

Saving the Lost Ones

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I

I want to argue that, with respect to the living and the dead, counting the numbers is not simply a bad thing, however impersonal such numbers may be.¹ Whether it is the numbers of those who died before their time (as measured, for example, in ‘excess deaths’), or the numbers among those still living (as measured, for example, in differences in votes cast for candidates in an election or in remunerations received in wages and pensions), they are not something we should want to discount or discredit.

I will begin, however, with considerations concerning something that seems to get entirely lost as soon as we start counting. What I have in mind is highlighted in a remark by Ludwig Wittgenstein that I will cite fully in a moment, in which he speaks of ‘the consciousness of *the uniqueness of my life*’ (NB, 79, emphasis in original).²

In view is a finite life that is alive to the finitude of its own being alive; a life that has, for that reason, what Martin Heidegger calls ‘*mineness*’ (*Jemeinigkeit*) (BT, 68).³ Every such life is, in each case, *my life* – not just an instance of a kind or a genus, each the same as every other, but each an example of something that is, in each case, one of a kind, each one unique, each an unsubstitutable singularity, an unreplaceable one-off.

One cannot, it seems, count above one without altogether losing sight of what is in view here.

To explain why, nevertheless, it is *just* that we count the numbers, and to defend the idea that the anonymous *remunerated citizen* deserves to be the conceptual starting point and interest-focus of egalitarian politico-economic thinking, I want, first, to bring into focus a point of view in which the singularity of a finite life is the exclusive interest-focus – but

where the ‘my life’ life in view is *not mine*. The focus that belongs to such a point of view is marked by what I will call *the singularising gaze*.

It is tempting to think that acquaintance with the existential singularity of another living being must ultimately be based on paying especially close attention to its behaviour; by attending closely to the specific sayings and doings of another human being, for example. My basic claim will be that the existential singularity of a living being *cannot* be disclosed on the basis of what is perceived in its describable behaviours alone but has its ground in acquaintance with the unique and singular ‘my life’ life that is, in each case, mine. The exclusive focus that marks the singularising gaze is configured as such, I will argue, by its drawing in, and in this way seen *with*, something I find *only* in myself. Manifest through the singularising gaze of this ‘seeing *with*’ kind, another living being is disclosed to *me* as a unique ‘me’ that is *not me* – but another ‘me’ that is, for just that reason, also *not not me*. ‘From *me* to *not-me* to *not-not-me*’, to borrow Donald Winnicott’s picture of child developmental maturation (cited *RT*, 121).⁴

II

The remark from Wittgenstein that I began with runs in full: ‘Only from the consciousness of *the uniqueness of my life* arises religion – science – and art.’ (*NB*, 79) A finite life that is alive to the finitude of its own being alive is shaped differently, has a different face, in each of these distinctive cultural fields. But they all clearly concern modes of behaviour that are *not* one’s own alone – and are among those interest-fields which typically count *most* in such a life and make it *worth while*. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein’s remark suggests that each also presupposes one’s own being alive to the life that *is* one’s own alone; they *come to life* only

in such a one-of-a-kind kind of life, however close or distant they are to what is in focus when what is in focus is the unique singularity of the ‘my life’ life that is, in each case, mine.

Wittgenstein’s little example list of cultural fields starts off with the classic binary of religion and science, but it ends with art. The fate of the cultural field of the arts was, in fact, a particular concern for Wittgenstein himself. They are, he thought, where ‘the value of an individual’ can find its most *complete* (and hence also *most* singular) expression. But we live today, he thought, in a time marked by ‘the disappearance of the arts’ (*CV*, 8),⁵ the disappearance of an artistically creative culture, the disappearance of everything that belongs to what, following Nietzsche, I will call the creation *of* a creature (*BGE*, 136).⁶ Living in the shadow of that disappearance we live in dark times. Can we still artistically create...a future, another creature, an attainable but as yet unattained ‘man’ to come? With the fading out of the cultural field of the arts in the European-West, does its central creation, ‘man’ of ‘Western civilisation’, still hold a future? Outlining an approach to this question is the final intention of this essay.

III

How should we understand the structure of the singularising gaze? I want to explore this question through a formulation from Bernard Williams: the singularising gaze concerns a point of view on the life of a living (or once living) human being ‘which is’, Williams suggests, ‘concerned primarily with what it is *for that person* to live that life’ (*IBWD*, 103, emphasis in original).⁷

The point of view on the life of a human being at issue here is one that Williams conceives as ‘abstracted’ from all ‘conspicuous structures’ of the life that it lives or lived (*IBWD*, 105). The thought is that we are seeing the life of that living being in a way that (mostly) suspends or brackets concerns with, for example, their social roles or social status

and titles – roles, status and titles that can be occupied by more than one such being. This ‘more than one’ isn’t about multiple occupancy but the *substitutability* or *replaceability* of the living human being that occupies any such ‘structure’ by another living human being. By contrast, the point of view Williams wants to identify is concerned with the *unsubstitutable* or *unreplaceable* (some) *one* that occupies any such subject position. For Williams, then, what I am calling the singularising gaze is the focus on another living being attained by this abstracting point of view, and his (implied) understanding is that such a gaze has its focus on structures of behaviour of a living human being that are characteristically inconspicuous. Williams does not discuss these, though one might imagine he is thinking of the language-game structures that human beings are trained to for expressing thoughts and feelings. Focusing on those inconspicuous expression-structures would be, one might think, to do everything one can to focus primarily on ‘what it is *for that person* to live that life’.

If this is what Williams is suggesting, there is a problem or at least a puzzle in the singularising gaze as he conceives it: it just doesn’t seem to be sufficiently singularising. The inconspicuous language-game structures that human beings are trained to might reasonably be thought to contrast with their conspicuous social roles, status and titles: it is through the reception of dispatched messages involving such inconspicuous language-game structures that we come to know what a human being thinks and feels about their subject-positioned lives. The problem, however, is that these inconspicuous structures are themselves marked by substitutability or replaceability every bit as much as the social roles, status and titles that belong to the more conspicuous structures that Williams wants (mostly) abstracted. Indeed, anything and everything that can be described in the structures of behaviour of a living (or once living) human being that would interest us under a singularising gaze is, as such a structure, something in relation to which the living being who is (supposedly) singled out is substitutable and replaceable: the language-game structures are *made to be repeatable* or

iterable, made to be used more than once, by another, indeed, by *anyone*. Abstracting those iterable structures too would obviously not help: what we would see would simply be a singular behavioural event and not at all the singular person we wanted to get in view. The puzzle then is this: if what appears in the singularising gaze really is an existential singularity, a ‘my life’ life, then what appears cannot be described in even the most exhaustive description of the structures of behaviour of the living being (or once living being) that interests us, and abstracted from such structures nothing of the right kind of interest appears at all.

If it is to be the appearance of anything of interest, what appears in the singularising gaze would seem to have to be *the apparition in the apparent of something inapparent*. I think it is exactly that.

What appears under the singularising gaze, if it really is a singularising gaze, has to be the unsubstitutable or irreplaceable *one* that lives (or once lived) a characteristically subject-positioned life: the *being-there (Dasein)* of an existential singularity, a ‘my life’ life. But here’s the problem. Under a gaze that is abstracted from all iterable structures (whether conspicuous or far less so), nothing of interest is left. And under a gaze that is not abstracted from all iterable structures (whether conspicuous or far less so) nothing singular is given. The solution is: when the existential singularity of another living being is *manifest* nothing is given that is descriptably *present*.

How can that be a solution? How can anything possibly be manifest that is not descriptably present? What makes itself manifest in this way can be manifest at all, I will argue, *not* by witnessing inconspicuous structures of the behaviour of the living (or once living) being that is right before my eyes (live or recorded) but, with both those and the more conspicuous structures in view, *only* if I bear witness to something ‘right before my eyes’ *in me*. What is right before my eyes here, what really is *fundamentally* inconspicuous, is not,

that is to say, *the visible other*; rather, it is *what gives visibility* to the existential singularity of a ‘my life’ life that is not mine. What is right before my eyes here is: everything that is *most familiar* to me in my own ‘my life’ life. In short, the appearing of a singular ‘my life’ life that is *not mine* has its ground in my right-before-my-eyes familiarity with the singular ‘my life’ that is *mine*. This kind of familiar acquaintance with my own ‘my life’ life *gives acquaintance* with the singular ‘my life’ of another such life. Arising from this right-before-my-eyes acquaintance with the ‘my life’ life that is *mine*, I see another unique singularity whose ‘my life’ life is altogether *not mine* – but which is, for just that reason, *not not mine*.

Such a perception of the other is not a direct meeting of minds – not direct (non-inferential) knowing what someone else is thinking or feeling, for example – but something like a direct communion of spirit: it is not simply a matter of understanding what someone is saying and doing, but a matter of understanding *them*, of seeing their singular countenance, seeing their face.

Williams calls the point of view he wants to identify ‘the human point of view’ (*IBWD*, p. 103). However, what I am calling the singularising gaze does not have to be restricted to our perception of living human beings (or once living human beings). Indeed, when Wittgenstein speaks to the idea of such a gaze in *Philosophical Investigations*, the living being he has in view is not a human being, it is a dog (*PI*, §357).⁸ There are singularities to be seen in the lives of non-human living beings too. To what extent, if at all, non-human living beings can themselves attain such a point of view is a good question. Social status positions typically rule their lives, and ruling relations of this kind might rule out the possibility of radically singularising ones. That an animal *is not* so alive to, or not alive at all to, the singular uniqueness of its own life is something we can be alive to when we see them under the singularising gaze. That an animal *is* in some way alive to the singular uniqueness of its own life is something we can be alive to as well (seeing, for example,

expressions of mourning). Oswald Spengler claims that the singularising gaze of a man to his dog is genuinely returned by his dog (*DW* II, 132).⁹ Perhaps the human point of view is not exclusively human. But it is markedly human.

IV

Williams does not refer to it, but his idea of the human point of view, and the contrasting ‘technical or professional attitude’, bears comparison with what Wittgenstein famously described as ‘*eine Einstellung zur Seele*’ – ‘an attitude towards a soul’, a singularising attitude that is, Wittgenstein suggests, most familiar to us in the relation to the other we call a ‘friend’ (*PPF*, iv, §§20-22).¹⁰ And this goes to the heart of Williams’s own discussion, which is not focused on soul-seeing but political ideas of ‘all people’s equality’ (*IBWD*, 105). The ‘general’ connexion between the singularising gaze and political equality is, as he puts it, ‘hazy’ (*IBWD*, 105). But the friend-relation helpfully connects them: the (each time singular) relation to the other who is a friend is characteristically understood as a relation to another who is (to *me*) both altogether other (*not me*) and also my equal (*not not me*). And this suggests, perhaps still hazily, a possible universalisation in the idea of a *community of friends* as a community of singularities all equal. As we shall see, this is an idea that has, in fact, been central to the history of Western democratic politics, central to the development of a politics that, in our time, affirms all people’s equality. In what follows, I want to follow up on this suggestive comparison, and to say a little more about the singularising gaze.

V

Wittgenstein’s drawing in the word ‘soul’ speaks to the great ancientness of the idea of each one’s unique singularity, and speaks to its (the word’s) survival in him. But in Wittgenstein’s text the idea is not, or is no longer, the ancient idea (or its more recent religious or

metaphysical variants) of the soul as anything that is actually separable from the life of a living (or once living) being. Retrieving the great word ‘soul’ from that inherited resource still with him, Wittgenstein uses it to specify an attitude that belongs to *seeing an altogether other ‘me’* when we see the behaviour of a living (or once living) being – a relation of identity (*not not me*) with the other who I am not (*not me*), an each time singular and unique relation accomplished in the singular and unique life that is *mine* to the singular, unique, irreplaceable, unsubstitutable, incomparable ‘*mineness*’ of another ‘my life’ life, the ‘*mineness*’ of a ‘my life’ life that is, in each case, *not mine*.

VI

Williams does not elaborate on the (on his account presumably) inconspicuous structures that would remain unabstracted when one takes up the human point of view as he conceives it. As we have seen, a plausible candidate here are those language-game structures people are trained to and through which they give expression to thoughts and feelings. However, as I have indicated, if that is what he has in view, it is not really sufficient for getting in view the singularising gaze he is after in his discussion of the ‘general’ but ‘hazy’ way that what is disclosed by the human point of view belongs to our ‘modern’ understanding of all people’s equality. In the human case, the language-games human beings are trained to all possess (as I once put it) ‘a structural anonymity’ (*OBWO*, 5):¹¹ they are made to be played on more than one occasion and hence also (by virtue of that) by more than one person, by *anyone*. If it can make its appearance at all, the singular *mineness* of a ‘my life’ life can appear only *within* the structural anonymity – the *anyoneness* – of conventionalised expression-games. Those certainly cannot be abstracted. On the other hand, what is manifest in the singularising gaze cannot be reduced to seeing such inconspicuous structures of behaviour either. As we have

seen, if this was the only way in which the unique singularity of the other could possibly appear then it is not clear at all that a unique and singular person could possibly appear.

I have suggested that there is a solution to this puzzle in the idea that there is another (far more fundamentally) inconspicuous dimension that belongs to the singularising gaze, one which really does deliver on the disclosure of the ‘*mineness*’ of existential singularity, but not by way of the abstraction of structures that are open to substitutability and replaceability. What we are after is not relatively inconspicuous structures of behaviour right before my eyes but something inconspicuously ‘right before my eyes’ *in me* when the ‘soul’ of another is seen. At issue here is nothing descriptably visible in any of the structures of the behaviour that we see: these are all marked by an essential substitutability or replaceability – and by their reproductive cinematicity (Zoom, etc.). Instead of something visible in the observable structures of behaviour of a living (or once living) being, the suggestion is that *what gives visibility* to what is *not* descriptably present in *any* of those visible structures, what is right before my eyes when I see the soul of another living being, is my familiar acquaintance with my own ‘my life’ life. Familiarity with the historically thrown *being-there* that is my own ‘my life’ life *permeates* what is visible: I see *with* it.

This is not ‘indirect’ seeing the soul in the behaviour of a living being. It is not a matter of reasoning by analogy, not a matter of observing my own behaviour and what is going on in me when I behave that way, then matching my own behaviour with the behaviour of the other, and then inferring that the same goes on in them (see *PI*, §357). This is obviously a classic, as Heidegger calls it, ‘cabinet’ picture of indirectly knowing what happens ‘in’ the other (*BT*, 89), and is not what is at issue here at all. No, what is given visibility through the lens of one’s right before one’s eyes acquaintance with one’s own singular existence *is* the singular soul of a living (or once living) being. There is no more

‘direct’ way: under the singularising gaze the singular soul of a living (or once living) being lies open to me.

The existential singularity of the ‘my life’ life of another living (or once living) being makes its appearance within a completely general structural anonymity. But it is not a visible (sensuous, phenomenal) presence there. *There is no phenomenology of the soul*. Rather, it is shown there, inscribed there, but without being anything descriptably *present* there – though we do, even in describing it as seeing someone’s soul, *represent* it that way, especially when, having *not* taken any interest in a living (or once living) being beyond their social subject positions hitherto, we suddenly turn a singularising gaze on them. (‘It was as though a shadow had taken substance.’ (FJ, 32))¹²

Seeing the behaviour of a living (or once living) being through the soul-visibility-bestowing lens of what is right before my eyes *in me*, and hence through all sorts of shadow figures in me – the child in me, others I have met or whose thoughts I have read or have otherwise inherited that are now part of me, permeating the ‘my life’ life that is uniquely mine, and which I now see *with* – this is what I am calling the singularising gaze: direct acquaintance with the singularity of the other ‘me’ who appears (or, in principle, always can appear) *in* what is directly received: the apparition of a soul seen in the (substitutable and replaceable) structures of the behaviour of a living (or once living) being that are delivered on some tele-com-system or other, live or recorded. Through the singularising gaze, what is directly received is, one might say, pneumatically configured: the soul of a living (or once living) being is manifest – right there, over there.

VII

My discussion of soul-seeing got kick-started by the conception of the singularising gaze that Williams explores under the title of the (mostly) title-stripped human point of view. As I have

indicated, however, the context of Williams's own discussion could hardly be more different. When he appeals to that idea, his own concern is whether one can give a non-religious and non-metaphysical justification for the modern political idea of all people's equality. It is with that in view that he invites us to consider the distinction between what he calls 'the technical or professional attitude' towards a person's life (and the kind of respect that people occupying such subject positions might or might not command) and 'the human point of view'. Returning to that discussion again will start us on our way towards clarifying the hazy bearing of the singularising gaze on our own time, the time and place of democracy with a money economy – life in what Nietzsche called our still most heart-attached place: life in 'The Pied Cow' [*Die bunte Kuh*] (ZD, 23).¹³

VIII

I want to home-in on the questions provoked by Williams's interest in the general haunting of the modern-Western idea of all people's equality by the hazy spectre of what is disclosed by the singularising gaze. These are questions most directly concerned with how we might organise a response politically to the in each case unique and singular relation to the unique and singular other we call the friend – the *one* who is *both* altogether other *and* my equal. At issue here is a political stage that would be compatible with the egalitarian politics internal to the Western-European heritage of the idea of democracy: a community of souls, a community of friends, all other, all equal: a political stage where the singularity of each has the chance of appearing within the anonymity of the conglomerate whole, the all.

Williams represents what he calls the human point of view as one that is, as he puts it, 'abstracted' from the 'conspicuous structures' that belong to all sorts of substitutable or replaceable subject positions. The human point of view, as he conceives it, (mostly) suspends or brackets an interest in those: it concerns itself 'primarily' with a dimension of someone's

behaviour that could not be, in that way, common to different people, still less common to all people. This would seem to point us away from and not towards the ‘all’ we have in view with ‘all people’s equality’ that is Williams’s own explicit interest. But that is not so. On the contrary, it should bring into view the *only* thing that is genuinely common to each in the all: namely, that every *Dasein* has, as Heidegger puts it, ‘*in each case mineness*’ (BT, 68).

Williams’s conception of the human point of view is intended to help capture that sense of the universality of the singular. This is why he wants to focus on what is seen when what is seen is abstracted from all structures in the living of a life that might be occupied more or less indifferently by others, common to more than one: one’s point of view would have its focus on the singular individual (the unsubstitutable and irreplaceable *one*) whose life is marked by its involvement with such (substitutable and replaceable) structures, the *one* whose ‘my life’ life is mostly occupied by occupying such subject positions and roles, and the task-duties they prescribe.

In a passage in which Derrida summarises the long tradition of political thinking about democracy in the heritage of Western-European politics, we can see that the connexion between this each time singular singularising friend-type relation and the democratic heritage of the West is, indeed, a fundamental one:

There is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy with the ‘community of friends’ (*koína ta philōn*), without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal. The two laws are irreducible one to the other. Tragically irreconcilable and forever wounding. The wound itself opens with *the necessity of having to count one’s friends*, to count the others, in the economy of one’s own, there where every other is altogether other. But where every other is *equally* altogether other. More serious than a contradiction, political desire is forever borne by the disjunction of these two laws.

It also bears the chance and the future of a democracy whose ruin it constantly threatens but whose life, however, it sustains, like life itself, at the heart of its *divided virtue*. (PF, 22, emphasis in original)¹⁴

‘Democracy’ is being regarded here as the best name we have for what is aimed at by a political desire – which is obviously not alien to every spiritual or religious desire – to respect the irreducible *singularity* of every other, and which, for that reason, most strongly resists the politics of class or group interests and distinctions that so clearly marked old Europe, and which has not gone away. On the other hand, for the same reasons and with related effect, it is also a political form that promises to respect the *equality* of every other. As we have seen, this ‘divided virtue’ is internal to what, today, we are beginning to make of our inherited idea of all people’s equality, the new inheritance of which Williams attempts to bring into focus through its hazy connexion to the human point of view, and which we took in a Wittgensteinian direction through the idea of a singularising gaze that gives visibility to the soul of a friend. In a community of (specifically) friends the equality of every other is not found in *anything* shared, as (either transcendently or empirically) common among friends (*koína ta philōn*) but lies in recognition that all are each equally singular – irreplaceable, non-substitutable, unquantifiable, uncountable.

Conceived in this way, democratic politics aims, then, at the realisation of a community of friends, a whole, that would be a gathered being-together of singularities, each infinitely other, each one the only one, each one the onely one, each the *solus ipse*.¹⁵ But that is why it also aims at the realisation of a community of friends in which each one can be recognised as, in that regard, just like every other, each one fundamentally equal to every other, a community of equals deciding on the basis of calculable, quantifiable, countable majorities where each one counts the same as every other, where each onely one counts one.

There where another finite life is experienced as *both* altogether other (not-me) *and* my equal (not-not me) – *this is the experience of the friend*. But it is right there that we are also in the space that opens the promise of a community of friends – *this is the promise of democracy*. It is the promise, as Teilhard de Chardin puts it, of the ‘collective organisation’ of ‘a human group’ whose ongoing and unpredictable political ‘*experiments and gropings*’ seek to ‘enhance rather than impair [...] the incommunicable singularity of being which each of us possesses’ (FM, 202).¹⁶ This promise makes its way into our time in the form of a democratic state with a money economy – a political economy that, today, can seem altogether *unpromising*.

There are, of course, calls to fix our democracies, to get back on track with respect to egalitarian ends. And not without justice, not without a just desire for social justice, in view. However, seeking such ends can be just as unpromising as the threatening condition that currently faces us – at least if such end-seeking is conceived as aiming at a condition of ideal egalitarian adequacy. With the ‘irreconcilable and forever wounding’ imperative of respecting both singularity and equality, democratic politics simply cannot attain such a final form of ideal adequacy. In fact and in principle, its ‘divided virtue’ entails that a certain non-ideal or ‘inadequate’ character belongs to it however it is constituted or thought. This constant inadequation to itself should not, however, be seen as democracy’s failing or fault but its abiding (divided) virtue. It is not that, with democracy, we seem always to wind up falling short of an ideal egalitarian adequacy we might one day attain. On the contrary, any projected ideal end of democracy would involve short-circuiting the very thing we want to save: a community of friends that really is worthy of that name. Such a community is one that recognises that it really is not one. Many-coloured life, life in The Pied Cow, is not attained best by its finally becoming One-coloured.

At issue with democratic political desire is an orientation to the future that does without the idea of the attainability of a final distant goal of ideal equality. Some may feel that without the good news of the coming of such an arrival, without faith in a Finally Redemptive End to come, we are left standing still, left at the starting line. But doing without this idea of a final end is precisely what can give us strength and speed, here and now, for the stress and strain of being the unpredictably self-transforming creature that we are: to do everything one can to keep the space open in which democratic politics, through its own interminable call for perfectibility through effective deliberations and decisions on public affairs, self-critique that never ends (including on what we should decide as the most effective form of deliberating and deciding on public affairs), can make its unpredictable way.

IX

One of the concepts that belongs centrally to the Western history of democratic politics is the ‘citizen’. There is a way of thinking about the citizen status of individuals in a democracy that is perhaps familiar: here the citizen, there the vote they can cast to choose a representative according to a regular electoral calendar.

Few would see this as the be-all-and-end-all of the citizen status, and most, perhaps all, would want to affirm further political and participatory significance to the category. According to the reading of democracy as a community of friends that I have just run through, however, we should see that there is a philosophical significance to the citizen status that goes beyond questions of proper political participation: it is a status that is inseparable from the fact that it confers a ‘title’ on the singular person that makes possible a way of apprehending ‘the universality of the singular’ (*PF*, 104). No doubt there are issues to be thought through here about this title, which is still a way of apprehending the other under a

title that not everyone has, and thus raises the question *who counts*, and the not-unproblematic history of that issue. On the other hand, as Derrida has noted, the ‘citizen’ title confers on those who do receive it the (in)dignity of being counted: counting as a ‘countable singularity’ – a status without which all politics would be ‘doomed to the incalculable’, i.e. simply doomed (*PF*, 104). Moreover, one might add, anything less formal and *more* friend-like in its interest-focus on the singular ‘my life’ lives of the living beings who belong to the community of friends would risk a limitless extension of political reason to the whole of their life – political totalitarianism, political neoliberalism – which is certainly *less* friend-like to the friend. Whether we are concerned with national contexts (ranging over citizens of a nation) or international contexts (ranging over nations and their citizens), democracy, as a political response to the imperative to take account of both the singularity and the equality of every other, thus opens a ‘wound’ that cannot be sutured: in order to respect the singularity of each we *must* also count the numbers, count each as the same. That is democracy’s deathly levelling risk – but also its (each) ‘my life’ empowering life, its chance.

And in this context, another side of life in *The Pied Cow* shows itself as remaining promising too: the money promise, credit-money. Indeed, money can be brought in here in what looks like a marriage made in political-economic heaven: money has exactly the same structural ambiguity as the citizen status. In both, we find, as Emmanuel Levinas puts it, ‘an element in which the personal is maintained while being quantified’ (*ET*, p, 44).¹⁷ The money economy introduces ‘a strange or remarkable ambiguity’ into the being and time of human life (*SAM*, 203).¹⁸ It is an economy which is fundamentally indifferent to the fundamental difference of each – it is indifferent to the onely *one* that you are, and functions in the same indifferent way for all. But money in wages and pensions is not an acquired possession among others. It is possession of a power: ‘*the possibility or ability to take possession*. Possibility, therefore, of allowing some degree of indetermination and life to the free will of

the possessor still open to other decisions.’ (*SAM*, 203) In short, just as the citizen title gives expression to our basic democratic understanding of *political equality and freedom*, so the credit-money form gives expression to our basic democratic understanding of *economic equality and freedom*.

Karl Marx was perhaps the first to recognise that the money system that belongs to capitalism ‘is in fact the system of equality and freedom’ (*GR*, 248).¹⁹ But Marx also supposed that such a system is simply unable to deliver on the equality and freedom it promises: ‘the realisation of equality and freedom [in the money system] [...] prove to be inequality and unfreedom’ (*GR*, 249). Marx wanted to realise the communist spectre of the spirit of democracy and the spirit of the market: to make politico-economic conditions actual in which universal equality and freedom might finally be attained. And he projected an according-to-need allotting economy *without* a credit-money system as its basic form. What we can now see, however, is that the spectre Marx wants to make actual is internal (as spectre) to the political economy he wants to abolish, and it cannot survive (as spectre) without it. Our continuing perfectionist interest in equality and freedom is inseparable from the spirit of the political economy we inhabit.

Unless we are happy to let that spirit go, we need to keep the spectre of the other created creature alive – *as a spectre*. Wanting to exorcise that spectre of the other ‘man’, the spectre of ‘man’ that would be other to whatever conditions we have presently attained, whether this exorcism is attempted in the name of democracy’s present existence or in the name of its future realisation, leaves nothing finally to be desired but more of the same. It is the levelled world of Nietzsche’s ‘last man’, his nightmare of the herd-human ‘return to the animals’ (*ZD*, 4): it is a vision of a finally attained community that really *is* one because it is a community that really is *one*: ‘No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.’ (*ZD*, 18) If

we don't want the end of the adventure of 'man' we have to learn to live forever haunted by the spectre of the one that follows after 'man', the other 'man' to come.

X

In a discussion about money held (rather splendidly if, for that reason, somewhat uncomfortably) at the Banque de France in 2004, Derrida affirmed, and rightly supposed he affirmed with Levinas, the ongoing mattering (not the radical de-mattering, de-materialising) of money:

Money has no smell, as one says, it is totally disinvested, an absolute abstraction. The possibility of this abstraction is that without which justice would not be possible. It is the opening of the possibility of ethics, namely that every other is respectable. In other words, money in its possibility – not in its reality – is the opening of an anonymous relationship to a universal singularity. I guess that's what Levinas means too. Anyone, no matter who, deserves to be respected. If I want to be fair, I'll be fair to anyone. And so this neutralisation is egalitarian from this point of view, and therefore democratic, the possibility of democracy. (*DM*, pp. 19-20, trans. mine)²⁰

This 'point of view' draws into our politico-economic thinking what Williams had called the human point of view: it draws in the point of view that 'respects the distance of infinite alterity as singularity' (*FK*, 22),²¹ and does so with respect to *any* other. This universalisation recognises that the singularising gaze, the *Einstellung zur Seele* that belongs to the *Darstellung eines Freundes*, is something that, as Williams puts it 'everyone is owed' (*IBWD*, 104), even if that is an infinite (and hence strictly impossible) demand. When Williams considers this universalisation, he is clear that it cannot entail making it so that each will, even ideally, be equally afforded what everyone is, in this way, owed, or even that it should ever be 'in the case of everyone the same' (*IBWD*, 104). And this is, one might say, the

beginning of democratic politics as a way of calculating with the incalculable, of *calculating the incalculable dues* (whether calculated benefits or penalties) that each is owed, by opening a space in which *any* other *can* be respected.

In political life today, this structure is given its chance through the citizen concept, the political concept of the universality of the singular, the countable singularity: it is a political status in terms of which ‘every other is respectable’, as Derrida puts it. What is perhaps more commonly called social justice is often thought to require, by contrast, indiscriminate equality. But deliberations and arguments will be required to justify decisions on equal treatment just as much as unequal treatment in any actual case. To suppose otherwise, to suppose that what is owed indifferently to each is in the case of everyone the same, will always involve smuggling back some supposedly shared or common characteristic of human beings (all alike in likeness to God or all alike as rational animals, for example) that would ground such a judgement in an *a priori* way. However, as John Kane has argued, where considerations of social justice start, instead, from the *law*, and with what Roman jurists expressed as *suum cuique tribuens*, ‘giving to each their due’, the (unavoidable and necessary) calculation of incalculable dues typically depends for its fairness on something like ‘the application of a principle not of equality but of equivalence, that is, on the Aristotelian doctrine of proportionality’ (*JIE*, 377).²² ‘If it is to be worthy of the name’, ‘justice [...] must discriminate’ (375): incalculable justice *must* be ‘calculated’ (378).

This more or less *talionic* (eye-for-an-eye) sense of social justice as calculated fairness, invariably involving a calculated equivalence between strict non-equivalents, invariably demanding a calculation of the incalculable, never supposing in advance that what is owed to each is in the case of everyone indiscriminately the same, has, in the economic sphere, precisely the same shape. Just as the citizen status articulates a (perfectible) *political* measure through which we can calculate with the incalculable singularity of every other, so

money (remuneration in wages and pensions) provides a (perfectible) *economic* measure for doing the same.

XI

Of course, in capitalist economies all remuneration in wages and pensions is something that economic executives (those whose work-titles belong to trades and service worlds of various kinds) must stress and strain to receive from economic organizers (those whose work-titles belong to the worlds of the management of capital of various kinds). Reasonable (creditable, credible) fairness is by no means guaranteed by either the citizen status or the credit-money form – or existing law. Not at all. Nevertheless, in a society where the political economy is tied to the citizen status and credit-money form, the stresses and strains for social justice finds terms of trade that provide for ‘the possibility of democracy’, opening us there to a definite political task-duty: ‘to create and guarantee’, as Nietzsche puts it, for each, ‘as much independence as possible in their opinions, way of life and occupation.’ (*HH* II, 344)²³ In view here is what Spengler calls a basic ‘socialist’ spirit running deep in the fabric of the European-West – a socialism ‘which long preceded Marx and will yet displace him’ (*DW* I, 138)²⁴ – that is marked by a care [*Sorge*] for the whole that wants ‘to call into life a mighty politico-economic order that transcends all class interests’ (*DW* II, 506). And right now, in our time, there where the form of economic thought that discloses everything only in terms of private financial profit is nearly bankrupt, ‘at the end of its success’, with no life-worlds left to conquer, the life of the old finance powers starts to ‘fade out’, and ‘the political side of life’ can assert itself once again (*DW* II, 506). By means, precisely, of the force of ‘law’, the ‘*private* powers of the economy’ – whose massive financial clout is used politically through ‘the tool they have made for themselves’ in the form of ‘the subsidized party’ – could be ‘overthrown’ by the power of an alliance *without* party of those who find satisfaction ‘not in

the heaping-up of riches but in the tasks of true rulership, above and beyond all money-advantage.’ (*DW* II, 506)

Things are not simple here, however. Faithful to both Nietzsche’s aristocratism and to his own model-for-our-time of Rome as the civilisational creature created by Greek cultural creation, Spengler conceives such an alliance without party as one between ‘strong families’, predicting a ‘Caesarism’ to come in the West comparable to Nietzsche’s anticipation of new over-Europe (‘spiritual’) ‘tyrants’ (*BGE*, 105).

For Spengler, the advent of this Caesarist socialism will see both the political party-form and the economic money-form ‘abolished’ (*DW* II, 507). Marx, by contrast, hung on to the idea that the party form has a future – but exclusively in the shape of a single organising party, indeed of a party representing the interests of only part of the whole, the whole proletariat. On the other hand, like Spengler, Marx too thought the money system had to go. In one way or another, both Spengler and Marx saw the political-economy of democracy and a money system as entirely tied-up to an historically capitalist order that was in its death-throes, destined to be succeeded by a socialist alternative altogether without the apparatus of multi-party politics and a credit-money economy.

For his part, Derrida (formally) agrees with Spengler, against Marx, about the finitude of the party form, and calls for its end, but he does not, with that, call for the abolition of all electoral and representative democracy – and that precisely because he does not suppose that there is just one form of electoral and representative democracy, the one that exists in capitalist conditions. ‘Democracy’, Derrida argues, is the name we have inherited for ‘the only regime’ whose own concept includes within itself an essential openness to its own unpredictable self-destroying self-transformation, through interminable ‘self-critique’ (*R*, 86).²⁵ And if democracy in this way invokes an always possible political perfectibility, the money form has an ongoing utility too: invoking the possibility of economically organising

the whole in a credibly, creditably fair way. So, money does not have to go either. As Derrida put it during the discussion at the Banque de France: ‘I do not have to propose that we eliminate money.’ (*DM*, 32 trans. mine)

XII

With its interest-focus on the anonymous *remunerated citizen* this conception may seem, at best, a contribution to ‘bourgeois’ political economy; limited to an interest in ‘how the existing state might reasonably be organised’ (*CV*, 24). However, if the essence of the democratic state is precisely the possibility of the critique of any existing democratic state, this is not so. That any actually existing (past-created) democratic state is *not* the only possible one, or final one, belongs to its concept. It is, in Spengler’s terms, *Faustian* through and through: infinitely finite.

The endless perfectibility of democracy speaks to the always open possibility of an as yet unattained democratic future. On the other hand, for just that reason, it also says *nothing whatsoever* about what perfectionist ambitions might belong to any such future world. Democratic perfectibility projects the possibility of an egalitarian set-up in which each counts the same, where every other is respectable. But that can only mean: projecting a way to be *without* projecting any determinate way in which each should be. Indifferent to each, the politico-economic organisation of the whole deals, one might say, *primarily* in anonymous numbers. And yet this indifference is precisely what maximises the chance, as Stanley Cavell has put it, ‘for each...to seek a step toward an unattained possibility of the self’ (*PDAT*, 131).²⁶ Whether that concerns a step within or beyond the opinions, ways of life or occupations that are, in any here and now, presently attained by each, this is a perfectionism radically opposed to projecting a finally perfected way for each to be. We have already flagged up that some of the most difficult problems for democratic societies today devolve

from the very concept through which we inherit a way of responding to the universality of the singular (the citizen status that determines who counts), and we might also point to the worrisome persistence of the figure and value of ‘fraternity’, the ‘brother’ figure and the exclusively male-only friend models, that have shaped the Western-European conception of a ‘community of friends’. But the Cavellian perfectionist model holds just as much for our concepts of the citizen and the friend as democracy: these too are equally open to unattained possibilities, open to ‘the step beyond’ any presently attained formation. Indeed, the fundamental indifference to the differences of each that a democratic society with a money economy opens is constitutively one that wants to *remain* open to its own ‘beyond’ too: a perfectionism ‘democratized’, in a form of endless self-critique ‘called for by the democratic aspiration’, is reflexive through and through (*CHU*, 1).²⁷ Always exposed to the deathly risk of terrifying and murderous totalitarianisms, political neoliberalisms that prescribe ‘a final or perfected state that each is to attain or pursue’ (*PDAT*, 121), ‘the fascism and socialism of our time’, for example (*CV*, 8), this perfectionism is the promise of life in The Pied Cow, the promise of democracy, and of money too. Paradoxically, precisely because of what David Graeber and David Wengrow call its ‘form of terrifying equivalence’ (*DE*, 444),²⁸ the money-form, like the citizen-title, opens a space in which the singularity of each has the chance of appearing in the anonymity of the all. There where what counts *most* proscribes counting above one, right there it is *just* that we count the numbers – including, perhaps especially, counting the numbers of the lost ones, the deaths of anonymous others, that are ‘excess deaths’.

¹ I would like to express my thanks to Peggy Kamuf and Anjali Joseph for comments and suggestions for improving this essay.

² *NB*: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916* (Second Edition), translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, Blackwell, 1979).

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- ³ *BT*: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by M. Macquarrie and J. Robinson (Oxford, Blackwell, 1962).
- ⁴ *RT*: Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York, PAJ Publications, 1982).
- ⁵ *CV*: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Revised Edition), edited by G.H. von Wright, translated by P. Winch (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1998).
- ⁶ *BGE*: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973).
- ⁷ *IBWD*: Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005).
- ⁸ *PI*: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Revised 4th Edition), translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- ⁹ *DW II*: Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Volume II, translated by C.F. Atkinson (New York, Knopff, 1955).
- ¹⁰ *PPF*: Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment', in *Philosophical Investigations* (Revised 4th Edition), translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 182-243.
- ¹¹ *OBWO*: Simon Glendinning, *On Being with Others: Heidegger – Derrida – Wittgenstein* (London, Routledge, 1998).
- ¹² *FJ*: Margery Allingham, *Flowers for the Judge* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1944).
- ¹³ *ZD*: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zarathustra's Discourses*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (London, Penguin Books, 1995).
- ¹⁴ *PF*: Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, translated by G. Collins (London, Verso, 1997).

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- ¹⁵ I am indebted to Peggy Kamuf for drawing my attention to ‘onely’ as an early modern English spelling variation of ‘only’.
- ¹⁶ *FM*: Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, translated by N. Denny (London: Harper Collins, 1969).
- ¹⁷ *ET*: Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Ego and the Totality’, in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by A. Lingis (Lancaster, Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 25-46.
- ¹⁸ *SAM*: Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Sociality and Money’, translated by F. Bouchetoux and C. Jones, *Business Ethics: A European Review* 16:3 (2007), 203-7.
- ¹⁹ *GR*: Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by N. Nicolaus (London, Penguin Classics, 1993).
- ²⁰ *DM*: Jacques Derrida, ‘Autour des écrits de Jacques Derrida sur l’argent’, in *L’argent: Croyance, mesure, speculation*, edited by M. Drach (Paris, La Découverte, 2004), 201-32.
- ²¹ *FK*: Jacques Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge’, in *Religion*, edited by J. Derrida and G. Vattimo, translated by D. Webb (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998), 1-78.
- ²² *JIE*: John Kane, ‘Justice, Impartiality, and Equality: Why the Concept of Justice Does Not Presume Equality’, *Political Theory* 24:3 (1996), 375-93.
- ²³ *HH II*: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, Part II, translated by P.V. Cohn (New York, MacMillan, 1913).
- ²⁴ *DW I*: Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Volume I, translated by C.F. Atkinson (New York, Knopff, 1955).
- ²⁵ *R*: Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by P-A Brault and M. Naas (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005).
- ²⁶ *PDAT*: Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).
- ²⁷ *CHU*: Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1990).

²⁸ *DE*: David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything* (London, Allen Lane, 2021).