

Themes from Cavell

EDITORIAL COMMENT

The papers collected in this special issue were delivered at a conference titled “Themes from Cavell” that I organized in the Philosophy Department at the University of Sydney, Australia, on February 27–28, 2012. Australian philosophy is famous for a strong allegiance to analytic metaphysics in the form of scientific materialism and what Devitt calls “jack-booted realism.” In this high altitude low-oxygen environment it is worthy of note that there exist dissenting voices who would like to return philosophy to more habitable, more commonable, climes. Stanley Cavell is a worthy hero of this renegade movement as a philosopher who brings words back from their metaphysical to their personal, so interpersonal, employment. It is this return from theory-driven abstractionism that particularly characterizes his powerful reading of Wittgenstein’s vision of language, his special emphasis on one’s own “experience” in matters of art and aesthetics, and his unheralded discovery for philosophy of the deeply personal orientation of actual moral and political thought and talk. These papers reflect engagements with Cavell’s thought in the land of Oz, where dreams of another life for philosophy are closer than we realize.

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