PHILOSOPHY'S RESPONSE TO SKEPTICISM
STANLEY CAVELL AND THE INHERITANCE OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

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LIST OF ABREVEATIONS

Works by Cavell

CR Claim of Reason
CT Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman
MW Must We Mean What We Say?
PH Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage
PP Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises
QO In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism
WV The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film
TS Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes
NUA This New Yet Unapproachable America

Works by Wittgenstein

CV Culture and Value
OC On Certainty
PI Philosophical Investigations (Part two is referred to as PI II, pg. nr.)
TLP Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

A change in philosophical outlook involves not only the substitution of new hypotheses for old, not only the abandonment of supposed insights in favor of other judgments, but something more radical – a change in one's whole attitude toward the so-called problems of philosophy. One becomes aware that questions have new, hitherto unnoticed dimensions. What was thought to be clear suddenly appears obscure and problematical. The question of just what in general is and is not philosophically discussable is given a different answer. All meaning and value accents shift, and with them the concept of what philosophy itself is.

Stegmüller, W. (2012). *Main currents in contemporary German, British, and American philosophy*. Springer Science & Business Media, xiii

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an original interpretation of the critical philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell. It is well known that Wittgenstein interprets philosophical puzzles posed by the metaphysical tradition dramatically and psychologically as a kind of illness, rendering the philosophical response to metaphysics a matter of acquiring intellectually sanity. Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein goes beyond the traditional understanding by viewing the return from metaphysics not just as a path to personal sanity and intellectual clarity. Instead of focusing only on individuals or specific fields like philosophy, Cavell sees it as a necessary response to the cultural and historical tendency to repudiate the ordinary. Insofar as Cavell interprets this drive not only as pertaining to the individual but as permeating public history of the modern period (since Descartes and Shakespeare), the response to skepticism (the repudiation of the ordinary), hence philosophy, epitomized by the "Wittgensteinian voice", presents itself as a critique of modernity. While such a reading of Cavell's work is readily available, mostly notably in his mid-period book *Disowning Knowledge,* in his magnum opus *The Claim of Reason* and his late text *This New Yet Unapproachable America,* going back to Wittgenstein with Cavell, and reading Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as exemplifying a critique of modernity presents the real challenge of this dissertation. Cavell, I argue, permits us to interpret Wittgenstein's psychological dramatization of metaphysics as depicting a catastrophic eventuality for a culture, of public history and presence.

Besides attempting to place Wittgenstein and Cavell in a broader thematic context of modernity and culture, this dissertation's second thread concerns their mode of

response to skepticism, which, as I suggest, is best conceived in terms of interpretations and critical responses to text, as opposed to solutions of what has been traditionally associated with Wittgenstein, namely canonical problems of philosophy. For Cavell and Wittgenstein a text can be read and interpreted as exemplifying and instantiating the repudiation of the human.

INTRODUCTION

Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things that look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different. I was thinking of using as a motto for my book a quotation from King Lear: 'I'll show you differences.' [laughing:] The remark, 'You'd be surprised' wouldn't be a bad motto either.[1]

Wittgenstein frequently lamented the potential dangers of being misunderstood, as well as the challenge of effectively conveying his ideas to others. In light of the quote above, this concern can be framed as a reflection on the fundamental purpose underlying the acquisition of knowledge concerning distinctions or "differences". It is well known that Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections ascend in contradistinction to the sublime, the universal, and the immutable. He does not conform to the archetype of a philosopher inclined to expound, from a philosophical and universal perspective, on matters concerning the world, our existential state, or our perceptual experiences; that is, if we construe learning about the world through the lens of abstraction and generalization, Wittgenstein's philosophical orientation diverges. Differences are challenging to learn from and easier to be misunderstood.

The thread undergirding Wittgenstein's piece-meal studies of human language games resides in the premise that in abstractions that facilitate comprehension, an inherent sacrifice occurs. Abstraction is deployed to facilitate a lens through which the world may be apprehended. Both the scientific enterprise, characterized by rigorous design, and philosophy, characterized by its concise systems of thought, necessitate a certain relinquishment of detail inherent in the natural and the human world. For this reason, it

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[1] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1981. *Recollections of Wittgenstein*. Edited by Rush Rhees. Oxford University Press: 157

appears necessary at intervals, to revert to the ordinary, to our forms of life, or at the very least, to remain cognizant of our capacity to do so. This conscious reconnection might serve as a bulwark against detachment from the world.

Wittgenstein and Cavell scholars hold that the trajectory of philosophy will proceed through a return to differences – the ordinary conceived as a standard for correctness. Instead, I align myself with Cavell's perspective on this matter. According to Cavell, once we have returned to the details and differences of the everyday intellectually, we essentially bring philosophy to a standstill. In his view Wittgenstein discovered instead a pathway by which we can intentionally halt philosophy, whenever we deem it necessary. In universals is where our contemplative thought resides, while in the concrete is where our lived experiences unfold, and where, once taken hold of, we can find peace in our thinking. We can only at times suspend our thinking in order to return to the "rough ground" of everyday life. [2]

Wittgenstein's body of work serves as an admonition against the hazards intrinsic to abstract thinking. This admonition is conveyed in a profoundly personal and self-sacrificial manner. The sincerity and earnestness that permeate his philosophy prompt one to contemplate that his later works encapsulate the empirical embodiment of what initially in the *Tractatus* might have appeared only in theoretical terms – a revelation that we possess the capacity and drive to inflict harm upon ourselves by unswervingly subscribing to the revelatory bliss of abstraction. This holds true whether within the domain of scientific exploration or the domain of philosophy.

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[2] PI 107

"Wittgenstein lived with the mentality of an exile."[3] Inspired by the concept introduced by James Klagge, advocating the interpretation of Wittgenstein's works as emanating from not only intellectual but also geographical exile, I find myself inclined to, in conjunction with the aforementioned points, envisage the act of returning to the ordinary – the manifold, the contingent, the specific, the differences, form of life, and the everyday – as a deliberate withdrawal from the dominion of the scientific and academic discourse regime. This retreat can thus be seen as a form of contemplation from a *higher-as-lower* vantage point, providing a perspective that allows for critical reflection upon the scientific and academic world. Stated differently, considering that the universality and abstraction are inherent in the domains of both science and philosophy, the act of returning to the ordinary signifies, both in societal and intellectual dimensions, a pivot towards a state of exile – a state of non-inclusion. It is pertinent to acknowledge the communicative role of the universal, a notion we have understood notably since the time of Thomas Kuhn. The creation of a universal language is the outcome of a consensus reached among a collective of individuals who have managed to harmonize a set of concepts by which the world can be accounted for; over time this consensus, simultaneously, retains according to Kuhn an inherent flexibility.

Predictably, the "discovery" of the concrete manifests as an inherently romantic gesture, one that could only have flourished in the form of pure wonder toward the world. The undeniable poetics inherent in the particular provides Wittgenstein an entryway into a domain that stands opposed to the essential sterility of the universal. Through the poetics of the particular, the world unravels as chaotic yet, paradoxically, "truthful" and, as

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[3] Klagge, James. 2014. *Wittgenstein in Exile*. MIT Press: 167.

opposed to the realm of consensual scientific discourse, permanent; changes in the particular happen – to use Cavell's term from a text called "Declining Decline – "all at once" so that nothing dramatic is ever happening as everything in eternal flux appears as a still life in the absence of paradigms, theories or abstractions.

The particular remains elusive to the human eye and mind, for reason and thought takes shape within the domain of the universal – a sphere shaped through the conjuring and persistent pursuit of ideas and visions, hopes and dreams. The transitory nature of the ordinary, though offering a fleeting glimpse of authentic truth and truthfulness, relegates the philosophies of Wittgenstein and, consequently, Cavell, to the sphere of responsiveness, akin to a *momentary* exile. Foreshadowing their methodological paradigm, we could say that true intellectual equilibrium, a form of sanity, is achieved not by living in perpetual exile, but by recognizing the potentiality of such exile – of halting philosophy, and momentarily suspending the pragmatic sobriety inherent in philosophical and scientific projects.

The manner in which Cavell and Wittgenstein bring into play the particular against the abstract however differs markedly.

This difference can be explained by emphasizing Cavell's challenge to Wittgenstein's notorious notion of the end of philosophy: "The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to."[4] Cavell introduces his challenge by contemplating the essence of the pronoun "I". The ordinary, though transient, is, in Cavell's view, **something to be aspired by as a community, a culture by modernity**.

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[4] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009. *Philosophical Investigations*. Edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Wiley-Blackwell: 57.

Such a community requires the incorporation of the Wittgensteinian paradigm in order to craft an understanding of itself, and to recognize the perils inherent in universal consensus and unquestioned necessities. **It is my interpretation that this stands as Cavell's overarching inquiry, the foundational objective of his entire intellectual pursuit and the manner in which he envisions his role of inheriting Wittgenstein's legacy.** The objective of this dissertation is to expound specific theoretical and methodological components within Cavell's corpus that possess the potential to shed light on and attain this aspiration.

It is important to acknowledge that non-theoretical and methodological facets of his work also contribute toward extrapolating from the late Wittgenstein what in German would be called *eine Philosophie*, that is a system of thought which anyone can or should adopt in order to awake from ignorance, or as Kant put it, from a "dogmatic slumber". For instance, his contributions in the realm of Shakespeare studies and his explorations of Hollywood films make their own assertions in pursuit of this achievement. Analysing these "practical" dimensions, or simply engaging with them from a non-academic standpoint, might indeed be the optimal approach to comprehending the extent to which Cavell aimed at cultivating a Wittgensteinian spirit within the domains of the humanities, philosophy and society. It is above his practical work where he succeeded in establishing this inheritance. My task on the other hand will be to look at the theoretical portion of his work, and to pay specific attention to questions regarding his inheritance of Wittgenstein's work, while also not losing sight of his original understanding of philosophical interpretation and philosophical critique, which are methodological concerns, but which inform of course much of his "practical" work. The central subject of this project is concerning the notion of **philosophical critique** in light of the Cavellian

inheritance of Wittgenstein late philosophy. My central conclusion in regard to this research question is that in Cavell's hands Wittgenstein's philosophy of the ordinary is conceived fundamentally dialectically. The dialectic is conceived in terms of ***responses*** which in turn are articulated in form of ***readings***, that is, ***interpretations*** of **texts**. To put it in utterly practical terms, by interpreting and identifying texts as *artefacts without a voice* (without the voice of exile, of particulars, of the ordinary) Cavell activates and enables the possibility of "ceasing philosophy" for the community, for culture. Through the interrogation (reading and interpreting) of skeptical texts (artefacts without a voice) culture is offered a perspective leading beyond and behind its (philosophical, ideological, scientific) projects.

The vision of ordinary language philosophy, which this thesis seeks to elucidate, initially arose from a profound sense of disillusionment – the recognition that the return to ordinary language does not yield a conclusive resolution to philosophical problems, as its prospects were initially cast in middle 20th century philosophy, most notably in Oxford. I am referring to Cavell's disillusionment over his analysis of material object skepticism, notably in his lengthy discussion of Descartes' *Meditations*. The essence of this critical inquiry finds its expression in the second part of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*. This transformative encounter marked the genesis of a fresh perspective for Cavell. His work encompasses various avenues of exploration, ranging from Romanticism and Critical Theory to Shakespeare studies, among others. Nevertheless, the foundation of his philosophy remains firmly rooted in Wittgenstein's thought. Understanding the extent of the Wittgensteinian legacy in Cavell's oeuvre would be a vast undertaking for a single dissertation. Therefore, this study will primarily focus on a theme that has been a prominent topic in Wittgenstein scholarship throughout the 20th and 21st centuries –

namely, Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical critique. "Philosophical methodology", a term often used to encompass the broader Wittgensteinian legacy, will be approached with caution throughout this dissertation as Cavell challenges the notion of philosophy as a detached "tool", indeed, a method as opposed to *eine Philosophie.* This critical stance is reinforced after the transformative text, Part II of the *Claim*, which marks the emergence of the pivotal notions of "siting" and "studying" skepticism.

These terms imply a more humble and implicit approach than one might typically expect from a Wittgensteinian perspective, or more broadly from an analytic philosophical tradition. The deployment of and appeal to what both Cavell and Wittgenstein construe as the ordinary bears the legacy of attempting to end philosophy, solve all philosophical problems, and "therapize" our attachment to problems, suggesting a promise of substantial progress in addressing philosophical issues. However, Cavell, in his mature period, does not harbour such ambitions. Instead, the appeal to the ordinary serves as a "method" for studying and "siting" skepticism – bringing to light, unearthing, and revealing certain projects, philosophical projects as bearing skeptical tendencies. This thematic reorientation presents certain challenges to understanding exactly its purpose and philosophical significance. While the rationale for wanting certain problems to be "solved" (since problems are, by definition, meant to be solved) seems apparent, the mere presentation of philosophical works being skeptical raises questions about its practical implications and how such a project would genuinely benefit us philosophically.

Wittgenstein has made abundantly clear that it is tendencies of our own (ordinary) thinking (often taking the form of compulsively recurring pictures) which give rise to maturely grown philosophical problem. The origin of what may afflict the discipline is

distinctly recognized, opening the door for a therapy-oriented approach that has, in turn, influenced an entire generation of philosophers. The essays presented in this dissertation seek to enrich the understanding of Cavell's legacy within the Wittgensteinian paradigm. This perspective, I contend, diverges from the commonly referred to therapeutic and orthodox approaches to Wittgenstein's work. By exploring this distinct interpretation, the aim is to bring greater clarity and depth to Cavell's unique philosophical contribution and by consequence to present an alternative path for inheriting Wittgenstein's work as *eine Philosophie*, or at least possibility of a Wittgensteinian *Philosophie.*

As with any undertaking that seeks to establish its own originality, one often finds limited assistance from others. Stephen Mulhall, currently considered among the most distinguished interpreters of Cavell, approaches Cavell in a rather traditional manner, rooted in an orthodox Wittgensteinian perspective, a standpoint with which I, and I believe Cavell himself, might express some hesitancy to fully concur. "On the view forwarded by Mulhall", writes Giordano (in her PhD Dissertation!), we "would locate Cavell within a Wittgensteinian tradition where the therapeutic aims of that tradition are understood as quietist".[5] Resisting the influence of scholars like Mulhall presents a challenge, while drawing inspiration from a PhD thesis may be viewed as unwise. The resistance against the orthodox, quietistic and therapeutic interpretation of Cavell's work however is a central aspect of the current project.

Apart from therapeutic Wittgensteinians like Gordon Baker, who interprets the term "therapy" as relating to the specific aim of Wittgenstein's methodologies concerning

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[5] Giordano, Laura K. 2015. *Redemptive Criticism: Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Stanley Cavell and Democratic Culture* (Doctoral dissertation): 214

the subject and its individual freedom, for Cavell, "therapy" or "liberation" pertains to the possibility of attaining intellectual autonomy. Although many therapeutic readers drew inspiration from Cavell's work, he is strikingly "orthodox" in the sense that he does not pursue an introspective approach – the questioning and probing of subjectively held philosophical pictures. The Wittgensteinian therapeutic, introspective paradigm serves him as a means for the interpretation (one could almost say "analysis") of a philosophical text.

> My own sense of liberation in encountering *Philosophical Investigations* was that it freed me to explore whatever experience or text (in whatever medium) genuinely interested me, seemed to call for my attention, a freedom which in my English-speaking world the institutionalization in philosophy over the past half-century has sometimes seemed to wish precisely to forbid me. Put otherwise, I have had to occasion to notice that in *Philosophical Investigations* philosophy does not speak first [...] taken to heart the idea of philosophy's task as responsiveness.[6]

In Cavell's interpretation the self is not subject to philosophical cure, but it functions as the medium through which a text is read, transformed, and preserved. The essence of reading and writing is not silence or quietistic; rather, it is the expression of a voice among voices in "the politics of interpretation". He writes: "[...] ordinary language philosophy is a mode of interpretation and inherently involved in the politics of interpretation. The way I put this in my early essay on Austin was to say that it is an unmasking philosophy, as analytical philosophy generally is bound to be."[7] A few pages later Cavell makes clear that unmasking philosophy can be conceived as a philosophy of

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[6] Cavell, Stanley. 2005. *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 211-212.
[7] Cavell, Stanley. 1984. "The Politics of Interpretation (As Opposed to What?)." In *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*. University of Chicago Press: 28

reading. I quote the following section from the essay "Politics as Opposed to What" in full, as it encapsulates in condensed fashion central elements of my overall approach.

> Of all the problems that beckon and seem to me worth following from the sketch, the one that is perhaps paramount in terms of my work on skepticism […] is one I only mention here, namely, why or how the same silence, or rather the stillness of the text, the achievement of which perhaps constitutes textuality, or a text's self- containedness, should be interpretable politically as rebuke and confrontation and be interpretable epistemologically as the withholding of assertion, on which I have found the defeat of skepticism, and of whatever metaphysics is designed to overcome skepticism, to depend – as if the withholding of assertion, the containing of the voice, amounts to the forgoing of domination.[8]

Cavell prompts the question of how this very silence, which may embody the core essence of textuality or the self-contained nature of a text, can be politically perceived as a reproach or confrontation, while also being epistemologically interpreted as a conscious withholding of assertions. He makes clear that the withholding, the deliberate containment of one's voice, is linked to the triumph over skepticism and any metaphysical pursuits aimed at surmounting it. The philosophical critic then must disrupt the "stillness" and "self-containedness" of a text in order to allow its words and propositions to come through, as it were, and to withhold withholding assertion, to regain "domination", in essence, to *free* words from its framework, its original philosophical language games. A text has the ability to construct a space where "the conditions are ideal" as Wittgenstein notes in a different context, but in doing so, we unknowingly drift away from the "rough ground" of reality and language.[9] In order to allow the words and propositions of a text

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[8] Ibid. 51
[9] PI 107

to express themselves, the textuality must be disrupted, its fixed conventions challenged, and the ultimate objectives of the text's project must be set aside.

If we accept what is likely the most sincere and proximate interpretation of Wittgenstein at face value (a so called "therapeutic" interpretation"), the *Philosophical Investigations* do not confer objective instruments with the capacity to alleviate metaphysical burdens – not in the sense that we can lean on a particular analytical methodology to objectively render certain philosophical quandaries obsolete, and thus, "solved". Rather, what is posited is a method that operates efficaciously only within certain constraints contingent upon specific parameters of the therapeutic situation, such as openness, willingness, and receptivity. The Cavellian framework envisions the role of philosophy in extending this therapeutic paradigm by applying it to the interpretation of texts, a hermeneutic instantiation of the Wittgensteinian voice.

Wittgenstein's intention is to "inhabit metaphysics with us",[10] as noted by Rupert Read, whereas Cavell, on the other hand, chooses to inhabit metaphysics with culture, our history and our present. Their divergent approaches become apparent as Wittgenstein diagnoses the self that has been affected by metaphysics, while Cavell critiques the enduring allure that metaphysics maintains throughout human history, particularly in European modernity. Stylistically, the contrast between their approaches is evident. Wittgenstein's writing is celebrated for its intellectual elusiveness, characterized by a unique style that is challenging to reproduce. On the other hand, Cavell's prose possesses a distinctive academic flair. Unlike Wittgenstein's aphoristic form, Cavell's writing in

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[10] Read, Rupert. 2020. *Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy: Thinking Through His 'Philosophical Investigations'*. Routledge: 149.

comparison is fairly academic and perhaps akin to that of a literary critic. He traverses a wide range of subjects, encompassing the history of philosophy, literature, and history itself and demonstrates a literary voice which becomes most evident when he synthesizes different philosophical perspectives and analyses scenes from films, Shakespeare plays, French philosophy and literary criticism, the history and philosophy of music, etc. By contrast, Wittgenstein is a more idiosyncratic and self-absorbed thinker who resists easy categorization as an intellectual. Wittgenstein is, if you will, the poet and Cavell his interpreter.

Wittgenstein, lived in both geographical isolation and intellectual exile, found solace in philosophy as a means towards intellectual liberation. His interests in thinking about the ordinary lay not in propelling philosophy and society ahead through a collaborative effort, in fact he held a vehement opposition to the concept of progress, as Read for example has shown.[11] Like many of his philosophical forebears such as Tolstoy and Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein detected a spiritual aura in life and thus imbued his philosophy, including topics like mathematics, logic, and the methodology of philosophy, with a religious and ethical flavour. Wittgenstein gravitated naturally towards a way of thinking that centred around authenticity and selfhood. He viewed philosophy of the ordinary as an introspective tool that aimed to emancipate oneself from the dictates of his intellectual environment.

In contrast, Cavell's intellectual bearings and interests were not primarily driven by a pursuit of spiritual enlightenment or ethical value. While these elements are

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[11] Read, Rupert. "Wittgenstein and the Illusion of 'Progress': On Real Politics and Real Philosophy in a World of Technocracy." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 78 (2016): 265 – --84.

undoubtedly present in his work, they do not dictate his writing style. He rather functioned as an ardent overseer and collector of the academic and intellectual world, synthesizing a plethora of fields. Hence for Cavell, the ordinary offered a vantage point from which to scrutinize not only oneself necessarily but also human life, culture, the academic world, and modern culture.

In embarking on the investigation of Cavell's inheritance of Wittgenstein, the question arises regarding the fate of Wittgenstein within Cavell's new methodological orientation. The argument put forth is that Cavell's incorporation of skepticism into our history and our presence can be primarily understood as a hermeneutical rejuvenation of the Wittgensteinian therapeutic paradigm. While Wittgenstein, say, absorbs a "skeptical" idea, is open to its damage, lives skepticism, suffers it, Cavell reads and interprets a philosophical text with the lens of the Wittgensteinian paradigm.

Wittgenstein, as for example in in PI 134, views the quest for a universal definition of "proposition" and the desire to grasp its inherent essence as a reflection of human yearning and an inner imperative. The *Investigations* can be seen as a confessional and redemptive piece, portraying Wittgenstein's experiences of disappointment with metaphysics, rather than serving as a critique of the history of metaphysics. Cavell, in turn, *activates* and engages with this Wittgensteinian experience by projecting it methodologically into the texts her reads and writes about. Stylistically and practically, this engagement highlights the difference in their philosophical approaches. The martyr-like and sacrificial aspect, undoubtedly present in Wittgenstein's work within the context of his philosophical inquiries, appears differently in Cavell's approach. In Cavell's work,

it is presented in a (comparably) detached and analytical manner, again, as a mode of reading and writing.

Employing the dialectical framework of ordinary/skepticism, Cavell interprets a diverse range of texts – philosophical, literary, and others – as manifestations of the inherent human yearning to evade the constraints of its own finitude, and to root human nature in what Wittgenstein referred to as the metaphysically sublime. This interpretive practice, as applied to texts like Descartes' *Meditations*, is intended as a form of redemption for the author, guiding him back from the skeptical frontiers of the ordinary. Incorporating the Wittgensteinian model, a trajectory from the sublime or skeptical back to the ordinary – as an approach to text interpretation signifies a noteworthy development and expansion of Wittgensteinian method. Wittgenstein's method is essentially oriented around a therapeutic pursuit, seeking to provide relief from this *individual* drive to evade the everyday practices or ordinary life in philosophical practice. In analysing the evolution of the Wittgensteinian schema within Cavell's work, this study also contends that this new progression presents a revised vision of ordinary language philosophy and an alternative future for Wittgenstein studies.

Cavell's analysis perceives skepticism as historically determinable, signifying its existence as a feature endemic to a certain epoch of human history (and perhaps intrinsic to human consciousness as such). In recognizing it as both a part of our collective self and our shared history, the philosopher's objective does not seek to eliminate skepticism. Rather, the aim of philosophy, as Cavell interprets it, is to conceptualize the reality of the dialectic and to render it cognizable. This dual task, which underscores the evolution of the Cavellian philosophy, seeks not only to make sense of our inherited skeptical tendencies but also to foster a shared comprehension of the dialectic and thus of ourselves.

An essential and distinguishing trait of Cavell's methodology is thus what we might call its historic fatalism, forming a stark contrast to other Wittgenstein interpretations that are heavily imbued with a sense of a-historicism. Even if the grand metaphysical questions (such as other minds, material skepticism, etc.) were to be ultimately resolved through a scientific philosophy – a universally accepted symbolism that definitively demonstrates that these issues need not perturb us any longer – history, particularly intellectual history, would still exert its influence on our rationality. In alignment with Wittgenstein, Cavell does not hold a strong faith in progress, nor does he harbour the optimistic anticipations linked with the Wiener Kreis and early analytic philosophy. The mission of his philosophy, as he sees it, is to maintain a dialogue with rationality's own historical development and, in doing so, incessantly retrieve it from skepticism: "Now imagine a world in which the voices of the interlocutors of the *Investigations* continue on, but in which there is no Wittgensteinian voice as their other. It is a world in which our danger to one another grows faster than our help for one another."[12]

In support of my recommendation to interpret Cavell as a philosopher of reading (and writing), I explore whether this approach draws direct inspiration from Wittgenstein's *Investigations.* Traditionally, the *Investigations* have not been read as presenting a direct response to a particular book or text. Instead, they are often perceived as providing solutions (or therapies) to a range of philosophical problems, the origins of which are not explicitly or rarely stated in the book. When direct references occur, Wittgenstein was doomed by many leading interpreters to misread, misrepresent his

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[12] Cavell, Stanley. 1989. *This New Yet Unapproachable America.* The University of Chicago Press: 140

predecessors. I take these alleged misreadings as inviting the claim that Wittgenstein methodologically (as we shall see, in a *poetic* sense) misread others which, in turn, I take to indicate a definite parallel and forebearer to Cavell's textual approach.

The methodological transformation of ordinary language philosophy as it can be witnessed in Cavell's work begins with Part II of *The Claim of Reason*. In its final moments Cavell concedes that the appeal to ordinary language cannot serve as a direct criticism of Cartesian skepticism but merely as a reflection of its skepticism. In this chapter, I critically engage with prominent interpreters of Cavell to reinforce my argument that the philosophy of the ordinary, as developed by Cavell, does not serve as a method aimed at resolving philosophical puzzles. Through this engagement, I aim to emphasize that the philosophy of the ordinary, in the Cavellian context, operates as a method of studying and siting skepticism. On my way to arriving at this conclusion of Cavell's mature thought I traverse a variety of related subjects, particularly epistemological aspects which regard the appeal to ordinary words in the context of philosophical analysis.

I present three approaches to this question, a transcendental, an empirical and a realist approach, paying specific attention to the latter as it appears the most established view within the literature. The realist view held for example by Sandra Laugier I argue, is overemphasized in her work as it seeks to account for the overall direction of Cavell's philosophy, i.e., as a call for philosophy to return to (linguistic) realism, hence pursuing a tradition stemming from early analytic philosophers such Gottlob Frege and the early Wittgenstein. This account, I claim, largely overlooks the critical side of Cavell's philosophy which is rooted in the idea of responsiveness, interpretation and reading. Far

from trying to educate philosophers to root their language in a realism framework of thought (to speak, say, non-skeptically), Cavell deploys realism (the sphere of the ordinary) as a mode of interpretation and reading, of responding to skepticism. In doing so, Cavell, as I suggest in later chapters, desires a philosophy whose primary end is to stay in conversation with (its own) skepticism as opposed to one which seeks to end it.

Contrary to the claims made by Laugier, Conant, and Hamawaki Cavell argues that this form of rationality is not a specific form of realism but rather a dialectical one. According to Cavell's vision, the role of philosophy is to conserve, site, study skepticism (hence to conserve the dialectic of skepticism and the ordinary) rather than turning to realism, embracing a stance of therapeutic quietism, as we see it in some early works of Rupert Read and in Steen Mulhall's work on Cavell, for example.

While Part II of the *Claim* is looking into material object skepticism, the more explorative Part IV is setting the stage with Wittgenstein's remarks on the possibility of a private language. It is in that section of the book where Cavell will find occasion to explore different subjects which according to him naturally emanate from Wittgenstein's text, including the notion of *lived skepticism*; the idea that the problem posed by skepticism has a history, and that this history should and can be studied.

As discussed in Chapter One, the Wittgensteinian paradigm is not fit for a refutation of skepticism but rather rends itself to a much more tacit intervention into philosophy, namely through siting skepticism, conserving rather than rejecting the impulse to repudiate ordinary criteria. Lived skepticism for Cavell further articulates the truth in skepticism, as the terms already suggests, that it is true of our everyday lives that we locally and but repeatedly act in ignorance towards ordinary criteria. In this chapter I

will explore further a thread which I had already anticipated in the previous chapter, namely that the task of siting skepticism will want to find acknowledgement of the fact that skepticism can or should be studied from its human side, hence not abstractly, but in terms of something which does perhaps concern us everyday.

With these terms in place, I shall explore an important distinction which perhaps Cavell himself did not spend enough time making. Indeed, as I show with McGinn's interpretation and defence of Wittgenstein *against* Cavell, it is easy to read Cavell as though he shows at least *some* sympathy for the skeptic – as though he was writing in favor of the view that we cannot really know other minds. To unravel this, this chapter will explore Cavell's and Wittgenstein's notion of privacy, as it is in his acceptance of the privacy of the mental where McGinn locates Cavell's sympathy for the *traditional* other mind skeptic.

Now, the distinction Cavell fails to draw succinctly enough is that his investigations into lived skepticism in Part IV of the *Claim* is deeply informed by his historical approach, which wants to understand skepticism of other minds as a distinctive feature of European public modern history, studied and sited in the works of Shakespeare: "Since I shall say no more in defence of such ideas here, I surface with two or three Shakespearean texts, further instances in which skepticism with respect to other minds is more or less explicitly under investigation, to illustrate [...] that tragedy is the story and study of a failure of acknowledgment, of what goes before it and after it —i.e., that the form of tragedy is the public form of the life of skepticism with respect to other minds."[13]

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[13] Cavell, Stanley. 1999. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Oxford University Press, 478.

Cavell's guiding *intuition* is that in Shakespeare skepticism with respect to other minds surfaces as a subject of inquiry in reaction to the transformation of public reason, highlighted in "the rise of the new science, the consequent and precedent attenuation of displacement of God; the attenuation of the concept of Divine Right; the preparation for the demand for political legitimation by individual [as opposed to authoritative] consent".[14] As Cavell reads Shakespeare (and Descartes) as a response to the general epistemic uncertainty, modern lived skepticism ought to be distinguished – at least from a methodological point of view – from what might be called his account of *existentially* lived skepticism. In other words, the kind of privacy Cavell is happy to accept as something conditioning our lives, emerges more dramatically in Part Four of the *Claim,* for it is privacy infused with predicament of the modern age. In other words, this dramatic siting of skepticism in Part IV is not what describes our everyday lives *part tout*, but our everyday lives under the straits of the modern aera, or at least an eventuality for them.

However, this is not to say that Cavell would submit to the view for example held by Peter Hacker, that our lives with respect to others (their private sensations) is entirely public. Cavell holds, what I will defend as a commonsense view, namely that there is a difference in the way I experience my own sensations and those of others – of course there is an epistemic gap here. What emerges as the central difference between Cavell and the skeptic – *the* difference – is that the skeptic interprets my privacy in terms of an epistemic theory, while Cavell does not. Purpose matters, as Wittgenstein has repeatedly emphasized. To contextualize *existentially* lived skepticism and *modern* lived skepticism further, Cavell argues that our, call it privacy unbound by time (our existential privacy),

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[14] Cavell, Stanley. 2003. *Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 21.

presents the condition upon which modern lived skepticism could become a real possibility. In this light, as I shall propose, we should also read Cavell's later text, "Declining Decline", which is Cavell's only explicit attempt of reading the *Investigations* from a cultural, modern point of view.

In the much later text published in 1989, titled "Declining Decline," Cavell presents what has been later referred to as a "cultural" reading of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. In this text, he directly attempts to read the *Investigations* politically, offering a therapeutic opposition to philosophy as a confrontation with the intellectual climate of his time. In my view, "Declining Decline" once again highlights Cavell's textual and literary approach to philosophical works, as he portrays the *Investigations* itself as a portrait of culture as opposed to a treatise on philosophical methodology or therapy. He emphasizes not the solutions the book might offer to specific problems, but rather an approach to understanding it as a treatise on our subjectivity, particularly to a hypothetical period of human intellectual history. The unfolding of this struggle is articulated through the spiritual turmoil of an authentic and ethical mind when confronted with a specific type of philosophy, according to Cavell's reading. In conceiving the *Investigations* as a portrait of a culture we are encouraged to read Wittgenstein's late work not as a rule book for philosophical therapy but as a perfect example for a "responsive" text, engaging within the dialectic of the Wittgensteinian voice (the ordinary) and the voices of skepticism.

It has been suggested by many that the *Investigations* only inaccurately represent their philosophical adversaries, indeed that Wittgenstein misread others. My intention is to systematize Wittgenstein's mis-readings, i.e., to elaborate misreading positively and

functionally as *creative misprision*. In this by far most ambitious section of my dissertation I will be looking at three case studies of misreading: Wittgenstein's (mis)reading of Russell's *Analysis of Mind,* of Augustine's *Confessions,* and of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.*

Both traditions of Wittgenstein scholarship regard the latter as being primarily concerned with either philosophical 'isms (orthodox readings) or personal-relative dispositions (therapeutic readings). Neither of these traditions has, say, a theory of text production. The philosophical text, or book in these traditions is a highly undervalued category for understanding and interpreting Wittgenstein's work.

Cavell utilizes the Wittgensteinian paradigm (voice) as a hermeneutic principle, employing it as a method of critical reading. In this chapter I seek to making plausible that Wittgenstein has a distinct way of reading of his own, indeed that his way of responding to texts articulates his philosophical approach, serving also as a major influence on Cavell's approach to textual interpretation. Hence this chapter is best read in conjunction with Chapter One where I have argued that Part II of the *Claim* does not represent a good reading of Descartes' *Meditations.* In the *Claim,* the (methodological) "activation" of the Wittgensteinian voice (which is always asking, "Can I mean what I say") required an abstraction from the *Meditation* methodological structure articulated in the framework of the text – it required, say, a "bad" reading of the text. My goal in this chapter is to show that something similar is happening in the *Investigation* when it is read (as others have already suggested) as a response to Bertrand Russell's *The Analysis of Mind.*

CHAPTER ONE

SITING SKEPTICISM -

THE ORDINARY AS A METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

Abstract

This introductory chapter narrates the development of Cavell's thought, focusing on three central elements. First, I examine his theoretical struggle with the methodological issues of ordinary language philosophy, including the justification for using ordinary language to address philosophical questions. Contrary to interpretations by scholars such as Sandra Laugier, I argue that Cavell's references to Kant in this context aim not merely to critique analytic philosophy but to establish a new philosophical framework. Next, I revisit Cavell's early Modernist phase, contending that much of his later conception of philosophical critique is already foreshadowed in this period. Finally, I demonstrate these elements through an analysis of Cavell's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to refute Cartesian skepticism—a failure that, I argue, leads him to adopt a philosophy of the ordinary, one that remains in dialogue with skepticism, to site it, rather than attempting to refute it.

Cavell has later maintained that his *Claim of Reason* does not offer a refutation of skepticism. I want to offer a perspective from which this is not seen as a failure of ordinary language philosophy, but instead a defining characteristic of its procedures. Since this perspective (of the truth of skepticism) unfolds in Cavell's late works (which include Part One and Four of the *Claim)* interpreters have for good reason ignored Part Two "Skepticism and the Existence of the World" which at first glance appears strikingly traditional and "moralistic".

In this section of the book Cavell makes it seem as though a resolute response to skepticism is the goal. See for example the following remark: "My hopes are to suggest an answer in the arena of traditional philosophical skepticism, and to suggest that the Wittgensteinian view of language (together with an Austinian practice of it), and of

philosophy, is an assault upon that denial [of the human self]."[15] Elsewhere Cavell describes his effort in philosophy as one that is driven by the prospect of progress within the philosophical community.[16]

Why an interpretation of Part Two might nevertheless prove to be worthwhile as a discussion of Cavell's thesis of the "truth of skepticism" has to do with the fact that its resolute stance appears occasionally unstable, which I believe is suggestive of the *Bildungs*-aspect of this work. In other words, I would like to recommend reading this section of the *Claim* as a diary of philosophical conversion, depicting the trajectory from the logically sublime back to the "rough ground", from refuting philosophical skepticism to the task of siting it, from ordinary language philosophy to the philosophy of the ordinary. As readers of the *Claim,* we are not fed results, but we are asked to pay witness to the intellectual struggle and growth of an exceptionally lucid mind.

Historically, "Part Two" ranks among the first texts in which Cavell applies his own vision of Wittgenstein's method to what the tradition has termed a "philosophical problem". *Must We Mean What We Say* (an earlier work) on the other hand is centred around general methodological concerns of ordinary language philosophy. The applied portion of this early work is looking at literary works, philosophy of art and at the problem of aesthetics more generally and seeks to shed light on these subjects or works through the perspective of ordinary language. Hence in this early phase Cavell appears to hold back on the idea that ordinary language is apt to enter a fruitful conversation with perennial philosophical problems. The *Claim* however accepts this challenge, as we shall see.

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[15] CR 154
[16] See ibid. 146

I would like this biographical trajectory, the *Bildungs*-aspect of the *Claim* to suggest that Cavell *discovered* ordinary language not via its original calling (to bring philosophy to an end, say)*,* but rather as a new way of thinking, as *eine Philosophie,* a universal framework of thought and ethical contemplation. Reminiscent of post-Marxist philosophers who interpreted culture, language, and institutions of modern societies as mechanisms of power and subjugation Cavell offers a new perspective on how to interpret philosophical texts. This perhaps gives us a hint as to how to approach Part Two of the *Claim.* Indeed, the overarching argument of this chapter is that the relevance of the ordinary is best understood if we look at it as a way of thinking, as a method of interpretation and of re-writing intellectual history, of "siting skepticism".

1. The Appeal to Ordinary Language

Cavell's mature conception of ordinary language philosophy emerged from a prolonged and challenging engagement with epistemological questions related to the use of ordinary language. The central question was: What can we learn from the way we use language to refer to things, and how reliable is our knowledge of this reference for addressing deep philosophical issues?

To address these questions and enter contemporary debates, Cavell turned to Kant. Cavell's early references to Kant are anecdotal and therefore best seen as objects of comparison or means of clarification. The relevant passage appears in "The Availability of Wittgenstein's later philosophy", with little commentary on its significance, which is why I won't requote it. Cavell simply says: "That is not the clearest remark ever made, but I should think that no one who lacked sympathy with the problem Kant was writing

about would undertake to make sense of Wittgenstein's saying: 'Our investigation…is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the "possibilities" of phenomena.'"[17][18] With Kant, Cavell is responding to a criticism raised by Mates regarding the epistemic nature of statements made about ordinary language use. Cavell summarises Mates' criticism of Ryle's conception of ordinary language as follows: "One of Mates' objections to Ryle can be put this way: Ryle *is* without evidence – anyway, without very good evidence – because he is not entitled to a statement of the first type (one which presents an instance of what we say) in the absence of experimental studies which demonstrates its occurrence in the language."[19] As Ryle does not concern us directly here, let me put this criticism in the context of Wittgenstein's employment of grammatical propositions: For example, Wittgenstein asks whether to "follow a rule" is something that […] would be possible for only *one* person, only *once* in a lifetime, to do?"[20] To state that it *isn't* possible would be "a gloss on the grammar of the expression "to follow a rule"; that following a rule is something humans do on a regular basis expresses an unassailable truth of our concept "following a rule". Now Mates' paradox is the following: Since grammatical statements are meant to articulate the way humans use concepts they are best understood as empirical statements. Empirical statements require evidence. Since Ryle (or Wittgenstein for that matter) does not provide evidence, he is simply voicing an opinion about language use. That statements of this sort fail to provide a liable foundation to philosophical reasoning is Mates' main criticism.

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[17] PI 90
[18] Ibid.
[19] Cavell, 2002, 4
[20] PI 199

Cavell finds a solution to this problem, or rather an adequate response to this criticism in Kant's conception of the transcendental. Kantianism (rather than empiricism) is also considered by Kuusela a possible alternative:

> Wittgenstein's so-called grammatical statements articulate conditions of intelligibility for the employment of concepts, clarifying what is necessarily assumed in their use and what their possible uses are. Thus construed, Wittgenstein's descriptions of language are not empirical, but he might instead be characterized as engaged in philosophical anthropology whose aim is to clarify the essential (rather than merely accidental) features of the phenomena of human language use.[21]

In other words, the grammatical statement "rules cannot be followed privately and only once" articulates the conditions under which the concept "following a rule" can be employed intelligibly, and as such it is an *a priori* statement about language use, not an empirical one.

But, to ask "what kind of statement" a grammatical statement is would once more be begging the question. The Kantian argument just seems to reiterate what ordinarily language philosophers take to be a matter of course. So, for Cavell the better question to ask is why we want grammatical statements to be transcendental in the first place? What Kant accomplishes for Cavell is that it shifts the attention to the phenomenology of *making* a grammatical statement, to the question of *claiming* it. He asks, what would it mean for me as the claimant to make a statement of such universal magnitude that its truth speaks for all of us, in fact, that it can be considered something Kant calls "transcendental". Kant at this stage helps him to make a claim more congenial to Cavell's own thinking. The philosophical significance of recounting facts of language use (of

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[21] Kuusela, 2019, 3

grammatical rules, of criteria, etc.) can only become apparent to us once we understand that it says something about us.

> If it is accepted that "a language" (a natural language) is what the native speakers of a language speak, and that speaking a language is a matter of practical mastery, then such questions as 'What should we say if…?' or 'In what circumstances would we call…?' asked of someone who has mastered the language is a request for the person to say something about himself, describe what he does. So the different methods are methods for acquiring self-knowledge.[22]

It is not sufficient, as Ritter rightly observes, referencing Cavell, "to think of Wittgenstein's philosophizing merely as 'analysis of concepts'. Although laying emphasis on this aspect runs the risk of prompting all sorts of philosophical kitsch, it is an essential aspect of Wittgenstein's thinking."[23] But is Ritter is hinting at something paradoxical here? If Wittgensteinian self-knowledge is essential to what has been called analysis, then the question is: what becomes of analysis? Can the philosophical *analysis* of concepts be undertaken parallel to an ethical or self-transformational project? Well, this is something Cavell has been wrestling with since Part II of the *Claim*, as we will see.

Cavell's conception of the ordinary (as transcendental) also bears certain elements more congenial to Hegel's thought rather than Kant's. I have said above that a *phenomenological* transcendentalism is not interested in what grammatical statement *are* but in how they must be claimed – requiring the education of an attitude towards my claim and towards myself. Hence one of the advantages of the phenomenological perspective is that it can explain transcendental propositions by reference to their use in language, while

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[22] MW, 120
[23] Ritter, Bernhard. 2020. *Kant and Post-Tractarian Wittgenstein: Transcendentalism, Idealism, Illusion*. Springer Nature: 38

Kant come *close* to speaking of "transcendental objects", i.e., of things in the mind. Although Cavell (and Wittgenstein) does have, like Kant, a *de re* (in contrast to a phenomenological) conception of the transcendental, it is *epistemically* empty for it simply means "all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'". And so, for Cavell the empirical world and the transcendental world are the same world, what counts as empirical and what as transcendental ("logical" in OC) depends on my attitude, on the use I make of my claim and, on the generality, I wish it to have. But this does not take us any closer to answering what *the* transcendental might be. If I can voice it, then what, we might ask, is *it?* This is where Hegel and Kuhn come in handy for Cavell.

In contrast to Kantian categories, Wittgensteinian grammar (criteria) is not static nor merely restrictive but flexible and sense-enabling. Wittgenstein is, as Klagge observes, "endorsing the weak thesis about conceptual change and acknowledging it as a source of conceptual resolution of problems."[24] The method of inventing fictious language games, fictious natural histories and fictious forms of life was central to his philosophical "therapies".[25] Thus, he seems committed to the idea that our present grammar (the statements about the possibilities of phenomena we call to mind *now*) does not delimit *all* possibilities of phenomena and of reality. For Hegel, and this might be true for Wittgenstein as well, "[in contrast to Kant], our categories do not keep us at one remove [sic] from the structure of things [the thing in itself]. Our categories do not confine us within the alleged limits of human experience; they equip us to see and understand what *is*."[26] Like Hegelian categories, grammar in Wittgenstein is open to conceptual

[24] Klagge, 2014, 93
[25] Kuusela, 2019, 20
[26] Houlgate, Stephen. 2005. *An Introduction to Hegel. Freedom, Truth and History*. Blackwell Publishing:6.
We perhaps should not be surprised that Wittgenstein laid the intellectual foundations for Kuhn's project:

change and allows for new possibilities for sense-making, or in the words of Hacker, for new "methods of representation. [27] As Kantian categories, by contrast, are not contingent upon structural transformations of the social world they might be characterized as "tyrannical", a verdict Cavell originally applied to linguistic conventionalism. But Cavell does not venture upon a full-blown criticism of Kantianism and conventionalism. His point of departure is necessity conceivable as in need for mutual agreement and as subject to historical transformation. The move away from Kantianism and conventionalism and towards Hegel was instrumental to this project. The Hegelian (Kuhnian and Wittgensteinian) notion that necessity has a history, entertains the idea that transcendental knowledge requires not only a certain positioning or attitude towards my immediate lifeworld which Wittgenstein calls forms of life, but towards its history.

Kant helps Cavell appreciate the intellectual weight of articulating one's criteria. Yet, because Kant views reason as a subjective capacity realized through intellectual processes such as inference-making, he fails to recognize the fluidity and adaptability of reason and its ability to reject necessities. Once we recognize that we grow into our necessities – understanding the inheritance of reason's history as a process of learning and teaching – resistance and conscious acceptance become possible. Cavell elaborates on

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"To the Aristotelians, who believed that a heavy body is moved by its own nature from a higher position to a state of natural rest at a lower one, the swinging body was simply falling with difficulty. Constrained by the chain, it could achieve rest at its low point only after a tortuous motion and a considerable time. Galileo, on the other hand, looking at the swinging body, saw a pendulum, a body that almost succeeded in repeating the same motion over and over again ad infinitum. And having seen that much, Galileo observed other properties of the pendulum as well and constructed many of the most significant and original parts of his new dynamics around them. From the properties of the pendulum, for example, Galileo derived his only full and sound arguments for the independence of weight and rate of fall, as well as for the relationship between vertical height and terminal velocity of motions down inclined planes. All these natural phenomena he saw differently from the way they had been seen before." (Kuhn, T. S. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific revolutions* (Vol. 111). University of Chicago Press.

[27] If his similarity to Kant is seen, the differences light up the nature of the problems Wittgenstein sets himself. 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). (Cavell, 1969b: 65f.)

this perspective in the chapter titled "Natural and Conventional" in *The Claim*, where Cavell's interest in Kant's transcendental philosophy, along with his departure from Kant by recognizing the fluidity – and as we will explore later, the culturally determined nature – of our necessities, suggests that analytic philosophy can now pursue a new understanding of its foundations in the name of ordinary language philosophy. It might seem that this shift presents an opportunity to fulfill the tasks outlined by Frege and Russell, specifically the development of a logic or language capable of addressing and resolving metaphysical problems.

Having introduced the challenges of establishing a foundational methodology for ordinary language and examined how Cavell seeks to overcome conventionalism and empiricism by redirecting our focus to what ordinary language offers philosophy, I now turn to Sandra Laugier's perspective on this shift in interest. While Laugier effectively portrays Cavell's movement away from conventionalism toward realism, she overlooks a broader evolution in Cavell's thought. This evolution does not merely involve utilizing ordinary language to advance analytic philosophy. Instead, Cavell transforms the analytic paradigm from within, suggesting that its focus should shift toward engaging with skepticism rather than attempting to resolve it. This critical insight is what Laugier misses, and it is the argument I will develop in the following pages.

1.1 A Return to Realism – From the Acceptance of Finitude to the Study of Skepticism

Laugier, with the assistance of Cavell and Wittgenstein seeks to "undo the analytic paradigm"[28] in which ordinary language has so long been held at bay. According to the "analytic paradigm", ordinarily language philosophy was thought to undergo either normative clarifications (logic) or internal examinations (realism). A dualism which she finds has severely undermined the credibility of this philosophical discipline:

> It is clear that the division carried out from 1940 to 1960 between the paradigms of the philosophy of language – between, on the one hand, the paradigm of logical clarification of ordinary language through an imposition of our rules, and, on the other hand, the much more fragile paradigm of an immanent examination of language through a discovery of its rules – seems definitive and that ordinary language philosophy today seems to have become obsolete.[29]

For this much needed paradigm shift to obtain she says, is it necessary "to rethink logic, to de-psychologize psychology […] to conceive the naturalness of language without naturalization and to rethink language philosophically, outside of the field of philosophy of language: these are ideas that, although they seem paradoxical, nevertheless outline a project."[30] Laugier argues that this paradigm-shift is already entertained in Cavell's work. According to Laugier, both Scylla (normative clarifications) and Charybdis (internal examinations) are driven by the ideal of philosophical or scientific rigidity. Both aim to solve problems (to refute skepticism) in a once-and-for-all fashion. While Scylla seeks to establish normative rules for thought, Charybdis hopes to

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[28] Laugier, Sandra. 2013. Laugier, Sandra. 2013. *Why We Need Ordinary Language Philosophy*. University of Chicago Press: 12
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

find these rules in language (practice) itself – in the way we use words. Cavell's vision of language methodologically escapes the analytic paradigm described by Laugier. I quote in full this by now famous passage from Cavell:

> We learn and we teach certain 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 (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), 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.[31]

Cavell's point is, as Laugier shows, to construe human rationality anthropologically, as a process of growing into a culture and of sharing established forms of life. Rationality is here construed naturally or 'realistically. Fittingly, Cavell calls this vision of language and rationality *simple* because it abstains from a systematic and theoretical approach. This simplicity, however, brings with it a "terrifying" difficulty. What does Cavell mean by that? The difficulty is I believe two-fold. Laugier correctly observes that it consists in the mere absence of a foundation, of rules that help speakers to engage in language meaningfully. The much greater difficulty, hinted at by Laugier, stresses our reluctance to *acknowledge* intellectually and philosophically this "simple" vision of language and of our forms of life – of acknowledging the fragility of our rationality or, which is the same, of the fact that language has been learned or inherited.

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[31] MW 48

For Cavell, thus, no "treatment" for skepticism emerges out of the fragility of our agreements. That our ordinary language is based on nothing other than itself is a source of disquiet not only about the validity of what we do and say: it is the revelation of a truth about ourselves that we do not wish to recognize—the fact that "I" am the only possible source of such validity. To reject this, to attempt to erase skepticism, amounts to reinforcing it. This is what Cavell means by his famous proposition that skepticism is lived. This is not an "existential" interpretation of Wittgenstein but a new understanding of the fact that language is our form of *life.*[32]

The acceptance of this fact, which Cavell defines as "the absence of foundation or guarantee for finitude, for creatures endowed with language and subject to its powers and impotences, subject to their mortal condition," is thus no consolation here, no deliverance, but rather the "acknowledgement" of finitude and of the everyday.[33]

Against McDowell, Laugier argues that consolation cannot be found in accepting that our rationality (speaking, countering, following rules, etc.) depends on everyday practices, indeed that they are ordinary practices (and therefore ungrounded). The return to the real and therefore to reality is achieved in her view if this dependence is itself not something that is secured autonomously, that is, without taking active responsibility for this finitude. Realism can only be achieved through the voice, by making ourselves count in the acknowledgement of our own finitude. What this means is that we must make ourselves heard – heard to "the words broken in skepticism".

Cavell's suggestion to conceive of Wittgenstein's vision of rationality anthropologically is, as Laugier shows, *not* to be construed as an epistemic insight. The idea that language is a learned practice (and not conceivable in terms of universals as

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[32] Ibid. 83
[33] Laugier, Sandra. 2011. „Introduction to the French edition of *Must we mean what we say?*". *Critical Inquiry*, *37*(4), 627.

Wittgenstein would insist) does not adumbrate a finitist vision of rationality. In other words, what is not important is *that* rationality is an anthropological phenomenon (what else would it be?), but what follows from accepting its *humanity* as a given. What follows according to Laugier, is that our rationality is not, as some analytic philosophers have taken Wittgenstein to suggest, somehow encoded in our practices. There is no, say, password we can resort to when faced with problems related to the constitutions of rationality. The point of our rationality being *human* is that it has, in order to sustain and cultivate itself, be *claimed*. It is for both Cavell and Wittgenstein not enough to re-anthropomorphize human rationality – to end metaphysics and end philosophy – but to make manifest the philosophical repercussions of the acknowledgment of its finitude and therewith rejuvenate philosophy as conversation and recovery. This means very simply that we cannot, as it were, outsource rationality (to forms, linguistic schemes or rules or even criteria), but that we must make ourselves count in the constitution of meaning and thought, and *voice* criteria. It is because of this vision of rationality that Cavell is sympathetic to romantic thinkers and to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, and Kant – that is thinkers who thought of philosophy as an ethical enterprise. But more of this later.

While I am in full agreement with Laugier's account of realism, i.e., the idea that the appeal to the ordinary stands in need of an *active* acknowledgement of our own finitude (un-groundedness of language and rationality) I found wanting within this framework the philosophical function she envisions for Cavellian realism. Laugier makes a strong point arguing why ordinary language philosophy and therefore analytic philosophy needs Cavell. But she leaves unanswered why philosophy (or humanity or culture) needs ordinary language philosophy. It remains unclear what exactly will happen after we have successfully converted to a Cavellian account of realism and unclear what

will be philosophy's call after that. The fact that Laugier leaves this question largely unaddressed makes her account susceptible to what she herself found wanting in McDowell's construal of the truth of skepticism – the concern that with the acceptance of the finitude of language and rationality philosophy comes to end, that all philosophical work is completed. So, why does philosophy (or humanity?) need (or may need) ordinary language philosophy? In the preface to the updated version of *Must We Mean What We say* Cavell summarizes his interest in ordinary language as follows:

> That the concepts which in my writing do the work of theory are not distinguished as technical, or given technical restrictions, maybe be expressed as saying that for philosophy, as I care about it most, ordinary language is not less or more an object of interpretation than a means of interpretation, and the one because of the other.[34]

What can we make of this interesting remark? Firstly, what does Cavell mean when he says, ordinary language is an object of interpretation only *because* it is a means of interpretation? I think what it says is that ordinary language will only be of interest (becomes an object of interpretation) if it allows us to interpret a text through its own light. And this means for Cavell to read into philosophical texts a "chronic expatriation"[35] from ordinary language, to read skepticism, that is the denial or repudiation of the human into it. In this process ordinary language will become its object of interpretation, that is, the interpretation will reveal certain truths about our relationship with language, our escape from it and our intimacy with it. Philosophy begins for Cavell with interpretation, with interpreting a text as skeptical. The return to the real and to finitist understanding of human rationality, as Laugier has it, is not its primary goal. What we can do is interpret

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[34] MW, xxvii
[35] Ibid. xxiii

these texts as somehow lacking a proximity with the world and with our experiences, our desires, our humanness and form of life, etc. And that is exactly what an interpretation would want to achieve. Neither Cavell's nor Wittgenstein's originality can be accounted for if we look at realism only. The return to realism is something that is always already happening, something that I alone can achieve, for the sake of my own conversion (as I will show later in a comparison of Baker and Cavell).

What Cavell wants *philosophy* (philosophy conceived as an academic enterprise) to achieve is to "study skepticism", viz., study how realism (voice) has always already been repudiated in human history, in philosophy, art history, etc. What Laugier terms realism is not what Cavell brings up against skepticism and metaphysics, but what he understands to be in an eternal conversation with skepticism. The task of philosophy instead is to make this struggle and its history known to itself, to conceptualize it (*auf den Begriff bringen*).

Only an incomplete indication of what this might entail is possible in the present chapter. Chapter Two offers a more detailed discussion. For now, I turn my attention to philosophical skepticism, to what Cavell might conceive as concerning the conversation with skepticism, as opposed to its refutation.

My approach will in some sense be chronological as I begin with Cavell's modernism. I will concentrate on a passage from the *Claim* and on the essay "Music Discomposed" where Cavell offers a critical discussion of musical composition in modernity and in modernism. These texts, in many ways, anticipated Cavell's mature conception of realism, the ordinary and of skepticism. A different, more ambitious way to put it is that Cavell's philosophical employment of the ordinary has never ceased to be

modernistic, which would mean that the ordinary for him has never ceased to offer a means of interpretation.

Having introduced some prevalent epistemic concerns over the (justified) appeal to ordinary language, it should be noted by the reader that the success Cavell's approach of interpreting what he calls a skeptical text, or in following case, skeptical music, does not hinge on the justification of the appeal to the ordinary. The ordinary instead manifests as a mode of interpretation, of presenting something *as* a possible instance of the repudiation of the human.

2. On What Must be Written – Introducing Cavellian Skepticism

> I said ("Music Discomposed", pp. 200, 201) that at some point in Beethoven's work you can no longer relate what you hear to a process of improvisation. Here I should like to add the thought that at that point music, such music, *must* be written. If one may speculate that at such a stage a musical work of art requires parts that are unpredictable from one another (though after the fact, upon analysis, you may say how one is derivable from the other), then one may speculate further that Beethoven's sketches were necessary both because not all ideas are ready for use upon their appearance (because not ready ever in any but their right company), and also because not all are usable in their initial appearance, but must first, as it were, grow outside the womb.[36]

The passage is looking at the process of the creation of musical works and the subjective listening experience. Cavell draws attention to how our mode of hearing the piece parallels or mirrors the complexity of the creative process. The more complex and interrelated ("derivable from the other", "because not ready ever in any but their right company") its segments, the harder it gets to relate to what you hear as an isolated segment. This mode of hearing is I think best described as sophisticated or

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[36] CR 5

intellectualistic. If the "idea" (or "intention") of the segment only reveals itself as a constituent part of the narrative-whole, the whole needs to make itself present in the mind, say as a picture against which its parts are heard and rationalised. Contrariwise, the fragment which can stand on its own, in its "initial appearance", outside of the "right company" and *inside* "the womb" is relatable instantaneously, without the help of the intellect. In the mind of the sophisticated hearer the fragments are present simultaneously, his attention travels through time-intervals, back and forth. That which is heard as improvisation on the other hand sways in the now. As Cavell describes it in "Music Discomposed", the "kind of complexity" characteristic of the late Beethoven makes it unrelatable as the result of improvisation and spontaneity: "In listening to a great deal of music, particularly to the time of Beethoven, it would, I want to suggest, be possible to imagine that it was being improvised. Its mere complexity, or a certain kind of complexity, would be no obstacle." "If this could be granted [that its complexity is not the obstacle]", he continues, "a further suggestions becomes possible. Somewhere in the development of Beethoven, this ceases to be imaginable", and; "[…] in the late experience of Beethoven, it is as if our freedom to act no longer depends on the possibility of spontaneity" and where "[…] the entire enterprise of action and of communication has become problematic."[37]

Now in the *Claim* Cavell adds that once what you hear is not relatable as a process of improvisation it "*must* be written". The artist needs to let the fragment "grow outside the womb" and weave it into a constructed (un-improvised) narrative, while the hearer

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[37] Cavell, 1976, 201

must bring this narrative into imagination to make sense of its fragments. He must, as it were, read and reread it.

The contrast between music written and music improvised gets amplified, as Cavell observes, in Viennese modernism. In the works of Schönberg, Bartok and Stravinsky, "a piece is written or, rather, determined: it is, so it is said, totally organized."[38] Chance on the other hand, which is "meant to *replace* traditional notions of art and composition; the radical ceding of the composer's control of his material is seen to provide a profounder freedom and perception than mere art […]", is cast both as a counterpart and as complementary to "total organization".[39] Chance provides the elements "unforeseen" in the process of composition and functions as a "[…] metaphysical principle which supervises [the artist's] life and work as a whole".[40] Chance is epitomised and transcendentalized in the figure of the muse which "serves the purpose to indicate that his work comes not from *him,* but *through* him."[41] Its complementary function is apparent in the second stage of the compositional process when the "serial orderings" ("variable of rhythm, duration, density, timbre, dynamics and so on") are rendered into a performable whole, a piece. "What remains [of total organization] is simply to translate the rules into the notes and values they determine and see what we've got."[42] The mathematical foundations – "where the conditions seem ideal" but which leave out the human, as Cavell would have phrased it – are given a human face by the introduction of chance, of humanlike incompleteness and contingency.

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[38] Ibid. 179
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

One can already sense, with the humanist gestures of the *Claim* in mind, that Cavell will not be satisfied with this attempt to rescue the human. The muse strikes as hyperbolized, as beyond the confines of convention and community. She represents *pure* and *absolute* chance. In the world of the modernist composer the "success of an action is threatened […]: by the lack of preparation or foresight; by the failure of the most convenient resources, natural social; and by a lack of knowledge about the best course to take, or way to proceed."[43] The best course to take is for example provided by virtue: "Courage and temperance are virtues because human actions move precariously from desire and intention into the world, and one's course of action will meet dangers or distractions which, apart from courage and temperance, will thwart their realization."[44] The modernists want to move from desire and intention into the world, from intention to a performable piece of art, almost instantaneously, without taking risks. He lets his formulas works for himself and *wishes* for (rather than invests in) a satisfactory result: But "a world in which you could get what you want merely by wishing would not only contain no beggars, but no human activity."[45] Later Cavell would phrase the denial of human activity in creative undertakings of the artist and the philosopher as a denial of responsibility for *claiming*: "It is as though we try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our responsibility for *claiming* something to be so (to get God to tell us what we must do in a way which is independent of our responsibility for choice."[46] The point is made, again and again, that in the "modernist situation" creative resources (musical language, natural language, etc.) are being out-sourced. The success of meaning, of significance of beauty and truth now hinges on a suspected and desired

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid. 184
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid. 216

mathematical order of language, on the geometrical order of musical forms, on God as Choice, etc. The modernist situation for Cavell is a skeptical one, through and through.

The denial of human activity not only jeopardizes the artists relationship with his own work, but also tempts the fate of the spectator, the reader and hearer. Our experience of listening to modernist works of art (as the examples of Schönberg and Stravinsky are intended to show) demands the possibility of enjoyment, of aesthetic and intellectual experience as such to be re-negotiated. The reason why this becomes necessary once again lies in modernist fate of the artist, who distracted by the charm of numbers and total organization, does not compose for the sake of the hearer but for the aesthetics of mathematical order itself. In this situation "artists are unmoored from tradition, from taste, from audience, from their own past achievement."[47] The artist's denial of human activity and the hearer's feeling of alienation and unrelatedness to the work of art represent two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the hearer/spectator is not spared from writing himself. Music, in the modernist situation must be written, but it must also be written *about*. The critic enters as a much-needed mediator between lose ends, the artist and the artwork, the spectator, and the artwork. Here it becomes even more clear that understanding and enjoyment of art becomes a far more sophisticated task. The spectator must now familiarize himself with the *culture* of art to understand its artworks. He must read about it and enter debates about the essence of art, etc., to appreciate its artistic contribution to society and to criticism, etc.

The early modernist Cavell anticipates his later approach to philosophical skepticism and thus provides a better understanding of the latter. That which is voice-able

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[47] Ibid. 192

in Cavell always denotes what is relatable (without passwords), remarkable, tellable, sayable, claimable, and sharable as objects of meaning and significance within a given community (such as Hollywood movies, comedies of remarriage). Not all texts that are written obviously defy shareability, but those that *must* be written.

The requirements for what can be shared and what can only be passed on and inherited through texts vary. The reason why the *Investigations'* philosophizing "cannot be spoken" as Cavell remarks early in the *Claim,* has something to do with historical contingency of our time and of the 20th century, which I take Cavell to imply, is a time dominated by scientistic thought. Goethe and Lichtenberg might on the other hand represent a "human circle" where Wittgenstein's aphorisms would have received more adequate attention. "I may say that while Wittgenstein's philosophizing is more completely attentive to the human voice than any other I can think of, it strikes me that its teaching is essentially something written, that some things essential to its teaching cannot be spoken. This may mean that some things he says have lost, or have yet to find, the human circle in which they can usefully be said."[48] Goethe and Lichtenstein, both whom Wittgenstein admired, stand at the forefront of an intellectual period (late enlightenment, Weimar classicism) where one could do psychology (Lichtenberg) with psychologizing, and interpret natural phenomena (Goethe, on colours) without being reductionistic (even though Goethe may have in hindsight overstepped in claiming that a psychological account of colour is superior to a naturalistic one).

It is not due to historical contingencies that the works of the Viennese modernist for example *must* be written, but something that pertains to human (second-) nature more

[48] Ibid. 5

broadly. These works defy language, human activity, they want to overcome human separateness (between creation and enjoyment, creator and receiver, sketch and completed work) through pure chance and pure form. Like the works of the modernists, Descartes' *Meditations* (which markedly does not classify as a modernist piece) do not defy historical contingencies but human nature. For Cavell, I take it, there is no conceivable period at which the teachings of *Meditations* could be spoken, now or then.

One might object that the *Meditations'* teachings are the first thing that come to mind when one hears the word "philosophy". But it is also true that when we entertain Descartes' skeptical doubt, in the classroom, in the company of friends or family, we either mean it as a kind of joke or we present it *as* the teachings of someone who lived centuries ago, someone who is dead and who is called Descartes. Hence someone unlike ourselves. In either case we do not *mean* what we say. And that of course is exactly what Cavell means when he says that it cannot be "spoken". It cannot be spoken *with meaning.* Why it nevertheless can be *written* must be answered by the justifications forwarded in the work at hand. Or otherwise put, since writing, by the mere charity of space, gives room for the inclusion of justification, contextualisation, and reference to the historical situatedness of its claims, it *can* (at last) be written. The inheritability of its claims, if worthy for teaching, is dependable on its written form.

3. Exegesis: *The Claim of Reason* – Part II

> The claim interpretation "offers an explanation of the nature of that "methodological doubt" which has so often puzzled, or annoyed, its critics." It has been wondered whether the "doubt" invoked in the Method of Doubt is real *doubt,* or whether it is not merely feigned or even, more recently, neurotic doubt, diluted with academism and dignified by the title "methodological".

The claim interpretation would show the philosopher's "methodological doubt" *is* peculiar, but not in any of the ways it has been, so far as I am aware, said to be peculiar. Its peculiarity is a function of the peculiarity of the philosopher's original claim. Since the investigation turns upon a claim imagined to be entered (a claim which must be entered and which cannot be entered), the investigation will proceed through a doubt which can only be imagined (a skepticism which must be felt and which cannot be felt).[49]

The Claim of Reason invites us at numerous occasions to consider Descartes skepticism as a genuine expression of subjective experience. The feeling "of being sealed off from the world" for Cavell has existential truth value. We can understand Cavell when he says that people can have experiences of skepticism. If someone experiences this the doubt enters as a *claim,* not "methodologically": "It appears to me that nothing exists and I find this worrying", can be the expression of a profound psychological experience.

But this is not a good interpretation of Descartes' text. The method of doubt interpretation certainly remains closer to the text as it considers the motivation of the author and the historical context and the purpose of the investigation. However, Cavell's argument in this part the *Claim* is that even the methodological doubt in some sense *must* enter as a claim as it relies on a claim being made: "I don't see all of the object." The main question for the skeptic is therefore whether this claim can be entered meaningfully, and Cavell's conclusion is that in the context of the skeptic's investigation it somehow fails to be a genuine claim because the world in which it could be considered a claim (the world vis-à-vis it is entered) is not our world but a "geometrically constructed" world: a world where all objects are moons:

Thus, this skeptical picture is one in which all our objects are moons. In which the earth is our moon. In which, at any rate, our position with respect

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[49] CR 230

to significant objects is rooted, the great circles which establish their back and front halves fixed in relation to it, fixed in our concentration as we gaze at them. The moment we move, the "parts" disappear, or else we see what had before been hidden from view —from any other position than one perpendicular to that great circle, that "back half" which alone it establishes can be seen: to establish a different "back half", a new act of diagramming will be required, a new position taken, etc. This suggests that what the philosophers call "the senses" are themselves conceived in terms of this idea of a geometrically fixed position, disconnected from the fact of their possession and use by a creature who must act. This further suggests an explanation for the "instability" of the general skeptical conclusion […].[50]

The claim "I don't see all of it" relies on a notion of the senses conceived in terms of a geometrically fixed position, as Cavell suggests. If in this geometrically fixed position, our senses, are "disconnected from the fact of their possession and use by a creature who must *act"*, isn't the skeptic's claim then accurately described as a *methodological claim*, that is one by which I am not "affected" and one that I cannot *mean* but only *say* (without meaning it) and then work out its consequences (and turn to my project of establishing a new foundation of knowledge as the *Meditations* do)? It appears Cavell's diagnosis of the skeptic offers a "method of claim" interpretation of Descartes' project, that is a claim that can only enter hypothetically, for the sake of the argument, as a thought experiment, etc. This echoes the chapter's central conclusion which is in fact a methodological proposition: to investigate the costs of "the temptation to knowledge":

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[50] Ibid. 240

In the *Investigations* the cost is arrived at in terms (e.g., of not knowing what we are saying, of emptiness in our assertions, of the illusion of meaning some- thing, of claims to impossible privacies) suggestive of madness. And in both the cost is the loss, or forgoing, of identity or of selfhood. To be interested in such accounts as accounts of the cost of knowing to the knowing creature, I suppose one will have to take an interest in certain preoccupations of romanticism.[51]

Descartes' cost for wanting to "know" (or to "possess", which Cavell also terms the "masculine" form of knowing) the material world is that the claim cannot be claimed nor meant. And the easy way out is to insist that it is simply a methodological claim and that we do not have to mean it. But even this for Cavell has its consequences. It requires us to do philosophy while foregoing identity and selfhood, integrity, sanity, expressiveness, self-knowledge etc., authority, autonomy, etc.

The critique levelled against the skeptic and what Cavell called the deepest conflict between the "tradition" and "its new critics", is based on the critics' observation that the skeptic in some way or another must "fix reality" for his expression to have sense. This requirement or need of an "alternative" reality will reveal that the skeptic must accept a "bizarre" notion of "discovery", the discovery that we in fact cannot be certain of the existence of reality, a bizarre notion of "claim". Neither does the skeptic assume what we generally call a "point of view". Placing himself at the outskirts of language the skeptic "wishes to effect *that* reconciliation, offer *that* concession. And this is another way of saying that, perhaps of beginning to see why, his conclusions are "unstable"."[52]

Cavell says, "To take a statement to be competently made is to provide for it a context ("fix reality" if necessary) in which it would make good sense (*not* be "odd") to

[51] Ibid. 242
[52] Ibid. 199

say it. The philosopher's progress then appears to be this: first deprive a statement of such a context, then to fix reality, or construct a theory, which provides this sense another way. "And the question I have constantly pushed at us is: 'Why? Why does only his way satisfy him?'"[53] What is the philosopher's way? His first step, as noted above is to deprive the statement in question from his everyday context. The statement in question is what in the *Claim* makes an appearance as the "ground for doubt "the skeptic needs to make his doubt about the existence of the world understood. The skeptic expressed a doubt that pertains not only to one specific object but to objects as such, this is what Cavell calls a generic object. He explains:

> When those objects present themselves to the epistemologist, he is not taking one as opposed to another, interested in its features as peculiar to it and nothing else. He would rather, so to speak, have an unrecognizable *something* there if he could, an anything, a thatness. What comes to him is an island, a body surrounded by air, a tiny earth. What is at stake for him in the object is materiality as such, externality altogether.[54]

In questioning the existence of an object as opposed to its identity, that is, not whether we have a duck or goose in front of us but whether this or nothing, the skeptic must disregard the specific criteria which mark its identity. But can the skeptic to do that, can he name all objects (as he must for his conclusion to be general) once he has repudiated the criteria which mark their specific identities?[55] And what are the costs for this repudiation?

> The general relation between these notions of criterion is roughly this: If you do not know the […] criteria of an Austinian object (can't identify, name it) then you lack a piece of information, a bit of knowledge, and you can be told its name, told what it is, told what it is (officially) called. But if

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid. 53
[55] See below for a more detailed discussion of the skeptic's dilemma.

you do not know the grammatical criteria of Wittgensteinian objects, then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects *überhaupt;* you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no object of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to it.[56]

As Laugier has pointed out, this inflection of Wittgenstein's grammar continues and responds to the Kantian project of portraying reality as deductively linked to our own method of representation, our own language. More specifically, she notes that for Cavell, Wittgenstein's manner of characterizing his own philosophical method as directed towards the possibilities of phenomena parallels Kant's transcendental deduction. "The difference with Kant lies"[57], she contends "that for Wittgenstein, every word of our ordinary language requires a deduction"; and Cavell: "Each is to be tracked, in its application to the world, in terms of what he calls criteria that govern it."[58] It is in this sense that our grammar is to be understood as a priori: in the sense that human beings are 'in agreement' in their judgments. After Wittgenstein the question of the condition of the possibility of experience, thus of the world, for Cavell assumes a more mundane and ordinary dimension. It now becomes a matter of speaking with sense, of trying to not lose touch with reality in language, of trying not to succumb to skepticism.

It is only against this background that we can understand skeptic's fatal move; The absence of criteria is more than the loss of an occasion to voice its complaint (about the existence of external objects), but it is the loss of the world itself.

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[56] Ibid. 77
[57] Laugier, 92
[58] Ibid.

Let me provide some more details. In his final discussion of the skeptic's claim, Cavell focuses on the "ground for doubt" that is implicated in his claim. The skeptic's ground for doubting whether we can have certain knowledge of the world and therefore of its existence is the idea that "we do not see all of it". The argument being that, if our relation to objects can in general be described as one in which objects can never been seen in full (only in 'halves' as it were), then the world is never fully accessible to our senses, which in turn would mean that we cannot know of their existence. Differently put, since "seeing" is the primary source of your knowledge of objects, and since you cannot *know* objects because "they are not in full view" or because you "can never see all of it", even less will you know of its existence.[59] At this juncture Cavell goes to describe ordinary occasions in which objects are "not in full view" and comes to the conclusion that what is commonly implied by such (ordinary) claims is that something obstructs our view, that something is in our way of seeing the object. The skeptic however, as I said earlier, is not interested in specific objects and specific claims, but his claim pertains to objects in general, to generic objects. Hence, he is forced to a projected use of the expression "not in full view". And Cavell maintains, that for us to accept his projection we need "some explanation"[60], "the epistemologist must undertake to *show,* that his object, in his context, is not in full view"[61]. The idea that the skeptic is urged to move, as it were, beyond ordinary life to stake his claim, gives the ordinary language philosopher the occasion, not to "reject" the skeptic's claim on the mere basis of introducing a new meaning or of changing criteria, but to ask what this tells us about the skeptic's position as a claimant. What are the costs of desperately trying to make sense of his projected use?

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[59] The *Claim* will say that this is not a satisfactory argument.
[60] CR 198
[61] Ibid. 193

Whether the Dilemma offers a Refutation of the Skeptic's Claim

Scholars such as Morris, Conant and Hammer tend to focus on the following dilemma the skeptic, according to Cavell, faces.

> Now we have a formulation of the philosopher's conclusion which poses this dilemma: Either the model in terms of which we, and he, must understand his statements fails to fit its original object, becomes a model of nothing – unless we *make* it fit by distorting our life among objects (and here distorting our "concept of an object *überhaupt"*?) […], or else it fits its original faithfully, in which case it carries no implication about the validity of our knowledge as a whole […].[62]

Conant rightly observes that the skeptic hovers between two horns of the dilemma. He states, "either (this is the first horn of the dilemma) the claim that the skeptic adduces will not be a (proper) claim or (this is the second horn) the claim is a (proper) claim to knowledge. If it is the former, Wittgenstein aims to show that an investigation of its epistemic credentials does not bear on the integrity of our ordinary claims to knowledge. If the latter, meaning it does not qualify as a proper claim, Wittgenstein aims to show that it will not be the kind of example of knowledge the failure of which can serve the skeptic's purposes: namely, the specification of a ground for doubting it will not cast a shadow over the whole of our knowledge."[63] From this Conant is happy to conclude, or appears to conclude, that the skeptic has failed to give his claim any meaning: "What the skeptic needs, in order to pull off his trick, is to engage in a performance that qualifies as a speech-act of claiming while prescinding from all of the messy context-dependent details that come with any actual concrete situation in which a claim is made."[64]

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[62] CR 203
[63] Conant, James. 2005. "Stanley Cavell's Wittgenstein." *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 13 (1): 50-64: 55.
[64] Ibid. 55

It seems to me, what in Cavell is portrayed as a *dilemma,* in Conant takes more the form of paradox. Conant seems to say that, for his doubt to have any consequences on "our world"[65], the skeptic *must* entertain his claim vis-à-vis our world rather than vis-à-vis a model of our world. But why does Cavell say that "that will hardly constitute a refutation of skepticism, much less of the traditional epistemological procedure as a whole"? And "even" as he says, "it is on the right track", why does he not pursue this track?

In order to tackle these questions, we must backtrack and keep in mind what the critic is concerned with in their examination of skepticism. Cavell underscores that the very "doubt" itself is the focal point of investigation. The critic hence assesses the skeptic's doubt in terms of a *claim* he makes. And, as Cavell emphasizes, making a claim successfully and meaningfully has its conditions. What is *not* under scrutiny on the other hand is the "idea", the doubt, but the claim, the performative manifestation, as it were, of a doubt:

> Since the investigation turns upon a claim imagined to be entered (a claim which must be entered and which cannot be entered), the investigation will proceed through a doubt which can only be imagined (*skepticism which must be felt and which cannot be felt)*. The special peculiarity of the philosopher's doubt is derivative from the special peculiarity of the philosopher's claim, not the other way around; it does not dictate the form which the philosopher's investigation must take.[66] [my emphasis]

> And:

> Does what he *must* mean convey what he *wishes* to mean?" "If my saying that the philosopher has made an invention and not discovery is at all convincing, and if the suggestion that this comes about because the philosopher uses forms of expression which forced upon him *by the way*

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[65] CR 203
[66] CR 230

he has entered and conceived his problem and which he must *give* clear sense.[67] [my emphasis]

Due to the nature of his inquiry, the nature of the claim entered, certain expressions have been forced upon him, not the other way around. It is not due to his expressions that his claim fails, but because of the way he has been forced to enter his claim. And Cavell, in an obscure remark, gives credit to the difficulties of taking the dilemma as fatal for the skeptic:

> Again, and glaringly, the stage at which we have attacked the procedure still leaves us with *objects* in the world, whereas if other considerations could convince us that the existence of objects is problematic, we could not appeal to our life with objects as proving the irrelevance of the conclusion to our world."[68]

What cannot be meant (or what cannot be under attack) by the critic is the *object* itself (whether exists or not)*,* but *our life with objects*. The skeptic's claim fails *only* in the sense in which it fails to be about *our life with objects*. The focus on our life with object constitutes the nature of the critic's inquiry. The critic is interested in the claim and how the nature of his inquiry has forced certain expression upon him. Thus, the nature of the critic's inquiry at least hypothetically (by focusing on the skeptic's "claim") leaves open the possibility that the existence of objects can be shown to be problematic by "different considerations", i.e., not be entered by a "claim" perhaps. But what exactly Cavell thinks such a consideration to be is not further specified and can therefore not be answered. The "literary" offers such an alternative. The methods of literature offer a

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[67] CR 232
[68] Ibid. 203

language in which the cost of entertaining the skeptic's doubt is minimal, hence where the skeptical doubt can be made without the loss of one's voice.[69]

3.1 The Deepest Conflict

The section entitled "The Philosopher's Basis; and a More Pervasive Conflict with His New Critics" enters at the point in text in which Cavell could have substantiated the idea that the dilemma might offer a refutation (or "resolution" as he calls it elsewhere) of the skeptic's claim. But he chooses a different continuation and instead turns towards what for him is a Wittgensteinian trademark of ordinary language philosophy's procedures – the *diagnosi*s of skepticism.

The main criticism levelled against this skeptic thus far was to say that he does, at least according to what the ordinary use of "claim" implicates, make a bizarre kind of claim. We might therefore say that this is what Cavell regards as the "less" pervasive conflict between traditional philosophers and its critics. It merely concerns what we or he define/s to be a claim. It is of fundamental concern to Cavell's overall project that the discussion does not head towards a "flat repudiation" or "direct criticism" of the skeptic.

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[69] Considering what we might call a successful and unsuccessful appeal of skepticism Cavell introduces the following distinction between "what we might call a thought experiment and what we might call a piece of science fiction." (CR 456) What exactly distinguishes thought experiments from "mere" fiction? At first glance they seem very similar as both appeal to our faculty of imagination. Cavell goes on: "In the latter case [science fiction] we may work out the consequences of a hypothesis about a fictional world, one which we do not identify as ours; in the former case [thought experiments] the counter-factual nature of the fiction takes place within a world we do identify as ours." (Ibid.) I would have never learned what it means to be a brain in the vat, even if I had been in one. Therefore, of the fictional tale Cavell says that it is "a history over which the teller has absolute authority, call it the power to stipulate the world from beginning to end." (Ibid. 457) Hypothetically, we might ask, what would it mean or what effect would it have on the storytelling had the teller *less* power? It means to allow for a partition of power between himself and his readers in which case the specific nature of the reader is considered in the presentation of the problem. Hopefully, what emerges is not fiction but a story or thought experiment which resonates with people's lives. Descartes' image of the dreamer would do, and has unsurprisingly, ever since been the most common, everyday way to introduce skepticism to friends, students, or family members.

The term "pervasive" is chosen with great diligence here. The selection of this term (rather than say "better") is suggestive of the worry that the discovery of the dilemma of the skeptic and its consequent argument that the skeptic cannot enter a claim the way he wishes to, again becomes a matter of "giving definitions". "Wittgenstein's methods in philosophy", says Cavell, "are guided by the realization that the goal of philosophy cannot be found in the classical "search for a definition."[70] As the consequent remark makes clear, for Cavell, the search for a definition in philosophy stands in a stark contrast with the goal of finding the "depth" or "pervasiveness" of a conflict in philosophy: "This is something I had in mind in speaking of the "deepest conflict" between the tradition and the new philosophy."[71] In order not to misunderstand Cavell here we have to ask what, according to him the discovery of the dilemma *says,* what truth about the skeptic does it reveal? For if it only says that the skeptic doesn't really enter a claim (as indicated by what we ordinarily call a claim) we are back to relying on definitions, or on criteria alone.

"Contra the skeptic, Wittgenstein maintains that we cannot always be deceived because deception and dissimulation is *not* always possible."[72] According to Moyal-Sharrock – because "we cannot be mistaken because there is no logical space for mistake," – Wittgenstein "unequivocally refutes skepticism".[73] Certainly, it is indeed quite evident that Wittgenstein attempts to refute skepticism on multiple occasions within the book: "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty."[74] For this reason, "deception and

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[70] Ibid.
[71] CR 207
[72] Moyal-Sharrock, Danièle. 2017. "Too Cavellian a Wittgenstein: Wittgenstein's Certainty, Cavell's Skepticism." In *Wittgenstein and Modernism*. Edited by Michael Mahieu, and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé. University Chicago Press. 92-112: 100.
[73] Ibid.
[74] OC 115, also: 156, 676

dissimulation is not always possible" – the expression of a doubt presupposes linguist certainty. While Moyal-Sharrock is happy to accept this as the Wittgenstein's master argument levelled against the skeptic, Cavell on the other hand is deeply skeptical of the mere logical or the mere linguistic for it is as though we have outsourced our responsibility of meaning what we say – the words, or as it is in this case, the *logical inference* is out of control. Note that Cavell does not deny that the dilemma can potentially overthrow the skeptic's claim. His main worry instead is that the investigation stops here. That after we have discovered a logical inconsistency the investigations have reached their destination.

3.2 A Refutation

Cavell never comes to deny tout court the possibility of a refutation of (epistemic or theoretical) skepticism. In the *Claim* he acknowledges this by saying that, in order for the discovered dilemma to count as a refutation or rebuttal of skepticism at all one would have to do a bit more work as "too much is being left out."[75] In referring to Cavell's observation that the skeptic's claim cannot be intelligibly expressed, Mulhall notes that "it might seem that if anything constitutes a refutation of skepticism, this does"[76]. Indeed, if "there can be no knowledge-claims about which the skeptic might raise intelligible doubts", it appears that we are asserting something the skeptic *cannot* do, which means we are in one way, or another stressing the impossibility of this doubt and hence aim for what appears to be a flat repudiation of skepticism. Wouldn't we *ordinarily* call this a refutation? And on what grounds other than our ordinary criteria (of what we call a

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[75] CR 203
[76] Mulhall, Stephen. 2001. *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard.* Clarendon Press: 89.

"refutation") could Cavell assess the philosophical consequences of his discovered dilemma. If it is a dilemma, is it not a dilemma after all? Cavell seems to leave open the possibility of refuting the skeptic yet contends that a refutation is not possible. How to resolve this apparent tension in this part of the *Claim?* I am going to argue that there is no conflict here if we bear in mind that both interpretations of the, let's call it 'fate of skepticism' relies on two different interpretations of skepticism itself.

Cavell distinguishes between two interpretations of skepticism: the skeptic's own interpretation of skepticism, conceived as an epistemological thesis ("I don't see all of it)", and Cavell's interpretation, which considers it as a kind of existential withdrawal from the world and as a denial of our human conditions of knowing. This contrast is made clear in the following passage: "And we take what we have fixed or constructed to be *discoveries* about the world, and take this fixation to reveal the human condition rather than our escape or denial of this condition through the rejection of the human condition to knowledge and action and the substitution of fantasy."[77] While the skeptic is happy to interpret his discovery/fixation as suggestive of the human condition of knowledge, Cavell says our better option is to interpret the withdrawal of the skeptic not as symptomatic of our condition as knowers but of what the skeptic wishes (but in some way) cannot mean, hence as symptomatic of *his* condition or of the condition of traditional epistemology altogether.[78]

Again, according to the skeptic, skepticism is an epistemic problem, for the ordinary language critic it is a human and cultural problem. And our confusion with respect to the 'fate of refutation' can now be explained as follows: If we adopt the first

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[77] CR 216
[78] This, in short, is what Cavell will later call the "argument of the ordinary", indicating that there is no winner here.

interpretation, if the problem of knowledge is (merely) an epistemic one, then our appeal to ordinary language and with it the discovery of the dilemma could be employed as a possible refutation of skepticism.[79] However, after we adopt Cavell's interpretation of skepticism we have left the paradigm of traditional epistemology. And this change of direction in fact entertains a change of interest. More than that, it marks the advent of a new kind of philosophy which is not *interested* in refutations or in epistemic certainties, but in the philosopher's withdrawal from the world and from language.

Mulhall ascertains "four main components" of the idea that skepticism cannot be refuted. The first relates to the nature of (Wittgensteinian) criteria in general. Criteria do not "confer certainty". On the contrary, says Mulhall, "since our having criteria in common is ultimately a matter of our agreeing and continuing to agree in employing and deploying them, it is of the essence of criteria the that they are open to repudiation; for anything ultimately founded in agreement or consent is unavoidably vulnerable to termination or withdrawal of that agreement or consent."[80] From this it follows that "we cannot 'refute' the possibility of repudiating an agreement, however fundamental that agreement may be".[81] Since the prevalence of criteria is dependent on our active agreement on them, and since agreement is per definition always open to disagreement, criteria do not provide a solid basis upon which the skeptic could be refuted. The third component draws upon Cavell's anthropological and psychological insights into the human aspiration to "transcend finitude" and the longing to escape human limitations. As Mulhall aptly puts it, "desire is not open to refutation."[82] The fourth component concerns

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[79] Albeit, not in the classical sense where the conclusion has shown to be contradictory, but rather in the sense in which refutation is understood as dissolution, or resolution hence as transformation and the withdrawal from the temptation of theory as such.
[80] Mulhall, 2001, 104
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

the "truth of skepticism". What is shown with the discovery of the dilemma (and everything else that comes with it; unnaturalness, non-claim context, non-discovery, etc,) is that the skeptic was right in some sense. To enter his claim, the skeptic needed to face an array of concessions. For Cavell these concessions are expressive of the fact that our relation to the world cannot be described entirely as one of knowing. In this specific sense the skeptic *shows* that he was right. To put it in Wittgensteinian terminology; the claim that "we cannot be certain or cannot know the existence of objects" is a *grammatical* statement. It clarifies what it means "to know something" and "be certain of something". The grammatical reminder here is that we cannot "know" the world as such, but we can "acknowledge" it. In this sense, the skeptic says something true – true about himself and his relation to the world. His failed or "shaky" performance shows that "acknowledging" existence would come more natural to us humans.

Now the way Mulhall puts it is that with this new interpretation of skepticism (as concerning the withdrawal from the world) philosophers of the ordinary do not offer or do not wish to offer a refutation. So much is clear. But to what extent is this interpretation a common basis for both the skeptic and the critic of ordinary language? The skeptic after all believes that his model of the world upon which his 'non-claim context' has been entered offers a valid conclusion about the inaccessibility of our world – that we cannot see 'all of it' in this particular sense. The critics interpretation of skepticism on the other hand, upon which he could show to the skeptic his intention of not wanting to refute skepticism remaining conceptually inaccessible to the skeptic. Our challenge, which I believe mirrors Cavell's own, is how to engage with the skeptic without succumbing to either of these two extremes: one being the refutation of the skeptic grounded in their interpretation of skepticism as a matter of knowledge and epistemology, and the other

being our inaccessibility to the skeptic based on the critic's understanding of skepticism as a withdrawal from the world. We hover between Scylla (accepting his interpretation and offer a refutation (which we do not want)), and Charybdis (introducing our interpretation and remain alien to the skeptic's form of rationality).[83]

With respect to Cavell's construal of philosophical critique, Hamawaki has made the following, very crucial observation: "Like Kant, Cavell, under the pressure of responding to the skeptic, proposes nothing less than a new way of conceiving of our rationality."[84] But what, we might want to ask, are the costs of doing this? The advent of a new form of rationality in any given culture at any given time does not merely play out on the level of intellectual debate. "The prerequisite to revolution", says Thomas Kuhn" is "the sense of malfunction that can lead to crisis".[85] It is a radical change in its most literal sense – a society uprooted, as Max Planck has observed: "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.'"[86]

Cavell has understood, I claim, that he cannot simply offer the skeptic a new understanding of himself and "make him see the light". Cavell acknowledges, only under this condition, only after having scrutinized his own rationality, under the terms offered

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[83] "If the skeptic does not recognize this failure of (his) words, then *this* is the correct criticism of him here (thought we do not know yet how serious a criticism it is). But to apply an inaccurate term of criticism to him (to say of him falsely, that this idea is inherently confused) further reflects the truth to which he is responding." ("Knowing and Acknowledging", in *Must We Mean What We Say,* 2002, 240)
[84] Hamawaki, Atsushi. 2014. "Cavell, Skepticism, and the Idea of Philosophical Criticism." In *Varieties of Skepticism: Essays after Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell*. Edited by James Conant and Andrea Kern. Walter de Gruyter: 389-429: 426
[85] Kuhn, Thomas. 2012. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (50th ed.). University of Chicago Press: 102.
[86] Max Planck, 1949. *Scientific Autobiography and Other Paper.* Translated by F. Gaynor: 33 – -- 34.

by the new critics, will he not await a refutation anymore but something completely different, an interest in his own personal withdrawal from the world. The *Claim* exists in a delicate balance between two realms of rationality: the traditional domain of epistemology and the uncharted territory of 'unattained lives'. This inherent duality serves as a central theme, highlighting our inherent inability to engage in meaningful communication with the skeptic: "Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic."[87] But instead of declaring the skeptic a fool Cavell reaches out to him. And the only way to do that is by sticking to the skeptic's own terms; to regard the problem of skepticism as an epistemic problem. And under this condition the dilemma can still be considered an attempt to refute the skeptic. Under this condition the ordinary language critic declares that your expression of doubt lacks meanings, faces a dilemma, etc. and declares these concessions (at least in theory) to be decisive.

For Cavell it is pertinent to view these concessions not as attempts to refute a philosophical position and therewith to mute the philosopher, but to see them as an expression of interest in his skeptical condition. The real answer to the skeptic is not the dilemma (and everything else that comes with it) but the invitation to develop an interest in himself and the cultural climate around him.

In his later work Cavell recounts that, the "thought that ordinary language philosophy is not a defence of what may present itself as certain fundamental beliefs" (such as the existence of the external world), was not as he says put "effectively enough" in his early work. A most succinct expression of this idea, the idea that there is truth in

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[87] OC 611

skepticism, we find later in his *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, published 1988, 11 years after the publication of the Claim of Reason: "In Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*", he contends "the issue of the everyday is the issue of the siting of skepticism".[88] If the primary function of the ordinary is to provide a framework for contextualizing skepticism, thereby illuminating the skeptical, historical, and existential dimensions of the human condition, then for Cavell, the question of whether the ordinary can serve as a means of challenging conventional philosophical frameworks remains a subject of ongoing debate, one that requires further consensus-building. The recognition that the ordinary has relevance to philosophy, and that one's personal experiences and perceptions are of philosophical significance, is not a mandate that the ordinary imposes on philosophy; rather, it is one of several potential avenues that the ordinary presents. The most notable contribution of *The Claim of Reason* is therefore its identification of the ordinary as a tool for interpreting the human experience, which amounts to a rediscovery of the human as a domain characterized by perpetual self-denial.

Cavell's diagnostic framework brings to the fore multiple levels of necessity and interdependence in the skeptic's articulation of his claim. He *must* enter a particular claim for his investigation to be coherent; he *must* entertain his claim in a non-claim context for his conclusion to be general (pertaining to the human experience of knowing in general); he *must* speak in absolutes; he *must* use words detached from ordinary criteria; he *must* speak in a manner which does allow him to mean what he says; he *wishes* to say something, i.e. that objects are not in full view, but cannot mean it; he *must* model the world according to the requirements of his claim. The interpretation of Cartesian

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[88] Cavell, Stanley. 2018. *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism: The Carus Lectures, 1988*. University of Chicago Press: 61

skepticism provided by the appeal to ordinary language mirrors Cavell's interpretation of

the Viennese modernists and of early analytic philosophy. Cavell offers no refutations;

he only makes observations.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TRUTH OF SKEPTICISM IN LIGHT OF WITTGENSTEIN'S ACCOUNT OF
THE POSSIBILITY OF A PRIVATE LANGUAGE

Abstract

The general aim of this chapter is to raise awareness of the problems lurking
in reading Cavell's signature term "truth of skepticism" theoretically and
existentially, as though his primary interest in the notion of skepticism lays
(following Heidegger perhaps) in expounding our relation to the world –
which, if true, does indeed render his work susceptible to the kind of criticism
levelled against him by for example McGinn (and others), who does suspect
that he fell for some version of epistemic skepticism. Against this, I
recommend that his critical philosophy should be read as pertaining to the
investigations of modernity, and in a further step, to reconceive the task of
philosophy (as critique, in the Wittgensteinian sense) as that of responding to
itself and its own history from the point of view of the (philosophy's) denial
of the human, from the point of view of skepticism.

Part II of the *Claim* serves as a transitional section, initially showing promise in its

attempt to refute Cartesian skepticism. However, as it progresses, it concedes that even

under ideal conditions, a refutation can only be so direct that it may not significantly

undermine the rational foundation of skepticism. The subsequent part of this transition

raises questions for the present chapter, which aims to articulate the fundamental elements

of what Cavell defines as the *truth of skepticism*: As the "the human habitation of the

world is not assured in what philosophy calls knowledge", the skeptic's conjecture that

we do not know the existence of material objects gets affirmed: we do not *know* of their

existence, our relationship with them expresses itself in terms of acceptance or

acknowledgment.[89] The world as a whole is not *known,* it must be *acknowledged*. That is

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[89] DK 25

what Cavell calls the truth of skepticism. The truth is that it cannot be *known,* as the skeptic indeed claims. Our relationship with the other and with material objects is that their existence must be *acknowledged.*

Hamawaki, Laugier, and Mulhall discern in Cavell the emergence of a novel form of rationality, which Laugier has labelled realism. My aim in the preceding chapter was to suggest that Cavell does not subscribe to such a teleological conception of philosophical progress. This perspective on progress, which in Wittgenstein's work might be perceived – or has been interpreted – as achieving "complete clarity", posits that philosophical analysis can resolve our conceptual puzzles. Cavell's approach *does* bring greater clarity to the problem of cartesian skepticism by confirming and supporting our initial natural intuition about its "falsity" or oddity. Along the way, we seem to have lost a certain linguistic intimacy with the world and with others in communication, or rather, to advance a project as significant as Descartes', substantial concessions regarding our authentic relationship with the world had to be made. However severe our concessions may be, they do not suggest that articulating skepticism related to objects is impermissible or impossible; they do not provide that kind of solace. On the flip side, when faced with concessions rather than rigid refutations, one might be tempted to think that the possibility of the non-existence of objects still stands, since the skeptical hypothesis has not been refuted. The following quotation brings to view the continuation of philosophy after such concession:

> After enough repetitions and variations of pattern of inconsequence or irresolution – or put otherwise, after some five hundred pages of belated doctoral dissertation on the subject – I concluded that the argument between the skeptic and the antiseptic had no satisfactory conclusion, or that I would search for one. This left me at a place I called Nowhere, or specifically it left me disappointed. I mean that as I began to think and to write my way out of

my nowhere, what I found I was writing about was disappointment, the life-consuming disappointments in Shakespearean tragedy, but also the philosophy-consuming disappointments with knowledge as expressed in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. It was in following out these paths, with some reason to believe that their crossings were definitive for my philosophical direction, that I came to the idea that philosophy's task was not so much to defeat the skeptical argument as to preserve it, as though philosophical profit of the argument would be to show not how it might end but why it must begin and why it must have no end, at least none within philosophy, or what we think of as philosophy.[90]

As there is no solution to the problem of skepticism – as indeed this would lead to another form of skepticism – the task of the philosopher consequently now is not only to look at himself and his discipline, much less to solve conceptual problems pertaining to his discipline alone, but to contextualise skepticism as a human, that is historical and cultural fact, as something that must be preserved for otherwise it will be forgotten.

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I highlighted the problematic nature of philosophically substantiating the kind of tacit intervention Cavell envisions for philosophy. Defining the identity of philosophy by a set of problems which might eventually be solved, seems to secure it a sound foundation. Ethical concerns, at least once they are not phrased and posed in terms of a conceptual puzzle, which is rarely the case in contemporary debates, appear to raise too many questions about philosophy's contributions – to what, exactly? To the discipline itself, to reason, to science, to society? Wittgenstein, for example, famously claimed that his early work, the *Tractatus*, was in fact an ethical treatise, while in fact, the book speaks only marginally of ethics. The Foreword to the *Investigations* suggests that the book was written in opposition to the spirit of its time, indicating a cultural or almost a political interest, while the book itself

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[90] QO 5

says barely anything substantial about ethics, culture, or politics. The therapeutic interpretations of the late Wittgenstein have somewhat shifted philosophy's identity towards a human-centred one. They are writing with Wittgenstein for, as we might put it, intellectual sanity and thus for individual intellectual freedom. Cavell's writing reflects a more sombre perspective on the repercussions of philosophical reasoning. He cautions against a world where the repudiation of the human has become untenable and where the voices advocating a return have been utterly silenced. Thus, he invites us to "imagine a world in which the voices of the interlocutors of the *Investigations* continue on, but in which there is no Wittgensteinian voice as their other. It is a world in which our danger to one another growths faster than our help for one another."[91]

I want to complement this statement with a passage from the *Claim* which does hint at the kind of world which might evolve in where the Wittgensteinian voices have kept silent. Cavell introduces Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* as "plausibly" marking the end of Romanticism, which suggests that Cavell's "romantic" project might not be readily reconcilable with Hegel's rather analytic and systematic approach. But Hegel does incite Cavell's interest and concern for the issue that the nature of human subjectivity is an entity subject to change through time and history. In the passage which Cavell references, Hegel describes "the right of subjective freedom" – the right of individuals to express their uniqueness and seek personal satisfaction – as the fundamental distinction between the ancient world and modern times and observes that Christianity has been pivotal in manifesting this right, which has since evolved into a universally effective principle that shapes a new form of civilization. The unfolding of history, according to Hegel, is the

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[91] NUA 150

continuous realization and embodiment of this right. Cavell now takes this line of thought to make the following conjecture:

> Then I might put the question "Is there such a thing as soul-blindness?" in the following way: Is this new form of civilization being replaced by another? In particular, is it being replaced by one in which nothing that happens any longer strikes us as the objectification of subjectivity, as the act of an answerable agent, as the expression and satisfaction of human freedom, of human intention and desire?[92]

Inspired by Hegel, Cavell incites the idea whether our current civilization might be giving way to a new form of reason that lacks the possibility for the recognition of human subjectivity and agency, where the expression and fulfilment of human freedom, intention, and desire are no longer possible. In such an eventual future, this civilization would, dramatically, lose the very notion of satisfaction and with it, the ability for its people to perceive feelings in themselves and others, depriving them of their humanity. Interactions would become devoid of the emotional responses characteristic of human encounters, reduced to the level of reactions to non-human entities.[93]

With these iterations in place, it becomes clear that for Cavell, his interpretation of Descartes' *Meditations* is instrumental to a diagnosis of modernity, of "modern public history". Hinted at in the previous chapter, as the refutation of skepticism would hypothetically require the formation of a new form of rationality (one in which our habitation of the world is perceived as requiring the acknowledgement rather than knowledge of the world) a true refutation would require us to wait for that form of rationality to emerge practically – not only hypothetically. The end of skepticism for

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[92] CR 468
[93] See ibid.

Cavell would require something approximating the end of modernity. The catastrophe described above is "the event or advent of skepticism, conceived now as precipitating not alone a structure each individual is driven by, or resists, but as incorporating a public history in the modern period, in principle awaiting a historical explanation for its specific onset in, say, Shakespeare and Descartes."[94]

The thesis that the "failure of acknowledgement" is historically determinable does appear however at odds with Cavell's, call it, linguistic theses on the provenance of skepticism: "the return to the ordinary does not represent the permanent dissolution of the skeptical nightmare, but rather its abeyance. Because criteria do not constitute the prehistorical foundation of everyday speech, but rather are set and re-set in language— hence drag prehistory along with them; hence belie the thought of (progressive) history itself – every re-establishment of the native tongue gives rise to further misunderstandings."[95] If, as Giordano establishes, it is the inheritance of language and criteria as such which render impossible a permanent dissolution of skepticism, then Cavell's claim that skepticism is specific to a certain period of European modern history caused primarily – as we shall see by the emergence of the sciences, the death of God, etc. – than the provenance of modern skepticism is overdetermined, begging the question as to its *true* cause.

What I will suggest is, that "lived skepticism" which attests the existential fact that I cannot know what my words mean (or whether I will be understood) and that I cannot know your presence as a soul, is the metaphysical condition for the possibility of

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[94] DK 20-1

[95] Giordano, L. K. (2015). *Redemptive Criticism: Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Stanley Cavell and Democratic Culture* (Doctoral dissertation): 210.

skepticism to evolve historically, i.e., for skepticism to become a problem of modernity, a fantasy of modernity.

Let me repeat the point made in the previous paragraph in some greater detail. Cavell grants the skeptic a certain truth by forwarding the notion that our relationship with language and with the other is (not "epistemically uncertain") but *non-epistemic*. A typical Wittgensteinian way of voicing our non-epistemic connection with others' and my own sensations comes out for example in the following grammatical reminder. "It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I'm in pain. What is it supposed to mean except perhaps that I *am* in pain?" [96] The fact that it would be odd to say such a thing shows that we do not truly know these things – we are too intimate with them for them to be fully known by us. As I will discuss further below in my response to McGinn, it might appear quite challenging *not* to read some form of skepticism into Cavell's account other minds, as indeed the necessity of acknowledgement entails the absence of knowledge.

Skepticism for Cavell however only really starts once the necessity of acknowledgement leads to disappointment with our relationship with others, with language, and in some cases with material objects – once the need is felt to compensate for an epistemic lack. For once we do that, we are moving beyond what we in fact are, beyond our form of live. We then live in a world in which *Othello* is read as science fiction: "Could we imagine that there is a culture for which Othello, say, reads like science fiction – a group who just have no first-hand knowledge of the need for trust or of the pain of betrayal?"[97] Trust and betrayal are games of acknowledgement, not knowledge-

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[96] PI 244
[97] CR 458

games. Gaining trust, and the loss of it is conditioned on the fact that we cannot fully *know* each other, for else there is nothing to be gained, nor lost. Once my relation to the other (or to myself) is conceived of as a lack, something requiring rectification, I have denied, refused to play the game of acknowledgement. This, for Cavell, is where skepticism begins. Denial, trust, non-humanly played.

"The life-consuming disappointments in Shakespearean tragedy, but also the philosophy-consuming disappointments with knowledge as expressed in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation*"[98] have a cause and a possibility or condition. They are possible because my life with language and with the other are open to repudiation. And they are caused by metaphysical structures of societies. Only in conjunction of both the emergence of skepticism can be accounted for.

Cavell frequently finds support for his vision of the human condition (of going beyond what conditions our existence) in Kant who famously proclaimed that "human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is not able to answer."[99] It is not a surprise that Cavell will use this phrase from Kant's preface to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* as an epigraph to his *The Claim of Reason*. What deeply influenced Hegel and similarly set the stage for Cavell's philosophical interest is the notion that human reason, at its core, is constituted by antinomies. If the antinomies of human reason are not

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[98] QO, 5
[99] Kant, Immanuel. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. Macmillan & Co., A707/B735.

accidental but rather mark a characteristic mode of its deployment and existence, then the study of human irrationality must be included in the study of reason itself.

Kant is a significant precursor to Cavell's perspective that the impulse toward skepticism – manifested in Kant as antinomies and exemplified by dialectical illusions – is inherent to our nature as thinking beings. While it is crucial for me to highlight an importance difference between Kant and Cavell; Kant attributes the origin of antinomies to a subjective element within us, arising at the level of (ir)rational judgments. Cavell, however, extends the persistence of skepticism to history and modernity, implying an aspect more incidental (historically contingent) to our lives. Kant did not relegate this predicament to its historical situatedness, as did Cavell and Hegel before him.

1. Introducing Other Mind Skepticism in Wittgenstein's Investigations

In *The Claim of Reason* Cavell presents a possible human catastrophe, where the possibility of acknowledgement of the world and of others became unimaginable, where we are constantly doomed failing to distinguish objects from subjects, machines from human beings, etc. In so far as philosophy presents the problem of the existence of the world and of the other epistemically as a problem of knowledge, philosophy is complicit in the formation of such dystopia for it refuses to acknowledge and therefore, *refuses to teach* that the necessities of our form of life and the existence of the world are accepted, and the existence of others acknowledged.

To demonstrate that skepticism could pose a genuine threat to the development of our subjectivity, as Cavell alludes to in his reference to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right,* he must establish that skepticism is not just an intellectual conundrum but one that

potentially impacts us directly, our lives directly. To grasp how Cavell makes the issue of skepticism pertinent to discussions on human subjectivity in the context of modernity, an exposition of Cavell's understanding of skepticism about other minds is required at this juncture.

Cavell wrote Part IV of the *Claim* which discusses other mind skepticism several years after he had completed Part I-III. These parts, particularly, Part II *could* be read as though they were intended to block or rebut skepticism, while in Part IV Cavell appears now fully committed to the project of locating skepticism "in the economy of human knowing",[100] so much so that Cavell is ready to submit „that the correct relation between inner and outer, between the soul and its society, is the theme of the *Investigations* as a whole. This theme, I might say, provides its moral."[101]

Wittgenstein's examination of the possibility of a private language should be considered in light of his discussion of the Augustinian conception of language, which states that the meaning of a word is defined by its reference to a specific object. The meaning of the word is construed as whatever it refers to, and without a corresponding object, the word "apple" would be meaningless. According to this view, if language is thought to function by associating words with objects they represent, and if these objects are considered to be private experiences that are "owned" by an individual and known only to them, then the language that refers to these experiences would be inherently private. This straightforward interpretation about other minds stems directly from the simplistic Augustinian idea that the meaning of a word is the object it stands for.[102] But let me elaborate the Augustinian picture before turning towards other minds skepticism.

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[100] Hammer, Espen. 2002. *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity, and the Ordinary*. Polity Press: 74
[101] CR 329
[102] See Hacker, 71

Initially, this portrayal of how language works seems unproblematic; it might even resemble the way we explain language to a child. However, difficulties arise when we attempt to pinpoint a singular entity that solidifies this connection concretely. Wittgenstein's interlocutors in the *Investigations* are persistently in search for that particular *thing* or a metaphysically or psychologically identifiable mechanism which does connect words with their referent: association, ostensive definition. So, while the passage from Augustine's *Confessions* (quoted at the beginning of the *Investigations*) appears to entertain a rather "unexceptional" account of language, it is only once we enter a particular "debate", pursue particular philosophical interests – as the *Investigations* do – that Augustine's account becomes objectionable, skeptical as it were:

> The transformation of Augustine's remarks from trivial to metaphysical occurs when we read the passage as attempting to treat certain sort of problems as being entered in certain sorts of debates. The notions Augustine invokes, like 'naming some object', 'wishing to point a thin out', and 'state of mind', can be entirely unexceptional; after all, we use them all the time. However, Wittgenstein seeks to show that when these notions are used in certain contexts, they come to have a weigh that our ordinary understanding of them does not support.[103]

Augustine's scene of instruction "naively" tries to make sense of the way we acquire linguistic competence. The notion of a connection between a word and an object, in this manner, remains within the bounds of our ordinary criteria, within language, and within ordinary language games. To borrow Cavell's terms here, we might say Augustine risks being misunderstood while still acting in good faith – his goal is to elucidate why words can make sense to us and why we can make sense with them. However, once we

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[103] Goldfarb, Warren D. 1983. "I Want You to Bring Me a Slab: Remarks on the Opening Sections of the 'Philosophical Investigations'." *Synthese*: 265-282: 268.

attempt to materialize or naturalize this connection, hypothesize a *real* relation, we step into a specific domain of knowledge we know nothing about – departing from our ordinary criteria.

> What is the relation between name and thing named? Well, what *is* it? Look at language-game (2) or at some other one: that's where one can see what this relation may consist in. Among many other things, this relation may also consist in the fact that hearing a name calls before our mind the picture of what is named; and sometimes in the name's being written on the thing named or in its being uttered when the thing named is pointed at.[104]

What Wittgenstein's interlocutor desires is more than for a word to have a particular referent, an object; he also wants to attribute a certain something (a picture in the mind) to the relationship between the two. In response, Wittgenstein directs him back to how we ordinarily speak, to demonstrate how we would picture or make use of a "connection", as seen in the quote above. The hastiness of the interlocutor, contrasts with the patience of the Wittgensteinian voice, which, in speaking and using words, must assert his presence, must implicate himself, and must take the risk that his words might not convey what he intends them to mean. The epistemologist on the other hand seeks, akin to the modernist composer as discussed earlier, to leap from word to meaning in one instance, once and for all.

How does this philosophized notion of a relation between words and objects give way to skepticism? Now, while Wittgenstein does seem to deny that there is a particular relation between words and objects that accounts for the possibility of linguistic meaning (he doesn't; he simply states that any such language game in which such a thesis is asserted idles), it does not follow that the absence of a particular identifiable relation or

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[104] PI 243

connection leads to the denial of objects altogether. In the absence of this relation, we might lack a good account of meaning, but we still have objects.

The situation with regard to mental "objects" is different; in the *Investigations* the denial of a substantial relation does tempt the skeptic to conjecture that there might be nothing that, for example, the word "thinking" refers to. "And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes."[105] In the absence of an identifiable relation between words and perceptible objects, such as an apple, we are only lacking a theory of language that can account for the successful connections we make every day when speaking about the material world. We are as it were free to propose another theory that works better for us, for whatever the purpose. In the case of mental "objects" however, we do not have objects visibly present before us; indeed, when you speak of pain, you might mean something entirely different than when *I* use the word. Indeed, the other-mind skeptic might interpret Wittgenstein's "beetle in the box" parable as an argument favouring the non-existence of mental phenomena.

> Well, everyone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case! – Suppose that everyone had a box with something in it which we call a "beetle". No one can ever look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. But what if these people's word "beetle" had a use nonetheless? If so, it would not be as the name of a thing. The thing in the box doesn't belong to the language-game at all; not even as a *Something*: for the box might even be empty. No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.[106]

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[105] PI 308
[106] PI 293

But Wittgenstein's famous reply to his own parable is of course this: "That is to say, if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and name', the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant."[107] As, of course we do not "want to deny them", it is the model of "object and name" which we want to discard, not the mental.

Although Wittgenstein certainly acknowledges the issue of skepticism concerning other minds, it is important to recognize that he does not single it out as a distinctive problem. The "problem" manifesting in the sections after paragraph 242 in the *Investigations* revolves around the contemplation of the possibility of a *private language*. In this context the notion emerges that the perceptions of my own feelings, urges, pains, etc., are *more real* than those of the other. I cannot feel the pain of the other, I can only feel my own. In the right philosophical frame of mind this ordinary fact of our lives might yield a general thesis regarding the non-existence of other minds.

2. The Meaning of Privacy – Marie McGinn and Stanley Cavell

The pivotal question then is, why does Wittgenstein pose the problem or possibility of a private language to himself? When assessing this, one might be inclined to think that the choice of interpreting these segments of the *Investigations* is based on individual preferences. Compare Cavell's reading, which I will explain further below, with that of the distinguished Wittgenstein scholar Peter Hacker:

> The global purpose of Wittgenstein's discussion of private knowledge of experience, private ownership of experience and private ostensive definition (which might be called the private language argument in a narrow

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[107] PI 293

sense) is not to establish that language is essentially social. [...] Rather, his global purpose is to reveal the incoherence of a comprehensive picture or group of related pictures of human nature, of the nature of the mind and of the relation between behaviour and the mental, of knowledge, self-knowledge and knowledge of the experiences of other people, of language and its alleged foundations in 'the given'.[108]

Hacker deploys Wittgenstein's private language arguments to refute a "defective picture" of the mental that has, according to him, captivated the tradition of modern Western philosophy. *Wittgenstein, Meaning and Mind* endeavours to contextualize the *Investigations* within the wider framework of the European philosophical tradition. This seminal work spans over 600 pages. An accomplishment which stands in stark contrast to that of Cavell, who does not view the *Investigations* as a reaction to a specific set of ideas about the mind, meaning, knowledge, or other topics. For him, the deviation from the ordinary that the book illustrates is taken quite literally – as the text reads like an event unbound by time and space – capable of occurring anytime and anywhere. The *Investigations* do not supply context, nor do they explicitly state what (specific theory) they intend to contest or refute. In reading the *Investigations* qua a text, as an isolated singular work, Cavell identifies in it an urge to philosophize, and thereby, a certain *desire* to depart from ordinary language.

This approach markedly diverges from Hacker's view, which advocates using ordinary language as a means to correct thought – as if our everyday ways of speaking and the rules of grammar somehow depict the state of the world and the mind. By contrast, for Cavell the departure from the ordinary yields not incorrectness, but rather the notion

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[108] Hacker, P. M. S. 2019. *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind (Volume 3 of an Analytical Commentary on the* Philosophical Investigations*), Part 1: Essays*. John Wiley & Sons: 13.

that we do not *want* to stay there and that we somehow have to push ourselves, free ourselves to go back to where we all come from.

In tracing our disappointment with criteria, in denying that Wittgensteinian criteria can, or are meant to, refute skepticism", Cavell continues, "I seem, in my remarks about the problem of other minds, to have left the other's privacy intact." It is this precisely what Marie McGinn in her essay "The Everyday Alternative to Scepticism" finds deeply concerning. According to her reading, Wittgenstein's analysis of other minds does not leave any room for metaphysical privacy, a view Cavell seems to be committed to. She argues that Cavell's association of everyday uncertainty with skeptical doubt problematically characterizes our ordinary uncertainties as, fundamentally, doubts about the existence of others. Furthermore, McGinn contends that Cavell incorrectly imposes on Wittgenstein his view that our common everyday uncertainties stem from a universal source, our inherent separateness from others. She says: "Cavell does, of course, acknowledge that the suspicion that the other is somehow playing me false is still a way of affirming his existence, but he nevertheless insists that our ordinary relations with others are haunted by a possibility of isolation which makes the worry of the sceptic somehow real to us."[109]

To begin with, we might ask why Wittgenstein does not endorse such a view initially, especially since it seems intuitively true that we do not perceive "your pain" in the same way we perceive our own pain. Espen Hammer provides a quite convincing portrayal of the naturalness of what other mind skepticism entails or seeks to convey: "We relate, presumably, to other human beings every day – embodied beings endowed

[109] McGinn, Marie. 2003. „The Everyday Alternative to Scepticism", Cavell and Wittgenstein On Other Minds. In *Wittgenstein and Scepticism*, Routledge, 240-259: 244.

with thoughts, fears, wishes, hopes, desires, and so on. But how, or on what grounds, do we really know this? We know, the answer runs, what others are able to show us of themselves. Similarly, others know of us what we are able to show of ourselves. Our access to others is mainly perceptual. But how much ca be shown? Well, at least we", and here Hammer quotes Cavell", see a humanish something of a certain height and age and gender and colour and physiognomy, emitting vocables in a certain style".[110]

But Hammer continues "this is insufficient, it might be argued, to claim to know *another mind*; for it is compatible with such an experience that the other is a robot, zombie, golem, or any other perfected human-like being without an inner life. Hence it follows that we are not entitled to claim knowledge of other minds. Indeed, for all I know, the human-like others could appear to my senses as they now do and I could be the only human in existence."[111] This portrayal of skepticism towards other minds is, as presented, relatively benign. It is only when we engage in a debate charged with specific philosophical concerns – for instance, by harbouring the desire that our relationship with both others and non-others necessitates a certain refinement of our condition, or that it presents a problem significant enough to provoke human, intellectual despair (here, I am reminded of Goldfarb's remarks on Wittgenstein's treatment of Augustine's conception of language) – that it becomes more fraught or problematic to us.

We could speculate that Wittgenstein does not seriously consider the possibility or necessity of a general denial of other minds, as he seems to be opposed to the idea that knowing the other (in terms of epistemic knowing) is central to our relationship with the

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[110] Espen Hammer, 59-60
[111] -Ibid.

other. The primary issue with McGinn's critique is that, similarly, Cavell's focus is not on refuting or confirming skepticism.

As explored in Chapter One, the genuine and sole counter to skepticism involves shifting our interest from it – specifically, to position skepticism as a fantasy within the context of human relationships. The validity of skepticism depends on the possibility of narrating its story, and Cavell contends that the most substantial narrative is that skepticism manifests in modernity as a recurring fantasy – a story that can be told. Hence, I submit Wittgenstein would, if he had to, agree that there is a difference between the way we know objects, and the way we know others, that knowing the other and whether the other is there, is, say more complicated and that not knowing the other is more real, *lively* than not knowing of objects. The question is if one is compelled to infer from this general epistemological theses about the life of others. *This marks the crucial difference between Wittgenstein and Cavell on the one hand, and the traditional skeptic on the other.*

Cavell suggests that the private language passages in the *Investigations* do not put forward a serious conjecture for Wittgenstein to prove or disprove. Rather, they present a fantasy that someone with the mindset of an epistemologist – who simplifies our relationship with others to mere knowledge – might succumb to: "If the fact that we share, or have established, criteria is the condition under which we can think and communicate in language, then skepticism is a natural possibility of that condition; it reveals most perfectly the standing threat to thought and communication, that they are only human, nothing more than natural to us."[112] This skeptical vision of language – always open to repudiation, a terrible truth of our existence – does appear to permeate much of Cavell's.

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[112] CR 47

In addition to what McGinn finds rather unacceptable in Cavell, namely the view that we are metaphysically conditioned to live our skepticism vis-à-vis others one might get impression that Cavell succumbs to some kind of – at least not in the traditional sense – dogmatism with respect to the human condition as being existentially skeptical.

McGinn is not alone in invoking Wittgenstein *against* Cavell to steer us back to the certainties of everyday life. Moyal-Sharrock uses uncompromising language in her argument: "Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein here is a misreading. For Wittgenstein, skepticism is not an important, ineluctable truth of the human condition; it is the product of a misunderstanding of our epistemic situation – a misunderstanding that is resolvable, once and for all. All that needs be done is to recognize that skepticism is conceptually untenable",[113] and she quotes a passage from *On Certainty* to support her stance: "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty."[114]

McGinn provides a set of examples where Wittgenstein accounts for the contingency of our everyday use of psychological concepts. For example: "Sufficient evidence [for pretence] passes over into insufficient without a borderline. A natural foundation of the way this concept [pretence] is formed is the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies."[115] And she explains that Wittgenstein posits our psychological concepts must inherently possess the flexibility to discern patterns within this continual fluctuation. For these concepts to function within the vibrant flux of life, they must be inherently adaptable or "elastic". Therefore, we cannot lay down explicit,

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[113] Moyal-Sharrock, Danièle. 2017. "Too Cavellian a Wittgenstein: Wittgenstein's Certainty, Cavell's Skepticism." In *Wittgenstein and Modernism*. Edited by Michael Mahieu, and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé. University Chicago Press. 92-112.
[114] OC 115
[115] RPP 2 614

unwavering criteria for emotional states such as grief, joy, etc., because the standards we use to determine these feelings inherently differ from person to person and from one situation to another. Moreover, the application of our criteria considers not just an isolated behaviour or expression but the behaviour or expression within the context of the tumultuous whole of human life and interpersonal relationships. This type of indefiniteness is what sets these concepts apart from more concrete concepts, such as those pertaining to diseases or other physical conditions of the human body, where criteria are more clearly defined.

Sympathetic to Cavell she concludes that his "discussion of privacy can be read as an expression of his sense of the fundamental difference between psychological concepts and those which we use to characterise physical objects, it can be seen as voicing a central theme of Wittgenstein's remarks."[116] In rather cynical fashion she completed her thought as follows: "However, in so far as it attempts to characterise this difference by reference to an asymmetry vis-à-vis the philosophical sceptic, it goes against the grain of Wittgenstein's thought."[117] Her cynicism is apparent in the implicit claim that Cavell succumbs to the very kind of skepticism he seeks to address, situate, and comprehend. It is no surprise, then, that Cavell's direct response to McGinn turns out to be rather defensive.: "Suppose, in other words, that what Wittgenstein uncovers in his general sense of uncertainty on psychological attribution is not what emerges in Part Four of *The Claim of Reason,* in its encounters with automata, slaves, embryos, golems, enchanted frogs, statues, dolls, bodies as guises, the outsider, horror, best cases of knowledge and

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[116] McGinn, 248
[117] Ibid.

acknowledgement, confinement and exposure in knowing. Then we differ on the matter."[118]

Where Cavell markedly differs from Wittgenstein's approach to skepticism is in the diagnosis of skepticism itself. Wittgenstein does not explicitly state but rather demonstrates the persistent allure of skepticism, the tendency to reject our shared understanding in language in the attribution of mental states. It can be asserted, I believe uncontestably, that Wittgenstein's *Investigations* depict the venture into metaphysics and the sublime – speaking outside of language games – as a constant threat, something that inherently conditions our lives as thinkers. The *Investigations* not so much articulate the unceasingness of the skeptical threat, as they *give an impression* of it by iteration, as Giordano puts it: "This reiterative movement is captured in the heap-of-fragments form of the *Investigations*, what sometimes feels like its aimlessness, its inconclusiveness, and its rhetoricalness, and, at other times, its inexplicable poignancy. The *Investigations* goes nowhere; its digressive method bespeaks the ambition to teach us how to begin again after finding only false-starts."[119] Cavell on the other hand does attempt to provide an explanation for why this phenomenon persists, and more specifically, why skepticism concerning other minds is lived, and why material object skepticism is not or cannot be lived.

This is where, I take it, we ought to situate Cavell's claim as to our separateness with each other. In so far as the acknowledgement of the other presents itself more difficult, more complicated, in so far as the problems of the other persists as a problem of modernity (as Cavell shows in Part Four of the *Claim),* our separateness, our privacy vis-

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[118] Cavell, Stanley. 2003. "Reply to Four Chapters", In *Wittgenstein and Scepticism*, Routledge, 278 – -- 291, 287.
[119] Giordano, 210

à-vis the other is less a conclusion drawn from our uncertainties with others, but an interpretation of it. The fact that we are in search for the other and that we search for the other to find me, know me by *acknowledging* me, can be read as giving expression to the fact that we are in some way separate to one another, hence live our skepticism.

I aim to conclude my discussion of McGinn's critique of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein's private language passages in the *Investigations* by adding substance to the notion that the type of privacy or separation Cavell attributes to us is a kind of privacy that McGinn would be willing to accept on Wittgenstein's behalf, that is one which shows forth within ordinary language games, within criteria, which she calls the "practical" domain of being separate from one another.

Privacy, according to Cavell, is exactly what is being undermined by the skeptic's conjecture about the uncertainty of our knowledge of others. To phrase it bluntly, once the skeptic, analogously to material object skepticism, frames our relationship to other minds epistemically – as something that requires empirically verifiable knowledge – he negates and disavows the ordinary criteria upon which our daily understanding of others is negotiated, known, and made known to ourselves and each other. This repudiation of our standard criteria of knowing (which involves acknowledging the other and making myself known to the other by expressing my criteria) is, according to Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's private language paragraphs indicative of a desire to transcend my separateness from the other, and thus my privacy. But why does Cavell insist, conversely, that the "fantasy" of the possibility of a private language expresses the denial that language is something essentially shared, and therefore a denial of publicness?

To resolve this, I revisit an important distinction hinted at in the previous chapter. This distinction notes that the skeptic and the ordinary language critic have divergent understandings of what the skeptic is doing, has achieved, or has failed to achieve. From the skeptic's own perspective, my separateness from the other represents an epistemologically significant, perhaps insurmountable lack of knowledge. Conversely, according to Cavell, the skeptic, by interpreting the gap between me and the other as an intellectual deficiency, dismisses the domain in which this gap is lived – that is, within and through the agreements in language, in our shared criteria (for what counts as pain, love, jealousy, etc.). The skeptic bemoans what he sees as an epistemic gap between himself and others, while Cavell, interpreting skepticism as a retreat from the world, from shared criteria, argues that the skeptic rejects "real" privacy, the kind that is negotiated, acknowledged, or dismissed within the conventions of language and the practices of our ordinary life.

In the celebrated sequence of paragraphs in the *Investigations* (242-246), Wittgenstein arrives at the hard-earned conclusion at paragraph 242 that what we call "understanding a rule" is contingent on mutually agreed criteria in language. This condenses Cavell's narrative neatly, as paragraph 243 suddenly envisions the possibility of a private language, thereby regressing to an imagined world where I do not need to make myself count in the constitution of meaning. Wittgenstein's turn from paragraph 242 to 243 can be read in Cavell's terms, as turning from real and lived privacy to empty idling privacy, to privacy as a fantasy, *modern* lived skepticism.

> But is it also conceivable that there be a language in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences his feelings, moods, and so on a for his own use? – Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? But that is not what I mean. The words of this language are to refer to what only

the speaker can know a to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.[120]

242 establishes the publicness of language; 243 abruptly repudiates this notion by imagining a private language; 244 makes clear that this notion was encouraged by the object-referent picture of how language is supposed to work. Wittgenstein at this juncture introduces a different picture, which is supposed to substitute the Augustinian object-referent picture, steering us away from the urge of identifying a psychological mechanism securing the relation between words and sensations. Indeed, it might seem straightforward; we frequently discuss and label our sensations. But establishing the association between a word and the sensation it signifies leads to the question how a person can come to understand the names of sensations?

The new picture Wittgenstein offers is that words can be seen as *expressions* of sensation. A child who has suffered an injury, cries; subsequently, adults introduce him to expressions of pain and, eventually, full sentences, thereby teaching the child an alternative "pain behaviour": 245: "How can I even attempt to interpose language between the expression of pain and the pain?"

The gap between sensations and words, which arises because of the Augustinian picture, lays the philosophical groundwork that makes the possibility of disconnection seem plausible initially, skepticism seem a possibility. Against this Wittgenstein introduces a view (a myth) of our natural history of language learning where this gap does not appear, or where the gap can only become a practical problem: that is, the challenge of learning to express one's pain in a more complex linguistic way. The perceived

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[120] PI 243

disconnect or misalignment between the mind and the world then, according to Wittgenstein, is reconciled or corrected through the recognition of human practices and conventions, of emerging as a part of the linguistic community, of shared criteria.

Cavell now says that this suggests that the feeling of a gap stems from an effort or desire to withdraw from (to be an outsider to, or detached from) these shared practices, and to abandon the duty of preserving them.[121] The gap between the child, who has not yet mastered "proper" speech and does not follow the rules of ordinary language, can once again serve as an analogy for the type of privacy Cavell refers to. This privacy experienced by us, persists as we become grown-up children, continually learning the meaning of your pain-expressions, your signs for love, your jealousies, etc. Cavell aims to depart from the kind of privacy where the skeptic is comfortable, and instead return to the "practical" privacy that we, as humans, must navigate diurnally:

> I remarked that traditional philosophy, so far as this enters the Anglo-American academic tradition, fails to take this gap seriously as a real, a practical problem.[122]

Insofar as the tradition views skepticism as a problem to be solved, it has already committed to a certain methodological assumption. Cavell's point is not that once we adopt a *practical* interest in the problem of the other, etc., we become immune to the allure of the theoretical approach to the problem. But once we take up the practical approach, once we focus on the human, we might afford ourselves relief from the problem – in a practical sense; our interest in our lives – and ultimately, in our culture – shifts. This in fact amounts to a "complete" rejection of skepticism as far as interest and method

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[121] See, CR 109
[122] CR 109

are concerned, two things we should say are sufficient to distinguish two positions from one another.

Interpreters such as McGinn, Moyal-Sharrock and Peter Hacker argue with Wittgenstein that the publicness of language make us inherently knowable to one another, dismissing the idea of private, inaccessible meanings.[123] Cavell comments: "When the issue of private language comes up in Wittgenstein, and when philosophers insist that language is public, they tend to find a substitute for these thoughts in the idea that grammar is autonomous."[124]Indeed if whatever the word "pain" means is determined not by an inner sensation, but publicly, then the meaning of "pain" does not incite an epistemic inquiry of the mind. Cavell, on the other hand, challenges this conventional interpretation of publicness. He contends that although our language is intrinsically shared, it depends on our continual effort to maintain a shared understanding through actively communicating and validating the bases of intelligibility. Criteria must be voiced, claimed.

No theoretical proof can relieve us of the obligation to ensure this mutual intelligibility. A proof would be, as Hammer puts it, "a skeptical answer".[125] The notion that criteria are given, as opposed to the necessity of maintaining them, encourages the thought that they might provide a sound foundation for our knowledge claims about other minds, thus potentially refuting skepticism about other minds. See for example, Peter Hacker on this: "It seems, both from Wittgenstein's writings in the 1930s and from the

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[123] Hammer, 68
[124] Standish, 2
[125] Hammer, 68

Investigations, that he conceived of criterial support as decisive, conferring certainty *ceteris paribus*, and as justifying a knowledge-claim."[126]

Contrary to the standard interpretation of the private language argument, Cavell is not focused on delivering such proof or refuting its coherence. Instead, he suggests that any attempt to prove this point is skeptical. Cavell's perspective acknowledges that the impulse for privacy articulates a profound wish to release ourselves from the burden of revealing ourselves to others. Believing a logical proof could address the inherent challenges in expressing ourselves is a skeptical stance. It overlooks our actual separateness and fails to consider the complexities involved in self-disclosure. Instead of resolving the issue of privacy, it fosters an illusory alignment between the physical and the psychological, ultimately reinforcing our isolation.[127]

> A fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness would solve a simultaneous set of metaphysical problems: it would relieve me of the responsibility for making myself known to others – as though if I were expressive that would mean continuously betraying my experiences, incessantly giving myself away; it would suggest that my responsibility for self-knowledge takes care of itself – as though the fact that others cannot know my (inner) life means that I cannot fail to. It would reassure my fears of being known, though it may not prevent my being under suspicion; it would reassure my fears of not being known, though it may not prevent my being under indictment. – The wish underlying this fantasy covers a wish that underlies skepticism, a wish for the connection between my claims of knowledge and the objects upon which the claims are to fall to occur without my intervention, apart from my agreements. As the wish stands, it is unappeasable.[128]

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[126] Hacker, 304
[127] Ibid.
[128] CR 251

But who, according to Cavell, became inexpressive? Here I want to highlight an important distinction which Cavell in my eyes has not given enough attention. Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein's private language passages of the *Investigations,* which Part IV begins with, leaves the impression his *human* interpretation of skepticism is fused with the traditional epistemic. This view, which finds support in a variety of Wittgenstein scholars is understandable but ultimately misguided once it is made clear, as I sought to do, that Cavell's existential interpretation of skepticism is not a theory he seeks to defend. It is rather meant to highlight the degree to which, under the right circumstances, human reason is prone repudiate the conditions upon which our privacy is negotiated. What instead is under scrutiny in this part of the *Claim* is the *rejection* of our privacy, hence of "lived existential skepticism". In retrospect, it would have served him well not to label our ordinary uncertainties with respect others (our knowledge about other minds) skepticism. This is at time confusing, even more so when the task is to engage with Cavell deeply, academically. However, this "strategy" is part and parcel of his ambition that skepticism in philosophical practice should in fact *mean,* denote something else: the study of the human fantasy to repudiate the human, wanting to move, like the modernity composers from desire and intention into the world, from intention to a performable piece of art, almost instantaneously, without taking any risks. What is under investigation in Part IV is what *modern* lived skepticism. Modernity for Cavell is marked by an increased interest in the problem of the other, precisely because the foundations of knowledge are put into question, so much so that my life with others, my ability to distinguish between humans and automata, is put into question. What happened in modernity then is a dawning of a particular picture of the human, which is a misinterpretation of ordinary, of existential

skepticism. That I cannot fully "know" the other became an intellectual puzzle, a puzzle to be solved. Herein lies the drama Cavell describes in Part IV of the *Claim.*

2. Skepticism as a Human Catastrophe

As Cavell's discussion of other mind skepticism unfolds in conversation with Wittgenstein's remarks on the possibility (fantasy) of a private language, it becomes evident that for Cavell other minds skepticism is of interest only in terms of a fantasy, hence he interested in skepticism as a human, not an epistemic problem. More concisely, the historical emergence of the idea and the attempt to its refutation for Cavell must be apprehended as responses to the advent of the modern area which, according to him, is marked by a crisis of foundations characterized by "the rise of the new science, the consequent and precedent attenuation of displacement of God; the attenuation of the concept of Divine Right; the preparation for the demand for political legitimation by individual consent."[129]

In the absence of foundations, of God, we are inclined to respond, by building a new foundation with the means provided by the sciences. This overreaction – which in Wittgenstein words lead to nothing more than mere "houses of cards" and the repudiation of the human – stands in stark contrast with viewing the crises of foundations as an opportunity to forge a new, authentic understand of our own finitude, our existence as free subjects, as explained by Giordano. Cavell's notion of secularism (the displacement of God), revolves around the idea that secularity is not, as she contends, merely the absence of religious or metaphysical beliefs but is a distinctive condition marked by the instability and constant self-questioning of our social norms and individual beliefs. In a

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[129] DK 21

secular society, agreements and understandings are not predetermined but are continually formed and reformed through our interactions and the negotiation of our shared criteria.

For Cavell as for Wittgenstein respectively it is a *fact* that necessities are things we *acquire from history*. In the *Investigation's* "scene of inheritance" we learn and are instructed to what is necessary and what is subject to interpretation. Cavell suggests, as many have done after him, that Wittgenstein's "philosophy provides, one might say, an anthropological, or even anthropomorphic, view of necessity."[130] The anthropological perspective, wants to explain why "the thing called necessary is *beyond our control"[131]*, or indeed, why we *experience* the thing in question as such. Just as the notion that mathematical truths are "metaphysical things" gives voice to their unassailability, so does the view that necessities are learned – because they are learned (and taught, shown, etc.) *as* necessities.

However, emphasizing the learned or anthropological/historical *aspect* of necessity also brings to view that its fluidity: "necessaries are means",[132] and that "what we take to be necessary in a given period may alter."[133] Behind Cavell's claim as to the historicity of necessity lies what conventionalism might disguise (here the influence of Kuhn is strongly felt): "It is worth saying that conventions can be changed because it is essential to a convention that it be in service of some project, and you do not know a priori which set of procedures is better than others for that project. That is, it is internal to a convention that it be open to change *in convention,* in the convening to those subject

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[130] CR 118
[131] Ibid. *119*
[132] Ibid. *120*
[133] Ibid.

to it, in whose behaviour it lives."[134] What conventionalism and Platonism prevents is *"the arising of the issue for which convening is necessary, viz., so see what we do, to learn our position in what we take to be necessaries, to see in what service they are necessary."*[135] And further: "*What* I take as a matter of course is not a matter of course. It is a matter of history, a matter of what arrives at and departs from a present human interest. I cannot *decide* what I take as a matter of course, any more than I can decide what interests me; I have to find out."[136] If, as conventionalism (and Platonism) would claim, "we have [or God has] agreed beforehand to all that would be necessary"[137] then my participation in convening over what is necessary is not internal to our concept of necessity, but external to it.

With Wittgenstein, Cavell views the secular turn as an opportunity for critical self-reflection and a chance to redefine the terms of our communal existence. He positions this type of skepticism as a catalyst for change, urging individuals to take responsibility for their own convictions and the conventions they live by and sees ordinary language philosophy to recover the ordinary and to reorient ourselves in our everyday lives. It is about recognizing that our most familiar and taken-for-granted practices are not fixed but are subject to re-evaluation and change.

Moreover, Cavell's secularism implies that the understanding of our own words and conventions requires an ongoing process of discovery, which is inherently unstable. It is a quest not for final answers but for a deeper engagement with the questions that define our lives. Thus, Cavell's secularism is shown in the dynamics of loss and recovery,

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[134] Ibid. 120
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid. 122-123
[137] Ibid. 31

where skepticism is both a challenge to be met and a condition to be explored for deeper understanding and the possibility of creating a more authentic community. What must be acknowledged, as Giordano puts it, "is the condition of secularity: that the limits of reason and human agency needn't be a condition of despair but rather the opportunity for a renewed search for community."[138]

For Cavell skepticism and the historical attempts of its refutation in epistemology are as it were bad interpretations of our secular condition. When skepticism is examined through its epistemological arguments, even at its most theoretical and seemingly detached level, it is indicative of an underlying, unacknowledged anxiety. Freedom, that comes with emergence of a secular society entails the possibility of a limitless society, a danger enforced by unattended philosophy.

In an interview Cavell makes clear that the Wittgensteinian ordinary is a scene of continuous invasion by philosophy, where "philosophy has joined in the making violent of the world":

> Metaphysics and skepticism go together in Wittgenstein. You metaphysicalise the idea of what it is to see an object then you create metaphysical objects called 'sense data' or 'objects as they are in themselves' and so on. And then you require what Wittgenstein calls a return to the ordinary. Austin doesn't speak of that, but I do. But I say this return is also a return to a place you've never been. So I say let's go, let's speak then of two ordinaries: the actual and the eventual. […] When Wittgenstein says of the ordinary that philosophy leaves everything as it is, I'm taking this as an assertion that the actual ordinary is precisely not something that philosophy has left as it is. Philosophy has joined in the . . . (I wish I could have a verb for 'violent') . . . in the making violent of the world: the thing that politics means by the world having become a scene of power.[139]

[138] Giordano, 215
[139] Cavell, Stanley, and Paul Standish. 2012. "Stanley Cavell in Conversation with Paul Standish." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 46.2,155-176: 12.

The actual ordinary is characterized by self-loss, reification of language, avoidance, monologue, violence, and tragedy. As Cavell puts it, "Wittgenstein's appeal […] to the everyday finds the (actual) everyday to be as pervasive a scene of illusion and trance and artificiality as Plato or Rousseau or Marx or Thoreau had found."[140] The "eventual" ordinary now describes a state at which we become conscious of this condition. Cavell charts the progress of consciousness, which he conceives as the transformation from the actual (unknow) to an eventual ordinary) from an initial naïve state. At the outset, we are unaware of our condition allegorized by the ungroundedness of our language, our privacy vis-à-vis the other. Oblivious to this predicament yet burdened by it, we seek a foundation for our rationality, constructing systems of thought as exemplified in Descartes' *Meditations*. This pursuit inadvertently sidesteps human condition, propelling us toward a (constructed) sublime. At a third juncture – and here I contend that Cavell views this realization as an indispensable stage in human consciousness, and, as we shall see, of European history, of the Enlightenment – we recognize that our creations are monstrous; they are constructs in which we can no longer see ourselves. They represent the sublime, the other to our ordinary selves. With this awareness, we come to understand that we are fundamentally ordinary and un-sublime, and that the structures we have erected are merely fabrications, not our true ordinary selves.

Cavell's philosophical project, as explained by Giordano, is answerable to the interpretation of secularity, indeed to cast it as an opportunity and to avoid the catastrophe that is implied or anticipated by skepticism. Philosophy's task or virtue here is "responsiveness", "and it is in reading and responding to the works of those who have

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[140] NUA, 46

come before us, and doing so together, that we learn who we are and how to become who we are."[141] But becoming who we are, as Norris puts it, in Wittgenstein is not *only* a subjective process, i.e., one that wants to facilitate a moral and philosophical life. In siting and representing history as a place of skepticism and intrusion, philosophy makes its own skeptical past known to itself. In becoming aware of its history and its presence philosophy conceptualized (*auf den Begriff bringen)* both the possibility of skepticism and its return.

> I tend rather to emphasize in the *Investigations* other features [not the self-subversive aspects of reason and grammar] of what I alluded to as its implied sketch of the modern subject, namely one subject to the philosophical aspiration and perplexities depicted in the quasi-fragments of the *Investigations*. These further features seem to me better to draw out my interest in Wittgenstein's text. I am turning here from the idea of the *Investigations* as a portrait of our culture to the idea of it as a portrait of what I am calling the modern subject.[142]

3. Concluding Remarks

Wittgenstein's writings have undergone a considerable transformation during his so-called middle period, hence the time after he had returned to Cambridge in 1929 and once the *Investigations* had been completed around 1945. In particular his notes on the possibility of a private language had occupied him for a considerable amount of time, and while his first remarks on this subject stemming from the 1930's leave the impression as though they had been written with the intention to combat "latter-day idealism", the more polished version of these remarks published in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein appear to

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[141] Norris, 2017, 7
[142] PT 206

be "less didactic, and more dialogical, and mark a shift from lecturing the mistaken student to telling a story about how we are misled by a 'dream of our language' (MS 165, p. 5)".[143] By not taking this methodological transformation at face value we might run the risk of imposing onto the *Investigations* an attempt the refute, as Goldfarb puts it, a "naive form of mentalism", a doctrine which

> could be so easily defeated. Indeed, such naive mentalism is most foreign to just those philosophers with whose views on language Wittgenstein is most concerned, viz., Frege and the author of the *Tractatus*. After all, the keynote of early analytic philosophy is "always to separate the logical from the psychological"; Frege and the early Wittgenstein are insistent on the irrelevance of the passing mental show to any questions of meaning. Their order of priority is clear: only given the structures they see as underlying object.[144]

Wittgenstein appeared to have been cognizant of the tendency to be read as though he was opposing mentalism, idealism. His apparent rejection of the possibility of a private language might be read as a refutation of a strong version of idealism, namely solipsism, favouring "behaviourism". He says, "'aren't you nevertheless a behaviourist in disguise? Aren't you nevertheless basically saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction?' If I speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction."[145] It seems he is suggesting that his goal was not to present a philosophical counter to the idea of mental solipsism, but rather to demonstrate that any attempt to articulate mental solipsism results in creating fictitious grammatical constructs that serve no purpose in our language. If this is taken for granted, then our question should be why the *Investigations* are "carrying out the very different task of trying, and failing, to give meaning to the interlocutor's

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[143] Stern, David G. 2010. "Tracing the Development of Wittgenstein's Writing on Private Language." In *Wittgenstein after His Nachlass*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010. 110-127: 113.
[144] Goldfarb, 266
[145] PI 307

proposals", in particular, the interlocutors fantasy of a private language?[146] And why does Wittgenstein call this quite literally a "dream of our language"? The reason, at least according to Goldfarb, is that Wittgenstein wants to give voice to what happens *before* philosophy: "The forced naivete is thus meant to unearth how things we say, things that in ordinary contexts are the most ordinary sorts of descriptions, can become something else",[147] i.e. how they can become something approximating a philosophical theory.

The remainder of this dissertation will try to argue that what Goldfarb describes here as "intentional naiveté" – while clearly influenced by Cavell – is not exactly what Cavell had in mind in terms of what the fantasy of the private language is seeking to express or give voice to. Goldfarb's account makes it seem as though language itself is luring us to move from ordinary accounts of how language works (when for example we explain this to a child) to philosophical accounts. By following Wittgenstein, naming the possibility of a private language and *fantasy,* Cavell also implies that it is not only language to blame, or perhaps an erred relationship with our language. What, according to him remains unaccounted for, is why this critical move from the ordinary to the sublime is ultimately taken. Such an account will help us to understand what and to whom the *Investigations* are responding to. Stern, Burnyeat, Cavell, Goldfarb, Mulhall, Fischer and more do seem to agree that the proto-views Wittgenstein appears to oppose aren't views anyone seem to have held quite like that. If we do not want the *Investigations* to oppose philosophical strawmen, then what they attack or give voice to is not a philosophical theory. Similarly, if, as McGinn, Moyal-Sharrock, and Hacker suggest, Wittgenstein utilizes the notion of a private language to argue in favour of the public nature of

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[146] Stern, 113
[147] Goldfarb, 268

language, then we are confronted with the reality that Wittgenstein seems to be defending something that most of us find obvious, and opposing a theory perhaps no one has ever seriously held in the past. At the very least, this would constitute artificial philosophizing.

If, what the *Investigations* give voice to is not only the deceiving and captivating forms of our language leading us to philosophize, and if it is more than a public view of language and of the mental, they seek do defend against mental solipsism, or idealism, then perhaps our conclusion should be that it is these things all at once, and perhaps more than that. As I am going to suggest with Cavell, the *Investigations* can indeed be read as a responsive text, hence a text responding not only to psychological temptations to philosophize or to theories held by his forebearers but responding to a philosophy (metaphysics) which is held suspicious in refusing *my* (human) participation in it. And while any philosophy addressed in terms of the repudiation of the human has its (professional) justifications for doing so, as we have seen with Descartes, Wittgenstein perceives an ethically or even politically motivated call to resist exclusion. Indeed, and this will be the central argument of Chapter Four and Five, Wittgenstein "intentionally" and "naively" reads Russell's *The Analysis of Mind* – against the way it perhaps should be, namely as entertaining a research program for a future study of the mind – but as a concrete threat to my own integrity, my own grammar.

In order to continue tracing Cavell's journey towards making ordinary language philosophy, and more particularly, the Wittgensteinian voice available to a critique of modernity (or less concretely, an account of the conditions, possibilities and dangers of the modern period) I am turning now to the late text "Declining Decline", which does

forward in unapologetically direct fashion the idea that the *Investigations* can be read as a response to the decline of culture.

During the present chapter, I sought to make plausible that – contrary to McGinn's view – Cavell does not subscribe to the notion that "lived skepticism" depicts a night-marish reality of the human condition. Quite the opposite, it articulates (analogously to the *Investigations)* that from our everyday uncertainties about the meaning of words philosophical fantasies *can* evolve – that this is an everyday possibility. The main question again, for Cavell and for Wittgenstein is why and under what conditions these possibilities can become a reality. Our everyday uncertainties, are, once again, not the reason why we dwell in fantasies, but their criterial and grammatical structure or nature make the repudiation of our shared criteria possible. Under the right (modern) conditions this can happen. This is precisely what Part IV of the *Claim* and the *Investigations* mean to articulate.

CHAPTER THREE

WITTGENSTEIN'S DRAMATIZATION OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SKEPTICISM – "DECLINING DECLINE"

Abtract

This chapter explores Stanley Cavell's interpretation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's work as a hypothetical and dramatized critique of cultural decline. Through Cavell's essay, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture," this chapter argues that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* presents an exaggerated portrayal of cultural "exhaustion" and the loss of a shared cultural "home." Rather than reflecting an actual state of decline, Wittgenstein's approach is a speculative warning that underscores the potential consequences of an overreliance on metaphysical philosophy and unchecked skepticism. This Cavellian interpretation of *Investigations* as a book on cultural decline underscores Cavell's understanding of ordinary language philosophy as a form of cultural critique. By illustrating a hypothetical cultural malaise, Wittgenstein reveals the risk of distancing language from the practical, everyday contexts that ground meaning. This dramatic perspective serves as a cautionary framework, suggesting that bringing words back to their everyday use is a method to preempt cultural and intellectual disconnection before it fully manifests.

In 1986 Cavell submitted a talk in Trømso entitled "Declining Decline, *Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture*". This is a short and experimental text which formulates its goal very carefully: "[…] there is *a* perspective from which Wittgenstein's philosophy *may* be seen as a philosophy of culture."[148] *[highlight by me]* In what follows I will attempt to clarify the possibility of a cultural perspective as Cavell envisages it for Wittgenstein. Towards achieving this goal, I shall compare this perspective unique to Cavell with a recent attempt of reading the late Wittgenstein from a cultural angle.

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[148] NUA 110

What do the *Investigations* as a portrait of a culture in decline accomplish? What is its philosophical and critical function? Both DeAngelis and Mulhall extract from Wittgenstein's portrait (after Cavell's interpretation) a philosophical instruction for combatting cultural decline. Metaphysical philosophy, so the argument goes, is symptomatic of a Spenglerian cultural decline: exhaustion of forms; externalization; loss of home, etc., are all Spenglerian terms that are meant to characterize the modern predicament of culture. Metaphysics is symptomatic and an expression of an already ongoing process. Wittgenstein's signature phrase of bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use would combat decline in this direct way, returning not only words, but also a civilization back home. Hence Cavell's optimism: "Now imagine a world in which the voices of the interlocutors of the *Investigations* continue, but in which there is no Wittgensteinian voice as their other. It is a world in which our danger to one another grows faster than our help for one another."[149] The difficulties with DeAngelis' interpretation are I believe rather obvious. It seems too simplistic, impractical, and moralizing towards the philosophers (and all philosophy). Both philosophy and a culture would be reluctant to accept this interpretation of themselves. It conveys an attitude Cavell wishes to contest, incessantly. His cultural reading of the *Investigations* is far more intricate and requires a more nuanced reading, which I attempt to provide.

In Cavell's reading the *Investigations* do not only entertain a picture of a culture but also of philosophy. Further, both the portrait of philosophy and of culture are *fantastic,* imagined, and exaggerative. It depicts a culture in which philosophy has perlocated to its smallest and most fundamental units, where philosophy has occupied a

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[149] NUA 140

culture's scenes of inheritance, i.e., where wrong necessities are being taught to its children, to all men and women, diurnally. In Wittgenstein's portrait of philosophy already caused "false hope and excessive despair" among its people, in everyday life. Under these severe conditions philosophy's response to philosophy (metaphysics), as Cavell puts it is "farced to the point of death", our philosophical "spirit indulged". The influence of metaphysics is heightened to a point where a confident response to is not anymore possible and where we are forced to respond in utter poverty; the poverty of philosophy[150]: "This is what I do", "Explanations come to an end somewhere", etc.

As the influence of metaphysics and philosophy's response have reached an *impossible* state, I will suggest that the *Investigations* present a "transcending *philosophical* culture" intending to make us ponder whether it bespeaks the dangers lurking in philosophical thought. To have us think about *that* is philosophy's "performance", its critique.[151] Conceived in this way the *Investigations'* notion of philosophical criticism must at least to some extend be thought of as prophetic.

In conceiving of the *Investigations* as a portrait of a culture Cavell offers a perspective from which the *Investigations* can be read from the *outside,* as it were. The hermeneutic standpoint shifts its attention away from Wittgenstein's voice of correctness towards *all* voices which in one way or another mirror what is already happening in our lives: "When Wittgenstein says of the ordinary that philosophy leaves everything as it is, I'm taking this as an assertion that the actual ordinary is precisely not something that philosophy has left as it is. Philosophy has joined in the . . . (I wish I could have a verb

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[150] NUA 73 ("The poverty of philosophy" does not refer to Marx's critical study of P. J. Proudhon's work *System of Economical Contradictions, Or, The Philosophy of Misery* published *The Poverty of Philosophy*.)
[151] MW *Foreword*, xi

for 'violent') . . . in the making violent of the world: the thing that politics means by the world having become a scene of power." The scene of violence portrayed in the *Investigations* is one in which philosophy (metaphysics, etc.) has invaded the ordinary but continuously fails to occupy it completely. In conceiving this struggle as a cultural *portrait,* the *Investigations* do not read as say, a handbook for philosophical therapy and Kantian subjective critique where our task as philosophers is to imitate its procedures, its modes of correctness. Quite to the contrary, Cavell's hermeneutic standpoint reads the scene of violence as unavoidable, and hence in need for philosophical attention. In other words, what critique wants to attend to are not subjects but rather "modern" subjects in the straits of philosophy.

1. DeAngelis' Optimism

> On my understanding of how the cultural component of Wittgenstein's work stands in relation to its philosophical and grammatical component, one can master the philosophical content with little or no appreciation of the cultural intimations. So, while proud to have identified a latent cultural component of Wittgenstein's late thought, one that he deemed important, I am not prepared to claim that an understanding of that component is a requirement for understanding the explicit content of that work – the philosophical, grammatical investigations that are its centrepiece.[152]

When a cultural dimension in Wittgenstein's work first struck me as a relevant topic to discuss, I soon found myself pondering the broader philosophical relevance and contribution of such a project. DeAngelis' Afterword to his monograph *Ludwig Wittgenstein – A Cultural Point of View* is testament to this lurking anxiety. After all, the *Investigations* alone do not provide enough evidence (no evidence at all I suppose) that it wants to be read as a reflection of cultural decline. Grammatical investigations are, as

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[152] DeAngelis, William J. 2007. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Cultural Point of View: Philosophy in the Darkness of this Time*. Ashgate Publishing: 118

DeAngelis rightly points out, its centrepiece. Its recurrent appeal to imagined *cultures* and forms of life serve mainly as grammatical thought-experiments and objects of comparison, as elucidations of our grammatical schematism, of our natural reactions, of *our* form of life. Cavell makes this cultural angle seem even more implausible when he contends (consistently, in early and late writings) that Wittgenstein's concept of *forms of life* has a "biological direction" as opposed to a "conventional" one. What is at issue in Wittgenstein's concept of life forms, according to Cavell, "are not alone differences between promising and fully intending, or between coronations and inaugurations, or between barter and a credit system, or between transferring your money or sword from one hand to another"[153], things we would attribute to the ethnological level, to either primitive[154] or more civilized forms of human behaviour and cultural organization. Instead, "in being asked to accept [our form of life] or suffer it, as given for ourselves, we are not asked to accept private property, but separateness; not a particular fact of power but the fact that I am a man, therefore of *this* (range or scale) of capacity for work, for pleasure, for endurance, for appeal, for command, for understanding, for wish, for will, for teaching, for suffering."[155] The *Investigations* of course are rife with ethnological observations and Cavell's examples are not chosen at random. Banter, coronations, and different forms of money transfer do feature in the *Investigations.* However, they do not so much elucidate our way of living as they describe the background on which *human* understanding, meaning something, desiring, wishing, feeling pain, teaching, etc. is possible, in the same way "simulating pain" wouldn't be possible without the right cultural/ethnological surroundings and in the same way "talking" wouldn't grammatically

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[153] NUA 41

[154] I employ the term "primitive" here in the Wittgensteinian sense, referring to a simpler form of life as opposed to a more complex one. For reference, you can consult *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) 2.

[155] Ibid. 44.

be the same without its ethnological modes of actuality (telling stories, giving orders, etc.):

> Why can't a dog simulate pain? Is it too honest? Could one teach a dog to simulate pain? Perhaps it is possible to teach it to howl on particular occasions as if it were in pain, even when it isn't. But the right surroundings for this behaviour to be real simulation would still be missing.[156]

> It is sometimes said: animals do not talk because they lack the mental abilities. And this means: "They do not think, and that is why they do not talk." But they simply do not talk. Or better: they do not use language if we disregard the most primitive forms of language. Giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.[157]

Wittgenstein's cultural (qua biological) objects of comparison do not, at least for now, animate a cultural reading in that direct and naïve sense. What according to Cavell is lost and recovered in the *Investigations* is the human (human nature), not a culture. But what if a culture loses its capacity to furnish a background on which we can continue to be human, i.e., "simulate pain"? And why does philosophy as Wittgenstein encountered it in early 20th century potentially deprive our culture of the possibility of human expressiveness? Or did Wittgenstein, as Cavell surmised, believe philosophy would do such a thing at all?

DeAngelis' *Ludwig Wittgenstein – A Cultural Point of View* aims to "defend and expand upon the views" Cavell developed regarding the "Spenglerian valence in Wittgenstein's late works".[158] To make a start here, it is questionable to contend as Angelis does, that the cultural according to Cavell constitutes only a "*component [my*

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[156] PI 250
[157] PI 25
[158] DeAngelis, 2004, xii

emphasis] of Wittgenstein's work". See for example the following introductory remark in "Declining Decline": "Philosophy of culture signals something fundamental, if not yet quite surveyable, in Wittgenstein's teaching, internal to it; it is a way of seeing the teaching."[159] The reason why DeAngelis does not take notice of this passage might be attributed to the fact that his inquiry takes an altogether different direction than Cavell's, or perhaps to the fact that he overestimates Cavell's trust in Spengler. Cavell would at all costs try to avoid being regarded as a (intellectual) historian. "In calling my guiding theme an intuition I am distinguishing it from a hypothesis. Both intuition and hypotheses require what may be called confirmation or continuation, but differently. An intuition, say that God is expressed in the world, does not require, or tolerate, evidence but rather, let us say, understanding of a particular sort."[160] In *Disowning Knowledge* this passage contextualizes Cavell's guiding intuition that skepticism (in the form discussed in Chapter Two) occurs in the works of Shakespeare. Cavell's *intuitional* tone persist in "Declining Decline": "Then I will suggest, without argument, that what Wittgenstein means by speaking outside language games, which is to say, repudiating our shared criteria, is kind of interpretation of, or a homologous form of, what Spengler means in picturing the decline of culture as a process of externalization."[161] There is sufficient evidence at least for the claim that *The Decline of the West* influenced Wittgenstein. We know that he read it.[162] However, as assembling evidence is not Cavell's approach the following quotation is, I would like to say, not Cavellian enough:

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[159] NUA 31
[160] DK 4
[161] NUA 65

[162] I am using James Klagges' most helpful ft. 14 (p.112) in support of this claim: "According to Drury ('Conversations with Wittgenstein', 113), in 1930 'Wittgenstein advised me to read Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. It was a book, he said, that might teach me something about the age we were now living in. It

Cavell focuses on what he takes to be one of the most important of Wittgenstein's directly philosophical tasks in the *Investigations* – specifically, the attempt to identify and describe philosophical misuses of language. He thinks that Wittgenstein, in the performance of that task, indirectly confronts cultural decline. For Cavell, Wittgenstein's accounts of philosophers' misuses of language connect with cultural decline in two ways. First, he thinks, Wittgenstein represents those misuses in such a way as to show that they themselves constitute a form of cultural decline. Second, Cavell claims that Wittgenstein's account of those misuses functions in the *Investigations* as an "interpretation" or a "homologous form" of a Spenglerian picture of cultural decline.[163]

What is wrong with it? As my reader might already expect, I do not agree with DeAngelis here that Cavell focuses on identifying and describing "philosophical misuses of language" as this sounds too "moralistic". To accuse philosophers of misusing language "leaves the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him."[164] Only once the critic implicates himself in the human arena of philosophical skepticism would he refrain from "identifying misuses" and turn his eyes on what drives *philosophical* uses in the first place. That's Cavell's big message. Regarding the latter part of the quote, DeAngelis does not find the right words when he identifies Cavell's underlying goal behind bringing Spengler and Wittgenstein together. Once again, Cavell does not so much "claim" that Spengler's form of cultural critique is homologous to Wittgenstein's as he rather just follows an intuition here. The question is then: how such an unwarranted move can be allowed?

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might be an antidote to my 'incurable romanticism.'' While Wittgenstein was clearly interested in the outline of Spengler's views, he warned Drury: 'I don't trust Spengler about details. He is too often inaccurate. I once wrote that if Spengler had had the courage to write a very short book, it could have been a great one.' See also Wittgenstein's numerous comments on Spengler in 'Movements of Thought,' and in *C&V*. Wittgenstein's ongoing interest in Spengler into 1950 is confirmed by von Wright's editorial comments in 'Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Georg Henrik von Wright,' 478."

[163] DeAngelis, 2004, 65-66
[164] Ibid.

"Declining Decline" places trust in "Wittgensteinian voices". Cavell writes: "Now imagine a world in which the voices of the interlocutors of the *Investigations* continue on, but in which there is no Wittgensteinian voice as their other. It is a world in which our danger to one another grows faster than our help for one another."[165] I think anyone who wishes to take seriously the *Investigations'* cultural acuteness must also recognize its unfitness for a critical philosophy of culture. It is a critical attitude that is "difficult to articulate, or difficult to assume",[166] and difficult to appropriate, and to continue. Cavell has nothing to offer as to the practicability of Wittgenstein's approach to culture's "externalization" and decline, and his final words – "it is a world in which our danger to one another grows faster than our help for one another" – are nothing more than prosaic embellishments of Wittgenstein's voices if they cannot be repeated (by us, say) *as* a cultural critique. That they have never been repeated *this way* is evidence enough that they never will be. Its appropriation as a criticism of culture will forever be deferred, also if in the hands of an acute thinker such as the likes of Cavell. Cavell's emblematic endorsement of a cultural reading of the *Investigations* should be taken with a grain of salt and should be viewed in context of his philosophy of the ordinary and of philosophical critique, which, I claimed, wants to recover, and retain the ordinary as an idea and a possibility *for* its culture and *through* philosophy. Let us now see how this is done in the text.

2. A Portrait of a Culture in Decline

DeAngelis accepts Cavell's apparent optimism uncritically when he writes: "Cavell's account stresses two ways in which Wittgenstein combats cultural decline in the

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[165] NUA 140
[166] Ibid. 110

Investigations. First, to the extent that philosophy's misuses of language are themselves instances of cultural decline, he seeks, in correcting them, to combat them – both as linguistic misuses and as instances of decline."[167] Before I continue my criticism of DeAngelis' approach and explain why I believe it is too optimistic, let me turn to the details of Cavell's Wittgensteinian diagnosis of a "culture in decline" and how he thinks it compares with Spengler's own critical diagnosis. The comparison revolves around three concepts: externalization, inheritance, and home. While explaining these concepts I will rely for the most part on DeAngelis' text in the hope that it provides a solid background for my critical remarks that follow afterwards.

De Angelis begins with the following contention: "Cavell […] seeks to give an account of how Wittgenstein's later philosophical writings fulfil Spengler's final *desideratum* for a philosophy of civilization. That is, it is an account of how specific philosophical observations found in the *Investigations* 'absorb', 'embody', or 'realize' the prominent features of its civilized time."[168] What the *Investigations* "absorb", "embody", or "realize" is homologous with Spengler's picture of cultural decline. Cavell quotes the following section from *Decline:*

> Civilization is the inevitable destiny of the Culture ... Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion ... death following life, rigidity following expansion, petrifying world city following mother-earth. They are ... irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again ... a progressive exhaustion of forms ... This is a very great stride toward the inorganic... – what does it signify?

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[167] DeAngelis, 78
[168] Ibid. 66

The world-city means cosmopolitanism in place of "home". ... To the world city belongs [a new sort of nomad], not a folk but a mob.

In a footnote here Spengler declares "home" to be a profound word "which obtains its significance as soon as the barbarian becomes a culture-man and loses it again [with] the civilization-man ..."[169]

In well-known fashion Cavell does not elaborate on details of Spengler's concepts here, as for example DeAngelis, when he writes: "Spengler's explicit comment on the term 'home', which Cavell takes pains to quote, shows that, in *Decline*, the term evokes one of the essential features that define a Spenglerian culture. These are, most notably, a community, a shared sense of life, and natural (as opposed to artificial) forms of interaction and expression."[170] The term "artificial" is of particular interest here as it draws an explicit connection with Cavell's diagnosis of Viennese Modernism, discussed earlier. The modernist composer, who, by relying one pure and absolute chance recedes from his culture's past achievements, from humanness and from himself and thus creates a piece of work that becomes unrelatable, artificial. The Spenglerian slide from culture to civilization and cosmopolitanism is similarly a receding from a shared sense of life into a world of artificiality, Cavellian skepticism, and creative isolation. For Cavell, Wittgenstein's diagnosis of philosophy is analogous to the Spenglerian dialectic of home and civilisation, says DeAngelis. In Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, the words of philosophy are "idling", are "nonsensical", "lack use", etc., and only while they are at "home" in their ordinary use they guarantee human expressiveness and meaning. DeAngelis summarizes the connection with Spengler as follows: "Spengler […] sees cultural loss metaphorically as loss of home; Wittgenstein […] sees philosophical misuses

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[169] For Cavell's citation, consult: NUA 121-122. For the original see: Spengler, Oswald. 1962. *The Decline of the West*. Modern Library translation, abridged edition, 1962.
[170] DeAngelis, 70

of language, also metaphorically, as an abandonment of home, a kind of self-exile in which the philosopher becomes lost."[171] *Externalization*: Once more, Cavell leaves the concept unexplained. DeAngelis provides a useful reference but sees the connection drawn by Cavell to be ultimately flawed. He writes: "In the terms of Spengler's vivid metaphors, certain forms of expression, unique to a culture, unify that culture. They hold it and its people together. They maintain it as a home within which a folk share their perception of, and characteristic responses to, the world. When cultures degenerate into civilizations, these forms become *exhausted*."[172] And he adds, in a critical tone: "Perhaps Cavell's analogy limps a bit here. For me, it is hard to see how Wittgenstein's descriptions of philosophical misuses of language evoke, metaphorically or analogically, a sense of exhausted expressive forms. Certainly, the terms that are misused by philosophers, insofar as they are *misused*, would be better characterized as *empty* or *wayward* than *exhausted*."[173] We might speculate here that DeAngelis' dissatisfaction derives from his constricted use of Wittgensteinian "terms of criticism". While it seems correct that a philosophical "misuse" of words is better described as "empty" rather than "exhausted", his above account of Spenglerian externalization fits well with many of Cavell's diagnoses for Cartesian skepticism. Since the skeptic has to use "forms of expression, unique to [his] culture ", viz., ordinary language to express his particular philosophical position, he might as well be taken to *exhaust* their function in the relevant philosophical context. The meaning of his form of expression, "I don't see all of it", is exhausted once it is used to refer to "objects as such". The skeptic, Cavell will say, has deprived himself of human expressiveness. In any case, for Cavell to make his point successfully he does

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[171] Ibid. 71
[172] Ibid. 72
[173] Ibid. 73

not have to get all the details right. As opposed to DeAngelis, he is not interested in highlighting a Spenglerian influence in Wittgenstein's philosophy but rather to clarify Wittgenstein and the ordinary *with* Spengler. *Inheritance:* The concept of inheritance is central to Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein. Once more, DeAngelis' restricted use of Wittgensteinian terms of criticism does not get the most out of Cavell's remarks. DeAngelis writes: "Wittgenstein's wayward philosopher who abandons home by using words outside their proper language games, *ipso facto*, abandons their *shared* grammatical rules and also, in this sense, abandons *community*." He correctly notes that the scene of a child's "inheritance of language" for Cavell is "an image of a culture as an inheritance" and explains this idea in his own words in the following way:

> It would certainly seem that the development of the rules that govern the uses of words in a linguistic community is part of the social history of that community. For persons born into the linguistic community, those rules constitute what can be thought of as social constructs that have been developed and handed down from generation to generation within the community – and metaphorically, at least, as an inheritance. In learning those rules, and complying with them, an initiate into the community accepts something provided by the community for the use of those born into it.[174]

By using words outside language games and without shared criteria that enable their meaningful employment the philosopher repudiates community and also, as DeAngelis puts it, "metaphorically, at least", his cultural inheritance. In the *Claim* Cavell conceives the *Investigations'* scene of teaching and learning as a "magnified view" of what happens in cultural inheritance, a scene of rejection and inheritance, negotiation and initiation. In the scene of inheritance, as the *Claim* had already made plain, not only criteria and rules for word-employment are being taught and learned, but, quite literally, a *history*. "That

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[174] Ibid.

that is a painting, a sentence, a proof", is not itself a matter of course, i.e., defined by a rule, "but it is a matter of history, a matter of what arrives at and departs from a present human interest."[175]   Since necessities, are not fixed explicitly by rule, criteria or conventions, their acquisition is not "always smooth". "What I cannot now take as a matter of course I may come to: I may set it as my task."[176] Wittgenstein's philosophers use words in such a way that it places them outside of human history and human interests where their meanings could be newly negotiated. The philosopher's repudiation of inheritance, hence of history, is therefore wrongly conceived as a "metaphorical" description of the repudiation of linguistic criteria. It is rather an interpretation of it, dramatizing the philosopher's drive to inexpressiveness. The importance of "inheritance" is brought out acutely in "Declining Decline":

> The *Investigations* is a work that begins with a scene of inheritance, the child's inheritance of language; it is an image of a culture as an inheritance, one that takes place, *as is fundamental to Freud, in the conflict of voices and generations*. The figure of the child is present in this portrait of civilization *more prominently and decisively than in any other work of philosophy* I think of (with the exception, if you grant that it is philosophy, of *Émile*). It discovers or rediscovers childhood for philosophy (the child in us) as Emerson and Nietzsche and Kierkegaard discover youth, the student, say adolescence, the philosophical audience conscious *that its culture demands consent*; youth may never forgive the cost of granting it, or of withholding it. The child *demands consent of its culture*, attention from it; it may never forgive the cost of exacting it, or of failing to.[177]

„Indeed", writes Freud in *The Uncanny, "*the progress of society in general rests upon the opposition between the generations. On the other hand, there is a class of neurotics whose condition is recognizably determined by their having failed in this

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[175] CR 122
[176] Ibid. 123
[177] NUA 112-113 [my emphasis]

task."[178] With Freud the point could be made that the philosopher's withdrawal from the scene of inheritance and from history is expressive of his succumbing to neuroticism. By employing his words in such a way that their meaning becomes unnegotiable, untouchable, he places himself beyond "the opposition between the generations" and thus succumbs to intellectual isolation. The philosopher hence finds himself in an unceasing state of crisis. This fits well with Cavell's observation that "the philosophical impulse in adults is that it is characteristically brought on by a crisis in one's life, or by a philosopher demonstrating you that you have become lost in thought. Since adolescence is a time of crisis, it is not surprising that the impulse is at the surface of that period."[179] And if the analogy between the magnified view of a child's inheritance and the philosopher's inheritance of history holds, then, what we witness in Wittgenstein's portrait of a culture is a culture in crisis, i.e., one that neurotically repudiates the necessity for inheritance: "The child in Augustine's portrait strikes me as an invisible witness of its prospective culture, or its fated future, as if stealing its means of expression;"[180]

Here I want to return to DeAngelis's earlier remark in which he voices a concern regarding Cavell's argument as to the homology of Wittgensteinian and Spenglerian "exhausted forms". In response to his criticism, I suggested that Cavell's diagnosis of the skeptic can be seen as an inflection of Spenglerian exhausted forms. Now, perhaps I have said not enough about this since in Spengler the exhaustion of forms must regard cultural decline at large. In other words, saying that the philosopher might be taken to exhaust *his* forms of expression does by no means imply that this is characteristic of an entire culture.

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[178] Freud, Sigmund. 2003. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock. Penguin Publishing: 161

[179] Cavell, Stanley. 2008. "Time and Place for Philosophy". Metaphilosophy, 39(1), 51-61: 59
[180] Cavell, 2008, 57

Klagge points to a similar problematic when he writes (against Cavell): "I do not disagree that philosophers sometimes (mis)use words in this way. But if such misuse of words is the primary objection, then Wittgenstein is taking issue with philosophers, not with the civilization of our times. I see no evidence that the misuse of words outside their home language game is somehow characteristic of our times."[181] So how do we move from a portrait of a philosopher (or of philosophers) to a portrait of a culture in the *Investigations?* This should be our main question here since, as I have already argued, the *Investigations* do not portray a culture *directly*.

According to DeAngelis, Wittgenstein's portraits of philosophy are "interpretations" and "instances" of Spenglerian decline. DeAngelis reads Wittgenstein as someone who saw "darkness" in his time and who believed that philosophy represents an instance or a symptom of the declining condition of his culture. I do not wish to contest this claim insofar as Wittgenstein's own intentions are concerned. But I believe DeAngelis "symptom-interpretation" leaves crucial aspects of Cavell's reading unaddressed. Most importantly, he fails to mention that for Cavell, Wittgenstein's portrait is only "a picture", i.e., and imagined picture of "a" culture, not a realistic one and not a specific one. Secondly, as Cavell has made abundantly clear, Wittgenstein neither tries to "correct" philosophers, nor does he (or because of that) address philosophers directly: That philosopher 'A' misuses 'x' is not a Wittgensteinian term of criticism. As I will suggest now, if we *follow it through to its logical conclusion* then Wittgenstein's portrait according to Cavell depicts an *imagined* culture, hence of a culture that is *maybe* theirs or *maybe* ours, or *maybe* yours, or no one's. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

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[181] Klagge, 2014, 167

articulate their criticism of philosophy by virtue of dramatizing the effects of philosophy (metaphysics, etc.). It does that by virtue of depicting a culture in which philosophy has percolated to its smallest and most fundamental units, where philosophy has occupied a culture's scenes of inheritance, i.e., where wrong necessities are being taught to its children, to all men and women, diurnally.

For clarity, I shall mention in passing to those accustomed with a therapeutic reading of the late Wittgenstein, that I take a cultural dramatization of the effects of philosophy – as depicted in the *Investigations* – to offer a further interpretation of the subjective and person-relative "drama" therapeutic/liberatory Wittgensteinians have so acutely described in their commentaries. "[Wittgenstein] wants to help the reader out of their confusion, out of their desire to leap to conclusions. He wants to free one from the limiting mental constraints, more or less self-imposed, that give one what he sometimes called 'mental cramps'."[182] In order to tackle and free ourselves form "mental cramps" we have to go through its motions, that is we have to open ourselves up to confusion. See for example, the following famous remark: "Why is philosophy so complicated? It ought, after all, to be *completely* simple. Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking which we have tangled up in an absurd way; but to do that, it must make movements which are just as complicated as the knots."[183] Baker notes: "[Wittgenstein's] aim was to bring each patient to acknowledge the origins of her particular conceptual disorders (especially in the workings of analogies or pictures of which she was not conscious), and the patient's own acknowledgement of the rules in which she is entangled is a precondition of the correctness of the diagnosis as well as of the effectiveness of the cure."[184] So, we have to

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[182] Read, 2020, 85
[183] PR 52
[184] Baker, 2008, 68

make philosophy complicated for ourselves first, i.e., dramatize its effects, before we can entertain its resolution, a therapy and critique. As per analogy, in order for a culture to respond to the problems philosophy poses to itself, it has to also dramatize its effects, be *open* to its threats, exhaust them. For Cavell, I submit, the *Investigations* realize this imagined condition of a culture by virtue of the *fantastic* portrait it provides.

3. A Portrait of Culture and of Philosophy

> So it is worth considering that the sense of Wittgenstein's uniqueness, which I share, comes from the sense that he is joining the fate of philosophy as such with that of the philosophy of criticism of culture, displacing both – endlessly forgoing, rebuking, parodying philosophy's claim to a privileged perspective on its culture, call it the perspective of reason (perhaps shared with science); anyway forgoing for philosophy any claim to perspective that goes beyond its perspective on itself. This is its poverty of perspective.[185]

When presenting ordinary's modes for combating cultural decline DeAngelis paints only an incomplete portrait of the culture Cavell had in mind. While DeAngelis reads the ordinary as external to (repudiated by) culture, for Cavell the ordinary itself is part of Wittgenstein's "complete sophisticated" portrait of a culture – it is already *declining* decline. In Wittgenstein's portrait the ordinary is always already due to be recovered, where Wittgensteinian voices have not kept silent. In portraying both a culture's decline and philosophy's response to decline the *Investigations* portray a certain image of philosophy, a culturally defined identity. As Cavell explains, what philosophy claims for itself according to the portrait of itself "is no more than poverty, not Platonic or Augustinian or Cartesian or Kantian or Hegelian or Heideggerean lavishness."[186] In other words, in the *Investigations* philosophy's particular mode of response is cast as a

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[185] Ibid. 73
[186] Ibid. 134-5

necessity of its own time and culture, or an expression of it which at another time would not have taken this form; a form Cavell describes figuratively as "starvation":

> Here I propose that we take the famous description in the Preface to the *Investigations* — "this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time" — to be naming the time in question as what is conceived and depicted by and in the work as a whole, in its apparent empty-handedness ("Isn't my knowledge completely expressed in the explanations I could give?"[187]); its apparent denials, its embarrassments ("Explanations come to an end somewhere," "This is simply what I do"[188]); and madness. Its declaration of its poverty is not a simple expression of humility but a stern message: the therapy prescribed to bring light into the darkness of the time will present itself as, will in a sense be, starvation; as if our philosophical spirit is indulged, farced to the point of death.[189]

The *Investigations* portray a culture "in which the continuation of philosophy [itself] is at stake,[190] where in its dark time philosophy (the response to philosophy, metaphysics, skepticism) is fated to embarrassment. Philosophical starvation and poverty portrayed in the *Investigations* contrasts with Kantian, etc., "lavishness "in the sense that its response won't be final (but endless and therefore diurnal), that it won't speak first (but second), and that it won't be systematic and speculative (but ordinary).

Its mode of response is taking example form the *Investigations'* "scenes of instruction" where the question "How am I able to follow a rule?"[191] is tempting a philosophical or metaphysical or scientific and naturalistic response but where it in fact (temporarily) ends with the cold (and resourceless) "This is simply what I do."[192]

> The demonstrative registers that we are to recollect those very general facts of nature or culture which we all, all who can talk and act together, do (must)

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[187] PI 75
[188] PI 1 and 217
[189] NUA 130
[190] NUA 136
[191] PI 217
[192] Ibid.

in fact be using as criteria; facts we only need to recollect, for we cannot fail to know them in the sense of having never acquired them. If someone does not have them, that is not because his studies have been neglected, but because he is for some reason incapable of (or has been given up on as a candidate for) maturing into, or initiation into, full membership in the culture.[193]

Cavell intimates here as early as in the *Claim* that the recovery (claim) and the loss of reason affects the cultural organism. Being a candidate and not being a candidate for initiation is not contingent upon intelligence, or ignorance, or openness, and Kantian proper use of reason, but on whether I will be allowed to be initiated and whether I have access to the process of its negotiation. Once the whirl of organism (and its modifications) which constitutes the human form of life is no longer available to us, say due to political ideology, philosophical dogmatism, political despotism, and totalitarianism, we lose grasp of the conditions of thought and hence of knowledge of ourselves. The roads are blocked. The *Investigations'* scenes of instruction and initiation (Augustinian paragraphs and rule-following sections) give a magnified view of a culture in which the transmission of language, of our form of life, hence of reason is at risk of being unlearned at every instance of instruction. "How would it help me", asks the pupil, if it were the case that "all the steps are really already taken" once I have properly understood the meaning of +2? The question is whether the wayward "all the steps are already taken" is a useful criterion for whether I have understood the use of +2, or not. Once we resort to the words of philosophy in teaching the most fundamental constituents of our form of life, we stir up confusion. Our pupil shrugs his shoulder:

> One does not feel that one has always got to wait upon the nod (the prompt) of the rule. On the contrary, we are not on tenterhooks about what it will tell us next, but it always tells us the same, and we do what it tells us.

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[193] CR 73

One might say to the person one was training: "Look, I always do the same thing: I . . ."[194]

In conceiving the *Investigations* as a portrait of a complete and sophisticated culture in decline Cavell (and Wittgenstein) bring into imagination a world in which we all teach with the means provided by philosophy therefore constantly fail in teaching. And since teaching happens daily the response of the ordinary must happen diurnally and "unmelodramatically". Philosophy's *poverty* and humbleness (as opposed to its lavishness and systematic sophistication) is necessitated by a culture where metaphysics, Platonism, reductionism, etc. seeped through to its smallest and most fundamental units. Once metaphysics has modified our forms of life to the point where no one can escape its influence – where "*any* word my elders have bequeathed to me as they moved obscurely about me toward the objects of their desires, may come to charging me", and where "all my words are someone else's"[195] – the ordinary is being called for everywhere and always, bringing metaphysics to an end, locally and diurnally. "Nothing is happening at once, there is no single narrative to tell. What is of philosophical importance, of interest what is for philosophy to say – is happening repeatedly, unmelodramatically, uneventfully."[196]

The motivation for Cavell's claim as to the radical poverty of philosophy lies the surmise that in Wittgenstein's portrait philosophy already has caused "false hope and excessive despair" among its people, in everyday life. These "sign or effects of unobserved philosophy"[197] cannot be relinquished by yet another philosophy (or a system). As the ordinary subject does not stand unaffected by philosophy (skepticism)

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[194] Ibid. 223
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid. 40

and since its effects are immediately felt, it must react now, immediately. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* only postpones matters. The ordinary subject (Cavell's "I") is forced to react now. And it has nothing else to offer than to show what it does and speaks.

In more familiar terms, Wittgenstein analyses philosophical propositions (metaphysical theories of understanding, meaning, etc.) in the contexts of the everyday and thereby exposes their false simplicity and incompleteness. Call this: methodological projections. Augustine's picture, as Wittgenstein says, presents an incomplete picture of how language works for it only seems to consider nouns and verbs; what do all the other words of our language "refer" to, what does the word "this" refer to? If we take Augustine's metaphysical picture of language (in which words have meaning by virtue of the object they refer to) by its word, then it presents a language that is different from ours. The everyday (the ordinary) so conceived provides means for correctness and philosophical normativity. A cultural interpretation takes a different route. In conceiving the first couple of paragraphs of the *Investigations* (where Augustine's case is presented) instead as a portrait of a culture, Wittgenstein's methodological *projections* are more like continuous *invasions,* or descriptions of invasions where an incomplete picture of language is presented to all of us or taught to all of us, hence something we must *live* with. For Cavell this describes a situation where philosophy has been left "unattended", where philosophy's teachings suddenly inform our doings, directly, and where its theories become reality; any words of my elders (Augustine, Russell, Frege, Descartes, etc.) chagrin me. "Declining Decline" conceives the *Investigations* scenes of instruction and of the everyday not as methods (where the "true" meaning of the word "meaning" is readily available in a synoptic representation of its everyday uses) but as modification of our "lives as talkers" undermined by philosophy. "In the straits of philosophy" our

practices of initiation and of conversation can fail once the words of philosophy are in everyone's mind, endemically.

While an interpretation of the *Investigation* along the lines presented by Cavell might sound foreign to orthodox readers of Wittgenstein (Hacker, Glock, etc.), in fact not so much has changed. We still have non-sense, unwarranted uses of words, temptation, speaking outside of language games, etc., and we still have correctness, purpose, criteria, context, etc. We might say, for both Hacker and Cavell the *Investigations* are the same – a conflict of ordinary language and philosophy. They differ however in their understanding of what comes *before* and what comes *after* it, as we might put it. For orthodox readers the *Investigations* expose misguided philosophical theories and traditions. Wittgensteinian grammar according to Hacker will provide a better grasp on philosophical concepts of human cognition and human experience. For Cavell on the other hand philosophy (metaphysics, skepticism) in the *Investigations* arrives as transfigured, viz., not *directly* (in its original form, i.e., as a book or theory, etc.) but as already consumed by a culture, by every ordinary man and woman. In Wittgenstein's vision of a philosophical culture philosophy's unspoken desire for having been read by everyone is at last satisfied. Since philosophy arrives in the *Investigations* as already transfigured and consumed by a culture, what comes "after" Cavell's reading is not a critique of philosophical theories and dogmas but rather a critique (of *lived* philosophy) of reason, of "public discourse of the culture, the culture thinking aloud about itself", of a culture that believes "itself to be talking philosophy".

To contextualize this claim, let me retrace my steps a bit. *Cartesian skepticism:* In Chapter One I suggested that a Cavellian criticism of Cartesian skepticism develops an

interpretation of the skeptical project which is conceptually inaccessible for the skeptic. While the skeptic believes to be making a generic claim about objects *as such*, Cavell's interpretation concerns our *life* with objects, hence our (Kantian) capacity to employ concepts and make judgements about the world. I argued that only once the skeptic accepts the Cavellian interpretation of himself will he give up on his general claim. In other words, the skeptic must hover between two different forms of rationality. For Cavell, I suggested, this dilemma delimits the possibility of a *direct* criticism of the skeptical project as there can be no criticism, only conversion or only interpretation (of his withdrawal from the world). Most relevant to my present purposes is to note that also in Cavell's discussion of Cartesian skepticism the original philosophical project (dogma or theory) arrives transfigured, i.e., as (wrongly) concerning the human *relation to* objects and reality. Similarly, in Wittgenstein's portrait of a culture, philosophy (metaphysics) distorts our relation to the world, i.e., to employ concepts competently. The difference between the former and the latter case is that in Wittgenstein's portrait, philosophy is not *interpreted* as concerning our life with objects (like in Cavell's reading of Descartes), but it is, we might say, *enacted* or *actualized* as such. In the chapter to follow I will attempt to show that this *enactment* requires Wittgenstein to misread Russell's *Analysis of Mind* on the point that their philosophy does not concern "our lives with objects". Russell's theory of understanding is, as he says, a "working hypothesis", and as such it is not meant to clarify (to me) my relation to reality; it rather entertains and informs a research project. I will claim that misreading, in both Wittgenstein and Cavell, is a methodological and conscious decision. Methodological misreading is gesturing at the fact that philosophy *must* clarify our life with objects, our relation to the world, the soul, God.

From Kant to Hegel: Kant also features prominently in *This New Yet Unapproachable America.* Once again Cavell draws attention to similarities between Kant's and Wittgenstein's project: "The work of *Philosophical Investigations* is marked by placing the idea of the kind of statement we make in the position Kant establishes for forms of judgment, those functions of unity to which "we can reduce all acts of the understanding"[198] that is, they tell "what kind of object anything is."[199][200] However, Cavell now submits that Wittgenstein is "replacing" Kant's idea, in the following way: "The demand for unity in our judgments […] is not the expression of the conditionedness or limitations on our humanness but of the human effort to escape our humanness — which is also a replacing of a discovery of the *Critique of Pure Reason.*"[201] Wittgenstein does not join Kant in picturing reason "dogmatically", viz., the demand for our conditionedness for Cavell's Wittgenstein cannot be conceived of in absence of its denial and repudiation, in absence of the cultural dialectic. As he says elsewhere, "Wittgenstein has no diagnosis to offer of the anonymous, burned everyday, beyond his discovery of its invasion by, or production of, philosophy unconscious of itself."[202] Finally, and without further comment, Cavell remarks: "(Say Wittgenstein has discovered the systematic in the absence of unity.)"[203] This needs some elaboration: As we have seen, Kant introduces in the first *Critique* systematic unity of reason as a subjective and necessary demand for reason (the subjective demand for a good and proper employment of reason). He formulates this first subjective "law" as follows: "Find for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to

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[198] *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 69; B 94
[199] PI 373
[200] NUA 162
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid. 121
[203] Ibid. 162

completion."[204] The unity of reason can be brought to completion once the transcendental ideas or the unconditioned (God, Soul, reality) are *posited* as (as opposed to "believed to be") metaphysical objects. "The necessity and inevitability of the ideas, then, derives from the antecedent interest of reason in bringing knowledge to systematic unity and completion."[205] As we have seen, while Kant held that transcendental illusions are inevitable (that we think of God, etc., as transcendental *objects* is inevitable), he submits that reason's unity can be secured once the necessity of transcendental ideas is posited by reason as regulative principles for knowledge and understanding. In claiming that Wittgenstein's "demand" for reason (and conditionedness, humanness) has systematicity but no unity Cavell submits that transcendental illusions in Wittgenstein are historically recursive and a cultural given. In other words, unity in Wittgenstein cannot be brought to completion since the lack of unity defines the dialectical conditional of a culture; in Wittgenstein's portrait, culture is declining but also declining decline, diurnally. While Cavell had formulated this idea earlier in terms of the openness of language and of criteria, in Wittgenstein's portrait of a culture the fragility (and antinomic nature) of the human condition and hence of culture is brought to bear in terms of a "cultural" and *historically* (not *existentially* recursive as in Part II of the *Claim*) recursive condition. Regarding the former Mulhall wrote: "since our having criteria in common is ultimately a matter of our agreeing and continuing to agree in employing and deploying them, it is of the essence of criteria that they are open to repudiation; for anything ultimately founded in agreement or consent is unavoidably vulnerable to termination or withdrawal of that agreement or consent."[206] "Declining Decline" spots a similar necessity, but its focus lies

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[204] A308/B364
[205] Grier, Michael. 2001. *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*. Cambridge University Press: 20
[206] Mulhall, 104

on a culturally conditioned openness to repudiation. Wittgenstein's portrait of a culture (also of the "modern subject") depicts the human as always already in conversation with its own denial. Culture (or "home") is not as a solution to skepticism and transcendental illusions but its "abeyance".

4. Dramatic Siting – The Romantic Fragment – How to Read Wittgenstein as a Critic of Philosophy

In anticipation of what is to follow in later chapters, the question comes up whether a fantastic (unrealistic) picture of a (philosophical) culture can serve the purpose of a philosophical criticism. Cavell's description of a "complete and sophisticated" culture is undeniably *fantastic,* or, just unrealistic:

> Now take all this, the events of the *Investigations* — from the scene and consequences of inheritance and instruction and fascination, and the request for an apple, and the building of what might seem the first building, to the possibility of the loss of attachment as such to the inheritance; and these moments as tracked by the struggle of philosophy with itself, with the losing and turning of one's way, and the chronic outbreaks of madness — and conceive it as a complete sophisticated culture, or say a way of life, ours.[207]

> Then how shall we describe the details of the *Investigations* so that they may be seen to express "an attitude" — that is, so that the sequence of sketches appears as *details*, details as it were of one depiction, a depiction of *a* culture?[208]

The italicized "*a*" indicates that the portrait has no *specific* culture as its model, but a *possible, eventual* culture. The following remark makes this point even clearer: "The *Investigations* does not paint mimetically the circumstances of our way of life, though it

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[207] NUA 64
[208] Ibid. 99

conveys the unmistakable impression that our patterns or modifications of the human form of life are undermining that life, deforming it."[209] This, once more, sits uncomfortably with DeAngelis' "symptom-interpretation". The modifications and externalizations are, Cavell notes further, "themselves of course pictures. They may be ones common at a certain stage in the history of culture. To imagine a language means to imagine a modified form of talking life."[210] What has a non-mimetic picture to show for against philosophy, one that only "*may*" become "common at a certain stage in the history of culture"? How can we come back from philosophy transfigured and fantasized to philosophy proper, to its texts and its history?

Cavell immediately ads to the second quote I cited in this subsection: "(My question here is meant to invite comparing, eventually, the logic of the detail with that of the romantic fragment.)"[211] Stephen Mulhall, like DeAngelis I would say, an optimist regarding the redemptive capacities of Cavellian reason, explains, optimistically, the philosophical function of the "fragment":

> The texts [Wittgenstein and Cavell] now write are written in the name of that future possibility and in the shadow of the present actuality, on a ground where construction is possible but only with the ruins of the past and amid the ruination of the present, they must take on a form that is both dismembered and embryonic, a half-built edifice whose form acknowledges both its origin in ruins and the completion it foreshadows.[212]

Since Cavell and Wittgenstein write according to Mulhall in anticipation of a "new human circle" which will reconstruct "new but personally authorized conventions"[213],

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[209] Ibid. 129
[210] Ibid., 91
[211] Ibid., 99-100
[212] Mulhall, Stephen. 2005. "Refusing to Begin." In *Contending with Stanley Cavell*. Edited by Russell B. Goodman. Oxford University Press: 22-36: 32
[213] Ibid.

they have to write with what is incomplete, that is the embryonic, or the fragmentary, that which is "entirely isolated from the surrounding world" (i.e., isolated from an eventual future) but "complete in itself"[214]. For Mulhall, in following the Emersonian (subjectivistic) lineage of Kant's inheritance here, the *Investigations* depict details and fragments of a culture it desires (Wittgenstein allegedly desires) for itself.

The fragmentary here also fulfils the function of a utopian myth. Myths, says Mulhall, "deal with origins at which no one can have been present; they are open to continuation, which can be thought of as revision; a false myth is not just untrue but destructive of truth; when the mythology and actuality cease to coexist harmoniously, then you have stopped living the myth."[215] The *Investigations,* in its album-like structure, present details of a cultural eventuality in which "no one can have been present" yet, but since I carry the truth already within me (I am the ordinary, only magnified and locally) actuality and myth coexist harmoniously, hence in mutual anticipation for each other. As the anticipated humanly habitable form of life – like my history (my culture's inheritance, necessities, interests, etc.) – refuses my immediate presence in it, I have to "shepherd" it back to me, to my culture, diurnally. The *Investigations* portrait such shepherding – but, as I tried to explain above – back from a *fantastic* (and dystopian) world. And thus, I want to underscore "the difficulty confronted by the aphorism or the aphoristic style", which, as Sandy puts it, "through, its pithy, partial, subjective gesturing towards a greater whole (real or imagined) transforms the very object of study that it tries to see clearly."[216] Since the aphorism, the fragment, or the embryonic "condenses a judgement authoritatively into

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[214] Critchley, Simon. 2005. "Cavell's 'Romanticism' and Cavell's Romanticism." In *Contending with Stanley Cavell*. Edited by Russell B. Goodman. Oxford University Press: 42.
[215] Mulhall, Ibid. 34
[216] Sandy, Mark. 2019. "'A Ruin Amidst Ruins': Modernity, Literary Aphorisms, and Romantic Fragments". In *Aphoristic Modernity*: 37-52: 51

a phrase that has paradigmatic character"[217] it must exaggerate (dramatize) the very object of study, transform it. The literary fragment can do that because its function is not to represent "mimetically" its object of study (or of desire) but to affect a certain experience in the reader, to get the truth speak to him, to "make the impression", as Cavell says above, that our lives are being modified. While the ordinary indeed surfaces *"unmelodramatically"*, i.e., locally, and not "lavishly", the everywhereness of its return and its denial dramatizes the scene, wants to unsettle us.

Since in Wittgenstein's portrait the main destructive force is not a culture nor philosophy proper, but a transcending *philosophical* culture, neither the negative nor the positive (the "habitable life, the eventual ordinary) are "real". For Cavell there is no finality, no anticipation of completion in this portrait, but only repetition. Wittgenstein articulates *possibilities* of danger and intuitions about cultural tendencies.

If we *follow Cavell's interpretation through to its logical conclusion* then Wittgenstein presents the antagonism between philosophy and the ordinary in a most exaggerated form. In this sense Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy is as indirect as Cavell's criticism of Descartes. Both are interpretations, sitings, exaggerations. The answer to my question: How can we come back from philosophy transfigured and fantasized to philosophy proper, to its texts and its history, is then this: It depends on us whether we want to (or can) accept Wittgenstein's exaggerated (impressionistic) portrait

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[217] Janik, Allan. 2018. "Kraus, Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Language." In *Wittgenstein's Vienna Revisited*. Routledge: 185-196: 190

as the proper expression of the dangers lurking in philosophical thought. To have us think about *that* is philosophy's "performance", its critique.[218]

Perhaps the *Investigations'* form of philosophical critique bears certain similarities with Orwell's *1984,[219]* as Löfgren writes:

> *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows us conditions inflicted by torture or indoctrination (through reality control and doublethink) that result in the uprooting of our capacity as knowers in primarily three areas: as knowers of the external world, of language, and of other minds. This radical undermining of our knowledge and understanding is not *skeptical* in the traditional philosophical sense precisely because it is lived: you are not at liberty to entertain it just *hypothetically*. The totalitarian version of *lived* external world skepticism is the condition of being beaten and/or indoctrinated to the point where you are no longer able to trust the evidence of your senses. The totalitarian version of *lived* meaning skepticism consists in an inability to trust your own sense-making capacity, caused by pain, fear, and doublethink that has forced you to jettison your sanity.[220]

Of course, the world Orwell describe*s 1984* is not a real world. But it is not just "hypothetical" either, i.e., the beginning of an argument. Its *fantastical* portrait of "damaged lives", of skeptical lives, constitutes its mode of criticism.[221]

As per above discussion the literary form of the fragment (I use this term synonymously with the "poetic", the "aphoristic", etc.) depicts, in condensed and exaggerated fashion, "details" of a "philosophical culture". The success of this form of presentation is contingent upon our acceptance of it, i.e., on whether the myth conjures a relationship with the danger we sense, the danger philosophy (critique) *should* sense. If

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[218] MW Foreword, xi

[219] Orwell, George. 2021. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Penguin Classics.

[220] Löfgren, Ingrid. 2021. "'Nineteen Eighty-Four,' Totalitarian Lived Skepticism, and Unlearning How to Love." *Policy Futures in Education*: 6

[221] CR 448: "To say I cannot "live" material object skepticism is to say that there is an alternative to its conclusion that I am bound, as a normal human being, to take. Accordingly, to say I (can) live skepticism with respect to others is to say that there is no such alternative, or no such conclusion."

Wittgenstein's portrait of a culture presents a myth, it is that of a dramatized dialectic between culture and philosophy, and not, as in Mulhall, of a "just enough" society.

The *Investigations'* journey of troubled characters, as I read it, is an invitation to write critique *with* characters as opposed to a critique *for* individuals. In this sense it is closer to literature, to Beckett or Orwell, farther from Freud, the late Baker and Emersonian perfectionism and Kant. This does not mean that liberation (from pictures and ideologies, etc.,) and self-knowledge isn't a state worth achieving or a process worth commencing. Rather, it means that liberation should be anchored in institutions and culture, that is in literature and in philosophy. Writing *is* culture and culture is consumed while it is read. I find Read's and occasionally Cavell's trust in the (Emersonian) individual at times too optimistic, as though society can find a new beginning with subjective reason alone, or through conversation alone. Critique is *philosophy's* "performance", thinking (Kant, Read), yours and mine.

CHAPTER FOUR
READING PHILOSOPHY LIKE THE LATE WITTGENSTEIN
WITTGENSTEIN READS
RUSSELL'S *MIND*

Abstract

This chapter explores Wittgenstein's interpretive approach to philosophical texts through his critique of Bertrand Russell's *Analysis of Mind*, revealing Wittgenstein's unique reading style as both critical and transformative. This chapter illustrates how Cavell adopts Wittgenstein's approach, challenging the conventional ways philosophy engages with its own texts. By viewing *Philosophical Investigations* as Wittgenstein's therapeutic response to *Mind*, I interpret Wittgenstein's detachment from context as a purposeful "misreading." This strategy reclaims language from theoretical constraints, restoring it to its role in daily life. Through this case study, I argue that Wittgenstein's critique of Russell offers a model for philosophical reading that moves beyond fidelity to the text.

From a cultural perspective, I aimed to argue that *Philosophical Investigations* can be interpreted as portraying the possibility of a culture in decline. While this may not be the most straightforward or intuitive approach to the book, even Cavell acknowledged this. However, since the *Investigations* does not specify exactly who or what is being criticized by philosophy or the philosophical ideas of its time, there is ample room to experiment with different interpretations. What is clear is that the book engages with and responds to a specific philosophical tradition and the ideas characteristic of Wittgenstein's era.

In pursuing this dissertation's goal of exploring the notion of critique underlying the work of Wittgenstein and Cavell, I am led to the key question of how they respond to philosophical texts—specifically, their method of reading and engaging with a text. I want

to explore further the kind of attitude toward a text that makes it possible to interpret concepts such as skepticism within it, or even cultural decline.

I was greatly aided to read Wittgenstein's *Investigations* as a book of instructions – as Cavell has suggested – one that delineates both exemplary (freeing) and flawed (captivating and deceiving) instructions about how to conduct oneself in the face of philosophy. The book commences with a quote from Augustine, who, in the true fashion of philosophers of his era, was a teacher, albeit one who was evidently not very proficient in the role, so it seems: Augustine's conception of language gives rise to a plethora of philosophical conundrums in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*.

Augustine scholars, historians, and philosophers has however quite unequivocally demonstrated that Augustine had in fact no intention of entertaining a theory akin to what Wittgenstein appears to challenge in Augustine's *Confessions*. What might appear to some to be a matter of course, namely, the assertion that Augustine incorrectly conceived of linguistic meaning as an object-referent relationship, could be perceived by others as an example of a philosophical strawman. When looking at Wittgensteinians on one side and Augustine scholars on the other, it is natural to become intrigued by the reasons for such profound disagreements concerning the interpretation of a relatively small passage from Augustine's *Confessions* and its philosophical implications in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. What adds an even more perplexing layer is the uncomfortable notion that Wittgenstein himself may have seriously misinterpreted this passage. "When he criticised other philosophers, he rarely gave chapter and verse for his criticism, and on the rare occasion on which he quoted verbatim he did not always do justice to the authors

quoted."[222] Kenny is disturbed by the apparent agreement between Wittgenstein and Augustine on the point that "a) the understanding of an ostension presupposes a certain mastery of a language and b) ostension by itself cannot make clear the role which the word to be defined is to have in language."[223] And he argues correctly that according to the passage quoted from the *Confessions* "Augustine does not think that the ostension by itself will teach the child the meanings of the word: the child must also", as Augustine states, "hear the words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences".[224] While it is true that in the passage quoted by Wittgenstein Augustine does "lay great stress on the role of ostension in the learning of words, and makes no [explicit] distinction between different parts of speech"[225], it is not entirely clear, and this what I believe motivates Kenny's inquiry, why Augustine should be held suspicious for stressing *too much* since the apparent tension between Wittgenstein and Augustine could be resolved after further details of Augustine's quotation have been considered.[226]

It is well-known that Wittgenstein wished to have his two major works, the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* published together in one volume, with the intention that the reader could approach the latter as a commentary on the former. If we contemplate this notion for a moment and take it at face value, while also comparing the following passages quoted below from the respective books, we cannot help but be struck by the kind of playfulness with which the commented text is treated -almost resembling a form of parody. I am quoting it in German because the English translation tends to strip away

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[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] According to Kenny, the *Investigation's* tendency to misread stretches far beyond the early section of book after which it becomes "more obvious and much more serious in Wittgenstein's treatment of 'the great works of Frege'". The lion's share of his paper however addresses cases of misreading that concern Wittgenstein own earlier work, the *Tractatus.*

the ordinariness of his language, which aligns much better with the conclusions and insights I am inclined to present in the course of this chapter. The German word "Satz" is quite mundane and carries fewer connotations of academic language. When Wittgenstein uses the word "Satz", the English translation as "sentence" would indeed seem more natural.

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus	Philosophische Untersuchungen
4.5 Dass es eine allgemeine Satzform gibt, wird dadurch bewiesen, dass es keinen Satz geben darf, dessen Form man nicht hätte voraussehen (d. h. konstruieren) können. Die allgemeine Form des Satzes ist: Es verhält sich so und so. 6.0 Die allgemeine Form der Wahrheitsfunktion ist: [p, ξ, N(ξ)] Dies ist die allgemeine Form des Satzes.	134. Betrachten wir den Satz: "Es verhält sich so und so" wie kann ich sagen, dies sei die allgemeine Form des Satzes? Es ist vor allem *selbst* ein Satz, ein deutscher Satz, denn es hat Subjekt und Prädikat. Wie aber wird dieser Satz angewendet in unsrer alltäglicher Sprache nämlich? Denn nur *daher* habe ich ihn ja genommen.

When we extract these segments from his life's works and place them in contrast, one cannot help but be struck by the odd simplicity of the commentary in the *Investigations*. After all it is a response to a fragment that, in its original form and context, encapsulates something that could be described as nothing less than a deeply serious philosophical ambition and which by comparison receives a fairly naïve response.

While the text in the *Investigations* endeavours to investigate the motivations behind labelling something as the general form of a sentence, he does so by employing an analogy. Initially, Wittgenstein clarifies the definition of the general form of a

proposition as follows: "And to say that a proposition is whatever can be true or false amounts to saying: we call something a proposition if *in our language* we apply the calculus of truth functions to it." The emphasized "*in our language*" suggests someone who has devised a language for themselves that operates in this specific manner – akin to inventing a language game, or indeed a board game: "It is as if one were to say, 'The chess king is *the* piece that one puts in check'. But this can mean no more than that in our game of chess only the king is put in check. Just as the proposition that only a *proposition* can be true can say no more than that we predicate 'true' and 'false' only of what we call a proposition." So, what initially seems like a definitive conclusion about the nature of any proposition – that it takes the form "this is how things are", and is proven "by the fact that there cannot be a proposition whose form could not have been foreseen," transforms – as presented in the *Investigations* – into general rules applicable to real games such as chess and hypothetical activities, as mentioned in the following passage.

Here, the text outlines a procedure through which a child could learn how to distinguish certain expressions in a language from others, essentially separating those elements of language that we can categorize as being either true or false from those which cannot be predicated as true or false. A child might be taught to distinguish propositions from other expressions by being told, "Ask yourself if you can say 'is true' after it. If these words fit, it's a proposition."

The philosophical goal of defining the essence of a proposition shifts into a more practical and meaningful pursuit. It is as if we (Wittgenstein) are approaching the *Tractatus* as a flawed guide for managing language.

Can the *Investigations* be interpreted as reading the *Tractatus* as a book of instructions? Let me return to a notion that appears rather uncontroversial: Wittgenstein's grammatical method is grounded in the idea that in philosophy, we employ words in a metaphysical manner. Some have asserted, following Wittgenstein, that in philosophy, we use these words incorrectly, essentially breaking the rules governing their proper use. To demonstrate this and reveal their correct use, Wittgenstein dissects the ordinary use of words in everyday contexts. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, this so-called grammatical method led to extensive theoretical debates about the rule structure of language. Since philosophers following Wittgenstein believed that this method held the potential to "resolve philosophical problems" they felt compelled to establish a robust epistemology for the rules of grammar. Achieving such a high objective relied on a strong theoretical foundation. Part of Chapter I aimed to illustrate that by relinquishing this lofty goal of "solving problems", we are no longer bound by the necessity of a solid theoretical foundation.

This, in my perspective, stands as Cavell's accomplishment: the abandonment of a theory of language for the philosophy of language. For some, myself included, this shift was profoundly liberating. For others, it proved to be a significant disappointment. It appears that Cavell pulled the rug out from under one's feet when he asserted that there was no necessity to do so, as not doing so precisely aligned with Wittgenstein's intention. There is indeed a certain risk in this approach, as people may potentially lose interest in Wittgenstein's work if the aura of vigour and precision is cast aside. What seems to remain of the grammatical method once the epistemological aspects are set aside is an individual who relocates words from one context, the metaphysical context, into an everyday, ordinary context. The very attractive answer to the question, why does he do so, can no

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longer be, because "grammar sets the rules", grammar determines whether your sentence means something or doesn't mean something – a high bar. My intention here is to examine this transition (from the metaphysical to the ordinary) not through the lens of a "method" that heavily relies on an aura of linguistic precision, almost approaching a form of sublime mysticism about how the rules of language (should) dictate our thinking. Instead, I aim to perceive it as a form of reading, which I more precisely define as allowing oneself to be guided by a text. Reading naively and from a distance: "What can I do with it, what is the author trying to tell me?"

The central argument I intend to convey and create conceptual space for is that the act of "bringing words back" inherently involves a process of detaching them from their textual context. To understand this, we must consider that "bringing words back" requires an examination from the perspective of *reading* a text, hence an attitude towards a text, a form of interest. The method I employ to elucidate Wittgenstein's approach of "bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" is to adopt an author's perspective and emphasize the hypothetical *satisfaction* derived from allowing oneself to be instructed by texts in the manner delineated above and in the *Investigations*. I envision this "attitude of satisfaction" as a motivating force driving Wittgenstein's writing – a satisfaction that arises from the act of writing itself, from engaging with texts in a manner that allows them to guide and instruct one's own writing.

1. The *Philosophical Investigations* read *Analysis of Mind* – A Misreading

In "Existentialism and Analytic Philosophy" published in 1984, Cavell "reminds" philosophers and students of philosophy, in particular students of "logical analysis and logical positivism", of the

> rote and repetitiveness that is the price of one's having, of course for good and sufficient reason, to control material to which one can make no contribution in return: of presenting one-self as a victim to learning. So much of education seems fated (while the necessity gets lost in the shadows of our institution) of the turning of bread into stones. Of course, if it is worth it to you to study philosophy it should be worth it to you to study, for example, Russell's Theory of Descriptions, hence possibly to postpone it. But nothing is worth hearing such a theory repeated, as if a password, at the beginning of a good half of the courses taught one under the rubric of philosophy, say two or three courses a year, for four years, with no hope of making the thing one's own to divine with. No real science would accept so unprogressively a hold in its paradigms, I mean would treat its paradigms as passwords, their fruitfulness exhausted in their correct saying. Science hasn't that kind of guilty conscience.[227]

I think anyone who once earned some interest in Russell's theory of description and attended to the teachings of logical analysis "say two or three courses a year" will find some truth in Cavell's remarks. But we should not misunderstand Cavell here. Why is there "no hope of making the thing [logical analysis, positivism] one's own to divine with"? Competence or complexity of the subject is not in question, as one might tend to believe. His point is rather that the "necessity" (or relevance) of its teaching cannot be made out by me alone, in language and experience. Because I cannot "divine with" it, its necessity, as Cavell declares, *must* get "lost in the shadow of our [academic] institutions".

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[227] TS 196

Cavell does not wish to say that the teachings of logical analysis are bereft of any worldly applicability. Neither does he *accuse* logical analysis for "treating its paradigms as passwords". His worry is that any discipline of thought which *does* treat its paradigm like so ought *not* to fall "under the rubric of philosophy". Passwords give access to something of greater interest; their own significance therefore is ephemeral, instrumental. A philosophy which treats its paradigms like passwords is a philosophy whose paradigms are not worthwhile "lingering" with, to use Theodor Adorno's term here. For this reason, precisely science does not have "this kind of guilty conscience". Since its significance is measured with reference to the outcome it produces science can treat its paradigms as passwords. Contrariwise, the significance of the teachings of philosophy, according to Cavell at least, lie in the confrontation with philosophy itself, in the process of acquiring it and resting with it. Logical analysis, the descriptive theory of language and causal theories of meaning seem unlikely candidates for the encouragement of such virtues. After their intellectual acquisition one controls materials "to which one can make no contribution in return", which turn "bread into stone".

Admirers of Russell and Frege are by and large reluctant to go along with the notion that Wittgenstein's later work presented a critical contribution to the philosophical projects of Russell and Frege. This includes Nicholas Griffin who writes, polemically:

> So here we have the full philosophical story in outline. Russell early in his career committed a monstrous howler in identifying the meaning of an expression with its reference. For the rest of his career he failed to see the absurdity of the theory he had embraced and was led as a result into numerous errors. It was only when Wittgenstein revealed the use theory of meaning that we learnt how to correct Russell's blunder and properly diagnose the errors into which he had been led. To mix a variety of Wittgensteinian metaphors: Russell was held fast by a misleading picture until Wittgenstein, with the use theory of meaning, showed the way out of the fly-bottle. It's a perfect piece

of philosophical mythology masquerading as history. And it was, and perhaps still is, remarkably widely held.[228]

This story made its way to the 21st century through a philosophical lineage which Wittgensteinians are all too familiar with: From Ryle, to Strawson, to Hacker and Soames and Kenny, etc. The attractiveness of this tale is understandable as it recounts a successfully story of an influential philosophical paradigm. Certain discrepancies in Wittgenstein's reading of Russell and Frege likewise were however either left unnoticed, or if they were noticed, they did not shake the tradition's perception of Wittgenstein as a *reader* and critic of his philosophical peers, a shaking which I believe is duly required.

What might be called Wittgenstein's reluctance to be read contextually, i.e., as someone who contributed *directly* to debates in early analytic philosophy, caused a retreat into subjectivity in Wittgenstein scholarship. It has been suggested, for example by Fischer, that "Wittgenstein's "soliloquies" are "[…] thought to provide an exemplar for how contemporary philosophers can tackle unexamined modes of thought (inadvertently held pictures) that influence their own philosophical work."[229] If Wittgenstein's work only lends philosophical interest merely by virtue of the "modes of thought" they entail it follows that the pictures themselves and their place in intellectual history are of no deeper significance. Indeed, in his paper Fischer sets out, with Wittgenstein's assistance, to develop a "new form of philosophical criticism" that is able to systematically expose "relevant philosophical pictures, and efforts to overcome their tacit influence on philosophical reflection."[230] By contrast, the pictures Wittgenstein himself discusses in

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[228] Griffin, Nicholas. 2020. "Russell's Use Theory of Meaning." Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy: 3.

[229] Fischer, Eugen. 2006. "Philosophical Pictures." *Synthese* 148: 476.

[230] Ibid.

the *Investigations,* Fischer suggests, should be of little historical interest, for they "were never advanced in quite that form by any known philosopher".[231] Fischer is thus keen to point out that "instead of attacking a remarkably unrealistic straw man, Wittgenstein seeks to expose and combat the hold certain ideas he reflectively rejects [...] have on him."[232]

There is a point to be made that the retreat into subjectivity and a-historicism has something to do with Wittgenstein's complicated relation to his own tradition, and the (largely unacknowledged) difficulties one encounters in contextualizing his thought. And this problematic is not limited to Russell and Frege whose names appear prominently in the *Investigations*, but also regards Wittgenstein's reading of Augustine's *Confessions*[233], which as Goldfarb[234] and Cavell and others suggest, is a misreading.

Garth Hallet, in his *Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"* makes the – to many – surprising recommendation to read *Analysis of Mind* as a foil to the *Investigations.* "For a clear understanding of what Wittgenstein was doing a comparison of the *Investigations* with Russell's *Analysis of Mind* is almost as revealing as a comparison with the *Tractatus."*[235] But Hallet is also taking sides when he writes that Russell's book "is vitiated from start to finish by Russell's disregard of the truth, 'Essence is expressed by grammar'[236]." Russell, according to Hallet, "forgets that things

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[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Augustine, S. (1853). *The Confessions of S. Augustine* (Vol. 1). JH Parker.
[234] Goldfarb, Warren D. 1983. "I Want You to Bring Me a Slab: Remarks on the Opening Sections of the 'Philosophical Investigations'." *Synthese*: 265-282.
[235] Hallett, Garth. 2019. *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. Cornell University Press: 35
[236] PI 371

are what we call them" and that his book would be an impossibility for "anyone aware of the linguistic problems that Russell ignores".[237]

What I would hold against this assessment of the relationship between *Mind* and the *Investigations* is to say that the latter was indeed only possible because of the former. In other words, *Mind* for Wittgenstein was philosophical reading-material which made writing the *Investigations* the way he did possible. Words and fragments taken from *Mind* are not merely analysed and rendered a linguistic problem, but they are much rather tried, projected into our form of life, as instructions.

1.1 Russell and Wittgenstein – A Personal Encounter

Wittgenstein's views of an ethical life and of the aesthetics of writing philosophy lend to the idea that what he found to be of value in a philosophical text will not be at the mercy of extraneous factors. His sympathy for a text hinged on whether he can "divine with it" and not whether it does, say, contribute to the prevalent scientific or philosophical discourse, which by contrast would certainly be Russell's view. His valuing of an internal moral values over external moral principles is thematic: "It is typical of their fundamentally opposed attitudes, for example, that Russell, even in this, perhaps his most introspective period, should think that keeping one's soul depended upon a 'large purpose that one was true to' – that he was inclined to look outside himself for something to sustain him. It was typical, too, for Wittgenstein to insist that the possibility of remaining uncorrupted rested entirely on oneself – on the qualities one found within."[238] Russell, in

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[237] Hallet, 35
[238] Ibid. 51

a somewhat cynical and ironic manner, suggested to Wittgenstein that he should acquire slaves to state his arguments, as Wittgenstein expressed his reluctance to engage in argumentation: "'I am seriously afraid', [Russell] told Ottoline, 'that no one will see the point of what he writes, because he won't recommend it by arguments addressed to a different point of view.' When Russell told him he ought not simply to state what he thought, but should also provide arguments for it, he replied that arguments would spoil its beauty. He would feel as if he were dirtying a flower with muddy hands." To which Russell replied: "I told him I hadn't the heart to say anything against that, and that he had better acquire a slave to state the arguments."[239]

Regarding Williams James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* Wittgenstein notes: "This book does me a *lot* of good I don't mean to say that I will be a saint soon, but I am not sure that it does not improve me a little in a way in which I would like to improve *very much*: namely I think that it helps me to get rid of the *Sorge* [worry, anxiety] (in the sense in which Goethe used the word in the 2nd part of *Faust*)."[240] I do not wish to take Wittgenstein too literal here as I am not suggesting that he read philosophy like they were self-help books. What is of interest to me is how his temperament might have informed his manner of reading and his attitude towards pieces with a theoretical outlook. James did not write *Varieties of Religious Experience* with the intention to help others in that direct sense. His works intends to contribute theoretically to the study of human psychology and invites his readers "to a descriptive survey of […] religious propensities."[241] Despite its scientific agenda Wittgenstein hastens to communicate the influence it had on him *personally*. It seems of little interest to him what the author

[239] Monk, Ray. 2012. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. Random House: 200
[240] Ibid. 50
[241] James, William. 2003. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Routledge:19

intended to achieve and whether it provides or fails to provide a salient contribution to the scientific paradigm. The introduction to *Varieties of Religious Experience* clarifies that its purpose is descriptive and scientific. Hence Wittgenstein finds little interest too in contexts in so far as "introductions" are concerned.

Wittgenstein read philosophical texts in a manner which involves himself as a person, or with a "voice". It also shows, I believe, that in order to "let himself be read by a text", as Cavell puts it, he (one) needs to abstract a text from its context/framework/introduction. Finally, I also do not think it is a coincidence that this temperament of Wittgenstein becomes most apparent in discussions with Russell. Historically unfounded appears to be Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell, Ogden and Richards, who according to *Investigations'* own assessment suggest that the "inner life is composed of objects"[242]. Russell's proto-scientific approach is immune to this sort of criticism since the "objectification" of the mind (of understanding language) follows a purely scientific and methodological agenda. It does not, as Cavell and Wittgenstein would have it, repudiate our criteria of "understanding" (directly). A philosophy that is concerned with the most general elements of the scientific inquiry as Russell's *Mind,* is philosophical only, as he would contend, because not all elements of the inquiry are yet accessible to a scientific approach, i.e., because they defy empirical testing, etc.

Wittgenstein was aware of the central ideas of Russell's *Analysis of Mind.* As Engelmann suggests however,

> it is not immediately clear why Wittgenstein thinks that the causal theory of meaning would be so destructive. Why is Russell's account of meaning not something outside the scope of Wittgenstein's interests or simply irrelevant? The problem with Russell's theory according to Wittgenstein is, I think, that the description of language based on a causal mechanism subordinates

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[242] CR, 91

questions of logic and language to this mechanical explanation. So, Russell's 'conception of the way language functions' is incompatible with Wittgenstein's own general views about the way language works; in fact, it is incompatible with it and with any reasonable account of language, according to Wittgenstein, for the '*whole* logic and everything that goes with it' is at risk.[243]

In similar fashion, Hilmy argues that Wittgenstein could have pointed out more clearly that his philosophical peers, Ogden, Richards, Russell, James, etc., pursued ends diametrically opposed to his own philosophical project. "Description [the description of the uses of words] is to be understood [by Wittgenstein] as a methodological alternative to the given [...] psychological explanations of the effects signs have on the mind."[244] It is puzzling that Wittgenstein occasionally acknowledges a difference of interest in the logical and the scientific study of language, and yet assumes a methodological conflict between the two anyway. To give yet another example, Wittgenstein famously rejected James' idea that understanding a word necessarily involves a distinct and recognisable experience or feeling of meaning. But, as Russell Goodman notes, „in fact, James is not particularly interested in what constitutes linguistic meaning, which is of course a central question for Wittgenstein."[245] The central question for James on the other had was how to develop a „science of finite individual minds", as did Russell in *Analysis of Mind.* The idea that a feeling or an experience accompanies or enables the understanding a word was just part of such an inquiry.[246]

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[243] Engelmann, Mauro. 2013. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Development: Phenomenology, Grammar, Method, and the Anthropological View.* Springer:70-71.
[244] Hilmy, Stephen. 1987. *The Later Wittgenstein: The Emergence of a New Philosophical Method.* Basil Blackwell: 345
[245] Goodman, Russell B. 2002. *Wittgenstein and William James.* Cambridge University Press: 123
[246] Ibid.

Contrary to Russell, Wittgenstein believed that philosophy and the sciences are methodologically distinct fields of inquiry. While philosophy deals with relations of concepts (internal relations) the sciences deal with relations of facts (external relations). By consequence, hypothetical assertions about the workings of the mind, as we find them in Russell, James, etc. for Wittgenstein do not fall under the rubric of philosophy as they pertain to external relations and are empirical in nature. Hence, it comes as no surprise that, as Griffin claims, "a significant part of the huge chasm that divides Russell's philosophy from that of the later (and even the earlier) Wittgenstein lies in differences in their attitudes to science and its relation to philosophy."[247]

But it is not, and this might have been missed by Wittgenstein, as though Russell believed that his theories achieved "sufficient definiteness that its hypotheses can be refuted or confirmed". This also wasn't his intention. Russell did not think of his work as scientific in this strictly empirical sense, but, Tully observes, as "working hypotheses rather than as definitive revelations of the nature of reality. This enabled him to avoid the charge of dogmatism as well as to condemn extreme philosophical skeptics for being dogmatic."[248]

1.2 Russell and Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use, Language as Practice and Mental Imagery[249]

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[247] Griffin, 2003, 19

[248] Tully, R.E., "Russell's Neutral Monsim", in Ibid., 334.

[249] "*The Analysis of Mind* is Russell's attempt to come to terms with, and reconcile, James' neutral monism and Watson's behaviourism, there is a further question as to why Russell should have felt at just this time that these were important questions that he needed to tackle. I think that the answer to this question lies in his sense that Wittgenstein has shown that his previous philosophy was deeply flawed. That previous philosophy had included the presumption of the correctness of Brentano's thesis that mental phenomena have essential reference to objects." (Baldwin, T. (1994), "Introduction" to *The Analysis of Mind*, ix.)

Several years prior to Wittgenstein's return to Cambridge (after 10 years of absence) in 1929, Russell developed a use-theory of meaning (of sorts). In *Analysis of Mind* (published in 1921) he writes: "To say that a word has a meaning is not to say that those who use the word correctly have ever thought out what the meaning is: the use of the word comes first, and the meaning is to be distilled out of it by observation and analysis."[250] Meaning, at least in Russell's later works is fixed by its use.[251] But if "our business" as Russell makes plain in *Mind*, is "psychology", how can a use conception of meaning be relevant to his investigation?

The first thing to note is that in *Mind* "meaning as use" is not a view Russell seeks to defend and elaborate, but one that serves as starting point for his psychological account of "thought" or "thinking". Like Wittgenstein he takes for granted that "the association of words with their meanings must have grown up by some natural process, though at present the nature of the process is unknown."[252] Russell is critical of the idea that language is based on conventions, something that is "added to an existing language" […] as is done, for instance, with new scientific terms."[253] Natural languages and their respective word-meanings have evolved historically ("Their origins he contends, like in "any Indo-European language" can be traced back "far enough") and *naturally*, which is to say that conceptual change for Russell depended on and was "determined by the [social and biological, I take it] environment", and rarely by *ad hoc* conventions. "Meaning as use" in Russell is therefore roughly synonymous with what Wittgenstein calls grammar; the customary word-uses we inherit as language-learners and pass on as language-

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[250] Russell, B. (2005). *The Analysis of Mind*. Routledge, 165
[251] See, Baldwin, T. (2003), "From Knowledge by Acquaintance to Knowledge by Causation", In *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*. Cambridge University Press.
[252] Russel, 159
[253] Ibid.

teachers by means of explanation, rules, criteria, examples, exemplification, etc. In *Mind*

however, Russell is not concerned with "the social use of language" but: "We are almost

more concerned with the internal speech that is never uttered […]"[254] It is for this reason

that Russell will focus on meaning not in terms of use, its social ontology, but in terms of

"understanding", its psychological ontology. Russell is interested in, what Wittgenstein

in the *Investigations* calls, the "internal processes" of understanding language.[255]

In the *Investigations* the contrast between meaning as use and meaning as

understanding (internal process) is discussed in the so-called rule-following paradox.

Wittgenstein's well-known problem here is how the social grammatical structure of

language-use (the "rules" for their use) determine how a word is understood correctly

(*when* it is understood correctly): "For we say that there isn't any doubt that we

understand the word, and on the other hand that its meaning lies in its use. There is no

doubt that I now want to play chess, but chess is the game it is in virtue of all its rules

(and so on)."[256] In order to play chess correctly and to speak a language correctly, do the

rules of these "games" have to be present in the mind, and if that is the case, how do I

know that I have applied these rules (in my mind) correctly? These Wittgensteinian

concerns are all well-known and I shall not explain them any further at this point. For my

present purposes it suffices to jump right to Wittgenstein's suggested resolution of the

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[254] Ibid., 160

[255] "'*Contrat sociale*' – -- here too, *no* actual contract was ever concluded; but the situation is more or less similar, analogous, to the one we'd be in, if. . .. And there's much to be gained in viewing it in terms of such a contract. (Wittgenstein, BT, 151e)." Similar to Wittgenstein Russell holds that the rules (conventions) constitutive of the social contract (for grammar in Wittgenstein) are mythical (as if): "How these roots acquired their meanings is not known, but a conventional origin is clearly just as mythical as the social contract by which Hobbes and Rousseau supposed civil government to have been established. We can hardly suppose a parliament of hitherto speechless elders meeting together and agreeing to call a cow a cow and a wolf a wolf." (*Mind*, 158-9*)*

[256] PI 197

paradox. Wittgenstein's therapeutic proposal is that the conundrum is linked to our desire to look for explanations, and more specifically for an explanation for what exactly happens (in the mind, for example) when we understand a word correctly, apply rules correctly, etc. To understand *how* I can apply them correctly, Wittgenstein wants us to conceive of linguistic understanding in terms of a practice: "To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to have mastered a technique."[257] Russell writes in *Mind:*

> It is not necessary, in order that a man should 'understand' a word, that he should 'know what it means,' in the sense of being able to say, 'this word means so-and-so.' Understanding words does not consist in knowing their dictionary definitions, or in being able to specify the objects to which they are appropriate. Such understanding as this may belong to lexicographers and students, but not to ordinary mortals in ordinary life. Understanding language is more like understanding cricket: it is a matter of habits, acquired in oneself and rightly presumed in others. To say that a word has a meaning is not to say that those who use the word correctly have ever thought out what the meaning is.[258]

Russell argues that understanding words doesn't require knowing their exact definitions. Instead, it is more like a habit, where people use words correctly through practice rather than through explicit knowledge – similar to learning cricket by playing, not by studying the rules. For Wittgenstein explanations have to end right here, on the level of costume and technique. Russell on the other hand seeks to explain further the causal-psychological mechanism on which these costumes, say, operate. This would seem to suggest that Russell and Wittgenstein have different things in mind when they speak of languages in terms of practices, and techniques.

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[257] PI 199
[258] Russell, 165

But first we must understand why for Wittgenstein explanations end at a point where no explanation has been given whatsoever, and why Russell needs to go beyond that. Let me turn to Wittgenstein first.

So why do his explanations end where they do? The purpose of this austerity is ultimately a therapeutic one. To see *how* I can understand a rule, a word, or a sentence (I know *that* I do, because I speak that language) for Wittgenstein it suffices to bring into my imagination my own culture, the life of "ordinary mortals in ordinary life"[259] (Russell's phrase). And this is done by eliciting examples, or illustrations of how "understanding a language" happens in our form of life. Wittgenstein examples of language learning in the *Investigations* yield a "surveyable representation"[260] of what we call "following a rule", "understanding a language", etc. In this way *our* grammar of these concepts is presented to us and our craving for explanations that go beyond the explanations *we can or would give ourselves,* stopped. As per analogy, to explain the game of cricket to someone unfamiliar with its rules and procedures it will suffice to show, by means of examples, what cricket *is*, and how it is played and how its rules can be acquired. A grammatical explanation of human practices and human concepts is based on "my knowledge":

> What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean to know it and not be able to say it? Is this knowledge somehow equivalent to an unformulated definition? So that if it were formulated, I'd be able to recognize it as the expression of my knowledge? Isn't my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations that I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game, showing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these, saying that I would hardly call this or that a game, and so on.[261]

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259 Ibid.
260 PI 122
261 PI 75

Wittgenstein emphasizes that *my* knowledge of a game is fully expressed in the examples and explanations *I* can give, not in a rigid definition. *My* concept of a game is revealed through *my* ability to show what I'd call a game, or not, through *my*particular understanding and usage .If all we can do in philosophy, in our philosophical account of "understanding", "following a rule", of games, is giving examples, then this "poverty of philosophy" is difficult to accept:

> "But then doesn't our understanding reach beyond all examples?" A very curious expression, and a quite natural one! But is that *all*? Isn't there a deeper explanation; or at least, mustn't the *understanding* of the explanation be deeper? Well, have I myself a deeper understanding? Have I *got* more than I give in the explanation? But then, whence the feeling that I have more? Is it like the case where I interpret what is not limited as a length that reaches beyond every length?[262]

Cavell questions whether understanding is limited to examples, asking if it reaches beyond them. He suggests that there might be a deeper aspect to understanding that is not fully captured in explanations. This leads to a sense that there is more to understanding than what can be articulated, akin to interpreting an infinite concept as extending beyond all measurable lengths. As Wittgenstein goes on to say now, "my understanding" of grammar and of how deep my understanding goes depends on what we find *relevant* in the practice of understanding and following rules, and teaching rules and games, etc. If I instruct someone to continue an ornamental pattern, Wittgenstein ponders "how can he *know* how he is to continue it by himself?"[263] Russell argues, as I explain below, when we understand a word, we sometimes picture its meaning in form of a mental image. So,

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[262] PI 209
[263] PI 211

in case of the ornamental patterns the learner might first picture in his mind the way he is supposed to continue the pattern, in case of the algebraic formulas such as +2 he might picture a series of calculations: 10+2=12… 100+2=102… 1000+2=1002, etc. While Wittgenstein does not deny that this might happen, it is also clear that we never really make any mention of mental images when we teach. The same seems to be true in case of *following* rules. How does he know how to continue? Wittgenstein responds: "Well, how do *I* know? —- If that means "Have I reasons?", the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.[264] And: "When someone of whom I am afraid orders me to continue a series, I act quickly, with perfect assurance, and the lack of reasons does not trouble me."[265] This shift to the first-person perspective elicits a kind of phenomenological description of following rules (as opposed to a scientific, psychological one).

So how does Russell's "theory" play out? Firstly, as mentioned earlier, Russell and Wittgenstein do agree on some important aspects of "understanding": Mental images are not necessary for understanding; it is not necessary to know all possible uses of a word to be able to understand it and use it correctly; language and word-meanings have evolved historically and naturally. Both Wittgenstein and Russell take it as a matter of course that linguistic understanding is a human practice made possible by learning and teaching. Hence, they agree that understanding a language is a technique such as playing cricket (in Russell) or chess (in Wittgenstein).

Relevant to their investigations are cases of understanding which do not require interpretation and mental imagery. They discuss such cases extensively. When certain

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[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid. 212

words (rules or signs) are sufficiently well learned, we react to them "blindly", as Wittgenstein says. Russell introduces understanding of this kind with the following example.

> Suppose you are walking in London with an absent-minded friend, and while crossing a street you say, "Look out, there's a motor coming." He will glance round and jump aside without the need of any "mental" intermediary. There need be no "ideas," but only a stiffening of the muscles, followed quickly by action. He "understands" the words, because he does the right thing. Such "understanding" may be taken to belong to the nerves and brain, being habits which they have acquired while the language was being learnt. Thus understanding in this sense may be reduced to mere physiological causal laws.[266]

The kind of understanding Russell describes here is seen as a product of learned habits in the brain and nervous system, suggesting that it could be reduced to physiological causal laws rather than higher cognitive processes. The same topics appear in Wittgenstein's sign-post examples:

> Let me ask this: what has the expression of a rule, say a signpost, got to do with my actions? What sort of connection obtains here? Well, this one, for example: I have been trained to react in a particular way to this sign, and now I do so react to it.

> But with this you have pointed out only a causal connection; only explained how it has come about that we now go by the signpost; not what this following-the-sign really consists in. Not so; I have further indicated that a person goes by a signpost only in so far as there is an established usage, a custom.[267]

Russell and Wittgenstein have established a "causal connection" between the learning of language and the "immediate" reaction to and understanding of signs. The

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[266] Russell, 166
[267] PI 198

better acquainted one becomes with a sign, the less likely it is for one to misunderstand it and hence the more immediate one's reaction becomes. Other kinds of signs (words or rules) might be more troubling. Words we are only imperfectly familiar with come to mind, a signpost one has never seen before, a technical term, or even the use of familiar signs in unfamiliar contexts. Anyway, the list goes on. For Russell such cases of understanding cannot be reduced to "mere physiological laws" as they in some way break the automatic response of our nervous system. When it comes to explaining our capacity to understand words "intermediately" (i.e., not blindly and automatically), for Russell behaviourist accounts are inadequate; even if the more troubling word was understood correctly and caused adequate behaviour, etc. the behaviourist leaves unexplained the active contribution of the mind (i.e., of imagination.) in the process of understanding. A psychological account of understanding and meaning would look more closely at these processes.

In the rule-following sections cases of "immediate" understanding are of interest to Wittgenstein too as they form part of the physiognomy of what we call following a rule – it is part of our ordinary concept and the phenomenology of rule-following and understanding that we follow rules and use words "blindly", without interpretation and without the occurrence of mental images.

To dwell the mechanism of the mind is a temptation we ought to resist: "If we had a more accurate knowledge of these things [the brain and the nervous system], we would see what connections were established by the training, and then when we looked into his brain, we would be able to say: 'Now he has *read* this word, now the reading connection

has been set up.'"[268] It is hard to imagine that we ever would or ever did "see what connections were established" for we don't know anything "about these things". Whether the connection has been made, hence whether the word (or the rule) has been read "with understanding" can be established (and in our form of life always has been established, it is a fact of our natural history) without any reference to brain states. What we care about is whether someone goes on using the rule correctly, whether he goes on using it differently, or whether he needs further examples to clarify its correct use. In other words, brain states (what we might see "when we look into his brain") do not serve as criteria of "understanding", but whether one goes on using rules correctly or incorrectly, etc., does. The "grammar of following a rule" is not related, as Wittgenstein would put it here, to the grammar of "brain-states". In ordinary life brain-states might not even come close to having a "grammar" of their own but might merely serve as a "convenient fiction", "a short way of describing certain processes".[269] I take it that Russell could be easily convinced that the physiological occurrences such as brain states do not play any part in forming our ordinary concepts and our ordinary criteria of understanding. Clearly, that is not something that could have been *missed* by him. But since "our business is psychology"[270], we might ask whether Russell commits to such a mistake. As Russell analysis unfolds, it becomes clear that he takes no particular interest in the *concept* of understanding in Wittgenstein's sense.

Their conception of understanding remains similar, even identical up to a certain point. Differences become only apparent in their critical stance towards behaviourism. In countering the tendency in science to "materialize the mind" Russell discusses examples

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[268] PI 158
[269] Russell makes this point with regards to the concept "desire".
[270] Russel, 164

of understanding which he thinks cannot be explained in behaviouristic lines, viz., materialistically. For both Russell and Wittgenstein cases of immediate understanding are identifiable through third-person ascriptions, i.e., by outward criteria. In such language games either the object, as Russell puts it, is "present" (i.e., "dog" or "box" in *Mind, "*sign-post" or "rule" in the *Investigations*) or the successful behaviour. Where third person-ascriptions are not possible, i.e., when we "read" a text with understanding the behaviourist flounders. Russell calls this "introspective" use of language, idiosyncratically, "thinking". So, when we "think", i.e., use language privately (when we read poetry, as Russell also puts it) no external criteria for correct use (understanding) are available: "To understand the function that words perform in what is called 'thinking', we must understand both the causes and the effects of their occurrence. The causes of the occurrence of words require somewhat different treatment according as the object designated by the word is sensibly present or absent. When the object is present, it may itself be taken as the cause of the word, through association."[271] When such an object is not present the association between the word (correct use) and the object is not identifiable behaviouristically or materialistically. To account for introspective understanding, this is Russell's methodological proposition, we must give up on a purely materialistic account (behaviourism) and resort to psychological terminology such as image, imagination. He explains: "These two ways of using words, including their occurrence in inner speech, may be spoken of together as the use of words in "thinking." If we are right, the use of words in thinking depends, at least in its origin, upon images, and cannot be fully dealt with on behaviourist lines. And this is really the most essential function of words, namely that, originally through their connection with images, they

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[271] Ibid. 170

bring us into touch with what is remote in time or space. […] Thus, the problem of the meaning of words is brought into connection with the problem of the meaning of images."[272] Behaviourism is not per so wrong but rather incomplete as it leaves the "most essential function of words" unaccounted for.

The methodological slide from the outer to the inner also receives critical attention in the *Investigations*. But Wittgenstein dramatizes its effect. "Wittgenstein takes the risk of apsychism".[273]

> Aren't you nevertheless a behaviourist in disguise? Aren't you nevertheless basically saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction?" If I speak of a fiction, then it is of a grammatical fiction.
> How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviourism arise? — The first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states, and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we'll know more about them we think. But that's just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a certain conception of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that seemed to us quite innocent.) And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them.[274]

Why is Wittgenstein "taking the risk" (but not committed) to "denying" mental processes when he says, "An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria".[275] To go beyond criteria and "into" the inner (the other's privacy) would repudiate, in Cavell's phrase, my criteria. The criteria for what "I" can reasonably call *his* "understanding" are

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[272] Ibid.
[273] CR 400
[274] PI 307-8
[275] PI 580

limited. I cannot "know" the other. Criteria do not articulate existence (material or mental) but identities (duck or goose). I must *acknowledge* his presence, the presence of his mental life through the "material" presence of his actions and his behaviour and his body. (My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul.).[276] Wittgenstein records "effects" of inner processes, not the "inner nature of things". "In reality, any attempt to express the inner nature of a thing is fruitless. What we perceive are effects, and a complete record of these effects ought to encompass this inner nature."[277] Wittgenstein would not, like Goethe here, say that the investigation of inner processes is "fruitless" but that it's teachings *can* be invasive once it enters a culture's scenes of instruction and initiation. Knowledge of the inner nature of things does not educate the child, it can only confuse him.

But science ought to move forward, also from behaviourism to psychology. Surely, mental images play a role in language learning, in speaking and understanding. A scientific investigation of its function would contribute to a method-based understanding of the mind and of psychological process. Russell of course does not conduct empirical observations and experiments and thus his approach is not scientific. His *philosophical* approach is at most propaedeutic to science: a philosophy *for* science.

In unexpected course of events, Russell now appears to turn against his own methodological proposition: "Having admitted images, we may say that the word "box," in the absence of the box, is caused by an image of the box. This may or may not be true – in fact, it is true in some cases but not in others. Even, however, if it were true in all cases, it would only slightly shift our problem: *we should now have to ask what causes*
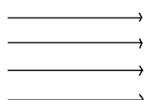
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[276] PI iv, 22

[277] Von Goethe, J. W. (1970). *Theory of Colours* (No. 3). MIT Press, 158.
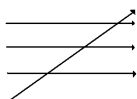
an image of the box to arise."[278] Here one immediately thinks of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following:

> Suppose different ways of reading a chart were now introduced; one time, as above, according to the schema:

> another time according to this schema:

> or some other one. Such a schema is added to the chart as a rule for its use.
> Can we not now imagine further rules to explain this one? And, on the other hand, was that first chart incomplete without the schema of arrows? And are the other charts incomplete without their schemata?

Through association of a word with an image the word has meaning. But how does the *image* get its meaning and thus cause understanding (adequate behaviour)? As the analysis unfolds, it becomes clear that Russel's investigations naturally lead toward the primordial, exploring the more biological and fundamental aspects of human cognition. While language competence reflects the learned aspects of human intelligence, the capacity to think in images taps into a more intuitive function of the mind. The next logical step in this analysis should explore even more primitive facets of human cognition, which Russell identifies as rooted in human desire. When hearing the world "box" uttered

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[278] Russell, 171, my emphasis.

in the presence of a box repeatedly, the child might not yet understand what "box" means. The more stable the association becomes over time, the child, when hearing to word, is urged to conjure the image in his mind, thus establishing the connection more firmly. The child in Wittgenstein's example in *Philosophical Investigations* §86 finds himself in a traditional teacher-student scenario. The teacher presents a chart with signs on the left and images of building blocks on the right. Arrows indicate the meaning of each sign by aligning it with the corresponding image. In contrast, Russell's child learns through observation without the aid of physical images or cards. Lacking a teacher or any learning materials, he must rely on his imagination – conjuring the image in his mind. Despite the significant differences between the two scenarios described by these philosophers, they both grapple with a similar issue: What ensures our understanding of signs or words? Whether through mental or physical images, how are these images integrated into the mechanism of linguistic practice?

From a philosophical standpoint, this problem leads to an infinite regress. However, from a psychological and scientific perspective, we are perhaps beginning to understand how the mind operates and how biology might play a role.

Wittgenstein misread Russell in "believing" that his "psychologistic philosophy" seeks to explain the "social" or grammatical dimension of language use. Russell understood that the explanation of the meaning of a word would not require the investigation of any mental phenomena. Neither was Russell interested in our "ordinary" conception (our grammar) of "understanding". Russell looked at linguistic understanding in terms of an empirical and natural phenomenon, something to investigate, potentially empirically. Russell's empirical philosophy wants to set up a research program for future psychological studies. "If our business were logic [...], but as it is psychology that

concerns us [...]."[279] It has nothing to do with Wittgenstein's problem which always was a Kantian one; drawing the limits of language (reason). What seems evident from Wittgenstein's unpublished writings of this period is that psychological considerations about linguistic understand nevertheless deeply troubled him. To attain the "logical point of view" was seemingly hard for him.

I was highlighting Russellian influences, fragments of *Mind* persistently undermining the logical point of view, the point of view of the human. In these sections Wittgenstein deploys affirmatively numerous theoretical elements of Russell's Lecture X in *Mind* but redeploys their function. Russell starts his analysis from a use theory of meaning, taking it as his point of departure for a causal theory of meaning. Wittgenstein redeems Russell's theory of use by humanizing its function: 'use is what 'I' can explain'. Russell continues his analysis arguing that language use is not fixed conventionally but historically and organically – like a technique and like play. Wittgenstein endorses this view but once again redeems it by humanizing it, as for him explanations end at the level of costume. Russell explains that competent language speakers do not have to rely on mental imagery to understand a word correctly. Wittgenstein endorses this view unequivocally. Russell suggests that mental images *can* give words meaning but then ponders how do images get their meaning. This will lead Russell to develop a theory of desire. The mind, as it were, when it hears a word creates the "desire" for its meaning: a place, that had been prepared for it by virtue of habit and custom. What in Russell begins as an argument *ad infinitum* but then ebbs in a theory of desire, in Wittgenstein surfaces

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[279] Russell, 164

as the famous argument *ad infinitum* in PI 86. Hence humanizing once again a Russellian

theoretical fragment. "Explanations have to end somewhere."

CHAPTER FIVE

WITTGENSTEINIAN READING AS THE RECOVERY OF THE HUMAN

Abstract

This chapter positions Wittgenstein's reading as both political and ethical, interpreting Cavellian skepticism as resistance to a text's implicit authority over individual forms of life. Through the act of quotation, Wittgenstein and thinkers like Cavell and Benjamin challenge philosophical conventions, proposing that "misreading" and contextual dislocation can reveal new, critical insights. These acts of "misprision" illuminate a liberating form of critique where language becomes therapeutic, grounded in the ordinary yet charged with political significance. I argue that Wittgenstein's selective, occasionally naive reading echoes the child's learning, embodying a cultural inheritance that balances legacy with renewal. Ultimately, Wittgenstein's radical, fragmentary reading highlights a "repudiation of the human" often embedded in philosophical discourse, suggesting that to reclaim language's authority is also to reclaim the voice of the individual.

With these brief comments on Wittgenstein's seemingly unconventional response to the *Tractatus*, especially when assessed through conventional standards, and with a more extensive exploration of Russell's *Mind* within the broader context of a Wittgensteinian approach to reading, I aimed to present an alternative perspective through which we can comprehend the undertaking of "bringing words back". In doing so, I have essentially replaced the orthodox justification, which heavily relies on the assurance of linguistic correctness and where the analysis of words in ordinary language games is portrayed as a method for investigating how words genuinely and correctly function.

In an earlier chapter, I alluded to the political implications of a philosophy of reading. By this, I mean that Cavellian and Wittgensteinian modes of reading articulate, in the name of reason, a form of resistance towards a text. This resistance is primarily directed at what Cavell referred to a text's skepticism. The political dimension of skepticism

becomes evident when we seriously consider the potential for a text to claim authority over my *form of life*, instructing me on how to conduct myself, organize my concepts, perceive myself and the other as *having a soul*, and so on.

In the remaining pages of this dissertation, my endeavour will be to cultivate a hermeneutic perspective on "bringing words back," but infused with a more politically or critically charged vocabulary. Once again, this perspective becomes vital when we consider that "bringing words back" simultaneously implies "taking words away" from a particular context which defined their textual function and purpose. Again, *Mind* wants to establish a theoretical framework through which mental linguistic process could analysed and potentially investigated empirically. Its deployed words and ideas work towards this goal. This politics of *taking-away* needs further explanation. My current focus is on how the act of reading, as described in relation to Wittgenstein, can inherently carry political and critical dimensions, challenging a particular perspective on rationality, reason, and philosophy. The act of detaching words from their context, as I will argue with the support of Walter Benjamin and Karl Kraus, inherently possesses political significance. It's crucial to understand that when I use the term "political" in this context, it should be interpreted within the framework of Cavell's notion of skepticism. To reiterate, Cavell employs this concept to highlight a form of rationality that overlooks the authority of the voice.

To illustrate with an example, Russell's explanation of meaning and understanding is firmly situated within the framework of an as-yet-to-be-established science of the mind, and is therefore, by definition, entirely disregarding *my* role in the matter. In other words, it neglects what *I* need (and have always needed) to know in order to determine when a

rule is being followed correctly or incorrectly. Russell's dismissal of this voice, which could have articulated her criteria, must, according to Cavell and Wittgenstein as presented throughout this dissertation, be considered a political gesture in itself. Simply the act of quoting, of relocating words to their "home" in ordinary language, constitutes a political act as it restores the authority of the self, of the voice.

As I will now elaborate in more detail, the act of quotation for Wittgenstein can only assume a political dimension when the purpose of the quotation involves an act of injustice towards the text from which the quote is extracted, indicating that the text is *misread*. For this reason, I will focus now on the concept of quotation in conjunction with misprision or misreading.

1. Quotation and Misprision

I claim no originality for either having suggested that Wittgenstein was not a concise reader of Russell and his precursors nor for suggesting that a positive and hermeneutic, even a *philosophical* function can be attributed to Wittgenstein's misprisions. My contribution to this scantly explored subject was and will be limited to examining its general implications for Wittgenstein's and Cavell's philosophy of the ordinary and their conception of philosophical critique. Hence "misreading" accounts in yet another way for philosophy's transfiguration in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. All in all, my approach is I believe palpable enough: If Wittgenstein's interlocutors are ordinary voices (they are, for they do not present structured arguments, but sketches of temptations etc.) and historical voices at the same time ("rubbles left from philosophy's history") then their transfiguration from history to an eventual presence (ordinary voices) must undergo interpretative rendering: misreading, contextual omission, etc.

For clarity, I should note that by "misprision" and "misreading" I do not mean "logical" or "argumentative fallacies", i.e., I am not interested whether Cavell and Wittgenstein offer seemingly valid, but actually erroneous arguments or pieces of reasonings caused by a fallacy of accent, fallacy of accident, fallacy of composition, of false cause, hasty generalization, emphasis, equivocation, etc.[280] In Cavell and Wittgenstein and elsewhere, it is not what I believe *separates* and disconnects Cavell and Wittgenstein from the arguments of their philosophical precursors. I understand their structurally motivated "fallacies" more in terms of acts of freeing rather than of separation. "Discontinuity is freedom."[281] But what freedom is it for our philosophers of the ordinary (and of skepticism)? If continuity in philosophy is the un-fallacious appropriation and elaboration of texts and ideas, then a "good" reading is cause for unfreedom, for anxiety.[282]

I want to add some additional layers to what has already been said by moving towards a philosophical conception of misreading and contextual omission. Since "quotation" can perform a misreading (or can be the beginning of a misreading) as it performs contextual omission, I develop briefly a philosophical conception of "quotation". This has a tacit historical precedent. In his essay "Signals and Affinities", Cavell sketches the beginning of a project that seeks to compare the works of Walter Benjamin and Wittgenstein. Benjamin wrote extensively on Karl Kraus (whom Wittgenstein read and admired). Benjamin's essay "Karl Kraus" will help me to explain

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[280] Bunnin, N., & Yu, J. (2009). *The Blackwell dictionary of Western Philosophy*. John Wiley & Sons, 249-250.

[281] Bloom, H. (1997). *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Oxford University Press, USA, 39.

[282] The *Preface* to the *Philosophical Investigations* bespeak (or demand) discontinuity: "For more than one reason, what I publish here will have points of contact with what other people are writing today. If my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine, then I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property."

in some more detail the philosophical function of quotation, of creative misreading in Wittgenstein's late work.

1.1 Cavell, Benjamin, Kraus, and Wittgenstein

Although the writings of Wittgenstein and Cavell differ in style, both are thinkers of the occasional and the particular. While "[Wittgenstein] confronted *specific remarks [my emphasis]* of specific writers (sometimes Augustine, Plato, James, or Köhler, often Frege, Russell, and the author of the *Tractatus*)"[283], Cavell confronted specific texts, as opposed to say, specific philosophers and problems. Their hermeneutics is not exegetical or historical but archaeological. They are investigators of the "rubbles left of philosophy", of fragments and isolated quotations.

Fragmentation, for a therapeutic reader of Wittgenstein like Baker, achieves methodological acclimatization: "[Wittgenstein] did not see himself in the role of a public health official whose brief was to eradicate smallpox from the face of the earth (e.g., to eliminate Cartesian dualism once for all by means of the Private Language Argument). Rather he operated as a general practitioner who treated the bumps that various individual patients had got by running their heads up against the limits of language."[284] In Baker, locality is a matter of therapy, of talking *with* her as opposed to talking *against* history. She (like our natural history, like Wittgenstein's details of a cultural dystopia) is mythical in the sense that her philosophical ailments are presented as – are only accessible through – fragments. Her context, her psychical life, the movements of her thinking process, her knots must be explored and retraced and then retracted. Bakerian therapy is abstract (as

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[283] Baker, 2004, 68
[284] Ibid.

opposed to historical) in the sense that it does not educate historical figures. "Specific remarks" about "Augustine, Plato, James, or Köhler, often Frege, Russell, and the author of the *Tractatus"* are therapeutic identification tools that are in service of a *present* case. They will be asked whether they can find her concern articulated or adumbrated in the fragment. Identification is part of the therapeutic process, not a historical determination.

In Baker's therapeutic settings the fragment retains no meaningful relationship with its historical or textual context as its function is conceived purely in terms conversion, not in terms of criticism. Through *their,* the quotation (remark, fragment, etc.,) is given a new context, but not to expose the "injustice" of the original author but to come to terms with their own injustices that somehow stand in a signifying relationship with the quotation. This is how also quotations for Baker (in Wittgenstein) serve therapeutic purposes.

If, however, as said in Chapter II, philosophy "proceeds essentially by criticizing past efforts at this criticism"[285], a retreat into subjective freedom would discontinue this effort, that is, it would cease to criticize itself. Hence, our main question should be **whether Wittgensteinian citations can have a different function, one that retains a critical relationship with history without at the same time succumbing to Hackerian "language policing".**

For the "filling-in" approach which Morris and Baker attribute to Hacker's reading of the late Wittgenstein, not only seems necessary if we expect from the *Investigations* a resolute response to philosophical problems, but also if we expect it to speak to its historical interlocutors as *directly* as Hacker believes it to be the case. "If we expect to find knock-down proofs and refutations, preferably of important philosophical positions

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[285] CR 121

like Cartesian dualism, we are likely to see lacunae in Wittgenstein's arguments."[286] If what Hacker has to offer is historical diagnosis (which would be a hypothesis) rather than therapeutic analysis (which merely requires personal acknowledgement of the diagnosis), then his diagnosis requires further evidence and textual support, along the lines of Augustine's[287] principles of biblical exegesis such as: "We should look to straightforward passages to help make sense of more obscure ones. We should understand the goals of the text as a whole when interpreting the parts of the text. When the point of a text is a certain kind of action, we can evaluate interpretations of the text by how well they promote those actions. Material outside the text could be useful for understanding the meaning of the text, both in its proper and its figurative meanings." [288] And so on. While anyone would find it hard to object to the principles laid down by Augustine, it remains yet to be seen whether philosophy is bound to follow them. Therapeutic readers perhaps suggest that he should be spared from the pains of hermeneutic exegesis. Wittgenstein, all things considered, does not respond to "texts" but to inadvertently and unconsciously held philosophical pictures and ideas which a text does not say (or state explicitly) but which it, as it were, *suffers* from, implicitly, i.e., by virtue of the patient's own identification and assessment. Orthodox readers like Hacker do not have this option at their disposal. If a new philosophy replaces and old one (grammar replaces Cartesian Dualism), then exegesis must be accurate; it must by all costs avoid a *non-sequitur*, otherwise their criticism is unfounded and philosophical progress, an illusion.

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[286] Baker,

[287] My reference to Augustine at this stage of the text is not based on the assumption that Augustine is an authority on the matter of exegesis. Instead, I point to the fact that these principles, written over 1500 years ago, remain remarkably intuitive even today.

[288] Vessey, David. 2016. "Medieval Hermeneutics". In *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics* (Vol. 60). Edited by Niall Keane, Chris Lawn. C.John Wiley & Sons, 38.

Had Cavell and Wittgenstein followed Augustine's principles, their diagnosis of the "modern subject" could not have been articulated against the background of the philosophical works they found so troubling. To read the denial of the human condition into a philosophical text requires Cavell and Wittgenstein to misread a text. To find an idea as drastic as the rejection of the human in a text or in a fragment of philosophy Wittgenstein and Cavell must bracket the writer's oeuvre, or his intellectual environment. "Overreading, […] is driven by skepticism towards the key notions of context and coherence. Context roots the work in the external world; a presumption of coherence ensures that its vision is unified and self-consistent."[289]

> Naturally I do not deny that some readings are irresponsible in fairly straightforward ways. But "reading in," as a term of criticism, suggests something quite particular, like going too far even if on a real track. Then the question would be, as the question often is about philosophy, how to bring reading to an end. […] My experience is that most texts, like most lives, are underread, not overread. And the moral I urge is that this assessment be made the subject of arguments about particular texts.[290]

Cavell's call for "overinterpretation" and "overreading" in his introduction to *Pursuits of Happiness* sits uncomfortably with orthodox interpretations of Wittgenstein. Disclosing latent "nonsense" in a philosophical text for Cavell comes to say that a text is being "underread", which at the bottom is the worry that analytic philosophers might under-*appreciate* the texts they chose to read and investigate. That Cavell can say that words in a text lack meaning without at the same time taking away any of their significance, that is without underreading and underappreciating them, behoves a different parameter for meaning and significance which according to Cavell

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[289] Davis, C. (2010). *Critical Excess: Overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek and Cavell*. Stanford University Press, 174-5.
[290] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 35

"overreading" can or must institute. The disclosure of the significance of philosophical nonsense (speaking outside language games, speaking without meaning) describes Cavell's philosophical preoccupation overall.

The factoring out of the historical context of philosophical pictures and quotations is a conscious methodological choice. Mulhall rightly points out that Cavell reads texts primarily as "the intentional product of a single organising intelligence, as the creation or composition of an individual human being."[291] Cavell's "emphasis upon the integrity of the text and upon the individual authors as its primary source" has made him vulnerable to two kinds of criticism as Mulhall observes: "first, that it lacks any genuine awareness of the complexities of the social, historical, and political contexts within which the production and reception of the text took place and by which they were consequently marked; and second, that it fails to acknowledge the essentially discontinuous, self-undermining, and uncontrollable nature of linguistic meaning and subjectivity- as argued by the proponents of Post-Structuralism in the humanities."[292]

Peter Hylton's *Propositions, Functions, and Analysis – Selected Essays on Russell's Philosophy* is a historical and critical evaluation of Russell's work. There he writes programmatically, "I have spoken of the essays as concerned to recapture and articulate Russell's philosophical vision. In doing this, one sees something of what it is to have a philosophical vision, as opposed merely to expressing opinions about this or that topic."[293] If one sees it as merely expressing opinions one might fail to see "how ideas can interact to support each other" and how "one idea lends credibility to others

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[291] Mulhall, S. (1994). *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the ordinary*. Oxford University Press, 188.
[292] Mulhall, Ibid.,
[293] Hylton, 2005, 2

which in turn lend credibility to others, and so on; the whole forms a system which is more powerful and perhaps more plausible than any of its parts."[294] Two different approaches.

To those familiar with Wittgenstein's work, it is no news that the attention to "parts" rather than to the "system" is thematic in the *Investigations*. But isn't it as though the interlocutor's claims and sentences featured in the *Investigations* have been stripped off what Hylton elsewhere calls their "framework"? One might say, what sustains the interlocutors' sanity is the framework in which the sense and purpose of their assertions could be explained. Omitting that framework takes away from them the option to account for their claims in this way. By entering the inheritance scene, it is as though they deliberately forfeit the key/password which discloses the intention behind their claims.

 So how is a signifying and critical relationship between the fragments, quotations and their origins etc. maintained? How can **Wittgensteinian citations of philosophical "rubbles" retain a critical relationship with history?** The figure of the child and the scene of inheritance are once again, key. Philosophy, similar to a child learning a first language, assumes a comparative stance of a learner. In acquiring our native language or any other, our speech is not original but secondary. Philosophy, from the stance of a learner, comes to understand that its scope and purpose are not self-imposed but are accepted from external sources, much like a child assimilates language and culture. This realization entails a perpetual process of re-engagement with not only the substance of its discourse when prompted to contribute but also with the manner and tonality of its expression. Consequently, this defines the philosophical endeavour as one of re-

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[294] Hylton, Ibid.

acceptance, which deals with the balance of consistency and change within the cultural

and intellectual legacies it receives and bequeaths.[295]

> And in the recognition of how little can be taught; how, so to speak,
> helpless or impotent the teaching is, compared with the enormity of what is
> learned. As though [Wittgenstein] sees philosophical disputes as
> exemplifying this concurrent outsideness and fatedness to a culture. Or as
> dramatizing, re-capitulating, the original facts of this asymmetry between
> teaching and learning. (Then the motive to philosophy can be thought of as a
> desire to true this asymmetry.)[296]

The critical relationship between fragments, quotations, and their origins in

Wittgensteinian philosophy is maintained through the figures of the child and inheritance.

Philosophy, like a child acquiring language, assumes the stance of a learner, recognizing

that its substance is not self-generated but inherited. This comparative stance

acknowledges that philosophy's role is not merely self-directed but is shaped by historical

and cultural legacies. Thus, philosophy must continuously re-engage with its inherited

discourses, balancing consistency with the evolving tones of cultural transmission. This

ongoing "re-acceptance" is central to philosophy's method, where the learner realizes the

asymmetry between teaching and learning, highlighting philosophy's limited power to

impart compared with what must be absorbed. Wittgenstein's scene of learning is

dramatized as a space of "reading" and "therapy," underscoring the philosophical weight

of the child's role as a site of origin, pre-civilization, and cultural heritage. As Benjamin

notes in his essay on Karl Kraus, the child, embodying both innocence and resistance,

becomes a figure that defies conventional ideals of maturity, serving instead as a primal

vessel of language and history for Kraus, Wittgenstein, and Cavell.[297] The identification

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[295] See Kompridis, N. (2011). *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future*. MIT Press.)

[296] *COR*, 112

[297] Benjamin, W. (1979). *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter, London: NLB and Verso

of philosophy with the perspective of the child in my eyes provides a sound and helpful characterization of and addition to what Goldfarb has described in the context of Wittgenstein's reading of Augustine and his philosophical method more broadly as "intentional naiveté". Let me explain by first introducing the famous opening of the *Investigations,* referencing Augustine's *Confessions:*

> When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant to point it out. This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, indicates the affections of the soul when it desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified. And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes.[298]

Wittgenstein says that the passage "gives a particular picture of the essence of human language", to which Cavell replies: "This doesn't seem obviously true. How does Wittgenstein know this?"[299] Augustine's reflections, as quoted by Wittgenstein, may initially seem trivial, simply describing how children learn the names of objects and how to articulate their needs. To the average reader, Augustine's account appears unremarkable, hardly a basis for profound theory of language. According to Goldfarb, Wittgenstein's subsequent remark in the *Investigations* stating that Augustine's passage paints a "definite picture of the essence of language" is meant "to call up amazement".[300] He posits that although Augustine's remarks might seem mundane, they could – under the

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[298] Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 8, quoted in PI.
[299] Cavell, S. (1995). *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida*. Blackwell, Mass., Cambridge, 256
[300] Goldfarb, 268

right circumstances – be interpreted as forwarding a philosophical theory. And he concluded that this shift from the ordinary to the metaphysical happens when we use Augustine's words within philosophical debates. By quoting "naming objects" or "expressing states of mind" from Augustine's text, Wittgenstein's aim, according to Goldfarb, is to reveal how these everyday notions, when placed in a philosophical context, can gain a weight that transforms them into something un-ordinary, metaphysical: "The forced naivete is thus meant to unearth how things we say, things that in ordinary contexts are the most ordinary sorts of descriptions, can become something else."[301]

While I am generally sympathetic to Goldfarb account, it leaves unaddressed the general context of the quotation from Augustine, which is not entirely "innocent", or un-remarkable, as Rupert Read has acutely observed: "Augustine relied on God to give him powers to understand language as an individual: that last turns out to be key to what Wittgenstein found substantively troubling about the 'Augustinian picture'."[302] Read in broader context of the *Confessions* and in conjunction with Augustine's major piece *De Magistro* it is clear that Augustine, in his account of language-learning, does rely on God. This is also confirmed by the Augustine scholar Burnyeat, who writes: *"For Augustine, the self-aware weakness of a certain kind of teacherly language – a language he gradually learns to employ in his dialogue with his son simply acknowledges the powerlessness of human language in general to establish presence when measured against the presence of the world with-out and truth within, both of which are illuminated by God."*[303] Burnyeat shows that Augustine's philosophy of language serves his more general thesis of the

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[301] Ibid., 260

[302] Read, Rupert. 2020. *Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy: Thinking Through His Philosophical Investigations*. Routledge.

[303] Burnyeat, M. F. 1987. "The Inaugural Address: Wittgenstein and Augustine's De Magistro." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 61: 1-24, 4.

inadequacy of language to teach us "anything at all". Augustine's *De Magistro,* a Socratic dialogue written well before the *Confessions,* aims to show that learning a language requires the student to go through a transformative process that words alone cannot elicit – hence only with the assistance of God.

We can improve Goldfarb's suggestion that Wittgenstein is intentionally trying to shock his reader by detecting a theory of the essence of language in Augustine's passage, by highlighting that the generality implicit in a theory of language is already present also in Augustine's text. With that, a critical relationship with original text is maintained, but at the same time it is broken for Wittgenstein does not try to situate Augustine's quotation in the context of book – he does not give voice to Augustine' as a philosopher, to what he might have had in mind. *GOD,* and then this:

> Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right: the language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass him the stones and to do so in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they make use of a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.[304]

Wittgenstein manner of reading and interpreting a text leaves the context of the studied segment aside and instead lets himself be instructed by it, entirely naively. Here bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use performs a radical break with the original while maintaining the generality of it. The naiveté I would like to attest to Wittgenstein is the way in which this process of initiation and instruction *really*

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[304] PI 2

comes out of nowhere. It is naïve because it has no regard for intended purpose of the original quotation.

Wittgenstein's method of reading, like Cavell's, demonstrates a radical departure from conventional interpretation. He leaves behind the philosophical or literary context of a passage, allowing himself to be guided by the text in a manner that appears naïve – free from the intended purpose or theoretical framework of the original. In this approach, words are not treated as bound by their metaphysical or theoretical origins but are instead reclaimed in the ordinary. This movement from metaphysical abstraction back to the ordinary is central to Wittgenstein's project, a process that breaks with the original context yet maintains a form of generality and relevance. It is this naiveté, this deliberate disregard for the framework in which the words were initially set, that allows Wittgenstein to reanimate them in the "rough ground" of everyday life, making them accessible once more to human understanding.

Benjamin's reflections on quotation, particularly in his discussion of Karl Kraus, mirror this approach. Benjamin writes that "to quote a word is to call it by its name," highlighting how Kraus brings language out of its original context and into his own sphere, where it is no longer confined by the intentions of its source.[305] By wrenching words from their previous setting, Kraus, like Wittgenstein, breaks their conventional function and allows them to return to what Benjamin calls their "real origin" – language itself, as used in the ordinary world. In this act, the word is both saved and chastised, liberated from the theoretical or institutional frameworks that have concealed its ordinary meaning, and restored to its primal function in communication. This act of quoting, in

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[305] Benjamin, 434

Wittgenstein's terms, parallels the concept of "mis-reading" discussed throughout this dissertation. Just as Cavell inherits Wittgenstein's "mis-reading" of philosophical texts, this mode of interpreting a text is not concerned with upholding the unity or autonomy of the original. Instead, it reflects a deeper engagement with the words themselves, as if torn from their context and repurposed in ordinary language games. This process echoes Wittgenstein's therapeutic method, which seeks not to solve philosophical problems through theoretical means but to dissolve them by returning language to its everyday use.

The act of quotation, as Benjamin suggests, not only liberates the words from their theoretical confines but also transforms their function. As discussed earlier, this is not a mere play of meanings but a profound shift in the text's function – its power is reactivated when it is placed in a new, ordinary context. The removal from context disrupts the philosophical or scientific "passwords" that once defined and concealed its function, revealing a new, "real origin." In Kraus and Benjamin, this origin is simply "language" itself; for Wittgenstein and Cavell, it is the ordinary – language as it lives and breathes in everyday life.

Thus, Wittgenstein's and Cavell's "mis-reading" and Benjamin's theory of quotation both perform what might be called a redemption of language. They liberate words from the abstractions and metaphysical entanglements of philosophy, science, or art, restoring them to their ordinary use. This act of mis-reading, much like Benjamin's view of quotation, exposes the inherent tension between origin and destruction, between context and meaning. As Cavell suggests, the act of reading becomes an ethical gesture, reclaiming the human by resisting the tyranny of philosophical systems and abstraction. Language, thus freed from its metaphysical bonds, regains its vitality within the structure

of a new text, grounded in the ordinary, where meaning is no longer obscured but made visible through this dialectical process of reclamation.

"How wonderful", says Benjamin, echoing Wittgenstein's non-moralizing attitude, that "this voice [of Kraus] approaches not to punish but to save".[306] Since the destructive moment is simultaneously an act of redemption the relationship with the original text is not completely broken. When Wittgenstein quotes himself in *PI* 134, "This is how things are", he retains the original meaning as well as the intended generality of the sentence. Here, Wittgenstein's auto-quotation still carries with it the meaning and generality of the precursor project, but since the meaning of the words is now consummated in ordinary language (not in a highly technical book), a rupture materializes, not though through re-interpretation or deconstruction, but rather through displacement. Stripped off its original context Wittgenstein's master key "[p, ξ, N(ξ)]" has no more passwords to its excuse and thus speaks directly to the child, messianically.

Here, Wittgenstein's method resembles Kraus's radical use of quotation: both disrupt the original context, but in doing so, they bring the words closer to their "true" origin—their everyday use, or what Benjamin refers to as "language consummated." In both cases, the act of extracting and repositioning the text represents a rupture that is simultaneously an act of restoration. Words are stripped of their original "passwords"— the theoretical and philosophical frameworks that once contained them—and are made accessible in a new, more direct way.

This process of destruction and redemption parallels what Cavell terms the "repudiation of the human" in philosophical texts. Cavell, like Wittgenstein, seeks to

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[306] Benjamin, 435

uncover the ways in which philosophy, by abstracting itself from the ordinary, has left the human element behind. Wittgenstein's peculiar reading method – his refusal to engage with philosophical texts historically or contextually – can be understood as a response to this very absence. By taking texts out of their original philosophical framework, Wittgenstein, much like Kraus, allows them to resonate on a more immediate, human level.

2. Concluding Remarks

The central aim of the preceding was to show how Cavell's general motif of the repudiation of the human in philosophy's history and in modern history originates, or at least finds expression in Wittgenstein's peculiar way of responding to texts in a critical fashion. Cavell from the beginning sets up the difficult task of interpreting philosophy under these terms. While my main aim was certainly no to provide evidence for such a claim and project as this would demand a thorough survey of the history of modern philosophy, what I sought so accomplish instead is to find this peculiar and speculative notion of philosophy's past in Wittgenstein attitude towards a text.

In so far as a take Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein to be authentic – the *Investigations* undoubtedly portrait a culturally or otherwise motivated drive to move beyond the limits of reason, beyond the ordinary – I find my intuition that Wittgenstein's peculiar reading of philosophy can be a reflection or a further explanation for the general theme of the book encapsulated in the term skepticism. In doing so, I have ventured upon a third path. While orthodox readings portray Wittgenstein's method, his view on the (public) nature of language, his rejection of privacy, etc., as a direct attack on previously

held accounts of the mental, of language, of logic, etc., therapeutic readings find Wittgenstein to be "merely" interested in the way we (as philosophers) can so easily be deceived in thinking. While I find the former too speculative (Wittgenstein does not explain who his historical adversaries are), and the former too disconnected from our past and from what might have motivated Wittgenstein extrinsically. The extrinsic dimension of the human drive towards skepticism is of course the overarching theme of Cavell's work as it links the emergence of skepticism with societal transformations. As I have tried to incorporate this perspective not only as a theme of the *Investigations* as a whole, but also in the manner it was written, or on the manner it reads and responds to other texts, I was naturally drawn to suspect that Wittgenstein's refusal to read others correctly (contextually, historically, etc.) lies in the way these texts affected him, that they left him out. Here, I hope, we are not far off from something Cavell called the repudiation of the human. Since the authors Cavell and Wittgenstein are responding to, do not write, as it were, for the human but for philosophy as science, and science as the pursuit of unknow knowledge, it was important for me to highlight that the repudiation of the human has to be read into a text. If anything, Cavell presented a meta-narrative for the history of philosophy, which can, but does not have to be acknowledged.

CONCLUSION

In a paper of pivotal significance for this dissertation, Cavell writes in a

programmatic manner:

> Those of us who have claimed responsibility for ordinary language
> procedures, or profit from them, have not to my mind satisfactorily described
> their performance. I do not mean, it goes without saying, that someone cannot
> perform them without being able to describe their performance. But to the
> extent that these procedures are philosophically undescribed, or
> underdescribed, ordinary language philosophy remains an esoteric
> practice.[307]

My intention, as was Cavell's was not to advocate for any modifications to ordinary

language philosophy or offer recommendations on how it should be approached. Instead,

my objective is to emphasize, with the support of Cavell, an attitude that is frequently

overlooked in the manner in which ordinary language philosophers articulate their

critiques of philosophy and philosophical texts. This attitude, from my perspective,

encompasses (or perhaps ought to encompass) a way of thinking, a form of rationality, or

an intellectual disposition which manifests itself as a form of reading, and,

psychologically, as an attitude of resistance towards a text. The act of Wittgensteinian

reading, of taking words away from their (philosophical) context and returning them to

the sphere of the ordinary, is a political or ethical gesture aiming towards claiming back

the human from philosophy.

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[307] Cavell, Stanley. 1984. "The Politics of Interpretation (As Opposed to What?)." In *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*. University of Chicago Press: 2

Cavell inherits Wittgenstein's work as a "philosophy of reading" and explores this intellectual disposition through the way in which Wittgenstein reads texts. I argued that their approach requires a kind of "mis"-reading of texts – breaking apart a text's unity and autonomy.

The notion that this dialogue, facilitated by a distinct approach to reading texts, aims to preserve the perpetual dialectic of skepticism and the ordinary, the oscillation between departure from and return to the ordinary, is crucial. However, portraying Wittgenstein as a reader of this kind, an intentional "mis"-reader of philosophical texts, required an exploratory and experimental approach since he is not traditionally regarded as a reader of philosophy in the conventional sense, which might support the therapeutic interpretation of his work. Nonetheless, as I have emphasized repeatedly, the *Investigations* have been perceived by many as insufficient in presenting philosophical ideas or theories. Recognizing and comprehending this aspect has been enlightening for me and has spurred my pursuit of the concept of mis-reading within the context of ordinary language philosophy.

Ordinary language philosophers have often faced criticism for being perceived as conservative and not taking philosophical discourse seriously. However, recognizing that this apparent lack of seriousness is actually one of its distinguishing features would be a significant achievement. It suggests that calling out the words of a philosophical text "by its name," as Benjamin has put it, amounts to a task that is distinct from mere philosophical commentary or linguistic analysis. Commentary entails accepting the theoretical and methodological parameters of a philosophical project; Cavell and Wittgenstein break these parameters – a necessary manoeuvre to allow the words to speak

for themselves rather than being confined within the constructed framework of a philosophical text. Describing a text's framework, philosophical school, introduction, etc., as mere excuses was intended to emphasize that they can be examined in a different manner – through the lens of ordinary language philosophy, that is in of the repudiation thereof.

The extensive first chapter focused on a close reading of Part II of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*. The concept of "siting" and "studying" skepticism, which is developed in this chapter, challenges a neat fit within the analytic tradition, which urged Cavell to move forward in a new direction. This essay presented original insights by exploring Part II of *The Claim of Reason* as a transformational text. Here, Cavell confronts the attempt to refute skepticism, leading to a new vision for ordinary language philosophy. Notably, prominent interpreters of this part of the text, such as Sandra Laugier, James Conant, and Hamawaki, have, in my view, overlooked the transformational aspects of this text and the direction in which Cavell wishes to take Wittgenstein's legacy.

This legacy is more authentically present in Part IV of the *Claim* which in a way completes Cavell's turn towards ordinary language philosophy as means to interpret philosophical texts and to problematize, make visible the subject of skepticism (as he now conceives it) as a problem and an opportunity for philosophy. The "truth of skepticism" is not anymore only a symptom of the failure to refute traditional material object skepticism, as in Part II, but a manifestation of a practice of philosophy which operates under the acknowledgement that skepticism is not there to be refuted, but to be studied. The philosophical step Part IV undertakes is to locate skepticism as a human phenomenon, something humans fantasize, are urged to fantasize. Under this light, not

only the human existentially conceived but also the history of modernity and of modern philosophy receives a new interpretation of itself.

Most importantly, the drama of our failures to know the other, which the *Claim* depicts, are not real representations of our lives as knowers. As the book engages with Shakespeare's plays, it remains thematically within the realm of philosophy, of the theoretical. This is not to say that Cavell does not believe that the modern scientific paradigm of modernity has *not* arrived at the realm of the common, the everyday, but it is not the main purpose of the text. In this light I understand Cavell's interpretation of the *Investigations* as depicting a culture in decline. The *Investigations* do not depict or portray a realistic scenario, nor our lives with each other, but a possibility for it after philosophy remained silent.

Chapter Three presented an improved reading of Cavell's late text "Declining Decline" challenging the most intuitive interpretation of the text, which suggests it as a cultural interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. The term "cultural" in this context signifies the idea that the skeptical voices in the *Investigations* represent the voices of a culture that Wittgenstein philosophically and ethically opposes – implying that these skeptical voices are representative of the way a culture thinks. In opposition to this proposition, I have suggested that Cavell's reading presents the *Investigations* as a fictional world where a skeptical philosophy has occupied the ways a culture thinks. The realization that Wittgenstein, in a sense, exaggerates the impact of philosophy on the way a culture thinks, finds support in the fifth chapter. Chapter Four and Five aim to make the case that Wittgenstein is a "creative" misreader of philosophical texts, someone who takes the words of philosophy very personally, as acts of personal instructions. This form of

reading a text and intellectual sensitivity demonstrates the kind of responsiveness we would encounter later in theoretical form in Cavell's work.

The concept of "mis-reading" serves as a central motif in this dissertation, not merely as an interpretive strategy but as a philosophical method that challenges the boundaries of traditional textual analysis. This is explained in Chaptes Four and Five.

By "mis-reading," Cavell situates the philosophical text within a dialectic of estrangement and return, echoing Wittgenstein's own dramatization of philosophical problems. The reader is invited not to resolve these problems, but to engage in a transformative encounter with them. In doing so, Cavell not only inherits Wittgenstein's method of philosophical therapy but expands it into a broader critique of modernity, culture, and the history of ideas. The act of "mis-reading," as I have emphasized, destabilizes the conventional frameworks of philosophical discourse by challenging its internal coherence.

However, I acknowledge that this approach may appear speculative or even overly experimental, particularly for those who seek clear-cut resolutions to philosophical problems. In more traditional approaches, textual integrity is often treated as sacrosanct; the goal of interpretation is to clarify the author's intentions, to restore the unity of the argument, or to place the text within an established canon. In contrast, my adoption of "mis-reading" draws from Cavell's willingness to treat the text as a site of disruption, where the ordinary, the everyday, and the skeptical are allowed to speak. This is not to suggest that the practice of "mis-reading" rejects rigor or coherence, but that it opens a space for rethinking the nature of philosophical thought itself. Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein shows that philosophy, at its most productive, is not about solving

philosophical problems but about responding to them in ways that resist closure. This method, then, can be seen as a "siting" of skepticism—placing skepticism at the heart of both philosophical inquiry and the text itself, as something to be lived and studied rather than refuted.

In this light, "mis-reading" serves not only as a method of philosophical critique but also as an ethical and political stance. By resisting the urge to resolve skepticism, Cavell and Wittgenstein engage with the text in a manner that mirrors their broader critique of modernity's desire for certainty. The act of deliberately disrupting the text's internal structure, or of reading it "against the grain," becomes a gesture that refuses the intellectual hegemony of traditional philosophical and cultural or political projects.

It is worth noting that this method does not attempt to place Cavell and Wittgenstein outside the tradition they critique but rather engages with it from within. The "mis-reading" is a form of internal critique, one that both acknowledges and subverts the text's philosophical ambitions. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Cavell's practice of reading philosophical texts not only reveals the skepticism they contain but also offers an opportunity to re-imagine and rewrite these texts as sites of resistance.

In acknowledging that the implications of this approach may not always be immediately clear, I see this as an invitation for further philosophical exploration rather than as a limitation. The "mis-reading" that I advocate here encourages readers to engage with texts in a way that is dynamic, open-ended, and deeply personal, reflecting Wittgenstein's own assertion that philosophy is not about discovering objective truths but about achieving intellectual clarity, a clarity only attainable once the false truth of textual coherence and logic is exposed.

By embracing this form of reading, Cavell and Wittgenstein offer us a way to preserve philosophy's ethical core – a core that refuses the comforts of finality and certainty, and instead thrives in the continued oscillation between skepticism and the ordinary. Rather than viewing this as a speculative exercise, I believe this approach is a necessary extension of Cavell's broader project to reclaim the human from the abstractions of philosophical discourse, to allow the words of philosophy to speak for themselves, outside of the theoretical constructs in which they are often confined. This, ultimately, is the promise of "mis-reading" – not as a failure of interpretation.

Reading for Cavell and Wittgenstein, we said, aims at preserving the skeptical impulse to repudiate our shared criteria, make it know to us. But while its preservation will proceed essentially through the critique of philosophical texts, critique does not wish to incarcerate but rather to restore human creativity, philosophy of religion (Augustine), philosophy of science (Russell), logic (*Tractatus*): "Skepticism, in Cavell's view, is a condition created through a free way of thinking."[308] The culture Cavell envisions for himself (hence for others) is not ordinary (a philosophy "self-stultified") but a *self-consciously* skeptical one. Wittgenstein portrays a culture where the voices of the ordinary have kept silent for already too long. Philosophy's starvation, farced to the point of death, is the result of a limitless society – where philosophy (skepticism) has been left unattended, moving into dangerous abstractions. The Soviet interpretation of Marxism is an apprehensible example of unattended philosophy – heading towards a catastrophe. But most of the time philosophy will find more subtle ways. It played its part in the emergence of a new form of societal and political self-organisation, in the Enlightenment project.

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[308] Löfgren, 2021, 5.

But loss of meaning, of purpose and orientation incurred by institutional transformations of the academic, art, market and political world are necessary repercussions of the Enlightenment project and pose tangible threats to subjectivity and personal freedom and expressiveness. But this doesn't mean that we should stop probing the limits of thought and reason and the ordinary and move beyond the human, conjure utopias, etc. As one would perhaps not expect, Cavell does not lapse into a theoretically motivated critique of enlightenment and of modernity, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, when they write: "Today the order of life allows no room for the ego to draw spiritual or intellectual conclusions. The thought which leads to knowledge is neutralized and used as a mere qualification on specific labor markets and to heighten the commodity value of the personality."[309] This is a powerful criticism of capitalist society. Hundreds if not thousands of young men and women went on to study the humanities, philosophy, sociology, etc., if it wasn't for Adorno and the Frankfurt School. An entire youth culture was held captive by such ideas. But Cavell has nothing to offer as to a practical and direct criticism of a culture like Adorno and Horkheimer. This is because he lacks a compelling vision of the materialistic reality of a culture.

Kraus, Cavell, and Wittgenstein are philosophers of language rubbles, of chatter and slogans, of what people say and fantasize, in newspapers or in philosophy books. Their analytical framework is not designed to analyse the piece-meal institutional materialization of ideas and words. In this sense they are all prophetic thinkers: they start

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[309] Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. 1997. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming. Verso: 424.

from A and then go to C directly, from mottoes in the book Creation to reality. They are not, as we might call Adorno and Horkheimer today, social scientists.

"It does not appear unthinkable that the bulk of an entire culture, call it the public discourse of the culture, the culture thinking aloud about itself, hence believing itself to be talking philosophy, should become ungovernably inane."[310] It is not unthinkable that a culture becomes ungovernable inane, as for example in Wittgenstein's portrait of a transcending philosophical culture, but it is not realistic either. What Cavell and Wittgenstein have to offer are objects of comparison, fantasized brushes of skepticism that require acceptance or rejection from its culture and from its reader. They are an invitation to think rather than to analyse and liberate. Their points of departure are not fantasies proper, say political fantasies, but ordinary words, fantasized. "Our question is not whether the enlightenment is good or bad, but whether we can survive its solutions."[311] With that, Cavell welcomes skepticism, as one might put it, as a necessary consequence or side-effect of the solutions provided by the Enlightenment. The main task for philosophy after the acknowledgement of skepticism is not its refutation but its conservation.

The process of conservation, I take it, is best understood as a continuation or reinterpretation of Hegel's philosophical project. Since Cavell's work as whole, we could say, is conscious of the truth of skepticism, both in its existential and historical materialization, the history of skepticism (of philosophy, the arts, etc.) relates to Cavell's system in the same way in which "lower philosophies" relate to *Hegel's* system. Both systems "sublate lower ones, embodying the principles that they advanced in isolation,

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[310] CR, 95
[311] CH, 21

again with some important caveats in place."[312] A good example for this is Descartes'

Meditations. As Hammer puts it, hinting at Cavell's general diagnosis of modernity:

"According to Cavell, Shakespeare (along with Montaigne and *Descartes[313]*) is perhaps

the first major intellectual in Western history to have fully registered and responded to

the early modern collapse of epistemic, moral, and political absolutes. Whereas *skeptical*

schools of philosophy surely existed far back in antiquity, the issue posed in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries is no longer how to conduct oneself in an uncertain world; the

issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world."[314] Giordano even goes so far

as to say that "Cavell treats the problem of modern skepticism as a socio-political

problem, the cataclysmic loss of divine guarantee as both a historical and a mythic

event."[315] Because Descartes addresses this historical moment of crisis with the provision

of a new foundation to knowledge Cavell will say that this provision is itself an

interpretation of the original problem posed by skepticism: conceiving the lack of

foundation an intellectual lack where instead we ought to understand that there is no

foundation other than my own finitude. Since the *Meditations* address the problem of

skepticism as though it was an intellectual lack, they do so unconscious of its truth (of the

truth of skepticism), hence unconscious in Cavell's eyes, of itself. Wittgenstein

adumbrates a self-conscious response to skepticism; He actualizes it by conceptualizing

its truth into a self-conscious philosophical system. Not Descartes' "principles" but rather

his "approach", his skeptical method we should say, is sublated in the hands of Cavell's

system.

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[312] Inwood, M. J. 1992. *A Hegel Dictionary*. Blackwell Publishing: 292
[313] My emphasis.
[314] Hammer, Espen. 2002. *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity, and the Ordinary*. Polity Press: 77
[315] Giordano, 2015, 211

Critique ("the criticism a culture produces of itself")[316] offers its culture a mode of thinking, a method if you wish, which allows itself to stay in conversation with the image of human nature it produces, or with the image it imagines for it, and to make known to itself that the denial of the human is a standing possibility, but also that return and redemption are. The image it responds to will not present itself in terms of general statements about the condition of the human or as theories, but in the form of modes of inquiry, in what philosophy is and *does* rather than what it says, in the formation of its skeptical history, elucidated by the act of philosophical reading and interpretation. The term "philosophy" stands for *how* a culture thinks or might think in the future. For Cavell and Wittgenstein the criticism of a culture is enacted as a criticism of philosophy.

Descartes' skeptical project however is an unexampled endeavour. In what sense could *its truth* be of any interest to Cavell, or for that matter, to philosophy? If Cavell wants to conceive skepticism ubiquitous to modern thought and modern history then the *Meditations* are perhaps not the right place to begin a study of skepticism, and to mount its preservation – to make its truth a self-conscious possibility. Something else needs to be the subject of this study, or *more* than that. Cavell will find further "characterizations" of "skepticism as such" in Shakespeare's tragedies. But even for a history of skepticism to abide by the demand placed upon philosophy it itself needs to be more than mere history or say more than mere literary theory. As he made strikingly clear from the beginning, the proper place for the ordinary and for skepticism in philosophy is adumbrated in Kant's system, a struggle with and against reason. But if reason (or its limits) cannot be instantiated ad hoc and if (and because of that) skepticism is *true,* then

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[316] CR 175

reason and skepticism come in waves, diurnally and periodically. Hegel's model for a history of philosophy, of the arts and of religion serves Cavell a much-needed example with which the Kantian heritage can outlast. He writes: "Following what I construe Kant's examples of the transgression of reason, in their intersection with Shakespearean drama, to suggest (perhaps it is Hegel's suggestion): that the arts, beginning with tragedy (or in Hegel's aesthetics, end with tragedy), may variously been, or claimed, as a chapter of the history, or development, of philosophy, hence perhaps of certain of its manifestations."[317] An early phrasing of the same Hegelian suggestion foreshadows the accomplishments of his late work: "It would not hurt my intuitions, to anticipate further than this book [*The Claim of Reason]* actually goes, where someone able to show that my discoveries in the regions of the skeptical problem of the other are, rightly understood, further characterizations of (material object) skepticism, of skepticism as such."[318] What Cavell had earlier only anticipated will later develop into fully-grown study of the "skeptical problem of the other" in the plays of Shakespeare, Hollywood movies, and elsewhere. With these studies completed, one could argue, Cavell consummated his *system.* In this system the history of skepticism (the continuous possibility of avoidance and of the acceptance of the world and the other) now lives in a single oeuvre conscious of itself, hence conscious of and through its sublated content.

From this Cavell imagines a prospective role for philosophy, and consequently, a future trajectory for the project of reason which had initially (throughout the Enlightenment period) emerged with the objective to assign philosophy a distinct role and responsibility amidst the sciences and the humanities. In the quest of this objective,

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[317] PT 14
[318] CR 451

philosophy (in Cavell) is essentially envisioned as ethical; it endeavours to redeem its own past and present in relation to what both Wittgenstein and Cavell term as the ordinary and the everyday.

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