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Ordinary Language Philosophy

Although it continues to exert influence, half a century after its heyday ordinary language philosophy (or Oxford philosophy) is no longer fashionable, having been replaced by intellectual currents such as deconstruction, hermeneutics, and more recent developments in analytical philosophy. Yet in the 1950s and early 1960s, though its actual practitioners were few and the representative contributions rather diverse in nature, it was commonly viewed as a major new movement in philosophy. Before encountering ordinary language philosophy, Cavell had co-authored two articles published in major philosophical journals, both of them in a spirit critical of logical positivism, the then dominant doctrine of American academic philosophy. However, it was not until he encountered the teaching of John Austin – the founder of ordinary language philosophy – at Harvard in 1955 that he started to find what he calls his own voice as a philosopher:

Then I had the experience of knowing what I was put on earth to do. I felt that anything I did from then on, call it anything you want to, call it philosophy, will be affected by my experience of dealing with this material. It is not necessarily that in Austin I found a better philosopher than my other teachers had been, but that in responding to him I found the beginning of my own intellectual voice.¹

This chapter will attempt to elucidate Cavell's early thinking about the nature and implications of ordinary language philosophy. Readers who are entirely new to the enterprise might find it some-

what demanding; yet since this engagement sets the trajectory of all his subsequent work, including the most recent, it is crucial at this stage to obtain as clear an understanding as possible of his initial reception of Austin's work. But in addition to the emphasis on Austin, Cavell strikingly blends his reconstruction of ordinary language philosophy with elements from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (a book to which Austin himself, from his conspicuous lack of references to it, seems to have been either indifferent or outright hostile). Although Cavell later recognizes profound differences between Austin's and Wittgenstein's approaches to skepticism, the focus in this chapter will be on how these two philosophers, each in their own way, shape Cavell's thinking about the ordinary.

The Philosophical Significance of What We Ordinarily Say

According to a widespread preconception, especially among philosophers in the Continental tradition, ordinary language philosophy, with its emphasis on what we ordinarily say and mean, is essentially expressive of a positivist attitude. On Herbert Marcuse's interpretation, which was instrumental in spreading this view, the appeal to the ordinary in these philosophers' writings is simply ideological: while failing to realize the constructed character of the social world, it views the social as a realm of brute "facts" before which critical thinking inevitably must halt.² It would be premature at this stage simply to brush Marcuse off as having entirely misunderstood what Oxford philosophy was all about. Yet for Cavell, such an assessment must seem very strange indeed. For one thing, as only scant knowledge of their work reveals, both Austin and Wittgenstein were deeply hostile to logical positivism. For example, Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* is a sustained attempt to demonstrate the absurdity of some of positivism's central doctrines.³ More importantly, however, much of the motivating force behind Cavell's early work consists precisely in liberating himself from the positivist climate (at Berkeley and Harvard) within which he received his training.⁴ Like "friends who have quarreled," he writes, positivism and ordinary language philosophy "are neither able to tolerate nor to ignore one another" (MWM, 2).

As Cavell explains in one of his early attempts to clarify the difference between his own efforts and those of his mentors, the funda-

mental goal of leading American philosophers at the time was to logically clarify the structure of (natural) science.⁵ To the proponents of the hegemonic logical positivist program, it seemed evident that satisfactory theory-formation in science presupposes the achievement of a perfect formal perspicuity. This implied that natural language had to be replaced by formalized systems or be revised through logical unmasking of formal disorder. Whereas the structure of theories was held to be representable in purely logical notation, the answerability to the world was seen as occasioned by simple observational statements, purporting to refer to sense-data. On this view, all we shall ever be in a position to know will necessarily be an integral part of a natural science (or any investigation using its methods). Outside the rigorously defined domains of science, no claim can count as knowledge unless it gets analyzed and tested against a standing body of scientific belief. In an even more radical version, statements about the world for which the exact conditions of empirical verifiability cannot be specified in advance were regarded as simply meaningless. Since they presumably contain no empirical content, that is, since no observations of the world would be able to demonstrate their truth or falsehood, they are patently nonsensical.

Needless to say, the rise of logical positivism to intellectual prominence meant that the relationship between philosophy and the culture at large entered a phase of mutual suspicion. For, according to its most militant spokesmen, all ethical, aesthetic, metaphysical, and religious questions – in short, all the issues that traditionally have made philosophy relevant to its own culture – were ruled out as not worth pursuing. They should, rather, be viewed as pseudo questions, incapable of yielding anything but pseudo answers. (Notoriously, such a minimalist conception generated problems for the propositions of positivism themselves, which seem not to pass the test of verifiability. Moreover, in the wake of criticisms made by Quine and others, many philosophers came to adopt naturalist positions, which were often felt to be more coherent.) But logical positivism did not just threaten the integrity of the ‘higher’ achievements of culture. Indeed, on this view, everyday life, with its endlessly intricate networks of expressions, reactions, and responses, could not function as a source of meaning and orientation to human existence. Appeals to the ordinary had to be viewed as pre-philosophical, unworthy of intellectual attention.

In “Must We Mean What We Say?”, his first single-handedly written philosophical article, which was published in 1958, Cavell attempts

to defend Austin's methods (and the Oxford philosophers in general) against criticisms leveled by Benson Mates, a well-known logical positivist.⁶ In order to set the stage for his discussion, Cavell initially notes the uncontroversial point that philosophers who subscribe to the procedures of ordinary language philosophy usually deem it sufficient to solve – or at least make progress with – a philosophical puzzle by pointing out that words have been employed in a non-standard way, and then delineate their standard (or ordinary) employment. Such a practice, which Cavell refers to as the production of “categorical declaratives,” typically involves (a) citing *instances* of what is ordinarily said in a language (“We do say . . . but we don't say . . .”; “We ask whether . . . but we do not ask whether . . .”); and (b) occasionally accompanying these instances by *explications* of what is performatively implied by their enunciation (“When we say . . . we imply (suggest, say) . . .”; “We don't say . . . unless we mean . . .”). In Austin's own formulation, proceeding in philosophy from ordinary language means to examine “*what we should say when, and so why and what we should mean by it.*”⁷ While objecting to this program, Mates's overall strategy consists in referring to an actual conflict between two philosophers who work by reference to such a procedure, and then argue that the nature of their disagreement bespeaks not only a fundamental lack of methodological soundness but a failure to indicate the rationale and relevance of such suplications.

The example Mates provides is a discussion between Gilbert Ryle and Austin in which Ryle had argued that saying that someone is responsible for some action implies that it in some sense is morally fishy, one that ought not to have been done, or someone's fault, to which Austin had replied by providing a counter-instance, namely that on special occasions we say “The gift was made voluntarily,” which does not imply that the action of making the gift was morally fishy or in any sense blameworthy. According to Ryle, “It makes sense . . . to ask whether a boy was responsible for breaking a window, but not whether he was responsible for finishing his homework in good time.”⁸ While agreeing with this, Austin, by pointing out that making a gift is seldom something that ought not to be done, counters Ryle's generalization: it is not true that all cases of speaking about responsible action, though they inevitably have to make reference to some sort of irregularity with regard to the action, imply that somebody is *morally* at fault.

In Mates's account of it, all that this discussion reveals is two professors of philosophy each claiming about their own intuitions that

only they express objective truths about language. In the absence of evidence, however, further discussion seems unlikely to settle the dispute; hence it is unclear, Mates continues, why such a debate, since it does not seem responsive to any objectively binding constraints, should even qualify as serious philosophy. According to Mates, the obvious way of establishing such responsiveness to evidence would be to take a poll. Philosophers of ordinary language should leave their armchairs and start doing empirical linguistics.

Cavell's initial response to this objection is quite simple. The production of instances of what we say when and its implications must be made by competent speakers of the language in question, in this case native English speakers. However, evidence is generally not needed in order for statements of this kind to be made; and in so far as it is needed, native speakers will necessarily be the *source* of such evidence. Obviously, a non-native speaker may be uncertain about what we say when and its implications, but such an uncertainty would exclude that person from doing ordinary language philosophy with the language in question. Moreover, in constructing the grammar of a specific language, a descriptive linguist is bound to rely on the intuitions of competent native speakers. No special information or counting of noses would then be relevant in telling the difference between correct and incorrect moves in that language. Indeed, if the native speaker's intuitions had not been sufficient for these purposes, then there would never be any linguistic data in the first place. Cavell is not thereby disclaiming the existence of cases of relevant empirical linguistic research on one's own native language, say on questions concerning its history or sound system. His point is, rather, that someone who tends to require special information in order to produce the instances that interest the philosopher would no longer count as a native speaker. Such a person would not be a master of the language in question. Finally, the procedures of the philosopher of ordinary language philosophy do not rely on memory. Someone may forget or remember certain expressions, or what expressions mean; but on the assumption that it is employed continuously, nobody forgets (or remembers) his or her own native language. Thus to speak a language does not require a tremendous amount of empirical information about its use, as if its possession were on a par with knowledge about objects in the world. Rather, "All that is needed is the truth of the proposition that a natural language is what native speakers of that language speak" (MWM, 5).

Relying on his competence as a native speaker, Cavell then goes on to offer his own reaction to the clash between Ryle and Austin. Although Ryle was right in resisting the view, common to many philosophers (in search of generality), that the term “voluntary” correctly applies to all actions that are not involuntary, what Austin’s counter-example shows is that he failed to specify its applicability with sufficient precision. As philosophers of ordinary language, they were both in the business of undoing a too crude distinction (“all actions are either voluntary or involuntary”); but whereas Ryle narrowly construed the condition for intelligibly asking whether an action is voluntary (as opposed to involuntary) to be that it somehow is *morally* fishy, Austin viewed a whole variety of (real or imagined) cases of fishy actions – not only *morally* fishy ones – as liable to be described as voluntary. They both agreed that what we would call a *normal* action – an ordinary, unremarkable action, for example the making of a usual Christmas gift – does not call for the question whether it is voluntary or not; indeed, the question cannot meaningfully (competently) arise. But Austin differed from Ryle in correctly perceiving that the question whether it was voluntary or not can intelligibly be raised in a variety of cases of unusual or untoward actions, for example giving the neighborhood policeman a check for \$3,000. As Cavell concludes, “Ryle’s treatment leaves the subject a bit wobbly. Feeling how *enormously* wrong it is to remove ‘voluntary’ from a *specific* function, he fails to sense the slighter error of his own specification” (MWM, 8).

As this example involving action and freedom illustrates, part of the effort of a philosopher of ordinary language consists in showing up traditionally neglected differences. Both Austin and Ryle reproach their fellow practitioners for employing a metaphysically distorted picture of the mind, one according to which all actions are either voluntary or involuntary. Thus the negative purpose of such investigations is to repudiate, to quote Cavell,

the distinctions lying around philosophy – dispossessing them, as it were, by showing better ones. And better not merely because finer, but because more solid, having, so to speak, a greater natural weight; appearing normal, even inevitable, when the others are luridly arbitrary; useful where the others are academic; fruitful where the others stop cold. (MWM, 103)

On the other hand, the positive purpose of Austin’s distinctions consists in that they, like the work of an art critic, bring to attention

“the capacities and salience of an individual object in question” (ibid). Indeed, ordinary language philosophy is about whatever (ordinary) language is about: the ordinary world. While excluding most of what mathematics and science, using constructed languages, refer to, the world of the ordinary includes all the objects, people, events, values, and ideals we encounter in our ordinary lives. Such a philosophy will have little or nothing to say about “quantum leaps” or “mass society,” though it presents us with a procedure with which to clarify the nature of cultural phenomena such as morality, knowledge, love, art, religion, thinking, and so forth – as well as material ones such as trees or chairs. It should thus be able to relate to all aspects and corners of ordinary human concern; accordingly, it demands to be taken seriously as a “new philosophy” (MWM, 1), capable of challenging other schools of contemporary thought.

As these are obviously ambitious claims (to say the least), it seems necessary to look more in detail at the epistemic status of the knowledge Cavell claims to possess when siding with Austin in his discussion with Ryle (or Ryle when disagreeing with Austin). What exactly is achieved by the formation of such knowledge? Consider statements of the second type, that is, of what we say when together with an explication of what saying so implies. Austin’s examples counter Ryle’s claims because they make us realize that the statement (of the second type) “When we say, ‘The gift was made voluntarily’ we imply that the action of making the gift was one which ought not to be done, or was someone’s fault,” is false. So on the assumption that Austin produced the more plausible account, if someone for example asks (A) “whether you dress the way you do voluntarily,” you will take him to imply or mean (B) “that there is something peculiar or fishy about your manner of dress.” What is the nature of this implication? What might it be that warrants our sense that raising the question of voluntariness must mean or imply that something about one’s actions is fishy? In Mates’s account, the answer is obvious. Since the relation between A and B is not logical (not holding logically between propositions), it follows that its nature must be a matter of the contingent pragmatics of language (the way we happen to use it). A reply of this sort would be consistent with Mates’s commitment to the positivist thesis that all non-logical relations between statements must be dependent on contingent facts about the world. The problem, though, with Mates’s recourse to the distinction between the logical-semantic and the pragmatic levels of language is that, applied to examples such

as the one just mentioned, it strikingly fails to do justice to the “hardness” of the implication, the *must* in “must mean.” By raising, Cavell argues, the question of voluntariness, “he MUST MEAN that my clothes are peculiar” (MWM, 9). In this sense, then, *we must mean what we say*. Rather than being a matter of how we (contingently) happen to use language, the necessity involved is itself expressive of an unavoidable condition of linguistic intelligibility: *this* is how we must speak in order to make sense of ourselves, be intelligible – in short, to speak the language we speak (in this case, English). If a series of utterances betray a disregard for such implications, for example, if a person continuously turns out not to imply fishiness by the request for an answer as to whether or not an action of dressing has been voluntary, then that does not force us to revise our relevant linguistic intuitions. It only reveals something about this specific person – that she is different, indifferent, mad, or incompetent, in short that she is not taking responsibility, at least not in the same way as we do, for the implications of her utterances. Our linguistic responsibilities thus extend not only to explicit factual claims, that is, to abide, say, by the norms of logic, truth, and sincerity; they also, regardless of whether we heed them or not, require us to mean or intend the implications of what we say. To say something is to take up a particular position vis-à-vis others, one that encompasses obligations and expectations, and which allows the repositioning of oneself along certain routes, for example by apologies, excuses, clarifications – in short what Cavell, following Austin, calls elaboratives. As the next chapter will explore in further detail, it is precisely the refusal of this kind of responsibility (and therefore also burden) that in Cavell’s view characterizes much traditional philosophy.

Having introduced the theme of philosophy’s forgoing of responsibility, it is important at this stage to draw attention to the fact that Cavell, in “Must We Mean What We Say?”, may seem to want to encourage a somewhat different vision of language from that which he defends only a few years later, i.e. in the early 1960s. In this very early essay, written before Cavell’s encounter with Wittgenstein, the relevant sense in which we are held to be responsible for our utterances is in terms of observing and respecting the necessary implications of our utterances. You *must* imply fishiness by asking whether a person dresses the way he does voluntarily; if you want to make sense and speak a certain language, you have, as it were, no choice with regard to the commitments your speech involves:

the language makes the choice for you, it intervenes on your behalf. The commitment to such a strong necessity-thesis invites, in other words, a vision of language whereby speakers, in their production of strings of meaningful utterances, are guided along by impersonal rules of some sort. Indeed, for such a necessity-thesis to go through, it must be the case that speakers always encounter a definite number of possibilities as to how to correctly employ terms or concepts in given circumstances. In his later works, however, Cavell starts to reject such a view of language in favor of a conception of individual response and judgment within a shared form of life. As will soon be discussed in more depth, to be responsible for one's own utterances then becomes not simply a matter of being responsive to the material inferences provided by a given linguistic structure, but of accepting that the commitments and obligations we project in a given speech act are expressions of who we are, and that the position of authority ought not to lie with an impersonal body of rules, thus risking what Cavell calls "a subliming of language," but with the subject of the enunciation itself. Projecting and observing linguistic implications articulate who we are and hence what we take to be authoritative in our everyday practices. In this later account, then, the major "sin" of philosophy or metaphysics consists not in a disregard for the necessity of material inferences, but in a discounting of the self.

The emphasis on individual responsibility seems conspicuously at odds with the position outlined in "Must We Mean What We Say?", where Cavell is happy to align his notion of linguistic constraints with conceptions of the "quasi-logical," of the "necessary but not logical," or, as some Oxford philosophers, most notably Stephen Toulmin, have proposed, with "a third sort" of logic in addition to the inductive and deductive varieties.⁹ All three alternatives would make sense, Cavell claims, as possible characterizations of the nature of such implications. In particular, what fascinates Cavell is that "something *does* follow from the fact that a term is used in its usual way: it entitles you (or, using the term, you entitle others) to make certain inferences, draw certain conclusions" (MWM, 11). Cavell further maintains that the process of learning what these implications are is part of learning the language. Although few speakers of a language ever utilize the full range of conversational implicatures that their native tongue provides, comprehensive knowledge of this "logic of ordinary language" is required for a native speaker to possess linguistic competence at all.

Hence there is generally no need to ask, as it were, for directions in language. Our knowledge of its performative logic remains largely implicit, constituting a “know how” rather than a “know that.” But this is a condition of there being a shared language at all: if every implication of a word had to be made explicit, then communication would never get going. We would never get to the point.

We have seen that explications of instances of ordinary language are neither analytic nor synthetic. Their truth-value, which is not contingent but necessary, is constituted neither by virtue of formal logic nor by correspondence or non-correspondence with facts (native speakers, as opposed to a linguist describing English, do not know what would be the case for these statements to be false). While being tempted to call them a priori, Cavell’s suggestion is that they should be viewed as a species of transcendental knowledge. The usefulness of Kantian terminology reveals itself in the analogy between Kant’s effort to uncover the conditions of possibility of knowledge and the ordinary language philosopher’s attempt to explore the conditions of possibility of phenomena in general.¹⁰ Transcendental knowledge is knowledge of the conditions or constraints a phenomenon must satisfy in order to be what it is. It concerns the essence of the phenomenon – what the phenomenon is *as such*. As Wittgenstein, approvingly cited by Cavell, puts it, “our investigation . . . is directed not toward phenomena, but, as one might say, toward the ‘possibilities’ of phenomena” (PI, §90). Applied to the debate between Ryle and Austin, this means that both philosophers explore the conditions of possibility of actions – the *essence*, as it were, of action. The concept of an action *überhaupt* entails that if fishy or conspicuous, then necessarily the question whether it is voluntary or not arises. For something *X* to qualify as an action for us, it *must* appear as constrained by that implication. In uncovering such tacit linguistic knowledge, then, the philosopher simultaneously reveals essential truths about phenomena. The possible configurations of the world necessarily accord with non-arbitrary yet human constraints. Hence the affinity between Cavell’s account of ordinary language and Kant’s transcendental idealism. Both aim at showing how the intelligibility of the world is conditional upon our practices and concepts.

So explications of what is implied by the said serves to illuminate both language and the world. The debate between Austin and Ryle brings to light not only what the concept of action essentially means; it also tells us something essential about actions themselves. The same can be said to hold true for statements that produce

instances of what is said. In Cavell's example, someone comes across the word "umiak." Upon finding out what the word means, i.e., when it would be correct to say of something X that "this is an umiak," one simultaneously realizes what an umiak *is*. Knowing the word "umiak" means knowing the object umiak – the small boat used by Eskimos in Alaska. Conversely, if one runs across a small boat in Alaska, coming to realize what one sees is to a significant extent a matter of acquiring its name, of knowing what to call such an object, and ultimately of being able to project the word "umiak" adequately into all contexts in which umiaks play a role. For a person could not be said to know what an umiak is unless he or she recognizes not only the umiaks on the beach as umiaks, but also the umiaks on the sea as umiaks, how umiaks are used, what they are made of, and so on, indefinitely. Thus, when we master the concept, at the same time we comprehend the nature of the phenomenon. Language and world refer to each other and presuppose each other for their mutual intelligibility. In this account, human learning becomes the process of aligning language and the world.

We can now see more clearly what Cavell wants to achieve by the proposition that ordinary language philosophy is about whatever ordinary language is about. As opposed to science, its aim is not to gather relevant but hitherto unknown facts for explanatory purposes. Nor is it to understand how language functions, though this may of itself, of course, be of great significance. Rather, the situation in which humans find themselves urged to engage in the kind of reflection that Cavell recommends is one in which, despite the presence of all relevant facts, they feel puzzled by what they confront. As in the Socratic dialogues, they experience the question "What is X?" as unsettling, yet their sense is that the answer cannot be entirely foreign to their own self-understanding. Ultimately, some fact about our use of language needs to be recollected and thus returned from repression or forgetfulness:

We feel we want to ask the question, and yet we feel we already have the answer. (One might say we have all the *elements* of an answer.) Socrates says that in such a situation we need to remind ourselves of something. So does the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language: we need to remind ourselves of *what we should say when*. (MWM, 20)

The idea that ordinary language philosophy explores the ordinary as forgotten, lost, or repressed comes to figure as a major theme

throughout Cavell's writings. Strictly speaking, the ordinary is only knowable retrospectively, as what is distorted or threatened (by philosophy or, empirically, by the way we live our lives). As an equally consequential thought, Cavell later emphasizes that access to the ordinary tends to be difficult and even painful, and that the recovery of the ordinary requires an act of self-transformation. Moreover, traditional philosophers have been particularly prone to disregard the ordinary. It is as if philosophy is intrinsically driven to deny its conditionedness or finitude and "escape those human forms of life which alone provide the coherence of our expression" (MWM, 61). According to Kant, a transcendental illusion arises when reason seeks to obtain knowledge of that which transcends the conditions of possible knowledge, i.e. when the philosopher attempts to escape her own finitude. Similarly, the philosopher of ordinary language attempts to reveal the illusions arising from employing words in the absence of those constraints and responsibilities which provide their intelligible employment, that is, in the "absence of the (any) language game which provides their comprehensible employment" (MWM, 65). In Wittgenstein's formulation, to which Cavell refers, "The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language" (PI, §119).

These similarities between Cavell and Kant being recorded, it is important at once to notice a fundamental difference between the two thinkers. The categorial status of the statements about what we must mean by asserting that X is F (for example "this is an action") is, as we have seen, not derived from a formal system (in Kant, the logical form of judgments), but from one's own native language. From this it follows that a deduction (or proof) of the objective validity of the complete set of "categorial declaratives" cannot be provided once and for all. Just as importantly, the philosopher of ordinary language relies on his native language *as it is*, i.e. as it happens to be and as it has become; and the source of normativity does not lie in the assertions about use; rather, what is normative is exactly the ordinary use itself (MWM, 21). Consequently, Cavell views transcendental knowledge as historically relative: "It is perfectly true that English might have developed differently than it has and therefore have imposed different categories on the world than it does; and if so, it would have enabled us to assert, describe, question, define, promise, appeal, etc., in ways other than we do"

(MWM, 33). Now this may seem to jeopardize the hardness of the “must” in the philosopher’s explications. If an implication *appears* binding to us simply because we have come to speak this way, then that begs the question whether it *really* is binding. In response to this objection, Cavell points out that for any speaker there is only one native language. Given the lack of alternatives, the skeptical appeal to historical contingency is moot. A person who tries to evade this condition by claiming that “anyone may speak as he or she pleases, there is no need always to use normal forms in saying what one says,” is right in drawing attention to the flexibility of language, i.e. that on particular occasions, we may change the meaning of words or speak metaphorically, cryptically, paradoxically, and so on. Yet the possibility of speaking strangely is itself provided for in the native language. Outside those parameters, no utterance is extraordinary or weird; outside there can only be unintelligibility and noise.

A further, and to many philosophers a surprising, peculiarity about statements that offer instances of what we say or explications of their implication – that is, categorial declaratives – is that though expressive of a normative relation, they are not correctly represented as prescriptive utterances. Prescriptive utterances (or commands) tell me what I *ought* to do if I want something else, whereas categorial declaratives tell me what I *must* do in order to speak my own language. As opposed to prescriptive utterances, there is no alternative to the “must” of the categorial declaratives: while telling me what I must do in order to perform correctly, they simultaneously describe the performance itself, how it is done. It follows from the normativity of the “must” that mistakes can be made, yet deviations mean that I no longer do what I think I do: I can no longer say what I say “*here* and communicate *this* situation to others, or understand it for [myself]” (MWM, 21). Deviations threaten to make me unintelligible. My words become private; no longer do they make a claim on others nor are they believable. Hence a relationship of complementarity holds between rule and statement. To say how something is done is to say how it must be done in order to be done at all. So although many philosophers tend to think of rules as best expressed by prescriptive utterances, Cavell offers a view which significantly links normativity to the features outlining actual practices themselves. By describing the ordinary, what we say and imply on specific occasions, the philosopher at the same time draws attention to its normativity.

Self-knowledge

As I have already hinted, in another early essay entitled "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," published in 1962, Cavell explicitly characterizes the knowledge pursued by ordinary language philosophy as self-knowledge. Upon coming to accept that Austin was right in pointing out, against Ryle, that it sometimes makes sense to say "The gift was made voluntarily," and hence that not all instances of fishy actions are *morally* fishy, thus demonstrating Ryle's failure to specify correctly the conditions under which it makes sense to ask whether an action is voluntary or not, I realize what *I* am prepared to say when. It marks me as a speaker that *this* is what *I* would say in *that* real or imagined situation. I thus obtain, or at least aspire to obtain, something that Cavell finds much philosophy to have disregarded as irrelevant or uninteresting: knowledge about myself – about who I am:

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 (for example, oneself) 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. (MWM, 66)

The claim, then, is not that ordinary language philosophy has anything distinct to say about the self *apart* from the actual practices of procuring self-knowledge. As with Freudian analysis, the emphasis lies with the activity rather than the results. To pursue such an activity, like dream analysis or the use of "free" association in psychoanalysis, is to engage, each one of us, methodically in the pursuit of knowledge of our own selves.

At first blush, this claim seems to raise more problems than it solves. For if what the philosopher of ordinary language recounts are truths about one's own particular self, then Mates's charge that Ryle and Austin, in their debate, fail to transcend their own privacy and reach a position from which to claim universal agreement seems unanswered. As Cavell suggests in "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" of 1965, we would then have a practice similar to what Kant calls a judgment of sense. According to Kant's argument in the *Critique of Judgement*, if I find something (for example a

wine) to be empirically pleasant, I may report my subjective sensation to others, but there would be no ground on which I can base a demand for their agreement: "To strive here with the design of reproving as incorrect another man's judgement which is different from our own . . . would be folly."¹¹ In this region of self-knowledge, each mind is a potential enigma to the other. We are never in a position to speak *for* another mind; and should our responses overlap, then that would simply be the result of a contingent correspondence, a crude fact of nature. A demand for agreement would not appeal to anything shared, and therefore not really be a demand at all. For such a demand to be possible, something must be in common, yet on this – for Cavell's purposes – false picture we each inhabit our own world, closed off from all others. Calling it a skeptical fantasy of self-sufficiency, Cavell at regular intervals returns to this deluded representation of the self and its relation to others. For example, in *The Claim of Reason* he explores, as I will return to in the next two chapters, the wishes and fears that underlie such a picture, and how its implicit denial of others (and of oneself) is destructive and ultimately tragic.

But if self-knowledge, understood as knowledge of what I am prepared to say when, cannot be accounted for in terms of a model of strict privacy, then is there an alternative? According to a competing (yet, as we shall see, false) model, my practical mastery of words, though *mine* and hence with some charity a species of self-knowledge, could be seen as displaying an impersonal knowledge of a body of theoretical rules and an abstract set of principles. In Kant's expression, I would then, as in the domain of morality, be depending on a definite concept of how to proceed. This would seem analogous to a master of a proficiency, for example an engineer, who, if asked to tell us how he proceeds to construct and set up a bridge, would instruct us in the rules and principles governing his activity. In so doing he would tell us what it essentially takes to be an engineer. Obviously, the application of the term "self-knowledge" would in this case be very strained. Strictly speaking, that which the engineer imparts would tell a lot less, if anything, about him, *this* engineer, than about the conditions and content of his specific expertise. His competence would not be *his* in the same manner that his awareness of his own character, for example, which relies on a privileged perspective (though not necessarily his own), would be his. Yet if transferred to the domain of language, a vision of mastery based on knowledge of abstract rules or principles, though it hardly passes for self-knowledge in the ordinary sense,

would seem to offer Cavell an effective means with which to undermine Mates's worry about subjectivism. If being a competent speaker were equivalent to possessing such knowledge, then the statements of philosophers of ordinary language would indeed, one could argue, be objectively constrained. Rather than simply expressing the parochial beliefs of the philosopher, such statements, like physiology or generative linguistics, would refer to facts about human nature in general. However, if the vision of our life together on the model of strict privacy implies that we do not count *for one another*, then the vision according to the impersonalist model is that *we* do not count for one another: it would not be *I* who count, or fail to count, for you; instead, mutual intelligibility would be insured by the linguistic structure.¹² Again, as we shall see in more detail later, this is yet another way of trying to avoid responsibility for what we say.

On a more immediate level, though, the problem with the impersonalist model is that it seems incompatible with our real usage of words. In a chapter of *The Claim of Reason* entitled "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language," Cavell argues that, if true, then words would be both less flexible and less inflexible than they actually are. Less flexible, because if the correct application of words in judgments, and hence what can be said in a language, were everywhere determined by algorithmic rule-formation, then the projectibility of words into new contexts would be much more limited than it is. Of the essence of words is that they always tolerate unexpected and surprising new projections, and this is how it must be. The world we inhabit continuously requires, as it were, new expressions: for since there are "always new contexts to be met, new needs, new relationships, new objects, new perceptions to be recorded and shared" (CR, 180), without the flexibility of words we would not be able to employ them in order to engage with the world. From saying "feeding the kitty," "feeding the lion," and "feeding the swans," one day one of us starts saying "feeding the meter" and "feeding in the film," and yet such new projections do not prevent communication and expression. On the contrary, while making perfect sense, they allow more fine-grained distinctions (for example between putting material into a machine and adding new material to the construction of it) than more general verbs such as "to put." One might imagine that using a more specific verb than "to feed" would function equally well and hence make the projections redundant, yet there are limits as to how differently we are able to view certain activities and still make sense of our experience. A language per-

factly intolerant of projection – in which no connection would be seen between, say, giving food to birds and to fishes (such that they would be two entirely different activities, having nothing in common) – would be very primitive. At least from our perspective, it would fail to record relevant relations of similarity. On the other hand, if we imagined it as the language of a culture very different from ours, we would feel strongly tempted to think not only that they *viewed* giving food to birds and to fishes in very different terms, but that these activities, from their perspective, *in fact* were markedly different. Perhaps the cultural significance of the two activities had so little in common that it made no sense *to them* to apply the same designation. But everything cannot simply be different, for then there would be no instances of concepts, and hence no concepts either.

This does not mean, though, that our words possess an unrestricted degree of flexibility. While language in general is tolerant of projection, not any projection will be legitimate and thus make sense. One can “feed peanuts to a goat” and “feed pennies to a meter,” yet one cannot feed a child by stuffing coins in its mouth. As Cavell puts it:

An object or activity or event onto or into which a concept is projected, must *invite* or *allow* that projection; in the way in which, for an object to be (called) an art object, it must allow or invite the experience and behavior which are appropriate or necessary to our concepts of the appreciation or contemplation or absorption . . . of an art object. (CR, 183)

Without an inner constancy and stability, we would never be in a position to know whether a new instance is covered by our concept: our concepts would have no sense. But how do we know *when* a projection is allowed? What makes a context inviting? According to the impersonalist model, in order to know that we would need to possess complete explanations for the correct use of every word. However, as I will return to at the end of this chapter, since we determine something *as* something, and thus make the world intelligible, by means of a vast network of tacit competences that connect us to the form of life into which we are socialized, no explanation (or rule) can control *every* single application of a word:

You cannot use words to do what we do with them until you are initiate of the forms of life which give those words the point and shape they have in our lives. When I give you directions, I can adduce only

exterior facts about directions, e.g., I can say, "Not that road, the other, the one passing the clapboard houses; and be sure to bear left at the railroad crossing." But I cannot *say* what directions *are* in order to get you to go the way I am pointing, nor *say* what my direction *is*, if that means saying something which is not a further *specification* of my direction, but as it were, cuts below the actual pointing to something which makes my pointing finger point. (CR, 184)

Returning to the relation between ordinary language philosophy and the issue of self-knowledge, we now see that neither strict privacy – in the sense of Kant's judgments of sense – nor impersonal matrices – in the sense of Kant's judgments of reason – can account for the capacity of knowledge about the self, in the specific sense of "what I say when and the implications thereof," to claim general validity. However, in addition to those two types of judgment, Kant also describes reflective judgments of beauty, which on his view is the only genuine form of aesthetic judgment. Without considering the technical terms of Kant's analysis, on Cavell's reading the distinguishing feature of a judgment of beauty is that on the basis of a purely subjective ground, it none the less is possible to be speaking with what Kant calls "a universal voice."¹³ For Kant, the subjective ground of such judgments consists in a feeling of pleasure resulting from the free play of the imagination and the understanding when faced with a beautiful form. In so far as the agreement of these two faculties is necessary for cognition to be possible at all, it follows that each agent will be entitled to presuppose that others ought to agree with them in their judgments of beauty. Alternatively, Kant calls the effect of such a necessary interplay between faculties a common sense (*sensus communis*), and argues that the claim to universality bases itself on the assumption of the universality of such a sense. As opposed to determinate judgments of goodness, however, which *postulate* the agreement of everyone on the basis of universally binding reasons, reflective judgments of beauty, for which no subsumption under determinate concepts takes place, only *demand* or *claim* universal validity. If someone disagrees with me about whether an object is beautiful, no proof or argument will settle the matter. In the hope of reaching agreement, though, what I can do is keep on articulating my own response and thereby try to make the other appreciate what I see. The other may continue to hold a different opinion, but doing so does not rule out my claim upon him (or his upon me). It only shows how different we are. Likewise, Cavell insists that when I reflect on *what I would say when*, I do so as a representative speaker; hence I am in a posi-

tion to claim the assent of others. Thus the task of the ordinary language philosopher is not to discount subjectivity, “but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement, but to master it in exemplary ways” (MWM, 94). In explorations of the ordinary, claims made about my life simultaneously purport to be about yours: I take myself as representative of all human beings, and in so doing I make a claim to community. However, there is always a risk of rejection. Claims to community or commonality, though in most cases they find assent (otherwise communication would not be possible), may turn out to have limited applicability: the most common concept *could* be used differently by others. Depending on the circumstances, this may either be tragic or comic. Of great significance, yet only hinted at here, however, is that the degree of my idiosyncrasy only reveals itself in the representation of my subjectivity as exemplary. Before attempting to master my subjectivity in exemplary ways, not only do I fail to know myself and my position in the world; I also do not know others, or rather the extent of our agreement. Thus my existence is unknown unless *I make myself known*, i.e., express myself; and to possess one’s existence, as we will see in more detail later, is ultimately to enact it. In his more recent works Cavell adopts the name “perfectionism” for this concomitant search for the self and the other.

Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy

With the possible exception of Austin, no author has exerted a stronger influence on Cavell’s thinking about the ordinary and the status of ordinary language philosophy than the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. The reading of Wittgenstein is extremely complex, demanding an overview of Cavell’s whole *oeuvre* in order to realize its full impact, yet many of his crucial responses are already present in the 1962 essay “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy.” Using David Pole’s then recently published book *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein* as his object of polemic, Cavell plunges straight into a discussion of what scores of philosophers have regarded as the key to the *Investigations*, namely its conception of rules and rule-following.¹⁴

According to Pole, in order to account for linguistic normativity – i.e., the correctness or incorrectness of particular uses of words – language must be viewed as essentially a rule-governed structure. It is only because agents follow rules that it is possible to distin-

guish between right and wrong, as opposed to just viewing utterances naturalistically as ways of merely sounding off. Pole accounts for linguistic normativity in several steps. First, in employing language, the validity and rightness of each move within it are assessed by appealing to a set of normative procedures, and, second, for every such move a competent speaker must be able to tell whether a rule is applicable or not. Third, rules are determinate in the sense that where they apply, there can be no question whether a rule has been followed or infringed; their correct interpretation is given with the presence of the rules themselves. Beyond the structure of rules, however, there can be no further appeal. Thus, fourth, if a case appears to which no existing rule applies, one may choose to adopt or invent a new rule, yet its application, while changing the game, is only the result of one's decision to make use of it; there is no right or wrong in accepting it. Echoing the positivist distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive discourse, Pole's account thus drives a wedge between "internal" and "external" questions, where only the former allow rational claims to be made.

In response, Cavell argues that although Pole's "Manichean" conception of rules may seem fit as a description of how a *constructed* language functions, it falls hopelessly short of capturing the way correctness is determined in everyday language. Accordingly, when Wittgenstein in the opening paragraphs of the *Investigations* famously draws attention to the analogy between language and games, he should *not* be taken to suggest that everyday language is best understood as a rule-governed structure. Rather, the notion of language-games is meant to bring into prominence the fact that mastering human speech requires participation in a form of life, involving others, and it does not intimate a vision of speech as presupposing that in every situation a definite set of moves will be open to us. The aim of the analogy, then, is to help us realize that "the absence of such a structure in no way impairs its [everyday language's] functioning" (MWM, 48). While it would be wrong to discard the concept of rules altogether (retrospectively they may play a role, but then as wholly parasitic on what we would say in particular circumstances), philosophically the attention should be shifted from rules to judgments. The basic fact in need of philosophical reflection is that we learn words in certain contexts, and after a while we are expected to make judgments by appropriately projecting those same words into further contexts. As already noted, Cavell's general claim, which entails a dismissal of the necessity-thesis we found operative in "Must We Mean What We Say?", is

that no universal can relieve us of the anxiety and responsibility involved in making those projections. No rules or pre-given idealities intervene, as it were, between my judgments and the world to which they are meant to respond.

With reference to Wittgenstein's own discussion of rule-following, several points emerge as consequential. First, rules do not circumscribe every aspect of a meaningful activity or speech act. It belongs to the nature of our linguistic being that there will always be projections of words for which it is not obvious whether or not rules apply. On Pole's view, however, this would imply that rules are "incomplete." However, the sense that they are incomplete ought to vanish, or be seen as idle, upon realizing that the notion of completeness has no application: what matters is that which we are able to say, and how and to what extent we are able to make sense in particular cases. Second, every rule-following activity is learnt and takes place against the background of innumerable other activities. It would be impossible to master just *one* activity. Hence the idea, entailed by the Manichean picture, that every move a speaker makes can be viewed in isolation from this background is incoherent. Normativity ("right" and "wrong") cannot be sustained simply by reference to the concept of a rule, for this would presuppose an atomistic conception of language according to which linguistic activities can be seen in isolation from the background and viewed exclusively in terms of their corresponding rules. Third, no listing of rules can ever determine what taking part in an activity – *playing a game* – amounts to. Indeed, mastery of a game – obeying orders, repeating what other people say, and so forth – ordinarily takes place in the absence of rules, or any reference to them. So linguistic normativity does not involve the strong, quasi-logical (and hence impersonal) conception of material inference and conversational implicature that we seem to encounter in at least parts of "Must We Mean What We Say?". Fourth, what we call a game has no essence. There is no feature that necessarily has to be present for something to be a game; nothing is common to all games. Rather than strict essences, there are at best what Wittgenstein famously calls "family resemblances": "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities in detail" (PI, §66). Thus "being determined by rules" as such has no general application: "Language has no essence" (MWM, 50). Fifth, Cavell suggests that "following a rule," to the extent that such an expression appears applicable here at all, itself *is* a practice. As we have seen, however, the nature of ordinary

linguistic practices is such that if you perform them correctly, you simply do them. There is no stage at which their degree of correctness may be assessed: either you make a promise or you don't. Finally, being an initiate of these practices is a matter of participating in a form of life: "That [i.e., forms of life] is always the ultimate appeal for Wittgenstein – not rules, and not decisions." In a celebrated passage, Cavell sums up his vision of language as follows:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (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 sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour 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. (MWM, 52)

The vision is terrifying in contrast to the view proposed by Pole, according to which rules intervene on our behalf, as it were, and authorize and control the way we talk. According to Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's "forms of life," it does not make sense to ask for the foundation of our practices. In successfully employing language for communicative purposes, we simply rely on a *fact* of agreement in interest, feeling, and response for which there can be no further explanation. To interpret this predicament as indicating an *absence* of foundation, and therefore as an alarming truth about our life with language, rather than simply the condition of intelligibility, is characteristic of the skeptic, who then demands that there *must* be some structure, some presence, or some set of rules, that can relieve him of the anxiety, commitment, and responsibility involved in the exercise and expression of his rationality. As we will see in the next two chapters, much of Cavell's work on skepticism consists precisely in showing up the cost of repudiating our "forms of life" (and thus our humanity and finitude), while simultaneously avoiding a skeptical interpretation, i.e., one according to which our life-forms would be reified and misinterpreted as foundations.

In stressing the fragility of our agreement, Cavell is not denying the importance of social life in coming to master concepts. Without training in the practice of using words, we would not be initiated in the language-games that make speech possible. The claim is, rather, that neither the social nor the numerous practices sustained within it can ever relieve us of our individual stance. *We*, each of us, need to be responsive. As the criticisms of Pole's understanding of rule-following have revealed, rationality cannot be construed as the standing presence of a substance within us, something that by its very nature simply guides us along. Our picture of rationality must leave room for reasonable deviance – for contesting conventions in order to seek a better expression of our own self-understanding and conviction. For sometimes the grammar of an expression just *needs* explaining, and unless we can recognize our own commitments and identity in the account we then attempt to give, it will not appear believable: the essential reference to the self that intelligible speech demands will be lacking. So against Pole's objection that such a struggle to determine and express rationality (that is, do ordinary language philosophy) would be a matter of mere choice, devoid of cognitive value, Cavell maintains that with the acceptance of an expression as expressive of a part of the grammar of (my) language, it also follows a sense of commitment and responsibility. While there is no "right" and "wrong" with regard to such expressions – indeed *they* make right and wrong possible – it would be false to say that nothing binds or constrains them: for Cavell's claim, as we already know, is precisely that *I* must be able to recognize myself in what they express, and that without such an acknowledgment, no elucidation of the ordinary would even get started.¹⁵ Indeed, accepting a categorial declarative (or grammatical proposition) is not essentially different from all other forms of belief-formation: "we no more decide what will express our conviction here than we decide what will express our conviction about anything else – for example, that the road to New Orleans is the left one, that the development section is too long, and so forth" (MWM, 53). However, rather than taking the content of this universal agreement among native speakers for granted, the procedures of ordinary language philosophy invite us to explore the extent of that agreement.

Reference to the community, to intersubjectively shared practices, is indispensable for our understanding of how speakers can have a language in the first place. A language is always inherited, and the ways in which it allows us to make ourselves intelligible to

one another are not laid down by single speakers. Where Cavell sharply differs from a number of Wittgensteinians is over whether mere conformity with shared practices is sufficient to constitute a speaker's right to lay claim to linguistic correctness, that is, pose as a representative speaker. Although it appears as something of a leitmotiv in Cavell's writings, his response to Saul Kripke's interpretation of the *Investigations*, printed in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, is in this respect particularly revealing.¹⁶ According to Kripke's community-based reading, Wittgenstein emerges as a radical skeptic about meaning; and only an appeal to a social consensus, while not refuting the skeptic so much as offering a "skeptical solution," can show how normativity is sustained. While agreeing with Kripke that skepticism should be seen as internal to Wittgenstein's teaching and that the *Investigations* contain no attempt at refuting skepticism, Cavell sharply rejects Kripke's ascription of meaning-skepticism as well as his "skeptical solution." In order to support his interpretation, Kripke crucially relies on the following passage in the *Investigations*:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. (PI, §201)

Any proposed candidate for the meaning of a predicate must be such as to sustain linguistic normativity: from the alleged meaning-constituting property of a word it must be possible to read off the correct use of that word. According to Kripke's reading of paragraph 201, however, nothing about the speaker can be produced that constitutes meaning in such a way as to meet the normativity requirement, and hence the whole notion of meaning falls into jeopardy. Put differently, no fact can be cited which constitutes a speaker meaning *this* rather than *that* – that the speaker means *x* and not *y* by "*x*". So "Wittgenstein's main problem is that it appears that he has shown *all* language, *all* concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible."¹⁷ Roughly, Kripke's skeptical solution to the paradox consists in accepting that while meaning is never a fact about speakers, normativity is sustained by means of assertibility conditions that refer them to their social life. Knowing what an expression means is to know the conditions in which the expression may find communal assent. Meaning is thus constituted by

knowing the circumstances in which a certain “move” in a language-game is permitted. Kripke does not claim that we continually check the assertibility of our own and each other’s utterances: predominantly, we rely on practical capacities that have been internalized through training. His point is rather that without the *possibility* of mutual control, we would never know in cases of doubt what the right use of a concept might be. For an individual regarded in social isolation, however, no such possible check on right and wrong uses of expressions would exist; thus in such a case assertibility conditions and therefore also meaning and language would collapse.

Cavell contests all of these claims. Although Kripke is correct in emphasizing the importance of skepticism for Wittgenstein, there is no skeptical paradox to be found in the *Investigations*. For as paragraph 201 continues, Wittgenstein unequivocally points out that the paradox is based on a misunderstanding: it only arises on the false assumption that acting in accord with a rule is to interpret it correctly. The assumption is false because any interpretation is just a new sign which itself stands in need of an interpretation. We could always try to give a rule for the application of a rule, but this would threaten to end in an infinite regress. However, since no interpretation takes place when we correctly project words into new contexts, the lack of any fact of meaning (that is, of the speaker meaning x rather than y by “ x ”) fails to trigger any skeptical consequences. Indeed, Kripke misleadingly turns the absence of fact itself into a fact; yet rather than being a shocking revelation about ourselves as speakers, the absence of a fact of meaning is a requirement on the part of the skeptic. Only on the assumption that the skeptic is right that such a fact is *needed* can its absence appear to be shocking. So no skeptical conclusion *ought* to follow from this imputation of a lack.

Moreover, by emphasizing the skeptical paradox, Kripke launches his investigation from an anti-social, hence skeptical, perspective, and the problem thus becomes one of positioning the individual in the community, rather than showing the costs of repudiating the community. For Cavell, on the contrary, the individual is always already in agreement with someone (otherwise he could not have acquired a language), though not necessarily with us and our practices. However, there is no sense in which human judgments *rest* on communal agreement, as if on a fact: the agreement in judging is itself, as it were, the final fact. While no explicit agreement ever occurred such that I could have been party to it, we

agree, due to our shared natural reactions and the way we allow things to count in specific ways, pervasively in judgments and thus in our concepts:

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

Nothing is more fundamental than this agreement, yet nothing – no structure, matrix, or mental dispositions – explains it; rather, it is the basis on which meaning and communication, indeed our representational capacity in general, are made possible. Cavell thus warns against asking, as does Kripke, for ultimate explanations or epistemological accounts of our agreement: all foundationalisms, even those of neo-pragmatism whose appeal to practices is done in the name of anti-foundationalism, must be rejected. Conjointly, as a result of demanding – inappropriately, in his use of the skeptical paradox – the same precision and capacity to determine in advance what counts as an instance of a concept for ordinary concepts as we do for mathematical ones, Kripke betrays an impulse to condemn language for failing to correspond to a given matrix; he thus implicitly sublimes language, thereby repudiating our agreement and driving out responsibility for making sense of ourselves and others. For even though language is essentially shared, humans are separate from the world and others – and nothing except their willingness to continue to let themselves be known to others can ensure the existence of their agreement.

Kripke's (skeptical) repudiation of agreement comes out well in his construal of the public nature of language. For Kripke, what is *normal* in a community *licenses* the correct performance of a given practice. Training, the initiation of newcomers into our practices, thus becomes a question of showing that the pupil's reactions conform to those of the teacher: by matching inclinations, the teacher "judges that the child is applying the procedure he himself is inclined to apply."¹⁸ If the (normal) teacher reaches the limits of what appears justifiable (say if the pupil demands an answer to why, ultimately, the sum of 68 and 57 is 125), then she may confidently, though without "justification," follow her own inclination that her response is the *right* one. As Cavell recasts Kripke's "scene

of instruction" by means of a familiar passage from the *Investigations*, "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am *licensed* to say: 'This is simply what I am inclined to do'" (CHU, 70; my emphasis). But, as Cavell quickly points out, in the entry being paraphrased (§217) Wittgenstein does not speak of licensing; what he says is rather that he is "inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'," and what someone is *inclined* to say is not something she necessarily says. Whereas Kripke hears Wittgenstein identifying normality, and hence normativity, with blind obedience, Cavell senses a certain hesitation, as if the teacher, rather than refusing, like Kripke's authoritarian teacher, to take responsibility for her procedure, wants to present herself as an example, as the representative of the community and not the final arbiter of the nature of all its practices. The good teacher is able to draw the attention of the other – not by threatening to exclude, which only sustains privacy and isolation, but by accommodating herself to the singularity of her pupil. However, there is no fact about the teacher that justifies what she does and says except *herself*, the way her exemplary actions earn her the right to authority: "the fact that [she] can respond to an indefinite range of responses of the other, and that the other, for [her] spade not to be stopped, must respond to [her], in which case [her] justification may be furthered by keeping still" (CHU, 77). Since there is no pre-given normativity by appeal to which their separation can be overcome, the teacher can never relieve herself of the anxiety that their mutual incomprehension might continue. All she can do is be patient, allowing the other the difficult and perhaps even maddening task of finding, if possible, her own way out of her isolation. (Indeed, as Cavell points out, both childhood and madness haunt the *Investigations* from the very beginning: a fact that testifies to its dramatization of teaching and learning "in which my power comes to an end in the face of the other's separateness from me" (CR, 122), and hence also, figuratively, of the endless task of inheriting one's culture.) While at some point excluding the possibility of explanation (the child *comes* to agree), the instruction thus aims at real agreement between separate individuals; it is not satisfied simply with conformity, the impersonal match of inclinations. For agreement to be possible, the individual (qua individual) must involve herself in allowing the other to make sense of her, whereas Kripke leaves out the "I".

Fundamentally, Kripke's conventionalist vision of community accounts neither for our separateness nor for our agreement and accommodation (indeed the possibility of mutual accommodation

is on principle ruled out). By assuming that skepticism can only be kept at bay by monitoring each other, by threatening to exclude deviants (the child, the foreigner), and by unquestionably demanding conformity, it does not so much present attunement between individuals as, rather, a crisis of consent:

I feel sure my sense of Kripke's Wittgenstein's solution to the crisis as more skeptical than the problem it is designed to solve is tied up with my sense that this solution is a particular kind of political solution, one in which the issue of the newcomer for society is whether to accept his or her efforts to imitate us, the thing Emerson calls conformity. The scene thus represents the permanent crisis of a society that conceives of itself as based on consent. (CHU, 76)

Rather than overcoming privacy, Kripke's social conventionalism makes it unexceptional. In the wrong-headed attempt to offer a solution to skepticism, he empties out the individual's responsibility for meaning and replaces it with assertibility conditions. As a result, the agreement he invokes is one between strangers, conventionally united yet indifferent to each other – hence a false view of agreement, a view that denies, rather than affirms, our finitude as participants in a human form of life.

In another essay from the same period, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture" (1988, collected in NYUA), Cavell adds to his assessment of (Kripkean) conventionalism by distinguishing between two senses of Wittgenstein's notion of form of life: one ethnological or horizontal, the other biological or vertical. While the first sense is meant to register features that are culturally and historically variable, such as the difference between, say, "promising and fully intending," or between "coronations and inaugurations," the second recalls features that are universally distributed among humans, regardless of culture, such as the fact that the realization of intention requires action, or that most of us have two arms. Rather than compartmentalizing these two senses, as if they were mutually exclusive categories, Cavell urges us to think of the two dimensions as sliding into one another. By restricting his focus to the ethnological-horizontal aspect, Kripke tends to support a too fluid, conventionalized, and adoptable sense of agreement. He thus fails to record the *depth* of our agreement, the "conventionality of human nature itself" (CR, 111), as opposed, simply, to the conventionality (or tyranny) of human society by which the attempt to establish new conventions would be a matter of arbitrary decision.

Moreover, conventionalism begs the question of skepticism: from the fact of “successful” participation in social life, no conclusion seems to follow concerning the existence, say, of other minds. On the other hand, if the natural appears to us as nothing but a set of bare natural necessities, then the very idea of exploring them in order to find new ways to respond to them would lose its point. We would then be like the builders Wittgenstein imagines in the second paragraph of the *Investigations*: dumb, unimaginative, incapable of achieving an individual existence – in short, taking no interest in our position in the world and with others.

No recovery of interest and passion can ever refute skepticism (the sense that each of us is separate, barred as it were, from the world and others); yet upon realizing the precise way in which our existence is both social and natural, or both mental and physical – how the soul expressively interconnects with the body – the skeptic’s vision of confinement may be lifted. This is the background against which Wittgensteinian criteria function: they regulate and keep together the inner and the outer, mind and world. Having in this chapter studied how the pursuit of ordinary language philosophy aims at speaking representatively, bespeaking the world and obtaining self-knowledge, we can no longer postpone a discussion of criteria.