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Methodische Neuansätze
zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte

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Parable and Vocative Word

A Dialogue with Levinas

Stephen Curkpatrick

Which would you prefer not to lose — sight or hearing? Whenever this question is asked, the prevailing preference is not to lose hearing. The reason often given for this response is an awareness of someone who is acutely isolated and reticent within family or community through the loss of hearing, while loss of sight bears testimony to surprising forms of adaptation and social connection. Anecdotal? Perhaps.

Hearing relates to the vocative — being addressed by another. Someone speaks into our existence. The source of this speaking is unique and uniquely creative within human life through decisions and actions, generating events beyond the sum of material items that constitute our surroundings. In the vocative, we are confronted, not by the world of things but by relationship(s). Information may be exchanged but an event occurs beyond what is seen as tangible. The phenomenon of being addressed by another precedes any correlation of facts as to who and what this person is by reference to a context.

In the vocative, I am addressed by another as unique as myself. I may see this person but beyond seeing is the inner event that goes unseen as heard — the event of address. I am addressed, however incidentally, by this person who is in proximity to my existence — not a hypothetical parent, partner, child, sibling, friend or colleague, but this person here at this time. I exist as an addressed-one among many who likewise have as their primary locale of meaningful existence the fact of being addressed by specific others. No one is merely constituted as a bundle of facts and statistics. The vocative establishes me as a person, which precedes any such data about my material existence within phenomena.

Being addressed by another, I am also held to account by another, which occurs at various levels of ethical response as responsibility, whether this responsibility is ultimately appropriate and accepted or not. Whatever transacts in the acceptance or rejection of responsibility occurs through the initial prism of vocative address or summons by another and volitional response. As volitional, response to another human being is particular to each. It is
therefore a response to the vocative, even if no words are uttered. By responding or ignoring I answer another who has addressed me. The vocative gives me a unique relationship to every other, who is also unique beyond generic nomination – social, racial, economic etc. – but as addressed and summoned by another to some form of personal response.

The vocative sense is hermeneutical as it invokes hearing and response – an interpretive process in which deliberative choice is called forth in the addressed, unlike nomination, which relates to collation and systemisation, and does not require a moral volitional decision unless the vocative enters. The vocative requires a relational or social response, which is therefore intrinsically ethical. Phenomena may be correlated and ordered into data that is then applied to certain use. This use in the context of others will involve interpretation that extends well beyond the first procedure, collating and ordering, and ultimately involves the vocative. Interpreted data in the social realm will become a question of: What is my response – acceptance, rejection, obedience or refusal? It will be vocative.

Vocative Encounter in Biblical Testimony

The biblical tradition of resistance to idols and satire of idolatry is central to the incursion of a word, volitional and significant for existence founded on the vocative register of human experience in eventful hearing and response. The prophetic satire of idols makes the point that these figures and images remain dumb (Jer 10:5; Bar 6:8). They cannot speak for the Absolute. The idolater cannot see that what is made an ultimate source of meaning as a medium of the Absolute is consumed for warmth and cooking. It is one with the material objects that can cease to exist. These are consumed in sustaining daily existence. There is total passivity. The idol is unable to give effect to anything of eventful consequence. Indeed, the material idol is of less value than the material that has pragmatic use (Isa 44). This is a decisive word on the status of the material \textit{utis-\-utis} human existence; it is of pragmatic use but is dumb as an idol or medium of the divine.

This satire is replicated in brief vignettes throughout biblical tradition. The stupidity of the idolater is in assuming that mere matter, what can be nominated within a generic series, could represent the Absolute. The alternative is the living and evocative, volitional and relational word of hearing and response, which cannot be represented but is given effect in eventful and responsible human life.

The vocative encounter is not primarily aesthetic – based on appearance of the more or less beautiful – but volitional, relational and ethical, even if adorned with the aesthetic, which is seen for having heard in inheriting a social language.
Lettuce and Wayne, 1977

969.1634: Year of the Seaweed by L. A. Meyers and H. E. Park

Certainly, one can compare the outcomes of similar experiments in different species. It is possible to see how these patterns may differ between species, and thereby gain insights into the biological processes involved. However, this approach is limited by the inherent variability of biological systems, and the need for more detailed, species-specific studies.

The concept of education is crucial in the context of the broader educational community. It is essential to provide high-quality and relevant educational experiences that prepare students for their future careers. 

This is evident in the current educational landscape, where there is a growing emphasis on developing skills that are transferable across various industries. Advances in technology and the rapidly evolving job market require a more flexible and adaptable educational approach. 

The urgency of education is underscored by the need to address global challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, and social equity. These pressing issues demand a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach, where education plays a pivotal role.

The concept of education is not just about imparting knowledge; it is about fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity. It is essential to provide students with opportunities to engage in meaningful learning experiences that prepare them for the complexities of the modern world.
A cosmic, world in a planetary context

that circumstances
lie in a world of purpose, where human existence and the very identity of the world depend on human action and the decisions made by individuals and societies. The world is in a state of constant change, influenced by the actions of humans and the natural world. This interplay between human and natural forces creates a dynamic and ever-evolving world.
Voicing Parables and Koans

In the context of human possibilities, a parable acts as a powerful and transformative tool. This occurs in each voicing context into their world through a story. The parable is a specific instance of the general, acting as a means of expressing profound truths and insights. The act of voicing the parable is not just about repetition or translation, but about transforming discourse into action. The parables presented here are selected from various traditions and cultures, offering perspectives on wisdom, ethics, and human potential. The parables are accompanied by reflective questions that encourage deeper thought and application. By voicing these parables, we aim to stimulate dialogue and reflection, inviting readers to engage with the wisdom they contain in their own lives.
The concept presented in this section is focused on the relationship between language and thought processes. It explores how the structure of words and sentences can influence our understanding and interpretation of information in various contexts. The discussion emphasizes the importance of context in shaping our perception and the potential for language to be a powerful tool in communication. The examples provided illustrate how subtle changes in wording can lead to different interpretations, which is crucial in understanding the complexities of human interaction and the role of language in shaping reality. Additionally, the text underscores the significance of active engagement with language to foster deeper comprehension and effective communication.