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The Forgotten View of the Origin of Language: The Legacy of Herder's Philosophy

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Abstract

*The question about the origin of language marked modernity with approaches that still echo in contemporary thinkers. This is the case with Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language*. The question with which Herder opens the essay is significant and expresses well the fundamental problem that marked the philosophical intentions of the 18th century, namely: "Were human beings, left to their natural abilities, able to invent language for themselves?" Forgetting for a moment the implicit reference to God that continued to mark historically the philosophical narratives, it is important to focus the question on the appearance of language. In this sense, the philosopher's essay is not limited to hypotheses about the emergence of language, or rather, about the founding characteristics of language, but it consolidates it in the anthropological, sociological and even biological horizon from which it allows the understanding of human nature and condition. The enunciation of the four natural laws and the narrative of justification that the philosopher elaborates on reveals a strong potential to understand the phenomenon of language and the human mind. This essay seeks, first, to explain Herder's theses; second, based on this explanation, see in what sense his approach allows us to understand the phenomenon of the origin and formation of language; and finally, to understand the scope of his work with regard to language and mind, that is, to seek to determine its legacy in contemporary philosophy, namely with regard to the understanding of the human mind. Regarding the latter, it is important to mention two essential points to understand the importance of Herder's thought for the understanding of the human mind: the mention of reflection as an inner thought and hearing as a fundamental characteristic for the development of language. It is all these questions that this essay seeks to address.*

Keywords: *language; origin of language; Herder; imitation; mind; sociobiology*

I. Introduction on Herder's thought

One should start by saying that the philosopher's book is not limited to proposing hypotheses about the emergence of language, or rather, about the foundational characteristics of language; it provides a new approach and understanding of human nature and the human condition. The statement that the essay represents a milestone in the establishment of the philosophy of language seems, therefore, undeniable – one can risk saying that it is effectively an ontological-metaphysical approach to the contents that will come to categorize the philosophy of language as a specific area that would define much of 20th century philosophy¹ – and in this sense, an instrument of ontological formation of the human world itself, conforming from the epistemological, aesthetic and anthropological point of view, the positioning of the man who knows and knows himself in the historicity of his creative, emotional and educational experiences.

The notion of a language that makes the world happen is already in genesis here, not in the classical sense of naming and the relationship with the truth value or with the existence of the named (of which Plato's well-known *Cratylus* and *Sophist* are good examples), but in the sense of the intimate configuration of human action with the *dic-tum* that dictates it. Note the following words of Herder which already suggest this reconfiguration of meaning from the “philosophy of languages” to a philosophy of language, a “first philosophy” that becomes an object of reflection for the construction of man's own philosophical thought:

And as this important theme promises so much insight into Psychology and natural economy of the human race, into the philosophy of language and of all the sciences which have arisen with it; who would not wish to make the attempt? Besides, as men are the only creatures, with whom we are acquainted, endowed with speech, and are thus distinguished from all other animals, where can we find a more certain course for inquiry than is afforded by observation of the difference between man and brute? Condillac and Rousseau must necessarily err, as to the origin of language, because they erred so decidedly and oppositely, upon this

¹ José Justo says in the introduction of the Portuguese edition: “In other words, the philosophy of language begins to occupy the strategic place of a First Philosophy.” See Johann Goottfried Herder, *Ensaio sobre a Origem da Linguagem*, introduction and trans. José M. Justo (Antígona Editores, 1987), 13.

very distinction, the former viewing animals as men, the latter, men as animals.²

In another way, the phenomenological thought of a man who speaks in the world is in genesis here and, let us say, an anticipatory vision of language as the house of being, which would come to mark some of the philosophical discourses of the 20th century (namely of Heidegger), as it places man as the only entity capable of a language that challenges the discourse of being and that, therefore, allows the interpellation of the self and the reasoning that thinks it.

The relationship that Herder establishes between reason and language is not only evident but also necessary for the coherence of the discourse in his essay, that is, for the justification of the human origin of language. The constitution of this language is done through the interconnection of the elements that constitute the subjective experience, particularly in the reception carried out by the senses of mundane impressions, the reflection-reasoning operation and the consciousness of (being) in a social world, which, as the philosopher says, “nature has neither created us isolated stony rocks, nor egotistical monads!”³

In this approach to Herder’s essay (although flying over many of his words), we cannot fail to notice that there is still a philosophical work to be done regarding his thought. Two examples can be immediately provided in this regard, one, the lack of a rigorous linguistic reading of the philosopher’s considerations about signs, and second, the lack of a phenomenology of hearing (or at least a phenomenological interpretation) that would certainly integrate Herder as a main character. In other words, it is necessary to carry out a reading that would integrate the elements of a phenomenology of the inaugural event of human language – where the hearing and the occurrence of the vibratory phenomena of sounds took place as part of the way of being of the being that is-to-be-in-the-world – which would prepare and expand the understanding of language and of human nature itself. This does not mean that we want to make Herder’s philosophy (or this book in particular) a phenomenology of the subject or subjectivity, but to alert to the existence of these elements in a philosophy of the (origin) of language. Such elements are not merely decorative elements in this narrative but rather an exaltation of the subject endowed with reason, sensitivity, imagination (one cannot ignore the speeches/works

² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Treatise upon the Origin of Language* (Camberwell Press, 1822), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

of his contemporaries that populated the philosophical culture of the time). It can, therefore, be said that Herder manages to introduce into the heart of the problematic of language, the conception of a being that is exactly the way it is (in fidelity to the spirit of the philosopher's letter, the human animal), that is, a being endowed with reason and sensitivity, who develops himself in the middle of a wild nature, manages not only to learn through his intelligence (also empirically) but also to share what he has learned.

II. Language, natural laws and the thinking of human nature according to Herder

Herder's essay is divided into two parts, the first part consisting of three chapters and the second, a shorter one, consisting of a single text (eventually, a division can be seen through the natural laws that are enumerated). In the first part, the first chapter has the function of exhorting the thought about the human origin of language⁴ (mainly criticizing the view of divine creation of language proposed by Süßmilch, which Condillac and Rousseau cannot escape) following the presentation of human frailty (their nature) in contrast to the nature of animals.⁵

The second chapter, perhaps the most important for the purpose of the essay, presents a set of considerations about man as a being who, lacking animal aptitudes (such as innate abilities and instinct), is endowed with intelligence and sensitivity (taken as natural dispositions).⁶

⁴ For example: "He commented, like his predecessor, with the outcry of nature, from which human language arose. I cannot perceive how it should ever have thus arisen, and am astonished, that the penetration of a Rousseau, should have allowed him to dwell here for a moment [...]. Diodorus and Vitruvius also, who rather believed than proved the human origin of language, increased the difficulty of the subject, by supposing men for a time to have ranged about the woods, howling as animals and afterwards, God knows why, or wherefore, to have discovered language." Ibid., 14-15.

⁵ "A new born infant, with the exception of the outcry of his sensitive machine, is dumb, it utters neither ideas, nor impulses by tones, as every animal does, in its peculiar manner; placed, therefore, only among animals, it would be the most orphan child of nature, naked and exposed, weak and necessitous, timid and unarmed and, what constitutes the sum of misery, devoid of any guide through life. With such divided, enfeebled, sensitive power, such indistinct, dormant faculties, such separated and weakened impulses, evidently appointed for a thousand necessities, destined to a capacious sphere, and yet so helpless and abandoned as not even to be endowed with a language to declare his wants! No, such a contradiction does not exist in the economy of nature. Instead of instinct, there must certainly be hidden faculties dormant within him!" Ibid., 19.

⁶ "However, this disposition of his powers may be termed, whether understanding, reason, or reflection etc. If these names be not considered as abstract powers, or merely degrees of elevation of the animal powers, it is the same to me. It is the total arrangement of all human powers,

Here Herder introduces the fundamental concept of “reflection” that will help him to reconcile objectively three orientations: first, to present human reason and determination for thought (for example, not being a being who only knows but who knows that he knows),⁷ second, to give the possibility of developing the argument in favor of a being that can reason only because it has language and vice versa, and third, the placement of the concept of “conscious reflection” (a “state”) that allows to unveil the essentiality of human nature:

It follows, therefore, from these rules of combination, that all the words, sensitive power and instinct, phantasy and reason, are merely different determinations of one and the same power, which resolves all opposition to unity, and consequently that – if man was not intended to be an instinctive animal, he must by means of the free, active, positive power of his soul, be a thinking being [...]. Reason not being a distinct power, acting separately, but a peculiar direction of all the powers of the human species, man must possess it, in the first state in which he is man.⁸

This conception of Herder’s is fundamental for the global understanding of his thought, and specifically, for the understanding of the problem to which he dedicated himself in this essay. In fact, the philosopher is not only emphasizing human rationality, which, moreover, was already a mark of thought at the time, but demanding a different tone for that rationality by placing it within the scope of an essentiality that is interior to the human mind; This means that “reflection” as a characteristic of man allows him to validate an ontological primacy in human

the total economy of man’s sentient and intellectual, of his intellectual and volitive nature, or rather, it is the positive power of reflection, which, connected with a certain organization of body, is called reason in man, and the instinctive faculty in animals, which in the former, gives birth to freedom, and in the latter, to instinct.” *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ “More correctly speaking, the rationality of man, the characteristic of his species, is completely different, viz ‘it is the superior tendency of his thinking powers, proportioned to his sentient faculties and impulses’ [...]. If the sentient animal state, and concentration upon one point ceased, a different creature must appear, whose positive power must necessarily manifest itself in greater space, as arising from a finer organization, i.e. ‘more clearly’ and which, distinct and free, not only understands, wills, and acts, but is also conscious of understanding, willing, and acting. This creature is man; and this disposition of his nature, we shall, to avoid the confusion of specific rational powers, term conscious reflection.” *Ibid.*, 23-24. Note: it must be taken into account that Herder uses many language subterfuges, and this allows him to redo his speech.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

nature, that is, reflection only plagues reasoning, thinking, because it is already constitutively original in the human soul, if it were not, it could not appear because as Herder says:

If there be nothing in this faculty, by what means could it enter the soul? If in the first state, there be nothing positive of reason in the soul, how could any thing, even in millions of succeeding gradations, ever become realized? It is verbal sophistry to say, that use could convert mere possibility into reality; for if power exist not, it can neither be applied, nor exercised [...]. But the sentient state of man was nevertheless human, therefore, reflection took place, though in a minor degree; and the least sentient state of the brute, is still brutish. The greatest clearness ever attained in its thoughts, therefore, could never produce the reflection of a human idea.⁹

The philosopher thus inserts in the scope of the analysis of human nature a founding form of intellection that will be conducive to language. Reflection (see also the primary meaning of this internal awareness as what it reflects in its interiority), is this capacity for internalization that operates a recognition (of differentiating characteristics, also read with a symbolic function) and that, giving a conscious dimension of himself and of the act, will favor the appearance of language. Thus, human language goes beyond a mere identification of speaking and what is spoken, that is, it is present in the very way in which the soul has consciously inscribed in itself the recognition of the reality of what is inside and outside it.¹⁰ Herder refers:

Man being placed in the state of reflection peculiar to him, the first time this reflection acted freely, language was dis-

⁹ Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁰ For this reason, Herder says that "If it be incomprehensible to others, how a human soul could invent language, it is incomprehensible to me, how a human soul could be what it is, without discovering language for itself. Nothing more clearly develops this origin, than the objections of its opponents." Ibid., 30. And further on, he consolidates this idea by saying: "Thus then language is the declaration, expression or organ of the understanding, and forms, as it were, an artificial sense in the human soul; in the same manner as the sensitive soul among the ancients formed for itself the eye, and the instinct of the bee constructed its cell. How excellent that this new, this artificial sense of the mind, even at its origin, was a connecting medium and must be so! I cannot imagine the first human thought, nor the first formed judgment, without a kind of dialogue within my soul, or an endeavor to carry out one; the first human thought, therefore, from its nature, is a preparation for social intercourse." Ibid., 38.

covered. For what is reflection? What is language? This reflection is characteristically peculiar to man, and essential to his species, so is also language and his own discovery of language. Discovery of language is, therefore, natural to him as man! [...] He shows reflection, therefore, not only by clearly and acutely observing all the properties, but by acknowledging one or several as distinguishing properties. The first act of this acknowledgment, produces a clear conception, it is the first judgment of the soul. By what means did this acknowledgment take place? By means of a sign, which he must have fixed, and which as a sign of reflection remained clear within him. Well then, let us hail him with *εὕρηκα!* (it is found!) [...]. With this human language was discovered.¹¹

It is, therefore, from the understanding of this state of reflection and not from the explanation of the imitative character present in nature,¹² which must lie the logical and natural explanation for the human origin of language. This is a sensitive point in Herder's speech that, as it still happens today, raises many questions. And it raises them precisely because the idea of imitation seems to appear as something reductive or as something that refers to an instinctive competence in the human, which according to Herder does not seem acceptable.¹³ One of the great defenders of the mimetic theory is Susan Blackmore, who says that imitation is precisely what makes us human, or rather, we would be "differentiated imitators,"¹⁴ meme beings (one feels the influence of

¹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹² "Another principle has been adopted, viz: the imitation of nature and her sounds, as if anything like thought could ever be produced from such a blind impulse! As if the ape, even with such an inclination, or the black bird, which can so well imitate sounds, could ever have contrived a language [...]. It is not the mere utterance of feeling; for it was not a breathing machine, but a reflecting creature which invented language. It was not a principle of imitation in the soul, which is only a means to attain one single object; least of all is it agreement, or an arbitrary convention of society. The savage, the hermit of the woods, would have discovered a language for himself, even had he never uttered it. It was the intelligence of the soul with itself, an intelligence necessary to man, as man." Ibid., 29-30.

¹³ Daniel Everett in his most recent book seems to meet (some of) Herder's argument, thus contradicting Chomsky's view of an innateness of language. Cf. Daniel L. Everett, *How Language Began. The Story of Humanity's Greatest Invention* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2017).

¹⁴ "To be human is to imitate [...]. Most living beings on Earth are the product of evolution based on the copying, varying and selection of genes. However, once humans began to imitate they provided a new type of copying and so let loose an evolutionary process based on the copying, varying and selection of memes. This new evolutionary system co-evolved with the old to turn us into more than gene machines. We, alone on this planet, are also meme ma-

Richard Dawkins' work, *The Selfish Gene*), which he defines as "instructions for performing behaviors, stored in the brain (or in other objects) and passed on by imitation."¹⁵ Let us just say that despite these theories, and even with the discovery of mirror neurons (a kind of neuronal justification for imitative processes), there are still many uncertainties about their validity, since there is no scientific agreement on that.

The third chapter reveals the genius of Herder's thought as it justifies from the internal point of view (the human soul) and from the external point of view (the social history of the languages and peoples of the world), the human invention of language.¹⁶ To this end, the philosopher introduced a curious triangulation that operates in the game between sonorities, ear and inner language (hearing, sound and reflection), and will advance with the conclusion that he will explore in the second part saying "that man must have necessarily have invented a language himself, and state under what circumstances this could have been most easily effected."¹⁷

In fact, and as we have already mentioned, Herder pays special attention to hearing by attributing to it the responsibility of interconnecting the heard sound and the inner resound of meaning (as the attribution of identifying and/or differentiating characteristics of external reality), that will assent in the interiority of man to the functional unveiling of reason and language.¹⁸ While not neglecting the importance of the other senses for the process, Herder submits them to the

chines. We are selective imitation devices in an evolutionary arms race with a new replicator. This is why we are so different from other creatures; this is why we alone have big brains, language and complex culture." Susan Blackmore, "A imitação faz de nós humanos," in *O que nos torna humanos?* ed. Charles Pasternack, 30-46 (Texto e Grafia, 2009), 30.

¹⁵ Apud Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 17.

¹⁶ "The origin of language in the human soul, is as capable of demonstration, as any philosophical evidence whatsoever; and the external analogy between all ages, languages, and nations, has as high a degree of probability as the most established historical fact could possibly have." Herder, 74.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Using a set of practical everyday examples, Herder explains the relevance of hearing in the process: "The turtle dove coos, the dog barks, thus arise three words, because he endeavored to seize three clear ideas, the ideas he marked down in his logic, the word in his dictionary. Reason and language advanced a timid step together, and nature came half-way to meet them, with the assistance of the ear. She not only brought forward the sounding tones, but caused them to penetrate to the depth of the soul, a sound is heard, the soul catches the sound, and has thus gained a sounding word! Man, therefore, as a listening observing creature, is naturally constituted for language; and even a person born blind and dumb, must form a language, unless he were also deaf and devoid of feeling." Ibid., 40.

relevance of hearing,¹⁹ because it is “easy to comprehend how words arose from sounds, and were stamped as signs by the understanding.”²⁰ Meaning that in the order of sensation (all feeling) will immediately have its “sound” and since the ear is a language organ that unifies the totality of the sensations that sounded, the conduction to the plane in which a characteristic is rationally attributed will pass to exist a word for such an evocation.²¹ This is exactly what is said to support the notion of the ear as a central sense for that “creature of reflection and language, of consciousness and linguistic creativity” that is man. In Herder’s words:

As man attains to speech with the aid of instructive nature; by means of the hearing, without which he could not invent language, the hearing may be termed the central sense, the portal of the soul, and the bond of connection, between the other senses.²²

It also happens that languages evolve, prepare and develop broader concepts and, therefore, bring also more abstract concepts, which according to Herder confirm once again the human origin of language:

As human reason cannot exist without abstraction, and as no abstraction develops itself without language, the language of every nation must contain abstract ideas, *i.e.* must convey an impression of reason, from having been its instrument. Each language only contains as much abstraction, as the nation was capable of, and has no one abstract idea, independently of the senses, which is proved by its original sentient expressions. Consequently, no other di-

¹⁹ Herder refers to the primacy of the ear over touch and vision, because in the sensations that the world offers, it is through sounds (objects, according to Herder, always sound in some way) that they are represented internally: “Feeling approaches very near to hearing, its designations, e.g. hard, rough, soft, woolly, velvet, hairy, stiff, polished, smooth, bristly, etc., which all refer merely to surface, all sound as if they were felt [...]. The words scent, tone, sweet, bitter, sour, etc., all sound as though they were felt: for what were all the senses originally but feeling?” *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

²¹ The philosopher justifies the importance of the ear through the clarity and distinction that allows us to say that it is felt for language: “Hearing seizes something from both sides, renders clear what is too dark, and softens what is too bright, brings more unity into the obscure variety of feeling, more unity into the too brilliant variety of vision, and this recognition of many things, by one, by a sign, gave rise to language.” *Ibid.*, 53.

²² *Ibid.*, 52.

vine arrangement is perceptible, excepting this, that language is human throughout.²³

It should be noted that Herder is throughout the essay articulating (almost) unnoticed a fundamental concept that will give an extraordinary and ingenious unity to his theory and which is, in the words of José M. Justo, the “device” of totality (or globality). It is with him and from him that it makes sense to think about the global unity of man in becoming, in the historical course of his acquisitions and, thus, the totality of man makes itself resonate in the totality of the constitutive process of language by successively improving the reflexive states (in the interiority) of his being.²⁴

In the second part of the essay, and on the basis of much of the argument already developed, Herder will establish the natural laws that condense the laws of nature and of the human species, with regard to its predisposition to language.

Thus, the First natural law states that: “Man is a free thinking, active being, whose powers operate progressively, and as such is a creature formed for speech!”²⁵

Man is a being that is, by his nature, predisposed to develop himself, so his first moment of internal awareness would also have to be that of the inner birth of language. For Herder, man is a man from the moment he is placed in the world, and although he may not yet be a creature of consciousness, he is already a creature of reflection (since all states of reflection are linguistic states, that is, “a chain of thoughts is a chain of words”). In this way, the formation of language is a process that develops as naturally as the formation of human nature itself.

²³ Ibid., 67-68.

²⁴ “This means that each state of this process is a condition in a double sense: a condition of what can be operated with this configuration (for example, in the initial state, a condition for the internalization of characteristics) and a condition of the transformations to which the configuration will be subjected (for example extreme, the initial state contains ‘in nuce’ the necessary conditions for man to slowly transform himself into what he is today and, of course, into what he will be tomorrow). From this it follows that the genesis (from the moment Herder was able to face it), far from being an additive linear path, a mechanical chain of causes and effects in which there would be no place to talk about progress because all moments would have the same value, becomes a path of increasing complexity, a sequential articulation of states in which each one collects the wealth of the previous ones to prepare the following ones and in which each state being a ‘living whole’ produces more than the mechanical sum of the parts.” Johann Goottfried Herder, *Ensaio sobre a Origem da Linguagem*, introduction and trans. José M. Justo (Antígona Editores, 1987), 16.

²⁵ Herder, 75.

The second natural law establishes that “Man is by destination, a gregarious and social creature, the cultivation of language is, therefore, natural, essential and necessary to him.”²⁶

Just as it is natural for a creature to develop within a community, it is natural for a man to develop linguistically among men. Herder says that no man exists for himself, that is, men share a nature that prevents them from uprooting themselves from the human species. He also adds that since man is a social being by essence, it would make no sense not to have a means of communication, that is, in absurd this would contradict the very notion of being social. From this also follows the diversity of languages that the third law and fourth law come to shape, as can be seen:

The third natural law dictates that “the human race could not possibly continue only one flock, confined to one language, therefore, the formation of different national languages became necessary.”²⁷

The fourth natural law:

In all probability the human race constitutes one progressive totality, from one source, and forming one vast household. The same principle refers to languages, and with them to the whole chain of cultivation.²⁸

The philosopher is emphasizing what was already implied before the expression of the laws; but with them, it allows him to underline, with the richness of his anthropological thought, namely, that not only is humanity one and the same, but also that language is reproduced and develops in the proximity of humanity, or to use Herder’s nomenclature, with the human race (once again the cohesion of the philosopher’s discourse is felt by the constant reference to globality in the proximity of the essentiality of human nature). It can be said, therefore, that Herder’s thought expands and opens doors to think about human existence with language (in what can be seen as an affirmation of the coexistence of the species and its cultural legacy):

It may, therefore, be affirmed, that there exists no thought, no invention, no step towards perfection, which may not be extended ad infinitum. I can perform no action, can entertain no thought, which may not influence the immeasur-

²⁶ Ibid., 90.

²⁷ Ibid., 99.

²⁸ Ibid., 107.

able course of my existence. So also, there is no creature of my species that does not influence the whole species, and the progressive total of the whole species. Every one impels a greater or lesser wave, every one alters the state of an individual soul, therefore the total of these states always acting upon others, therefore changing something in them. The first thought in the first human soul, stands in connection with the last in the last human soul.²⁹

III. Herder's legacy

The cogitation operated by Herder around the human origin of language allowed us to understand that the human species and language are in permanent evolution.³⁰ If there is an effective history of progress, then it must consider language as a fundamental acquisition from which there would not be this same history. It should also be considered that there is in Herder's essay a kind of teleology (of evident Kantian background) for humanity that reveals itself precisely through the conception of an incompleteness of language and of man, but which would tend towards perfectionism (of which metaphysical languages may constitute a first sample). In accordance with this, such purpose finds meaning in the horizons that it constitutes and, therefore, expanding the experience of being to a being that reinvents language.³¹ Perhaps here Herder's essay gains a new meaning by alerting us to the permanent reconstruction that man makes of himself and the knowledge he generates. It is from this inventive capacity of man (inscribed in his nature) that the blossoming of the different languages that would transform the world takes place (Castro in his book about Heidegger call it the onto- potentiality of language).³² Such a conception also allows us to understand that not all inventions can be made with the fortune of language in their creation.

²⁹ Ibid., 108.

³⁰ It is said: "The divine origin is rather injurious than beneficial, it destroys all the activity of the human soul, and renders both psychology and the sciences inexplicable. For with language man must have received the seeds of all knowledge from God? Nothing, therefore, proceeds from the human soul. The commencement of every art and science, and of all knowledge, must be thus rendered inconceivable. The human origin admits of no step, without some view, or without the most useful elucidation in every branch of philosophy, in all kinds and compositions of languages." Ibid., 118.

³¹ Cf. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh et al., *Apes, Language, and the Human Mind* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

³² Cf. Paulo Alexandre E. Castro, *Ontopotencialidade da Linguagem: Breve ensaio para compreender o essencial da linguagem em Heidegger* (BonD, 2024).

So, taking all of this into account, one can see that the capacity of hearing, that is, to be aware of sounds, will represent the emergency and consolidation of reflection – which nothing less than to be aware of its own thoughts or if one prefers to be aware of the existence of consciousness – that will give rise to the appearance of abstract words. What is not said, but is somehow implied between the lines, is that the understanding of abstract words by others allows the expansion of language and therefore its enrichment. But it is not all: from an externalist point of view, this will mean the assertion of the existence of other minds (although such a slight assertion may be contested), since they would be able to reach the understanding of these words. Now, such scope refers to an internal conceptualization (reflection) that reveals all the characteristics that are attributed to a mind. In this sense, the listening and reflection highlighted by Herder reveal the deep meaning of the human mind. Herder left us a very rich text that allows different readings; this reading is perhaps just another one that touches on a set of topics that have not yet exhausted the theme.

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