

# Genesis

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies*. For our first issue, we solicited papers discussing Stanley's autobiographical writings. To mirror types of conversations, we asked for both short and long (though we received mostly the latter). In upcoming issues, we will be setting up *threads of conversation* — as certain pieces appearing in this issue seem fit to begin *immediate* conversation with one another. The promise of peering in on such conversations, we hope, will keep readers engaged with our journal more regularly. Whether discussing art criticism or philosophical thinking—Stanley sees *each as the other*, both as human activities, that is, personal activities, which are inherently dialogical. This publication springs from the same view. He writes:

This [...] means, for me, defending the process of criticism, so far as criticism is thought of, as I think of it, as a natural extension of conversation. (And I think of conversation as something within which that remark about conversation is naturally in place. This one too.)<sup>1</sup>

Stanley's latest, *Little Did I Know*, has already produced fine ruminations on the philosophical value of autobiographical writing.<sup>2</sup> The most impressive aspect of the book, however, is Stanley's power of recall. When Stanley says that "so much of what has formed me has been not events but precisely the uneventful, the nothing, the unnoted,"<sup>3</sup> all recalled in extraordinary detail, he is letting us take up or take

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1. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 7.

2. David Kaufmann, "Taking Stock," *Tablet*, October 15 2010, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/47442/taking-stock>. Benjamin Lade, "Little Did I Know," <http://www.ralphmag.org/GN/cavell.html>.

3. Stanley Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 61.

into account the possible significance of everything and anything his recall can afford him. What manner of recall is (i.e., where is the methodology, let alone the philosophy in) that? If everything is significant then nothing is. How shall we find our bearings?

To link entries with the time of writing is so to speak a formal consequence, beyond let us say, the allegorical occasion of opening my text with the procedure of catheterization.<sup>4</sup>

Stanley is interested in letting his heart speak under the formal constraints of recording the time of writing. Why certain intuitions should strike on certain days or in a certain order, then, is a question Stanley is inviting us, or someone, to consider. The answer, unknown to him, guarantees his voice a certain authority and sincerity. Perhaps he is encouraging a type of autobiographical *convention*, or some convention of recall, because surely whatever we have before us comes not from an obligation to respect the flow of chronological time but indeed the catheterization of a heart.

The work of a philosopher must be, for Stanley, a labor for the valorization and acknowledgement of human expression, particularly in its verbal form. For him, words have to be intimately charged with life and therefore philosophical thought has to return and be returned to the ordinary. In this sense, all of his philosophical works have direct or indirect autobiographical connections. It is not that when he is thinking philosophically he cannot think beyond his own history. Rather, the meandering affair of thinking and rethinking from his own history, which is also the history of ideas, makes his thought thick and inviting as if it were the starting of a potentially endless dialogue with himself and with us.

We have already seen considerable intellection gather around the monument of Stanley's father. Timothy Gould again raises Stanley's ominous revelation of "paternal hatred." Discovering a father's hatred for a son burns in the imagination, not only Stanley's, but anyone's, Gould's included. Nonetheless, drawing on Stanley's reading of *Hamlet* and, derivatively, Janet Adelman's discussions of maternal

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4. Cavell, *Little*, 62.

fantasies, Chiara Alfano reminds us that we have as much, if not more, evidence to anchor our discussions of Stanley's formative years squarely around his mother, even mother-as-rival, rather than obsessing, like so many Freudians, over the father-as-rival motif. Daniel Wack weighs in on how Stanley's movie-watching habits suffered a catastrophic transformation and how we are now living uncertain, even unbeknownst, as to whether movies can or should provide us with *any* moral instruction. Sebastião Belfort Cerqueira comments not on Stanley's movie-watching habits, but on his chosen methodology in how he talks about films (and art) in general. Jônadas Techio provides us with a useful overview of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein, highlighting Stanley's emphasis on the possibility of "soul-blindness," and Tomaz Grušovnik extends a discussion of such blindness to our interaction not with other human minds, but with animal minds.

Stanley says in life, he is better at beginnings than endings. We hope *Conversations*, beginning here, can be the same.

Best wishes to all,

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