

# Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Havercroft, Politics and International Relations  
University of Southampton  
Southampton, UK  
SO17 1BJ  
email: j.havercroft@soton.ac.uk

David Owen, Politics and International Relations  
University of Southampton  
Southampton, UK  
SO17 1BJ  
email: downen@soton.ac.uk

*Forthcoming in Political Theory*

## **Abstract:**

What does it mean to see someone as human, as a member of humankind? What kind of call for justice is it to demand that a group be seen as human beings? This article explores a fundamental kind of injustice: one of perception and how we respond to our perceptions. Drawing on Cavell, Wittgenstein and Rancière we elucidate “soul blindness” as a distinct and basic form of injustice. Rancière’s police orders and Cavell’s soul blindness are mutually constitutive; the undoing of police orders entails a politics of soul dawning. Soul dawning entails acknowledging the humanity of others without erasing difference. In the concluding section we consider white obliviousness to the Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement as a case of soul blindness. Part of the political import of BLM is its capacity to illustrate how practices of soul blindness in the U.S. constitute whiteness in a racialized police order.

## **Keywords:**

Cavell; Rancière; Wittgenstein; soul-blindness; aspect perception

## **Biographies:**

Jonathan Havercroft is an Associate Professor of International Political Theory at the University of Southampton. His research has appeared in *Constellations*, *Global Constitutionalism*, *Review of International Studies*, and the *Journal of Political Science Education*. He is the author of *Captives of Sovereignty* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

David Owen is Professor of Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Southampton. His research has appeared in *Political Theory*, *European Journal of Political Theory*, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *European Journal of Philosophy* among others. He is a series editor of *Citizenship Transitions* (Palgrave) and *Critical Powers* (Manchester University Press). His most recent single authored book is *Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality* (Routledge/McGill-Queens University Press, 2007).

It is sometimes imperative to say that women or children or black people or criminals are human beings. This is a call for justice. For justice to be done, a change of perception, a modification of seeing, may be called for. But does it follow that those whose perceptions, or whose natural reactions, must suffer change have until that time been seeing women or children or black people or criminals as something other than human beings?

-- *Stanley Cavell, The Claim of Reason* (1999, 372)

I learned in New Jersey that to be a Negro meant, precisely, that one was never looked at but was simply at the mercy of the reflexes the color of one's skin caused in other people.

-- *James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son* (1965, 77)

What does it mean to see someone as human, as a member of humankind? What kind of call for justice is it to demand that a group be seen as human beings? Cavell argues, and Baldwin implies, that justice in these instances requires that those in a hegemonic position must change how they perceive, how they naturally (i.e., spontaneously) react, to members of such groups. These types of calls for justice are responses to a fundamental injustice: one of perception and how we respond to our perceptions. Such injustice involves what Cavell calls “soul blindness”. By this term, Cavell means the failure to see “others or ourselves as human” not in the sense of *homo sapiens* as a biological kind but in the sense of humanity as an ethical kind (Mulhall 2001, 254). In this article, we draw on the work of Cavell, Wittgenstein and Rancière to elucidate “soul blindness” as a distinct and basic form of injustice. Our central thesis is that “police orders” (a term that we take from Rancière) and soul blindness are mutually constitutive and, as such, the undoing of police orders entails a politics of soul dawning – i.e. of coming to see a person or group of people as human. In order to unpack this claim and its political implications, we first examine Cavell’s concept of soul blindness in the context of Wittgenstein’s work on seeing aspects that frames Cavell’s development of this concept. The second section argues that Rancière’s work on politics and police orders can be productively read as elucidating the political implications of Wittgenstein’s and Cavell’s work. In particular, we

argue that a politics of soul dawning entails acknowledging the humanity of others without erasing difference. In the concluding section we consider white obliviousness to the Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement as a case of soul blindness. Our claim in this section is that difference blind approaches to politics – as exemplified by political responses to #BlackLivesMatter such as #AllLivesMatter – instantiate the very condition of soul blindness to which BLM seeks to draw attention. Part of the political import of BLM is its capacity to illustrate how practices of soul blindness in the U.S. constitute whiteness in a racialized police order.

## I

Wittgenstein initially introduces the term ‘aspect’ and the related terms ‘aspect-perception’, ‘aspect-dawning’, and ‘aspect-blindness’ to discuss a set of perceptual phenomena that develop out of Gestalt psychology (Glock 1996, 36 – 40). The most famous of these images is Jastrow’s duck-rabbit; a picture that can be seen as either a duck or a rabbit, but never both at the same time. Wittgenstein refers to those types of schematic images that can be taken as objects – such as the famous duck-rabbit image, a triangle, the three dimensional cube, the black and white cross image – as “picture-objects” (Wittgenstein 1973, sec. xi 194). These images are of interest because they are instances in which we take the image as the object that it pictures. The key discussion on aspects in the *Philosophical Investigations* is in Part II xi whose main concern is with what Mulhall labels the “inherent paradoxicality” of aspect-perception (Mulhall 2001, 274): “I see that [the face] has not changed; and yet I see it differently” (Wittgenstein 1973, sec. xi 193).<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein argues that what changes when one perceives a different aspect is one’s attitude towards, not one’s opinion about it, the image (1973, sec. xi 205). By ‘attitude’, Wittgenstein is not referring to a cognitive relation but to a practical relation to the picture-object, that is, a relation of practical engagement with, and not simply

knowing or believing or thinking about. In order to explicate this phenomenon, Wittgenstein introduces several different terms in the first half of section xi. He describes the self-conscious experience of seeing something as something as a case of “noticing an aspect” (Wittgenstein 1973, sec. xi 194). Dual or multi-aspect images such as the duck-rabbit picture draw attention to the fact that our attitude towards such picture-objects can change. The thought here is that we can be struck by the dawning of an (new) aspect, where ‘being struck’ denotes the suddenness of this manifestation and its natural expression in spontaneous avowals such as ‘Now I see it!’ Aspect dawning “is forced from us. – It is related to the experience [of a perception] as a cry is to pain” (Wittgenstein 1973, sec. xi 197), it involves standing in practical relation to a picture-object in terms of the object it depicts, seeing it *as* something (not merely as marks on paper from which we infer a representation of something). Continuous aspect perception denotes the readiness-to-hand of the immediate description of the picture in terms of the object it depicts or represents, where ‘this *readiness-to-hand* is a manifestation of the perceiver’s *taking for granted* the identity of what he perceives’ (Mulhall 1990, 23). Conversely ‘aspect change’ denotes that form of aspect dawning which occurs when a person shifts from seeing a picture-object under one aspect to seeing it under another.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Wittgenstein introduces the term “aspect blindness” (1973, sec. xi 213 – 214) to describe someone “lacking in the capacity to see something as something” (1973, xi 213). The aspect blind person is unable to experience the picture-object as the thing that it depicts. As such, the aspect blind individual is unable either to experience continuous aspect perception – i.e. to see a picture-object as something – or to experience aspect dawning.<sup>4</sup>

Wittgenstein’s analysis of seeing aspects is of particular importance for Cavell’s subsequent development and investigation of the phenomenon of soul blindness.

According to Cavell's reading, aspect dawning involves three inter-related activities: 1) connecting together different things; 2) realizing the significance that grows out of these connections; 3) making the behavior real to myself. Cavell describes this third activity as "bearing the right internal relation to others" (1999, 378). Soul blindness, in Cavell's sense, is however much more specific than aspect blindness; it does not entail that the soul blind person cannot see another as something (continuous aspect perception) nor that they cannot move from seeing another as x and then as y (aspect change). It entails only that they cannot see the other as human, that is, as en-souled, where the concept of 'soul' draws attention to the character of human beings as beings whose conduct gives expression to the inner lives that they have.

What is at stake in soul blindness? Cavell considers the case of slavery, arguing that the failure of the slave-owner to take the slave as human demonstrates that the slave-owner 'is ... missing something about himself, or rather something about his connection with these people, his internal relations with them, so to speak.' (Cavell 1999, 376). The idea of bearing an internal relation with others as being an important part of one's humanity is key here. One should not be misled by the use of the phrase 'internal relation' here. It does not refer to an inner mental process (knowing, believing, thinking) but rather to an attitude towards the other as en-souled that is manifest in one's practical engagement with the other. Not seeing someone as human is seen as a lack for Cavell – the individual who cannot see the humanity in others thereby betrays a failure of their own humanity. It is a failure in four important ways.

First, soul blindness entails a failure to be struck by the other's humanity in a way that is analogous to Wittgenstein's discussion of the individual who lacks the ability to notice an aspect. Cavell imagines the slave-owner saying of the slaves that they are 'not human

beings' and ask what he could mean by this, given that '[e]verything in his relation to his slaves shows that he treats them as more or less human':

When he wants to be served at table by a black hand, he would not be satisfied to be served by a black paw. When he rapes a slave or takes her as a concubine, he does not feel that he has, by that fact itself, embraced sodomy. When he tips a black taxi driver (something he never does with a white driver) it does not occur to him that he might have more appropriately patted the creature fondly on the side of the neck (Cavell 1999, 376).

Cavell's response is that the slave-owner 'means, and can mean, nothing definite':

This is a definite state of mind. He means, indefinitely, that they are not *purely* human. He means, indefinitely, that there are *kinds* of humans. ... He means, indefinitely, that slaves are different, primarily different from him, secondarily perhaps different from you and me. ... In the end he will appeal to history, to a form, or rather to a way, of life: this is what he does. ... It could be said that what he denies is that the slave is "other", i.e., other to his one. They are, as it were, *merely* other; not simply separate, but different. It could also be said that he takes himself to be private with respect to them, in the end unknowable by them (Cavell 1999, 376–7).

What the slave-owner thereby denies, as Raymond Gaita puts it, is "that the slave has his kind (the slave-owner's kind) of individuality – the kind of individuality that shows itself in our revulsion in being numbered rather than called by name and that gives human beings the power to haunt those who have wronged them, in remorse" (Gaita 1991, 156).

Second, overcoming soul blindness requires coming to stand in "the right internal relationship to others" (Cavell 1999, 378). Just as nothing changes in a picture-object when I come to see it as the object it represents, only something in terms of how I

practically relate to that picture-object, soul blindness consists in the perceiver not standing in the right internal relationship toward the other. Justice requires, most fundamentally, a person standing the right kind of internal relation towards the other.<sup>5</sup> Unlike those approaches to justice that see the problem in these cases as a problem of knowledge, Cavell sees justice in these cases as requiring acknowledgment.<sup>6</sup> Cavell argues that if we treat our failures in our relations towards others as failures of knowledge, then we leave these relations vulnerable to our doubts about our knowledge of others and of ourselves. Conversely, acknowledgment involves not what you know about something, but how you respond and relate to that thing. In the case of inter-personal relations, knowing that someone lives next to me does not make him my neighbor rather this requires taking up a reciprocal relation to him: “if one is to acknowledge another as one’s neighbor, one must acknowledge oneself as his or her neighbor” (Cavell 1999, 434). It is important to be clear about the character of the concept of acknowledgment here. Cavell remarks:

So when I say that ‘We must acknowledge another’s suffering, and we do that by responding to a claim upon our sympathy.’ I do not mean that we always in fact *have* sympathy, nor that we always ought to have it. The claim of suffering may go unanswered. We may feel lots of things – sympathy, *Schadenfreude*, nothing. If one says this is a *failure* to acknowledge another’s suffering, surely this would not mean that we fail in such cases to *know* he is suffering? It may or may not. The point, however, is that the concept of acknowledgment is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success. It is not a *description* of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated. (It is the sort of concept Heidegger calls an *existentiale*.)” (Cavell 2002, 263–4)

Soul blindness is *not* a failure of acknowledgment in the sense instanced by an unsympathetic response to the suffering of another as a claim on our sympathy. Rather it

is a failure to see the suffering of another as making a claim on our sympathy of the same kind that our own suffering would do so. It is a failure to see their suffering as suffering of the same kind as our own. It may be helpful here to introduce briefly a further example explored by Gaita concerning James Isdell, Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia in the 1930s, who administered a programme in which children of mixed blood were (typically forcibly) removed from the Aboriginal mothers 'and placed in circumstances in which (it was hoped) most of them would have children with lower class whites':

Responding to the question, how did he feel taking children from their mothers, Isdell answered that he 'would not hesitate from a moment to separate any half-caste from its Aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time'. They 'soon forget their offspring', he explained (Gaita 1991, 332).

As Gaita remarks, these words, coming from Isdell, 'marked his sense of the kind of gulf that existed between "them" and "us". "Our" children are irreplaceable; "theirs" are not.' (Gaita 1991, 333). Isdell was not ignorant of the facts concerning the victims of his actions, rather 'he suffered a kind of blindness to the meaning of what they did and suffered':

Although the grief of the women who had lost their children was visible and audible to him, he did not see in the women's faces or hear in their voices grief that could lacerate their souls and mark them for the rest of their days. It was literally unintelligible to ... Isdell that sexuality, death and the fact that at any moment we may lose all that gives sense to our lives could mean to 'them' what it does to 'us' (Gaita 1991, 333-4).

Isdell could not see that 'their' loves, griefs, joys, and desires go deep in 'them' and have depth in the same way that they do for 'us'. It is not that Isdell necessarily lacks



sympathy, it is rather that he cannot see the suffering of these Aboriginal women as having the same kind of claim on his sympathy as the suffering of, for example, White Australians.

Third, soul blindness involves what Cavell describes as “inhabiting a particular *Weltanschauung*” (1999, 378). By this he means that those who take other human beings to be slaves have a fundamentally different world-view from those who do not. Because each way of taking the individual (as either a human being or a slave) involves not just one’s relation towards the other, but one’s practical relationship towards the society and social institutions in which and through which one relates to the other, the soul blind individual inhabits a different world from the one who can see another’s soul, that is, the ‘worldhood’ of the world is both distinct and incommensurable for soul seeing and soul blind persons. These two worlds occlude each other. And a particular kind of politics is involved in attempting to bring about the kind of aspect dawning required to address the condition of soul blindness.

Finally, in order to overcome soul blindness one must come to be struck by the world, and by oneself, in a particular way that is expressed in how one practically engages with the world and with oneself (Cavell 1999, 378). This experience of being struck by something is the experience of soul dawning. In relation to the soul blind person, the political challenge is not one of offering normative reasons or empirical facts but, rather, one of giving expression to the claims of those who are not seen as equal members of humanity in a way that enables the soul blind person to undergo soul dawning. This task of *world-disclosure* is nicely captured by Rancière’s view that “politics is both argument and opening up the world where argument can be received and have an impact” (1999, 56)

and to develop our account of the politics of soul-dawning, we turn now to the work of Rancière.

## II

Wittgenstein describes aspect-blindness as the inability to be struck by the immediate expressiveness of a picture-object. As we have noted, Cavell's reflections on soul blindness addresses how one may fail to be struck by, and so deny, the other as 'other to his one': "They are, as it were, *merely* other: not simply separate, but different" (1999, 377). At this stage in our argument, we introduce the work of Jacques Rancière into this philosophical investigation of soul blindness. Although he does not use these terms, we hold that Rancière's work perspicuously addresses the import of seeing aspects and soul blindness for political theory.<sup>7</sup>

Rancière draws a useful formal distinction between politics and police.<sup>8</sup> He elucidates the concept of 'police' as, "an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task" (Rancière 1999, 29). He links the concept of a police to the realm of the sensible by describing policing "as a rule governing [the] appearing [of bodies]" (Rancière 1999, 29). A police order is constitutive of, and constituted by, what Rancière calls "a distribution of the sensible" (1999, 29). By this he means that the police is an evaluative and normative ordering of what is apprehended by the senses – both in the sense of what is visible/invisible, audible/inaudible or sayable/unsayable and in the closely related sense of what is visible as what or audible as what or sayable as what. The distribution of the sensible thus refers to an order of continuous aspect perception (where 'perception' stands for the senses more generally). It is this focus on seeing aspects that discloses the sense in which Rancière speaks of aesthetics as being at the

core of politics. Rancière defines 'politics' as "whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse what was once only heard as noise" (1999, 30). Politics in this formal sense necessarily takes the form of aspect-change. This aspectival character of politics explains some otherwise potentially puzzling features of Rancière's discussion of politics.

Consider Rancière's insistence that politics is "primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage":

It must first be established that the stage exists for the use of an interlocutor who can't see it and who can't see it for good reason *because* it doesn't exist. Parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name and in which they are counted as parties. (1999: 27)

The staging of politics requires aspect-change in order that what is seen as an issue of, say, misfortune can appear as a claim of injustice and, in so doing, constitute the parties to this dispute as parties to a dispute. Aspect-change is the necessary condition of the constitution of a common world (in Cavell's sense) within which the claim of injustice becomes intelligible as such a claim. Politics in this sense always appears to involve a double movement in eliciting aspect-change - both (1) a dis-identification of "the part of those with no part" (Rancière 1999, 30) with the existing order of continuous aspect perception and (2) the exemplification of a world in which the distinction between those who have a part and those who have no part is erased.

To develop and ground these claims concerning the salience of the concepts of continuous aspect perception and aspect change for Rancière's police/politics distinction and, hence, the claim that Rancière provides one route for drawing out the import of

these concepts for political theory, we will consider the case of the First Plebian Secession from the Roman Republic in 494 BCE. The plebian secession initially began as a protest by the plebs over their debts to the ruling class. When the Senate refused to listen to the plebian demands, one of the plebs, Lucius Sicinius Vellutus, recommended that the plebs secede from Rome by leaving the city en masse and camping on hills outside the city. The Senate attempted to resolve the crisis by dispatching a former consul, Agrippa Menenius Lanatus, to negotiate with the plebs. In Livy's account of the events, Menenius resolved the crisis by delivering an apologia to the plebs about how all the different parts of the body must work together in order for the body to survive. His implied message was that the plebs and patricians were separate parts of the same body (Rome), and in order for the Republic to survive the two classes must work together. The agreement the patricians and plebs reached was to create a new class of magistrates called the Tribunes to represent the interests of the plebians.<sup>9</sup> In *Disagreement* Rancière analyzes not only Livy's account but also a second account by the 19<sup>th</sup> century counter-revolutionary French historian Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1829). Rancière notes that in Ballanche's account the secession of the plebs is "a restaging of the conflict in which the entire issue at stake involves finding out whether there exists a common stage where plebians and patricians can debate anything" (1999, 23). Three features of Rancière's treatment of this exemplary confrontation are salient to our current concerns.

The first is the speech that Ballanche attributes to the Consul Appius Claudius (who favoured using force to crush the plebians) concerning the report of Menenius that *words* were issuing from the mouths of the plebs when logically the only thing that could issue forth was noise:

They have speech like us, they dared tell Menenius! Was it a god that shut Menenius's mouth, that dazzled his eyes, that made his ears ring? Did some holy daze take hold of him? ... He was somehow unable to respond that they had only transitory speech, a speech that is fugitive sound, a sort of howling, a sign of want and not an expression of intelligence. They were deprived of the eternal word which was in the past and would be in the future.' (Ballanche 1829, 94; cited in Rancière 1999, 24).

This speech is the response of someone situated within an order of continuous aspect perception for whom the plebian is one kind of human being, namely, the kind of human being who lacks *logos* and whose individual existence leaves no trace other than instantiated through biological reproduction. Claudius's speech act is an immediate reaction to a report of an event to have occurred for which there is simply no logical space within his *Weltanschauung*. As Rancière observes:

This verdict does not simply reflect the obstinacy of the dominant or their ideological blindness; it strictly expresses the sensory order that organizes their domination, which is that domination itself (1999, 24).

As a factual report, Menenius' account cannot *mean* anything determinate to the patricians. Hence Claudius' felt requirement to offer an explanation of this senselessness that is compatible with the order of continuous aspect perception that the patricians inhabit (e.g., sensory illusion).

The similarity between of Appius Claudius' response to Menenius' report and Cavell's discussion of the figure of the slave-owner is striking. If a slave-owner were to announce to his peers that slaves have the same kind of individuality as slave-owners, the immediate response by other slave owners would be that he was not "in his right senses" and for the same kind of reasons. The implication of Rancière's reading of the

secession of the plebs is that soul blindness is constitutive of police order. Rancière's formal concept of "the part who have no part" (plebians in this example, slaves in Cavell's example)<sup>10</sup> thus denotes those to whom soul blindness is exhibited.

The second salient feature of Rancière's example is the soul-dawning of Menenius in relation to the plebs. It is this that drew Appius Claudius' response. The apologia that Menenius delivers to the plebs asserting the legitimacy of the rule of the patricians on the grounds that the plebs are "nameless" beings lacking "logos" involves a performative contradiction. The act of delivering the apologia necessarily attributes the capacities for logos that the content of the apologia denies: "The apologia implies an inegalitarian partition of the perceptible. The sense necessary to understand this division presupposes an egalitarian division that puts paid to the former, but only the deployment of a specific scene of revelation gives this equality any effectiveness" (Rancière 1999, 25). This action thus serves to 'light up' the relation between patricians and plebs pronounced in the apologia as an inequality between equals, as an inequality whose justification is undermined by the very act of offering a justification. The performative contradiction of the apologia is exposed by the plebian response to it: "they listen politely and thank him but only so they can then ask him for a treaty" (Rancière 1999, 25). The important point here is that the plebs represent themselves to each other by conducting themselves "like beings with names". The plebs constitute themselves as an exemplar of *an-other* police order, they make *actual* another police order. This mode of action elicits aspect change in Menenius. When Menenius delivers his apologia, this act acknowledges the very thing that it purports to deny: the plebians are being with names. In performing this act, Menenius sees himself through their eyes and they see themselves through his. Notice that acknowledgment, as we have stressed, is an attitude towards the other, a practical engagement with them expressed in bodily performances (e.g., words, gestures, spatial

postures of standing before a group and addressing them).<sup>11</sup> Through his performative acknowledgment of the plebians as beings with names, the souls of the plebians dawn for Menenius and a new world exemplified by the police order they enact becomes visible and tangible to him.

The third feature of the secession of the plebs is that the act of instituting an-other police order is an act of politics (in Rancière's sense) only insofar as it succeeds in establishing a new order of continuous aspect perception for the plebians and creating the conditions of eliciting aspect-change in the patricians. This matters for how we conceive of political action. We can distinguish between two forms of activity in that police operates within a common world, whereas politics has to constitute a common world. Rancière's theory of political action may be that of part-taking without legitimacy, without qualifications, and without expectations but this characterization only underscores the point that political action cannot force aspect-change. In enacting the improper egalitarian logic of taking a propriety (property of status, or mode of decorum) that does not belong to them, the political action of the plebians discloses a world in which the distinction marked by the propriety is erased and thus *may* elicit aspect-change – there can be no security or guarantee of success for such “democratic takers” (Honig 2003, 79).

Having grounded our claim concerning the relationship of Rancière's discussion of police and politics to Wittgenstein on seeing aspects and Cavell on soul blindness, we are now in a position to clarify an important point concerning Rancière's use of the concept of equality and his insistence that equality is the condition of politics. By equality, Rancière does not mean a substantive principle that can be stated independently and in advance of the particular disputes within which it is manifest (1999: 33). Instead, by equality Rancière means “the pure empty quality of equality between anyone and

everyone” (Rancière 1999, 35). The denial of this kind of equality is a constitutive dimension of soul-blindness. As Cavell observes, the soul-blind slave-owner does not (and cannot) deny that slaves are human beings as such. Instead, the slave owner denies the humanity of slaves by asserting “they are not *purely* human”, instead “that they are *kinds* of human” (Cavell 1999, 376). The slave owner inscribes inequality of this sort by simultaneously acknowledging that the slave is a human (in the sense of being part of the species *homo sapiens*) and denying the slave’s humanity (in the sense of saying that he is not part of the same ethical and political order). As Cavell observes, it is “to deny just this that Marx, adapting Feuerbach’s theology, speaks of man as a species-being. To be human is to be one of humankind, to bear an internal relation to all others” (Cavell 1999, 376). The egalitarian logic to which Rancière, like Marx, adverts is that of standing in an internal relation to the other as other to my one or, in the first person plural, other to our one.<sup>12</sup> Because Rancière conceives of equality in this sense, he speaks of it as “a mere “assumption” that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it” (1999, 31). When Rancière speaks of democracy as the improper principle of politics marked by the absence of every title to govern, he means that to acknowledge one another as equals is to acknowledge that anyone at all can occupy the positions of governor and of governed. Conversely, any police order is characterized by criteria marking out those who have title to rule and those who do not. This discussion of Rancière provides a way of explicating the import of seeing aspects and soul blindness for political theory, but to ground the value of this general theoretical discussion, we turn now to a specific exemplification of the type of injustice and kind of politics that our analysis of soul blindness aims to make visible.

### III



In this section we consider the BLM movement and the White response to it in light of our analysis of aspect perception, soul blindness and police in the previous two sections. If, as we have argued, police orders are constituted through soul blindness and politics, in Rancière's sense of the term, necessarily involves the effort to bring about soul dawning and, thus, giving specific practical instantiation to the most basic sense of equality, then BLM can be read as a contemporary political example of this political dynamic. To take up this task, recall the quotation from Cavell that serves as an epigraph to this paper (Cavell 1999, 372). There are at least three salient features of these remarks. First, one kind of claim to justice, the first and most basic, is the claim to be a subject of justice, that is the claim for acknowledgment as an member of humankind. Second, being human in the relevant sense is not just a predicate that one ascribes or not to others on the basis of empirical evidence but a matter of how we stand to each other. Third, it is a call for the group that "must suffer change" to undergo a change in attitude towards the other in which they come to perceive the internal relation between themselves and others as members of humanity. It is important to note, however, that this change in attitude cannot be *either* voluntary in the sense of being something that can be brought about through an act of volitional willing *or* forced in the sense of compelled by external agents. This change in attitude is something that is practiced; it is both evidenced through and constituted by a change in the mode of practical engagement with the other.

Our claim in this section is that Black Lives Matter is a call for justice of this fundamental kind that is continuous with the basic demand evidenced in the history African American struggle in the USA and expressed by Baldwin in the Civil Rights era:

*Negroes want to be treated like men:* a perfectly straightforward sentence, containing only seven words. People who have mastered Kant, Hegel, Shakespeare, Marx,

Freud and the Bible find this statement utterly impenetrable. The idea seems to threaten profound, barely conscious assumptions (Baldwin 1991, 64–5).<sup>13</sup>

BLM is a response to a police order constituted through a racialized form of soul blindness. It critiques an order of continuous racial perception enacted in and through everyday practices of racecraft. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter is an exclamation, a complex avowal, that may be, at once, an expression of pain, of anger, of indignation, of resilience and, even perhaps, of hope. It is also a reminder that within the police orders that compose the history of the United States of America, black lives have not, or have only exceptionally, been seen as mattering, as of account, in the same way as white lives<sup>14</sup> – and that this condition is a product not of the black community but rather of those who see themselves as white<sup>15</sup> and, more specifically, of their becoming white.<sup>16</sup>

However, one may also fail to be struck by the connections expressed in the avowal #BlackLivesMatter. This failure to be struck is evidenced in a common mode of response from the community of those who see themselves as white that is expressed in the hashtag #AllLivesMatter. The fact of this response is important, we suggest, because it evidences the very phenomenon of racialised soul blindness to which the Black Lives Matter movement seeks to draw attention. Those who respond to #BlackLivesMatter with #AllLivesMatter may mean different things by this response. They may mean that #BlackLivesMatter is a racialized and hence divisive, even racist, speech act. This for instance is the view of Mike Huckabee, who said in an interview on CNN:

“When I hear people scream, ‘black lives matter,’ I think, of course they do. . . . But all lives matter. It’s not that any life matters more than another. . . . That’s the whole message that Dr. King tried to present, and I think he’d be appalled by the notion that we’re elevating some lives above others” (Ehley 2015).

In responding to the movement, Huckabee claims to acknowledge the value of black life, but then rejects the movement on the grounds that the avowal #BlackLivesMatter is valuing black lives over other (presumably white) lives. This response to BLM exposes the problem with difference blind approaches to racial integration. Unlike the anti-integration and pro-segregation rhetoric of U.S. conservatives in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, conservatives today have co-opted civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King and calls for racial equality in the name of closing down contemporary claims for racial justice. Just as Appius Claudius was unable to comprehend how the plebs could have speech like us (Rancière 1999, 24), Huckabee is unable to comprehend how a claim such as #BlackLivesMatter is anti-racist. Huckabee's response is an expression of soul blindness, it evidences his inability to understand how a demand to acknowledge the value of Black lives and the end of their legalized killing by the police is, in a fundamental way, a demand by the Black community to have equal standing to speak and act in American political life.

A second use of #AllLivesMatter comes from white liberal Americans. For instance, at the 2015 Netroots Conference, Presidential candidate Martin O'Malley responded to a direct action by #BlackLivesMatter activists with the statement: "Black lives matter, white lives matter, all lives matter" (Dayen 2015). The description of the response, at the same event, when another Presidential candidate, Senator Bernie Sanders was confronted by protestors, is equally telling:

"I spent 50 years of my life fighting for civil rights and dignity," he said, alluding to his time as an organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s and his marching with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Even so, he pivoted away from every criminal justice question by returning to economics" (Dayen 2015).

The problem with these liberal responses to BLM is that they respond to the demand of the social movement as if it were a matter of liberal principles of equality. O'Malley in his first response to the activists chants took the claim that #BlackLivesMatter as simply a demand for black lives to be valued before the law in the same way as white lives. This is an example of what Rancière means of confusing equality as a principle with “the empty quality of equality between anyone and everyone” (Rancière 1999, 35). O'Malley and Sanders respectively misread BLM as a demand for either equality before the law (i.e. a politics of recognition) or economic equality (i.e. a politics of redistribution). In this way they take what we might call the ideal of the current police order as acceptable, all that needs to be done is make the police order live up to its ideal.<sup>17</sup> To declare “#AllLivesMatter!” in this situation is a form of soul blindness because it does not acknowledge how the current police order, the one the protestors are challenging, asymmetrically enables police brutality against black Americans: “The system isn't broken, it was built this way” as Ferguson protestors argued.

One way of reading these protests at the Netroots Nation conference is as an attempt by the activists to elicit soul dawning in white liberals. Goldie Taylor, one of the participants in the Netroots direct action observed: “What Sanders should have done, when they said ‘Sandra Bland,’ you say ‘Sandra Bland!’” (Dayen 2015).<sup>18</sup> Notice that the primary request of the activists was not understood at all by Sanders or O'Malley – and both responded initially as though confronted by a personal accusation, becoming defensive and listing their civil rights credentials. Rather than recognizing that the protestors wanted the candidates to listen to the protests, to make space on the stage for them to voice their demands in their own terms (whether or not they would then have assented to these requests), O'Malley's and Sanders' responses avoid acknowledgment of the protestors by assimilating BLM protestors to their own perspective. This prevents the construction of

a common stage (in Rancière's terms). The character of this failure of understanding by the politicians reveals a fundamental performative contradiction in the declaration #AllLivesMatter. By responding in this way, the politicians expose the failure behind their protestations of commitment to racial equality. #AllLivesMatter is an avoidance of acknowledging the protestors' voice. This avoidance reveals that the politicians do not see the point of granting equal standing to the protestors in the articulation of the terms of political discourse. While these protests are instances of politics in Rancière's sense of the term, the temporary spaces that they open up are quickly foreclosed when the cry #BlackLivesMatter is rebuffed with #AllLivesMatter. While the protestors can create new spaces that disrupt police orders through their actions, unless the targets of their actions respond to the protests with a moment of soul dawning, then the existing police order remains intact.

What would soul dawning by a white politician look like? To address this question, let's consider a third instance of BLM protestors confronting a prominent white liberal politician: Hillary Clinton. In a video taped meeting between BLM activists and Clinton, Clinton listens for several minutes to the activists speech, thus letting them guide the conversation. When one of the activists points out that her family played a significant role in the rise in mass incarceration in the U.S. in the 1990s, Clinton responds:

Your analysis is totally fair. It's historically fair. It's psychologically fair.

It's economically fair. But you're going to have to come together as a movement and say 'Here's what we want done about it.' (Lopez 2015).

Unlike O'Malley and Sanders, Clinton does not avoid the protestor's calls for justice by trying to re-inscribe the movement under a general principle of legal equality (as O'Malley did) or a distinct call for economic redistribution (as Sanders did). And in acting thus, she creates a space for the activists to voice their concerns. However, her

response is not one of soul dawning. Rather she is like a person who is shown how one could take the duck-rabbit as a duck, and acknowledges the possibility of such an inference (i.e. “Your analysis is totally fair”), yet she is still unable to see the image *as* a duck. This gap is revealed when one of the activists responds to her:

I say this as respectfully as I can, but if you don’t tell black people what we need to do, then we won’t tell you all what you need to do. This is and has always been a white problem of violence. There’s not much we can do to stop the violence against us . . . What you just said was a form of victim blaming. You were saying what the Black Lives Matter needs to do to change white hearts is a policy change. (Lopez 2015)

The activist’s point is that the ones who “must suffer change” (Cavell 1999, 372) are the white community. While Black Lives Matter protests can expose the contradictions within white liberalism’s claims to equality and open up spaces where their arguments can be received and have an impact, real change requires soul dawning. It requires the soul blind whites of America to change their internal relations to, and thus their mode of practical engagement with, blacks.<sup>19</sup>

Clinton’s response fails to see the distinct and fundamental injustice to which the protestors are seeking to draw attention and hence to grasp the kind of politics that addressing it requires. “Look, I don’t believe you change hearts. I believe you change laws, you change allocation of resources, you change the way systems operate” (Lopez 2015). In saying this, Clinton closes down the space that the activists had opened up and effectively re-inscribes the BLM movement as simply another (albeit important) interest group lobbying a politician for resources and legislative action. Yet this is a categorical error on the part of Clinton. Not every political movement is a liberal interest group movement. And not every justice claim focuses simply on resource redistribution or legal

recognition. While Black Lives Matter activists have formulated specific political demands, the possibility of overcoming the condition that gives rise to the problem addressed by such specific demands requires a more radical change in the attitudes and, therefore, practices of white Americans must take place, as the activist speaking to Clinton makes clear. So long as the white majority in the US is soul blind to the suffering and brutality that black Americans face not just in the US criminal justice system but in American social and political life more generally, the police order that finds its expression in this suffering and brutality will remain in place even if the particular forms and locations of the individual and institutional expression of soul blindness may change.

It is important to be clear here that we are *not* claiming that changing laws, allocations of resources and the ways that systems operate are not important. On the contrary, these may be crucial to cultivating conditions that support the widespread emergence of soul-dawning, a social awakening to the reality of racial injustice. Thus, for example, Elizabeth Anderson's (2013) analysis of black-white inequality across social, economic and political indices as a form of 'durable inequality' points to the importance of spatial and role integration as conditions that breakdown stigmatizing stereotypes and the conditions of their formation. In our terms, such a practice of integration cultivates responsiveness and facilitates soul dawning as a social phenomenon among the population that see themselves as white. Rather our point is twofold. First, that soul dawning and the change of attitude through which it is expressed is not a functional output of such social and political policies, nor an automatic byproduct of their successful implementation. Second, that soul dawning is a necessary condition of the realization of racial justice, of practices of mutual engagement within which the terms of racial justice can be worked out. However, it is important to add a further point here. We have stressed that a change in attitude is also a change in practices, in one's practical relationship to oneself and

others. This point matters because such changes, even at very local levels, can give rise to social practices through which participants experience, and new participants acquire the capability for, continuous soul perception. BLM may be understood not only as a protest against the fundamental form of injustice that is racialised soul blindness but also, at the same time, as an invitation to enter into and engage in such practices.

Each of the three responses to #BlackLivesMatter that we have considered evidences the very phenomenon to which this avowal seeks to draw attention, but they also illustrate a further more specific point, namely, the difficulty of seeking to draw attention to forms of soul blindness in a context where the ideology of the police order enshrines a mode of reflection of itself that takes the form of what Jacob Levy acutely characterized as ‘folk ideal theory’:

It is taken for granted that there is some meaningful and noncoincidental overlap between what the speaker thinks states are normatively supposed to do ... and what they do. So if a suspected shoplifter gets shot to death by a cop or a member of a crowd outside a store with broken windows gets beaten by a cop, the wrong on one side is accepted a priori (people shouldn't steal stuff or break stuff) while the wrong on the other is treated as an open question, and an aberration from the norm. ... State abuses are always, in a basic sense, seen as aberrations from the norm. ... State abuses are always, in a basic sense, seen as aberrations from the norm. Indeed, the norm is seen as the norm: the *normative* is *normal*, and vice-versa. (Levy 2015).

In our terms, the problem to which Levy draws attention is that, in a police order that reflects on itself in this way, and especially one whose official ideal is that of respect for the moral dignity of all persons, it is immensely difficult for the very idea that this police order is itself constituted in part by a form of soul blindness to gain traction. The admitting of this possibility would entail acknowledging that the story that white America



tells about itself about its ideals is, in a very real sense, an ideological obfuscation, a form of motivated self-deception, that it is not a case of white America failing in some institutional context or other to live up to its ideals, rather it is one of failing to hold these ideals, of not actually being committed to these ideals. This is the biting point of Baldwin's remark that white Americans 'are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.'(Baldwin 1990b, 16–7)

### **Conclusion**

In this article we have aimed to recover the salience of Wittgenstein's discussion of seeing aspects and Cavell's reflections on soul blindness for political theory. Integral to this recovery was our analysis of Rancière's work on police and politics in which we argued that police orders are orders of continuous aspect perception marked by soul-blindness and that politics necessarily involves aspect-change and the phenomenon of soul dawning. We have argued Rancière's concept of 'the part that has no part' denotes those to whom soul blindness is exhibited and his radical concept of equality highlights the centrality of standing in internal relations to one another as members of humankind. We put this analysis to work through an account of BLM as a movement that draws attention to the mutual constitution of a racialised police order and racialised form of soul blindness – and of particular type of response to BLM as exhibiting the very phenomenon of fundamental injustice against which its protest is directed. A central point for our discussion is that the kind of politics required to address soul blindness cannot solely take the discursive form of adducing facts and reasons or the practical form of legal recognition or economic redistribution, rather it requires a fundamental shift in the attitudes and perceptions of those who are soul blind. Those who are marginalized via soul blindness, be it Rancière's example of the plebians or Cavell's example of the slaves or our example of the black population of America, can stage events that try to

elicit soul dawning (under conditions that are more or less enabling of the kind of responsiveness required). As Rancière points out, “politics is both argument and opening up the world where argument can be received and have an impact” (1999, 56). Yet, as most recently exhibited by BLM protests such as “Hands up don’t shoot”, “I can’t breathe”, or direct actions such as the Black Brunch<sup>20</sup>, whether or not these actions elicit the response that the activists seek is ultimately out of their hands. Constructing a common stage is not something can be forced. While soul dawning is possible at any given time, the precise moment of its occurrence, or even the actuality of its occurrence, is contingent on the capacity and disposition for responsiveness of the soul blind (which may be differentially enabled or obstructed by social, economic and political structures), and so not simply a matter of volitional willing for either the soul blind or those who are subject to soul blindness. At the same time, and to the extent that it emerges, the development of social practices of continuous soul perception provides a space through which a politics of soul dawning that acknowledges the humanity of others without erasing difference can be enacted.

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this paper was presented at APSA 2015 and we are grateful for our fellow-panellists, audience members and particularly our discussant Tracy Strong for comments and suggestions. It has also been given at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Critical Theory conference at the Centre for Philosophical Studies, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and we'd like to thank all those present, especially Gianfranco Casuso, Sebastian Leon and Chris Zurn. It was also offered to an audience at the Philosophy Department, Texas A and M University and thanks are due especially to Daniel Conway, Claire Katz and colleagues for their helpful discussion of the issues raised.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein's initial interest in the paradox involves refuting two possible ways of resolving it. The first is a response appealing to physiology that attempts to explain aspect change as the result of a shift in eye movement patterns by saying dismissively that "the cause" of the phenomenon is "of interest to psychologists" where as philosophers "are interested in the concept and its place among the concepts of experience" (Wittgenstein 1973, sec. xi 193). To explain aspect shifts physiologically would avoid the question of what a shift in aspect perception is and its relationship to our conceptual experience. The second response that Wittgenstein wants to avoid involves asserting that the appearance of paradox is the result of an internal mental process (1973, sec. xi 193), where this would rely on appeal to the incoherent idea of an inner copy of an image that somehow shifts even as the external image does not (Wittgenstein 1973, sec. xi 193).

<sup>3</sup> For political applications of this dimension of Wittgenstein's thought, see (Owen 2003; Owen 2002) on the possibility of 'aspectual captivity' as distinct from 'false consciousness' and 'ideological captivity. See (Havercroft 2011) for aspectual captivity as it relates to discourses of sovereignty and (Havercroft 2003) for aspect perception and dawning as it relates to political theory debates over liberty.

<sup>4</sup> The scope may vary from a specific domain to all domains

<sup>5</sup> One of the few moral and political philosophers to pick up on the salience of Cavell's discussion of soul-blindness is Rainer Forst, see (Forst, 2012, 41)

<sup>6</sup> Our distinction between recognition and acknowledge in this section draws heavily on Patchen Markell's arguments on these matters in *Bound by Recognition* (2009, 32 – 38).

<sup>7</sup> Others have also explored some of the affinity between Cavell, Wittgenstein, and Rancière, albeit with different interests than those we take up. See most recently Panagia (2014) Frank (2015, 259) and Norval (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Rancière's distinction between politics and the police has led to competing interpretations in political theory. The anarchist reading, put forward by Todd May (2010; 2008) sees politics as displacing police, and that the ultimate goal is the permanent replacement of police order with a radical politics of freedom. Conversely, Sam Chambers argues that politics is always impure and disturbs police orders rather than replacing them (2011; 2014). For a critique of Chambers' understanding of Rancière's politics see (Woodford 2014; Woodford 2015).

<sup>9</sup> These events are covered in Livy, *History of Rome*, book 2, section 22 – 34 (2002).

<sup>10</sup> See also Schaap (Schaap 2011) for an examination of this dimension of Rancière's thought in relationship to Arendt (1973) and the "right to have rights".

<sup>11</sup> Our thanks to Jane Bennet for helping us to clarify this point.

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<sup>12</sup> See also Deranty (2003) who makes a similar point about Rancière in relation to Hegel and Honneth on recognition and Bull (2000) who links Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect dawning to apocalypse theory and Hegel's theory of recognition.

<sup>13</sup> Baldwin's use of the term 'men' may itself betray a lack of appreciation of the gendered and other dimensions of the problem of race in America but whether or not that is the case would require a fuller discussion of Baldwin's work than we can provide here.

<sup>14</sup> Baldwin is again to the point, writing in his 1968 essay 'Black Power':

America sometimes resembles, at least from the point of view of the black man, an exceedingly monotonous minstrel show; the same dances, same music, same jokes. One has done (or been) the show so long that one can do it in one's sleep. (2010: 99)

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note here, with Charles Mills, that the Racial Contract is moral, political and epistemological. Its epistemological dimension prescribes norms for cognition that partition a society into a "white" hegemonic group and a "non-white" subordinate group (Mills 2011, 11). For the argument that race is a political construct that supports a cross-class alliance of domination for whites see Olson (Olson 2004). On the history of the social construction of race in general and whiteness in particular see Roediger (1991; 1994) and Ignatiev (Ignatiev 2008).

<sup>16</sup> As Baldwin notes:

No one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country. ... America became white – the people who, as they claim, "settled" the country became white – because of the necessity of denying the black presence, and justifying the black subjugation. (2010: 167)

The point is echoed by Coates:

Americans believe in the reality of race as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism - the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them - inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men. ... this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white. (2015, location 80 – 85).

<sup>17</sup> This evocation of #AllLivesMatter rests upon what Jacob Levy, writing in response to the Ferguson protests of 2014 called folk ideal theory. "There's a phrase that gained popularity during the Ferguson protests last year: "The system isn't broken; it was built this way." (Ta-Nehisi Coates didn't coin it, but he did some writing developing the idea in important ways.) The ideal theorist—professional or folk—has a very hard time with that thought. State abuses are always, in a basic sense, seen as aberrations from the norm. Indeed, the norm is seen as the norm: the *normative* is *normal*, and vice-versa" (Levy 2015).

<sup>18</sup> A second participant at the Netroots conference, Jana Zinzi made a similar observation:

Can you imagine how the conversation and energy in the room could have changed if he just stopped and said, 'I'm listening?' That would have given the other white people the message that maybe something legitimate is being communicated and that they should actually listen, too. That would have showed real leadership and basic humanity. (Dayen 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Baldwin makes just this point when he writes in his essay 'The White Problem':

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The price of this transformation is high. White people will have to ask themselves precisely why they found it necessary to invent the nigger; the nigger is a white invention, and white people invented him out of terrible necessities of their own. And every white citizen of this country will have to accept the fact that he is not innocent ... (2010: 97) He draws out the implication of this point about white America for the black community in his letter to his nephew in *The Fire Next Time*.

There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*. . . . They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. (Baldwin 1990a, 16 – 17).

<sup>20</sup> This was a protest by BLM activists in January 2015 that took the form of occupying predominantly white-patronised restaurants for Sunday Brunch and reading out the names of black victims of US police violence.