

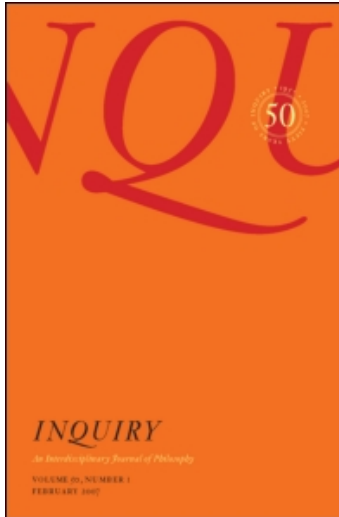
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Perfect Pitch and Austinian Examples: Cavell, McDowell, Wittgenstein, and the Philosophical Significance of Ordinary Language

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ABSTRACT *In Cavell (1994), the ability to follow and produce Austinian examples of ordinary language use is compared with the faculty of perfect pitch. Exploring this comparison, I clarify a number of central and interrelated aspects of Cavell's philosophy: (1) his way of understanding Wittgenstein's vision of language, and in particular his claim that this vision is "terrifying," (2) the import of Wittgenstein's vision for Cavell's conception of the method of ordinary language philosophy, (3) Cavell's dissatisfaction with Austin, and in particular his claim that Austin is not clear about the nature and possible achievements of his own philosophical procedures, and (4) Cavell's notion that the temptation of skepticism is perennial and incurable. Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein is related to that of John McDowell. Like McDowell, Cavell takes Wittgenstein to be saying that the traditional attempt to justify our practices from an external standpoint is misguided, since such detachment involves losing sight of those conceptual and perceptual capacities in terms of which a practice is understood by its engaged participants. Unlike McDowell, however, Cavell consistently rejects the idea that philosophical clear-sightedness can or should free us from that fear of groundlessness which motivates the traditional search for external justification.*

It was familiarly said that the point of Austin's stories, those examples apart from which ordinary language philosophy has no method, required what you might call "ear" to comprehend (as in, more or less at random, setting out the difference between doing something by mistake or by accident, or between doing something willingly or voluntarily, carelessly

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or heedlessly, or between doing something in saying something or by saying something, or between telling a bird by its call or from its call). My mother had something called perfect pitch, as did one of her brothers. That I did not was a source of anguished perplexity to me, one of the reasons I would eventually give myself for withdrawing from music, particularly after I found that the only role I conceived for myself in music was as a composer. Yet I felt there must be something I was meant to do that required an equivalent of the enigmatic faculty of perfect pitch. Being good at following and producing Austinian examples will strike me as some attestation of this prophecy.¹

I.

When I was fourteen, I went to a class in elementary music theory where one of the students had perfect pitch. The teacher would often begin his lessons by playing a tune on the piano, a tune which we were supposed to write down in musical notation. On one occasion, someone asked what one should do if one heard a tune and wanted to write it down, but did not have access to a tuning-fork or something else by means of which one could decide the key. The teacher suggested using the telephone: at least in Sweden, the tone one hears before one starts dialing is a 440 Hz A. However, after the class, the student who had perfect pitch told me, in all seriousness, that the telephone should not be trusted: "Often the tone is not an A, but almost an A flat. That's really annoying."

I remember finding this remark highly intriguing, but for reasons I could not make entirely clear to myself at the time. Now, I think I can say that at least part of my bewilderment had to do with the following insight: having perfect (or absolute) pitch involves not just the ability to identify the pitch of a given tone without making use of a tuning-fork or some similar device. Moreover, if he who has perfect pitch is confident enough in his talent, he might even pass judgment on particular tuning-forks. After having listened to the tone it produces, he might claim that a tuning-fork is misconstrued since the A which it is said to generate is, in fact, too low or too high. For me, who does not have perfect pitch, delivering this sort of criticism is impossible. My way of arguing that a particular tuning-fork is wrongly constructed is, rather, to compare its alleged A to the A produced by other tuning-forks (and similar such devices). Only if, on such comparison, I found that the tone generated by the tuning-fork deviated from the other tones, would I dare to claim that the tuning-fork does not produce a genuine A.

The nature of my bewilderment over the student's remark can be further explored by means of the following thought-experiment. Imagine a world in which *everyone* has perfect pitch. In this world, tuning-forks would not have

the function they have among us, since people would decide what pitches tones have simply by listening to them. (That is to say: in this world, there would be no tuning-forks.) These people always, or very nearly always, agree in their judgments. When they teach their children to identify pitches, one thing they do is to produce sample tones, by singing or whistling, and say things like “This is a D flat”, “This is an F”, and so on. This sort of training does, in fact, work; after a while, the children are able to identify pitches as directly and as competently as their parents. (This is not to say that such ostensive exercises will be the only training required for the child’s learning to use names of pitches.)

Now there is a temptation, at least for someone who lacks perfect pitch, to argue that such a community’s way of identifying pitches is, as it were, strangely free-floating. One might be tempted to say that there seems to exist no solid foundation on which this practice rests. On hearing a tone, these people spontaneously agree that it is, say, a B. But if we asked them what reason they have for thinking so, it might happen that all they would say would be something like: “We simply hear, directly, that the tone is a B. We don’t need any further justification. Indeed, any attempt at such further justification would be superfluous; nothing could lend additional support to our identification of the pitch. To us, that the tone is a B is already fully transparent.”

This sort of answer may appear unsatisfactory. Borrowing a phrase from John McDowell, one might want to say that all that seems to be going on here is “a congruence of subjectivities.”² Hearing tones causes beliefs in these people, beliefs that, luckily enough, concur intersubjectively. To be sure (one might want to continue), this spontaneous consensus must have a natural explanation: nature has endowed these people with similar perceptual apparatuses. But nonetheless, the consensus seems in a certain sense like mere *luck*, for what they agree on is not supported by any rational procedure of justification.

Consider what would happen if these people suddenly started disagreeing with one another—if the peaceful consensus which has so far characterized their practice were replaced by widespread discord. Someone says a given tone is a B; someone else calls it a C; a third listener identifies it as a C sharp; a fourth listener thinks it is a D; and so on. In this case, there might be nothing available which could restore the consensus, no agreed-upon procedures or criteria by means of which the true answer could be identified. If such disagreement became the rule, the practice would break down. Indeed, it would then perhaps be too generous to characterize the prevailing chaos in terms of disagreement, for the breakdown would be so deep-going that the sort of determinacy of content required by the notion of disagreement would be threatened. The old words would cease to have a clear function within that community. It would no longer be clear what it would mean for these people to “identify the pitch” of a given tone.

Such considerations might strengthen the feeling that a community where everyone has perfect pitch would be a community in which the identification of pitches is a strangely free-floating affair, based on nothing, and dependent on a consensus which just *happens* to be there. Indeed, somewhat ironically, one might be tempted to argue that the practice of our own community, where most people do not have perfect pitch, is on firmer footing. For, among us, there *are* ways of justifying or falsifying the claim that a certain tone that one is listening to is, say, a B. Suppose you and I hear a tone, and are asked to guess what pitch it has. Imagine that we come up with different hypotheses. Perhaps your guess is that the tone is an A, whereas my guess is that it is a B. So, we disagree. Our disagreement, however, is easily resolved: consensus can be restored, for example, by comparing the tone with the reference tone generated by a tuning-fork. Hence, it might appear that our practice has the sort of rational foundation that the practice of the community imagined in the thought-experiment seemed to lack.

But this is an illusion. The difference between the two practices is not that one is irrationally free-floating whereas the other rests securely on rational procedures of justification. The difference is better characterized by saying that in these practices, justification comes to an end at different places. For us, the end-point is, roughly: measuring the tone against the tone produced by a tuning-fork. Consider the simplest sort of case. You guess that a given tone is an A, whereas I guess that it is a B. In order to decide who is right, we use a tuning-fork. When we measure the pitch of our tone against the pitch of the reference tone (say, a 440 Hz A), we hear that the pitches are the same. So, I admit you were right: the tone is, indeed, an A. Certainly, this procedure constitutes a justification of your hypothesis (and a falsification of mine). And one might call this justification procedure “rational”, if one likes. But still, this procedure presupposes a kind of recognition that does *not* rest on any further justification, namely, our hearing that the pitch of our tone is *the same* as the pitch of the tone produced by the tuning fork. This recognition of sameness of pitch is no less “direct” than the direct recognition, by someone who has perfect pitch, that a certain tone is an A.

To clarify this point, let us imagine a tone-deaf person—by which I mean: a person who cannot decide the pitch of a given tone *even* if he makes use of all the tuning forks in the world; a person who is unable to perceive the difference or similarity in pitch between two tones which are played simultaneously or right after one another. Such a person will be just as puzzled by our ability to identify the pitch of a given tone by means of a tuning-fork as we are puzzled by the ability of someone who has perfect pitch to identify the pitch of a tone without making use of a tuning-fork. Suppose the tone-deaf person asked us what reason we have for saying that two tones that are played right after one another have the same pitch. Our

best answer would be something like: “We simply hear, directly, that the tones have the same pitch. We don’t need any further justification. Indeed, any attempt at justification would be superfluous; nothing could lend additional support to our recognition that the pitch is the same. To us, the identity of pitches is already fully transparent.” At this point, the tone-deaf person might be tempted to respond that all that is present here is a congruence of subjectivities: hearing tones causes beliefs in us, beliefs that, luckily enough, agree intersubjectively. And he might find support for this analysis in the observation that if we suddenly started disagreeing with one another about the results we get when we measure pitches by means of tuning-forks, there might be no rational way of restoring the earlier consensus. Our practice would then collapse.

We were unsatisfied with the way pitches were identified by people in a community where everyone has perfect pitch. That practice seemed to us “free-floating”, whereas we wanted a practice which rested on a solid foundation. In other words, we wanted a kind of practice where justification comes to an end, not just at a different place, but, as it were, at an absolutely stable place. But now, it is becoming increasingly clear that the idea of such an “absolutely stable” foundation is an illusion. Justification within *any* practice has to end at *some* point, and this point will always be such that questions for “further reasons” will be met by responses which will seem completely uninformative to the person who wants additional grounds: “Don’t you hear—*this* is an A”, or “Don’t you hear—*this* tone has the same pitch as *that*” etc. This is true even of a world in which everyone is completely tone-deaf, but where, for some reason, they still want to talk about “pitches”. Let us assume that for such people, the final arbiter is the result shown on the displays of portable frequency meters. Roughly: when a tone is played, they look at the display of such a frequency meter, and if it says “A” then it has been decided that the tone is an A. This kind of procedure presupposes the ability to identify letters simply by looking at them: to distinguish the expression “A” from the expressions “B”, “C”, and so on. And this ability is no less “free-floating” than the ability to identify the pitch of a tone simply by listening to it. If these tone-deaf people were asked to provide reasons for saying that the letter shown on a certain display is an “A”, their answer would be analogous to the one given by someone who has perfect pitch in response to the question how he knows that a certain tone is an A: “I just see, directly, that the letter is an ‘A’. I don’t need any further reason for making that identification. Indeed, any attempt at justification would be superfluous; nothing could lend additional support to my saying that the letter is an ‘A’. To me, this is already fully transparent.”

II.

I have been discussing what, to my mind, is a rather suggestive instance of a sort of philosophical puzzlement that plays a central role in the writings of the later Wittgenstein. I have not been talking about rules, but Wittgenstein's so-called "rule-following considerations" are very much related to the sort of worries I have pondered above. Worries of this sort also play an important role in Stanley Cavell's writings, and this is, indeed, a point at which Cavell is directly influenced by Wittgenstein.

In an often-quoted passage from his early essay, "The availability of Wittgenstein's later philosophy", Cavell describes a "vision" he thinks can be found in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

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 insures that this projection will take place [...], just as nothing insures 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, 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'. 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.³

One who likes to quote this passage is John McDowell. If I read McDowell correctly, however, he would want to qualify its final sentence. According to McDowell, the vision Cavell sketches seems terrifying only in so far as it has not been properly understood. McDowell says, "[t]he terror of which Cavell speaks at the end of this marvellous passage is a sort of vertigo, induced by the thought that there is nothing but shared forms of life to keep us, as it were, on the rails. We are inclined to think that is an insufficient foundation for a conviction that when we, say, extend a number series, we really are, at each stage, doing the same thing as before" (*MVR*, p. 61). But this vertigo, he continues, is based on a misunderstanding. If we get clear about the sense in which we are dependent on our shared "whirl of organism", we will realize that:

Contemplating the dependence should not induce vertigo at all. We cannot be whole-heartedly engaged in the relevant parts of the "whirl of organism", and at the same time achieve the detachment necessary in order to query whether our unreflective view of

what we are doing is illusory. The cure for the vertigo, then, is to give up the idea that philosophical thought, about the sorts of practice in question, should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life. (*MVR*, p. 63)

Or, as he puts it elsewhere, “we would be protected against the vertigo if we could stop supposing that the relation to reality of some area of our thought and language needs to be contemplated from a standpoint independent of that anchoring in human life that makes the thoughts what they are for us” (*MVR*, p. 211).

I cannot here explain all the details of what McDowell takes to be the “cure” for, or the “protection” against, this vertigo. One of McDowell’s central ideas, however, is that occupying the sort of external, detached viewpoint from which a given practice might seem to lack a “solid foundation”, involves losing sight of (or being blind to) those thoughts and perceptions which are made possible by the practice, and in terms of which the practice is characterized from the inside, by its engaged participants. According to McDowell, being unsatisfied with the place at which justification comes to an end within the practice—feeling that justification should end “further down”, at a more “solid” place—means: not having access to, or perhaps having denied oneself access to, those conceptual and perceptual capacities in terms of which the practice is understood by those who are “normally immersed” in it (*MVR*, p. 211). This means that a question can sensibly be raised about the significance of this sort of disappointment with a practice. For if this disappointment is based on a description of the practice which is alien to the practice itself—in particular, if the description is not faithful to those conceptual and perceptual capacities in the light of which the procedures of justification which are immanent to the practice will seem perfectly sufficient—then there is reason to ask why this sort of disappointment is anything to worry about at all.

My earlier discussion of perfect pitch, normal pitch, and tone-deafness provides an instructive illustration of McDowell’s point. Our dissatisfaction with the way pitches were identified by the inhabitants of the world where everyone has perfect pitch had to do with our construing the ability to hear directly that *this is an A* in terms of the ability to say, directly, “This is an A”, on occasions where everyone else in the community would say the same thing. Precisely because we lack perfect pitch, we have problems recognizing any substantial difference between these two abilities. This might be said to mark the limited extent to which someone who lacks perfect pitch can understand what it means to have perfect pitch. One might say that not having perfect pitch means lacking the perceptual and conceptual capacities required in order to understand clearly how hearing directly that *this is an A* can be a matter of *perceiving how things are*, rather than just a matter of

being caused, by some natural event, to believe something that one's peers also believe. In this sense, perfect pitch is indeed an enigma to he who does not have it. This is not to say, à la Nagel, that someone who lacks perfect pitch does not know "what it is like" to have perfect pitch. The relevant difference is not one between subjective qualities, in Nagel's sense. Rather, the point is epistemological: he who lacks perfect pitch is unable to situate perceptions of the relevant sort within the logical space of reasons (rather than within the space of causes). He has difficulties conceiving perceptions that do not involve the measuring of a given tone against a reference tone as genuine justifications of the claim that *this is an A*. And similarly for the tone-deaf: his inability to hear differences and similarities in pitch is an inability to conceive perceptions that do not involve the use of a frequency meter (or some similar device) as genuine justifications of the claim that *this* tone has the same pitch as *that* tone.

Cavell definitely agrees with much in McDowell's general analysis of our inclination to look for a "solid" external foundation for our practices. But it is also worth mentioning, even at this early stage of the present investigation, that there seem to be differences between Cavell and McDowell at this point, differences that are hard to identify precisely but which might nonetheless be quite significant. In brief, what I have in mind is this: reading McDowell, one often gets a sense that he thinks the temptation to search for an external foundation, and the terror one might feel when one realizes that this search is bound to be unsuccessful, can be kept at a distance once the falsity or meaninglessness of the ideas on which this temptation and this feeling of terror are based has been made fully evident. Again, he suggests there is a "cure" from, and "protection" against, such terror. According to McDowell, Wittgenstein's vision of language is frightening only to someone who is still held captive by the sort of pictures Wittgenstein meant to combat. McDowell seems to think that if you have a clear grasp of Wittgenstein's vision, you realize that such terror is misplaced, and you will know how to get rid of it were it to begin to haunt you again.

Cavell, by contrast, never so much as suggests that this terror is something one can be cured from or protected against. Perhaps he would even hesitate to call it misplaced. He seems to think that no matter how philosophically clear-sighted we are, our normal immersion in practices would not be what it is unless the possibility of not being thus immersed could scare the hell out of us. Of central importance for an adequate understanding of this aspect of Cavell's thinking is his idea that there is a sense in which our very immersion in familiar practices tempts us to disengage from those practices. He talks of "the possibility of the repudiation of ordinary concepts by, as it were, themselves", a possibility he describes as "our possibility of repudiating our agreement in terms of which words have criteria of relation (to the world, of the world) given them in the human life form" (*PoP*, p. 97). He also speaks of the "attempt, or

wish, to escape [...] those shared forms of life, to give up the responsibility of their maintenance”, adding, famously, that “[n]othing is more human than the wish to deny one’s humanity.”⁴

Admittedly, there are passages in which McDowell suggests that philosophical peace of mind might be no more than a practically unattainable ideal. “Interesting philosophical afflictions”, he says, “are deep-seated. Even after temporarily successful therapy, they re-emerge, perhaps perennially, in new forms. If the risk of re-emergence is perennial, peace is always beyond the horizon.”⁵ Cavell, however, questions the idea that such peace of mind makes sense, even as an ideal. While McDowell might regard the perennial re-emergence of philosophical terror as a plausible conjecture, Cavell suggests it is somehow essential to what it means to lead a human life.

I am gesturing here at one of the central and most controversial parts of Cavell’s philosophy. Providing more than such vague gestures would be premature at this point, since further precision presupposes a deeper understanding of the significance that Wittgenstein’s vision of language has for Cavell. In particular, it will be necessary to get clear about one important aspect of what this vision means to Cavell, namely, its import for his conception of so-called ordinary language philosophy. Achieving such clarity is the overall aim of sections 3 and 4. Further discussion of how Cavell might differ from McDowell is postponed until section 5. This issue will then be related to Cavell’s dissatisfaction with Austin, and, in particular, to Cavell’s claim that Austin is not clear about the nature and possible achievements of his own philosophical procedures.

III.

I now turn to the analogy Cavell makes in the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper: between being able to practice with understanding the method of ordinary language philosophy and having perfect pitch. Let me start by saying that when I first read this passage I found the analogy striking but also very puzzling. I could not make clear to myself what the alleged similarities between these two abilities were supposed to be, and nonetheless I felt sure that such similarities existed. A few pages after the quoted passage Cavell again mentions perfect pitch, in a discussion of the relation between philosophy and autobiography. “If”, he says, “philosophy is for me finding a language in which I understand philosophy to be inherited, which means telling my autobiography in such a way as to find the conditions of that language, then I ought even by now to be able to begin formulating some of those conditions.” He then goes on to give a list of linked conditions, among which he includes “a version of perfect pitch” (*PoP*, pp. 38–9). Eight pages later, he says of these conditions that “the

feature of perfect pitch is apt to be the hardest to recognize, and the most variously or privately ratified.” And then:

I mean it as the title of experiences ranging from ones amounting to conversions down to small but lucid attestations that the world holds a blessing in store, that one is, in Emerson’s and Nietzsche’s image, taking steps, walking on, on one’s own. (*PoP*, p. 47)

This is not easy to comprehend, and I do not claim to have anything like a complete understanding of what Cavell is trying to say here. But I do find his talk about perfect pitch as the title of the experience that one is taking steps, walking on, on one’s own, illuminating. The best way for me to explain what kind of elucidation I find here, is by relating the passage I just quoted to the significance of the fact that the remarks of ordinary language philosophers are, typically, in the first person plural: “We say ...”, “We don’t say ...”, “When we say ... we imply ...”, and so on. According to Cavell, this feature is a central clue to the nature of such remarks. (See, for example, *MWM*, p. 14.) He argues that the use of the first person plural shows that such remarks combine two aspirations that, at first, might seem difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, such remarks are not statements of empirical science: they are not based on polls, statistical studies of linguistic behavior, or other such evidence. One might say that this constitutes their first-person aspect. On the other hand, in making remarks of this form, the ordinary language philosopher does claim to speak for others. This is crucial, since “the primary fact of natural language is that it is something spoken, spoken together” (*MWM*, p. 33). According to Cavell, if the philosopher claimed to speak only for himself, as someone completely detached from the linguistic community of which he is a member, he would be speaking for no one—not even himself. Language, as we know it, is something we share.

Some philosophers have felt that the first-person aspect and the plural aspect of such statements are straightforwardly incompatible. They have argued that if you claim to say something about how language is used by a community, the only way to justify those claims is to make empirical, socio-linguistic observations. According to Cavell, this argument ignores that the relevant statements about ordinary language are made by native speakers of that language, speakers who,

do not, in *general*, need evidence for what is said in the language; they are the source of such evidence. It is from them that the descriptive linguist takes the corpus of utterances on the basis of which he will construct a grammar of that language. To answer *some* kinds of specific questions, we will have to [...] count noses; but in general, to tell what is and isn’t English, and to tell whether what is said is

properly used, the native speaker can rely on his own nose; if not, there would be nothing to count. (*MWM*, p. 4)

It is easy to misunderstand the idea expressed here. Cavell's point is not that the native speaker has some sort of intuitive and infallible insight into the linguistic dispositions of his fellow speakers. On the contrary, Cavell freely admits that the speaker's claims about what "we" say might be mistaken, and that the speaker's peers might disagree with them. The point is, rather, that if such disagreement arises, what happens is quite different from, and in an important sense much more troubling than, when a socio-linguistic hypothesis is falsified by statistical polls or other empirical data. When my claims about what we say are questioned, what is questioned are both my own self-understanding and my sense of what I share with my peers, these two things being inseparable. Even occasional and corrigible mistakes may be worrying in that sense, not to mention persistent disagreement. Such disagreement might undercut that sense of community inherent in the notion of a common language, and the sense of authority inherent in the notion of linguistic competence (the authority for which we take on responsibility when, e.g., we teach our children to speak). Cavell writes:

The claim that in general we do not require evidence for statements in the first person plural does not rest upon a claim that we cannot be wrong about what we are doing or about what we say, but only that it would be extraordinary if we were (often). [...] If I am wrong about what he does (they do), that may be no great surprise; but if I am wrong about what I (we) do, that is liable, where it is not comic, to be tragic. (*MWM*, p. 14)

This means that practicing the "method" of ordinary language philosophy involves both a rather particular sort of self-reliance and a rather particular sort of humility. Indeed, such self-reliance and such humility are internally related: they are exhibited simultaneously, and cannot be present apart from each other. This, says Cavell, is why, and the sense in which, the ordinary language philosopher cannot shun the autobiographical, but must use it as the ground from which he dares to speak for others:

Philosophers who proceed as Austin suggests will not be much interested to poll others for their opinion [...]. Then why do such philosophers say "we" instead of "I"? With what justification? They are saying what the everyday use is [...]. And by whose authority? Their basis is autobiographical, but they evidently take what they do and say to be representative or exemplary of the human condition as

such. In this way they interpret philosophy's arrogance as the arrogation of the right to speak for us, to say whatever there is to say in the human resistance to the drag of metaphysics and of skepticism; and authorize that arrogation in the claim to representativeness, expressed autobiographically. There is a humility or poverty essential to this arrogation, since appealing to the ordinariness of language is obeying it—suffering its intelligibility, alms of commonness—recognizing the mastery of it. (*PoP*, p. 8)

Now where does perfect pitch, as the title of the experience that one is walking on, on one's own, come in here? Well, in something like the following way: having perfect pitch involves a peculiar mixture of self-reliance and vulnerability. He who has perfect pitch trusts his own perceptual capacity. His having perfect pitch means that he cares little about consulting tuning forks. Nor does he ask others for their opinion—after all, that *this is an A* is not settled by polls. However, if people started disagreeing with him about the pitches of tones, that *would* be troubling. It might be a sign that he is no longer part of that special community of people who have perfect pitch (his talent may be gone.) Or, it might mean an even more profound disintegration of his, or his fellow-speakers', sanity. This situation is analogous to the case described in the following remark by Wittgenstein:

How do I know that the colour that I am now seeing is called "green"? Well, to confirm it I might ask other people; but if they did not agree with me, I should become totally confused and should perhaps take them or myself for crazy. That is to say: I should either no longer trust myself to judge, or no longer react to what they say as to a judgement.⁶

In a rather (but, as we shall see, not altogether) similar sort of way, the ordinary language philosopher must dare to rely on his own sense of how we speak. His remarks can be neither confirmed nor falsified by polls. Nor is a dictionary, or some other officially sanctioned collection of linguistic rules, of much help. For his investigation takes place at a level where such officially sanctioned rules do not function as normative standards in the relevant sense of the word (this point will be further clarified below). It might turn out that his peers do not want to agree with what he says they should say. But this lack of agreement does not, by itself, constitute a falsification of his remarks. Rather, it might make unclear the extent to which these people *are* his peers; or, it might be a sign that it is unclear to *him* what is involved in his being part of the community in question. If disagreement becomes prevalent and persistent enough, he might even doubt his own sanity.

Consider Austin's famous donkey example:

You have a donkey, so have I, and they graze in the same field. The day comes when I conceive a dislike for mine. I go to shoot it, draw a bead on it, fire: the brute falls in its tracks. I inspect the victim, and find to my horror that it is *your* donkey. I appear on your doorstep with the remains and say—what? “I say, old sport, I'm awfully sorry, &c., I've shot your donkey *by accident*”? Or “*by mistake*”? Then again, I go to shoot my donkey as before, draw a bead on it, fire—but as I do so, the beasts move, and to my horror yours falls. Again the scene on the doorstep—what do I say? “By mistake”? Or “by accident”?⁷

Even if Austin here speaks in the first person singular, his intent is in the relevant sense plural: his example is designed to remind us of how *we* speak. And he succeeds, brilliantly. We all agree that in the first scenario the donkey was shot by mistake, whereas in the second scenario it was shot by accident. But what if people did not agree with this? What if they said the opposite: no no, the first donkey was shot by accident and the second by mistake? Well, supposing that they are serious, their disagreement would be utterly weird—much more so than the falsification of a socio-linguistic hypothesis. For you (who, I suppose, agree with Austin) would not understand to what their disagreement amounted. It could not just be a local rupture, for you would then also want to know what places these people assign to a host of other concepts, such as “intention”, “responsibility”, “blame”, “excuse”, and so on and so forth. Of course it might happen that such an inquiry makes them change their minds about Austin's story, and admit that the first donkey was shot by mistake and the second by accident. If so, there is perhaps not much to worry about. But it might also turn out that those people want to place the relevant concepts in a pattern that is foreign to you, or that you do not succeed in understanding these people at all. In either case, the result is more or less radical estrangement: these people may become enigmas to you (Cf. *MWM*, p. 67).

IV.

In the previous section I said something brief about the *level* at which the investigations of the ordinary language philosopher take place. I said this had to do with what I take Cavell to mean when he talks about perfect pitch in terms of “walking on on one's own.” Let me try to clarify what I meant by reflecting on a passage from a paper by Stephen Mulhall. In his reply to Steven Affeldt's criticism⁸ of his book *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Mulhall discusses Cavell's notions of grammar and criteria, and he argues that there is a perfectly good sense in which

“there is a given grammar which represents the normative standard against which a particular judgment is to be assessed.” Mulhall proceeds by giving the following example of what such givenness and determination might involve:

If someone were to dispute my claim that the colour of my living room wall is blue rather than green, we might try to settle the dispute by asking the views of others, but we might also refer to the colour chart in an interior decoration book—checking the match between wall colour and sample. This is what I would mean by talk of assessing a judgment against a grammatical standard.⁹

What Mulhall says here is just not right. Typically, if someone were to dispute my claim that the color of my living room wall is blue rather than green, we would not try to settle the dispute by consulting the color chart in an interior decoration book. A color chart might be of help if we were quarrelling about, say, whether a certain shade of green is called (by a certain paint maker) “Apple Green” or “Pear Green.” But a chart will not help us decide whether a given color is blue or green. In our world, color charts just do not have that kind of authority in this sort of case. If two people really disagree about whether the color of a wall is blue or green, and if they are at all confident in their ability to distinguish these colors, they will continue to disagree about whether the relevant color sample is blue or green. It matters little whether such a color chart counts that sample as a shade of green or a shade of blue. If I am really convinced that the color is blue, the color chart’s calling it, say, “Sea Green”, will not make me change my mind; rather, I will argue that what this color chart calls “Sea Green” is, in fact, a shade of blue.

Nor will asking other people be of much help. Suppose I think the color of the wall is a borderline case, but if I had to make a decision I would call it “blue” rather than “green.” Then, if almost everyone else told me that they would rather call it “green”, I might change my habits of talking. But if I do not, I will still be counted as a member of that linguistic community. My continuing to classify this shade as “blue” does not mean that people will regard me as incompetent in my use of color words. At most, they will think of me as just a little bit idiosyncratic. By contrast, if I am absolutely convinced that the color is not a borderline case, but definitely blue, the fact that other people disagree with me would be very troubling. But it would not be troubling in the way a straightforward falsification of an empirical hypothesis is troubling. It would be worse. As Wittgenstein says in the passage quoted above, such disagreement would make me totally confused and I might then perhaps take my peers or myself for crazy. It might, of course, turn out that I have become color-blind; but this will then show itself in my being unable, in regular and predictable ways, to distinguish between

green and blue in a series of other cases. This scenario is not, I suppose, what Mulhall has in mind.

So ironically, the example Mulhall offers illustrates precisely the opposite of what he takes it to show. If, by “a normative standard against which a particular judgment is to be assessed”, we mean something like a color chart, then there are many uses of language which are not governed by any such standard. Indeed, many of the most basic, everyday uses of language involve no such authoritative standard. Now what I am arguing is that, according to Cavell, the ordinary language philosopher is interested in precisely these very basic and elementary strata of linguistic practice. That is the level at which his investigation takes place. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? If he were interested in uses of language where authoritative standards analogous to color charts did play the kind of role Mulhall describes, his task would be relatively simple but also relatively uninteresting. All he would have to do then would be to inform us about the authoritative charts, rule-books, and so on. But this is precisely what he cannot do; it is precisely the sense in which his task is not simple. Instead, he has to remind people of what they already know (but cannot be informed about), and the only basis on which he can claim to do so is his own position as competent language user, his own sense of the language he has inherited and claims to share with others.¹⁰

This is related to what Cavell regards as another central feature of philosophical investigations of ordinary language, namely, that such investigations “can as appropriately or truly be said to be looking at the world as looking at language” (*MWM*, p. 99). Considering the cliché that Austin’s central philosophical concern lies in drawing distinctions, Cavell discusses how examples and (“most characteristically”) stories set the stage for Austin’s distinctions. He contrasts Austin’s use of examples with that which can be found in the writings of more traditional philosophers, such as Russell, Broad and Moore,

whose distinctions do not serve to compare and (as it were) to elicit differences but rather, one could say, to provide labels for differences previously, somehow, noticed. One sometimes has the feeling that Austin’s differences penetrate the phenomena they record—a feeling from within which the traditional philosopher will be the one who seems to be talking about mere words. The differering role of examples in these philosophies is a topic whose importance cannot be exaggerated, and no amount of words about “ordinary language” or “make all the distinctions” will convey to anyone who does not have the hang of it how to produce and test such examples. (*MWM*, p. 103)

On reading Austin, says Cavell, “what we learn will not be new empirical facts about the world, and yet illuminating facts about the world. It is true

that he asks for the difference between doing something by mistake and doing it by accident, but what transpires is a characterization of *what a mistake is* and (as contrasted, or so far as contrasted with this) what an accident is" (*MWM*, p.104).

Consider a case when you need to use a color chart. You and your friend are having a dispute about the color of his living room wall: you say it is Apple Green, he says it is Pear Green. Your problem might then be described as follows: you want to know about a set of rules telling you which one of the labels "Apple Green" and "Pear Green" is rightly applied to an already identified bit of reality. Now this is very different from the kind of problem with which Austin's donkey example is designed to deal. Austin does not give us rules for how to apply the terms "doing something by mistake" and "doing something by accident" to already identified bits of reality. Rather, he tells us stories which remind us of what reality might be like, and once these stories have been told it is clear to us that there is a difference between doing something by mistake and doing it by accident. The question, "Do *these* words apply to *this* piece of reality?" never comes up. The problem is, rather, that we have no clear conception of what "*this* piece of reality" is or can be like. But once Austin has told us stories that describe such pieces of reality, we immediately recognize the scenarios he describes as instances of doing something by mistake and doing something by accident, respectively. Hence, what we needed was not rules telling us that those scenarios are instances of those concepts; what we needed was to be reminded of the very possibility that reality might involve such scenarios.

This makes it somewhat clearer why it is so difficult to come up with stories like Austin's donkey example. Finding rules of application is not so hard, and presupposes that we are clear about what the rules are going to be applied to. But if what the rules are going to be applied to is precisely what we are not clear about, then we have a much more challenging task, the accomplishment of which requires a form of sensibility that cannot be conveyed by simple instruction.¹¹ Cavell suggests it is no less troublesome to teach someone who lacks the required sensibility the materials and methods of ordinary language philosophers than to teach someone who lacks musical sensibility to master an instrument. "Perhaps what is wanted", Cavell says, "is a matter of conveying 'the hang' of something, and that is a very particular dimension of a subject to teach—familiar, for example, in conservatories of music, but also, I should guess, in learning a new game or entering any new territory or technique or apprenticing in a trade" (*MWM*, pp. 103–4).

V.

I now return to the theme of section II: the similarities and differences between Cavell's and McDowell's ways of understanding Wittgenstein's

vision of language. According to McDowell's Wittgenstein, the worry that established practice amounts to nothing but a congruence of subjectivities depends on the idea that philosophical reflection should be undertaken "at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life." What can be learnt from Wittgenstein, McDowell says, is that such external reflection loses sight of, and thus fails to do justice to, those conceptual and perceptual capacities in the light of which customary procedures of justification seem perfectly sufficient. This is the reason why philosophical detachment makes it hard to understand how familiar concepts and perceptions can tell us how things really are. Seen from within their anchoring in human life, however, the objective purport of such concepts and perceptions is unproblematic. Indeed, McDowell's Wittgenstein thinks such anchoring is a precondition for objectivity. Weighing the anchor means closing oneself off from the world.¹²

So far, there is perhaps not much disagreement between McDowell and Cavell. In any case, the disagreement I am interested in here has to do with the question of whether Wittgenstein's vision of language is, as Cavell puts it, "terrifying." I suggested before that McDowell would not, without qualification, agree with this characterization. According to McDowell, if Wittgenstein's vision appears terrifying, it is only because we have not fully understood it. By contrast, Cavell's Wittgenstein does not think that philosophical clear-sightedness offers protection against such terror. On the contrary, his view appears to be that the dream of such protection is fundamentally misguided.

In order to get clearer about this issue, it is useful to consider some of the ways in which the relation between having perfect pitch and lacking perfect pitch is different from the relation between being "normally immersed" in familiar practices and being philosophically dissatisfied with such practices. Here is one such difference. In relation to a community where everyone has perfect pitch, I would be an outsider. For I cannot identify pitches without making use of something like a tuning-fork. Similarly, someone who is tone-deaf is an outsider in relation to people who have normal pitch. And the colour-blind are unable to use colour words in that direct sort of way that characterizes the practice of people endowed with normal colour vision. In all these cases, the outsider's position is, as it were, totally involuntary: his inability is a natural deficiency he can do little or nothing about. Roughly speaking, he has no choice but to view the practice from without. By contrast, in the sort of case on which both McDowell and Cavell focus, where someone is philosophically dissatisfied with familiar practices, the situation is different and more complex. For in this sort of case, the person is perfectly able to participate in the relevant practices. Indeed, most of his time he is as "normally immersed" in those practices as anyone else. Consequently, his philosophical alienation must somehow be self-imposed,

and thus quite different from the non-participation of the tone-deaf or the color-blind.

Moreover, this philosophically dissatisfied person is not clearly aware of his detachment: he does not take himself to have lost sight of the concepts whose objective purport he wants to legitimize. On the contrary, he thinks his reflections lead to a firmer grasp of those concepts. His sense is that the procedures of abstraction and generalization that typically characterize his approach serve to clarify or purify the concepts, rather than to hide them from view. So here we have a second disanalogy between this sort of philosophical detachment and the way in which someone who lacks perfect pitch is detached from practices that involve the exercise of perfect pitch. He who lacks perfect pitch knows he is an outsider. Whereas, if Cavell's and McDowell's diagnosis is right, the philosophically dissatisfied person is not aware of his having dissociated himself from the conditions under which the concepts he claims to be clarifying are meaningfully applied.

Note how extremely provocative this diagnosis is, or should be. The provocation is largely due to the fact that the supposedly detached philosopher is a master of the practice from which he is said to have alienated himself. He is a competent language user. And yet, Cavell and McDowell dare to claim, when such a person thinks he is gaining a reflective understanding of certain concepts of that language, what happens is the very opposite: those concepts slip through his fingers.

How is such self-inflicted yet unconscious alienation possible? If the sort of diagnosis that Cavell and McDowell are offering is going to seem at all plausible, they must give a credible answer to this question. At this point, one can begin to sense a distinctive difference between the two philosophers. McDowell can be read as providing an answer according to which the temptation to alienate oneself from familiar practices is contingent upon certain events in relatively recent intellectual history. In *Mind and World*, he argues that the philosophical anxieties he discusses require the background of a conception of nature as "disenchanted", a conception which "was made available only by a hard-won achievement of human thought at a specific time, the time of the rise of modern science."¹³ Admittedly, it is not altogether clear if the root of the anxieties McDowell refers to here is identical with the sort of self-inflicted alienation I have been describing above, or if those anxieties should rather be seen as resulting from one *specifically modern form* of such alienation, other forms being imaginable under different historical circumstances. The latter alternative would leave it open for McDowell to argue that the temptation to alienate oneself from familiar practices is not, in *general*, as historically conditioned as he sometimes seems to be suggesting. On the other hand, the fact remains that the only account he gives of the origin of this temptation is in terms of the emergence and metaphysical exploitation of our modern conception of

nature. Insofar as he thinks the temptation is capable of taking other, less scientific forms, he tells us nothing about its general allure.

Cavell, by contrast, tends to focus on features that make our urge to alienate ourselves from familiar practices seem less contingent, or better, more ineradicably human. He would not deny that the view of nature as disenchanted is significant to certain ways in which this urge manifests itself in contemporary thinking. But such disenchantment does not play the sort of pivotal role in Cavell's writings that it seems to play in McDowell's. Typically, Cavell's descriptions of what self-inflicted yet unconscious alienation may involve are not restricted to philosophical anxieties whose ultimate source is a modern conception of nature. Rather, what he tries to make us recognize is what he takes to be the more fundamental allure of such alienation—something about which McDowell has little to say.

The best way of getting clear about the details of Cavell's analysis is to look at a concrete and representative example. Consider the following a story.¹⁴ Yesterday night, Peter witnessed a magical performance. "In his right hand", he tells his friend Paula, "the magician held two ping-pong balls. They were in full view, right under my eyes, no concealment or anything. Suddenly, he moved his hand a little, and one ball just disappeared." Paula, who knows something about conjuring tricks, replies: "Did you really see the whole balls? You know, magicians often use shells. It's a simple idea, you can make two such shells yourself by cutting an ordinary ping-pong ball into halves. By displaying the convex side, you make people think they see a whole ball. If the magician holds one real ball and one shell in his hand, and then rapidly slides the ball into the shell, he creates exactly the kind of illusion you describe." Peter pauses and then says, "Yes, you're right. Come to think of it, I didn't see the whole balls, but only the front surfaces of what I took to be two balls. Clearly, one of them might have been a shell. That's the explanation of course."

This is an example of an everyday use of the expression, "I didn't see the whole thing, but only its front surface". Now, imagine an epistemologist who wants to make what appears to be a rather similar (even if much more general) application of the same expression. This epistemologist argues that *whenever* we look at an object, all we really see is its front surface. Of course the epistemologist knows that in everyday life we say things like "I see the whole building from here" or "If you remove your hand I will be able to see the whole teapot". But these ways of talking, he argues, are strictly speaking false: it never happens, it *couldn't* happen, that we see a *whole* building or a *whole* teapot.

This epistemologist might be said to invoke a model or a scheme that is as simple as it is persuasive. According to this scheme, the part of an object seen by an observer at a given time is identified only in terms of the geometrical and physical circumstances of the situation. The basic idea can

be rendered as follows: the part of the object that is seen consists of all the points of the object which are such that you can draw straight lines from the observer's eye to those points without interruption. If no non-transparent matter blocks the way from the eye to a given point, then that point belongs to the visible part of the object. The eye is like a searchlight directed toward the object: the part that gets illuminated is the part which can be seen, while the part which remains dark is out of sight. Since any instance of seeing something is possible to picture in this sort of way, it seems to follow that whenever we see an object, we see only that part of it which faces us in the above mentioned sense—the object's front surface. Hence (the argument continues), to the extent that we want to say that a certain object consists of something more than such a front surface, we will have to admit that we never see the whole object, but only a part of it.¹⁵

This argument may seem indisputable. But Cavell thinks there is a fundamental problem with it. This problem becomes discernible once we dare to raise the following question: does the model the epistemologist invokes really manage to identify and distinguish between *parts* of an object? At first, this question may sound ridiculous. Clearly, one wants to say, the suggested scheme distinguishes between parts. One part is the part made up of all the points to which straight lines can be drawn without interruption, and the other part is the part to which such uninterrupted lines cannot be drawn. That seems obvious enough.

But are these so-called “parts” really parts in any substantial sense of the word? Think again about Peter's and Paula's discussion. To understand what it means for Peter to be struck by the fact that he did not see the whole ball, it is crucial to realize that the identity of the part he did see is *not* established by reference to the fact that this part happens to be facing him. Suppose Peter grabs the object and turns it around. That would mean that the part that he just saw gradually *disappears from view*, and yet it remains the *same* part as before. Some *other* part of the thing, a part that was not seen earlier—the back side—will then come into view. If the thing is a ball, that other part will have the same convex shape as the part that was visible earlier. If the thing is a shell, Peter will instead be looking into a concave hollow.

So when Peter and Paula talk about “the back side” of what Peter took to be a ball, the identity of that part “is established independently of the (merely geometrical-physical) fact that it is then and there not visible from [Peter's] position” (*CR*, p. 200). And analogously for the front surface. This makes their usage significantly different from the one suggested by the epistemologist's scheme. In fact, it is crucial to the general aspirations of the epistemologist—his will to conclude that we can never see any part of an object other than its front surface—that no such independent identification of parts occurs. If the identity of a part is established independently of the geometrical-physical facts of a particular moment of seeing, then it *is*

perfectly possible to see the back side of an object: just walk around the object, or turn it around.¹⁶

Considered merely as a formal move within his model, the epistemologist's conclusion, "We never see any part of an object other than its front surface", is indeed indisputable. But it is also both trivial and empty: it is a tautologous consequence of the conventions that define the model, and has no bearing on anything else. The problem is that the epistemologist wants his generalization to amount to something more than such an empty move. His conclusion is supposed to result from an application of the model to reality. He intends to make a substantial claim.

This means that the epistemologist has run into a dilemma. His general aspirations require that no independent identification of parts be made. His wish to make a genuine claim requires the opposite: that such an independent identification of parts *is* made. The validity of the epistemologist's conclusion depends on the model's being a model of nothing; whereas the substance of the conclusion requires that the model is actually applied.

This might be difficult to realize. One might think that applying the model cannot be a problem, for it seems to fit (automatically, as it were) all instances of someone's seeing an object. Again, it is trivial that each such act of seeing takes place under certain geometrical and physical circumstances, and the scheme seems to tell us how those circumstances determine what is actually seen. But, again, the problem is with the expression, "*what* is actually seen." There is of course a sense in which it is true that geometrical and physical circumstances determine what part of an object is visible from a given point of view. It is essential, however, that we can specify the seen part, the "*what*", without reference to those geometrical-physical circumstances. Otherwise, it is totally unclear what is being "determined" by the geometrical and physical circumstances; all we get is a *redescription* of those circumstances in terms of "visible points."

And if we try (by force, as it were) to make reality fit this empty redescription in a more substantial sense, the result is arbitrary distortion. For example, how are we going to account for the fact that real-life observers can and must move around in the world? If the identity of the parts of an object is established solely in terms of their geometrical relation to the observer, such moving around becomes incomprehensible. After all, for a creature with visual organs, moving around among objects means coming to see *new* parts of the objects, parts that were previously out of sight. But seeing parts that were previously out of sight is precisely what the redescription seems to leave no room for, since it entails that we always see the same part of an object, "the front surface." So, the upshot is that we do not move around. Allegedly, what actually happens when we, as we usually put it, "walk around objects in order to take a look at their back sides", is

that the front surfaces of objects change their visual appearance. The picture is that it is the passing show around us which alters, somewhat like when watching a film, whereas the position of our eyes remains fixed.¹⁷

I hope my discussion of this example has given the reader a sense of the complexity Cavell sees in the relation between our familiar use of concepts and the philosophical dissatisfaction with that use. Moreover, the example should suggest why it is there, in that complex relation, that Cavell finds the explanation of how a master of the language can take himself to be clarifying familiar concepts when, in reality, he loses sight of those very concepts. It is, for example, highly significant that our imagined epistemologist starts from familiar language. He uses ordinary words, even if his use of those words is not entirely natural. Cavell says the epistemologist makes a *projection*: he imports familiar words into a not so familiar context, somewhat like when the word “feed” gets projected from familiar constructions such as “feed the baby” and “feed the dog” into new ones, like “feed the meter” and “feed his pride.”

Now, Cavell does not think there is anything wrong with projections from familiar contexts into less familiar ones. In particular, he does not think that the unfamiliarity of a new context means that the projection involves a distortion of established concepts. “Feed the meter” is a perfectly fine and meaningful expression. And, at least at first sight, the epistemologist’s way of talking seems equally all right. As Cavell notes, “it doesn’t seem obvious that an object can’t (and even oughtn’t to) be taken to be something whose front ineluctably conceals its back” (*MWM*, p. 251).

In fact, Cavell thinks meaningful language use is not just compatible with, but dependent on our projective abilities. According to Cavell, the pervasive significance of our unregularizable projective imagination manifests the extent to which keeping language alive and the world in view is not a matter of passive conformity, but a continuous undertaking which requires the employment of those interests, feelings, modes of response, senses of humor and significance and fulfillment that he refers to in his earlier quoted description of Wittgenstein’s vision of language. This undertaking is our task, as language using creatures; we are burdened with this responsibility. It cannot be transferred to, say, a machinery of rules the application of which is fixed independently of human modes of response.

What *is* special about the epistemologist’s projection is that it serves to hide the fact that we are responsible in this sort of way. This makes it different from a projection like that from “feed the dog” to “feed his pride”, where it is more or less clear that our ability to go on in the relevant sort of way involves an unregularizable employment of human sensitivity. The epistemologist’s projection, by contrast, appears to make such human sensitivity redundant. By abstracting from the particular reasons people have for asking what parts of an object are visible, and instead providing systematic principles for distinguishing between the seen and the unseen

parts in any particular case, the epistemologist's model seems to cleanse our ordinary ways of making that distinction from the shifting concerns which make us raise the issue in real-life situations. In real cases, we have specific worries: we suspect that what looks like a ball is, in fact, a shell; we want to know whether John sees that the vase before him has a crack in it; we use an ultra-sound scanner to look at a fetus in order to check its development; and so on and so forth. In each such case, saying "I don't see the whole thing" has a specific point, the appreciation of which requires, precisely, a sharing of interests, feelings, and perhaps senses of humor, significance, and fulfillment. The epistemologist's conclusion, by contrast, is in that sense pointless. Indeed, it is this very pointlessness that constitutes its attraction. Unclouded by real-life concerns, the epistemologist's scheme seems to allow us to focus on *the issue itself*, as it were: what is it that we *really* see when we see an object?¹⁸

This, then, is the irony of the epistemologist's endeavor: if a projection is something we do and for which we are responsible, the epistemologist's projection does not appear as a projection at all, but as a necessary development grounded in and guided by something more fundamental and firm than that "whirl of organism" which manifests itself in our being able to understand expressions like "feed his pride." As Cavell notes, the epistemologist is likely to think of his way of talking, not just as natural enough, but as *inevitable* (*CR*, pp. 144–5, *MWM*, pp. 107 and 251). The invoked scheme seems to be called for by the concepts themselves, as it were. The feeling is that once you have become clear about what "seeing", "part", and so on, really mean, you must admit that all you ever see of an object is its front surface. As a result, the epistemologist's projection tends to obscure or even make invisible the responsibility we have as language users. Language itself seems to take over. It appears as if all we need to do is follow it in its tracks.

It is here, and not in the mere fact that the epistemologist's usage deviates from ordinary language, that Cavell locates the real trouble with the epistemologist's way of reasoning. According to Cavell, the epistemologist does not realize that his projection assigns a purely schematic role to familiar expressions. The epistemologist's conclusions are moves within the invoked model. Considered merely as such internal moves, they are indeed unobjectionable. The problem, however, is that the conclusions are conceived as substantial claims: schematic validity gets confused with general application. As Cavell puts it, the epistemologist fails to see that "what his conclusions find in the world is something he himself has put there, an invention, and would not exist but for his efforts" (*CR*, p. 223).

As I have emphasized, Cavell thinks this kind of self-delusion constitutes a permanent temptation. He thinks we are persistently attracted to the supposition that if the world can be adequately described at all, the description has to be made from a position where we have, as it were,

purified our concepts so that they are no longer tainted by human life. The struggle with this temptation is what Cavell calls the struggle with *skepticism*. He explicitly says this struggle is “endless.”¹⁹ Our question is: what are his reasons for saying so? Why, according to Cavell, can’t we put an end to the struggle, simply by taking Wittgenstein’s vision to heart and, in McDowell’s already quoted words, “give up the idea that philosophical thought [...] should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life?”

To begin with, Cavell thinks it cannot be made fully clear, beforehand and at a general level, what it is that we are supposed to give up here. What can be learnt from Wittgenstein, he argues, is that the line between what is “internal” to a practice and what is “external” to it cannot be drawn preemptively, as it were. If, in a suitable situation, I say, “feed his pride”, I am still “inside” our practice with the word “feed.” My peers and I sense the significant continuity between this and earlier uses of the word. But if there is someone who does not sense this, there is no independent and authoritative way of demonstrating to him that he is wrong. Conversely, if someone claims to sense a significant continuity that we fail to see, there may be no agreed-upon procedure by means of which the issue can be resolved. The notion of giving up, once and for all, the idea that philosophical thought should be undertaken at some external standpoint—not to say the notion of being protected against the terror associated with this idea—seems to make sense only on the assumption that we can decide in advance, and with respect to any case of metaphysical perplexity, what projections are tolerable. According to Cavell, what Wittgenstein makes clear is precisely that the idea of such a pre-emptive decision is incomprehensible.

This is related to Cavell’s worry about the tendency, in the writings of Austin and other ordinary language philosophers, to argue as if certain ways of talking constitute demonstrably inappropriate deviations from established usage. The deep problem with this attitude, Cavell argues, is that the method of ordinary language philosophy, properly conceived, leaves no room for such straightforward dismissal. As Cavell says, the vision of language that should inform the practice of ordinary language philosophers “must itself prevent *flat* repudiation” (*CR*, p. 192). Such flat repudiation would be possible if the disagreement between the ordinary language philosopher and his interlocutor were analogous to the disagreement over whether a certain paint-maker calls the color of a certain wall “Apple Green” or “Pear Green.” But, as I have already emphasized, Cavell’s point is that the disagreement is of a different sort—akin to, though not identical with, the more radical sort of breakdown that I talked much about in the first half of this paper. Restoring consensus, if possible at all, cannot in such cases be a matter of straightforward proof or demonstration. For the disagreement goes too deep: demonstration, in the relevant sense of the

word, requires a consensus that, in this sort of case, cannot be taken for granted without begging the question.

This is not to say that one cannot have a meaningful discussion about the appropriateness of a projection. In some cases, as in “feed his pride”, there is spontaneous agreement—or “attunement”, to use the term Cavell prefers in this connection. In other cases, however, the agreement or attunement is less immediate. As Cavell notes, “a new projection, though not at first obviously appropriate, may be made appropriate by giving relevant explanations of how it is to be taken, *how* the new context *is* an instance of the old concept” (*CR*, p. 192). In fact, this should make it even clearer that the idea of deciding beforehand which projections are tolerable and which are intolerable is absurd. Explanations of the sort Cavell is talking about are given, for example, when an art form is renewed, or when a scientific revolution is instigated. It is of the essence of such renewals and revolutions that their character and appropriateness is unforeseeable. We need to consider each such case individually, when we are actually confronted with it. Before such actual confrontation, it is indeterminate what the adequate diagnosis of and response to the projection will be.²⁰

Consider the following example. A director claims to have made a film noir. Watching the film makes us puzzled and suspicious, however. For, in many seemingly important respects, this film seems quite different from classical film noir. Either it constitutes a radical renewal of the genre, or it is not a film noir at all—and we suspect the latter. Clearly, deciding the issue cannot just be a matter of applying pre-established rules or definitions or criteria. To be sure, many film guides and cinematographic textbooks list criteria for what constitutes a film noir, but one thing that characterizes the imagined situation is that such official criteria are useless, since the director clearly intends to challenge their purported accuracy. The way to resolve our puzzlement is, rather, to engage in a careful reexamination of what it is that *we want to say* when we classify a film as a film noir. Perhaps a sensitive critic can show us that our spontaneous reaction (to say that the film is not a film noir at all) is in fact in tension with what we are able to recognize as the most profound characteristics of classical film noir when we watch them carefully and perceptively. By reminding us of those characteristics and experiences, and by making careful comparisons between paradigm examples of the genre and the new film, such a critic may be able to identify surprising continuities. Taken together, such comparisons and reminders may make it clear to us that we should acknowledge that the critic is right: the film is, indeed, a film noir. It may of course also happen that the critic’s explanations do not work, but betrays his own superficial grasp of the genre. In such a case, we might want to conclude that our initial refusal to count the movie as a film noir was perfectly sound.

There are many other cases similar to this one. In his early essay, “Music discomposed” (*MWM*, pp. 180–212), Cavell expresses his misgivings about

the ways in which the terms “composition”, “improvisation” and “chance” are used in the writings of John Cage, Ernst Krenek, and others. Part of Cavell’s method is to remind his readers of facts they should be able to recognize as quite familiar. He points out that “[i]t is, obviously enough, within contexts fully defined by shared formulas that the possibility of full, explicit improvisation traditionally exists” (*MWM*, p. 201). He notes that if we see someone being interested and becoming absorbed in a pin, or a crumpled handkerchief, “[t]he situation demands an explanation, the way watching someone listening intently to Mozart, or working a puzzle [...] does not” (*MWM*, p. 197). And so on and so forth. By putting such reminders together in the right sort of way, Cavell makes us think again, and think hard, about what it is that we want to say when we talk about compositions and improvisations and chance. Clearly, he wants to encourage the suspicion that the theories behind some of Krenek’s and Cage’s works are problematic. However, he is careful to point out that his aim is not to *prove*, for example, that those works are not musical compositions. Indeed, it is totally unclear what proving such a thing would amount to (*MWM*, p. 205). Rather, the aim of his procedure is restricted to that of urging us to reconsider what is involved, and what we take to be of value, in that sensitivity and in those modes of response by which we give music the place it has in our lives.

According to Cavell, the aim of ordinary language philosophy is, or should be, similar. The disagreement between the ordinary language philosopher and his more traditional interlocutor is not resolvable by reference to rules or definitions. On the other hand, this disagreement is different from a disintegration like that described at the beginning of this paper, of the practice where all participants have perfect pitch. With respect to such disintegration, it makes little sense to try to revive the practice by entering a dialogue with oneself or with one’s peers. If our perfect pitch is gone, then it is gone; verbal exchange will not make it come back. By contrast, practicing the method of ordinary language philosophy, as Cavell conceives it, means keeping the hope for agreement alive. In this sort of case, entering a dialogue is meaningful. Even if there is no guarantee that a resolution will be found, it makes sense to strive for it, and it is the ordinary language philosopher’s job to do so.²¹

One way of summarizing Cavell’s dissatisfaction with Austin’s methodological self-understanding is to say that Austin does not take seriously enough the need for a genuine dialogue in philosophy. He has a wonderfully sensitive ear for the nuances of everyday language, but his impatience with those who do not see those nuances or do not find them illuminating displays a lack of understanding of, or perhaps of interest in, what it is that pulls those unappreciative interlocutors away from the ordinary. Austin often argues as if the difference between him and his interlocutor is, basically, just a matter of discrimination—as if the perceptivity of his

interlocutor were somehow impaired, in contrast to his own perfect pitch, so to speak. This, however, indicates that Austin fails to understand the significance of the fact that the projections that his interlocutor is suggesting are, as Cavell puts it, “not obviously inappropriate.” According to Cavell, that a projection is “not obviously inappropriate” does not just mean that its inappropriateness is difficult to perceive. Rather, it means that the inappropriateness cannot be perceived—or, better, that the charge of inappropriateness makes no clear sense—unless the interlocutor is given the opportunity to explain how his suggested projection is to be taken, how it is supposed to be an instance of the old concept. Not giving him this opportunity amounts to ordinary language dogmatism. It signals a failure to differentiate between philosophical confusion and mere linguistic deviance. It is only by asking the interlocutor to clarify what it is that he wants to say that we can put the adequate sort of pressure on his conception. It is only in relation to the answers that he then provides that we can be said to have revealed that his purported projection does not put language to new and interesting work, but on the contrary, lets it go on holiday.

One thing that is likely to make an investigation of this sort particularly difficult is the sense of inevitability that characterizes the interlocutor’s relation to his own projection. As I said before, Cavell thinks such a person’s dissatisfaction with established practice is internally related to his feeling that the model or scheme that he invokes is somehow made necessary by the concepts themselves. This brings us to another aspect of Cavell’s qualms about Austin, namely what he regards as Austin’s failure to see the methodological importance of this sense of inevitability. Consider Austin’s tendency to accuse his philosophical foes of *mistakes*. Cavell objects that accusations of being mistaken are usually misplaced in philosophy, since “it seems [...] that ‘mistaken’ requires the idea of a wrong alternative (either taking one thing for another, or taking one tack rather than another)” (*MWM*, p. 107). The problem is that this notion of “wrong alternative” suggests that the “correct alternative” is somehow open even to someone who is held captive by a philosophical scheme. This, in turn, makes it seem as if such a person is philosophically confused because he has been overhasty, sloppy, ignorant, stupid, or suchlike. And indeed, Austin often uses such terms to account for what he takes to be the errors of his opponents. But, as Cavell points out, accusations of this sort are, at best, artificial: philosophers worth taking seriously are not hasty, sloppy, ignorant or stupid in any reasonable sense of those words. Philosophical confusions go deeper, and should be characterized in ways that do justice to their irresistible appeal. Once you have come under the spell of a philosophical scheme or model, there seems to be *no* alternative. The scheme tells you how the concepts *must* work. And it is precisely this apparent capacity to annul our options (and, thus, our responsibility) that makes the scheme so attractive.

Austinian examples may serve to break the spell of such a scheme. But there is no guarantee that this will happen. Sometimes some people will experience the examples as immensely powerful and significant. A more typical reaction, however, is to say that they are irrelevant. The interlocutor may admit that the examples remind him of how we talk in real life. But then, he might add that this established way of talking is of little philosophical significance. He explains away the reminders. This may be done in various ways. In a Humean fashion, the interlocutor may argue that the practical demands of everyday life force us to talk with the vulgar, even if this means saying things that are strictly speaking false. Alternatively, he may decide that what does not fit his model lies outside the realm of conceptual content altogether: he may classify it as imprecision due to practical demands or limitations, as a merely “pragmatic” aspect of everyday usage, or whatever. Since we are here moving at a level at which talk about language and talk about reality cannot be neatly separated, such explaining away constitutes a disapproval, not just of everyday language but of everyday reality: our life-world is reduced to mere “appearance.” It is part of being held captive by a scheme that one is good at finding such explanations, explanations that seem able to disarm any attempt to make what is ordinary significant for philosophical investigation.

The reminders themselves do not determine how the interlocutor will respond. Nor do they determine how he should respond. In a sense, no response is wrong, as long as it tells us something about how the interlocutor wants his words to function. Indeed, this is precisely the significance of the interlocutor’s reactions: they show us (and him) *what he wishes to say*. Austinian examples are not proofs but provocations. They bring forth responses that clarify the relation between the interlocutor and the words he wants to use. Clarification of this relation is achieved even in cases where the reminders are explained away. For such explaining away also tells us something about the interlocutor’s desires and requirements. His preferring a certain explanation may make it clearer what the structure of his philosophical scheme is, what he expects from this scheme, and so forth. The hope is that if we are careful and patient enough, our discussion may reach a point at which it is becoming clear to everyone, including our interlocutor, that the ways in which he wants to use his words do not hold together. We state reminders; those reminders get explained away; we state more reminders in response to the ways in which the former ones were disarmed; and so on and so forth. Eventually, this dialectical process may make it patent to us and to the interlocutor that his position is unstable, that he is wavering between different and incompatible requirements. This is what it means to show that the interlocutor is speaking nonsense, in a philosophically pertinent sense of that word. Rather than proving that his way of talking constitutes an inappropriate departure from everyday usage, what we do is bring the investigation to a point where it is plain, to us and to

him, that his requirements are incompatible and nothing determinate is being said.²²

VI.

According to Cavell, Wittgenstein's vision of language entails that we are burdened with the responsibility of keeping language alive and the world in view. Moreover, Cavell says we fear that responsibility: we would like to get rid of it. At bottom, it is this fear that shows itself in our tendency to reason as if being immersed in human life forms is an impediment to (rather than a precondition for) perceiving and describing the world. In a sense, we *want* a gap to open up between familiar practices and reality, a gap the bridging of which cannot be up to us. For the existence of such a gap would seem to mean that our having access to the world depends on there being some self-standing mode of justification, the validity of which is independent of what we do or who we are.

If this is right, it means that our fear of responsibility tends to conceal itself. It tends to appear under the disguise of what seems like a very different, and by no means irresponsible, propensity: wanting to find that rational and self-standing mode of justification which, supposedly, makes our descriptions and perceptions genuinely objective. One of Wittgenstein's most important aims, Cavell argues, is to reveal this charade.

The revelation, however, cannot be definitive. The masquerade is never over. According to Cavell's Wittgenstein, "there is no absolute escape from (the threat of) illusions and the desires constructed from them, say there is no therapy for this, in the sense of a cure for it"; he "sees illusions of meaning as something to which the finite creature is subject chronically, diurnally" (*MWM*, p. xx). McDowell sometimes describes Wittgenstein's conception in similar terms. According to McDowell's Wittgenstein, permanent peace of mind is implausible since the intellectual roots of our philosophical anxieties "are too deep for that." McDowell says we should not take Wittgenstein "to be envisaging a post-philosophical culture [...]. He is not even envisaging a future for himself in which he is definitively cured of the philosophical impulse. The impulse finds peace only occasionally and temporarily."²³ But still, there remains a significant difference between McDowell's and Cavell's Wittgenstein. Cavell and McDowell might agree that the fact that I have taken Wittgenstein's vision of language to heart and am prepared to acknowledge my responsibility *qua* language user does not mean that the temptation to disclaim that responsibility is dissolved or can be kept under control. For Cavell, however, this is not just a plausible conjecture. Rather, he sees it as a constitutive claim. According to Cavell's Wittgenstein, being burdened with responsibility for keeping language alive is inseparable from being tempted to disclaim that responsibility: they are two sides of the same coin.

Thus, Cavell's Wittgenstein thinks the fact that I have become fully aware of my responsibility in itself means that I am prepared to acknowledge both that the temptation is still there, and that the possibility of my succumbing to it is a real and permanent danger for which no secure protection can be provided. If this sounds speculative or even abstruse, it may be helpful to note that something similar may be said about various other kinds of human interaction. For example, consider marriage. As a spouse, I am responsible for keeping my marriage alive. Passively ignoring the required effort means killing the relation; the marriage then continues to be a marriage only in the formal sense of the word. And yet it is tempting to give up this responsibility and behave as if the maintenance of the marriage is somehow guaranteed even in the absence of my active and continuous devotion. Now, imagine someone who claims to be fully aware that he is responsible for keeping his marriage alive, but then adds that this awareness means that he no longer feels, or that he is protected against, the temptation to passively let the marriage take care of itself. Arguably, this by itself reveals that he is *not* fully aware of his responsibility. For being thus aware involves being prepared to acknowledge that the fear of responsibility and the associated temptation to give up that responsibility is still present and is not under full control. What true awareness of responsibility gives you is not protection against that kind of fear and that sort of temptation. Rather, the awareness involves an appreciation of the fact that the dream of such protection is itself a manifestation of the fear against which one wants to be protected.

Cavell claims that Wittgenstein's vision of language is terrifying. What is the nature of the alleged terror? As long as we think of ourselves as engaged in the search for a rational and self-standing mode of justification for our familiar practices, what seems worth fearing is certainly not our propensity to engage in that kind of search, but the possibility that there is no justification of the sort we want to find. This means that we take our fear to be directed toward something that is not, as it were, part of ourselves—something that is independent of our predispositions and responsibilities. *We* are not to blame if it turns out that the alleged gap between our practices and the world is unbridgeable. The threat, it seems, comes from without.

According to Cavell, Wittgenstein's vision of language entails a sort of Copernican turn precisely at this point. Cavell reads Wittgenstein as showing us that the most profound threat does not come from without, but from within ourselves. At the deepest level, what merits fear is our own inclination to disclaim responsibility for the maintenance of those human practices within which language has its life. And, again, Cavell's Wittgenstein offers no protection against that inclination. If Cavell is right, what Wittgenstein's vision should make us realize is this: we must learn to live with our fear of responsibility, with the associated inclination to disclaim that responsibility, and—if we are philosophically clear-sighted

enough—with a fear of that very inclination. Taking Wittgenstein’s vision of language to heart means understanding that this is the price we must pay for having a language at all.²⁴

Notes

1. Cavell (1994), p. 21. All future references to Cavell (1994) are made parenthetically in the text by means of *PoP* and the appropriate page number.
2. McDowell (1998), pp. 61, 207. All future references to McDowell (1998) are made parenthetically in the text by means of *MVR* and the appropriate page number.
3. Cavell (2002), p. 52, note omitted. All future references to Cavell (2002) are made parenthetically in the text by means of *MWM* and the appropriate page number.
4. Cavell (1979), p. 109. All future references to Cavell (1979) are made parenthetically in the text by means of *CR* and the appropriate page number.
5. McDowell (2002), p. 294.
6. Wittgenstein (1978), paragraph VI-35.
7. Austin (1979), p. 185, n. 1.
8. Affeldt’s criticism is in Affeldt (1998).
9. Mulhall (1998), p. 40.
10. I take my point here to be closely related to what Affeldt says about Cavell’s notion of criteria in the following passage: “To speak of our sharing an order of criteria is to speak of an order *in* our judgments (and conduct). Eliciting criteria reveals the fine-grained structure of our agreement in judgment. It does not reveal a separate order undergirding and controlling that agreement. [...] It would be a philosophical distortion of what is involved in our being, as Cavell puts it, initiates of language, to imagine that we somehow always have or possess (perhaps only tacitly) a catalogue of criteria which we use in speaking and making judgments. One central reason for Cavell’s insistence that our agreement in language and our agreement in criteria are the same phenomenon differently described is precisely to fend off this, philosophically tempting, idea” (Affeldt (1998), p. 15).
11. Perhaps the difference between the two tasks is not very different from Kant’s difference between formal and transcendental logic: whereas the former takes the application of rules for granted, the latter constitutes an investigation into the conditions for the possibility of such application (Cf. *MWM*, p. 168).
12. One might want to argue that the term “objectivity” is misplaced here, since this term is too ingrained with philosophical prejudices of the sort which both McDowell and Cavell are concerned to reject. But McDowell would disagree. He freely admits that the notion of objectivity involves the idea of inquiry as answerable to something other than ourselves, but argues that this is a perfectly intelligible idea that does substantial work within our familiar practices. What needs to be rejected, according to McDowell, is not the familiar notion of objectivity, but the idea of a gap between the world and us. (See, for example, McDowell (2000), pp. 110–111.) I take Cavell to ascribe a similar view to Wittgenstein, for example in the following remark which alludes to Kant’s conception of things-in-themselves: “For Wittgenstein it would be an illusion not only that we do know things-in-themselves, but equally an illusion that we do not (crudely, because the concept of ‘knowing something as it really is’ is being used without a clear sense, apart from its ordinary language game)” (*MWM*, p. 65). As the parenthetical remark makes clear, the point here is not that Wittgenstein takes the concept of “knowing something as it really is” and its cognates to be somehow illegitimate. Rather, Cavell is arguing that Wittgenstein thinks those concepts *have* familiar uses, uses that are perfectly all right. What Wittgenstein is said to react against is the philosophical attempt to remove those

concepts from that stream of life within which they do their work. According to Cavell, it is precisely that sort of attempt which makes it seem as if a gap opens up between familiar practices and reality.

13. McDowell (1996), p. 70.
14. What follows is a free rendering of the discussions in *CR*, pp. 197ff., and *MWM*, pp. 249ff. Thanks to Stina Bäckström for a good conversation about these passages, and to David Finkelstein for a stimulating discussion about the philosophical significance of ball shells.
15. I am disregarding the case when the object is made of some transparent material, such as glass. In this sort of case, the scheme, as specified above, does allow us to say that we “see the whole object” even if the object consists of something more than a front surface. In fact, reflecting on the phenomenon of transparency may have far-reaching consequences for the epistemologist, and cause considerable modifications of his original scheme. For example, he might conclude that the very idea of a third dimension is foreign to our visual sense, arguing, perhaps, that before they are conceptualized by us visual impressions are inherently two-dimensional. It is not necessary to consider these complications in further detail here, however.
16. Of course, getting to see the backside of something might in some cases be quite cumbersome. Consider the moon.
17. The epistemologist might try to leave room for the fact that we can move around in the world by saying that what establishes the identity of the parts of an object is not just their position relative to an observer, but also certain other properties that are independent of the geometry of the situation. That would seem to allow for the possibility of seeing new parts of an object: even if I always see a front surface, the front surface I now see might be distinguished from the one I saw, say, two seconds ago. This, however, has another weird consequence. For let us suppose that the front surface I now see is not the same as the one I saw two seconds ago. Given this assumption, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the front surface I saw two seconds ago no longer exists, and, conversely, that the front surface that I am seeing right now did not exist two seconds ago. For everything that exists now differs from the front surface I saw two seconds ago in ways that are relevant to its identity: either with respect to its position relative to me, or with respect to some of the other criteria of identity. After all, the only thing that now occupies the same position as the front surface I saw two seconds ago is the front surface that I am now seeing, and we were assuming that these two surfaces are not identical. Analogously, the front surface I now see did not exist two seconds ago, since what occupied its position relative to me was the front surface I then saw, and, again, the two surfaces were assumed not to be the same. (Cf. *CR*, p. 202.)
18. For a penetrating discussion of Cavell’s conception of the *point* of an utterance, see Baz (2003).
19. Cavell (1989), p. 57.
20. I am presupposing that the aim of serious revolutionaries within art or science is not limited to the mere overthrowing of old conventions (if their aim were thus limited, their endeavors should not be characterized as projections at all.) According to Cavell, what a serious revolutionary wants to do is often to regain the original significance of an art form or a science. In the eyes of such a revolutionary, the reason for replacing old conventions is that, under new circumstances, they have come to obfuscate rather than promote this original purpose. Cavell says, “deep revolutionary changes can result from attempts to conserve a project, to take it back to its idea, keep it in touch with its history. [...] It is because certain human beings crave the conservation of their art that they seek to discover how, under altered circumstances, paintings and pieces of music can still be made, and hence revolutionize their art beyond the recognition of many. This is how, in my illiteracy, I read Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: that only a

- master of the science can accept a revolutionary change as a natural extension of that science; and that he accepts it, or proposes it, in order to maintain touch with the idea of that science, with its internal canons of comprehensibility and comprehensiveness, as if against the vision that, under altered circumstances, the normal progress of explanation and exception no longer seem to him to be science” (*CR*, p. 121).
21. What I am saying here and in the rest of section 5 is meant to address the worry that ordinary language philosophy, as conceived by Cavell, must be impotent as a mode of criticism. This worry is perhaps reinforced by a misunderstanding of the intimate connection between, on the one hand, the impossibility of flat repudiation, and on the other, the first person plural character of the investigations of ordinary language philosophy. Cavell writes, “the way you must rely upon yourself as a source of what is said when, demands that you grant full title to others as sources of that data—not out of politeness, but because the nature of the claim you make for yourself is repudiated without that acknowledgement: it is a claim that no one knows better than you whether and when a thing is said, and if this is not to be taken as a claim to expertise (a way of taking it which repudiates it) then it must be understood to mean that you know no better than others what you claim to know. With respect to the data of philosophy our positions are the same” (*MWM*, pp. 239–40). Isn’t the consequence that the conflict between the ordinary language philosopher and his interlocutor is exactly like the earlier imagined conflict between people who used to have perfect pitch but who no longer agree in their identification of pitches? If so, it seems as if all the ordinary language philosopher can do is to *insist* that his own “everyday” way of talking is the appropriate one. And that would not convince his opponent, who we may expect to be an equally staunch defender of “philosophical” usage. According to the sort of reading I present here, however, a main purpose of Cavell’s criticism of Austin and other ordinary language philosophers is precisely to show them a way out of this kind of stalemate. According to Cavell, to argue that “philosophical” usage constitutes a demonstrably inappropriate deviation from everyday language is dangerous, precisely because the real consequence of such belligerence is impotence: the ordinary language philosopher and his opponent will be talking past one another, and each one will be as convinced as before that he is (demonstrably) right. (See, for example, *CR*, p. 146.)
 22. For an illuminating discussion of what Cavell thinks it means to lapse into meaninglessness, see Witherspoon (2002).
 23. McDowell (1996), p. 177.
 24. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at workshops at Uppsala University and at The University of Chicago. I thank the audiences for thoughtful discussions. In particular, I wish to thank Zed Adams, Steven Affeldt, Avner Baz, Stina Bäckström, Stanley Cavell, James Conant, David Finkelstein, Stephen Mulhall and Lisa Van Alstyne for helpful comments and criticisms. I am, of course, solely responsible for any remaining mistakes and misinterpretations. Work on the paper was financed by The Swedish Research Council.

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