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Logic and Voice: Stanley Cavell and Analytic Philosophy

Espen Hammer

In this paper, I aim to reconstruct and discuss Stanley Cavell's interpretation and critique of analytic philosophy. Cavell objects to the tradition of analytic philosophy that, in its eagerness to provide abstract, theoretical reconstructions, it has failed to understand the importance of "the human voice" for philosophy. First, I outline Cavell's retelling of the history of analytic philosophy from Frege and Russell to ordinary language philosophy. Second, I turn to Cavell's reading of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein in order to show what the suppression of the human voice is supposed to mean and entail. Central to Cavell's account is a particular view of language according to which no structure can explain our capacity for sense-making. Third, I exemplify Cavell's approach by analyzing his debate with Kripke. Kripke sees the absence of "rails" determining meaning as a skeptical problem and calls for a communal solution. Cavell, by contrast, accepts the absence of rails while highlighting the need for individual responsiveness. In the conclusion I contrast the analytic interest in theory, structure, and abstraction with what I see as Cavell's humanism. While respectful of key aspects of the analytic tradition such as its commitment to rigor and transparency, Cavell wished to bring the human subject back into philosophy.

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1. Introduction

To many professional philosophers in the Anglophone world, the story of Stanley Cavell's position in the field can be made quite simple. While most of his teachers and colleagues, especially during his many decades in the Harvard Philosophy Department, were "analytic philosophers," quite early in his long and distinguished career he himself broke with the analytic tradition, forging a different and in many ways highly original path, a peculiar form of American Continental philosophy that would be based on his complex reception of the work of the late Wittgenstein, the ordinary language philosophy of John Austin, selections of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, as well as the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau. If Cavell's intellectual identity were indeed anything close to what many in the profession have deemed it to be, it would display such disregard for the most cherished virtues of analytic philosophy—argumentative rigor, discursive clarity, a focus on puzzle-solving within contexts of ideal theory—that any attempt to relate his contribution to analytic philosophy, including its history, would seem in vain, like trying to compare apples and pears. Whatever Cavell did—whether, as has been argued, he was engaged in some form of "post-analytic" philosophy or, as some people have intimated, he gave up on professional philosophy altogether—he certainly did not side with the majority of its practitioners, nor would he be a reliable interlocutor in matters relating to what

the standard American professor of philosophy would associate with analytic philosophy.

A cursory look at Cavell's writings may, however, quite quickly dispel the impression many have had of there being such a considerable distance, or even downright incompatibility, between what he did and what most of his colleagues would do. For example, Cavell would regularly reflect on what it means to be a professional philosopher in the analytic vein, and a number of his most wide-ranging interventions, such as those relating to Kripke and Rawls, addressed work that on most accounts clearly should be viewed as belonging to the analytic tradition. However, while Cavell tended to discuss analytic philosophy with considerable respect and even admiration, acknowledging its significant impact both on himself and on American philosophy at large, his *diagnostic* approach may have made it difficult for many to recognize exactly how his writing engaged with analytic thought. Just as, for the psychoanalyst, the psyche becomes known through its repertoire of repressions, so the analytic tradition appeared to Cavell mainly in its omissions, what it centrally leaves out of view, refusing to touch and grant academic responsibility. That this could be a source of confusion, creating suspicion and eventually rejection, ought not to be surprising.

Whenever Cavell referred to the analytic tradition, he would engage with it. He would ask critical questions. That said, apart from a few sections of his intellectual autobiography, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (2010) and a few of his essays, he seems not to have taken much interest in the history of analytic philosophy *for its own sake*. In this paper, however, I turn to some of his early work and reconstruct the outline of what I take to be his understanding of that history. In the absence of such an outline, his response can make no sense. I then formulate and defend a hypothesis of what he viewed as its most general presuppositions while considering some of his most crucial objections to those presuppositions. The most consequential of these is what I will call the *abstraction requirement*, the notion that

what may count as an appropriate, reasonable, or even intelligible use of words must be supported by some universal structure or form whose complete meaning and set of internal relations may be articulated systematically. For Cavell, while shared constraints on what can and cannot be said intelligibly do exist, what goes missing in typical analytic accounts is a recognition of how speakers, in order to make sense, need to exercise context-dependent skills of judgment. In her drive to adopt the objectivism of the positive sciences, the analytic philosopher excludes the human subject from view. Thus, while analytic philosophy harbors an anti-humanistic strain and tendency, Cavell's thinking is decidedly humanistic, aiming to respect and recognize the meaning-making capacities of the human voice in all its forms and expressions.

2. Cavell on the History of Analytic Philosophy

In an essay from 1983, "The Philosopher in American Life," Cavell situates the origins of analytic philosophy in Vienna and Berlin of the 1930s and how, being aligned with strands in American pragmatism, it gradually achieved intellectual dominance in Anglo-American philosophy departments.[1] In many of his shorter remarks, scattered across a number of writings, he points to what he sees as its call for a rhetoric of purity grounded in an ongoing attention to logic, its rejection of "Continental idealism and metaphysics," its focus on the analysis of language, and its aspiration for philosophy to attain at least the outward shape of a "normal science" devoted to puzzle-solving within a highly professionalized culture of formally certified and mutually recognizing experts. These experts share a number of views about what it is that may count as a successful argument, which

journals are worthy of full intellectual recognition, and how, ultimately, an accomplished career within this field might be forged.

"The Philosopher in American Life" stands out insofar as it addresses how the cultural conditions of the United States may have predisposed it to being receptive to analytic philosophy, and in particular to its classical configuration as logical positivism.[2] Recalling Max Weber's celebrated address, "Science as Vocation," delivered in 1918, Cavell observes how the American philosopher, in order to devote herself to philosophy, has had to accept professionalization. Thus, like a regular scientist, the philosopher who seeks recognition has had no choice but to exclusively engage in highly specialized activities of systematic research, far removed from the questions and pursuits being available to people in everyday life, and, at least when it comes to the fundamentals of theory-choice, purportedly in a value-free space. While, as Weber points out, European thinkers could take some assurance in the continued existence of high culture and a common literary inheritance, mediating to some extent between academic philosophy and public life at large, American thinkers had nothing in common, no shared high culture.

The separation from its own culture, the attainment, as it were, of a high degree of intellectual autonomy, came at what Cavell deems to have been a high price. It meant that philosophy found itself incapable of expressing its own culture philosophically. Indeed, not only did it lack the tools of self-expression, but it became oblivious to its own culture up to the point of celebrating its own obliviousness! A stark expression of this is how, with the exception of pragmatism, analytic philosophy in the United States would take virtually no interest in the American traditions of philosophy, in particular the one going back to the transcendentalism and romanticism of Emerson and Thoreau. Reconnecting with that neglected tradition of American intellectual life, view-

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[1]See Cavell (2003, 33–58). For an occasionally idiosyncratic but at the same time invaluable study of the history of analytic philosophy, see Dummett (1993).

[2]For an astute account of Cavell's understanding of the role of philosophy in the United States, see Eldridge (2003, 172-89).

ing it in conjunction with reflections on European thinkers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger, was, from the early 1970s, one of Cavell's abiding concerns.

In an early essay, "Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy," (Cavell 1984, 195–234) first published in 1964, Cavell set himself the task of exploring the nature and implications of philosophical professionalization. Worrying that so much of the teaching and initiation into analytic philosophy would take place by means of the mastery of technical problems, and hence exclude the more comprehensive and open engagement with the self characteristic of existentialism and much Continental philosophy, he views analytic philosophy as seeking to "recover Reason from superstition" by isolating problems that, while being non-scientific, can be treated as "technical." (Cavell 1984, 205)

According to Cavell, three revolutions mark the development of analytic philosophy. The first is associated with the *logical and semantic work of Frege and Russell*. "The commanding and continuously fruitful insight of their view," Cavell writes,

> was expressed by the dictum that the real form of a proposition is its logical form, or contrariwise, that the obvious linguistic form of a proposition masks or distorts its real form, and that this masking or distortion, unrecognized, has produced many of the deepest problems of philosophy since Plato. (Cavell 1984, 207)

As an example of philosophical analysis based on such an appeal to logical form, Cavell instantiates Russell's theory of descriptions.[3] As is familiar to students of analytic philosophy, the theory offers a procedure whereby a puzzle about naming and definite descriptions (which would include questions of meaning, identity, and existence, etc.) permits resolution via a translation of statements of ordinary language into their corresponding form in quantificational logic. On the view informing the application of such a procedure, a significant number of the problems of philosophy were deemed to be problems of language and

logic. If only that logic could be made transparent, philosophical problems would not just be solved but disappear completely. Indeed, it would become evident that they could not even be raised coherently (since attempting to raise them as problems presupposes that one does not possess an understanding of the underlying logical form).

In Cavell's reconstruction of the development of analytic philosophy, the second major upheaval took place with the emergence of *the Vienna Circle and its logical positivism*. Inspired by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, it continued to emphasize the role of language and logic in analyzing philosophical problems. However, unlike the earlier generation of Frege and Russell, the members of this circle, which included such figures as Carnap, Schlick, Feigl, and Neurath, were less interested in classical problems of philosophy than in displaying what they thought of as the logical structure of science. Proponents of what they called a "scientific conception of the world," they argued that propositions have cognitive meaning only to the extent that they allow for verifiability. (The verifiability theory of meaning would in typical cases take the form of holding that to know the meaning of a proposition is to know what observations could confirm its truth or falsity.) In the absence of verifiability, propositions are cognitively meaningless (such that whatever meaning they might have, it would not endow the proposition or utterance with any truth-value). Thus, while scientific propositions have cognitive meaning, metaphysical, ethical, aesthetic, and religious propositions are without such meaning, incapable of generating anything but pseudo questions that, since they do not allow for verification, can have no genuine answers. While there may be various forms of non-cognitive meaning— "emotive" or "poetic" meaning—accounting for our actual use of non-cognitive statements, such statements are deficient in failing to be truth-value bearing assertions, and hence to be viewed with suspicion. On Cavell's reading, logical positivism was distinct in particular because of its wholesale rejection not only of

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[3]The first contours of this theory were developed in Russell (1905, 479–93).

metaphysics but of philosophy in general. Only natural science could pose matters of serious intellectual concern, and, if philosophy still may carry any conviction, it would have to be in its transformed activity of serving as a handmaiden to science.

In "Existentialism and Analytic Philosophy," Cavell sees *ordinary language philosophy* as the third and latest phase of analytic philosophy. While many of his later texts tend to consider ordinary language philosophy less as an outgrowth of the analytic tradition than as a challenger to it, more akin, at least in the late Wittgenstein's work, to the kind of writing one expects to find in Emerson or Heidegger than to the methods normally associated with the term "analytic philosophy," this early essay situates this particular school of philosophy within the already recounted development from Frege and Russell to the logical positivists. Cavell seems to be doing this in part because, in his account, G. E. Moore, Russell's contemporary and colleague at the University of Cambridge, figures as a kind of originator of ordinary language philosophy. Neither a logician nor a scientifically inclined thinker, Moore defended common or ordinary belief against metaphysics, suggesting that proponents of the latter tend not to fully mean what they say. To the philosopher who were to say, "There are no material things," Moore would reply by holding up his two hands, saying "Here's one human hand and here's another; so there are at least two material things." (Moore 1993, 166) This, Moore claimed, while perfectly common, is simply a true, justified belief. With Gilbert Ryle, J. L. Austin, and, especially, the late Wittgenstein, philosophers found different and often more sophisticated defenses of the ordinary, and of ordinary language, but like Moore they all utilized the potential of this new procedure to attack metaphysics.

Cavell's early classification of ordinary language philosophy as "analytic" comes with a number of qualifications and is ultimately somewhat ambiguous. First, he notes how Austin's work, for example, tries to rescue the cognitive import and meaning of many of the categories of speech that Russell, the early Wittgen-

stein, and, in particular, the logical positivists, had understood to be without cognitive meaning. Although ethical, aesthetic, and religious utterances may be scientifically unverifiable, and hence for the positivist devoid of cognitive meaning, they can be shown to have a logic of their own, different from that of scientific statements, which permits speakers to distinguish between correct and incorrect moves, and between intelligible and unintelligible speech. Second, while classifying ordinary language philosophy as analytic philosophy, the essay "Existentialism and Analytic Philosophy" ultimately seeks out a number of similarities between what Austin and the late Wittgenstein do and what an existentialist such as Kierkegaard does. Reading the whole essay, it appears that ordinary language philosophy has a lot more in common with existentialism than with the analytic tradition that comes out of Frege, Russell, and the Vienna Circle.

Despite writing and publishing well into the twenty-first century, Cavell never traced the history of analytic philosophy beyond ordinary language philosophy. There could be perfectly trivial reasons why that is the case. Perhaps his personal interest in tracing its history simply did not extend any further. However, it may also be because analytic philosophy, considered as a distinct school of philosophy (albeit, as we have seen, with different phases and changing commitments), is no longer alive in the way it used to be in American departments of philosophy between the 1950s and the late 1970s. Indeed, today, there is widespread agreement that "analytic philosophy" considered as referring to a movement characterized by a distinct scholarly identity and a set of guiding epistemic commitments has largely become a thing of the past. While in a colloquial sense the term is still in use, it tends to be employed either in order to refer to its history or to express opposition to various trends in contemporary philosophy, including more hermeneutically oriented strands of European (Continental) philosophy. Occasionally the defense of analytic philosophy involves nothing more than a preference, academically, for a certain kind of vocabulary and

legalistic rhetoric, typically one that strives to make entailment-relations explicit and to emphasize the value and importance of "argumentation" over "ideas" and their meaning within various contexts, whether academic or not. Indeed, today, being an analytic philosopher might simply signal an adherence to certain loosely defined institutional norms. Attending specific conferences, teaching a certain set of materials, and publishing in certain journals, might be enough to qualify.

An important reason why those who are being told by their skeptical detractors that they practice analytic philosophy often dislike this epithet is the forceful and consequential attack, performed by W. V. Quine, Cavell's long-standing colleague, on the analytic/synthetic distinction and the reductionism prevalent among practitioners belonging to the analytic movement.[4] They simply feel that their work is not based on the commitments that Quine attacked so forcefully. For Quine, since the very notion of the a priori being applied by them could be shown to invite a number of strong objections, including of course that the very idea of synonymity supporting the classical account of analyticity turns out to be incoherent, it followed, as he baldly states in "Naturalized Epistemology" and elsewhere, that philosophy does not have a task of its own (namely to clarify "the logic of language") but must accept its epistemic continuity with empirical natural science.[5] Whence naturalism, whence post-analytic philosophy.

Part of the reason why Quine's attack turned out to be so effective was related to the fact that it emerged from within the school of analytic philosophy considered in the narrow sense. The thinkers he had in mind included Frege, Russell, and especially Carnap, to whom he had been exposed in Prague. In writings such as *The Logical Structure of the World*, Carnap, to be sure, did subscribe to a form of logicism; and like the logi-

cal empiricists with whom he had been associated, he believed in verificationism and the related doctrine of reductionism, according to which the meaning of theoretical statements must be analyzable in terms of either simple propositions allowing for empirical verification or some kind of attribution of self-evidence (amounting to some form of either indubitability, incorrigibility, or infallibility). On this fundamentally anti-realistic set-up, all other propositions, including ones that assert moral or aesthetic claims, have to be viewed as devoid of cognitive value.

It is worth emphasizing that while Cavell did engage with analytic anti-realism in morality and aesthetics, he seems never to have been very interested in what turned out to be the basis of Quine's attack (i.e., a certain understanding of the nature of the analyticity and of reductionism). Nor did he espouse naturalism except in a Wittgensteinian, attenuated manner, insisting on the "natural" or "anthropological" constitution of necessity—a sense, as it were, that certain things are beyond our control—while acknowledging that "what we take to be necessary in a given period may alter" (Cavell 1979, 119). Quine's way with classical logical positivism led to naturalism and paved the way for research programs referring extensively to scientific results. Cavell's way with it led to a defense and reformulation of ordinary language philosophy, emphasizing in particular the human voice, including the finding of one's own voice.

In an interview with Giovanna Borradori from around 1990, Cavell makes some remarks that seem pertinent in this regard. "Philosophy," he says, is "in a sense, to write your own words, to write your own inner voice." He continues:

But the discipline most opposed to writing, and to life, is analytic philosophy. To oppose writing: I interpreted that opposition as an opposition to the human voice, which is where I come into philosophy. This is what my first essays are about—the suppression of the human voice in academic analytic philosophy. But, paradoxically, I felt nothing else was as promising as that same philosophy. The fastidiousness, the absolute desire to make every mark on the page

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[4]See Quine (1980, 20–46). For a helpful discussion of Quine's contribution to the dismantling of doctrinal analytic philosophy, see Hacker (1996, 193–227).

[5]See Quine (1969, 69–90).

have a meaning, which is also my prerogative, was first set forth by analytic philosophy. But it doesn't come out in its writing. So how can I have both? ([Borradori 1994](), 126–27)

Critics of analytic philosophy sometimes complain about its supposed narrowness of range: it may seem to have lost touch with the fundamental problems of human life that preoccupied the philosophical tradition from Plato and Aristotle to Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. As another long-standing colleague of Cavell, Hilary Putnam, once put it, "My problem with analytic philosophy is that it is empty. All philosophy does not have to be argument, and all arguments do not have to be in the analytic style." ([Borradori 1994](), 69) A related complaint might focus on its concern with technical detail and its supposed divorce from culture at large. Its interest in demonstration and proof gives to analytic philosophy a certain legal flair: unlike other forms of philosophical reflection, which would emphasize the importance for philosophy of interpretation, understanding, rhetoric and narrative, and perhaps even intuition, its goal is exclusively to establish rational conviction. While Cavell does not dismiss any of these concerns, his claim in the quotation above may come across as surprising or even bizarre. Analytic philosophy, he claims, is opposed to writing and life. As such it has "suppressed" the *human voice*.

How might this be understood? Surely, being opposed to writing cannot mean that analytic philosophers somehow prefer not to write or prefer other modes of communication. Although some might like, say, the openness of oral dialogue, that would be philosophically inconsequential and mainly a matter of subjective preference. Indeed, when considered as a profession, analytic philosophy demands a great deal of writing and seems to value writing very highly. Cavell praises its "fastidiousness" and admits to having been inspired by it. Yet the fastidiousness, he says, does not come out in analytic writing. How, when writing is what analytic philosophers do in order to get published and be recognized professionally, might this be the case? To top it off, Cavell deems opposition to writing to in fact involve an opposition to the human voice. Where might one start with all of this?

3. Analytic Philosophy and Its Suppression of the Voice

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida once made his whole work revolve around the notion that Western philosophy has suffered from what he called "phonocentrism" or sometimes also "logocentrism." Drawing on Heidegger's critique of "the metaphysics of presence," Derrida argued that thinkers in the Western tradition have privileged the human voice because of what they have viewed as its unique presence to the soul of the speaker— "the natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul within the logos." ([Derrida 1976](), 37) Unlike writing, the voice is immediately present to itself as the origin of meaning, serving as its foundation. In sharp contrast to such a view, Cavell is holding that traditional philosophy—and in our case "analytic philosophy"—has suppressed the voice, making it subsidiary to some other construal of how sense-making and communication take place. Moreover, unlike Derrida, his understanding of the human voice is not as some sort of ultimately false guarantor of the stability of meaning, generating self-presence, but as a capacity or disposition that human beings acquire as they learn a language within a community of speakers. While Derrida keeps claiming that the voice is appealed to in philosophy because of its foundational qualities (of being immediately present to "the soul" and human intentionality), Cavell, in a passage that has become justly famous, insists that nothing "guides" or "controls" our use of words in speech:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing ensures that this projection will take place (in

particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing ensures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, sense 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." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (Cavell 1976, 52)

As we have seen, Cavell puts forth a number of objections to analytic philosophy considered as a professionalized discipline within the twentieth-century Anglophone research university. Ultimately, however, these objections—professionalization, a too narrow range, the separation from culture at large, and even the voicelessness—only make full sense when considered in conjunction with the vision of sense-making that is articulated in this passage.[6]

The deepest level at which Cavell views analytic philosophy relates to its quest for some sort of *structure* that is supposed to account for our capacity to string words together and make ourselves intelligible. More than anything else, the analytic philosopher conducts her analyses with a view to discover and lay bare that structure and thereby separate sharply the a priori from the a posteriori. As Alice Crary (2016, 44) puts it, the analytic philosopher is under the spell of an "abstraction requirement," the idea that in order to get a clear view of reality, we must abstract from reliance on any subjective endowments made evident through

the use of language in ordinary contexts of meaning-making. In the history I laid out, we saw how, according to Cavell, the early generation of analytic philosophers, rather than focusing on the manifest structure of a sentence, would search for its underlying logical structure, appealing to that in order to make the meaning of the sentence clear. Likewise, the logical positivists—Carnap, for example—would look for the structure of scientific inferential-relations, dismissing as pre-philosophical any analysis that would study the actual use of scientific language in specific contexts. Even ordinary language philosophy, despite its interest in how language is being used in ordinary or everyday situations, has at times displayed a tendency to prioritize structure over use. (Surely, this tendency was always a lot more pronounced in the works of John Searle and Jürgen Habermas, who explicitly aimed to reconstruct the "constitutive" rules regulating a particular practice, than John Austin, whose writings Cavell never stops admiring.)

In academic contexts, the abstraction requirement translates into a demand for *theory*. The traditional philosopher searches for explanations or definitions by means of which to account for rational behavior and intelligible speech. Indeed, typical papers in analytic philosophy are expected to ensue in some kind of definition: the theory being defended is the final statement that in general terms lays down a rule or principle that is meant to hold in all cases and contexts. Perhaps the biggest hurdle for many new readers of Cavell is his rejection of theory in precisely this sense. The traditional philosopher takes for granted that philosophical questions and answers can be *given*. While philosophers may need to revise and occasionally reject them, they expect the relevant questions and answers to be available and meaningful to everyone, or at least to those possessing the requisite training and academic aptitude. Cavell's view, however, is that philosophical questions and answers must be *found* by the individual, and as such that individual will need either to grow into or actively search for them. While growing into

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[6]Note that I am not claiming that Cavell's vision of language is sufficient to account for what it is to be a speaker in a natural language L. At the very least, it appears that there must in such a speaker also be some evident mastery of truth-conditions made by lexical items such as names, predicates, sentential connectives, etc. Without those, a speaker would not be intelligible as a claim-maker, and no assertational speaking of L would take place.

them largely coincides with acquiring, and becoming a master of, one's first language, actively searching means responding to a puzzle or crisis one might have as an adult speaker. It is the latter that forms the basis for an adequate understanding of the picture of philosophy that Cavell recommends.

The rejection of theory does not imply a rejection of philosophy. Rather, what it means is that "doing philosophy" must be understood in a completely different manner from that of the traditional philosopher. In "Existentialism and Analytic Philosophy," Cavell helps himself to an account of this difference by pondering the nature of existentialism and its opposition to traditional philosophy. Of course, at the time of writing this essay, existentialism was considered by many in American philosophy departments to be *the* main challenger to the dominant analytic paradigm. However, Cavell is less interested in the professional tension between the two orientations than he is in the radically new way of conceiving of philosophical activity that existentialism proposes. Adding to the interesting complexities of this essay is the fact that while Kierkegaard figures as Cavell's main spokesman for existentialism, he also instances Wittgenstein—and by implication himself insofar as his work from this period onwards becomes increasingly defined in terms of his ongoing engagement with the *Philosophical Investigations*—as a thinker with a decisive existentialist bent.

What is it that makes Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein so different from that of traditional philosophers, including analytic philosophers? In very general terms, it can be said that, like Montaigne, Nietzsche, and a few other modern thinkers, including perhaps Heidegger, they are engaged in the effort to revive the ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life against the modern insistence on philosophy as a form of discourse. However, Cavell's account of it is a lot more specific. Both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, he claims, see philosophy as the response not to a set of theoretical problems but, rather, to a form of malady or sickness of the soul. In this image, the philosopher *diagnoses* and,

if possible, helps *curing* the disease. For Kierkegaard in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (2009), the malady consists in our tendency to replace human existence—especially in the form of being capable of the resignation and faith required to follow Christ—with knowledge. The right lens through which to view Kierkegaard's battle against the primacy of knowledge is that of his painstaking critique of Hegel's system. While Hegel considers the deepest problems of human existence to be solvable within the framework of an overall and fundamentally metaphysical theory, Kierkegaard insists that the problems of life must be posed from within existence itself. Hegel's system, he claims, cannot get at what it is to be a Christian. It might be able to tell us everything there is to know about what Christianity is, how it has evolved, and, in particular, what its ultimate meaning can be said to be. What it cannot do is instruct us in how to achieve the inwardness and the subjective disposition requisite for faith. No argument—and certainly no appeal to essences—can do that: theory as such always falls short of what it is for an individual to start accepting Christianity as binding for itself.

In order to arrive at such an acceptance, the individual, rather than attending to some argument or, as in Hegel, following the trajectory of some dialectical development, must accept her particularity, the fact that no one but she is ultimately responsible for her own self-definition. Yet such an adoption of the standpoint of particularity—of the implications of one's own existence viewed from within the first-person perspective—in turn demands that the existing individual manages to see things in a new way. As Cavell points out with reference to both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, doing that may entail no more than coming to detect the obvious while holding on to that without supplying more discourse. One turns or returns to one's everyday existence, though in a self-transformed manner. Johannes de Silentio, the narrator in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (2006), cannot in any way justify Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. However, he knows that it is precisely this willingness—this *in-*

commensurability, indicating infinite resignation with regard to all finite existence, including that of Isaac—that makes him a true Christian. Johannes must therefore remain silent; whatever communication he is capable of will have to be indirect.

Although the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* does not explicitly ask questions about faith, he shares with Kierkegaard the aim of bringing his reader back to something that he knows or is capable of but, thanks to our yearning for foundations, explanations, or essences, have failed to acknowledge. Sometimes he refers to this return to the forgotten ordinary in terms of producing "surveyable representations" (*übersichtliche Darstellungen*). In Cavell's gloss on this term, it "means, roughly, that instead of accumulating new facts, or capturing the essence of the world in definitions, or perfecting or completing our language, we need to arrange the facts we already know or can come to realize merely by *calling to mind* something we know." (Cavell 1984, 225) In both authors philosophy tends to become uncertain of its own status. Rather than asking for more theory, it may look to the arts (and thereby in some sense substitute for its own felt inability to continue satisfactorily) or quite simply to the further production of sentences that may serve to provide surveyable representation of commitments that we find we can mean (rather than just state). As Cavell emphasizes, this perpetual effort at overcoming a certain way of providing philosophical insight and clarity (namely through theory) does not have to issue in some vision of the conclusive *end* to philosophy. Unlike Richard Rorty, Cavell never advocated the end of philosophy. Rather, since the problems to which this kind of thinking responds will always be with us, it must continue to respond to the particular question being asked. Philosophy thus becomes a perpetual activity of self-clarification, a work on the self that in principle every reflective human being engages in to a various degree. As Cavell puts it, "In grown-up philosophy, the problems we have *remain* answerable only through growth, not through explanation or definitions. The idea of growth is meant to emphasize that we are no longer to expect answers and solutions in traditional terms—any more than we can accept philosophical questions as *given*." (Cavell 1984, 232)

Readers of "Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy" may wonder whether Cavell sees his distinction simply as an effort to provide a value-neutral classification of two fundamentally different ways of doing philosophy in the twentieth century—*or* whether it is intended to also rank them according to a scale of value. The rhetoric in this early essay seems to be pointing in both directions. Some of it seems constructed merely to prevent misunderstanding of how the two camps operate; its *modus operandi* would then simply be to create a form of *modus vivendi* such that the two could exist side by side without anyone feeling tempted to interfere in the others' affairs. For example, Cavell repeatedly compares and contrasts the two in ways that, while striking, sound entirely incapable of provoking any of the camps' practitioners: "The one [i.e. analytic philosophy]) wishes to recover Reason from superstition; the other [i.e., existentialism] wishes to recover the self from Reason. Yet both are modern philosophies; both are, by intention and in feeling, revolutionary departures from traditional philosophy." (Cavell 1984, 205–6) Other passages seem more tailored toward favoring one of them, namely existentialism. While, as mentioned earlier, Cavell pays great respect to the analytic tradition, referring, say, to existentialism as "grown-up" philosophy does more than simply indicate that its aim is personal growth: it intimates that existentialism provides a more mature way of doing philosophy.

Of course, if construed in value-neutral terms, the analytic philosopher will see no purely academic reason to be worried by Cavell's characterization of the distinction. While the analytic philosopher may or may not accept the characterization of his *métier*, if interpreted descriptively, nothing in Cavell's distinction indicates or suggests that what the analytic practitioner does is somehow problematic, deficient, or misleading. Indeed, not only might the analytic philosopher find Cavell's interpretation

of his field to be illuminating, but he could also start questioning the manner of drawing the distinction itself. For example, the analytic philosopher may feel grateful for the description of what he does in terms of providing technical and theoretical transparency within highly circumscribed and precisely defined areas of theoretical research. Yet the analytic philosopher could question Cavell's restriction of existentially consequential insight to the domain of existentialist thought. Why, he might ask, could not a purely theoretical statement—a real definition—motivate someone to change their lives as well? Isn't Cavell portraying analytic philosophy as more bloodless than it actually is? Why, for example, would it not matter to us qua subjectively existing beings whether or not we can have objective knowledge, whether or not minds exist as non-material substances, and likewise with all, or at least many, of the other purely theoretical questions studied in analytic philosophy?

It is, however, quite evident, especially from Cavell's subsequent writings, that he does set up a value-laden contrast between the two ways of doing philosophy. He will continue to stress the superiority of existentialism in terms of its unique capacity to address human beings as existing subjects, responsible for their own being. Although most analytic philosophers are likely to refuse to accept the terms with which he arrives at this notion of superiority, the value-commitment only becomes more overt as Cavell keeps developing his own position. There is for him a seriousness of purpose to what thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein are involved in that cannot quite be equated to the purely contemplative endeavors of analytic philosophers. The latter are puzzle-solvers; the former engage their own selves and conduct exercises whose subtlety and seriousness place them on a par with the highest and most transformative achievements in the arts or in religious thought. However, not only does Cavell insist on the more "mature" nature of his own preferred modes of philosophical thought, but he also thinks it can be proven superior by attending closely to

the theoretical reasons that speak in its favor. There is a sense in which, for Cavell, the analytic philosopher simply philosophizes on the basis of commitments that are untenable or misleading.

The actual *critique* of analytic philosophy appears within a number of different theoretical contexts and is brought to bear on a great variety of different positions. We already know that Cavell objects to a certain lack of attention among analytic philosopher to how speakers use language in ordinary life— or to what he calls their "voice"—and, as a result of that, search for a structure, or perhaps a canon of rules or set of essences, that they deem capable of regulating capacities that, in his view, are better thought of as capacities for discernment lodged in individual responses to commonly shared expectations and norms. While speakers belonging to the same linguistic community do share an enormous number of linguistic dispositions, there is no shared foundation other than the fact of them sharing these dispositions that explains how individual projections of words into ever new contexts predominantly make sense. It is with those dispositions in mind—and hence without any authorization going beyond one's own attempt to speak representatively (and make sense)—that Cavell as an ordinary language philosopher addresses philosophical questions.

4. Cavell's Critique of Kripke

A particularly noteworthy and instructive example of Cavell's critique of a position in analytic philosophy can be found in his engagement with Saul Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.[7] To do full justice to the intricacies

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[7] I take it as uncontroversial that Saul Kripke deserves to be called an analytic philosopher. His work in metaphysics, the philosophy of language, and modal logic belongs squarely within the analytic camp. Whether his interpretation of Wittgenstein counts as "analytic" depends on the eyes that see. Today, many academic philosophers see Wittgenstein's work as not at all analytic, and recent research on Wittgenstein has increasingly revealed him as a thinker

of Cavell's objections to Kripke would undoubtedly exceed the format of this essay. However, a few important points from this debate can nevertheless be revealing. Kripke, as is well-known, conducts his argument in two fundamental steps. First, he argues that Wittgenstein, most succinctly expressed in *Philosophical Investigations* §201, displays an extreme skepticism regarding meaning.[8] Since any rule allows for an infinite number of interpretations, no course of action, including the production of a speech act, can be determined by a rule; hence nothing can be cited that would constitute a normatively binding reason to understand an expression in a particular manner. "X" could mean x, yet it could also mean y, z, or indeed take on any other value. Thus, in what Kripke considers to be the most radical form of skepticism ever formulated, meaning collapses: "Wittgenstein's main problem is that it appears that he has shown *all* language, *all* concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible." (Kripke 1982, 62) Arriving at the second main step of his argument, Kripke proposes a "skeptical solution" to the problem of interpretation raised by Wittgenstein. According to this "solution," while no rule can dictate meaning, speakers, insofar as they are committed to intelligibility, find that their projection of words into ever new contexts is normatively secured by means of socially shared assertibility conditions. Speakers within a given linguistic community share a form of tacit knowledge with re-

gard to when, and in what circumstances, a certain linguistic move is acceptable; and by being acceptable to the community, the expression becomes intelligible. Through training and socialization, speakers arrive at a level of competency whose constitutive feature simply consists in general conformity with communal expectations regarding the rightness and wrongness of particular linguistic moves.

Cavell agrees with Kripke about the importance of skepticism for Wittgenstein. However, he refuses to accept the attribution of a skeptical paradox to the *Investigations* § 201. Only on the assumption, rejected by Wittgenstein, that acting in accord with a rule is to interpret it correctly might such a paradox arise. Indeed, no such interpretation is necessary when using words and expressions intelligibly. Kripke, in other words, turns the absence of "rails" determining meaning—an absence which as such plays no role in accounting for our linguistic capacities—into a purportedly alarming fact. Moreover, Kripke starts his investigation from a pre-social point of view. His discussion hinges on how individuals may be positioned in a community, suggesting that they do so by conforming to conventionally established norms. Cavell, by contrast, maintains that Wittgenstein initiates his investigations *from* a social point of view. For Wittgenstein, Cavell claims, the agreement in judging, rather than resting on any kind of foundation, is the final fact to which the philosopher may appeal.

> The idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *überein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bottom. (Cavell 1979, 32)

On Cavell's account of Wittgenstein, while individuals are attuned in this incredibly fine-tuned manner (such that ever new projections of words can be made intelligible to other mem-

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more indebted to the larger framework of central European culture than, say, to the works of Frege and Russell (important though they no doubt were). For Kripke's reading see Kripke (1982). Cavell discusses Kripke's reading in Cavell (1990). For an expression of the current tendency to see Wittgenstein as a European (or even "Continental" philosopher), see Klagge (2011) and, for what is possibly the most influential study in this regard, see Janik and Toulmin (1973).

[8]See Wittgenstein (2009, §201): "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here."

bers of the speech community), their attunement as such is not enough to secure authority in individual cases. Since no foundation directs or controls them, individual speakers must, implicitly at least, always *claim* authority—that is, claim intersubjective agreement. Sometimes this can come with a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety. Speakers will struggle to find the right words. They will risk isolation, of being met with incomprehension. On Kripke's account, however, there is no risk of isolation as long as speakers conform to communally constituted and shared expectations. The price, though, for holding such a view is that agents become interpreted as devoid of their own voices: they will be conformists without any genuine claim to selfhood. The point here is not that Cavell somehow attributes to Kripke a conformist attitude or anything of that sort. Rather, the very vision of sense-making that Kripke presents appears to be incoherent. A community of Kripkean speakers would not permit individuals to become intelligible to each other.

With this in mind it becomes easier to see how skepticism can be said to be the key concept in accounting for the difference between Cavell's approach to the *Investigations* and that of the "analytic" philosopher, Kripke. For Cavell, skepticism quite simply names the condition in which speakers find themselves when they strive to make sense. Projecting words intelligibly into new contexts, rather than being based on some absolute foundation, is something speakers do when they succeed in speaking representatively. The criteria that regulate the use of words— the knowledge, say, of what it is for something to be x rather than y, a building rather than a shed—simply express their attunement, and instead of skyhooks controlling use, there are singular and, from a communal point of view, unauthorized instances of speech, requiring individual responsiveness. While skepticism, on Cavell's view, threatens to isolate speakers, it is also the very condition of being able to make sense as an individual facing other individuals. Only by accepting that there is no foundation—that *logos* is ontologically separated from *exis-*

tence—can the individual secure proximity and sense. As Cavell often intimates, while skepticism is not true in the sense that it condemns us to accept some sort of absence, we have to live with it and accept it up to the point of existentially affirming it. To the extent that we achieve this, the ontological breach between *logos* and *existence* will be overcome through human practice: we acknowledge each other as competent makers of meaning. Kripke, by contrast, takes a much more traditional view of what skepticism entails. For him, the skepticism at stake in Wittgenstein hinges on the absence of a foundation: no rule can adequately prescribe the correct use of a term or expression. Since he interprets skepticism epistemologically, his solution remains skeptical.

I have revisited the discussion of Kripke's Wittgenstein for the sole purpose of trying to throw light on the ultimate rationale behind Cavell's complicated yet ultimately quite negative assessment of analytic philosophy. Of course, doing this can only be of use insofar as Kripke's response to Wittgenstein can safely be interpreted not only as one analytic philosopher's reading but, rather, as representative of how *any* analytic philosopher would look at Wittgenstein, and even of how analytic philosophers generally think! Having traced Cavell's account of the origins of analytic philosophy, it does not seem inappropriate to attribute to him the view that what more than anything else characterizes this way of doing philosophy is its impulse to regard the logic of ordinary of language as having the form and nature of fixed rules that are abstract, universal, and complete. As a clear expression of Kripke's indebtedness to such a commitment stands his focus on precisely such rules (or logic)—and his observation of their shortcomings. It is thanks to this observation, which he views as skeptical, that he finds it necessary to introduce the account of assertibility conditions supposedly able to impersonally and inflexibly license particular practices of projecting words.

We have seen how Cavell distances himself from the extreme professionalization and narrowness of focus that characterizes

analytic philosophy. However, we are now in a position to see that what concerns Cavell the most about the analytic tradition is its inherent tendency to sublime the everyday idea of linguistic normativity and thus to downplay or even eliminate the, on his view, necessary appeal to the human voice. Understood along such lines, analytic philosophy may be viewed as more continuous with traditional philosophy than Cavell sometimes intimates. Ultimately, however, nothing is more human than the attempt to sublime the normativity of ordinary language.

5. Conclusion

Unlike the standard narrative of a thinker who forged his own path independently of the analytic tradition, and without any real engagement with it, I have argued that Cavell provides a number of thought-provoking reflections on its institutional and professional conditions, its history, and, most significantly, on its philosophical shortcomings when considered as a research-program. The extent to which his critique hits home depends on many things, not least his characterizations of what analytic philosophers aim to be doing. However, if the question of the voice and its general suppression in analytic philosophy holds at least some promise of being a fruitful approach to standard ways of doing such philosophy, then engaging with it is likely to prove important. In Cavell's case, this engagement has been central in his own formulation of what philosophy may aspire to achieve. Reintroducing the human voice into philosophy means that subjectivity arrives at the center-stage. Cavell was a philosophical humanist.

Espen Hammer
Temple University
espen.hammer@temple.edu

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