

JUSTICE AS LANGUAGE IN A FASCIST AGE

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Abstract

We live in dark times, a time when light dominates as authority in the name of thought and perception. Light can become a paradigm of totalising subjugation. Light has become knowledge and perception. It is the human urge to dominate and subdue, which is fascism. It is a threat to our everyday life. It is a crisis of culture. It comes to life as banality of thoughtlessness. The restraint of the ego is ethics and spirituality. Every time there is a holocaust, it is the cry of man for his place under the sun. The sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of pure being. Solitary cry in the wilderness is empty, but only when it has become the object of discourse. It is in the course of speaking that we learn to be human.

Keywords: Fascism; Justice; Language and Discourse

Introduction

‘The light of the public darkens everything’ is a statement attributed to Heidegger. But was he not a fascist? Fascism is the desire to dominate and conquer the other. It could be looked at individually or collectively. The light of the public can be an unprecedented political or religious regime, historically a new system of governance that can become the burden of our times and the crisis of our century. The light of the public can be the solar light of domination and subjugation. Nothing escapes the Sun. In Western thought “the optical imperative has subjugated our approach to

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things speaker notes, and induced us to think under the guaranty of light or under the threat of its absence."¹ The tradition of "perversion of language" has always been to act "as though we were able to see the thing from all sides": "Speech no longer presents itself as speech, but sight freed from the limitations of sight. Not a way of saying, but a transcendent way of seeing. The 'idea,' at first a privileged aspect, becomes the privilege of what remains under a perspective..."² "Light becomes idea and makes of the idea the supremacy of the ideal."³ The sun is the sovereign unity of light—it is good, the Good, the superior One, that makes us respect it as the sole true site of being all that is 'above.'⁴ The hegemony of vision in our cultural paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality."⁵ Plato makes vision the measure of truth. "Is it not true," Heidegger asks, "that the Being of whatever is, is grasped by Plato as that which is beheld, as idea?"⁶ Doesn't pure looking form our relation to Being as such? Blanchot asks, "Is objectifying thinking and speaking a particular kind of thinking, or does all thinking as thinking, all speaking as speaking, necessarily have to be objectifying?"⁷ Blanchot spoke of the "lifelong fascination with the complicity of speech and violence."⁸ Levinas, Blanchot, Heidegger and Derrida also argue that the entire history of philosophy follows the "violence of light." With "The Violence of Light" (*Violence de la lumière*), Derrida poses the question, how is it possible to speak of our encounter with the other without the metaphors of light. "To see and to know, to have and to will, unfold only within the oppressive and luminous identity of the same," and if "Everything given to me within light appears as given to myself by myself," and "if there is no history, except through language," how will we ever "dominate" light, Derrida asks. "What language will ever escape it?" To see, perhaps, is to forget to speak; and to speak is to draw from the depths of speech an inexhaustible forgetfulness."⁹

¹Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, 28.

²Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 28-9.

³Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 28-9.

⁴Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 160.

⁵Blanchot, David Michael, "Introduction," *Sites of Vision*, 44.

⁶M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, 143.

⁷Blanchot quoted in M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, Ed. William McNeill, Cambridge: University Press, 1998, 54.

⁸Maurice Blanchot, *The Refusal of Philosophy*, Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, 22.

⁹Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 29.

“We see this Night,” as Hegel profoundly says, ‘when we look a human being in the eye: a Night which turns terrifying, the Night of the World that rises up before us...’ This passage, which one would like to have seen Sartre choose as the epigraph for his chapter on the gaze, dominates, from a commanding height, the whole of contemporary anthropology. “The birth of man is, in Hegel, the death of nature. Animal desire whether hunger, thirst, or sex sates itself on natural creatures.”¹⁰ The violence of vision is not an absolute darkness, blindness, or an inability to see, but vision that is blindness and inability to stop seeing, both at the same time. Despite the weakness of the eye, it is not possible to gaze into nothingness, either. “If seeing was fire, I required the plenitude of fire, and if seeing would infect me with madness, I madly wanted that madness.”¹¹ The idealist metaphysics of *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived) comes to an end with the fire of the sun.

The Anti-Oedipus

The eye of solar light that dominates by the eros of power and domination burns to death men and women. The great enemy of man is man himself—*homo hominis lupus*. It is not animality that is preying over man; the power to dominate is even posited in the divine and approved to kill and massacre. It today is called fascism. The Indian narrative of Aswametha yagam is nothing but letting loose the horse of the ego’s eros, whoever obstructs war is declared an enemy. Sacrificing all and every one impeding my way. Historically the enlightenment period of *aude sapere* witnessed the worst disaster in human history in Nazism of Hitler and communism of Stalin and Mao. Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* is a philosophical inquiry into the Holocaust that seeks to understand the significance and meaning of the Holocaust, independent from the empirical fact of its occurrence.

The holocaust, the absolute event of history, which is a date in history that utter-burn where all history took fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up, where the gift, which knows nothing of forgiveness or of consent, shattered without giving place to anything that can be affirmed, that can be denied. How can thought be made the keeper of the holocaust where all was lost?¹²

¹⁰Bataille’s text was first published in the Cahiers du Sud, no. 286, in the latter half of 1947.

¹¹Blanchot, *La folie du jour*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1973 (2002), p.23-4

¹²Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 47.

Holocaust is marked by

the violent absence of meaning where all was lost, including guardian thought. Not happen, not only because there is no I to undergo the experience, but because (and this is exactly what presupposition means), since the disaster always takes place after having taken place, there cannot possibly be any experience of it.¹³

The Nazi history is a macro event, but it happens everywhere in its small levels.

Michel Foucault wrote in the preface to the *Anti-Oedipus*,

The major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism (whereas *Anti-Oedipus'* opposition to the others is more of a tactical engagement). And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively – but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. I would say that *Anti-Oedipus* (may its authors forgive me) is a book of ethics.¹⁴

How do we get rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behaviour? This art of living counter to all forms of fascism. Fascism creeps into religions as well. As Jan Patočka rightly points out,

Religion is not the sacred, nor does it arise directly from the experience of sacral orgies and rites; rather, it is where the sacred qua demonic is explicitly overcome. Sacral experiences pass over (to the) religious as soon as there is an attempt to introduce responsibility into the sacred or to regulate the sacred thereby.¹⁵

The demoniac ecstasy can pretend to be freedom and at times it does, overcoming this orgiastic sacredness. It is precisely then that it is seen as demonic. The sacred can either become irresponsible or responsible. The sacred in itself does not have an inherent relation to responsibility. Jesus was killed by this demoniac and is justified by the religious leader. “Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (Jn 11:49-50). So many are killed as scapegoats of religious sacrifice in the history with mimetic rivalry as willed by God. This crisis of religions is very true of Christianity. It is

¹³Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster*, 28.

¹⁴Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia*, Copyright 1983 by the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1983, xii.

¹⁵Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd, Chicago: Open Court, 1996, 101.

with Constantine Christianity got freedom from being a persecuted religion. But he did not enthrone Christ as the God of the empire, instead he changed the name of the God of the empire. The Sun remained the God and the empire and Caesar remained incarnation of Sun. He only changed the name and continued to face the East. He is said to have got a vision which he interpreted as revelation on the Milvian bridge. "*In hoc signo vinces*" ('in this sign, you shall conquer'). He is the originator of the crusades. Roman domination and colonization followed through the centuries. What is the way out of this basic tendency in man to dominate and subjugate the other? The Western thought was basically Platonic, which nothing but a solar perspective was.

Writing of the Disaster

We are living in a disastrous time. Disaster means being separated from the star. It means the decline which characterizes disorientation when the link with fortune from on high is cut. It is the heedless unlimited; it cannot be measured in terms of failure—all gods and men returned to absence. All prophets have prophesied only for messianic time. Who will act for him faithfully, waiting on him depends on you and me. Waiting is an obligation. Disasters and the human tragedies have to be written and narrated. Sarah Kofman wrote,

If no story is possible after Auschwitz, there remains, nonetheless, a duty to speak, to speak endlessly for those who could not speak because to the very end they wanted to safeguard true speech against betrayal. To speak in order to witness. But how? How can testimony escape the idyllic law of the story? How can one speak the unimaginable?¹⁶

Derrida asserts that literature serves as real testimony. "It is a fiction of testimony more than a testimony in which the witness swears to tell the truth... without the *possibility* of this fiction... no truthful testimony would be possible..."¹⁷ The abject dispossession suffered by the deportees signifies the indestructibility of alterity, its absolute character, by establishing the possibility of a new kind of the possibility of a new ethics. Of a new humanism. Blanchot attests being Jewish: "What we owe Jewish monotheism is not the revelation of the one God, but the revelation of speech as the place where men hold themselves in relation with what excludes all relation: the

¹⁶ Sarah Kofman, *Smothered Words*, trans. Madeleine Dobie, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998, 36.

¹⁷Derrida, *Demeure*, 71-2. *The Instant of My Death / Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, 71-2.

infinitely distant, the absolutely foreign.”¹⁸ This humanism will testify to itself through what is most distant from language. It will not accord with the logos of a definition: this humanism is instead a cry:

cry of need or of protest, cry without words and without silence, an ignoble cry or, if need be, the written cry, graffiti on the walls. It may be that, as one likes to declare, man is passing... He is. He has even always already passed away, inasmuch as he always been adapted to and appropriated by his own disappearance... So, humanism is not be repudiated: on condition that we recognize it there where it adopts its least deceptive mode; never in the zones of authority, power, or the law, not in those of order, of culture or heroic magnificence, but such as it was borne even to the point of the spasm of a cry.¹⁹

The cry of the face is language. It asks only one thing, “Don’t kill me.”

Heideggerian ontology subordinates the relation with the other to the relation with the neuter, Being, and it thus continues to exalt the will to power, whose legitimacy the other alone can unsettle, trouble good conscience. When Heidegger calls attention to the forgetting of being, veiled by the diverse realities it illuminates, a forgetting for which the philosophy developed from Socrates on would be guilty, when he deplores the orientation of the intellect towards technology, he maintains a regime of power more inhuman than mechanism (and which perhaps does not have the same source as it; it is not sure that National Socialism arises from the mechanist reification of men, and that it does not rest on peasant enrootedness and a feudal adoration of subjugated men for the masters and lords who command them. This is an existence which takes itself to natural, for whom its place in the sun, its ground, its site, orient all signification, a pagan *existing*. Being directs it building and cultivating, in the midst of a familiar landscape, on a maternal earth. Anonymous, neuter, it directs it, ethically indifferent, as a heroic freedom, foreign to all guilt with regard to the other.²⁰

The Crisis in Culture

Culture helps to create the world. This humanly created world is made up of durable, lasting, non-consumable things that occupy our attention and make our world meaningful and lasting; things such as monuments, paintings, poems. The threat to this enduring and lasting world comes from the rise of consumerism and mass society,

¹⁸Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, 127.

¹⁹Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 262

²⁰E. Levinas, *La philosophie et l'idée de l'infini*, 236-7. Alphonso Lingis is the translator of *Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity*, in *Emmanuel Levinas, Collected Philosophical Papers*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998, 52-3.

where people have excess time for leisure and entertainment, and the means to purchase this. The more society consumes cultural goods, the more it transforms culture into entertainment. Culture's central attitude toward all objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches. Hannah Arendt's little-known essay "The Crisis in Culture" says:

The totality of fabricated things is so organized that it can resist the consuming life process of the people dwelling in it, and this outlast them... Generally speaking, culture indicates that the public realm, which is rendered politically secure by men of action, offers its space of display to those things whose essence it is to appear and to be beautiful. In other words, culture indicates that art and politics, their conflicts and tensions notwithstanding, are interrelated and even mutually dependent... The common element connecting art and politics is that they both are phenomena of the public world.²¹

The crisis in culture matters. Culture is those goods that all of us come to recognise as worth preserving. Arendt tells us, following Nietzsche and Heidegger, "lost plausibility."²² Furthermore, "nihilism" is "a danger inherent in the thinking activity itself," for, as Arendt witnessed first-hand in Germany, the relentlessly dissolving quest for meaning "can at any moment turn against itself, produce a reversal of the old values, and declare these contraries to be 'new values.'"²³

The Banality of Evil

H. Arendt who wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem* after witnessing the trial in Jerusalem coined this term "the banality of evil" inheriting from St Augustin's "*privatio boni*." She wrote, the man who was responsible for the killing of six million Jews was not a monster, but an ordinary human being who was simply 'thoughtless.' The capability to judge between good and evil "is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty of everybody; by the same token, the inability to think is not the "prerogative" of those many who lack brain-power, but the ever present possibility for everybody – to shun that intercourse with oneself whose possibility and importance Socrates first discovered."²⁴ This thoughtlessness

²¹ Introduction to "The Crisis in Culture" by Hannah Arendt. <https://youtu.be/tvR7yrrod0A>.

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, 10, 11.

²³ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, 176.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken, 2003, 187.

crept in to the general public of the German nation. A thoughtless generation where the demise of culture was a silent but solemn death.

Arendt claims that the standard excuse, “I was just a cog in the machine,” fails to pass muster because it makes no sense in the courtroom where “a person is on trial, not a system or an ‘ism’.” The relevant question to a defendant like Eichmann is, “Why did you let yourself become and continue to be a cog, a nobody?” – which means, “Why didn’t you stop and *think* and seek to become a person with integrity?”²⁵ ... “It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never “radical,” that it is only extreme and that it possessed neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay to waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is “thought-defying,” as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing in it. That is its “banality.”²⁶ She added, “There is difference between a man who sets out to murder his old aunt and people who ...built factories to produce corpses. One thing is certain: We have to combat all impulses to mythologize the horrible.” Eichmann was no Iago and no Macbeth, and nothing would have been further from his mind than to prove a villain. “Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all...He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing.”²⁷ The Aryan is the Prometheus of mankind, says Arendt, “a conqueror [who] subjugated inferior races. He not only remained master, but he also advanced civilization: should he be forced to disappear, human culture will vanish and the world will become a desert.”²⁸

The circumstance of “total moral collapse,” where “every legal act is immoral and every moral act a crime.” In the early 1950s Hans Jonas, German-born American Jewish philosopher writes:

That nature does not care one way or the other is the true abyss. That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaninglessness of his projecting meanings, is a truly unprecedented situation... As the product of the

²⁵Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken, 2003, 31.

²⁶Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, New York: Schocken Books, 2007, 470.

²⁷Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 196, 287.

²⁸L. Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, New York: A Meridian Book, 1971, 1, 2.

indifferent, his being, too, must be indifferent... There is no point in caring for what has no sanction behind it in any creative intention.²⁹

Jonas admonished us:

The warning lights of various limits are coming on. The time for the headlong race of progress is over, not of course for guarded progress itself... The starry-eyed ethics of perfectibility has to give way to the sterner one of responsibility. The latter is not devoid of hope, but gives also fear its rightful place. Its heart is *veneration for the image of man*, turning into trembling concern for its vulnerability. Promethean immodesty... must yield to the modesty of goals that we and nature can afford.³⁰

In the total moral collapse of Nazism and Stalinism, there were no “ultimates” to which people could appeal. According to Arendt,

What recommended sight to be the guiding metaphor in philosophy—and, along with sight, intuition as the ideal of truth—was not just the ‘nobility’ of this most cognitive of our senses, but the very early notion that the philosopher’s quest for meaning was identical with the scientist’s quest for truth.³¹

As she puts it in *The Human Condition*:

If one wishes to draw a line between the modern age and the world we have come to live in, he may well find it in the difference between a science which looks upon nature from a universal standpoint and thus acquires complete mastery over her, on the one hand, and a truly “universal” science, on the other, which imports cosmic processes *into* nature even at the obvious risk of destroying her, and, with her, man’s mastership over her.³²

Language is Justice

The world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. Human Language is the means of solving issues of humans. The face is a living presence; it is expression. The face speaks: “The Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me.”³³ The face is not the mere assemblage of a nose, a forehead, eyes, “but takes on the meaning of

²⁹ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 23.

³⁰ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 130, 201-202.

³¹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, 121.

³² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 268.

³³ Emmanue Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1968, 207.

a face through the new dimension it opens up in the perception of a being ... The face is an irreducible mode in which being can present itself in its identity."³⁴ It is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse. "The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation."³⁵ "The face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation."³⁶ The face to face is already the pure form of language, it is communication as such. "A face is not just a face for me but the whole cosmos," Levinas wrote. "In the face whole cosmos reveals itself."³⁷ "Far from yielding an essence of the human or a universal moral law as a distillate of faciality, the face transcends images, remains exterior to them."³⁸

The face possesses for Levinas an ethical dimension, which is connected to language and discourse. It is precisely through its specific physical appearance that the face holds this important metaphysical position in Levinas's thinking:

Those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation. The Other is the only being that one can be tempted to kill. This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of the face. To see a face is already to hear 'You shall not kill', and to hear 'You shall not kill' is to hear 'Social justice.'³⁹

A beggar in our culture faces us and asks not money but dharma – he demands ethics. The look is questions of anxiety and fear. Language is not only a system of signs in the service of a pre-existing system. "Speech belongs to the order of morality."⁴⁰ "The face resists possession, resists my powers."⁴¹ Ethics is criticism. The face and its connection to language outline the setting out of which Levinas's thought. He posits that humans are aware of ethical obligations because of interhuman face to face relations; "the human" first

³⁴Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and Spirit," in *Difficult Freedom*, 3-10, 8/"Éthique et Esprit," in *Difficile Liberté*, 20. See further Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, chapter 2, "Singularity: The Unrepresentable Face," 50-77.

³⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201.

³⁶Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

³⁷Clemens Wailer, Alexej Jawlensky, *Köpfe, Gesichte, Meditationen*, see illustration no. 18: Published 1970: "Ein Gesicht ist für mich nicht ein Gesicht, sondern der ganze Kosmos. Im Gesicht offenbart sich der ganze Kosmos."

³⁸Edith Wyschogrod, "Corporeality and the Glory of the Infinite in the Philosophy of Levinas," in *Crossover Queries. Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy's Others*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, 37.

³⁹Levinas, , "Ethics and Spirit," 8/21.

⁴⁰Levinas, , "Ethics and Spirit," 9/21.

⁴¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197.

emerges in the face to face. Levinas holds that the human emerges out of animality as it emerges out of being and nature, taking Darwin's theory of evolution to mean that animals "struggle for life without ethics."⁴² Humans transcend this level of being in face to face relations, through expression and responsibility. In this formulation, height appears as a characteristic of humans in general, rather than of the Other: "already human egoism leaves pure nature by virtue of the human body raised upwards, committed in the direction of height. This is not its empirical illusion but its ontological production and its ineffaceable testimony."⁴³ He is seeing humanity as free from the blind force of nature. The Other solicits oneself from "above and beyond."⁴⁴ As Levinas says, "The primordial essence of expression and discourse does not reside in the information they would supply concerning an interior and hidden world... but a solicitation that concerns me by its destitution and its Height."⁴⁵

Derrida asks,

Must not this place of the Other be a human? If this is indeed the case, then the human, or at least the figure of some—in a word—divinanimality, even if it were to be felt through the human, would be the quasi-transcendental referent, the excluded, foreclosed, disavowed, tamed, and sacrificed foundation of what it founds, namely, the symbolic order, the human order, law, and justice. Is not this necessity performed secretly in Levinas...?⁴⁶

Levinas says: "The eyes break through the mask—the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks."⁴⁷ This "language of the eyes" is a metaphor, and should not be forced back into literality when the suggestion is made that the leaves of a tree do not merely shine but speak. He writes:

The work of language is entirely different [from that of things]: it consists in entering into relationship with a nudity disengaged from every form, but having meaning by itself ... signifying before we have projected light upon it ... Such a nudity is the face. The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light

⁴²Tamra Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainley, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, London: Routledge, 1988, 172.

⁴³Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 117.

⁴⁴Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 200.

⁴⁵Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 200.

⁴⁶J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass. London and New York: Routledge, 1978, 2003, 134.

⁴⁷Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66.

exterior to it. The face has turned to me—and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system.⁴⁸

They, like Levinas, argue that “Ethics must come first.”⁴⁹ The ethical command arises before thematization, but in order to hear that command, we must invite Others into relation with us, using additional themes of interpretation. To recognise the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the Lord, to him whom one approaches as ‘You’ in a dimension of height. Speech cuts across vision. “The banal fact of conversation—quits the order of violence. This banal fact is the marvel of marvels.”... “Language is justice.”⁵⁰ Levinas states that “the essence of language is goodness...the essence of language is friendship and hospitality.”⁵¹

“I see your face as seeing God’s face” (Gen 33:10). Jacob does not say to Esau, I just saw God as I see you but I see you as one sees God, which confirms the suggestion that the marvel is indeed the human presence, this Other Presence that is no less inaccessible, separate, and distant than the Invisible himself. Jacob was coming after his wrestle with the Other, wounded. Whoever sees God risks his life. Whoever encounters the Other can relate to him only through mortal violence or through the gift of speech by receiving him. The Other is not God in any conventional or traditional sense of the word. It is the human other “expressing” and “revealing” infinite transcendence. When we speak of encountering God or of God revealing Himself to us, this is an expression of our desire to respond to the other person with kindness and generosity, our sense of being called by the other and being obligated. The only way of having a relation with God is to respond to the interpellation of the human face, to be good.

⁴⁸Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 74–75.

⁴⁹Cheney and Weston advocate “an ethics-based epistemology, rather than an epistemology based ethics,” *Environmental Ethics*, 1999, 21, 118.

⁵⁰Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

⁵¹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 205.