

Political vocations

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Abstract

My intention with this article is to suggest that that Derrida's notion of *différance* provides an interesting tool to bridge a gap in political liberalism. Focusing on the contemporary reading of liberalism, I expose the Kantian transformation of political philosophy, identifying the establishment of a reflexive-normative view-from-nowhere where in multiple conceptions of good are pacified by Reason. A phenomenological reading of political liberalism, in this context, allows me to recast the problem of political signification and identity under a different light, suggesting that the Husserlian exposition of an ethical-political core in language complements the formal gap in liberalism.

Keywords: *Différance*, Liberalism, Identity, Language, Discourse

Resumo

Minha intenção com esse artigo é sugerir que a noção de *différance* encontrada em Derrida pode ser uma ferramenta interessante para suprir uma lacuna no liberalismo político. Ao focar na leitura contemporânea do liberalismo, procuro expor a transformação Kantiana da filosofia política, identificando nesse o estabelecimento de uma visão reflexiva-normativa partindo de um ponto de vista de lugar nenhum, onde múltiplas concepções do bem são pacificadas pela razão. Uma leitura fenomenológica do liberalismo político, nesse contexto, permite-me retomar o problema da significação política e da identidade desde uma perspectiva distinta, sugerindo que uma exposição Husserliana de um centro indivisível ético-político na linguagem pode complementar uma lacuna formal no liberalismo.

Palavras-chave: *Différance*, Liberalismo, Identidade, Linguagem, Discurso

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Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards, with a mixture of passion and a sense of proportion. It is absolutely true, and our entire historical experience confirms it, that what is possible could never have been achieved unless people had tried again and again to achieve the impossible in this world. But the man who can do this must be a leader, and not only that, he must also be a hero – in a very literal sense. And even those who are neither a leader or a hero must arm themselves with that staunchness of heart that refuses to be daunted by the collapses of all their hopes, for otherwise they will not even be capable of achieving what is possible today. The only man who has a “vocation” for politics is the one who is certain that his spirit will not be broken in the world, when looked at from his point of view, proves too stupid or base to accept what he wishes to offer it, and who, when faced with all that obduracy can still say “Nevertheless!” despite everything².

Introduction

My purpose with this article is to identify in Derrida's Voice and Phenomenon a recasting of the problem of signification as a moral and political problem, one that points to a blindspot in contemporary political philosophy and that might offer an interesting complementary notion to liberal and critical views of the political space and political identity.

Initially, I'll need to focus on the emergence of the problem of signification in Aristotle. The first part of this article will then provide an explanation of the status of language as a reproducible and representational quality of a determined Being which is only possible politically in Aristotle. This means that the second order predicative function of the word and the trace already happens in a *polis*, and is ever inserted in one. Outside this field of signification any possibility of asserting difference and identity is only potential – it may be uttered as a voice which is not yet reduced to its comprehensible form. If we take Aristotle seriously we need to read his two definitions of a man in association with one another, that is, *zoon echon logon* (the animal which reproduces reason in language³, or the animal that has speech) must be read as always associated with the *zoon politikon* (the political animal). In this, we'll find a connection between the life form (*zoon*), its natural ability (*echon logon*) and its natural placement (*politikon*). Such association in Aristotle is absolutely necessary: the potentiality of the being which is the

² WEBER, *Politics as vocation*. p. 1249

³ This is Heidegger's translation in his course on Hölderlin.

human being is only realizable in the *polis*. The voice has a decisive importance here, as well as the trace of that voice (a letter, or the process of writing), because it is through these media that political identity and political communities are built.

In the course of this paper, I'll attempt to show how this connection between language, nature and identity is deliberately transformed in contractualism in order to provide an answer to conflict and multiple conceptions of good while at the same time allowing a distinction between private and public life and action. This movement privileges the placement of forms of law and management of population.

In order to understand this movement, we must first understand the main tension in modern liberalism – one that has remained the most relevant question in political philosophy for three hundred years – the tension between political egotism (Hobbes), naturalism (Rousseau) and constructivism (Kant) and the manner in which Kant's revolution on metaphysics and political philosophy reshaped the discourse about discourse.

I'll try to show that the first main shift from Aristotelian doctrine is provided by Hobbes when he dislocates the emergence of language from nature and defines it as an invention that makes way to the emergence of the interested individual as dislocated from socialization or recognition. I'll deal with that in the second part of this article.

The political paradigmatic shift started with Hobbes in the sense that some of the main features for the construction of modern liberalism had been given. Still, I need to articulate Rousseau's recasting of Hobbes notion of the *Civitas* and its formation in order to get to Kant and to show how Kant's privileged point of view over the contractualist debate would turn the project of political realism into a project of moral constructivism and critique. Again, in Rousseau (the third part of my investigation) I'll try to locate the same issues that I'd previously identified in Hobbes and Aristotle – and that guide my research in this article as a whole, that is: How does language emerge? What is the role of the voice in this language? Is there a political relevance to discourse and does it relate to the issue of the voice? What is the notion of human language that holds all those issues together?

In the scope of this article, the articulation that is most decisive is the one that will identify language and reason, and will lead to *uses* of language being representative of different uses of reason. Kant will identify in all contractualists a preoccupation with the *fact* of freedom *in* nature. The general concern with moral and epistemic realism is also put in perspective by Kant who proceeds with a transformation of metaphysics and moral epistemology. The

consequences of such transformation are still felt when we read Derrida and his re-problematization of the problem of subjectivity and language.

So Kant manages the tension between private and public conceptions of good by identifying voice with reason. In doing so Kant deliberately reduces the scope of political action to the level of reasonability by associating a determined form of assertion that could be universalized to all possible reasonable contents. I'll try to manage the political subtleties of this movement in Kant by focusing on the contemporary reception of Kantian practical philosophy in Rawls and Habermas, and how the notions of Original Position, Overlapping Consensus and Communicative Reason are all attempts to establish the role of reason as a tool for assimilation and discursive equalization.

That's the point where Derrida's assessment of the Husserlian transcendental revolution and its consequences for the role of the language in its expressional and indicative relevance becomes paramount. For Derrida, difference is left aside when we focus only on the grammatological (formal) aspect of language. Since Kant reduced the scope of language in politics to a certain form of assertion, we reduced the realm of language to the realm of the letter. Derrida attempts to relocate in Husserl the exposition of an ethical and political core to language. By articulating this exposition, I attempt to situate a political blindspot in critical and liberal notions of politics and suggest that Derrida's notion of *différance* could provide an interesting tool to bridge this gap in political theory.

I

In Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias* we are immediately informed of a relation between *voice* (*phonē*) and letters (*gramma*)⁴, this relation is stated by Aristotle as one of *nous*⁵, wherein the voice is a symbol of an affection in the soul (an expression) and letters are symbols of voices⁶. Voice is an expression of a mental state when it says something about something which is later symbolized grammatically⁷. This symbol is a letter, a *gramma*. The multiplicity of letters testify to the multiplicity of voices, and the correspondence between a certain expression and a certain symbol of an expression indicates a substantial relevance to both voice and letter.

4 ARISTÓTELES, *Peri Hermeneias*, 16^a1

5 Transliterating *νοῦς* in ARISTÓTELES, *Peri Hermeneias*, 16^a5

6 *Ibid.*

7 As a first order predicate, however, the voice does not say something *as* something until it is modified in the second order predicate of a letter (*gramma*).

The letter appears as a sign of a voice, as a trace that demonstrates what was there in a voice: all sentences are significant but not all of them are indicative (in the sense that they are 'statement-making'), they are forms of expressions that may or may not say about the status of something as something, they may or may not express something in terms of falsity or validity – they are not necessarily *logical* expressions of truthfulness or falsity. And yet, they are substantial. This is because they hold psychological significance before the possibility of an affirmation or a negation is given. So expression, as pure *phoné*, is given before the logos and it is necessary for the emergence of forms of signification that are truly indicative of meaning.

The *gramma*, however, presupposes a modification of the voice into a sign-of-the-voice⁸. If we follow Aristotle's definition of a man as that being who reproduces reason throughout language⁹, then we see that the realm of the logos is that of the *echon logon*, of reproducing language in a form which is truthful – which is correspondent to reality. Such correspondence expresses the relation between the being of beings and the non-being of non-beings, and every time such correspondence is found it is the expression of something in the mind which is universal. Nature is reproduced in a linguistic form as it really is (in the case of an affirmation) or as it is not (in the case of a negation)¹⁰.

But what is, after all, this universal content which is expressed in association? How does it emerge in Aristotelian doctrine? It does in the form of a predication, of an assertion that abandons its phonetic expression and is predicated as written: a demonstration that both exposes and limits a sign, showing that which was in the voice, and at the same time is no longer a voice. In this, acts of speaking are temporalized in the act of writing, and before this act of writing no difference is stated¹¹. This means that the *phonema* is purely identical to itself, it expresses but it does not make itself understood until we are able to reduce it to *gramma*. If the phonetic expression is a first order predicate, it is still not understood as predicative until the process of writing appears as trace of that voice – as a signification and differentiation. So even though the voice is a first affection of the *psukhē*, it is the modification of that simple affection that makes the processes of understanding and conating sensible, which, for Aristotle, is the same as saying it is reducible to logical forms.

It must be said that *sensible* is not the same as *sensed*. All animals have sense insofar they are living. Animals are able to experience sensations and some other varieties of

8 AGAMBEN, *Potentialities*, p. 36

9 ATISTÓTELES, *Polítiká*, 1253^a

10 ARISTÓTELES, *Peri Hermeneias*, 18^a1

11 AGAMBEN, *Potentialities*, p. 37

psychological states, and even plants, to a certain extent, have a *psukhē* in the capacity they have to strive to become¹² - though they are not animals¹³. However, the faculty of perception of sense which characterizes something as sensible presupposes the ability to knowledge¹⁴, a potentiality to become aware of oneself as a self, as a being which is capable of expressing its identity as One and identifying itself as not-the-Other.

Only man is capable of expressing this difference, and through difference to predicate the identical. This *hermeneutics* is language¹⁵, which, it turns out, is an articulation of the voice, a necessary modification and limitation of the purely phonetical – it is by this articulation that *logos* and *epistēmē* are made possible, but it must not be forgotten that the articulation presupposes this voice, this first order predication. If we wish, the *phonema* is not yet discursive, but it carries the potentiality to become discourse within it. Hence the importance of a second-order predication that would realize the potency of the *phonema*.

But the second order predication, this index of voices, is given by convention. It is given in a social space. It is an interesting subtlety of Aristotelic doctrine that the realization of the potentiality of man as a rational being is only possible in the social space: men can only comprehend something as something once they are able to index the multiplicity of voices and establish a limit for language. In this, a world is constructed wherein the space for signification is limited to the space of the *logos*. It is only in this space that Being can be described in terms that can justify itself while Being. The insertion of a form that is either empty of content (*kenon*) or incommensurable (*uc-topic*) is only understood as a receptive function – any interval, any *diastema*, is only possible to be identifiable when there is something that fills it, that situates it and shapes its limits. It is in this sense that Aristotle will speak of potentiality as *dynamis* and *adynamia*, all beings are immediately in movement and in contact with something else and this tension also constitutes a place. The political order follows the order of nature-, but this is not to say that we are dealing with the same kind of beings: there is a remarkable difference in complexity and hierarchy between these orders, and the *place* of the *anthropos* is not merely a *topos*, but rather a *pole*.

12Perì Psūchēs , 415^a It is interesting to note that ψυχή also translates as *breath*. This could be read as a will-to-life, a potentiality to strive for one's own existence. Any being that has this capability to strive for existence will have, in Aristotle, a *nous* in the sense that they are alive.

13Perì Psūchēs, 413^b1

14Perì Psūchēs, 414^a1:25

15AGAMBEN, *Potentialities*, p.65

Aristotle distinguishes in his metaphysics between forms of bare life (*zōon*) and complex life (*bios*). The ability of speaking (*legō*¹⁶) is connected to complex life, as well as the dimension of chronology. It's already been mentioned that Aristotle characterizes Men as *zōon echon logon*, but Aristotle's second definition of man as *zōon politikòn* (the political animal, or the animal inserted in the city - as opposed to the field, where the bare forms survive), allow us to realize that Aristotle uses the word *zōon* to characterize men, at this point¹⁷. However, the placement of this man is in the *polis*, in a pole where he can organize and constitute a community. So the *polis constitutes the ontological position of Men*, and it is from this position, and in relation to each other, that men can finally assert meaning, describe their identities and posit their differences.

But Aristotle's notion of political positioning was very static. There was no social mobility or struggle to improve one's placement in the *Polis*, government was precisely the art of realizing the placement of individuals in the political space, avoiding the emergence of an anarchic situation. Any emergence of conflict or disruption within the political space was an indication that the association between the natural organization of the *kosmos* and the political organization of the *zōon politikon* had not been thought fittingly. Given the proper management and the proper placement – the proper distribution, that is –, social organization would follow in an orderly manner. The construction of the best system of government is, of course, a work in progress, but Aristotle trusts the natural prevalence of Aristocracy and predestination to function. He also hardly shapes a difference between private and public action for the individual. This is because the dynamics of language are already political in Aristotle, there is not a private notion of knowledge or a diversity of opinion. There are right and wrong forms of asserting something about the world. So even though Aristotle recognizes the multiplicity of voices, he is also quick to point at the urge to identify which forms of assertion are held in a coherent and transitive form – those forms are the universal forms of assertion, and they've been universal all

¹⁶λέγω denotes the process of speaking or telling a story, as opposed to λόγος (*logos*) that denotes the unity of language and discourse that we translate as reason. For Aristotle there is no difference between discourse and reason, he uses the same word (λόγος) to describe both, in these sense we could say λέγω is both *reasoning* and *speaking* and λόγος is both reason and speech.

¹⁷AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer.*, p.10; also FOUCAULT, *Society must be defended*, p.127 “The animal whose politics brackets its life as a living being” Giorgio Agamben has advanced here the argument that by stressing the animality of human live, Aristotle only wishes to stress that while we acquire a characteristic that is a disrupture with the bare forms of live, we remain biologically tied to a certain animality – so there is some kind of relevance to the ζῷον in the sphere of βίος; conversely, animals have no access to what is called λόγος. The first point is what Heidegger calls “Boredom” (*Langeweile*, also translated as “Tedium”), the second “Captivity” (*Benommenheit*).

along. The same could be said about placement and governance. Though politics and governance are a work in progress, they have a natural form that is necessary. The less adequate forms of government only indicate a failure to adequate the mind to the order of nature – a failure in reasoning.

This notion of politics was sufficient to justify forms of government even as we move from the classical economical and political model and into feudalism. Though a number of Stoics and Franciscan philosophers problematized the issues of Aristotelian and Platonic notions of politics, they did not change the main structures of placement, governance and predestination in any decisive form. It is not until the emergence of the great navigations and the surge of the bourgeois class that the insufficiency and static social construction of the Aristotelian political theory is exposed.

II

In Hobbes we'll see the transition between classical forms of political theory into something resembling liberalism. This is because Hobbes will contest the Aristotelian doctrine of language as a natural potency that was realized by men in reason and define it as an invention. This is not to say language – or speech, for that matter – is not important for Hobbes. The importance of Speech, for Hobbes, is described in quite hyperbolic language:

[t]he most noble and profitable invention of all other, was that of SPEECH, consisting of *names* or *appellations*, and their connexion; whereby men register their thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutual utility and conversation; without which, there had been amongst men, neither commonwealth, nor society, nor contract, nor peace, no more than amongst lions, bears and wolves¹⁸.

From start, we are able to identify a sharp difference between Hobbes and Aristotle, and this difference is one that is going to shape Modernity and its opposition to the political model of Ancient and Medieval philosophy. If in Aristotle language and speech are natural properties of men that are discovered and realized in political praxis, in Hobbes speech is invented as a tool for communication – a tool for transference of private sense-perception. The experience of sense, in Hobbes, is first private¹⁹: it is a relation of forces where the external body in relation to the external world starts a chain of causes that is finally identified as the sensing of

18HOBBS, *Leviathan*: I, 4 [559]

19*Idem*, *Leviathan*: I, 1 [553]

something in the external world²⁰. This experience does not require others, it does not require difference or even language capable of describing such experience of sense. Such experience of sense gets more complex as we imagine and represent sensible characteristics of the external world. Again, this process of imagination is prior to the appearance of language²¹ – but the train of thoughts or consequences of imagination requires something Hobbes calls *mental discourse*²². This kind of discourse is still purely internal, but it is already linguistic in the sense that there is a reproducible function of a determined sense, a remembering of one's action. However, the communication of a sense requires an externalization of internal discourse, and this externalization is speech.

In opposition to Aristotle, wherein the sensing of the world required the social construction and placement of men, in Hobbes the sensing of the world does not yet require the insertion in a place wherein one can speak. Prior to the constitution of the political space (the commonwealth) to Men, we already have internal representation of sense – in Aristotle, prior to this constitution all we have is had in a silent form, it is had in a state of no-conation, of sense without representation. But why is that relevant?

It is relevant because we are dealing, in Hobbes, with two colliding notions of discourse and language. On one hand we have private experiences of sense that are represented internally, on the other we have the public assertion of these representations where we index and communicate our thoughts to others. Hobbes is shaping a distinction between private and public reason, expressed as a tension between *marking* and *signifying*, wherein marking is a private action of indexation and labeling and signifying is a demonstration of what is *meant* by a determined mark. It is a demonstration of a *sign*²³.

The issue of the *sign* is therefore problematized politically, in the relation between two individuals that assert different *marks* to each other. When discourse becomes speech, politics are born. Because in speech we have the emergence of beliefs, of opinions, of diversity. Since men have equal faculties and potentialities²⁴, they strive to impose their respective private assertions as the dominant ones. This competition to awe the others and to obliterate the different conceptions of “marks” and attempts to signify the external world shapes the *Civitas*.

20Idem, *Leviathan*: I, 1 [553-554]

21Because this imagining is still internal and mechanic, both men and dogs are capable of *imagining* and *understanding* in this mimetic level (HOBBS, *Leviathan*: I, 2 [556]). It is in this sense that imagination is only a decay of sense (HOBBS, *Leviathan*: I, 2[554-555]), not yet a discursive reproduction of sense.

22HOBBS, *Leviathan*: I, 3 [557]

23Idem, *Leviathan*: I, 4 [559]

24Idem, *Leviathan*: I, 13 [591]

If we follow Hobbes, the problem is already a moral one. In expressing sense one is communicating a form of value. If one says “the field is green” or “killing is wrong” the adjective value that is expressed is one the speaker will be willing to fight for, especially if the other speaker is saying “the field is blue” or “killing is sometimes acceptable”. For Hobbes, as long as the individuals are in a position of equality and that no dimension of sense is made public, war will prevail. This is because men need a determined form of indexation to be *the* form of signification which is common to all men²⁵.

Now, if in Aristotle the indexation and the formation of a grammar is established by convention, in Hobbes this convention is absolutely impossible without a dominant power that imposes a way of speaking and a standard of indexation. This sovereign imposition is one of *content*, not of *form*. This means that what the forthcoming social contract regulates is not simply the form of an expression, it is the content of an indexation which is limited by the contract. Singular opinions may still be relevant privately, but the dominant form has a determined content and scope – and that's the scope any publicly held expression must follow.

It is true that Hobbes requires some sort of representation in the contract. So singular opinions must find some support on the contract, otherwise individuals will not be prone to transfer their singularity to the state²⁶.

In Hobbes the State seeks to reduce difference in opinion and action through the contract, and in the Leviathan the rights of personality are connected to the renounce of individual wills to the will-of-the-State. The discursive practices are then limited politically in order to tame the inclination to conflict of individuals in the Anarchic position – and power is limited to the scope of the contract. So the sphere of thought, of private life and internal practices are not regulated – and could not be regulated – by contract. It is interesting to note that the emergence of rights of privacy and to the private life are only possible when the individual is situated under the rule of the sovereign. Before the emergence of the written Law and the contract, the individuals do not have any rights of personality. They are neither people nor subjects but merely living bodies that are not situated in proper political relation, but in anarchic conflict.

Egotistic individuals will only recognize each other, in Hobbes, as this other is inserted in a space of similitude. Into a political space and as a political body – as persons. This movement is both discursive and exclusionary. And it also grounds a new form of understanding

25HOBBS, *Leviathan*: I, 13 [591-592]

26*Idem*, *Leviathan*: II, 17 [608]

politics: as an artificial construction of a space for discourse and action. This separation of the individual in the state as a relevant and protect being and the individual outside the state as an abandoned and anarchic singularity that neither respect nor needs protection would shape modernity – and define liberalism.

III

The commanding nature of Hobbes' text shapes the following works on contractualism – and, to a certain extent, the discussion regarding the place of language as part of men's nature and the mechanisms of recognition that follow from certain comprehensions of language – and discourse always as a peculiar form of language.

If in Hobbes there is a private language that, when made public, brings upon a need for sovereign control and imposition of significations for determined forms of speech, Rousseau will propose, once again, that speech arises from human relation. Primitive men only have language in a basic and non-reflexive level, it is an invention necessary for the survival of young children that must communicate their needs to their mothers²⁷. However, this does not build a dynamic of recognition or one of difference, it is just a form of expressing an immediate need that does not develop into a complex language capable of positing difference and demanding recognition²⁸. Still, it is this language that will provide men with the potentiality to develop the ability to think and “to discover the art of speaking”²⁹. It is only with the discovery of the art of speaking that men enter the dynamics of differentiation: while language is just basic utteration of instinctive signs, the possibility of recognizing individuals *as* individuals is problematic. That is because in wilderness the savage is solitary, as soon as he can leave his mother he does, and socialization is practically inexistent beyond coincidental encounters that do not cause for mutual recognition. Rousseau will describe this position as one of radical equality, since the savages are all equal in their potentialities, and do not individualize themselves according to possession, identity or power. However, in this position of radical equality man is not able to posit himself as “a man” and even less to put his needs in relation and perspective to the needs of others. There is a recognition of one's own existence and one's own strive to persevere in existence, but this is

27ROUSSEAU, *Discourse*, I. [792]

28Rousseau describes this language as a “cry of nature” (ROUSSEAU, *Discourse*, I. [793])

29*Idem*, *Discourse*, I. [793]

not yet a Subject – it does not have any identity. In solitary, wild life, everything appeared radically equal and common to all³⁰.

Rousseau will be the first to then identify in historical moment that leads to social life the placement of an order of things that identifies a direct relation between language, power and knowledge³¹. This articulation will posit, first, the emergence of a *private space* to singular bodies. This means that individuals were displaced of the common space of the field are now situated in a private property wherein they can exercise their singularity and express themselves in relation to others, this relationship with others and the need to maintain one's own private space makes it necessary an external government of this bodies that are all constituted under the rubric of *political bodies*³². This resembles Aristotle's description of the *Pole* to a certain extent, but where in Aristotle language was a natural fact in Rousseau it is, in its complex forms, a way to take distance from nature. The political bodies are set in opposition to the natural and equal bodies found in the state of nature, they are artificial inventions that allow for the appearance of material inequalities and conflicts that were not possible previously.

But if conflict was not possible, knowledge and complexity were also impossible. Conflict arises from the complexification of relations – one could say it emerges with relations. In order to mediate these relations the social contract is created. Though the particularities of the Social Contract are outside the scope of this article, there is something to be said about the importance of language and especially of grammar to this contract.

Rousseau, unlike Hobbes, thought that there was the possibility of cooperation (instead of bargain) in the formation of the contract³³. Individuals are capable of communicating their needs and reducing their needs to the form of a contract that would express the needs and beliefs of the many fittingly. If in Hobbes there is a *subjection* to the word of the Sovereign, in Rousseau the social compact is built from the *unity* of singular bodies that create a *body politic*³⁴. This reciprocal commitment between the public and the private dimensions of life re-shapes Hobbesian liberalism. If in Hobbes liberalism is a matter of imposition of forms of being in order to control egotistical forces, in Rousseau the social compact permits the space for individual expressions.

30ROUSSEAU, *Discourse*, I. [798-799]

31*Idem*, *Discourse*, II. [805]

32*Idem*, *Discourse*, II. [807]

33RAWLS, *A Theory of Justice*: §3

34ROUSSEAU, *On the social contract*: I, 6 [836-837]; I, 7 [838]

Locke, before Rousseau, had developed Hobbes reflection into the first incarnation of Liberal Politics, but it was in Rousseau that the issue of language is cast differently and as a tool that man will use to be cast *outside* nature and later that will be make it possible for the *emancipation* of man from Bondage and Slavery in the body politic. If in Hobbes and Locke *Civitas* shaped individual expression, in Rousseau individual expression *shapes* the political sphere in the social compact³⁵.

IV

Rousseau's naturalism and his idealistic conception of freedom brought in a series of problems, especially when one considers the developments of the French Revolution and the rise of industrialization in England. Voltaire's *Candide* was directed at Rousseau's *noble savage* as much as it was direct at Leibniz “best of all possible worlds”; if the developments of the Age of Enlightenment proved anyone right, it seemed, it was Hobbes.

In the Groundworks to the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant will develop the *proof* for the Categorical Imperative as the leading clue for all processes of moral justification. But why must morals be justified?

In Hobbes, morality was first just an expression of singular will that one had to strive and fight to enforce as a prevalent notion – publicly. Later, in the *Civitas*, this same morality had to be dropped in favor of a public conception of value that was imposed. Force was the reason for obedience to law – and the only possible way to expect peace between singularities was by obliterating dissent in the commonwealth. Rousseau, on the other hand, did not conceive human nature³⁶ as *naturally* inclined to conflict. Conflict arose because men would let go of their natural mimetic needs, and in the political sphere the social compact was possible once men learned how to express their wills accordingly to the common good. Neither Rousseau nor Hobbes needed a process of moral justification, because they had a notion of human nature that supplied them with sufficient elements to explain moral expression as a *fact*.

35OLIVEIRA, *Tractatus Ethico-Politicus*. p. 68-69

36Maybe *human nature* is not the best word here. Rousseau will not identify the savage life form as *human*, because such nomenclature already establishes an order of identities, impossible in such state of nature. Rousseau speaks of the *good savage* in this particular context, already attaching the nature “good” to the state “savage. But, since the *savage* already has a potentiality to become “human”, his *nature* as good is kept as the identity “human” becomes prevalent. In this way, I believe it is acceptable to say that, for Rousseau, human beings inserted in the social space remain inclined to cooperate.

Kant could not provide a sufficient doctrine for human nature. He couldn't provide such doctrine once the Critique of Pure Reason placed the knowledge of men as outside the limits of reason. There was a gap between subject, consciousness and world³⁷. In order to provide a bridge to link these notions, Kant provides us with an anthroponomy³⁸.

From the fact of reason it does not follow the factuality of the *content* of moral expression: the moral expression is not based on empirical conditions, but on the freedom of the will – which is clearly a Kantian abstractalization, a practical use of reason that regards freedom only insofar the actions of reasonable beings are concerned³⁹

In this sense, discourse is always subject to practical reason in the sense that forms of positing predicative assertions are determined by a pure form of law – which conditions all maxims. This is the fundamental law of pure-practical reason that binds all reasonable discourse⁴⁰. Linguistic expression is then subject to the binding force of Reason, and the political and moral practices that emerge from within discourse are moral or immoral insofar they reflect the necessity of pure reason for whatever is said or written by individuals.

This necessity of being moral in every act of freedom that could be considered reasonable caused the post-Kantian political and moral philosophy, and divided the debate between those who still trusted the project of a necessary mode for political expression and those who adopted Hegel's accusation that Kant's philosophy was fatally wounded with formalism.

In contemporary political philosophy this tension between Kant's moral intuitionism and political reason against Hegel's notion of a historical construction of the State and the Moral Subjectivity is recast as the coronation of the project of liberalism. On one hand, Kant stands for the need of a *view from nowhere* that would justify all forms of moral predication and expression. On the other, Hegel will give the necessary elements to narrate the dynamics of mutual recognition and mutual disrespect that are built historically.

But for all their concerns with forms of expression and the historical movement that would eventually build an ideal state, Kant and Hegel built a moral and political philosophy that

37STEIN, *Antropología Filosófica*, p. 98

38MdS, p. 538: “Alle Hochpreisungen, die das Ideal der Menschheit in ihrer moralischen Vollkommenheit betreffen, können durch die Beispiele des Widerspiels dessen, was die Menschen jetzt sind, gewesen sind, oder vermutlich künftig sein werden, an ihrer praktischen Realität nichts verlieren, und die *Anthropologie*, welche aus bloßen Erfahrungserkenntnissen hervorgeht, kann der *Anthroponomie*, welche von der unbedingt gesetzgebenden Vernunft aufgestellt wird, keinen”

39GMS III Schlussanmerkung

40KpV 55

no longer made any distinction between language, voice and reason. The problem of language and of moral assertion was always connected to the accomplishment of the fact of reason (Kant) or with the necessary progress towards an ideal and spiritual form of assertion that would recognize and sublate every possible form of discourses within it (Hegel).

The project of liberalism and its radical expression in cosmopolitanism also aimed at the assimilation of different forms of assertion, in making different voices sound more alike and more recognizable to each other. The most important political philosophers of the twentieth century – Habermas and Rawls – point at this necessary assimilation of different political vocations under the scope of Political Liberalism, Habermas through the construction of a Communicative Reason and Rawls in the notion of the Original Position (in the Theory of Justice) and the Overlapping Consensus (in his Political Liberalism).

It is not my intention to suggest that Habermas and Rawls are falling in some kind of linguistic and political imperialism that would obliterate difference and destroy multiple forms of assertion (though that is certainly the case with Hobbes), but they are not able to account for different forms of assertion, and they are not able to posit how different voices might emerge with different forms of positing equally fair comprehensive doctrines – this is precisely the blindspot in liberalism that Derrida will be able to identify.

V

But how is it, then, that Derrida will be able to point to this blindspot? It seems to me that understanding the gap in liberal conceptions of politics, for Derrida, presupposes the comprehension of the role of language, intersubjectivity and wordliness. This was an issue for Kant, already, and it was one of the reasons for the resort to a normative solution to the problem of politics. Now, if Kant trusted a moral intuitionism that would inform every normative justification and also a transcendental semantic perspective that allowed for an universalization of signification and assimilation of several contents of grammatical expression under the rubric of an universal form, the phenomenological turn embraced by Derrida presupposes understanding these questions differently: it presupposes situating the matters of language, intersubjectivity and wordliness in the context of phenomenology and, specifically, in the tension between identity and difference – between self and other. For Derrida,

[I]f we are attentive to Husserl's renewal of the notion of the “transcendental”, then we must do the opposite of transcendental psychologism and guard

against endowing this distance with some sort of reality. We must not substantialize this inconsistency or turn it into, perhaps by simple analogy, something or some factor of the world. (...) This war of language against itself is the price we have to pay in order to think sense and the question of the origin of sense. We see that this war is not one war among many. As a polemic for the possibility of sense and of the world, this war takes place in this difference, which, as we have seen, cannot inhabit the world, but only language, in its transcendental restlessness. In truth, far from merely inhabiting language, this difference is also its origin and its abode. Language keeps watch over the difference that keeps watch over language⁴¹.

There's quite a lot at stake in being attentive to Husserl's renewal of the notion of the transcendental. So far, I've tried to demonstrate how different conceptions of language and selfhood in contractualism have had direct consequences in the further developments on political philosophy. The substantialization pointed by Derrida is what Husserl identified in Locke as the failure "to distinguish between an idea in the sense of an intuitive presentation (...), and an idea in the sense of a significant reference"⁴² This monadic understanding of the processes of representation, in Locke, is already a reflex of what we identified in Hobbes. Husserl transforms this notion of monadic and substantial reference by trusting an associative (at least during the Logical Investigations) phenomenology that makes way to intuition. Where in Hobbesian language we had a mental representation that was reproduced in the world as it were in the mind, in Husserl we have a transformation where the externalization of an expression puts it in tension not with other forms of expression (as it was the case in Hobbes) but with itself, an understanding which is first purely expressional is now indicative of something – it urges to communicate.

Now, Husserl will draw this distinction in order to provide a relation where we abandon the naive conceptions and integrate expression and indication in their complexity. This is a transcendental movement. It takes concepts out of the pre-indicative tranquility held in solitary life and manifests the intention behind every act of communication. Before indication, meaning is still not in relation to objects, but the indication that apprehends objects is abstracted in association with these mental facts⁴³. This abstractive movement is paramount for the understanding of the transcendental revolution performed by Husserl. Where monism had found a direct immanence of nature which would be reflected by understanding, and Kant inserted a normative stand point to bridge between world and consciousness, Husserl finds an ideal unity

41 DERRIDA, *Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 14

42 LI, I: p. 252

43 LI, I: p. 182

between expression and indication which paves the way for the construction of a social framework. It is true that in the logical investigations the question of the construction of a social framework is not the main concern for Husserl and the subject of intersubjectivity is hardly brought into play from a social perspective. However, if we follow the passage from Expression in the solitary life into *acts* that are constitutive of indication and communication, we can see how expression is first situated in the “I” as a *potentiality to communicate which is realized in an indication*⁴⁴. But if indication requires an internal understanding of a word, the expression itself may be uncommunicated – it may be understood as an expression “whether we address it to anyone or not”⁴⁵.

It seems to me that the “war of language” that Derrida mentions is precisely the tension between the internal expression and the communicative indication of a sign. For Derrida, difference habits *language*, but what does that mean? How is it that difference arises? If we follow Derrida, we must identify in the moment of assertion of an expression, in the moment of communication, the emergence of such tension. As we pass over from the purely linguistic sign of an expression into the *vouloir-dire* of an indication we perceive a gap between the purely linguistic and the discursive sign, this emergence is the emergence of a voice.

[W]e shall not be surprised to discover that language is really the medium of this play of presence and absence. Is it not in language, is not language first of all the very thing in which *life* and *ideality* could seem to be united? Now, we must consider *on the one hand* that element of signification – or the substance of expression – which seems best to preserve at once ideality and living presence in all of its forms, its, is living speech, the spirituality of the breath as *phoné*. On the other hand, we must consider that phenomenology, the metaphysics of presence in the form of ideality, is also a philosophy of *life*⁴⁶.

It’s interesting to see the relation Derrida makes between the presence and the absence of signs and the emergence of a voice in the association of ideal expression and living indication. Now, I realize those terms are not used by neither Husserl nor Derrida, but I believe that this is an interesting way into the problem of communication, that is: how the form of a solitary expression is lived in an indication, and the association between this ideal language and a lived presence of a language constitutes a difference. This difference turns us away from the matters of presentification and reproduction of *sameness* into the field of intuition and constitution. When Derrida says that discourse outside its expressive kernel is impossible, but it is

44LI, I: pp. 192-193

45LI, I: p. 190

46DERRIDA, *Voice and Phenomenon.*, p.9

nevertheless taken almost in its totality in an indicative web⁴⁷, what we have is the issue of an association that goes beyond pure expressivity and substantive reproduction of signs⁴⁸.

It's become common place to say that Derrida holds an impossibility of the “outside of discourse”, but as we follow the embodiment of speech in Voice and Phenomenon, we see that such hyperbolic statement is quite problematic. It is true that there is no discourse outside *expression*, but is expression always discursive? Pure expression, as such, seems to hold for Derrida a pregnancy of discourse, but expression in its ideality is not yet discursive as such, it presents a kind of boundary between discourse and no-discourse, a *limine* where the body of speech starts to be constituted. What happens to expression, then, as it starts to be signified? As we manifest ourselves, we finally integrate the absence of the sign in pure-expressivity with the empirical incarnation of language. In this, alterity emerges as the mediation that allows for meaning to be constituted. Derrida is going ahead of the logical investigations and into the development of the problem of sign and meaning in Husserl's' philosophy, and I believe we reach the main point of voice and phenomenon when Derrida writes that “one must therefore acknowledge that the third person of the indicative present of the verb to be is the irreducible and pure kernel of expression”⁴⁹. In this, we see that Derrida will place in the limit of the discourse, shaping all possibility for the emergence of meaning, the figure of alterity. Such alterity emerges as the movement of *différance* produces the transcendental subject in expression as both a trace and an expectancy of an other-to-come. An *absolute limit to speech and reduction*, something that is not possible to be meant in its integrality⁵⁰. So we abandon the apparent self-referentiality of the naïve conceptions of similitude and enter the realm of a signification that has its boundaries marked by difference.

So the trace of the other is part of every act of signification in Derrida, and it is interesting to note that it is precisely this trace that is obliterated in the “extinction of the signifier in the voice grounding the Western conception of truth”⁵¹. If we turn back to Aristotle, we'll see this movement of obliteration of the signifier expressed in the form of the paradox of potentiality – where the potentiality not to is only understood in terms of its being: we can only identify the possibility of a *tabula rasa* when there is something already written, the possibility of silence is only given whereof one can speak and the *adynamia* of the written is only possible on

47 *Ibid*, p.36

48 *Ibid*, p. 37

49 *Ibid*, p. 88

50 *Ibid*, p.103

51 AGAMBEN, *Potentialities*, p.212

the basis of the *dynamia* of speaking. We cannot think the pure potential to think without this writing. But, Agamben sums it beautifully, the understanding of the trace that marks this paradox opens the way into ethics:

Derrida's trace, "neither perceptible nor imperceptible," the "re-marked place of a mark," pure taking-place, is therefore truly something like the experience of an intelligible matter. The *experimentum linguae* that is at issue in grammatical terminology does not (as a common misunderstanding insists) authorize an interpretative practice directed toward the infinite deconstruction of a text, nor does it inaugurate a new formalism. Rather, it marks the decisive event of matter, and in doing so it opens onto an ethics. Whoever experiences this ethics and, in the end, finds his matter can then dwell – without being imprisoned – in the paradoxes of self-reference, being capable of not not-writing⁵².

If we follow Derrida, then, we must identify in the transcendental turn performed by Husserl the exposition of the ethical core of language and the irreducible character of alterity in this play – now, it is easy to turn this into an immanent discourse on the sacrality of the Other, or into an incursion into the impossibility of politics. Certainly, those are defensible interpretations of the Derridian take on Husserl, but I want to hold that the comprehension of intersubjectivity that arises from within this turn is defensible politically and within the context of modern contemporary thought.

VI

[N]ous n'avons pas le temps d'analyser ici ce texte et ce n'est pas le lieu de le faire. Il nous faut seulement, entre Kant et Lévinas, aiguïser ici une différence qui compte aujourd'hui plus que jamais quant à ce droit du refuge et à toutes les urgences qui sont les nôtres, partout où, en Israël, au Ruanda, en Europe, en Amérique, en Asie et dans toutes les églises St Bernard du monde, des millions de « sanspapiers » et de « sans domicile fixe » exigent à la fois un autre droit international, une autre politique des frontières, une autre politique de l'humanitaire, voire un engagement humanitaire qui se tienne effectivement au-delà de l'intérêt des États-nations⁵³.

What could be the reason to refer authors that at first may seem so distant from each other? As Derrida, later in his philosophy, faces the issue of Cosmopolitanism as an issue of differences, he seems to suggest that Kant was not able, with the transcendental analytic, to deal with the problem of the multiplicity of voices and conceptions of good. Indeed, the problem of

⁵²*Ibid.*, p.218-219

⁵³DERRIDA, *Adieu.*, p. 175

personality is dealt with, in Kant from a normative-reflexive point of view. With this transcendental schema Kant sacrifices difference in order to provide a study of morals inside the critical perspective.

But I don't want to be unfair with Kant in these matters: the tension between public and private conceptions of good is not easy to be dealt with, and Kant indeed provides some important hints into the problem. Levinas shares with Kant (hence Derrida's quote) a grounding concern with the moral act. However, as this act is placed from a metaphysical and normative point of view in Kant, Levinas places the ethical as the ground for all action and relation to and with the other. We cannot put our feet into the world without this being-captured by such ethos. Thus, when Derrida reminds us of this mediation among Kant and Levinas, what is at stake is the need to inform Kantian morals with an existential meaning, bringing the problem of ontology into normativity. When Derrida writes about a humanitarian engaged politics (*un engagement humanitaire*) what is suggested is that the subject should take a position about politics, in opposition to a political system that takes the subject as a data in his bare life. Subjects must affirm oneself and recognize each other beyond the State and beyond a certain conception of rights and norms.

But how are we to deal with conflict? Granted that we concede to Derrida the ethical emergence of the self in relation to Others – and even circumscribed by this *limine*. However, can we really leave the political matters aside and focus on the ethical? Can we separate these issues? Levinas will link the issue of the discourse with that of Justice, and Derrida brings the question of doing Justice to others in discursive practices that are situated within a politics that he calls a politics of hospitality. The third – not by coincidence, it is the same third person of the singular that constitutes the limit, the kernel of expression – expects and constitutes an ethical response.

I am especially interested here in the movement that Derrida is proposing, because if the Other is always placed in an anarchic position for Levinas, I am not so sure if this is the case for the Derridian proposal of a politics of hospitality. Steinbock⁵⁴ has suggested that what is at stake here is becoming critical of one's own voice in order to do Justice to the encounter with the Other – this process of affecting and being-affected by a difference might be constitutive of a social relation, where we see different perspectives colliding with each other and constituting each other. Now, if it is true that one responds to the alien “from the perspective of the home”, how is it that one becomes more responsive? What happens if we situate this conflict outside an

54STEINBOCK, *Home and Beyond*, p. 185 ; p. 256

anarchic position? That is, what if the conflict and the emergence of the other is always constitute from within a political realm? Again, we must go back to some of the main problems of liberalism: provided that the emergence of the self is political, how do we access sociability without obliterating difference?

In short: What if, after all, the Other is Political? Isn't then, such a form of responsibility too hyperbolic for a political scenario where the emergence of an other is not metaphysical? Honneth points that

[W]hat Derrida, following Levinas, referred to as a caring justice that takes the infinite particularity of the individual human being into account has, unlike both treatment and solidarity, the character of a completely unilateral, nonreciprocal sort of concern. The obligation accompanying it will always tend to be so extensive that even one's own autonomy in action has to be restricted to a large extent. Thus not every human being can be expected to assume such a form of responsibility in the same way that all human beings are expected to show respect for the dignity of each individual⁵⁵.

Honneth seems to be pointing at a confusion between the realm of moral obligation versus political recognition in Derrida and Levinas. Though it is understandable that such reaction could emerge out of some of the statements in the late period of Derrida's philosophy, it seems that Honneth was rather unfair with Derrida when he mentions the issue of justice and recognition as only in the realm of being-affected. Though it is true that there is a receptive function in the dynamics of recognition, it's clear when one reads Derrida – or Husserl and Levinas, for that matter – that such dynamics are mutual, in the sense that the Other who is encountered also encounters. The dynamics are not of singular and detached affection, but mutual estrangement – moreover, the form of a recognition in Derrida is one of becoming a stranger to oneself, as one discovers his position and tries to detach from it. In this sense, Honneth has the most demanding take on the matter, since the sublation of the other in the struggle for recognition pacifies the process of estrangement dialectically, while in Derrida the conflict is left exposed in its ethical core, in a permanent lived-experience of response.

The question of the pacification of the struggle for recognition, as a matter of fact, has been at the heart of both liberal and Marxist conceptions of politics. If we follow the construction of modern politics, the tension between private conceptions, material inequalities and the necessity to socialization has marked a move towards formal equality, public good and assimilation. It is at this point that, I believe, a phenomenological deficit is exposed in modern politics.

55HONNETH, *Disrespect*, p. 124

Nythamar de Oliveira has pointed at this deficit, writing that “the phenomenological deficit of critical theory ultimately unveils communicative networks and lifeworldly practices that resist systemic domination”. This phenomenological deficit holds both for Honneth in the dynamics of recognition and Habermas, in the resort to communicative action. Now, from within phenomenology what are our options regarding these dynamics of mutual estrangement that emerge politically?

I don't want to undermine the importance of a politics that aims at egalitarianism, or at least at reducing material inequalities, but in order to reduce such inequalities, is it necessary to dislocate the dynamics of estrangement and replace them with a normative point of constitutive practices of speech based on structures of social control?

In a sense, the answer is positive. Governance is a necessary aspect of life in society, and the anarchic position of the individual is not defensible in the long run. There is a need for social structures of organization and disposition of singular bodies in a political body. This is because Aristotle was not wrong when he said that individuals emerge *politically*, that is, always already in relation and conflict with each other.

But still, the question of governance is always at tension. Foucault pointed so well at the tension between the government of the self and the technologies of power, but there is something to be said about the permanent failures of both the attempts of isolated self-government and totalitarian power over the life and death of individuals.

If we are able to recognize the importance of a reflective equilibrium between ideal principles of justice that are decided in a representative form, and a moral pedagogy that informs the decisions about conceptions of good, we must also understand that these processes are not static, nor are they always given in the same way or in the same environment. Reflecting this multiplicity of conceptions and the conflict of this conceptions is precisely what is at stake for the written form of a legislation that aims to enforce sociability among different individuals – and different sociabilities that come incarnate with these.

Both critical and liberal notions of politics tend to move to a cosmopolitan position that trusts the possibility of a semantic core of predication which would allow for an universal form of asserting value when they are faced with the multiple contents of value-like propositions. In this sense, there is an attempt to neutralize the multiplicity of environments that constitute value for an individual (or for a group of individuals). For Derrida, a blindspot is left exposed here since historicity is left behind in order to make way to political organization and management of people.

It is true that accusing critical and liberal notions of lacking a concern for historicity might sound unfair, especially after Hegel. But the critique is not at ignoring historicity, it is at trusting the possibility of incorporating the conception of the Other within the framework of a determined form of assertion, instead of recognizing that permanent state of estrangement which is not peculiarly reducible to *gramma*. The issue of memory arises here as the main actor at the political management of social relations, and we must ask of both Rawls and Habermas what's the possibility of taking an original position or establishing communicative consensus of this aspect of constitution. It is interesting to note that in one of the few times Habermas mentions the question of memory, in the text "Interpreting the fall of a monument" he writes that "non-occidental cultures must take on the universal content of human rights based on their own resources and an interpretation that produces a convincing link between local experiences and interests"⁵⁶. This was written after Habermas had his seminal debate with Derrida, and that both agreed on the unfairness of the doctrine of "democratic imperialism" forwarded by NATO. It also shows an important recognition, that is: whatever is understood as the content of a human right, it will be understood based on whatever is at hand for those who construct that understanding.

This late development in Habermas doctrine of communicative action is a hint at the possibilities of informing liberal and critical notions of politics with a phenomenological point of view, something that Derrida might have had in mind all along: a notion of politics that would re-incorporate the place of the *phonema* in a discussion that had been focusing too much in the *gramma*, without turning the debate into a poor discussion between illiterate relativism and deaf cosmopolitanism.

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⁵⁶HABERMAS, *The divided west*, p. 35

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