Article

Phenomenology of Language as Praeambula Fidei: A Study Based on Edith Stein

Miriam Ramos Gómez

Escuela Universitaria de Magisterio Fray Luis de León, Universidad Católica de Ávila, 47010 Valladolid, Spain; miriam.ramos@frayluis.com

Abstract: The 20th century "linguistic turn" seems to have established itself as one of the main defining aspects of contemporary philosophy. This is especially visible in analytic philosophy's emphasis on the study of language, ultimately disconnecting and isolating it from its deep connection to the person. Without denying the validity and meaning of this type of approach, the aim of this article is to highlight that, in Edith Stein's work, it is possible to find a phenomenology of language, in which the connection with the totality of the person, with its spiritual dimension, is essential. Although it is true that none of the works by this author systematically deal with questions related to language as such, both in her more strictly phenomenological works as well as in those that are also inspired in the philosophy of Aquinas, we find thought-provoking reflections on the question of language. Once the philosophy of language becomes re-connected to philosophical anthropology, it is transformed by Stein into the praeambula fidei, which enables dialogue with theology, especially with the theology of the body and what Vatican II calls the "ecclesiology of the sign".

Keywords: phenomenology of language; Edith Stein; theology of the body; ecclesiology of the sign

1. Introduction[1]

The so-called turn to language seems to define an important part of twentieth-century philosophy. But what does the turn to language refer to, and what kind of philosophy does it define? It is true that the term "linguistic turn" inevitably refers to the popular collective volume edited by the American philosopher Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn*, 1967. Here, Rorty himself, truthfully, tells us that the author of the expression is another thinker (Rorty 1967, p. 9; Gross 2008, p. xxix). Indeed, more than a decade earlier, Bergmann uses the expression "linguistic turn" to refer to a new style of doing philosophy (Bergmann 1953, p. 455).

However, without detracting from the merit that corresponds to Bergmann and Rorty in their conception of the locution, the true concept of the linguistic turn in philosophy has its roots, in my opinion, in an earlier article published in the thirties -in German, and in English in 1959- in the well-known journal *Erkenntnis*, namely, "Die Wende der Philosophie", which can be translated as "The Turn of philosophy", authored by Moritz Schlick. There, faced with the sad perplexity caused by the lack of progress in philosophy since its origins, Schlick prophesies a change in the situation, a new birth, a definitive turning point. Such a turn consisted in a new "insight into the nature of logic itself"[2] (Schlick 1959, p. 55). It implied the identification of the logical with pure forms, so that "every cognition is an expression or representation, [...] it expresses a fact which is cognized in it" (Schlick 1959, p. 55). The pure, logical form would be that which is common to the different modes of representation (languages, sign systems, etc.). According to Schlick (1959, pp. 55–56):

So all knowledge is such only by virtue of its form. It is through its form that it represents the fact known. But the form cannot itself in turn be represented. It alone is concerned in cognition. Everything else in the expression is inessential

and accidental material, not different, say, from the ink by means of which we write down a statement.

This simple insight has consequences of the very greatest importance. Above all, it enables us to dispose of the traditional problems of "the theory of knowledge". Investigations concerning the human "capacity for knowledge", in so far as they do not become part of psychology, are replaced by considerations regarding the nature of expression, of representation, i.e., concerning every possible "language" in the most general sense of the term. Questions regarding the "validity and limits of knowledge" disappear. Everything is knowable which can be expressed, and this is the total subject matter concerning which meaningful questions can be raised.

Careful examination reveals four theses that help us understand the "turn to language": (a) knowledge is conceived as expression or representation; (b) pure forms are understood as the foundation of knowledge; (c) what can be expressed is knowable; (d) and, finally, the task of philosophy is transformed from research on epistemology to research on language, that is, to examine the nature of expression or representation. This is the turn of philosophy.

In the following section, the theses will be explained. The central role of the pure forms consists in the claim that all knowledge is expression or representation of the fact that is known, so that, in the multiple systems of representation, in the different languages, what lies in common is the logical form; that is, what is important in knowledge. However, in our understanding, such a description is inaccurate. Why? Because, on the one hand, it tends to isolate logic by disconnecting it from its relation to ontology, to reality, omitting the connection between logical forms and ontological forms: what is fundamental is the logical form, and the rest, i.e., reality, is accidental. On the other hand, the given definition of knowledge as expression or representation of the "fact that is known", is speaking of "facts", therefore, of a reality or at least of "something", that is, what is known. Is this position not ambiguous? How can knowledge be defined as the "expression or representation of the fact *known* in it"? In addition to ambiguity, the definition of knowledge is accused of being imprecise because it tries to elude the relation with reality, dismissing it as mere wasted "ink", which, as it is proved by going deeper into the question, is not possible.

Secondly, by emphasizing pure forms, the matter is not settled. Indeed, it is indicated that such forms are the foundation of knowledge. This is what is common to the various representations or idiomatic expressions. But it is also argued, they are not represented, they are not expressed. Once again, we are faced with a problem. Why? Because in attempting to understand knowledge by abstracting it from reality, one wants to understand the logical forms without any connection to it. But if what is expressed are the known facts, as Schlick himself affirms, the dependence of the logical forms with respect to the ontological forms remains unquestionable.

As far as the statement "what can be expressed is knowable" is concerned, Schlick necessarily refers us indirectly to Ludwig Wittgenstein. Remotely inspired by David Hume and more by Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, according to this new concept of philosophy, the propositions of language can only be formal or factual. Formal propositions are those of logic or pure mathematics, they are tautological. The factual ones are those that are empirically verifiable (Ayer 1959, p. 10). Thus, it is understandable that one of the "talismanic" postulates of the turn to language is sentence number 7 with which the *Tractatus* ends: "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 108)[3]. This is intended to invalidate the aspiration of metaphysics and, of course, of theology and its attempts to understand being, the nature of God, and Revelation.

Certainly, there are many intertextual references that refer to allegations against metaphysics because of what is judged as an unhealthy temerity. As soon as one approaches this subject, one understands how Rudolph Carnap can affirm: "Metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability"[4] (Carnap 1959, p. 81). And Alfred Jules Ayer, in the same vein, remarks: "The metaphysician is treated no longer as a criminal but as a patient: there may be good reasons why he says the strange things that he does" (Ayer 1959, p. 8).

Consequently, it is easy to understand how the fourth thesis postulates that the new task that establishes the horizon of philosophy must be to investigate the nature of expression or representation. That is, to investigate language, because what is not expressible cannot be known. It is not denied that what is not expressible does not exist. In fact, those who praise Wittgenstein for laying the foundations of the turn to language often forget to complete the seventh sentence with the other words of the same author in sentence 6.552: "there is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 107). These words illustrate how Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of the "inexpressible", although nothing can be said about it, and, as his interpreters will say, it cannot be known. But, in any case, scientifically it is of no interest.

Kant, upon noting the supposed impossibility of metaphysics, placed epistemology at the center of philosophy. The proponents of the turn to language, continuing the line of thought opened by Kant, replaced epistemology with the philosophy of language (Seifert 2013, pp. 20–29). Given the difficulties posed by such a structured philosophy for dialogue with theology, our aim, then, will be to discover what there is in the Steinian corpus that allows for a different philosophical claim and fruitful communication with theology.

As we have noted elsewhere (Ramos Gómez 2020), Bruno H. Reifenrath, Peter Freienstein, and Wolfgang Rieß have made interesting contributions on language in relation to the work of Stein. While Reifenrath has dealt with Stein's reflections on the place of language in the process of personal development (Reifenrath 1985, pp. 250–51), emphasizing pedagogical reflection, P. Freienstein has pointed out three interesting philosophical contributions of Stein's conception of language. The Steinian category of "pragmatic imagism", Freienstein claims, (*pragmatisches Imagismus*) is the thread that allows us to understand Stein's philosophy (Freienstein 2007, p. 129). It consists of using images that have achieved the level of a philosophical statement, because they are based on a meaning that makes communication possible. He also points out the influence of Judaism in Stein's conception of language, specifically in his treatment of the conceptual language about the transcendence of God. Finally, he provides an outline of a comparative study of the philosophy of language in Martin Heidegger and in Stein (Freienstein 2007, p. 93).

Our paper, however, can be regarded as being, in a certain sense, in line with the comparison of analytic philosophy with phenomenology made by Rieß (2010), although, in our understanding, it distances itself for two reasons. First, because of the presentation we make of analytic philosophy, which is briefer and more genealogical, although we do not cease to delineate its systematic aspects derived from the description of essence based on the "linguistic turn". Secondly, because our gaze will be directed especially to the contrast with the proposal of analytic philosophy and its potential for dialogue with theology.

Our thesis is, in Edith Stein, we find a sufficient basis to found a new concept of philosophy of language in which the connection with the totality of the person, and, in particular, with its spiritual dimension, is essential. In this way, we consider that once the philosophy of language and its spiritual, personal dimension have been anthropologically restored, the philosophy of language becomes a praeambula fidei that enables dialogue with theology, especially, as we shall see, with the theology of the body and the ecclesiology of the sign.

2. Hermeneutic Keys to Language as a Theme in Edith Stein's Philosophy

We find in Edith Stein's biography some aspects that facilitate understanding her approaches to language. Stein was a translator of philosophical works[5], an interpreter of philosophical traditions, and a professor of literature (in Speyer) thanks to her academic training in German philology, and, as a philosopher, her work cannot be understood without attention to the theme of the person. This extremely interesting background, which we cannot unpack here with the depth it would require, provides an important hermeneutical key to understanding some aspects of Stein's complex thinking on language (Borden Sharkey 2023, p. 98).

From the historical–philosophical point of view, as is well known, the three main sources from which Steinian thought draws are Husserlian phenomenology, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, and the mysticism of Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and Pseudo-Dionysius. More precisely, Husserl's first logical investigation (Husserl 1901, pp. 23–104) "Expression and signification", in which he deals with the concept of sign as sign (as an indicative function) and as expression (with significant function, besides indicative), offers Stein the basic conceptual framework in her doctoral thesis on empathy to refute the theory of Theodor Lipps' *Einfühlung*, especially his identification of symbol and expression. It is precisely the phenomenon of expression, phenomenologically described and understood, which will allow us to understand the basis of her philosophy of language. On the other hand, turning to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, the fourth question of *De veritate*, "The Word", stands out as relevant here. In Stein's summary of this question in her German translation of Aquinas' work, she especially emphasizes the distinction between the word of the heart, the inner word, and the outer word, explained by analogy with the divine essence, the ideas and the Creation or the Incarnate Word (Ramos Gómez 2018, p. 72 ss.). Finally, Teresian, Sanjuanist, and Pseudodionysian mysticism are for her a motivation and an inspiration regarding the reflection on the language of God. We will examine soon the relevance of these three ideas that we have mentioned in relation to each of the main sources from which the Steinian philosophy of language is born.

3. Essential Keys of Edith Stein's Phenomenology of Language Relevant for the Dialogue with Theology

There are three keys that allow us to understand Stein's phenomenology of language: her analysis of the phenomenon of expression (*Ausdrücksphänomen*), which allows us to base a philosophy of language in philosophical anthropology; the hermeneutic value that can be discovered in her conception of empathy (*Einfühlung*); and her openness to God.

3.1. In Contrast to the Abstract Character of Analytical Philosophy, a Phenomenology of Language Based on Anthropology. The Phenomenon of Expression

As has been said elsewhere (Ramos Gómez 2022)[6], for Stein, between bodily expression and linguistics there is a relationship of analogy, because both represent two dimensions of language. In other words, it could be said that for Stein, language is expression and the phenomenon of expression is language. For her, in the phenomenon of expression:

> [Self-translation:] The gaze goes through it towards what it expresses and rests on it, just as in word comprehension, the spoken sound or the image of the word does not stand before the intellectual gaze as a fully constituted independent objectuality, but only constitutes the bridge, through which the apprehending consciousness tends towards its own end, which is the meaning. Likewise, the look, the expression of the face, the features of the face "signify" what they "express", and direct the gaze towards their "meaning", while they themselves become objects only if the attention is turned away from its "natural direction".[7]

But as every analogy implies a certain relation of similarity and a certain relation of dissimilarity, for Stein it is important to delve into the similarities and differences that are found between bodily expression (facial, gestural) and linguistic expression (through word). A first similarity that Stein finds between both dimensions of expression is that both communicate meaning by themselves. While, in facial expression, my cousin's cheerful face means what it expresses, that my cousin is happy, when I hear a sentence, for example, "the pen is on the floor", I am led directly to the meaning of the sentence, without needing to dwell either on the words themselves, or on the syntactic units that make up the utterance, or on the words with their letters. A second similarity is the fact that both phenomena of expression present a universal character and an individual character. Although my cousin's joy is "my cousin's joy" when I see it, there is something common that I also see when I look at other people who are rejoicing, just as every word, in its concreteness, refers to a universal meaning, even when it wants to express meanings referring to singular beings.

Thus, "in the word on which he leaves his imprint, the individual spirit gives expression to what he grasps in an intuition, as he grasps it, but he gives it a universal expression that arises from his spiritual sphere and can be carried into other spiritual spheres" (Stein 2014, p. 80)[8]. The third similarity that Stein identifies is the relationship of correspondence that occurs, on the one hand, between the inner and the outer life of the soul in bodily expression, thus Stein speaks of the iconic character of this type of expressive phenomena, and, on the other hand, between the meaning and the object, in linguistic expression.

Similarly, Stein finds three differences between both phenomena of expression. The meaning and the object to which it refers are not one and the same thing in the word, whereas, in bodily expression, the joy expressed cannot be separated from the subject in which I see it. In this line, the individual character of the word is different from the individual character of the object to which it refers, while there is a correspondence between the individuality of the mimic expression and that of the spirit that is expressed in it. The third and last difference is found in the fact that through gestures and the bearing of the body, that is, through something that we perceive through the senses, the emotional life that it embodies is made accessible to us, whereas, in linguistic expression, it is the meaning, which we do not "see" with the senses, which makes present to us something that can be perceived or comprehended.

The iconic character of the phenomena of expression to which we referred earlier is rooted in the unity that exists in the person between the bodily and the spiritual, for which reason it only makes sense to speak of phenomena of expression in relation to the spiritual life of the self, and not of beings that lack inner life (such as animals[9], plants, or inert beings). Although the former can present vital sensations and feelings, they do not have spiritual feelings. If we say of them that they "express" something, we can only say it in an improper sense. Indeed, the unity of experience and expression seen in spiritual beings reveals the radical distinction that exists between the spiritual life and the sensitive life, as well as the different ways in which both are made accessible to me, which is the most faithful testimony of the two fundamental laws that govern human psychic life: psychic causality and motivation. The first conditions the person by means of his or her vital feelings and vital energy, dependent on his physical, biological, and psychic features. The second is the protagonist of the life of the spirit, whose peculiarity is intentionality, the key to rational life.

Considering the particular legitimacy of the spiritual life of the self, Stein says, "to the extent that I know more deeply the foundations of the motivation of a person's experience, the more I will be able to represent with credibility the particular features of that experience" (Stein 2004a, p. 162)[10]. This is extremely important, for when I perceive my cousin's happy face, I may not know why she is happy. Only if I know how to answer the question "why" she rejoices and "how" she rejoices (Stein 2005, p. 41), that is, if I know the foundations that motivate her joy, will I be able to say that I understand her experience. But it is also necessary to take into account the freedom of the person whose experience is expressed in it. Trust and openness are necessary to make oneself known in the expression of oneself. Trust and openness are the fruit of the self-giving that makes love possible. For this reason, "love and knowledge are so closely united in the relationship between persons" (Stein 2005, p. 41)[11]. Only by taking this into account can one be saved from the deceptions to which the interpretation of the other's language can give rise.

With this, we have reached an important finding. The phenomenon of expression is, in Stein's work, of great richness. If analytical philosophy is often a rationalistic and impersonal reflection on language and expression, often disembodied from the person, in Edith Stein, it is possible to find a philosophy of language based on anthropology. There is a link between language and person, derived from the link that exists between spirit and body, so that the body expresses the spiritual life of the person (Tommasi 2016, p. 249 et seq.)[12]. Therefore, the phenomenon of expression is contemplated "without cuts".

From the point of view of dialogue with theology, the value of the phenomenology of language as *praeambula fidei* is significant. If the spiritual life of other people is given

to me through expression, it is possible that others may place before my eyes values (also disvalues!) of which I may not have been aware. Stein herself, in Göttingen, meets believing philosophers who allow her to see de facto intellectuals for whom faith is not something strange that has nothing to do with them. And when she sees a lady going to a Catholic church in Freiburg to pray, carrying her shopping, she is thereby expressing a different mode of relationship to God than Stein knew as a Jew (Stein 1986, p. 401).

That Stein maintains a realist stance regarding her phenomenology of language is evident in several of her writings. Propositional sentences, understood as possibilities of expression, have their base in states of affairs (*Sachverhalte*), so that human language with its sounds and written characters is posterior to this reality (Stein 2002, pp. 17–18; 2006, p. 25). Likewise, the objectivity of the language of words is not obscured by the fact that they also express the person from whom they come. For Stein, the objective word is one that has detached itself from the person from whom it comes, "becoming independent", unlike "individual" words that are preserved as the personal property of the person who created them or as a gift received from another person. While with objective words a language is formed, "with 'individual' words it is the personal vocabulary available to the individual" (Stein 2014, p. 80)[13]. Hence, from the point of view of theological dialogue, it can be understood why Nathanael (Jn 1:47–50), or Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:16) understood words of the Lord in which the important thing was not the objective or universal meaning, but the particular meaning, which only they and the Lord knew—a meaning of words that deeply touched their hearts.

But if it is human beings who create the words that have come to be incorporated into a language, "meaningful structures are not created but merely re-created or copied [*nach-bilden*] by human beings" (Stein 2002, p. 379; 2006, p. 322)[14]. Thus, the following text, from the late 1930s, could be Edith Stein's response to Carnap's claim that "metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability":

> For example, a melody is not a mere sequence of sounds sensorially experienced. We hear in it the singing of a human soul—in jubilation or mourning, in a placid or angry mood. We understand the "language" of this melody. It touches and moves our soul; we meet in it a life that is akin to our own.
>
> This does not necessarily mean that singers or musicians experience inwardly what their songs or instruments express. Not even creative artists necessarily express their personal experiences. Their gift of empathy may inspire or demand this particular kind of expression, and they may then be induced to reproduce this empathetic experience in their work. And we understand this expression even without paying attention to the artist whose mediatorship has made it possible for us to gain access to it. In this way we may also understand and appreciate the meaning of a poem without paying attention to the personal characteristics of the handwriting of the poet. What the sequence of the words of a poem or the sequence of the sounds of a melody (both supported and intensified by the "corresponding" sounds of "recitation" or "recital") express is a *meaningful structure* [*Sinngebilde*] of a special kind—a structure which peremptorily demands to gain life in a human soul, and the souls of both the artist and the listener help bring about this kind of "actualization". (Stein 2002, p. 379; 2006, p. 322)[15]

In conclusion, human beings may create the words, but the sense, or the meaning they express, is not created. And the objectivity of this meaning is attested especially by the fact that "nonsense gives evidence of the fact that meaningful structures are subject to stringent formal laws" (Stein 2002, p. 330; 2006, p. 284)[16].

3.2. Facing the Incommensurability of Philosophical Discourses: A Philosophy of Language That Founds a Hermeneutics Open to Tradition. The Phenomenon of Empathy

Undoubtedly, as we have been exploring the implications of the phenomenon of expression, we have been led gradually to the question of how we can know it. It is

therefore necessary to speak of empathy as a sui generis act that allows us to become aware of what another person is experiencing, that is to say, that makes it possible to grasp the experience of another's consciousness (Stein 1989, p. 11; 2008c, p. 20) as it is expressed by their bodies and as sensibly perceived by us.

However, the scope of empathy is not limited to the mutual knowledge of different people who are present here and now in the flesh, face to face. Through empathy, I can access the experiences of fictional characters when I read a novel and I cry or I become outraged with others. And, importantly, I can grasp the personality of the author or the spirit of an era. Why? Because human works express the spirit of their creator, for "the spirit gives expression to what it grasps in the way it grasps it, and precisely in so doing that expression becomes an expression of itself" (Stein 2014, p. 75)[17]. Art, literature, architecture, music, etc., are for Stein, the source of history as a science, because they allow us to access the past and to get to know it. Certainly, it is true for the author that when contemplating a literary work, for example, a 16th-century poem, I can consider it in isolation, trying to understand the words, but to fully understand it, I must be able to grasp what gives unity of meaning to that work, grasping the human life from which it arises, the spiritual center from which it is born. And this is possible because "in the same way that it is the means of expression that allow the embodiment of spiritual individuality, it is the phenomena of expression that provide the researcher with access to spiritual realities" (Stein 2004a, p. 214)[18].

On this point, is it not possible to build a bridge with systematic theology when it speaks of creation as the work of a Creator, of the possibility of knowing the One (with a capital letter), from whom comes the intelligible order and the beauty that is expressed in what we see? And, on the other hand, contemplating a Hindu temple and a Catholic church, is it not possible to enter into the history and typology of religions and contrast different visions of the world and of the relationship with Transcendences that are artistically expressed in different ways?

It is obvious that these possibilities offer suggestive paths of exploration in which the phenomenology of language knocks at the door of theology for a good evening of discussion. In our context, however, we want to pay attention to an aspect in which empathy has de iure a special relevance, although our author has not developed it theoretically, but de facto. We refer here to the hermeneutic value of empathy.

We can understand better what we mean if we take into account the philosophical diagnosis, issued by the philosophers Paul Ricoeur and Alasdair MacIntyre, of our times. In the field of ethics, MacIntyre seeks to solve the problem of the "incomensurability" (MacIntyre 2007, p. 8) of current moral discourses by rescuing virtue through a genealogy of moral concepts that goes back to Antiquity and the Middle Ages, because by identifying the lost morality of the past we will be able to rid ourselves of current emotivism, the basis of the "simulacra of morality" (MacIntyre 2007, p. 2) in which we live today. For Ricoeur's part, in order to solve the "conflict of interpretations", he tried to resituate the debate between linguistic structuralism and hermeneutics on an ontological level and to avoid the solipsism of modern philosophy on the basis of the notion of the "world of the text" (Ricoeur 1978, p. 460), ultimately affirming the relation of language with reality rather than with the creative subject of the text. Evidently, this is due to Ricoeur's (2004, p. 219) exploration of hermeneutics with the phenomenological method in its Heideggerian variant, and therefore with a markedly anthropological foundation.

We want to place Edith Stein next to these proposals of 'intellectual or philosophical mediation' between different currents of thought, which, because of a relativistic or skeptical background of knowledge, seem to condemn the attempts of dialogue to the empty space between two *ghettos*. Indeed, her later philosophy developed since her conversion to the Catholic Church on 1 January 1922 seeks dialogue and encounter between the modern, phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl and the medieval, scholastic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (Tommasi 2002; Ales Bello 2018), in order to avoid the pitfall of "conflict of interpretations" or "incomensurability" (using Ricoeur's and MacIntyre's expressions).

Therefore, when we said above that for Stein empathy has a de facto hermeneutic value, we were referring precisely to its guiding function in interpreting texts that differ from one century to the next, in order to grasp the expression of the intellectual universes from which they are born and to make possible the sought-after encounter of the two 'logos' that are at the base of them. A text that exemplarily demonstrates what we have just said is the following, where Stein puts into the mouth of Thomas Aquinas the following words addressed to Husserl:

> [Thomas.] Neither you nor I ever had any doubts about the *power of ratio*. Your first great achievement was tracking down skepticism in all its modern disguises and bringing it firmly to earth. But for you *ratio* was never more than *natural reason* while for me the distinction between natural and *supernatural reason* arises at this point. (Stein 2000a, p. 9; 2014, p. 95)[19]

Evidently, together with the hermeneutic value of empathy, there is the horizon of the current of the philosophia perennis that runs through history, immutable in its mutability of methods and systems, but constantly renewing itself. For Stein, not everything new is "good", nor everything old is "bad". Hence, a dialogue between the philosophical tradition and a current philosophical system is possible. And this is why, in opposition to the idea of sola Scriptura, the idea of a "living Tradition of the Church" guarded by a "Magisterium of the Church" fits well in her philosophical worldview. This is even more the case if what others tell me about myself allows me to correct my self-knowledge or my perception of things, thereby helping me to realistically get out of a solipsistic vision that isolates me from a world in which the only valid thing is my own vision of reality.

3.3. Facing Sentence No. 7 of L. Wittgenstein's "Tractatus": A Phenomenology of Language Open to God

If a work is an expression of its author, then, as we hinted above, the idea of a creation that expresses a Creator that proclaims his majesty, that extols His power, or that whispers His wisdom, is not strange. In short, we have a creation that speaks of Him. Evidently, as Stein says, the language with which, especially from its material elements, speaks of its Author, is ineffable, so that, "it cannot be expressed in words nor can its meaning be conceptually grasped" (Stein 2002, p. 248; 2006, p. 216),[20] but we can intuit it in the waves of the sea, the roar of the storm or the light breeze, in the cosmos that exists in spite of the apparent chaos.

But if this mysterious language of creation about its Creator is ineffable, this does not mean that human beings, who are also fully His work, because we share a spiritual nature with the angels, cannot put into words their experience of God, His action in the world and in people, their way of being[21]. Yet, obviously, it is necessary to have experience of God in order to understand the language of God, because "our understanding of language develops along with our experience and our intellectual heritage" (Stein 2007, p. 69)[22]. When what has been experienced exceeds any previous experience, then we resort to images taken from sensible experience to express the ineffable:

> It is natural for human language to transfer the names of sensible things and events to the spiritual: we speak of "overflowing" joy, "dark" fate, "blazing" anger. The more natural our language and the more concrete our thinking, the more vividly we feel these connections.

> Now, how is it possible for us, starting with the things of experience, to reach something lying beyond all experience? [...] When Moses calls God a consuming fire, his designation neither rests on a deduction of natural reasoning nor intends to prompt such a process. He "experienced" God, stood before him, was seized by him. And only through this image could he convey what he then experienced. He who "knows" God will understand. (Stein 2000b, p. 158)[23]

It is not surprising that this should happen. Why? Because if it happens in the order of profane things, it happens even more in the order of divine things. Anyone who attends a singing class to learn the art experiences the explanations of vocal technique, diaphragmatic breathing, the air column, and the vocal cords, ultimately noticing how the teacher uses frequent metaphors so that the beginners can experience what it means to raise the soft palate or place the voice. Often, he or she should end the class by pointing out the need to perform exercises to find out for themselves what it means when these things "happen".

For this reason, Stein, a convert, observes that even the atheist has an "experience" of God, because, in order to deny Him, he gives a meaning to that word. Perhaps such experience was given to the atheist by his family or school context in which he heard about God. Maybe even as a child he believed in Him, but he assumed it without real conviction (Stein 2007, p. 69), as a sponge absorbs what is in its environment. But when crises come, what had no roots and had not penetrated to the depths disappears.

Stein alludes to three common ways of speaking of God (Stein 2007, p. 70), depending on the addressees: natural theology or theodicy, proclamation of faith, and symbolic theology. Curiously, all the addressees are related to faith. We do not find among them those who confess to be atheists, agnostics, or unbelievers. She, who may well have considered herself at one stage of her life to be in this group, and who represents an exemplification of the intellectual discourse of her time, seems to indicate surreptitiously that "to learn to see the true Christ, the modern European needs a new attitude towards the supernatural" (Stein 2003, p. 1013)[24]. In other words, it is necessary to look at the addressee in his personal reality in order to read between the lines and connect with what the heart is asking for in order to speak as he needs. Does this not connect with the anthropological turn of the Second Vatican Council as expressed especially in *Gaudium et spes* (Second Vatican Council 1965, n. 2)?

> This Second Vatican Council, having probed more profoundly into the mystery of the Church, now addresses itself without hesitation, not only to the sons of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity. For the council yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today.

4. Phenomenology of Language, Theology of the Body, and Ecclesiology of the Sign

Let us here highlight two themes on which the Steinian phenomenology of language can enter into a fruitful dialogue with theology. We refer to the theology of the body and to what we will call the ecclesiology of the sign.

Concerning the former, we will begin by saying that, as opposed to the "thou shalt not make any graven image" that we read in the Book of Exodus, which forbade the representation of God in images, the Incarnation of the Word, the union of God with human flesh, elevates man, whose knowledge begins with the senses and justifies the artistic representation of the divine. But this clarification, which became evident at the VII Council of Nicaea in 787, is not an isolated consequence of the mystery of the Incarnation. As John Paul II said (John Paul II 1980):

> The fact that theology also considers the body should not astonish or surprise anyone who is aware of the mystery and reality of the Incarnation. Theology is that science whose subject is divinity. Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology through the main door.

The reflections of John Paul II that led him to base his theology of the body as a response to the signs of the times on marriage and the family make it clear that "the human body is not only the field of reactions of a sexual nature, but is, at the same time, the means of expression of the whole man, of the person, who reveals himself through the 'language of the body'" (John Paul II 1984).[25] With these words, the connection between Edith Stein's phenomenology of language that we have outlined here and the Polish pope's theology of the body, which he develops in the field of the theology of marriage and the

family to illuminate the understanding of the sacrament from an adequate anthropology, becomes evident.

If we extrapolate the vision of the body with the language of the person to the field of interpersonal relationships in general, not only to the male–female relationship, what could we say? What pitfalls of interpersonal communication do we discover in our time? The main one is that we have replaced the real world with the virtual world, preferring to look at our cell phone to see if we have received a WhatsApp notification over looking at the face of the person who is talking to us at that very moment (Sánchez Martínez 2023, p. 87), who with just his or her countenance may be silently shouting at me. If in Stein's time, phenomenology was born as a response to idealism and relativism in order to "turn to the things themselves" and to learn to look at them, today we are faced with the need to recover the same slogan but to react to the easy temptation to evade in the virtuality of both ephemeral and abundant social relations of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc. Stein, then, brings us a phenomenology of language that teaches us to look at things, to look at faces, to look at the body and see the person in it, and with it, she opens the door to "direct our gaze to the 'things of heaven'" (Pope Benedict XVI 2011).

Regarding the second topic, there is a connection between the Steinian phenomenology of language and the theology derived from the Second Vatican Council that we can recognize from the reflection on the following text by Izquierdo Urbina (2002, pp. 544–45, my translation):

> The Church is in fact presented as a sign of God's revelation and salvation, which prepares the way to faith in Christ. The reasons for believing presented by the Church lead to an encounter with Christ through incorporation into a communion of faith, into a community of believers where Christ is given in word and sacrament. That community is the Church herself. This way of approaching the significance of the Church today depends on the ecclesiological perspectives opened up by Vatican II.

Urbina underlines in this text two essential ideas that will be expressed by means of two words: sign and community. It is affirmed, in effect, that the Church is a sign and that the Church is a community. A third idea comes to explain the cause of this way of understanding the Church, namely, the ecclesiology proposed by the Second Vatican Council. The first idea is the one that is relevant in our current context.

A sign is, in the common theory of language, something that refers to something else beyond itself. Thus, words are signs of the concepts and realities to which they refer. Traffic signs are signs of prohibition, permission, or indication for the pedestrian or for the driver. What does it mean, then, for the Church to be a "sign"? It is, in essence, to be a kind of St. John the Baptist: to point to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, and whose sandals are not worthy to be untied (Jn 1:27, 29). To be "a sign of God's revelation and salvation" is to refer to God's self-manifestation and self-donation in Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures that derive from it, and to lead to God's salvation. Izquierdo also warns that, being a sign, it "prepares the way to faith in Christ". This may not be understandable in such an intuitive way. In fact, a simple question inevitably arises: how can the Church, which can only be recognized as such through faith, prepare the way to faith? But the apparent paradox becomes blurred when we consider a simple fact: if the Church is all the baptized, then we all prepare the way to faith for those who do not know Christ. All of us. Anyone who, because of his or her baptismal condition, vibrates with the apostolic restlessness of filling the Heart of Christ, bringing Christ to the hearts that, without knowing it, yearn for Him and silently cry out for Him. Sometimes, more often than it seems, it is the contact between people that makes it possible to realize that there is an inner emptiness that is crying out for fulfillment.

Indeed, until you use a telescope[26] you cannot see more stars than you see with your eyes alone. But if you do not have a telescope, seeing other people's telescopes encourages you to wish you had one too. Of course, this telescope of faith is not something one buys on sale, nor by investing shares in a bank, nor by working "overtime". It is very valuable.

Very expensive. But it can only be received as a gift. However, mysteriously, the one who gives it, who is truly the one who can give it, has wanted to make use of others who have it, but cannot give it, to arouse in those who do not have it, the desire to have it.

This is what happened to Stein when she met her colleagues from Göttingen, who were a sign of something new for her. They expressed with their life, their bearing, and their words something else. They referred to Someone beyond themselves. It was faith that transformed her understanding of the task of philosophy, which, from then on, would consist precisely in being a sign of the One who gave her the most precious gift she could receive in this life. The new task of philosophy would not be the one that Schlick mentioned in the article that we brought up at the beginning of this work. The task is none other than that of John the Baptist: "to prepare the way for supernatural faith" (Stein 2002, p. 28; 2006, p. 35)[27].

5. Conclusions

We started from philosophy's turn to language in order to outline the possibility of a phenomenology of language in Edith Stein that provides a philosophical justification that makes dialogue with theology more possible. After reviewing biographical and intellectual aspects that enabled us to enter into language as a theme in Edith Stein's work, we discovered three elements that define her phenomenology of language: the understanding of the phenomenon of expression, which is the *Leitmotiv* of the anthropological foundation of her philosophy of language; the hermeneutic value of empathy (*Einfühlung*); and the positive answer to the question of whether it is possible to express in words something of God. These constitutive elements make possible theological dialogue through the connection with the theology of the body of John Paul II and the ecclesiology of the sign of the Second Vatican Council, as elaborated by César Urbina.

Notes

1   This paper finds its motivation and structure in the communication presented by the author at the 6th International Conference of the IASPES "Edith Stein's Legacy to the World" held via live stream in Mexico, 12–15 October 2021 and organized by the IASPES, the Centro de Investigación Social Avanzada, (CISAV, Querétaro, Mexico); the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla (UPAEP, Puebla, Mexico); the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (UASLP, San Luis Potosí, Mexico); and the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo (UMSNH, Morelia, Mexico). The communication, which was not published, was delivered on Wednesday, 13 October. However, the written development presented here is outlined by focusing attention on what is relevant for dialogue with theology and expanding the content of several sections. I thank Prof. Dr. Antonio Calcagno (King's University College at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada) for his valuable help in the final revision of the English text.

2   The German original reads as follows: "Die Einsicht in das Wesen des Logischen selber" (Schlick 1930, p. 6).

3   In German: "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen" (Wittgenstein 2009, p. 136).

4   The German text reads as follows: "Metaphysiker sind Musiker ohne musikalische Fähigkeit" (Carnap 1931, p. 240).

5   Among other works, she translated Thomas Aquinas' *De veritate* (Stein 2008a, 2008b) and John Henry Newman's *The idea of University* and other autobiographical writings (Stein 2001, 2004b).

6   In this section, we follow closely the expositions previously presented in another article (Ramos Gómez 2022).

7   In German: "Der Blick geht durch sie hindurch auf das, was sie ausdrückt, und ruht auf ihm, wie im Wortverstehen der gesprochene Laut oder das Wortbild nicht als voll konstituierte selbständige Gegenständlichkeit vor dem geistigen Blick steht, sondern nur die Brücke bildet, über die das auffassende Bewußtsein seinem eigentlichen Ziel, der Bedeutung, zustrebt. Auch der Blick, die Miene, die Gesichtszüge 'bedeuten' das, was sie 'ausdrücken', und lenken den Blick auf ihren "Sinn" hin, während sie selbst nur bei einer Ablenkung der Aufmerksamkeit von ihrer 'natürlichen Richtung' zu Gegenständen werden" (Stein 2004a, p. 159).

8   In German: "Der individuelle Geist gibt im Wort, das er prägt, dem Ausdruck, was er in einer Anschauung erfaßt, so wie er erfasst, aber er gibt ihm einen allgemeinen Ausdruck, der aus seiner geistigen Sphäre heraustritt und in andere geistige Sphären aufgenommen werden kann."

9   It is true that Stein considers that animals have a certain "inner individual life" (Stein 2002, p. 426), by virtue of their animal soul. But the phenomena of expression in this case are of a completely different nature, since the animal soul is not spiritual and lacks the freedom that characterizes spiritual beings.

10 Translation from German is our own: "In je reicherem Maße mir die Motivationsgrundlagen für das Erleben einer Person bekannt sind, desto mehr Einzelzüge dieses Erlebens kann ich mir in glaubwürdiger Weise vergegenwärtigen."

11 English translation is our own.

12 This is why, among other things, as Tommasi says, Stein's phenomenology is realistic, because of the connection between pure self and real self.

13 Translation from German is our own: "[...] aus 'individuellen' Worten der persönliche Sprachschatz, über den der Einzelne verfügt".

14 In German: "[Die kurze Überlegung zeigt wiederum, was schon in anderem Zusammenhang klar wurde]: daß Sinngebilde nicht von Menschen geschaffen, sondern nur nachgebildet werden".

15 In German: "Eine Melodie ist für uns keine bloße Folge von Tönen, die wir sinnlich vernehmen. Es singt daraus eine Menschenseele, jubelnd oder klagend, schmeichelnd oder grollend. Wir verstehen ihre 'Sprache', sie rührt an die Seele und bringt sie in Bewegung. Es ist eine Begegnung mit einem uns verwandten Leben. Es ist nicht gesagt, daß in dem Sänger oder Geiger das vorgeht, was sein Gesang oder Spiel ausdrückt. Nicht einmal der schaffende Künstler muß Selbsterlebtes zum Ausdruck gebracht haben. Sie können sich in etwas 'einleben', was nach diesem Ausdruck verlangt, und ihm zum Ausdruck verhelfen; und dieses Etwas verstehen wir, ohne daß wir den Künstler, der uns den Zugang vermittelt, dabei beachten müssen. So wie wir den Sinn eines Gedichtes erfassen und uns daran freuen können, ohne der Handschrift, in der es geschrieben ist, und dem, was Persönliches aus ihr spricht, Beachtung zu schenken. Was die Wortfolge des Gedichts, die Tonfolge der Melodie zum Ausdruck bringt (beide beim 'Vortrag' durch 'entsprechende' Klänge unterstützt), ist ein Sinngebilde besonderer Art: es verlangt danach, in einer Seele Leben zu gewinnen, und die Seele des Künstlers wie des Hörers hilft ihm zu dieser 'Verwirklichung'."

16 In German: "Der 'Unsinn' legt Zeugnis dafür ab, daß es eine strenge Formgesetzmäßigkeit für Sinngebilde gibt".

17 Translation from German is our own: "Der Geist gibt dem, was er erfaßt, so Ausdruck, wie er erfaßt, und eben damit wird dieser Ausdruck zum Ausdruck seiner selbst."

18 Translation from German is our own: "Wie es Ausdrucksmittel sind, die die Darstellung geistiger Individualität ermöglichen, so sind es Ausdruckserscheinungen, die dem Forscher den Zugang zu den geistigen Realitäten verschaffen".

19 In German: "[Th.] An der *Kraft der ratio* haben wir beide niemals gezweifelt. Ihre erste Großtat war es, daß Sie die Skepsis in allen ihren modernen Verkleidungen aufspürten und ihr energisch zu Leibe rückten. Aber *ratio* hat Ihnen nie etwas anderes bedeutet als *natürliche Vernunft*, während für mich hier die Scheidung in natürliche und *übernatürliche Vernunft* eintritt."

20 In German: "eine Sprache, die sich nicht in Worte übersetzen läßt, deren Sinn nicht in Begriffe zu fassen ist".

21 Stein's religious phenomenology has been studied in depth by Beckmann (2003), although it remains the subject of ongoing interest by researchers, as evidenced by Haney's (2018) study, in which he pays attention to language about mystical experience.

22 Translation from German is our own: "[Es ist jedoch zu bedenken, daß] unser Sprachverständnis im Zusammenhang mit unserer Erfahrung und unserem gesamten Geistesbesitz erwächst".

23 Translation from German is our own: "Weil menschliches Erkennen mit Hilfe der Symbolzusammenhänge vom Sinnenfälligen zum Geistigen fortschreitet, darum ist es der menschlichen Sprache natürlich, die Namen von sinnenfälligen Dingen und Geschehnissen auf geistige zu übertragen: Wir sprechen von 'heller' Freude, von 'schwarzem Verhängnis', von 'loderndem Zorn'. Je naturnäher eine Sprache noch ist, je konkreter das Denken, um so lebendiger werden diese Zusammenhänge noch gefühlt. Wie aber ist es möglich, von den Dingen der Erfahrung aus zu etwas zu gelangen, was jenseits aller Erfahrung liegt? [...] Wenn Moses Gott ein verzehrendes Feuer nennt, so beruht das weder auf einem Schlußverfahren des natürlichen Denkens, noch will es dazu anregen. Er hat Gott 'erfahren', hat vor Ihm gestanden und ist von Ihm ergriffen worden. Und was er dabei erfahren hat, das kann er nicht anders wiedergeben als in diesem Bild. Wer Gott 'kennt', der wird es verstehen."

24 Own translation from the Spanish version.

25 Own translation from the Spanish version.

26 The metaphor of faith as a telescope comes from Tomás Morales.

27 The German text affirms: "Wegbereiterin des Glaubens zu sein".

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