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Introduction to the Special Issue

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*Special Issue: Recovering the History of Analytic Philosophy
with Stanley Cavell*

Edited by Edward Guetti and G. Anthony Bruno

Introduction to the Special Issue

Edward Guetti

This special issue of the *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* gathers together some of the rich material that can be produced by situating the work of Stanley Cavell in dialogue with texts, methods, and philosophical problems from the analytic tradition. The central claim of the editors is that this juxtaposition, with patience and care, can lead to the uncovering of unforeseen philosophical affinities between the analytic tradition and what might generally be described as its externalities. The broad interest of this collection is to provoke both a wider re-examination of Cavell's relationship to the analytic tradition as well as a revision of the relation between the tradition of analytic philosophy and distinct traditions of philosophy. Situating Cavell's work, thus—as the transformative relation between the relation of (i) canonical texts and approaches proper to analytic philosophy and (ii) the externalities of this tradition—is both appropriate and made possible because of the wide-ranging philosophical themes and methodological discussions within his texts.

Cavell's work poses continual challenges to superficial conceptions of tightly bounded philosophical traditions and the narrow specializations that are encouraged by such boundaries. These challenges, characteristic of Cavell's texts, might be thought to be direct inheritances from two of Cavell's constant sources: Emerson, thinking here, in particular, of the 1837 "American Scholar" address, and Wittgenstein, too often (and too reductively) thought of as being stubbornly antithetical or even arbitrarily allergic to the practice of philosophy. This is, of course, not to suggest that the value of Cavell's challenges to traditional boundaries is reducible to a dogmatic insistence on the relevance of, say, American Transcendentalism or the indubitable

correctness of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Rather, what is meant is that Cavell, at once, both extends the thought of these (and other) texts ecumenically across disciplinary divisions and, in doing so, transfigures the contemporary philosopher's relationship to what she inherits as traditional philosophy. This volume seeks to pursue this approach by focusing on some of Cavell's themes in relation to the tradition of analytic philosophy. In particular, these papers elaborate extensions of Cavell's positions on skepticism, the normative authority of ordinary language use (encapsulated in consulting "what we say"), the significance of the relation between logical structure and the capacity to understand and use ordinary language, and what might be called a dialectic between the particularity of one's voice (or one's individuated sense of enunciative propriety) and the inclusive first-personal form of expression that seems to be available for reflection as the "we" of "what we say."

Before outlining how the essays collected here engage with these themes, it will be best to provide an overview of Cavell's philosophical *corpus* with the aim of introducing the trajectories of Cavell's thought for the reader who may be new to Cavell. This overview is provided alongside an emphatic *caveat* served to the reader that, due to the wide-ranging content of Cavell's work, it is necessarily a poor substitution.¹ Yet, for all of his wide interdisciplinary engagements—for example, his widely known interpretations of Shakespearean tragedy, modernist artworks, or Hollywood comedies of "remarriage"—Cavell's philosophical writings are represented in this volume as maintaining a steady concern with central themes and concerns of the analytic tradition. Thus, instead of providing a list that is only ordered by the hazards of publication dates, I will seek to provide a more unified motivation that intersects with a description of the essays collected here. I propose to focus on a dispute that emerged

¹For a sympathetic and insightful overview of Cavell's philosophy, see Mulhall (2006).

quite early in Cavell's career as a lens that can capture the ways that Cavell's thinking maintains a steady commitment to questions that stem from this dispute but which also intersect with the governing aspirations of this collection: to illustrate how Cavell's work produces a transformed understanding of the methodological resources and philosophical issues that are inherited within analytic philosophy.

Stanley Cavell (1926–2018) was the Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value at Harvard University. After breaking with his study of music composition at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, Cavell became an ardent convert to the Ordinary Language Philosophy of J. L. Austin.² One of his earliest essays, "Must We Mean What We Say?" (1958), the title of which would later become the title of his first published collection of essays (1969), announces its humble ambition of defending Ordinary Language philosophy—formerly known as Oxford philosophy—against the criticisms of Benson Mates. But it touches upon much more than merely defending the Oxford philosophy against Mates. In this early essay, Cavell not only manifests a commitment to the methodology of Austin (Wittgenstein hardly appears in this 1958 essay) as something like a "natural" position granted by ordinary language and to exhibit how attention to the conditions of this position reveal *critical differences* between Ordinary Language Philosophy and anterior traditional methods,³ but Cavell also commits himself to the value, the point, of examining the differences between Ordinary Language Philosophy and traditional philosophy. (Cavell 1958, 172)

²For Cavell's focus on his biography in relation to his philosophical development, including an account of his transition from music composition to philosophy, see, especially, Cavell (2010, 1996).

³"The profoundest as well as the most superficial questions can be understood only when they have been placed in their natural environment. . . The philosopher is no more magically equipped to remove a question from its natural environment than he is to remove himself from any of the conditions of intelligible discourse. Or, rather, he may remove himself, but his mind will not follow." (Cavell 1958, 205)

Cavell's modest claim provoked criticism from the defenders of the conception of philosophy's proper methods within mid-twentieth century Anglophone philosophy, what might be called the sense of the scientific advancement of methods of analytical philosophy as these developed, in particular, within the context of Cold War academic cultures in the United States and Great Britain.⁴ Notably, Jerry Fodor and Jerrold Katz attacked Cavell's essay in their "The Availability of What We Say" (1963).⁵ One of the points of contention that emerge in their attack is the role of empirical confirmation and the possibility of expert testimony, assembled upon the basis of available data, in reporting on "what we say." Although Cavell never offered a thorough response to Fodor and Katz (apart from occasional mentions in Cavell 1969), the heart of the problem is one that both (i) sticks with Cavell through *The Claim of Reason* (1979) and characterizes his thinking about Emerson and Thoreau (in Cavell 2003, 1972) and (ii) illustrates a central tension and string of related philosophical questions that arise concerning the different methodologies of Ordinary Language Philosophy and traditional analytic or post-analytic philosophy (represented here by Fodor and Katz, but not exclusive to them). Because of the importance I have just described, I will expand on this conflict before merely putting a series of introductory questions before the reader. In elabo-

⁴This is not to suggest that analytic philosophy is an anglophone invention or that it (if it is indeed singular) only developed within the United States and Great Britain; far from it. One need only point to the importance of members of the Vienna Circle for the philosophical development of, say, Quine or Ayer, or the philosophical discussions of empiricism and natural law in nineteenth century German and Viennese scientific circles to be dissuaded from a purely anglophone orientation. One can go further back, still, to a French tradition of positivism in Saint-Simon, Laplace, and Comte for a similar valorization of empirical science over speculative metaphysics. My point is only that the context of Cavell's early philosophical activity was located within these historical academic cultures.

⁵For very useful overviews of this discussion see Hansen (2017) as well as Bates and Cohen (1972).

rating answers to these questions, I will begin then to sketch the ways that the essays that are collected in this volume can be understood to outline responses. It is not my wish that the essays that follow be understood as merely responding to the questions I pose, but rather I only submit that they form a unity upon the basis of the ways that they offer distinct responses and points of attention for answering this early dispute in Cavell's philosophical career.

Fodor and Katz write that

[t]he position Cavell advocates in [his essay "Must We Mean What We Say?"] seems to us . . . to be mistaken in every significant respect and to be pernicious both for an adequate understanding of ordinary language philosophy and for an adequate understanding of ordinary language. (Fodor and Katz 1963, 58)

The heart of their criticism stems from the apparently naive assurance, supposedly assumed by Ordinary Language Philosophers, that native speakers are entitled, *qua* native speakers, to normative authority without appeal to empirical evidence, to be said to authoritatively grasp the contours of ordinary language use simply in virtue of their being native speakers. We might fail to understand this to be a problematic assumption. After all, it is obvious that a native speaker of some natural language, *X*, need not reflect upon conjugating verbs or searching for the names of things in *X* in the same way that someone who has acquired *X* as a second language will rely upon the authority of others, textbooks, or technological assistance in seeking to make herself understood in *X*. We seem to be invited to think of being a native speaker of some natural language as a kind of epistemic entitlement, a claim to a mastery over an impersonal body of knowledge (i.e., a grasp of grammatical rules, evinced in ordinary contexts such as properly asking for a cup of coffee, etc.). What could be problematic about this representation of one's relationship to one's native language?

Restricting myself here to what is appropriate for an introduction, I will only humbly submit the datum that no one is born

with the linguistic expertise that one (later) evinces as an adult. Moreover, it may be submitted without arousing suspicion that every learner of a language does not learn that language in identical social conditions. The understanding that *nativity*, as a category attributable to speakers, could provide a solid and universal framework for investigating and conducting empirical study of the norms or rules of ordinary language already seems to be covering over differential experiences that are encountered along the way of any individual's claim to linguistic mastery. So far, I have not said anything against either Cavell or Fodor and Katz. Fodor and Katz explicitly claim that the kinds of statements that a native speaker may make about her native language(s) need not be necessarily true. One can point here to the various jokes and stereotypes used by native speakers of a language in some (geographical or socio-economic) region about the different patterns of speech or accents that emerge in speakers of that same language but in a different (geographical, socio-economic) region. This point motivates Fodor and Katz to insist upon a certain form of expertise that is embodied in the *technē* of the linguist, the relevance of data, and the corresponding need for an impersonally catalogued assemblage of authoritative grammatical rules or linguistic principles. Yet Cavell resists following Fodor and Katz in representing the human being's relationship to her language as even capable of becoming a question that could be authoritatively resolved entirely through empirical study, in the sense that data or expert testimony alone could confirm or reject particular uses of language.

As I wrote above, Cavell's reasons for refusing this portrayal of language use, mastery, and the availability of empirical verification for "what we say" as a normative standard (i.e., not merely as a description of speech patterns) are constant themes in his philosophical writings. In what follows here, I will first isolate some central questions that must be answered in order to come to a decision regarding this attack on Cavell's work. Such questions, as I am presenting them here, are intended to not only

catch the disagreement that is at the heart of the dispute between Cavell and Fodor and Katz, but is also intended to open onto vistas that have been thematized within analytic philosophy. One possible series of related questions, useful for my introductory purposes here, is the following:

Is it adequate to talk about one's grasp of one's (native) language(s) as a matter of epistemic expertise? How can one possibly explain the evident patterns of normativity that emerge in ordinary language use, patterns which are necessary for the possibility of communication, without positing rules or principles that attain in or as such patterns? Why not think, in principle, that such patterns generate empirical data that can serve as the basis for defeasible claims of theoretical knowledge? Is the character of the relation that attains between a speaker and her language ultimately one that is rooted in measures of knowledge and certainty, one that admits of epistemic expertise? Is such expertise best thought of as the grasp of an impersonal array of rules or principles? What relationship attains between the norms that emerge in any account of linguistic normativity and laws of logical reasoning? If we wish to refuse the epistemic and empirical sourcing of Fodor and Katz's portrayal of linguistic expertise and the normative character of ordinary language use, how would we, in some alternate account, understand the possibility of linguistic community (of which each native speaker of some natural language is a member indexed to some grouping of natural languages)? If not upon empirical rules, how else could we describe the possibility of appealing to an inclusive first-personal understanding of what *we* say? What alternative accounts can be provided for a cogent understanding of the basis of linguistic community, expertise and fluency, or having the capacity to reflect upon phrases or claims which are *representative* of the norms of a group of speakers? Finally, how should the individual understand her relationship to this representative community if not upon the basis of impersonally attained guarantees? Is it even a live possibility to wonder whether one

is truly representing *oneself* within a linguistic community or is this a nonsensical question?

As an introduction to this collection, I am presenting the essays collected here as, minimally, each contributing answers to some of these pressing questions that are brought about through considering this early theoretical skirmish in the reception of Cavell's work. They *also* provide an account of the transformative relationship that Cavell's philosophy bears towards the contemporary inheritance of analytic philosophy than I am capable of outlining here (without stepping on quite a few toes). The separate contributions by Bruno and Pritchard each tackle the initial epistemological questions in the series above by investigating the possibility that the human being's relationship to the norms of language use are not grounded upon knowledge. This apparently skeptical position is investigated by each under the theme of the sensation of vertigo, following terminology introduced by John McDowell but rooted in a scene from one of Cavell's early essays (i.e., "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," collected in Cavell 1969) where Cavell describes "human speech and activity, sanity and community" as resting upon nothing other than a "whirl of organism," (1969, 52) which Cavell explicitly relates to the Wittgensteinian conception of *Lebensformen* or forms of life. We might quickly paraphrase the position as denying the possibility of any absolute foundation of rule-following practices that is external to the forms of life in which such practices are actualized. Cavell's position denies that there is a trade-off between adhering faithfully to the normativity disclosed in ordinary practices and the lack of an overarching or undergirding schema, available to *a priori* reason, that provides the conceptual support for these practices.

But are we, thus, confronted with something like a limit of philosophical explanation? Characteristically we are able to successfully communicate with one another, our claims about the world or about ourselves make sense, and yet it seems that Cavell seems to be establishing a boundary that excludes pre-

cisely that which philosophical accounts of normativity have sought to explain. The feeling of vertigo may be easy for the reader to understand, because of its associations with a feeling of groundlessness or standing atop unsteady constructions, but it may also be something the reader is inclined to reject since it seems to be rooted upon a robustly skeptical position. Both Bruno and Pritchard take issue with the manner in which McDowell seeks to disarm the skeptical threat that Cavell presents as a *truth* of the human condition. Bruno looks back to Hegel and Schelling to consider the career of a similar skeptical dispute in post-Kantian Idealism, Pritchard looks to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and recent scholarship on "hinge commitments" to bolster Cavell's anti-foundationalism. Both of these contributions should be understood as modelling accounts of what it means to connect the concerns of analytic philosophy to its externalities through the work of Cavell.

The question of the character of the relation between the complex threat of skepticism, its denial of a secure epistemic grasp on the norms that emerge in ordinary language, and the paradigmatic methodological question of Ordinary Language Philosophy is explored in the contributions made by Hamawaki and Guetti. Both can be understood as responding to those questions in the list above which move from reflecting on the epistemic pressures that flow from this antifoundationalist posture and the constitution norms for what we say. Both contributions explore the *transcendental* structures that are unveiled in the activation of capacities within this linguistic space, a community of speakers that forms around the threat of skepticism. Each of these contributions includes an elucidation of Cavell's methodological position through a comparative account of philosophers from the analytic or post-analytic tradition (Frege, Moore, Russell, Davidson, and Bernard Williams) while also inquiring into the brief methodological allusions that Cavell makes to Kant. Through focusing on recent inheritances of the Kantian notion of the "transcendental" (in Hamawaki) or exploring aspects of

Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that Cavell leaves hanging (in Guetti), these contributions develop historical alliances that seek to provoke a transformation of philosophical methodology through Cavell.

The contributions from Hammer, Laugier, and Miguens each can be read as taking up the methodological questions raised above through a point of intersection between Cavell's methodology, the evident importance of first-personal expressions (or what might be called the "voice"), and competing considerations from analytic philosophy (in Hammer and Laugier) and from aesthetic considerations (in Miguens). Laugier's contribution focuses on the genesis of Cavell's method out of and alongside a detailed account of the precepts of the Ordinary Language Philosophy of J. L. Austin. The contribution by Miguens approaches these methodological questions through questions of modernist aesthetics, which cannot be avoided in considering the formation of normative standards of what we say, formed in the wake of an acknowledgment of a skeptical truth, and pursuing the meaningful question of one's own voice amidst authoritative, traditional norms. Hammer's contribution takes up Cavellian questions of individual voice, rule-following, and styles of writing philosophy through examining the disciplinary differences that formed between the analytic tradition and existentialist or "Continental" philosophers. Each of these contributions provokes reflection on what it means to pursue one's own voice—even the pursuit of a desired form of life—through a philosophical style grounded in an account of the ordinary (especially in Laugier), the inseparability of the establishment of these standards from what had been understood to be questions of taste or aesthetic questions (especially in Miguens), and, necessarily, brings about further reflection on the professionalization of philosophy and the *sine qua non* conventions that have become the professional currency of research in academic philosophy (especially in Hammer).

As I wrote above, the essays in this volume do much more than respond to the series of questions I raised as a result of framing the conflict between Cavell and Fodor and Katz. Framing the essays as engaging with this local series of questions, nevertheless, is a useful point of entry to the collection as a whole and also as a basis to understand the unified aspiration of the contributors across these various scenes from the history of philosophy. The essays in this volume all share the hope that examining dominant narratives, themes, and methods associated with the analytic tradition from a Cavell-informed perspective will provoke a historical reimagining of Cavell's relationship to the analytic tradition and a revision analytic philosophy's relation to distinct traditions of philosophy. This special issue takes up the task of recovering the history of analytic philosophy, wrongly stereotyped as a tradition that is hermetically sealed-off from wider traditions, and aspires to provoke new narratives that can reshape future scholarship on the history of analytic philosophy. In this way, at least, the aspiration of the editors is consonant with Cavell's own aspiration (though not directly thematized at length here) to widen the understanding of North American Anglophone philosophy to include Emerson and Thoreau as meaningful forerunners or to defend the relevance of Hollywood remarriage comedies as images of the plight of moral perfectionism. Though Emerson, Thoreau, and, say, *The Philadelphia Story* are not directly engaged here, this, of course, does not mean that we find such connections untenable or un insightful. Indeed, this volume might be said to be a step in the ongoing project of rearticulating what is meaningful or urgent for contemporary philosophers (who have an interest in the analytic tradition) to inherit from the history of philosophy through the lens of Stanley Cavell's philosophical work.

The editors offer these articles as invitations to investigate what it means for a philosophical tradition to be fated with a history, what conditions are revealed in the inheritance of this history, how this fate reveals unexpected affinities across disciplinary

borders within philosophy, and why trespassing across these borders expands the value and promise of a shared philosophical enterprise. The broader purpose in assembling these is, we hope, to inherit and transform a philosophical lineage that grasps its own history as an ongoing philosophical task.

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