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Whoever I Am: On the Quality of Life

Nicola Masciandaro

Department of English, Brooklyn College, City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY 11220, USA; nicolam@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Abstract: What is the relation between quantification and the mysterious question of identity? What order of quality is proper to the inexplicable fact that one is oneself? Starting with an examination of the ontological blind spots of counting, this essay investigates the priority of quality over quantity, in connection with the spiritual nature of life understood as the spontaneous and infinitely evolving question of itself. It argues, in face of the forces of quantophrenia and numerocracy, for the importance of recognizing the essentially serial and apophatic structure of identity, the existential sense that all entities *are* the living question of themselves. As such, no individual may be considered as merely a part of reality. Each is, no less, the totality.

Keywords: quality; quantity; identity; individuality; individuation

1. That This

> I must interrupt to say that 'X' is what exists inside me. 'X'—I bathe in that this [*esse isto*]. It's unpronounceable. All I do not know is in 'X' . . . Always independent, but it only happens to whatever has a body. Though immaterial, it needs our body and the body of the thing.
>
> –Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*

> The structure of the question is implicit in all experience.
>
> –Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

> Life is a series of experiences which need innumerable forms.
>
> –Meher Baba

Ignorance and indifference regarding the question or mystery of identity are part and parcel of an inordinately or irrationally quantified approach to reality, termed *quantophrenia* by Pitirim Sorokin now a lifetime ago.[1] That we have a word for wayward quantification as a mental disorder is a fitting index of the spiritual nature of the problem, specifically, how it concerns one's personal inner sense of the absolutely radical fact of individual existence. That there are popular 'self-tracking' or 'quantified self' movements, largely focused on well-being, which promise a "self-knowledge through numbers" having nothing to do with this question is another.[2] Perhaps in an age of numerocracy, it is inevitable that persons will attempt to cure and control themselves through quantification, as if performing reflexively the inversion of private and public, subjective and objective, which such 'rule' generates.[3] And yet it is just with respect to the non-quantifiable and unexchangeable nature of the individual, the status of everyone as irreparably themselves, that we register the injustice or error of over-quantification: "this world in prey to rampant quantification, or even quantophrenia . . . represents an affront to the irreducible individual on an intimate level, the level of his or her dignity".[4]

Seeing that counting functions as a procedure of familiarization, a translation of multitudinous and multidimensional things into digits we grasp in the medium of homely hands, it seems natural for quantification to blur the question of identity, wherein one faces paradoxically the utter strangeness of oneself. "For the essence of my self arises from

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this—that nothing will be able to replace it: the feeling of my fundamental improbability situates me in the world where I remain as though [*comme*] foreign to it, absolutely foreign" (Bataille 1988, p. 69). And this *as*, the virtuality or seemingness of one's absolute foreignness, is crucial, being identical with a familiarity nearly too close, too oneself, to recall or conceive—the inescapable vast intimacy of identity itself. The fact that I am myself escapes me by the same circuit wherein I am bound to it, just as "escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [*moi*] is oneself [*soi-meme*] (Levinas 2003, p. 55)". Hear how long Meister Eckhart took to notice his *own* existence: "I once thought—it was not long ago—that I am a man is something other men share with me . . . but that *I am*, that belongs to no man but myself, not to a man, not to an angel, not even to God except insofar as I am one with Him" (Eckhart 2009, p. 131). As this passage implies, it is the counting of one's being as one of many, as equivalent to those of others, which obscures its special quality, just as when numbering objects, we overlook or forget our recognition of the one whereby we count in the first place. Uniqueness, being one, becomes unit. Or as Stephen Priest states, "Quantification is blind to the first-person/third-person distinction" (Priest 2012, p. 298).

This complicity between quantification and identity-blindness, in the sense of not seeing (the question of) identity per se, is exposed in Nietzsche's diagnosis of an ancient error: "The discovery of the laws of number was made on the basis of an error already predominant in the earliest times, that several things might be identical (but actually there are not identical things)" (Nietzsche 1995, p. 30). There is convergence between quantification's suppression, or forgetting, of uniqueness, and stupidity towards the question of identity. Both meet in patterns of thinking that narrowly see things as exchangeable, as members of classes or ones of several, and as summable into greater or lesser values. Both naturalize singularity or take identity for granted, treating the being of an entity, its taking place, as a fact among others. And both, instead of perceiving identity as the question of itself, think of it as something resolvable into a *sum*, whether quantity or 'I am' statement, confusing identity with identification or eclipsing its question with an answer. Yet this old error is actually threefold, comprising not only the illusion of sameness connected with the suppression of singularity, but symmetrically along with it the elision of the serial process of counting, the movement from one to one to one, as well as the overlooking of the presence of unity in the first place, the unarithmetical counting of things as ones through which one counts their plurality into a single number, as presumed in the concept of *arithmos*.[5]

Accordingly, to counter inordinate quantification is to ask not simply for a defensive return to the ontological priority of quality, but for attention to the successive movement of spirit that originates and sustains enumeration, the dynamic ground on which counting stands, wherein the *one* is immanently or always already the series of itself, a series of ones.[6] This is the same seriality or one-after-another-ness that mediates the threshold between quality and quantity, as exemplified in the sorites paradox or the fact that measure, "the immediate unity of the qualitative and the quantitative", is always "a series of measures".[7] Seriality is the dialectical interface of quality and quantity, the quality of quantity and the quantity of quality, an all-pervasive form forever entangled with one's perceiving of it.[8] Without awareness of this interface, critique of quantification will remain stuck in the opposition between quantity and quality, likely leading to some kind of nostalgic ontologizing of substance or to a definition of the qualitative underlying reality of things as *something*—precisely the dead end which the weird fact of identity or problem of being someone compels us to exit. As Priest sums it up in *The Subject in Question*: "The essence of the problem is, if we try to answer the question What am I? no ontological answer seems adequate . . . The problem is saying what is claimed about one of these things when it is claimed I am it" (Priest 2000, 153n11). It is of the quality of identity not only to be questionable, but actually to be, to exist as, the question of itself, as seen in Eriugena's indication of the divine image: "the Divine likeness in the human mind is most clearly discerned when it is only known that it is, and not known what it is . . . what it is is denied

in it [*negatur in ea quid esse*], and only *that* it is is affirmed" (Eriugena 1999–2009, IV.73). There is something superessential about oneself. There is one "in whose eyes I am made [*factus sum*] a question to myself".[9]

To stand with the priority of quality summons the question of the one who quantifies, requiring in Tillich's terms the essentially involved "existential attitude" towards knowledge, which the detached mood of quantitative measurement, "inadequate . . . to reality in its infinite concreteness", steers clear of.[10] To clean the atmosphere of quantophrenia's miasmic fog, not only must "I reject the idea that the meaning of 'existence' can be fully or relevantly captured by the language of quantification", but I must resuscitate or inspire its breathing subject, affirm the qualitative being of whatever is alive to the open, beginningless, and endless nature of reality, and the intimate question of one's identity with(in) it (Gabriel 2015, p. 8). So we speak of 'quality of life' not because we are alive and also like qualities, but because quality itself is a liveness, just as for Hegel determinate being [*Dasein*] *is* quality itself and "*something* . . . is . . . the beginning of the subject" (Hegel 2010, p. 89).[11] Specifically, this means foregrounding at once the singularity, the individuality, and the seriality of beings, all the principles which tend to be suppressed in the process of considering them quantitatively or summing them up. The inevitable impossibility that I am, that anything is itself, comprises all three of these principles. For to be oneself, to exist as a specific individual, is simultaneously to be one of many (one among the other unique individuals) and one *in* many, this singular line flowing through innumerable experiences and forms, such that it is always more true to affirm 'I am *that* I am' than to say 'I am *what* I am'. Similarly, Proudhon unites individuality and seriality into a "metaphysical axiom": "That alone is durable, living, useful and beautiful, which is serial; that alone is of natural and permanent institution, which has its ordination in itself, *cujus lex in ipso est*" (Proudhon 2023, III.vi.308). Or as Eckhart says, "Only that which is without principle properly lives".[12] Contrariwise, "A self which has become a matter of calculation and management has ceased to be a self. It has become a thing"[13] (Tillich 2000, p. 124). Life is properly improper, the condition of being at home being out of place in the limitless line of itself. It not accidental that the inevitable impossibility of individuality is illuminated, as per Sartre's classic example of the social series (from PIE root **ser-* 'to line up'), as a situation of *being in line*: "Consider all the people of the past (if you like, in a long line), add to that all present and future people (again, if you wish, in a line). Now consider yourself. It is a striking and puzzling fact that out of all the people there have been, are and will be, you yourself are one of them" (Priest 1991, p. 220). To put it in medieval terms, seriality is like a mirror in which Nature's production of individuals in order to preserve species reflects God's generation of species in order to create individuals.[14] Or, discarding the frame of any such intention behind manifest reality, seriality is simply the immediate form of individuality's infinity.[15]

The wish of this essay, then, is to articulate and appreciate the priority of quality over quantity in a manner that overcomes the dialectical opposition of these fundamental categories and thus steps past—or at least sideways to—the logic of another "renaissance of the qualitative" (Neuenschwander 2013). I see the opposition between quality and quantity as ultimately false, meaningful only as a means or tool for tuning understanding of their hierarchical relation. Specifically, I will consider the priority of quality as identical with the essentially spiritual nature of life as the spontaneous and infinitely evolving question of itself. The form of identity proper to this priority is apophatic and serial, true to our actual existential situation of being the question of oneself or not knowing who you are in the whole unbounded line of beings: "Here, being neither oneself nor someone else . . ."[16] (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, p. 137). Indicatable yet indicable, present and inexpressible. Being such, breathing and bathing in that this, is qualitatively at odds with substantivism, insofar as it "holds that talk about *this* and *that* cannot be part of a proper description of what things are", and on par with indexicalism, the view "that any enclosed realm described by substantives has something beyond it—*beyond* is a constituent of reality as much as an ingredient of thought" (Bensusan 2021, pp. 15, 19). Analogously, seriality is the open and

anonymous order of unity or wholeness, the dimension where oneness is independent of sameness and difference, as shown, for instance, in Aristotle's definition of the soul and in Young's recuperation of social seriality as collectivity without the requirement of shared attributes or common identity.[17]

The connection between quantification and the question of identity may be clarified further by considering their shared relation to classification as an ontological sorting process whereby it is decided *what* things are and are not.[18] Quantification depends upon classifying beings as the same or different, on grouping them into categories within which they are considered or defined as exchangeable or identical. Even if we do not count things explicitly, the simple act of classifying individuals as ones of a group, of defining them by categories, is already a rudimentary form of quantification, because groups and categories are essentially structured as multiplicities or aggregates that bear a certain magnitude and vague cardinality, just as "assumption of multiplicity always presupposes that there is *something* that occurs multiple times"[19] (Nietzsche 1995, p. 30). Correlatively, simply to name or designate a being as a particular kind of thing, to call it something (as opposed to pointing to it), is a proto-quantitative act, not only because the entity is thus rendered countable, but because it is now the member of the set of somethings designated by that name, part of a group, the multiplicity of which, even if lacking actual form or concrete order, is informed and ordered by the essential capacity of names to signify multiple entities for the multiplicity of beings who use them. Thus, categorization projects onto its object the group dynamics of nomination itself, a dynamics in which the collective power of multiplicity in is play, along with the relative quantitative distinctions of greater and lesser which multiplicities are subject to. It is telling in this regard that the word *category* originally signified accusation and, more literally, declamation in an assembly (*agora*), underscoring how categorization, like public accusation, draws upon the power of multiplicity to include an individual as being in, or excluded from, the vague ordinality of a group. The word *class* (from PIE root **kele-* 'to shout') similarly bears the trace of the collective power of the call (to arms). In short, categorization facilitates and/or enforces quantification by defining individual beings as countable members of multiplicities, members who, by the collective force of the act of categorization itself, bear a quantitative sense, even if the intention is solely to sort, and not count, them.

It is critical, therefore, that the utility and inevitability of classification not blind us to its *coercive* capacity as an instrument of quantification and numerocracy. This requires that one not mistake the sorting of beings for reality or the fullness of truth, but see it for what it is, a more-or-less necessary fiction or representation. As Nietzsche observes, "without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the wholly invented world of the unconditioned and self-identical, without a constant falsification of the world through numbers, people could not live" (Nietzsche 2002, p. 7). Yet it is precisely the coercive power of classification which is blindly embraced when we not only sort ourselves and others into categories for whatever reason, but actually *identify* the being, essence, or lives of ourselves and others with the conceived substance or somethingness of those categories. The issue is that classification, like accusation, insinuates itself into the subject of identity, coloring and occluding its intrinsic 'questionality', or who-am-I-ness, with the collective force of the category. Now it is 'known' what something is, now it is 'decided' who someone is, with all the quantitative power or 'strength in numbers' entailed in membership in and/or exclusion from a group. Now your life is 'a life'. But nothing is identical to what it is. Everything moves with the beyond within it. Even the nothing or "nonbeing itself", says Pseudo-Dionysius, "longs for the Good which is above all being" and by "repelling being . . . struggles to find rest"[20] (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, p. 73). Telling myself who or what I am kills the question *that* I am (at least without some impervious, apophatic skin of extreme circumspection which understands the imperfection of all answers, holding to the vertiginous quality of existence and standing in the infinite seriality of everything). Quantification and occlusion of the question of identity intersect in identification, the horizontal, substantive, and relative form of identity, as opposed to the vertical, indexical,

and absolute truth of identity per se, the unmasterable fact or fate that I am I and you are you. And this (congested) intersection is all the more inevitable in an auto-quantifying world driven by and committed to the dynamics of majority and minority, to relations between the few and the many, wherein identification, confused with identity itself, carries the force of increasing or decreasing the weight or importance of a being by connecting it quantitatively to some logically defined group. "For as long as there have been people, there have been herds of people as well (racial groups, communities, tribes, folk, states, churches), and a very large number of people who obey compared to relatively few who command"[21] (Nietzsche 2002, p. 86). What the self-sorting, peopled world of identitarian entities massively suppresses is the original, inescapable meaning of *sort* itself, the unaccountable lot of being oneself, which is best formulated as a question (who am I?) rather than a certainty, and which bears an essential link to seriality, sharing the latter's verbal root (from **ser-* 'to line up'). My lot is to be here, whoever I am, in line with everyone else. But by classifying everything into countable and orderable categories, it is as if people take impotent vengeance on the divine weirdness of individuated existence, assuming the role of beings who stand apart from the untraceable line of reality and are able to decide what is what. Between quantophrenia and blindness to the mystery of identity stands a will to sort everything out, starting with the power to call oneself this or that. But why this pressurized need to be someone, to belong to a category of countable beings, to amount to something? Why not classify only weakly, gently, without forcefully identifying entities with their shared attributes, and just let everything be whatever it is, the whole series of itself? Why think of ourselves and others in such a way that there is no more room for anything to be everything and/or nothing but only *what* it putatively is, no more spaceless space for this/that mysterious non-thing called life or the soul?

As far as I can see, it is only from the perspective of a self-unknowing serial one that there is a proper place to welcome and speak of the individual soul or someone who in truth knows who they are talking about when they say "*this is my body*". The self-knowledge we lack is immeasurable, for "what is lacking cannot be counted" (Eccles. 1:15), or as St. Jerome translated the line, "the number of fools [*stultorum*] is infinite" (Eccles. 1:15).[22] In turn, identifying being with something, defining ourselves and others as this or that, renders life as an object of calculation, with all the unfixable consequences of a world of fixed things.[23] *Stultus* is from PIE **stel-*, 'to set, be stiff'. In sum, the intellectually and scientifically unanswerable question of one's identity asks everyone to loosen up about their 'ownmost' essential stupidity and follow wheresoever it leads: "If the fool would persist in his folly . . .".[24]

2. Everyone First!

The common, and now classic, way of countering inordinate quantification and its unfortunate consequences is by appeal to the category of *quality*, construed as quantity's opposite and/or correlate, the suppressed content or integrity which is counted in quantification, paradoxically at the expense of its own privation. Concern over the loss or relative devaluation of quality in a world of universal quantification is legible from many directions and is especially germane to Romanticism.[25] For Goethe it pertains to the flight of mathematical knowledge from experiential reality and the consequent need for an attentive, intrinsic science of quality: "quantity and quality must be looked upon as the two poles of visible being; which is . . . why the mathematician raises the language of his formulas high enough . . . to include the immeasurable world together with the measurable and calculable world . . . now everything appears tangible, within reach and mechanical".[26] For Marx, it pertains to the alienating temporal commodification of labor under capitalism: "Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time's carcass. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything" (Marx 1955). For Guénon, it pertains to the inversion of matter over form, substance over essence, and the consequent descent of rationalism into the homogenizing hegemonic materialism of the modern West: "the reduction of quality to quantity is intrinsically nothing but a 'reduction of the higher to the lower', and

some have very rightly attributed this very character to materialism: to claim to derive the 'greater' from the 'lesser' is indeed one of the most typical of modern aberrations".[27] For Kula, it pertains to the demise of a "traditional mentality", the local, negotiable, and discretionary methods of measure of which attest to the "dominance of qualitative over quantitative considerations in the social thinking of preindustrial societies".[28] For Evola, it pertains to the "infantile" character of American individualism, which is "open to every kind of standardization": "the 'open-mindedness that some would ascribe to Americans is the counterpart of their formless interior life. The same goes for their 'individualism' . . . Individualism and personality are not the same: the one belongs to the formless world of quantity, the other to the world of quality and hierarchy".[29] For Hayek, it pertains to the blindness of scientism: "the common tendency in the study of social phenomena to attempt to disregard all the 'merely' qualitative phenomena and to concentrate, on the model of the natural sciences, on the quantitative aspects, on what is measurable . . . is the result of an entirely unfounded prejudice" (Hayek 1955, pp. 50–51). For Lukács, it pertains to the spatialization of time in modern life: "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space" (Lukács 1968, p. 90). For Lord Northbourne, it pertains to the very possibility of meaningful existence and action vis-à-vis our insignificance on the cosmic scale: "if human life has any significance at all, it is not in the domain of quantity but in the domain of quality . . . To accept the perishability and dependence of ourselves and of the entire universe of forms . . . is a necessary prelude to the understanding of our situation, and such an understanding is indispensable to effective action. It seems that for the present our achievements in the domain of the quantitative and perishable have obscured from us our dependence on the qualitative and imperishable, thus confusing our sense of direction and frustrating much well-intentioned action" (Northbourne 2008, pp. 39–40). For Corti, it pertains to the prospect of engineering neuroprosthetic hands, integrating the manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world into artificial organs, organs more in tune with the actual nature of embodiment: "The point is to try to get science to focus on, include and discuss qualitative methods and the qualitative dimension in its approach to the world. I am not convinced that we need to reconstruct the scientific image of man if we want to take into account also raw feelings . . . I will argue . . . for the possibility of constituting a quanto-qualitative view in the analysis of upper limb prostheses" (Corti 2022, p. 200). For Barthes, it pertains to the essence of bourgeois mythology: "*The quantification of quality* . . . By reducing any quality to quantity, myth economizes intelligence: it understands reality more cheaply" (Barthes 1982, p. 153). Similarly, as Sandoval and Haraway observe, the hyper-pervasive figure or logic of "the more, the better" is "crucial to the affect of postmodernism globalization [*sic*]—the subject immersed in sensation, in stimulation, in the hyperreal . . . It is a figure of the 'new world' postmodern order in its neocolonial mode" (Sandoval 2000, pp. 202, 122). No less is this blind equation of quantity with goodness "a social and psychological dynamic . . . in the university", where the "valuing of quality through the quantity of effects produced . . . economizes scholarly intelligence itself"[30] (Sandoval 2000, p. 122)—as performed in this academic amassing of passages.

There is plenty of truth in this pattern of concern. It confirms, overall, that there is something totally precious and intrinsically valuable in the lifeworld of beings, something no less internal than external, which cannot and will never submit to quantification, simply because it is not so, because one's own vivid overwhelming existence is pure validation of a principle commonly grasped as 'quality', the meaning of which is immediately and unquestionably indifferent to more and less, greater and smaller. As Meher Baba explains, quality pertains to the *totality* of dignity, the inherent standing of all in identity with reality, one with the spiritual infinity of the truth inside all things: "Spiritual life is not a matter of quantity but of inherent *quality* of living. Spiritual infinity includes in its scope all phases of life. It comprises acts which are great as well as acts which are small. Being greater than the

greatest, spiritual infinity is also smaller than the smallest, and it can equally express itself through happenings irrespective of whether they are outwardly small or great . . . There are no gradations in spiritual importance, when all life is lived in the shadow of eternity . . . The infinite Truth which is latent in everything can reveal itself only when life is seen and accepted *in its totality*" (Baba 1967, I.168).[31] In other words, quality concerns not only the phenomenon and nature of spirit in life, of something vitally valuable which stands below and above and beyond the bounds of quantitative measure, but the essential openness and non-separation of everyone as entities capable of revealing and realizing the endless truth of everything by living (directing and experiencing one's existence) in the face of life's totality, "the shadow of eternity". Quality of living, in this sense, is more fundamental than 'quality of life' in the common sense, as it has to do with the "inherent quality of living" per se, as distinct from the external manners of living which draw from it.[32] Like the proverbial sweetness of life to itself, this spiritual quality of living regards one's recognition and savoring of everyone's being truly *first* in the order of reality's infinity: "the spiritual infinity of the Truth has room for the paradox that one person can be regarded as the totality itself. Therefore one person is not only capable of being looked upon as equal in importance to two or more persons but even as equal to all . . . Since everyone in creation is not only in spiritual infinity, then *everyone is first in importance and no one is second*".[33] The unitary quality of spiritual infinity thus contradicts the flatness of generic equality (from *aequus*, level, even, or flat) which ranks beings as the same by identifying them as just or merely themselves, or worse, as members of a shared category, each no greater than the other.[34] In comparison to irony, which is constituted by the individual's self-suspending negation of totality as the unified sum of all things, the sincere quality of spiritual life is connected to the individual's identifiability with the totality, not as a quantified whole, but as the endless reality, the unboundedness of which each life manifests by and in its own event, a spectacular 'uncircumscribable sphere' before which everyone has, and is, a front-row, first-person seat.[35] Not only is there everything, there is you—and you are it! Spiritual life as quality of living is thus not so much anti-ironic as sincerely hyper-ironic, suspending the totality as such by recognizing its identity with everyone and everything, with simple disregard for questions of external scale or importance, and happily investing itself in "happenings irrespective of whether they are outwardly small or great". The spiritual quality of living is *inherent* because life contains what contains it; life moves in the specular and chiastic circuit of spirit whose being is nameable as an X or transposition between self and all: "You are because God is. God is because you are".[36]

3. Is a Bone

Quality of life is essentially spiritual (from *spiritus*, 'breath') in two interpenetrating senses, both positive and negative: (1) in the positive sense of belonging to ontologically permeable, living and breathing beings who at once witness as if from outside and immersively are their own experience of being in a world, of existing in and as the very eyes of this wild totality; and (2) in the negative sense of being non-reifiable, neither reducible to, nor definable as, an objective thing, whether materially (materialism) or immaterially (animism).[37] The relation between the spiritual quality of life and the 'equatability' of everyone with all is revealed in the two's shared contradiction of reification, which, as Gabriel and Žižek show, is the means and end of irrational quantification as the natural consequence of non-reflective knowing, of science that forgets its own being, in particular, the evident fact that quantification itself is a spiritual exercise, an activity of objectifying inwardness: "The fetishism of quantification and of the logical form prevailing in much of contemporary philosophical discourse is characterized by a lack of reflection on its constitution . . . Reification mistakes its own activity of setting up its world (in the sense of a framework in which determinate things can appear) for the activity of something external to it to the effect that the world appears as the given par excellence . . . *Reification is the problem and it begins where reflection denies access to itself*" (Gabriel and Žižek 2009, pp. 14, 77). The anti-spirituality of reification, which is continuous with the error of enumerating different

beings as identical things, lies in its being a false form of objectivity, a picture that denies its having been taken, an auto-contradictory refusal of the objective fact that the spirit of life is, first and foremost, objective, that the quality of life per se is associated with its ability to experience itself as self-objectifying spirit: "*Life* objectifies itself, it realizes itself in animal bodies which in turn are capable of manifesting expressions. The inwardness of life is only realized in its outward manifestations" (Gabriel and Žižek 2009, p. 77).[38] From this comes our natural delight in activity, which as Dante says, amplifies in a certain way the being of the agent by manifesting his own image [*propriam similitudinem explicare*].[39] That activity has for us has this unavoidable musical quality, that "without activity pleasure does not arise, and every activity is completed by pleasure",[40] that movement and music are twin sciences,[41] demonstrates the inescapable imperative to *harmonize* quantitative perception with the priority of qualitative truth.[42]

Spiritual freedom is not freedom from materiality, but precisely the life of freedom through matter: "The life of the spirit . . . is a life of positive freedom in which the spirit *infuses itself into matter* and shines through it without submitting to any curtailment of its own claims . . . The life of the spirit is a *unified and integral existence* which does not admit of exclusive or unrelated compartments" (Baba 1967, I.130).[43] The very failure of materialistic progress to produce happiness, to generate free spirits out of well-provisioned bodies, all the daily deaths of the dream of materialism, proves this.[44] And because the spirit of life is integral and integrating, a 'synaesthetic' symbiosis of inside and outside, its self-expanding gravity is to receive and project, for better or worse, the quality of itself into all things. It cannot not do so, as "[t]here is no unbridgeable gulf separating the finer aspects of nature from its gross aspect. They all interpenetrate one another and exist together"[45] (Baba 1967, III.55). "Whether they desire it or not, all persons are constantly acting and interacting upon each other by their very existence"[46] (Baba 1967, II.92)—a fact that digital networks materialize too clearly, not merely as media of quantitatively mutual influence on individual opinion and behavior, but more profoundly, as a single global device for factualizing truth itself, territorializing the experiential quality of science or the event of knowing per se.[47]

If the division at the heart of science (from PIE root **skei-* 'to cut, split') is between knower and known, and the destiny of knowledge is to unite them, to realize a knowledge of reality coincident with self-knowledge, then the sign of scientism is precisely that quality of excising the lived being of the knower, cutting out the substance of the one who knows from the order of knowledge via representations or illusions of participation.[48] This is reflected with parodic effect in the domain of conspiracy theory, in which the externality and inaccessibility of the truth—*the truth is out there*—is united with the shared alienation of speaking or breathing the out-there truth together (*con* + *spirare*). But the knower cannot walk out of the room of science's universe; the spiritual quality of knowledge remains (t)here, for as Heidegger said, "severing also is still a joining and relating".[49] Experience does not stop just because it is mistrusted or discounted.[50] The task, then, is to capitalize on the dialectically necessary and constantly impingent return of science to life, or for the being of the knower to give place to the cornerstone of quality, "the stone which the builders rejected" (Psalm 118:22).[51] This means to recollect and elevate what escapes our categories. "Has not the moment perhaps arrived to remember when the living being was not yet either a god or a man or an animal, but simply a soul, that is, a life?" (Agamben 2004, my translation).

Where reflection denies access to itself, to the fact of its own coming-to-be, is also where it denies to others identical access, depriving of spirit the thus-constituted 'world'. This is evident in how the modern sense of death follows the demotion of the factical from the *that* to the *what*, such that a lifetime is no longer seen in the halo of its having been. The dead are deprived of the past's everlasting quality and open significance, other than whatever novel meaning they may acquire via reinterpretation by the living.[52] Without room to breathe *between* the poles of being (that and what), the dead are no longer recognizable as the ones who *were* themselves, as per Virgil's self-introduction in Dante's *Inferno*: "Non omo, omo

già fui" (*Inferno* 1.67) [Not a man, I was formerly a man] (Alighieri 2011). In other words, it looks as if being itself has been historicized away, as if the dead will no longer have been, should they be forgotten. This may help to explain the modern fixation with counting the dead.[53] The modern sense of death stands in denial of the truth that, as Rosenzweig says, "when a form of the world dies . . . it is made eternal" (Rosenzweig 1998, p. 55).

The relationship between quantification and this denial is dramatized in Wordsworth's poem, "We Are Seven", in which the reification of life and death is countered via the eternality of number in the spirit of a child who tallies her dead siblings in the present tense. "A simple child . . ./That lightly draws its breath,/And feels its life in every limb,/What should it know of death?" (Wordsworth and Coleridge 1969, p. 63). The feeling of life-in-limb knows that everything that happens happens forever, which means, at the same time, that nothing ever happens, that non-happening is the universal location where things properly take place. The indissoluble unity of the child's "seven" reflects the ever-green, non-quantifiable singularity of each life: "Their graves are green, they may be seen". These lines, while, in an adult manner, trying to instruct the child in the factuality of death, only slip through her response into another, present sense of *they*: "The little Maid replied,/'Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,/And they are side by side.'" (Wordsworth and Coleridge 1969, p. 64). A life never need recur to continue, because its form lives forever, whether or not it is lived again.[54] The grave, the corpse, the bone, only testify to the ever-present fact that someone forever will have been. Alternately, we may grasp the concept that that which is an individual is never born and never dies. "A body came into the world, but it wasn't you" (Howard 1995, p. 164). There is a sense in which 'Socrates is dead' means that 'Socrates is.' (Coomaraswamy 1977).

To think of individuals in these terms, whether as eternal selves or no-less-imperishable nothings, is correlative to witnessing that, as a life or soul, no one in reality ever does anything, but rather *is* that which identifies themselves with movements of mind and body.[55] In the absence of such perception, the impulse to remember the dead becomes a call to interminable action: *We will never forget!*—a slogan of blindness to the eternality of the dead. This is a saying of a collectivity which cannot live as already-dead, which thinks of death (under the sign of capitalism) as permanent loss: "all the living awaited the experience of the dead . . . Thus living and dead were interdependent. Always. Only a unique form of egoism has broken this interdependence. With disastrous results for the living, who now think of the dead as the *eliminated*" (Berger 2007, p. 5). Such is the disaster identified by Kundera in the opening of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, whereby the illusion of permanent disposability and inherent obsolescence founds a kingdom where forgiveness (and forgetting) is meaningless, resembling our collective production of "the profound moral perversity of a world that rests essentially on the nonexistence of return, for in this world everything is pardoned in advance and therefore everything cynically permitted" (Kundera 1984, p. 4).

4. Facing the Face

It is a wonderful discovery, like waking from some bad dream, to remember or recollect something that everyone by virtue of their own experienced event knows, namely, that the immediate transcendent quality of everything is always right here, looking at you in the face, that every entity is actually an unveiling that no denial can erase: "The being-worm of the worm, the being-stone of the stone, is divine. That the world is, that something can appear and have a face . . . this is the good . . . Evil, on the other hand, is the reduction of the taking-place of things to a fact like others, the forgetting of the transcendence inherent in the very taking-place of things"[56] (Agamben 1993c, p. 14). The evil habit of the human mind is to recognize this simple inherent good, one comparable to Hegel's conception of the pure quality of *Dasein* or determinate being (quality without yet being the quality *of* something), only once it is quantitatively negated or threatened, to see the taking-place or register the face of something, perceive its truly primary quality, only in light of counting its death or actual reduction to a fact like others, as an objectified good for us. Correlatively,

the quantified modern fact is not simply a sensuous particular, but one for which the meaning is tied to *interest*, to its potential to pay off epistemologically.[57] Such is the habit which scientistic quantophrenia, as ironically captured in pseudo-Stalin's aphorism—"The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of a million is a statistic"—prescribes: "The science-oriented ideology of our time, which holds that all knowledge ultimately . . . can be represented in quantitative relations, contributes substantially to darkening our horizon; from this perspective, one cannot understand how objective and simultaneously spirit-independent moral facts . . . can even exist"[58] (Gabriel 2022, p. 189). But spiritual truths (moral, metaphysical, mystical, etc.) are inherently live and situational, not informatic, and thus not quantifiable. They are located on the sacred threshold between objects and subjects, in the zone where each ecstatically includes the other.[59]

We know in our hearts what is inherently wrong, but override that knowledge with intellectual justifications in denial of the actual quality of life, i.e., according to desires or fantasies which we fear or lack courage not to act on.[60] Mentally wedded via desires to the quantified space of reasons, we become bound to disregard the value or good for which there is no reason, that of existence, life, being or reality itself, regardless of however it might appear to us. And yet logically we must see it, divine the taking-place of things, so as to perceive anything at all. This implies that the reduction of being to a fact like others is more properly understood as a kind of *blindly willful unseeing*, an overlooking-by-seeing-otherwise. As Bonaventure says with respect to our blindness to pure and simple being (*purissimum esse*): "How remarkable . . . is the blindness of the intellect which does not take note of that which it sees first and without which it can know nothing" (Bonaventure 2002, p. 115). Even more remarkable is the fact that this stupidity or inattention (not knowing what you are doing while you are doing it) regarding the immanently transcendent quality of being is, no less, and perhaps more deeply, an expression of fear. As Lispector states: "The horror is that we know that we see God in life itself . . . And if I postpone the face of reality until after my death—it's out of guile, because I prefer to be dead when it is time to see Him and that way I think I shall not really see Him, just as I only have the courage to really dream when I sleep" (Lispector 2012, p. 154). Accordingly, to grasp authentically the nature and scope of quantophrenia requires relinquishing the too-easy sense that one is indeed and already in all sincerity a lover of quality, when in reality the reverse might be the underlying uncomfortable truth. Just as we are often inadmissibly intimidated by excellence, to encounter superiorly simple being and identity, sovereignly purposeless and beyond reason, namelessly wild and free, is simply frightening and a threat to the self-image of someone who thinks they know who they are and where they are going, who is counting on things in that way. To what extent is quantophrenia, or the mad will to insist upon tallying the immeasurable, actually symptomatic of qualophobia, the fear of quality per se?[61]

Quantitative understanding, when mistaken for trustworthy experience of reality or dependable determination of what matters, tends to cloud one's perception of true values, which are not relative, and not dependent upon counting, but qualitatively intrinsic to things themselves, inherently independent of both whatever it is anyone wants to be true and whether they are recognized or not: "True values are values which belong to things *in their own right*. They are intrinsic, and because they are intrinsic, they are absolute and permanent and are not liable to change from time to time or from person to person. False values are derived from desires or wants; they are dependent upon *subjective factors*, and being dependent upon subjective factors, they are relative and impermanent and are liable to change from time to time and from person to person" (Baba 1967, III.139).[62] Infinite discrimination is needed, then, in order to never stop seeing the difference between the good of the thing and the 'goodness' you see or think or want in relation to it. Again, the priority of intrinsic values and its elision are evident in the psychic movement of counting, which, by considering toward the sum, ordering itself into the quantity of co-identified things, overlooks the inherent and integral quality of each thing, on the basis of which counting at first became possible or desirable. Reckoning everything quantitatively, making

decisions as if only the numbers counted, ties intelligence to frames of mind in which the very notion of intrinsic value *does not compute*, where the forgetting of quality is not only experienced tangibly in the degradation of environments and material evidences of spiritual malaise, but more subtly in the less measurable colors of muteness, distraction, and other affects of mere information-transmission which reification imposes on persons by denying the infinity of their spirit or breath as beings transposable with the totality, as if the world were populated with epiphenomenal bystanders and not, as expressed in some Amerindian myths, absolutely original entities: "in the beginning there was nothing . . . only people" (de Castro 2013; Danowski and de Castro 2017).

5. Who Am I?

To recognize the quality of life as spiritual, as endlessly other than a breathless thing, means to be real and stand with everyone before everything in the place of each one's taking-place, in the location of the question.[63] In Gabriel's humanistic terms, "spirit is the capacity to lead a life according to a notion of who we are and who we want to be. We humans locate ourselves at some point in the universe, history, the animal kingdom, culture, the social order, and so on, and whatever we do always stands in relation to this location"[64] (Gabriel 2022, p. 179). That, at least, is one more way of indicating the essence of quality, that pure thisness and this pure thatness, which, if it could be defined, may be conceived as a question, the '?' inherent to the heart of all beings. Standing in deictic relation to reality and locating oneself in the question—Who am I? What am I doing here?—are simultaneous movements continuous with the recognition of a universal interiority, as Bensusan shows with regard to the links between indexicalism and perspectivism: "Perspectivism understands that what is common between intentionalities across species is deixis"[65] (Bensusan 2021, p. 86). The immeasurable quality of reality, also known as the spiritual infinity of the truth, is inseparable from the ability of beings to become whatever they are via being the question of themselves: "the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being this or that. It has the structure of a question" (Gadamer 1989, p. 362). So, the magnitude and endlessness of human questioning suggests that behind and in front of it all lurks 'ONE' who unquestionably needs to know: "The unitarian Beyond is an indivisible and indescribable infinity. It seeks to know itself. It is of no use to ask why it does so".[66] Likewise, the original mystery of everything is exposable as nothing more mysterious than the question itself, which renders reality infinitely self-elusive in its self-production: "It seems hard to find an acceptable answer to the question of how or why the world conceives a desire, and discovers an ability, to see itself, and appears to suffer in the process. That it does so is sometimes called the original mystery. Perhaps . . . the mystery *arises from* our insistence on *framing* a question where there is, in reality, *nothing* to question"(Brown 1969, p. 105). Whatever answers are and are not forthcoming, there simply is this place of the question where everything stands.

Whether there is a hidden reality behind all questioning or whether such a reality is only the projection of questioning is a question for elsewhere. The important point is that there is a crucial spontaneous bond between questioning and the experiential spark or spirit of life, just as "Every sudden idea has the structure of a question" (Gadamer 1989, p. 366).[67] The being of the question is the elided–revealed unity inside the scientistic schism between experiment and experience. Whatever a proper science of the question might deduce, it makes good sense to assert that life has the quality of a question, and that the quality of life is questionality or the being-question. As the question is the form of life's connection to itself, so it is the special bond between knowledge and nature: "Every experiment is a question put to Nature, to which it is compelled to give a reply" (Schelling 2004, p. 197). To experiment is to play with experience via manifest or latent, or explicit or implicit, questions. It is an activity in no way limited to the kind of creature who is compelled, and compels itself, to mark its voice with the spontaneous emergence of questions ('the question arises') and to subject its own questioning to questioning.[68] As a smile is the flashing of the soul, a question is the smile of the mind. Its spark, in whatever form, is the very sign

of that spontaneous living quality we find to be, and through which we find things to be, good, intrinsically valuable, and inherently worthy of care and attention.[69]

And yet, as Fiumara points out, our immediate appreciation of the spontaneous, of what arises of itself (sua sponte), is also something that especially sours in the human psyche in relation to the question of spirit, namely, the problem of mind and body: "there is nothing more attractive or convincing than spontaneity, something admired to the extreme of envy, *in whomever it may be recognized*. Also, we commonly think of the mind as a creation of our living body . . . And yet in the admiration of spontaneity we seem to perceive that this mental attitude, conversely, almost shapes and informs our living bodies. There is thus *a pervasive question* asked here, namely why this potential is not developed, why spontaneity for the most part is evaded or attacked".[70] Note here the sense in which spontaneity is recognized as a kind of meta-quality, or quality of quality, a form that impresses us irrespective of whether we like or dislike, or approve or disapprove of, its subject. It speaks to the fundamental performativity of life, to excellence in living irrespective of 'whose side you are on.'[71] But that tiger-like quality, this 'aliveness' of being as the radical, unanswerable question of itself—"What immortal hand or eye,/Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"—is unsettling to the mind that wants to think it knows itself, and that it grasps its origin and end (Blake 1967, p. 42). Distaste for spontaneity, the bubbly quality of being, is the mirror image of the fear of death seen as fear of life, the horror, as Bataille says, of "the universal ferment of life", a repulsion towards the spontaneous generation-cum-decay from which we spring (Bataille 1991, II.80). Loss of spontaneity is like collapsing in the face of contradiction: "the prime casualty of our failure to sustain paradox is our potential for spontaneity"[72] (Fiumara 2009, p. 25).

Spontaneity stimulates and is the stimulation of spirit, the impulse prickling that sleepy part of you which would rather remain numb to this vitally decaying predicament of embodied being.[73] It echoes, to haunting and/or thrilling effect, what Meher Baba terms "the original whim [*lahar*]" or "the first 'word' uttered by God—'who am I?'" (Baba 1973, p. 83), this "sudden and spontaneous impulse" whereby "the undifferentiated being of the Absolute" is instantly "astir with the life of innumerable frothy selves who secure their separateness in definite size and shape through self-limitation within the foamy surface of the ocean"[74] (Baba 1967, I.57). Here, the original intimacy between quality and question is disclosed at the touchpoint of spontaneity and immediacy, the emergence or first event of existence, which, as Hegel articulates it, belongs to the simple unity of being and non-being.[75] So the simplicity of quality, as that suchness about which nothing further can be said, is like the intelligent 'stupidity' of the question which, neither knowing nor not knowing, is the verbal analogue of the existential unity of being and non-being, a first word that is at once word and non-word. Quality is the filmy and foamy surface of the absolute's self-bubbles, the determinate iridescence of the ocean which speaks and breathes in sighs the question of itself. The spiritual nature of quality is revealed in the present suddenness of the question, just as "spontaneity is of the essence of true spirituality"[76] (Baba 1967, II.192).

Regarding the socio-cultural question of quantity vs. quality, it is curious and conspicuous that questioning is at the core, positively and negatively, of the expanding human–digital interface and is, furthermore, a threshold for so-called artificial intelligence (Romele 2019). As formalized in the search engine, questioning is the primary way we currently use and are used by Big Data and it is also, as the essence of dialectical understanding and discursivity, that which digital networks seem driven to preclude and degrade into, for instance, behaviors of blind browsing (searchlessly searching for nothing). As Han explains, infocracy, or digital postdemocracy, is marked by the mutual disappearance of questionality and the voice (i.e., spirit) of the other: "My statement or opinion acquires a discursive quality only through the voice of the other. Under conditions of communicative action, I need to be aware that what I say may be challenged by others. A statement that does not have a question mark hanging over it does not have a discursive character".[77] The techno-hermeneutic black-box-like world of research and development, in cooperation with

the bureaucracies of numerocratic rule, would seem to be generating outside itself a more and more deceptively transparent, algorithmized world where questions are increasingly unreal, abstract, or always already answered, in contradiction to Socrates's point (which is the hardest point to understand for those who want others to spend the rest of life quietly minding their own business) that discursive questioning is both the divine will and that which makes life worth living.[78]

6. Ellipsis

How to bridge the abyss between philosopher and ruler, governor and seer, this uninhabitable, yet vastly peopled, space between the ones who see life as a matter of always having the answer and the ones who see life as a matter of following the question all the way into the truth of its own negativity, who breathe the knowledge of not knowing?[79] One thing one may do is learn to recognize the spiritual quality of every thing's existence and give expression to the sense of life as the living question of itself, which, perforce, entails dequantifying one's notions of the good or valuable, and holding quantification to the minimum imposed by necessity. As Blake's hand, transcribing the writing on the wall in Daniel 5:25-28, indicated: "Bring out number, weight & measure in a year of dearth" (Blake 1988, p. 36). This means thinking otherwise than according to numerically quantified determinations of value/success/profit, e.g., the massive framing of collective concerns as a matter of majority or minority, because "manipulation of *numbers*, however clever, can neither yield right adjustment between the individual and society, nor can it yield true harmony between various groups which come to exist within the society . . . As long as a social problem is dominated by the idea of numbers and multiplicity there is no lasting solution for it. The One in all cannot be contacted through the multiplication of the many, but only by shedding the false idea of the many"[80] (Baba 1967, I.169–70). In essence, one must let fall the whole idea that anything, whether of the same kind or not, can ever be considered as equivalent to another thing, as one *of* many, except in the pseudo-sense of being the very 'same' infinite unity or utterly independent One in all. The very notion of multiplicity as a quantity or number must go, in favor of the serial or "innumerable frothy selves" understanding of reality—a move, or swerve, which has more than enough in common with what one usually does, with life as actually lived in the midst of itself as opposed to narrativized as if from an inexistent superior vantage point.

As suggested by the history of laments over quantification and appeals to the priority of quality, i.e., the record of renaissances of the qualitative, from humanism to Romanticism to modern phenomenology and so on, a proper remedy against inordinate quantification is not to be performed via nostalgia for quality as a lost good or an appeal to become more human again. There is no going back—this is a seduction of the qualitative immediacy of memory/imagination—and such nostalgia even more tragically and perversely spoils the vivid, sacred question or intuition of qualophobia, failing to fathom the depth of everyone's profound fear of all the present immeasurables which, in their wild and immediately transcendent spontaneity, will never be enslaved to quantification. It is as if life under better, more perfectly managed conditions would somehow make sense, produce lasting happiness, or infinitely coincide with itself. If one needs to catch up to anything, it is to spontaneity itself, which as Fiumara says, is "developed by being capable of *resisting* the joint threat of outer persuaders and inner agents"[81] (2009, p. 20).

In place of further appeals (such as this one) to the principle of quality under the onslaught of rampant quantification, what is called for now is a creative overcoming of the opposition in the form of a qualitative appreciation of every individual, all beings, as no different from the totality, dispelling all illusions of anyone reducibly being merely one more or 'another' member of a quantified class: "The One *in* the many comes to experience itself as one *of* the many. This is due to imagination or false thinking"[82] (Baba 1967, I.35). It is therefore a question of anarchically forgetting *at once*, via this profound prepositional shift, both the individual and the collective ego: "In social life the recognition of the spiritual infinity of the Truth will mean a challenge to individualism as well as to collectivism. It

initiates a new way of thinking in terms of an indivisible totality and it discards all the relative values of comparison *in favour of the recognition of the intrinsic worth of everything*"[83] (Baba 1967, I.171). The crucial importance of such a forgetting, one equal to remembering the one in everyone, is evident in all the ways in which its opposite, the sticky web of toxically pressurized complexes of personal and group identity, is clouding the perception of the limitless anonymous place, the open *heart* of individuality, beautifully named by Augustine as "my heart, where I am whoever/whatever [*quicumque*] I am" (Augustine 2006, 10.3.4).[84]

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Notes

1 (Sorokin 1956) Not that Sorokin was against quantification per se, which is unthinkable given that "ultimate reality is infinite quantitatively and qualitatively" (Sorokin 1954, p. 366).

2 See *Quantified Self: Self Knowledge Through Numbers*, https://quantifiedself.co (accessed on 5 June 2024)). On the self-tracking movement, see Lupton (2016).

3 "Governance by numbers, as a radical form of impersonal power (an impersonality to which the law already aspired), has thus paradoxically spawned a world of bonds of dependence. In it there can be no difference marked between countries and businesses, or public and private . . . The suppression of the Law's heteronomy—legal rules treated as just another product competing on a market of norms—has generated a double movement of privatisation of public responsibilities and 'publicisation' of private ones" (Supiot 2017, p. 285).

4 Bouilloud and Deslandes (2020) and Ghislain Deslandes, "Life is Not a Quantity: Philosophical Fragments Concerning Governance by Numbers", in (Bouilloud and Deslandes 2020, p. 100).

5 "The fundamental phenomenon which we should never lose sight of in determining the meaning of *arithmos* . . . is counting, or more exactly, the *counting-off*, of some number of things. These things, however different they may be, are taken as uniform when counted as *'objects.' Insofar* as these things underlie the counting process they are understood as *of the same kind*. That word which is pronounced last in counting off or numbering, gives the *'counting-number,'* the *arithmos* of the things involved . . . In the process of counting, in the *actus exercitus* (to use scholastic terminology), it is only the *multiplicity of the counted things* which is the object of attention. Only that can be 'counted' which is *not one*, which is before us in a certain number: neither an object of sense nor *one* 'pure' unit is a *number* of things or units. The 'unit' as such is no *arithmos*" (Klein 1968, vol. 46, pp. 48–49).

6 "The series is simultaneous unity and multiplicity, particular and general: true poles of all perception, which cannot exist without one another" (Proudhon 2023). "The ONE is one complete whole and simultaneously a series of ones within the ONE" (Baba 1963, p. 52). As a metaphysical principle, seriality is present for Aristotle both in the ordering of the categories and in the refuted, 'bad tragedy' view of nature as "a series of episodes" (Aristotle 1941, *Metaphysics*, 1090b20–1), though his argument for the priority of substance, by entertaining the serial view hypothetically, expresses a certain ambivalence, or play, in the totality of things: "The subject of our inquiry is substance; for the principles and the causes we are seeking are those of substances. For if the universe [*to pan*] is of the nature of a whole [*holon*], substance is its first part; and if it coheres merely by virtue of serial succession [*ephexes*], on this view also substance is first, and is succeeded by quality, and then by quantity" (Aristotle 1941, *Metaphysics*, 1069a19–22). Aquinas articulates such whole/serial ambivalence as a question of perspective, in considering the nature of angelic knowledge: "Now it happens that several things may be taken as several or as one; like the parts of a continuous whole. For if each of the parts be considered severally they are many: consequently neither by sense nor by intellect are they grasped by one operation, nor all at once. In another way they are taken as forming one in the whole; and so they are grasped both by sense and intellect all at once and by one operation; as long as the entire continuous whole is considered" (Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas n.d.), *Summa Theologica*, Ia.58.2, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1058.htm (accessed on 5 June 2024)). So, for Proclus, seriality is a universal principle manifesting the neither-one-nor-many nature of the One: "A series [*seirá*] or order is a unity . . . but that which is cause of the series as a unity must be prior to them all . . . Thus there are henads consequent upon the primal One, intelligences consequent on the primal Intelligence, souls consequent on the primal Soul, and a plurality of natures consequent on the universal Nature" (Proclus 1963, p. 21).

7 (Hegel 2010, pp. 285, 302). On the sorites paradox, see (Paradox 2018).

8 Seriality is a deceptively simple idea and phenomenon with connections to various interrelated concepts like sequence, succession, repetition, consequentiality, implication, order, iteration, list, coincidence, enumeration, pattern, and so on. To think clearly about seriality requires understanding the distinctions between seriality's proliferating possibilities while staying within sight of the

principle of seriality in its simplicity. This is always somewhat difficult, because of the way seriality mirrors the movement of thinking as a passage from thought to thought, to the point that the being or existence of a series may appear indistinguishable from the thinking of it. Just as, in thinking, we pass from thought to thought in a manner that makes one focus on the thoughts and forget or elide their passing per se, so, in the perception of seriality there is a natural tendency to give attention to the elements of the series and their interrelationships and to disregard seriality as such. We think and talk all the time about series *of* this or that without properly considering that we are dealing with seriality, no less objectively than subjectively. As many forms of relation and non-relation fall within the general idea of seriality, so do thoughts follow upon each other in all sorts of related and unrelated ways, such that the two are always becoming entangled. Whenever we are perceiving a series, however seemingly random or formally defined, there remains an unshakeable sense of its inseparability from the seriality of experience itself, as if the unity or individuality of one's own being cannot but mark itself indexically across serially salient points of awareness, and, vice versa, as if our integrity, the unity of oneself, were somehow inseparable from this indicating of unities, one after another. Thus, in the case of the random or coincidental series, say a sequence of stars, there remains, despite the evident dependency upon seeing them as a series, the fact of their seriality being objectively or phenomenally there to notice. And in the case of the most irrefutable, observation-independent series, say, the set of natural numbers, there always remains, despite the awareness of their formal independence from one's observing or counting them, the fact that one must imaginatively 'fill them in', projecting the integers to infinity, in order to grasp the set. The former, a presence of seriality where no regular series is there, pertains to the *quantity of quality*, in the positive sense of a 'surplus' magnitude of integrity, the intensive presence of much and of many qualities which make for more seriality than there are series. The latter, an inherent absence of seriality where a regular series is there, in the negative sense of a seriality's lack of itself or auto-ellipsis, pertains to the *quality of quantity*, in the sense of a 'deficient' kind of integrity, the absence of the substantiality proper to its magnitude and number as abstractions which 'never arrive' or always fail to capture what they measure. Accordingly, we have, on the one hand, the putative 'law of the series', the theory put forth by Paul Kammerer, according to which reoccurring forms and events typically labelled as 'coincidences' are thought to be expressions of a deeper underlying force of attraction or affinity, "something like a transcendental precondition of all forms of regularity and coherence" (Wetters 2019). And on the other hand, we have Wittgenstein's 'rule-following paradox', according to which all signs, however clearly they appear to demonstrate that something *follows*, are suspiciously in need of one's following or deciding them (Wittgenstein 2009, §85). Whether we are dealing with a haphazard series of points connected 'only' by our connecting them or a series of unmistakable signs making 'total' sense, there remains the intriguing synthetic phenomenon of seriality, the being-serial of oneself and the thing, as if everything were held together by an endless spark leaping across the omnipresent gap between the two. Correlatively, we may say that between any two elements of a series, between this and that, there is not only nothing, but everything, just as in all perception, "Synaesthetic perception is the rule [*la règle*]" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 237).

[9] Augustine (2006, X.33) translation modified to express literal sense of the verb. On the being-question, see (Marion 2005; Masciandaro 2011).

[10] "There are realms of reality or—more exactly—of abstraction from reality in which the most complete detachment is the adequate cognitive approach. Everything which can be expressed in terms of quantitative measurement has this character. But it is most inadequate to apply the same approach to reality in its infinite concreteness. A self which has become a matter of calculation and management has ceased to be a self. It has become a thing. You must participate in a self in order to know what it is" (Tillich 2000).

[11] "*Dasein* as such—being that is one with non-being—thus coincides completely with quality—non-being that is one with being; there is no sharp difference between them. *Dasein*, therefore, is not to be thought of as the 'subject' that 'has' qualities but is distinct from them; on the contrary, *Dasein* is one with—indeed, identical to—quality itself: as Hegel puts it in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, "*quality* is, in general, the determinacy that is immediate, identical with being" (EL 146/195 [§ 90 A]). Being is determinate, therefore, insofar as it is qualitative; or, to put it another way, quality is what makes being determinate" (Houlgate 2022, p. 161).

[12] Meister Eckhart, quoted in Sells (1994, p. 286).

[13] Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 124.

[14] Cf. "And in those beings which are the highest and most important, it is the individual that is primarily intended by God" (John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d.3, n.251, quoted in Scotus (2005, xxi)).

[15] As simultaneously one and many, the series is also logically neither one nor many, and thus the medium of Platonic individuality as the polycentrism of the One: "the ultimate source of reality is *neither one nor many*; individuality is not dissolved but established at the highest level; all things as individuals participate immediately in divinity, in a way that transcends the hierarchical levels of being" (Perl 2010). Cf. "When the soul comes out of the ego-shell and enters into the infinite life of God, *its limited individuality is replaced by unlimited individuality.* The soul knows that it is God-conscious and thus *preserves its individuality*. The important point is that individuality is not entirely extinguished, but it is retained in the spiritualised form" (Baba 1967, II.174–5).

[16] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1001A, in *The Complete Works* (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, p. 137).

[17] See *De Anima*, II.3. Fraser comments: "the serial entities [i.e., the various grades of soul] do not share any community of essence—they are not synonyms. What is common between the prior and the posterior entities is just their position relative to one another in the series; they cannot, therefore, be regarded as equal and co-ordinate species of a common genus" (Fraser 2003, p. 136). For Young, to embrace the "collective otherness of serialized existence", in which "a person not only experiences others but also himself as an Other, that is, as an anonymous someone", is crucial, as it "allows us to see women as a collective without

identifying common attributes that all women have or implying that all women have a common identity" (Young 1994). While seriality in Sartre's view seems to constitute a deficient and superficial form of sociality, its own serial relation to group formation reveals the fundamentality of the series as the process of "constant incarnations" governing the arising and dissolution of social forms: "groups are born of series and often end up by serializing themselves in turn . . . [what] matters to us is to display the transition from series to groups and from groups to series as constant incarnations of our practical multiplicity" (Sartre 2004, p. 65). Kathleen M. Gough (Gough 2024) emphasizes the open, relational, and educational dynamic of seriality: "Thinking in a series is always about thinking in multiples. You are never solo, never alone, you are always in relation" (p. 13). Seriality is thus the more authentically democratic form, that which saves individuality from the pressurized collective ego of the political group: "Once of the growth of the party becomes a criterion of goodness, it follows inevitably that the party will exert a collective pressure upon people's minds . . . Political parties are organizations that are publicly and officially designed for the purpose of killing in all souls the sense of truth and justice" (Weil 2013, p. 13). Cf. "What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging" (Agamben 1993c, p. 85).

18 I would like to thank the anonymous reader who suggested this avenue of clarification.

19 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 30.

20 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 697A, in *Complete Works*, 73.

21 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 86.

22 On how this happened, see Weeks (2020, p. 348).

23 Let us call it a self-destroying world of meaningless anthropocentric humanism. "In performing quantifying valuing, numbers effect an order of political economy that brings into being quantifiable and hence manageable nature" (Verran 2013, p. 35). "In truth, the very notion of the 'aims' of public policy is shaped in a deep way by the dictates of quantification. We don't quantify because we are utilitarians. We are utilitarians because we quantify" (de Mesquita 2019). "The 'in order to' has become the content of the 'for the sake of'; in other words, utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness" (Arendt 1958, p. 154). "The weakness of humanism's claim consists in dogmatically imagining not only that man can hold himself up as his own measure and end (so that man is enough for man), but above all that he can do this because he comprehends what man is, when on the contrary nothing threatens man more than any such alleged comprehension of his humanity. For every de-*finition* imposes on the human being a finite essence, following from which it always becomes possible to delimit what deserves to remain human from what no longer does" (Marion, "*Mihi magna quaestio factus sum*", 14).

24 (Blake 1988, p. 36). On individuation and/as stupidity, see (Masciandaro 2010; Ramey and Farris 2016).

25 "Many Romantics felt intuitively that all the negative characteristics of modern society—the religion of the god Money (Carlyle called it mammonism); the decline of all qualitative, social, and religious values; the death of the imagination and the novelistic spirit; the tedious uniformization of life; the purely utilitarian relations of human beings among themselves and with nature—stem from the same source of corruption: market quantification" (Löwy and Sayre 2001, p. 35).

26 (Goethe 1998, #1286). In other words, mathematics is haunted to infinity by its own indifference toward actual entities: "Mathematics, like dialectics, is an organ of the inner higher intelligence; in practice it is an art, like oratory. Nothing is of value to them both except form: content is a matter of indifference. Mathematics may be calculating pennies or guineas, rhetoric defending truth or falsehood, it's all the same to both of them" (#605). Henri Bortoft (Bortoft 1996) explains how Goethe's approach relates to the distinction between primary (quantifiable) and secondary (non-quantifiable) qualities: "Goethe gives attention to the phenomena . . . so that he begins to experience their belonging together . . . and thereby to see how they mutually explain each other. Such a holistic explanation is an *intrinsic* explanation, in contrast to the extrinsic explanation whereby phenomena are explained in terms of something other than themselves—which is conceived to be 'beyond' or 'behind' the phenomena, i.e., separate from the phenomena in some way. Extrinsic explanation is the mode of explanation typical of theory-based science. But through *attention* to the concrete, i.e., to the phenomena as such, we begin to encounter the *qualities* of the phenomena without any concern for their supposed ontological status as dictated by a theory (i.e., whether they are secondary qualities). Attention to the phenomena brings us into contact with quality, not quantity. The latter is in fact reached by abstracting from the phenomena, which entails standing back from the phenomena to produce a head-orientated science (to use Goethe's phrase) instead of participating in the phenomena through the senses" (p. 214).

27 (Guénon 2001, p. 20). He describes the relation between rationalism, materialism, and descent into uniformity as follows: "As soon as it has lost all effective communication with the supra-individual intellect, reason cannot but tend more and more toward the lowest level, toward the inferior pole of existence, plunging ever more deeply into 'materiality'; as this tendency grows, it gradually loses hold of the very idea of truth, and arrives at the point of seeking no goal other than that of making things as easy as possible for its own limited comprehension, and in this it finds an immediate satisfaction in the very fact that its own downward tendency leads it in the direction of the simplification and uniformization of all things; it submits all the more readily and speedily to this tendency because the results of this submission conform to its desires, and its ever more rapid descent cannot fail to lead at last to what has been called the 'reign of quantity'" (94–95).

28 (Kula 1986, p. 42) "Kula concludes that in the preindustrial world, the qualitative was always dominant over the quantitative. The regime of discretion and negotiation clearly favored local interests over central powers, as was universally recognized. The

privileging of judgment over objectivity in measures was only the tip of the iceberg. Every region, sometimes every village, had its own measures" (Porter 1995, p. 25).

29 Julius Evola, quoted in Furlong (2011, p. 82).

30 Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 122.

31 Italics altered.

32 "Spirituality must make man more human. It is a positive attitude of releasing all that is good, noble and beautiful in man. It also contributes to all that is gracious and lovely in the environment" (Baba 1967, I.32).

33 Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.171, italics altered. Taurek's controversial answer to the trolley problem (give all individuals an equal chance at survival by flipping a coin), regardless of its practicality, exposes the truth of this paradox: "I cannot see how or why the mere addition of numbers should change anything . . . The numbers, in themselves, simply do not count for me. I think they should not count for any of us" (Taurek 1977).

34 "Although the sense of equality is made the basis of many social and political ideals, the real conditions of rich co-operative life are fulfilled only when the bare idea of equality is replaced by the realisation of the unity of all life" (Baba 1967, II.76).

35 I find our shared human sense that there is *a* world in the sense of a single total sum of all things to be an ironic shadow of *homo numerans*: "the postulated domain of unified total overall reality corresponds to the idea of unrestricted quantification" (Gabriel 2015, p. 7). The sense of this irony needs clarification. Given that everything as it appears to us is precisely not a totality, but more of an unbounded and open-ended experiential expanse involving endless individualized co-witnesses with no-less-weird inner and outer worlds, our sense of there being *a* world, a single totality, is absurd. Now irony, as explained by Kierkegaard, represents the negative, self-suspending freedom of a subject absolutely isolated or alienated from objective reality: "It is not this or that phenomenon but the totality of existence that it contemplates *sub specie ironiae* [under the aspect of irony]. To this extent we see the correctness of Hegel's view of irony as infinite absolute negativity . . . In irony, the subject continually wants to get outside the object, and he achieves this by realizing at every moment that the object has no reality" (Kierkegaard 1989, pp. 254–57). Per Kierkegaard's pun, irony is a kind of bad eternity, comparable to Hegel's bad infinity, which never stops counting itself. So, irony contemplates negatively what unrestricted quantification contemplates positively (i.e., everything as a sum), exploding the additive mass of all things into an endlessly revisable *space* of possibilities: "In irony, the subject is negatively free . . . and as such is suspended, because there is nothing that holds him. But this very freedom, this suspension, gives the ironist a certain enthusiasm, because he becomes intoxicated, so to speak, in the infinity of possibilities, and if he needs any consolation for everything that is destroyed, he can have recourse to the enormous reserve fund of possibility" (Kierkegaard 1989, p. 262). Correlatively, unrestricted quantification, that which adds everything up into the totality of a world, may be grasped as a kind of anti-irony which produces for the subject not negative freedom but *positive imprisonment*, a pseudo-sense of being securely confined in a countable whole. I say 'pseudo' both because the whole is never really countable and because the aim of adding it all up is also a way of existing or standing outside the count, discounting the presence of the counter, being virtually beyond the totality, such that quantification's anti-irony is also itself ironic, a type of negative (or even nihilistic) freedom—*there is a world and I have counted it*. Consider, for example, how, even at the physical level, the radically unknown is included in our calculation of a universe composed of 95% dark matter, as if we could actually, from some vantage point, see and tally the totality, the 100% beneath, above, and inside our feet. Of course, neither irony's suspension nor quantification's fixity suffices the infinite flow of a heart's desire, which wants both the unlimited play of positive freedom and the absolute safety of negative imprisonment, the 'prisonless prison' of eternal security, in the sense of the absence of an outside, which music, neither inside nor outside the world, gives an experience of. What we want, then, is a kind of paradisical, neo-medieval irony, in the sense of a humble, unnihilistic, non-isolating self-suspension harmonizable with subjectivity/objectivity, recalling that "medieval irony stemmed from man's recognition of his place in creation; it was not at all a challenge to God but rather an acceptance of man's own inadequacy, bearing out Kenneth Burke's point that 'humility is the proper partner of irony'" (Reiss 1981). In other words, it would be some decent species of sincere irony, a homely double suspension of self and totality that unveils truth. For neither imposing our image upon nor forever hiding from reality are happy or actual options.

36 Meher Baba, speaking in *Beyond Words*, dir. Louis van Gasteren (1997), https://youtu.be/qOwi4MaLULI. (accessed on 5 June 2024).

37 See *All That Breathes*, dir. Shaunak Sen (2022), which explores interconnectedness in relation to the meaning of breath: "Life itself is kinship. We are all a community of air. One shouldn't differentiate between all that breathes". Cf., "The ordinary man never loses faith. He is as one who climbs up a mountain a certain distance and, experiencing cold and *difficulty of breathing*, returns to the foot of the mountain. But the scientific mind goes on up the mountain until its heart freezes and dies" (Meher Baba, *Everything and the Nothing*, 55–6, my emphasis). We may say that breath is literally symbolic of spirit, a confluence of air and life that always speaks to the openness of beings to each other via a shared embodiment belonging to the extra-materiality of nature, its causal non-closure: "Nature goes beyond the universe. It is that which we attempt to know through measurement, but whose complexity always makes it more than we think we know at any time" (Gabriel 2022, p. 232). Correlatively, Allen argues for the need to think breath in political ecology: "Attending to breath brings previously considered immaterialities (elements, lungs, dust, emotions, affects, atmospheres and breath itself) into sharp focus with implications for how environmental subjectivities and politics come into being and how embodiment figures through these encounters" (Allen 2020, p. 98). Similarly, Gaard argues for the critical importance of 'airstories' in the contemporary world: "In an era of anthropogenic climate change, extinctions, migrations, pandemics, refugees and smog, recuperating, and sharing airstories offers a timely approach toward

illuminating the interbeing and intra-action of all vital matter, and the life that is continuous, coexistent, and present in every breath" (Gaard 2022, p. 315). To consider the spiritual and environmental nature of breath promises a path beyond the overheated "global civilization greenhouse" wherein human beings, haunted by the scientistic worldview of humankind as "towered above on all side by monstrous exteriorities that breathe on it with stellar coldness and extra-human complexity", are "driven to limit themselves to small, malicious arithmetic units", a way into a more livable, breathable sphere or "immune-systemically effective space" for "ecstatic beings that are operated upon by the outside" (Sloterdijk 2011, pp. 23–28).

38 Gabriel and Žižek, *Mythology, Madness, Laughter*, 77.

39 "For in all action what is principally intended by the agent, whether he acts by natural necessity or voluntarily, is the disclosure or manifestation of his own image. Whence it happens that every agent, insofar as he is such, takes delight. For, because everything that is desires its own being and in acting the being of an agent is in a certain way amplified, delight necessarily follows, since delight always attaches to something desired" (Alighieri 1965, 1.13.2–3).

40 (Aristotle 1984). As Aquinas explains, pleasure perfects operation both as end and as agent, as an as-it-were extra end, a supplementary good added to the good of the action, and as an as-it-were extra agent, an instrumental helper in the action's completion—'as-it-were' because the distinction is essentially logical rather than actual. "Pleasure perfects operation in two ways. First, as an end: not indeed according as an end is that on 'account of which a thing is'; but according as every good which is added to a thing and completes it, can be called its end. And in this sense the Philosopher says (Ethic. x, 4) that 'pleasure perfects operation . . . as some end added to it': that is to say, inasmuch as to this good, which is operation, there is added another good, which is pleasure, denoting the repose of the appetite in a good that is presupposed. Secondly, as agent; not indeed directly, for the Philosopher says (Ethic. x, 4) that 'pleasure perfects operation, not as a physician makes a man healthy, but as health does: but it does so indirectly; inasmuch as the agent, through taking pleasure in his action, is more eagerly intent on it, and carries it out with greater care. And in this sense it is said in Ethic. x, 5 that 'pleasures increase their appropriate activities, and hinder those that are not appropriate" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-1.33.4, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2033.htm#article4 (accessed on 5 June 2024)). The question of pleasure's activity and activity's pleasure is existential, connected to a deferrable ambivalence at the core of life's movement, or, further, to the present moment as displacement of the ambivalent ordering of life and pleasure: "But whether we choose life for the sake of pleasure or pleasure for the sake of life is a question we may dismiss for the present" (Aristotle, *Ethics*, 10.4). This is clarified by Coomaraswamy, drawing on Bonaventure, in relation to the beauty of the opportune: "What is true of *factibilia* [things to be made] is true in the same way of *agibilia* [actions to be done]; a man does not perform a particular good deed for the sake of its beauty, for any good deed will be beautiful in effect, but he does precisely that good deed which the occasion requires, in relation to which occasion some other good deed would be inappropriate (*ineptum*), and therefore awkward or ugly. In the same way the work of art is always occasional, and if not opportune, is superfluous" (Coomaraswamy 2007, p. 35).

41 Augustine defines music as "the science of moving well, such that the movement is desired for itself and because of this delights through itself alone [*scientiam bene movendi; ita ut motus per se ipse appetatur, atque ob hoc per se ipse delectet*]" (*De Musica*, I.2, http://individual.utoronto.ca/pking/resources/augustine/De_musica.txt (accessed on 5 June 2024)).

42 As Quinn states in summarizing the broadly perennialist/traditionalist view, "The enemy was for them rather the reduction—the *reductio ad quantitatem*—an apodictic denial of the reality of the intelligible realm, the specious and at times dangerous conclusions reached by those who held an exclusively quantitative worldview—for example, the proclivity to deracinate the process of intellectual intuition in metaphysics and the results thereby achieved from the 'respectable and relevant' academic milieu. Quantity, in the Traditional view, is a complement to quality, not an irreconcilable antithesis; under the right conditions the *complexio oppositorum* becomes a *coincidentia oppositorum*" (Quinn 1997, p. 46).

43 Italics altered. This ideal of positive freedom as infusion without curtailment is similar to what Sloterdijk more normatively identifies as the 'floating' nature of human life: "Humans have never lived in direct relationship with 'nature,' and their cultures have never set foot in the realm of what we call bare facts; their existence has always been exclusively in the breathed, divided, torn-open and restored space. They are life forms designed to be floating beings—if floating means depending on divided moods and shared assumptions" (Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 46).

44 "The condition of the world, the strife and uncertainty that is everywhere, the general dissatisfaction with and rebellion against any and every situation shows that the ideal of material perfection is an empty dream and proves the existence of an eternal Reality beyond materiality; for if this Reality did not exist, the increased material well-being of millions of people which science has brought about would have produced contentment and satisfaction, and the tremendous imagination science has projected into the general consciousness would have let loose happiness" (Baba 1963, p. 55).

45 Meher Baba, *Discourses*, III.55.

46 Meher Baba, *Discourses*, II.92.

47 I think it is fair to say that quantitative factualization tends to *dualize* knowledge, fashioning it as knowledge *about* an object, as we say, 'to gather the facts about' something. This occludes the appreciative dimension of knowing, as hermeneutic appreciation of the thing itself, attending to it with understanding as an inherent reality, a being saturated with its own necessity. As Nietzsche ways, "I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them—thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful" (Nietzsche 2001, p. 157). Fundamentally, this imperative is about insisting on a science

which unites rather than separates subjects. Cf. "In non-duality there is . . . knowledge and appreciation of things as they are" (Baba 1967, I.169).

48 Here one might consider the connections between spectatorship and paralysis, as dramatized, for example, in Brian de Palma's *Body Double* (1984), in which the paradox of acting inside the tomb of histrio-cinematic observation is investigated. Where the real is confounded with a screenic world-picture and oneself a character, there would seem to be no space for movement and no one who can know.

49 "[A]uch das Trennen ist noch ein Verbinden und Beziehen" (Heidegger 1970, p. 337).

50 "[M]odern science has its origins in an unprecedented mistrust of experience as it was traditionally understood" (Agamben 1993a, p. 19).

51 For a specific attempt at such science, see Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR), "a marine science lab dedicated to doing science recently by foregrounding *anti*colonial land relations" (Liboiron 2021, p. 6). As Liboiron explains, "the methodological question is: how do I get to a place where these relations are properly scientific, rather than questions that fall outside of science, the same way ethics sections are tacked on at the end of a science textbook? How do I, as a scientist, make alterlives and good Land relations integral to dominant scientific practice?" (20).

52 The quantification of life has a stronghold in the medical sphere, as instanced by the calculation of quality-adjusted life year (QALY) and the correlative general concept of the life span: "life is turned into a pilgrimage through check-ups and clinics back to the ward where it started. Life is thus reduced to a 'span,' to a statistical phenomenon which, for better or for worse, must be institutionally planned and shaped. This life-span is brought into existence with the prenatal check-up, when the doctor decides if and how the fetus shall be born, and it will end with a mark on a chart ordering resuscitation suspended" (Illich 1976, p. 79).

53 On the rise of this practice in the 14th and 15th centuries, see Gagné (2014). Gagné locates this development at the confluence of war and pandemic—specifically mustering and memorial practices—and the emergence of the modern fact, an epistemological unit the peculiar self-effacing emergence of which "was central to creating, then sustaining, the illusion that numbers are somehow *epistemologically* different from figurative language, that the former are somehow value-free whereas the excesses of the latter disqualify it from all but the most recreational or idealist knowledge-producing projects" (Poovey 1998, p. 6). Coupled with the rise of printed news bulletin and the addition of numbers to war monuments after 1500, "the meaning of numbers" was carried "beyond the instrumentality of quantification", becoming, as Gagné states in an apt mercantile metaphor, "carriers of commemorative freight in extending a cult of memory" (794).

54 As Meher Baba says of the form of life which he followed from 1949 to 1952, "This New Life is endless, and even after my physical death it will be kept alive by those the life of complete renunciation of falsehood [etc.] . . . This New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is not one to live it" (Purdom 1964).

55 "The belief that the soul is doing anything is a false belief. For example, a man believes that *he* is sitting in the chair, but in fact it is the body which is sitting in the chair. The belief that the soul is sitting in the chair is due to identification with the physical body. In the same way a man believes that *he* is thinking, but in fact it is the mind which is thinking. The belief that the soul is thinking is due to identification with the mind. It is the mind which thinks and the body which sits. The soul is neither engaged in thinking nor in any other physical actions" (Baba 1967, III.146). This is equivalent to saying that the spontaneous, uncaused cause of action does not itself act, just the ceaseless present, as the standing now (*nunc stans*), does not move. Priest writes, "the soul is an initiator. It causes actions but is not caused to cause those actions. At the unconditioned level it is disclosed both that the soul is the cause of its own actions and that there is always the possibility of not acting, or acting otherwise, which is to say the soul has free will" (Priest 2012, p. 332). That one does not fully realize and enjoy this spontaneous freedom is due to the mind's being conditioned by the impressions (*sanskaras*) of experience: "The mind is capable of genuine freedom and spontaneity of action only when it is completely free from *sanskaric* ties and interests" (Baba 1967, II.162).

56 Agamben, *Coming Community*, 14.

57 "[T]he singular experiences or observed particulars that natural philosophers began to value in the seventeenth century . . . were neither signifiers of anything nor self-evidently valuable; only when such particulars were interpreted as evidence did they seem valuable enough to collect, because only then did they acquire meaning or even . . . identity as facts" (Poovey 1998, p. 9).

58 Gabriel, *Moral Progress*, 189.

59 Markus Gabriel expresses this by underscoring the reality of circumstances: "moral statements deal with actually existing circumstances involving feeling and thinking living beings. These actually living existing circumstances are never maximally objective or maximally subjective but are located somewhere between these extremes. Their location depends on the concrete circumstances of our action situations" (*Moral Progress*, 94).

60 "Mind cannot tell you which things are worth having, it can only tell you how to achieve the ends accepted from non-intellectual sources. In most persons the mind accepts ends from the promptings of wants, but this means denial of the life of the spirit. Only when the mind accepts its ends and values from the deepest promptings of the heart does it contribute to the life of the spirit. *Thus mind has to work in co-operation with the heart; factual knowledge has to be subordinated to intuitive perceptions; and heart has to be allowed full freedom in determining the ends of life without any interference from the mind*. The mind has a place in practical life, but its role begins after the heart has had its say" (Baba 1967, I.140). Cf., "the natural sciences are unsuitable for ascertaining moral facts

using measuring procedures or mathematical theorizing. This in no way means that there are no moral facts, simply that there is a great deal that cannot be scientifically explored or technologically controlled" (Gabriel 2022, p. 233).

61 For a defense of qualophilia against the demands of qualophobia, as the claim that one should admit to being a zombie (or the equivalent to) and not "a subject of genuine conscious experience", see Levine (1994). Levine diagnoses qualophobia as fear of "disrespect for the authority and objectivity of science" and a "rush to solve the mind-body problem", which causes qualophobes "to deny the undeniable" (125). Similarly, fear of either the face of reality or God may be seen as the simultaneous fear of seeing oneself, fear of seeing others, and fear of the faceless: "Each face, then, that can look upon Thy face beholdeth naught other or differing from itself, because it beholdeth its own true type . . . In like manner, if a lion were to attribute a face unto Thee, he would think of it as a lion's; an ox, as an ox's, and an eagle, as an eagle's . . . In all faces is seen the Face of faces, veiled, and in a riddle; howbeit unveiled it is not seen until . . .". (Nicholas of Cusa 2007, p. 24–6).

62 See note 31.

63 Cf., "Things are not outside of us, in measurable external space, like neutral objects (*ob-jecta*) of use and exchange; rather, they open to us the original place solely from which the experience of measurable external space becomes possible. They are therefore held and comprehended from the outset in the *topos outopos* (placeless place, no-place place) in which our experience of being-in-the-world is situated. The question 'where is the thing?' is inseparable from the question 'where is the human?'" (Agamben 1993b, p. 59).

64 Gabriel, *Moral Progress*, 179.

65 Hilan Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, 86.

66 (Baba 1958, p. 8) Cf. "Every being questions. Just as we question every being, every being questions us. Every questioning is being questioned. In other words, nothing lies beyond questioning. The questioning of questioning is the questioning of all questioning. It is the mother of questioning. It is a generating process, the process of bring forth into the open, and at the same time a process of conserving the bringing forth into the open" (Murungi 2011, p. 357). On mysticism as "a pure science of the question, not irrational experience, but the superrational experience *of* experience, the conscious being of question itself, the question that one is", see Masciandaro (2011).

67 On the spontaneous nature of the question, see Masciandaro (2018).

68 Even if one limits the question to animals, "the roots of the biological ability to evolve and perform playful acts go back over a billion years" (Burghardt 2005, p. 379).

69 Question as spark is comparable to synderesis: "Just as the spark is that part of fire which is purer and hovers above the whole fire, so synderesis is that which is supreme in the judgment of conscience. And it is according to this metaphor that synderesis is called a spark of conscience" (Aquinas 1994, p. 325). As conscience stands above the judgment of others, questioning stands apart from opinion: "Plato shows in an unforgettable way where the difficulty lies in knowing what one does not know. It is the power of opinion against which it is so hard to obtain an admission of ignorance. It is opinion that suppresses questions. Opinion has a curious tendency to propagate itself. It would always like to be the general opinion, just as the word that the Greeks have for opinion, doxa, also means the decision made by the majority in the council assembly" (Gadamer 1989, p. 366).

70 Fiumara (2009, p. 5), italics altered, quoting, Symington (1993, p. 93).

71 "I like villains, heroes, angels, devils—anyone who acts their parts perfectly!" (Meher Baba, quoted in *Lord Meher*, 2133).

72 Fiumara, *Spontaneity*, 25.

73 "For as the Etruscans are said often to torture captives by chaining dead bodies face to face with the living, fitting part to part, so the soul seems to be extended throughout and affixed to all the sensitive members of the body" (Aristotle 1984, B107).

74 Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.57.

75 "The connection which determinateness now has with being is one of the immediate unity of the two [being and non-being], so that as yet no differentiation between the two is posited. Determinateness thus isolated by itself, as *existent* determinateness, is *quality*—something totally simple, immediate. *Determinateness* in general is the more universal which, further determined, can be something quantitative as well. On account of this simplicity, there is nothing further to say about quality as such" (Hegel 2010, p. 85).

76 Meher Baba, *Discourses*, II.192.

77 (Han 2022a). For an attempt to think how digital networks might be better tuned to the nature of learning, see Johnson et al. (2022, pp. 39–58). Given that "something is clearly wrong in the technical world that we have built for ourselves" and that "our abstractions have increased the gap between the way nature works and the way people think" (39), the authors argue for the possibility of improving digital networks by restoring network theory to "the micro-foundations of networks in cellular dynamics" (40). While they do not consider the place of questioning in life process as such, the argument does hinge on bio-hermeneutic analogies between cell function and learning, specifically the way cells develop via anticipatory self-modelling and how holes or zero totalities operate in biological processes, both of which are definitive of the nature of questioning (47).

78 "Perhaps someone might say, But surely, Socrates, after you have left us you can spend the rest of your life in quietly minding your own business. This is the hardest thing of all to make some of you understand. If I say that this would be disobedience to God, and that is why I cannot 'mind my own business,' you will not believe that I am serious. If on the other hand I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both

myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living, you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless, that is how it is" (Plato 1963, p. 23).

[79] "And just as the dialectical negativity of experience culminates in the idea of being perfectly experienced—i.e., being aware of our finitude and limitedness—so also the logical form of the question and the negativity that is part of it culminate in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing" (Gadamer 1989, p. 362).

[80] Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.169–70.

[81] Fiumara, *Spontaneity*, 20, my italics.

[82] Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.35.

[83] Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.171.

[84] Translation modified. Cf., "The coming being is whatever being" (Agamben 1993c, p. 1). See also Elisabeth Roudinesco's critique of identity politics which proposes "a possible world in which everyone can adhere to the principle according to which 'I am myself, that's all there is to it,' without denying the diversity of human communities or essentializing either universality or difference. 'Neither too close nor too far apart,' as Claude Lévi-Strauss was wont to say" (Roudinesco 2022, xi). The connection between totality and the affective or heart-centric core of thinking (and therefore authentic identity) is articulated by Han in contradistinction to so-called artificial intelligence: "Thinking sets out from a *totality* that precedes concepts, ideas and information. It moves in a '*field* of experience' before it turns toward the individual objects and facts in that field. Being in its totality, which is the concern of thinking, is disclosed first of all in an *affective* medium . . . the world as a totality is pre-reflexively disclosed to humans . . . Artificial intelligence may *compute* very quickly, but it lacks *spirit* . . . Artificial intelligence is without heart. Heartfelt thinking measures and feels *spaces* before it works on concepts" (Han 2022b, pp. 37–40).

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