the criterion or order of Being. If Husserl had searched for the extra-temporal and absolute essences of human experience, Vico intends to search for the essences, the irreducible and trans-circumstantial principles which, if distinct, made accessible and mastered, allow man to positively realize history according to the model of the “ideal eternal history”, that is, according to the intentionality of Providence. In fact, if for the Neapolitan philosopher history is the creative work of man and intimately belongs to him, through knowledge and mastery of causes, at the same time the mind of man is guided by an underlying higher principle that tends to direct it to the its purposes. That is, Providence is the architect of history, while man is its blacksmith, and for this reason sometimes the projects of the former conflict with the individual goals that men aim to achieve:

[...] Because even men have made this world of nations; but he is this world, undoubtedly, which emerged from a mind that is often different and at times completely contrary to and always superior to these particular ends that these men had proposed; what narrow ends, made means to serve more large ends, has always used them to preserve the human generation in this land.<sup>(6)</sup>

In order for man to be a mediator of the intentionality of Being through his way of making history, Vico declares the need to found a science that can find the ‘causes’, ‘laws’ and ‘principles’ to which the historical events obey. In this way, man can create them in accordance with the divine rational order always underlying the facts. Now for us, who interpret Vico in the horizon of transformation, the enormous project inaugurated by the

Neapolitan thinker concerns the ultimate research not only on the *keys to reading* that allow the understanding of historical becoming, but also the identification of *those laws and principles* that make it possible to insert those 'causes' that can positively alter the evolution of the whole.

Towards a synthetic revision of the two types of knowledge

The depth and universality of any thinker is measured by his ability to go beyond his time. He is all the greater the more he is *constant relevance* for generations to come. So it is certainly today for Vico (today, when scientism is dominant and man is unable to *make* history humanly) and for Husserl (today, where more than ever our technical and objectifying knowledges are evidently inadequate for a real *transformation* in our way of being). The insights that we have re-conducted to these two enormous thinkers therefore represent obligatory points of reference in this our age of radical crisis, and represent a new decisive starting point to the question of *what is required* to satisfy the human, cultural, spiritual mission that appeals to us. Both open a knowledge which they call "science", but which wants to be fully and truly human, and from that found *human criterion* to remake the world. Knowledge reveals possibilities on *the world of the way of being*, the other on *the world of the way of acting*: both are oriented towards remaking man and the world on the criterion of Being.

However, an interpretative and integral revision of these two intuitions is needed, revisited within a horizon expressly oriented to the project of a transformation of man and the world. *Integral* because - for the decisive generation - the most fruitful knowledge will be that which does not exclude, but which is capable of understanding and integrating these two world views. *Interpretative revision* because today our relationship with the "phenomenological science" and with the "new science" can no longer be reduced to a simple repetition - or development - of the different contents, acquisitions and realizations of these two authors and their pupils, albeit essential and to be included in our visions. Rather, we must continue guided by the ambitious - and much

more difficult - project of proposing a critical, integral and transformed revision of their *research projects*, revisiting them in the horizon of transformation.

Above all, we must *focus and question* ourselves on the link between man and history, finding the 'ontological nexus' between these two dimensions, in the plane of causes. Here is where the 'place of investigation' has moved: what is *the intersection* between the world-of-life and the world-of-history? More precisely, what are the first evidences, the causal principles that, if included in the *consideration* of a new generation, can free it and strengthen it in what it must 'be' and in the history it must 'make'? It is no longer enough to find the principles of *one* or the *other* world. It is necessary to find the principles of the intersection. It is a frontier research, as demanding and varied as it is urgent and essential<sup>8</sup>. Its outcome is the identification of new *ethical criteria* for the human, since ethics is that field of investigation that encompasses (and is limited to) all those acts that require the intervention of a *reflection*; that between spontaneity and action inserts the mediation of a rule, principle, consideration, criterion. *Ethics is man's stature*, be it individual or generation, and the decisive generation needs new ethical criteria to guide all the necessary transformations to be unfolded.

And since we *can only want what we can think and see*, we must first of all broaden our horizon of thought to open up new criteria of being and of action. In one way or another, it will always be within our *vision of the world* that the possibility of a way of being and of making history that is capable of *going beyond* the point where we found ourselves will be at stake live. Therefore, I would like to expose some fundamental ideas, certainly not yet complete and superficially enunciated, which however have the power to illuminate that point of intersection between the world-of-life and the world-of-history from multiple angles. They are essential elements or lines for all those researchers and change agents who feel part of a decisive generation. Here, then, is how some of the most profound insights of the recent history of thought appear, freely reinterpreted within the framework of a transformation project. A decisive generation should master at least these ideas:

a) **The “inherited horizon”.** The world has not been given to us only as an environment, but above all as a *horizon* in which to live. We already find ourselves living in an *inherited culture*, formed by unexamined assumptions coming from the outside, by a conventional and irresponsible collective Self. To review it critically is to create a breach to transform ourselves and history. [José Ortega y Gasset].

b) **History also writes inside.** If man creates history, history creates man. History is not only outside, but also *within* us, it speaks to us and lives there. Receiving it without *understanding and completing* it means that our ‘future’ will be a projected past, a more-of-the-same. Being responsible for history means discriminating what is *for* or *against* the evolution of life, that is, what *favors* or *oppresses* the freedom of the spirit. [Benedetto Croce].

c) **See by ourselves.** It is impossible the knowledge without being able to see, and it is impossible to see without putting in parentheses the *thought* mind that stands between us and the real. We are not used to thinking *clearly*, nor do we understand well most of the things we say. To do this, a *breakthrough* in what we are is required. [Edmund Husserl]

d) **The mission and the “possible horizon”.** Each generation has its own historical mission; betraying it means serving an *ontological guilt*, towards the appeal of the Being. Realizing it always includes introducing - in history - a new *vision of the world* [José Ortega y Gasset and Martin Buber]

e) **The role of disharmonies.** We can touch *the future* that we are called to introduce, listening to our *anomalies and disharmony* with respect to the prevailing world. The body is the “Great Reason,” and its sensitivity often communicates what *we feel the time has come for it to take place*. [Thomas Kuhn and Friedrich Nietzsche]

f) **Pay the ransom.** The individual or the generation that identifies himself, and who in order to *create* must somehow *destroy* previous values, must pay a ‘ransom’: undertaking to produce equivalent or higher values. [Carl Jung]

g) **The language that creates the history.** Not only with *thought and vision*, but also through language we create ourselves and history. There is a language that represents, and one that creates. Promises, requests, invitations, revocations, etc. they are *acts that create events*, opening or closing the future. [John Austin and John Searle]

h) **The paradigm of paradigms.** This synthesis comes from a work developed in collaboration with Alberto Alberti<sup>(8)</sup>. If action is that principle that impacts the reality, it comes from the source of ideas<sup>10</sup>. Among the various ideas, the one relating to *how it happens to himself* (how he interprets and encounters himself) is decisive for man. Creating a future that otherwise would not have happened involves the creation of a new horizon on what it means to be human beings, which is not yet fully available today.

### Homo creator

The decisive generation must be prepared with *frontier knowledge*, able to support it in bringing existence back to the criterion of being, and to express this being in existence<sup>(18)</sup>. On the one hand, it must make it enter the world-of-life: analyze the causal structures of existence, open and vary the causes *within* the being there to allow - like Augustine’s proceeding - to bring ‘as I exist’ back to ‘what I am’. On the other hand, in the *world-of-history*: read, open and vary the causes of history *within*, so that the instinctual drives of being (Maslow) can express themselves in it. Both are indispensable. Whether they are *internal or external causes*, through these know-how the generation can put its hands in the fabric of life and history, and change it in the plan of causes (Bartoli). Now these two knowledges come from the same *identity place*. In fact, what is that human identity from which we can read, alter, insert causes into existence (being there) or into reality (history)? It is the Ego creator of man <sup>(9)</sup>. Man appears here, therefore, no longer as *homo sapiens* (intelligence) or as *homo faber* (action) but as *homo creator* (creative responsibility). The identity trait of the decisive generation is that it understands - more deeply than the others - the real nature of our *being creators*.

We are beings, that is, who continually create the world with every act - even if we ordinarily take it for granted that the world exists as we have found it. As Ortega says:

What has been done by others, executed, perfect in the sense of concluded, advances towards us with a particular anointing: it appears almost consecrated, and, since we have not elaborated it, we tend to believe that it is not the work of anyone, but let it be reality itself. There is a moment when the ideas of our masters do not seem to us the opinions of determined men, but the truth itself anonymously descended on earth. On the other hand, our spontaneous sensitivity, what we think and feel with our own means, never appears to us complete, concluded and rigid as a definitive thing, but as an inner flow of less resistant matter. <sup>(10)</sup>

Heidegger was very fond of Pindaro's famous phrase: "Become what you are!". In fact, he believed that making a *change* means rediscovering one's *essence*. Today, under the fire of an epochal crisis, we are called to reinvent the man and the world under the banner of being. But transforming the way we *live* ourselves and the world means creating a new home. It means realizing that our world (internal and external) is not made, but created. And therefore - as Vico said - that *the world is still young*. But above all it means realizing that creating consciously is, perhaps, our greatest gift. Perhaps, the very nature of our essence.

We receive many gifts, of many kinds. But the highest and truly lasting gift that is given to us is always our *essential nature*, with which we are endowed in such a way that we are what we are only through it. It is for this reason that we must thank for this gift, first and foremost and without ceasing. <sup>(11)</sup>

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Mauro Ventola

*For the footnotes and the bibliography see the article in Italian.*

## OUT OF LOVE

*Translation by Achille Cattaneo / Gordon Leonard Symons*

Love grabs us like an ocean wave; it overwhelms us, takes us far, out there into deep waters. Fear, trembling – still the wave supports us, plays with us, embraces us, floods us...

and then, it abandons us, and dumps us on the shore, like wrecks, or broken branches.

What must we do? Find our breath again, feel the ground firmly - and get up again, heavy with wet sand, salty all over? What must we do?

Here on the shoreline, I wander among scraps of seaweed and emptied shells. Not even the sand keeps my footsteps. The ocean roars far away. An autumn mist rises; from the muffled sky a passing seagull calls to me.

*Estranged*

*on the stretch of sand*

*I am*

*where an old sea left me, naked.*

*I drag my barefoot steps – and do not progress,*

*but always wandering, I stoop to pick up*

*the pearly shells of my laughing*

*days – or intentions – and all are used up*

*and empty and I find them broken, and I rummage*

*and hope and chuck, hooks*

*and tangles of brown and heavy algae*

*uprooted and then discarded*

*and never caring,*

*and a lot of grudges and many still*

*scattered around, broken pebbles*

*and my steps become entangled in it,*

*and it becomes heavy,*

*sore and limp. The wind is silent*

*and flees the day to rest.*

*Out of love I remain. Closeness?*

*I no longer even dare ask.*