

Getting To The Heart Of It: Cavell, Philosophy And What Matters

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▶ **To cite this version:**

Brad Samuel Tabas. Getting To The Heart Of It: Cavell, Philosophy And What Matters. Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies, 2020, 2020 (8). hal-03148547

HAL Id: hal-03148547

https://ensta-bretagne.hal.science/hal-03148547

Submitted on 23 Feb 2021

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2. Getting to the Heart of It: Cavell, Philosophy and What Matters

BRAD TABAS

> The road that took me to philosophy was an attempt
> to discover a way to write that I could believe.
> CAVELL, *A Pitch of Philosophy*

Retrospections

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I was seated in cafés in Paris, intermittently employed as an adjunct professor, and engaged in a struggle to find my professional place and philosophical voice. I lived in this way for almost six years. At present I am a tenured professor at a prestigious French engineering school, seated at my desk and enjoying the sense of well-being and intellectual liberty that such a position provides.

I perhaps would not mention this but for the light that it sheds on the following pages. When I wrote them, my feelings regarding Cavell were mitigated. I admired or even idolized him as a writer of philosophy, and these pages follow Cavell's example on a voyage towards philosophical writing, taking heart from his courage and his "arrogation" of philosophical reason. Yet in my admiration there was also bitterness. Cavell, quoting Thoreau, "unblushingly publish[ed] [his] guilt," in the autobiographical work published as *Little Did I Know*. I credited him for this, but as he offered up examples illustrating the ways in which "the human race is an expensive race. It lives off others," I found that I could not help but regard him askance.[1] I found in his work an entanglement between Cavell's rise to a position of prominence among American philosophers

1. Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 447.

and hurts and harms that were incurred along the way. I felt that *Little Did I Know* demonstrated ways in which not only his livelihood, but also his philosophical works, were "taken out of the mouths, or bodies, of others."[2]

One example that particularly struck me was Cavell's recounting of the treatment of Marshall Cohen, a friend and rival for a tenured post in the Harvard Philosophy Department. Cavell got the job as the Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and General Theory of Value, while Cohen, a figure "made, and h[aving] made himself" for the position, did not.[3] Cavell admits to having hesitated to accept his chair because Harvard had "mistreated a friend,"[4] though in the end he just got on with it, commenting that worrying about such things could "drive one mad."[5] I understood this, but I felt a profound sympathy with Cohen. I had had the experience of seeing friends and former teachers denied tenure, and I recognized what a profound traumatism this was. For if a chair at Harvard represents money and stability, an office of one's own and so forth, being denied tenure above all amounts to a repudiation of one's voice. It amounts to the denial that one has something to contribute to philosophy. I felt this acutely, because at that time, I had not been denied tenure, but I was striving to find the courage to believe that I had something to contribute to philosophy, and I felt that the world was contriving to deny me even the right to attempt philosophizing. When I had applied for tenure-track jobs I had had but one interview, and that had not born fruit. I lacked even the baseline stability to write and research associated with a tenure-track job. In consequence, the cost of writing was ragingly apparent to me. As romantic as writing in Parisian cafés might sound, those rickety tables were but a poor excuse for an office, and in the economy of the existence that I then lived those moments of writing were the exception, not the norm. My quotidian consisted in shuttling back and forth between the campuses of the six different universities that employed me as a temporary worker, preparing as best I could for my overabundant course load while trying to spend "quality" time with my wife and newborn son, and (of course), sending in applications for that dream job which would permit me the time and place to write and think (a post like the one that I now enjoy.)

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2. Ibid., 447.
3. Ibid., 392.
4. Ibid., 415.
5. Ibid., 446.

From this perspective, I regarded with some bitterness the marvelous expressive courage and confidence that I saw manifested in Cavell's writing, and which I excavated as being of exemplary value. But even now I am unsure whether the idea of speaking from the heart as a response to the paralyses of skepticism is really something that one can do if one is not ensconced in a chair at Harvard, benefitting from what Cavell calls the "Saint Matthew Effect" ("To them that hath shall it be given.")[6] In retrospect, there is probably some truth to this. This paper was rejected when years ago I first tried to publish it, and that is perhaps because if it begins in philosophy, it ends in fantasy or religion. It expresses the reasoned hope that all that one has really to do is trust in one's genius, willing oneself to speak from the heart, following the example set by Emerson, Wittgenstein and Cavell, and one will speak philosophy. Yet looking back at this paper from where I now stand, I still see some use in the journey that it endeavors to undertake. A question that animates the following is thinking about what counts as philosophy, if philosophy after Wittgenstein cannot be imagined to be legitimated as such by recourse to logic or to institutions. Today I am less engaged with this question than I once was, yet some version of it still matters to me.

I teach moral philosophy at an engineering school. In a pitch of Emersonian perfectionism I am constantly suggesting that my students ought to strive to become environmentally conscious actors, to master their consumption of energy, to think about recycling, to resist fostering consumerism, to think about the social and ecological consequences of technological innovations and so forth. Yet like Cavell, who wrote moral philosophy and yet foregrounded his own moral fallibility through his autobiographical writing, I feel myself to stand on shaky ground. I myself do not live sustainably, I myself do not always think about curbing the consequences of my actions. I live not only on the "bodies of others" but on the future of all. As a result, I often ask myself if I have the right to act or to speak in the name of that which I am aware that I know not how to accomplish. Because of this, and in this light, I find a new appreciation for Cavell, or at least for my reading of Cavell. For in a way—albeit in a different way—it is more difficult for me now to arrogate reason, to give public voice to what matters, than it was when I had no office, no chair of my own. For as I

6. Ibid., 292.

write, here in my office, I recognize that I have come here in my diesel car, that I sit in a room heated by fossil fuels, surrounded by disposable plastic objects, that I receive a paycheck from the military industrial complex, that I type on a computer made with rare metals that were almost undoubtedly harvested with human blood. Moreover, though I tell others to craft their lives differently, I hardly know myself how to live otherwise. Yet despite these contradictions, or perhaps because of them—and because of Cavell, or at least of the reading of Cavell presented below—I stand by what I have written below.

1. Ordinary Language and the Paradoxical Grammar of "Philosophy"

Stanley Cavell, alongside Wittgenstein and Austin, took himself to have initiated a new way of doing philosophy, what he called "ordinary language" philosophizing. The procedure involved in this form of philosophizing is "looking at what we say."[7] To philosophize, we simply think about what we would say in certain situations and contexts. We are looking, to quote Cavell, for why we "grant any concept to anything, why we call things as we do."[8]

The genius of this new form of philosophizing seems to be that it reveals that many of our philosophical problems emerge when philosophers use words in ways that depart from the ordinary. As Cavell explains "I understand Wittgenstein's having described his later philosophy as an effort to "bring words back" to their everyday use (*Philosophical Investigations*, §116; my [Cavell's] emphasis), as though the words we use in philosophy, in any reflection about our concerns, are away."[9] Taking this into account one might say that many of the skeptical problems that relate to philosophy are simply issues associated with word use, problems that emerge when language goes on holiday. Yet if this is so, it strikes me that the method of ordinary language philosophy creates another problem for itself.

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7. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.
8. Ibid., 30.
9. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We* Say?: A Book of Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Kindle edn.

Say we flip the same procedure around and apply it to philosophy. If ordinary language philosophy is able to critique traditional philosophy for its abuses of ordinary language, this is perhaps because it has ceased to be and do what philosophy does. *Which is to say that ordinary language philosophy is not what we ordinarily call philosophy*. Wittgenstein seems to have felt the force of this concern. He is reported to have said that what he was "doing" when he was doing philosophy "was not the same kind of thing as Plato or Berkeley had done, but that we may feel that what he was doing *takes the place* of what Plato and Berkeley did, though it is really a different thing."[10]

Does that mean that what he is doing is philosophy? Or is it not philosophy? And if it is something other than philosophy, then what is it? Does ordinary language philosophy, via its recourse to ordinary language, not condemn itself to unending skepticism with respect to its own status as philosophy, its own claim to reason? Cavell's work addresses this concern. In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell asserted continuity in the relationship between traditional and ordinary language philosophy, emphasizing the non-triviality of traditional philosophy from the viewpoint of ordinary language philosophy (he claimed that ordinary language philosophy must "inevitably remain internal to philosophy.")[11] Yet his more elaborated response to the philosophical identity crisis seems to me to be what I call his theory of philosophical modernism.

2. Philosophical Modernism

Philosophical modernism understands philosophy not as a set of problems (as philosophy was understood by Russell) but as "a set of texts."[12] The model for this conception is the history of literature and art. Michael Fried, a friend of, and influence on, Cavell, writes of painting that its historical unity happens not because works "deriv[e] from" one another, but rather because they "go on from" their predecessors.[13] The unity of painting is thus a unity of ruptures and differences, of changing paradigms and states

10. This remark is actually G.E. Moore's paraphrase of Wittgenstein. See: G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Papers* (London: Routledge, 2014), 304-5.
11. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason,* 166.
12. Cavell, *Must We Mean What we Say?*.
13. Michael Fried, *Morris Louis* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1965), 11.

of incommensurability (to borrow terms from Thomas Kuhn, who himself strongly influenced Cavell's understanding of history). In the same way, a work of philosophy would be philosophy not because it continued the work of philosophy, but because it ceased that work and introduced something new and different, confusing and renewing our sense of what philosophy was. A philosophical work would be philosophy in the same way that Morris Louis' work was painting, because in being unlike previous painting it "broke through to what was possible" for painting.[14] It is in the spirit of this modernist going on and breaking through that I understand Cavell's claim to have "courted a certain outrageousness" in his juxtapositions of philosophy and film (though surely a penchant for provocation can be detected nearly everywhere in his philosophical writing).[15] Fried argued that "what is nakedly and explicitly at stake in the work of the most ambitious painters today is nothing less than the continued existence of painting as a high art."[16] The same can be said true of philosophy for Cavell: each act of writing philosophy for him was a performance in making philosophy possible, an attempt to demonstrate, against all certitude, that philosophy still is. For this is what the loss of derivation in the history of philosophy demands. In philosophical modernity, there is no *internal reason*, no guarantee, that anything is philosophical. Or as Cavell more tamely put it: "what I am showing is that philosophy is to be understood, however else, aesthetically."[17] Again restated: ordinary language philosophy is philosophy if people call it philosophy. Philosophical modernism opens up space for multiple forms of philosophical writing. It also opens up new vistas on philosophy's past, on the families of things that we would classify as philosophy. But what if they don't classify my philosophy as philosophy? Aren't there many art lovers who find Manzoni's *merda d'artista* to be nothing but crap? Are there not many philosophers, including some of Cavell's analytic philosopher peers, who would think something the same of *Little Did I Know* and even the rest of Cavell's oeuvre, with the possible exception of the first few recognizably "philosophical" essays in *Must We Mean What We Say?*

Can, and should, ordinary language philosophy address this?

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14. Ibid., 13.
15. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13.
16. Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 142.
17. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 14.

3. Philosophy and Confession

Cavell, at least, does. His work almost always includes a self-conscious pitch for its own status as philosophy. One of these pitches stakes a claim for the idea that philosophy and autobiography can be performed as "dimension[s] of the other."[18]
Cavell's pitch for this form of philosophy in *The Claim of Reason* is as breathtaking as it is tradition-shaking:

> But if the child, little or big, asks me: Why do we eat animals? Or Why are some people poor and others rich? Or What is God? Or Why do I have to go to school? Or Do you love black people as much as white people? Or Who owns the land? Or Why is there anything at all? Or How did God get here?, I may find my answers thin, I may feel run out of reasons without being willing to say "This is what I do" (what I say, what I sense, what I know), and honor that.
>
> Then I may feel that my foregone conclusions were never conclusions that *I* had arrived at, but were merely imbibed by me, merely conventional. I may blunt that realization through hypocrisy or cynicism or bullying. But I may take occasion to throw myself back on culture, and ask why we do what we do, judge as we judge, how have we arrived at these crossroads. What is the natural ground of our conventions, to what are they in service? It is inconvenient to question a convention; that makes it unserviceable, it no longer allows me to proceed as a matter of course; the paths of action, the paths of words, are blocked. "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." In philosophizing, I have to bring my own language and life into imagination. What I require is a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I may imagine them; and at the same time to confront my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me: to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets me.

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18. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), vii.

> This seems to me a task that warrants the name of philosophy. It is also the description of something that we might call education. In the face of the questions posed in Augustine, Luther, Rousseau, Thoreau…we are children; we do not know how to go on with them, what ground we may occupy. In this light, philosophy becomes the education of grownups.[19]

There are so many threads here as to threaten to make any attempt at summary burgeon into a treatise on Cavell's philosophy as a whole. Yet to parse these lines briefly, we might say that philosophy for Cavell emerges out of a lived encounter with the questioning other, with the child, and out of the questions that they ask about the order of things. These questions bear on why things are the way they are, and that is to say why they are the way that one somehow feels they ought not to be. Philosophy seems to be born out of the realization that the answers which I have at hand, or that we have at hand, are not the right ones, but that they stand rather as excuses, obfuscations, hypocrisies. Philosophicality here is not based on truth or even knowledge, certainly not on the knowledge of any positive truth, but rather on a kind of revelation of the untruth of what we commonly and hypocritically accept to be truth. If we are to judge by the antecedents that Cavell cites—by and large figures that do not take themselves to be philosophers—philosophy is not about knowing but about confessing. Philosophy consists in saying what we believe, and also perhaps avowing that we are wrong, or that our claims are unfounded. To philosophize is to confess. It is a moral act, but its understanding of morality does not pass through any obedience to universal maxims or utility calculations. Without debunking such ideas, philosophy confesses the ways in which our best intentions fall short, but it nevertheless confesses the belief in trying despite failure. It may be striking to find Augustine and Luther on this list of philosophical antecedents, for one supposes that neither turned to philosophy but rather to scripture or God when confronted by the child. Yet there is also a sense in which we can see the going on from Augustine through to Cavell as a series of passages whereby the word, in the final instance the philosophical word, stands both at the beginning and the end of the confession, as if Augustine and Luther were

19. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 125.

always already turning to philosophy when they turned to the word, without themselves or philosophy being attuned to this fact at the time.

4. On the Forms of Philosophical Life

Cavell calls *Little Did I Know* a "test of representativeness."[20] He also has written that philosophy "concentr[ates] what human life disseminates at random, hazardously."[21] Cavell's autobiographical works should thus be seen as concentrations, distillations of acts of representativeness, of people and acts illustrating the confession of philosophy. To take a term used by the medieval church to describe saint's lives, Cavell's autobiographical writings are and contain *exempla*. As in the tales of the early church, these are tales of passion, not of purity, illustrations of a devotion of what one believes is philosophy, a belief that sometimes leads to persecution and misunderstanding. The slings and arrows risked by a philosophical life find perfect illustration in a tale that Cavell tells of his colleague, Hans Meyerhoff:

> A number of other students were already gathered there witnessing the event [a dispute between Meyerhoff, a professor devoted to the arts, and a teaching assistant, a specialist in philosophical logic]. As I approached the group the teaching assistant was saying, "We know now that every assertion is either true or false or else neither true nor false; in the former case the assertion is meaningful, in the latter case cognitively meaningless. If you go on saying that this line of Rilke is cognitively meaningful, I smile at you." Meyerhoff was in evident distress. He would of course have heard roughly this positivist refrain before, but for some reason he had been drawn in a weak moment into an aggrieved effort to defend a work important to him on grounds that may or may not have been important to him. And this defense seemed at this moment, as similar moments have so often seemed to others, to demand that he deny what seemed undeniably true, however insufferably asserted, in this assault on his treasured convictions. To

20. Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 6.
21. Ibid., 448.

> discover a different mode of response to such an assault became as if on the spot an essential part of my investment in what I would call philosophy.[22]

Meyerhoff is presented as a victim of philosophy. The logical positivist teaching assistant expects philosophical truths (or the absence of philosophical truth) to have a certain logical form. Meyerhoff finds no "philosophical" way to deny the rightness of this expectation, and he feels lame in his insistence on the value of Rilke. As he fails, we can imagine the taunts and smirks of the crowd of philosophers surrounding him. We can imagine them circling like wolves waiting for the kill, brute beasts savoring the defeat of the other in the contest of wits that passed for philosophy on late-twentieth century university campuses. We can imagine them stocking away the lesson: never philosophize without the hammer of philosophical logic. Yet if Cavell's writing these lines constitutes his response to this bloodthirsty horde, he pitches the camp of philosophy outside of logic, locating it rather in emotion and in narrative. In his failure to offer logical claims, Meyerhoff becomes a philosophical martyr in Cavell's pages. We feel that he is a righteous example of the iron will to hold to philosophy at all costs. Yet when we cast about in search of what makes him right, when we ask ourselves what is cognitively meaningful about Rilke, we too find ourselves beggared for reasons, vulnerable to the attacks of the well-armed logic choppers. Yet we may recognize that Meyerhoff's example, and that of Cavell too, is the way of philosophy.

5. The Public Language Argument

One way of understanding Cavell's new picture of philosophy is to see philosophizing as engaged in the act of constantly seeking to test what I call the public language argument. This argument is a conceptual cousin to the "private language argument" that so long occupied Cavell's attention. Brutally paraphrased, the private language argument claims that it is not possible to imagine a language that cannot be shared with others. But the denial of private language does not in fact mean that all of our speech acts are understood by the public. As Cavell writes: "nothing ensures that we will make and un-

22. Ibid., 252-53.

derstand the same projections" but "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."[23] Put otherwise, the public language argument claims that we can make public speech, in essence, say things in the ways that others feel that they should be said, but it does not guarantee that we do actually do this. Moreover, if undertaking to speak philosophy is to attempt to demonstrate the public language argument by providing an example, then each time we authentically philosophize we must speak with no more support than is given by this terrifying whirl of organism that is our form of life. Unlike Augustine, the ordinary language philosopher has no recourse to the consolation that he speaks the word of god; words whose universality is guaranteed by a transcendental guarantor. Unlike Rousseau, the ordinary language philosopher has no recourse to a secure certitude in the universality of man and reason. He or she cannot take it as a "philosophical datum" that he "can speak for society and that society can speak for him, that they reveal one another's most private thoughts."[24] Nor can the ordinary language philosopher be content with professing philosophy as usual, for this is all too clearly a form of discourse that has traded in true philosophy for the banalities that inspire a feeling of certitude. For example, divining what we should ordinarily say is unsurprising and ultimately meaningless when we seem to be following a mathematical or logical rule (most of us feel comfortable saying that "we" should say "12" when confronted with the series "3…6…9"). In the same way, we equally feel comfortable when we know what we should say is supported by strong institutional conventions, norms and expectations (I feel as certain that I am doing "normal" philosophy when I say "Kant" as when I say "I do" at my marriage). But we all know that when we really are prompted by the questions of the child, these kinds of procedures do not offer the answers that we need.

We all know that these are but flights from philosophy. I want to say that any time philosophical speech feels too certain and well grounded, this is *because* we are faking it. I suspect that our current sense of philosophy as consisting primarily in flights from philosophy stems from a trade. This is what philosophy has traded in or-

23. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*.
24. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 25.

der to become a trade, to become a profession practiced by philosophy professors.[25] But if we are not to fake it, then how are we to get ourselves to dare to philosophize? For it seems that all too many of us who have grasped the above aspects of philosophizing find themselves reduced to muteness, and they perhaps even find themselves pushed out of the trade: "I should think that every philosopher now has at least one philosophical companion whose philosophical ability and accomplishment he has the highest regard for, who seems unable to write philosophy."[26]

6. Speaking from the Heart

Cavell does not give us an answer to this question (how could he?). He does offer us an image—perhaps a noble lie—that can inspire us; can help us to get over the hump to philosophy. The figure that he gives us is that of the heart.

It is with the heart that *Little Did I Know* begins:

> catheterization of my heart will no longer be postponed. My cardiologist announces that he has lost confidence in his understanding of my condition so far based on reports of what I surmise as symptoms of angina and of the noninvasive monitoring allowed by X-rays and by the angiograms produced in stress tests. We must actually look at what is going on inside the heart.[27]

These lines may not sound as if they are articulating anything particularly philosophical. We encounter the heart in what seems like its most soulless variant, the heart as a biological organ. But there is nevertheless something more to these lines. Intimations of it emerge when Cavell writes: "we must actually look at what is going on inside the heart"; as if he, like the doctor, must make an examination. As if to suggest,

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25. I am intentionally playing on the idea of trade here. The initial title Cavell wanted to give to his *A Pitch of Philosophy* was "Trades of Philosophy." The word "trades" is a double entendre: referring at once to trade winds (to philosophy today according to Cavell, for he was called upon to "present an analysis of the problems and developments in my field of research and study" but also to the trade or profession of being a philosopher. I take him to be interrogating whether and what philosophy has traded to make philosophy into a trade, and whether or not a man who philosophizes for a trade can still profess to be a philosopher. See Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy,* ix and 4.
26. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*.
27. Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 1.

faced with our own mortality, our fact of having a physical heart, we can, and should, look deep inside ourselves to find what ails us in our spiritual hearts. I find justification for this reading in one of Cavell's favorite lines from Emerson: "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius."[28] One might say that the movement from the failure of the finite heart to the encouragement to speak from the heart, and so to speak philosophy in its fully confessional form is a kind of interpretation of this turn of phrase.

Elsewhere in Cavell's work we also find him concerned with the heart, generally following this Emersonian insight into the relationship between the heart and philosophical truth. Cavell writes of the person that has devoted oneself to perfectionism (to a life devoted to philosophizing as he understands it):

> here there simply seems no room for doubt that the intuition of a higher or further self is one to be arrived at in person, in the person of the one who gives his heart to it, this one who just said that the great have been his delegates and who declares that "I" can one day, so to speak, be that delegate."[29]

I want to say that according to Cavell's Emerson-informed sense of what he himself is doing, being a philosopher is precisely coextensive with giving one's "heart to it," of finding a way of voicing one's self that resonates with what we are willing to call our hearts.

In other contexts, Cavell aligns philosophy's failure to grasp the notion of ordinary moral discourse in terms of a loss of sensitivity to the heart. In *The Claim of Reason*, for example, he writes that professors of philosophy were taking "the heart out of statements to which we were attaching great importance."[30] In an early essay on Shakespeare, Cavell laments the "hardness" of our "hearts," a point that he returns to in a later text, suggesting that we need to cleanse "our imaginations of each other" and that this can only be done by "mend[ing] the heart of language in a heartless world."[31] I take it that mending the heart of language amounts to nothing other than

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28. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), Kindle edn.
29. Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 161.
30. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 102.
31. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Kindle.

offering up more of the language of the heart to the world, what Cavell calls the "performative and passionate utterance"—or simply philosophy.

There is nothing novel in Cavell's idea that truth must come from the heart, as we have seen the trope is Emersonian, but it is also much older. The association between the heart, courage, and autobiography is so old and so tight that it forms part of the etymology of the English language. The English word 'courage' is a derivation from the Latin word '*Cor*,' or heart, while the verb 'record,' the act which is precisely undertaken while writing autobiographically, is itself derived from a Latin word containing '*cor*': '*recordari*.' Unsurprisingly, the heart is the font of Augustine's confession.[32] Perhaps more astonishing, and certainly more interesting to students of Wittgenstein's *Investigations* (which Cavell has occasionally suggested is a kind of commentary on Augustine), is Augustine's location of the source of the human voice in the heart: "By making all sorts of cries and noises, all sorts of movements with my limbs, I desired to express my heart (*sense cordis mei*) so that people would do what I wanted."(2009: 1.8) Without pretending to recount the long history linking Augustine to Emerson and Cavell, I want only to remark—keeping in mind that philosophizing involves calling forth my culture's criteria—that the dean of all American philosophers, Jonathan Edwards, also based all of his philosophical work around the notion of the heart. For Edwards, the heart was the location where grace enters man, such that the moment of conversion which rendered one a Protestant saint was an affair of the heart, to be prepared for actively with the mind, but finally to be achieved passively, in the affections of the heart, and through divine grace.[33]

There is, then, a long tradition of generating a certain kind of truth claim out of the heart, and if we may wish to discount this tradition as theological, we can at least consider seriously whether we might not wish to call this philosophy, and might not wish to try to speak philosophically from our hearts ourselves, if we recognize this to be part of the philosophical endeavor. But then again, the heart is but a figure. It is a trope, a metaphor. We can of course feel that it is the right metaphor. We can feel in it the courage to speak, to philosophize.

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32. For a detailed account on Augustine and the heart (and indeed of all things heart related in the middle ages), see Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

33 On Edwards and the heart, see Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

7. Leaving the Woods

> I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves.[34]

With these lines Thoreau progressed towards the close of his *Walden*; indicating his return from that higher life by the lake to the quotidian. I cite them because I have begun this revisiting of an old text with a near citation from Thoreau, and in closing it seems meet to return to him. But I also cite Thoreau in closing I want to mark my own sense of a return to a less apparently romantic form of life. In its way this text recounts a voyage to philosophy undertaken hand in hand with Cavell, a voyage that I might imagine as akin to a trip to Walden, symbolic of a search for a pure life, for something like philosophical purity. Whether or not I have gotten there, or contributed something to philosophy via my voyage, I leave it up to my readers to judge. Yet without saying that I have abandoned this quest, let me say that today what seems to matter to me as philosophy is not writing something that others count as philosophy. From my present perspective, I care about finding the courage to speak from contradiction. By contradiction I refer to that position in which we find ourselves in ordinary life, within that state of affairs in which we rarely feel that we live handsomely, and in those cases when we do live handsomely we find ourselves ready to admit that this is as much a function of moral luck as of moral fiber. I find precisely such a contradictory existence exemplified in the life of Stanley Cavell as it is recounted by Cavell. I find this life in contradiction and the skepticism that it engenders to stand at the core of what he exemplifies as counting as philosophy. To me today what matters not is speaking philosophy but daring to speak out despite our existential contradictions. I have evoked above a certain analogy between speaking for sustainability as a rhetorical situation and the challenge of proclaiming philosophy within the framework of ordinary language. To call upon others to strive for sustainable existence

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34. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, in *The Writings of Thoreau* (New York: Modern Library, 1992), Kindle edn.

even when one knows one's existence is unsustainable is an effort that requires, in my sense, speaking from the heart. Is it right to call a moral discourse for a sustainable future "philosophy"? Perhaps not, but it is a struggle to extract from life, and to bring into words, that much maligned thing that we could call wisdom. This willingness to seek, and to strive to speak wisdom, seems consonant with the quest for philosophy as exemplified in Cavell's autobiographical writing, as far away from Cavell's own efforts as it might seem.

8. Thanksgiving

Before I close this essay, let me beg pardon of my readers. When considering my pitch for philosophy, my readers may most pertinently wonder why I have not endeavored to cite or engage with the many fine writings that have come out on Cavell. When I first wrote this article, it was nourished by work from Laugier, Conant, and Putnam. When I revisited this text, I consumed pieces by Gould and Moi, Johannsen and Dumm. These contributions to our reading of Cavell matter. I have not cited them, however, out of a desire to try to refuse institutional justification of my words as philosophy (in a professional or any other sense). As I wrote I wondered what we trade in philosophy in order to take part in the trade, and I thought that I would perhaps remove these niceties of the trade from the text as an experiment in philosophy. I wanted to consider whether these allusions to the institution actually encourage us to avoid the risk and burden inherent in daring to speak the philosophical word, though I recognize too that there is a certain arrogation, a certain reproachable arrogance, in this experiment. Nevertheless in our desire to test new things, we must not forget to give thanks, and not just to those who contributed great thoughts, but also to those ones who, like my colleague Darren Paisley, humbly helped with the little things like proofreading this text.