Eric Vandendriessche (SPHERE - CNRS & Université Paris Diderot, France)

Lévy-Bruhl’s theory on ‘prelogical mentality’ and its influence on the field of history and philosophy of science

Abstract – Over the first decades of the 20th century, French philosopher and sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl developed the theory of a "prelogical mentality", which he attributed to members of "inferior/primitive" societies. In particular, he argued that these peoples had a lesser ability to abstract and generalize, and that their way of thinking was not governed by the same logical principles than ours. In this paper, we shall evaluate to what extent this theory of a "primitive mind" has significantly influenced scholarly discussions/studies in the field of history and philosophy of science (Léon Brunschvicg 1912, Abel Rey 1937…), when comparing – between "civilizations"– the emergence and the development of "science" (and of mathematics in particular).