Why Does *The Claim of Reason Matter*?
A Symposium in Memory of Stanley Cavell (1926-2018)

9:30-10:00	**Breakfast**
10:00-10:10	Introduction by Toril Moi
10:10-10:30	Sandra Laugier (*CR* 27-8)
10:30-10:50	Juliet Floyd (*CR* 121-3)
10:50-11:10	**Mid-morning break**
11:10-11:30	Sarah Beckwith (*CR* 177)
11:30:-11:50	Espen Hammer (*CR* 241)
11:50-12:45	Discussion
12:45-1:30	**Lunch**
1:30-1:50	Avner Baz (*CR* 284-5)
1:50-2:10	Toril Moi (*CR* 351-2)
2:30-2:50	Rob Chodat (*CR* 359-60)
2:50-4:00	Discussion

**CR* refers to Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*. Each speaker will discuss a passage from the book.

1. Sandra Laugier

To speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind. Who these others are, for whom you speak and by whom you are spoken for, is not known a priori, though it is in practice generally treated as given. To speak for yourself then means risking the rebuff – on some occasion, perhaps once for all – of those for whom you claimed to be speaking; and it means risking having to rebuff – on some occasion, perhaps once for all – those who claimed to be speaking for you. There are directions other than the political in which you will have to find your own voice – in religion, in friendship, in parenthood, in love, in art – and to find your own work; and the political is likely to be heartbreaking or dangerous. So are the others. But in the political, the impotence of your voice shows up quickest; it is of importance to others to stifle it; and it is easiest to hope there, since others are in any case included in it, that it will not be missed if it is stifled, i.e., that you will not miss it. But once you recognize a community as yours, then it does speak for you until you say it doesn't, i.e., until you show that you do. A fortunate community is one in which the issue is least costly to raise; and only necessary to raise on brief, widely spaced, and agreed upon occasions; and, when raised, offers a state of affairs you can speak for, i.e., allows you to reaffirm the polis.

It follows from including "speaking for others and being spoken for by others" as part of the content of political consent, that mere withdrawal from the community (exile inner or outer) is not, grammatically, the withdrawal of consent from it. Since the granting of consent entails acknowledgment of others, the withdrawal of consent entails the same acknowledgment: I have to say *both* "It is not mine any longer" (I am no longer responsible for it, it no longer speaks for me) *and* "It is no longer ours" (not what we bargained for, we no longer recognize the principle of consent in it, the original "we" is no longer bound together by consent but only by force, so it no longer exists). Dissent is not the undoing of consent but a dispute about its content, a dispute within it over whether a present arrangement is faithful to it. The alternative to speaking for yourself politically is not: speaking for yourself privately. (Because "privately" here can only either be repeating the "for myself", in which case it means roughly, "I'm doing the talking"; or else it implies that you do

not *know* that you speak for others, which does not deny the condition of speaking for others.) The alternative is having nothing (political) to say.

I would like to say: If I am to have a native tongue, I have to accept what "my elders" say and do as consequential; and they have to accept, even have to applaud, what I say and do as what they say and do. We do not know in advance what the content of our mutual acceptance is, how far we may be in agreement. I do not know in advance how deep my agreement with myself is, how far responsibility for the language may run. But if I am to have my own voice in it, I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me. The alternative to speaking for myself representatively (for *someone* else's consent) is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute.

2. Juliet Floyd

We were led, and I take Wittgenstein to be similarly led, to those recent more or less mathematical examples, from within a need to follow out an idea of normality. Why is this? I am not competent to quarrel with or to affirm Wittgenstein's ideas about logic and the foundation of mathematics. But mathematical-looking fragments make their appearance as integral to the thought of the *Investigations,* and I cannot to that extent ignore them. What is their function?

Their general background is an idea that the primitive abilities of mathematics (e.g., counting, grouping, adding, continuing a series, finding quantities equal or smaller) are as natural as any (other) region of a

natural tongue, and as natural as the primitive abilities of logic (e.g., drawing an inference, following a rule of substitution). The implication is that ordinary language no more *needs* a foundation in logic than mathematics does. More specifically, he uses the picture of "continuing a series" as a kind of figure of speech for an idea of the meaning of a word, or rather an idea of the possession of a concept: to know the meaning of a word, to have the concept titled by the word, is to be able to go on with it into new contexts — ones we accept as correct for it; and you can do this without knowing, so to speak, the formula which determines the fresh occurrence, i.e., without being able to articulate the criteria in terms of which it is applied. If somebody could actually produce a formula, or a form for one, which generated the schematism of a word's occurrences, then Wittgenstein's idea here would be more than a figure of speech; it would be replaced by, or summarize, something we might wish to call the science of semantics.

Most immediately for us, the examples of "knowing how to continue" give, as I was suggesting earlier, a simple or magnified view of teaching and learning, of the transmission of language and hence of culture. It is a view in which the idea of *normality,* upon which the strength of criteria depends, is seen to be an idea of *naturalness.* It isolates or dramatizes the inevitable moment of teaching and learning, and hence of communication, in which my power comes to an end in the face of the other's separateness from me.

Wittgenstein's idea of naturalness is illustrated in his interpretation of taking a thing to be *selbstverständlich.*

> The rule can only seem to me to produce all its consequences in advance if I draw them as a *matter of course.* [§238]

I know the series, I can continue with a word, when, for me, the continuity is a matter of course, a *foregone* conclusion. In the series of words we call sentences, the words I will need meet me half way. They speak for me. I give them control over me. (Maybe that is what a "sentence" is; or rather "a complete thought".) That is what happens to my power over the pupil; I give it over to the thing I am trying to convey; if I could not, it would not be that thing. No conclusion is more foregone for me than that *that* is human suffering, that *that* is the continuation of the series "1, 2, 3, . . .", that *that* is a painting, a sentence, a proof. *What* I take as a matter of course is not itself a matter of course. It is a matter of history, a matter of what arrives at and departs from a present human interest. I

cannot *decide* what I take as a matter of course, any more than I can decide what interests me; I have to find out.

The course is not always smooth. What I took as a matter of course (e.g., that that is a proof, that that is not a serious painting) I may come to take differently (perhaps through further instruction or examples or tips or experience, which it may be a matter of course for me to seek or to deny). What I cannot now take as a matter of course I may come to; I may set it as my task. "I am not used to measuring temperatures on the Fahrenheit scale. Hence such a measure of temperature *'says'* nothing to me" (§508). I know more or less how to go about getting used to another measuring system, that it takes repeated practice; and it may or may not work in my case – a fever of 39 degrees centigrade may never come to *look* high. Taking counts, like cursing, is familiarly deep in a native tongue; someone fluent in a foreign language may revert to the native for *just* such purposes, as though he can't be sure they have *taken effect* otherwise.

If it is the task of the modernist artist to show that we do not know a priori what will count for us as an instance of his art, then this task, or fate, would be incomprehensible, or unexercisable, apart from the existence of objects which, prior to any new effort, we do count as such instances as a matter of course; and apart from there being conditions which our criteria take to define such objects. Only someone outside this enterprise could think of it as an exploration of mere conventions. One might rather think of it as (the necessity for) establishing new conventions. And only someone outside this enterprise could think of establishing new conventions as a matter of exercising personal decision or taste. One might rather think of it as the exploration or education or enjoyment or chastisement of taste and of decision and of intuition, an exploration of the kind of creature in whom such capacities are exercised. Artists are people who know how to do such things, i.e., how to make objects in response to which we are enabled, but also fated, to explore and educate and enjoy and chastise our capacities as they stand. Underlying the tyranny of convention is the tyranny of nature.

3. Sarah Beckwith

And we can also say: When you say "I love my love" the child learns the meaning of the word "love" and what love is. *That* (*what you do*) will *be* love in the child's world; and if it is mixed with resentment and intimidation, then love is a mixture of resentment and intimidation, and when love is sought *that* will be sought. When you say "I'll take you tomorrow, I promise", the child begins to learn what temporal durations are, and what *trust* is, and what you do will show what trust is worth. When you say "Put on your sweater", the child learns what commands are and what *authority* is, and if giving orders is something that creates anxiety for you, then authorities are anxious, authority itself uncertain.

Of course the person, growing, will learn other things about these concepts and "objects" also. They will grow gradually as the child's world grows. But all he or she knows about them is what he or she has learned, and *all* they have learned will be part of what they are. And what will the day be like when the person "realizes" what he "believed" about what love and trust and authority are? And how will he stop believing it? What we learn is not just what we have studied; and what we have been taught is not just what we were intended to learn. What we have in our memories is not just what we have memorized.

4. Espen Hammer

An admission of some question as to the mystery of the existence, or the being, of the world is a serious bond between the teaching of Wittgenstein and that of Heidegger. The bond is one, in particular, that implies a shared view of what I have called the truth of skepticism, or what I might call the moral of skepticism, namely, that the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing. (Cf. "The Avoidance of Love", p. 324.) (Then what rootlessness, or curse, made us, lets us, think of our basis in this way, accepting from ourselves our offer of knowledge?) Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger continue, by reinterpreting, Kant's insight that the limitations of knowledge are not failures of it. *Being and Time* goes further than *Philosophical Investigations* in laying out how to think about what the human creature's relation to the world as such is (locating, among others, that particular relation called knowing); but Wittgenstein goes further than Heidegger in laying out how to investigate the cost of our continuous temptation to knowledge, as I would like to put it.

5. Avner Baz

A: You ought to give the speech, as you promised.

B: That is unfortunately beyond my power. My health will not permit it.

This example deals with the consequences of a judgment's *influence*. A is endeavoring to influence B to give the speech. If B's reply is true, then whatever influence A's judgment may have on attitudes, it will not have the further consequence of making B speak. Realizing this, A will be likely to withdraw his judgment; he sees that it cannot have its intended effect. We shall later find that the old problem of "free will", so far as it relates to ethics, brings up the same considerations.

> In the present case A may withdraw his judgment not merely because it will fail to serve its original purpose, but because it may have effects which he, in kindness, does not desire. It may lead B to be perturbed about his disability. [p. 126]

Does A assume that B has forgotten the promise? doesn't take it seriously enough? doesn't realize that what he said was legitimately taken as a promise? If so, why not *tell* him? If not, then *why* remind him of the fact? Does A not know that B is disabled? Then, when he finds out, does he "withdraw his judgment" because "he sees it cannot have its intended effect" or because he sees that it would be incompetent or incoherent not to? And *how* does he "see" that it cannot have its intended effect? Because he *sees* that B is disabled? Then are we to imagine that A goes to the hospital to visit B, and, after seeing both of B's legs to be in traction, says, "You ought to give the speech"? Or is the disability less obvious, so that A is in some doubt as to whether B's condition is as serious as he says? Then how does he "see" or "realize" that his judgment will not have its intended effect? Perhaps he sees that B is adamant; that might be a clear case of "realizing (finally, no matter how hard you try) that your judgment cannot have its intended effect". But we've forgotten that speech in our bewilderment. Was it important? Important enough so that you are willing to urge B to risk his health to give it, or go there in a wheel chair if necessary? Then B's reply "My health will not permit it" is not enough to make you "realize" that your judgment will not have its intended effect. And if the speech is *that* important then does *B* not know this? And if he does, then has he done *nothing* about it, having become ill? Has he, for example, not tried to find or suggest a replacement, or have the meeting rescheduled, or dictated a speech which could be read? If that would be uncalled for, then why *is* it so important that he give the speech? Why *ought* he to?

But enough. The speech is not important; it doesn't exist. And neither does a moral relationship exist between these people.

6. Toril Moi

A fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness would solve a simultaneous set of metaphysical problems: it would relieve me of the responsibility for making myself known to others – as though if I were expressive that would mean continuously betraying my experiences, incessantly giving myself away; it would suggest that my responsibility for self-knowledge takes care of itself – as though the fact that others cannot know my (inner) life means that I cannot fail to. It would reassure my fears of being known, though it may not prevent my being under suspicion; it would reassure my fears of not being known, though it may not prevent my being under indictment. – The wish underlying this fantasy covers a wish that underlies skepticism, a wish for the connection between my

claims of knowledge and the objects upon which the claims are to fall to occur without my intervention, apart from my agreements. As the wish stands, it is unappeasable. In the case of my knowing myself, such self-defeat would be doubly exquisite: I must disappear in order that the search for myself be successful.

7. Robert Chodat

Here is something I know but cannot prove: the closing image of *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* the hero dying in a pine forest in Spain, holding a rear-guard action alone to give his companions time for their retreat, alludes to, or remembers, Roland's death in *The Song of Roland.* It is not to be expected that everyone will credit this. I may wish to say nothing more, or I may wish to draw the line further along, perhaps saying: The implication of the allusion would be that romantic love has come to bear the old weight of patriotism; the only society left to love, to die for, is the one we can create now, between us. One is, or ought to be, naturally reticent about saying such things. And there are many reasons to hesitate putting oneself in the position of having to consider saying them. No one of the reasons need be that I am unsure of my knowledge; in the present case I am not. I may hesitate because to say such things to you puts something into our relationship which I am not willing should be there. Or I may not be willing either to risk your rebuff should you not agree or to discover that we disagree here. Or I may not want to deprive you of the knowledge – not just deprive you of the pleasures of discovery, but of the pure knowledge itself, for if I tell you then my act itself gets mixed up in your knowledge. To unmix it you may have to turn your gratitude for the knowledge into hostility toward me, to prove your independence. And I may not be willing to bear that, either the hostility or the independence or that way of expressing independence. Knowing me would have become as it were the price of that knowledge rather than, as it may have been, a further effect of it. – Something of this kind is generally not unfamiliar. There just are things which I want you to know but which I do not want to tell you (certain of my wishes or needs perhaps). One might say: I want you to want to know, and to want to in a particular spirit; not, say, out of curiosity. Such a wish goes into Thoreau's view of friendship. It can be overdone.

If I do tell you, then one or other reasons for hesitancy have been overcome. It may, for example, be of overriding importance to me to test the attunement of our intuitions, our agreements in judgment. Since I believe that philosophy can reach no further than these agreements, I am apt to be tempted to test them. (And I might write about film.)

But why call such a thing as my claim about the Hemingway ending a piece of knowledge? Isn't it at best an intuition? But "intuition" *here*

would suggest that something or other may come along to confirm or disconfirm the intuition. And I can envision nothing of the sort here — unless one wishes to say that another person's agreement would confirm me. Anyway, why not call it knowledge? Because it is not knowledge of a matter of fact? Why is that special? Because in order to forgo my knowledge of a matter of fact I would have to bring under suspicion an unforseeable range of concepts and judgments in terms of which there are such facts for me at all? But that is not unlike the way I feel about the Hemingway ending. — Perhaps I exaggerate. Perhaps the depth of my conviction is somewhat shallower than my conviction about the meaning of certain poems of Blake which I am at the moment not willing to talk about. But my conviction about the Hemingway is certainly deeper than a feeling I have about *The Red and the Black,* that among the other significances of the title colors, they are meant to match the colors on a roulette table. That is, for me, hardly more than something one might call an open guess, which I may or may not some time attempt to confirm. If it is confirmed, then it is an insight (even if, as for all I know may be true, it has long been known or accepted by good readers of Stendhal); if it is disconfirmed, i.e., leads nowhere, then it is nothing, or almost nothing: it is obvious how (though not when) one might hit upon the idea, and it reveals next to nothing about me personally. An idea I have about myself cannot in this way be nothing; my false interpretations of myself are as revealing as my true ones.

If my attitude towards him expresses my knowledge that he has a soul, my attitude may nevertheless not be very definitely expressed, nor very readily. It may take ages; it may be expressed now in the way I live. You may have to bear such an attitude towards me in order to credit that I bear it towards him, or towards you. It is an old fantasy, or a fact about an older world, that such knowledge was in the possession of certain communities, into whose secrets one may have sought initiation. Some people, strangely, take the University to be such a community — or perhaps take it as a reminder of such a community. — The word "attitude" can be misleading here. It is not, in the matters at hand, a disposition I can adopt at will. It is helpful to take the English word in its physical sense, as an inflection of myself toward others, an orientation which affects everything and which I may or may not be interested in discovering about myself.