

# Little Did He Know: Cavell Absorbed by Nietzschean Esotericism

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If he gets the crime into the prose...

CAVELL, in response to Charles Bernstein's question about whether it matters that a philosopher or poet's criminal or morally questionable life impacts their work's relevance

Through Nietzsche, tradition has been shaken to its roots. It has completely lost its self-evident truth. We are left in this world without any authority, any direction.

LEO STRAUSS, "Religious Situation of the Present"

Continental philosophers and their followers seem to be, for the most part, untroubled by the machinations, lies, political accommodations, inactions, and ethical breaches by major figures in that tradition.<sup>1</sup> This does not lead to recognition of irony by

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1. The problem stretches back to Plato and the foundational political paradigm that there are supposed to be rulers and those ruled (the *Republic*), which doesn't prevent interpretations of that work as "a democratic epic poem." See James Kastely, *The Rhetoric of Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Besides the thinkers addressed in this essay (e.g., Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Stanley Cavell), many others have long ignored ethico-political problems in philosophical esotericism. A short bibliography on the matter includes: Steven Ungar's *Scandal and After-effect: Blanchot and France since 1930* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed., Bruce Krajewski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), hereafter *GR*; Peter Brooks, "The Strange Case of Paul de Man" in *The New York Review of Books* (April 3, 2014), 44-47, an article that mostly makes excuses for de Man; Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Thomas Sheehan, "Emmanuel Faye: The Introduction of Fraud into Philosophy?" in *Philosophy Today*, 59.3 (Summer 2015), 367-400, an essay that thinks it sensible to ask "Is there anything at all in the 102 volumes of [Heidegger's] *Gesamtausgabe* that is not contaminated...?"; Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, Or, the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) – Tim Brennan calls Waite's book "the most informed and creative take on Nietzsche's writings in English"; Bruce Krajewski, "The Dark Side of Phrónēsis: Revisiting the Political Incompetence of Philosophy," *Classica*, Vol. 24, 1&2 (2011): 7-21. Accessed 16 January 2016. <http://revista.classica.org.br/classica/article/view/166/155>.

the scholars who then recommend these major figures as guides for ethics.<sup>2</sup> Catherine Zuckert goes so far as to that “philosophical dialogue and textual hermeneutics are essentially ethical” (*GR*, 234). Cavell has chosen to declare an ethics as well. The theme of “moral perfectionism” that one can find in many of Cavell’s books, particularly the works dealing with the repositioning of Thoreau and Emerson, is part of an ongoing project to locate something “American” in concerns about “moral perfectionism” and the everyday. We even have a book about what “Christians might learn from [Cavell].”<sup>3</sup> Stanley Bates can serve as a representative of a chorus of writers who not only embrace Cavell as someone presenting an ethical viewpoint, but who also have become proponents of that viewpoint.<sup>4</sup> Bates has no hesitation in claiming on Cavell’s behalf a connection between ethics and politics: “Cavell is interested in the dimension of moral life that must be lived by an individual within a political setting, a life that a ‘good enough’ state of political justice makes possible, but that is not, and cannot be, determined by rules” (*SCE*, 42-43). Bates ends his essay by telling us that in at least one important way, Cavell is like Nietzsche, and it seems as if Bates intends that to be a positive comparison. Bates seems free of any knowledge of Nietzsche’s posthumous “political setting” in the National Socialist period.

While this essay will provide evidence that Cavell has been coopted by Nietzsche and Nietzsche’s followers, I do not expect the data or the argument to convince people, especially Cavell’s acolytes. “Facts don’t necessarily have the power to change our minds.”<sup>5</sup> In part, the problem becomes, as with Nietzsche himself, a bifurcation at fundamental levels of understanding. As Stanley Corngold and Geoff Waite have reported: “For every person who reads Nietzsche as the step-grandfather of fascism or German National Socialism’s indirect apologist, at least two embrace him as a man of the Left: whether allegedly for having *made himself* fascist in order to better fight fas-

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2. Johanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Heidegger has even been appropriated as an environmental ethicist—see David E. Story, *Naturalizing Heidegger: His Confrontation with Nietzsche, His Contributions to Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

3. Peter Dula, *Cavell, Companionship, and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), x.

4. Stanley Bates, “Stanley Cavell and Ethics,” in *Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ricahrd Eldridge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15-47; hereafter *SCE*. See almost all the articles in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 48.3 (Fall 2014).

5. Joe Keohane, “How Facts Backfire,” *The Boston Globe*, July 11, 2010, [http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/07/11/how\\_facts\\_backfire](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2010/07/11/how_facts_backfire).

cism [a jaw-dropping quotation from the philosopher François Laruelle] or for his deconstruction and rejection of the moral and conceptual preconditions of fascism.”<sup>6</sup> One might take the Nietzsche case as paradigmatic for a host of thinkers, almost all of whom were, or have been, infected by Nietzsche—Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Maurice Blanchot, Paul de Man, Leo Strauss, Gadamer, Irigary, Derrida, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler, to name a few.

My narrative is akin to a detective story. The important details of the case are not at the crime scene however. Remember, *if the crime gets into the prose*. The detective genre brings me back to Cavell. Cavell remarks in his autobiography, *Little Did I Know*, that Edgar Allan Poe’s writings make a “decisive cameo appearance” in Cavell’s own work. As Stephen Mulhall notes in his book *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy’s Recounting of the Ordinary*,<sup>7</sup> Cavell undertakes some impressive close reading of Poe’s “The Imp of the Perverse” by focusing on the plethora of words in the tale that contain “imp.” The level of attention given to that tale by Cavell equals the kind of intensive hermeneutical scrutiny Cavell brought to Thoreau in *Senses of Walden*. Both Cavell and Mulhall claim that the “imp” text demonstrates how the ordinary and the everyday operate beneath human radar. The argument from both Cavell and Mulhall is that most readers (except perhaps for some gifted philosophers) do not notice the recurrence of the “imp” words in Poe’s own tale. This overlooking will serve as a framing device for what follows. The first bit of evidence lies in Cavell’s “The World as Things” in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*.<sup>8</sup> That piece brings Cavell to Poe’s famous detective Dupin, and to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” a narrative that allows Cavell to enter the contemporary discourse of the Posties: the postmodernists, postcolonialists, post-capitalists, and in this case, the posthumanists, whose discourse, among other things, questions distinctions between animals and humans, as if we can always tell the one from the other. More importantly, I want to dwell on Cavell’s comment about the genre of the detective story, its “function of warding off the knowledge that we do not know the origins of human plans, why things are made to happen as they do.”<sup>9</sup> On this rea-

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6. Stanley Corngold and Geoffrey Waite, “A Question of Responsibility: Nietzsche with Hölderlin at War, 1914-1946,” in *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?: On the Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 196, emphasis added by Corngold and Waite.

7. Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy’s Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

8. Cavell, “The World as Things,” in *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 236-80.

9. Cavell, “The World as Things,” 247.

ding, the detective genre, even of the cozy mystery variety, is not what it seems; it operates beneath the human radar that takes the genre as following in the footsteps of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle and his followers insist that a proper tragic narrative leaves threads that come together in a knot,<sup>10</sup> in a fashion that produces a comforting etiology—things happened for a reason. Cavell's insight is that the detective genre is exactly what is non-Aristotelian, and it deceives its readers by frequently offering us detectives who seem to wrap up cases by retrospectively imposing Aristotelian knots where Poe's knots are slipknots demonstrating that crime stories expose holes in epistemology rather than producing closure that allows people/characters to move on with their everyday lives in the face of further, apparently ceaseless, criminality.<sup>11</sup>

My aim is to show, using Cavell's own trope in his section on Nietzsche in *Cities of Words*, that Cavell is a victim of Nietzschean vampirism (etymologically, absorption is being "sucked in," or less politely, being a sucker).<sup>12</sup> When it comes to Nietzsche, Cavell has it right that he missed something important. His description of the detective genre captures Nietzsche's strategy—not knowing the origin of human plans. Cavell seems unaware of Nietzsche's *Nachlass*, in which Nietzsche addresses a kind of writing that deliberately places its agenda inside what looks to be clear packaging. It's a version of clear air turbulence. You don't see the danger until you have flown into it and become its victim. We don't have interpretive radar for that. Note how Cavell emphasizes Nietzsche's "clarity" and plainness in his defense of Nietzsche against Rawls in the section from *Cities of Words*.

Here is my thesis, since some readers might feel uncomfortable without such an announcement. While Cavell has applied "logical esotericism" to his understanding of Wittgenstein,<sup>13</sup> Cavell fails to read Nietzsche as well as Heidegger as esoteri-

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10. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1455b24. See the Gerald Else English translation of the *Poetics*.

11. See Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991), especially the chapter "Two Ways to Avoid the Real of Desire."

12. Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). The telling section begins on 219, in which Cavell objects to John Rawls's reading of Nietzsche as non-egalitarian. Cavell wants Nietzsche in the democratic camp, despite evidence to the contrary. Cavell notices that when Nietzsche makes certain claims about human beings in general, those claims can "sound bad," but Cavell presses on to make Nietzsche's case for *Übermenschen*, all the while denying that Nietzsche believes that ruling others is only for a special few.

13. Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, 199-205. "Just as Cavell's 'esoteric' does not take seriously enough the possibility of *intentional manipulation by authors at the level of textual production*, so also it does not suggest a way of analyzing texts appropriately *at the level of consumption*. This failure is unacceptable in dealing with Nietzsche/anism" (201).

cists, and thus falls victim to their pernicious ideology. Nietzsche in his *Nachlass* had proclaimed: “My writings should be so obscure [dark] and incomprehensible!” (*Meine Schriften sollen so dunkel und unverständlich sein!*).<sup>14</sup> In *Cities of Words*, Cavell portrays Nietzsche as a champion of a kind of independence, a methodology for “becoming who you are,” à la Charlotte in *Now, Voyager*. It is a crucial hermeneutical problem that Cavell takes Nietzsche at face value, despite ample evidence, which you can find, among other places in Geoff Waite’s book *Nietzsche’s Corps/e*, that Nietzsche, like Heidegger and Wittgenstein, kept the real, anti-egalitarian agenda off the main stage.

If Cavell read the *Nachlass*, perhaps he could have read this 1884 Nietzsche passage plainly, and come to a different conclusion about Nietzsche’s intentions: “First Basic Law: no consideration for numbers: the masses. The suffering and unhappy concern us little—only the foremost and most successful exemplars, so that they don’t get short shrift out of consideration for the ill-bred ones (i.e., the masses). Destruction of the ill-bred—to this aim one must emancipate oneself from previous morality.”<sup>15</sup>

Hardly anyone, including philosophers who make a living teaching and publishing about Wittgenstein, read Wittgenstein’s Koder diaries or the *Geheime Tagebücher*, secret diaries, which have yet to be translated into English. Here was the situation in the early 1990s, as described by Jaako Hintikka, a well known Wittgenstein scholar: Wittgenstein made double use of his notebooks. Besides using them to jot down philosophical ideas as they occurred to him, he used the very same notebooks to record other observations. In order to prevent any casual reader from having access to his private thoughts, he used a code to record the private matters. The coded passages have been deciphered. A pirated edition of the coded parts of the 1914-16 notebooks was published in 1985 in the magazine *Saber* in Barcelona.<sup>16</sup> Much as Heidegger’s family has kept a tight rein on how Heidegger’s works have been published, Wittgenstein’s literary executors restrict access to the coded passages. They are supposed to be censored from the microfilms distributed by the Cornell University Library, though at least one major

14. Nietzsche to Carl Gersdorff, 1 April 1874; *Kritische Gesamtausgabe Briefwechsel*, 2/3 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1978), 215.

15. Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Vol. 7/2, Walter de Gruyter, 1974, 71. Hereafter as *KGA*.

16. See *Wittgenstein in Florida*, ed. Jaako Hintikka (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1991).

university library received an unexpurgated copy. This is the kind of situation in which close reading is useless. You cannot read closely what is not available, but people can do their homework. That is, with a little digging, it's possible to learn about the secret writings of these philosophers. The North American audience for this essay is familiar with the TMZ-like electricity that has taken place in the Heideggerian world of scholars over the publication of the *Schwarze Hefte*, the "Black Notebooks," which were "under seal" until their publication in German in 2014. The release of those notebooks caused the chair of the Martin Heidegger Society, Günter Figal, to resign his position this time last year. Günter Figal's epiphany that one of his favorite authors had written numerous passages that reek of anti-Semitism, late in coming as that *Aha-Erlebnis* was, lends credence to a view that foregrounding the esotericism in Continental philosophy is not fruitless. Others might also be saved from thinking that Nietzsche, Cavell, Heidegger and company are misread leftists, or benign conservatives, or truly wretched beings whose philosophies must be bracketed from their personal lives, as if the personal lives and the philosophies were not, in these particular cases, reinforcing. You are also familiar with the rhetorical move of claiming certain thinkers have early and late phases, and one phase needs to be ignored while another elevated. Those versed in the scholarship on Wittgenstein will recognize that move as a commonplace. This is the same tactic Cavell uses with Nietzsche to ease Cavell's conscience, I suppose, about the obvious impact that a word like *Übermensch* has on a post-Hitlerian audience. Cavell prefers to think of the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil* as the untainted Nietzsche, despite claims by Nietzsche scholars like James Porter in his *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, who writes: "What is less well recognized is that in his later writings Nietzsche continues to treat the same problems that he had treated in his earlier writings, and often in the same ways."<sup>17</sup>

Porter's claim works in a world of close reading, when the important materials are there for the reading. The claim becomes problematic in the world of esotericism. The context of philosophical esotericism in the West, connected to the thinkers already mentioned, is now better known, thanks to the work of Arthur Melzer.<sup>18</sup> In Ber-

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17. James I. Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 2.

18. Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

nard Yack's review of Melzer's 2014 book, Yack writes: "Melzer amass[es] an enormous amount of testimony, testimony from major figures in every age from Classical Antiquity through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, confirming knowledge and approval of these ways of esoteric means of communicating philosophic ideas. Esoteric writing, this testimony makes clear, was no secret. It was a familiar and unremarkable feature of the Western philosopher's intellectual landscape right up to the beginning of the 19th century."<sup>19</sup> Yack is a bit flippant with the acceptance of esotericism among philosophers and academics. Yack makes it seem as if what Melzer offers is uncontroversial, but a great deal is at stake. Plato's *Seventh Letter* might serve as an example. Plato's letter is a text unimportant to Cavell's thinking, though Cavell has a great deal to say about Plato's *Republic*. As you will recall it's in the *Seventh Letter* that Plato makes the claim that philosophers would be better off not making public their real ideas. It is too dangerous, and he obviously must have the fate of Socrates in mind in making that statement. Yet, classicists and philosophers are still working to discredit the *Seventh Letter* as an authentic Platonic text. In a 2015 book entitled *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter* by Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, the authors attempt a weak case in that direction, one easily dismantled by Charles Kahn.<sup>20</sup> Plato's explanation of the motivation of philosophical esotericism in the *Seventh Letter* was one of the motivations for Leo Strauss's famous work *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, one of the key texts in thinking through the political implications of the ongoing history of esotericism, close reading, and cryptography.<sup>21</sup>

On to the serious business about Cavell. Cavell admits in his autobiography *Little Did I Know* that Cavell thinks Heidegger's dalliance with National Socialism was "impermanent," and does not seem to link it to Heidegger's extended interest in Nietzsche nor Heidegger's propagation of Nietzsche's work in Heidegger's famous two-volume study of Nietzsche, published in 1961, but based on earlier lectures which arose out of Heidegger's so-called discovery of Nietzsche sometime between 1927 and

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19. Bernard Yack, "Review of Arthur Melzer's *Philosophy Between the Lines*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, October 27, 2014. Accessed January 16, 2016. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/53333-philosophy-between-the-lines-the-lost-history-of-esoteric-writing>.

20. Charles Kahn, "Review of Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter*," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, November 9, 2015. Accessed January 16, 2016. <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/62135-the-pseudo-platonic-seventh-letter>.

21. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; originally published in 1952).

1933.<sup>22</sup> As early as 1921, Heidegger had written to Karl Jaspers about forming an “invisible community” of those interested in the philosophical topics occupying Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes that “the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the force of the most elemental in which Dasein expresses itself, and to keep it from common understanding.”<sup>23</sup> This is of a piece with Nietzsche’s comments in his *Nachlass* that his works are not meant for common, ignorant people.

In a recent brief and elliptical discussion, the poet Charles Bernstein has with Cavell about Heidegger and National Socialism, Cavell is at pains to suggest that he would think differently about Heidegger, had Heidegger “actually laid hands on people.” This misses the point of esoteric politics bent on war. One has others put hands on people, while one’s own hands remain seemingly unstained. It’s a version of drone wars at which philosophers excel. Cavell seems to have no idea of what it means for Nietzsche to have described himself as “dynamite,” and to have predicted his own rise from the dead: “To be ignited in 300 years—that is my desire for fame.”<sup>24</sup> A contemporary analogue to this is playing out in Germany at the moment, with the success of a book about the return of Hitler by Timur Vermes and the subsequent film entitled *Er ist Da Wieder (Look Who’s Back)*.<sup>25</sup>

The evidence of Cavell’s questionable moral reading – by a man who has labeled his own work as instructions in the moral life, and who claims that Nietzsche and Heidegger and others deserve our attention as readers and students, and should adjust our moral lives – rests, if nowhere else, in a few minutes of the podcast with his former student Charles Bernstein. I have transcribed the relevant section.

BERNSTEIN: Do you think that a philosopher’s or a poet’s work should be judged by their moral conduct in the world or by the work itself? Does the bad things that people do—I mean, there are many famous examples that will immediately come to your mind as I say that [laughter from CB]—does it negate the work?

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22. Allan Megill, “Martin Heidegger and the Metapolitics of Crisis,” in *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, ed. John Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 264-304.

23. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1979), 220; *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 262.

24. *KGA VII/1*, 195.

25. Timur Vermes, *Look Who’s Back*, trans. Jamie Bulloch (New York: MacLehose Press, 2015; first published in German in 2012).



CAVELL: Well, I mean, it would have to be a pretty bad life to negate the work. I mean, if you're a child molester, I'm not going to read your writing.

BERNSTEIN: Well, That would be a good example. Those aren't the paradigmatic examples, but why not? Why couldn't someone be a child molester? And would it make a difference whether it was a poet or philosopher? Or an artist or a philosopher?

CAVELL: That's a really very good question.

BERNSTEIN: Yeah, that's my question for you. It's a real question I have wanted to ask you, because I figure you thought about it in some way.

CAVELL: Well, not enough. Not enough. I am willing to go *very far* with the voice that's actually in the words, in the text. But what it brings to mind is how utterly it depends on both sides of that—what the criminal aspect of the writer has been.

BERNSTEIN: So it's the particular nature of the crime?

CAVELL: It's the nature of the crime, and it's the nature of the prose, both. If he gets the crime into the prose, and has something important to say about it, and isn't trying to polish it over, or [can't make out] an excuse about it, or something, then I might feel moved by it.

BERNSTEIN: And would it make a difference if it was philosophy? That we would want a philosopher or could somehow not take seriously the work of a philosopher who...

CAVELL: I think the aroma of a bad life, if it's bad enough, is going to be there, and if you know about it, you're going to have to deal with it.

BERNSTEIN: It's hard to see with a poet, although people would say that. If you write some poem that's a wonderful poem that exists, it can't really be compromised, but many people wouldn't say that. So, I mean, the poetry example most famous is [Ezra] Pound.

CAVELL: Well, yes, that's a good instance. And it's a problem. And sometimes you get caught up in the problem, and sometimes you leave the crap behind, and you are in the mood, you're in the poem. But I don't think there's a formula for this.

BERNSTEIN: And the other one that I'm obviously leading to, because it's a person you write about, is Heidegger.

CAVELL: Yeah. That's a very good instance.

BERNSTEIN: Yeah, of course. Your relation to Heidegger is interesting. He seems fundamental to you. At some point in your work, but at the same time, *not*—can I put that—you sort of don't want to turn away from Heidegger it seems to me in the writing. But I don't actually know what at this point in your life—you certainly haven't been writing about it recently, you think about that. Because I think even the thinking about what the relationship to Heidegger's work as the rector was has for many people contaminated the ability to read the later Heidegger (*Poetry, Language, and Truth*) or certainly *Being and Time*—There's something about that Nazi, Aryan supremacy—just because you put the two things together, you all of a sudden start to see it there. If you want to. Once you put that on there, then all of a sudden you project that in. I mean, is that unfair? Is that accurate to the work? Is it fair to philosophy, or the philosophy that is important to you, because there are things that are said there that are needed?

CAVELL: I am just going to say it depends. If he had been a murderer, I mean, actually laid hands on...

Cavell says he has thought about these ethico-political matters, but “not enough.” Bernstein expected otherwise. Cavell's response to Bernstein is in a special cadence in the podcast. There is a deliberateness in delivery leading up to the “it depends.” Cavell introduces contingencies and conditional clauses. “If he gets the crime into the prose” and “if he actually laid hands on.” Some boundary exists, and once the boundary is crossed (when the crime enters the prose, and when the hands are laid), then it's possible to make judgments and larger ethical decisions, perhaps as dramatic as Cavell's statement about the writings of a child molester. On this line of thinking, a threshold must be achieved, establishing the groundwork for an ethical position, a

commission of an act that leaves unspoken whether ethical thought also needs to address acts of omission. Time for a closer look at “it depends.”

Cavell’s “it depends” functions as a refuge for those who do not want to deal with the dark side of Heidegger, or Nietzsche, or Gadamer, or Blanchot, or de Man.<sup>26</sup> It can reach absurd levels, such as Sheehan’s reliance on exact numbers that get us specifically nowhere. In Sheehan’s criticism of Faye, and doubtless it’s as much a personal criticism as a defense of Heidegger, Sheehan writes: “*Being and Time* is a thickly argued book comprised of 497 pages and 143,000 words in the German. But despite the magnitude of his claim, Faye devotes only 1550 words to his analysis of Heidegger’s magnum opus – while in the process passing a damning judgment on the entire book” (*EF*, 379).<sup>27</sup> Would 1,551 words of analysis have been better, more to the point, justified the “damning judgment”? The number of words to reach the important threshold (for Sheehan to accept Faye’s judgment) is never mentioned. On the other side, someone like Jean Grondin, official biographer for Gadamer, wants to claim that because Gadamer had *some* Jewish friends during the National Socialist period, that fact serves as exculpatory evidence that he could not be an anti-Semite, or someone who accommodated National Socialism. For Cavell, Heidegger must have actually laid hands on... on whom? The presupposition must be that we lack an episode reporting Heidegger strangling one of his Jewish colleagues or pushing a concentration camp prisoner into an oven or punching an Allied soldier in the face during a battle. There’s *that* kind of “laying hands on.” Would that be the necessary scenario for Cavell, the man ready to stop reading the writing of child molesters, to acknowledge the stain that runs across Heidegger’s works? On the other hand, we also lack episodes in which Heidegger actually laid hands on any National Socialist or Nazi sympathizer who might have been involved in harming others—if “laying hands on” is the decisive criterion. But it is not, any more than one would make ethical judgments about a sniper using the “actually laid hands on” line of defense, since “laying hands on” could not be

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26. Waite makes the case that misunderstanding National Socialism heightens the ethical interest in the particular philosophers and others who failed to resist, collaborated, accommodated themselves to it, saved themselves from it, but occludes access to the larger picture of capitalism as such. National Socialism was capitalism in crisis, but the defeat of the Nazis militarily did not mean an end to capitalism. National Socialism was one phase of capitalism (see GR, 279-81). See also Peter R. Sinclair, “Fascism and Crisis in Capitalist Society” in *New German Critique* 9 (Autumn 1976), 87-112.

27. While pummeling Faye’s scholarship, Sheehan ignores that others besides Faye have made the case that *Being and Time* is not politically benign, such as Johannes Fritsche, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

taken literally by Bernstein or other listeners to the podcast with Cavell. In the German Criminal Code prior to 1968, anyone who was convicted as an accomplice to a crime was subject to the same penalty as the perpetrator.<sup>28</sup> Cavell must have been thinking about Heidegger in a different legal frame in response to Bernstein's question, a question that apparently has not been troubling Cavell or his followers, especially the ones who want to foist a Cavellian ethics upon us.

In the "actually laid hands on" defense of Heidegger, Cavell offers a version of the Doubting Thomas narrative. The wound/crime is real, only if one can touch it, put hands on it, through it. Elsewhere, such as in his interpretation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman," Cavell seems to warn his readers against such literal-minded skepticism, while suggesting that a skeptical crisis can spread throughout a community, and looks like a massive reconsideration of reality itself (a situation that seems necessary for Cavell and his acolytes). Might some listeners to the podcast say that Cavell is giving the proverbial "benefit of the doubt" in the absence of overwhelming empirical evidence of hands being laid on someone? Must we have overwhelming empirical evidence of bloody acts by Heidegger before we wonder about Heidegger's ethics, as Charles Bernstein and Günter Figal have? We can start questioning the motives of those committed to esotericism,<sup>29</sup> and to someone apparently enthralled by Nietzsche, a writer who planned on having posthumous effects, which gives his writings more relevance for readers now. In Lacanian terms, Nietzsche fashioned himself into a structuring absence ("to be ignited in 300 years"). In his own writings, Cavell follows the lead of other philosophers, like Kant, who suggest a continual probing of one's own motives.<sup>30</sup> It seems time for students and followers of Cavell to follow Bernstein's example in questioning Cavell, who admits he has not thought enough about these matters related to Heidegger and Nietzsche. If Cavell has not thought enough about it, they certainly have not.

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28. Lawrence Raful, Herbert Reginbogin, and Christoph Safferling (eds.), *The Nuremberg Trials: International Criminal Law since 1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 211.

29. While the evidence appears much earlier, one cannot miss Heidegger's focus on the concealed/unconcealed dichotomy in writing in his "The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought" in the *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44.2 (May 2013), 119-128; Heidegger writes, "unconcealment is everywhere in need of concealment" (127).

30. See Charles Warren, "Philosophy/literature/criticism/film" in *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy, literature and criticism*, eds. James Loxley and Andrew Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 184.