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**THE PROJECTION OF LANGUAGE**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Language is one of the most pervasive and yet mysterious of human activities. It is our tool for so much of human life that it (and our ability to acquire it) can miss the attention it deserves. Yet it raises profound and timeless philosophical questions, such as whether or to what extent it is “natural”; how it may connect with our neurobiology and our experiences; how it began; and how we use and change it, and the role elements of human consciousness, such as intention, play in such processes. In this dissertation, I consider the question of how we project words into new contexts. I rely on the contemporary work of such philosophers as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, but particularly Stanley Cavell, to consider this question. I outline the aspects of their philosophy that inform such an investigation, especially Cavell’s “projective imagination,” which, he argues, is what we use when we project words forward. I give an account of this imaginative aspect of human life, enlarging on Cavell’s account. I explain how it works and why it can be called “imaginative,” and I provide examples of language use that support my interpretation of language projection. I also argue that the projection of language is analogous, in many respects, to our use of metaphor. This explanation constitutes my contribution to original research. My primary conclusions are as follows: these philosophers have provided better avenues to the exploration of language than recent, previous efforts in the philosophy of language (for various reasons, including their treatment of context and intention); the imagination is functioning much more widely and in more complex ways in our use of language (and doubtless other areas

of human life) than has hitherto been recognized; and the timeless, fascinating process of language projection, borne out by the centuries of change we see in our languages, is not occurring because we operate with language according to determinate rules.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF PROJECT**

How do we project words into new contexts? On what resources of mind and language do we rely when we do this? Take our English word, “feed.” It dates to before 900 C. E.; it is rooted in Old and Middle English. Why did we eventually come to use a word for the act of nourishment for the process of putting coins in parking meters, centuries after use of the word began? Will we continue to make such moves in language? Is language a rule-bound endeavor that guarantees there are fixed ways to do this? And what do philosophers working in this area have to say on these matters?

Some philosophers suppose we can trace this process back to our mental acts of will, to the way in which we intend certain meanings, including language meanings. Some are inclined to think we have no say in the process of projecting words—certain rules of language, which control our very ability to use it, shape the direction our language takes. Perhaps there is a third possibility, one that recognizes that intention plays a role in our use of language; regularities of meaning and context do as well (though we should be careful to call such regularities “rules” without qualifying what, exactly, we mean by “rules”); but the characteristics of words themselves also play a determinative role in what we can mean by them and what we can do with them.

The first two ideas have been historically influential philosophical views about how we can mean in our languages and how languages operate. But they are naïve and misleading ways of thinking about language. We might suppose that meaning is completely determined by individual intention, so that what we mean in any case is completely up to us and determined by our individual acts of will. Philosophers of language influenced by H. P. Grice’s work in the field (and his emphasis on the

constitutive role of intention in communication) have taken views along these lines. Or, at the other extreme, we might think of language as a rigid, rule-bound calculus, so that what we can mean is determined absolutely by fixed rules of some kind that allow no innovation or change. For example, philosophers of language and logicians have espoused a “structuralist” picture of language, recent philosophical dissatisfaction with which Paul Livingston traces in his work.

The third view is proposed as an improvement on these two, and, in this project, makes use of the projection of language as a unique avenue of language use in which we can see intention, regularities, and word-meanings playing constitutive roles in this uniquely human activity. I argue that Stanley Cavell’s (and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s) appeal to projective imagination is a way we can avoid the two misleading views with the appeal to “what we would say when.” That makes our understanding and projection of language into a kind of self-knowledge that is also appropriate for critical thinking about our culture and larger social lives. This dissertation is about how this works.

This investigation reveals much about the nature of language and the role intention plays within its development and continuation. It also reveals something about ourselves and our forms of life; for one thing, imagination is playing a much more profound role in our use of language than has been generally recognized. I challenge the idea that language is primarily dependent upon consciously controlling intentional states or immutable language rules. Instead, projection is deeply influenced by our swift imaginative engagement with the perceptual inputs surrounding us. In developing my exposition, I rely on the contemporary work of Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, and especially Cavell, who provides an account of the “projective imagination” meant to illustrate how

we move language into new contexts. I focus primarily on what these philosophers have to say in their work regarding language, intention, and imagination. In the course of this analysis, I demonstrate that these three contemporary philosophers hold views of language that could be characterized as essentially pragmatic, as that term has been used in the philosophy of language: they recognize the importance our learning, imagination and judgment, and the various contexts in which we use communication all have on our fundamentally important human use of language. This is particularly clear in their treatment of intention, as well as in Austin's analysis of how words are not just speech; they can actually do things. I also illustrate the fact that intention is not the sort of mental act that can necessarily control human phenomena like words. Instead, as G. E. M. Anscombe describes, it is a diffuse and complex aspect of thought that takes various guises, answering to a description of "what we are doing," which will vary (as will our awareness of it) from case to case.

### **Outline of Philosophical Research**

I begin by providing a summary of the work of Wittgenstein, Anscombe, Austin, and Cavell, focusing on their discussion of these issues about the nature and structure of language, intention, and linguistic production. This summary will inform the discussion to follow.

In the course of the review of this literature, I explicate Cavell's views on intention and the way he uses the work of Austin and Wittgenstein to support his views. I examine how his view of the way we acquire and use language is related to his understanding of intention, and I describe two views of intention he is countering. I



suggest that, in analyzing intention, these philosophers establish that it cannot be the sole determinant of our language meanings.

First I provide an explanation and some analysis of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I explain that Wittgenstein has famously criticized a certain conception of language and offered another that emphasizes the nature of language-games. I provide accounts of his terms "criteria," "form of life," and "context," and I address his exposition of the nature of language. For Wittgenstein, it is a shared, social procedure, which indicates our agreement in judgment and justification. Briefly, I mention Wittgenstein's emphasis on how we learn the judgment relevant to such an activity, and I also explain features of his notion of the imagination, especially its connection with willing and how, at least in some cases, it relates to what we can conceive as possible. Next, I turn to his account of an "institution," and I point out that Wittgenstein relates institutions to the use of rules. Following this, I argue that Wittgenstein is skeptical of certain conceptions of rules. It is not clear that he is skeptical of rules if they are understood as conventions, for example, but he is skeptical of the view that they are "rails to infinity," inescapably catching us up in their trajectory. I review some of Wittgenstein's remarks on intention (emphasizing that he argues there is a difference between what is "inner" and what is "outer") and explain how he can be understood to avoid discussion of so-called inner states. I argue that Wittgenstein refuses to discuss what he thinks cannot productively be discussed, and I close with some remarks about the significance of the "voice" to his work. I focus almost entirely on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, as Cavell often does, only occasionally referring to his other work.

Next, I provide a review of important aspects of G. E. M. Anscombe's influential *Intention*. Some of Anscombe's claims are relevant to the work of both Wittgenstein and Austin, and her explanation of how intentions effect changes in the world will anchor my claims about how intentions assist in the process of projecting language forward into new contexts.

Next, I turn to a discussion of Austin's philosophy, providing a summary of a number of his claims about language. I point out that he often engages in a close analysis of our use of words. Like Wittgenstein, he calls them "tools," and like Wittgenstein, he also relies on metaphor.

Austin is interested in providing a "linguistic phenomenology" that captures features of our language use. He notices that our words do not capture everything that is significant about reality; he emphasizes that there is a difference between the world and our language. However, he acknowledges we cannot work with an endless vocabulary. We focus on similarities and cannot foresee what, in our language use, will change. He says the "economy" of language is responsible for the fact that we do not often introduce new terms, though we can, and the words we do have reveal the use of generations and thus herald a type of collective wisdom. Austin also claims words do not escape their etymology. As language users, he maintains, we frequently agree, but even when we do not, this does not reveal some fundamental flaw in language itself.

I also explain some aspects of the imagination Austin notes (he appears more puzzled by it than Wittgenstein) and some remarks he makes about the meanings of words. He says when we use the same name to refer to different entities, this has been understood to indicate either that we recognize a universal, or to show that the entities of

the same name are similar. He criticizes the idea that such identically named entities are similar, and I in turn criticize his view (relying on some of his own comments to do this).

Austin also discusses intention, calling it a “miner’s lamp” illuminating what is before us, and a general aspect of our actions (of what we are “doing”). A characteristic of his philosophical work is a tendency to draw an initial distinction (he rarely, if ever, maintains them as clearly at the conclusion of his analyses). He draws such distinctions when he discusses the “linguistic legislation” of naming and sense-giving, and when he describes the difference between performatives and constatives.

In *How to Do Things With Words*, Austin says performatives are those types of speech acts that are more than words (or more than just descriptive or constative words), or saying something. They also do something. I provide an explanation of what performatives are as well as how Austin thinks they can both succeed and fail to do something. In specific instances, the failure of performatives is associated with their institutional setting. Austin claims the circumstances surrounding the uttering of words may carry more weight in actually accomplishing something than the words themselves. He disputes the idea that we can conceive of words as merely outward evidence of inward acts, remarking that we can say one thing but really mean, or be thinking, something else. And in such circumstances, one can be “bound” by one’s utterances, even if one does not mean them. This is significant, because it is evidence for the idea that intention cannot be the chief determinant of meaning in those cases in which language presents interpretive difficulties and we find ourselves trying to locate an arbiter of such meaning.

Cavell's work shows the influence of Wittgenstein and Austin, and he conceives of himself as continuing the project of returning language to everyday use (and endorsing the methods of ordinary language philosophy in doing so). He also points out the significance of their work for education itself.

I explore Cavell's characterization of the *Philosophical Investigations*. I explain that Cavell reads Wittgenstein as aware of skepticism and thinks we are dissatisfied with aspects of ourselves and lacking in real knowledge (about ourselves and the world). For Cavell, the problem of skepticism concerning other minds ultimately involves a failure of acknowledgment of that other, not a failure of knowledge. I review Cavell's emphasis on learning and aspects of judgment (especially about matters of value, which he principally investigates) before turning to Cavell's analysis of criteria. I explain Cavell's account of "ordinary" and Wittgensteinian criteria. I also provide an explanation and commentary on the following terms as these are used in Cavell's philosophy: authority; attunement; convention; and context.

Wittgenstein's influence is apparent in Cavell's account of how we learn language. Like Wittgenstein, he maintains it is public and shared, and not the product of formalist rules. I provide a summary of Cavell's explanation of our language acquisition and our ability to "go on" in language. One indication that we have learned a language is our ability to project words into new contexts. This feature of Cavell's work—his account of the "projective imagination"—is one I address in later chapters. I briefly point out that Cavell's analysis of language demonstrates Austin's influence before turning to his analysis of one of Austin's examples (from Euripides's *Hippolytus*) and the implications of that analysis for Cavell's view of intention.

Cavell thinks our intentions regarding *words* take place within the shared structures, or settings, of the language in which we find ourselves, into which we are initiated. Those institutions constrain what we can mean by words. Intention and language can come apart. He uses his concept of “attunement” to reinforce this point, and, like Austin, mentions that our disagreements often indicate the extent to which we do agree (and says writers, unlike other artists, are able to rely on such agreement). We even share the connotations and implications of our words, for they are learned and collectively reinforced as an aspect of this form of life. Words reflect our intentions as well as the constraints on those intentions; they are like the “horses of thought,” which we inherit and carry forward. Cavell underwrites this view by appealing to the work of his philosophical influences, Wittgenstein and Austin. His view clearly recalls elements of their work, down to the metaphors he uses. Cavell maintains that both Wittgenstein and Austin emphasize the institutional setting in which language occurs and, as a result, that institutional setting’s greater weight in determining meaning than individual intention.

Cavell is responding to two possible ways of construing the significance of intention to discussions of the meaning of language: either intention counts for nothing in determining meaning, or it counts for everything. He can be read as supplying a view of intention that navigates between these two extremes (as Kant meant his “Copernican revolution” to represent a successful sail between the cliffs of rationalism and empiricism). He ultimately affirms a conclusion like Austin’s own: we have to consider the total speech-act in our attempt to judge its meaning, and intention, in Cavell’s phrase, is just the “fuse to the flame” within that context.

## **Assessment of Research**

I close this review of these philosophers' work by arguing that their views are substantial improvements over some ideas formerly prevalent in philosophy of language (especially the structuralist picture of language) and maintain that they point us in the direction of promising further research for that field, for philosophy of language appears in general to have failed to recognize the different contexts in which language and intention occur—written and spoken, for example—and the implications those contexts may have for the role intention plays in each.

## **The Projective Imagination**

Next, I explain and assess Cavell's account of the projective imagination. First, I recapitulate views of the imagination expressed by Wittgenstein and Austin, and then explain Cavell's view. Cavell provides a provocative, though not fully outlined, explanation of the faculty that enables us to project words into new contexts. He calls this the "projective imagination" and says we access it by thinking of examples, supposing, and so on. Our imaginative ability to project is responsible for the manner in which we both respond to the projections of others and create them ourselves.

Ultimately, I provide an account of the role imagination and intention play in the process of projecting words into new contexts, carrying our language use toward the "judgment of the future," to use a phrase of Cavell's. When we project, we do so against the backdrop of our shared forms of life as well as the tendency to economize language described by Austin.

I examine specific processes involved in projecting words into new contexts, and I argue that this can be described as an aspect of imagination. First, however, I

emphasize that this process is not taking place because we are completely constrained either by our intentions or a calculus of rules. When we project words into new contexts, we rely, consciously or unconsciously, on a process that is imaginative. I sketch elements of this process and explain why those elements justify its characterization as imaginative. Related to this, I touch on the fact that projection bears similarities to the way imagination functions in the use or creation of metaphor and other types of figurative language, and throughout, I make use of the motif of similarities between music and language (a connection reinforced especially by Wittgenstein, though also by Cavell).

I support Cavell's idea that we project on the basis of "similarity." Cavell emphasizes how "controlled" our projections are, and one reason for this is because there are similarities between previous contexts of use and the new context into which a word is projected. It is the reason we do not just find everything "different," as Cavell puts it. In fact, our economy of language may be directly due to our capacity to recognize similarities. Imagination is indispensable to the ability to recognize a context to which a term could be applicable. I examine instances of projecting words into new contexts—such as the case of extending a word like "feed" into a new context, and the case of extending a term like "game" to a new instance—to establish that when we project successfully, this happens because the contexts of a word's projection and its previous incarnations are relevantly similar in some way. (However, I do not maintain we are always aware of these similarities, nor that the ways in which contexts are "similar" can be exhaustively catalogued or specified in advance of our projections.) I support Wittgenstein's "family resemblance" concept in making these claims, and mention that recognizing similarities is often an imaginative endeavor.

Intention in this context is constituted by the projective imagination. Though we are not automatons parroting language with which we have been passively programmed (by rules or mental states), we may be improvising more profoundly than we have yet recognized. In this context, we make use of a type of judgment that Wittgenstein examines in various passages in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

I also relate my account of projection to Anscombe's *Intention*. In that work, Anscombe shows our intentions must exhibit a "word-to-world" direction of fit. I mention this is what happens when we project words into new contexts. We use our imaginations to give words new meanings, but we do this in a way that corresponds to what is factual or discernible in our world (at least, our world of language). My account of the projective imagination also answers to her explanation of what intention is—it is supposed to answer to the "Why?" question, to explain what "we are doing." I have developed an answer to the "Why?" question, and to the question of what we are doing, when we project.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I make a few final points about projection: our projections do not necessarily render language unstable, though projection itself has no end—we are never through projecting toward the judgments of the future.

I close by describing the issues that are still open to me and awaiting further research and by surveying some facts about the history of language that reinforce the idea that projection—not only of words, but languages themselves—takes place because of the convening of our criteria (a phrase I will explain) and our collective language use. Language is confounding; many questions confront us, including how it began, how



“natural” it is, how its different contexts—written, spoken, and so on—relate to one another, and if it reflects universally shared human experiences. But it is always open to projection, as its history demonstrates, and I have tried to account for the way this works. I wonder if the phenomenon of language projection is timeless, even if languages themselves are not.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**THREE PICTURES OF LANGUAGE AND INTENTION (WITTGENSTEIN, ANSCOMBE, AND AUSTIN)**

**Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations***

In the following section, I focus on Wittgenstein's views on language, judgment, and rule-following, also discussing his remarks on intention and imagination. These are the topics that will inform the discussion of the projective imagination, to follow. (I indicate the location of passages by putting the section of the *Philosophical Investigations* [I or II] first and then the number of the passage.)

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein arguably turns from his earlier philosophical thoughts to a new conception of philosophy and seeks descriptions and analyses of our concepts. He proposes therapies, rather than one way of solving philosophical problems, and claims "The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known" (I, 109). He included a quote by the playwright Johann Nestroy, whom he admired, at the beginning of the work (though it was not included in all editions); the quote claims progress looks greater than it really is. The quote's significance is of great interest: was Wittgenstein alluding to the "progress" he had made? Or the so-called progress philosophy has made? Or the progress (especially the technological progress) of his culture—a progress he viewed as problematic?

Wittgenstein's work in this book marks a change in his own thought, and significantly, more questions are raised in the *Philosophical Investigations* than are answered. He attempts to bring words back into "everyday" use, rather than what he calls their metaphysical use, and this is a project to which Cavell will continually allude.

Wittgenstein says when words are used “normally,” their use is clear (I, 142). He records his investigations in what he calls “remarks” (vii), and these remarks are uttered by various “voices,” through whom Wittgenstein presents different views and responses to them. He begins with a discussion of language, emphasizing that when a child acquires rudimentary knowledge of words, “the teaching of language is not explanation, but training” (I, 5). For Wittgenstein, the elements of language are like the tools of a toolbox; not all parts of it have the same function, and not all are what we could call names (I, 11, 12, 23). (Words share this feature with tools, though they are not like tools in all respects.) Language is not “finished” or done, either, but is like a city with various sections and new developments, containing all kinds of sentences, and, just like a city, language is not immutable:

ask yourself whether our language is complete;—whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses (I, 18).

Languages change, they develop, and some disappear.

Wittgenstein argues what we see if we examine language use are “language-games.” They are related by what Wittgenstein terms “family resemblances,” so one member of the category may share a feature or features with another member, but not

with the others; there is no *one* feature that all of the members of the family share. Rather, they might be said to form an interlocking web. Wittgenstein counters the idea that some of our concepts can be circumscribed by an essential definition, a definition that isolates the sufficient and necessary conditions of a concept's existence and marks its boundaries (I, 66).<sup>1</sup> This idea—that some propositions may not share one, common essence, in spite of whatever disjunction of properties they do share—has been influential. Wittgenstein provides examples of such language-games, and says reading is one. Reading fits the “family resemblance” description, for we use different *criteria* for different instances of it.

What are criteria, according to Wittgenstein? I maintain that, for Wittgenstein, they are the aspects of our shared intellectual judgments as well as ways of behaving that specify what it means to say that the requirements for a concept have been fulfilled in a given instance. (I will discuss Cavell's understanding of criteria below. I think Cavell's account is substantively similar to Wittgenstein's.) For example, we might say that we consider people proficient readers of a language other than their native language if they can read, silently or aloud, words in another language and then explain what those words mean, or translate the terms. (This is different from reading that does not require translation, such as “reading” the words of a foreign language by just sounding out the letters.) Thus a criterion for reading in a second language is being able to independently read and translate texts of the second language. Such criteria establish what we subsume under our concepts. There are many different types of criteria (our criteria for judgments about the merits of art may differ from the criteria we apply in judging what makes one a good friend), and it is possible that different criteria are required for the application of

one concept on different occasions. For example, the term “art” may apply to a work of creative activity for many different reasons, as different criteria can satisfy this concept. If a sculpture is particularly well-done, we might subsume it under the concept of “art”; if a play is especially original, it might count as art as well. Skill and originality constitute criteria we use to determine whether something falls under the family-resemblance concept of art, and though many works of art display both, these two criteria do not always occur together. These criteria are not only manifested by our judgments; at I, 269, Wittgenstein says there are criteria in *behavior* for understanding; for thinking one understands; and for not understanding.

According to Wittgenstein, the speaking of language is “part of an activity, or of a form of life” (I, 23). His term, “form of life,” is, like “criteria,” a disputed one, but it clearly is a term he uses to refer to the shared aspects of human life, shared aspects that invoke our judgment when we deliberate about them. These judgments are shared as well, though the possibility of disagreement—and settling it—cannot be dispelled. Forms of life include the various human dimensions of our lives—shared experiences, thoughts, and behaviors. This does not mean that clearly delineated communities, akin to social or political organizations (with codes, e.g.) always accompany our criteria. For example, all (or almost all) people who exhibit pain can be considered to share a certain form of life, that is, all the various ways, often physical in nature, that people manifest pain (this is an example of something just mentioned—Wittgenstein’s insistence that there are criteria for behavior). There is no deliberately planned association of pain-exhibitors here, and pain, like many other manifestations of bodily behavior, is a natural element of human life. But what makes it a form of life is the way in which participants,

or potential participants, of that form of life can discern it for what it is and apply their collectively shared concepts to it. People can be said to share a form of life when they are participants in an aspect of their experience that they understand, at least to some minimal extent, and can engage in together. Perhaps not every person understands or participates in every element of it (as many English-language users do not know every term of English, or all of its grammar rules, and, of course, people do not know every language spoken, past or present, though they are still language users), but there is enough agreement or overlap in what they do that they can be said to share a form of life. Speakers of a particular language form such a community, as Wittgenstein has said. It is plausible to suppose criteria reveal the collective judgments and behaviors of participants in a form of life. In his use of the term, “form of life,” Wittgenstein focuses on those forms of life that seem most elemental and natural to the human experience. (It is unclear that he endorses the idea that there is *one* such form of life, but it seems plausible that he supposes aspects of human experience must be held enough in common between us that we can share judgments and agreement in criteria about those experiences.)

He also emphasizes the importance of context in making sense of language, providing the example “After he had said this, he left her as he did the day before” (I, 525). He says we cannot really understand this sentence absent a context, but it provides enough clues to what it might mean that we could construct possible meanings that would match it. The sentence could mean a person left someplace, say a house, leaving the person he was visiting as she herself was the day before (maybe she was gardening on both occasions, so when he took leave of her, he took leave of her in the garden on both occasions). It could also mean he did the same thing in the same way on both occasions:

maybe both times he put a hat on his head in the same way. Or perhaps it just means that he left her again, left her for a second time. What it presumably could not mean is that machines think, or the laws of physics can be ignored. There are limits to what the words can mean. Wittgenstein also emphasizes the significance of context in another passage, providing the following exchange: “I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever.’—Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything or nothing” (I, 6).

What does this suggest he thinks a context is? The context, for Wittgenstein, is, in my reading, all of the background factors relevant to determining the meaning of some aspect of our experience or consciousness which we are examining (in these cases, what is necessary to understand a sentence, and what is necessary to make a piece of equipment function as a brake-lever). The factors must be relevant, though we face difficulties about the extent to which we agree or disagree about such matters; we cannot consider every possible factor that could conceivably be in the background of what we investigate. In the case Wittgenstein has provided in I, 525, there are a number of ways of reasonably interpreting these words, but not every interpretation of the sentence is reasonable. The example requires interpretation because although it is sensible, it seems to require more information, outside the sentence, to truly constrain its meaning (if it is construed as a sentence referring to an actual situation). This is true of many (perhaps most) of our sentences, though some give rise to greater ambiguity than others. The second case (I, 6) is a metaphor for different types of cases. It emphasizes how the contextual factors of a subject of our investigation must fit together in order for us to

make sense of it. The parts of the machine make up the whole; they function collectively to establish the machine itself. They acquire their significance from this overall, cohesive context.

Wittgenstein argues against the idea that our concepts are “unregulated” (too loose) or otherwise defective (one of the speakers says “meaningless”—I, 70) if they have unclear boundaries (I, 68) or “blurred edges” (I, 71). He writes “Does it take (a boundary) to make the concept usable? Not at all!” (I, 69), “(‘inexact’) does not mean ‘unusable’” (I, 88), and “When I give the description: ‘The ground was quite covered with plants’—do you want to say I don’t know what I am talking about until I can give a definition of a plant?” (I, 70). In response to the worry that a blurred concept really does not count as an actual concept, as Gottlob Frege would argue, he says “Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all?” (I, 71). He says such blurriness can even be useful. He continues “is it senseless to say: ‘Stand roughly there?’” (I, 71); and, when one of the speakers asserts, “An enclosure with a hole in it is as good as *none*,” another responds “But is that true?” (I, 99). Language itself, including the concepts we indicate in using it, can be vague, though this does not render it useless or meaningless. In fact, acknowledging as much can support the conviction that we find concepts expressed in language meaningful even if they cannot be defined in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions: “What does it mean to know what a game is? What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it?” (I, 75). It is a puzzling fact of our language use, and our thought, that we employ concepts we cannot satisfactorily circumscribe in essential definitions, and we may well wonder why a new game gets subsumed under the concept. We may also well feel that simply providing examples and pointing out how they



resemble other instances of the concept in question is not entirely satisfactory. (I will suggest how we might resolve this persistently nagging dissatisfaction below.)

Wittgenstein uses these considerations about how language works to approach the view that language is formalized and complete, like a calculus, and we could reach “a final analysis of our forms of language” (I, 91) if we would just eliminate such inexact language as he has been describing. In passages that reflect his tendency to use the metaphorical to describe such matters, he says this urge reflects a preoccupation with what might be “*beneath* the surface” (I, 92). This is our conception of logic, “Something that lies within, which we see when we look *into* the thing, and which an analysis digs out” (I, 92). If we could locate an answer, it would be something that sounds eternal, “given once for all; and independently of any future experience” (I, 92). He thinks we suppose there is a logic to propositions that is “something in the background—hidden in the medium of the understanding” (I, 102). (In these passages, he is recalling views he expressed in the *Tractatus*.) But he thinks this is a mistaken view, like looking through glasses (which must focus the image in a particular way, rather than another) that we could remove (I, 103), and this is something we are actually mistakenly imposing on the subject, a mistake in our investigative thinking: “We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it” (I, 104). He emphasizes this point in other passages: “For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*: it was a requirement” (I, 107); next he says this crystalline purity is a “*preconceived idea*” (I, 108). Later he says the thought that “reality *must* correspond” to such preconceived ideas is a frequent “dogmatism” of philosophy (I, 131). We do not maintain an adequately clear understanding of language if we stray from the ordinary, everyday uses of our

words, and philosophy, he says, can only describe language; it cannot provide a foundation for it (I, 124).

For Wittgenstein, language is a shared, social phenomenon, which people are trained to use and understand (“To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique” [I, 199]). This is thought-provoking, as a technique is something that many different people may do, though many techniques can be carried out by individuals acting on their own (as an example, auto repair is a technique, and something that many different people may do, but one person can do it individually). Likewise, many speak language, but language users can talk to themselves, or think about, write, or otherwise engage in the technique of language absent the company of others.

Language also requires “regularity” (I, 207), that is, were it chaotic or unpredictable, it would not serve its purposes so well. Wittgenstein acknowledges that we look for the “common behavior” of humanity when faced with trying to understand an unknown language, and to “find the right expression” is like “translating or describing” (I, 335). And we must become proficient in a language if we are to mean something by it: “After all, one can only say something if one has learned to talk. Therefore in order to *want* to say something one must also have mastered a language” (I, 338). As J. L. Austin does, Wittgenstein also makes the point that words can accomplish acts: “Words are also deeds” (I, 546). He emphasizes that the meaning of a word is its use in the language (I, 43). He tells us to search for that use, because in many (though not all) cases in which we use the term “meaning” or “mean,” the “meaning” is supplied by giving an account of the use. Wittgenstein means by this that we should not try to locate some object or

correlate of a word, but should examine the way the word is used; that use will clarify the meaning of the word. In the course of this mastery of language, he claims “we *calculate*, operate, with words, and in the course of time translate them sometimes into one picture, sometimes into another” (I, 449). Sometimes, depending on the context, our mood as writers or speakers, we might prefer one word over another; such choices are indicated in our use of parts of speech, such as nouns and verbs, and even in our choices of punctuation.

Language also requires agreement in our judgments, which cannot be equated with agreement in definitions. To take one example, we frequently agree on what constitutes sufficient evidence for proof in the realm of scientific experiment. We do not share such judgments simply because we agree on definitions for “evidence” and “proof” as these terms are applicable to science. We agree because we jointly recognize the set of circumstances that provide us with what we would call “evidence” or “proof”—that boiling indicates (is evidence or proof of) the heat of water, for example, or why the newly discovered Kepler planets may be capable of supporting human or other life. Agreement in judgments is not an agreement that undermines our logic: “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so” (I, 242). However, we have to be able to agree among ourselves about what our terms mean. We cannot simply legislate linguistically (to anticipate a term of Austin’s) or make our uses of terms inaccessible to others: “For if I need a justification for using a word, it must also be one for someone else” (I, 378).

Now, what does he mean by justification? That will vary, depending on the form of life and the criteria and contextual factors involved. “What people accept as a justification—is shewn by how they think and live” (I, 325), he writes. This is a trust in our ability to understand and share judgments, and not defeasible simply because those judgments could be mistaken or are not anchored in reality by a discernible foundation. He says the kind of certainty we require for our judgments or justifications depends on the subject of the investigation: “The kind of certainty is the kind of language-game” (II, xi). For example, it is possible that the kind of certainty required for aesthetic judgments may differ from the kind of certainty required for at least some mathematical or logical judgments (though he does not say this here). We can verify what we mean by “justification” by considering how often we will advert to it when describing aspects of language-games: “How is the word ‘justification’ used? Describe language-games. From these you will also be able to see the importance of being justified” (I, 486).

Wittgenstein makes astute observations about how we are likely to develop good judgment about matters of human feeling, and this endeavor, like the use of language, is also not the result of some kind of calculus. In the course of these observations, he often uses music or visual imagery to illustrate his claims. Understanding language, like understanding music, may very well depend upon this type of judgment. We can indeed speak of “expert judgment” in matters of feeling, and pronounce some judgments better than others. Those with better judgment are those with the best insights or knowledge into matters of human life. Can this faculty be learned, as language can? Wittgenstein says yes, but our facility with such judgments depends on *experience*, or perhaps the prompting of a good teacher, one who knows just how to help at the right time: “From

time to time he gives him the right *tip*.—This is what ‘learning’ and ‘teaching’ are like here” (II, xi).

In “Morality, Human Understanding, and Language,” Ben Tilghman cites this passage and provides just such an example of this kind of learned ability, analyzing the novel *La Princesse de Clèves*. In this work, Nemours, a member of the court of Henri II, realizes a woman is infatuated with him, though she never says anything to him and in fact tries to avoid him. Tilghman says “Nemours’s judgment in these things is better than many others” (*Wittgenstein in America*, 242); he attributes this expertise to the man’s experience. Now, Nemours has this expertise because he is the sort who has the social acumen (perhaps, but not necessarily, due to his station at court; certainly, according to Tilghman, because of how effectively he can assess his experiences) to size up the chemistry between himself and the woman in question; though this is not, probably, the type of knowledge about which he could claim to be indubitably certain.

As another example, suppose two people, a “student” and a “teacher,” observe the racist treatment of a third (the experience of racist treatment qualifying as a matter of human feeling, though it is other things as well). A number of factors count as racist treatment; suppose this incident involves underestimating the intelligence of the offended person. The teacher says to the student: “That’s what racism looks like,” and the student, if properly poised to receive it, grasps this tip.

This is more art than science, but it has its sense of right and wrong, true or false, nevertheless. The infatuation of the first case, and the racism of the second, are real, even if not physically quantifiable; so is apprehension of such states of affairs. One can learn and apply accurate judgments about such matters. “What one acquires here (knowledge

gained from this process of learning) is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right' (II, xi). The reference to experience is underscored by Tilghman's analysis of what is going on emotionally between two characters. Thus Wittgenstein argues:

Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just *this* the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say "Because I know what it's all about." But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. In order to 'explain' I could only compare it with something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern) . . . (How does one justify such comparisons?—There are very different kinds of justification here.) (I, 527).

Just as we might sense the upcoming bridge of a song, we understand the meanings, implications, and cadences of our sentences and interactions. This is the kind of skill involved in making judgments of value, and it can be taken very far, as Wittgenstein points out, saying in the case of aesthetics, for example, "It is possible—and this is important—to say a *great deal* about a fine aesthetic difference" (II, xi).

Skill in such judgment is displayed, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, in our efforts to imagine. He says we lack clarity about the imagination and the role it plays in making propositions meaningful, or sensible. Wittgenstein writes, "In what sort of circumstances should we ask anyone: 'What actually went on in you as you imagined this?'—And what sort of answer do we expect?" (I, 394). But, he argues, imagination

can be used “in the course of proving something” (II, xi), and it, as well as the ability to perceive an aspect, “are subject to the will. There is such an order as ‘Imagine *this*’, and also: ‘Now see the figure like *this*’; but not: ‘Now see this leaf green’” (II, xi). For example, when we consider the duck-rabbit image, the switch we make in our minds when we see it as a rabbit, then a duck, depends on our *willing* (and if we do not invoke our wills, the image will appear to us one way or the other—as either a rabbit or a duck). It is a way of perceiving or conceiving of examples that is under our control. While there may not exactly be limits to what we can imagine, there are constraints, he suggests. (Limits would mark a sharper boundary on our judgments than constraints; beyond them we could not go, but the constraints might provide something akin to “guidelines.”) For example, he writes “we call something (or *this*) ‘the length of a rod’—but nothing ‘the length of a sphere’” (I, 251) and says “many mathematical proofs do lead us to say that we *cannot* imagine something which we believed we could imagine” (I, 517). An example is the construction of the heptagon, and such examples “lead us to revise what counts as the domain of the imaginable.” (Nevertheless, as a heptagon cannot be constructed, we realize in confirming this via proof that we thought we could imagine something we actually could not.) But we also perceive that our imaginative efforts will reveal which connections are apt. The imagination will also be deployed on those occasions when we have reason to imagine something; we could use it to think up all sorts of things, but we do not do this (or at least, we do not do this on many occasions when we could). For example, Wittgenstein asks, “Could one imagine a stone’s having consciousness? And if anyone can do so—why should that not merely prove that such

image-mongery is of no interest to us?” (I, 390). (He is here considering what “kinds” of things we think can have consciousness, and why.)

He says a sentence “can strike me as like a painting in words” (II, xi) and, as he frequently does, likens language to music, pointing out people can have a “sensitive ear” for the nuances of words (II, xi). Seeing an aspect is like seeing an image—“Doesn’t it take imagination to hear something as a variation on a particular theme?” (II, xi). Failing to do so is like failing to understand music as well: “Aspect blindness (that is, the inability to see something in a particular way—as something, as Wittgenstein puts it) will be *akin* to the lack of a ‘musical ear’” (II, xi).

Language is a type of institution for Wittgenstein, and we might consider what he means by “institution.” Though it is not entirely clear what he does mean, he obviously thinks many aspects of customary behavior are linked to human institutions: “To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions)” (I, 199).

Wittgenstein’s juxtaposition of these terms deserves closer consideration. Customs and institutions are not identical entities. There are customs that are not institutions, and there are institutions that are not customs. The practice of shaking hands is a custom, but it is not institutionalized. It has not always existed in its present form and may now be declining as a custom of polite behavior. And many institutions are not customary. Perhaps the presidency of the United States is one such example. Though many formalities associated with that office are carried on regardless of who holds it, one of its primary functions is to enable the incoming president to make changes as needed, to exercise prerogative without necessarily paying heed to any custom. Institutions can also



be formally instituted without historical precedent or deference to custom, as well. The United States did indeed do that when it first instituted the office of the presidency. Also, it is not clear how the term “use” relates to either. Wittgenstein may be suggesting some likeness between these terms. Perhaps he means to emphasize the fact that customs, uses, and institutions are at least alike in the way they reveal and cause (at least to some extent) regularities in our behaviors and ways of life.

Wittgenstein’s use of the term “institution” suggests he means they are those structures that reflect certain regularities or conventions of human behavior, including perhaps human forms of life, for Wittgenstein does describe language as an institution. They impose, and reflect, the regularity of the shared judgments and justifications of our human experiences. (Though in no particular order of precedence—whether the institution or judgments particular to it comes first would depend on the case in question, though in many or most cases, there might exist a complex interplay of mutual determination between the institution and the judgments.) The characteristics of these institutions can also serve to explain how those forms of life can be carried forward. Institutions have a tremendous impact on who we turn out to be and what and how we perceive. We are not always consciously aware of these institutions and their influence on us, but they do shape our lives in definitive ways. This is obviously true of language, and Wittgenstein notes “custom and upbringing” influence what we are able to perceive even in styles of painting (II, xi).

The signs of such institutions can also direct our behavior. Wittgenstein says “a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of a sign-post, a custom” (I, 198). We may follow signs as a result of customs, too, which have not been

clearly instituted in any formally recognizable sense, so it is worth distinguishing between customs and institutions in this respect. To take a very simple example, we follow conventions in spelling because we have regular sign-posts (the correct spellings) for the way we write our words. These spellings are a customary aspect of our lives and could be different than they are, but they provide a regular, customary way, which we use, of conveying our words. We do not, of course, infallibly conform to spelling conventions, for many reasons, nor are these conventions immutably fixed for all time, as any study of the developments of the English language—to take just one example—will reveal. We have also either adopted or accepted, to varying degrees of consciousness, such sign-posts for polite behavior, appropriate workplace behavior, and so on.

Institutions are not always formally codified, though they can be. They must be instituted if they can fairly use their name, but that process need not require conscious rules and regulations. The construction of a creole language counts as an example. The creole is instituted to resolve communication problems; if it receives formal codification, that comes later. It is important to distinguish between institutions that clearly reflect conscious human decisions (such as institutions of law and government) and those that do not, such as our natural dimensions of human behavior (like language), as well as all the unclear cases that exhibit characteristics of both human reflection and natural life. Wittgenstein does not explicitly make such a distinction in this passage above. However, it is implicit in his work in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

But institutions do more than this in Wittgenstein's philosophy. They also give rules their point. For example, Wittgenstein says rules "hang in the air" if "the institution

of their use is lacking” (I, 380). And understanding what Wittgenstein really thought about rules is a central interpretive challenge posed by the *Philosophical Investigations*.

What did Wittgenstein mean by a “rule”? When he talks about what a rule might be or what it might do in this work, he says the following (among other things): rules can function as instruction; rule-governed behavior can be something we observe, and learn about that way; they can be a tool in a game (he does not elaborate further) (I, 54); they do not always clearly “circumscribe” the games in which they play a part (I, 68); following a rule is like following an order (I, 206); vagueness does not render them meaningless (I, 100); they raise a paradox that makes it seem as if they could be interpreted in any way (which, in my reading, he ultimately intends to contest—I, 201), and they are related to agreement (I, 224). We can also ask, however, whether learning, obeying, or understanding a rule means applying that rule consistently, indefinitely into the future, after learning it.

Wittgenstein asks,

Whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule . . . The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space (I, 218-219).

This is a supposition that wrongly leads us to believe we have to “wait upon the nod (the whisper) of the rule” (I, 223). Under such a conception of rules, we are led (perhaps as an instance of imposing a predetermined concept on our experience, as he has suggested) to think the “steps are *really* already taken, even before I take them in writing

or orally or in thought” (I, 188) (which he also suggests means “I no longer have any choice” [I, 219]). He claims we can gain this impression from thinking about the workings of a machine: “the action of a machine—I might say at first—seems to be there in it from the start . . . If we know the machine, everything else, that is its movement, seems to be already completely determined,” and, just as we might suppose the first step in “rule-following” sends us along such a series of rails to infinity, “We might say that a machine, or the picture of it, is the first of a series of pictures which we have learnt to derive from this one” (I, 193).

Wittgenstein does not appear to be a thoroughgoing skeptic about rules, though skeptical of certain *conceptions* of them. In particular, he is skeptical of the idea, described above, that language corresponds to or is a calculus, and that in following language’s rules we somehow instantiate or locate such a calculus. It seems quite clear that Wittgenstein did not mean a “rule” is a metaphysical reality that catches us up and carries us toward infinity. In these passages, he is criticizing that idea and disputing traditional metaphysical conceptions of philosophy. Nor does he mean that once we learn it, we are bound always to follow it, though we frequently might.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, based on his use of certain examples, Wittgenstein does not clearly distinguish between mathematics and language. He sees mathematics as an integral part of human forms of life and language, and in his later philosophy he may have conceived of mathematics much differently than he once had. Of course, Wittgenstein understood mathematics well. It is also possible that he conceived of mathematics as a clear, perhaps the clearest, example of a rule-following human endeavor, and if he could cast doubt even on the nature of rules in mathematics,

he could cast doubt on the possibility of rules elsewhere, including in language. But even if both mathematics and language can be reduced to games that exhibit family resemblances, the differences between them, or at least his reasons for thinking they are similar in this respect, should be more clearly accounted for than they are in the examples he uses.

Does this mean once we learn a rule, we must always apply it without variation in the future? The answer must be no. Wittgenstein, and, later, Cavell, would say as much, and this appears to be the consequence of Wittgenstein's view that languages develop as do cities. (Perhaps in other areas of human endeavor and knowledge, "rule-following" is necessarily more rigid, as well as different in nature.)

What do we do when disputes arise about who is right? Wittgenstein appears to be aware of this problem and does not appear to hold the view that interpretive disputes about the truth or who is right can be solved by simply issuing more words (at least not always, though of course sometimes words do clear things up). The regularities or conventions of a subject like language are not empty of meaning and do not collapse into the subjectivity of each individual. In *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein demonstrates an awareness of this possibility when he says the consequence of such an endorsement would be: "Then . . . everybody could continue the series as he likes" (I, 116). Such regularities simply do not seem to be grounded in a foundation we can locate, a foundation that reveals the existence of the "rules" we follow. And there may be a limit to how far we can pursue questions about them or adjudicate between conceptions of what is right or true, though that, as Wittgenstein might say, reflects the certainty such inquiries call for; it does not mean everything is a matter of individual

subjectivity, and any view is as good as any other, and no distinctions or evaluations can be made in our judgments concerning what is right or true.

Wittgenstein says the question “How am I able to obey a rule?” is a request for a justification if it is not a request for information about causes, and he responds “If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned” (I, 217). In this passage, Wittgenstein is not only refuting the idea that there are formalist rules underlying our language use, including ones “encoded” in neurophysiology, which will explain why we do what we do. He is also pointing out that those attempts to explain must come to an end at some point: he claims “Justification by experience comes to an end. If it did not it would not be justification” (I, 485). As mentioned above, justification (its nature and certainty) depend on what people accept within their forms of life, and here, Wittgenstein explicitly links experience to it. One’s experiences determine how far one can be expected to provide explanations, and if two people are involved in a search for explanation that reaches bedrock, they may be unable to take their inquiry further. As an example, consider what might happen if a student asks a teacher about the nature of a logical contradiction: “Why are you representing the propositions as A and not-A?” “So that I can demonstrate that the sentence is logically false.” “What does that mean?” “It means the sentence will never turn out to be anything other than false, no matter what truth-value you assign to its component letters.” “So that sentence can never be true?” “No. It is like saying something is true and false at the same time. That’s a contradiction.” “So? Does that mean contradictions are just sentences? Then can’t they just be ignored?” “Well . . .” The conversation may move at this point toward a discussion of the nature of reality, or how human minds conceive of it, or how logic can

represent or idealize certain aspects of reason, but if the student truly refuses to see the significance of these explanations, or to see the force of such properties as logical truth and falsity, not much more in the way of justification can be supplied—“the chain of reasons has an end” (I, 326), Wittgenstein writes. This does not mean the student is right, and it does not mean the teacher can continue to supply reasons indefinitely.

Now this is a final point of providing reasons in a conversation, so to speak, but it neither reveals a final point for all such disputes, nor the need for one. Wittgenstein explains “an explanation serves to remove or to avert a misunderstanding—one, that is, that would occur but for the explanation; not every one that I can imagine” (I, 87). He also adds that justification may not be necessary in some cases; the request for definitions can be “architectural,” an “ornamental coping” (I, 217).

Wittgenstein also raises questions about intention. He does not say much about the physical nature or brain-state of intention itself (he appears to think we could not locate “intention” in this way), though he acknowledges, as G. E. M. Anscombe will, that an expression of intention can function as a prediction about how one will act in the future (II, x). He says intention is not always apparent; it can come into view, it can “vanish” (I, 645); and sometimes it seems as if it is only clear to us in speaking about it, when, for example, we say we know we had an intention to quiet someone, Wittgenstein says, but we do not remember the words we used to do this (I, 648). He says our memory might not supply anything; all we might have are the recollection of the words we spoke.

He says intention is not an “experience” as meaning is not an “experience”:  
 “Meaning is as little an experience as intending . . . They have no experience-content.  
 For the contents (images for instance) which accompany and illustrate them are not the

meaning or intending” (II, xi). The intention is not actually instantiated in what happens as a result of it: “The intention *with which* one acts does not ‘accompany’ the action any more than the thought ‘accompanies’ speech. Thought and intention are . . . to be compared neither with a single note which sounds during the acting or speaking, nor with a tune” (II, xi).

But it is something we accept, something we recognize when questions about what someone meant arise: “In a law-court . . . the question might be raised how someone meant a word. And this can be inferred from certain facts.—It is a question of *intention*” (II, xi). He also wonders if being the recipient of something meaningful, rather than the sender (we do often seem to construe intention as the effort of a “sender”), could be similarly important: “But could how he experienced a word—the word ‘bank’ for instance—have been significant in the same way?”

In the passages that refer to intention, he seems clearly to be emphasizing an “ordinary” sense of intention, as when he notes that it can be a species of willing: “If (willing) is the action, then it is so in the ordinary sense of the word; so it is speaking, writing, walking, lifting a thing, imagining something. But it is also trying, attempting, making an effort (to do those things)” (I, 615). He endorses the idea that our intentions do not change or determine the meanings of our shared words. For example, he includes in a note:

It is also possible for someone to get an explanation of the words out of what was intended as a piece of information. [Marginal note: Here lurks a crucial superstition.]



Can I say “bububu” and mean “If it doesn’t rain I shall go for a walk”?—It is only in a language that I can mean something by something. This shews clearly that the grammar of “to mean” is not like that of the expression “to imagine” and the like (18).

Though Wittgenstein’s term, “grammar,” is one that raises interpretive issues, we can suppose Wittgenstein thinks meaning differs from imagining because he is referring to the fact that words cannot just mean anything, even if we are imagining various meanings through them. We are not limited by our imagination in the same ways we are by our languages. We can imagine many things (even without using language); we can even imagine going for a walk when we use the term “bububu”; but we cannot actually mean that. Later, he remarks: “Suppose I said ‘a b c d’ and meant: the weather is fine. For as I uttered these signs I had the experience normally had only by someone who had year-in year-out used ‘a’ in the sense of ‘the’, ‘b’ in the sense of ‘weather’, and so on.—Does ‘a b c d’ now mean: the weather is fine?” (I, 509). He returns to this problem in posing the following questions: “Make the following experiment: *say* ‘It’s cold here’ and *mean* ‘It’s warm here’. Can you do it?—And what are you doing as you do it? And is there only one way of doing it?” (I, 510).

Yet later on in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein muses: “Suppose, however, that someone were to draw while he had an image or instead of having it, though it were only with his finger in the air. (This might be called ‘motor imagery.’) He could be asked: ‘Whom does that represent?’ And his answer would be decisive.—It is quite as if he had given a verbal description: and such a description can also simply take the *place* of the image” (II, iii). Wittgenstein reinforces the idea that in some

contexts what we seek to know is someone's intention; it is decisive in resolving some interpretive problems. In cases such as these, the only way to find a meaning is to consult the creator's intention, or *what relevantly counts* as that intention. What we take to be an intention will vary from case to case, depending on the context. (But this may not always remove interpretive difficulties. If we ask someone what is meant by something, we may get an answer. But presumably this answer consists of words. And what do we do if those words raise further indeterminacies of meaning?)

His speakers revert to intention again, as well as a mysterious question about its relation to rules: "it is just the queer thing about *intention*, about the mental process, that the existence of a custom, of a technique, is not necessary to it" (I, 205). He says we go along with rules the same way we go along with orders, thus following our training (I, 206). He sees intention as bound up with its surroundings: "An intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions. If the technique of the game of chess did not exist, I could not intend to play a game of chess. In so far as I do intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question" (I, 337).

In this passage, it is clear that he holds the view that our intentions as expressed in language are constrained (in some way) by the language itself. He appears to recognize that human intention does not necessarily arise from what is outside of human beings. Intentions are an aspect of our consciousness, even if we are not cognizant of them; what we could call part of the "inner" human life. But what is "outer" can influence them and the shape or expression they can take (as language can influence our intentions when we speak). What we call or refer to as "intentions" are, in some cases, part of what we

describe as our consciousness, but in other cases they are not. One can intend to become an artist, for example, without ever fully or completely realizing this intention, or realizing it much later than one might have supposed one would. The “inner” and the “outer” can be separated, and it is not possible to suppose that intentions themselves can be neatly analyzed in terms of a well-defined, comprehensible “inner” landscape and an equally well-defined, comprehensive “outer” one. But what is within and what is without can work together in the expression of intention. For example, when we play games, to use Wittgenstein’s example, we are often following along with the “rules” of those games, regardless of whatever personal intentions we may hold. We can follow rules “blindly” (I, 219). But we can also hold intentions specifically relevant to the games we play: our moves in chess are embedded within the context of that game, and inform it. Without the game of chess, we could not intend anything with respect to that institution; likewise, he says, without the institution of language, we could not intend certain sentences.

As a result, we can infer that Wittgenstein maintains that when we intend something in language, we must do so within the framework of language itself, which provides our tools for meaning certain things by our words. This also limits our ability to change their meanings. When we use language, we use tools held in common.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein is criticizing certain notions of language, but he is also criticizing certain conceptions of what we might term “inner states” that allegedly have some connection to language and other elements of human experience. For example, he criticizes the idea that every word corresponds to an object; that every utterance of language calls up some specific picture or mental process; that our

thoughts must always match language or reality, or even control it—“to remember,” for example, is not a term that should be equated with whatever goes on in our consciousness when we remember (I, 305; I, 601); and also that when we speak, we have in mind every use or definition of the words we are using, as if dictionary definitions must scroll through our minds when we use words (or our memories, or recognition of things we have seen in the past—I, 603). We do not just view all of the meanings of words in our minds, he says. If asked to “mean” the word “Scot” in different ways, he writes “I blink with the effort as I try to parade the right meanings before my mind in saying the words” (II, ii), but this is not something he would do in other contexts in which the word “Scot” might naturally arise. Do we mean something different, he asks, every time we point to something we perceive, such as the color of an object? Perhaps only if we are asked to do so. Reading may offer different experiences still; speaking numbers 1 through 12 is different than looking at the numbers on a watch and “reading” them (I, 161). He disputes the idea that when we are communicating, we are transferring our mental states over to someone else (I, 363) and rightly notes that conscious thought and language do not always function together. Conscious thought can be so automatic and instantaneous that sometimes there appears to be no “inner working” of the mind there, if we go to look for it. For example, we frequently talk sensibly without any conscious forethought about the words we are suddenly putting into speech.

Wittgenstein has effectively criticized some ways of discussing inner states, and in considering what he says, and what he will not say, we can mark an aspect of Wittgenstein’s procedures as a philosopher. He conveys the impression that he feels talk is cheap when it will not issue in real answers we can accept, and he shows that this is

where, at least at this point, in this work, he stopped. He is not eliminating questions about “inner workings,” but he is criticizing certain ways of posing such questions, or certain ways of understanding what the real questions are, because he realizes we will encounter difficulties and reach a point at which we have nothing comprehensible to say. Though such questions can be posed, they ultimately will not lead us anywhere; this is another feature of philosophy—sometimes it raises questions for which we realize we do not have direct answers, or indirect ones, either, and perhaps never will.

This is as far as he will take such subjects, and perhaps as far as he thinks they can be taken. For example, at I, 157, after he has been describing the questions that arise when we consider when we can say someone has learned to read, he attributes the ability to read to a change in behavior. But in the next passage, 158, a speaker poses the question: “But isn’t that only because of our too slight acquaintance with what goes on in the brain and the nervous system? If we had a more accurate knowledge of these things we should see what connexions were established by the training, and then we should be able to say when we looked into his brain: ‘Now he has read this word, now the reading connexion has been set up.’” To which Wittgenstein responds that this sounds plausible, and may indicate whatever we may mean by “a priori” knowledge, but then says: “Now, ask yourself: what do you *know* about these things?” And then he says someone could accuse him of holding a behaviorist view, to which he replies:

We talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know more about them—we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better . . . And now the

analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium.

And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them (I, 308).

He will not weigh in or give voice to a view on these matters—beyond saying we cannot. Is his failure of voice here a capitulation to skepticism, or a signal of the state of his philosophical activity? (It is more likely the latter. Wittgenstein notes that two things tend to occur: (1) we assume something we do not know anything about [e.g., that there “must” be some kind of brain process going on], and then (2) when we cannot find what we assumed must be there, it looks as if we are denying something. Both aspects of the philosophical “game” are misleading us into false pictures.) It is noteworthy that he says “when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound” (I, 261). The project of cataloguing the ontological status of inner states is such a point. It is as if words, and his voice, fail him here, and it is interesting that in this work Cavell sees so much material for his own “voice” in philosophy.

How can words fail us when we do philosophy, specifically if, like Wittgenstein, we approach philosophy out of dissatisfaction with the questions and the answers it gives—which also fail us? No doubt one reason is because of the nature of philosophy itself, a discipline that works at the outer edges of what we can know, including those questions for which we have never developed satisfactory answers. But one could also argue that words fail us in certain compressed instances of learning itself: one begins with questions and confusions, one learns, one understands, and that is it—one's early efforts seem puzzlingly inept at a backward glance; the material has been mastered, it is

past, and there is nothing more to do or say. Sometimes the effect of this education is to let us see that there really was no question where we thought there was one. Cavell says, at the opening to *Must We Mean What We Say?*, that history can refer to what has passed within oneself, and when one has progressed through learning, one can similarly feel that the need to explicate one's thoughts has also passed. That foment of words that can accompany learning can exorcise the very need to say any more about the subject once it has been mastered. This may be especially true of those areas of inquiry involving "something that is already open to view," as Wittgenstein put it (I, 89). I suspect this experience may be true of progress through the levels of other kinds of endeavors; it may, for example, be related to the way in which some visual artists move increasingly toward abstraction as their skills, their experience, and their knowledge become ever more refined. And in philosophy, one can, in an instant, see the problems, see the impossibility of resolving them, and get to the point of feeling an inarticulate sound is most appropriate, as Wittgenstein says. Perhaps this is where he found himself. These are experiences in philosophical development that can affect anyone who is philosophically inclined, not just Wittgenstein.

Related to this, the quote with which Wittgenstein begins the *Philosophical Investigations* deserves more investigation than it has received (I notice it is rarely even translated in editions of the book). Nestroy writes that progress appears greater than it is. The observation is symbolically rich: Wittgenstein could be using the words to suggest philosophy has not progressed very far, or that he and other philosophers have made less progress than planned or supposed. The words are mocking, depressingly accurate, amusing, and simply true. Is he raising a challenge to progress forward? It does not

seem like it; he is reflecting from the standpoint at which he has found himself. (These words correspond well with the tone of the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*.) And it is noteworthy that Wittgenstein availed himself of someone else's brief, insightful words, the words of a playwright who, like his quote, should receive more attention.

The *Philosophical Investigations* poses numerous interpretive difficulties (not the least of which is the translation of the text itself, as well as what Wittgenstein would have done with the sections his editors arranged). A feature of the text that is notably consistent is its own particular use of language: a forceful, no-nonsense brevity, as if Wittgenstein was or had grown impatient with what he saw as philosophical mistakes (his own, those of others, or both?) or his own ability to get his thoughts across. Questions remain about whether he can be understood as abandoning philosophy; if, in his view, he felt he had dissipated the confusions of the subject, and philosophy itself had nowhere further to go, or if he can be understood as providing a new, positive program for investigation. (It sometimes sounds as if he is doing both.) At any rate, Wittgenstein writes like the kind of teacher he describes. His language illustrates the striking power of imagery to convey ideas, and he distills his reflections to main points (or at least central questions). He tends to get to the point; Cavell quotes his remark in *Culture and Value*: "Each of the sentences I write is trying to say the whole thing" (*Cavell Reader*, 386). This may be because he writes with the image of his previous work in mind. Cavell also repeats his admission "My account will be hard to follow: because it says something new but still has egg-shells from the old view sticking to it" (*Cavell Reader*, 387).

**G. E. M. Anscombe's *Intention***



I will explain elements of Anscombe's influential account of intention, later relating some of Austin's remarks to hers. Anscombe begins by pointing out three uses of the word "intention": it is used for statements that one is going to do something; it is used to characterize actions as intentional; and it is used to refer to the intention underlying or motivating such actions. She says we use the same word for these three cases of intention, but this does not mean we are describing the same thing in each case. Though in some cases expressions of intention, or descriptions of intentions or intentional actions, may concern events in the future, intentions are not merely predictions of the future, as Anscombe explains. For one thing, an intention might fail to get carried through in the future; this does not mean it was not an intention. The fact of the intention's existence is not supplied by the fact that the action or behavior named by the intention occurred. Intention also requires no outward evidence, though that can accompany intention: it "can exist without a symbol," Anscombe says (5). That is why we say intention can be expressed. Yet expression is not necessary for the existence of intention either, for one can have intentions that are not expressed in any way or that do not match, or contradict, what one says or does.

Anscombe asks how we can at least recognize intention, and says we can often do this by determining what a person is doing. She thinks we might suppose the only way to determine a person's intentions is by consulting that person about them; the person who has intentions, on this view, has some sort of internal thoughts, and the person's intentions are "authoritatively settled" by whoever holds them. But she says we have to begin by analyzing outward, not inward, acts:

All this conspires to make us think that if we want to know a man's intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire; and hence, that if we wish to understand what intention is, we must be investigating something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind; and that although intention issues in actions, and the way this happens also presents interesting questions, still what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need consider in our enquiry. Whereas I wish to say that it is the first (9).

In saying this, Anscombe raises the concern, related to criticisms that have been made of Wittgenstein, that she is too focused on what is only observable by way of "outer" behavior. As mentioned above, Wittgenstein's emphasis on the "outer" has led to charges that he was a behaviorist (and I have maintained that he would not engage in unprofitable discussions about what we couldn't talk sensibly about, such as certain "inner states"). Similarly, Anscombe's emphasis on what we are "doing" can make it sound as if she gives insufficient attention to the aspect of human thought (whether consciously recognized or not) that actually informs so much of human activity, and which she herself recognizes; as just reviewed, she acknowledges that we often use the word to refer to something "inner," and she maintains that a person's intention might not be carried through in action. If we *have* to choose between studying outer states, or studying inner states, when we assume a starting-point in our accounts of intention, perhaps Anscombe is correct to emphasize what is "outer" and observable. This involves different philosophical problems than investigations into brain-states or "inner" states, and Wittgenstein may be right to recognize, as I maintain he does, that such

investigations lead to irresolvable problems and may be misguided. I do see how Anscombe's construal of the issue could incline readers to suppose hers is a behaviorist explanation, however, and as such leaves something to be desired. In "Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*," Cavell says that if the interpretations of Wittgenstein reduce to behaviorist or antibehaviorist, he would pick the antibehaviorist (280), and I would do the same. I am inclined to do the same for Anscombe.

Having said this, Anscombe turns to intentional action. Intentional actions, she explains, fall within what she calls a "sub-class" of things "known without observation," that is, not only known because they are observed. She thinks intentional actions are those that, unlike other actions, can be investigated by a "Why?" question. The answer to "why?" could refer to a historical factor, supply an explanation of the action, or refer to something the actor is trying to bring about in the future (something that, she later adds [35], the intending person must reasonably suppose can be brought about). (Anscombe mentions that "reason" and "cause" cannot always be sharply distinguished: revenge as a reason for an action is certainly different from knocking a cup off a table when startled—so the cup is caused to fall—but is, she asks, the answer "Because he told me to" to the "why?" question a reason or a cause? She says it depends on the case and its circumstances. She also distinguishes between motive and intention, though she acknowledges there are connections between them. She points out motives can "interpret" [19] what we do. But one aspect of her ensuing description of the difference between them is confusing. For example, she says revenge is a motive, but the act of

revenge is itself the revenge, it constitutes the motive; an act of revenge is not some other, additional state of mind or affairs.)

The “why?” question does not apply when we can answer “I was not aware I was doing that,” or when we cannot provide (however this is to be done) some sort of mental cause. (A hard case, to Anscombe, is the answer “I don’t know why I did it” [25-26].) Intention depends on answers other than “I just did” (33), according to Anscombe: “the concept of voluntary or intentional action would not exist, if the question ‘Why?’, with answers that give reasons for acting, did not” (34). This intention, which she thinks is revealed in answers to the “why?” question, is, she says, “the intention *with which* a man does what he does” (34).

She then asks a fundamentally important question, “is there any description which is *the* description of an intentional action, given that an intentional action occurs?” (37). In response, she considers the case of a man pumping water that will be transmitted to people inside a house. The water is poisoned; in pumping it in to them, the man is engaged in poisoning them in order to stop their atrocities against Jewish people and bring about a better political order. Anscombe argues that what the man is doing can be *described* in various ways—as sweating, wearing out his shoes, making money, exerting his muscles—but not all of these descriptions capture the intentional aspects of what he is doing. Answers to the “why?” question here would issue in a sort of chain that supplies a description of the intention: if asked why he is moving his arm, the man would say he is pumping; if asked why he is pumping, he would say he is providing water for the house; if asked why he is pumping the water, he might respond the people in the house need water, and he is going to “polish that lot off” (38). Again, however, not everything the

man is doing counts as relevant within such a description of his intention. We could ask him a series of “why?” questions to which he will say he is moving his arm, pumping the water, and then finally reach the point where he says he is poisoning the people in the house. “And,” Anscombe writes, “here comes the break; for though in the case we have described there is probably a further answer, other than ‘just for fun’, all the same this further description (e.g. to save the Jews, to put in the good men, to get the Kingdom of Heaven on earth) is not such that we can now say: he is saving the Jews, he is getting the Kingdom of Heaven, he is putting in the good ones” (40). We have reached the point where we are moving past what counts as an accurate description of the man’s action, though in my view there could be room for disagreement about when exactly this happens in the example she provides. Though she says the man’s intention is not to save Jewish people and put good leaders in office, it seems to me this is in fact relevantly connected to his intention and is part of the overall point of what he is doing.

This view encounters difficulties in the case in which the man claims his intention is just to acquit his job duties and get paid. He might say, she explains, that he didn’t care about the poisoning or any of that; he just wanted to do his usual job. She says “The answer to this has to be: there can be a certain amount of control of the truthfulness of the answer . . . It is therefore necessary that it should be his usual job if his answer is to be acceptable; and he must not do anything, out of the usual course of his job, that assists the poisoning and of which he cannot give an acceptable account” (43).

Each aspect of what the man is doing makes up a series of descriptions, Anscombe says, using the formulation “A—B—C—D,” where each letter represents a description of an action, and each description depends on the one that came before it. In

the case of the man pumping water that will poison the people in the house, “A” refers to the intentional movement of his arm; “B” to the operation of the pump; “C” to the transmission of water to the house, and “D,” finally, to poisoning the people in it. She says this is “one action with four descriptions” (46), and refers to one intention as the last in the series—“D” is what really isolates the intention under investigation, and it explains each of the prior stages in the series (46-47). There are innumerable details of events that might interest us (we might focus on the way the water is being pumped to the house; we might focus on other minutiae within the chain of events that has been initiated), but Anscombe rightly points out that within any series we could construct, if what concerns us is a description of the intention, we would only focus on those that are of relevance to the intention. Later she claims that the movement of the pump handle may be construed to play a part in the series, but not the train travel that brought the people to the house. She asks “Why has the movement of the pump handle a more important position than a turn of that wheel?” (83) and responds that it is because the pump is directly implicated in the process of the poisoning we are investigating (that is, in the way in which we are interested in it), though the train ride is not (though again, there is room for dispute about what is relevant and what is not). She says “After all, there must be an infinity of other crossroads besides the death of these people” and cites Wittgenstein to support this focus: “Concepts lead us to make investigations, are the expression of our interest, and direct our interest” (citing *Philosophical Investigations* 570) (84).

Now, an important aspect of Anscombe’s work in *Intention* concerns the “direction of fit” between intentions and the world. She says if a man goes to the store carrying a shopping list, it counts as an expression of his intention if he wrote it, and an

order if his wife wrote it. If he is being observed by a detective who then makes up a list based on what the man is buying, there is an important difference between the list the man is carrying (whether it is an expression of an intention or an order) and the list the detective makes. The man makes a mistake of performance if he does not buy what is on the list; but there is a mistake in the record if the detective writes down something the man buys that the man, according to his list, was not supposed to buy (56). She says if we do not follow an order correctly, “there is a discrepancy between the language and that of which the language is a description. But the discrepancy does not impute a fault to the language—but to the event” (57). For example, she says, if we came home with a grocery item we were not supposed to buy, because it was not written on the list, we would not fix this by scratching out what is written on the list and supplying the term for what we did buy.

This passage has been interpreted to emphasize the significance of the fact that our intentions can effect a change in the world; they do not simply describe that world. We cannot make the world aright by changing some words on a list. When our words function as the performatives Austin will describe, for example, they actually change what is in the world; they cause boats to be named, people to be married, bets to be placed, and so on. They are like “deeds,” as Wittgenstein called them. Intentions are like this as well, for they bring about changes in our world, if they are acted on. The fit is what is called “word-to-world,” and I will investigate how intentions bring about changes in the world when they function in the projection of words into new contexts.

### **J. L. Austin’s “Linguistic Phenomenology”**

J. L. Austin, like Wittgenstein, pays careful attention to our use of words and what their use reveals. For example, in the essays of *Philosophical Papers* (abbreviated *PP* in what follows), he analyzes “can,” “if,” and “*prae-tendere*,” the Latin etymological root of “pretend,” as well as the differences he perceives between “purpose,” “intend,” and “deliberate”—all three of which can figure differently in the case in which a child happens to spill ink (“Three Ways of Spilling Ink,” *PP*, 274). He also employs metaphors and, in phrases that recall Wittgenstein’s, he calls words our “tools” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 181) and insists “we should use clean tools,” by this presumably referring to the need for precision and an avoidance of terms that obfuscate our inquiries into language. He also wishes to examine the connection between words and what they are about, or what exists, and he terms this a type of “linguistic phenomenology” (where this refers to the “phenomena” we perceive in the world) (*ibid.*, 182). In connection with this phenomenological project, he provides examples of classifying and analyzing various speech-acts.

I begin by reviewing Austin’s ideas about language. Though he believes we have to closely examine our existing language use, and should not try to assimilate it to some ideal model, Austin acknowledges our ordinary use may not reveal everything that is meaningful or could be expressed in language, or that we would wish to investigate. He says “There may be plenty that might happen and does happen which would need new and better language to describe it in . . . There may be extraordinary facts, even about our everyday experience, which plain men and plain language overlook” (“The Meaning of a Word,” *PP*, 69). There is, he argues, a sharp difference between the world and our language; words are not “facts” or “things,” and sometimes we must “prise (words) off



the world” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 182), so we can see it clearly. He thinks language can only accommodate some human purposes. The world in which humans find themselves, he says, is extraordinarily varied, “but we cannot handle an indefinitely large vocabulary; nor, generally speaking, do we wish to insist on the minutest detectable differences, but rather on relative similarities; nor, with our limited experience both as individuals and as a race, can we anticipate in our vocabulary vagaries of nature which have yet to be revealed” (“How to Talk,” *PP*, 147). It is unlikely that we will need to introduce words to our language if we have some that work, he claims, due to “the natural economy of language” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 195), but it is true that this may occur: “fact is richer than diction” (*ibid.*). Yet he does maintain “our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations” (*ibid.*, 182), and thinks these represent a “survival of the fittest” that are probably more valuable than any that can be invented by philosophers of an afternoon (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 182; also “Three Ways of Spilling Ink,” *PP*, 281). Words themselves do not, he says, ever move entirely away from their source. In his view, it is rarely the case that a word “shakes off its etymology and its formation” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 201). The “old idea” will remain; “no word ever achieves entire forgetfulness of its origins” (“Three Ways of Spilling Ink,” *PP*, 283). Additionally, as language users, we do not really differ in that use as much as we might suppose, though it might turn out that on some occasions we imagine things differently from one another—“which is all too easy to do, because of course no situation (and we are dealing with *imagined* situations) is ever ‘completely’ described” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 183-184). As Wittgenstein did, as Cavell does, he

has confidence in our ability to agree (which is not to say we must or always do agree, though he is optimistic about our ability to secure common ground, as necessary). If we do fill in such a picture, he thinks it is unlikely it will turn out we disagree, but even if we do, he goes on to say this may not be cause for alarm about the overall coherence of language, or reason to suppose we should give up on it or find it hopelessly flawed: “If we light on an electron that rotates the wrong way, that is a discovery, a portent to be followed up, not a reason for chucking physics” (*ibid.*, 184).

Significantly, and like Wittgenstein and Cavell, Austin makes use of imagined cases to make his points. Examples must be brought to mind for examination by way of the imagination. For example, Austin asks us to consider the difficulties posed by thinking about a case such as “x is extended but has no shape” (“The Meaning of a Word,” *PP*, 68). Yet he says “there are difficulties about our powers of imagination, and about the curious way in which it is enslaved by words” (*ibid.*, 67). The imagination is hampered both by its own erratic power and its connection to language, Austin says. For, he argues, “we can only describe what it is we are trying to imagine, by means of words which precisely describe and evoke the *ordinary* case, which we are trying to think away. Ordinary language *blinkers* the already feeble imagination” (*ibid.*, 68). What we can do, he says, is make ourselves aware of the tendency of ordinary expressions to obscure whatever it is we are trying to perceive, and work around this: “the only thing to do is to imagine or experience all kinds of odd situations” (*ibid.*). (In the case of something that is “extended but has no shape,” what I imagine is something like the air all around us.) The imagination can be assisted by details: “The more we imagine (a) situation in detail, with a background of story—and it is worth employing the most idiosyncratic or,

sometimes, boring means to stimulate and to discipline our wretched imaginations—the less we find we disagree about what we should say” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 184). (Though as he has mentioned, no imagined situation is ever fully described.) And when it fails us, that may be because of a “failure to appreciate the situation” (*ibid.*, 194).

Austin criticizes the attempt to find “the meaning of a word” when that amounts to trying to figure out what a word *itself* is, in general. He says we can sensibly ask such questions as “What is a rat?,” but not “What is *the-meaning-of-a-word?*”, meaning by this asking what it is for *any* word to have *any* meaning (“The Meaning of a Word,” *PP*, 58). In those cases in which we seek the meaning of a word like “racy,” to use Austin’s example, we can either try to provide a definition, or we can try to convey what the word means “by getting the questioner to *imagine*, or even actually to *experience*, situations which we should describe correctly by means of sentences containing” the term “racy” and its cognates, as well as situations in which those terms would be inapplicable (*ibid.*, 57). The first case is explaining the word’s syntactics; the second, demonstrating its semantics (*ibid.*, 57, 60).

When, he says, we wonder why we call a set of entities by the same name, two kinds of responses have been provided. The first supposes this use must indicate the presence of a universal; the second supposes there must be something “similar,” as Austin says, about all of the objects referred to by this word. But he objects to this notion of “similar,” arguing that many objects called by the same name are very different from one another. For example, he says, the aspects of the world we describe as “healthy” (exercise and the human body) are not similar to each other. And when we consider the use of “foot” employed in the “foot of a mountain” and “the foot of a list,” he asks, how

can these two uses of “foot” be similar? He criticizes the “similarity” explanation by claiming we often give B the same name as A because it is like A; C the same name because it is like B . . . and before long we are calling things by the same name that bear no discernible similarity to some other members of the category. For example, we might say a game of hopscotch is like a game of jacks because both games can be played with just a couple of people, but how do either resemble baseball, which involves multiple players? Wittgenstein maintains that there are many different human activities to which we apply the term “game.” Yet there are overlapping characteristics that result in their placement under that broad umbrella, “game.” Here, Austin is focused on how *dissimilar* identically named entities could turn out to be. As well, sometimes we use a term to refer to an object that bears only one characteristic borne by others of the category. But he feels the subject deserves further consideration:

it is a matter of urgency that a doctrine should be developed about the various kinds of good reasons for which we ‘call different things (sorts of things, he adds) by the same name’. This is an absorbing question, but habitually neglected, so far as I know, by philologists as well as by philosophers . . . to develop such a doctrine fully would be very complicated and perhaps tedious: but also very useful in many ways. It demands the study of *actual* languages, *not* ideal ones (“The Meaning of a Word,” *PP*, 70).

While Austin is right to point out that many things do not look, upon closer examination, very similar, and concepts such as “game” may serve as names for entities that appear flatly dissimilar, he may not have adequately made his case against similarity. He ignores two observations of his own, explained above—first, that as language users

we focus on relative similarities, and second, that words usually do not entirely shake off their histories. If they hew close to their histories, can't we, at least some of the time, trace their travel through contexts? It is true that nominalists, as he calls them, should specify exactly how entities called by the same word are "similar," for this explanation can be too vague, and we should not ignore the extent to which entities called by the same name are dissimilar. Here Wittgenstein's explanation of the nature of concepts (that they exhibit family resemblances, rather than essences we can specify in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions) is persuasive.

Both philosophers are appealing to something like family resemblances as being the actual basis for what we term "similarity." And Wittgenstein does this by looking at our actual language use, not by peering at ideal language constructions. I am unsure why Austin would not avail himself of this explanation, beyond his aversion to some of Wittgenstein's thought. (Incidentally, "healthy" seems like a much less problematic concept than "game.")

In "Three Ways of Spilling Ink," which Austin did not complete, he distinguishes the word "intention" from "deliberate" and "on purpose." "Intentional" lacks certain senses of performance, he says, and supposes this is because "intention is too intimately associated with ordinary action in general for there to be any *special* style of performance associated with it" (282). But the word itself is metaphorically associated with bending or straining, he says; "compare 'intent on mischief' and 'bent on mischief'" (*ibid.*, 283) (though these could be interpreted to suggest a level of determination that is slightly different in each case). Intention is more "subtle" than deliberating or acting on purpose, he explains. Echoing Anscombe (he cites her as the source of the insight), he claims it is

about “what we are doing,” which we do not determine by observation (*ibid.*). He describes “what we are doing” as a “miner’s lamp on our forehead which illuminates always just so far ahead as we go along—it is not to be supposed that there are any precise rules about the extent and degree of illumination it sheds” (*ibid.*, 284). The illumination, however, will be limited. It cannot extend any length whatsoever; it cannot light up everything that is ahead of it. Everything that follows from “what we do” in a given instance cannot be associated with that one intention. We can intend to fill our car’s gas tank at the gas station, but if the gas station runs out of fuel shortly thereafter, this does not mean our intention was also to deplete the station’s fuel resources. The intention will take place, Austin claims, against what he calls a “background of *circumstances*” (this background includes what other people do). A number of other incidents or factors are implicated in this background of the intention. It is not a notion we often make explicit in our use of verbs, according to Austin, except at those times when we are *not* doing what it can be supposed we were doing. When we do something inadvertently, we might say “I didn’t do that intentionally” (though this is not to suggest that “inadvertent” is a synonym for “unintentional”).

Austin, like Wittgenstein, is aware that there is more to this aspect of our consciousness and our actions: “we need to realize that even the ‘simplest’ named actions are not so simple—certainly are not the mere makings of physical movements, and to ask what more, then, comes in (intentions? conventions?) and what does not (motives?)” (“A Plea for Excuses,” *PP*, 179). He sees intention as a useful way of understanding what we are doing, but it is important to consider the acting agent’s own assessment of what that is:

There is a good deal of freedom in ‘structuring’ the history of someone’s activities by means of words like ‘intention’ . . . we can assess (human activities) in terms of intentions, purposes, ultimate objectives, and the like, but there is much that is arbitrary about this unless we take the way the agent himself did actually structure it in his mind before the event (“Three Ways of Spilling Ink,” *PP*, 285).

It is interesting to review Austin’s comments in “Three Ways of Spilling Ink” (though, again, that work is incomplete) in light of Anscombe’s analysis. As explained above, Austin briefly comments on intention, separating it from other elements of human action or behavior, such as doing something “purposefully” or “deliberately” (“intention,” “purpose,” and “deliberate” function in the different ways one can spill ink). Intention is general; it is, as he says, following Anscombe, about “what we are doing,” conceiving of this as a miner’s lamp, with the limits of such a source of light. Our intentions are not a source of our responsibility for everything that follows from them. At some point, the context of intention in which our actions take place diffuses to the point where we cannot really say our intentions are linked to it any longer. The same can be said of the elements of a context that precedes our intentions. Anscombe says we do not count the train ride to a house as implicated in the chain of events that led to the poisoning of the people who traveled to it. Likewise, not every aspect of a situation that precedes our intentions can count in forming our intentions and carrying them through. Of course, as I have noted in discussing Anscombe’s work, there will be room for dispute about just when we can say intentions have been formed and how we are responsible for what follows from them. Austin also says actions are not simple; he wonders how

intentions and conventions figure into them; and he thinks it is important to determine how acting agents conceive of their own behaviors. To Austin, our own accounts of our intentions are important in making sense of intentions.

Austin's work shows a tendency to draw distinctions in the service of making some initial point, and then to blur them, or to see they must be blurred, at a certain point: "You will be waiting for the bit when we bog down, the bit where we take it all back, and sure enough that's going to come but it will take time" ("Performative Utterances," *PP*, 241). This occurs in his analysis of what he calls "linguistic legislation" ("How to Talk," *PP*, 136) and in the initial distinction he draws between performative and constative utterances. It is possible that this tendency illustrates Austin's efforts to do ordinary language philosophy. Perhaps he initially draws such a distinction because it is very clear to him in our ordinary use of terms and concepts, but, upon closer examination, the difficulties of maintaining such a distinction become just as clear. (This may reveal a significant feature of linguistic structures themselves—systematic accounts of their natures may face these difficulties eventually, somewhere.)

The initial distinction between performatives and constatives is drawn in detail in *How to Do Things With Words* (the following quoted passages are from this work unless otherwise noted). He defines performatives as utterances that are not words alone; they do not just say something. They are part of, or function as, actions.<sup>2</sup> (In "Performative Utterances," in another of his frequent examples drawn from the law, he likens them to "operatives" used by lawyers—*PP*, 236.) Saying something is doing something, as he later puts it. Examples include getting married, christening a boat, betting, and setting out the terms of a will (5-6). When we say "I do," "I bet," or "I promise," we are doing



more than uttering words; we are committing ourselves to certain courses of action and actually bringing about different states of affairs. This, of course, assumes we do something, bet on something, or promise something using the right words, in the right context, under the right circumstances. Austin defines constatives as statements (the kind of expressions, typically declarative sentences, that are supposed to be true or false), and they are not, according to Austin, restricted just to definitions. He goes on to point out that the difference he has located between saying something and doing something makes an appearance in American jurisprudence: “a report of what someone else said is admitted as evidence if what he said is an utterance of our performative kind: because this is regarded as a report not so much of something he *said*, as which it would be hearsay and not admissible as evidence, but rather as something he *did*, an action of his” (13). This marks an initial rough distinction between saying something and both saying and doing something.

What is of great interest is his analysis of how performatives can succeed or fail. Performatives can be “happy,” as he puts it (successful), or “unhappy,” that is, not true or false. This depends, significantly, on context, or all of the other surrounding factors that must be in place for a performative to succeed. Austin uses the term “circumstances,” which he says must be “appropriate,” and includes within those circumstances the states of mind of those trying to do something by their words. Austin says we may regard the words of a performative as crucial, but he allows that context may be even more important to the successful execution of the performative than the words used.

He then describes the things that have to obtain for performatives to go right. He breaks this set of conditions into lettered distinctions:

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(F.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(F.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently (14-15).

These are also described, more or less, in “Performative Utterances” in the *Philosophical Papers*. Here, he says we can fail to enact performatives when we try to “pick” a person for a game who then tells us he is not playing, or when we try to appoint a horse Consul. In that work, he does not formally specify the nature of such failures. But we can see that they violate A.2 in particular, above; a person who refuses to play a game, and a horse, are inappropriate targets for the invocation of the procedures of game-playing and political appointment, respectively.

We can examine an example of these conditions by considering a quote from Euripides that Austin provides and Cavell analyzes in great detail. In Euripides’s *Hippolytus*, Hippolytus says he took an oath with his words, but not his heart; he spoke

the words, but he did not mean them: “The classic expression of this idea is to be found in the *Hippolytus* (l. 612), where Hippolytus says i.e. ‘my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not’” (10).

Hippolytus makes

(A.1) The promise, as

(A.2) someone who has the authority to make it (selected by the legitimate, accepted procedure of language use to function in this capacity), acquitting his promise

(B.1) Correctly and

(B.2) Completely

(*F*.1) He must have the correct thoughts, feelings, and intentions in conducting his duties (in this case, carrying out his promise) and

(*F*.2) His actual conduct reveals this.

Austin says that violating these conditions can cause unhappy performatives.

(And, as Euripides presents it, Hippolytus’s promise is such an unhappy performative.)

Austin develops what he calls a doctrine of the infelicities, which he says obtain when performatives fail.<sup>3</sup> He then turns to an account of the difference between these classifications. Here Austin makes another distinction, between the A and B cases taken together and the *F* cases.

The A-B cases are misfires, but the *F* cases are abuses. He explains that in a “misfire” that may accompany the act of marrying, we are liable to call the marriage void; but we are liable to call an abuse “hollow” or “not implemented,” though we would not call it void.

If we offend against any of the former rules (A's or B's)—that is if we, say, utter the formula incorrectly, or if, say, we are not in a position to do the act because we are, say, married already . . . then the act in question . . . is not successfully performed at all, does not come off, is not achieved. Whereas in the two *I* cases the act *is* achieved, although to achieve it in such circumstances, as when we are, say, insincere, is an abuse of the procedure (15-16).

So the difference is that in the case of misfires, the attempt to successfully bring about the performative fails because something was wrong with the initial *situation*, so the performative is never brought about—it is void. But in the case of abuses, the failure has to do with the “hollowness” of the act, or the inappropriate thoughts or behaviors accompanying the attempted performative—promising when we do not mean to keep the promise, for example. Abuses seem to lean more toward the failure of participants' intentions than do misfires; this occurs in the statement from the *Hippolytus*.<sup>4</sup> (However, there could be some cases where failures of intentions result in misfires—for example, when nobody in a wedding ceremony intended to go through with it because they were all performing as actors in a play. Some of the A conditions will fail in this case as well—for example, the authority condition A.2.)

Austin considers to what these infelicities apply (conventional acts—that is, ritual or ceremonial ones); how complete this classification is; whether the classes he has demarcated are mutually exclusive; and says questions will arise about the ones to which he has assigned question marks (18). In the *Philosophical Papers*, he points out that such a classification cannot account for misunderstanding: “You may not hear what I say, or you may understand me to refer to something different from what I intended to refer to,

and so on” (“Performative Utterances,” *PP*, 240). It also does not account for cases where we may be under duress or otherwise relieved of responsibility, he says, for the nature of our speech-acts. He also rightly acknowledges the distinction between misfires and abuses may not be as sharp and clear as it seems. For one thing, it is possible to think of cases that are both.

It is striking in Austin’s account that success or failure of the performatives—whether they are happy or unhappy—depends upon the commission of certain *acts*, and the intention of the actor does not outweigh the surrounding context in which the act occurs.

Austin himself seems to think as much. For example, when we consider the phenomenon of promising, he claims we may wrongly assume that whatever words are associated with the promise merely reflect the intentions of the person doing the promising: to suppose an utterance is “the outward and visible sign . . . of an inward and spiritual act,” thereby leading us to think the utterance “a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance” (10). That is, we might erroneously suppose there is a correspondence between inner state and outer act; the outer act merely reflects the content of the inner one. This is normal in cases where the performative seems what he calls “serious,” which means we must not be teasing, or speaking words in some other context in which we do not expect words to truly convey the speaker’s thoughts—as when actors recite lines on stage, or poets or fiction writers express claims in literature. Austin says this may lead us to think that we can then report on the words of a given performative as truly or falsely reflecting the intentions of the person promising. But Austin does not think this is correct, and he cites the *Hippolytus* to point out that the

connection between inner state and expressed words may fail. He says “if we slip into thinking that such utterances are reports, true or false, of the performance of inward and spiritual acts, we open a loophole to perjurers and welters and bigamists and so on . . . It is better, perhaps, to stick to the old saying that our word is our bond” (“Performative Utterances,” *PP*, 236). Hippolytus is, as the *I.I* case stipulates, supposed to have the correct thoughts, feelings, and intentions in conducting his duties—making good on his promise.

Austin does not think this means promises or bets given in bad faith are thereby false, and when we speak of false promises, we mean something by this other than the falseness we attribute to statements. Saying something is not always enough, as he explains, mentioning you cannot successfully bet after the race is over.

Austin later goes on to describe locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act is essentially a voiced utterance. The illocutionary act, on which Austin primarily focuses, is the doing of something by such voiced utterances. Russell Goodman provides an explanation of the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts: “An illocutionary act is what we do *in* saying something, for example, christening a ship, or making a promise by uttering appropriate words in appropriate circumstances. Perlocutionary acts, in contrast, are what we do *by* saying something, for example, frightening someone. They need not be accomplished through language” (*Contending with Stanley Cavell*, 4). Austin notes “the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of *uptake* . . . many illocutionary acts invite by convention a response or sequel” (117), and perlocutionary acts can be achieved without locutionary means, by waving a stick or pointing a gun, for example (119).

We can fail to effect these speech acts, too, of course (105-106). We can intend to do things we do not achieve; we can fail to intend things and achieve them anyway (106). Notably, again, Austin places the emphasis on the surrounding circumstances, all the relevant contextual factors, or what he calls a “speech situation.”<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, Austin does not maintain the distinction between performative and constative utterances. He says it “has to be abandoned in favour of more general *families* of related and overlapping speech acts” (150). This emphasizes the significance of context in our uses of language. Austin recognizes that we cannot entirely distinguish such uses; it is impossible to claim that our words can be classified as immutably performative or immutably constative in all cases. In fact, according to Austin, the category of constative expressions might collapse into the category of performative expressions. Uses of words crisscross, take on different shades of meaning and significance, depending on the circumstances of their use. And in abandoning this performative-constative distinction in favor of families of speech-acts, Austin again seems to share Wittgenstein’s conception of games as exhibiting family resemblances among themselves, though he might not say this himself. He declares “The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating” (148). This suggests he notices that all three types of speech act are instantiated in complex ways in many of our utterances, and in different combinations, and cannot be clearly separated from one another, or from the contexts of their occurrences. He conveys his understanding of the significance of contextual factors surrounding our utterances in the *Philosophical Papers* as well: “*the difference between one named speech-act and*

*another often resides principally in a difference between the speech-situations envisaged for their respective performances*" ("How to Talk," *PP*, 151).

Austin's work illuminates the difference between saying something and both saying and doing something. "If we follow Austin," Michael Morris writes, "our interest in language is shifted from the concentration on truth which characterizes the bulk of work in the analytic tradition (of philosophy of language), to a general concern with the various ritual and conventional procedures involving language with which we carry on our everyday lives" (*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, 232). Austin's work also illuminates the difference between successfully carrying through an intention, and failing to do this, because of the circumstances surrounding that intention.

Interesting parallels can be drawn here between Austin's work and Wittgenstein's.

Wittgenstein clearly establishes that "inner" intention is deeply affected by the workings of the institutions or customs in which it occurs. Perhaps Austin is less decisive about the nature of the circumstances surrounding intention because he ultimately emphasizes that we must consider the overall context of utterances, though Wittgenstein would not disagree with this. But in discussing the way our uses of speech can fail us, as when we fail to carry an intention through, or fail to absolve ourselves of the commitments entailed by the words we use, Austin, like Wittgenstein, establishes that we work with common tools that decisively constrain the meanings of our shared stock of words.

In closing, it is worth considering what Austin thought about the future of the study of language, as he saw it. He characterizes philosophy as the "sun" from which other disciplines have issued, becoming planets, or sciences, with their own trajectories toward knowledge. He says this has happened with mathematics and physics, and



wonders if it will happen with language: “Is it not possible that the next century may see the birth, through the joint labours of philosophers, grammarians, and numerous other students of language, of a true and comprehensive *science of language*?” (“Ifs and Cans,” *PP*, 232).

Such a science of language would rest upon observation of our human languages in use, as Austin maintains that actual language is very different from any ideal language, or model of one (he also questions the propensity to classify sentences as either analytic or synthetic). Such a project shares features with Wittgenstein’s work, as Wittgenstein decisively focused on actual language use and would not endorse any ideal language. I think Austin would have supported contemporary developments in linguistics and cognitive science for their focus upon empirical analysis of language and its connection with neuroscience. A science of language in keeping with Austin’s own work could further investigate the issues Austin himself has mentioned: how two contexts can be “similar” to one another and how words do not move entirely beyond their sources. (Cavell will say Austin heralds a “science of linguistics.”) But it also must examine what Austin said about the “economy” of language; we do not often enlist or create more words than we need. I intend to contribute to the science of language Austin might have envisioned by examining the relationship of these elements of his thought to the phenomenon of projecting words.

### CHAPTER 3 STANLEY CAVELL

Stanley Cavell's work takes place against the backdrop of the work of Wittgenstein and Austin, what he terms "the superficially, and sometimes deeply, similar thoughts of Austin and Wittgenstein" (*Themes Out of School*, 216). Cavell is profoundly influenced by them, though he points out that he himself puts off engaging in an examination of works of Wittgenstein's other than the *Philosophical Investigations*. He says Austin's teaching prompted him to consider whether he was "serious" about philosophy (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 60), and says Wittgenstein is the famous philosopher who has been most significant to him (*Cities of Words*, 293).

He conceives of himself as validating a number of their insights by way of defending ordinary language philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Cavell insists that a conception of the "common" underlies his conception of ordinary language philosophy, specifically the work of Wittgenstein and Austin (*The Senses of Walden*, 142-143).<sup>7</sup> Ordinary language philosophy, Cavell says, gives him what he calls a "voice in philosophy," as well as a "return of voice to philosophy" (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 69). Their work enabled him to find his way as a writer and philosopher, and it is curious that he became inspired philosophically by a work (the *Philosophical Investigations*) that may indicate a point at which Wittgenstein vocally breaks off speaking about aspects of the subject. (Now, Wittgenstein does not simply stop because he is speaking from a position of assumed strength, one that demands obedience, but rather because he is recognizing our limits. A sense of those limits is reinforced by Cavell's reading of him, described below.)

Cavell is uniquely suited to address philosophy like Wittgenstein's: as a young college student considering a career in music, he was acutely aware of feeling like a

fraud, someone who could not make his way forward in that endeavor, because he lacked understanding. Charles Petersen writes of this consternation of Cavell's: "it was as if each new (musical) performance (of Cavell's) followed only from instinct, without the understanding that promised a way forward." Cavell's later philosophical works powerfully attest to varieties of skepticism: to the skepticism he experienced in the presence of logical positivism, and, as Petersen says, as a philosophical problem, an intellectual experience, that philosophy should attempt to solve, or at least adequately acknowledge.<sup>8</sup>

Cavell sees in Austin and Wittgenstein "the concern and implication of their work for correct instruction" (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, xxv), and the significance of instruction is an important theme of Cavell's own work. Cavell argues in that book that Wittgenstein and Austin are both complicating the relation of philosophy to its history, and this can be instructive. For Wittgenstein, a primary instructive aim is showing the "fly" out of the bottle—dissipating the confusions that philosophy can both cause and cure. Austin's careful focus on the way our words work in the world—including what they can change, and what they cannot—is instructive as well as eye-opening.

Austin, according to Cavell, dismisses much of past philosophy, or cites people whose views could easily be criticized. Wittgenstein, Cavell claims, mentions major philosophers, but directs his energy to the act of philosophizing itself; according to Cavell, "(neither) Austin or Wittgenstein spends much of his time confronting other philosophers directly" (*Themes Out of School*, 216). Cavell says an interpretation of Austin is that his "fundamental philosophical interest lay in drawing distinctions . . . in this crosslight the capacities and salience of an individual object in question are brought

to attention and focus” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 102-103), even if, as Austin himself says, those distinctions often “bog” down upon closer examination.

Cavell shows great ease in moving between literature and philosophy and never insisting on a sharp demarcation between them; perhaps this is due in part to a facility with all of these aspects of cognition—abstract, imaginative, all combined together—that shape thought and endeavor in both fields.

### **Cavell on Wittgenstein and Philosophy**

Cavell characterizes the *Philosophical Investigations* in various ways, mentioning that Wittgenstein refers to his work as “sketches” and an “album” (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 59); he later says the book “*can* be seen as a philosophy of culture, one that relates itself to its time as a time in which the continuation of philosophy is at stake” (*ibid.*, 72). The continuation of philosophy is threatened by what Cavell calls the “modern,” the main aspect of which “lies in the relation between the present practice of an enterprise and the history of that enterprise, in the fact that this relation has become problematic” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, xix). The “modern,” for Cavell, marks a discontinuity between the past or tradition of an art or intellectual endeavor and its current (and in Cavell’s assessment, wanting) state. (Perhaps Wittgenstein’s work is a direct embodiment of such tensions, and this is one reason why, as briefly discussed above, it can be so illuminating as contemporary philosophy.) We cannot, according to Cavell, always innovate and then repudiate what came before; history does not vanish. And he elsewhere notes that at the time he is writing, he feels philosophy “is in one of its periodic crises of method” (*ibid.*, 74). He notes the difficulty of the modern in its present

manifestation in academic philosophy as the professional journal article,<sup>9</sup> and he notices the effect of the modern not only on philosophy, but on other disciplines.

He characterizes Wittgenstein's speakers as antagonists, one the voice of "correctness," and the other a voice of "temptation" (*ibid.*, 71). He says Wittgenstein is aware of the importance of feeling and emphasizes the significance of his spare, emphatic writing style. He emphasizes the literary quality of Wittgenstein's other strategies: "the patently and unembarrassed literary responses to itself, where we are asked to consider such matters as a fly trapped in a bottle, a beetle in a box, talk from a lion, the teeth of a rose" (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 193) (not to mention the mouse forming out of gray rags—meant to illustrate why and when we search for the reasons for things, and light upon the explanation that seems most reasonable). Cavell says of these methods of making points that they prompt "pleasure," a "shock of freedom," an "anxiety of exposure" (which could incline Wittgenstein's interpreters to missteps), that they are "plain," "sudden," "brilliant"—they are reflective of Wittgenstein's talent. And "they require a matching aesthetic effort to assess: for example, to see whether their pleasure and shock and anxiety are functions of their brilliance" ("The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself," *Wittgenstein in America*, 255).

Cavell says Wittgenstein's work parallels Kant's: "one of the most revelatory of the affinities of *Philosophical Investigations* with the vision of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, (is) its sense of the essential and implacable restlessness of the human, its distinguished faculty of reason as precisely the faculty that tantalizes itself" (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 195). The works of Kant and Wittgenstein illustrate reason's dissatisfaction with itself and recurrent philosophical tendency to place itself on trial.

Cavell sees Wittgenstein's philosophizing in the text as a struggle (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 37), a struggle aware of philosophy's tendency to create problems for itself, as Wittgenstein sees it. This struggle recognizes inherent limitations in our quest for knowledge and truth. What we call or count as knowledge often must include an awareness of our fallibility and potential lack of information or understanding. In Cavell's reading of him, Wittgenstein wishes us to reconcile with this aspect of our knowledge without feeling as if what we call knowledge is ultimately unsatisfactory or unworthy of the name. We must bear in mind that we may have to recognize that we are wrong, or revise our information in light of further developments. However, this does *not* mean what we count as knowledge is worthless (though it may be imperfect, incomplete, or subject to revision), or that one idea (say, about the coexistence of dinosaurs and human beings, or the actual workings of gravity) is as good as any other.

Cavell's impressions of the *Philosophical Investigations* contribute to the idea that philosophizing can leave us dissatisfied, searching, and far from ourselves, but philosophizing can also lead us toward, or affirm, what we consider knowledge. Cavell notes "the justifications and explanations we give of our language and conduct, that our ways of trying to intellectualize our lives, do not really satisfy us, is what, as I read him, Wittgenstein wishes us above all to grasp" (*The Claim of Reason*, 175). (Cavell refers to this as an "exile of words" [*This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 36].)

What is the nature of this "disappointment," this "exile"? It can refer to the disquieting sense that what we take for knowledge or what we perceive around us is not all there is, or we are mistaken about it, and we must seek answers—the impulse that can prompt philosophy in the first place. And it can refer to our dissatisfaction with where

philosophy takes us. I pointed out above that we can come to understand philosophical problems as well as the impossibility of solving them, and this can lead us to an experience of “voicelessness”—words often seem useless, or at least past, in such circumstances. And it can refer to the frustration we may experience in realizing that words irrevocably shape us, but may not be enough for our thoughts, or truly reflective of them, or inadequate for what we may feel or wish to convey, as Austin noted. Our explanations of our language and conduct—our ways of “intellectualizing our lives”—may reflect all of these shortcomings.

Cavell also quotes Wittgenstein’s remarks on the fact that a person can be an “enigma” to others. We can fail to understand each other even if we speak the same language, and our fundamental relation to the world is not one of knowing about it, so we continually look for knowledge where we cannot find it—or where locating it would not solve our philosophical problems: “I once put what I gather to be a congenial thought by formulating an intuition I find shared by thinkers from Emerson to Wittgenstein to the effect that our fundamental relation to the world is not one of knowing” (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 79).

The *Philosophical Investigations*, to Cavell, represents an attempt to resolve or treat these intellectual dissatisfactions. Philosophy is, in Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein, a potentially therapeutic process, one meant to demonstrate how philosophical problems come up, and how we can resolve or understand them. It can combat other pitfalls of human experience, which Cavell characterizes as episodes of “restlessness, disorientation, phantasms of loneliness and devastation, dotted with assertions of emptiness that defeat sociability as they seek it” (*Contending with Stanley*

*Cavell*, 161). He calls human restlessness “a fundamental, motivating idea of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, a perpetual seeking, perpetually undermined, for what Wittgenstein calls rest, or peace” (*Cities of Words*, 128).

In *Cities of Words*, Cavell likens the effect of Wittgenstein’s book to that of Plato’s myth of the cave from the *Republic*. He emphasizes that Wittgenstein mentions *turning* in passages 108 and 116 of Part I of the *Philosophical Investigations*, and compares this to what happens when those in the cave turn toward the light (*Cities of Words*, 328). This turning does not, to Cavell, effect a cure, if by cure one means that one is finished with philosophy and kicks it away, as Wittgenstein himself says, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, we will kick away ladders we have used to climb. Cavell emphasizes instead that the *Philosophical Investigations* is actually an example of the very old philosophical search for self and wisdom, which is liberating: “If I say that philosophy, as influenced by the later Wittgenstein, is therapeutically motivated, this does not mean, as some philosophers have construed it, that we are to be cured of philosophy, but that contemporary philosophy is to understand its continuity with the ancient wish of philosophy to lead the soul, imprisoned and distorted by confusion and darkness, into the freedom of the day” (*Cities of Words*, 4). Philosophy can release us from delusion (*ibid.*, 293).

Cavell thinks Wittgenstein does not see philosophy as completed, as indeed some interpreters have taken Wittgenstein to have demonstrated, in his own writing: “Philosophy in him is never over and done with” (*Senses of Stanley Cavell*, 47). We have made progress, in Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein, when we move “from illusion to clarity . . . from insistent speech to productive silence” (*Cities of Words*, 328). And



perhaps this is an intellectual phase through which Wittgenstein moved (though he did not stop engaging in philosophy). Cavell thinks Wittgenstein can be understood as struggling to get back to a conception of philosophically grounded acknowledgment or liberation we can really endorse, and Cavell wonders “is it strained to speak of Wittgenstein’s philosophizing as the study of homesickness?” (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 235). The challenge for us is presented by Wittgenstein in the remark, quoted above: “The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known” (I, 109).

It is a challenge echoed in some lines of T. S. Eliot’s:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time

(from “Little Gidding,” quoted in *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World*, 456).

(Of course, “exploration” may not entirely match Wittgenstein’s project, with its emphasis on the therapeutic, not necessarily new discoveries.)

But this should not lead us to any kind of easy acceptance of common sense. Cavell thinks Wittgenstein refutes the idea “that in the (apparent) conflict between philosophy and the common ‘beliefs’ (assumptions?) of ordinary men, philosophy’s position is superior” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 61), but he is not, therefore, plumping for common beliefs. Cavell says Wittgenstein “does not wish to give the impression that what is in question are two modes or realms of discourse, the ordinary

and the philosophical. His claim, largely implicit, is that the philosophical is not a special mode of discourse at all” (*Themes Out of School*, 37). That does not mean philosophy has no place, or that uncritical acceptance of what we perceive works just as well as anything else, or that we ought to abandon the pursuit of knowledge or truth. The pursuit is important, even if it may bring us back around to something we knew, or thought we knew, from the start. While philosophy sometimes confirms the deliverances of common-sense reason, sometimes it does not, and it is valuable as both an intellectual activity and a subject of inquiry with its own historically important texts and problems. Also, for Cavell, Wittgenstein is a critic of contemporary culture, and sees philosophy as one means by which to make such a critique.<sup>10</sup>

Cavell thinks the various thoughts rehearsed in the *Philosophical Investigations* are exercises in seeking self-knowledge, and one reason it is so difficult to come to grips with this aspect of the book (in his opinion) is due to the fact that since the rise of modern science, the pursuit of self-knowledge has not figured largely in the history of philosophy. As an example, he quotes Bertrand Russell on the fact that philosophers have tried to understand the world, and says “so astonishingly little exploring of the nature of self-knowledge has been attempted in philosophical writing since Bacon and Locke and Descartes . . . But philosophers from Socrates onward have (sometimes) also tried to understand themselves, and found in that both the method and goal of philosophizing” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 68). Securing what we accept as knowledge for ourselves, however, does not entirely resolve the unsatisfactory aspects of experience with which Cavell takes the *Philosophical Investigations* to grapple. An awareness of the force of skepticism remains a constant challenge. And, in Cavell’s

reading of Wittgenstein, knowledge may fail to issue in better versions of ourselves: “Wittgenstein’s disappointment with knowledge is not that it fails to be better than it is (for example, immune to skeptical doubt), but rather that it fails to make us better than we are, or provide us with peace” (*Cities of Words*, 5).

Cavell’s recognition of this problem of self-knowledge is, he says, related to Wittgenstein’s idea that there are different methods of philosophizing, as there are different therapies. Cavell says “in all of these methods part of what is necessary is that we respond to questions like ‘What would we say if . . . ?’ or ‘But is anyone going to call . . . ?’” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 66). But if we do this—if we ask someone “What should we say if . . . ?”—about some topic, we are seeking information that will reveal something about that particular person, but not, obviously, only about that person. And in seeking that information, we presumably advance the person’s self-knowledge. There are ways—methods—of acquiring self-knowledge, even if they are not, as Cavell terms it, “obvious”:

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 . . . (Wittgenstein’s is the) discovery that knowing oneself is something for which there are methods—something, therefore, that can be taught (though not in obvious ways) and practiced (*ibid.*, 66-67).

For Cavell, our ability to imagine is also dependent on our self-knowledge (*The Claim of Reason*, 146). The greater our insight into ourselves and our experiences, the greater our ability to reap the advantages of at least some levels or aspects of the imagination. Such self-knowledge may not generate creative leaps, but it can refine our capacity to “call to mind” information as needed and to recognize and understand aspects of imaginative thinking.

Cavell also glosses the self-knowledge we have won as related to our forms of life and the ways in which they may develop. He does this by describing an experience of his own, his reflection on whether atonal music should be assimilated within the concept of “music.” He broaches the question of whether atonal music is really completely without tonality and uses an investigation of the phenomenon of assimilating this type of music to existing examples we unequivocally consider music in order to illustrate “Wittgenstein’s sense of the way philosophical problems end . . . this happens (at least in the *Philosophical Investigations*, according to Cavell) when we have gone through a process of bringing ourselves back into our natural forms of life . . . I had to describe the accommodation of the new music as one of naturalizing ourselves to a new form of life, a new world” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 84). He thinks this recognition of the way in which language-games operate is Wittgenstein’s “most original contribution” (*ibid.*, 85) to philosophy. As mentioned above, it has certainly been influential.

Cavell does not wish to call Wittgenstein a pragmatist, perhaps because, he maintains, pragmatism does not take skepticism seriously, or at least seriously enough. But he maintains that in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein’s writing is “deeply practical and negative” (*ibid.*, 72). For the process of invoking philosophy

therapeutically, clarifying what one thinks and knows, as Wittgenstein does, is a pragmatic (in the sense of practical) endeavor; it is negative in that it burns away the dross, which, helpful though this may be, may leave nothing in its place.

In general, Cavell places great importance on learning, and how that takes place in every conceivable human activity, from learning a language to following rules to engaging in art to doing philosophy (though learning a language is uppermost in priority for Cavell). He relates teaching and learning to our reasons for speaking, and he thinks it “remarkable” that the *Philosophical Investigations* begins with a child; “It is not a figure one expects to find in philosophical texts” (*Philosophical Passages*, 167). Yet perhaps this is not so surprising, since Cavell says the book is “a work of instruction,” in “the culture depicted in the *Investigations* we are all teachers and all students” (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 75), and the passage about reaching bedrock is “its scene of instruction” (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 112). He mentions that there is a controversy over how to interpret this passage in Wittgenstein’s text. He reads it “as acknowledging a necessary weakness, I might call it acknowledging separateness, in teaching (or socialization), stressing that the arrival at an impasse between teacher and pupil also threatens, and may enlighten, the teacher . . . (this is) a recognition of finitude, limitation, expressing patience, (not one of) assumed strength, insisting upon obedience” (*ibid.*, 113, 136). This may very well be just the type of impasse Wittgenstein reached, and is an apt description of his own acknowledgment of limitation and resulting loss of voice. We learn to follow rules much as we learn language, according to Cavell: “against the background of, and in the course of, learning innumerable other activities” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 49). And we even learn that there are things we cannot

learn, or at least that we cannot be directed into accomplishing. “Every art, every worthwhile human enterprise, has its poetry . . . You may think of it as the unteachable point in any worthwhile enterprise” (*Themes Out of School*, 14). When we reach such a point in these worthwhile human enterprises—in art, in language, in the practice and ultimate mastery of a skill—it is up to us to go on alone, to be fully competent, and this requires (primarily practical?) aspects of judgment that we must internalize for ourselves.

Like Wittgenstein, Cavell recognizes the nature and importance of an attuned or educated judgment that does not depend on any kind of calculus. His own work demonstrates an understanding of Wittgenstein’s insight into the similarity involved in understanding a sentence and understanding music. Cavell investigates issues of *value*, topics that historically raise doubts (perhaps common-sense doubts) about the objectivity (or the provability) of their judgments, judgments that must be made in the absence of such a calculus. As an example, Cavell points out “Hume’s descendants . . . found that aesthetic (and moral and political) judgments lack something: the arguments that support them are not conclusive the way arguments in logic are, nor rational the way arguments in science are” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 88). Cavell argues that this does not mean judgments of value do not thereby count as meaningful and reasonable grounds for argument in philosophy: “Indeed they are not, and if they were there would be no such subject as art (or morality) and no such art as criticism. It does not follow, however, that such judgments are not conclusive and rational” (*ibid.*). In considering aesthetic judgments in particular, and the similarity between the structure of those judgments and those of the ordinary language philosopher (at least in certain respects), he argues “the aesthetic judgment models the sort of claim entered by (ordinary language) philosophers .

. . the familiar lack of conclusiveness in aesthetic argument, rather than showing up an irrationality, shows the kind of rationality it has, and needs” (*ibid.*, 86). He wants to say Kant’s sense of “universality” (perhaps what we can intersubjectively validate) is “what we hear recorded in the philosopher’s claims about ‘what we say’: such claims are at least as close to what Kant calls aesthetical judgments as they are to ordinary empirical hypotheses” (*ibid.*, 94). (I will return to this matter below, as I describe the kind of knowledge that informs our ability to project terms.) He suggests that the different kinds of judgment called for in different philosophical contexts registers a difference in what Wittgenstein would call their grammar (*ibid.*, 90).

Cavell, like Wittgenstein, emphasizes the importance of certainty (though Wittgenstein emphasized that the kind of certainty we require may be dictated by the language-game we investigate), and thinks we need to supply it in areas of inquiry important to human life, including, presumably, areas of value: “I am inclined to say that to give up the quest for certainty regarding our fundamental convictions concerning the way our lives are is to give up seriousness in our judgments. They may be overthrown” (*Contending with Stanley Cavell*, 161). In order to understand the type of certainty Cavell feels we can productively seek, we need an account of Cavell’s conceptions of criteria, convention, context, and what is “natural.”

What, for Cavell, can provide some ground for our learning and our correct judgment? For Cavell, an important aspect of our ability to judge correctly depends on “criteria” of the kind Wittgenstein describes. I defined Wittgenstein’s “criteria” above as “aspects of our shared intellectual judgments as well as ways of behaving that assist us in understanding whether the requirements for a concept have been fulfilled in a given

instance.” We share “criteria” in our forms of life for what counts as pain: people groaning, rubbing the part of the body that hurts, and so on. By these means, we recognize what pain is. We can think of other examples: we have criteria for singing or reaching a new insight, for example. Clearly, however, one can behave in this way without being in pain, and one can be in pain without exhibiting any of these criteria for pain. In another example of the way the “inner” and the “outer” can come apart, pain may not be conclusively established by either the presence, or the absence, of criteria, and this may lead us to suppose, skeptically, that our shared criteria for pain cannot really tell us whether it exists in a given instance or not. Cavell will go on to argue that Wittgenstein’s conception of criteria cannot actually successfully deflect this charge of skepticism, and this is not its aim (for example, *The Claim of Reason*, 7, 45).

Cavell argues that Wittgenstein’s notion of criteria does depend on what Cavell calls the everyday idea of it, though the two are not the same. He collects instances of criteria that illustrate how we use the word, referring to such examples of ordinary criteria as admission to a college and what qualifies a poem for poetic excellence. These examples illustrate the terms on which groups accept something, or determine what “counts as” something. Cavell extracts seven elements he says underlie this ordinary use of “criterion”: these are (1) source of authority, (2) authority’s mode of acceptance, (3) epistemic goal, (4) candidate object or phenomenon, (5) status concept, (6) epistemic means (specification of criteria), and (7) degree of satisfaction (standards or tests for applying 6) (*The Claim of Reason*, 9).

Criteria establish whether the object, person, or event under consideration is fit for evaluation according to the specifications of the relevant group; these specifications



concern the status, or value, of the thing in question (*ibid.*, 11). When we use the word in its ordinary sense, Cavell says, criteria determine if something is eligible for the category under which it is being considered. Could we love or hope for just a second?—No, because that is not a possibility included in our understanding of those concepts (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 91, n. 9).

Standards, however, he says, specify how well the objects actually meet the specifications of that category. He points out that contests provide an example of a case in which criteria are formally specified, and the objective of the contest is often to determine how well those who meet the criteria of a category actually acquit themselves by its standards.

Importantly, these specifications concern *judgment*; it is an indispensable element of such practices. Cavell establishes that criteria are the basis of judgment: “Criteria are criteria of judgment”—at least in some cases (*The Claim of Reason*, 17). Criteria concern not only individual judgments, they “settle” and announce our collective judgments (*ibid.*, 31). The builders’ primitive language, presented by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and illustrating a limited conception of language, is for Cavell “imagining them . . . without the possession of (shared) criteria” (*Cities of Words*, 286). (The builders can get by with their shared possession of a few words, but they lack the full-blow dimensions of language actual ones exhibit, including the multiplicity of uses of words that reflect and carry forward our judgments.) Cavell mentions that entities that determine criteria (in the ordinary sense) often include an office specifically reserved for it. Such judges ascertain how well contestants meet standards, but they are not empowered to actually change the criteria under which they judge. Interestingly, he

notes there are some who think judges working in law should confine themselves to this model as closely as possible, while others argue this is not only unnecessary, but impractical or impossible. (He mentions some wish to uphold the saying “judges make the law, not merely apply it”—*The Claim of Reason*, 12.) Cavell points out that this is a false dichotomy. Judges of law are not, theoretically, free to make law that does not respect what has come before; neither are they able to apply the existing law to every new case as if using a calculator that can produce a correctly computed result that does not depend, at least in part, on judges’ reflections or interpretations. (But he does note the “myth” that the case, not the judge, is thought to “extend” the law.) And he says umpires are more limited than judges in their ability to exercise discretion. They are supposed to call what they see, Cavell says. But umpires do have some discretion, Cavell argues, when establishing whether a player’s *intentions* violate the rules of a game (*ibid.*, 13).

Cavell says Wittgenstein does not use the “standards” of this two-part, “criteria/standards” model Cavell has used to describe our ordinary use of the word “criteria.” He says Wittgenstein does not apply criteria to objects of these kinds (*ibid.*, 14). When seeking criteria, Wittgenstein is talking about commonplace and pervasive aspects of our experience, Cavell argues, not Olympic performances and their rigidly delineated requirements (or similar special institutions, not the “general” institution we think language is). To Cavell, this means Wittgenstein would maintain that criteria govern our use of concepts in general. Cavell also says Wittgenstein’s notion of criteria differs from the ordinary notion because Wittgenstein’s does not pick out officials who establish or enforce criteria, but counts all of us, “we,” as the authorities. Authority is constituted by all human beings: “It is, for (Wittgenstein), always *we* who ‘establish’ the

criteria under investigation. The criteria Wittgenstein appeals to—those which are, for him, the data of philosophy—are always ‘ours’, the ‘group’ which forms his ‘authority’ is always, apparently, the human group as such, the human being generally” (*ibid.*, 18).

When we make appeals to what “we” say, we are appealing to all of us, our shared convictions (*ibid.*, 20). (Cavell would maintain a community exists between Wittgenstein and his readers; he points out readers do recognize and respond to the often highly personal examples of his experience Wittgenstein describes.) As examples, Cavell alludes to criteria for our concepts of “art” and “chair”: “that an art object is an object which is fit for holding attention, allowing contemplation, inviting appreciation . . . as much determines the nature of art, the criteria of art (what we are going to *call* ‘art’ and the ‘criticism of art’) as what is fit to sit on determines what we are going to call a ‘chair’ and ‘mending a chair’” (*ibid.*, 210). We seek or attempt to clarify criteria when we sense there is a problem or confusion about some subject of investigation (Cavell says when we are “lost”), and we have frequently sought criteria for the application of our term “art.”

For example, as they developed, people questioned whether photography, and later film, should be considered art. Some people argued that the products of such technology should not be called art, because they are “not made by hand.” This is a criterion for art: to some people, at a certain point in time, artifacts that were not “handmade” were not art.

As another example, Cavell discusses the fundamental importance of tonality to our concept of music. It is so important to us, Cavell maintains, that the entire concept of music might not be the same for us without it. As such, it is one of our basic criteria for music, music as a form of human life:

The language of tonality is part of a particular form of life, one containing the music we are most familiar with; associated with, or consisting of, particular ways of being trained to perform it and to listen to it; involving particular ways of being corrected, particular ways of responding to mistakes, to nuance, above all to recurrence and to variation and modification. No wonder we want to preserve the idea of tonality: to give all *that* up seems like giving up the idea of music altogether (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 84).

It is no doubt the case that there are variations in the contexts in which criteria occur, and variations in the judging abilities called for in each context. Participants of a sport, the citizens of a nation, members of a creative community, and those who share a friendship all make use of criteria in the exercise of their judgments, but some of these human activities are more elemental to the human experience than others (as language is more basic than the standards of a sport). And they call for different applications or levels of judgment, different standards of proof, and so on. In some cases, we may apply standards or select judges, as necessary. But in other contexts, such as those in which Wittgenstein is primarily interested, in which “we” are all authorities,<sup>11</sup> some of us will be better able to clarify criteria and make judgments about some aspects of our experience than others. Almost all of us may be able to weigh in on what a chair is, but it may not be the case that all of us can conclusively determine what art is. Moving, resting, and sitting are part of the basic daily functions of human beings, and even those who cannot engage in these activities are familiar with them, unless they are unconscious or unable to understand those aspects of reality. Understanding and using chairs is involved in those functions. Art is not necessarily this basic, though elements of aesthetic

experience *may* be (probably not). Does this mean art cannot be investigated according to Wittgensteinian criteria, because for example he eschews standards and suggests we are all authorities? I do not think either Wittgenstein or Cavell would say so. For example, the fact that Wittgenstein eschews standards does not mean he eschews critics, or, indeed, criteria.

“Authority” for our criteria is something that is constituted by our judgments, and may not exist without them. When the subject is language, authority is constituted by competent language users, though there is no independent standard or definition of competence. Aspects of authority will be determined by the subject of investigation. For example, a form of government, such as a democracy, acquires its authority from the citizens who accept and institute it, and then participate in it. (Although one might object that this kind of “social contract” is in many ways a fiction with respect to those actual democracies people have limited choice in constituting.) This does not mean there are specialized “authorities” at work in the institution and maintenance of government; the point of many governing organizations is that everyone has this authority. But it has no real existence otherwise; it is something that exists as authoritative because of the collective exercises of human beings. Authority can be formally institutionalized, as the example of government illustrates, though this does not always happen, nor should it always happen. (An additional consideration arises regarding those subjects whose criteria *are* institutionalized. Those applying or seeking criteria in an institutional setting must act within the institution in an appropriate way in order for their judgments about the subject to be legitimate. In an observation that could introduce complications into the idea that everyone has authority, we might say that not all do in such settings. This can

be either fortunate or unfortunate, depending on whether those with the best judgment about a given subject are affiliated with the institution in an appropriate way.)

Many of us may have authority in various areas of human judgment, but not all areas. When the subject is chairs, more or less every member of the human race counts as an authority, though there might be significant cultural differences concerning what is a “chair,” what is appropriate to sit on and how, and so on. When the subject is art, it is that group of people who make the best judgments about art, which will not be almost all of us, even if one reason for this is that some people simply lack interest in the subject, not the ability to judge it.

Though it is not a formally codified institution, language is called an institution, by both Wittgenstein and Cavell. Perhaps they should not have used exactly this word, as it suggests deliberate formation, a moment of organization and a choice of officers. (Maybe it could have just as effectively been called a “custom,” or a “practice.”) Instead, language is a type of institution whose authority is determined by all of us. It exists because of what all of us do, and it does not exist for us otherwise. But our collective authority for language depends crucially on our ability to understand each other—we have to share the meanings of the terms of that language itself, as Cavell will claim (below). We have to *agree*. Agreement is not necessarily simple or superficial, however (as perhaps different cultures might “agree” on appropriate manners or customs of dress, or the rules of a game, or what will count as suitable for a certain party); it also marks our considered judgments about knowledge and what we consider true. We have the criteria for pain that we do (that Cavell describes) because acting in the way Cavell explains is a

fairly typical reaction—shared by human beings—to this aspect of the natural world.

Because people know what pain is like, they agree on criteria for it.

Our search for, or application of, criteria, and our collective authority, are possible because of our agreement. Cavell, like Wittgenstein and Austin, emphasizes its role in our judgments about our lives. Cavell maintains that we do share agreements of which we may not be conscious: “there is a background of pervasive and systematic agreements among us, which we had not realized, or had not known we realize” (*The Claim of Reason*, 30). And he claims Wittgenstein “sometimes calls them conventions; sometimes rules” (*ibid.*). (Here, in order to explicate what Cavell thinks rules are for Wittgenstein, it is helpful to consider Cavell’s remark regarding claims about ordinary words and actions: if they “are taken as guides and supposed to be followed, they are rules” [*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 15]. If we obey a rule, Cavell says, this is ultimately due to convention; “That is always the ultimate appeal for Wittgenstein—not rules, and not decisions” [*ibid.*, 50].) As explained above, Wittgenstein is critical of the conception of rules as rails laid to infinity, and here, I think Cavell is trying to make the same point. Cavell marvels at the pervasiveness of our agreement, and the way in which it is reflected in our automatic, indeed unconscious, use of words. He likens this agreement to *attunement*, and the musical phrase echoes Wittgenstein’s own use of music as an example in conveying his ideas—agreement is “being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. (Human beings) are mutually voiced with respect (to their language), mutually *attuned* top to bottom” (*The Claim of Reason*, 32). Attunement indicates our shared forms of life. Criteria do not explain or

prove attunement, Cavell says, sounding a Wittgensteinian note; they describe it (*ibid.*, 34).

Applying criteria rests, again, on judgment, indeed collective judgment, and Cavell thinks statements of fact as well as judgments of value stem from the same capacity. Criteria help us, in making distinctions, toward what counts as knowledge in a given epoch (*ibid.*, 17). Later, he says “what can comprehensibly be said is what is found to be worth saying” (*ibid.*, 94), which suggests that the attunement underlying our criteria are also attunement in valuing. It is not that what we value arises from or depends on what we communicate, he says; what we communicate depends on what we value. But he also emphasizes, as Austin does, that language and the world can come apart (and routinely do): “growing up (in modern culture? in capitalist culture?) is learning that most of what is said is only more or less meant—as if words were stuffs of fabric and we saw no difference between shirts and sails and ribbons and rags” (*ibid.*, 189).

Cavell’s discussion of the example of pain illustrates that criteria, in describing our attunement, also demonstrate that pervasive aspects of our lives reflect conventions. If we did not know what constitutes criteria for displaying or pretending pain, we might not understand deviations from these criteria, and this, according to Cavell, reflects convention. For Cavell, conventions register the “convening of criteria”<sup>12</sup>—conventions are products of our attunement (though not the result of actual events in which people gather to decide on matters).

Because we recognize how human beings often manifest pain, we are better able to understand if someone is showing it or faking it: “In all such circumstances he has satisfied the criteria we use for applying the concept of pain to others. It is because of



*that* satisfaction that we know that he is feigning pain (i.e., that it is pain he is feigning), and that he knows what to do to feign pain” (*ibid.*, 45). We have norms for these aspects of our experience; if we come across a case of behavior that does not fit our concept of it, we will not “give up our usual notion of what pain-behavior is” (*ibid.*, 89). For example, if someone expresses pain by suddenly dancing vigorously or cheering or behaving in ways we do not ordinarily associate with pain, we are not inclined to change our criteria for pain. These would be exceptional cases, if they count as real cases of pain at all. (They *could* count, depending on other aspects of the context.) If people stray too far outside our conventionally accepted categories, they challenge our recognition of them as persons, Cavell says (*ibid.*, 90). We do share behaviors and often do not deviate from them: “That human beings on the whole do not respond in these ways is, therefore, seriously referred to as conventional” (*ibid.*, 111). According to Cavell, Wittgenstein “says that language, and life, rests on conventions. What he means is, I suppose, that they have no necessity beyond what human beings do” (*Themes Out of School*, 224).

But such criteria can be disappointing, for they do not guarantee that what we are observing is pain; there is no way to know that for certain. The surety we might wish for eludes us, and we recognize this is what counts as knowledge.

Cavell does not mean by this sense of convention “the arrangements a particular culture has found convenient, in terms of its history and geography, for effecting the necessities of human existence, but as those forms of life which are normal to any group of creatures we call human”; they are aspects of the universality of human life, not “patterns of life which differentiate human beings from one another, but those exigencies of conduct and feeling which all humans share” (*The Claim of Reason*, 111). (A possible

ramification of this, Cavell says, is that human nature is empty, determined by convention, and there is no essence to it.) He says the idea of normality indicates learning, and it is from this that our criteria gain their force, from “an idea of *naturalness*” (*ibid.*, 122) (though Cavell discusses the “natural” in the biological, as well as the cultural or conventional, sense). In investigating the communities we share, we are unlikely to discover that these elements of our experience are consciously dictated by us. Instead, they arise from what is natural or normal to human beings. Our criteria for pain include the natural human tendency to wince when one is in pain, for example. We did not consult each other and decide to count this as a way of identifying pain; it just reflects our normal, natural experience of it. Should we seek criteria for pain, we will understand this experience and the expression of it. According to Cavell, “(Wittgenstein) does not mean, for example, that we might all convene and decide or vote on what our human forms of life shall be, choose what we shall find funny or whether we will continue finding loss and comfort where we do. If we call these arrangements conventional, we must then also call them natural. The thought was perhaps expressed by Pascal when he said of human beings, ‘Custom is our nature’” (*Themes Out of School*, 224). (I return to Pascal’s idea, and to the “naturalness” of convention, below.)

Of course some aspects of our lives are conventional in a manner that does reflect conscious agreement. Games provide a good example of conventions consciously decided and carried forward (though these are not the most important subjects of investigation for Wittgenstein and Cavell). Conventions also reflect the human tendency to devise, or settle on, ways of life that are more or less arbitrary and may require revision. Custom may reflect or influence irreducible aspects of human nature. But it

also reflects the problematic or pointless traditions human beings institute, for various reasons, some the product of conscious reflection, some not. These can ossify into traditions or institutions that require change. Cavell says “it is essential to a convention that it be in service of some project” (*The Claim of Reason*, 120), so it can change. Within those forms of life that require revision, Cavell says “only a slave of (convention) can know how it may be changed for the better, or know why it should be eradicated. Only masters of a game, perfect slaves to that project, are in a position to establish conventions which better serve its essence” (*ibid.*, 120-121). Cavell also says that only such masters can recognize revolutions within areas of inquiry as natural extensions of it (he uses the example of science), when that might not be how the revolution is viewed by others (*ibid.*, 121). Presumably, those who fully understand certain forms of life—for example, those who fully understand the conventions employed in judging Olympic figure skating—will be able to determine how to revise the conventions operating within that activity, and can offer justifications for doing so: “a justification for saying that a different practice is ‘just as good’ or ‘better’ is that it is *found* just as good or better (by those who know and care about the activity)” (*ibid.*, 120). Such justifications may or may not be explicit; they may also be accepted or refused.

But in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, Cavell emphasizes that the interpretations of Wittgenstein focused on the “social” aspects of his philosophy should not be taken as assuring that everything we do can simply be reduced to convention, because convention could exist between automata (41-43). Robots lacking self-consciousness and the ability to recognize criteria, or speak of matters such as their “convening,” could be (are) programmed to behave conventionally. Such a lack of self-

consciousness marks a startling difference between the two types of conventional behavior—one of humanity, the other of automata. (Where, then, does convention stop, how far into human nature does it reach, and how can we distinguish human life from the behavior of automata—a point of investigation Wittgenstein might say would cause us to make an “inarticulate sound”? These may not be our most pressing questions, as the close of *The Claim of Reason* demonstrates.)

Cavell uses the concept denoted by the word “stable” to explain that investigations of criteria will reveal their dependence on context—they are “object-specific” (*The Claim of Reason*, 15). We must rely on context, in Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein, in order to analyze the nature of our concepts. (As mentioned above, I define a context, for Wittgenstein, as “all of the background factors relevant to determining the meaning of some aspect of our experience or consciousness which we are examining.”) Criteria for determining excellence in figure-skating will differ from criteria for pain, and both will differ from criteria for establishing what counts as a chair. Cavell acknowledges his debt to context, but does not think we usually need to over-specify what it is. In the case of language, for example, he says: “Giving directions for using a word is no more prodigious and unending a task than giving directions for anything else” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 17). He says he “would claim to have characterized the context sufficiently (for the purpose at hand) by the statement that something is, or is supposed to be, fishy about the action” (*ibid.*). In cases of what Cavell would call the ordinary use of the concept “criteria,” we implement, change, and dismiss rules or standards depending on the context (whether we are dealing with football commissions, bar association committees, and so on) (*ibid.*, 24). We cannot do that in

other situations, such as those involving mathematics; we cannot make rules or change them as easily, and this is because they reflect our natural forms of life to a greater extent than artificially constructed environments such as football commissions (though some ordinary cases of rules or standards may reflect very natural elements of our ways of living, as well. The judgments of excellence pronounced at the Olympics may be rarefied, but for all that, they do not, to me, seem entirely removed or discontinuous from our natural forms of life). In contexts involving values, or considerations of what we must do, statements about such values as obligation only make sense if they are operating in a context in which there is understanding about what constitutes doing the thing well or badly, though these do not constitute pure “imperatives” (*ibid.*, 27, 30).

Cavell’s account of criteria, convention, and context raises doubts about whether we will agree or understand each other. It also raises questions about determining what is natural or normal. For example, if forms of life arise between different cultures that are both recognizably human but issue in different values and emphases on what is important, or what is right or wrong, then whose form of life is the right one, the better one, or truly reflective of what is normal, or what is human? How do we resolve such disputes even *within* a culture? But Cavell has confidence in our ability to correctly discern, at least in many cases: “we know how to make sure, know what to do to make sure and certain” (*The Claim of Reason*, 58) of our experiences. He is assured of the fact of our attunement, and we need not suppose we must give up on this account of our forms of life and our judgments of them even if we encounter disagreement. Some people may simply be wrong: “You can’t talk to everyone about everything” (*ibid.*, 197). Our criteria are sufficient for many of our purposes. However, this is not to suggest that

Cavell is unaware of how fragile these criteria can be—internal to our practices and human forms of life; not guided by anything external to them (as a rail to infinity would be).

Our criteria are not analytic, or necessary, Cavell says, and it seems plausible that this might incline us toward skepticism about them. Cavell seems to suggest that our shared criteria both secure us against skepticism and lead us to it, since they can be given up, or are not “necessary” (*Transcendental Etudes*, 35-36). In “What’s the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?,” Cavell relates that Wittgenstein “(struggles) with the threat of skepticism” throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*. (And he thinks this distinguishes Wittgenstein from William James and John Dewey, who, he argues, do not grapple with it the way Wittgenstein does. This is one reason Cavell is not convinced Wittgenstein is a pragmatist.)

But Cavell will accept rather than reject criteria. However, he knows this is not the sort of account that will satisfy the skeptic.

### **Cavell on Language**

When it comes to language, Cavell continually emphasizes that this extraordinary human power is shaped by what we learn and share, and he never supports the idea that we are caught up in rails to infinity that underlie it or guarantee its form. We learn not only about language, but about the world, when we use ordinary philosophy, Cavell says (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 99). He argues “we learn language and learn the world *together*, that they become elaborated and distorted together, and in the same places” (*ibid.*, 19); this is very “elaborate.” Once we look up a word in the dictionary, we already know a great deal of language; we bring the world with us to the dictionary (*ibid.*, 19-20).

Cavell said of Austin that he sought “clarity” in philosophy by what Austin himself titled a “linguistic phenomenology,” as mentioned above (the “title to [Austin’s] methods,” Cavell says, in *The Claim of Reason*—99), which could be “achieved through mapping the fields of consciousness lit by the occasions of a word” (*ibid.*, 100). Cavell does not see as close a connection between Austin’s work and the empirical investigation of language as Austin apparently did or may have wished for. He also says Austin does not devise a theory of language (*Themes Out of School*, 35), and wonders if he is “really a philosopher, or is he rather a herald—as he seemed sometimes to wish to be—of some unheard-of science of linguistics?” (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 62). (As explained above, the “science of linguistics” in question must concern further examination of the difference between the world and our words; as Austin said, sometimes we must “prise” words off the world.) Cavell’s analysis of language echoes Austin’s own exploration of the ways in which we use words, and what that use reveals. He also notes John Searle’s work on speech acts has been more famous than Austin’s philosophy, which, Cavell says, began the entire line of philosophical inquiry (*Philosophical Passages*, 44).

In his discussion of language, Cavell echoes Wittgenstein as well, seeing in language use a form of life that is shaped by our public, shared meanings. He mentions Wittgenstein’s “teaching of his obsessive emphasis on the publicness of language and on the outwardness of criteria” (*The Claim of Reason*, 329), and he explicitly defends the idea that “It is commonly taken as obvious, it is surely obvious, that for Wittgenstein language is as it were a public, shared fact” (*Cities of Words*, 371). In the context in which he says this, Cavell refutes those who do not think Wittgenstein ultimately

endorses the idea that language's publicly shared aspects determine the meaning of language. Cavell is also raising the question of what this idea amounts to and how best to understand it, in a way consistent with what he has said about ordinary language and criteria.

Cavell also underscores "Wittgenstein's insight that thinking, our use of language with each other, occurs with no ground beyond what we can find in ourselves" (*Cities of Words*, 114). There is no foundation that our language rests on beyond our shared judgments, our shared criteria; there is nothing that guarantees that there must, or always will be, such shared criteria. He says Wittgenstein argues we suffer from a problematic conception of language, supposing it a "symbolism in an exact calculus" (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 51). According to Cavell, the *Philosophical Investigations* (again, the only work Cavell analyzes in detail) disputes this idea that there is a skeleton of grammar or rules underlying human language, which somehow controls it, or is responsible for the essence of language and our use of it. Cavell says "Frege's and Russell's visions of a perfect language set out their philosophical hopes" (*Themes Out of School*, 57), but in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein works to establish "everyday language does not, in fact or in essence, depend upon such a structure and conception of rules, and yet . . . the absence of such a structure in no way impairs its functioning" (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 48). Wittgenstein argues against a particular illusion, Cavell says: "perfection or generality or completeness. One of its forms is the idea that the intelligibility of our language rests upon a foundation of logic, or is secured by essences or rules. It is as though he had asked himself, ten years after his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was written, 'How can logic show us the real form of language?' and had to answer, 'It



can't” (*Themes Out of School*, 217). Cavell endorses Wittgenstein's view that there are no tracks laid down underneath our language use that catch us up in their grooves, if by tracks we mean immutable laws or rules that somehow operate inexorably on human understanding. Cavell questions whether the idea of such a foundation is even worthwhile:

But on another step we may feel this idea of (lack of) foundation to be impertinent, an old thought for an old world. (The idea of foundation as getting to the bottom once and for all of all things is a picture Thoreau jokes about in describing . . . the time he took measurements of the bottom of Walden, and times such measurements become controversial) (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 109).<sup>13</sup>

He says Wittgenstein uses the concept of the “game” as a way to explore the way in which so-called rules or regularities are observed, but these are not rails to infinity that determine our cognitive futures. Within our forms of life, Cavell supposes Wittgenstein to be saying that we will gain a facility for how each form works: “knowing how to go on, as well as knowing when to stop, is exactly the measure of our knowing, or learning, in certain of its main regions or modes—for example, in the knowledge we have of our words” (*The Senses of Walden*, 136).

He conceives of Wittgenstein as approaching the question “What must I know to say what I must say?” (*This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 19). Yet Cavell also acknowledges “The *Investigations* lends itself to, perhaps it calls out for, competing emphases in its consideration of human discourse—an emphasis on its distrust of language or an emphasis on its trust of ordinary human speech” (*ibid.*, 32). Cavell says

he goes in for the latter, perhaps because of his focus on the *Philosophical Investigations* in particular, though indeed Cavell's work reflects the impact distrust may have on our experience, and the way in which it may result in the experiences of alienation, lostness, or skepticism.

In Chapter 7 of *The Claim of Reason*, "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language," Cavell provides the kind of detailed examination of language acquisition which Wittgenstein more or less avoids in the *Philosophical Investigations*, though Austin does not, in his work. And perhaps this could be considered a type of contribution to the science of language Austin envisioned. Cavell asks "What do we teach or tell a child when we point to a pumpkin and say, 'Pumpkin'? Do we tell him what a pumpkin is or what the word 'pumpkin' means?" He says his initial response was to say "You can say either," which got him thinking about the connection between how knowing what something is links up with what it is called, as well as David Hume's remark from the *Treatise*, "We may change the names of things, but their nature and their operation on the understanding never change." (In engaging in this analysis, Cavell sees himself as addressing two matters of language Wittgenstein addresses: the first is that learning a name is learning its meaning, the second is that acquiring language is simply a process of acquiring new words [*The Claim of Reason*, 173].) But he says this answer ("You can say either") can only be applicable to people who have learned a language, and, he claims, we may not really be telling a learning child either what a pumpkin is or what the word "pumpkin" means (*ibid.*, 168-170).

How might saying "Pumpkin" and pointing to a pumpkin not be "telling the child what a word means"? There are many sorts of answers to that. One might be: it

takes two to *tell* someone something . . . You can't tell a child what a word means when the child has yet to learn what "asking for a meaning" is . . . Nor, in saying "Pumpkin" to the child, are we telling the child what a pumpkin is, i.e., the child does not then know what a pumpkin is. For to "know what a pumpkin is" is to know, e.g., that it is a kind of fruit; that it is used to make pies; that it has many forms and sizes and colors; that this one is misshapen and old; that inside every tame pumpkin there is a wild man named Jack, screaming to get out (*ibid.*, 170-171).

Essentially, there are a number of very diverse and variable facts about our "form of life" associated with pumpkins, which people come to understand through learning. But what is happening in these situations? Cavell calls it a process of *initiation*. We bring someone into our experience of human life, rather than imposing something external onto them: "Instead, then, of saying either that we *tell* beginners what words mean, or that we *teach* them what objects are, I will say: We initiate them, into the relevant forms of life held in language and gathered around the objects and persons of our world" (*ibid.*, 178).

We can ask how language first started, and if this has any effect on its properties. There may be no empirically verifiable answer to this, but Cavell provides a plausible account of how it continues. Because it depends on criteria, and our shared forms of life, languages could conceivably be much different than they are. Indeed, the concepts of criteria and shared forms of life plausibly explain why languages differ, and account for the different emphases and words that diverse cultures develop to express aspects of their experience. No underlying architecture of language guarantees that language users will

all arrive on the same page. If there is no underlying architecture of language, perhaps there is an architecture of language connections that build up as children learn more and more language, and more and more about the world.

Cavell wonders if “perhaps we are too quick to suppose we know what it is in such situations that makes us say the child is learning something. In particular, too quick to suppose we know what the child is learning”:

her word was produced about a soft, warm, furry object of a certain size, shape, and weight. What did she learn in order to do that? *What did she learn from having done it?* If she had never made such leaps she would never have walked into speech. Having made it, meadows of communication can grow for us . . .

although I didn’t tell her, and she didn’t learn, either what the word “kitty” means or what a kitty is, if she keeps leaping and I keep looking and smiling, she will learn both (*ibid.*, 171-172).

The child will learn how to go on. Cavell wonders “We say a word and the child repeats it. What is ‘repeating’ here? All we know is that the child makes a sound which we accept. (How does the child recognize acceptance? Has he learned what that is?)” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 52), and in *The World Viewed*, he remarks, “(A child) might be very puzzled by the remark, said of a photograph, ‘That’s your grandmother.’ Very early, children are *no longer* puzzled by such remarks, luckily. But that doesn’t mean we know why they were puzzled, or why they no longer are” (18). This could mean that children are astute at reading expressions, seeing patterns, understanding different instances of the same thing (recognizing a cat every time it appears, for example), gaining an understanding of modes of representation (e.g., picture for person), and, crucially,

mimicking their teachers. (What the child has learned, however, does not necessarily have one, definite correct theoretical description.) What we appear to be witnessing is the remarkable success of the process of initiation into forms of life. This form of life will provide the basis for the institution of language.

Cavell means to emphasize important aspects of the process of education and the way in which, throughout this learning process, our language skills build up to increasingly complex language (and possibly cognitive) structures. (As a part of this learning process, Cavell adds that we often accrue associations to words that are not really part of their conventional meaning, which we may later remember.) This provides a compelling example of education's power, its influence on us, and the way in which language, as Cavell describes it, expands from cases like "pumpkins" to "cities and mayors . . . God exists . . . I cannot do otherwise . . . (and) Beauty is but the beginning of terror" (*The Claim of Reason*, 172-173), to use his examples.

He characterizes this instruction as in part a two-way process in which we show children what we do and then endorse what they do in response. (Children could flout our instructions, or we could avoid endorsing children's attempts to communicate with us.) But, since he acknowledges this is not a picture of language that suggests a scaffolding of rules or foundation beneath it, Cavell thinks, "We begin to feel, or ought to, terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations—a thin net over an abyss" (*ibid.*, 178-179). But he says "Wittgenstein does not seem unnerved by this experience, or this recognition. Should he have been?" (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 135).

We may have been born into language, learned it, and no doubt it shapes our thoughts (and perhaps our sense of what is possible; had it been different, we might be too) to an unfathomably deep degree, but after reaching a stage on which we can reflect self-consciously on language, we can say that we accept it. (We may not have any choice.) We use it to communicate, relying on our judgment and experience. But, as Cavell says, we are faced with questions about why this happens. Why do we accept what our elders tell us, and why do they accept what we do? What would they do if we did not accept the process of learning language? It would appear that one reason for this is because the process of initiation into language also indicates initiation into understanding of elements of communication as well as acceptance of authority.

Though we learn language, as Cavell has described, we are never finished learning, as he goes on to say. We do not learn in advance every context in which a word can be applied, and we also use words in ways that cannot be learned (for example, when we use them metaphorically). We are never through projecting words into new contexts; we do not limit their use to fixed ones, as he points out (*The Claim of Reason*, 180). Yet, he says, a projection must be “appropriate” or “correct,” as he calls it (*ibid.*, 168-169); we cannot project words into new contexts arbitrarily, and this raises questions about why and how our ability to project is limited by what a context will “invite” or “allow,” as he puts it (*ibid.*, 182-183). He alludes to this particular power: “words of a natural (that is, of a culture’s) language . . . are . . . projectible into further (not-old, not-new) contexts. (There is no *place* that words fail to reach; this does not mean that they go places limitlessly.)” (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 97). But it does not seem as if Cavell would maintain that this projection is anything that can be described as “rule-governed,” and

again, he appeals to Wittgenstein's work to support his view: "Wittgenstein does speak of forms of expression which we might think of as representing 'a new move' in a shared language, to wit, those whose 'grammar has yet to be explained' . . . But (he does not say of) such expressions that in explaining them we decide to adopt the rules which confer meaning on them" (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 54). Additionally, he claims we can carry a word into new contexts without "being able to articulate the criteria in terms of which it is applied" (*The Claim of Reason*, 122). The question is, how do we carry out this "projection," which is not based simply on rules or reducible to a mechanical procedure, though it explains both our understanding of meaning and our life in our culture? This will be the major question I address in what follows.

Cavell remarks on the Euripides passage in Austin's work on several occasions, wondering why it has not received more attention: "Not that any other reader I know of *How to Do Things With Words* stops to wonder about it either" (*Philosophical Passages*, 53). He supposes this may be because it seems trivial—"to mention that brilliant readers do not notice Austin's reference to Euripides is to imply that they do not sense it to be important enough—to Austin—to mention"—though Cavell uses it to make significant points about intention, and emphasizes rather excitedly that Socrates uses the same quote in order to avoid speaking in the *Symposium*: "I do like learning things, and I like providing what might be news, such as that Hippolytus's line that Austin cites is also quoted by Socrates in the *Symposium*" (*ibid.*, 63, 82). Curiously, Socrates, in that passage, misquotes the line, essentially saying he did not take an oath with his mind; he claims that he really has no obligation to go through with what he said he would do. He

argues he does not need to deliver a eulogy to love, disclaiming his ability to do so after hearing the eulogies already delivered. He says:

it seems I did not know how to make a eulogy, and it was in ignorance that I agreed to take my turn to eulogise. “My tongue it was that swore; my mind is not under oath.” Goodbye to my promise! I don’t intend to eulogise in that way (for I could not do it) . . . (*Symposium*, 199a).

Here Socrates explicitly (though perhaps ironically) admits his “inner” mind has no obligation to the “outward sign,” to use Austin’s language. Both Austin and Cavell, however, would maintain that this type of performative act (if offered or taken *seriously*) has indeed effected a change in the speaker’s circumstances and obligations. (Cavell does not speculate about whether there are dramatic or philosophical circumstances surrounding this quote that would differentiate it from Austin’s analysis. I think he should have. Perhaps he really did want to just mention this—provide “news”—and emphasize this point of connection. But it is impossible to impute a view to him on this matter.)

Cavell significantly engages Austin’s views on the subject of intention, analyzing the implications of context for Austin’s account of it, and examines what Austin says about the phrase from the *Hippolytus*. Cavell uses Austin’s work on the Euripides quote to argue that no matter what Hippolytus’s inner states may have been, he made a promise to which he is bound: that promise, as part of shared language, commits him to keeping it, regardless of his desire to get out of it.

Cavell says he disagrees with Austin’s analysis of the line (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 176) (he later refers to this analysis in *Contending with Stanley Cavell*:



189). In the Seminar on “What Did Derrida Want of Austin?”, Cavell says Austin uses the Euripides passage to claim that Hippolytus offers an excuse, rather than the oath Cavell takes the words to be.<sup>14</sup> Austin maintains, as explained above (40-41), that we cannot assume a correspondence between outer words and inner states; he says words do not function as true or false statements about inner states, and “our word is our bond.” This is why, for Austin, the oath of Hippolytus is “a metaphysical dodge, or a deviously motivated attempt at one, between saying and intending” (*Philosophical Passages*, 75-76).

Cavell does not read the line in this way. He calls what Hippolytus says “paradigmatic of oily efforts to renege on promises or vows” (*Contending with Stanley Cavell*, 189) and points out that the “sacredness of promising is a familiar enough fact of human life to participate in the action of tragedy” (*Cities of Words*, 177). Hippolytus has, according to Cavell, committed himself to an oath, whether he wanted to or not.

The Greek sentence Austin calls classic and cites from Euripides and translates as “My tongue swore to, but my heart did not,” is Hippolytus’s reply to Phaedra’s nurse when she reminds him of his oath to keep her revelation a secret . . . But Austin himself seems to be forgetting something about the *Hippolytus*, since he apparently attributes the line to Hippolytus as a species of excuse, whereas Hippolytus never uses it so, and indeed the pity and terror involved are some function of the knowledge that the most *casual* of utterances may be irretrievable: so my tongue swore without my heart—*nevertheless I am bound* (*Philosophical Passages*, 62).

Even if Hippolytus did not mean his words, nevertheless, he promised; and this is what we would expect, given Austin's own distinction between performatives and constatives.

As described above, Austin describes misfires as those performatives that are not accomplished because something about the situation makes the performative illegitimate. But abuses occur because something about the actor's reasons is amiss. Cavell describes Austin's distinction in the same manner:

The distinction Austin draws is this: In the opening instances of performatives, if when I say, for example, "I do," it happens that the (other) circumstances are not in effect then the act (the supposed performative) was not in effect, it was not done at all (for example, it wasn't the captain who performed the ceremony but the purser); whereas if, in the later instances of performatives, when I say, "I promise" (in the canonical circumstances), I have no intention of keeping it (I have not met that particular "circumstance," or condition), even so *I have promised* (Austin phrases it, "I have promised, but") (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 107-108).

Hippolytus committed an abuse, one that can be described as "hollow," but it is not void, as a misfire would be. Whatever his thoughts or feelings, they are not enough to excuse him from the conventions of the social act he performed. Hippolytus's words are a commitment his thoughts cannot override. Cavell considers whether Hippolytus's intention could be central, the "organizing center" for attributing meaning to his words, and he denies this. "This seems the reverse of making intention the organizing center of the analysis of performatives, since in a sense in certain major categories of performatives it shows intention to be inessential to whether a performative is in effect"

(*ibid.*, 108). Cavell supposes this is why Hippolytus is given this “moment”: “it makes explicit the fact that (his intentions) will not count (for him) as determining whether he swore, whether his words are in effect” (*ibid.*). One could argue, too, that the same goes for Socrates, and the narrative of the *Symposium* reveals this. Socrates has to protest to get out of the oath he makes and explain why he will give a different kind of speech. Cavell and Austin both share the conviction that the surrounding circumstances constrain possible meanings of terms. Though Hippolytus may wish to excuse himself, he cannot. Neither, perhaps, can Socrates, though perhaps a point of difference here is that Socrates thinks it obvious that the excellence of the eulogies preceding his turn has changed his promise-keeping obligations, and he is joking around, which the others presumably understand (also, the matter—giving eulogies—is not so grave, save for literature!). While both Austin and Cavell would agree that the promise is in this case “hollow” or “empty” though genuinely made, the difference consists in Cavell’s emphases that, first, the way Hippolytus tries to dodge the implications of his promise is *typical* of the activity of renegeing on a promise; and, second, as such it is not a “metaphysical” dodge between inner and outer, as Austin portrays it. (Perhaps here Cavell casts some doubt on the reasonableness or coherence of Austin’s condition of “sincerity,” or on how it is to be understood.)

### **Cavell on Intention in Language**

Cavell argues that an intentional inner state does not override other determinants of meaning in a context that depends upon the use of *words*, either written or spoken. There may be many times when what is of paramount interest to us is someone’s intention. A paradigm example is one’s intentions regarding the commission of a serious

crime. But in those contexts where we ask ourselves whether meaning is constituted by intentions or words—which must it be, we might ask ourselves?—the intention cannot be central, the “organizing center,” as mentioned above. Cavell insists “I should urge that we do justice to the fact that an individual’s intentions or wishes can no more produce the general meaning for a word than they can produce horses for beggars, or home runs from pop flies, or successful poems out of unsuccessful poems” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 38). He says an investigation into what someone “really means” does not turn on an investigation of the meaning of a specific *word*. The fact that people re-think the terms that they use (that they have “second thoughts,” he says) indicates that they realize words have meanings which their users cannot really subvert, at least not if they wish to make themselves comprehensible to others. If, he says, we want to convey what we mean, we have to choose the appropriate, shared words, or, if necessary, stipulate a new meaning for the terms we use: “Changing the meaning is not wishing it were different” (*ibid.*, 38-39).

In fact, echoing Wittgenstein, he suggests we could not mean anything at all through language if we did not have shared criteria for our words (sign-posts, both might say) on which we all rely. He insists “you could not mean one thing rather than another (= you could not mean anything) by a given word on a given occasion without relying on a (general) meaning of that word which is independent of your intention on that occasion (unless what you are doing is *giving* the word a special meaning)” (*ibid.*, 39, n. 32). In connection with this, he mentions that what we say often obviously depends on what we intend, but intention should not be understood as a form of “wanting or wishing” (*ibid.*). When, he says, we say something like “I mean by X, YZ” we are doing something

performative to the word itself, or giving what he calls a special report, but not describing wishes or intentions.

Cavell uses his concept of attunement, previously described, to express the conviction that our language is shared. He says we are “attuned” when we talk to each other, when, we might say, we draw on our shared criteria, consciously or unconsciously. Cavell says, “(Attunement) is rather something that sometimes gives us the feeling that the fact of language is like a miracle. Poets cultivate the feeling” (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 139). Cavell’s confidence in our attunement with each other recalls Austin’s insistence that we do often agree, and even if we disagree, this does not mean the disagreement has revealed a fundamental flaw in whatever subject about which we disagree (he says, as pointed out above, we should not give up on physics simply because we encounter scientific phenomena that puzzle us or challenge our notions of how the natural world works). Our reliance on the shared meanings of terms is demonstrated by our disagreement, Cavell says: “We can disagree in many of our beliefs, but that very disagreement implies that we agree in the use of the words which express those beliefs” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 240).

Cavell argues that our sharing of language even alleviates some of the problems confronting writers (though not other artists) in the age of what he calls the modern: “Writers do not share the severe burden of modernism which serious musicians and painters and sculptors have recognized for generations: a writer can still work with the words we all share, more or less, and have to share; he still, therefore, has an audience with the chance of responding to the way *he* can share the words” (*ibid.*, 187). (Yet, significantly, Cavell points out “in modernist art the issue of the artist’s intention, his

seriousness and his sincerity, has taken on a more naked role in our acceptance of his works than in earlier periods” [*ibid.*, 228].) This even extends to what he terms the writer’s “faith,” the conviction that we also share the senses that accompany our words—“confidence that what we are accustomed to call, say, the ‘connotations’ of words, the most evanescent of the shadows they cast, are as available between us as what we call their ‘denotations’” (*The Senses of Walden*, 104). Within language, we are likely to acquire and share certain senses of words. For example, many of us acquire an understanding of slang terms as those can be applied in various contexts; many of us realize the word “cold” is usually not a compliment, though nowhere in its definition (in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, at least) is its status as a term of compliment, or insult, ever discussed. As an example, Cavell provides the associations carried by the term “disinterestedness”: it “has never really stabilized itself as a word meaning a state of impartial or unselfish interest, but keeps veering toward meaning the divestment of interest altogether, uninterestedness, ennui” (*The Senses of Walden*, 117), as well as “Debussy”: “A generation or so ago, ‘Debussy’ referred to music of a certain ethereal mood, satisfying a taste for refined sweetness or poignance; today (at the time of his writing) it refers to solutions for avoiding tonality: I find I waver between thinking of that as a word altering its meaning and thinking of it as referring to an altered object” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 184). (He also rues our various uses of the word “normative.”)

This is an outcome of the process of learning language:

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. (This is part of what you say when you say that you are talking about the *logic* of ordinary language.) *Learning what these implications are is part of learning the language*; no less a part than learning its syntax, or learning what it is to which terms apply: they are an essential part of what we communicate when we talk. Intimate understanding is understanding which is implicit. Nor *could* everything we say (mean to communicate), in normal communication, be said explicitly (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 11-12).

He insists “the ‘pragmatic implications’ of our utterances are . . . *meant*; that they are an essential part of what we mean when we say something, of what it is to mean something” (*ibid.*, 32).

He makes the case for this view in the process of quoting other words of Emerson’s, from “The Poet”: “In every word he speaks he rides on them as the horses of thought” (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 22). He reverts to metaphorical language to make his point, as Wittgenstein and Austin do. Cavell says of this passage that horses are metaphorically equivalent to words, which “(suggests) both that they obey our intentions and that they work beyond our prowess” (*Transcendental Etudes*, 3); “The idea is that the words have a life of their own over which our mastery is the other face of our obedience” (*ibid.*, 203). According to Cavell’s reading, words, as the horses of thought, are both the signals of our intentions and instruments that control us. Horses are often directed by the intentions of their riders, but riders depend on the cooperation and performance of their horses. We do make our intentions intelligible through language; language thus does function as a signal of intention. But, no matter how individual or idiosyncratic the thoughts we formulate in language, when we use language to express

them, we do so using means shared by other speakers of language. In that way, words are instruments that constrain us. (It does, ultimately, appear to be internal to Cavell's view that a metaphor for metaphor tells us most directly what is happening in many literal cases of ordinary language and meaning.)

Given what he has said about learning language and about intention taking place within the confines of the institution of language, it is fitting that, when interpreting Emerson, Cavell writes "language is our fate . . . (diction) is what puts us in bonds, that with each word we utter we emit stipulations, agreements we do not know and do not want to know we have entered, agreements we were always in, that were in effect before our participation in them" (*Transcendental Etudes*, 72), and "language is an inheritance. Words are before I am; they are common" (*ibid.*, 92). This affects what we can mean by them: "Words come to us from a distance; they were there before we were; we are born into them. Meaning them is accepting that fact of their condition. To discover what is being said to us, as to discover what we are saying, is to discover the precise location from which it is said; to understand why it is said from just there, and at that time" (*The Senses of Walden*, 64).

Now, although we inherit words, that does not mean that inheritance is static and never develops. We also carry language forward, and do so in a way that might considerably change the meanings of words over time (though perhaps, as Austin suggests, many of our words never entirely desert their historical origins). Cavell argues "the occurrence of a word is the occurrence of an object whose placement always has a point, and whose point always lies before and beyond it" (*The Senses of Walden*, 27).



His phrase “before and beyond it” is important; it signals the fact that our words can be directed forward.

Cavell cites the work of Wittgenstein and Austin as support for his view. He mentions Austin likened intention to “headlights” (he is apparently referring to something Austin said in a seminar, and not to Austin’s actual work in “Three Ways of Spilling Ink,” where Austin refers to the lamp a miner wears), and Cavell interprets this to mean that intention might guide the way or cut through the dark in a given context, but other elements of the situation are crucial for successful driving.<sup>15</sup> In Cavell’s reading of Austin and Wittgenstein, intention is something that takes place and acquires its significance within the borders of settings or “institutions.” In language that clearly demonstrates elements of their views, he says:

For Austin as for Wittgenstein intention is anything but something inner making up for the absence of something outer; it lines the outer. Intention can guide the variation of signal flags through a sequence of positions, but it cannot—that is, *that* intention cannot—guide the establishing of the flags, and what counts as their positions, and what the positions signify, and so on. In the absence of this institution no such intention of variation is formulable. It may help to say: a context *is* what allows such a thing as an intention to do so much and to be so little. It is why some things you can do intentionally you can do inadvertently (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 111).

Cavell expresses the view that language, as a form of life, is shared by us, and that shared institution determines which meanings are possible—the institution of language

establishes the flags. As an example, he says “A poem, whatever else it is, is an utterance (outer-ance)” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 228).

Cavell makes the persuasive point that intention is one factor among others in determining meaning in language; it is not the “organizing center.” He claims Austin and Wittgenstein’s work supports this view, which seems plausible. This view also seems to logically follow from Cavell’s conviction that we are initiated into a language that we then share with others. As language users, we are all participants in this shared form of life, but this is an institution that already has its own flags in place, which our own intentions cannot displace. Speakers’ or writers’ intentions cannot fully determine meaning.

Cavell refers to a passage in Henry James’s story “The Birthplace” that reinforces both the intuition that intention must take place within an institution with certain parameters that control what is possible, and another intuition, that intention is central to the determination of even inner meaning. The philosophical tensions are evident in the passage Cavell quotes:

Husband: “‘The play’s the thing.’ Let the author alone . . .

Gedge: there *is* no author; that is for us to deal with. There are all the immortal people—in the work; but there’s nobody else . . . There *is* no such Person,” but then “The evening air listened, in the warm thick midland stillness, while the wife’s little cry rang out. ‘But *wasn’t* there—?’”

Cavell sees this as a dichotomy between those who claim intention can decide solutions to interpretive problems, and those who claim intention should have no say in determining them. It is a difference between a “W. C. Fields” view (the view that

intention is not constitutive of meaning) and Humpty Dumpty's (words mean whatever Humpty Dumpty wants them to mean): "Even if some theorists speak as though intention were everything there is to meaning, is that a sensible reason for opposite theorists to assert that intention is nothing, counts for nothing in meaning? Is W. C. Fields our only alternative to Humpty Dumpty?" (*Transcendental Etudes*, 96). Cavell notes his consternation at being confronted by a philosopher who attended one of his talks, who insisted Humpty Dumpty's view of meaning is correct<sup>16</sup>; but though he does not think we can call intention everything there is to meaning, he does not think it counts for nothing or is irrelevant, either.

Instead, Cavell explains, "Intention is merely of the last importance. Everything (else) has first to be in place for it to do what it does—as in putting a flame to a fuse" ("Macbeth Appalled," *Cavell Reader*, 213).<sup>17</sup> I will provide an analysis of this figurative language below.

In summary, Cavell emphasizes the shared, indeed "attuned," nature of language. He also emphasizes intention does not count for nothing in establishing meaning; neither does it count for everything. He provides a moderate view of intention that recognizes its importance for understanding our language use, but does not make the mistake of supposing that our intentions can actually constrain the meanings of our shared words. (There is a sense, however, in which our intentions create those words; they effect changes in the world, as Anscombe and Austin might say, when we project them toward the judgments of the future.) Both the shared meanings of words and our intentions are important to the proper functioning and understanding of language. Language is intentional, but it is an intentional element of human life that produces words on which

we all rely, words which are not identical to our intentions. Our shared reliance on them is possible because of our attunement. Cavell gives importance to both intention and the publicly available meanings of our terms.<sup>18</sup>

This is a “vision of language” that he says will “underlie the ordinary language philosopher’s procedures, and which, for (Cavell), advances our understanding of language and of human knowledge, or the conventionality of human nature generally . . . underlying, or forming part of, the philosophy which proceeds by appeals to what we should say when, to how words are normally used” (*The Claim of Reason*, 165, 167). It is a vision of a shared form of life, which depends upon the criteria all humans share; this secures our shared agreements and understandings about language, our form of life of communication. We learn words—in “certain contexts,” as Wittgenstein says. Cavell argues that this is not an enterprise underwritten by rules of cognition or grammar, but learning and sharing, and it shifts around as our criteria and our understandings and emphases shift around. But the vision of language is essentially a vision of one of the most fundamental aspects of human experience which, despite its timeless continuity and importance in the lives of human beings, does not acquire its authority because of the operation of language rules upon our understanding. It acquires it instead from us, our various forms of life, and the criteria operating within them. We not only learn words, but we gain an understanding of how to carry them forward in new contexts: “We learn words in certain contexts and after a while we are expected to know when they are appropriately used in (= can appropriately be projected into) further contexts” (*The Claim of Reason*, 168-169). Our ability to project appropriately is a criterion for our having learned a word. As he makes clear in his analysis of Austin and the Euripides passage,

and in his remarks on intention, Cavell also maintains that those words can be our bond; our inner thoughts cannot override our collectively shared meanings for those terms and what those words can also do—in certain contexts. In analyzing the Euripides passage, Cavell reveals his commitment to a Wittgensteinian picture of language: language as a shared form of human life, specifically, as Wittgenstein called it, a type of institution. Within such a form of life, one's own intentions or private inner states are shaped tremendously by what occurs outside of them, and if a conflict should arise over which element determines meaning—individual speakers' intentions, or the shared meanings of words?—what is shared in that form of life will prevail; individual intentions cannot override the meanings, the uses, of words.

We learn words in certain contexts, words with publicly shared meanings, and then, as participants in the shared form of life of our language, we carry them forward. “At some point,” Cavell writes, “demonstration and monitoring come to an end, and the other goes on alone, and within bounds of mutuality, or not. How far the bounds extend is not given by, not transparent from, the concepts in play, which are in principle open to the judgment of the future” (*Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 138).

**CHAPTER 4**  
**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE PICTURES OF LANGUAGE FOR**  
**CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE**

The literature review above describes the contributions of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell to our understanding of language (what it can do as well as how it can mean), the shared nature of our experiences, and touches on their conceptions of context, judgment, and knowledge. Wittgenstein and Cavell in particular also investigate the current state of philosophy and the experience of philosophical reflection. We have also noticed Anscombe's emphasis on "what we are doing" as an aspect of intention; intention gives an answer to the "Why?" question. These philosophers provide a powerful contemporary picture of the way language (and intention within the context of language) works. Their views avoid the shortcomings of the unsatisfactory conceptions of language described at the outset of this project. Among other things, their philosophy does the following: (1) provides fodder for a more nuanced exploration of the role intention is playing within philosophy of language, (2) is a significant improvement on the structuralist picture more prominently supported in earlier decades, and (3) accords with recent work in linguistics, which Austin in particular might have enjoyed. I consider each of these points in turn.

(1) The "intentional" view of language (Grice as well as P. F. Strawson are examples of proponents) can be contrasted with an "institutional" view, typified by speech act theory and the work of Austin and John Searle.

The broad outlines of the institutional view should be clear following my appraisal of Austin's "linguistic phenomenology." What is the "intentional" view? Grice's is probably the most significant, so I provide some details of it here. Very

briefly, Grice links the *meaning* of expressions to the meanings—intentions—of speakers.<sup>19</sup> Those speakers' audiences have to take up that communicative pitch somehow; they have to recognize what speakers are doing. How does this approach differ from approaches like Austin's? The debate is complicated, and many objections and revisions have been volleyed back and forth. I will mention one point, considered a major problem. Language use is clearly intentional. But can the meaning of words be hitched to those intentions?<sup>20</sup> How can speakers mean anything unless they are meaning with those commonly used tools, words—but then doesn't speaker-meaning depend on an antecedent word-meaning?

Michael Morris describes this objection as follows: "It is impossible to mean anything by an expression which the expression does not (already) mean" (267) (he also says this objection depends on the conviction that meaning something at one time is not the same as a meaningful *action* at that time). He continues, "Grice himself seems to be giving the words a kind of meaning which precedes the meaning of any particular action of using the words. Moreover, the moment we think of words and sentences as a *resource* to be used in actions of uttering, rather than as mere features of such actions," then, he says, we see the force of this objection to the intentional view:

If words and sentences are such a resource, they must bring their own properties with them. And that will mean that you cannot mean what you like by them. It will no longer be plausible to suggest that they mean, even on a particular occasion, what you intend them to mean on that occasion. For it will be clear that the whole point of your using the words is to use them to mean what they already mean (267-268).

Obviously, I find this objection persuasive (and I think the work of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell establishes that they do too), but I do not think we are simply making noises or manipulating signs we have learned without intentional efforts and input. I suspect that intention is more obviously at play when we are forced to invent new language, or when we recognize that language is insufficient for our purposes.

Efforts have been made to demonstrate that there is no real inconsistency between the intentional and institutional approaches within philosophy of language, and such efforts are on the right track. Ruth Millikan writes:

Unlike the case of most technical skills passed down by imitation, but more like the case of other conventional social forms, those effects that encourage continued replication of a language form are not determined by the purposes only of the agent producing them. The functions of language devices are fulfilled through cooperation between speakers and hearers, and hence are determined by the interests of both. Language devices will produce effects that interest speakers often enough to encourage continued replication only if hearers replicate hoped-for cooperative responses often enough. And hearers will continue to replicate intended cooperative responses often enough only if the results are, in turn, of interest to hearers (*Varieties of Meaning*, 25).

This is a welcome emphasis on the shared nature of language and the role all of its actors play in constituting its meaning. It would be a mistake to suppose only the agent's determinate acts control that meaning, and arguably, philosophy of language has paid too much attention, in recent decades, to the possible meaning-determining nature of intentions. (Though one might have worries about Millikan's use of phrases such as



“language devices” and “produce effects that interest speakers.”) And further analysis should be done regarding the different contexts in which language and intention occur. As just mentioned, I think our engagement with language is more clearly intentional when its use requires our conscious input—when language fails us, or reveals a gap, for example. And philosophers of language often emphasize speakers and hearers, but more should be said about readers and writers. One of the most fundamental attributes of writing is its ability to function as communication without a speaker present. That may be why it exists. So the writer’s intentions, while of course important to the genesis of those written words, cannot be said to “accompany” and control them once they are available to be read. Intention may be less important in the investigation of written language than it is in the investigation of spoken language, or it may turn out to play a different kind of role, in any case.

(2) The work of these philosophers also point up deficiencies in the structuralist picture of language. In *Philosophy and the Vision of Language*, Paul Livingston defines the structuralist picture of language and demonstrates its problems, tracing confirmation of this view in the projects of Wittgenstein and Quine, among others. (Livingston also suggests that continental and analytic philosophy have pursued parallel investigations into the nature of language and hopes “the usual dismissive attitude that one still finds among practitioners of each ‘tradition’ toward the other can yield to a broader and more responsible conversation” [132].)

Livingston writes:

the *structuralist* picture of language consists in four interrelated central commitments and a fifth, less central one that often (though not always) goes along with the first four:

1. Language as a whole can be understood as a *system* or *structure* of signs, words, propositions, sentences or other significant terms.
2. The logical, grammatical, or structural interrelations among these terms, as well as their ordinary use in speaking or writing, are wholly or partially constrained by a corpus of intelligible *rules* or *regularities*.
3. These rules or regularities are describable and their description can account for the *correct* or *normal* use of terms in everyday interlocution.
4. On the basis of such a description, it is possible to determine the *meaning* or *meaningfulness* of terms or combinations of terms used on particular occasions.
5. The rules or regularities that thus constrain the use of language are essentially *public*, *intersubjective*, and *social* in character.

In “From Syntax to Semantics (and Pragmatics),” he describes the results that followed Frege’s search for the logical underpinnings of mathematics. Livingston cites Gödel’s incompleteness theorems and Tarski’s demonstration of the impossibility of defining truth that can be applied within a system. Gödel and Tarski’s projects revealed, for the analytic philosophers who followed them, the inadequacy of a (purely) syntactic account of language structure.

Essentially, Gödel and Tarski, in looking for the “bare bones” (in Gödel’s case) of logic underlying math, and trying to define the essence of a truth within a formal system

(in Tarski's), ultimately undermine any attempt to present an entirely syntactic conception of a language's logical structure.

Thus those who followed their work saw the need, as Livingston points out, of "supplementing the purely syntactical analysis of a language with a 'world-directed' semantical analysis of the referential character of its terms and formulas" (67). But this was not its only supplement: philosophers began alluding to "pragmatics" as well, a category named by Charles Morris in 1938. Morris felt syntax, semantics, and pragmatics would be sufficient to analyze signs logically. He thought this could guarantee the objectivity of signs as well as clear up confusions about the concept of "meaning," but this did not, as one might suppose, lead philosophers to abandon the structuralist picture of language:

the difficulties and considerations that led to the supplementation of syntax with semantics and pragmatics did not cause any abandonment of the basic structuralist picture of language as a regular totality of signs wholly governed by rules of use . . . The results and tensions that could have demonstrated an inherent and general instability within the structuralist project of analysis were instead taken only to demand, within it, an expansion of the categories of analysis to include the other dimensions of sign functioning that had been ignored by the purely syntactic conception (67-68).

And Austin's work casts doubt even on these "categories of analysis" (syntax, semantics, and pragmatics). As Livingston points out, Austin significantly shows "the essential inseparability of the pragmatic dimension from the other two, and hence of the insuperable entanglement of any philosophical account of the basis of meaning with the

problems of the pragmatic application of signs” (71). Austin’s work was also taken to underscore that the perhaps chimerical “rules of usage” underlying language apply to action and behavior, so, as Livingston mentions, subsequent conversations focused on “*public* linguistic action and its relevance to the determination of meaning . . . the structuralist picture of language . . . explicitly became the expression of a much broader and more varied project of analytical and structural reflection on the relationship of language to the ordinary life of its users” (71). This, of course, raises questions about the nature of language users’ communities and the way in which those communities exhibit regular and comprehensible language use. Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell direct us toward the best available answers, at least at present. They emphasize our “attunement,” our shared criteria, as language users.

(3) The contemporary work of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell also accords with recent work in linguistics, especially new approaches to that subject. Austin advised us to examine actual languages. I follow his advice here, peering briefly at Nicholas Ostler’s recent, magisterial survey of the history of languages, centered on the reasons for their development, the dimensions they take on, and, in some cases, their eventual death, to emphasize that these philosophers’ views of language are borne out by the history of the subject.

Ostler argues that he contributes an important dimension to the study of languages: “to suggest ways in which it might actually matter what type of a language a community speaks” (*Empires of the Word*, 23).<sup>21</sup> He claims he is taking a new tack within linguistics, focusing on the history and evolution of languages. He calls this approach “the study of language dynamics,” or, as he says in a note beneath this, “more

explicitly and technically, diachronic sociolinguistics” (558). In his explanation of his approach to language history, which he notes has seldom been undertaken, he echoes Wittgenstein and Cavell and their account of language-games and forms of life, saying he is “understanding human societies: how language, in all its evolving variety, organizes not just the human mind but also the large groups of human minds that constitute themselves into societies, which communicate and interact, as well as think and act” (558-559). What occurs within these language societies echoes what Cavell says of our attunement in judgments, and the remarkable fact that it works: we share “routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls ‘forms of life’” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 52).

Ostler’s history of the past five thousand years of language begins with literacy, which is thought-provoking, since, as I emphasize, reading, writing, and speaking, though all types of language, may present different conceptual issues and problems. This makes sense for Ostler’s study, however, focused as it is on aspects of the history of language; literacy and writing give us some proof as to what that history includes. But it does have its limits. He traces the influences that play a role in the life of a language: its number of speakers; immigration patterns; business practices, such as trade; and whether the language in question is viewed as prestigious. Colonization has played a massive role in the story of language around the world: Ostler claims there are “six colonizing languages in the list of the world’s top ten languages by population” (325). He even notes some of

the world's largest language-speaking groups are people who regularly support themselves by rice.<sup>22</sup> He provides notable examples of the influences of different language cultures on one another, and his approach to linguistics can be interpreted as a study of how entire *languages*, and not just words, move into new contexts; all of these factors play a role.<sup>23</sup>

Ostler echoes philosophers such as Cavell in emphasizing how words reveal the associations and histories of all their uses:

A language that links together a speech community, even a vast one like the global multitude who think and speak in English, is given its character not so much by its phonetics and phrasings as by the patterns of associations that have piled up on its words as they are transmitted down the generations. A language bespeaks a history . . . This is one reason why study of a language has long emphasized its literature, “the best that has been said and thought” (quoting Matthew Arnold) using that language, as selected by its own tradition (516).

“But,” he immediately goes on to add, “not all the experiences in a language’s long memory may have been hallowed by good writing.” (This can be connected to what Austin would maintain—language can function as a repository for collective historical wisdom.)

An overview of English indicates that language is subject to great change and local variation, even if enough of it remains constant for it to merit its continuing name. It can appear unrecognizable when different centuries or even decades of it are set side by side. It is curious that a language so deeply influenced by the contexts surrounding it has now, in the view of many linguists, attained such monolithic status, but Ostler gives us

some idea of how this came to be. Language researchers wonder if English is approaching such world dominance that it will always be with us, though Ostler's work demonstrates that some of the most apparently impregnable languages in history have eventually vanished or declined. David Crystal laments the possibility that it may become our only language, claiming that if English is all we have left to use in another 500 years, "it will have been the greatest intellectual disaster that the planet has ever known" (191).<sup>24</sup>

Even if our language future may betoken a merging perhaps unsurprising in light of globalism, it is unlikely that language will remain static. It will continue to develop and change, to capture and reflect our realities. Supposing otherwise is simply to fail to take account of what is occurring in linguistics. This is easy enough to do. Ostler quotes Dante Alighieri (who recognized elements of the Romance languages in Latin), in order to emphasize that languages can change and take on new forms, even if they do this gradually:

Nor should what we say appear any more strange than to see a young person grown up, whom we do not see grow up: for what moves gradually is not at all recognized by us, and the longer something needs for its change to be recognized the more stable we think it is. So we are not surprised if the opinion of men, who are little distant from brutes, is that a given city has existed always with the same language, since the change in language in a city happens gradually only over a very long succession of time, and the life of men is also, by its very nature, very short. Therefore if over one people the language changes, as has been said, successively over time, and can in no way stand still, it is necessary that it should

vary in various ways quite separately from what remains constant, just as customs and dress vary in various ways, which are confirmed neither by nature or society, but arise at human pleasure and to local taste. This was the motive of the inventors of the faculty of *grammatica*: for *grammatica* is nothing but the identity of speech unalterable for diverse times and places (*De vulgari eloquentia*, i.9.8-11; quoted in *Empires of the Word*, 321).

(Perhaps Cavell would find it interesting that Dante uses the image of a young person growing, and Wittgenstein that he mentions the language of a city.)

Language use is not disorderly; its progression is often gradual, as Dante describes. Its projection does not result in chaotic flux in the aspects of life affected by language, for language, as well as culture and art, exhibits a certain provisional stability (Cavell emphasizes this as well; *The Claim of Reason*, 185). Indeed, its perceived stability may have contributed to the impression of some philosophers that it masks an underlying skeleton of rules. While many things change, much stays the same, at least for long periods of time. To take one example, in discussing language development in the Middle East, Ostler points out, “As one result of Semitic language persistence, it can be shown that counting to ten has hardly changed here in over four thousand years, or two hundred generations” (37).

But though we may see such stability, the process of language development is infinite; it is never finished and closed off, as Cavell emphasizes.<sup>25</sup> As Austin’s linguistic legislators, we do not act like the Académie Française, founded by Louis XIII’s regime, “to give certain rules to our language and to render it pure, eloquent and capable of



treating the arts and sciences” (*Empires of the Word*, 409). For we are never done learning.

## CHAPTER 5 THE IMAGINATION

### Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell on the Imagination

We have reviewed the contributions of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell to the study of language and related, philosophically significant aspects of human life, including intention, shared judgment, and philosophy itself. Their work emphasizes not only promising new directions for investigations of these matters, but also the imagination. Having outlined Cavell's debts to Austin and Wittgenstein and his views on intention and language, which draw on their work, I turn to his account of the imagination (relating his remarks to Wittgenstein and Austin's remarks on imagination) and his account of the projective imagination. Then it will be time to consider how the "bounds of mutuality" work in projection. I will begin with a brief review of the remarks about imagination provided by Austin and Wittgenstein before turning to Cavell's account of imagination and projection.

Austin says when we make use of the imagination, we do not fill in every detail we could fill in; we do not entirely describe what we imagine.<sup>26</sup> This seems especially true of the way the imagination is employed when we read literature. He thinks the imagination can function as a tool through which we can access and study examples for consideration. But it raises questions, it is "feeble," it is "wretched," he says, and it is impeded by its connection with our words. When we try to enlist ordinary examples, try to get someone to imagine something, we use words to outline what we want someone to imagine. And this may not be what we wish to do; we may not want to "blinker" the imagination with our ordinary words and ordinary cases when we are trying to think those away. The more we fill in the picture we attempt to imagine, the less likely we are

to disagree with others about whatever we are trying to imagine. (And perhaps the further we get from employing the imagination.) It can fail us when we fail to “appreciate” a situation, he says.

Recall that Wittgenstein has said we lack clarity about the role of the imagination; he has questioned what is occurring when we use it; it can be used to obtain proof, and it is subject to the will, as is the ability to perceive an aspect. (A failure to perceive an aspect is not unlike the failure of the ear in music, according to Wittgenstein; they are both subject to the will, but they also appear to be contingent on our ability to judge. One may not be able to perceive either an aspect or the characteristics of music—or perhaps not without great effort.) We can invoke it and control it in a way that we cannot invoke the contents of perceptual states: he says we cannot *imagine* a leaf as green if it is not. (Presumably he means not that we could not imagine a non-green leaf, which we can easily do, but that we cannot actually change our perception of a green leaf into the perception of something else, or perhaps that we cannot imagine a *given* leaf as green when it is not.) But our imagination seems to be constrained in certain ways. We do not imagine the length of a sphere, though we do the length of a rod. We think about what fits. And our imagination is also engaged by the aspects of our experience that are of interest to us. We do not often, or at least not usually, exert it over questions like whether a stone has consciousness, though we could imagine circumstances in which we might do so.

I will outline Cavell’s remarks on imagination itself before describing his account of its projective use. The imagination is clearly important to his methods as a philosopher. Cavell says he uses it himself to think of his language and life in order to do

philosophy; he checks language and life against the wider context of his community. In the course of that effort, he engages in a confrontation with what he terms his culture's criteria, and a *convening* of those criteria, which relates to his conception of "convention."

But he says the imagination is "the laziest, if potentially the most precious, of human faculties" (*The World Viewed*, 150). In a phrase that recalls the language of fire he uses to characterize intention, he writes "the imagination can . . . be fired by information, (but) you cannot always know when the fire will strike" (*The Claim of Reason*, 338). It is something that we can call to mind, out of its laziness. He also claims our cognition is fundamentally constituted by it: "Our imagination, or our capacity for images, and for the meaning or phenomenology of our images . . . are as *a priori* as our other forms of knowledge of the world . . . Human forms of feeling, objects of human attraction, our reactions constituted in art, are as universal and necessary, as objective, as revelatory of the world, as the forms of the laws of physics" (*The Senses of Walden*, 103-104).

Within the space of these remarks, Cavell says of the imagination that it is an extraordinarily important aspect of our consciousness, relating us to the world in basic, important ways; also, that in a way it is out of our control, and in a way it is not. It appears to assist us in striking forward in our thoughts and our relation to the world, as well as passively reacting to what the world imposes on us. There may be much we can do to lay the groundwork for imaginative experience, but in some respects its power appears unbidden. Cavell also says the imagination can be directed or controlled by our

own thought processes. For like Wittgenstein, Cavell insists the cognitive faculty of imagination is subject to the will.

Cavell wonders how we are to imagine competently; how to imagine just enough, but not something that would change what he calls the context; he says the context cannot be fixed in advance. It will depend on what it is we are asked to imagine and why:

“Whether a situation is fully described will, one supposes, depend on the point for which it was being described” (*The Claim of Reason*, 158).<sup>27</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Cavell sees educational value in the appeal to the imagination. And he sees it as a fundamental component of ordinary language philosophy. When we use the strategies of ordinary language philosophy, we are often responding to requests to imagine states of affairs or illustrative examples. Cavell says imagination in this context “is the capacity for making connections, seeing or realizing possibilities . . . Imagination is called for, faced with the other, when I have to take the facts in, realize the significance of what is going on, make the behavior real for myself, make a connection” (*The Claim of Reason*, 354). He explains “take the facts in” as “seeing behavior in a certain way” (this “seeing” is what Cavell claims Wittgenstein would understand as “interpretation”). This does not mean, he points out, that we invariably form visual images in our minds when we use the imagination. Instead, he describes here an important way in which we gather data, try to understand it, understand ourselves and others, and orient ourselves toward our worlds and the people in them. According to Cavell, these strategies help us understand the criteria for our concepts.

The imagination is also specifically named as the capacity by which we project words into new contexts.

What is the projective imagination?<sup>28</sup> It is likened to “the nature of supposition” (*The Claim of Reason*, 151). Cavell also says “language itself depends on the ‘capacity for projection’” (*ibid.*, 196); it is an indispensable element of our language use. He equates it to the analysis of our concepts when he terms it a technique of both traditional and ordinary language philosophers, “involved,” he says, “with investigating our conceptualization, or projective imagination, of problems and situations” (*ibid.*, 157). For the ordinary language philosopher, according to Cavell, we rely upon it when we are interpreting our conceptualizations.<sup>29</sup> And it is influenced, in ways I will describe below, by our myriad perceptions.

Cavell says we can access it by posing certain questions, such as those starting with “What should we say if . . . ?” Such questions can invite us to project, as he puts it. He uses examples such as “suppose you have three rabbits” and “think how you would feel if that had happened to you” (*ibid.*, 147). What happens when we suppose? We summon the case to mind, and this occurs (at least usually) under our direction. No doubt we often do this with an eye toward some other purpose, purposes such as solving a computation problem, conceiving of the world in a certain way—anything from the weather to rabbits to political states of affairs—and trying to understand or empathize with another person’s point of view. We can hold the thought that we have three rabbits, and we can put ourselves in another person’s shoes if we think about what happened to someone else happening to us. Such examples illustrate the variety of ways in which we can project. In the first case, we call to mind a state of affairs that is primarily conditional: we imagine the three rabbits, though we do not have to conjure up a mental image of the rabbits themselves. Images of rabbits may appear in our consciousness,

with or without their hutches and food, though a specific mental picture is not necessary. But a conception is suddenly there—the state of having three rabbits—that we can access as needed. In the second case, we are asked to consider other people’s emotional states. Cavell makes the claim that in considering other people’s experiences we are better able to understand them, and presumably to empathize with them. For example, in a stage in his argument about skepticism, Cavell uses the term “empathic projection” to describe how we might recognize each other’s humanity (*ibid.*, 423).

Once we do begin “calling to mind” the quite astonishingly inexhaustible examples our imagination provides us, such examples set up their own terms of investigation, and are insulated from the conditions of the real world that might be thought to intrude upon them: imagined cases are “inaccessible to what in fact happens” (*ibid.*, 148). But there is logic to what we imagine; not anything can interfere with it: “an *imagined* situation *cannot*, in logic, be other than it seems, or is described, to be” (*ibid.*, 155). This is illustrated by a story Cavell quotes, of a soldier being asked what he would do if a battleship approached. He replies that he would torpedo it; when asked where he got a torpedo, the soldier responds that it is from the same place as the battleship (*ibid.*, 151).

In some of its most powerful incarnations, the imagination bears a close connection to facts. Like Wittgenstein and Austin, Cavell sees a link between imagination and fact, or what is fitting to imagine: “The human imagination is released by fact. Alone, left to its own devices, it will not recover reality, it will not form an edge . . . Both imagination and experience continue to require what the Renaissance had in mind, viz., that they be humanized” (*The Senses of Walden*, 75).

Cavell distinguishes the case of supposing from predicting, as Wittgenstein does, in Cavell's reading of him. When the subject of "What should we say?" or "would we call?" is raised, Cavell says Wittgenstein is not seeking a prediction, or asking how frequently a word will be used: "He is asking something which can be answered by remembering what is said and meant, or by trying out his own response to an imagined situation" (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 64) (this gives us knowledge of our grammar). Cavell emphasizes this idea in his own work, saying that asking what we should say, how we should consider some particular case, issues in not a prediction, but a request "that we *imagine one*" (*The Claim of Reason*, 146; emphasis added).

Projection takes place because something about the new context will "invite" or "allow" that new use of a term, to use Cavell's words. As he says, "legitimate" projections are "deeply controlled."<sup>30</sup> Not any projection will do—in order for our communication to function successfully, we cannot leap too far, as he puts it (*The Claim of Reason*, 192). Our ability to project is unlimited, but it is not "accidental or arbitrary" (*ibid.*, 183).<sup>31</sup> Though there may be variations in the circumstances under which projection occurs, projections are not. Our use of the word "shoe" reveals such orderliness, he says.<sup>32</sup>

In raising the question of what makes a projection appropriate or correct, Cavell claims the "traditional" answers are that we recognize another "instance of the same universal" or the "new object is *similar* to the old" (*ibid.*, 169). He remarks "we have to show *how* the new context is an instance of this old concept" (though he also acknowledges it may not always be apparent how far we need to specify the projection) (*ibid.*, 196). And if a projection is puzzling, he says, it "may be made appropriate by



giving relevant explanations of how it is to be taken, *how* the new context *is* an instance of the old concept” (*ibid.*, 192).

But we are unable to do this if we have not entirely *learned* how to use a word. We cannot project unless we have a sense of how terms work.

A case of projection is provided by Cavell; he uses the example of “feed” as a word that gets projected into a new context. The term “feed” is extended into a new setting, the expression “feeding the meter.” Using a more “general” verb like “put” would not necessarily be better, because, according to Cavell, it actually increases our potential meanings to an unacceptable degree, resulting in a word that is flaccid in meaningfulness. Also, “feeding,” as in “feeding pride,” allows us to access the language of the emotions, he says. If we could not project at all, what would we have to imagine in order to understand that? He thinks we would perceive a culture in which there is no connection between things—everything is just “different” (*ibid.*, 181, 182). Cavell emphasizes that people would not project words if they conceived of everything about which they communicated as “different,” if they saw no connections between contexts. “Can everything be just different?” he wonders (*ibid.*, 182), not only in language, but in the world? But this is not what we do, how we engage with our world, he emphasizes.

For Cavell, the stability and tolerance in the meaning of a term ensure that we can use it to cover multiple cases and apply it to new ones. He calls this flexibility, of which projection is an example, the “tempering of speech” (*The Claim of Reason*, 185-186). We shouldn’t puzzle over the generality of some of our language-games, Cavell maintains; why *shouldn’t* we project? We grasp what these shared (or not-shared) characteristics are if we grasp the grammar of the concept in question. For example, an

understanding of the grammar of art will yield insight into the similarities, and dissimilarities, among its constituents.

Cavell's work demonstrates support for the idea that "similarity" affects our ability to project. He points out that projections are controlled by what contexts invite or allow, and he maintains that we can demonstrate that new applications of a concept or a word are relevantly related to previous cases. "It is in the exercise of this form of imagination," Livingston writes, "that the standing and structural possibilities of the language that I speak come into view. But at the same time, through this exercise the possibilities that *I* can project onto the world—the routes of significance that I can inhabit, the senses of meaningfulness that I can share—are shown in the variation of situations into which *they* can be projected by me" ("The Sense of Finitude and the Finitude of Sense," 27).

**CHAPTER 6**  
**THE PROJECTIVE IMAGINATION: MAPPING THE FIELDS OF**  
**CONSCIOUSNESS LIT BY THE OCCASIONS OF A WORD**

In this chapter, I extend the conceptions of imagination provided by Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell to supplement my view of how we project words into new contexts. In doing so, I shall support Cavell's overall conception of the projective imagination, though I will supply details that are not included in his account, and I will develop my own view of the role imagination is playing in projection. While what I have identified may not be the only way language users project, it is representative of a significant portion of it. For the aspects of imagination and intention at work in projection underlie a variety of language uses, and it is in our use of language that we can see evidence of this phenomenon. These associated functions of the intention and imagination in our language use have likely endured throughout the centuries, even if our languages themselves have not.

When we project words into new contexts, we rely on a process that is imaginative. The "imagination" of the projective imagination exhibits the following characteristics, which justify its appellation as imaginative: (1) it is creative; (2) it is a shortcut between verbal (and other) contexts, and contributes to our economy of language (and I explain how this process works, relying on contemporary work by Colin McGinn to emphasize just how widely imagination may be functioning in our use of language); (3) it involves both active and passive functions of thought, but it may be primarily unconscious, not performed according to deliberate acts of will; and (4) it is a powerful tool for education as well as intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction, supplying "voice" for us. It will become clear that projection, in various ways, is similar to metaphor (and the

two categories of language use occasionally overlap), and I draw on arguments by John Searle, A. P. Martinich, and Donald Davidson (as well as Cavell) to illustrate certain aspects of metaphor and its connection to the projection of language. Having characterized the process of language projection, I question a distinction Cavell draws between projection and metaphor.

Austin, as Cavell recounts, called his “methods” “linguistic phenomenology”; Cavell says they map “the fields of consciousness lit by the occasions of a word.” In what follows, I sketch such a linguistic phenomenology, and what occurs when we project words, igniting our fields of consciousness as we do so. I intend to demonstrate that projecting terms depends on a not-often-conscious interplay of imagination in conjunction with a “chance” that appears intentionless, though it is not entirely. Ultimately, I maintain that the projection of words typifies something described in a phrase of Wittgenstein’s: “Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.”

First, however, I reinforce the idea that this process is not taking place because we are wholly constrained either by our intentions or a calculus of rules.

It might be thought that in projecting, we are relying on rules or a calculus to carry words into new territory (as Wittgenstein appears to have thought, at one time). However, this is not a rule-governed process. Our ability to correctly project and understand each other’s projections is going to depend not on a calculus, but on our shared criteria and the attunement of our judgments Cavell describes, discussed above. He outlines the process in a powerful passage from *Must We Mean What We Say?*:

Nothing insures that (language) projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life.” Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying (52).

The ability to employ the projective imagination depends on our experiences, our competencies as speakers and participants in language-using forms of life. Thus those who lack the requisite experiences may not be able to respond to these appeals. Cavell acknowledges that many competent speakers are able to employ the projective imagination, though not all can do this in the same way. For example, a speaker who comes from a different culture or form of life may not be able to project in the way that members of another culture or form of life do—e.g., such a speaker does not understand the normal practices of the “point” of the other group. Cavell writes: “Not everyone *can* respond to this invitation; some have not yet been initiated into the forms of life which control the power of supposition, some will never manage it, some have lost it through personal damage. But any competent speaker can in fact respond, without hesitation, and without the shadow of a doubt of correctness” (*The Claim of Reason*, 148). For example,

those who do not speak English as their first language can miss verbal ambiguity when it occurs in English phrases. We depend on our shared criteria to make this enterprise comprehensible; it involves no more, though certainly no less, than that.<sup>33</sup> Cavell does not think it will always be clear why imagination fails, but does consider the possibility that “you haven’t fully projected yourself into the situation” (*ibid.*). Recall the examples (provided above) of experience as a guarantor of expertise, of learning. Nemours might lack the ability to understand the woman at court is infatuated with him if he cannot assess and truly understand the dimensions of human relationships, in which he is experienced; someone may miss the racism the teacher points out to the student if one lacks the ability to enter into thoughts about such aspects of our world. One reason for our inability to project in this way may be due to our failures to participate in our shared criteria, for whatever reason. For example, a failure of imagination may be due to a failure of associated powers such as empathy, memory, and observation that arise from our forms of life and experiences. The inability or unwillingness to understand the instructive example of racism could mark such a failure of imagination.

Livingston emphasizes “the ongoing projection of words into new contexts is neither arbitrary nor ‘determined’ by rules or norms” (187).

He says we must

negotiate the determination of appropriateness again and again, in each case appealing to the interlocutor’s own senses of propriety, significance, and relevance . . . there is no substitute, in the practice of ordinary language philosophy, for the ever-renewed appeal to what Cavell calls the “projective imagination” . . . this appeal must be renewed in every new case, and that its

application in each case is, to some extent at least, an exercise of the imagination, serves to mark it off from any comprehensive attempt to theorize the norms of language and reason once and for all (188).

(However, here Livingston is referring to what we do in engaging in ordinary language philosophy, not all ordinary interlocution. He thinks, as Cavell does, the ordinary language philosopher makes explicit the projection we perform everyday as it is.)

Our shared criteria help us stay on the same page. Language use is not arbitrary, because it is shaped by what contexts invite or allow; but it is not rule-governed, because in using language in these ways we are not circumscribing grooves of tracks laid down for us. The regularities or conventions our languages reflect and reinforce can indeed be “rule”-like, or guidelines, though not if by the term “rules” we are understood to connote an inevitability. In what follows, I explain how we are able to tell what a context invites or allows (this is due to our imaginations), and how our imaginations interact with language in such a way that we can be linguistically creative or combine words in new contexts.

A glance at the history of language, like that provided by Ostler, demonstrates that it could hardly be running on deterministic principles. Language may have some deeper tie to our human biology than we have yet established, but its variability suggests that even if communication of some form has always been or has become a human constant, the form of that communication has not, and it does not reveal the regularities we might expect were it based on “rules” of the type Wittgenstein is ultimately dubious about. Instead, language reflects the convening of our criteria, though these are subject to change, depending on our forms of life.

This is not to suggest that some languages might not actually have the characteristics of a calculus; some formal languages do. And, in codifying our rules of grammar and the meanings of terms in dictionaries for languages such as English, we could suppose these languages function as “rule”-governed systems. But it is not obvious that a general language used for everyday purposes could have such a structure.

### **(1) The Creativity of Projection**

Our imaginations help us recognize contexts into which words can be extended. This process is imaginative, because it depends, on complex ways still to be entirely enumerated, on perceptual inputs that provide grist for imagination and language. And, crucially, it is imaginative because it depends on the recognition of the similarities between two (or more) contexts (an aspect of our thought process that may be heavily influenced by our perceptual information), and this process is frequently creative. It involves the imaginative ability to make *connections*, a phrase Cavell also uses. Such connections are not always obvious; they may be striking, novel, incongruous, involve an element of surprise or the recognition of novelty. The capacity to make and appreciate such connections is itself creative. A retrospective examination of the use of language in some particular instance might reveal such connections, or make them apparent.

We focus on *relative* similarities,<sup>34</sup> to recall a phrase of Austin’s: “we cannot handle an indefinitely large vocabulary; nor, generally speaking, do we wish to insist on the minutest detectable differences, but rather on relative similarities; nor, with our limited experience both as individuals and as a race, can we anticipate in our vocabulary vagaries of nature which have yet to be revealed.” We also leave open future possibilities, as Austin recognizes in these remarks. Myriad future contexts await us. We



do not know how we will understand or describe them, assimilate our language to them, and carry our language on from them. But in noticing similarities, we continue to give voice to our mental images.

But what do I suppose *similarity*, or the similarities between contexts, to be? We may not be able to specify a precise list of the way in which the objects of our language and thought are similar to others. It may be impossible to account for every case of similarity or to catalogue exhaustively every such case that has or will occur.

Nevertheless, John Searle provides an interesting list of the “similarities” that can be recognized between metaphors<sup>35</sup> and the materials of context of which they make use, and his explication of “similarity” respecting metaphor provides a look at how similarity is functioning in making projection possible.

Searle explains similarity is a “vacuous” or unilluminating predicate that cannot determine which properties are relevant for comparison, because each thing could be like everything else in some way. He thinks there is no one principle that accounts for the way metaphor works, though one can ask how one thing might remind us of another thing. There are at least eight, and probably more, ways (sketched below) in which something can remind us of another thing, or “call to mind” something else.

Nevertheless, we can be reminded of something else in ways that do not involve metaphor, and we could conceivably think of things that “call to mind” other things without communicating them to other people. (Searle thinks principles of “reminding” must work to restrict these processes, in order to, first of all, ensure that the reminding is taking place because of a metaphor, and second, determine whether that metaphor is something that can be intelligibly communicated from speaker to hearer.<sup>36</sup>)

Searle discusses various principles of interpretation that enable the comprehensible “calling to mind” of other things. They are:

Principle 1: Things which are P are by definition R.

Principle 2: Things which are P are contingently R.

Principle 3: Things which are P are often said or believed to be R, even though both speaker and hearer may know that R is false of P.

Principle 4: Things which are P are not R, nor are they like R things, nor are they believed to be R, nonetheless it is a fact about our sensibility, whether culturally or naturally determined, that we just do perceive a connection, so that utterance of P is associated in our minds with R properties.

Principle 5: P things are not like R things, and are not believed to be like R things, nonetheless the condition of being P is like the condition of being R.

Principle 6: There are cases where P and R are the same or similar in meaning, but where one, usually P, is restricted in its application, and does not literally apply to S.

Principle 7: A way of applying principles 1 through 6 to simple cases which are not of the form “S is P” but relational metaphors, and metaphors of other syntactical forms such as those involving verbs and predicate adjectives.

Principle 8: Special cases of metaphor, such as, perhaps, synecdoche and metonymy.

Possibly, Principle 9: Where an association between P and R that did not previously exist could be created by the juxtaposition of S and P in the original sentence.<sup>37</sup>

Principles 3, 4, 5, and 9 apply especially frequently to the similarities that could be said to exist between the contexts marked by the projection of a word. For example, Principles 4 and 5 apply to Cavell's example of "feeding" the meter: the condition of "being fed" a coin is like the condition of "being fed" some food. Presumably, this may come about because of circumstances that can be described by Principle 9; eventually, this use of the word "feed" for both contexts can also be understood as an example of Principle 3.

Now, Searle emphasizes that noting similarities between objects should only function as an inferential strategy, not as the basis for an *assertion* of genuine likeness, because such an assertion can result in a likeness's being construed as part of the metaphor's meaning, when not all "metaphorical assertions are equivalent in meaning to statements of similarity" (415). This is because assertions require a successful commitment to matching truth-conditions; if the truth-conditions of the objects involved do not correspond, there can be no assertion of likeness. For example, the fact that "Richard is a gorilla" is a metaphor and implies that Richard has attributes that are commonly or mythologically (but falsely) associated with gorillas does not mean that there can be a real assertion of similarity, with the same truth-conditions, between Richard and gorillas. Assertions of similarity can be inappropriate because the objects under consideration, as they are being described by a metaphor, do not share any property that could be asserted as a real likeness, or because one or both of the objects may not exist or have any verifiable properties. Though metaphors can "call to mind" similarities between objects, these similarities cannot always be formulated as assertions of genuine likeness.

Searle's emphasis here is also applicable to the similarities marked by projection. The similarities between feeding an animal and feeding a meter are not literal. We must infer these connections, not actually successfully assert that what is true of the feeding of an organism is likewise true for the "feeding" (if we can even say such a thing literally exists) of a meter. So such inferential strategies assist us in seeing how one thing could be considered like something else, or related enough to it that the term used in one case can apply in the other. In many cases, the similarities are those marked by Searle's list, though no doubt there are more, and more still to be created.

The similarities that will be revealed by an examination of the contexts in which a word occurs are the similarities best characterized by family resemblances, as explained above in the literature review. There may be no one way things are similar to each other, but a word's new context will share some interconnecting relationship(s) with its previous ones.

As an example of such similarities, we can consider our use of verbs. I begin with Cavell's own example. Why does the word "feed" work in the new context, or, as Cavell asks in *The Claim of Reason*, "what makes a projection an appropriate or correct one?" (169). In the case of the word "feed," it is clear that "feeding" the meter can be metaphorically associated with the act of supplying food; we "feed" the meter with coins the same way we might "feed" a person or animal with food. This word seems to work especially well here because we put coins in toward the top of the meter, often in a round or oblong piece above a post, and that makes it seem as if we are putting coins into the mouth in the meter's "head," just as we would when feeding a person or many animals. We would not be able to do this if we did not recognize contextual similarities between

the previous use of the word (feeding people and animals) and the new context (feeding meters); we could not do this if we did not understand the way in which a verb like “feed” could appropriately take on new uses.

Cavell says we “feed” the meter; Searle uses the example of the ship “plow(ing)” the sea. Strictly speaking, we do not feed meters anything, nor do ships plow waves. But there is something about the action of feeding the “head” of a meter coins that is *relevantly similar* to the act of feeding an organism; there is something about the ship’s prow breaking the waves in its path that is *relevantly similar* to the manner in which the prow-shaped plow cuts through the soil in its path.

Many verbs involve movement, often words we use to account for the experiences of our mental endeavors: we use such phrases as “holding a thought,” “calling to mind,” we say we “summon up” or “conjure up,” “dig into the past,” and so on. We mention inspiration itself, “falling into the mind,” and so on. We cannot actually hold thoughts, call things into minds or let things drop into them; we cannot dig into pasts—two contexts are frequently different in that one might refer to an actual event or action, the other to an abstract entity. But researching the past is like what happens when we uncover by digging; the feeling of inspiration is like having something tumble down from up above us (sometimes it is literally like that). Austin says “bog down,” McGinn frequently employs “shorn,” Ostler “blot”—as when he refers to one language blotting out another—and in all of these cases, these movements are sufficiently similar to what happens in the endeavors of thought and intellect they are used to characterize. “Blot,” with its suggestion of a liquid stain and its spreading, blurring edges, is a particularly

compelling way to describe how one language might seep into the province of another and eventually extinguish it entirely.

The term “fire” and its appearances in the various ways we account for types of illumination is another example of the way we trade on similarities between contexts: specifically, intellectual illumination and actual illumination. The phrase “flash of insight” makes use of the language of light and the way in which brightening our field of perception is like brightening our field of cognition. It also trades on the speed with which illumination takes place, when light floods a room, for example. In such cases, our experiences, aspects of our perception, are converted to matter for our imaginations and, finally (or perhaps simultaneously; see below), our language.

Similarities marked by crisscrossing, complex family resemblances are borne out by other types of language use. This is apparent when we examine the most frequently used verb in modern English, “run,” now the bearer of at least 645 meanings. This number has been settled on by lexicographer Peter Gilliver, who worked on “run” for the upcoming edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* for over nine months. (Three words, “set,” “put,” and “run,” resulted in months of work—indeed, years, according to Simon Winchester—for those contributors to the next *OED*, slated to be published in 2037.) “Run” may have ascended to the top of the list of meaning-laden terms in part because of its facility for describing the movement of machines (e.g., trains “running on tracks”), according to Winchester, but our language use also currently reflects variations in meaning that are much older. How have we projected “run” into all of these contexts?

This is due to family resemblances between these various meanings of “run,” indeed, the hundreds of them—we see crisscrossing patterns of association and connection just as Wittgenstein describes in explaining the associations between games.

Our uses of terms also mark how we do, or can come to see, dissimilarities between contexts, eventually thinking one word works better than another, for example. Winchester sees in “run” a less old-fashioned (and less British) term than “set,” the word “run” displaced in frequency. And “put” may have contributed to the unseating of “set,” for now we often say we “put” things places (on shelves, for example) rather than “setting” them there. This may be due to the fact that “put” better suits our current language use than “set.” Dissimilarity has crept in here; we apply “put” more frequently perhaps because family *differences* are afflicting the usefulness of “set.” Thus our projection is informed not only by family resemblances, but by these differences, or breaks in use. (A curious current example is the phrase “a sight for sore eyes”: it is apparently now being understood as a negative remark, instead of a compliment—as a sight that might *make* eyes sore, rather than relieve their distress.)

We can also speculate about whether projection has taken place, even if we (I) do not know the answer. The word “crane” is known to refer to a certain species of bird, or to a certain way of moving—as our current version of the *OED* has it, “to stretch out one’s neck; to lean or bend forward with the neck stretched out,” e.g. It is a very old word, from before 1000 C. E., which can function as both a noun and a verb. But it has another meaning—it refers to a piece of equipment, a tall, thin, swiveling machine that can lift and transport objects. This use of the word, which etymological sources characterize as metaphorical, appears in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and shares its sense with

equivalent words in German and Greek. Did the machine get its name, “crane,” because it “called to mind” the bird, or the movement of craning? What type of crane is craning one’s neck *like*? The bird, or the equipment?

Another case is provided by the stolidly useful word “clam,” which refers to many things that have no apparent connection to each other, some invoked figuratively, some not—shellfish, dollar bills, shutting down into silence, and, fascinatingly, a mistake musicians make, either by missing a note or using the wrong one. And a “clambake” doesn’t only refer to a meal of clams; it is the term for a musical work that contains a significant number of such errors in its execution. “Clam” apparently derives from the old German “*klam*” (“to press together or squeeze”), from which the shellfish gets its name, because its shell squeezes together in this way (“*klam*” also gave us “clamp”). But do we use this term because musicians may have associated their mouths with sealing up, as clams do? Or does it stem from yet another sense of “clam”—the name given to another kind of musical mistake, the kind made by those ringing bells in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, who on occasion rang the bells at the same time (and may have thus given us our word “clamor”)? Or does it derive from some other source altogether?

A probably sometimes related (though not perhaps as often clearly metaphorical) case of projection occurs when we apply the word for an existing concept to a new instance of it, as when we extend terms like “art,” “law,” and “game” to putative new examples of them. Thomas Hobbes engages in this kind of speculation, wondering at all the meanings of the word “faith,” and at the close of the *Categories*, Aristotle muses over the ways we use “having.” Hobbes calls these types of expression “equivocal” (he says all metaphors are, “by profession”) and says they are the kinds of words that often bring



things to mind different from what they originally referred.<sup>38</sup> (Austin says words never entirely shake off their histories; Hobbes thinks they can. Who is right—Austin or Hobbes? I suppose it depends on the word.)

As reviewed, Wittgenstein says we project a word for a concept to a new instance of it by use of language-games; Austin says some claim we project words in this way on the basis of “similarity.” He has also said this aspect of our language use deserves closer consideration, claiming we should supply a catalog of reasons for using the same term for different things. Austin thinks this topic has been neglected and would be complex, and would also require the study of actual language use, rather than ideal language.

Consider the application of Wittgenstein’s own example, “game,” to a new set of circumstances. Why would we call some new arrangement a “game”? What is the significance of the new context? Doesn’t something render the application of the term appropriate in that situation? I will consider a current controversy that involves a game—specifically, can a game be art? Can it, or has it already, gained entry to the category of art objects?

Some maintain that video games are or can be considered art, because they exhibit creativity and aesthetic excellence in their design and execution, and many have pointed out that their quality has increased significantly in a relatively short span of time. Others argue that video games simply are not art; they are *games*. The fact that they involve interaction, at least one person manipulating the materials involved, is enough of a sticking-point, according to some proponents of this view. (Though some forms of art may include interaction with audiences.) Video games may exhibit creativity, or aesthetic excellence, but many aspects of our lives do this that we do not consider art.

If we eventually come to accept the idea that video games are art, this will be at least in part because video games will be thought to exhibit enough of the characteristics or partial similarities already exhibited by members of the family of art objects to gain entry. Plausible candidates include demonstrating creativity and aesthetic excellence. If video games are rejected from the art category, it will be at least in part because they lack enough of these characteristics (they simply are not enough *like* other members of the family).

(I find myself leaning toward the idea that video games are not art, though I suppose my view could change in the future—if so, I think something would have to change about our understanding of video games. We would have to consciously begin appreciating them from an aesthetic point of view, I think, and this would have to be our *primary* purpose in seeking them out. And I find that my views on this are affected by my thought that video games were not necessarily created to be art, but to be games. [I also think our tendency to call them *video* games may not last. In the future, might we more commonly call them digital games, interfacing games, “interaction,” or something like that?] Had our intentions toward video games, including our intentions about creating them, been different, perhaps our conception of them as art objects would be too. I realize they make use of attributes exhibited by the other arts—they include narrative, visuals, and music, as film and theatre often do—and I accept that they may be aesthetically remarkable in many respects, though I think part of our wonder at that is affected by the fact that we are impressed, perhaps unduly, by the technological advancements involved in creating them, and the speed at which those advancements has occurred. I also realize their creation, and consumption, may produce aesthetic

enjoyment or admiration. But, though I think they obviously involve aesthetic elements, they are not part of the art category—at least not yet. They are no more necessarily art objects than festivals, zombie pub crawls, or Halloween costumes—other endeavors that can certainly be creative, but are not necessarily art, and were not, at least not as a matter of course, intended to be. We do not characterize all graceful physical activity, including great athletic speed and prowess in sports, as dance, even though elements of sport might be thought continuous with elements of dance—and again, the intention makes a difference. Nor should we think video games, despite the attributes they share with the other arts, can fairly be classed with them.)

I mentioned above that we may feel that simply providing examples and pointing out how they resemble other instances of the concept in question might well fail to satisfy us. We might, for example, feel that the word “art” covers so many and various instances of human activity that it is foolish to use one word for all of them, or we may feel that this persistent usage must reflect something more than resemblances or similarities. Why do we keep using that term? Why do we have such strong views about what should be included in the category, and what should not? Isn’t there more to this?<sup>39</sup> Might we not be circling around something essential and universal in employing such a term? I would suggest that in such cases, we need to heed Austin’s advice to prise our words off the world. When we take a good look at the world, without thinking about what we *call* things, I think we can see that there are considerable differences among the products of human creativity that we have, at one point in human history or another, called “art”—works of literature, ancient sculpture, contemporary electronic music, and so on are very different things. Some members of the category are not even important enough to it to be

included any longer (such as the furniture or china of previous centuries); some might still be involved in our idea of it, but only tangentially (such as gardening). These things really are different, out in the world, and our engagement with them changes. But in our language, in our human concepts, our tendency to note similarities reveals a story about how they all came to be called the same thing. (Such a story can be told regarding all the different ways we use “run.”) Wittgenstein’s extraordinarily powerful metaphor for language as a city, with its various developments and suburbs, is effective here: the word “art” directs us to its own municipality. Some concepts are more difficult to delineate than others; the concept of “terrorism” is a current thorny example. (Does it involve targeting innocents? Who is innocent? Is it always political? How is it different from war, if it is? Why or how is it unjustifiable when war is justifiable—if it is? Does it always involve subnational groups, or can it be committed by governments?) But some difficulties in analyzing our projections can be resolved by setting aside those terms and considering the world they are marking. We are capturing that world in our language-games, and this is not arbitrary, but it may be that we organize or classify objects in certain ways because of our useful, economical ability to project, recognizing similarities. And if something about our world changes, our criteria for our judgments, and our words, might too. For example, if in the future video games become more closely associated with art than they now are, we may project the term “art” toward them. (This may not account for what we are always doing when we invoke “universals,” but it may helpfully illuminate many of them.<sup>40</sup>)

Once we begin to look for it, we can see the projection of language everywhere. And everywhere we see it, we see that it is frequently marking, or concealing (sometimes just barely), relevant similarities between contexts.

There exists an array of disjunctive possibilities that reflect ways in which newly created instances of a concept are similar to previous ones. But we can also produce connections or similarities that are unprecedented (a possibility included in Searle's list for metaphors), and our sense of what is similar to what may change and develop over time, particularly as we extend our concepts toward new cases. (Note the sense of movement involved in suggesting we extend concepts "toward" other contexts.) There is more than one way of understanding similarity, and there are multiple ways in which contexts are or could be similar. But to the extent that our capacity to project involves the capacity to make connections between contexts that are similar in some way, this is probably very often due to family resemblances.

So we project, creatively, on the basis of similarities between contexts, which cannot be exhaustively catalogued, though the concept of "family resemblances" provides insight into how it is occurring. This is an imaginative mental endeavor. And recognizing how contexts are *relevantly similar* to one another is often a profoundly imaginative act.

## **(2) A Shortcut**

"One day one of us says 'feed the meter', or 'feed in the film', or 'feed the machine', or 'feed his pride', or 'feed wire'," Cavell says, "and we understand, we are not troubled" (*The Claim of Reason*, 181).

Language users are not always trying to map out contexts for projection that strain credulity or the imagination; if this were so, the projection of words into new contexts would not work as it does. We do not and could not preface our use of words in new contexts with explanations of how the new use of the word corresponds to the previous context(s).

If we were troubled, we could not do this. We would not be able to project; the use of language might be completely different from what we now see. What would that look like? The following are some possibilities. It would look like a situation in which communication required continual explanation, summing up, calculation, or extension. We might be constantly trafficking in stipulative definitions, or straining to make inferences as if we had no conventional knowledge or memory of what our languages require. (“He said ‘intention’ is a ‘miner’s lamp’—all right, this is what an *intention* is, that is what a *miner’s lamp* is, they don’t seem to fit together . . . what does that mean?” Actually, perhaps this would not happen, because if we were troubled by projection, maybe we would never use such phrases as “miner’s lamp” for things like intentions.) Or it might look like a system of rules artificially imposed—language invented and maintained for specific purposes that do not change except through conscious processes (though how would the need or desire for change be recognized?), as we use conventionally devised symbols to denote possible conditions on the road, or formerly used Morse code. (Perhaps such systems of representation are more useful and applicable to further contexts the more skeletal they are—their indeterminacy renders them richer. We could do this in our daily use of language, too, but we have found it expedient to mark many more aspects of our world with our language.<sup>41</sup>) Or it might

involve continual development. People might be constantly inventing new words, which would not work very well when they attempted to communicate with others, for one thing, and for another, it is unclear that we would have any reason to do that. Why would any of us feel the need to invent new language on a regular basis? How would we even know we *could* invent and try out new languages (even unsuccessfully), if we lacked an antecedent concept of language like our own? If we did manage to continually invent new words, perhaps launching them at those around us, how could we do that without relying on those words or concepts we already know? Would we want to avoid any perceived connection to our previous words? But why? As a matter of principle? To do so would be yet another strained move. We might do this (and people probably have fairly frequently) because of the sheer delight we take in the innovative possibilities of language, but only up to a point. This does not characterize a primary way of using language. Austin cautioned that we cannot handle an indefinitely large vocabulary. Nor does it seem that we frequently need to, or actually, try to grow ours, and if we did, our motivations for doing so (as well as our success at trying) would require further examination.

Now, maybe we do not extend language only because plenty of it already exists that we learn, and there is always more of it to learn. But, in general, if these peculiar scenarios revealed the truth about language, language would require a level of foresight, individual “authority” over words, and perhaps stasis, that it has probably never had. It is far, far more spontaneous than that, even if much of what we use of it is learned, and we inherit it and are in its bonds, as Cavell claims. It would also require a probably sometimes hilarious inability to understand and relate to each other not borne out by

actual languages, though in such a “language,” we would probably lack such a commonly shared concept of humor. Presumably one of language’s advantages is that it is such a fleet vehicle for our thoughts and various interactions with each other, even if it is not perfect and does not capture everything we could think or is important to note. Language probably would not be as useful a tool, or knife, for us as it is if it was a clumsy, blunt one that we had to consciously think about wielding (and decide how to wield) every time we needed it. Cavell said language is our fate. But it is also our human memory, guiding us in what we do, on both a collective and individual level. The history of language is the collective repository of all we have said, read, and written. It is also our individual memory: we learn and retain word-meanings with astonishing facility, regardless of our individual predilections for the enjoyment to be found in language. Just as memory does in other contexts, it constrains, in language, what is possible.

And when it comes to the case where we project words, we do not use new words all the time. Why not? Related to what is said above, if we did, we would be (1) noting differences in a way that is artificial or contrived from the way we often do use language, (2) if we did this too often, we would be at pains to make use of, or reinforce, a conventional vocabulary we comprehensibly use and share, and (3) we would be engaging in language-games that are much more strained and self-conscious than what we actually find in our ordinary fluency, which disproves such an idea. Cavell says such a society would be one where everything is just “different.” That is not our language form of life. Instead, we see connections; our imaginative ability to project does substantial intellectual work for us.



When it does this, instead of one of the possibilities I have just considered, it is working as a shortcut. It short-circuits through often dimly perceived (if perceived at all) similarities of contexts. When all of the steps in this process are not explicit or clear, this may increase our tendency to experience the imagination as beguiling, and to suppose that it is not logical or connected to facts, for it may look as if there is no connection between the word in its prior context and its new one. In fact, however, this use of the imagination may be deeply “controlled,” to use Cavell’s words, by what we experience and our forms of life. The imagination cuts a path through these contexts, lighting up connections between them the way intention lights the fuse to the flame of our language use, in Cavell’s terms. It is the flash of insight that permits us to make use of the materials of our experiences and languages, much as occurs when we make and appreciate art.

We do see connections, and this shortcut works because, at some point in our language development, we are able to understand that language can move forward in this way. Such uses of language may take us by surprise, causing a thrill of enjoyment or cognitive illumination if they are new to us, or particularly illustrative. But in general, it is unlikely that we will read Ostler’s description of one language “blotting” out another, cast about for Ostler or an interpreter, and ask: “What is meant by that?” Our imaginative linguistic capacity fills in the blanks for us. Now let us consider some characteristics of this imaginative endeavor, particularly why it is a shortcut.

The first thing to say about this process is that it is fast. It often works without our conscious tinkering, and it can be difficult to perceive or explain at all. We do not self-consciously reckon up the similarities between contexts most of the time. In

deciding whether to extend or withhold a term from a new use, our linguistic imaginations grasp the relevant factors and provide understanding. It makes sense to say one language can “blot” out another; it is a particularly good way of making the point. It makes sense to say insight can operate like a “flash.” In grasping all of this, I did not engage in the mental equivalent of adding sums to reach my understanding of these words and their applicability to another context. I will consider another example that might be thought to require more rehearsal, the case of whether or not to apply the term “art” to video games. We can think about this; I have thought quite a bit about whether I would use the word “art” for video games. But I did not engage in some kind of workaday speculation over the concepts “art,” “game,” and so on. I can investigate those language-games, as Wittgenstein would point out, but I am using language full-blown, as he would say, to think about this problem. I am using language as an expert; I am using language with the proficiency of someone immersed in the form of life; and thus I am grasping what is relevant to each case. My fields of consciousness are indeed lit by the occasions of these words. All I have to do, if I want, is map those fields, and mapping them will reveal the similarities (or dissimilarities—too many of them, and video games do not make the category) described above.

In saying those fields are lit, I mean that I infer,<sup>42</sup> often from one context of a word’s uses to the other(s), and I frequently do so with a speed like light. Both metaphor<sup>43</sup> and projection more generally frequently depend upon inference for their comprehension. This process *can* be highly reflective and conscious, in which language users deliberate about a metaphorical subject or the projection of a term and the candidates for its meaning. But it can also be as unconscious and mechanical as the most

immediate of cognitive or perceptual steps. This can occur because the demands for interpretation are not high, or because metaphors or projections, occurring in particular contexts, can be so readily understood, perhaps over repeated occurrences, comprehending them becomes as rote as comprehending dead metaphors (and perhaps this is how some metaphors died). But understanding projections or metaphors, especially if they are demanding, and giving metaphorical meaning to non-metaphors, requires inference, even when that process is immediate or not obvious. The meaning of metaphor that philosophers such as Searle and Martinich examine depends entirely upon inference (and consequently a theory of metaphor must address how metaphor operates according to inference).<sup>44</sup>

When we do infer in this way, we gather information from both our languages and the world, and we are so thoroughly immersed in both that we do not need guidance, except as children, to do this.

As a way of demonstrating this inferential process, I provide syllogisms to illustrate what happens in some particular cases of metaphor or projection. I follow an example of Martinich's in doing so. Martinich believes it is possible, in the case of standard metaphors, to build inferential arguments mapping out the analyzed meanings of metaphors and ultimately producing true conclusions, even if they may contain one or more false premises. One would do this by, first, presenting the metaphorical utterance (literally false) as a premise; constructing a second premise that lays out the salient properties the metaphor prompts one to note—this is the “major” premise; and third, concluding what the metaphor means by specifying that the subject of the metaphor

(whatever it might be) somehow possesses the salient properties pointed out in the second premise.

For example, one could construct the following inferential argument for Searle's (fantastic) metaphor, "Sam's car is a pig."

P1: Sam's car is a pig.

P2: Pigs have a hearty appetite for fuel.

C: The hearty appetite for fuel of Sam's car is like a pig's.

Another, less likely possibility:

P1: Sam's car is a pig.

P2: Pigs have a distinctive shape (or make distinctive noises or . . .)

C: The distinctive shape of Sam's car is like a pig's (or the distinctive noise it makes or . . .)

It is not necessarily the case that there must always be one identifiable property (or set of properties) that a metaphor prompts us to note; the "or" in the examples above is meant to indicate this. Indeed, in some cases it might be difficult to articulate the property or properties we have been led to note at all. Yet frequently metaphors work to call up the similarities that are being traded on, so we could paraphrase, or give some sense of, what a metaphor means.

Now, I think we can do the same with projections, at least as a way of illustrating what they frequently get across. We can map the fields of consciousness connected by our shortcut. And the inferential argument we construct for a projection can mark the disjunction of similarities captured by a projection. For example, I could suppose:

P1: A language *blots* out another language.

P2: A blotting liquid can seep into or obscure other objects.

C: A blotting language is like a blotting liquid; a blotting language seeps into or obscures another one.

(It is very curious that the word “blot” could also mean to “darken” or “dry,” among other things. But I think the sense in which Ostler uses it is better captured by the idea that some things *seep*.)

Martinich’s device for elucidating the meaning of metaphor is clearly related to what Cavell has to say on metaphor, in “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” from *Must We Mean What We Say?* In that section of his work, Cavell argues that metaphors can be paraphrased (which is in effect what Martinich’s procedure allows us to do). (I later question a distinction Cavell draws between metaphor and projection.)

Cavell points out that types of language can be distinguished from one another on the basis of whether they can be paraphrased and, if so, how (*ibid.*, 74). He says “literal” uses of language do not need paraphrase, but metaphors do, or we can use it to draw out a metaphor’s meaning, by a paraphrase that concludes with “and so on” to mark the perhaps infinite number of ways in which a metaphor’s sense can be captured (just as I use ellipses in the syllogisms above).

As an example of the “literal” use of language, Cavell provides “Juliet (the girl next door) is not yet fourteen years old.” If someone does not understand the meaning of this, Cavell says we would try to clear up confusion by attempting to “put the thought another way,” or essentially re-word or re-express essentially the same idea about Juliet’s age. But if someone asks for the meaning of “Juliet is the sun,” one can paraphrase; Cavell says we would “*not* try to put the thought another way” (*ibid.*, 78), but would,

instead, draw out possible meanings, which express different propositional content: we would say

Romeo means that Juliet is the warmth of his world; that his day begins with her; that only in her nourishment can he grow. And his declaration suggests that the moon, which other lovers use as emblems of their love, is merely her reflected light, and dead in comparison; and so on. In a word, I paraphrase it. Moreover, if I could not provide an explanation of this form, then that is a very good reason, a perfect reason, for supposing that I do not know what it means. Metaphors are paraphrasable. (And if that is true, it is tautologous.) (*ibid.*, 78-79).

Metaphors are distinguished from other uses of language by this type of paraphrase which calls for “and so on.” As well, the “and so on” ending the paraphrase of a metaphor calls for further examination: it is not unique to metaphor, for one thing. While the “and so on” is indeed important, perhaps distinguishing, it is true of other attempts to capture meaning that do not involve metaphor.

Cavell is aware of a recent problem bedeviling theories of metaphor: do metaphors somehow depend on or exhibit “new” meanings, or is their construction the result of lexical dictionary definitions that nevertheless give rise to these new moves in language? He writes:

Two points now emerge: (1) The “and so on” which ends my example of paraphrase is significant. It registers what William Empson calls the “pregnancy” of metaphors, the burgeoning of meaning in them. (He believes this distinguishes metaphor from some (“but perhaps not all”) literal speech, as well as from simile, because similes are “just a little bit pregnant”—the “like” will lead listeners to

suppose the comparison will eventually be made for them, according to Cavell, and we will wait on it: “It is not up to me to find as much as I can in your words. The over-reading of metaphors so often complained of, no doubt justly, is a hazard they must run for their high interest.”) . . . (2) To give the paraphrase, to understand the metaphor, I must understand the ordinary or dictionary meaning of the words it contains, *and* understand that they are not there being used in their ordinary way, that the meanings they invite are not to be found opposite them in a dictionary. In this respect the words in metaphors function as they do in idioms (*ibid.*, 79).

He says we do not paraphrase idiomatic expressions, we just “*tell*” what they mean, we do not “*explain* it at all” (*ibid.*)—“either you know what it means or you don’t; there is no richer and poorer among its explanations; you need imagine nothing special in the mind of the person using it” (*ibid.*, 79-80). We do, he seems to be saying, restrict ourselves to a right or wrong answer, and are not faced with the potential interpretive complexity of metaphor.

He continues,

Any theory concerned to account for peculiarities of metaphor of the sort I have listed will wonder over the literal meaning its words, in that combination, have. This is a response, I take it, to the fact that a metaphorical expression (in the “A is B” form at least) sounds like an ordinary assertion, though perhaps not made by an ordinary mind. Theory aside, I want to look at the suggestion, often made, that what metaphors literally say is *false* . . . what are we to say about the literal meaning of a metaphor? That it has none? And that what it literally says is not

false, *and* not true? And that it is not an assertion? But it sounds like one; and people do think it is true and people do think it is false. I am suggesting that it is such facts that will need investigating if we are to satisfy ourselves about metaphors; that we are going to keep getting philosophical theories about metaphor until such facts are investigated; and that this is not an occasion for adjudication, for the only thing we could offer now in that line would be: all the theories are right in what they say. And that seems to imply that all are wrong as well (*ibid.*, 80).

Donald Davidson, in “What Metaphors Mean,” tries to answer such worries. He is not concerned with how metaphors work as the product of what speakers do with language; he is concerned with what they mean, as words and sentences. An “ordinary” fact about speech-governed communication, according to Davidson, is that it all depends of necessity upon “inventive construction and inventive construal” (415). Any kind of conversation requires (frequently imaginative) interpretive efforts on the part of those involved in figuring out what some utterance means, he maintains. Davidson thus forgoes discussion of context, speakers, hearers, and truth and falsity to pronounce that metaphors “mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more” and thinks they require nothing “beyond the resources on which (this) ordinary depends” (*ibid.*). Metaphors may be creatively constructed much of the time, and they may make us notice something in particular, but they do not have a meaning in addition to the literal meaning given by the words of which they are comprised. (They are also within the domain of use, he says; but apparently Davidson’s concern is solely with



meaning.) Attributing an additional meaning to a metaphor could be a result of confusing what a metaphor says (its literal words) with what it makes us notice or “attend” to.

Now, because of this, Davidson thinks it is unnecessary to paraphrase or somehow reword what is expressed by a metaphor. Meaning resides in the words *used*. This does not signify that one can never elaborate upon or perhaps further explain the point of a metaphor (but is this not elucidation of a metaphorical meaning?); it only means that such efforts should confine themselves to drawing out what has already been said by that metaphor. One should not go hunting for additional or new definitions, or some mysterious methodology by which metaphor works.

Davidson criticizes several proposed explanations of metaphorical meaning. Like Martinich and Searle, he finds fault with “extended meaning,” interaction, and similarity theories and also explicates problems with “ambiguity” theories that posit plays upon words occurring in metaphorical contexts.

He notes that in trying to pin down the “novel or surprising” likeness (416) between objects of comparison, one might be tempted to come up with a definition, itself metaphorical, that explains the metaphorical predication of this property. This could lead one to devise a new meaning for the word or words being used. That is to say, if one used a word metaphorically, that word would then take on whatever extended meaning is suggested by the metaphor (so, the definition of “ocean” in “an ocean of time” could be expanded to include that case in which there really are, lexically, such things as oceans of time). The extensions of these words would then include metaphorical applications. This, as Searle and Martinich also suggest, undermines the entire possibility of metaphor, because the idea of “new” or “extended” meanings becomes akin to straightforward

literal descriptions. All sense of metaphor “evaporates,” according to Davidson; “to make a metaphor is to murder it” (417), if this is what metaphorical meaning is.

Davidson also maintains that the beguiling complexity underlying metaphor that could lead to a perception of “ambiguity” about the words involved also results in errors in attributing meaning. Positing that words used metaphorically become “ambiguous” because of their suggestive power is an instance of putting the cart before the horse. If words seem somehow ambiguous because of metaphorical use, such an “ambiguity” would result after the comprehension of the metaphor, while one is reflecting on the richness or aptness that is unfolded to the mind’s eye. Ambiguity would not occur before or during comprehension, when one must interpret the metaphor based on the literal definitions of its words. Additionally, ambiguity is unsuccessful in trading on “dual” meanings that could arise in conjunction with metaphor: words always mean the same thing. They do not mean something different lexically because of the way they were used (Searle, Martinich, and Davidson all agree on this point).

Davidson also thinks it would be a mistake to understand metaphorical meaning in terms of “literal” and “figurative” expressions, in which perhaps some rule could ensure that words possess their usual, literal definitions and predication in addition to some metaphorical definition and predication. These additional metaphorical meanings could be mapped onto literal ones, in some shadowy interpretive manner, by the figurative connotations of the metaphor. Davidson thinks this possibility is just as unlikely, and it seems unnecessary and difficult to guarantee the layered figurative meaning in such cases as well.

Turning to another possibility, Davidson questions whether it might make sense to view “the figurative meaning of a metaphor (as) the literal meaning of (its) corresponding simile” (420), rather than viewing a metaphor as an elliptical simile. This would be too simple, he says, because metaphors cannot always be equated with similes; additionally, this suggests (as Searle and Martinich point out) that “everything is like everything, and in endless ways” (*ibid.*). In the case of Max Black’s theory, Davidson claims, metaphors, if they are elliptical similes, would need to say explicitly what similes say, because ellipsis is not “paraphrase or indirection” but “abbreviation.” More significantly, however, Davidson notes that a view of metaphor as elliptical simile does not explain what similarities or features are relevant for comparison or notice.

Other forms of language, Davidson says, work in a similar manner to metaphor—poetry can cause us to note likenesses, and it can do so by intimating. But “intimation is not meaning” (421), he asserts.

Because metaphor occurs within expressions possessing literal meaning, they display “normal” truth and falsity, according to Davidson (he does not specify how or if these normal truth-values depend upon a context; I do not see how it is possible to assess truth-values without one. Perhaps he is taking the presence of context for granted, as when he mentions the “context of use” [whatever it is] below). Because of their connection to literal utterances, metaphorical utterances are usually literally false. But Davidson importantly acknowledges that “patent truth will do as well”—the “ordinary meaning in the context of use is odd enough to prompt us to disregard the question of literal truth” (422). Davidson understands that falsity is not the crucial test for metaphor.

Finally, Davidson considers the effect of metaphor in order to argue that the cognitive content of a metaphor (whatever it produces, once comprehended) should not be imputed to the metaphor itself. Davidson thinks complaints about the unsatisfactory nature of paraphrase are also misguided: if a metaphor does possess a specific cognitive content, it should be possible to spell it out, even if its “effect is so much weaker” (424).

Davidson concludes that metaphors may indeed prompt us to notice certain things or comprehend utterances in particular ways. But these results of understanding do not mean metaphors work by conveying specific cognitive contents. For one thing, metaphors might “mean” endless things; these possible meanings might not be propositional in content; and these meanings might not be related to any kind of verifiable truth. “No such explanation or statement can be forthcoming because no such message exists,” Davidson writes (425), though he finishes by proclaiming that “interpretation and elucidation of a metaphor are . . . in order.”

I would add that our ability to create and understand metaphor, which depends on the aspects of imagination I am describing, is a pragmatic endeavor, as that term is deployed in philosophy of language. Metaphors are produced by terms possessing literal meanings, but, to borrow Wittgenstein’s insight, no more can be said: the resources for comprehending metaphor lie not in any “special” meaning we can attribute to words in their metaphorical use, but in a juxtaposition of those words with contextual factors grasped, and perhaps propagated, by our imaginations—and in those cases in which we move those terms into new contexts, our projective imaginations. When we project imaginatively, or create metaphors, we are not necessarily inventing new words or new meanings that must accompany each use; instead, our knowledge *of the meanings of*

*words* enables us to play these language-games. Nevertheless, though they may not be inventing new meanings for words, metaphors, and projections, do often have a meaningful content that can be approximated by way of a paraphrase or syllogism, as described above. What this often makes explicit is a cognitive shortcut that our imaginations engaged in, often without us consciously observing this.

So we infer, and we do this very quickly. When we infer, we can often (though perhaps not always) delineate the imaginative linking of contexts.

Suppose we had to, or decided to, clearly expound what we meant by each new use of a term; suppose we appended definitions to each move we made in language (announcing our creation of new metaphorical definitions, for example). That would hardly be language as we use it. Just as we could not provide a rule for each instance of the use of a rule, we do not provide a new definition (or application criterion) for each new use of a term. We do not need to do this, and in some cases, it would probably be difficult to do this. One reason for this speed is because we become, very quickly and remarkably, adept natives of language and what contexts invite or allow. Cavell uses his concept of “attunement” to reinforce our shared criteria, and, like Austin, mentions that our disagreements often indicate the extent to which we do agree (and says writers, unlike other artists, are able to rely on such agreement). We even share the connotations and implications of our words, for they are learned and collectively reinforced as an aspect of this form of life.

The projective imagination manages such matters for us. Even when we are not, as language users, consciously taking stock of all this, our projective imagination is.

But we do not only rely on what we know of language; our projections do not only occur because we see a kaleidoscope of definitions, connotations, and denotations cascading before us as we think and write and speak. The shortcut pulls not only on our stock of knowledge about language, but from *perceptual information* related to our forms of life, that is, those things we observe or perceive. Our imaginative shortcut is *informed by our shared criteria*, the “whirl of life” around us. We absorb it from what we hear, read, see, and understand in interaction with other people. Perceptual information is thus a deeply important source of fuel for our imaginations. This results in a powerful merging (perhaps simultaneous) of the cognitive and sensory, the “inner” and “outer.”

Those who are keen at understanding the ramifications of those criteria, and who have a fine imaginative sense, can astutely comprehend or make use of projection. Hobbes says: “men of quick imagination, *ceteris paribus*, are more prudent than those whose imaginations are slow: *for they observe more in less time*” (33; emphasis added).<sup>45</sup> His remarks emphasize the speed at which the imagination can work, a factor in the way we project, I maintain. He also may provide a hint about who is better able to create and recognize projections. Those whose powers of observation are sharp in this way may be better able to deploy projections and assess their value; many of them may be gifted with respect to language, as we believe writers are. Something similar is occurring in our use of wit. The perception of an opportunity for humor, of various kinds (absurd, supportive, sarcastic, and so on—various types of humor are a subject for thorough imaginative engagement and investigation themselves), can depend on a lightning-fast assessment of the suitability of the joke for the intended audience, its

likelihood of lightening the mood, or its impact in making a point. This can happen more quickly for some people than others.

For example, it may be difficult to grasp, exactly, how we understand a style of music has fallen out of fashion. We do not vote on this matter; no edicts are released to the public. Some people involved in the music world may issue judgments, but these are often not widely known, may differ from what is actually prevailing, and do not carry the force of a curfew issued by law enforcement. (Even if we decided to institute such laws, we would have to ask ourselves *why*. Presumably there would be a reason—we would be codifying into law something we felt to have the force of fact.) Yet somehow we come to know this. We may not be able to put a finger on the reason for it, but we develop a sense of what is current in the trends of our daily lives. We have to know something by experiencing or feeling it, according to Cavell. Once we do know this, feel it, it takes on its own necessity, and by necessity I mean that those who can see that a style of music is no longer current think that (to echo Kant) their judgment of this matter extends to everyone in that society at that moment. To return to the example of video games, a dominant aesthetic style in their construction has changed: in the 1990s, they made use of the visual language of the “cyberpunk” genre, but throughout the past ten years, that has apparently given way to warlike desert settings (perhaps because of the global military activities of the past decade). One style prevailed; now another does. The same could be said of styles of music.

It is irrelevant that some people may prefer now-unfashionable music, or may be anxious for the styles to cycle around again and think newer styles are distasteful. The point is that we have come to know something, and that something we know cannot be

settled, and was not established, by appeal to rules or proven by a formula, but by our shared criteria. But it seems to be true for all of us, nevertheless. How do we prove that a style is dated? That is just something that people can discern, using judgment, familiarity with elements of society, and so on. But we do not suppose this is only true for ourselves. We suppose it applies to the wider society. If a musical style is dated, it really is dated, for everyone involved, not just for one person.<sup>46</sup>

We may, in thinking about this, note the introduction of new terms into our language (to take English as an example): terms such as “o.k.,” “trick or treat,” “the whole nine yards,” and “parking meter” (“parking meter” entered the lexicon after the first of them was erected in Oklahoma in the 1930s; Robert Hendrickson recounts a minister was the first person arrested for an infraction<sup>47</sup>). The following examples should resound with the musically sensitive remarks of Wittgenstein’s—for example, his acknowledgment that we can have a “sensitive ear” for words.

Consider “o.k.” It may come from Martin Van Buren’s nickname “Old Kinderhook” (a reference to Kinderhook, New York, where he was born). The letters surfaced in the title of a group of his supporters for presidency, the “Democratic O.K. Club.” Van Buren’s supporters used the phrase “o.k.” as a type of “battle cry,” and it may have acquired its meaning of affirmation because Van Buren was considered “o.k.” (as we would now understand that term) by his constituents. (It is historically notable that supporters of his adversary, Harrison, made the metaphor of “keeping the ball rolling” an actuality, constructing ten-foot “victory balls” rolled between towns in support of Harrison’s candidacy for president.) H. L. Mencken thought “o.k.” the best “Americanism” ever invented. It has spread around the world, and related terms bear



their own interesting histories, or failures to launch. “A-O.K.,” used during space flights, became relatively common, but “nokay,” intended as the antonym of “o.k.,” has never really taken off. And “o.k.” may, as Hendrickson speculates, give way to just plain “k” (this is perhaps a current, paradigm example of the tendency to economize language). “Trick or treat” is another curious example—a phrase that apparently originated on the west coast of North America and made its way east in the first half of the twentieth century.

We are not entirely sure where these phrases came from (“the whole nine yards” is considered a notoriously difficult example), nor are they metaphorical; how are they projected?

We hear these phrases and, with the swiftness and sensibility I have described, the projective imagination takes these materials of our language use and moves forward with them. I cannot say exactly how this transpired with “o.k.” But at some point, it appears to have made sense as a “battle cry” to Van Buren’s supporters. This may have happened because of contextual factors in their interactions with each other that changed the phrase from Van Buren’s nickname to a phrase of affirmation.

Let us examine another case of projection which perhaps better illustrates this phenomenon. We are currently witnessing an explosion of shorthand in our written language, a shorthand that is itself a shortcut and that is breaking into speech.<sup>48</sup> This may be primarily due to technological developments and our use of cell phones and text messaging. It was with us before, in various shorthands devised for telecommunications for the deaf, hard of hearing, and speech disabled, and in the shorthands organizations might devise for instructions and so on. It is not an unprecedented use of language.

Nevertheless, communication over e-mail and cell phone is probably contributing to the bulk of its current development. Now, why do we do this? For one thing, it is an easy and fast way to get a message across. (Sometimes that is the reason people resort to visual symbols, instead of words at all.) But this is particularly the case when we use cell phones. As soon as one begins trying to text, one sees the value of ease and speed in culling unnecessary words and shortening up the ones one does need. It just makes sense to cut some corners; it even feels right, as our fingers slide across these devices. And some of the shorthand phrases seem to intuitively make sense, as shortcuts on our computer keyboards do. This is a merging of the sensory and conceptual; the need or desire to shortcut with language in these cases can be informed by perceptual inputs we are picking up in the context of typing, using screens, and so on. The two factors work together to nudge a person toward texting in this way. Other factors may contribute to this process, but these are certainly important. What is astonishing about this is that these practices are, actually, taking root one person at a time, and this is presumably what happened with “o.k.” as well as “trick or treat.” They spread, and language users engaging in these practices find each other comprehensible without obvious tutorials. If tutorials are called for, it is frequently for people who have been, for whatever reason, removed from such methods of communication—such forms of life. Such is language, and the construction and transmission of forms of life; in this case, a literally economical use of language. (But unfortunately, the “new media” and forms of communication impose an *aesthetic* of economy and speed, so we are more likely to be recognized as “with it” if we use these shortcuts than if we adhere to old-fashioned modes of expression, quite independently of any *actual* gains in convenience or economy. As a

personal example: I often prefer e-mail to texting in those contexts in which it does not make a difference, really, which is used, even though e-mailing has become less “with it” than texting. A computer keyboard is still more comfortable to me for typing out a message—indeed, I think it is superior, because it is bigger, and therefore better and less clumsy for my fingers.)

And, to the extent that our use of language is economical, imagination, as a shortcut, contributes to that economy. The economy of language identified by Austin results from our ability to recognize similarities. Why use more tools than we need, or create new ones where that is not necessary?

I suspect our fast, imaginative engagement with language is at work in other contexts than projection. It probably assists us in translation and in learning more than one language, and it certainly seems to be at work as we learn our native languages. Just as we infer imaginatively when we understand projections, we probably infer when we fill in the meaning of a word we do not know as we read or listen. We do not learn every word we know by looking all of them up in dictionaries. It must be the case that we learn them when they are surrounded by other words we do know, or by reading or hearing them in relation to other words in context. Our imaginative engagement with language helps us accomplish all of this. The imagination is also involved in our ability to create new linguistic combinations. We all know language so thoroughly, so unconsciously, that we do all of this without noticing our virtuosity. Cavell said that learning a language is learning the implications of words—I can add that we learn how to make use of those implications. Our imagination is very likely working to fill in these gaps where they

occur, short-circuiting for us in the inferential manner described. It is likely at work to a much greater degree in our use of language than has been adequately recognized.

In support of these claims, I call attention to Colin McGinn's recent work in *Mindsight: Image, Meaning, Dreaming*,<sup>49</sup> for it issues a challenge for a reappraisal of the imagination and launches an intriguing contemporary argument for its pervasiveness<sup>50</sup> in many areas of thought and philosophical reflection, including science,<sup>51</sup> the nature of meaning,<sup>52</sup> and, significantly, language. He notes the revulsion many philosophers have recently felt for associating meaning with imagery, but maintains that perhaps we need to think more subtly about potential connections between them. I shall review and then evaluate his brief account, which he intends as an opening volley into further exploration of the imagination.

McGinn speculates that imagination is innate (Cavell does too—mentioned above—though he may have been speaking loosely), as perhaps aspects of language may be, because we cannot be taught to dream, for example, and dreaming, on his account, is fundamentally imaginative. He argues “Just as we can understand sentences we have never heard before, so we can construct and interpret images of things we have never experienced before; we have a potential infinity of images; and all this creativity proceeds from a finite basis of primitive elements” (194). This is less obvious in the dreaming case than in the linguistic one, however—in the linguistic case, there exist a finite number of words operating as primitive elements. The potential infinity can develop out of primitive elements in a process he describes as an “imagination spectrum,” which is as follows: Perceptual inputs contribute to memory, which forms the basis for imaginative sensing. Imaginative sensing contributes to the ability to produce images, in

turn leading to dreaming (of both the day and night variety), possibility and negation, meaning, and finally “genuine high-level creativity”: “This comes on the scene once the mind is able to envisage ways the world might be and can manipulate these representations to form novel thoughts” (159-161). At this stage, we can contemplate different worldviews, different scientific accounts of the nature of reality, and write novels without hewing too closely to facts (161). He leaves aside the exploration into the role imagination plays in the arts, sciences, and philosophy. “Thus it is,” he writes, “that the simple memory image leads by stages to the highest flights of creative imagination” (*ibid.*).

In McGinn’s view, “images are *sui generis*, and should be added as a third great category of intentionality to the twin pillars of perception and cognition” (39). This is quite natural, according to McGinn, emphasizing that imagery is profoundly familiar and suffused throughout our mental existence. In remarks that echo Cavell’s emphasis on the pervasiveness and importance of the imagination to our mental lives, he claims “Imagery suits our minds very well; abstract thought can sometimes seem like an ill-fitting garment by comparison”<sup>53</sup> (198), and goes so far as to say, “We are *adapted* to images; abstract concepts are a struggle. Thus we lapse into imagery at the slightest provocation. The image is our most ancient and natural mode of cognition” (*ibid.*). But imagination itself is not restricted to what we can image, as McGinn points out: “the cognitive imagination (imagination so called because, according to McGinn, it takes “conceptual constituents, not sensory ones”<sup>54</sup> [128]) is employed in understanding, and this is not essentially imagistic” (147). The cognitive imagination, McGinn says, relates to imagery in the way

belief relates to perception. The cognitive imagination is informed by imagery, as belief is informed by perception, but that imagination cannot be reduced to images.

McGinn's work pays tribute to the long-perceived connection between imagery and the imagination, creativity, and memory; he tangentially mentions intentionality and children's imaginative power; and, importantly for my purposes, he sees the imagination at work in our use of language. Understanding, for McGinn, is memory plus imagination, and he explicates our use of language to show this.

According to McGinn, our ability to use language depends on two factors: (1) conventional aspects of a language that we learn and remember, and (2) the cognitive competence involved in combining these tools in unprecedented formulations. To McGinn, the first factor depends on memory, and the second involves imagination. The two work together to produce understanding; the first is not enough. We construct and understand new sentences and new possibilities by making use of more than our conventional store of language information. The first factor will vary in its details according to the language spoken, but the second is something all speakers possess, he argues, regardless of the language they speak; the second, imaginative function underlies all language use.

McGinn identifies other analogues between language and the imagination. He thinks language itself may actually rely on imagery.<sup>55</sup>

Very little is known about the phylogeny of language, but I think it is worth considering the hypothesis that imagery played a vital role in the upsurge of language all those thousands of years ago. The productivity of the image system, its combinatorial power, its creativity, its complex intentionality—all these mirror

analogous properties of language . . . the image system (may have played) a part of the cognitive machinery that gave rise to language. At the least, the stimulus freedom and productivity of imagery might prepare the mind for the elaboration of language (22, 196-197).

Creativity is likewise shared by both language and the imagination, specifically the creativity that is demonstrated by assembling new materials from existing ones. “Linguistic understanding,” McGinn writes, “has often been described as creative, combinatorial, productive: we can understand a potential infinity of sentences, and each act of understanding is a small instance of genuine creativity . . . on the rich(er) view of understanding entailed by the imagination theory, such talk seems literally true: imagination is the source of creativity, and it is constitutively involved in the comprehension of new sentences” (150-151). McGinn writes, “The freedom of the imagination to generate new representations of every kind of intentional object is precisely what language itself exhibits; so it is not surprising if the imagination lies behind the creativity manifest in language use” (151). Indeed, for McGinn, the imaginative faculty is ultimately responsible for linguistic understanding (157): “the human instinct for language is bound up with the human instinct for imagination. That is, the semantic component of the language faculty is inextricably linked with the imaginative faculty” (153-154). This, for McGinn, marks an enrichment of our understanding of meaning.

McGinn sees imagination as an aspect of human intellectual life that can proceed from the simple to the complex, which depends on input from the senses and, in its more complex manifestations, input from our concepts—and it may be unclear how this works,

since concepts (as opposed to objects of perception) seem to be in some way constituted linguistically themselves. (He also thinks this distinguishes us from other animals.) He argues “In the end, most adult imagination is a kind of fluid merging of the sensory and conceptual modes” (162). McGinn speculates that “It might *even* be true that without a capacity for imagery, linguistic understanding would not be possible, because cognitive imagination itself relies on mechanisms and processes that originate in sensory imagination. To be sure, imagining—that is not reducible to sensory images, but it may yet be true that it is an outgrowth of image formation—that it is what happens to the sensory imagination when it goes conceptual” (157-158).

We see how McGinn’s account works: we receive perceptual information (which, suffice it to say, is extraordinarily vast and complex); as we learn and grow, our minds consolidate all of this through memory and imagination, until we reach a kind of intellectual maturity that may be, if McGinn is right, more deeply imaginative than many philosophers have recognized. I would add our intellectual, imaginative maturity is not necessarily in the business of making this obvious to us; it just makes things work for us.

I think more empirical research needs to be done to establish that the “imagination” (however that is understood) is innate. McGinn’s insistence that we were not taught to dream is very interesting. But we were not taught to sense, or to use words in all the various ways we can use them, either (even if learning may play a role in the way we construe or relate to those senses, and our words), and by his own account, perceptual inputs, such as sensing, are more elemental than imaginative sensing. But I think McGinn thoughtfully emphasizes the link between memory and imagination and provisionally accept the analogues he identifies between language and creativity. I do



think imagination is profoundly involved in language use, particularly innovations in language. It is not clear to me that a universal imaginative ability underlies all language use, though I find this claim plausible, and I can adduce some examples that point in that direction. A compelling indication is supplied by the visual and spatial terms used to characterize music. All over the world, we claim notes are “high” or “low,” “light” or “dark,” “bright,” “open,” and so on. (This example is also interesting because it is profoundly metaphorical, and it combines imaginative inputs—the visual and spatial are related to the aural.) How can visual and spatial terms be applied to an art that many think is the most abstract there is, and which does not literally embody any of these physical qualities? In whatever way this works, it does effectively characterize music, and recalls the especially fascinating experience of synaesthesia, in which listeners see colors as they hear sounds. (The art movement of “color-music” was an attempt to play upon the regularities of just such experience.) And it has been deployed in various different languages at different points in history, without occasioning continual notice; such descriptions of music work well for us. In “The Meaning of Color Terms,” Anna Wierzbicka argues there may be a universal human basis for this experience.<sup>56</sup>

Another tantalizing possible example is provided by creoles. Ostler points out creoles all work similarly, even if they are constructed from different languages. He explains we learn languages three ways: children learn their native languages from adults who share a stable language community (as Cavell thoroughly describes); they learn a creole, if they are in a society that lacks a shared stable language (and adults devise pidgins when they lack such a stable common means of communication); or we consciously set out to learn new languages as adults. Now, creoles all tend to have a

common structure, he says, no matter what languages they are created from. The first two ways of learning, though, Ostler emphasizes, have nothing to do with the characteristics of the languages being learned. But the third might. He argues the languages we pick up as native speakers form what is called a “substrate,” the residue in our minds of the languages we know, and, though this is not settled by linguists, that substrate “may impose a constraint on the kind of language that can then be successfully learnt” (553). So we might, according to Ostler, come up with new versions of a language, versions influenced by our substrates; or we might face a barrier to learning new languages because of it. Ostler speculates this may be why English failed to catch on in Japan following World War II, in spite of speakers’ efforts to master it, as well as why Britons never took up a Romance language: “the structure of British—still perhaps bearing the influence of a pre-Celtic substrate—was rather different, above all being a verb-initial language: verbs come first in the sentence. It would have been harder for Britons to learn to express themselves in Latin than it was for Gauls, and this stubborn fact may be at the root of why France today speaks a Romance language, but Great Britain does not” (556). This does indeed suggest that one’s acquisition of a first language may constitute a fundamentally different kind of knowledge than acquisition of other languages, such as a second (I think Cavell’s account of how we learn language underscores this idea); it also suggests the very substance of our thinking is deeply affected by the languages we speak. Ostler supposes this may be a factor in the dissemination as well as the decline of languages, while acknowledging that, as linguists note, many factors (including non-linguistic ones) may be responsible for such

developments. The notion of the substrate is a fascinating one, suggesting that our language acquisition may irrevocably alter our patterns of thinking.

Linguists do not agree about what these data mean, as Ostler says, but they may point in the direction of some universal aspects of language. People have wondered if the variation exhibited between languages is evidence of irreducible differences between language systems, or if there are underlying universal similarities shared by all languages. Why do creoles work in the same way? Perhaps such language-games—which provide an opportunity for us to witness language being created from the ground up, by people who do not understand each other—suggest deeply shared human forms of life. Might substrates account for the differences we do perceive, differences that might obscure universal similarities? Recent, very controversial research speculates about a common “ancestor” language, positing all languages derive from this one.<sup>57</sup> It is plausible to suppose these aspects of language may be revealing something to us about universal elements of human experience, including imaginative experience, in support of McGinn’s thesis. They may also provide grounds for understanding how or why languages might diverge or eventually reflect differences, when they do. Certainly Ostler’s review of languages suggests they are deeply affected by the forms of life in play at different times and places in history.

Some other considerations related to McGinn’s hypotheses: It is striking to me that McGinn mentions how active the imagination is in children, and it is children who also exhibit such remarkable ease in acquiring language. There may be a reason that children are so imaginative at the same time they are rapidly acquiring language. Perhaps the facility with which they do both is due to the fact that imagination and language are,

as he argues, connected. But this process may also reveal a dulling of the imaginative powers as we age. McGinn has said imagination “is constitutively involved in the comprehension of new sentences.” If so, why can’t it better function in helping adults acquire new languages, with all their new words and sentences requiring comprehension? Particularly when adults have a store of experiences on which their imaginations can draw, which Hobbes saw as a strength—but does imagination, in general, begin to drop off with the passage of years, as does the average ability to acquire new language?

I propose that the imaginative power at work in our comprehension and use of language becomes so loaded down doing cognitive work for us that our ability to perceive it as imaginative may be strangled by the weight of these daily processes. This also, incidentally, distinguishes our language uses from other human activities that can rise to the level of art, as language can. For many of the arts are further removed from our daily activities than language. We may engage in physical activities that are close to drawing, painting, or dancing; we may speak in a way that brings us close to music. But we do not have to sing, or draw, or dance on a daily basis—that is, we do not have to *use* those forms of art when moving or speaking. Many of us do use language not only daily, but sometimes all day long, however, and the words we use are the same we appreciate and use in creating literature (transformed by context). This trades on our shared activity of using language, “in ways the contemporary ‘languages’ of painting and music do not,” as Cavell puts it (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 210). He says writers, unlike other artists, are able to rely on such agreement. This has its advantages; we are full participants in a shared form of life, and we gain such proficiency in it that we do not even need to think about what we are doing with it, much of the time. But it can make

language's connection to imagination harder to see and to cultivate.<sup>58</sup> In the course of imaginatively informing so much of what we think and say, in the course of imagination functioning at perhaps its highest and most automatic levels, it can become difficult to understand that the way we deploy it is connected to our creativity. (It can also be responsible for the fact that some writers are not convinced of the power of their own ability. I have overheard an art professor say he has noticed this is not a doubt he sees in his talented visual-arts students, who, he says, seem confident of their abilities in a way talented writers are not.)

I also find it plausible that we move from perceptual inputs up to the highest reaches of creativity, as McGinn claims. We start with basic perceptual inputs, and we end with engagement in philosophy, science, and other creative endeavors. This is a fruitful suggestion that marks the close of his work. Hobbes's comment may provide another hint here about how some may reach beyond ordinary language use into more challenging intellectual and creative endeavors that depend on imaginatively informed language use—perhaps those whose imaginations are most fleet can most assuredly do this.

Recognition of the value, and, in my view, the various functions of the imagination may be increasing following a long-standing philosophical tendency to suppose reason and imagination (or rational and creative thought) at odds with one another, the first the orderly and truly clear and reasonable way of thinking and problem-solving, the second unruly, unpredictable, and unreliable, among other things. Though there may be differences in these two general tendencies, their similarities in advancing knowledge and intellectual life should not be underestimated, either. And McGinn may

be right to suppose that our cognitive abilities are constituted by imagination much more pervasively than we have supposed; that the imagination helps to build our cognitive abilities, from our basic perceptions up to the highest reaches of creativity, and is extraordinarily fundamental to our language use.

That language is our inheritance, as Cavell said. Much of what we do in language is learned, along with, as he has said, our learning of the world. Probably much, if not most, of our language use travels the roads others have laid down for us. (We now learn “o.k.”; we do not project it as did language users of the past.) Projection might not make up most of the language created throughout individual lives; I am not aware of constantly projecting as a matter of course. But our languages include the various accumulated projections of many users over time. Roads are laid down in part because of human use of this shortcut. We are constantly using these tools we share in new and unprecedented ways and combinations to express our convictions, experiences, and so on, and this is due to our possibly natural facility with imagination.

### **(3) Active and Passive Elements of Imaginative Thought: The Role of Intention in Language Projection**

But for all that, it still seems astonishingly effortless. As I keep mentioning, this process is often not analyzed, and we are not always aware of it. Do we choose how or why we project words in the way we do? For example, do we ever decide “‘Feed’ works better than ‘put,’ because ‘put’ is too general”? Much of the time, it seems we do not consciously make such choices. We do not often think about the projection involved in our languages, once we have learned how to use them. And we do not need to, if Hobbes and McGinn are right—our experiences and almost automatic processing of the perceptual data for the imagination consolidate into a shortcut that some may be able to

use more readily than others, but even an average or compromised ability to use language creatively is quite remarkable. I am not suggesting we do not often put great conscious effort into communication, but simply that the conscious effort is not required, as a matter of course, in order to communicate at all. We are not weighed down from even engaging in language by the type of wielding problem described above; we do not have to deliberate and use language due to our individual acts of will, the way we do have to concentrate at least much of the time when we program or fix machines. Why not?

This is because our intentions, in this context, are constituted by our imaginations. Our apprehension of the similarity between the contexts of “feeding” a person or animal and “feeding” a meter depends on our imaginative skills, but those skills often need no prompting, because our will, while present in our use of language, does not need to be visibly working or consciously consulted in order to make this happen. The very possibility of *intending that*—e.g., that we should *go feed the meter*—depends on the presence “in the language” or “in the imagination” of this extension, or its possibility. I now investigate what this shortcut reveals to us about the connection of imagination to intention and the will, as these make their appearance in our projection of terms.

The imagination itself has been characterized in the work of many philosophers (including Wittgenstein and Cavell) as either passive or active, and it is worth looking more closely at this distinction (as perhaps Austin would agree), because the distinction marks different levels of awareness of the functioning of will. While the distinction may ultimately be difficult to maintain, as was Austin’s between performatives and constatives, it does mark some significant differences in the functioning of the will in our imaginations.

In drawing attention to these two fundamental ways imagination can work, Cavell is in the company of other philosophers such as Kendall Walton, who draws a distinction between deliberate and spontaneous imagining. The difference is the first requires the imagining subject's consciously intentional exercise of imagination; the second does not.<sup>59</sup>

I will characterize the passive aspect of imagination first. It appears to flicker and flare up of its own volition, which may be why Austin emphasizes its "feebleness," and Cavell its "laziness" as well as its "preciousness." For when it does flame into full power, it is responsible for some of our most important intellectual experiences, experiences so precious we may well wish we could better control or access our imaginations.

One important element of imagination that seems outside our conscious control is basically connected to inspiration, and the way in which it can appear to strike unbidden. An example of this process is provided by the many cases of artistic creativity that do not obviously appear to result from conscious processes. Inspiration of this kind can even be sought for its own sake. In fascinating passages about music, Cavell alludes to inspiration, and though he does not explicitly link it to the projective imagination in these passages, what he says provides a way of demonstrating how the ability to recognize contextual similarities may appear inspired in this manner.

In *Must We Mean What We Say?*, he quotes Ernst Krenek, a Schoenberg follower (and, interestingly, an artist inspired in some of his own efforts by Nestroy):

Generally and traditionally "inspiration" is held in great respect as the most distinguished source of the creative process in art. It should be remembered that



inspiration by definition is closely related to chance, for it is the very thing that cannot be controlled, manufactured or premeditated in any way. It is what falls into the mind (according to the German term *Einfall*) unsolicited, unprepared, unrehearsed, coming from nowhere.

(Curiously, Ostler defines *einfallen*: it variously means to “collapse” or “cave in,” to “invade,” for winter or night to encroach; for game birds or musicians to “come in,” or, crucially, for a thought to “occur to somebody” [304].)

Krenek goes on to write “This obviously answers the definition of chance as ‘the absence of any known reason why an event should turn out one way rather than another,’” but, in the course of describing how composers may try to invite inspiration untainted by plans or expectations, he points out they are “conditioned by a tremendous body of recollection, tradition, training, and experience” (195).

Krenek’s remarks underscore the idea that there is something especially valuable about the unbidden nature of such inspiration, inspiration that is out of our apparent control. This experience is pleasurable, and can heighten the enjoyment we take in our powers of imagination. The “pleasure” is compounded the less intentional it appears to be. (Why is this? Why is a creative experience that seems to come from nowhere, or by chance, such a valuable one?<sup>60</sup>) Puzzling as it can be, it is a truth of the process of composition.

The second, active function of the imagination includes those cases when it is under our control, or at least consciously used by us for a variety of purposes, as an object of our will. For example, Cavell says this depends on what we call a “flip” in ourselves, which “is reversible, and, in particular, subject to will” (*The Claim of Reason*,

354). He conceives of the will as a type of strength but also “as a perspective which I may or may not be able to take upon myself. So one may say that the will is not a phenomenon but an attitude toward phenomena” (*ibid.*, 361). Its failure presumably indicates some failure of the ability to imagine. When he characterizes the will as linked to the function of imagining, Cavell is perhaps providing an account of the way in which imagined thoughts *can* seem to appear in ways that lack our agency.

McGinn marvels at this aspect of our thought when he considers how perceptual inputs become raw material for the imagination: “This is quite a remarkable phenomenon: from being utterly resistant to the will, the percept is transformed into a plaything of the will . . . The wonder is that percepts retain their sensory identities through this drastic transformation: it is that very percept I experienced yesterday that now comes back to me in the shape of a memory image—only now no longer a percept at all” (169, n. 44).

Now, both aspects or cases of the imagination could be involved in the projection of words into new contexts. (It also seems as if one could actively decide to passively give oneself over to the workings of one’s imagination and see what results.) Projection can occur when language users are “inspired” to see and use a word in a different way (as happens in the first, passive case), and when they deliberately do this, setting out to limn a word with new possibilities (which could happen in the second case). The second instance could be invoked when, for example, philosophers propose certain stipulative definitions. And both involve corresponding “passive” and “active” modes of intention. It is in the second instance that intention is more clearly invoked in the process of directing the functioning of the imagination. There might also be a kind of a spectrum

between the two types of exercise, so that it would be hard to say in many cases whether an occurrence of this was (exclusively) an instance of passivity or of activity (or whether it was completely conscious or completely unconscious). It is an open question which happens more often, though it seems less likely that people are often consciously directing the uses and meanings of their terms, including new meanings that apply to different contexts. But both involve consulting similarities determined in advance by the connections between contexts.

I contend that language users are often quite unaware of this use of their imagination and intentions. They do not need to attend to it, because it takes place within the publicly shared network of language. Language users did not consciously decide to sync intentions when projecting “o.k.,” I speculate. Instead, that projection may have been “improvised.” We can, literally and figuratively, improvise within our languages when we project terms, and we could not do this so readily if we did not share language. We might not be able to do it at all; we might be at pains to make every move in our languages in the strained fashions considered above. Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell have all emphasized that intention, as a determinate act of will, cannot control the meanings of our terms. We can now see the significance of this while examining projection and imagination. Once again, intention, as a determinate act of will, while it occurs in our language use, frequently recedes in its ability to determine meaning (and can vanish from our conscious attention) when we project words.

In *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell points out “improvisation implies shared conventions” (204). That is true of language as much as it is of music. Because language is a publicly shared tool, containing words whose meanings are not overridden by our

intentions (as Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell all maintain), we are able to improvise with it. Our skill is “improvisatory” because (1) when we undertake uses of language such as projection, language itself provides us with a structure in which many of our “moves” or performances are settled in advance, but it nevertheless permits some room for our own engagement or imaginative understanding, and (2) though we can be aware of this, to varying degrees, we do not always know or self-consciously think about what is coming from this process or what we are doing with it.

In a note in his work, McGinn raises the following questions, among others: “The whole subject of intentionality and attention has not been investigated sufficiently. How basic is attention to intentionality? . . . How important is the voluntariness of attention to intentionality?” (168, n. 35). I propose the following answers to his questions, directing them only to intentionality within the context of language. Our imaginative ability to project is obviously intentional, but it does not always require a great deal of our attention. Voluntariness of attention is not necessarily basic to the intentionality that takes place in language, and this is probably largely, or mainly, due to the fact that we have learned it so thoroughly (it is one of the most remarkable of human abilities) and share it; we need not consciously consult it at every move we make in a language-game.

An argument about music that Cavell makes provides a striking analogy for our imaginative ability to project. Of music, Cavell writes it is:

within contexts fully defined by shared formulas that the possibility of full, explicit improvisation traditionally exists—whether one thinks of the great epics of literature (whose “oral-formulaic” character is established), or of ancient Chinese painting, or of Eastern music, or of the theater of the *Commedia*

dell'Arte, or jazz. If it seems a paradox that the reliance on formula should allow the fullest release of spontaneity . . . The context in which we can hear music as improvisatory is one in which the language it employs, its conventions, are familiar or obvious enough (whether because simple or because they permit of a total mastery or perspicuity) that at no point are we or the performer in doubt about our location or goal; there are solutions to every problem, permitting the exercise of familiar forms of resourcefulness; a mistake is clearly recognizable as such, and may even present a chance to be seized; and just as the general range of chances is circumscribed, so there is a preparation for every chance, and if not an inspired one, then a formula for one (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 201).

These remarks could be made about the language of our words as well as the language of music. We use conventions with which we are thoroughly familiar, and though we may not always find solutions or clearly discern mistakes, we are circumscribed by a range of chances that could be inspired or pursued by a formula.

We may not be paying attention to this skill we deploy, but how inspired is it? How much of it comes from nowhere? I suspect a good deal of our language use does reflect our prior learning and experiences, novel though our projections may seem. The workings of inspiration are not always apparent, indeed appear to come from nowhere, and that is part of their charm. Inspiration is a peculiar phenomenon, but it is often made possible by what has transpired before it, and it is not often entirely arbitrary. I recall a writer's description of a moment that inspired her: while running, she heard the sound of a foghorn, and it spurred a creative breakthrough. Yet that occurred partly because foghorns had, in the past, been background noise in a setting in which she had previously

worked. Often past experiences influence us in this way. Different times of the year incline me to listen to music that I know I am associating with prior occurrences of those seasons, and musicians, to take Krenek's example, are affected by the training they have absorbed and their innumerable experiences. Similarly, language users may "linguistically legislate" in ways that are likewise inspirational and seem arbitrary, or difficult to account for, though language users are also profoundly influenced by the wealth of knowledge, conscious or unconscious, they possess about their language. Language users are often such expert users of it, so conditioned by exposure to its various neighborhoods, that it would be difficult to maintain that any of their uses of words were truly inspired, "fall(ing) into the mind . . . unsolicited, unprepared, unrehearsed, coming from nowhere," as Krenek put it.

Wittgenstein said "Speech with and without thought is to be compared with the playing of a piece of music with and without thought" (I, 341), as mentioned above. Here, as elsewhere, his brief, powerful words direct us to similarities between language and music.

At any rate, once we have projected words into new contexts, towards judgments of the future, those judgments themselves can involve both aspect of the imagination: supposing, assessing, and analyzing why the new context works in conjunction with the former one, why the new use of the term is similar to the old. This itself is an imaginative act. Cavell said of Wittgenstein's methods of making points that they call for a "matching aesthetic effort to assess: for example, to see whether their pleasure and shock and anxiety are functions of their brilliance." When we pause to speculate over how and why words can be projected, including projections that involve metaphor, we

may well do the same. (For example, I recently marveled over the title *Breathless Zoo* for a book about taxidermy.) And we may adopt an active role in directing our imaginations, though we may also grasp projections without attending to what we are doing. When we comprehend why a projection works, we may rely on this active aspect of imagination, or the passive—taking into our minds what has fallen there as if from nowhere, which we recognize and understand as a legitimate use of language because of our own improvisational, imaginative way of using it and, sometimes, contributing to its development.

#### **(4) The Aesthetic and Cognitive Value of the Projective Imagination**

Projective uses of language capture just what we want to convey in a manner that is more compelling than would be the expression of thoughts or ideas without such crisscrossing across contexts. When we do become aware of this language use, by projecting or comprehending projections, we often enjoy it. We are acting as composers and conductors of language use in such cases, and this is more engaging, for many reasons, than would be the use of speech lacking such connections to make our points (or just using “different” words for different things, as Cavell puts it). We are working with a stock of materials already at our disposal, of course, but we are changing them, enlarging them, and when we do introduce new terms into our languages, we often wind up projecting them into new contexts in just this way.

As a shortcut that makes connections, can economize language, and marks the improvisational virtuosity of language users, the projective imagination is also a source of aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction, as is the “chance” of some inspiration, and the experience of imagination in general—the type of satisfaction that occurs when we think

that it really does make sense to say notes are “dark” or “light,” that a song “gets bigger” at certain points. Our language use reveals an unspoken relish for this shortcut of our language-games. As an aspect of our ability to communicate, we rely on this facility, perhaps often, or even originally, for pleasurable reasons, and we see its shadow in rhetoric and other forms of wordplay. We also use it to inform, to educate, and this section will examine the ways in which projection is both aesthetically and cognitively satisfying. I include an analysis of an image provided by Cavell to account for the role of intention in language.

The bulk of our language projections may involve those connections between contexts that are most useful, that play upon the most obvious similarities of contexts or strain our powers of understanding the least. We see how easily “cold” can answer as an adjective to so many cases. Inference works so speedily in many of these cases as to be imperceptible; we may never be conscious of it. Now, there are some figurative language cases of which Cavell says “it may be right to say: I know what it means but I can’t say what it means” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 81)—his example is Hart Crane’s expression “The mind is brushed by sparrow wings.” The cognitive workings that render projection so immediate and invisible may prompt such a thought. But we often can think about what such projections do mean, if we give the matter some attention. When projections are so useful, that is because they accord so well with connections we are likely to endorse, even if we do not do this consciously. They reveal what is most strikingly true for us, as genius does; they underscore universal or at least widely shared aspects of cognition or experience, as genius does. We call someone a genius who gives voice to something recognizable. Often the fact that the genius is the first to do it leads



us to characterize such a person as original. But we do not often call someone a genius if we do not recognize or endorse the product of that skill (even if the recognition only comes much later).<sup>61</sup>

We may also privilege or most admire those projections that depend on greater powers of concentration, a more insightful or nuanced awareness of potential connections between contexts, or funny, inspiring, witty projections. (This is perhaps how literature has developed many of its characteristics.)

Projection can also mark a failure of voice, or the only way to adequately give voice to one's philosophical ideas. Note the lack of precision of terms surrounding the discussion of intention in Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell; they are reduced to groping with such metaphors as "fire," "horses," "institutions" with their flags, and so on to provide a better picture of what is happening with intention within the context of language than a less figurative account might. In those cases in which it is difficult to explain matters precisely, such as the struggle to adequately characterize intention and language, figurative language that involves or initially relied on projection can be immensely helpful. Paradoxically enough, it can make matters more clear than they would otherwise be.<sup>62</sup> Such terminology can be *educational*.

For example, consider an anthropomorphizing phrase, lightning "finding its way to ground." The lightning is not consciously thinking about finding its way anywhere, but this is an illustrative way of putting the matter. It accounts for the way lightning appears to be willfully snaking toward the surface of the earth; the movement is so directed it appears intentional (more intentional, indeed, than many of our uses of language). I could say instead "some lightning results from discharges of energy between

the clouds and ground.” But I would miss accounting for what this element of nature often looks like. Philosophers of language have noted that language can affect our very ability to speak or articulate our lived perceptions. (Though no doubt it cannot do this perfectly for all of them.)

As an example of the importance of this type of figurative language to education, I analyze a phrase of Cavell’s. Cavell makes use of elusive imagery to make his points, but this is frequently an effective way of expressing what he is trying to say with any degree of directness, and the tendency to do this, he says, is borne out by Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*, which, he says, trades on the poetic. He says intention is a flame to a fuse, but it is not of first importance, and all else must be in place for it to do its work. What does this mean? I analyze each of these conditions in turn, explaining how intention is a flame, and what it is setting alight.

“Intention is merely of the last importance”—Why is intention of the last importance, not the first, or of some intermediate level of importance? I interpret Cavell to mean that intention *completes* the meaning (of the sentence)—when all the shared meanings are already in place, there is always still room for the intention to skew it one way or another (and in fact, without the intention, we would be lacking something essential). Intention factors into our use of words, but it is constrained by the meanings of those words, meanings that have been developed by language users over generations, in some cases. Words do exert some control over us, as Cavell means to suggest in discussing Emerson’s poetic image of horses. They have meanings we cannot ignore, and this control is evident in the nature of language use itself, because language use depends on shared agreement about the meanings of words.

What would it mean to argue that intention must be of *first* importance? In my view, this would suggest intention directs the meanings of all of our terms and is what we must seek out when we face interpretive difficulties (and this is often what happens). When we use the wrong word, this has not always been construed as a simple error, the wrong tool on the wrong occasion. Instead, philosophers often speak as if we need to track down the intention, find out what was actually meant, as if this controls for the meaning of the word. The view that intention is of the first importance is typified by versions of the “intentional fallacy.”<sup>63</sup>

Can intention (as it is manifested in language) work in this way? If it does, that suggests it is causally responsible for all of our meanings. When we use languages, the tools of our language embody our intentions. But this view is mistaken, for reasons I have catalogued. Suppose we commonly invented new private languages, intending new meanings. In escaping fate, we upend memory. If we wished this to be anything more than a mental exercise, if we wished these to be actual *languages*, we would then have to share these new words. We could try to structure a set of meanings and word-usages about which we never tell anyone. But for something to count as a legitimate language for more than one person, it must be shared. We would have to alert others to the meanings of new words, or the new meanings of old words, and then presumably the new language would only function because its users accepted the meanings of the terms publicly shared by all of them. As noted above, if we did not do this, we would be incomprehensible to each other.

It is perhaps foolish to speculate about the origins of language, but I suspect this was a necessary step in its development and eventual “institutionalization.” However

human beings developed language, the intention and the ability to use and direct speech or words (or at least to initially make noises that could function or turn into communication) depended on this sharing. Language is an intentional behavior, to be sure. It would not exist as we know it otherwise. But it is not language in the fullest sense if it is not shared, and this feature may have taken precedence over the centuries to the point where Cavell can now say intention is of last importance.

Perhaps in its earliest stages of development (for example, when we construct creoles), language exhibits a greater reliance on intention. (Though even then I would not argue intention was of first importance. Thought itself might be, but not intention.) One way in which this may be visible is in observing the effort made by two people who do not speak the same language to try to understand each other; they devise a makeshift method of communication, often relying on signs or gestures. (This is in fact what happened in the development of Nicaraguan sign-language.) (Donald Davidson presents such a picture in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”; Richard Rorty characterizes this as two people “coping with each other as we might cope with mangoes or boa constrictors—we are trying not to be taken by surprise” [14].) Here, intentional efforts are quite apparent, but these are directed at making oneself understood and understanding another; they are directed at setting up a language. As time passes, and human beings rely on their shared meanings, and children learn languages in the way Cavell describes, these visibly intentional behaviors recede.<sup>64</sup>

“Everything (else) has first to be in place for it to do what it does”—Cavell says everything has to be in place for the flame to light the fuse. Within the context of the institution of language, as he has outlined it, drawing on the work of Wittgenstein and

Austin, I interpret this to mean that our words make up the flame for the fuse. They must be the comprehensible tools on which we rely to communicate. Many other things must be in place, too, such as our shared institutions and judgments, those aspects of human community that make our language use possible. We share not only the meanings of words, but, as Cavell has said, connotations and denotations of terms; we share understandings and conventions about language and what to do with words in certain contexts. We are attuned to each other, and this establishes a shared place in which our intentions work.

“Putting the Flame to the Fuse”—Anscombe and Austin, as well as Wittgenstein, discuss intention in a general sense, as a phenomenon that occurs in myriad ways in human consciousness and action. Cavell is aware of these different aspects of intention and sometimes alludes to them. But in describing it as a flame to a fuse within the institution of language, he is alluding to something more specific. He is referring to the form it takes in a more limited context, the context of its connection to our language use. Within this context, it is most like the third sense of intention that Anscombe describes: it refers to the intention underlying or motivating such actions, in this case the action of using language, in whatever form that might take.

As Wittgenstein has said, it is in language that we can mean something by our words, and this reveals the directedness of intention in our language use. It is one instance of that aspect of human agency that is revealed in human thought and action. When we mean in language, when we use it, we intend. Intention is fundamental to our language use, even when it appears to be absent. Our degree of awareness of it may vary from occasion to occasion. Sometimes, we choose our words with great care, and

consciously reflect on what we will say and how we will say it; such uses of language reveal various levels of intention. At other times we speak so automatically or unreflectively that we would have a hard time isolating any thought that went into the words at all, even if they are entirely reasonable, we mean and accept them, and are expressing complex or detailed ideas.

Such cases are clear examples of Wittgenstein's recognition of the fact that intention does not "accompany" speech as something that can be clearly separated out from it, possessed of its own essence and function regardless of what flows from it. Wittgenstein provides the insight, mentioned above, that intention, though it is such a constitutive element of both thought and action, does not appear within them as a phenomenon that is separable from them (neither does meaning): "Meaning is as little an experience as intending . . . They have no experience-content. For the contents (images for instance) which accompany and illustrate them are not the meaning or intending" (II, xi), and, he says, "The intention *with which* one acts does not 'accompany' the action any more than the thought 'accompanies' speech. Thought and intention are . . . to be compared neither with a single note which sounds during the acting or speaking, nor with a tune" (II, xi).

To explain this point further, we could anthropomorphize the heart muscle and compare this fundamental component of the circulatory system to intention. The heart muscle appears "intentional," constantly pumping blood, and exhibiting predictable states (save for cases of injury or illness), but it is a subject for examination independent of the blood it directs into other regions of the body. The heart muscle's actual physical attributes are separable from the blood it "intends" to pump. Intention within the context

of language use is not like this; it is variable, and there is no fixed component there if we go to look for it—much as Wittgenstein says we will demolish an artichoke if we go looking for its essence and peel away its leaves until nothing remains: “In order to find the real artichoke, we divested it of its leaves” (I, 164). At those times we speak automatically—times in which, for example, we are talking without even being aware of how our words came about at all—we are also behaving intentionally, but the intention does not seem as clearly present, or, at any rate, the intention to say *just that* is not as present. In these cases, the intentional use of language almost seems more like improvisation or chance. They also resemble hard cases of intention that Anscombe says are captured by the acknowledgment “I don’t know why I did it.” These instances of language use may register as passive or the workings of an automaton, but in fact they reveal how automatic, and sometimes unconscious, our language use becomes. (This differs from the case in which speakers of different languages try to understand each other, as just noted.) This does not mean it is not intentional.

But even if intention cannot be separated out from the workings of language, as the actual heart muscle can be from the overall context of the circulatory system in which it functions, intention is fundamental to language. The features of our language, such as the words we share that exert the power Cavell describes over what we can mean, would be inert elements of human existence without intention; without intention, as mentioned above, language itself might not exist at all. Intentions quite literally light up those words and make the spark of communication possible. We are the actors who put the flame to the fuse, in Cavell’s term. In some way, intention may have constituted language. But these phenomena are not identical. When a musician plays the violin, we do not say the

music created is the intention, though playing the instrument is intentional. Our investigation of language use may reveal generations of intentions that have hardened into traces that other intentional actors recognize and accept. Anscombe and Austin argue that our words can effect changes in the world. When words do this, they are often a way of making intentions visible in the world.

The intentionality of our language use indicates our degree of control within the institution of language. We are controlled by the meanings of words, our tools; but we can use and combine those tools in ways that reflect our thoughts and agency. Our uses of these tools often reveal our potential for originality and creativity, which are not limited by the fact that the meanings of our words are shared. And sometimes our use of a shared word begins to slip beyond established meanings and gather new ones. So we are controlled by words, as Cavell would say, but our use of language is deeply intentional, and this intentional use of language indicates our control of the process. In explicating this phrase of Cavell's, I reaffirm much of what I have been arguing about language, meaning, intention, and the imagination.

Now, I can say all this, but I miss the power of Cavell's way of putting it in doing so. Cases of projection and metaphor can often convey ideas more effectively, indeed speedily; they give voice to what we wish to say in a fashion that can be intellectually or aesthetically satisfying, or both. Think of all the times we use the word "see" when that is not what we are actually doing, but this is such a useful way of describing matters. McGinn weighs in on metaphors, saying of them they "can be more or less apt, more or less evocative, and so on," and thinks this is to be expected, since the imagination plays a role in their construction (135).



Finally, it is significant that all of these philosophers use metaphors and other figurative language repeatedly throughout their works (consider the image of the “rails to infinity”). Max Black thought it distasteful to draw attention to a philosopher’s metaphors, but I disagree. Wittgenstein constantly uses metaphors and analogies, often visual and musical ones. Hans Sluga remarks on this aspect of the text, saying Wittgenstein uses “a precise and stylish language, often with the help of surprising and illuminating images and metaphors” (*The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, 29). To consider just a few: in the Preface, he supposes it is possible his work might “bring light into one brain or another” (xe) and calls his work an “album” that provides a “picture of the landscape” that was left after he had pruned and rearranged much of his “sketches.” When claiming that a search into the nature of “deriving” will cause the concept to vanish, he uses the image of an artichoke, as mentioned above. In emphasizing that we must adhere to everyday thoughts, rather than “subliming” conceptions of knowledge that he argues “we are after all quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal,” he says we must avoid fixing “a torn spider’s web with our fingers” (I, 106) (a phrase Cavell alludes to in *Must We Mean What We Say?*—96). He compares words to chess-pieces (I, 108), rule-followers to machines, the word “language” to the word “invent” (I, 492), the endpoint of our justifications to bedrock, and uses the term *picture* on so many pages of the *Philosophical Investigations* that its use warrants an investigation of its own. A continual comparison is made between the judgment involved in language and thought with that involved in music, which I am emphasizing. He likens understanding a sentence to understanding music, as mentioned

above. Language and music are alike too in the extent to which they can be competently carried out without self-conscious reflection, as I emphasize.

It is worth considering the numerous metaphors Wittgenstein uses to describe language itself. As we have seen, he likens it to a city. He claims the functions of words are like tools in a toolbox—“The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects” (I, 11); next, he says they are like the features in the cabin of a locomotive (I, 12), all with their different functions. He also says language “is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about” (I, 203). And it “is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments” (I, 569).

Austin does this as well, referring to the “miner’s lamp” of intention and the “sun” that is the discipline of philosophy, and Cavell’s work is redolent with metaphor. He calls words “knives,” because they can have different uses. He and Austin both rely on the imagery of flame or fire, as noted above. Cavell calls the “good city” and Plato’s republic the “city of words”; in the book of that name, he compellingly likens metaphysics to “a world of frozen meaning,” following Wittgenstein (*Cities of Words*, 109). And he compares the turned spade striking Wittgenstein’s bedrock to his pen (*Philosophical Passages*, 178-179). McGinn enlists the metaphor of the “mind’s eye” (41) (though he says that what we are doing when imagining is engaging in a kind of “mindsight” that actually is not metaphorical) and disputes the idea that when we imagine, we generate “replicas” of those objects we imagine which would “(fester) in the souvenir shop of (our) imagination” (72). (He also quotes Frank Ramsey’s metaphorical description of a belief as “a map by which we steer” [142].)

Cavell sees in Wittgenstein's work a connection between the image of architecture and everyday life, noting the scenes of the builders at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*. The scene of the builders contains

(the) simple invoking of philosophy's ancient sense, if not often thematized, of intimacy between its aspirations and those of architecture, whether in Plato's descriptions of public spaces for philosophical encounter, or in Descartes's and Hume's specification of private spaces for it; or in the pride Kant takes in what he calls his architectonic . . . or in Heidegger's identification, in his late essays, of thinking as a kind of building and dwelling (from "Epilogue: Everyday Aesthetics," in the *Cavell Reader*, 375).

And Thomas Hobbes provides a powerful comparison between the gradual workings of nature and the gradual workings of the senses:

As standing water put into motion by the stroke of a stone, or blast of wind, doth not presently give over moving as soon as the wind ceaseth, or the stone settleth: so neither doth the effect cease which the object hath wrought upon the brain, so soon as ever by turning aside of the organ the object ceaseth to work; that it to say, though the sense be past, the image or conception remaineth; but more obscurely while we are awake, because some object or other continually plieth and soliciteth our eyes, and ears, keeping the mind in a stronger motion, whereby the weaker doth not easily appear. And this obscure conception is that we call *phantasy* or *imagination*: imagination being (to define it) conception remaining, and by little and little decaying from and after the act of sense (27).

Hobbes's use of the term *decaying* is especially evocative.

Such an overview confirms the aesthetic and cognitive value of metaphor for these philosophers. It is noteworthy that in relying on them, they are often trying to explain difficult philosophical matters, such as intention. In using figurative language in these ways, they attempt to explain and get others to understand. They are engaged in extending and sharing our knowledge, and this is a fundamental context in which projection occurs.

The value of figurative language in conveying information is not restricted to metaphor, though it is often metaphorical. This may indeed be one reason figurative language developed. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says metaphors can set things before us, make us see them. We marvel at this more and more the better the metaphors become.

Having explained how this imaginative process works when we project words into new contexts, I finish by noting that it relies—in creation and in understanding—on the type of judgment that Wittgenstein elucidates. We cannot consult a rulebook for this, only the standards—indeed, the criteria—appropriate to our culture and forms of knowledge. As mentioned above, Cavell points out arguments over aesthetic or political matters may be different than arguments in logic and science. But he also says this should not incline us to think arguments about aesthetics, morality, or politics cannot be good arguments. The account of the projective imagination Cavell provides and I enlarge upon is not an account of a phenomenon that is easily subject to empirical investigation or, perhaps, logical deduction. We test its plausibility by age-old philosophical methods—considering whether it is rational; considering, too, whether it accords with our experiences, what we really feel to be the case. But this is enough. A theorem cannot demonstrate the “matching aesthetic effort” it takes to analyze Wittgenstein (*or*

projections). But we do not need that to judge such uses of words as Wittgenstein's, and our many projections, as apt.

This analysis also accords with something Anscombe says in *Intention*. There, as Austin affirmed, she said it was about “what we are doing,” which can give an answer to “Why?” questions. This account of the projective imagination supplies an explanation of what we are doing when we project words, as well as why and how this is happening. And when it does successfully work, it effects changes in the world—the “word-to-world” matter of fit.

### **The Distinction Cavell Draws Between Projection and Metaphor**

As will be clear from what has been said above, the imaginative projection of language works in a fashion similar to the way in which imagination informs metaphor, at least in some respects mentioned above, but not only in those ways. It is also the case that the way in which context can be primed for the projection of words is not unlike the way in which contexts permit metaphor, and some projections are metaphors. When these occur, they are frequently playing on recognizable similarities between contexts, and Cavell says the phenomenon of projection often prompts the response “All language is metaphorical.” (Cavell himself does not supply an argument for this, admittedly very strong, claim; I do think he accepts and endorses the pervasive power of metaphor. It is clearly a hallmark of his work.) However, here I take issue with what Cavell says.

He notes a difference between the two uses of language: “what is essential to the projection of a word is that it proceeds, or can be made to proceed, *naturally*; what is essential to a functioning metaphor is that its ‘transfer’ is *unnatural*—it breaks up the established, normal directions of projection” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 189-190).<sup>65</sup>

He is right to make a distinction between projecting a word and using metaphor. Though they seem related to me, they are not identical. For one thing, not all projections are metaphorical, and some projections may be metaphorical in one context, but not in others—“run” is an example. But, though projection and metaphor can be distinguished, I do not believe they can be distinguished as Cavell has described that here. Metaphor does not proceed unnaturally, at least not in general. In this respect it is more like projection than Cavell allows.<sup>66</sup>

What Cavell presumably means is that as we stretch out the meanings of our terms in the course of language projection, this occurs organically (indeed, often invisibly to many language users), whereas the frequently startling power of metaphor derives from its tendency to require greater cognitive leaps both in creation and understanding—and also allows it to be interpreted as metaphor, rather than just projection. To Cavell’s way of thinking (as he expresses it here), we might see a new use of the term “art” or “game” as quite unremarkably projecting those terms into new territories, yet the language-games involved in such a metaphor appear much more novel, perhaps truly unprecedented. The first case might be thought to involve variation within, or activity on the periphery of, our form of life; the second might be thought to involve a whole new stage in our language-games. The difference is recalled by the distinction we often draw between uses of language we would consider pedestrian and everyday and those more elevated and often deliberately aesthetic occurrences of words in our literary art forms. We see a difference, clearly, between our ordinary use of greetings, requests, explanations, and so on, and the works of Shakespeare Cavell analyzes (even if those works may make use, in part, of just these ordinary words). Often something extra is

posited of the literary context—we seek out structure, meaning, symbolism, and so on that we do not ordinarily seek out when using language in non-literary contexts.

But I think Cavell is wrong to draw this distinction. For one thing, it is incorrect as an account of projection and metaphor. Some projections could be “unnatural,” some metaphors quite natural. The projection of “o.k.” into all its various locations must have strained convention at one point or another, and “nokay” never even succeeded. And the metaphor Cavell analyzes, “Juliet is the sun,” appears so natural as to be unremarkable.

Projection and metaphor may differ in that projection is a broader category than metaphor, and the degree of self-consciousness required to create projections may be lower. But there are many affinities between them. Projection and metaphor are alike, as outlined above, in that they both involve (1) judgments of similarity in creation and understanding, (2) inference, (3) innovations in language that often depend on existing words and concepts, (4) paraphrasability, or “definability” of some kind, (5) the power to be striking, educational, and generally effective in conveying points, (6) and also alike in that they can become automatic (metaphors become dead metaphors). In fact, projections, once ensconced in our language use, are precisely like dead metaphors. Many expressions may have been figurative uses of language at one time, but have died or become rote as they usefully filled multiple roles. Language changes, but it may be possible to trace its development in just this way, and this may be why it can answer to Emerson’s description of it in “The Poet”: it is “fossil poetry.” And both projection and metaphor can be done “naturally” or “unnaturally.” It is therefore hard to mark a distinction between them as sharply as Cavell does. Such a distinction is difficult to draw, in any case, and both are likely proceeding from the same, or related, powers of

linguistic imagination. I address points (3) and (4) below in more detail to stress that the two uses of language are, unsurprisingly, more alike than might at first appear.

(3) Both projection and metaphor are innovations in language that nevertheless depend on what has come before them. When we go back to examine the process by which words were projected, or used metaphorically, after the fact of their use in this way, we often find that the extension of the words reveals the new context “invites” or “allows” such a language move. Thus, when describing the work of Robert Brandom, Livingston points out that we are commonly able to engage in a type of explication of a standard, after the fact of its use (Brandom uses the example of retrieving a principle from our review of legal decisions—to use an example of Ronald Dworkin’s from *Law’s Empire*, we might find the principle “we should not profit from our own wrongs” underlying certain cases when we look back at a set of legal rulings). We can also engage in this kind of explication following an instance of projection or metaphor, and at least locate the reason the use of language (projective or metaphorical) occurred (though, as Livingston points out, we need not do it, and we do not need to do it in order to apply standards. He also thinks we probably cannot do this in all cases, at least not in a way that will be indisputable, or obviously correct as an explication of what we “implicitly” did in the first place).

Perhaps in some cases the similarities between contexts that make metaphor possible are so difficult to discern (or require such leaps of creativity) as to seem unnatural; but they do, in general, seem to traffic in what contexts “invite” or “allow.” As with projection, that is part of their power.



(4) And, crucially, and as described above, Cavell notes that metaphors can be paraphrased. For example, in his account of “Juliet is the sun,” he says “Juliet is the warmth of (Romeo’s) world; that his day begins with her; that only in her nourishment can he grow” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 78-79). Would it be possible to draw out the potential meanings of this metaphor if not for the fact that Juliet’s warmth is *relevantly similar* to the sun’s, that she is part of the beginning of his day as the sun is, that she nourishes him as the sun nourishes life, as Cavell says, and add in another interpretation of our own—her position as center of Romeo’s existence is *relevantly similar* to the sun’s position as center of the planets in the solar system? I doubt it. In providing paraphrases of metaphors, we often are (even if inadvertently) calling attention to the ways in which contexts are similar, even if not obviously so. It is also quite natural, to use Cavell’s phrase, to do and recognize this. Indeed, if there were no connections to make explicit between metaphors and their possible paraphrases, between words and their meanings in the various contexts into which they are projected, these aspects of our language use would be meaningless, incomprehensible. Suppose I devised a metaphor (or projection of a term, though in this case I will use a metaphor) that is difficult or impossible to comprehend—“The crane is a sun.” What do I mean by that? I myself do not know, and chose the phrase for just that reason. But if I try to find a meaning, I do so by considering the ways in which the words map relevant similarities between contexts. Perhaps I mean “The crane (piece of equipment) is high in the sky,” as, to our perception, the sun is. Perhaps I mean “The crane (a species of bird) is gloriously or radiantly beautiful,” as, to our perception, the sun is. Searching for potential meanings, we search for potential similarities between contexts, even in those

cases where a metaphor is not clearly intended. (We would also need to know more about the context in which the phrase is being used to know what kinds of similarities are being invoked.) If we were to try to understand intentional uses of language that are puzzling in any way, our first step might very well be to elucidate similarities between contexts, to try to paraphrase them. We would have to link such uses of language to what we know or can understand. And if we could not do this, what would language mean? What would our paraphrases and metaphors mean? Cavell writes: “To understand a metaphor you must be able to interpret it” (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 172). It seems plausible to me to suppose that, likewise, to understand a projection of a word, one must be able to interpret it. (Nevertheless, it does not seem to be required that this interpretation consciously take place—this might be a difference, at least of degree, between metaphor and projection.)

This is hardly unnatural, though there are projections and metaphors both that may strain our comprehension or our sense of what is acceptable within our language-games. For example, which “reading” of my crane example is better? Are there other options that would be better than both I have provided? (Clearly, context would inform the choice of preferable “meaning.”)

Strain ourselves too far or too often, however, or append explanations at every turn when we use language in these ways, and I submit that projection, and metaphor, would no longer be what they are. We do not shout out words without our reasons, if we wish to be meaningful; we do not make new noises or signs or write unprecedented symbols, intending these as new uses of *language*, and expect others to understand us. The connections are not always obvious, and that is part of the pleasure of the

imagination in creating and discerning them. That does not mean the connections are not there. Just as philosophers are beginning to rethink the previously enforced divisions between imagination and inspiration, on the one hand, and rational thought on the other (or the erroneous limiting of the occurrence of imagination and inspiration to certain contexts), so we need to reconsider the extent to which projections, and metaphor, are not arbitrary, but do indeed reinforce connections, and what is “invited” or “allowed” by new contexts.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH/CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I have provided a description of the imagination at play in our projection of language. Our intentions in such contexts are frequently inspired, improvisational, and constituted by our imaginations. And all of this is possible because of our shared criteria; because of what we have learned, and what allows us to take our place in our various forms of life. Surveying some facts about the history of language reinforces the idea that projection—not only of words, but languages themselves—takes place because of the convening of our criteria and our collective language use.

What can projection reveal to us about our cultures, our language use, our understanding of our concepts and ourselves?

Projection demonstrates what we share, as well as what we do not. However, the fact that we do not all speak the same language—that there have been thousands of them, some radically different from one another—does not commit us to relativism about human truth and knowledge. Much of our human life is shared; much has remained the same throughout the centuries. Instead, this fact raises questions to continually examine about how and why our languages and cultures diverge; who has been closest to the truth at one point or another in history, and who has not; and what people have emphasized, discarded, or never noticed.

It also demonstrates, according to what I have outlined, that such features of our fluency in language occur after our process of initiation. Do we have to be initiated into a language in order to make projections? Yes, I think we do. We cannot project unless and until we are adept language users; we must have learned “how to go on,” as Wittgenstein says. Once we have learned a language (and a world) and thus learned our words’

implications, as Cavell put it, we can make further use of those tools. (Perhaps that is one reason those learning a new language beyond their native tongue sometimes struggle with the figurative elements of the new one.)

Projection demonstrates our enduring human interest and facility with figurative language as well as our ability to grasp and appreciate this filigree of our communication. It is illustrative; it is educational; it is beautiful, and there is more to be made, I think, of a potential link between philosophy of language and philosophy of art on just this point. Projection is a testament to the power of that finest of human gifts, the imagination, even when it is not perceived or lauded as it should be, and further surveying philosophical engagement with the subject of the imagination will remain an ongoing interest and subject of research of mine. Perhaps it is even more interesting when it is combined with our other intellectual powers, as projection in the case of our language use appears to be.

I find myself puzzling over a point of difference between Hobbes and Austin: is Hobbes right to argue that words can stray far from their sources, when Austin does not think they do? Also, Cavell has said that we learn the world as we learn language, but he notices there can be a disconnect between the two, and Austin rightly argues that sometimes we need to pry words off the world. How well do words and the world match? The match must meet a certain benchmark of efficiency, if we are to get by in language at all, and if, as Austin said, we generally avoid pulling in more language than we need. But where does the match fall short, and what is revealed when it does?

I have mentioned that philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Austin provide a positive program for further work in philosophy of language. Their claims about language, truth, and meaning are salutary corrections to some influential work in

that field. For one thing, they do not try to delineate a system of rules or intentions responsible for our language use, beyond the “rules” or regularities provided by our forms of life and criteria. They have presented views of language that are marked improvements over two conceptions that have been historically significant. Their considerations also support Pascal’s claim—custom is our nature.

But simply saying this can recall behaviorism and the criticisms rightly leveled against it. Cavell’s work demonstrates that knowledge, in this field, is shadowed by skepticism, a skepticism that we may not feel (or may not feel in the same way) elsewhere. Perhaps we find ourselves at a point in the philosophy of language marked by a retreat from structuralist conceptions of rules, but the advance toward a better solution is not yet clear. Nevertheless, these philosophers have indicated promising directions for investigators of language to pursue.

I am personally interested in something mentioned above—the different contexts in which language occurs (writing, speaking, and so on)—and would like to further pursue questions into these matters. I think such investigations will reveal the necessity for a difference in the treatment of intention within those contexts of language. Here, though, I think we may founder on the type of concerns that led Wittgenstein to break off into silence. There may be no better explanation of the role intention plays in projection than the one I provided above—words take on new meanings one person at a time. Are there conditions that make this more likely than not? For example, does the aptness or paraphrasability of a projection, or its appropriateness for a certain time and place, have anything to do with the success of a term’s new meanings? At what point does the potential new meaning of a word reach a critical mass of acceptance? Are the meanings

or uses of words changing faster now than they ever have (at least in English)? Is spelling lagging speech *more* than it used to (at least in English), and is technological change one reason for this (it has certainly motivated language change in the past)? Is the science of linguistics Austin envisioned possible, and can it answer questions like these?

Other, deeply mysterious questions remain, about the connection between the projective imagination and the aspects of human life from which it develops. Where or what is the projective imagination? Exactly what aspects of mind does it arise from, and how? What is the relationship between our biological talents or tendencies, our interests, and the prevailing aspects of culture and language that constitute our criteria and enable us to project? Is there one, and if so, how does it relate to the diffuse forms of life that provide material for the imagination? How will research in linguistics shed light on these questions? Does language variation itself result from cultural or psychological variation? Or is it the result of, or influenced by, certain genetic developments?<sup>67</sup> How are the inputs of our imagination working together? What exactly is the connection between language and music?<sup>68</sup> What light might the study of “new” languages—such as the sign language developed in Nicaragua, and the Warlpiri rampaku of Australia<sup>69</sup>—shed on these subjects? Is it the case that projection represents a transition between the “inner” and the “outer” worlds that allow us to do it?

Just how widespread is the imagination in our general engagement with the world, and how widespread are aesthetic and inspirational aspects of human life? I suspect they are much more widespread than many philosophers have supposed. While McGinn’s analysis of the imagination and its connection to language is sketched briefly and raises some questions (for example, about what is “innate”), he provides an interesting

affirmation of the importance and pervasiveness of the imagination. Cavell's own work, as well as Austin's and Wittgenstein's, provides a vivid example of the power of allusive language to raise ideas and make philosophical points.

Some of these questions invite and deserve empirical investigation, and no doubt that will reveal that projecting terms sometimes depends on prosaic factors: ignorance, opportunity, shifts in interests, mistakes, and so on. But some projections depend on an ingenious exploitation of possibility and great linguistic imagination. How is that prowess developed, and how does it combine with what we learn and propagate in our cultures?

I am also curious about the difference, or the gradience of difference, represented by the "active" and "passive" constituents of imagination, as well as the degree of self-consciousness that may mark the difference between metaphor and projection.

What difference would a globally shared language make to all of these matters? We would have reached a development in human life that we have not, so far as we know, ever encountered: human life not divided, and enriched, by different languages—all those languages that (to link language again to music) have *sounded* so different from one another, as much as their writing and their associated functions have differed. Suppose English takes over, a possibility Ostler examines. If this does happen, what will have happened to our human forms of life? Will we have reached an unprecedented human common ground—overcome the perceived challenge presented by Babel?<sup>70</sup> What will that mean for our intellectual endeavors, our judgments, our shared forms of life, including philosophy? Will that indeed be a loss, as Crystal suggests? For, as Ostler points out, the speaking of more than one language immeasurably enriches the lives of



those who can do it (I certainly wish I could claim as much). So many languages do and have accounted for so many forms of life, what we have found important enough to put into our languages, and what we have missed—it is a shame not to know all this. A story of Themistocles from Plutarch attests to the richness, to use Plutarch’s term, of language, and to the power of inhabiting, for oneself, the universe each language represents:

(King Xerxes) gave Themistocles leave to speak his mind freely on Greek affairs.

Themistocles replied that the speech of man was like rich carpets, the patterns of which can only be shown by spreading them out; when the carpets are folded up, the patterns are obscured and lost; and therefore he asked for time. The king was pleased with the simile, and told him to take his time; and so he asked for a year.

Then, having learnt the Persian language sufficiently, he spoke with the king on his own . . . (Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 29.5) (quoted in *Empires of the Word*, 5).

I suspect that if we ever reach such a “common ground” of language, this will be due to pragmatic and global developments in our use of it. We will lose much, no doubt. We will gain, too, and it is impossible to say what the future could hold—what new opportunities will open up for us. We will create new judgments, of that future and any to come. The gradual nature of this process ensures a stability that often endures at least for some period of time, even if it is not immutable. But we cannot count on it. Our languages have their own ideas. In *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell writes “one is never sure what is possible until it happens” (73). And as I have been emphasizing, no system of rules can guarantee what *will* happen, and what shape our languages will take. But whatever that is, it will reflect past usage as much as present and future, our linguistic memory as much as our fate, recalling some other lines of Eliot’s, from “Burnt Norton”:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

Speaking of the past, in the early seventh century B. C. E., Ahiqar remarked, “For a word is a bird: once released no man can recapture it” (“The Words of Ahiqar,” quoted in Pritchard). Ahiqar not only provides an example, hundreds of years old, of the tendency to invoke imagination, projection, and indeed metaphor in explaining this feature of language. He also uses that example to describe how those words fly forward to meet the judgments of the future, compelled by the power of our own, intention-determining, improvisational imaginations.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The famous passage is as follows:

Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.—For someone might object against me: “You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions* and of language.”

And this is true.—Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all “language”. I will try to explain this (65, 31e).

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don’t say: “There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look!—Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.—Are they all ‘amusing’? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; we can see how similarities crop up and disappear.

And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail (66, 31e-32e).

He goes on to claim “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’” (67, 32e).

<sup>2</sup> “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (6-7).

<sup>3</sup> “Besides the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types of case in which something *goes wrong* and the act—marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or what not—is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general *unhappy*. And for this reason we call the doctrine of *the things that can be and go wrong* on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the *Infelicities*” (14).

<sup>4</sup> “When the utterance is a misfire, the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched: and our act (marrying, etc.) is void or without effect, etc. We speak of our act as a purported act, or perhaps an attempt—or we use such an expression as ‘went through a form of marriage’ by contrast with ‘married’. On the other hand, in the *I* cases, we speak of our infelicitous act as ‘professed’ or ‘hollow’ rather than ‘purported’ or ‘empty’, and as not implemented, or not consummated, rather than as void or without effect” (16).

<sup>5</sup> “Once we realize that what we have to study is *not* the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act. Moreover, comparing stating to what we have said about the illocutionary act, it is an act to which, just as much as to other illocutionary acts, it is essential to ‘secure uptake’: the doubt about whether I stated something if it was not heard or understood is just the same as the doubt about whether I warned *sotto voce* or protested if someone did not take it as a protest, etc. And statements do ‘take effect’ just as much as ‘namings’, say” (139).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Livingston explains that Austin and Gilbert Ryle were “ordinary language” philosophers who, among other things, were interested in the “standard” and “non-standard” uses of words. In his 1953 “Ordinary Language,” Ryle says: “Learning to use expressions, like learning to use coins, stamps, cheques and hockey-sticks, involves learning to do certain things with them and not others; when to do certain things with them, and when not to do them. Among the things that we learn in the process of learning to use linguistic expressions are what we may vaguely call ‘rules of logic’” (quoted in *Philosophy and the Vision of Language*, 75), and his remarks recall Wittgenstein’s work in the *Philosophical Investigations* and prefigure Cavell’s. Livingston points out that ordinary language philosophy was unfairly denounced as “conservative” and “the cult of common sense” by Ernest Gellner in *Words and Things*, and this attack, though unmerited, contributed to the present habit of viewing ordinary language philosophy as something that has past. Livingston maintains instead that ordinary language philosophy practices are worthwhile and could be (or are) very useful to the type of critical considerations we should undertake (76).

<sup>7</sup> He also relates ordinary language philosophy to the work of Emerson and Thoreau. In *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, he says Emerson and Thoreau “underwrite” ordinary language philosophy (79). As an example, he claims “Thoreau is doing with our ordinary assertions what Wittgenstein does with our more patently philosophical assertions—bringing them back to a context in which they are alive. It is the appeal from ordinary language to itself” (*The Senses of Walden*, 92).

<sup>8</sup> See Charles Petersen, “Must We Mean What We Say?” (<http://nplusonemag.com/must-we-mean-what-we-say>). Petersen summarizes the argument of *In Quest of the Ordinary* as follows:

the logical positivists fled the world, attempted to create an artificial realm of absolute certainty, scientific, where thought would be practically mechanical; the ordinary language philosophers, then, returned to the ordinary, fleshy world in an attempt to bring out what their peers had left behind; but the ordinary language philosophers did not quite return to the original, “ordinary” world; rather, the encounter with the abstract, mechanical world changed the very experience of the ordinary—made it appear in a new light, akin to looking at a flesh-and-blood human after an encounter with an almost lifelike automaton; thus “the return of what we accept as the world . . . (presented) itself as a return of the familiar, which is to say . . . the uncanny.”

He also notes that Cavell’s work is unusual because of its approach to the potential connections between philosophy and literature: rather than approaching literature to find philosophical ideas in it, Cavell lets them emerge from his own experiences with literature—lets them surprise him, as Petersen puts it.

<sup>9</sup> The modern, academic, philosophical journal article could be problematic for a variety of reasons. The article can be a quite remarkable expression of precise, impressive, and often subtle intellect, of course. It can also be an example of just how far we can take human thought. But its current dominance may eclipse the variety of other formats in which philosophy can take place, written and verbal, and drain its readers of the wonder and excitement that bring many to philosophy in the first place.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, “What’s the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?” in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*.

<sup>11</sup> There are at least two dimensions of “authority” here: (1) who is entitled to speak, and (2) for whom they are taken to speak. In some cases, such as art criticism, we might have a restricted class of qualified speakers, but in a sense they still speak for “all of us.”

<sup>12</sup> Cavell's phrasing here does suggest a sense of doing something active, i.e., bringing together the criteria, as if convening a group or a convention. This does underscore his sense of reflection on culture, culture as we experience it. However, this is not inconsistent with my conviction that there is not necessarily an actual meeting of people who decide explicitly on our criteria. For these criteria can appear to "come together" or convene without anyone actually doing this—as *zeitgeists* somehow manifest themselves, though people do not consciously (at least not always) set out to make them happen.

<sup>13</sup> It does strike me personally as an old thought for an old world.

<sup>14</sup> "Why does Austin at a certain stage invoke Euripides? What he says about Hippolytus is that instead of acknowledging that the ordinary human being's ordinary word is his bond, is binding, is given to another being, Hippolytus wishes (as Austin seems to remember him) to use the fact that he said something without meaning it to excuse his word from the status of a bond . . . This distinction between tongue and heart represents for Austin a metaphysical dodge, or a deviously motivated attempt at one, between saying and intending" (*Philosophical Passages*, 75-76).

<sup>15</sup> "both genius and intending have to do with inclination, hence with caring about something and with posture. Austin, in a seminar discussion at Harvard in 1955, once compared the role of intending with the role of headlights. (This material is published under the title 'Three Ways of Spilling Ink.') An implication he may have had in mind is that driving somewhere (getting something done intentionally) does not on the whole happen by hanging a pair of headlights from your shoulders, sitting in an armchair, picking up an unattached steering wheel, and imagining a destination . . . Much else has to be in place—further mechanisms and systems (transmission, fuel, electrical), roads, the industries that produce and are produced by each, and so on—in order for headlights and a steering mechanism to do their work, even to be what they are" (*Transcendental Etudes*, 96).

<sup>16</sup> "(In linking W. C. Fields's suffering of convention with Humpty Dumpty's claim to be master, by his very wishes, of what words shall mean (and thinking of his fate), I find I have not forgotten a passage during the discussions of *Must We Mean What We Say?* the day I delivered it in 1957 (at Stanford, it happens). Against a certain claim in my paper, one philosopher cited Humpty Dumpty's view of meaning (by name) as obviously, in all solemnity, the correct one. This was, I think, the first time I realized the possibility that parody is no longer a distinguishable intellectual tone since nothing can any longer be counted on to strike us in common as outrageous)" (*Transcendental Etudes*, 96).

<sup>17</sup> Cavell and Austin both make use of the imagery of light or flames; Austin wonders if flames should be understood as things or events.

<sup>18</sup> As I have been explaining, Cavell discusses intention in the context of language. This is the setting in which he assesses Hippolytus's words and Austin's interpretation of them. But Cavell's work reveals (at least implicitly) that intention may have different characteristics, and may function differently, depending on the context of human agency in which it occurs.

Intention is deeply important to the workings of human thought, action, and behaviors such as art-making, Cavell says. It is indispensable to our understanding of how they work: "The category of intention is as inescapable (or escapable with the same consequences) in speaking of objects of art as in speaking of what human beings say and do: without it, we would not understand what they are" (*Must We Mean What We Say?*, 198). But, he says, in non-artistic contexts, intention differently functions as excuse or justification, not as a celebration of the ability to intend at all, which is, he goes on to say, one of the remarkable aspects of art. Intention is not an aspect of human life that will always reveal itself to our investigations in the same way (as Wittgenstein emphasizes). And, as pointed out above, Austin claims it is such a general feature of human action that we do not often characterize it in any particular way in our language use, and we may not, he says, call attention to intention in our language unless we explicitly want to claim we did *not* intend to do something.

<sup>19</sup> A theory of *meaning* for language—words, sentences, or some combination of the two together?—is, in my view, one of the most difficult subjects of analytic philosophy of language. I will not try to resolve that

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problem here beyond saying that I do not think it can be successfully done by hinging too much on speakers' intentions.

<sup>20</sup> This type of view also raises problems about what exactly those intentions are, as well as when and how they are in play when we use language.

<sup>21</sup> "How new and unprecedented are modern forces of language diffusion? Do they share significant properties with language spread in the past?"

How will the age-old characteristics of language communities assert themselves? In particular, can all languages still act as outward symbols of communities? And can they effectively weave together the tissues of associations which come from a shared experience? Can each language still create its own world? Will they want to, when science—and some revealed religions—claim universal validity?" (25).

<sup>22</sup> The top twenty languages, catalogued by Ostler: Chinese (Mandarin), English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Bengali, Portuguese, German (standard), French, Japanese, Urdu, Korean, Chinese (Wu), Javanese, Telugu, Tamil, Chinese (Yue), Marathi, Vietnamese, and Turkish (526).

<sup>23</sup> Ostler makes many fascinating comparisons between languages. He reflects on similarities of the language careers of Egyptian and Chinese, seeing in their countries' relatively large populations and self-images the secret to the languages' long endurance. He also sees parallels between Arabic and English: "both have a written history of about one and a half thousand years, have been spread around the world by speakers who often knew no other language, and have bodies of literature that freight them with associations many centuries old" (521). He sees parallels, too, in the complacency and myopia of ancient Greek and contemporary English speakers. And he explains how some languages may have more in common than others they might not be expected to mirror in any way:

Persian—as a language—has far more in common with languages of Europe or northern India than it does with Arabic or Turkish. Despite 1200 years of practice, the phonetic distinctions in Arabic which Westerners find hard to master, *s, z, t, d* versus *ṣ, ḏ, t, ḏ*, and *alif* versus *'ayn*, are difficult for Persian speakers too. The Persian word for 'is' is still *ast*, like Latin *est*, German *ist*, Russian *yesť* and Sanskrit *asti* (108).

Ostler emphasizes the aspects of culture that contributed to the spread or success of certain languages, and adduces evidence of these aspects of culture in words themselves. For example, he notes that the power of Gaulish derived at least in part from its technology—horse-drawn conveyances and impressive ironwork. He says the history of the word "iron" demonstrates this: though "iron" derives from different sources in Greek, Latin, and Celtic, the Germanic word for it comes from the Celtic, which we would expect, according to Ostler, because the Celts may have contributed to the development of ironworking in northern Europe. The Arabic term for a European in Eastern countries—*feringī*—reflects the French presence in that part of the world once upon a time (407). The Akkadians developed a new word for "scribe" (*sēpiru*) in place of *tupsarru* ("tablet writer," from the Sumerian "*dubsar*") after they began using new materials for writing (ink with either leather or papyrus instead of tablets). (Interestingly, Ostler reports that becoming a scribe in Egypt marked a pinnacle of professional achievement: "The Egyptian scribe represented from the earliest documented times the acme of ambition. This is amply confirmed by the kinds of texts that were copied in the scribal schools . . . In the *Satire on Trades*, the scribe boasts 'I have never seen a sculptor sent on an embassy, nor a bronze-founder leading a mission'" [155-156].)

The world scene of language was vastly altered by European imperialism and the printing of books in Europe. This ended the reign of Latin, and Ostler notes the interesting fact that the printing industry was seen as overwhelming: "The tide of new, unfiltered, information was too much for some. In France in 1535, King François I—briefly, and without effect—declared the printing of any books at all a capital offence" (326). Printing also standardized, so to speak, or advanced the influence of certain *dialects*: for example, Ostler points out "the main sources of book-writing in English, Oxford and Cambridge, were also located in the same broad dialect area, often known as southern West Midlands" (472).

<sup>24</sup> Ostler's examination of English relates its astonishing ascendance over recent centuries. Its position may be unprecedented: "Asked in 1898 to choose a single defining event in recent history, the German chancellor Bismarck replied, 'North America speaks English'" (xxi).

Yet it is a young language, and it is made up of the parts of many others. English only dates to the fifth century C. E., and French, Latin, and Greek have supplied it with most of its terms. (Though it contains many Norse terms, which constitute perhaps up to 7% of the language [*Empires of the Word*, 314].) But it is more like Chinese and Malay than other European languages. For example, English uses subject-verb-object word order; it relies for its complexity on the arrangement of simple words; and its verbs and nouns are rarely inflected (*ibid.*, 476). It has also changed a great deal in its short time span. "Mutual intelligibility has no doubt always been assured in each generation as between parent and child," Ostler writes, recalling Cavell's account of how we learn languages, "but this is not enough to guarantee that the language has stayed the same down the centuries. We can't easily understand what was written in English before the sixteenth century, and if we could hear their speech, we should probably have difficulty with our ancestors in the eighteenth" (525).

And, significantly, its spelling lags in development behind speech. Ostler notes "spelling has not been revised to keep up with changes in pronunciation" (476), likening this to the situation in Chinese: "As a result of the complexity of relation between spelling and sound, a large proportion of the primary teaching profession, in England at least, was until recently of the opinion that phonics are more confusing than helpful when teaching children to read and write: hence the notorious 'Look and Say' method, which essentially treated each word as if it were a Chinese character. As with Chinese, one can say that, for learners, the English language has been literate too long" (476-477).

(As another marker of the difference between written and spoken language, Egyptian language changed more drastically in its written, rather than its verbal, form. But that written form has no known precedents. Arabic script, too, has been more widely adopted than its language [*Empires of the Word*, 97].)

Even in English, acceptance and understanding of dialect vary, with language users in the U. K. demonstrating greater ease with a greater range of dialect than U. S. users of the language, who often dub dialects even if they are variants of English (as we have done with Australian English and, often embarrassingly, with African-American or Southern U. S. dialects).

But it has spread powerfully, so powerfully that many wonder if it is the language of the future, the only one in which we will make judgments of future projections. How and why did this happen, and how and why so fast? Ostler provides some explanation:

Amid the general splurge of galloping wealth creation, there was a particular surge in the power and speed of communications. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed progress that was unheard of, first in inventing, and then in speedily applying, all over the world, systems for transport of people and merchandise. Perhaps even more impressive is the parallel progress made, largely using electronics, in systems to transmit and store all sorts of information . . . Almost every one of these new technologies was invented by a speaker of English—Stephenson, Fulton, Wright, Bell, Baird, Edison—or by a speaker perhaps of another language who had to work in the English-speaking world . . . And even when they were not . . . it was English-speaking developers, such as Henry Ford or the film-makers of Hollywood, who first demonstrated what could be done with the new media on a truly vast scale. This inevitably meant that the key talk about these achievements, how to replicate them and what was to be done with them, took place above all in English. For scientists and engineers, but crucially for businessmen, English has been the language in which the world's know-how is set out. Never since cuneiform writing set up Akkadian as the diplomatic language of the Near and Middle East has technology been so effective in spreading a language (511-512).

<sup>25</sup> "If what can be said in a language is not everywhere determined by rules, nor its understanding anywhere secured through universals, and if there are always new contexts to be met, new needs, new relationships, new objects, new perceptions to be recorded and shared, then perhaps it is as true of a master of a language as of his apprentice that though 'in a sense' we learn the meaning of words and what objects are, the learning is never over, and we keep finding new potencies in words and new ways in which objects are disclosed. The 'routes of initiation' are never closed. But *who* is the authority when all are masters? Who initiates us into new projections? Why haven't we arranged to *limit* words to *certain* contexts, and then coin new ones for new eventualities?" (*The Claim of Reason*, 180).

<sup>26</sup> For example, we do not imagine just how many stripes a tiger may have when we imagine a tiger.

<sup>27</sup> “How do we know *how much* to suppose or imagine when we are asked to suppose or imagine something? How do we know that some possibilities are relevant, serve only to flesh out the skeletal context we have had drawn, whereas other possibilities would *change* the context sketched? . . . What will be story enough to get someone to imagine what you invite him to consider is not fixed . . . To ask us to imagine what we should say in a given situation, you will have to give enough story to rule out relevant possibilities and avert whatever misunderstanding may or will arise. How much you will have to include is, and need be, no more fixed than how much you will have to say or do to get someone to see what you are pointing to . . . or to get someone to understand what you mean” (*The Claim of Reason*, 152).

<sup>28</sup> “Projection” itself is the term for a category much broader than the phenomenon Cavell outlines (it contains other, different kinds of mental states, including closely studied psychological phenomena concerning our interactions with others). Projection is not always linked to imagination, either. Nevertheless, when the two occur together, in the way Cavell describes, the phenomenon is distinctive for its linking or connecting of contexts on the basis of their similarity, as I will describe.

<sup>29</sup> “If the invitation to respond to imagined contexts can prepare or lead us to answers for such questions, then it is, so far, a fully legitimate and revealing enterprise . . . The issue between (traditional and ordinary language philosophy), so far as it concerns the appeals to what is ordinarily said . . . concerns the nature of the sort of appeal to ordinary language which is relevant to philosophizing. The sort of appeal which I have taken as relevant is . . . a way of reminding ourselves of our criteria in employing concepts. Just now I said that the philosophical appeal to ordinary language essentially involves responding to *imagined* situations” (*The Claim of Reason*, 153-154).

<sup>30</sup> “But though language—what we call language—is tolerant, allows projection, not just any projection will be acceptable, i.e., will communicate. Language is equally, definitively, intolerant—as love is tolerant and intolerant of differences, as materials or organisms are of stress, as communities are of deviation, as arts or sciences are of variation. While it is true that we must use the same word in, project a word into, various contexts (must be *willing* to call some contexts the *same*), it is equally true that what will *count* as a legitimate projection is deeply controlled . . . I might say: 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” (*The Claim of Reason*, 182-183).

<sup>31</sup> “any form of life and every concept integral to it has an indefinite number of instances and directions of projection; and . . . this variation is not arbitrary” (*The Claim of Reason*, 185).

<sup>32</sup> “that condition of stability and tolerance I have described as essential to the function of a concept (the use of a word), can perhaps be brought out again this way: to say that a word or concept has a (stable) meaning is to say that new and the most various instances can be recognized as falling under or failing to fall under that concept; to say that a concept must be tolerant is to say that were we to assign a new word to ‘every’ new instance, no word would have the kind of meaning or power a word like ‘shoe’ has” (*The Claim of Reason*, 185-186).

<sup>33</sup> “Our ability to communicate . . . depends upon our mutual attunement in judgments. It is astonishing how far this takes us in understanding one another, but it has its limits; and these are not merely, one may say, the limits of knowledge but the limits of experience. And when these limits are reached, when our attunements are dissonant, I cannot get below them to firmer ground. The power I felt in my breath as my words flew to their effect now vanishes into thin air. For not only does (another) not receive me, because his natural reactions are not mine; but my own understanding is found to go no further than my own natural reactions bear it. I am thrown back upon myself; I as it were turn my palms outward, as if to exhibit the kind of creature I am, and declare my ground occupied, only mine, ceding yours” (115).



<sup>34</sup> A cognitive strategy that is useful in contexts other than the projection of language, though there may indeed be, well, similarities between those contexts and language. For example, in understanding other people, or aspects of human nature, it can often be more helpful to focus on our relative similarities to them than our differences. Could this be related to our tendency to affirm similarities in the use of language?

<sup>35</sup> I will avoid trying to provide a comprehensive account of metaphor, as I have of intention and imagination. As with those concepts, I restrict myself to discussing certain examples of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, I will mention some important developments in the investigation of the theory of metaphor and the views of three contemporary philosophers.

Theories of metaphor attempt to account for a way speakers or writers communicate one thing and mean something else, or at least something more. This process is common in language and results in relatively little confusion. Attempts to describe metaphor itself have not been so straightforward. It is questionable whether metaphor is better understood as a subject for semantics (concerning the meaning of words and sentences—A. P. Martinich, *The Philosophy of Language*, 4), or pragmatics (concerning what speakers do with language). Semantics hooks meaning to truth and reference, while pragmatics examines the kinds of acts speakers perform and is concerned not only with reference, but often context (*ibid.*).

Donald Davidson's theory of metaphor is semantic, according to Martinich (413), because it is concerned solely with meaning and does not address the context of use or intention (at least not directly). The views outlined by John R. Searle and Martinich are pragmatic, because they describe meaning as a product of speakers' intentions and context.

Other major theories of metaphor have emerged which these philosophers examine; all attempt to describe how metaphor works. Theories of ambiguity or additional meaning posit "new" or "extended" meanings for words that occur in metaphorical settings. The interaction theory, advanced by Max Black, among others, claims that there is an "interaction" between the literal and metaphorical semantic contents (their "meaning," once comprehended) of certain expressions. The simile theory proclaims that metaphor really functions as simile with the "as" or "like" left out. Davidson, Searle, and Martinich find fault with these common conceptions of metaphor, sometimes for similar reasons. Another problem of metaphor involves determining just how such expressions can convey meaning, when they are often false or nonsensical if taken literally. This problem is emphasized by the conviction that a person speaking metaphorically is often speaking truly. Searle and Martinich account for this fact by enlisting various strategies to draw out non-defective meanings for metaphors. But they, in addition to Davidson, acknowledge that there can be literally truthful metaphors, and Martinich goes so far as to say that those who insist that metaphor is false speech are being naïve. And Searle and Davidson mention that the context can occasion language users to decide whether an utterance should be construed metaphorically.

Additionally, there are difficulties involved in determining just what exactly a metaphor does mean. Martinich, Searle, and Davidson concede that there may not be only one suitable interpretation of a particular metaphor.

Related to all of the issues raised in the examination of metaphor is, then, an interest in how it works, because the way it works determines what it means (though certain metaphors may have more than one meaning), and whether it is true. Searle, Martinich, and Davidson present well-taken criticisms of other conceptions of metaphor, such as interaction and comparison theories.

<sup>36</sup> Three steps can help one decide whether a metaphor is occurring, and what the meaning of that metaphor might be: if, first, an utterance seems like a possible occasion for a metaphor (something would be wrong with it if it were construed literally), so the context will suggest the (or an) appropriate method of interpretation; second, the attribution in such an utterance of 'S is P' encourages one to specify how P is intended to call R to mind (one must look for "salient, well-known, and distinctive features of P things"—the "heart of the problem," as Searle acknowledges—"Metaphor," 423, 426), and finally, the list of "salient" features must be narrowed down somehow to a range of likely meanings.

<sup>37</sup> Hearers may seek these principles out if confronted with "obvious falsehood, semantic nonsense, violations of the rules of speech acts, or violations of conversational principles of communication" (in the last case, violations of Grice's cooperative principle or conversational maxims, for example) (422). These principles are not assertions of similarity; they only pave the way for constructions of assertions of

similarity (which would require paraphrases, though paraphrases might not seem as meaningfully apt as their metaphors). They do not cause any semantic content to “interact” with any other; they enable one to move from comprehension to recognition of what is intended by a speaker. The three-part structure of Searle’s analysis specifies the manner in which metaphor is recognized within comprehensible communication; how it works (by enlisting strategies of interpretation that are probably not exhausted by his list); and what it might mean (because presumably these principles enable one to restrict the range of possible meanings). Searle believes he has avoided some of the difficulties facing comparison and interaction theories because of this three-part structure, and he has crucially noted that metaphor must take place within the context of speech acts communicable from speakers to hearers.

At the least, Searle thinks a theory of metaphor should address how, in saying “‘S is P’” (metaphor), “one can mean and communicate that ‘S is R’” (hopefully exhibited by a paraphrase) (412). Metaphorical utterances differ from literal utterances not only because of their different uses of word or sentence meaning, but because metaphorical utterances require an “extra element” of understanding: “the utterance of an expression with its literal meaning and corresponding truth-conditions can, in various ways that are specific to metaphor, call to mind another meaning and corresponding set of truth-conditions” (412). Searle wishes to determine how this can happen and what is meant by “calling to mind,” itself a metaphorical expression. He examines the weaknesses of other theories of metaphor—the comparison and interaction views, and simile versions of the comparison theory. In Searle’s opinion, comparison theories generally fail to clarify the distinction between a metaphor’s meaning and the inferential process that results in its understanding, while semantic interaction theories confuse metaphorical meaning with sentence meaning (locating the “semantic” content of a metaphor in the sentence on which it depends).

Searle thinks the comparison and interaction theories of metaphor are inadequate in outlining the principles by which metaphor works—how it becomes possible to say ‘S is P’ and have that mean, intelligibly, that ‘S is R.’ Searle thinks that the principle of “similarity” by which comparison theories work is problematic, because apprehending a similarity between objects should be a part of generating and interpreting metaphors, and not a concrete component of metaphorical meaning.

In the case of semantic interaction theories, Searle points out that although a speaker’s utterance can occasion a change in meaning, that change does not take place in the literal definitions of the words used. The change or different use is speaker’s utterance meaning, not sentence meaning. And he notes, as Davidson does, that if a lexical change did occur in words used in a metaphorical context, what we take to be metaphor would no longer occur, but would be a case of “new” or “extended” uses of words (“. . . it is only because the expressions have not changed their meaning that there is a metaphorical utterance at all” [413])—in fact, such a situation characterizes projection, or dead metaphor.

Semantic interaction theories also emphasize that metaphors must occur within “literal uses of expressions,” because they supposedly operate according to the “interaction” between literal and metaphorical meaning. In such cases, metaphorical meaning is suggested by the literal meaning of the words used. But Searle argues that the assumption that “all metaphorical uses of expressions must occur in sentences containing literal uses of expressions” (415) is incorrect. Mixed metaphors, for instance, do not occur in these contexts. In Searle’s example “The bad news congealed into a block of ice,” the words are being used figuratively, not literally, to posit metaphorical meaning. (Presumably context would suggest that the expression should be interpreted metaphorically, otherwise it would probably be incomprehensible.) Additionally, the idea of an “interaction” between literal and metaphorical meaning is itself a dubious or metaphorical idea and sounds, to me, like a vague reference to some aspect of the inferential process.

The view of metaphor as an elliptical simile is also unsuccessful, according to Searle, because a statement of similarity cannot account for the way in which one moves from ‘S is P’ to ‘S is R.’ A strategy for interpretation is necessary to specify which properties are being “called to mind” in a metaphor, but the similarity theory is inadequate because it cannot specify these properties and the way in which they are allegedly similar.

<sup>38</sup> “This equivocation of names maketh it difficult to recover those conceptions for which the name was ordained; and that not only in the language of other men, wherein we are to consider the drift, and occasion, and contexture of the speech, as well as the words themselves; but also in our own discourse, which being derived from the custom and common use of speech, representeth not unto us our own conceptions” (*Human Nature*, 37).

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<sup>39</sup> I think there is, but I have a hard time saying more about it than what I am saying here.

<sup>40</sup> Some concepts cover instantiations that are more central to the term than others. Painting is a paradigm example of a core “art”; gardening has not been.

<sup>41</sup> How would a language that was constrained by a fixed code look different from our own actual ones? For one thing, it might more obviously employ deliberate intentionality. It might also resist the kind of change that natural languages exhibit.

<sup>42</sup> I leave aside the difficult question of whether some comprehension can be so immediate that it is not really inference at all, but more like perception. I think much of projection, and metaphorical understanding, is inferential.

<sup>43</sup> Inference and context determine whether an utterance is metaphorical and possesses meaning, whether it is true or false or indeterminate in truth value. And when the terminology of speech act theory—“speakers,” “hearers,” audience, intentions, and so on—is used in discussing the meaning of metaphors, I do not think it should be used to specifically presume actual persons or intentions or occasions of use, but is adopted to reflect a way of comprehensibly explaining the understanding of metaphor as a communicative endeavor that relies upon unmetaphorical lexical definitions.

<sup>44</sup> Davidson says that intimation is not meaning; nor is intimation peculiar to metaphor; but I would argue that intimation, understood as the inferential endeavor that makes projection and metaphor possible, makes meaning.

<sup>45</sup> He also says “they shall conjecture best, that have most experience” and says that older people are better at this than younger: “they remember more; and experience is but remembrance” (33).

<sup>46</sup> In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty makes a contribution to philosophy that is not incompatible with those of Wittgenstein and Cavell: among other things, he argues that the foundationalist picture of philosophy is wrong. Rorty argues that within philosophy of language, Davidson’s work refutes the conception of the “intrinsic nature” of language; it is, instead, contingent, Rorty claims (9).

Rorty also argues that literature offers more resources for certain philosophical projects than philosophy itself currently does. (In a well-chosen example, he discusses how the fine work of Vladimir Nabokov calls our attention to human absurdity and wickedness.)

<sup>47</sup> Robert Hendrickson, *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins*, 4th ed. (New York: Checkmark Books [Infobase Publishing], 2008).

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that this trend may reverse the pattern much language use takes—moving from speech into writing.

<sup>49</sup> McGinn muses, “I can’t help reflecting how neglected consciousness was until recently. Will imagination receive the same kind of belated recognition?” (198, n. 5). His book involves explaining all the ways imagination functions in and enriches our lives, and elevating the investigation of the imagination to its rightful level: “Imagination needs to be given more credit in any account of the human mind. In this book I have tried to give it the recognition it deserves” (163).

It remains to be seen whether imagination will undergo such a reappraisal, though this project is intended to support such an aim. And, if it does, it remains to be seen whether its results will support McGinn’s view. The imagination is a suggestive and rich concept that may well have the resources to explain, and contain, the various phenomena of our mental lives with which McGinn links it.

<sup>50</sup> “the imagination is the combinatorial faculty par excellence; its facility in producing newly envisaged possibilities is perfectly suited to the generation of new acts of understanding . . . imagination is in its element in the production of representations of possibilities. The productivity of imagery is the sensory

precursor of such productive cognitive imagination, and it may well be this property of imagery that encouraged earlier theorists to advocate an imagistic view of meaning; if so, they were onto something sound, even if images are not the right imaginative products to invoke” (151).

<sup>51</sup> “The role of imagery in science is also well attested: see Hadamard, *The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field*. To me this shows that we never quite leave imagery behind, even in the most abstract and sophisticated of pursuits. (I suspect that images play a significant role in shaping philosophical opinions.)” (198)

<sup>52</sup> “It is the impressive *motility* of images that suggests their affinity to meaning, not their phenomenal character” (194).

<sup>53</sup> Here, McGinn is using “imagination” solely in the sense of “visual imagery,” thus discussing something different, more specific, from some of the phenomena that Cavell and Wittgenstein call “imagination.”

<sup>54</sup> A distinction that might not ultimately make sense; it might “bog down,” as Austin would say, upon closer examination.

<sup>55</sup> Much of the philosophical literature focuses on the visual aspect of imagination, but imagination clearly makes greater use of other perceptual inputs than the visual, and this is true of language. For example, auditory imagination is compelling and deserves more attention than it has received, not only in its own right, but in connection to language. Within language, as I am pointing out, we see traces of not only visual but other kinds of cognitive imaginative work. And many philosophers discuss the imagination in relation to aspects of thinking that are not visual. (For example, Cavell suggests, as explained above, we “suppose,” and this does not necessarily involve visual imagery.) There is also fascinating cross-fertilization between such domains as the visual and the auditory and the imagination’s interaction with them. Some philosophers mention both: in “Imagination and Perception,” P. F. Strawson alludes to “a picture in the mind’s eye or . . . a tune running through one’s head.” Wittgenstein appears to recognize this in his intriguing linkage of music and voice.

Music is not only a product but a stimulant to creativity, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the human affinity for sounds demonstrated by our often profound attachment to music is playing a role in the projection of our terms. We hear language; we speak it to be heard. Indeed, music is frequently an extension of our speech made beautiful. This is not to discount our other perceptual inputs. I accept that visual imagery is no doubt playing a major role in our language use. And I realize not all language is spoken or heard (what light might sign language shed on these issues?). Also, no doubt many adjustments in our language are coming from written language; the use of acronyms and the proposed eventual shortening of “o.k.” to “k” (and “o.k.” itself) may be influenced by, or coming from, writing. Language is complex, it takes many forms, and all those ways in which we use it affect our projection of it.

We get our word “barbarian” because the Greeks thought the non-Greek tongues around them sounded like “bar,” “bar.” In this note in the history of language, I see confirmation of how important what we take from our aural surroundings can be for our use and projection of language. Onomatopoeia may derive its power from this aspect of the projective imagination. “Trick or treat” is another case—a phrase that originated in mystery and spread elsewhere and yet, in its legacy, is called out, heard.

<sup>56</sup> *Cognitive Linguistics* 1, Issue 1 (2009): 99-150. The article begins with the sentence “The hardest things to observe are those which one sees every day.” Also see Floyd Ratliff, “On the Psychophysiological Bases of Universal Color Terms,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, No. 5 (1976).

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Merritt Ruhlen’s work in two books from 1994, *On the Origins of Languages: Studies in Linguistic Taxonomy* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994), and *The Origin of Language: Tracing the Evolution of the Mother Tongue* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1994). In the latter book, Ruhlen argues “Human language came into being just once . . . all languages that now exist (or ever have existed) are (or were) altered later forms of this original language.” Also see Quentin D. Atkinson’s recent *Science* publication, “Phonemic Diversity Supports a Serial Founder Effect Model of Language Expansion from Africa” (*Science* 332, no. 6027 [2011]), and Nicholas Wade’s review of this research in the

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*New York Times*. In Wade's article, biologist Mark Pagel is quoted as saying language "retains a signal of its ancestry over tens of thousands of years" and claims language is one reason we became so dangerous.

<sup>58</sup> Which is not to suggest it cannot be equally difficult to access or develop the imagination in the context of the other arts—and, as with language, one reason for this difficulty may on occasion be increased age.

<sup>59</sup> Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>60</sup> The hypnogogic imagery we occasionally experience (in this "passive" way) is also pleasant, but why?

<sup>61</sup> Consider Emerson's remark, quoted by Cavell in *Transcendental Etudes*: "The deeper (the scholar) dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true."

<sup>62</sup> It can also cause problems. Feminist philosophers of science have undertaken careful evaluations of metaphor, for example, lamenting the (sometimes inaccurate) imagery used to describe the process of reproductive fertilization.

<sup>63</sup> Examples can be found in the works of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and Larry Alexander. See Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* and, as an example of Alexander's, his work with Saikrishna Parakash, "Is That English You're Speaking?": Why Intention Free Interpretation Is an Impossibility" (*San Diego Law Review* 41 [2004]).

<sup>64</sup> Perhaps they also begin to recede as our thoughts and our knowledge move from explication in language to gesticulating, to losing voice; to inferences that move at a speed rendering language frustrating or unnecessary.

<sup>65</sup> "in this, these uses are *like* metaphorical ones. Such uses have consequences in the kind of understanding and communication they make possible. I want to say: It is such shades of sense, intimations of meaning, which allow certain kinds of subtlety or delicacy of communication; the connection is intimate, but fragile. Persons who cannot use words, or gestures, in these ways with you may yet be in your world, but perhaps not of your flesh. The phenomenon I am calling 'projecting a word' is the fact of language which, I take it, is sometimes responded to by saying that 'All language is metaphorical'. Perhaps one could say: the possibility of metaphor is the same as the possibility of language generally, but what is essential to the projection of a word is that it proceeds, or can be made to proceed, *naturally*; what is essential to a functioning metaphor is that its 'transfer' is *unnatural*—it breaks up the established, normal directions of projection" (*The Claim of Reason*, 189-190).

<sup>66</sup> Now, in Cavell's discussion of metaphor and some of the remarks about it he uses, drawn from literature, I detect an uneasiness about paraphrasing metaphors, because it seems as if doing this to them will destroy their unique nature. In fact I think this may be partly responsible for the view that metaphors *cannot* be paraphrased. I would like to raise some questions about this: does Cavell share this unease? And is the paraphrase of a metaphor so different from other kinds of paraphrase that are possible? If so, how?

Also, Cavell believes the "and so on" of metaphorical paraphrase distinguishes it from simile, and says that, though metaphors function like idioms in that they rely on standard dictionary meanings of words to accomplish something else, they are not like idioms, because (1) we do not have to explain idioms, (2) idioms are found in the dictionary, and metaphors are not, which means we can catalogue idioms, but not metaphors, (3) providing the meaning of an idiom is like translation, (4) metaphors are "wildly" false, idioms only "quite false"—they can actually happen; people can "fall flat on their faces." (Additionally, as Livingston points out, we can make up metaphors spontaneously; we cannot do this with idioms.) Also, some other uses of figurative language (in Cavell's example, Hart Crane's "The mind is brushed by sparrow wings") cannot be paraphrased or explained at all.

Should we accept these points? I question the distinction Cavell draws between idiom and metaphor, as I question his distinction between projection and metaphor. Idiomatic uses of language are not always so simple; metaphors are not always so complex. For that matter, I also question the reason he

gives for the difference between metaphor and simile. Granted there is something unique about paraphrasing a metaphor, but is the process really so far from defining or (especially) giving a rendition of a simile?

<sup>67</sup> Daniel Nettle provides an overview of three theories of linguistic evolution. The first, the “chance” theory, postulates “there is a set of all language configurations consistent with the properties of the human mind, and where on that landscape a particular language moves is a random walk” (“Language and genes: A new perspective on the origins of human cultural diversity,” 10755). He says this does not mean all language possibilities will or can occur, and one reason for this is psychological “cost”: to take one case, he writes “it has been hypothesized that word orders where the object of the sentence routinely precedes the subject impose” such costs (Ostler, as mentioned, provides a related type of example). This theory does not suppose there is a genetic connection between language users and whatever language they happen to speak. Another possibility: “ecological or demographic parameters with linguistic parameters.” Here, Nettle cites the following interesting research:

languages spoken in warm climates tended to use more sonorous combinations of sounds (essentially, more vowels and fewer consonants) than languages spoken in cold climates. Languages with more sonorous sounds require lower speech volume at a given distance. The argument of Fought *et al.* is that in warm climates, more conversation occurs outdoors where there is more background noise, more sound dispersion, and greater interpersonal distances. This creates a context wherein innovations that increase sonority are more likely to be retained than they would be where conversation mainly occurs indoors (10755).

And then he introduces the third approach, new research by Dan Dediu and D. Robert Ladd. Their work attempts to show that two genes, apparently still evolving, may play a role in language development: “the likelihood of a language employing tonal contrasts . . . is strongly influenced by allele frequencies for these two genes in the population of speakers” (10755-10756).

Dediu and Ladd introduce this research with a summary of language that is not incompatible with the major points of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell:

Human populations are diverse both genetically and linguistically, through interpopulation differences in allele frequencies and in the variety of languages and dialects they speak. In general, any relationship between these two types of diversity merely reflects geography and past demographic processes, not genetic influence on language behavior. It is indisputable that normal infants of any genetic makeup can learn the language(s) they are exposed to in the first years of life, so we can assume with considerable confidence that there are no “genes for Chinese.”

Nevertheless, it is well accepted that there is widespread interindividual variation in many aspects relevant for language (developmental delays, differences in second-language learning aptitude, discrimination between foreign speech sounds, recognition of words in noise, and differences in short-term phonological memory correlated with different syntactic processing strategies). It is also accepted that this variation can be partially attributed to genetic factors, most probably through a “many genes with small effects” model including both generalist and specialist genes. There are also heritable aspects of brain structure in general, and language-related areas in particular.

It is therefore likely that there are heritable differences of brain structure and function that affect language acquisition and usage. These differences may have no obvious behavioral consequences in the nonclinical population; under ordinary circumstances, all normal speakers and hearers perform “at ceiling” on many language-related tasks. Moreover, no one doubts that all normal children acquire the language of the community in which they are reared. Nevertheless, if differences in language and speech-related capacities are variable and heritable and if the genes involved have interpopulation structure, it is likely that populations may differ subtly in some of these aspects, and that differences between populations could influence the way languages change through cultural evolution over time.

It is generally acknowledged that the process of language acquisition plays a major role in historical language change: language acquirers construct a grammar based on the language they hear around them, but the constructed grammar is not necessarily identical to that of their models, and the cumulative effect of such small differences over generations leads to language change. It follows that cognitive biases in a population of acquirers could influence the direction of language

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change across generations. These biasing effects could result in linguistic differences between populations, producing nonspurious (causal) correlations between genetic and linguistic diversities. Computer simulations support the idea that such biases could influence the structure of languages emerging over many generations of cultural change, and mathematical models suggest that, under appropriate conditions, extremely small biases at the individual level can be amplified by this process of cultural transmission and become manifest at the population level.

We propose that the linguistic typology of tone is affected by such a bias. Human languages differ typologically in the way they use voice fundamental frequency (pitch) (“Linguistic tone is related to the population frequency of the adaptive haplogroups of two brain size genes, *ASPM* and *Microcephalin*,” 10944).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, “Tone Language Speakers and Musicians Share Enhanced Perceptual and Cognitive Abilities for Musical Pitch: Evidence for Bidirectionality between the Domains of Language and Music,” which begins “A rapidly growing body of empirical evidence suggests that brain mechanisms governing music and language processing interact and might share an important link with respect to their underlying neurophysiological processing” (1).

<sup>69</sup> Warlpiri rampaku (Light Warlpiri) is discussed in “The role of multiple sources in the formation of an innovative auxiliary category in Light Warlpiri, a new Australian mixed language,” by Carmel O’Shannessy (*Language* 89, No. 2 [2013]).

<sup>70</sup> Which, Ostler remarks, is interesting as an example of a threat to human understanding, because it involves Babylon at a time when its citizens actually relied heavily on one language (Akkadian, giving way at the close of the empire to Aramaic). But if bilingualism and cosmopolitanism are high in a society, is there any threat? Such a culture may be undaunted by a multitude of languages thrumming within it.

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