# Walter Benjamin on the destructive character and language

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*Abstract: Benjamin thus describes language as a metaphysical entity which has divine origins from the bible. Naming completes the act of creation in which God has assigned man the authority to name things and thus bring out their linguistic being through language. Thus man communicates not through language but in it- names refer to a divine metaphysical concept rather than an external physical object. Revelation is thus completed through the process of naming. Man gains access to the divine nature of objects through naming them, thus completing the divine process of creation by naming and thus gaining authority over objects by creating the conceptual linguistic blocks of language which language is made up of. Language thus refers to itself in a chain of concepts rather than serve as a referent to an external object. In this way language is divine and a series of divine metaphysical entities through the concept rather than the referents to an object.*

*The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room, only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. (Benjamin 1978: 301)*

In the above passage Benjamin describes the destructive character who fuels progress. The destructive character demolishes and destroys tradition and history to make room for new paths and progresses.

*The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away traces of our own age, it cheers because everything is cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction,indeed eradication of his own condition. But what contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction. This is the great bond embracing and unifying all that exists. It is a sight that affords the destructive character a spectacle of deepest harmony.(Benjamin 1978: 301)*

The destructive character does not respect tradition and seeks to destroy traces of our age and the old. The destructive character reduces and eradicates his own condition in order to make way for the new, simplifying things by designating them worthy of destruction. Everything needs to be destroyed for the destructive character – this is his unifying vision.

*No vision inspires the destructive character. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what he has destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space, the place where the thing stood or the victim lived.(Benjamin 1978: 301)*

The destructive character thus destroys for the sake of destroying without any sense of vision of what he will replace his destruction with, it is senseless and futile destruction which is gratuitous rather than a real need to replace things that drives him, without any sympathy for his victims that will be in his way.

*The destructive character does his work the only work he avoids is being creative. Just as the creator seeks solitude, the destroyer must be constantly surrounded by people, witnesses to his efficacy.(Benjamin 1978: 302)*

Benjamin thus opposes the destructive character to the creative, seeing that he surrounds himself by people and destroys for the sake of destroying without being reflective, creative or contemplative, he drowns himself in the masses and herd mentality and sees only the need to destroy rather than create.

*The destructive character has no interest in being understood. Attempts in this direction he regards as superficial, Being misunderstood cannot harm him.On the contrary he provokes it, just as oracles, those destructive institutions of the state, provoked it. The most petit bourgeois of all phenomena, gossip, comes about only because people do not wish to be misunderstood, The destructive character*

*tolerates misunderstanding, he does not promote gossip.(Benjamin 1978: 302)*

The destructive character thus does not want to be understood and he completely disregards the opinions of others and wishes deliberately to be misunderstood, to this end, he tolerates gossip because he does not wish people to understand his character to or to comprehend his destructiveness.

*The destructive character stands in the front line of the traditionalists. Some pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them, others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called the destructive.(Benjamin 1978: 302)*

The destructive character thus has no interest in history or preserving things for posterity, he is interest only in practicality and utility without sentiment or conservation, thus clearing and destroying history.

*The destructive character has the consciousness of historical man, whose deepest emotion is an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognize that everything can go wrong. Therefore the destructive character is reliability itself.(Benjamin 1978: 302)*

The destructive character thus mistrusts the course of history and is a pessimist believing everything can and must go wrong, only seeing the negative in every situation and thus bearing no wish to preserve the present and only destroy the past to make way for the future.Hence the destructive character is

reliability because he trusts nothing and no one.

*The destructive character sees nothing permanent. For this reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there too he sees a way, But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force sometimes by the most refined, Because he sees ways everywhere, he always positions himself at the crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble, not for the sake of rubble,but for the sake of leading through it.(Benjamin 1978: 302-303)*

The destructive character thus believes in impermanence and transience, he sees ways everywhere to make room for the new, every obstacle is turned into a passage for the new. Because he always sees paths through the old he is always at the crossroads of making way for the new.He reduces everything to rubble to bring on new phases and trends.

*What does language communicate? It communicates the mental being corresponding to it. It is fundamental that this mental being communicates itself as language and not through language. Languages therefore have no speaker. If this means someone who communicates through these languages. Mental being communicates itself in, not through a language, which means it is not outwardly identical with linguistic being. Mental is identical with linguistic being only insofar as it is capable of communication. What is communicable in a mental entity is its*

*linguistic entity. Language therefore communicates the particular linguistic being of things, but for their mental being only insofar as this is directly included in their linguistic being, insofar as it is capable of being communicated.(Benjamin 1978: 317-18)*

Benjamin thus considers the communication of language as the naming of the mental being that corresponds to it but it does not correspond to any outward linguistic being. Mental being is named in rather than through language. This means that the lingual naming of an object refers us to its mental being or concept rather than the referential naming of an outward object. Thus language is revelation of the essential concept of mental being of an object to us and refers us inward to this object rather than outward to the object. It therefore refers us to the revelation of the linguistic being of the object as its concept brought about through its naming rather than an external object.

*Naming, in the realm of language has as its sole purpose and its incomparably high being meaning that it is the innermost nature of language itself. Naming is that by which nothing beyond is communicated and in which language itself communicates itself absolutely. In naming the mental entity that communicates itself is language. Where mental being in its communication only there is the name and only te name is there. Name as the heritage of human language therefore vouches for the fact that language as such is the mental being of man, alone among all mental entities, communicable without residue. On this is founded the*

*difference between human language and the language of things. But because the mental being of man is language he cannot communicate by it but only in it. The quintessence of this intensive totality of language as the mental being of man is naming. Man is the namer, by this we recognize that through him pure language speaks. All nature, insofar as it communicates itself communicates itself in language and so finally in man. Hence he is the lord of nature and can give names to things. Only through the linguistic being of thins can he gain knowledge of them from within himself- in name. God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man.(Benjamin 1978: 318-19)*

Benjamin thus describes language as a metaphysical entity which has divine origins from the bible. Naming completes the act of creation in which God has assigned man the authority to name things and thus bring out their linguistic being through language. Thus man communicates not through language but in it- names refer to a divine metaphysical concept rather than an external physical object. Revelation is thus completed through the process of naming. Man gains access to the divine nature of objects through naming them, thus completing the divine process

of creation by naming and thus gaining authority over objects by creating the conceptual linguistic blocks of language which language is made up of. Language thus refers to itself in a chain of concepts rather than serve as a referent to an external object. In this way language is divine and a series of divine metaphysical entities through the concept rather than the referents to an object.

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