Conversations 6

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Cavell After Cavell: A Philosophy Without Tears

EDITORIAL COMMENT

> The world is full of complainers. But the fact is, nothing comes with a guarantee.
>
> JOEL AND ETHAN COEN, *Blood Simple*

1. After June 19th, the title—"Cavell after Cavell"—for this collection of papers on Stanley Cavell's rich philosophical work has taken on a new meaning. Originally, contributors were asked to explore new trends based on Cavell's thought, but what we have now is also reminiscent of an homage by some notable scholars who were his students or who knew him very well.

In the first paper, Victor J. Krebs traces two of the main topics that thread Stanley Cavell's otherwise eclectic and idiosyncratic themes: his reinterpretation of skepticism and the role played by the philosophy of ordinary language "in the midst of the temptation of skepticism."

Next, Alice Crary takes up yet another thread that runs through Cavell's explorations of numerous themes. It is, to be sure, a thread that has received less attention than the aforementioned two, namely, "a preoccupation with what it is to be a responsible participant in a democratic polis".

Third, Nancy Bauer contributes with her own perspective on the difficulty of getting to feel confident about one's own tastes, especially after having studied and worked with an author like Cavell who had an iron trust in his own tastes, despite being, or perhaps because they are so, idiosyncratic. And she does this by telling us how she came to read Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*[1] "in the rather unusual way that [she] do[es]."

In the fourth paper of this collection, Gordon Bearn carries out two interesting and commendable tasks: the first is to try to understand what Cavell means exactly when he says that the writings of Thoreau and Emerson underwrite the procedures of ordinary language philosophy characteristic of the work of Austin and Wittgenstein. Secondly, he wants to suggest that this underwriting could be further secured by including what Whitman calls “the merge” and “the outlet,” i.e., a type of mysticism that redeems ordinary words through an abundance of experience.

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[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997).

The collection ends with yet another exploration of the consequences of Cavell’s continuation of Ordinary Language Philosophy. In her paper, Sandra Laugier makes good on her well known insistence that “ordinary language philosophy is from the outset oriented toward social matters” by exploring the connections between Ordinary Language Philosophy and the ethics of care. Thus, her “goal is to use [Cavell’s] work to interpret ordinary language philosophy in such a way that it can serve as a basis for re-defining ethics as attention to ordinary life and as care for moral expression.”

For my part, in what follows I would like to make my own modest and very brief contribution, both to the homage and to what lies ahead after Cavell.

2. Some years ago I was commissioned to translate into Spanish Cavell’s *Contesting Tears*.[2] The most difficult decision I had to make, in a task that itself was full of difficult decisions, came down to the following: how to translate the word “contesting” without missing any of Cavell’s intended meaning. In Spanish and in the context of the movies discussed by Cavell, "contesting" can mean many things: from tears that are "challenging", to tears that are shed as a complaint, or as an alternative to an ominous situation that requires rebutting, etc. I considered several options, but I was not satisfied with any of them. Professor Cavell was kind enough to discuss with me each of the many alternative and suitable translations I proposed to him one after another in my increasingly desperate e-mails. Finally, we went for a not so literal translation. And that's how we came to the final title of the Spanish translation: “Más Allá de las Lágrimas,” literally “Beyond Tears.” Not only is it not a literal translation of the original English title, but it implies a no less important difference: the Spanish title stops qualifying the object, i.e., the tears that the unknown women shed at some point, and goes on to tell us something

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[2] Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

about these women. And what it says is that they have all gone through a moment of revelation, or as Cavell puts it, they have at last formulated their own *cogito*, i.e., they exist because from that moment on they will speak by themselves. These women, unlike their sisters from the comedies of remarriage, don't need to be educated, but rather to accept who they are, what they think. In other words, they vindicate their right to have a voice in their own lives. In this sense, they clearly perceive that the world in which they had lived until that very moment has nothing to offer them; therefore, when they decide to leave that world behind, they are leaving nothing worth crying for. They have reached a level of "spiritual existence" far higher than those who used to be part of their (not so) ordinary world. In this situation, the tears caused by the different sacrifices that these unknown women are forced to make, are due not so much to the fact that they are resigned to the sad and ominous needs that they have been forced to accept, but to the sadness and even shame that they start feeling as soon as they realize that until that very moment they never had a voice in their own story. At last, then, they claim for themselves the right to judge the world that has forced them to sacrifice themselves in this way. The transformation that they experience from that moment requires, paraphrasing Cavell, that they break with what they had previously accepted as necessary and seek other needs that are more necessary. Be that as it may, these women are clearly beyond tears.

3. In his unmistakable style, Bertrand Russell begins his "Logic and Ontology," originally published in 1957, with the following remark: "My purpose in this article is first to discuss G. F. Warnock's 'Metaphysics in Logic' [...] Mr. Warnock belongs to the 'Philosophy-Without-Tears' School, so named because it makes philosophy very much easier than it has ever been before: in order to be a competent philosopher, it is only necessary to study Fowler's *Modern English Usage*; post-graduates may advance to *The King's English*, but this book is to be used with caution for, as its title shows, it is somewhat archaic."[3]

The good connoisseur would have inmediately realized that when Russell says "Philosophy-Without-Tears" he is actually referring to Ordinary Language Philosophy at large, and to (the later) Wittgenstein in particular, a philosopher that Russell was convinced had thrown his talent overboard and, in doing so, had philosophically degraded himself to common sense.

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[3] Bertrand Russell, "Logic and Ontology," *The Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. 9 (1957): 225.

In my opinion, Russell's remark hinges on two stereotypes underwritten by, say, the Philosophy-*with*-Tears school. On the one hand, philosophy's traditional search, say, for purity, is an epic quest that demands effort and involves suffering and, therefore, can cause tears. On the other hand, it is considered common sensical, leaving everything as it is, and therefore takes neither the traditional problems of philosophy seriously enough, nor does it say anything epic but, rather, it makes philosophy too easy. In both cases, the Philosophy-with-Tears school acknowledges our tragic condition—that "nothing comes with a guarantee"—but doesn't accept it.

Russell is definitely right when he suggests that Wittgenstein belongs to the "Philosophy-Without-Tears" school, but he is completely wrong in thinking that Wittgenstein makes philosophy all too easy. I think it is rather the opposite. According to Wittgenstein, (1) "the crystalline purity of logic, was, of course, not a *result of the investigation*; it was a requirement";[4] because (2) Wittgenstein is concerned "about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, and not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm";[5] and (3) the requirement is "in danger of becoming empty,"[6] that is to say, Russell's philosophy is not epic after all, but rather its constant quest for purity hides or is an answer to its unwillingness to accept the tragic nature of our real condition; therefore (4) "[t]he *preconceived idea* of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination round."[7] In a nutshell, Wittgenstein's is a philosophy-without-tears not because it is easy, but rather because it does not miss anything—i.e., guarantees, justifications, epistemic certainty…—we, philosophers, should be looking for; instead it seems to destroy anything that philosophers of the Philosophy-with-Tears—i.e., Russell's—School have deemed important (Ibid., §118). In this sense, then, Wittgenstein's is, no doubt about that, a philosophy-without-tears because it is *beyond* tears.

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4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* rev. 4th edn., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §107.
5. *Ibid.*, §108.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, §107.

As a would-be member of Wittgenstein's School of Philosophy-Without-Tears, if that school had existed, Cavell's too is a philosophy beyond tears.[8]

DAVID PÉREZ-CHICO

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[8] This is a question in which I have been working intermittently over the last few years and which I won't explore in further detail here. See Pérez Chico, "Filosofía sin lágrimas", in *Stanley Cavell, mundos vistos y ciudades de palabras*, ed. A. Lastra (Madrid: Plaza y Valdés Editores, 2010), 57-85; Pérez Chico, "Filosofía más allá de las lágrimas: Stanley Cavell a partir de los melodramas de la mujer desconocida", in *Cine y Filosofía*, Athenaica, ed. H. Muñoz, forthcoming. Furthermore, it is the main topic of a book in preparation on Cavell and Wittgenstein that is intended to be a vindication of the importance of Ordinary Language Philosophy.

Between Mourning and Desire

VICTOR J. KREBS

> I found myself attaching a small prayer for thoughts that have never come, or never been given sufficient appreciation. Priceless uncollecteds.
>
> CAVELL, "The World as Things"

During the month of November 1998, Stanley Cavell visited Caracas, Venezuela, invited by the Museum of Fine Arts and the philosophy department of Simon Bolivar University, to hold a three-day seminar on art and philosophy. During those days, Cavell presented and commented on the films *Jean Dillman*, by Chantal Ackerman and *Sans Soleil* by Chris Marker, as well as two lectures on material he was working on at that time: "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting,"[1] which was published in a volume by the Guggenheim Museum with the Pompidou Center, where he also read that conference that same year (it later appeared in a final version in 2005 in *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*).[2] The second lecture was "Trials of Praise," where he talked about Henry James and Fred Astaire.

From this event a text was prepared for publication with transcriptions of the discussions that gave rise to presentations by Cavell, translated into Spanish, as well as an interview in two parts (one in Caracas, and another between Caracas and Boston, after the event). The publication of the text, which was being prepared by the Museum of Fine Arts, was suspended as a result of the intervention of the Venezuelan cultural institutions by the Chávez regime, which canceled all the projects of the previous administrations. Since then some extracts have been published in Spanish in various magazines in Latin America, from the interview with Cavell, but the rest of the book remains unpublished.

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[1] Cavell, "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting," in *Rendezvous: Masterpieces from the Georges Pompidou Center and the Guggenheim Museums* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 64-89.

[2] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

The text that follows was prepared as an introduction to that book and its references are all to the unpublished text of 1998.

* * *

In the current philosophical scene, especially in Latin America, where the idea of scientific knowledge still haunts the aspirations of philosophy, Stanley Cavell's thought constitutes a radically different and important alternative. Having trained during the height of logical positivism in the forties and fifties in Berkeley and Harvard, and as one of the most distinguished philosophers in his generation in America, Cavell is deeply and intimately aware of the concerns and motivations of so-called Analytical Philosophy, with which he finds himself, however, in constant and permanent tension. And this is so not because he has opted for its traditional alternative, Continental Philosophy, which is for him nothing less than the other half of the split in the Western mind which he aims to overcome. (He once wrote famously, "it is not as if the problem were for opposed positions to be reconciled, but for the halves of the mind to go back together."[3]) His conflict with Analytical Philosophy lies rather in the fact that its espousal of the ideal of scientific knowledge tends to become a mechanism of evasion by which it can betray philosophy's "unlimited responsibility, or its demand upon itself for unending responsiveness, to the world."[4] Cavell is not interested, however, in redefining philosophy or erasing the boundaries that separate it from other humanistic disciplines. As he explains:

> I am no more willing that philosophy should be identified with poetry or with cultural criticism [...] than I am willing to see that philosophy should be identified with science [...] One way I have characterized philosophy is as the search for itself.[5]

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[3] Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 241.

[4] Cavell, "Interview," in *Caracas Seminar*, 14.

[5] Richard Flemming and Michael Payne (eds.), *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 56.

In other words, Cavell is attempting to recover philosophy's initial commitment to the search for self-knowledge, and he does this in a new way insofar as he conceives this aim not as a form of positive knowledge but as an attitude and a commitment to the intellectual life, primarily to make oneself intelligible to others. It soon becomes clear that the task involves above all a sensitivity to the diverse ways in which we are prone to obstruct our own vision, or block the path to our true need. This is perhaps why, as Cavell claims, the best way to come to philosophy is in a crisis, for it is in our own resistances to self-intelligibility that we can find our way; as he puts it, "they are fruitful things, to be followed if you are not to be lost to yourself."[6]

One of his most important contributions to current philosophical reflection is his reinterpretation of the problem of skepticism, an obsession of modern philosophy since its articulation in Descartes, which has defined its almost exclusively epistemological concern. Cavell shows that it can be understood—or rather, that it should be treated—not as an intellectual problem in need of solution but as an always possible existential crisis, a crisis in the life of the mind. The thought it gives expression to, namely, that we don't know with certainty of the existence of the external world (or other minds), requires no solution. Skepticism merely articulates the radical fragility of our natural condition with which we must learn to live, but it has the power to activate in us a need for certainty and so a false demand for security, which threatens to snap "the thread of sensory immediacy"[7] which binds our relation with things. The demand for certainty in our relation with the world ignores the ordinary character of sensible experience and the real nature of the subject, and thus fractures the link between experience and thought, between our ordinary language and our theoretical concepts. Insofar as we conceive skepticism as a problem it is an intellectual illusion that reveals the faint line that separates reason from its shadow, how philosophy's commitment to reason makes it so vulnerable to madness.

Although Cavell adopts the Kantian perspective in his treatment of skepticism, he rejects Kant's idealization of the self as a transcendental locus, which renders it impossible to articulate our intimacy with the world, and so forces us to ignore our intuitive sense of our relation with things. Cavell rather emphasizes its embodied

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6. Cavell, *Caracas Seminar*, Tuesday, 6.
7. *Ibid.*, Thursday, 34.

condition, recognizing it as subject to the vicissitudes of our real and concrete situation. He thus considers experience not merely in terms of the Understanding but also in terms of our sensibility and desire—in other words, not merely in terms of its conditions of intelligibility, but also (as he puts it, in his beautiful and illuminating discussion of Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* [1975]), in terms of "the conditions of its completion and disruption."[8] In this way he not only extends the Kantian answer to skepticism but also derives a new task for philosophy from Kant's own characterization of aesthetic judgment in the third critique, according to which the condition for claiming that something is beautiful, for example, is the demand for agreement on the part of others, even despite the possibility of rejection or rebuke. He thus establishes a general strategy for the treatment of philosophical problems that is grounded in an acknowledgement of the fragility of our concrete circumstances and in the clear awareness of the fate of our words as subject to the limitations of our own constitution—as much to our resistance to the demands of concrete experience as to our dependence on the receptiveness of beings similar to us, suffering the same constraints and limitations, the same difficulties of feeling, as we do.

Cavell is practicing a new way of thinking, one that renounces the need for possession that has characterized it in modern philosophy and assumes it rather as a loving receptiveness. As he puts it, following Heidegger, it is thinking as thanking or as praise. Philosophy therefore abandons the search for scientific knowledge and its attitude of control in favor of the cultivation of awareness in a conduct of gratitude, in which the task, far from the attempt to penetrate or tear from the object its essence, consists rather in "a specification or test of tribute,"[9] where I have to stake myself on the basis of nothing more, but also nothing less, than my own capacity to make myself intelligible to others. This defines a different agenda for philosophical criticism, where the dangers it faces are those of self-deception, the resistance to one's own desire, the fear of one's own mind—in other words, all those risks which Cavell has characterized as "the trials of praise."[10]

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[8] Cavell, "The World as Things: Collecting Thoughts on Collecting," in *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 255.
[9] Cavell, *Caracas Seminar*, Wednesday, 6.
[10] *Ibid.*

Skepticism may be seen then, in this new perspective, as a denial of our finitude, as the expression of a need, as old as Plato himself, to overcome our limitations and establish our citizenship in another world. But what modern skepticism specifically discovers, according to Cavell, is that our own words can deceive us, that the enemy, so to speak, resides in our own hearts. For this reason he proposes to undermine the problem, explicitly assuming the responsibility which it is meant to evade:

> This threat of skepticism is something you can repress or disguise with false cheerfulness and mock intellectuality. I want to turn that threat around so that one sees it is still possible to become responsible for one's language without having to claim more justification than one's own grounding in oneself, in one's own life [...] I am able to take responsibility for every word that comes out of my mouth, as a way of accepting that there is no responsibility for the world but my own. And this is something that everyone has to say; and it's something I want philosophy to teach each person to say in the midst of the temptation to skepticism.[11]

Appealing, with Wittgenstein and Austin, to ordinary language, Cavell establishes the task to treat our words, not as mere vehicles of information or objects of intellectual knowledge, but as part of a concrete and vital activity, as expressions of will and desire, to which we need to learn to listen in our concrete actions—or to see them as actions themselves, inserted in the world—approaching them affectively, and thus with a greater personal commitment than that of a merely intellectual interest. For Cavell it is essential that philosophy begin with our subjectivity, as if its starting point should always be in one's own concrete experience, and especially attentive of one's own interest. The issue of desire, in other words, is central to his conception of philosophy.

An extraordinary demonstration of the type of criticism he practices—as well as of the singular suitability of film as a medium for it—is offered by his moving reading of two routines of Fred Astaire's, which realizes in a concrete way the aspiration

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11. Cavell, "Interview," 3.

to make of philosophy an exercise in which we seek "to get into the right relation to an object by finding the idea of it to which one may pay tribute,"[12] as if one's own existence depended on the acceptance of this claim or judgment. What is at stake behind Cavell's analysis of Astaire's dance is nothing less than the on-going process whereby an always perfectible self seeks its realization; it constitutes a determined struggle against that habitual tendency in us to underestimate our own experience and thoughts which is responsible for what Thoreau calls our "quiet desperation."[13] Indeed, Cavell conceives this as a task of deep political significance; it amounts to assuming our commitment to our own pleasure and interest before the culture to which we belong. As he says, speaking of his reading of Astaire:

> If I am to possess my own experience I cannot afford to cede it to my culture as the culture stands. I must find ways to insist upon it, if I find it unheard. A way for me is to pose the question: Is this art of song and of dance, which I make part of my existence, a part I wish to demand that others recognize to be part of theirs, to be something from which we stand to derive pleasure of what is beautiful, hence, according to Socrates, something to be loved? Is this rightly ours to declare?[14]

It is not surprising then that skepticism is characterized as an erotic dynamic which Cavell finds not only in philosophy but, illuminatingly, in Shakespeare's tragedies, in the madness of King Lear, for example, which he describes as the result of

> [having] wanted so to love the world, to find it worthy of praise, that upon discovering that it is unpraiseworthy you cannot stop wanting its love. This is [...] the occasion for cursing the world precisely for its not providing your cause of praise, hence being left with the doubt that its behavior is caused by your having cursed it with a tainted love.[15]

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12. Cavell, *Caracas Seminar*, Wednesday, 9.
13. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 7.
14. Cavell, "Fred Astaire Asserts the Right to Praise," in *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 82.
15. Cavell, *Caracas Seminar*, Tuesday, 10.

The logic he outlines thus suggests that in our conception of the philosophical problem, and in our subsequent urge to solve it, we may be enacting an unconscious evasion of this dynamic, witnessing a constitutional resistance to the expressive or affective dimension or experience.

If Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholy" may be said to instruct us in "the difference between the pain of losing what has meant the world to us and the pain of returning to the world that must contain loss,"[16] we could say that the texts that follow are themselves a meditation on that lesson as it pertains to the fate of philosophy—not the academic discipline, however, but the human calling that goes by that name. It is as if with Descartes' landmark expression of modern skepticism, the philosophical denial of the world became an emblem of the human resistance to the transitory, an instance of the pathological side of mourning.

But Cavell refuses to see the situation merely as a neurosis. He is proposing rather the cultivation of an oblique way of seeing which, as he tells us, provides "a picture of getting to know that makes it indirect, negates the direction in which philosophy takes knowledge to come."[17] This does not mean, however, that philosophy ought to renounce its capacity to penetrate or see behind appearances to grasp the essence of things. The objects in the world are inexhaustible in their interest and their capacity to awaken us to the extraordinary, so we simply need to transform that power of penetration into "the ability to be patient, to suffer, to penetrate by allowing oneself to think another way, to be differently, more strongly, more finely, struck."[18] As he goes on to explain:

> It is a readiness to stop when you have nothing more to say; a willingness to subject yourself to silence, to mortality, to finitude, to end, to your own limitation [...] allowing death, mortality, finitude, to come into philosophizing, thus capturing something of what it means to say that to philosophize is to learn how to die.[19]

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16. *Ibid.*
17. Cavell, "Interview," 17.
18. Cavell, *Caracas Seminar*, Tuesday, 17.
19. *Ibid.*, 18.

It is not surprising that Cavell's proposal is aversive to a philosophy that identifies itself with the ideals of scientific rigor and clarity, a philosophy that is always intent on denying our limitation, evading the reality of death, hence unwilling to be surprised, holding on to its poor certainties and denying itself the discovery of what is important in the trivial or the ordinary. Cavell seeks a conversion of philosophy, which involves an attitude of receptiveness and the acknowledgement of a hidden activity beyond our consciousness and will, behind the silence of our words, of our objects, and even of our own mind.

This demand for listening and observation permeates Cavell's thought and informs his style of writing, where the reader must listen between the silences, hear voices behind the voices of the text, and enter into the secret dialogue between his words. As he notes, "we are, every instant and beyond all measures we recognize, affecting others (and ourselves) with our speech, hence with our silence; drawing blood as far as words reach, namely, in a word, everywhere."[20]

In company with Freud and Wittgenstein, he dedicates himself to the task of asking how and why our words sometimes get the best of us, or betray us, as if looking for their underside, insisting that we need to find out what they deny, not in order to determine the limits of our responsibility but to cultivate a lucid awareness of our real condition and learn to live with our own limitations. Ultimately it is a matter of recovering for philosophy that tragic consciousness which it has lost in its epistemological obsession, in its disowning the reality of desire.

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20. Cavell, "Interview," 15.

Cavell and Critique

ALICE CRARY

Stanley Cavell—my mentor and good friend—died on June 19, 2018, a week before I sat down to revise this tribute to him. I first presented these words in Cavell's presence at a 2017 workshop at Tufts University on "Changing Politics: Conversations with Stanley Cavell."[1] I was then concerned with a crucial political dimension of Cavell's thought that even admiring readers of his work sometimes overlook. This topic strikes me as, if anything, even more pertinent now. Within a day of Cavell's death, obituaries began to appear in the U.S. and abroad, and a common theme was Cavell's astonishing breadth as a thinker. He was, different papers reported, as eloquent and engaging on topics as various as Emerson and Thoreau, movies from Hollywood's "golden age," Shakespeare, Wittgenstein and Austin, what he called "the fact of television," Heidegger, Kleist, Kierkegaard, Hitchcock and Beckett. It is certainly true that Cavell had a great range. At the same time, as Nancy Bauer, Sandra Laugier and I observed in a post in the *New York Times* philosophy blog, *The Stone*,[2] there is an important political thread running through Cavell's explorations of his many topics and questions, namely, a preoccupation with what it is to be a responsible participant in a democratic polis and, specifically, a democratic polis as brutally and profoundly imperfect as the United States of America. Cavell's commitment to liberating, democratic politics was reflected in his actions beyond his writings, with some of his political endeavors described in his autobiographical tome *Little Did I Know* and others recorded in the work of his students and friends.[3]

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[1] The conference was organized by Nancy Bauer and Naoko Saito and sponsored, not only by the Philosophy Department at Tufts but also by the Kyoto University Spirits Project.

[2] Nancy Bauer, Alice Crary and Sandra Laugier, "Stanley Cavell and the American Contradiction," in *The Stone*, an online blog of the *New York Times*, July 2, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/02/opinion/stanley-cavell-and-the-american-contradiction.html).

[3] Accounts of Cavell's pollical activities are scattered throughout *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). For a helpful addendum to these accounts, see Larry Jackson's "Ordinary Faithfulness: Stanley Cavell 1926-2018" online at *n+1*, https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/ordinary-faithfulness/.

When I first encountered Cavell, during my undergraduate studies at Harvard in the late 1980s, he was a world-famous philosopher and cultural critic, massively learned, with an erudition that raised productively skeptical questions about familiar distinctions between “high” and “low” culture. He had a devilish and generous sense of humor and a—for me—rather alarming habit of attending seriously to even the most apparently trivial things that were said to him. It requires no special explanation to account either for the fact that, as a beginning student of philosophy, I took an interest in him or for the fact that, as a rather shy young person without an academic background, I found him quite intimidating. Although I enrolled in one of his lectures, I didn’t once speak in class or visit his office hours. My first substantive interaction with him occurred when he served as one of the examiners at the oral defense of my undergraduate honors thesis, which was partly devoted to his work. He encouraged me to go on in philosophy, and he supported my applications to PhD programs. Nevertheless, I only got to know him personally some years later when, after several semesters studying in the Philosophy Department at the University of Pittsburgh, I spent a year at Harvard (1993-1994), working as his research assistant and teaching fellow.

A large part of what attracted me to Cavell was his commitment to investigating the nature and demands of the sort of critical social thought that, he urges, is decisive for a functioning democratic community. Before finishing my undergraduate degree, I had taken an interest in theologies of liberation. During a year-long break from my studies, I had travelled to Guatemala with a friend with an eye to better understanding Christian base communities that, in the spirit of these theologies, used the Bible as a tool simultaneously for teaching reading skills and for political consciousness-raising. Around the same time, I started to become theoretically and practically engaged with feminism and the critical study of race. The first portion of Cavell’s thought that I studied closely was his writings on J.L. Austin and Wittgenstein, in particular, their images of the workings of language. When I first read Cavell on these topics, and listened to him lecture, it seemed to me that he was operating with a view of the workings of language that illuminated the kind of radical social thinking to which liberation theologians and critics of gender- and race-based injustices aspire. It was only somewhat later that this commitment to critical, non-conformist democratic thinking struck me as an organizing concern of his oeuvre, and that it came to seem fitting and important that his contributions be given a prominent place among the work of those we credit with teaching us about the nature and challenges of critique.

In developing his signature view of language, Cavell, as is well known, derives his inspiration in fundamental part from the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. It is reasonable to approach what is distinctive about Cavell's take on Wittgenstein by considering the significance Cavell attaches to the—in Cavell's argot—"scenes of instruction" that are regular features of Wittgenstein's writings, that is, the scenes or vignettes involving young children caught up in the types of interactions with their elders that result in the original acquisition of language.[4] An important point of these scenes—Cavell stresses—is to remind us that we don't make our initial way into language, in the manner of the child in the Augustinian allegory with which the *Investigations* open, as thinkers who are already capable of surveying the features of a complex world. There can be no question of our originally becoming linguistic simply by directing our attention toward and mentally hooking onto such features. Our path is rather one in which "learning" (that is, the sort of achievements that involve getting to know what things, or kinds of things, are and what they are called) is inextricably caught up with "maturation," understood as the development of an increasingly sophisticated conception of the world.[5] We mature in the relevant sense—in the sense of having the "light dawn" for us on the world to which our thought is responsible[6]—as we direct our attention to things that captivate speakers around us and get a feel for the importance of similarities among connections they make in their linguistic and other behavior. This is what Cavell has in mind when he says, in one of the most-cited passages of his work, that the fact that we emerge into language at all:

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[4] In *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson and Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1985) Cavell talks about how in Wittgenstein's opening reflections on language in the *Investigations*, "the figure of the child is present… more prominently and decisively than in any other work of philosophy I think of (with the exception, if you grant that it is philosophy, of *Émile*)" (60). For his talk in this connection of "scenes of instruction," see especially *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: the Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), *passim*.

[5] Cavell introduces "learning" and "maturation" as terms of art in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 171.

[6] The inset quote is taken from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), §141.

> is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life."[7]

We go on from these beginnings in ways that essentially involve building on the sensibilities encoded in our early, not yet fully linguistic skirmishes. This means is that, according to the Wittgensteinian vision that Cavell wants to place before us, our linguistic endeavors are ineradicably marked by human subjectivity. Language is, in a quite straightforward sense, something for which we need to have a feel. To be sure, the history of twentieth and early twenty-first century philosophical reflection about language is replete with thinkers who treat it as an unquestionable axiom that any representation of our linguistic capacities on which they are ineluctably subjective is incapable of accommodating objectively or universally authoritative speech. Cavell's presentation of his preferred image of language owes its majesty to a large degree to the originality of his use of Wittgenstein-influenced scenes of instruction to contest this well-worn posture and show that the indelible subjectivity of language is integral, and not a hindrance, to speaking "in a universal voice."[8]

This picture of our predicament as language-users owes its prominence in Cavell's thought to the light it sheds on what he sees as our duties as human beings and as citizens. It is a picture on which in speaking or thinking we cannot help but draw on our sensibilities, and Cavell wants us to see that a willingness to further develop our interests, our senses of what matters, is a condition of the kind of independent thinking that is necessary for healthy democratic conversation. In this portion of his work, Cavell presents an arresting conception the nature and difficulty of critical social thought. It is a conception that, although it certainly has notable forerunners in classic ideology critique, is distinctive and distinctively valuable.

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[7] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 52.

[8] For the idea of speaking in a universal voice, see Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say*? *A Book of Essays*. For Cavell's introduction of what is arguably his own most significant "scene of instruction," see the section of the *The Claim of Reason* entitled "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language."

To see this it is helpful to notice that Cavell's preferred conception of language accommodates an intuitively appealing notion of value realism, making room for a view of value judgments as both universally authoritative and essentially world-guided. The conception upends philosophically more traditional accounts of empirical thought by suggesting that a complex sensibility is internal to—objectively authoritative—world-guided thinking. Indeed, Cavell's Wittgensteinian reflections on language open the door to disrupting familiar accounts of empirical thought even more than this last observation suggests. In pivotal parts of his work, Cavell invites us to regard the categories we use in thinking about aspects of mind as both essentially world-guided and irreducibly ethical,[9] with the result that we come to see empirical thought as encompassing, alongside thinking about morally neutral features of our lives, also thinking about worldly things—for instance, human beings—that are as such morally significant. The empirical world turns out to be a variegated, evaluatively rich domain, so there is no problem about making room for concepts that trace out patterns in this domain—concepts of value—to admit of objectively authoritative use. That is what it comes to say that Cavell equips us to embrace a quite natural understanding of value judgments as both objectively authoritative and essentially world-guided.[10]

This achievement is politically consequential. What might be called "the problem of value judgments" is a central problem of democratic political theory. Linda Zerilli brings this out forcefully in her 2016 book *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, starting from the observation that "in multicultural democracies the problem of how to adjudicate among combating points of view [is] paramount."[11] This observation is worth accenting because, Zerilli explains, contemporary political theory is characterized by a pervasive skepticism about the idea of values that are in a straightforward sense open to view and available for authoritative adjudication. This is clear in the work of prominent neo-Kantian, liberal theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls and their followers. Because these thinkers take it for granted, in orthodox

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[9] See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, part IV. I defend a congenial conception of our categories for aspects of mind in *Inside Ethics: On the Demands of Moral Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), ch. 2.

[10] Although these issues are guiding concerns of part III of the *Claim of Reason,* they also figure much earlier in the book. See, e.g., Cavell's declaration at *ibid.*, 14 that "statements of fact and judgments of value rest upon the same capacities of human nature."

[11] Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, Kindle edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 178.

Kantian fashion, that the observable world is in itself devoid of values, they have no recourse to world-guided judgments to address worries about "value differences run amok."[12] They appeal instead to ideas of "public reason" that, Zerilli claims, are unattractively rationalistic or formalistic insofar as they are concerned exclusively with questions about whether maxims or practical principles are universalizable.

Despite her impatience with neo-Kantian notions of public reason, Zerilli is no more sympathetic to members of the currently influential group of "affect theorists" who agree with her that "public reason is a rationalist exercise in wishful thinking"[13] but who—because they share neo-Kantians' skepticism about the availability of objectively authoritative and world-guided value judgments—conclude that we are obliged to dedicate ourselves to directing affects through merely "tactical work…with the aim of promoting new modes of affective responsiveness."[14] Zerilli argues that it would be hazardous to abandon ourselves to affect theorists' image of political discourse as at bottom an unreasoned power-struggle to control the direction of affective responses. Her point is especially salient right now in light of the dramatic recent rise in authoritarianism in the U.S. and elsewhere. She is in effect asking us to reject the idea that we are obliged to recognize the legitimacy of purveyors of propaganda, currently so prominent in our political culture, who run roughshod over the distinction between truth and falsity. She is urging us to resist the thought that our only recourse is equally truth-insensitive yet somehow supposedly superior propaganda of our own.

Zerilli wishes us to see that, in thinking about democratic politics, we are not obliged to choose between neo-Kantian rationalism and rationally unconstrained appeals to affect. She is convinced that the problem of value judgments that advocates of both of these strategies skirt around admits of a straight solution, and she works toward such a solution by appealing to the portions of Cavell's work in which he makes room for value judgments that are both essentially world-directed and objectively authoritative. She in this way positions Cavell within a central debate in contemporary political theory, showing that he makes a singular contribution by leaving room for the authoritative adjudication of conflicting perspectives and values.

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[12] *Ibid.*, 190.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*, 214.

The exercise of adjudication, as Cavell conceive it, requires an open-ended willingness and ability to examine and rework our own perspectives and responses. We could say that, by Cavell's lights, confronting the bald lies that now permeate the public sphere requires, among other things, mustering the practical and discursive resources to clear away distortions. His thinking here aligns with a core aspect of an understanding of ideology critique that reaches back as far as the early Marx. The idea is that, if we are to combat ideological formations, we need not merely intellectual tools but resources that mobilize practical attitudes and are in this respect materially potent.[15]

This familiar image of what resisting ideologies requires is, however, often accommodated within conceptions of critique very different from Cavell's and more reminiscent of the liberal political theories which Zerilli rightly contrasts with his thought. Consider in this connection the model of critique recommended by Jason Stanley in his recent high-profile book *How Propaganda Works*.[16] Stanley addresses the corrosive effects of propaganda, which he conceives as heterogeneous species of rationally corrupted public discourse. His goal is to show that some kinds of propagandistic speech buttress harmful ideologies in ways that hinder public debate, thereby placing at risk the very substance of liberal democracy.[17] He helps himself to what he calls the "resources…of the analytic philosopher,"[18] and, without specifying precisely what he takes this to amount to, he assumes that the empirical world is in itself value-neutral, thereby accepting the skepticism about essentially world-guided and authoritative value judgments that is one of the marks of liberal political theory.

Stanley takes propaganda to be "a kind of speech that fundamentally involves political, economic, aesthetic or rational ideals, mobilized for a political purpose" and that is "in the service of either *supporting* or *eroding* [these] ideals."[19] When he talks about propaganda of the *supporting* type, he means propaganda that is "presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase the realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other non-rational means."[20] When he talks about propaganda of the *undermining* type, he means propaganda that "is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals."[21] Stanley illustrates his conception of supporting propaganda, for example, in reference to emotional appeals to "past wrongs against a group to strengthen ethnic pride and self-identification," and he illustrates his conception of undermining propaganda in reference to the deployment of teams of "scientific experts" to falsely indicate that climate science is undeveloped and uncertain—thus undermining the ideal of scientific objectivity that the purported experts are supposedly advocating.[22] Stanley-style supporting and undermining propaganda are similar in that both can bolster worthy or unworthy ideals. Stanley's term of art for propaganda that, whether of supporting or undermining varieties, boosts unworthy ideals is "demagoguery." His main concern is with 'undermining demagoguery' that is wrongly presented as encoding liberal democratic ideals of "liberty, humanity, equality and objective reason." He believes that this kind of demagogic speech figures centrally in fostering pernicious ideologies, thus polluting democratic culture.[23] At the same time, Stanley takes an interest in supporting and undermining propaganda that is *non-demagogic* in that it funds worthy ideals.

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[15] See Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).
[16] Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[17] See, e.g., *ibid.*, 11 and 27.
[18] *Ibid.*, xix.
[19] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 52.
[20] *Ibid.* (emphasis mine).

Stanley's attitude toward non-demagogic propaganda is characterized by the following nuance. Even though it falls short of rational legitimacy, this type of propaganda is sometimes a "necessary" counterweight to practices or institutions that corrupt democratic discourse.[24] Despite being imperative, these propagandistic gestures are "invariably democratically problematic" because they can't help but erode democratic discourse.[25] Stanley operates with the assumption that the employment of 'emotional means' is a method for propagandistic discourse to undercut rational reflection.[26] He assumes, that is, not only that discursive gestures that direct affective responses or shape attitudes can as such be non-rational but that they are necessarily so. Hence he regards political interventions that invite us to look at aspects of social life from liberating evaluative or cultural perspectives as, at least insofar as they issue such invitations, rationally flawed and propagandistic. In this connection, he discusses at length, and with sincere admiration, W.E.B. Du Bois' 1926 essay "Criteria of Negro Art."[27] Stanley credits Du Bois with identifying non-demagogic and emancipatory rhetorical forms that are needed to expose racist distortions and create a space for cognitively authoritative democratic deliberation. Yet, as Stanley sees it, even though discursive exercises such as Du Bois' are sometimes necessary for returning us to the realm of rational democratic conversation, they are propadeutic to rather than integral elements of such conversation.

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] For these examples, see *ibid.*, 60.

[23] See, e.g., *ibid.*, 68.

[24] *Ibid.*, 57. Jason Stanley's term for non-demagogic propaganda that is thus necessary is "civic rhetoric."

[25] The inset phrase is from *ibid.*, 58. See also 38 and 117.

[26] Although Jason Stanley doesn't mention "emotional means" in talking about what undermining propaganda amounts to, he is presumably assuming that these are among the non-rational tools of the purveyors of such propaganda. For a comment on the apparent disanalogy between his conceptions of the non-rational resources of supporting and undermining propaganda, see Ishani Maitri, "Propaganda, Non-rational Means and Civic Rhetoric," *Theoria* 31, no.3 (2016): 313-27.

Here Stanley's project, with its hints of liberal political theory, starkly opposes Cavell's. Cavell represents us as obliged to continually take seriously the possibility that we might need to reshape our modes of responsiveness with an eye to a more just vision of the social world. In adopting this stance, Cavell is echoing a key claim of classic accounts of ideology critique. It is characteristic of such accounts to suggest that at least imaginatively exploring evaluatively loaded social perspectives that members of oppressed human groups are made to occupy is necessary for getting in view morally and politically important aspects of our lives that are subject to ideological distortion.[28] Cavell makes a similar suggestion, in effect denying that evaluatively charged resources are limited to the instrumental role in critique to which Stanley restricts them and representing these resources instead as capable of directly contributing to cognitively authoritative critical endeavors. This means that Cavell is in a position to welcome into rational democratic conversation, for instance, the sorts of liberating forms of artistic expression that Du Bois was discussing in 1926. Or, to mention but a few further examples, Cavell equips us to take seriously the possibility of finding rational power, for instance, in Ta-Nehisi Coates' efforts in *Between the World and Me* to get us to see American society through the eyes of Black men as well as in Claudia Rankine's attempt in *Citizen* to reshape the way we look upon the lives of Black women.[29]

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[27] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *The Crisis* 32 (1926): 290-97.

[28] For one influential defense of such a suggestion, see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 149-222. For a discussion of how a suggestion along these lines is common to Marxist epistemologies and core feminist and Black epistemologies, see Charles Mills, "Alternative Epistemologies," in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 21-39.

This brings me to an additional respect in which Cavell animates and motivates classic themes of ideology critique. Cavell in effect asks us to regard insistence on taking ethical neutrality as a regulative ideal for world-guided social thought as a hindrance to healthy democratic conversation. Influential accounts of ideology critique likewise call on us to regard this familiar tone of insistence as having a role in critical social thought that is not warranted by the apparent considerations in its favor, and therefore exhort us to reject it as itself perniciously ideological.[30]

There is a significant payoff to including Cavell's voice in discussions about ideological patterns of thought and practice and about strategies for combatting them. Nowhere does Cavell suggest that the task of distinguishing productive, rationally legitimate contributions to public discourse from corrosive propaganda is an easy one. There is, for him, no question of appealing to the fact that a discursive gesture is practically or affectively potent to determine that it cannot as such contribute to rationally responsible discourse, and there is also no question of appealing to the fact that such a gesture is practically or affectively potent to establish its rational credentials. Cavell is consistently concerned with impressing on us the difficulty of the task that responsible thought and democratic participation represent. He wants to lead us to the recognition that our condition is aptly captured by the outlook he calls "moral perfectionism," by which he means not the search for some supposed state of perfection but a never-ending project of working on ourselves with an eye to bringing society, with its horrors and injustices as well as its joys and comforts, more clearly into view—and to improving our individual abilities to join in a good-enough democratic conversation.

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[29] See Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me (*New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015) and Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric (*Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014).

[30] See esp. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). For a more recent argument about how a demand for ethical neutrality can have the force of ideology, see Charles Mills, "Ideal Theory as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20, no.3 (2005): 165-84.

An Essay Concerning Beauvoir, Cavell, Etc.

NANCY BAUER

This is the story of my coming to read *Le Deuxième Sexe*[1] in the rather unusual way that I do.

I was raised, as it were, in the Philosophy Department at Harvard University as part of the last generation working seriously under the tutelage of Stanley Cavell. Though Cavell's tastes in philosophy were strikingly wide-ranging, crisscrossing the divide between analytic and continental philosophy, not to mention genres and mediums, there were limits to his tastes, as there of course are in every person's case. He was interested in Heidegger, but not in European phenomenology more generally. (The one thing I recall him saying about Sartre was this offhand remark, perhaps something he had heard or read before, during a seminar: "Sartre thinks it's very important that no one can die my death for me. Well, no one can take my bath for me, either.") He was interested in the great film actresses of Hollywood's golden period—Katherine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, Irene Dunne, Bette Davis, Ingrid Bergman—and even thought of them as, in their own way, philosophers on screen; but he was not as interested, at least publicly, in women writers. He did engage with feminist thinkers in his own writing about film, but he was concerned in those moments mostly to worry about what he experienced as a certain theoretical rigidity in feminist film theory and what he saw as its failing to allow the objects of it criticism breathing room and to give his own way of thinking, which he saw as very much sympathetic to women's concerns, a chance.

Anyone familiar with Cavell's writing knows that he is thinker with highly idiosyncratic tastes: Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, yes; but also Emerson and Milton and Shakespeare and Pascal and Kierkegaard and Samuel Beckett and George Cukor and Clement Greenberg and *La Traviata*. All of his students admired his trust in his own tastes and the range of his passions. His ability to appreciate the things he loved was contagious, and more often than not we found ourselves in love with what he loved. But—and no one was more aware of this fact than Cavell himself—there was also a great danger here, since it was singularly difficult to figure out a way to go on from our teacher. We could hardly dare to trust that the idiosyncratic things that we loved would bear up under the sort of extreme philosophical scrutiny to which Cavell subjected his own interests. Secretly, perhaps, we were afraid that their failure to withstand this pressure would kill these passions for us. Cavell believed completely in us and in what we cared about, but he could not make us believe in ourselves. He worried endlessly about how we would get on once we left his protective wing.

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[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997).

In 1991 I had been working with Cavell for several years and was struggling to get my doctoral dissertation off the ground. I was absolutely smitten—I am still absolutely smitten—with J. L. Austin's writing and his philosophizing from ordinary language; if anything, I think, I am even more in love with Austin than Cavell himself is (though this perhaps has to do with Cavell's having been, literally, a student of Austin's). And yet I have found it—I still find it—painfully difficult to go on with Austin; though I have written extensively about him, I often find myself simply pointing to his writing and admiring it. As a graduate student, I was completely stuck. I was also pregnant with my first child. So I experienced my being stuck as a kind of intellectual barrenness, as though I had only so much creative power to expend and was using it all up on my impending motherhood.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, my having watched my own mother, excellent middle-class, mid-20th-century woman that she was, devote her entire life to raising her children, I had always taken for granted that I would not follow in her footsteps. It struck me as obvious that feminism was an inflection of a basic quest for human rights on the earth in which, I thought, by definition all decent people participate; and I saw the enterprise of having a say in how things are, outside one's home, as fundamental to feminism. But here I was, despite having been lucky enough to secure a place in a top PhD program in philosophy, inducing a sea-change in my domestic life and with absolutely nothing to say.

Then, a month or so before my due date, an unusually well read graduate student colleague of mine, whose tastes in reading never failed me—a friend who was an admirer of Cavell's, but not quite his student—urged me to pick up Michèle Le Doeuff's *L'étude et le rouet*, brilliantly subtitled, *"Des femmes, de la philosophie, etc."*—as though this was the beginning of a list of things that naturally belonged together. The title alludes to a choice made by Hipparchia of Maroneia to abandon her spinning wheel (that is to say, her womanliness, as it was conventionally understood in her time) in favor of becoming a professional philosopher—and doing so on equal terms with, and wearing the same clothes as, her husband. The book itself is a profound reflection on the human impulse to philosophize, which, for Le Doeuff, means the impulse to follow one's own train of thought, to open oneself up to whatever the "etcetera" of one's thinking to turns out to be, and on how and why this impulse has historically been co-opted and distorted by theoreticians and system-builders and pedants—that is to say, by men. In other words, Le Doeuff's topic is why philosophy in the best sense of the word is so difficult, especially for those who have traditionally been excluded even from the debased ("professional") form of the enterprise.

Throughout *L'étude et le rouet*, as she demonstrates what it looks like to let one's thought genuinely wander philosophically, Le Doeuff finds herself returning to the case of Simone de Beauvoir, and particularly to Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre. In effect, Le Doeuff's question is how Beauvoir managed to produce as profound and original a philosophical meditation as *Le deuxième sexe* and yet to present herself in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, published ten years later, as, still, fundamentally a discipline of Sartre's. I found Le Doeuff's fascination with Beauvoir absolutely riveting; and I was stunned to realize that *L'étude et le rouet* was, in retrospect, the only thing I'd ever read that struck me at one and the same time as thoroughly feminist *and* thoroughly philosophical.

There was on my bookshelves from my undergraduate years studying social and political theory a fairly pristine copy of *The Second Sex* (in English); I had read, on assignment, perhaps two or three chapters of the book. In what turned out to be my good fortune, though it seemed like a curse at the time, I gave birth to a daughter who slept very little and only in short bursts, and whose father's biological rhythms and predispositions, completely opposite to mine, neither mirrored hers nor invited my interfering with his deep slumber. In the middle of each night, the baby strapped into a carrier on my chest, I walked endlessly around our big loft, trying to soothe her to sleep, with *The Second Sex* in one hand and a flashlight in the other. (The baby is now 21 years old, and an unusually intellectually creative writer and feminist; I like to imagine that her sleeplessness was a function of her trepidation about coming into a world uncongenial to women and that Beauvoir's fortifying words somehow leapt from my brain and heart to hers during those quiet, intimate hours.)

It took me a year, and a huge amount of needling and coaching from another dear graduate student friend, to confess to Cavell that I had abandoned the work on Austin, at least for the nonce, and was poised to write—to try to write—a meditation on philosophizing as a woman in the mode that Simone de Beauvoir had, by example, taught me to understand it. Austin claims in his gorgeous essay "A Plea for Excuses" that philosophers, in their attempts to plough the same old field over and over again, often deplete the soil in which good ideas can thrive; the trick, he says, is to find a virgin plot in the same general region that will allow for genuinely productive "field work," as he put it. To my relief and delight, Cavell, whose students were loathe to stray from the territory in which he had planted his own flag decades earlier, was thrilled to be able to call me a neighbor.

In certain obvious respects, however, I was very ill-suited to work this particular soil. While I had had some truck with 19th-century German philosophy and with Heidegger and had studied various French thinkers from Lacan up through Deleuze, Derrida, and the second-wave feminists, I had mostly been trained in the Anglo-American analytic philosophical tradition. Save from having been exposed to some Camus in high school and about 100 pages of *Being and Nothingness* in a college survey course, I knew basically nothing about French phenomenology and its existentialist inflection. Then again, this meant that I hadn't fallen into the habits of those better educated than I was in these matters: it was all new to me—a doubly virgin field—and in some respects, I think, my ignorance served me well.

For example, having read *Le deuxième sexe* very carefully before taking on *L'être et le néant*, I was struck immediately not by Beauvoir's indebtedness to Sartre, obvious as in some respects it is, but to her astonishing originality. *Le deuxième sexe* begins with what I see as a feminist appropriation of the first two of Descartes's *Meditations*. In the second meditation, after the method of doubt has culminated in his inability to doubt his own existence, Descartes gets on to the business of asking himself what sort of existent he must be. His strategy at this juncture is to start with common sense: he is a man. But what, then, is a man? Descartes reasons that insofar as he can doubt that his body exists, even while being unable to doubt that he himself does, the body cannot be an essential component of a man's being. Beauvoir in the introduction to *Le deuxième sexe* highlights the fatefulness of this move: insofar as one is a woman (whatever that will turn out to mean), one's body cannot be ignored, since what Monique Wittig called "the mark of gender" is written on it. It's as though Beauvoir is correcting a wrong turn taken at the very beginning of the modern philosophical era, one that foreclosed the possibility of philosophizing about what it means to be a woman, or *as* a woman.

Like Descartes, Beauvoir launches *Le deuxième sexe* in a sea of skepticism. In the first paragraph of the book, she asks, "Y a-t-il même des femmes?" and then goes on to provide some good reasons to think that the set defined by the category "woman" is null (*DS* t. 1, 13). But at the same time, she sees, this term is central to our conceptualization of our daily experience of the world. So since it seems as though women at least might exist, we need to ask: what is a woman? Beauvoir's own cogito *follows* this quasi-Cartesian question and its skeptical underpinnings. She writes, "Si je veux me définir je suis obligée d'abord de déclarer: 'Je suis une femme'; cette vérité constitue le fond sur lequel s'enlèvera toute autre affirmation" (*DS* t. 1, 16). I take Beauvoir to be vowing that, in the hundreds of pages of phenomenological investigation to follow, she will lose sight neither of the reality of her own body nor of her experience as a woman. This experience must ground her philosophical work, not because she is the ultimate woman, the very best specimen, but because the work must answer to the question of what it is to be *any* woman, and the case she knows best is her own.

Had I not been a student of Cavell's, I doubt that this move of Beauvoir's would have left me thunderstruck—as it continues to do. For a major theme of Cavell's work, which lies at the heart of a commitment to *moral perfectionism* that he sees running throughout the history of Western thought (from Plato to and through, for example, Dante, Shakespeare, Marx, Emerson, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, and the best films of Hollywood's "golden era"), is the idea that each human being is, for better or worse, potentially an exemplar of the species. Each of us *models* a possible way of living a human life, one that may or may not inspire others to transform their own. There is no formula for being human or for being an exemplar; whether you are or are not is a matter of whether others find themselves attracted to your way of negotiating your life. Cavell observes that you can also serve as your own exemplar, as when you find the courage, perhaps through your attraction to the witnessing of a person (or author or artist) you admire—a person through whom, whether you are known to her or him or not, you feel *befriended*—to desire transcending your present state toward another. For Cavell, the term "perfectionism" does not suggest that the moral life consists in trying to become a faultless human specimen; there is no such thing. Rather, it points toward the particular dissatisfaction we feel about our own lives, however comfortable or settled, when we encounter someone who stands for us an exemplar of a better way of being human, and the pull we feel toward become a further self. This productive form of dissatisfaction is to be contrasted with ennui, or cynicism, or anomie—a stultifying state of mind (or *Befindlichkeit*, in Heidegger's argot) that Cavell understands as the source of the sort of skepticism so vividly expressed, if not endorsed, in the *Meditations*.

Steeped in Cavell's thought as I was, I was primed on first reading—and, I must admit, on every occasion after—to construe the opening pages of *The Second Sex* not in existentialist terms, but perfectionist ones. (The philosopher Simon Glendinning has argued, to my mind very convincingly, that Cavell's philosophizing ought to be seen as fundamentally phenomenological, insofar as it takes human experience in its broad strokes and fine details as the touchstone of philosophical thinking. So perhaps my inflecting Beauvoir's views as I did was not wholly a function of my particular education.) I saw Beauvoir, in her pastiche of the opening moments of the *Meditations* and its climaxing in a cogito taking the form "I am *a woman*," to be marking *The Second Sex* as a quintessentially perfectionist text. What Beauvoir was saying, I thought and still think, is that she recognizes her condition, her self-definition, to be that of a woman, which is to say that of a human being whose social identity and self-understanding cast doubt on the nature of her existence. But at the same time she sees herself as an exemplar, that is to say, an ordinary human soul dissatisfied with her present condition who seeks a further state of self characterized not by faultlessness but by wisdom, and by what Emerson, in whose writings Cavell finds perhaps the richest and most precise expression of moral perfectionism, would perhaps call cheerfulness.

Beauvoir does not presuppose that others will regard her likewise. She takes no pains in *The Second Sex* to sell her reader a bill of goods. Instead, her strategy is, in part I, to show that women's second-class status throughout most of history has no justification and, in part II, to lay out, in great detail, a variety of everyday modes of living as a woman in such a way that many readers will see themselves in her thick descriptions and will experience a desire to live otherwise—that is, to transcend their present selves. The crowning achievement of the book is a function of Beauvoir's ability to reveal to each reader the temptations and attractions of her current state, all of which are wont to yield, at least from time to time, certain thin, if still real, moments of happiness (as when someone congratulates you, implicitly or explicitly, for fulfilling the norms of femininity) and at the same time to leave us feeling as though our current way of living is intolerable. The book thus constitutes a form of encouragement: it literally imbues us with the courage not to settle for fleeting bursts of happiness and to crave freedom. Unlike the author of *Being and Nothingness*, Beauvoir does not construe any complacency or compliance with the status quo on the part of women in terms of *mauvaise foi*. She does not see our capitulating to social norms as a moral fault. Rather—and here, *very* unlike Sartre—she is sketching the contours of a particularly insidious, intractable, and efficient form of *oppression*, one that relies, as all forms of oppression do, on extreme punishments for failure to follow the rules and, as only the most abiding do, on huge rewards for toeing the line.

Reading Beauvoir with Cavell revealed for me Beauvoir's tremendous compassion in *The Second Sex*. Readers less inclined to admire the book find this idea absurd; they claim, variously, that Beauvoir doesn't really like, or is even repulsed, by women; that she is moralistic or contemptuous of women's choices; that she has a horror of the body and of motherhood; that she puts men on a pedestal and urges women to be like them. But these critics simply are not reading well; they are, I think, distorting a thread in the book that runs parallel to the thread of compassion, one that constitutes what you might identify as its moral pull. This pull is not something that Beauvoir imposes on the reader, as though from on high; rather, it is a function of the way that her descriptions of women's lives cause the reader to feel as though *by her own lights* she is not living a life that's genuinely her own. This recognition is bound not to be pain-free. For, as Cavell has taught me, when an author or artist brings us to feel dissatisfaction with our present ways of being human, we are greatly tempted to ward the anguish off by attempting to locate its source in the work, rather than in our own hearts. This philosophical claim lends itself to a decidedly Sartrean inflection. But I have learned from Simone de Beauvoir that the sin of reading poorly is an occasion not for contempt or despair, but for mercy.

The Merge: Underwriting Underwriting

GORDON C. F. BEARN

Who need be afraid of the merge?
WALT WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass*

1. Underwriting Ordinary Language Philosophy

One of the most distinctive features of Cavell's continuation of Ordinary Language Philosophy is his conviction that the procedures of Austin and Wittgenstein are *underwritten* by the writing of Emerson and of Thoreau. Breaking into the middle of a sentence from 1986, we find Cavell expressing this conviction:

> I am in fact armed with names, before all of Emerson and of Thoreau, whose emphasis on what they call the common, the everyday, the near, the low, I have in recent years repeatedly claimed as underwriting the ordinariness sought in the ordinary language methods of Wittgenstein and of Austin.[1]

Cavell's conviction that there is an American transcendentalist underwriting of the philosophical return to the ordinary appears in his writings only after the completion, in 1979, of *The Claim of Reason,* and I suspect there is a story to tell about how the completion of that book, the writing of its inimitable Part IV, prepared the ground for that conviction.[2] For the moment, I leave the telling of that story to others. In this paper I simply want to understand what Cavell might have meant by the claim to a transcendentalist underwriting of the ordinary, and in addition, to suggest that this underwriting could be even further secured by including what Whitman calls "the merge" and "the outlet."[3] This paper is therefore a contribution to determining Whitman's position in Cavell's writing, both why Whitman's voice is so rarely invoked, and how Whitman's voice might have supplemented that of Emerson and of Thoreau. My suggestion is that Whitman's merge underwrites the underwriting.

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[1] Cavell, "Declining Decline," in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*. (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 34.

[2] In the "Foreword" to *The Claim of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), Cavell acknowledges that one of the reasons it was difficult to complete that book was that his books on Thoreau and on film, which were completed after finishing his dissertation in 1961, had "outstripped" the results of that dissertation (xviii). Cavell, himself, dates his suggestion that Emerson and Thoreau underwrite ordinary language philosophy to the completion of *The Claim of Reason* in Cavell, "The Politics of Interpretation," in *Themes out of School* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), 33. The claim to underwriting may even be one way, not the only one, of beginning an answer to the question on which *The Claim of Reason* ends: "But can philosophy become literature and know itself?" (496).

But first what is the claim to underwriting? I think I always supposed that the underwriting was some sort of insurance: the procedures of Emerson and Thoreau ensuring that the procedures of Austin and Wittgenstein would be successful. In a lecture on Emerson from January 1978, but without yet invoking the figure of *underwriting*, Cavell includes a paragraph:

> While I find that this sense of intimacy with existence, or intimacy lost, is fundamental to the experience of what I understand ordinary language philosophy to be, I am for myself convinced that the thinkers who convey this experience best, most directly and most practically, are not such as Austin and Wittgenstein but such as Emerson and Thoreau. This sense of my natural relation to existence is what Thoreau means by our being *next* to the laws of nature, by our *neighboring* the world, by our being *beside* ourselves. Emerson's idea of the *near* is one of the inflections he gives to the common, the low.[4]

As shocking, as for many it still is, to read Cavell thus privileging Emerson and Thoreau over Austin and Wittgenstein, most of that being shocked remains the result of a certain professional snobbishness of philosophers, perhaps towards literature in general, but at least towards those two literary authors who once thrived in the curricula of US-American high schools. If those philosophers could get over their snob shock, they would discover something about Cavell's conviction that, once seen, is almost obvious.[5] This: if the everyday drove us to metaphysics in the first place, the return to the everyday will never stabilize unless we address ourselves not only to philosophical language but to everyday language itself. That is why the inhabitants of Concord are needed to underwrite the inhabitants of Oxford and Cambridge. But how? There are three stages.

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[3] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Minneola NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 34 and 94.

[4] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, expanded edn. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), 145-46.

[5] *Almost* obvious: in my case, I was helped to see this obvious point by a conversational observation of Brett Topey.

Here is a citation from Wittgenstein: "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[6] All by itself, this suggests the following two stage movement, away from the everyday to the metaphysical and then back again. If you were feeling a little mean, you might have predicted that once we had thus returned to the everyday, then whatever drove us from the everyday in the first place would likely drive us back to the metaphysical again, and Cavell, himself, recognizes this. In the midst of a discussion of marriage in Mozart's *Figaro*, Cavell notes that given "the relation I earlier proposed between marriage and skepticism," the fact that marriage, in that opera, is manageable, means that "the world is successfully, if momentarily, called back from its skeptical annihilation."[7] Successfully, but momentarily. There can be no final overcoming of the temptations to metaphysics, rather our lives are characterized by a kind of metastability, oscillating between die Ruhe and die Unruhe, between quiet and disquiet, settled and unsettled.[8]

This is standard Cavellian stuff, it even projects his opposition to Derrida in whose work Cavell sees nothing like peace, quiet, or die Ruhe.[9] But where's the underwriting? We can come to see the need for such an underwriting if we read the entire section of the *Investigations* from which our one citation was cut:

> 116. When philosophers use a word—"knowledge," "being," "object," "I," "proposition/sentence [Satz]," "name"—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language in which it is at home?
>
> What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.[10]

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[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* rev. 4th edn., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §116.

[7] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 153.

[8] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,*§111 and §133.

[9] See Gordon C. F. Bearn, "Sounding Serious: Cavell and Derrida," *Representations* 63 (1998): 65-92.

[10] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §116.

Wittgenstein applied his therapies to famous philosophical words. He worried that these apparently important words had slipped away from their homes in the everyday to philosophy, from the everyday to metaphysics, and his leading them back home, therefore required *philosophical* investigations. Emerson and Thoreau are less particular. Emerson for instance, in a signature Cavellian passage, tells us that one of the deadening effects of the "virtue in most request,"[11] conformity, is that:

> This conformity makes them [(most men)] not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four is not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right.[12]

Every word, not just the famous philosophical ones, every word they say, breaks our hearts. One way Emerson and Thoreau may underwrite the procedures of Austin and Wittgenstein is by doing for *every word of our language* what ordinary language philosophers set out to do for a few.[13]

There is something those ordinary language philosophers did not manage to do. We met this idea already: "Austin's and Wittgenstein's attacks on philosophy, and on skepticism in particular—in appealing to what they call the ordinary or everyday use of words—are counting on some intimacy between language and world that they were never able satisfactorily to give an account of."[14] If we let Emerson and Thoreau account for that intimacy then there will be three stages in this practice of the ordinary. (1) In the first stage, our sense of disappointment or unease with the emptiness of the words of our everyday language motivates metaphysical inventions which, themselves, prove disappointing. We thought the problem with everyday language was that it wasn't abstract enough, so to understand the meaning of a sentence we needed to introduce *the proposition*. But our unease derived not from a lack of abstraction, but from its surfeit. Everyday language felt an empty system of conformity, and so we should never have expected an even more abstract formalism would be our cure. It's a familiar story: "One puts to one's lips what drives one yet faster into the abyss."[15] (2) In the second stage, the likes of Austin and Wittgenstein lead us from this metaphysical disquiet back to the rough granular ground of the everyday. (3) In the third stage, Emerson and Thoreau, addressing themselves to every word in our language, attend to the heart breaking discovery that nobody seriously means what they say, they attend to the very chagrin which incited our yearning for metaphysical salvation in the first place. It is this third stage which Cavell speaks of as the transcendentalist underwriting of ordinary language philosophy. The methods of Austin and Wittgenstein presupposed that the everyday itself was enough, and so it may be, but only if the everyday manages with the help of Emerson and Thoreau to turn from conformity, from the empty conformism of our daily life and language. These three stages project much more than a single book, indeed Cavell has written some of them already. In the next section, I will only take on the more defined topic of the appearance of stage three in Cavell's *The Senses of Walden,* first published in 1972.[16] It is in that book that Cavell puts what he will come to call underwriting in terms that should guide anyone's discussion of this subject:

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[11] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 261.
[12] *Ibid.*, 264.
[13] On this "every word in our language" see Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America,* 81.
[14] *Ibid.,* 81.

> Thoreau is doing with our ordinary assertions what Wittgenstein does with our more patently philosophical assertions—bringing them back to a context in which they are alive.[17]

I will approach this project through what Cavell doesn't quite call Thoreau's mysticism.

2. Granular Mysticism in Cavell's Thoreau

"As if you could kill time without injuring eternity."[18] Thoreau's words prickle with life. Called simply "Words," Cavell's first chapter is an attempt to understand the life of Thoreau's words. And before Cavell has even come to the end of his third paragraph, the first words he cites from *Walden* are about words:

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[15] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967) §5. (Thanks to Joe Volpe for this reference.)

[16] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*.

[17] *Ibid.,* 92. Timothy Gould provides what might be an interpretation of this very passage in his *Hearing Things* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 111.

[18] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden,* in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. J.S. Cramer (New York: Penguin, 2012), 203.

> The heroic books, even if printed in the character of our mother tongue, will always be in a language dead to degenerate times; and we must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line, conjecturing a larger sense than common use permits out of what wisdom and valor and generosity we have.[19]

Already you can see, by the appeal to "degenerate times," that Cavell may be enlisting Thoreau to emphasize the existential sources—the quiet desperation, the "deep disquietudes"—that Wittgenstein characterizes as the impulse to philosophy.[20] This first citation tells us that in degenerate times such as Thoreau's and Wittgenstein's and ours, the words of heroic books will be dead to us, even if written in our mother tongue. Of course, this is not because the words of those heroic texts are dead, but because one symptom of our degeneracy is that the words of our mother tongue are already dead, however instrumental in common use they nevertheless prove to be.

We tie our shoes habitually, without thinking, and so too we mostly converse without thinking, just passing on what we have heard, about the news, or sports, or the new exhibition, or the movie we have just seen, or how unbelievable it is that he said that to her. That is why Deleuze and Guattari write: "We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else has said to you. Hearsay."[21] Deleuze elaborates this account of communication in a passage I will quote at length for its description of the subjection of our lives to what Emerson would call "conformity":

> Primarily communication is the transmission and propagation of information. What is information? It is not very complicated, everyone knows what it is. Information is a set of imperatives, slogans, directions—order words. When you are informed you are told what what you are supposed to believe. Police declara-

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[19] Thoreau, *Walden*, 279; cited in Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 4.

[20] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §111.

[21] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 76.

> tions are appropriately called communiqués. Information is communicated to us, they tell us what we are supposed to be ready to, or have to, or be held to believe. And not even believe, but pretend like we believe. We are not asked to believe but to behave as if we did. That is information, communication [...]. This is the same thing as saying that information is exactly the system of control.[22]

Deleuze offers us this picture of communication emptied of belief, communication reduced to enforcing conformity, because he has tasted something else: acts of resistance, works of art. Like Bach. "Bach's speech act is that his music is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the separation of the profane and the sacred. This act of resistance ends in a cry."[23] Aunt Hester's shriek.[24]

This account of communication and information adds Deleuze to the list of people who feel that there is something disquietingly conformist or formal about what passes for communication, communication itself reduced to hearsay, informing become conforming. Austin, in his writings, was concerned with this phenomenon but almost exclusively as it appears in that part of linguistic life professionalized by philosophers. Wittgenstein, too, mostly wrote about this phenomenon in a philosophical context; although he could confess to being unsure whether he would "prefer a continuation of [his] work by others to a change in the way people live which would make all these questions superfluous."[25] Cavell reminds us that while even Austin can remark that a certain idea of incorrigibility is "perhaps the original sin [...] by which the philosopher casts himself out of from the garden of the world we live in," nevertheless this existentially turned remark is "momentary and uncharacteristic."[26] It is uncharacteristic for Austin; because in a move that strangely anticipates the resolute new Wittgensteinians, this sin is simply in error, to be set aside, resolutely, once and for all. This is not true for Wittgenstein as Cavell reads him, on that account this sin is a permanent temptation, its overcoming never completed, but ever anew to be achieved. Thoreau, Emerson, Cavell, Deleuze, and as we shall see, even Whitman recognize the existential work necessary to overcome the emptiness of common use, of conformalism. But they resolve it in different ways. Deleuze's cry might remind some of a certain barbaric yawp, but my immediate focus will be on Cavell's Thoreauvian resolution in terms of a *perfect nextness,* and Whitman's resolution in terms of *the merge*.

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[22] Gilles Deleuze, "What is a creative act?," in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 320-21.

[23] *Ibid.*, 323-24.

[24] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 4-5. Aunt Hester's shriek is used to help motivate Fred Moten's astonishing book: *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[25] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 61e.

[26] J. L. Austin, "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers,* 3rd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 90. Cavell's "momentary and uncharacteristic" come from his "The Wittgensteinian Event," in *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 195.

Now back to that first citation from *Walden*, the one about heroic books being written in a language dead to those who's linguistic horizons are fixed by the conformalism of common use. Thoreau tells us that heroic books demand that we "laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line, conjecturing a larger sense than common use permits."[27] And while you might have thought that this larger sense would be looser than common use, it is just the opposite. Cavell tells us this larger sense is to be "utterly specific."[28] When we speak of killing time we do not mean what we say. Heroic books do.

Heroic books are written not in our mother tongue which we speak mindlessly, habitually. Thoreau tells us the mother tongue is "commonly transitory, a sound, a tongue, a dialect merely, almost brutish, and we learn it unconsciously of our mothers."[29] A mere sound, so barely even enjoying semantic power, it is like a brake-lever in a locomotive. Heroic books are written in what Thoreau distinguishes as a father tongue, "a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak."[30] A father tongue is so semantically charged that it can't be heard at all. The work of our mother tongue is by sound, operating on our activities like orders to brutes. Slab! The work of our father tongue, the language of heroic books, is entirely at the level of meaning, it may have a sonic form but that is as irrelevant to heroic writing as whether the chess piece is made of stone, wood, or plastic. Heroic language invokes by sound or sight, but unessentially, not this or that common use of a word, not even two uses at once as in pun play. The heroic use of a word invokes what Cavell describes as "the entire language from which a word is woven."[31]

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[27] Thoreau, *Walden,* 279,

[28] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 16.

[29] Thoreau, *Walden,* 280.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 104. This expression arrives at the end of a paragraph that includes these two sentences: "This is the writer's faith—confidence that what we are accustomed to call, say, 'connotations' of words, the most evanescent of the shadows they cast, are as available between us as what we call their 'denotations.' That *in fact* we do not normally avail ourselves of them is a comment on our lives and shows our continuing need for art."

Cavell knows of course that Thoreau often plays with his words, but he tells us that when this happens it is because Thoreau is sometimes “content to rest from his mightier or migratory flights and let his words warble and chuckle to themselves (e.g., pun and alliterate), pleased as it were just with his own notes for company, or as he puts it elsewhere, humming while he works.”[32] So Thoreau puns when he rests from his heroic labors. And yet what we take for punning might be heroic after all. For if the heroic use of a word stretches out to the entire language from which the word is woven then each of the common uses invoked by a pun will inevitably be part of what is woven into that word. Perhaps for heroic writing, as Derrida risks suggesting for all writing, there might not be any puns.[33]

This still leaves us wondering how to understand the weaving of an entire language into the use of a word. Perhaps we should begin with what Cavell calls the “ontological condition of words; the occurrence of an object whose placement always has a point, and whose point always lies before and beyond it.”[34] Is this what is happening: The force of the entire history of the language funnels into the present occurrence of an object and then rushes out the other side towards the future. Is the claim that when this does happen to an object, then it becomes a word, or rather a *heroic,* utterly specific word? Is this always happening, whenever, even in common use, we speak or write. Then our challenge would be to accept or to acknowledge that fact.

Here is Cavell:

> A written word, as it recurs page after page, changing its company and modifying its occasions, must show its integrity under these pressures—as though the fact that all of its occurrences in the book of pages are simultaneously there, awaiting one another, demonstrates that our words need not haunt us. If we learn to *entrust* our meaning to a word, the weight it carries through all its computations will yet prove to be just the weight we will find we wish to give it.[35]

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[32] *Ibid.,* 41.
[33] Consider Jacques Derrida’s comment on his book *Glas* (1974), “Proverb: He that would pun..." in John P. Leavy, *Glassary* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 17.: “contrary to the rumor and to what some would like to have you believe, in that book there is not one single *pun.*”
[34] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 27.
[35] *Ibid.,* 34-35 (emphasis mine).

It sounds like that turn in Emerson's "Self-Reliance" when self-trust turns out to demand not the explicitly voluntary but on its opposite: "Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due."[36] Cavell gives us some guide as to how this is to be accomplished in the domain of writing, heroic writing. It requires that we "assume responsibility [...] for three features of the language [heroic writing] lives upon."[37] Cavell leads off with with this feature: "every mark of a language means something in the language, one thing rather than another; that a language is totally, systematically meaningful."[38] The second feature of heroic language is that human beings by meaning their words reveal or conceal their beliefs, and finally the third feature is that the context within which humans mean the words they produce, that is, where and when and how humans produce those words, is just as important to the meaning of what is said as the ordered words themselves.[39] Heroic writing is utterly specific because it attends so precisely to the where and the when and the how of linguistic life that each word, as meant by myself, can only mean one thing. It's not quite a recipe, but it is an articulation of our heroic responsibilities.

The challenge to write thus heroically, finally articulates the ways in which, for Cavell, the philosophical procedures of Austin and Wittgenstein are underwritten by Emerson and Thoreau: "This sense of my natural relation to existence is what Thoreau means by our being *next* to the laws of nature, by our *neighboring* the world, by our being *beside* ourselves."[40] Beside oneself, Cavell reminds us, is how the dictionary defines "ecstasy."[41] Here is Thoreau:

> With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in nature.[42]

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[36] Emerson, *Essays and Lectures,* 269.
[37] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 33-34.
[38] *Ibid.,* 34.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.,* 146.
[41] *Ibid.,* 104.
[42] Thoreau, *Walden,* 307; qtd. in Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 102.

Inhabiting heroic language is the way we come to be next to the world of things, the precision of heroic speech draws us absolutely or maximally near or next to things without yet dissolving into the evening air. And at last we are coming up on Thoreau's granular mysticism.

Cavell broaches the subject by writing that for Thoreau, and probably for Cavell himself: "Our relation to nature, at its best, would be that of neighboring it—knowing the grandest laws it is executing, while nevertheless 'not wholly involved' in them."[43] At which point he cites a passage from *Walden* in which Thoreau confesses "I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object [...] an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like the atmosphere sustaining me."[44] And then after parenthetically interrupting himself, Cavell comments about this idea of being nature's closest possible neighbor: "You may call this mysticism; but it is a very peculiar view of the subject; it is not what the inexperienced may imagine as the claim to union or absorption in nature."[45] Just out of earshot we can almost hear Cavell asserting that the ordinary is underwritten by the mystical.

It will put some people in mind of the *Tractatus,* for in Wittgenstein's book, it almost seems as if the ability to understand logic and therefore language, at all, is underwritten by the mystical. There is an experience which is not an experience that is required if we are to understand logic, and therefore language. The *Tractatus* characterizes it this way:

> 5.552 The "experience" that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of things, but that something *is*: that, however, is *not* an experience.
>
> Logic is *prior* to every experience—that something *is so*.
>
> It is prior to the question "How?," not prior to the question "What?"[46]

And this experience which is not an experience is what that book, in its dizzying concluding remarks, calls the mystical. "Mystical" enters the *Tractatus* in two propositions. Here is the first:

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[43] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 105.

[44] Thoreau, *Walden*, 304; qtd. in Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 105.

[45] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 105-6.

[46] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 5.552.

> 6.44 It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.[47]

The experience which is not an experience that we need if we are to understand logic is not that the world is this way rather than that, it is that there is a world. And the mystical is just that, the fact that is not a fact, that there is a world. Two more things are said about this in the next numbered proposition.

> 6.45 To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole.
>
> Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.[48]

The "experience" [Die "Erfahrung"] which we need in order to understand logic is not an experience, it is a feeling [Das Gefühl] of the world as a limited whole, and that feeling is the mystical. So in the *Tractatus,* setting aside the question of its self-destruction, we seem to be told that logic is underwritten by the mystical.

The mystical underwriting in Cavell's *Walden* is different from this. The *Tractatus* insists that in the absence of a mystical feeling of the world as limited whole, we would not be able to *apply* logic to the world.[49] In Cavell it is not the experience of the world *as limited whole* which underwrites our life with language, for Cavell the mystical underwriting is *granular*. I mean the word "granular" to reflect the fact that for Cavell there is no one feeling, no one general ground for the *applicability* of language to the world, no single transcendental deduction for all the categories of thought. For Cavell, the use of *each word* demands its own deduction. That is the granularity of Cavell's mystical underwriting, and in the absence of such granular deductions our linguistic life will be reduced to the emptiness of a ritual conformism. Our words slipping off the things of the world. Every word they say chagrins us, and so every word must be redeemed, "as if not just twelve categories but any and every word in our language stands under the necessity of deduction, or say derivation."[50] And now we we have a sketch of what such a deduction would involve. We need to stop forcing words to do our bidding, which just mechanizes them. Instead we should listen to the words' own voices, responding to all the contexts in which they have already lived and all the situations into which they might be projected. It's an enormous responsibility. We should "entrust our meaning to a word, the weight it carries through all its computations."[51]

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[47] *Ibid.*, 6.44.
[48] *Ibid.*, 6.45.
[49] *Ibid.*, 5.5521.

"Computations" will seem an odd word to use here, but only because we are not used to thinking of mysticism granularly. The result of letting an entire language revive a single occurrence of a word in context is to reveal the utterly specific force of that word in that context, and so there can be no blurring. It is the granular entirety of the language that gives a precise trajectory to each granular occurrence of the word. There can be no blurring. Cavell will say that it requires something like a linguistic form of pitch. On that topic, in an interview, he remarked concerning Emerson's powerful sentences:

> That they are each of them a universe entails for me the investigation of the language to which this sentence is native. It could be any language, but the web that produces this sentence can only be investigated by perfect pitch. That's my fantasy; that's the myth of writing for me. Well, I mean, Frege says—and Wittgenstein quotes Frege—you can only understand a sentence in the context of a language. Well, I say, what language? What's a sentence and what's a language?[52]

And when writing heroically we must, with perfect pitch, trust our words to the specific computations which they have enjoyed in all the contexts in which they have appeared or into which they might be projected. The result is that when our words arrive at the tips of our fingers, they will be perfectly next to what they concern: each word in a given sentence meaning one utterly specific thing.

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50. Cavell, *The New Yet Unapproachable America*, 81.

51. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 34-35.

52. Cavell, "An Apology for Skepticism," in *The American Philosopher: Conversations with Quine, Davidson, Putnam, Nozick, Danto, Rorty, Cavell, MacIntyre, Kuhn*, ed. Giovanna Borradori, trans. Rosanna Crocitto (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 133. In *Philosophical Investigations*, §49, Wittgenstein reports Frege more accurately as saying that a word has meaning only in the context of a sentence.

> To write standing face to face to fact, as it were a scimitar whose sweet edge divides you, is to seek not a style of writing but a justness of it, its happy injuries ecstasies of exactness. The writer's sentences must at each point come to an edge.[53]

Now at last our two will be the real two, our four the real four. And in heroic writing, as with Cavell's own writing, "paraphrase is difficult, and the prose is so closely woven that it is hard to disengage a sentence or a paragraph from its context for purposes of quotation."[54] Ordinary Language Philosophy is underwritten by perfect pitch, the granular mysticism of Emerson and Thoreau. Each word, each thing, one to another, perfectly, next.

3. Liquid Mysticism in Whitman

The voice which carries us through the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* is not the voice of quiet desperation, or even disquietude, and so these leaves will not at first seem to be addressed to the existential concerns that motivated Emerson and Thoreau and Wittgenstein and even (momentarily) Austin. The voice in those leaves is a voice of continuous joy: "Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy."[55] This does not mean that, unlike *Walden,* these leaves are not addressed to poor students or to those who are said to live in Brooklyn. The way to reconcile these two aspects, continuous joy and a concern with those living lives of quiet desperation, is to think of these leaves on the model of Part IV of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In Part IV of that book, Zarathustra is interested in talking to those not yet joyful, he is concerned about a cry of distress that he hears on his mountain. But he uses his own happiness as honeyed bait to lure those in distress up to his level:

> my happiness itself shall I cast out into all expanses and distances, between sunrise, midday, and sunset, to see whether many human-fishes will not learn

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[53] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 44.
[54] Mary Mothersill, "Review [of Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* & *The World Viewed* & *The Senses of Walden*]," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 2 (1975): 41.
[55] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 40.

> to wriggle and tug at my happiness.
>
> Until, biting on my sharp and well-hidden hooks, they must come up to *my* height, the most colorful abyss-groundlings to the most wicked among all human-fish catchers.[56]

So perhaps we can receive these leaves as being in the same existential business as Emerson's essays and Thoreau's pond.

But even apart from their joyful exuberance, these leaves set out on a very different foot, a metaphysical foot, a non-Kantian, non-Austinian, non-Wittgensteinian foot. The work of redemption provided by Whitman is not formal it is metaphysical. This makes it an odd match for "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[57] But the truth is that metaphysics was the word I used, for Whitman himself: "A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books."[58] And yet listen briefly to the opening sentence of the first of these leaves:

> I celebrate myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.[59]

"Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" could almost be the plain truth of today's science, although we might have to drop beneath the level of what is today called the atom to preserve its truth. But even if these atoms were more Democritean, than Schrodingerian, that would smell like the metaphysics of books, which however satisfying, will not satisfy as much as a blooming morning-glory. Nevertheless all these equally available atoms have a tendency to dull the sharp scimitar edges dividing this from that. Again if what I assume into myself, you assume into yourself, we may have difficulty keeping ourselves perfectly separate. So when he leads off, "I celebrate myself," he may be celebrating more than himself. Something like a metaphysical togetherness of all things, perhaps even a democracy of things.

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[56] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. Graham Parkes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 208.

[57] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §116.

[58] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 40.

[59] *Ibid.*, 21. The appearance of "atom" in this exuberant poem sometimes puts me in mind of Lucretius.

In the word "celebration" itself, I find a joyful welcoming that I do not hear in the expression "self-reliance" which seems more serious business, as if *self-reliance* counts on subtraction whereas *celebration,* especially celebration of a self which assumes what you shall assume, counts on addition. Are we catching a glimpse, here, of a different mysticism, not granular, precise, and perfect, but liquid, merged, and beautiful. Pierre Hadot, in turning from Plotinus, felt that "in the face of this mysticism of cutting away, there was room for a mysticism of welcoming."[60] Although there are aspects of mystical welcomings both in Emerson and in Thoreau, I mean only to contrast *Cavell's* Thoreauvian granular mysticism of the perfectly next with what I will call Whitman's liquid mysticism of the beautiful merge. But what is the merge?

One presupposition of the merge is loafing, abandoning goals. The merge is unavailable to those at work, I almost want to say that it is not available to those who are serious, though I don't mean by that to require the comic or the joking, only perhaps lightness: the opposite of *gravitas*. Zarathustra reports: "And when I saw my Devil I found him serious, thorough, deep, and solemn: it was the Spirit of Heaviness."[61] The merge depends on a certain lightness, being at ease, relaxing the will, the mind, the body. Its tempo, Andante.

> Loaf with me on the grass [...] loose the stop from your throat,
> Not words, not music or rhyme I want [...] not custom or lecture, not even the
> best,
> Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.[62]

He writes as if the granular definitions, the limitations, of words, music, or rhyme would be too far from genuine loafing to make the merge possible. He likes the hum of the voice undefined by words, music, or rhyme. He wants the throat uncorked, the open string, unstopped, Thoreau might have said Aeolian music.[63] Whitman's well know passage continues:

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[60] Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 82. Emerson had used a passage from Plotinus as the motto of his 1836 edition of *Nature*. Emerson, *Essays and Lectures,*1139.

[61] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 36. This distinction between the light and the heavy may live on in Deleuze's distinction between humor and irony in his *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 9: "Humor is the art the surface, which is opposed to the old irony, the art of depths and heights."

[62] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 23.

> I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
> You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me,
> And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my barestript heart,
> And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet.

It seems a languid erotic scene, and so it delightfully is, but it is also a characterization of overcoming or releasing the instrumental seriousness of our lives, bringing a stray stick so close to your face that you begin floating down the grain, swirling around rising bumps along its skin, until just to call it a stick would risk caging its quiet wildness. And there we are, each one to the other, becoming assumed. Whitman continues:

> Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth;
> And I know that the hand of God is the elderhand of my own,
> And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own,
> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers . . . and the women my sisters and lovers,
> And that a kelson of creation is love;
> And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
> And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
> And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and elder mullen and pokeweed.[64]

Limitlessness is everywhere, and this is not unrelated to love, creation's guide, because love too, exceeds what limits or defines us. And so it should not surprise us that this limitless peace and joy would exceed all art and argument, all technique whether those of a sailor or a seamstress or a scientist. Neither should it surprise us that this joy, this peace, includes also an aspect of knowledge that exceeds argument, for this passage comes hard on the heels of the eroticism of the preceding lines, and this may put us in mind of knowledge as a form of sexual intimacy. But, again letting sexuality be one aspect of something more comprehensive, there are occasions when we can feel known by another, so totally known as to exceed conceptual limitation.

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[63] Thoreau, *Walden*, 304.
[64] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 24.

Remember that Cavell told us one of the features of language that heroic writing must be perfectly responsible to, and perhaps for, is that “every mark of a language means something in the language, one thing rather than another.”[65] This goal will be rather overcome by the limitlessnesses we have just felt. Indeed, the very next sentence of these leaves is this:

> A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
> How could I answer the child [...] I do not know what it is any more than he.[66]

Love, the kelson of creation, of the “procreant urge of the world,” seems to push against there being something that grass is and not another thing.[67] If you were looking for limitations, for each word *meaning* this rather than that, for each thing *being* this rather than that, then the experiences we have just been through might make you fearful of those experiences, as though they would lead you away from where, in your, businesslike way, you intended to heading. These experiences then seem to be opposite of a kelson, or any way a keel. That is one of the forces which I sense in the line I took as this paper’s motto: “Who need be afraid of the merge?”[68]

And it is that fear of the merge which may help explain why Whitman appears so infrequently in Cavell's transcendentalist underwriting of ordinary language philosophy. He doesn't appear because he wouldn’t help.

It’s not that there is no answer to the child's question—“What is the grass?”—even in these leaves themselves, it is rather that there are too many answers. The lea-

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65. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 34.
66. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 24.
67. *Ibid.*, 22.
68. *Ibid.*, 26.

ves include these answers: the grass is “the flag of my disposition,” “the handkerchief of the Lord,” “itself a child,” “a uniform hieroglyphic,” “the uncut hair of graves.”[69] Each of these are aspects of the grass. How many aspects does it have? These leaves lean towards the answer: limitless. This seems no way to answer the demands of underwriting of ordinary language philosophy, and once again Whitman won’t appear often because he won't help much.

But I don’t think all is settled with the transcendentalist underwriting as it stands. Let’s remind ourselves of some old ground. Every word they say chagrined us because they were using those words automatically, unthinkingly, irresponsibly. It broke our hearts. Cavell’s granular mysticism underwrites ordinary language philosophy because it “registers within the writing of the word the entire language from which a word is woven.”[70] The difficulty with this answer is that it remains algebraic, although it is a corporeal algebra. What is a corporeal algebra? In a certain sense, every practical routine is an algebra, from shucking oysters to changing the oil in your car, from proving theorems in a logical system to ordinary linguistic exchange. In each case we break down the process of, for instance oyster shucking, into more manageable units, and there are some who become so skilled at shucking that they are scarcely conscious of what they are doing with the oysters. Games are algebraic and so too are language-games, corporeal algebras, and so language-games are also prone to becoming deadened as routine. The fact that these routines are corporeal is part of their being on the rough ground, but the rough ground won't protect our lives from stultifying, as routines stultify. The massive contextual sensitivity of the entire language from which each word in its place is woven is itself a corporeal algebra, and so there can be no even momentary escape from conformalism. To inhabit an algebra is to conform to that algebra. How can the merge help?

Especially how can the merge help if, in the wake of the merge we are unable to answer the child’s question: What is the grass? Our first clue is that there was joy or wonder in all the various answers to that question, those various aspects of grass that tumbled down the page. After the merge, the grass was not less, it was more. That is because the merge is only half the story. The other half is the outlet. As everything plunges in together, so everything emerges from the merge. The last line of the last leaf is part of the merge and the outlet: "Sure as the stars return again after they merge in the light, death is as great as life."[71] The stars return after they merge: merge and emerge. And when they emerge, they emerge more alive because energized by the merge. Here is a longer passage, three sentences long, merging the wicked and the righteous, all manner of peoples, and then the outlet.

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[69] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 24.
[70] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 104.

> This is the meal pleasantly set [...] this is the meat and drink for natural hunger,
> It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous [...] I make appointments with all,
> I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
> The keptwoman and sponger and thief are hereby invited [...] the heavy-lipped slave is invited [...] the venerealee is invited,
> There shall be no difference between them and the rest.
>
> This is the press of the bashful hand [...] this is the float and odor of hair,
> This is the touch of my lips to yours [...] this is the murmur of yearning.
> This is the far-off depth and height reflecting my own face,
> This is the thoughtful merge of myself and the outlet again.[72]

The merge is mystical. It is not the mystical feeling of the world as a limited whole, as it was in the *Tractatus*: not how it is but that it is. Nor is the merge the granular mysticism of Cavell's Thoreauvian underwriting, a scimitar slicing, each occasion of each word perfectly next to what it concerns, a transcendental deduction of every word in our language. I imagine the *Tractarian* mystical as an all at once confrontation of the logic of language in general with the world as a limited whole, and Cavell's granular mysticism as a one by one confrontation of each word with its hyper-specific semantic power. The merge is neither of these things. The merge is a liquid mysticism, it may even be near to "what the inexperienced may imagine as the claim to the union or absorption in nature."[73] But it is not only a centripetal merging, it is a centrifugal outlet. And as after meditation, one returns more alive; so too the outlet brings life to words and to things.

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[71] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 113.
[72] *Ibid.*, 34.
[73] Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 105-6.

In the outlet things do not emerge utterly specific, not anyway if this means single and separate, but as singular aspects of the merge, retaining all the energy and life, all the joy and wonder of the merge, and feeling that joy and wonder in every creature, in every thing, in every word, in every meaningless sound.

> The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
> Ya-honk! he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation;
> The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listen closer,
> I find its purpose and place up there toward the November sky.[74]

The power of the merge is the power of the sub-conceptual to redeem the the conceptual. If we listen closer. Perhaps the pert are afraid of the merge. “Have you reckoned the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture? [...] Or the brown land and the blue sea for maps and charts?”[75] Listen closer. Although maps and charts are eminently useful, there is more to the brown land and the blue sea than appears in any chart, or any collection of charts. The merge redeems.

> There is something that comes home to one now and perpetually,
> It is not what is printed or preached or discussed [...] it eludes discussion and print,
> It is not to be put in a book [...] it is not in this book,
> It is for you whoever you are [...] it is no farther from you than your hearing and sight are from you.
> It is hinted by nearest and commonest and readiest [...] it is not them, though it is endlessly provoked by them [...] What is there ready and near you now?[76]

Cavell, like Wittgenstein, is disinclined to take this metaphysical path. It places them both at the heart of the anti-metaphysics of the 20th century. The path Cavell's granular mysticism takes redeems language by means of language: “it is through words that words are to be overcome.”[77] It is a richer conception than the calculus conception of language because it is not just a linguistic algebra, it is a corporeal algebra, sensitive to all the rich contextual dependencies of the entire language. But it remains algebraic and so it remains formal, essentially a form of conformalism. Whitman’s merge and outlet, is anti-formal, so it is anti-conformal, and unlike Cavell's Thoreau, words are not enough, it takes more than words to redeem our words. It takes the merge. It takes the merge and the outlet.

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[74] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 29.
[75] *Ibid.*, 72.
[76] *Ibid.*, 71.

There are traditional metaphysicians who imagine the real existing elsewhere, away from us, but this is not Whitman’s merge. The things of this world, the words of our language are not fallen or vile, they are only partial. There is nothing behind them or beneath them. There is only more than them. Conformism is not to be overcome by discovering a more total and more systematic form, a more total and more systematic corporeal algebra. Redemption won't come from a partiality, however rough the ground, however totally systematic the language. Rather, each thing, each word, each creature, each sensual touch, is redeemed emerging from the merge.

It is in this way that Whitman's merge underwrites what Cavell takes to be the transcendentalist underwriting of the procedures of Austin and Wittgenstein. If that is so, we can begin to ask what it is about Cavell's philosophical carriage that made this so difficult to see. Cavell was always interested in meaning what we say, bringing our meaning and our words together with perfect precision. In his book on *Walden* this appears as the ideal of heroic writing. It is something that reminds him of perfect pitch, the perfect matching of sound and speech: that is F# an octave above middle C. The ideal is of a subject speaking and the things said, what is meant and what is said, synchronized perfectly, if only for a moment. It is a representational dream, as difficult to enjoy, and as rare, as perfect pitch. It is a dream of perfect fit, you could even call it a kind of perfectionism. Whitman's is not a representational dream: “Have you reckoned the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture?”[78] If the merge is rare, it is because we are afraid of the merge. Although Whitman

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77. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden,* 44.
78. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 72.

can speak of perfection, his is an ideal of beauty, of beauty everywhere in everything, already, even now. “Draw nigh and commence.”[79, 80]

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[79] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 109.
[80] Thanks to Brett Topey for regular encouragement and to Danica Palacio for an outdoor afternoon which brought me to see the critical importance of listening and the outlet for my reading of *Leaves of Grass*.

Cavell on Feminism and the Ethics of Care

SANDRA LAUGIER

This paper sets out to present a connection I have sought to establish since the publication of my first writings on the concept of care[1] between the ethics of care and my own philosophical background and foundation—ordinary language philosophy as represented by Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell—and thus to find in ordinary language philosophy (OLP), often considered to be disconnected from gender issues (except through speech act theory), resources for a reformulation of what for me is at stake in feminism: the inclusion and empowerment of women's voices and expressiveness and attention to their experiences.

The idea of an ethics formulated in a "different voice"—a woman's voice—follows from these explorations of OLP, with the further incorporation of Carol Gilligan's approach.[2] The ethics of care is defined as a practical response to specific needs (of vulnerable persons) and a sensitivity to the ordinary details of human life that *matter*. Hence, care is a concrete matter that ensures maintenance (e.g., as conversation and conservation) and continuity of the human world and form of life. This is a paradigm shift in ethics, with a reorientation towards vulnerability and a shift from the "just" to the "important." By proposing to valorize moral values primarily defined as "feminine"—caring, attention to others, solicitude—the ethics of care has contributed to modifying a dominant conception of ethics, and has changed deeply the way we look at ethics, or conceive of what ethics should look like. It has introduced ethical stakes into politics, weakening, through its critique of theories of justice, the seemingly obvious link between an ethics of justice and political liberalism. However, care corresponds to a quite ordinary reality: the fact that people look after one another, take care of one another, and thus are attentive to the functioning (or the commerce) of the world, which depends on this kind of care. The ethics of *care* affirms the importance of care and attention given to others, in particular to those whose lives and wellbeing depend on directed and constant attention. Ethics of care draw our attention to the ordinary, to what we are unable to see precisely because it is right before our eyes. So before being a feminine ethics, it is an ethics that gives a voice to humans who are undervalued precisely because they accomplish unnoticed, invisible tasks, and take care of our basic needs.

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[1] See Sandra Laugier, "Care et perception, l'éthique comme attention au particulier," in *Le Souci des autres: éthique et politique du care (*Paris: Éditions de l'Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2005) and "The Will to See: Ethics and Moral Perception of Sense," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 34, no. 2: 263-82.

[2] See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) and "Moral Orientation and Development," in *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Virginia Held (Oxford: Westview, 1995).

These ethics arise in response to historical conditions that have favored a division of moral labor such that activities of care have been socially and morally devalorized. The assignment of women to the domestic sphere has reinforced the exclusion of these activities and preoccupations from the moral domain and the public sphere, reducing them to the rank of private sentiments devoid of moral and political import. The perspectives of care carry with them a fundamental claim concerning the importance of care for human life, for the relations that organize it, and the social and moral position of caregivers.[3] Recognizing this means recognizing that dependence and vulnerability are traits of a condition common to all humans (not of a special category of the "vulnerable"). This vulnerability of the human life itself is at the core of Cavell's anthropology. Hence the crucial place of this *attention* to human vulnerability in the constitution of feminism.

I want here to show the relevance of ordinary language philosophy—Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell—to ethical and political issues, by developing an ordinary conception of politics and an ordinary conception of ethics. This systematic exploration of the (theoretical and practical) question of the ordinary is indeed anchored in ordinary language philosophy, the "rough ground" of our uses and practices of language; it leads to further investigating the denial or undervaluation of the ordinary as a general phenomenon in contemporary thinking.

My point, essentially inspired by Cavell, is that the ordinary is variously *denied*, undervalued, or neglected (not seen, not taken into account) in philosophy and theoretical thought. Such negligence (I call it *carelessness*) has to do with contempt for ordinary life inasmuch as it is domestic—and female—and it stems from a gendered hierarchy of the objects of intellectual research. One important result of ordinary language philosophy is that it calls our attention to human vulnerability (against the dominant theme of autonomy) and to expressiveness as embodied in women's voices, a point clearly made by Cavell in *Contesting Tears*.[4] I want to show that attention to expression is *care*—about human expression. Cavell himself has not connected this expressiveness to the feminist claim to a *different* voice; my goal is to use his work to interpret ordinary language philosophy (OLP) in such a way that it can serve as a basis for re-defining ethics as attention to ordinary life and as care for moral expression.

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[3] See Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder, *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

Making women's voices heard is the first aim of feminism. Making the human voice heard is the aim of OLP. And it is also the starting point of the ethics of care. I have tried to understand the ethics of care as a heterodox ethics, inspired in part by OLP, that allows us to re-center moral philosophy around ordinary language and expressiveness. My exploration of care and the ordinary thus follows the trajectory of Wittgenstein's philosophy beyond his analysis of the "grammar" of the first person, the uses of psychological verbs, and the nature of our states of mind. It aims to discover in Cavell's work an unknown strand, an attention to women's voices that goes beyond even the extraordinary ambition of *Pursuits of Happiness*[5] to present a moment in the history of women and the struggle for equality. I will focus on this expressiveness of women in film, and the ways female characters/actresses project moral values and textures perceptible on the perfectionist background of these Hollywood classical movies, and make themselves heard "in a different voice", and in a different vision of *what matters*.

1. OLP: Linguistic Phenomenology and Attention to Language

Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say*[6] is perhaps the only work of contemporary thought to have so completely carried through the project of ordinary language philosophy to rediscover ordinary life and to reinvent subjectivity. His renewal of Austin's theory of speech acts as open to vulnerability, and his radical reading of Wittgenstein and of the relation between skepticism, acknowledgement, and tragedy have produced the clearest statement of subjectivity as voice to date. The idea of an ethics formulated in a "different voice"—found in Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*—is contemporary with Cavell's works *The Claim of Reason*[7] and *Pursuits of Happiness*. The connection between the feminist idea of women's voice and ordinary language philosophy—a philosophy of the ordinary voice—is not obvious, and is never mentioned in the classic works of OLP (Austin, Wittgenstein) or in feminist theories, except for speech act theory.

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[4] Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

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

[6] Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

The starting point of my book *Why We Need Ordinary Language Philosophy*[8] was the idea of a philosophy of language anchored neither in standard analytic philosophy nor in continental philosophy but rather in *attention* to the uses of language, to language as it is used, circulated. We can call this use of OLP *realistic*, in the sense of an ordinary realism, one which construes language both as a human practice and as a fine, precision tool for describing reality. In OLP the ideas of adjustment, fitting, and the perception of differences and resemblances account for realist aspirations, but these ideas are inseparable from the recognition that language is part of the world, used in everyday life and conversation. The meaning of ordinary language philosophy does indeed lie in this recognition that language is used, spoken, by a human voice and breath. This sense of language is what the later Wittgenstein means by our "form of life": the question is no longer whether language is an image of reality, but how we can "come back to earth" and see the practices in which language is *caught* and which collect around our words. This notion of *human life* is connected to Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life/life form (a form *taken by life*, as Cavell and some anthropologists say), which also defines a texture of human life.

OLP is a minority current in the mainstream of philosophy of language and even in the active and recognized field of pragmatics. The analytic philosophy that emerged from the "linguistic turn," now a dominant strand linked to the cognitive sciences and the so-called “philosophy of mind,” is certainly fertile, but it has systematically neglected important and vibrant contemporary approaches to language that are irreducible to cognitivist models; approaches that are descriptive and attentive to everyday usages of language. OLP takes ordinary uses of language as the starting point for philosophical analysis, considering that doing so is a condition for avoiding the “scholastic illusion” denounced by Austin in the 1950s and later by Bourdieu, which consists in taking “the things of logic for the logic of things”[9] and which often leads to thought becoming sterilized in a vain scholasticism that loses all connection to the problems posed in ordinary life. Thus, OLP is from the outset oriented toward social matters and attention to an unseen, neglected reality. Its primary methodological ambition is to arrive at a conceptual analysis that makes it possible to recognize the importance of *context* in the practice of language, thought, and perception—that is, in our different ways of engaging in the real—while at the same time defending a form of realism anchored in agents’ actual practices: their words, expressions, and thoughts. It is the inspiration for today’s “contextualist” trend in philosophy of language and epistemology.[10] However, this contextualism, or even “relativism,” has ignored some important aspects and potentialities of OLP: its ambition to describe, as precisely as possible, the cognitive, perceptual, linguistic, social, and moral dimensions of our usages and to analyze all forms of expression—not only descriptive and performative, but also emotive or passionate. The domain of the perlocutionary is in particular a “dark continent,” which, with the exception of Cavell, has not been explored in philosophical literature because it is connected to women’s speech, or disconnected from the “malestream.”

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[7] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[8] Laugier, *Why We Need Ordinary Language Philosophy,* trans. Daniela Ginsburg (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

With the Austinian notion of linguistic phenomenology, OLP orients its reflection on language toward a type of adequacy between words and world that is no longer correspondence but rather the fineness of adjustment as a function of the perception of differences. OLP does not encourage defining the meaning of a term as the set of situations where the term is appropriate, or as a pack of established uses (an erroneous understanding of Wittgenstein and his definition of meaning as use), but rather examining how meaning is made and improvised by virtue of its integration into practice and self-expressivity. OLP sees language as part of the real and as something that affects us, allows us to affect others, and constantly transforms meaning—this is the main idea of Cavell's first book, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

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[9] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 49.

[10] See Charles Travis, *The Uses of Sense: Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Linguistic phenomenology means paying attention to our words. In return, we get a "sharpened awareness" (Austin) of words and what they are about. The agreement at the heart of linguistic phenomenology is not a (formal, or term-to-term) correspondence between words and things, but rather the agreement between ourselves, what we *mean*—and reality.

> The agreement we act upon Wittgenstein calls "agreement in judgments" (§242), and he speaks of our ability to use language as depending upon agreement in "forms of life" (§241). But forms of life, he says, are exactly what have to be "accepted"; they are "given."[11]

It completes the *political* agreement, as Wittgenstein says, *in* language, which is not a consensus. My agreement or my belonging to *this or that* form of life, whether political or moral, is not given. The form of this acceptance, the limits and scales of our agreement, are not knowable *a priori*, "no more than one can *a priori* know the scope or scale of a word,"[12] and this is essential to the relevance of OLP.

> In being asked to accept this, or *suffer it*, as given for ourselves, we are not asked to accept, let us say, private property, but separateness; not a particular fact of power, but the fact that I am a man, therefore of this (range or scale of) capacity for work, for pleasure, for endurance, for appeal, for command, for understanding, for wish, for will, for teaching, for suffering.[13]

That we agree in language means that language—our form of life—produces our understanding of one another. Words, says Austin, are ordinary objects, and we are *in*

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[11] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 30.
[12] Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 83.
[13] *Ibid.*

touch with them; the tangible relation we have to our words is something that connects OLP to attention to literature and to the general question of sensibility to words. This is how OLP brings us to two main strands of thought involving gender, feminism, and attention to women's voices: women's ordinary expressiveness, and the ethics of care, which was at the outset a claim for the validity of women's voice, a different voice. *Attention* is part of the meaning of care: one must pay attention to the details of life that we neglect (e.g. who has cleaned and straightened this room in which we are standing?), hence pursuing the anthropological relevance of OLP in ethics.

2. Care as an Ethics of the Ordinary: The Different Voice

Cavell's major contribution on this point is to define our relation to *our* words and our expressions in terms of voice and claim. This was one of Austin's intuitions through to the end: we must not concern ourselves only with the analysis of *what* we should say, but with the *we*, the *should*, and the *say*. *Must We Mean What We Say?* was perhaps the first work to ask the question of the relevance of our statements in terms of relevance in relation to ourselves, in various domains and by turning to unexpected resources (literature, art criticism, theater) that make room for women's voices. The content (objective, semantic, or empirical) of propositions is no longer the question, nor are "nonsense" or "performativity", but rather the fortunes and misfortunes of ordinary expressions—the search for (or loss of) the right tone or the right word. An unacknowledged point is the "unhappy" dimension, the dimension of failure in OLP, which is obsessed with cases where our words fail, are inadequate, inexpressive, inarticulate: with the vulnerability of voice (see Austin 1962, and Goffman). It is, in the end, a matter of an indissolubly aesthetic and moral problem: to connect, within women's voices, rightness of tone or adequacy of expression with self-confidence.

Wittgenstein's point is that the importance of grammatical investigations lies precisely in "destroying everything great and interesting," displacing our interests, our hierarchies. Here the specific tone that Cavell early on identified and expressed in his reading of Wittgenstein may be seen and heard as the refusal of a kind of male assertiveness in finding the right words and the all-too-easy identification of the important with the masculine. The conversion required in putting aside competing ideas of the important, in destroying our ideas of the important, is the condition of possibility of a place for women's expression (accomplished in *Pursuits of Happiness* through the emergence of women's voices in conversation in talking pictures). Cavell thus achieves a non-heterosexual tonality of language that may be sought after in Wittgenstein, and could be at stake in ordinary language philosophy.

Taking women's experience into account in politics and in philosophy is also the aim of feminism. In introducing the ethics of care in France, I meant it as a way of developing a heterodox ethics, inspired by approaches in moral sociology, but also as a way of continuing OLP by other means—by re-centering moral philosophy around ordinary language. Care is a sensitivity to the ordinary details of human life that *matter*. Hence, care is a concrete matter that ensures the maintenance (e.g., as conversation and conservation) and continuity of the human world and form of life. This is nothing less than a paradigm shift in ethics, with a reorientation towards vulnerability and a shift from the "just" to the "important," exactly as Wittgenstein proposed shifting the meaning of importance by destroying what seemed to be important. Assessing the importance of care for human life means acknowledging the vulnerability of forms of life.

The idea of an ethics formulated *in a different voice* and expressed in a female voice (as exhibited e.g. in literary and cinematographic bodies of work) is 1) an ordinary conception of ethics, 2) an expressivist conception of ethics. This ethics is not founded on universal principles but rather starts from everyday experiences and the moral problems of real people in their ordinary lives. The notion of care is best expressed not as a theory, but as an activity: care as action (taking care, caring for) and as attention, concern (caring about). Care is at once a practical response to specific needs—which are always those of individual, singular others (whether close to us or not)—an activity necessary to maintaining persons and connections, work carried out in both the private and the public sphere, and a sensitivity to the "details" that count. This is a definition of ethics (which may be called a paradigm shift) that is deeply connected to attention to, and repossession of, ordinary language, and that transforms the very notion of ethics, enhancing the question of human vulnerability and connecting it to the vulnerability of language use. In this ordinary conception of ethics, morality is founded not on universal principles but rather starts from the experiences of everyday life.

The (polemical) importance of the ethics of care is that, just like OLP, it subverts well-established intellectual and social hierarchies and draws attention to a number of phenomena that are overlooked because they are connected to women. It is a matter of showing that the (moral) sentiments and expressions of women are not, as Lawrence Kohlberg's analyses have demonstrated, an inferior form of morality, but a moral resource that has been ignored, and which would make it possible to profoundly renew moral and social thought. This is on the condition of seeing care not only as a sensibility or affectivity but as an ordinary practice, an ethics defined by the concrete work done for the most part by women, and neglected for that reason. In fact, taking into consideration the social, moral, and political importance of care makes it necessary to refer to "women," one of the categories to which the work of care has principally been assigned. The ethics of care has been criticized as "essentialist" (we may wonder why that would be a crime anyway), but its critique of the incapacity of the language of justice to take women's ordinary experiences and points of view into account as morally relevant and different[14] actually makes it a universalist political theory. Still, the hypothesis of a "different voice" is indeed that of a moral orientation that identifies and treats moral problems differently than the language of justice and liberal moral philosophy do—by claiming a voice.

The ethics of care has contributed to transforming ethics and the concept of voice. Care is a fundamental aspect of human life and consists, as Joan Tronto proposes, of "everything we do to continue, repair, and maintain ourselves so that we can live in the world as well as possible."[15] Care thus corresponds to an ordinary reality: the fact that people look after one another, take care of one another, and are attentive to the functioning of the world, which depends on this kind of care. The ethics of care affirms the importance of care and attention given to others, in particular to those

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14. See Linda Zerilli, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgment," *Signs* 34, no. 2 (2009): 295-317.
15. Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring," in *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 40.

whose lives and wellbeing depend on particularized, continual, and daily attention: ordinary vulnerable others. The ethics of care draws our attention to the ordinary, defined as what we are unable to see but is right before our eyes. It is an ethics that gives voice and attention to humans who are undervalued precisely because they perform unnoticed, invisible tasks, and take care of the basic needs of others.

These ethics are based on an analysis of the historical conditions that have favored a division of moral labor such that activities of care have been socially and morally devalorized. The assignment of women to the domestic sphere has reinforced the exclusion of these activities and preoccupations from the moral domain and the public sphere, reducing them to the rank of private sentiments devoid of moral and political import. The perspectives of care carry with them a fundamental claim concerning the importance of care for human life, for the relations that organize it, and the social and moral position of caregivers. To recognize this means recognizing that dependence and vulnerability are traits of a condition common to all, not of a special category, the "vulnerable." This sort of "ordinary" realism is absent from the majority of moral theories, which have a tendency to reduce the activities and preoccupations of care to a concern for victims and for the weak on the part of selfless mothers. Hence the importance of acknowledging the first tenet of the ethics of care: *the human is vulnerable*.

Vulnerability defines ordinariness, and the development of the concept of vulnerability provides new resources for a reevaluation of the ordinary. OLP helps us connect the ethics of care to the idea of the vulnerability of the human as it is developed in the ethics inspired by Wittgenstein. Cavell, Diamond, and Das connect the idea of the vulnerability of the human to the vulnerability of our life form(s), and of life itself. *Lebensformen*, Cavell stresses, could be translated not by the phrase forms of life, but rather *life forms*. This idea of a life form is connected, for Cavell and Das, to Wittgenstein's anthropological sensitivity or sensibility: his attention to everyday language forms as being both obvious and strange, foreign.

> The intersection of the familiar and the strange is an experience of the uncanny [...]. What I call Wittgenstein's anthropological perspective is one puzzled

> in principle by anything human beings say and do, hence perhaps, at a moment, by nothing.[16]

The uncanniness of the ordinary, for Cavell, is not resolved in the return to everyday life or common sense; the human is not a given, for it is defined by the permanent threat of denial of the human, of dehumanization—loss of the sense of life. Paying attention to the everyday, to what Veena Das in *Life and Words* calls *the everyday life of the human*, the *ordinary other*, is the first step in caring: care is defined as attention, and the ethics of care call our attention to phenomena commonly unseen, but right before our eyes. Das mentions a "difference of expression" within the experience of violence: "women tried to contain the poison that could not be put into the world and would violate the very sense of life as human life."[17] To define ethics in terms of immanent caring and a sense of life also calls our attention to the moral capacities or competences of ordinary people. The definition of care by Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher has to be taken seriously:

> In the most general sense, care is a species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web.[18]

Reflection on care can be construed as a consequence of the turn in moral thought illustrated by the work of Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond: against what Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book* called the "craving for generality," it is the attempt to valorize, within morality, attention to the particular(s), to the ordinary detail of human life, the neglected aspects.

What is the pertinence of the particular? What can the singular claim? It is by giving back a (different) voice to the individual sensibility, to the intimate, that one ensures the conversation/conservation (*entretien*/entertaining) of a human world.

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[16] Cavell, "Foreword," in Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), x.

[17] Das, *Life and Words*, 170.

[18] Fisher and Tronto, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring," 41.

This is obvious in the human contexts Das's *Life and Words* accounts for, when violence destroys the everyday and the very sense of *life* (Das 2007, 89), and when it appears that this everyday is maintained and *made* by women.

Cavell refers to Das'

> Recognition that in the gender-determined division of the work of mourning the results of violence, the role of women is to attend, in a torn world, to the details of everyday life that allow a household to function, collecting supplies, cooking, washing and straightening up, seeing to children, and so on, that allow life to knit itself back into some viable rhythm, pair by pair. Part of her task is to make us ponder how it is that such evidently small things (whose bravery within tumultuous circumstances is, however, not small) are a match for the consequences of unspeakable horror, for which other necessaries are not substitutes.[19]

The subject of *care* is affected, is *caught* in a context of relations, in a form of life both social and biological. This idea of *Lebensform* is associated in Cavell with attention to the ordinary form of life: to what Cavell calls "the uncanniness of the ordinary" and Das calls "the everyday life of the human." But Das takes Cavell's point about women's role one step further:

> However, where I found thought to be residing was in the rhythms of women's actions—making public the harm that had been done by becoming like stone in the still postures they adopted as mourners while simultaneously attending to the ordinary—(provisioning for food, consoling a child, assisting a new mother) that we glimpse care for the world seen as obligation toward the care of the dead as well as attention to the survival of the living.[20]

Das differentiates violence against the ordinary (the rupture of everyday life, and the work it takes to preserve it) from the *violence of the everyday*, the present condition of our life in unjust societies, defined by wide-spread violence, either of the spectacular kind that is public (terrorism), or of everyday deprivation and routine violence. The fact that *some* kind of violence becomes ordinary, "normal," is part of the ordinary—and makes it unacceptable.

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[19] Cavell, "Foreword," xiii-xiv.
[20] Das, *Life and Words*, 89.

> One of the issues I want to be attentive to is the violence *against* the everyday and the violence *of* the everyday, so that we do not end with any beatific picture of the redemptive qualities of the everyday.[21]

3. The Importance of Importance

The center of gravity of ethics is then shifted, from the "just" to the "important." Measuring the importance of care for human life means recognizing that dependence and vulnerability—precarity—are not accidents that happen only to "others." Going against the grain of the ideal of autonomy animating most moral theories, care reminds us that we need others in order to satisfy our needs. This unpleasant reminder may well be at the source of the misrecognition of care, when it is reduced to a vacuous or condescending version of charity.

In this approach there are no univocal moral concepts that need simply to be applied to reality, but rather, our moral concepts depend in their very application upon the narration or description we give of our existences, of what *counts* for us. This ability to perceive the importance of things, their place in our ordinary life, is not only "affective": it is the ability for adequate *expression* (or, equally, for a clumsy and awkward, failed expression). At the center of care is our ability for (our disposition to) moral expression, which, as Cavell has shown in various ways, is rooted in ordinary human and other life forms, in the (Wittgensteinian) sense of a simultaneously natural and social aggregate of forms of expression and connection to others. It is the form of life that determines the ethical structure of expression, and this expression, conversely, reworks it and gives it form. Our relation to others, the type of interest and care we have for others, and the importance we give them take on their meaning within the context of a possible unveiling (voluntary or not) of oneself.

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[21] *Ibid.*

Care is also specific attention to the *invisible* importance of things and moments: what Cavell calls "the essential dissimulation of importance"[22] which is part of what cinema educates us about. In one of his works on film, *Themes Out of School*, Cavell notes that the importance of film lies in its power to make what matters emerge, "to magnify the sensation and meaning of a moment."[23] Film cultivates in us a specific ability to see the importance of things and moments, and emphasizes the covering-over of importance in our ordinary life, for importance is essentially what can be *missed*, what remains unseen until later—or possibly forever. The pedagogy of film is that while it amplifies the significance of moments, it also reveals the "inherent concealment of significance."

> If is part of the grain of film to magnify the feeling and meaning of a moment, it is equally part of it to counter this tendency, and instead to acknowledge the fateful fact of a human life that the significance of its moments is ordinarily not given with the moments as they are lived so that to determine the significant crossroads of a life may be the work of a lifetime.[24]

The structure of expression connects the concealment *and* the revelation of importance, and such is the texture of life (our life form). This is the difficulty that Cavell describes when he speaks of the temptation of inexpressiveness and of isolation, and shows the essential vulnerability of human experience (another name for skepticism, and expressed in the genre of the "Melodrama of the Unknown Woman"). Acknowledging this is a crucial part of Cavell's contribution to feminism.

Failure to pay attention to details, to importance, it turns out, is as much a moral failure as it is a cognitive one. We discover importance not only through accurate and refined perception, but mostly through misperception, through our own failures to perceive, for "missing the evanescence of the subject"[25] is constitutive of our ordinary lives, in addition to being the truth of skepticism. Acknowledging this consequence of skepticism, our failure to appreciate situations and perceive importance, is a step toward genuine attention to ordinary life and the details we neglect.

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[22] Cavell, "The Thought of Movies", in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 11.
[23] *Ibid.*, 11.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*

Redefining morality on the basis of *importance* and the structural vulnerability of the human experience may thus help in rethinking the theoretical stakes of care. The notion of care is inseparable from a cluster of terms, a language game: attention, concern, importance, meaning, mattering. In response to the “original position” Rawls describes, this kind of realism would tend to make the “original condition” (Nel Noddings) of vulnerability the anchor point of moral and political thought. The notion of care points to a specific blindness in contemporary moral and political thought: blindness to the conditions of its own development within the human form of life.

The ethics of care gives a concrete account of this blindness or deafness in its ambition to valorize an ignored, unexpressed dimension of experience. The history of feminism begins precisely with the experience of inexpressiveness; John Stuart Mill was concerned with situations in which one does not have a voice for making oneself understood because one has lost contact with one’s own experience.

Cavell is clearly sensitive to the feminist tone of Mill’s sentence:

> Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature?[26]

This description captures all situations of loss of experience, language, and concepts altogether (it can motivate a desire to come out of this situation of loss of voice, to take back possession of one’s ordinary language, and to find a world that would be the adequate context for it.) To regain our contact with experience and to find a voice for its expression: this is the definition of an ordinary ethics. Gilligan writes that a “restructuring of moral perception” should allow for “changing the meaning of moral language, and thus the definition of moral conflict and moral action,”[27] but also for an undistorted vision of care, one in which care would not be the disappearance or diminution of the self. Care, understood as attention and perception, is to be distinguished from a sort of suffocation of the self by pure affect or devotion. It confronts us with our own inabilities and inattentions but also, and above all, shows us how these inattentions are then translated into theory.

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[26] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 6.

[27] Gilligan, “Moral Orientation and Development,” 43.

What is at stake in the ethics of care is inseparably ethical and epistemological: it seeks to bring to light the connection between our lack of attention to neglected realities and the lack of theorization of these social realities, rendered invisible, and our blindness to what makes ordinary life possible (e.g. what makes us ordinary). It is also a perfectionist ethics. To regain our contact with experience and to find a voice for its expression: this is the first aim, inseparably perfectionist and political, of ethics.

It remains to articulate this subjective expression with the attention to the particular that is also at the heart of *care*, and thereby to define a *knowledge through care*. The moral knowledge that literature or cinema give us, through an education of our sensibility (sensitivity), cannot be translated into arguments, but *is* nonetheless knowledge—from here, the ambiguity of Martha C. Nussbaum's title, *Love's Knowledge*,[28] comes: not the knowledge of a general object, love, but the particular knowledge that a perception sharpened by love, or a sharpened perception of love, gives us.

The idea of an ethics formulated *in a different voice* and expressed in a female voice is thus a perfectionist point. In this conception of ethics, morality is not founded on universal principles but rather starts from experiences of everyday life and self-reliance conceived as trust in your experience. This definition of ethics is a paradigm shift–it is deeply connected to attention to, and repossession of, the self through ordinary language, and it transforms the notion of ethics, enhancing the question of human vulnerability and our responsiveness and responsibility.

This defines the link between experience and trust in feminism: it is necessary to educate one's experience in order to trust it. The trust in the self is defined by the ordinary and expressive authority one has over one's experience: "Without this trust in one's experience, expressed as a willingness to find words for it, [...] one is without authority in one's own experience."[29] The trust consists of discovering in oneself the capacity to actually have an experience, to experience what one knows or what one believes one knows, and to express and describe her ordinary experience.

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[28] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

4. Care as a Politics of the Ordinary

The ethics of care, which opens ethics to ordinary voices in their diversity, constitutes a criticism of dominant understanding of ethics, by placing vulnerability at the heart of morality. It joins up with "Wittgensteinian" ethics,[30] and with ecofeminism and disability studies, which connect the vulnerability of the human to a vulnerability of the human form of life. Joan Tronto has suggested that the dyadic and affective conception of care to which Carol Gilligan remains attached is too narrow to allow the ensemble of social activities having to do with attentive care for others to be thought. She holds that the philosophical valorization of care must base itself not so much on a particularistic ethics but rather on an enlargement of the concept of action. This obliges us to give up on one part of the ethics of care, the idea of a specifically feminine ethics. Gilligan's position was indissociably from a gendered ethics: for her, the relationship to self and others as expressed in moral judgment takes opposing directions for men and for women. Tronto, on the other hand, proposes an anthropology of human needs in order to found the social dignity of care: not only do certain of our needs call directly for care, but care defines the (political) space in which listening to needs becomes possible, as a veritable, non-affectivist attention to others. Reflection on care seems to set a feminine and a masculine conception of ethics against one another, the first being defined by attention, care for the other, responsibility, and the connections we have to an ensemble of persons; the second by justice and autonomy. There is no need to emphasize the difficulty in contrasting a feminine ethics and a masculine ethics in such terms, opposing care and justice (for who doesn't love justice?), and the risk one would run of reproducing the very prejudices that the ethics of care as a feminist ethics was aimed at combating. One can, as Tronto does, integrate care into a general ethical, social, and political approach which would not be reserved for women, but would be an aspiration for all, and would thus allow for an amelioration of the concept of justice. Or one can, as others such as Nussbaum, Diamond, Gilligan herself have suggested, redefine care and justice together by redefining ethics on the basis of moral perception, something that has to do with a special expressivity of women.

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[29] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 19.

[30] See Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); Alice Crary (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); and Kittay and Feder, *The Subject of Care*.

Are these options incompatible? Is the kind of new attention that care forces upon us to be separated from women's point of view and from the fact that women's voices have been deadened? It is only in passing from ethics to politics that ethics of care can be given their critical power. By calling for a society in which caregivers would have a voice and relevance, and in which the tasks of care would not be structurally invisible or inconspicuous, they bring to light the difficulty of thinking these social realities:

> Recognizing the importance of care would thus allow us to revalue the contributions made to human societies by the outcasts, by women, by the humble people who work everyday. Once we commit ourselves to remap the world so that their contributions count, then we are able to change the world.[31]

As Tronto puts it, the valorization of care passes through *politicization* and voice. Truly carrying out the ethics of care would imply both including practices linked to care in the agenda of democratic reflection and empowering those concerned—care givers and receivers. The recognition of the theoretical pertinence of ethics of care necessarily passes through a practical revalorization of activities linked to care and a concomitant modification of intellectual and political agendas, including extending citizenship to those who are bound by relations of care. There can be no ethics of care, then, without politics: in their political articulation, dominant liberal (masculine) ethics, as well as some feminist philosophy and ethics, may be the product and expression of a social practice that devalorizes the attitude and work of care.

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[31] Tronto, *Un monde vulnérable. Por une politique de care* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 17.

> The world of care, needless to say, has generally been ignored by social and political theorists. The world of care, needless to say, is often inhabited more thoroughly by women, people of lower class and caste status, working people, and other disregarded ethnic, religious, linguistic groups. They are the people most often excluded by politics. Even to bold thinkers who wanted to support the claims for women greater public roles, such as Simone de Beauvoir, the vilification of the "immanent" life continued.[32]

So the ethics of care is a subversion of intellectual and ethical hierarchies. The perspective of care then leads us to explore the ways in which we—in practice and in theory—treat the demarcation between the spheres of personal relations (familial relations, as well as love, friendship) and the so-called "impersonal" spheres of public relations, with, of course, a hierarchy involved.

> The traditional association of caring with women rested on a social order that excluded women from many parts (or all) of the public sphere. Women (and for that matter slaves, servants, and often working-class people) as well as care activities were relegated outside of public life. One of the great accomplishments of the second wave of feminism was to break the caste barriers that excluded women from the public sphere.[33]

Again, the center of gravity of ethics is shifted from the "just" to the "important," and again this is done by destroying what seemed to be important. OLP can help us to go beyond the affective notion of care and, in keeping with the line of thought represented by Das, to engage in reconceiving ethics not on the basis of grand principles, but rather on the basis of the fundamental needs of humans and women. This ethical move is linked to the definition, developed by Diamond, of ethical competence in

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32. Tronto, *Un monde vulnérable*, 15.

33. Tronto, "Care as the Work of Citizens: A Modest Proposal," in *Women and Citizenship*, ed. Marilyn Friedman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 130.

terms of a refined and active perception, which certainly has not been followed out in all its feminist consequences, and in particular the analysis it provides of differences and inequalities between women (some of which are created by care networks and relations). What is at stake in ethics of care ends up epistemological by becoming political: ethics of care seek to highlight the connection between our lack of attention to neglected realities and the lack of theorization of these social realities rendered "invisible," and in this way to understand why ethical, and often philosophical and political, thought is blind to certain ordinary realities, those connected with the domain of the private, the domestic, and the female.

Thus, we find the continuation of the project of OLP, and the definition of the ordinary, supplied by Wittgenstein: "What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings […] observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes."[34]

> Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems to destroy everything interesting, all that is great and important? What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards [*Luftgebäude*].[35]

The ethics of care does not aim at installing pity, compassion, solicitude, and benevolence as subsidiary values that would soften the hardness of an impartial conception of justice based on the primacy of rights attributed to autonomous, rational individuals. The ethics of care makes it obvious that we depend on others in a world that values autonomy highly in both theory and practice. It even demonstrates that the most autonomous people are actually the most dependent, because of all the help and support they get. It does not aim to enlist compassion and solicitude. Its goal is the acknowledgment of a whole part of life that is systematically ignored in political discourse and moral philosophy. Care is just what makes ordinary form of life possible. Tronto and Fisher, in the definition quoted earlier, suggest that care should be defined at the most general level as a generic activity including all that we do in order to perpetuate and repair our "world," so that we can live in it as well as it possible. "This

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[34] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* rev. 4th edn., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §415.
[35] *Ibid.*, §118.

‘world’ includes our bodies, our environment, and ourselves.” Ethics, then, is not about how to live better or more virtuous or rational lives, but simply how anyone can live an ordinary life in this world; it is about achieving the ordinary and recovering the human. This becomes more important in situations of disaster and total vulnerability and risk—contexts of ordinary life in which humans’ needs, interests, and fragilities are completely exposed and threatened.

These are also situations in which the *value* of human life—or the reality of bare life, as Agamben calls it—appears in a new light:

> *The world is our home.* Human life, we must assume in the first place, is somewhat more important than anything else in human life, except, possibly, what happens to it. It deserves attention, and a seriousness of attention, commensurate with its importance. And since every possibility human life holds, or may be deprived of, of value, of wholeness, of richness, of joy, of dignity, depends all but entirely upon circumstances, the circumstances are proportionately worthy of the serious attention of anyone who dares to think of himself as a civilized human being. A civilization which for any reason puts a human life at a disadvantage; or a civilization which can exist only by putting human life at a disadvantage; is worthy neither of the name nor of continuance. And a human being whose life is nurtured in an advantage which has accrued from the disadvantage of other human beings, and who prefers that this should remain as it is, is a human being by definition only, having much more in common with the bedbug, the tapeworm, the cancer, and the scavengers of the deep sea.[36]

Standard ethics and political analysis, when they deal with the social contract, do not enquire into the society in question is made sustainable—thus carefully expelling out of ethics the world of care, and more generally speaking, all those actions that make ordinary social and moral relations possible and living. Ignoring the issue of care in ethics and politics amounts to ignoring the origin of what allows a moral society to exist and endure.

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36. James Agee, *Cotton Tenants: Three Families* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 34

This can help us see ethics of care not as "essentialist" but rather as an ethics that gives expression to humans who are undervalued because they perform unnoticed, invisible tasks. When Diamond affirms, in her introduction to *The Realistic Spirit* (1991, 23-24), that moral philosophy has largely become "stupid and insensitive," she means that it has become insensitive to the very humanity of moral questioning, to ordinary moral life bound up with the vulnerable other.

The ethics of care merges with a sensitivity to words and the "realistic spirit" by drawing our attention to the place of ordinary words in the weave and details of our lives, and our relation to/distance from our words. This connection between care and what counts has been brought out by Harry Frankfurt in *The Importance of What We Care About*,[37] and by Cavell with respect to film criticism:

> The moral I draw is this: the question what becomes of objects when they are filmed and screened has only one source of data for its answer, namely the appearance and significance of just these objects and people that are in fact to be found in the succession of films, or passages of films, that matter to us. To express their appearances, and define those significances, and articulate the nature of this mattering, are acts that help to constitute what we might call film criticism.[38]

Importance lies in details, and this particularism of attention to detail is another connection between OLP and care. Feminist moral philosophy displaces its very field of study, its target, from general concepts to the examination of particular visions, individuals' "configurations" of thought—forms of life, textures of being.

> We cannot see the moral interest of literature unless we recognize gestures, manners, habits, turns of speech, turns of thought, styles of face as morally expressive. The intelligent description of such things is part of the intelligent, the sharp-eyed, description of life, of what matters, makes differences, in human lives.[39]

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37. Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care about: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
38. Cavell, "What Becomes of Things on Film," in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 183.
39. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, 375.

6. Cavell and "What It Is to Be a Woman"

I want to insist on Cavell's contribution to the question of what it is to be a woman, with his elaboration of the concepts of expression and voice, concepts which are, as I have tried to demonstrate, most crucial to Cavell's OLP. Many commentators have noted Cavell's relevance, especially his classic work on film—Hollywood remarriage comedies and melodrama—to gender issues and what he calls the history of women. This relevance is based on a conception of voice and expression, and on a conception of language connected to ordinary use and forms of life, and ultimately to the essential vulnerability of meaning and expression—the constant threat of inexpressiveness. This is obvious when one considers the place Cavell gives to Hollywood film in the creation of a woman, and the emergence of a generation of women: the films studied in *Pursuits of Happiness* were written, shot and presented to the public at a historical moment (the 30s-40s) when, after great figures and notable gains culminating in the winning of the vote for women in 1920, it became obvious that women needed—still need—"more than rights" (as Annette Baier says, more than justice): equality of voice, which comes through fuller expression: that is, conversational equality, speech equality in general. The women/actresses in these films (e.g., Katharine Hepburn, Irene Dunne, Barbara Stanwyck) represent a generation of women capable of giving expression to these claims.[40]

Film democratizes the knowledge of the ordinary:

> Any of the arts will be drawn to this knowledge, this perception of the poetry of the ordinary, but film democratizes the knowledge, hence at once blesses and curses us with it. It says that the perception of poetry is open to all, regardless as it were of birth or talent, as the ability is to hold a camera on a subject, so that a failure so to perceive, to persist in missing the subject, which may amount to missing the evanescence of the subject, is ascribable only to ourselves, to failures of our character; as if to fail to guess the unseen from the seen, to fail to trace the implications of things—that is, to fail the perception

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[40] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness,* 18.

> that that there *is* something to be guessed and traced, right or wrong—requires that we persistently coarsen and stupefy ourselves.[41]

The question of attention to the others' style and textures brings us back to our starting point, the question of women's voice and our own capacity to pay attention to it.

It also shows how Cavell's writing on film can *matter*, not just for philosophy, ethics, anthropology, art and film criticism, but even—at least for now in France—for actual movie directing and writing, especially for a kind of film that displays, empowers, and legitimizes women's voices, expressions, and subjectivities. The fact that it is Cavell's work on melodrama and the Unknown Woman that provides such creative power for present filmmaking, as well as eliciting an increasingly strong response from feminist thought (perhaps more than from film studies), may be a further argument in favor of Cavell's remarkable relevance, and importance, for women's studies.

We can connect this to the permanent concern, in OLP, with felicitous and infelicitous expression and the vulnerability of speech. Cavell shows how film is the privileged medium for vulnerability and exposure, but also for empowerment and assertion—the expressiveness of women as sought by Gilligan. There can be no "care" without the expression of everyone's voice: here lies the *importance* of the different voice.

> Bringing women's voices into what was then called the human conversation, would change the voice of that conversation by giving voice to aspects of human experience that were for the most unspoken or unseen.[42]

Attention to voice is a token of the permanent concern, in Cavell's work, with felicitous and infelicitous expression, and the vulnerability of speech, what he retraces, following the Austinian attention to the failures of language, as a passivity of expression. We have seen how film is the privileged medium for its capacity to put before us vulnerability and exposure, and the specific expressiveness of women. Thus inexpressiveness becomes a gendered matter, something Cavell has studied thoroughly in his work on film. I have stressed Cavell's relevance for the discovery of women's voice in his work on film—on Hollywood remarriage comedy, and melodrama—his attention to women's expressiveness and capacity to hold, the high ground in a conversation, or even a fight (see *Philadelphia Story*). This relevance is grounded on a conception of voice, expression, and what Cavell's work describes as the threat/desire of inexpressiveness.

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[41] Cavell, *Themes Out of School,* 14.

[42] Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Looking Back to Look Forward," unpublished lecture, 2010.

> An essential dimension of Bette Davis's power is its invitation to, and representation of, camp; an arrogation of the rights of banality and affectation and display, of the dangerous wish for perfect personal expressiveness. The wish, in the great stars, is a function not of their beauty, but of their power of privacy, of a knowing unknownness.[43]

Cavell adds, on a more political note, that "It is a democratic claim for personal freedom," "something Davis shares with the greatest of the histrionic romantic stars". Histrionism is something that is not often claimed by women, and can be claimed only through an expression of privacy. So to understand the human nature of expression would be to understand the possibility of unknownness, privacy, neither as a hidden "thing," but as the privileged object of exposure. In melodrama, the ways female characters/actresses project moral values and textures perceptible on the perfectionist background of these Hollywood classical movies, and make themselves heard "in a different voice", in a different vision of *what matters*.

Cavell demonstrates film's capacity to show us the expressiveness of women. This account of meaning and expression deepens Wittgenstein's and Austin's attention to the powers and failures of language. Cavell's relevance to the discovery of women's voice, his attention to women's expressiveness and capacity to hold the high ground in a conversation or a fight, is based on a conception of voice and on what he describes as the threat of/desire for inexpressiveness—the fear of inexpressiveness, versus the terror of expressiveness, of total exposure (perceptible in the aria of madness in the melodrama, *Gaslight*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*)—the polarization of inexpressiveness into two states of voicelessness. This is the concrete and real meaning of the fantasy of private language criticized in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, and of what Cavell’s *Claim of Reason* as defined as Skepticism.

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[43] Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 128.

From Private to Public [a review essay of Andrew Norris's *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell*]

AMIR KHAN

The most impressive thing about Andrew Norris' book is its unflinching and unequivocal ease in bringing us to what I have elsewhere called the "Cavellian precipice" through ordinary language philosophy and "external world" skepticism exclusively. That is, this book has a remarkable and fluid grasp of Cavell's contribution to formal philosophical thought, which literary sorts like myself often eschew explaining precisely because the path to explaining skepticism, for us, *feels* far more pregnant and urgent when discussing objects of pleasure, namely film and literature.

Furthermore, to those not well-versed in upper level graduate training in and around the formal parameters of academic philosophy (and even amongst some who are), this book lays out very clearly Cavell's formal achievements within his chosen discipline. By the end of the second chapter, Norris has sealed Cavell's reputation as a post-Kantian philosopher of the highest magnitude, second perhaps only to Wittgenstein.

How does the book do this? First by largely forgoing any discussion of Cavell's work on literature and film to focus instead on Cavell's well-wrought treatment of an intellectual trope called *skepticism*—and patently not of the "other-minds" variety, which literary admirers of Cavell are perhaps primed to understand is of far *more* importance because surely Cavell's lessons have more to do with our treatment and reception of other *people* than other *things*. This is something philosophers just don't get.

But Andrew Norris does; and the Cavellian path he treads to get to the philosopher's denial of the other comes via Cavell's heroes of philosophy first and foremost. Austin, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are Cavell's true luminaries here, and less so Cukor, Capra, or Coleridge. Thoreau and Emerson also figure, but as philosophers above all—in line, surely, with what Cavell wants of both Thoreau and Emerson.

So what does it mean to be "post-Kantian" (85) exactly? The shift in thinking is away from an understanding of the existence of the external world as a matter of *knowledge*—as something one can know with certainty. To those familiar with Cavell's work, this sounds banally obvious. Let us bypass the idea that we cannot know for certain that the external world exists (through all manner of intellectual parables that many of us are familiar with—the simplest being that when we "see" a chair, we do not see all of it, i.e. not the back of it, hence we cannot be sure that the chair really exists in its totality). The Kantian knee-jerk concession is indeed to accept that human beings are restricted to an understanding of a world of appearances (the phenomenal world). The noumenal world, the "world-in-itself" is beyond our grasp. Surely this proposition *is* something we can know and assert with certainty—the beginnings, say, of a metaphysics. Hence, we can say with confidence: "The world does not exist," or, "We have no way of knowing that the world exists." Yet the reason even these utterances fail is because of the appeal to knowledge, as in "we have no way of *knowing*." Why ought the world's existence (or non-existence) to be a matter of knowing or knowledge at all? This is the primary philosophical mistake that characterizes the Kantian philosopher. Wittgenstein's (and through him Cavell's) achievement is the ability to understand that the world's existence cannot be construed as a matter of knowledge in either case. We cannot *know* that the world exists; equally, we cannot *know* that the world does not exist.

So does the world exist or doesn't it? This sounds like some cruel philosopher's joke, but the ability to bring this intuition to bear is what marks the Wittgensteinian event in Western letters. To borrow a quotation from Norris borrowing from Cavell:

> Wittgenstein's originality lies in having developed modes of criticism that are not moralistic, that is, that do not leave the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him, and which proceed not by trying to argue a given

> statement false or wrong, but by showing that the person making an assertion does not really know what he means, has not really said what he wished. (Cavell qtd. in 44)

Norris adds that "Cavell was one of the first to characterize Wittgenstein as a post-Kantian philosopher, one who seeks to demonstrate the impossibility of metaphysics while shedding light upon our temptation to it" (85).

Thus, to be "post-Kantian" is to resist turning the problem of the existence of the world into a problem of knowledge, which means we understand a) that language cannot describe the world "as it really is," but also, b) that language describes *all there is* that comprises the external world, necessarily real.

Let's take each of these propositions in kind. The difference is in criteria, Austinian versus Wittgensteinian. First, Austin. Here is some of Norris's fine commentary of Austin's importance through a Cavellian lens:

> Austin speaks of "the wile of the metaphysician," which he says consists in asking, "Is it a real table?" without specifying what may be wrong with it, 'so that I feel at a loss 'how to prove' it is a real one" . . . "Will some gentleman kindly satisfy himself that this is a perfectly ordinary hat?" We are left "balled and uneasy: sheepishly we agree that it seems all right, while conscious that we have not the least idea what to guard against." (54)

If someone says to you, "Is this table/hat real?", you could only suspect, at best, that the table/hat is counterfeit somehow, but you would have no way of conceiving how. Your only response would be: "What do you mean?", meaning, in what way could this table/hat possibly be fake? But the skeptic does not mean, "Is this table/hat fake?"; the skeptic means, "Does this table/hat exist?" and hence, "Does the world exist?"

Yet no one, in the everyday use of language, would even "go there," or take the skeptic to mean what he does. Yet the skeptic takes a moralistic stance—in a sense chiding his or her interlocutor for not knowing or questioning whether the world at large exists as if this is the interlocutor's philosophical duty to do. This is a Kantian position of strength where the skeptic has taken the inability of someone to answer the question ("Does this table exist?") as "proof" that one cannot *know* that the world exists.

> The philosopher [i.e. skeptic] might take himself to be in search of contact with the one real world, but Austin suggests that there is no such world . . . Conversely, if the order of the world fell apart in the manner the skeptic imagines it might, we would not conclude that our claims about it were wrong; we simply wouldn't know what to say. (54)

I'll say here as an aside that Cavell very much believes in philosophy as the site of self-examination, of examining what we in everyday speech tend to gloss over or repress. So isn't the charge to ask whether we know that this table, and hence the world, exists, however "moralistic" in tenor, *in line* with the philosophical project of self-examination?

According to Cavell, it isn't. The skeptic's moralistic imperative to chide his or her interlocutor is cover for something the skeptic him or herself does not exactly know but must *accept*: that both the table and the world do in fact exist; but lacking definitive knowledge, *how* can the skeptic accept this? Moreover, *why* would the skeptic *not want* to accept the existence of the table and/or world?

As Norris skillfully makes clear, the *how* is via Heidegger and Dasein. The *why* (i.e. why not want, or why unable to accept?) is Cavell's indelible contribution to Western philosophy.

> [T]he world doesn't generate philosophical questions for Austin; rather, the worldly Austin criticizes philosophy. Hence, what generates philosophical questions is, by and large, not his concern. Austin does not examine how the philosophers whom he attacks for abusing ordinary language come to speak the way they do—and therefore does not have an adequate account for why his own philosophical correction is necessary. (55)

As noted earlier, Wittgenstein's originality and contribution to philosophy is in his ability to make both the ridiculousness of the philosopher's/metaphysician's query palpable but simultaneously, not to deny that he himself is tempted to ask these questions in such a vein. That is, Wittgenstein is tempted to take language on holiday—to mean when he asks, "Does this table exist?", in effect, "Does the world exist?" But armed only with language that cannot possibly be taken to mean what he wants it to mean, he has, perhaps, hit bedrock. Wittgenstein, like Austin, understands that there is no good reason his interlocutor *ought to* follow his query where he (Wittgenstein) wants it to go. We are at an impasse. Wittgenstein is not inclined to berate his interlocutor from a position of knowledge by fastening onto the idea that the world is beyond our grasp because to presuppose that the world does not exist is to deny that by using language, we are creating a world. But this is precisely the problem. Is language something we are uttering in absentia? Is the world we create via language, like the Matrix, merely a dream world? Why can't Wittgenstein commit to *this*? Why, rather, are he and Cavell suspicious of a metaphysics that *means* to ask precisely this question, however extraordinary?

Construing the problem of the existence of the external world as a problem of knowledge is to impose subject and predicate onto the world—to assume a knowing 'I' distinct from its object of inquiry. But Norris paraphrasing Heidegger reminds us that to question Dasein in this way "is to deny *Da-sein* as such" (68). The picture of the world as accessible only through a single static frame removes the individual from both *being-in* the world and *being in time*, which are two incontestable facts of existence.

> [T]he skeptic's unseen and unseeable "back half" of the object picks out neither a part of the object that is already distinguished from the rest of the object prior to the skeptic's encounter with it, nor a part of the object that will be treated differently from the rest of the object outside of that encounter—as, say, the back of a chair is seen and treated differently from the armrest. In contrast to the back of the chair, the only "back half" that will serve the skeptic's purpose is one that moves with him, as if it were the shadow cast by the object bathed in the light of his eyes [...]. Cavell adds that the [metaphysician] is a spectator who tries to capture in a *single static moment* the object before him. He does not change his relation to the object (in a way that would allow for a

> perception of the passage of time) by walking around the object, observing and appraising it from different perspectives. If he did, the "back half" that he grudgingly comes to acknowledge eludes him would itself constantly be in flux, disappearing and reappearing. (Norris's emphasis 63-64)

Like Austin, Heidegger is also equally uninterested in what prompts us to pose questions about the external world at the expense of Dasein. To do so is simply in error. Yet to Cavell, the temptation to construe the problem of the existence of the external world as a problem of knowledge is not an intellectual stance that can be dismissed but must be "*worked through*" (Norris's emphasis 67).

> For Cavell, [the skeptic's motivation] is an idea, rather a fantasy, of self-effacement: "In philosophizing we come to be dissatisfied with answers which depend on our meaning something by an expression, as though what we meant by it were more or less arbitrary. . . . It is as though we try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our claiming something to be so." "I must empty out my contribution to words, so that language itself, as if beyond me, exclusively takes over the responsibility for meaning." This is an absolutely central claim of Cavell's, and it should be seen as a much more nuanced account of the suicide to which Heidegger refers. (Cavell qtd. in 69)

Cavell is uncompromising in this regard—to the point not exactly of *forwarding* a philosophy of suicide, but an austere understanding of the metaphysician's quest to remove him/herself from the scene of inquiry (by isolating an atemporal object as clear and distinct from the perceiving and equally atemporal "I"). *For Cavell, true acknowledgment comes via extreme metaphysical despair and feelings of suicide.*

> [W]here Austin treats this as an oversight characteristic of sloppy work that can be dismissed as such, Cavell treats it as a fantasy expressive of "the human drive to transcend itself, make itself inhuman," which is cast both as being incapable of bearing the weight of its responsibilities, its intelligibility, its own self-expression, and of not needing to do so. (Cavell qtd. in 69)

Cavell insists that the lesson of skepticism is in accepting the burden of language to create the world and to create forms of life (thus making the world habitable) but only *after* working through the temptation to “predicate” (79) the world, to study it and the problem of existence as a problem of knowledge. Yet the *acceptance* of the world cannot refute the skeptic, does not establish that the world does exist—or rather, cannot establish its existence on any type of foundation we could call knowledge (i.e. via predication, where the world is subject to external examination or criteria beyond the perceiving subject). In this way, we remain apart from the world; the principal skeptical lesson Cavell would forward is the truth of separateness and “externality” (85). We may be in and of the world; we may exist in being, and being-in-time; Heidegger may have shown the world to be habitable. But since we are not of “divine intellect” (84), we do not create the world as such; indeed, we *receive* it; our sense perceptions are finite. To accept “human finitude” (84) is to accept that the world precedes our existence, that we *receive and respond* to objects and others who remain external to us (we live our skepticism everyday). Such receptivity in fact *tempts us* into believing that the universe *surely* existed before our arrival, before our perception of it. Hence tempts us into believing an objective universe is real beyond our sense perception of it. But how to access it?

Yet to ask how in this way is precisely the metaphysician’s trick because there is no world-in-itself to access. The reason we are not only tempted but willing to entertain metaphysics at all is because we want to deny that we are indeed *of this world in a moral and ethical way*—that is, *responsible* for its being. And the reason *this* is so difficult to accept, the reason we hide from and disown this knowledge is because if there is no “objective” basis to our understanding of the world—i.e., no objective criteria attesting to why language functions at all, then language operates more fundamentally as a Wittgensteinian form-of-life. Language is characteristic not of our utterances obediently (objectively) expressing our wills and desires, but perhaps more poignantly, our always already compromised wills and desires as members of a human community. That is, for language and hence the world *to work, to exist, to be,* requires mutual attunement to one another that cannot be ratified against things in the external world.

The concept of a “King” in chess only signifies what it does if we are in attunement not only about the individual chess piece, but about the makeup of the entire chessboard; in this way, for a single piece to *exist* requires attunement on the rules and conventions of an entire game, here metonymic for a “form of life.” Language and the world “work” or “carry on” by no more than the agreements, conventions and forms of life that we commit to in too many ways to count or establish at the outset. The stakes may be rather small, the path to attunement rather easy for something like chess (a game), but when we start examining the nature and the effectiveness of our utterances governing our collective lives together (for example, what constitutes pain, or forgiveness), we are necessarily moving toward the political and easy answers are not so forthcoming.

In this way, that language works at all is an astonishing miracle, one that we must needs continually remind ourselves of especially in face of the ever present possibility that language will break down, that we will fall out of attunement with one another, which means we are always able to reach a point where even our compromised wills and desires to one another become incommunicable. This picture of language is one of frightening contingency which readily exposes our *vulnerability*. For reasons perhaps of self-preservation, we avoid acknowledging or accepting that our attunements to one another, our ability to speak the world and to each other, rest on everyday and ordinary acts of both exposure and acknowledgment. Lacking interlocutors willing either to expose themselves or acknowledge others, the world indeed as we know it breaks down and we fall into “intellectual tragedy” (81) where I am left feeling that chaos, violence, and suffering are the result of being unable to properly bear “responsibility for what I say, and how I say it” (80). This knowledge of skepticism and human finitude (in Cavellian register) is unbearable. Tragedy in the strongest sense is the dramatic rendering of this breakdown in language, this loss of attunement.

But can *speaking for oneself*, meaning what one says to the strongest extent possible, examining how or in what ways we *are* attuned to one another (via either formal Austinian query, or under more organic Wittgensteinian parameters, or both) really *prevent* such breakdown? This is the key question that Norris seeks to tackle in the remaining chapters of his book. For Norris, only by posing this question in this way can Cavell's philosophy be mined for its political significance.

Chapter 3 acts as an effective bridge. That is, thus far, skepticism is a problem that plagues the individual. In what way does it affect the polis, or a political community? If skepticism can ultimately be construed as an individual's quest to examine one's speech to mean what one says, how does the nature of such inquiry cross the Rubicon towards collective expression, or meaning what one says *altogether*? The answer, at least to me, is not at all obvious though Norris makes it clear that skepticism's route to shared political expression comes via Rousseau's social contract. Key to Cavell's reprise of Rousseau is not that such a contract is discoverable on the barks of trees, but "to understand ourselves as possessing a general will" (106) at all. Here is precisely where every word of Cavell's fellow Americans chagrins him—i.e., in their failure to understand the idea of what might constitute a general will in the first place.

> On Cavell's account, American political culture is (today as then) characterized by a false understanding of its *own* values, values such as individuality, publicity, community, freedom, and deliberation. [Cavell] finds an important corrective to this in the Rousseauian tradition, a tradition that for him culminates with the Romanticism of the American transcendentalists. The American neglect of the transcendentalists is in turn of a piece with American culture's misunderstanding of itself, its failure to realize itself. (Norris's emphasis 100-101)

Americans have a false understanding of freedom, i.e., *individuals doing what they like* as constitutive of a successfully implemented social contract, where no imposition of collective values impinges on an individual's right to pursue his/her worldly desires. In mainstream American parlance, collective interests are given political voice via "factions," or political interest groups (i.e., lobbies); a minimal social contract seeks to mediate amongst a plethora of competing interests. The general will is forged not out of communal agreement and discussion, but cut-throat competition. Norris astutely highlights a truncated version of Madison's *Federalist 10*, which seems to endorse this internecine manner of achieving the general will. Madison defines a "faction as ‘a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion or interest’” (Madison qtd. in 103). Yet for positivistic political scientists who simply (objectively) take the existence of such factions for granted, they are liable to conveniently leave out the remainder of the definition, which reads “adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community” (Madison qtd. in 103). That is, for positivist economists and commentators like “[Joseph] Shumpeter, [David] Truman, [Friedrich] Hayek, and [Milton] Friedman” (137), the philosophical question of what constitutes the “general will” is never addressed. All citizens have the right and freedom to pursue their own impulsive passions. Yet this short-sightedness does not prevent collective tyranny and domination. Rather, the general will expressed as an aggregate of individual freedoms *exacerbates* brute force and domination. In sotto voce, Cavell and even Norris’s picture of America is not of a functional democratic polis, but (then as now) of a tyrannical and even suicidal regime. In short, the hostility towards any social goal of transforming desire (expressed with particular viciousness by the “classical Liberals” (103)) is itself a form of tyranny. “On their account, the impartiality of science is matched by that of the market, which like science tames and controls the irrationality of desire without in any way transforming it” (104). Yet it is precisely the transformation of oneself and one’s desires that constitutes the moral life and *true freedom* within the polis. To preclude the possibility of such transformation is a fundamental misunderstanding of “freedom” and a reversal of what the general will should be, turning America monstrous.

> Lacking any ability to structure his life and his commitments [i.e. his desires], the childlike democrat has freedom without being able to develop the character that might allow him to use and order it. In Socrates’s typological history of regimes, this utter lack of structure in the end leads to a demand for order *of any sort*, and therefore to tyranny, which supplies just that. In a deeper sense, tyranny is the truth of this mode of democratic freedom, as it is only the tyrant who can truly indulge each of his passing fancies. (Norris’s emphasis 107)

In the classical liberal conception, what is meted out as the general will is the agglomeration of “little tyrants,” those who think nothing of the general welfare and only of their passing fancies. Moreover, such tyranny is socially contagious as one’s ability to satisfy one’s desires becomes a mark of “success” to be mimicked:

> It is a measure of Rousseau’s genius as a social critic that he perceives that, given our need for the support and approval of others in a modern society of public display and conversation, what we take to be our immediate desires are equally likely to express our ideas of what those around us want and expect—desires that are, in a bitter irony, themselves subject to the same *alienation*. Modern society is a hall of mirrors in which each looks to the others to tell him what he wants and who he is. (My emphasis 108)

What Rousseau is describing is a political state-of-affairs that pre-empts what Thoreau and Emerson will respectively call “quiet desperation” and “silent melancholy,” and Norris spends his last two chapters detailing the American transcendentalist response to this modernist alienation. And what Norris will try to show explicitly through Cavell is that the nature of both Thoreau and Emerson’s responses, however seemingly rooted in aesthetic individualism, is a challenge and provocation that extends to the polis, hence is the beginning of an indigenous American philosophy that has been largely ignored—certainly by America’s mainstream political philosophers.

> Cavell might make the claims he does when we consider the kind of danger posed to democracy by alienation, and the extent to which Emerson and Thoreau are concerned with that danger [...]. Only in democracy, where the people rule, are the people as a whole allowed and indeed called upon to actively participate in public life [...]. [T]his [...] makes Schumpeter’s (and so much of contemporary America’s) “definition” of democracy as the consent of the governed to the process of selection of their “leaders” so astonishing and disturbing. (142-43)

That is, public life in America simply extends over which "leader" will do the most for an individual's interests. Leaders are called upon to corral and tame a plethora of competing desires but, of course, never to provoke or change the desires of their countrymen/women at all. Yet the goal of provocation is not simply to cling to one's conceptions and interests in face of an adversary, but to pose them in public to see if one's interests are in any way compatible with what the general will might be. If not, perhaps one can be made to alter or change one's individual's interests for the sake of the greater good. Yet the hope for this sort of transformation is wholly lacking in the American political system.

But how is Thoreau's example any better? Retiring to Walden seems less a political act and more a spiritual one. Yet run analogous to the conversation of skepticism and knowledge that makes up the first half of the book, the act of retiring is an initiation of *acceptance* rather than a forwarding of political *knowledge*.

> Understanding Thoreau's efforts [...] as a contribution to philosophy is difficult for many in the world of academic philosophy [...]. The main problem arises, as Cavell notes, from the fact that Thoreau's text lacks what many consider the *sine qua non* of philosophy, *arguments*. (Norris's emphasis 166)

The rational or syllogistic forwarding of more political knowledge is not what America needs; rather, America requires the self-examination necessary to speak for itself, to exit the hall of mirrors, to claim its independence.

> As Cavell puts it, "America's revolution never happened. The colonists fought a war against England all right, and they won it. But it was not a war of independence that was won, because we are not free; nor was even secession the outcome, because we have not departed from the conditions England lives under, either in our literature or in our political and economic lives." (Cavell qtd. in 162)

Thoreau, for instance, tends the bean fields at Walden to discover if doing so has any purchase for him, and what that purchase may be.

> Thoreau depicts himself [...] in his account of raising beans, at the beginning of which he announces that he planted beans for money, and at the end of which he and the reader both recognize money to be the least of his purposes. (162)

Why raise beans at all? The reason is less at issue than the ability to question one's motives in the first place. Thoreau again does not provide an answer but acts as someone who has searched out an answer sincerely, not by actively going through the annals of great books of literature, but by being open and receptive to Walden—that is, by reading Walden in a way and allowing himself to be read by it. These aspirations are as true of *Walden*; the goal of the book is for you to read it and be read by it, which is not an invitation to esoteric philosophical knowledge but to a type of receptive, passive, self-examination. *Walden* is not a philosophical exercise aimed at no one (the solitary working out of a problem of knowledge); rather, *Walden* is aimed at waking up the neighbours.

> [A neighbour] had rated it as a gain coming to America, that here you could get tea, and coffee, and meat every day. But the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as may enable you to do without these, and where the state does not compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such things. (Thoreau qtd. in 162)

Thoreau as philosopher is initiating a post-Kantian move, the sort perhaps more readily taken up by documenting everyday experience rather than via rigorous academic argumentation. The philosophical goal is to prepare the citizenry, one-by-individual-one, to receive knowledge rather than chide them, as the metaphysician so often does, from a Kantian position of perfect knowledge.

Thoreau, then, acts as an Emersonian "exemplar," albeit as one incomplete, always in flux, as one who must remain open to the world not because one is at the moment lacking in knowledge, but because at *any* moment, acknowledgment is only *partial*, always incomplete as human beings are finite. "Just as, in epistemology, one cannot simply let the words speak for themselves (speak for us), so in the moral or practical life one cannot simply strip oneself of one's partiality" (208). The epistemological concerns raised by Norris in the book's first two chapters come to an Emersonian head in the book's last chapter. *We don't like* that language and the world work based on the contingent nature of mutual acts of acknowledgment and acceptance which threaten to break down at any moment. *We don't like* the lack of any objective guarantee behind our passive reception of the world. Similarly, in the moral and practical realm, if we are somehow launched by an exemplar on the path toward an examination of self, *we don't like* that such examination remains always *partial*, that our conversion remains forever incomplete. Yet this is the piece of Emersonian philosophical knowledge that we must *accept*. This is how Cavell forwards Emersonianism as an acutely political project.

> [A] drawback of the Socratic/Emersonian language of wakefulness and conversion [is] that it can encourage [...] the suggestion that the change required is a complete break with life as it is now lived. As in Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, one becomes a different person (Paul) or even kind of being: I who was once blind now see, I who once slept am now awake. But, as we have seen, when Emerson uses this language he quickly adds that a *gradual* revolution is required, one that can never, in principle, be completed. Partiality as such is never overcome, only particular instances of it. (Norris's emphasis 207)

Even attunement amongst our closest friends or dearest relatives are never fully realized, never fully complete; hence we are destined to live our skepticism every day, external and separate from others *in our finitude*. The impossibility at ever achieving perfect attunement with any other mirrors the political impossibility of achieving the general will. We are destined not not to have our say within and amongst the political structures of the day (even within those structures better attuned at articulating a general will than the one we find ourselves in currently), but to be constantly frustrated by the political arrogation of voice occurring amongst the polis. Under perfectionist constraints, in what way will the law of the land *ever* by *my* law?

> The disappointment for which Emersonian perfectionism prepares us is not that in which the vote does not go our way, but one in which the *demos* is not there [...]. For democracy to exist, the demos must be able to recognize themselves, to see themselves in action and speech. But this requires a public mode of speech that is all too rarely manifest [...] [H]ope is needed because who we really are—the *demos* [...] is never who we now are. (221)

The hope for America to see past her sins is perhaps the same hope Cordelia has of her father, admirable and requisite on the one hand, foolhardy and preposterous on the other. And my feeling is that for all the work Norris has done here bringing us squarely to the Cavellian precipice, there is simply no way forward.

Remaining in a state of becoming, of in-between nexts, promises not to unleash an individual's earned spiritual stance of transcendence and acceptance of finitude, the diurnal overcoming of voicelessness through ordinary acts of conversion and change, but more likely individual vituperative backlash. This can also be played out, perhaps is playing itself out, in the aggregate on the world stage. America, that is, routinely *lashes out*. Nietzsche says humans thrive within a given horizon. What Cavell forwards instead is an individual and political project of *perpetually shifting horizons* and it remains to be seen whether this is tenable, either psychologically or politically. Cavell himself both brands America as a nation suited to such a philosophical/political project while granting fully that America has always and continues to deny its sages, has itself never been on the perfectionist (Emersonian) path *ever*. What Cavell's political philosophy then amounts to is an apologia for America's sins guised as perfectionist philosophy. Norris is aware of the danger. In the book's final pages, Norris highlights how things might go awry via an open-ended project of never-ending spiritual deferral:

> [Cavell's approach] raises problems of its own. One of the most obvious and pressing is the potential cost of deferral here. If Cavell's is a perfectionism without perfection, how can it produce anything more than [a] frustrating chase after an horizon that endlessly recedes before us? [...] Cavell's perfectionism may evoke [...] Max Weber's grim account of modern life and science as mo-

> ments in a never-ending process [...] [Cavell] shares Weber's sense that modern life requires that one take one's stand without the kind of traditional or systematic support that Aristotle and contemporary communitarians envision. He seeks to transform Weber's nihilistic progression from within, not by imposing a form upon a section of the series from without, but in transforming the way we go on [...]. Accordingly, Cavell emphasizes more than Weber the threat from within—not the threat from war, economic ruin, political disorientation, or social conflict." (216-17)

We register our disappointment with the world of partial or incomplete justice as is by provoking others as an exemplar ourselves (while being open to provocation), but beyond that, neither Cavell nor his political philosophy, as far as I can tell, provide prescriptions for mounting a political opposition or collective struggle, particularly when faced with the threat of war, economic ruin, and social conflict. I understand that Cavell is not exactly in the business of writing political prescriptions. But as it stands, Cavell's political philosophy, rendered lucidly here by Norris in both its complexity and simplicity, is a political philosophy for the privileged. It provides therapy for those living under the constraints of their own perfectionist aspirations to survive the disappointment of the demos without challenging its wrongheadedness via any type of collective solidarity. I am not so sure such therapy is pressing, say at present, particularly when America's continual disappointment in herself results not (and has *never* resulted) in transcendental soul searching at a collective level but the continual wreaking of havoc the world over. The Cavellian political project is a tall order bordering on the farfetched. Note Norris's somewhat compromised optimism that concludes his impressive monograph: "Democracy, on this account, does not accidentally and unfortunately fall into rigidity, thoughtlessness, and conformity; rather, its essence is to convert these. This is hardly a consoling vision. But it is, I think, a heartening one" (222). Can the forces lobbying democracy toward rigidity and thoughtlessness (which could further be thought of as the Fortune 500 companies and their train of knights and squires constantly frustrating the general will) really be *converted* by the woefully outnumbered Emersonians and transcendentalists out there, and not of the self-help, but of the Cavellian variety? One can, indeed, hope.