



BREAKING REASON'S SILENCE: THE LIVING WORD ACCORDING TO LEVINAS AND MERLEAU-PONTY*

Rompendo o silêncio da razão: A palavra viva segundo Levinas e Merleau-Ponty

Rompiendo el Silencio de la Razón: La Palabra que Vive según Levinas y Merleau-Ponty

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Resumo: O objetivo da exposição é mostrar a crítica que Levinas e Merleau-Ponty dirigem ao poder neutralizante e totalizante do pensamento em relação às subjetividades humanas concretas. Mesmo existindo uma grande diferença entre os dois filósofos, é possível dizer que ambos defendem a seguinte tese: o pensamento não detém o segredo e as potencialidades da linguagem. Ou seja, a linguagem é a condição do pensamento, e não sua servicial. Ver-se-á também que Levinas se preocupa mais em descrever o *sentido* a partir do qual o silêncio produzido pela razão é rompido, ao passo que Merleau-Ponty argumenta que é preciso ouvir as próprias vozes silenciadas pela razão. Ressaltamos em conclusão que, mais do que produzir silêncio, a razão pode descobrir-se como uma forma de sensibilidade entendida como audição, responsabilidade e inquietude ética.

Palavras-chave: palavra; silêncio; subjetividade; alteridade.

Abstract: The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the criticism that Levinas and Merleau-Ponty address to the neutralizing and totalizing power of thought regarding concrete human subjectivities. Despite the differences between the two philosophers, it is possible to affirm that both defend the following thesis: thought does not hold the secret and the potentialities of language. Meaning: language is the condition of thought, not its servant. While Levinas is more concerned with describing the meaning behind reason's silence breaking, Merleau-Ponty argues that one's own voices, which are silenced by reason, must be heard. We emphasize in conclusion that, more than producing silence, reason can be discovered as a form of sensitivity understood as hearing, responsibility and ethical restlessness.

Keywords: word; silence; subjectivity; otherness.

Resumen: El propósito de la exposición es mostrar las críticas que Levinas y Merleau-Ponty dirigen al poder neutralizador y totalizador del pensamiento en relación con las subjetividades humanas concretas. Aunque existe una gran diferencia entre los dos filósofos, es posible decir que ambos defienden la siguiente tesis: el pensamiento no guarda el secreto y el potencial del lenguaje. En otras palabras, el lenguaje es la condición del pensamiento, y no su servidor. También se verá que Levinas está más preocupado por describir el sentido desde el cual se rompe el silencio producido por la razón, mientras que Merleau-Ponty argumenta que es necesario escuchar las mismas voces silenciadas por la razón. Destacamos en conclusión que, más que producir silencio, la razón puede ser descubierta como una forma de sensibilidad entendida como audición, responsabilidad e inquietud ética.

Palabras-Clave: palabra; silencio; subjetividad; otredad

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Introduction

Levinas and Merleau-Ponty are two very different philosophical personalities, but endowed with remarkable affinities. They took the floor for most of their lives to denounce a certain power to silence, to fly over, to cover up, and to neutralize what is experienced, perceived, expressed and, mainly, suffered by human beings. Both were concerned with the neutralizing and totalizing power of thought in relation to subjectivities and bodily experiences. For the Western philosophical tradition, language must be understood as a servant of thought, or exist according to it. Levinas and Merleau-Ponty sought, each in their own way, to question this subordination¹. Thus, they defended that thought does not hold the secret and the potential of language. In Merleau-Ponty, bodily operation makes it possible to criticize intellectualism, since language is originally word and expression. In Levinas, the word is rupture of a Totality, possibility of beginning, the starting point of all orientation in being. It begins in the relationship with the face of the other. Logos is an ordination. It subjects speech to its purposes, while the living word can mean something beyond what it intended. Therefore, we have the following difficulty. On the one hand, the living word comes out of the Totality, it is a kind of resistance to the unifying thought. On the other hand, it is a struggle against the mistakes and misunderstandings inherent in its own contingency. That is the reason by which the word always carries an objective intention, an aspiration for a common world, a movement that brings us out of the isolation and egoism of subjectivity. Thus, a phenomenology of language will have to think about a paradoxical situation: the word struggles to overcome the silence produced by objective and totalizing thinking, but it also struggles to get out of a situation of immanence or particularity. In the word there will always be the challenge of reconciling particularity and universality. Hence the problem is: no knowledge could carry out that reconciliation. The word is the modality of our life in the world with the other and with others.

1. Word and silence

Let's start with Levinas². At the early of Western philosophy, language has aspired to dominate and silence everything that is contingent, affective and allusive in words. Why? Because it wants to assume its true function: to communicate the thinking. If reason could speak, it would have to renounce its sovereignty, its self-sufficiency, its nobility. What we today name "work of science" prolongs this attitude insofar as it proposes to fight against the inevitable mistake of the living word. In this sense, language acquires a subservient role: it must shed light on something, to name, to communicate and, in so doing, it must submit itself to the thinking (Levinas, 2009, p. 72). The problem is not in the desire or need for communication, in the propositional dimension of the word, but in the subordination of this inter-human process to the organizing capacity of reason, to the logical sense of language and therefore in the claim to universality. Any relationship with the reality will be, according to this subordination, reduced to a theme. In seeking to characterize intentional consciousness by objective acts, or, as will be said later, by positional acts, Husserl is one of the culminating points of this tradition. For Levinas, when Husserl, in his fight against psychologism, claims that we can think the universal as an object, he manifests the complete subordination of the word to thought. (Levinas, 2009, p. 73).

Certainly, there are several contemporary reactions to the primacy of representation or objectifying acts. Heidegger, for example, pointed to the historicity of the human condition. The etymological investigation of words was very important to him and, above all, he insisted on the genius of

¹ We insist on a certain proximity between the two philosophers, but we must not forget that there are points that make the effort of approximation problematic. By showing that, in Merleau-Ponty, there is an emphasis on the concrete horizons of perception to the detriment of the transcendental operations of understanding, Levinas believes that such an undertaking is understood from the primacy of ontology. In Merleau-Ponty, the act of think "is inserted in culture through the verbal gesture of the body that precedes and surpasses it" (Levinas, 1993, p. 22). Thus, body gesture, expression, culture, art, all this means a kind of celebration of being. "Culture and artistic creation are part of the ontological order itself (...): they make understanding of being possible" (p. 34). For Levinas, on the contrary, "before Culture and Aesthetics, meaning is situated in Ethics, the presupposition of all Culture and all meaning. Morality does not belong to Culture: it is what allows us to judge it, which discovers the dimension of height. Height commands being" (p. 67)

² Our starting point is a Levinas conference, given in Paris (1948), at the *Collège Philosophique* founded by Jean Wahl. It is the second volume of the "Unpublished", in which we can read the conferences that constitute, in a certain sense, the basis of what will come up in *Totalité et Infini* (1961). We will leave, for another opportunity, the approach of the work *Autrement qu'être or au-delà de l'essence* (1974), in which the themes of subjectivity and sensibility take the lead in relation to the theme of exteriority, predominant in *Totalité et Infini*. There will also be, for another occasion, a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's work *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which the theme of the flesh could be a point of approximation between the two philosophers.



a language. Therefore, philosophy has the possibility of a self-revelation, and the Greek language is that possibility. In Heidegger's thought, language is not a kind of communication or transmission of ideas. He thinks that language makes possible the revelation of the being. Greek philosophy plays a decisive role in this revelation, especially in those moments when that philosophy has not yet fully expressed itself, as the pre-Socratic poems. We can therefore understand the revelator role of language before history had erased that power. The very significant conclusion is that: even if language unlinks itself from the role of a sign and, doing so, it finds the richness of a poetic saying, it continues linked to an unveiling power, to understanding, to light. This is why she never fails to show her obedience to thought (Levinas, 2009, p. 74).

Considered as a system (synchrony) or as history (diachrony), the relationship between language and thought is the same. In the first case, history is interrupted through the sign system, but in the second, language becomes necessary for the realization of history, that is, history is a course directed by an idea, a meaning and an intelligibility. This is how, in the Hegelian perspective, the challenge is to overcome the bad signs, those that are provisional, that act as a veil in relation to thought. The reason, in this case, produces silence. The function of language is to lead to the "silent intimacy of thought with being" (Levinas, 2009, p. 75). Keeping in mind the differences between various thinkers and their respective historical situations, Levinas emphasizes a basic thesis (Hegelian or Heideggerian): the various thinkers manifest differences and divergences, but for them just Reason itself acts in this process! In reality, what reason can reveal is not but Being itself.

The essence of Being is that it gives itself, it allows itself to be apprehended. The essence of Being is its phosphorescence. Being is an idea or concept, or even: reason is correlative to Being. Its position - its thesis - is for this very reason its thematization, its presence as a theme. That is why the speech that communicates is a speech that designates, it is a speech that names (Levinas, 2009, p. 76).

The importance of speech lies in this: it must contribute so that the intelligible is in fact the thinkable, or even, it must realize the meaning as permeability to the thought. Two modern philosophers are decisive here: Espinosa and Hegel. The latter emphasizes the unity with itself, the totalization as a process by which the being shows itself as an essence. Intellection is a kind of divinization of the human being. Why? Because - and here Spinoza is also evoked - it is understood as power over God, an absorption of God, an absorption in God. What calls Levinas' attention is this: the subject is defined by power. Language, in turn, fulfills its servile role insofar as it is involved in the task of explanation and intellection, thus promoting the condition of power of subjectivity, making every human relationship, sooner or later, a power relationship. (Levinas, 2009, p. 80).

The plurality of people becomes a numerical plurality. Communication, in turn, is possible as participation in the same truth, and not as a relationship between people. The common heritage of truth is anonymous. Subjectivity, however, is a self that thinks. Every thought, in a sense, is personal. We can always think for ourselves, but the truth is not a personal truth. Thus, there is a possible agreement between the universal and the personal, because what is common or universal is also something appropriate by an interiority, by a self that exercises thought. Levinas explains that light makes it possible to involve the outside from the inside, that is, it allows us to understand what the event of *cogito* and meaning is:

Thought is always clarity or beginning of a clarity. The miracle of light is its essence: by light, the object, even coming from outside, is already ours, on the horizon that precedes it; comes from an already apprehended exterior, and becomes as if coming from us, as commanded by our freedom (Levinas, 2013, p. 66-7).

That is the correlation between the common world and the inner world, between the objective and the subjective, the agreement with others through the appropriation of what is external. The collectivity, in this sense, will be either monadology, or pantheism. In the first case, the monad without doors or windows, which thinks of an object in its interiority, can only make it anonymous insofar as there is a pre-established harmony³ (Levinas, 2009, p. 81). In the second case, the social becomes anonymous, that is, it takes place as absorption in the truth, communion of people in the universality of reason. Communication and the expression of two thoughts involve exchange and participation. Therefore, the fact of owning, of having something in common, predominates. The participants,

³ We think that, for Levinas, the idea of monadology goes beyond the simple metaphysical desire of philosophers. According to Leibniz, every spirit would exist separately, in a kind of self-sufficiency. A monad is independent of every other creature. It contains the infinite, expressing the universe. In this sense, Alain Renaud clarifies Levinas' proposition: monadology is the act of birth of the individual and individualism. For the values of individualism are compatible with the idea of a rationality of the real. Each individual contributes to the order of the whole. The rationality of the universe is expressed exactly through the individuals who fulfill "their nature". This is how, in taking care of themselves, in seeking their own conservation, the individual is affirming the rationality of the whole (Renaud, 1989, p. 140).



however, remain isolated, both before and after the exchange. The relationship between people exists paradoxically: it is as if it did not actually exist. The conclusion is emphatic: "Silence is, after all, the element of reason: signs are sufficient" (Levinas, 2009, p. 82).

How to describe the rupture in the silence of reason? Here, a remarkable phenomenology emerges. The sonority of the sound contrasts with the brightness of the *logos*. How to describe the sound in its sonority? As an explosion, a scandal, that is to say, as an escape from the luminosity aspired by the *same* in his task of appropriating what is *other*. The sonority of the sound manifests an overflow of the sensitive quality in itself, announcing an alterity that cannot be encompassed in solitude and the silence of an interiority. The being-other as inconvertible in identity thus becomes possible. "Sound tears through the world of light, introducing an alterity and a beyond (*au-delà*) into the world" (Levinas, 2009, p. 90).

There is, however, more: sound is a superfluous or luxurious quality of something. To make a sound, the thing must be constrained, it must be forced to do so. Behold, when duplicating the manifestations of a thing, sound manifests the event of being, in all its manifestations. Sound introduces the verb into nouns, and is therefore not a simple quality of an object. Sound allows us to differentiate hearing and intellection. Listening supposes the breaking of a loneliness: that of seeing. Thus: "The sound as a whole describes the structure of a world in which the other can appear" (Levinas, 2009, p. 93). To say ethically: the sound refers to the inter-human situation that calls into question the primacy of a rationality that ignore the other⁴, that despises everything that it cannot control. The word (as well as the sound) breaks the violence, establishes a society in which the other to whom one talks is evoked and not just named. When the speaker recognizes the interlocutor as a look that requests him, he renounces domination and violence (Levinas, 1995, p. 22).

2. Word and responsiveness

The question now is that: an approach between Levinas and Merleau-Ponty is truly possible? The philosophy of language, presented in the phenomenology of perception, is not an emblem of renunciation of domination and violence? In Merleau-Ponty, speaking is, in a way, answering. The great otherness to which one responds is the world itself⁵. The world itself requires and calls us. It is only while situated in the world that we can find our symbolic references, knowledge of all kinds. "All knowledge is inscribed in the horizons opened by perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 280). Perception is the grate protagonist ignored by objective thinking. Who requires us is things themselves. They evoke a conduct. Demand a response. Things speak to our bodies and our lives, that is to say, they have human characteristics. They are docile, kind, bitter ... We are in a certain sense invested in things, just as they, in turn, invest us (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 35). What the primacy of perception teaches, therefore, is our status as respondents. The appeal, however, is not a gap to be filled. Why?

Sensations are not simple qualities or states of consciousness, says Merleau-Ponty, but the way the world and others ask and question us. I discover, then, that I have an anteriority in relation to myself, that I am marked by an extreme fragility. To say again: I am preceded by a word that I cannot speak for myself. "Every time I experience a sensation, I feel that it concerns not my own being, for who I am responsible and decide, but another me who has already taken sides in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 291). What does feeling teach? That there is, in me, a self that precedes and constitutes me. I cannot experience my birth or death. I cannot dominate the life of conscience that precedes me, from which both my actions and my personal life emerge. I am marked by conditions over which I have no control, since I can only assume my being from them (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 291).

The encounter with another person plays a decisive role here. This meeting has something special, unexpected, because it brings me out of an insurmountable loneliness. I discover, then, that I am always thrown into perspectives that are not mine, that I must answer for the mean that my actions can represent for others (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 70). In other words, speech inserts us in an endless conversation, but there is no rule that can put an end to disagreements and distances opened by the discussion itself. What are the consequences of this for the phenomenon of speech? It is necessary to distinguish

⁴ Language, in the original sense, is the possibility of being faced with an exteriority, that is, that reason can face the second person, another reason, or what Levinas calls *visage*, "temptation and possibility of murder" (Levinas, 2009, p. 93). Finding a face means not only the possibility to exchange signs, to seek communication through *logos*, but to be in front of the other as such, to be marked by a meaning (teaching) that could not come from myself, nor be appropriated by meeting of the diverse in the unity of knowledge. Thought does not condition language. The reverse is true.

⁵ In this regard, the reader would do well to consult an important work that brings Levinas and Merleau-Ponty together (Zielinski, 2002). Between the radical transcendence proposed by Levinas (*face*) and the immanence of the body in relation to the world (Merleau-Ponty), going to expression and aesthetics, Agatha Zielinski underlines the fact that the two philosophers react to Husserl's transcendentalism, being regular readers of the second volume of *Ideas (Ideen II)*. Both are vehement critics of the solipsism surrounding Husserl's work. "Merleau-Ponty and Levinas open the way for a return to the world that frees the body and the Other from solipsism, in which a certain transcendental attitude could imprison them (...). Apparently, the body and the other must be brought back to the origin of a primordial experience of the world - which needs to be described" (Zielinski, 2002, p. 37).



Between a secondary speech, which translates an already acquired thought, and an original speech, which first makes thought exist for ourselves as well as for others. Now, all the words that became the simple indices of univocal thinking could only do so because in the first place they functioned as original speeches (...) (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 531).

Merleau-Ponty's argument, in many ways, comes close to Levinasian tonality, especially when it denounces the thesis that speech is a secondary or servile phenomenon. From an empiricist or mechanistic perspective, stimuli and states of consciousness are highlighted, taken from the laws of nervous mechanics or the laws of association. The speech phenomenon is seen in its dependence on objective causality. For intellectualism, on the other hand, the word must accompany thinking from abroad. In other words, the sense, instead of being in the word, is found in the conceptual reality that is behind the word. Everything happens as if only thought had a meaning and speech, in turn, was just an articular and sonorous phenomenon. In the first case, there is no talking subjectivity; in the second, even if the speaking subjectivity is present, he should count only as a thinking subjectivity. That is why, if we want to overcome empiricism and mechanism, it would be necessary to show that "*the word has a meaning*". (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 241).

The word makes sense because, first of all, it is immersed in things, in an intimate relationship with the surrounding world. The understanding we have for language goes beyond the simple transmission or communication of certain thoughts. Why? Because to speak is to be inserted in a context of meanings lived concretely, before they are thought. Speech is not understood only as a servant of thought exactly because thought cannot do without the situations of language in which speech is exercised in a concrete world, endowed with coordinates of action, marked by an existence with others. Before representing the world through thought, the subject is already in full control of the articular and sound essence of the word. He responds spontaneously to his affections. He can say *his* word.

The word is a certain place in my linguistic world, it is part of my equipment, I only have one way to represent it for me, it is to pronounce it, just as an artist has only one way to represent the work in which works: you need to do it (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 246).

More than a mere sign of thought or external reality in relation to thinking, speech is closely involved with thought. Now, if the meaning is rooted in speech, it is necessary to admit the following. "Speech is the *exterior* existence of the meaning" (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 247. We emphasize). Thought needs speech not as a simple servant, but because the word has its own power of meaning. With words and speech, thought comes to the sensitive world, that is, thought is in the world, it would not exist outside the word, understood as an expressive power inherent to our bodily condition. Without speech, there would be no communication, and in communication we always find someone who speaks, who has his own style, which aims at a certain world, and not just any representation. Thus, one goes back to a kind of original and silent situation. It is shown, at the same time, that the word breaks the silence of a world in which thought and speech were as if immobilized (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 250-1).

There is no pure thought. Abstract ideas or universal concepts depend on the bodily condition, suppose our incarnation, our perceptual life, our attachment to a world. They depend on our feeling! The fact that Merleau-Ponty comes to the conclusion that there is no disincarnated thought has implications for the scope of the philosophy of language, culture, interculturality, history, etc. This thesis also presents extremely current ethical-philosophical challenges. We will limit ourselves to the dialogue proposed in our title, stating, with the author of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the following: speech is founded, as well as conceptual thinking, in a certain attitude, that is, it implies human behavior. Everything we do in the sphere of thought, supposedly independent of speaking, already implies an existential, gestural meaning. The language "is the subject's position in the world of the meanings of this same subject" (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 262).

Therefore, speaking is a kind of exit from oneself, an expressive, corporal, concrete movement by which the subject opens himself to the world and to others. Speech brings something new to the world. It is creative. In its manifestation, speaking speech is not reduced to any objective meaning. So what's going on? In speech, there is overtaking, a "going beyond", an excess. "Speech is the excess of our existence over the natural being. But the act of expression constitutes a linguistic world and a cultural world. Thus, what was moving beyond being falls into the being again" (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 267). We think that this overtaking has a notable ethical implication, as in Levinas⁶.

⁶ We underline here (hypothesis to be investigated) Bergson's influence on Levinas and Merleau-Ponty. A famous proposition by Bergson calls our attention: "We must understand by spirit a reality that is capable of extracting more from itself than it contains, from enriching itself from within, from creating and recreating endlessly, and that is essentially refractory to measure, since it is never fully determined, but always in action" (Bergson, 2011, p. 399). Levinas would say that this is the idea of the Infinite in us. And what would say Merleau-Ponty? He might say that the word always exceeds what it expresses, or even - and to say with his maturity work - that we can always see more than we



In our view, Merleau-Ponty's masterful commentary on Bergson, in his inaugural class at the *Collège de France*, helps us to understand the above. Speech as an expressive bodily movement shows that the truth is not the flight of the spirit over reality, it is not defined by a face to face with the true. Talking puts us in question, makes us see that the search for the true "goes through others", it goes beyond any possible adhesion to a cultural or institutional world that legitimizes itself. According to Merleau-Ponty, Bergson envisions the future persecution of Jews in Europe, and this makes him retreat from a conversion to Catholicism. There is no *place in the truth* that is independent of our connection to the world, to others, to history. The enigma of expression is also that of philosophy: "either we go to the real with others, or it is not towards the real that we address" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 37).

3. Word and reason

Are we getting back to the starting point? After all, we want get the true, we aspire to participate in reason. We contradict ourselves? The language really serves thought? We disdain everything we have previously stated? We must admit: if we live in the propositional language, we need to abandon particularity to seek the universal. Thinking cannot be content with the contingent, the factual, the relative. However, according to Levinas speech is understood from duality, that is, from the relationship with others. Speech calls into question the power that characterizes Western humanism, that is, it calls into question the overlap of knowledge and dominion, of rationality and animality, of will and heroism. The question is: how to think about the relationship of the word with the *logos*, with universality, with objectivity and, at the same time, to refuse the violence within the *logos* itself?

Speech is an event of the exteriority. The self that is in your home (*chez soi*) is challenged by an unchosen otherness. Being in itself (at home) is not a luminousness, is not a phenomenon. The self at home is not enlightened by the look directed at the world, at things. Levinas' phenomenology aims to achieve the condition of all appearing. It describes an interiority below all phenomenality, a harmless presence, a position in the being prior to any relationship between opposing terms. The decisive proposition is this: an exteriority is possible that is not a simple denial of interiority. Neither appropriation nor projection of possibilities, but an evasion, a transcendence. The self becomes *one-to-another*, its interiority is called into question by the other. What he calls interiority?

A life that is lived sensibly, a psyche around the nutrients of the world: this is the principle of individuation described phenomenologically by Levinas. For the simple fact of living, we are installed in the world that is offered to us as nutrient. To enjoy is not to fight for life, it is not to persevere in your being. Nor does it mean projection of possibilities. The self that enjoys is immersed in the joy of living. The self is involved in itself in the form of structural selfishness. Such selfishness is not moral, but vital. It conditions all activity of a self. "The human being is satisfied with his needs, he is happy with his needs (...). Living of ... is the dependency that is inverted in sovereignty, in essentially selfish happiness" (Levinas, 1974, p. 87). The self-identity of the self is not originally a social, psychological or ontological identity, but a particularity of pleasure, contentment and joy in living.

"The uniqueness of the self consists in remaining outside the distinction between the individual and the general (...). The refusal of the concept is interiority" (Levinas, 1974, p. 90). Interiority is the way in which existing outside of totality is a real event. It makes possible the eruption of a radical exteriority. The other emerges as one who calls into question the egoism of enjoyment, the happy possession of the world by a self. That is why, from a particular world, closed in the egoism of fruition, one can move to a *point of view that comes out of that particularity*. How is this possible? In the relationship with the other, one can enter into a logic of gift. My possession of the world becomes a manner to share world. At the same time, "in this gift of my world, the Other brings the gift of the world to both of us - of the common and objective world" (Arbib, 2016, p. 182).

In an essential moment of *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas asks himself: "Can objectivity and universality of thought be based on discourse?" (1974, p. 44). Levinas calls discourse the relationship between subjectivities who discover themselves outside the concept or the community of the totality. In the discourse, there is an encounter with an exteriority, with a non-synthesizable. To find a face, says Levinas, is to respond for a hunger, that is, to an appeal, to a nudity (1974, p. 48). This exteriority will also act as a master who, with his word, makes the phenomena signify. To find a master is to find an otherness, an interlocutor who is not on the same plane as the self. He calls into question the freedom of that self. Intentionality towards a common, shared, objective world depends on this encounter. We do not contemplate an objective reality in an impassive or simply intellectual way, since everything that belongs to the order of the constituted, the generalized and the common presupposes the inter-

see, because in the visible there is always an excess of meaning, an order of unpredictability that "teaches" about the limits of objectification. In intentionality, there is always an "aim more", an overflow, an irreducible alterity (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 226). What it means: "To see is always to see more than we see"? Answer: "To presuppose the real in its inexhaustible depth or the thing itself in its radical strangeness; it is to live in the shadow of a real that is greater than us and that we can never exhaust, precisely because we wanted to embrace it as a whole" (Bimbenet, 2014, p. 170).



-human situation in which there is the offer of something that one owns to an otherness that does not retain the goods owned by a self. Consciousness can thus think more than it can contain (idea of infinity in us). Criticism of knowledge always begins again. A face to face is the condition to explain a thought. "To find others is to reach them through the world of things possessed, but, simultaneously, it is to establish, through the gift, community and universality (...). To speak is to make the world common, it is to create common places" (Levinas, 1974, p. 48-49).

In the same way, it is possible to start again the criticism of knowledge and the search for truth. The language situation is the condition of ideas such as correction, certainty, truth, objectivity, etc., but it is also the beginning of an endless task of dialogue. For knowledge begins when we find an interlocutor (Levinas, 1974, p. 66). The world does not offer itself before speech. World is what is put in the proposition, in the conversation, in the situation of language. In the most of everyday situations of life we are dealing with thematization and maintenance of the world! Speech is the origin of all meaning (Levinas, 1974, p. 71). Thanks to speech, one can fight against the mistake, make the transition from the implicit to the explicit, to overcome obscurities and to found the school.

What about Merleau-Ponty? He poses a problem that remains open in the phenomenology of Levinas. It is necessary to think about the relationship between different perspectives on the world and reason, that is, to show that the lived world and the objective world must interrelate endlessly. Thus, the transition from particularity to universality, in Merleau-Ponty, is an invitation to dialogue. In Levinas, the face of the other, which makes all objectification and dialogue possible, *goes beyond the horizon of the world*. The face is a meaning without context! Can we get out of the world? The fact is that perception supposes belief in the world. "To perceive is to believe in a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 399). Without this belief, we could not distinguish between what is ours and what is common, between illusion and error. We can move ourselves beyond our subjectivity. "Movement that installs us in the world, before all science and all verification" (*Ibid.*, p. 459). This original faith or opinion can make every illusion possible and, for that very reason, it accomplishes the reconciliation that no knowledge could do: the reconciliation between "the given and the intended, the particular and the universal, the vital inherence of perception and their rational intention" (Bimbenet, 2003, p. 62). Belief - and not knowing - makes it possible to share the world, the intention that throws us out of ourselves, in a kind of world supposedly common between us and the other living beings.

The problem that a phenomenology of the face does not solve and does not eliminate is this: we seek evidence, we want clarity, we aspire to communication, but the meaning is never given. In fact, living speech bears witness to ourselves, to our supposed autonomy. At the same time, it exposes us, makes us leave ourselves. It will get a sense in a historical world, in a linguistic community. "The historical sense is immanent to the inter-human event, and fragile like it. But, precisely for this reason, the event takes on the value of a genesis of reason" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 53). Philosophy is not separate from the historical moment in which it is inserted, but this relationship is not pure and simple subordination. By expressing itself, by intervening in the world, by becoming inter-human praxis, philosophy has the task of revealing a historical context to itself, opening it up to other contexts, to other times. Living speech never finds rest in something that has been expressed. Philosophy "feels bored before what is constituted" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 59). It has its opposite in itself, because, in wanting to express the true, it refuses, at the same time, to remain in the expressed sense. It distances itself from this expressed sense because it wants to understand it. That is why philosophy does not stop at what it exposed, revealed, expressed (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, p. 63).

In Levinas, the word is an endless struggle against what was obscured in the word itself. The face, and only it, could put an end to the mistake that undermines the exercise of the word. However, to enter in the realm of reason, Merleau-Ponty would say, is to find yourself committed to an infinite task. "We are all in an experience of myself and of others that we seek to dominate by thinking, but without ever being able to boast of having accomplished it completely" (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 80). In Levinas, the radical exteriority of the other opens us to reason. At the same time, it keeps us vigilant in relation to the power of silence implicit in all constituted knowledge. Merleau-Ponty, in turn, states that "there is no given universal, there is only a presumed universal" (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 80). That is why it is necessary to hear, in fact, the voices that have been silenced by objective thinking. "Even when I believe that I think universally, if someone else refuses my assent, I experience that this universality was only mine" (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 80).

We need to fight all the time to reduce our differences, to explain our misunderstood words, to manifest our hidden aspects, to perceive the other. Reason and spirits agreement do not belong to the past, they are presumably before us, and we are as incapable of reaching it definitively as we are of renouncing them (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 50. We emphasize).

Levinas shows, phenomenologically, how alterity is produced in being. Merleau-Ponty invites us to the risk of an endless dialogue with otherness. What do they both have in common? Above all,



this: the word is the deep motivation of thought. That is why, at the origin of thinking, there is always a demand for an answer. The response to the call of the other and the world precedes the human desire for knowledge. Such an answer is described as a kind of sound capable of breaking the silence produced by reason. To exist in the world means, for both philosophers, not only to listen, but also to pronounce the word that makes us human. Rather than producing silence, reason can be discovered as a form of sensitivity, understood as hearing, responsiveness and ethical restlessness.

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