

Review of: "Distance as the most essential form of human thought and subjectivity"

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At the outset, it is worth noting the enormous breadth and depth of the question that this article proposes to address, which is to show the conceptual category of “distance” not only as applying to human thought in general but also as the essential form of everybody endowed with life. And the means chosen to accomplish this is the analysis of Western philosophy, also taken broadly. I doubt whether this can consist and rigorously accomplished in the length of a lifetime, however long, but it certainly cannot be done in one article. Numerous issues could be discussed in the author’s assertions, many of which would rebut the basic assumptions of phenomenology itself, which he embraces, but I intend to make only a few comments on what seemed to me most problematic.

The author refers to thought as that which builds a society, from its concepts, in the same way that Thales constructed a geometric figure. Are human societies mathematical constructions? I believe that this needs to be justified and that the justification would require a deep immersion into the concepts and methods of mathematics, relating them to the abstract concepts and procedures that human beings use when building societies. There seems to me to be no identity in these cases. The text also refers to social interaction as a practical form of thinking. What about gregarious animals, for example, ants and bees? This question is pertinent, since the author does not intend to reduce himself to the human being, but to encompass “everybody endowed with life” in his reflections. To justify his assertions, then he makes use of definitions that are diffusely chosen from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and others. For the author, the modern notion of the subject treated by various philosophers since Rationalism has resulted in a static, unchanging notion of “I”, isolated from the surrounding world, in which the notion of distance appears as something fundamental, but not sufficiently articulated. In effect, “distance” would be the essence of thought and of the internal dynamics of the subject, undiscovered even by those he calls “philosophers of distance” who would have surpassed Plato, among whom are Scheler, Cassirer, and Heidegger.

Thus, the goal is to demonstrate “distance” as the foundation of various relationships, both conceptual and theoretical, as well as practical, such as in decision-making. The approaches to the subject of experience so far have not clarified why it transcends itself, that is, how thought overcomes thought. In this sense, “distance” would explain how thought captures the tension between determination and indeterminacy, through reflexivity. According to the author, “distance” is necessary for the existence of the subject and thought because it is required as an essential part of living bodies, for the notion of “I” and social interaction. The article develops by referring to Heidegger’s discussions about difference and identity, which would allow thinking about tension between determination and indeterminacy in thought, a kind of “revealing-concealing”.

However, Heidegger is criticized because, in his thinking, “distance” is neither contemplation, nor, consequently, thinking itself and interacting. At this point in the text, the author presents his conception of distance as identical to difference: “For us, thinking articulates this difference (distance) in which an indeterminate absolute subject (Husserl’s zero point: *Leib*) and a determined object enter into experiential interaction”. This would demonstrate the tension between determination and indeterminacy in thinking, which would then be a movement “between” such poles.

To complement this abstract understanding of distance with another, linked to experience, the author refers to Hans Blumenberg’s concept of the “functional unit” of the individual, a concept that links the “distance” in the human being to the anthropological constitution of *homo erectus*. The very possibility of the existence of the human being is explained by “distance”, insofar as he acts at a distance (sees the distance), avoiding risks and various problems on the way. This is what would guarantee the development of advanced plans against enemies, strategies of thought, and action. From the ancestral action of picking up and throwing stones, the action at a distance created the possibility of putting abstract thoughts into action. It would essentially be the same thing accomplished by language, which “grasps” the world to understand reality. The concept distances itself from things and simulates reality, and this is where distance would reach its purest form, with the absence of the object. Language would distance itself and simulate reality through concepts, in a determinate way, and through metaphors, non-conceptually, that is, in an indeterminate way. The author concludes that “To think, therefore, is to move between the metaphorical or non-conceptual (indeterminate) and the conceptual (determinate)”. Distance, in short, would sum up all aspects of human life, passing through empathy, intersubjectivity, and the reflective nature of thought. The objectivity of the world would also be possible only as a consequence of distance, insofar as the breaking of solipsism would require the reflexive movement of the primordial body that addresses itself to nature. Distance, furthermore, would represent that which, in human beings, is incomprehensible to themselves.

To confirm or attest to their claims, one analysis of babies’ development and another of the notion of God are seen as sufficient, so far as “distance” does not exist in both. In the case of babies, psychological theses about their early state of confusion, of inseparability from the environment, would attest to the necessity of distance for thought and social interaction. The undifferentiated symbiosis or union between the child and the mother would show that, at this early stage, thought remains impossible. Even so, says the author, there is the possibility of linguistic phenomena, which will lead children to develop the distance that allows them to think and separate themselves from the rest, constituting their “I”. God, in turn, would have no reflexivity, interaction, or thought, because he would not differentiate himself in the phenomenon, according to the traditional metaphysical way of thinking about it. God is the most universal, the absolute being, that where there is no differentiation, the being where essence generates existence and beyond which human understanding cannot extend. God is identical to himself, without any distance or reflexivity, and his thought coincides with his acts.

Given the author’s exposition, the aspects that stand out the most from his reflection are, first, that “distance” was not sufficiently clarified. At one point in the text, it was associated with the idea of the difference in Husserl, as something articulated by thought between a subject and an object. This notion does not seem satisfactory for explaining and substantiating issues and phenomena as distinct as the essence of thought and action at distance. It should be clear to anyone that the theoretical distinction between the subject and the object of knowledge is something very different from

walking a path, making a course, planning, and taking action. Although subject and object must, from a logical point of view, exist before any human action in the physical world, I don't think we can identify the supposed distance between them with action at a distance, that is, a trajectory in space. It seems to me that it is this confusion that makes it possible to place the same notion as the foundation of thinking and acting.

Second, I would like to draw attention to the claims about the necessity of distance for the constitution of the "I" of babies, for their thinking and social interaction. A question immediately arises: how do animals interact socially without a clear notion of "I", without this supposed distance? Some higher primates indeed show signs of recognizing themselves in the mirror, for example, but the majority of other species do not know who they are, and do not distinguish their "I". From the author's point of view, this would allow us to say that they do not distance themselves from their environment and therefore should not, to say the least, interact with others of the same species. Well, this is absolutely false. The most serious problem in the question of babies is to make the objectivity of the world depend on the abstract thought of a human being when a simple look around shows that many animals know what the world is, objectively. Thirdly and finally, the reference to God as the being where there is no differentiation or reflexivity because he is absolute and coincident with himself, is quite disconcerting. Certainly, God is a philosophical question, but his concept is not a peaceful point, on the contrary, not to mention his existence. To put him here as proof of the necessity of the category of distance for human thought and action, side by side with the concrete existence of babies, as if it were a fact, is an excrescence.

In favor of the author, we can say that the field of phenomenology, in the history of philosophy, stands out for its indetermination, categorical instability, and consequently, for its insurmountable theoretical incipency. The pretension of adding "distance" to the conceptual apparatus of this current, in my opinion, makes its terrain even more unstable and slippery, despite Husserl's pretensions of recreating philosophy as a rigorous science purged of psychologisms. In fact, it is incomprehensible how one could describe what appears putting all reality in parentheses, and simultaneously, arrive at the essentials of everything. The so-called "eidetic reduction" intends to lead to pure or transcendental consciousness, highlighting the essential and general, which, however, is neither metaphysical, logical, scientific, neither phenomenal: in fact, it cannot be referred to anything clearly known. The phenomenological method wants to reach what comes before the first, what precedes everything, where no theory can reach it. Hence, the vague, undefined expressions and conceptualizations, at the end of which no one knows what they are talking about. Because, after all, the individual who theorizes in this way only follows internal states of consciousness, whose path is freely given from within himself.