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Leonard Lawlor, *From Violence to Speaking Out: Apocalypse and Expression in Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016, xii+308p.)

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From Violence to Speaking out (2016), subtitled *Apocalypse and Expression in Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze*, is the latest major publication by Leonard Lawlor, whose impressive philosophical research stretches all the way from classic figures like Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), to more contemporary philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) and Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995). Indeed, Lawlor's excellent translation of Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon* (1967) has become the reference among anglophone poststructuralist researchers since its publication in 2011. It is not surprising then that this book is also very much inscribed in his life-long effort of exploring, developing and connecting concepts essential to modern continental philosophy.

This work consists of two parts composed of several chapters, some of which were published separately and could indeed be read as independent articles. Generally speaking, the different texts included stem from Lawlor's research and expertise in the phenomenological tradition (Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) and firmly dive into the so-called « poststructuralist » thinkers, mainly Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. On this basis, it is possible to read it as both a commentary on phenomenological and poststructuralist ideas, or as a series of analyses addressing, implicitly or explicitly, the problem of the worst violence. For these reasons, a general reader, not particularly familiar with the thinkers discussed herein, could approach it as an interesting overview of phenomenology and poststructuralism which will explore and connect somewhat familiar concepts like *epoché*, temporality and auto-affection, with other perhaps less familiar concepts such as transcendental violence, event and repetition. On the other hand, the specialised researcher will equally find here a fresh and original approach to contemporary ethics and politics which posits poverty and powerlessness as the appropriate answers to globalisation and power.

This, however, does not imply by any means that this is an easy text, and even the general reader must stay attentive to the differences, as well as the similarities, between the various thinkers and arguments evoked throughout this book. In the present review, we will attempt to provide some elements for the

general reader, while also stressing those aspects which constitute Lawlor's original insights and extrapolations. We consider that the theme of the reversal of Platonism would be of particular interest to the general reader, while the problem of the worst violence and its eventual answer in poverty would be more compelling to the seasoned researcher.

The reversal of Platonism

One of the most prominent and overarching themes of *From Violence to Speaking Out* is its commitment to the reversal of Platonism. From the introduction Lawlor announces that this work « develops the problem of the worst violence through the idea of the reversal of Platonism » (p. 3). This general affirmation and the different ways it is explored and justified through the work will certainly be one of the highlights for readers of this text as an overview of continental philosophy during the second half of the twentieth century. Although Lawlor himself admits that such a commitment might be seen as a somewhat outdated by several of the same philosophers referred on the text, he nonetheless justifies it by arguing that Platonism itself is the very « worst violence » that this work seeks to confront: « If Platonism is violence, then the reversal of Platonism necessarily means […] the overcoming of violence, all sorts of violence and injustices, and especially the worst violence. » (p.4).

How are we to interpret Platonism thus characterised as violence? The answer to this important question is given mainly in chapter 2, titled *What Happened? What Is Going to Happen? An Essay on the Experience of the Event,* where Platonism is portrayed as measuring existence in terms of an origin from which it might be said to have fallen (essence), or in terms of an end towards it might be said to be advancing (*telos*). As Lawlor affirms quoting Deleuze: « To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to depose essences and to substitute events in their place » (p.45). This shifts the attention to the event as one of the key concepts in the pursuit of the reversal of Platonism. Effectively, the event cannot be conceived in terms of a Platonic circular temporality, which posits a primary origin and an ultimate destination for existence. The experience of the event contains no answer for the questions of origin and destination. This means that the temporality of the event, not being closed on itself, leaves always a « reminder ». This also implies that the event never really « happens »: no matter how far we go out into the future, there is always still another « to come ». « The event is always still to come » (p.46). Platonism, on the other hand, wills that all existence constantly approximates an ultimate *telos;* an *end* with no reminder, with nothing else « to come ». In this sense, Platonism wills the « worst violence ». Thus,

« the reversal of Platonism is a hyperbolic response to the hyperbolic will of Platonism » (p.46). In short, the theme of the reversal of the violence of Platonism serves as a common thread giving direction and structure to the diverse ideas and thinkers presented throughout this work.

The problem of the worst violence

Complementarily, *From Violence to Speaking Out* could also be seen as a reaction to the problem of the worst violence, which Lawlor identifies as « the hyperbolic reaction to violence », best exemplified as we mentioned above by Platonism. This primary « violence », against which Platonism reacts hyperbolically, is described throughout the first part of this work as a form of violence intrinsic and fundamental to experience. Lawlor calls this violence, together with Derrida, « transcendental violence ». The reasons why transcendental violence is fundamental, and therefore inevitable, are specifically addressed in chapters 2 and 3. Here, Lawlor invites us, with Husserl, to enact the *epoché*, or phenomenological bracketing, in order to turn back from the objects of our experience to the experience itself. According to Lawlor, the *epoché* will take us back to our interior monologue, which will appear as auto-affection consisting in the two contradictory forces of singularisation and universalisation. The structure of auto-affection *is* the structure of time which, in its turn, *is* transcendental violence.

Transcendental violence then, being fundamental to experience and life, is unavoidable: « experience itself is violence, and life is nothing other than violence ». Any attempt to suppress transcendental violence is an attempt to suppress life itself: these attempts « are actually worse than the violence against which they are reacting » (p.10). These attempts, among which we count Platonism, seek to eliminate all forms of violence thereby eliminating also the essential violence of time, becoming and individuation. In chapter 1, for example, this worst violence is described through the example of globalisation: « As it pursues its conquest of other cultures and lands, globalization acts in the name of peace ». Effectively, by perpetuating the cycle of violence, Platonism and globalisation demand the end of all life; that is, they will the apocalypse.

The question then to be answered in the second part of the book, titled *Three Ways of Speaking*, is: if violence is fundamental to experience and cannot be eliminated, what *can* we do? Or, as it is formulated in the introduction: « is it possible to imagine an iteration, that is, an expression, or a statement, or a mark, based in the experience of powerlessness, that not only functions and has

an effect on the one to whom it is expressed, uttered, or given (speaking to) – but also that at the same time minimizes the irreducible violence of repetition found in all experience, expressions, utterances, and marks? » (p.6). Is it possible to *speak out* while minimising violence altogether? These, needless to say, are not easy questions. As it turns out, the appropriate reaction to transcendental violence is not an effort to explain it or to eliminate it, but rather « opening oneself to the violence » so we can « become something other than what we are » and thus minimise violence. This form of « least violence » is defined by the three ways of speaking corresponding to each of the thinkers mentioned in the subtitle of this work and further developed in chapter 9: Foucault's speaking-freely; Derrida's speaking-distantly; and Deleuze's speaking-in-tongues. Accordingly, the answer to the worst violence, exemplified by globalisation in the first part, can be characterised as a form of poverty: to embrace the powerless ability to let go of the power to dominate others. In this sense then, this book starts from globalisation and ends with poverty.

Final remarks

All in all, *From Violence to Speaking Out* is a voyage that begins from basic philosophical principles, namely time and experience, and gradually leads us into an unexpected awareness of violence. We learn that violence not only is the condition of the possibility of time and experience, but also that it is inevitable, and that futile efforts to eliminate it have plagued Western philosophy since Ancient Greece. Reactions against such efforts, like the reversal of Platonism, are akin to other comparable projects ubiquitous in contemporary philosophy: Derrida's « deconstruction » or Heidegger's « *destruktion* », etc.. To be sure, Lawlor's exposition is straightforward and clear, but it should not be taken without a grain of salt, for, as he admits himself, many contemporary philosophers have entirely abandoned the idea of a « reversal » of Platonism or metaphysics. « Deconstruction », for example, *is not* the dismantling or the outright rejection of metaphysics. For these reasons, one could wonder why, whereas other philosophers engage with the problems posed by « old » metaphysics rather prudently, Lawlor decides to blatantly « fight against "the war without war" with "the peace against peace," » (p.286). On this note, a question that one could have in mind while reading this book is: to what extent is *speaking out* against violence also a form of the very hyperbolic violence it is denouncing? The author certainly provide us with several answers to this and other questions, but it is to the reader to judge by herself and to decide of their relevance.