The Aliveness of the Posthumous (2)

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Let us pick up where we left off. Part I started a conversation — pun intended — on Stanley Cavell's intellectual legacy after the publication of *Here and There* with the help of scholars who have repeatedly and proficiently engaged with his work. The purpose, retained here, is to lead Cavell's philosophy back where it is at home by spelling out the terms of criticism he contributed to set out and invite new attention to themes and argumentative tropes he cultivated. Given the range of directions in which Cavell's philosophy extends, it is little wonder that one volume could not contain everything worth touching on. Hence, the need for the Part II you are now reading. Part II has clearly no ambition to be exhaustive, though. But there is no perversity, we believe, in thinking that leaving something out can dovetail with our aim of letting someone in: once again, if the essays here collected will go someway toward rekindling the interest in Cavell's philosophy or, more generally and importantly, toward showing the aliveness of its philosophical approach to understand the world and ourselves, we will have enough ground to plant the flag we are trying to wave.

As with Part I, essays are here grouped in sections to favour the reader's perusal, standing the usual *caveat* — due to the nature of Cavell's thought — that there might be more points of connection than of separation between essays of different sections. The first section, which parallels the first in Part I and is equally entitled "Philosophy and Self-Knowledge," discusses Cavell's emphasis on the knowledge of oneself not only as a topic of philosophical inquiry, but also and perhaps especially as the means through which the latter can be carried out meaningfully and produce (re-)discovery and authentic expression. In what might be read as an articulation, or confession, of the self-knowledge he earned for himself and tried to elicit in others through his work, Cavell precisely stresses "the use of [one]self

as the source of [philosophy's] evidence and as an instance of its conclusions."[1] If the essay opening Part I enlisted Socrates, the prototypical gadfly of philosophers, in the tradition that finds in self-knowledge, or recovery from self-ignorance, the target of philosophy, Steven Affeldt's opening essay carefully traces the role of Austin as Cavell's personal gadfly in the latter's philosophical flourishing, or self-affirmation. Plumbing Cavell's autobiographical recounting of crises of expression, from his childhood to the early steps in the academic world, Affeldt resurfaces with an understanding of how Austin's philosophising shaped Cavell's philosophical voice by advocating and professing a general return of the human voice to philosophy. It is part of the understanding that Affeldt illustrates that Cavell not only inherits the sense of the powers intrinsic to (the appeal to) ordinary language that Austin groundbreakingly brings out. He also moves beyond his teacher in taking seriously the human — too human — drive to deprive ourselves of such powers and to remain powerless, exposed to emptiness and confusion.

In her essay, Naoko Saito offers an examination of Cavell's notion of self-knowledge as warding us off from distorted accounts of the relation between the inner and the outer and pointing to "what is accurate in the philosophical or metaphysical idea of privacy,"[2] on which, for Saito's Cavell, philosophy and metaphysics mulishly go astray. If the task of philosophical thinking is instead to gain and re-gain self-knowledge, then, concludes Saito, philosophical thinking must be identified as a practice and a way of life where we learn how to singularise our voice, encounter ourselves and others and find what matters.

The second section, 'Empathy and the Knowledge of Others', includes significative contributions on one of the most provocative pieces collected in *Here and There*, namely "Notes Mostly about Empathy."[3] This piece resumes Cavell's career-long investigation of what it is (or means) to know other minds or, perhaps better, *others* — a philosophical problem that, Cavell famously claims, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation* discovers, or re-discovers, for analytic philosophy in general. Edward Minar instructively guides us through the piece. He starts by noting

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1. Cavell, *Here and There: Sites of Philosophy*, ed. Nancy Bauer, Alice Crary, and Saundra Laugier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 102.
2. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 330.
3. Cavell, "Notes After Austin," in *Here and There*, 101-108.

that Cavell finds a particular incoherence in the notion of empathy when it comes to the problem of scepticism about other minds. To explain why, Minar links the discussion of empathy in "Notes" to Cavell's earlier extensive engagement with that problem in "Knowing and Acknowledging" and in Part IV of *The Claim of Reason*.[4] In particular, argues Minar, empathy seems to fly in the face of what Cavell calls "acknowledgement": while the latter is meant to capture our real need in living and engaging with others, the former contributes to reinforcing the confused picture of a cognitive barrier separating us from them by purporting to be a passage past such a barrier. But to surrender this picture and thus look for an epistemic bridge that might lead us directly into other people's minds or inner gardens is not to deviate from our acknowledgement of others but rather to elicit it or, better, its avoidance. Minar then asks what Cavell significantly adds to this nest of ideas in "Notes." His answer is that Cavell starts locating there the ordinary role of empathy in relation to acknowledgement as a mode of responsiveness to others that can bring us in conversation with and tune in to them — that is, as a mode of making ourselves known to them, and thus letting them be known.

Similarly, Edward Witherspoon's essay draws on "Notes" and precedent writings of Cavell to show that philosophy is tempted and tends to deny or distort what knowing others is and, in so doing, to ignore the genuine difficulties it involves. Witherspoon takes Ayer's treatment of the traditional problem of other minds as a paradigmatic example of philosophy's vices in this regard. According to Ayer, even if we cannot have direct knowledge of people's experiences, feelings and emotions, we are justified in our attributions on the grounds of their behaviour and by analogy with what we experience or feel when we exhibit such a behaviour. Witherspoon argues, in step with Cavell, not only that Ayer's proposal is unhelpful but also that it misrepresents the phenomenology of knowing others as others. Empathy as the ability to know what it is to be in a particular state of mind and the judgments one might express in it is required if, explains Witherspoon, we are to avoid philosophy's tendency to deflection, that is, to flee the genuine difficulties of knowing others – like their dissimulating or lying about their feelings — and get instead enmeshed in

4. See Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, updated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220-45; Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 329-496.

theoretical puzzles of no real significance. In Witherspoon's understanding, rather than solutions, those difficulties call for acknowledgement and this, in turn, for our expression of knowledge, so for conversation. Conversation provides the chief way to learn about other minds while revealing our own, or even ourselves. The risk we run in conversations and, more generally, in trying to know others, concludes Witherspoon, is not a possible loss of certainty but the certain fact of being exposed to and for them.

The essays of the third section, entitled 'Music and Meaning', focus on (motifs in) Part III of *Here and There*, where Cavell remembers his early tormented transition from performing music to the discovery of philosophy to tease out the relation of reciprocal illumination in which understanding a piece of music and understanding a stretch of discourse stand. In his essay, Victor Krebs proposes that Cavell's vocational crisis as a musician left a trace on his philosophy in what Krebs identifies as a proper "aesthetic turn." The key to appreciating that turn, argues Krebs, is Cavell's re-interpretation of Austin's performative utterances as passionate utterances, essentially infused with the sound they might have — that is, the meaning we might hear when they are used — in our (forms of) life. But we are inclined to suppress this sound and disconnect our utterances from what instils meaning to them, namely the human voice, to which we close our ears. According to Krebs, in looking for what Cavell calls "acknowledgment," we search for and test our mutual attunement in language through which we can (return to) hear each other. The core of Cavell's aesthetic turn in philosophy, concludes Krebs, lies in the non-representational understanding akin to musical understanding involved and required to understand our representations and find ourselves intelligible. This vision, for Krebs, teaches us to live with the true mark of our finitude.

Paul Standish's essay reflects on the relation between Arnold Schoenberg's notion of "row" and Wittgenstein's of "rules" on which Cavell commented in "Philosophy of the Unheard."[5] Standish begins by disputing a conservative reading of Wittgenstein on rules as standards of meaning fixed by society's approval and a caricatural reading of Schoenberg's innovation in his break with tonal music as consisting of a new, theoretically imposed set of rules. According to Standish, Cavell

5. Cavell, "Philosophy and the Unheard," in *Here and There*, 260-68.

has gone to great lengths to show the shortcomings of these readings, but we need to be careful not to misunderstand his efforts. Standish explains why Schoenberg's impact on music might be analogous to what Cavell's Wittgenstein brought to philosophy. Contrary to what Adorno seems to suggest, Schoenberg's crisis of musical expression is not, or not simply, for Cavell, a liberation from the false consciousness of the precedent tradition. Standish suggests that Cavell's reading emerges in light of the music theorist David Lewin's opinion of Schoenberg, which Standish proceeds to illustrate. Cavell's reading is that a crisis of (musical) expression is an attempt, marked by continuous tensions, at finding one's voice or, one might even say, being true to oneself, a search for what Emerson calls — and Cavell recalls as — self-reliance. But, adds Standish, Adorno and Cavell might then be closer than it seemed because they both see the conditions under which we can share words and the world as exposed to our leaping from them, perhaps away from false appearances (or pictures) but clearly towards our true needs, that is, towards new possibilities for (and responsibilities to) ourselves, our community, and the world, yet at the cost of remain misunderstood or even unheard.

Eran Guter devotes his essay to spelling out the extent of the elective affinity between Wittgenstein and the composer Gustav Mahler, who both manifested *in propria persona* — according to what Cavell claims in "A Scale of Eternity"[6] — the modern fear of inexpressiveness that derives from "confront[ing] the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in" those who question it in order to repossess it.[7] By drawing on Wittgenstein's famous and less-famous remarks on modernity and modern music, Guter takes him as identifying two kinds of myopia that are signs of cultural decline, namely the stiff imposition of a form of progress and its utter negation. But Mahler, for Wittgenstein, does not fit any of them. What is troubling about Mahler's music is the defamiliarization of familiar musical criteria. To explain this, Guter appeals to Cavell's understanding of Spengler's influence on Wittgenstein. In brief, Mahler gives voice to another kind of myopia that is a proper condition of modernity, namely, that of being or becoming disoriented, at a loss in one own's shoes, or with one's own culture. Despite seeing the genuine sense of the cultural

6. Cavell, "A Scale of Eternity," in *Here and There*, 279-85.
7. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 125.

decline in modern music, Mahler did not cope with it as genuinely, showing a failure of character or authenticity that Wittgenstein constantly feared about himself and his style of philosophising, according to Guter.

Finally, the fourth section, 'Cinema and Collection," traces or extends Cavell's reflections in *Here and There* (and elsewhere) on cultural phenomena or aspects of life that are not usually at the heart of mainstream philosophy. Piergiorgio Donatelli's essay locates cinema and the magic of films within Cavell's thought. Donatelli claims that cinema is born at the peak of the modernist period of other arts, in crisis and forced to confront the conditions of their own reality, and exists from its beginning in a modernist state but with the promise of a new world for its audience. What is fundamental to cinema, ontologically speaking, is making a world present to us while screening its existence from us. In doing so, cinema displaces our lives and reveals the existential, non-philosophical problem of scepticism that inexorably looms over them. But, argues Donatelli, cinema thus prepares us — also through the film stars that populate it and offer companionship and models of singularity — for returning to our everyday lives with a genuine sense of the responsibilities we have towards our words and actions. So cinema exists, in fact, between romanticism and modernism, as it works to maintain our alignment with others and the world while naturally testing it (especially in classical Hollywood films, on the ground of its inherent democratic potential, and differently from European arts of the same period, convincingly documents Donatelli). From an ethical perspective, thus explains Donatelli, our experience with films — or, perhaps more restrictedly, with classical Hollywood films, in Cavell's account — is one of moral perfectionism, though an experience that is weakened or absent in particular cinematographic ages.

In the last essay of Part II, David Rudrum focuses on Cavell's "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting," a piece on the philosophy of — or, even, on philosophy as – collecting, republished in *Here and There*.[8] Drawing on Virginia Woolf's description of her visit to Carlyle's house, Rudrum starts by unknotting the apparent paradox that, in collecting, we accumulate what is at once an emblem of a life lived and a mark of death: what we do is reconstructing the self (or selves) from the belongings we collect in a sort of detective work. He then moves on to explore

8. Cavell, "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting," in *Here and There*, 33-71.

Cavell's reading of a story by Henry James about people visiting — or going on a secular pilgrimage to — Shakespeare's birthplace and carefully unpacks Cavell's main claim that that story is a model of the nature and activity of criticism, along the lines of the appeal to ordinary language central to Cavell's philosophy. Finally, Rudrum arrives at Thoreau's *Walden* cabin and expands his investigation, through Cavell's writings, of the grammar of collecting and, with that, recollecting, and saving or bringing back from forgetfulness. On these bases, claims Rudrum, we should re-interpret the way museums and curators put their collections on exhibit for visitors, seen as ordinary critics.

As with Part I, we hope these essays will make aspects of Cavell's philosophy, or routes departing from it, salient, or salient anew, for readers curious to start a conversation with him or prone to pick up where they have left it. If you think something is wrong in what you are about to read, either from an exegetical or a theoretical perspective, please, tell a friend why and figure out together how to do it better. If you think something of Cavell's rich production is disgracefully left out here, please, write about it, and about why it merits scholars' attention in the current philosophical landscape. If you think you do not know what to think of these essays, or more generally, of Cavell's philosophy as a whole, please, take a rest and try again later, not because we want it to sound convincing, but because there is more to learn about it and your stance toward it by opening your ears rather than by closing them to it. So, be ready to offer criticism, but make sure that you acknowledge its terms, first and foremost for yourself. Nothing else but this is what the editors and the contributors wish for with this Special Issue.

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