from which we can turn away, though clearly sometimes we do precisely what we cannot do, usurping a power that we do not have or, at least, should not have.

Implicit, then, in this interdiction against killing is a question of what “can” be done and so a question of capacity or power (pouvoir). We have to make sense of the following paradox: We are without power to turn away from this face, though it is true that people turn away from faces all the time. People can turn away from the face, and, when they turn away, they have sought to escape this impotence (sans pouvoir), to become a subject with power. If we say that people can turn away, have turned away, turn away all the time, we are saying that they assert a power where there is no power and so nullify the claim that we cannot turn away, that responding to the face is prior to choice, drawing upon a power that is not properly our own. But even if we say this, thus identifying this ethical claim upon us as prior to any power and hence to any politics, we have to understand why and how this turning away happens. When we maintain, for instance, that people turn away all the time, we say that they take a certain power in the face of a demand to stay with a lack of power; this is another way of claiming that the political supplants the ethical. Of course, one could respond: the fact that everyone turns away all the time is a sign that we should, en masse, renounce the domain of power, the domain of the political, in favor of this ethical claim and that we should consider the deformation of the ethical the political invariably performs. But that conclusion effectively refuses the political, and Levinas clearly did not think that that was possible.

Levinas himself made clear that the ethical relation required by the face is not the same as the domain of the political. The political involves numerous people and not just the ethical dyad, the “I” and the “you.” That dyad is broken up by the “third”—an abbreviated way of referring to those who would be referred to in the third person, those whose faces we do not see, but with whom we are bound to live under contractual conditions that render us substitutable. With the third and the surpassing of the dyad, we are introduced into the order of calculability, of distributive justice, of laws that are passed by the majority, and so into the domain of the political, understood as a formalizable set of rules. Even though the social dimension of the political does not negate the ethical and its claim, it remains difficult to say in what way that ethical claim lives on in the social and political domain. After all, the ethical seems to revolve around the commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” and yet Levinas, in his politics, did not espouse a pacifism. Does the face survive in the domain of the political? And if it does, what form does it take? And how does it leave its trace?
I ask this question because one might be tempted to say that, for Levinas, the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” is absolute and foundational, that it is this commandment, more than any other, that the face conveys, that this commandment composes the very meaning and “saying” (le dire) of the face. When he refers to the “face” of the other, he refers to the face “before all mimicry . . . before all verbal expression (avant toute mimique . . . avant toute expression verbale)” (EN, 169; EN-F, 173), where the face is a voice, and where the voice does not emerge from the face, through the mouth, but is another name for the face and so a name for what can never be properly named at all. We are given this face as a voice and thus asked to allow this particular mixing of metaphors between what appears and what is heard. The voice that is the face is a “command” (une voix qui commande; DÉ, 175) and also an “address,” one that is directed toward me and enjoins me “not to be indifferent to that death.” The death of the other is in the face, but by this Levinas means only that the look (le regard) by which the other faces the world bears a twofold significance: it is, on the one hand, fragile and precarious, but also, on the other hand, an authority (une autorité), the authority of the command itself. Thus, in the face of the other, one is aware of the vulnerability of that other, that the other’s life is precarious, exposed, and subject to death; but one is also aware of one’s own violence, one’s own capacity to cause the death of the other, to be the agent who could expose the Other to his dissolution. Thus the face signifies the precariousness of the Other, and so also a danger that can be caused by my own violence; it signifies as well the interdiction against violence that produces a fear in me of my own violence, what Levinas calls “the fear of all the violence and usurpation that my existing, despite the innocence of its intentions, risks committing [crainte pour ce que mon exister, malgré l’innocence de ses intentions, risque de commettre du violence et d’usurpation]” (EN, 169, EN-F, 173).

The responsibility that I assume, or, rather, that claims me in this instant, is the result of the precariousness I see, the violence that I may cause, the fear of that violence. As a result, the fear must check the violence, but this does not happen all at once. In fact, the unlimited responsibility that I bear toward the other is precisely the result of an ongoing struggle between the fear induced in me by the commandment and the violence my existence potentially does to the Other. If I fear for the Other, it is because I know the Other can be destroyed by beings like myself. If I am obligated not to be indifferent toward the death of the other, this is because the other appears to me not as one among many, but as precisely the one with whom I am concerned. Thus, Levinas writes,

It is as if, in the plurality of humans, the other man abruptly and paradoxically—against the logic of the genre (la logique du genre)—turned out to be the one who concerned me par excellence; as if, one among others, found myself—precisely I or me—the one who, summoned (asigné), heard the imperative as an exclusive recipient (destinataire exclusif), as if that imperative went toward me alone, toward me above all (avant tout); as if, henceforth chosen. (élu) and unique, I had to answer for the death and, consequently, the life of the other (d’autrui).

The face of the Other thus disrupts all formalisms, since a formalism would have me treat each and every other of equal concern and thus no other would ever have a singular claim upon me. But can we, really, do without all formalisms? And if we cannot do without all formalisms—including the principle of radical equality—then how do we think about the face in relation to such political norms? Must the face always be singular, or can it extend to the plurality? If the face is not necessarily a human face—it can be a sound or a cry—and is not reducible to a single person’s face, then can it be generalized to each and every person to the extent that they appear precisely as of concern to me (but only to persons and not to nonhuman animals, in his view)? Would this be a rupture in the way we think about plurality, or would it imply an entrance of the ethical precisely into the formulation of plurality itself? Would it imply a deformalization of plurality? Can the face serve as an injunction against violence toward each and every individual, including those whose quite literal faces I do not know? Can one derive a politics of nonviolence from the Levinasian injunction, and is it possible to respond to the faces of the multitude?

WHERE TO FIND THE FACE?

I want to suggest that the ethical injunction, though “prior” to the political domain, emerges for Levinas precisely within the terms of political conflict. Although these two domains are separated and separable for Levinas, it may be that the ethical demand comes to have a specific meaning for us in specific political contexts. It would seem that already when we encounter the face of the Other as fragile, as what requires protection against our own aggression, we have that encounter in the midst of a sociality in which conflict is already part of its history and present. Would I be tempted to kill the Other if I were not already in some relation to him?
or her? Is it that the Other is fragile and my desire to kill emerges in the face of that fragility? Or is it that I see my own fragility, over there, and I cannot bear it, or my own capacity to do damage and I cannot bear it? Levinas puts it quite clearly when he writes, “the face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the ‘You shall not kill’ [le visage d’autre dans sa précérité et son sans-défense… est pour moi à la fois la tentation de tuer et l’appel à la paix, le ‘Tu ne tueras pas’]” (PP, 167, PP-E, 344). The struggle with one’s own violence then takes place in relation to the face of the Other.

Would I be tempted to kill that other if some injury were not already done to me or if some injury against me were not, at least, anticipated? Do we enter a political story in media res only then to encounter the ethical demand in its midst? Levinas gives us several examples that suggest the ethical emerges in the midst of a conflict already underway. And even if we encounter the other in a way that constitutes a break with sociality and plurality, it may be that the social field that is broken and interrupted by the emergence of the face is the same social field that forms a necessary background for that encounter with the face to begin with.

When Levinas describes the encounter with the face as “at once the temptation to kill and the interdiction upon killing,” he references both the anxiety and the desire that the interdiction produces. As I have discussed elsewhere, Levinas recounts the story of Jacob and Esau. Jacob waits for Esau’s arrival, and the scene is tense with the sense that a war will break out over rights of inheritance and land. Levinas cites the Bible: “Jacob was greatly afraid and anxious (angoisse),” Levinas notes that, for the commentator Rashi, Jacob exemplifies “the difference between fright and anxiety” and concludes that “[Jacob] was frightened of his own death but was anxious he might have to kill” (PP, 164). If Jacob might have to kill, he would kill in the name of his own life. But to destroy the life of the other by standing for his own life is precisely to turn away from the face. Interestingly enough, killing in the name of self-preservation finds no justification in Levinas. Does he, then, propose an absolute pacifism, even a politics of self-sacrifice that would, in every instance, turn away from violence in turning toward the face? Does the commandment translate into a politics, providing a biblical basis for an absolute interdiction against all violence?

Apparently not. He invokes the Talmudic counsel that if you know someone is coming to kill you, you must rise up early and be prepared to kill first. Thus the face has its exceptions. And though self-preservation is never really affirmed as an

ultimate value by Levinas, it appears that self-defense is another matter. If Jacob is not to kill Esau, he would have to find something else to do with his desire to kill, a desire that is internally linked with the fear of death. The only way the two brothers cannot go to war is by warring with themselves and the commandment. Thus, if nonviolence emerges, it is only as a consequence of another war, the one that one’s own murderous impulse wages against the interdiction that proscribes its realization.

Thus nonviolence for Levinas does not come from a peaceful place, but rather from a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence. Peace is an active struggle with violence, and there can be no peace without the violence it seeks to check. Peace names this tension, for it is, invariably a violent process, to some degree, and yet a kind of violence that takes place in the name of nonviolence. In fact, the responsibility that I must take for the Other proceeds directly from being persecuted and outraged by that Other. Thus there is violence in the relation from the start: I am claimed by the other against my will, and my responsibility for the Other emerges from this subjection. If we think about the face as that which commands me not to be indifferent to the death of the other, and that command as what lays hold of me prior to any choice I might make, then this command can be said to persecute me, to hold me hostage—the face of the Other is persecutory from the start. And if the substance of that persecution is the interdiction against killing, then I am persecuted by the injunction to keep the peace.

Of course, the commandment not to kill is, paradoxically, imposed upon me violently; it is imposed against my will and so is violent in this precise sense. The commandment does not convey that I am morally wrong, and it does not accuse me of any specific crime. If the face is “accusatory,” it is so in a grammatical sense: it takes me as its object, regardless of my will. It is this foreclosure of freedom and will through the command that is its “violent” operation, understood variously as persecutory and accusatory. Without this violence, I cannot become subject to the interdiction against violence. Levinas writes in Autrement qu’être that “persecution is the precise moment the subject is reached or touched without the mediation of the Logos”—that is, in a living way, without consciousness and without cause, according to no principle. I am not persecuted for a reason, and I am not persecuted by another subject, only by the face, the voice, the commandment, that touches me without any reason and prior to any will. Also in Autrement qu’être, Levinas remarks that suffering (la souffrance) is the basis of responsibility and that without being
held hostage there is no responsibility. Importantly, this kind of persecution does not leave me intact; indeed, this persecution shows that I was never intact. I am responsible for what the other has done, which does not mean that I have done it; it means that I suffer it and, in suffering, assume responsibility for it. I no longer occupy my own place. I have assumed the place of the other, but, more importantly, the other has assumed my place, usurped me, taken me hostage. Something “other” places itself in my place, and I can only then understand my place as this place already occupied by another. The other is not “over there” (la bas), beyond me, but constitutes me fundamentally. The other does not just constitute me—it interrupts me, establishes this interruption at the heart of the ipseity that I am. If I use “occupation” metaphorically here, it is with mixed intent, since Levinas himself will refuse a strictly metaphorical understanding of occupation or persecution. He remarks, for instance, that the historical experience of persecution grounds the ethics of responsibility:

Of course we do not owe Judaism to anti-Semitism, no matter what Sartre may say. But perhaps the ultimate essence of Israel, its carnal essence prior to the freedom that will mark its history—this manifestly universal history, this history for all, visible to all—perhaps the ultimate essence of Israel derives from its innate predisposition to involuntary sacrifice, its exposure to persecution. . . . To be persecuted . . . is not an original sin, but the obverse of a universal responsibility—a responsibility to the Other—that is more ancient than any sin.

(De, 225)

Nous ne devons certes pas le judaïsme à l'antisémitisme, quoi que Sartre ait pu en dire. Mais, peut-être, l'ultime essence d'Israël, son essence charnelle antérieure à la liberté qui aura marqué son histoire—cette histoire manifestement universelle, cette histoire pour tous, à tous visible—peut-être l'ultime essence d'Israël tient-elle à sa disposition innée au sacrifice involontaire, à son exposition à la persécution. . . . Être persécuté. . . . n'est pas péché original, mais l'envers d'une responsabilité universelle—d'une responsabilité pour l'Autre—plus ancienne que tout péché.  

Of course, there is a significant ambiguity in the apposition that Levinas offers us in this quotation. It would seem that persecution is a "disposition innée au sacrif.

ince involontaire" but also an "exposition à la persecution"; in the first instance he seems to be suggesting that this involuntary exposure is particular to the Jews, but then in the second instance it seems that this persecution is what is historically specific about Jewish experience. In the third formulation this internal or historical specificity is understood to be the persecution that grounds responsibility as we know it. One can read Levinas several ways on this occasion; one way is that the responsibility emerging from the persecution of the Jews makes a certain kind of responsibility necessary, one that is also formed within a Jewish framework. But I want to read this line against the grain, as it were, and to suggest that this kind of national or religious framing for responsibility would not be compatible with the line in Levinas's thinking we have been following. After all, he refers to the metaphorically loaded notion of "occupation" to elaborate what responsibility might be. Within such a context we learn that to exist in any place is already to be interrupted and defined by the others who are in that place. This is an act of substitution, what he sometimes calls usurpation, but it is one that grounds responsibility toward the other. This would imply that whatever "nation" grounds itself on the place of the other would be bound to that other, and would be in an infinite responsibility toward that other, a position that is clearly consonant with that of the late Said. If the other persecutes that self, that national subject, it does not in any way relieve the national subject of responsibility: on the contrary, a responsibility is born precisely from that persecution. What that responsibility entails is precisely a struggle for nonviolence, that is, a struggle against the ethics of revenge, a struggle not to kill the other, a struggle to encounter and honor the face of the other.

Of course, it is of interest to see how Levinas dealt with this question of Israel, the land that it occupies, the question of the other who is there, who was there, in the midst of this place, whose place was taken, and who now persists in this place as usurped. But I would prefer to think with Levinas against Levinas and to pursue a possible direction for his ethics and his politics that he did not pursue. Let us remember that if something substitutes for me, or takes my place, that does not mean it comes to exist where I once was or that I no longer am or that I have been fully negated by virtue of being replaced in some way. The other lays claim, but I am already exposed, vulnerable to the claim, and though this situation is, for Levinas, nonreciprocally, we can see that some kind of passion is undergone in this rhythm of exposure and claim. Substitution, in fact, implies that a certain transitivity between the "me" and the Other is irreducible and not under my control (out of my control).
In this sense, substitution is no single act; in fact, it makes the singularity of the act impossible ("la substitution n'est pas un acte, elle est une passivité inconvertible en acte"); A&F, 185); if it can be said to happen at all, it is happening all the time. I am always possessed by an elsewhere, held hostage, persecuted, impinged upon against my will, and yet there is still this "I," or rather "me," who is being persecuted. To say that my "place" is already the place of another is to say that place itself is never singularly possessed and that this question of cohabitation in the same place is unavoidable. It is in light of this question of cohabitation that the question of violence emerges. Indeed, if I am persecuted, that is the sign that I am bound to the other. If I were not persecuted by this claim upon me, then I would not know responsibility at all. It is the ethical claim upon me not to kill that persecutes me, and it persecutes me precisely because I may well be moved to kill or may well have to resign my will at the moment the commandment not to kill is addressed to me.

A museum of tolerance was to be built in Jerusalem by the Simon Wiesenthal Center on a Palestinian gravesite. Skeletons were to be removed from the site in order to build this museum, which will cost 150 million dollars. The self-proclaimed aim of the museum is to "promote unity and respect among Jews and between people of all faiths." This land served as a cemetery for one thousand years, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center argues that it belongs legally to Israel, regardless of its past ownership. The Palestinian legal counsel remarks that "it's unbelievable, it's immoral. You cannot build a museum of tolerance on the graves of other people... It is going to cause the opposite thing to tolerance." So it is, we might say, an intolerable situation that forms the basis, the ground, for this museum of tolerance, and we have to ask what relation this call for tolerance has to the ground on which it is built. There are already legal disputes about who owns the land, but can we pause for a moment and think about this particular problem of place prior to the question of law and property and rights? This place where the one lives, where the one seeks to build and found its own memory, is already a place where others have lived and left their remains and where they seek to honor the remains of the dead. The one builds its memory through the effacement of the other's memory, and this happens precisely through recourse to the land, one that both parties share and that sends this into court and onto the street. Perhaps we can think of an ethical relation that would, as it were, divide the land or, rather, show that the land, possessed, is already occupied by the other and that, if it is to govern the problem of place, responsibility will have to proceed precisely through an understanding of substitution as an ethical relation.
On the one hand, Levinas begins by acknowledging that he is an amateur, that he lacks traditional erudition and even the acuity of spirit that traditional scholarship presupposes and refines, but he also puts into doubt this very claim. What seems at first a humbling move turns out to be something more bold, if not arrogant, when he suggests that being "attentive to ideas" is something else, something he himself can and does do, and this being "attentive to ideas" is that "without which Judaism no longer is." So from the start we seem to be presented with a set of alternatives, couched in a grammar that is not altogether simple. There seem to be those who believe that traditional erudition alone supports the acuity of spirit needed to read the Talmud, and then there seems to be Levinas who offers suggestions that "attention to ideas" is possible at any instant and that it does not rely on erudition. He accepts that to read the Talmud involves a difficult passage from the present to the past, but he seems to think that this passage does not require any particular hermeneutic exercise. We who live in the present "have some pains" returning to these texts, and they are for us, of necessity, both strange and difficult. What we find there, though, is not historically specific, and I am not sure whether what we find is enmeshed in the page or in the writing in some way that makes it impossible to extricate ideas from language. At least here, and perhaps despite his own practice, Levinas suggests that the ideas and the questions can and must be extracted both from their time and their textuality. Thus, he can write that the task is to "draw out" what is "essential," which turns out to be those "questions which trouble humanity in every epoch, that is to say, 'modern humanity.'"

This last juxtaposition is, of course, jarring, since it will turn out that what is "modern" yields those questions that concern humans "in every epoch" and so "universally" (NTR, 49). It becomes clear that modernity is, for Levinas, the site in which a certain universality or generality emerges, at which point we are led away from both textualism and historicism. His own reading practice is described as an excavation, and it depends on taking certain kinds of figures quite seriously. If one excavates a word, one takes it out of its historical context, and this decontextualization is precisely the occasion on which the words become "inflamed" (NTR, 49). He notes that one has to "breathe" upon such words for their flames to spark, and here he makes use, quite obviously, of a kabbalistic trope in order to justify what seems an unapologetic presentism in his approach. The words must illuminate, and this can only happen if they are "breathed upon" in the right way. The breath does not come from elsewhere; it is not a divine breath, but a human one, the breath of the reader who figures his reading on the model of the spoken word. Whose word? Levinas's word?

Although I am pointing to an antithemeneutic dimension of Levinas's reading, and suggesting that it seeks to release ideas from words through a certain kind of reading figured as an exhalation, I think we have to return to the question of whether the "ideas" released from words are "universal" ones. At least in this respect, it is possible that Levinas is pointing to a recurrent kind of breathing exercise that is not available to all people under all conditions. This attention to "ideas" is not the same as an exercise of abstraction or a use of reason. To make more precise what is at stake, it makes sense to turn to Levinas's "Peace and Proximity" (1984) to understand how this exercise he proposes can be and is "Jewish" without, at the same time, being "universal" according to standards of accepted rationality.

In the essay, "Peace and Proximity," Levinas argues that a "European" consciousness is internally divided between Greek and Hebraic traditions. In his view, the idea of peace derived from the Greek tradition is one that believes that "peace is awaited on the basis of the True" (PE, 162). He characterizes this Greek position as one that believes that only on the basis of "Knowledge," which "unites" those who only apparently disagree, will peace arrive. This notion of "peace" strives for "unity," the overcoming of difference "where the other is reconciled with the identity of the identical in everyone" (PE, 162). He also notes that this Greek conception relies on "persuasion" in which each individual realizes that he or she participates in the "whole" and finds "tranquility" and "repose" in this unity. We may object to this characterization, but it is doubtless important to understand it on its own terms to see what is at stake for Levinas. He wishes, first of all, to underscore that the Europe that believes in this Greek conceit is one that cannot account for its own bloody history, the emergence of fascism, imperialism, and exploitation. Somewhat bitterly, he mocks the Socratic dictum, seeking "a break in the universality of theoretical reason, which arose early in the "know thyself" in order to seek the entire universe in self-consciousness" (PE, 165). Levinas finds traces within Europe of "a logic other than the logic of Aristotle" and describes it tentatively as an "exaltation which is perhaps explained by a remorse" over colonial wars and seems to be the result of a "long indifference to the sorrows of an entire world" (PE, 165).

So here the traces of another tradition, one emphatically non-Greek, seem to enter through human modalities that exist to the side of a universalizing reason: exaltation, remorse, and sorrow. He accuses the Greek tradition of building a theoretical
reason that cannot account for bloodshed and sorrow. If anything, confronted with
the history of its wars, Europe is plunged into an anxiety about its own capacity for
violence. He writes: “It is not the intellectual deception of a system belied by the
incoherences of the real that is the drama of Europe. Nor is it even just the danger of
dying that frightens everyone. There is anxiety in committing the crimes even when
the concepts are in agreement with each other. There is an anxiety of responsibility
that is incumbent upon everyone in the death or suffering of the other” (FP, 164).

On the basis of this anxiety and responsibility toward the life of the other, a
demand is delivered to me that that is precisely not universalizable. This demand is
one that is made on the individual and conveyed by the commandment. Thus it is
an ethical obligation that may well be delivered to each person, but one that is not
universalizable as a consequence. The singular address undoes the universality of
the claim, which is why one cannot look up and check to see if others are honoring
the “same” claim in the exact same way.

Against this background, and with the knowledge that, for Levinas, if nonvio-
ence emerges, it does so as a consequence of a war within the self against the self’s
murderous impulses, we can return to the question of what it means to read the
Talmud within modernity, what kinds of questions are brought to the text, and
what sorts of ideas are to be inflamed and illuminated through the kind of reading
that Levinas proposes. In the third chapter of New Talmudic Readings, translated
as “Who is One-Self?” (but which should be translated “As for oneself . . .”),
Levinas turns to Tractate Chullin 88b–89a, in which Abraham is rewarded by
Raba for having said “I am ashes and dust” (NTR, 109). Levinas cites the rabbinic
saying: “the world subsists only through the merit of Moses and Aaron. From them
the value of the words: ‘we are nothing’ [or, ‘What are we?’]” (NTR, 112). The two
sentences are understood to be equivalent in some way. We are nothing, so we
ask what we are. We ask what we are and find that we are nothing, that there is
no answer to the question, no substance that arrives to define or settle the “we”
who asks about itself in this way. For Levinas, we are the ones who are singularly
interpellated by the commandment and thus differentiated from one another in
such a way that universality is made impossible. On the other hand, because we
“are” nothing, and that interpellation implies no ontological resolution for the
“I” or the “we,” we come to recognize that we are, at an ontological level, disposs-
essed precisely by this demand. Indeed, the demand that is communicated by the
commandment evacuates us of all ontological substance. The human creature is
destitute, but it is, significantly, on the basis of this destitution that the obligation
to shelter the other’s life is elaborated: “In self-denying, in his dust and ashes . . .
there is an elevation of the human creature to another condition, to another level
of the human who, authentic under the incessant threat of his mortality, remains
someone who thinks of the safekeeping of others” (NTR, 114). So Abraham is
“dust and ashes,” but it would appear that his words are also “ashes,” as are the
words of the Talmud. “The Torah is exacting. One must blow on the ‘ashes’ of
ideas and images, for the flame tenderly to appear to man. All the same we have
gained some traces of a ‘me’ which is affirmed in its devotion to the other and
which is because it is obligated” (NTR, 115).

This obligation may well underwrite some of the ethical systems and laws
that seek to universalize obligations, but any codification of these obligations
also overwrites what Levinas calls the “anarchism” of such an obligation. This
“anarchism” is a departure from the Logos and constitutes another “ground” for
thinking about human relationality such. In his view, human relationality is
not Greek—and not rational in any established way. It is, rather, that which can
only be elaborated through figures that operate this side of the concept, which
link human destiny to a certain responsibility to shelter the life of others.
It is as if, or precisely because, we are transient, dust and ashes, that we must
shelter life: life is perishable; thus we must struggle not to let life perish. It is on
the basis of this perishability that an obligation emerges, neither a murderous
aggression nor any other form of nihilism. We cannot be careless in relation to
this perishability, since we know it precisely through the injunction to care for it,
and to care for it not for ourselves, but for others. This may well be a version of a
commandment, but it is not the logos: it bespeaks life, breath, sorrow, remorse,
attention, and obligation of an emphatically nonuniversalizable kind. The “one”
who is asked to follow the commandment is also vanquished ontologically by
this address, reduced, as it were, to dust and ashes; it becomes nothing other than
this obligation and is held in life by the commandment itself, and so sustained
and vanquished by this address. This means that the self is no substance and
that the commandment is no codifiable law, each exists only in the manner of
an address that singles out, vanquishes, and compels. Talmud leads Levinas to a
strange sort of anarchy, one that he finds to characterize every relation between
the one who receives the ethical demand and the demand itself. This thought
precedes him in the work of Walter Benjamin, who sustains a critique of the sort
of violence that operates through legal regimes. Taking the regime down requires an anarchic relation to an ethical demand that overrides the law, although for Levinas the ethical invariably engages this idea of anarchy, whereas the political, essentially concerned with justice, functions through formalizable law. But what happens if the formal rule of law is unjust? What place is there for anarchy under such conditions?