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'The Ordinary' in Stanley Cavell and Jacques Derrida

Judith Wolfe

Abstract

This paper analyses the opposing accounts of 'the ordinary' given by Jacques Derrida and Stanley Cavell, beginning with their competing interpretations of J. L. Austin¹s thought on ordinary language. These accounts are presented as mutually critiquing: Derrida¹s deconstructive method poses an effective challenge to Cavell¹s claim that the ordinary is irreducible by further philosophical analysis, while, conversely, Cavell¹s valorisation of the human draws attention to a residual humanity in Derrida¹s text which Derrida cannot account for. The two philosophers' approaches are, in fact, predicated on each other like the famous Gestalt-image of a vase and two faces: they cannot come into focus at the same time, but one cannot appear without the other to furnish its background.

Derrida and Cavell on J. L. Austin

In the final two sections of his paper 'Signature Event Context',[1] Derrida criticises the work of J. L. Austin (Stanley Cavell's first influential teacher) from the perspective of his deconstructionist position. His target text is Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin 1962), a posthumously reconstructed text of Austin's William James Lectures, delivered in 1955 at Harvard University. Austin's primary aim in these lectures is to introduce and classify what he calls 'speech-acts'. This conception of the nature of utterances is designed to overcome the 'descriptive fallacy' prevalent in Western philosophy: the assumption that all utterances ('at least in all cases worth considering') are descriptions or representations of essentially 'inward' (and thus separate and prior) intentions or meaning-content—what Austin calls 'constative utterances' (5-6). Against this assumption, Austin adduces what he calls 'performative utterances' (and under which he later subsumes constative utterances [134-135]): utterances (such as 'I do', spoken by the bridegroom in response to the priest's

question, 'do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife?') which do not merely report an action (conceived as in itself 'inward and spiritual'), but perform it (12-13). The 'felicity' (that is, the validity or 'success') of such 'speech-acts' is governed not by their alignment with a truth content prior and external to them, but by given criteria, including both an appropriate public context (in the example above, their utterance by an appropriate person in response to an appropriate question posed by an appropriate official) and a certain personal investment (the performance of the utterance freely and with requisite 'seriousness') (9). The criterion of 'seriousness' here refers not to sincerity of intention—on the contrary, Austin asserts that a promise made in the appropriate way and context is binding whether or not the speaker intends to keep it (10). Rather, it is meant to exclude situations which, in Austin's view, are 'parasitic' upon ordinary language use, such as stage recitations or jokes (9, 21-22).

From his discussion in *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin deliberately excludes consideration of speech-acts that were not performed freely or with the requisite seriousness. He explains the second of these exclusions as follows:

> As *utterances* [as opposed to acts] our performatives are *also* heir to certain other kinds of ill, which infect *all* utterances…. [These] we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will…be *in a particular way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy…. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (21-22; Austin's emphases)

Derrida's criticism of Austin centres on the implications of this act of exclusion, which, according to Derrida, involves a 'metaphysical decision' that 'marks' Austin's entire conception of the ordinary (Derrida 1988, 93). Against this wide-ranging

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remark, Cavell has rightly emphasised that Austin's exclusions are not categorical but heuristic, and in fact plainly if implicitly refer the reader to the confrontation of the problems of responsibility and seriousness attempted in his papers (then circulating in manuscript) 'A Plea for Excuses' (1956) and 'Pretending' (1958).[2] Derrida's formulation of his criticism clearly betrays that he is unaware of these pieces (Cavell 1994, 86, 91). Embarrassing though this exposure may be, however, it ultimately does not (as Cavell intends) avert Derrida's argument, which pivots precisely on Austin's assumption that an exclusion of 'etiolations' by an appeal to a prior distinction between 'ordinary' and 'parasitic' uses of language is even provisionally possible.[3] As Derrida's reading of Plato (Derrida 1981) makes clear, every utterance, even the most 'serious', is always already marked—indeed, is made possible—by 'iterability' (Derrida 1982, 315). 'Iterability', here, is the elemental capacity of a text or utterance to be repeated in the absence of its 'father', traditionally imagined as 'authorising' and thus guaranteeing the meaning / meaningfulness of an utterance by his presence. This capability of 'iteration in alterity' (Derrida 1982, 315), constitutive of 'writing' (in its inclusive sense) as a system of conventional or public signs, implies a problematisation of 'intention' that always already precedes Austin's distinction between 'seriousness' and 'pretending', rendering these terms useless as criteria of what 'counts' as a valid speech-act (Derrida 1982, 322). This dilemma, in fact, is implicit in Austin's own admission that '*all* utterances' are heir to the risk of iterability (Austin 1962, 21). Derrida's criticism of Austin, then, as Glendinning puts it, is that rather than 'pursuing an investigation of the functional structure of locutionary acts which shows why this "risk," *qua* possibility, is essential to its *being* such an act, his procedure positions it, *qua* eventuality, as something that transgresses the "ordinary circumstances" of language use' (Glendinning 1998, 39). In other words, Derrida criticises Austin for distorting the structure of the ordinary by defining the 'threat' of iterability as a possibility that might not be realised, rather than as a risk

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that is essential to what it means to count as an utterance at all (cf. Derrida 1982, 324-325).[4]

This Derridean critique is strongly reminiscent of Cavell's understanding of the threat of scepticism as integral to the ordinary as such—an understanding which, incidentally, marks Cavell's own chief departure from Austin. This departure is signalled in *The Claim of Reason* by an extended criticism of Austin's assumption that 'criteria' provide an insurance against epistemological doubt (see Austin 1961, 44-84; cf. Cavell 1979, Parts I & II). Contrary to Austin's assertion, Cavell argues, criteria of identification (e.g. that 'this is a goldfinch') ensure not the existence but only the 'shape' of a thing—not *that* but only *what* it is (Cavell 1979, 45). Thus, they do not unmask but rather make possible pretence and simulation: 'It is precisely by displaying the criteria for being an *X*, that a pretend *X* can be recognized as the *kind* of pretend thing it is, namely a pretend *X*' (Bearn 1998, 81). The function of appeals to ordinary language, in this conception, is not to exclude the possibility of scepticism altogether, but to recall the conditions within which alone utterances can function, and thus to heal, 'time after time, place by place' (Cavell 1985, 531), our desire to escape these conditions in pursuit of a total and unambiguous 'presence' of the world.

As appears from this brief summary, Cavell's and Derrida's critiques of Austin converge on a problematisation of speech (or language) which centres on the conviction that our life with words is fundamentally determined or shaped by the tension between, on the one hand, the ineradicable desire for a complete 'presence' of self and world and, on the other, the structural impossibility of such 'presence'. The nonetheless conspicuous dissimilarity between their approaches arises chiefly from their contrasting location of this 'desire', and consequently of the site or methods of its alleviation. For Cavell, desire for presence is a quintessentially human propensity, arising from our continual struggle to come to terms with the 'human condition',

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marked by limitation and mortality. It thus calls for 'therapy', a practice (whether of reading, philosophy, or psychoanalysis[5]) which helps the human subject towards an 'unattained but attainable self' (Cavell 2004, 13[6]). For Derrida, by contrast, desire for 'presence' or 'form'[7] is primarily a structural phenomenon, arising from the (apparent but ultimately deceptive) tendency of all signifying structures towards a 'signified' (Derrida 1976, xx). It thus calls for textual 'deconstruction', a method which, among other things, calls into question the very existence of a desiring or intending subject.

Derrida, Cavell, and the Inheritance of Philosophy

This discrepancy between the terms of Cavell and Derrida's analyses—related to the divergent ways in which they seek to 'inherit' philosophy, and the different sets of texts from which they chiefly inherit it (Cavell 1988, 15)—has caused in both a hesitancy or paralysis in speaking to and about each other's perspectives. Thus, Derrida has maintained an uncharacteristic and remarked-upon reticence vis-à-vis Wittgenstein, to which he cryptically alluded in 1999 as his long-standing '"problem" with Wittgenstein' (Glendinning 2001, 116).[8] Similarly, Cavell has repeatedly remarked (or implied) that 'in our philosophical-literary culture as it stands', the very question whether or not his and Derrida's concerns are 'the same' is 'unanswerable' (Cavell 1985, 531-532).[9] This section will follow out these remarks and their implications, concluding to a mutual critique that can be seen to be implicit in the very 'incommensurability' (Cavell 1985, 532) of Cavell and Derrida's approaches, and which, in turn, opens out towards a critique of both.

Cavell and Derrida met at a 'philosophical conversation' organised in Paris in the summer of 1970 between Derrida and a number of English-speaking philosophers, one session of which was intended to (but ultimately did not) deal with Cavell's early essay in defence of Austin, 'Must We Mean What We Say?' (Cavell 1976, 1-43). Despite this occasion (which required Derrida to read at least parts of *Must We Mean*

What We Say?, and prompted Cavell to attempt, at the least, *L'écriture et la différence*[10]), Derrida never remarked on Cavell's work in a published context.[11] Conversely, Cavell did not read Derrida with any systematicity until more than ten years later, and, with the exception of a lecture responding to Derrida's critique of Austin, has commented only hesitantly and fragmentarily on him, asserting that 'to locate and trace out the…resemblances [between the writings of Derrida and me], along with their companion disparities, is not my business, [and] if this work of contrast has profit in it, others are better placed to realize it than I' (Cavell 1988, 130).[12]

In 'The Division of Talent' (Cavell 1985), Cavell tests this sense of resistance. He begins by raising the question whether his own tendency to say that human reason and communication '*rest upon*' nothing more or less than 'shared *routes*' of interest, appeal and response (Cavell 1985, 530; emphasis added)—what Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'—implies that human reason has or that it does not have a foundation, concluding that the tension in this question, 'as it stands', is irreducible (530-531). Cavell then asks whether this continuing tension is the same as that which Derrida 'apparently wishes to maintain on what seems the same issue', namely Derrida's question about 'the foundation and the abyss of reason' (532), but immediately problematises this query:

> Is it the same issue? Or is there this decisive difference, that, following Wittgenstein, I am saying that explanations come to an end somewhere, each in its time and place [cf. *Philosophical Investigations* §1], to be discovered philosophically, let us say, time after time, place by place. Whereas Derrida is following the path this opposes, or reverses, suggesting that there is a somewhere, as if some metaphysical space, at which all explanations come to an end, or else there is nowhere they end. Say he follows this path only to undermine it. Is this different? (Cavell 1985, 531)

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The immediate point of posing this further question, according to Cavell, is that the attempted inquiry whether or not his own concern regarding the ground of human reason 'is or is not the same' as Derrida's is 'unanswerable in our philosophical-literary culture as it stands' (531-532).

However, the distinctive formulation of Cavell's further question of 'sameness' offers a more concrete sense of the character of the professed 'incommensurability' of his and Derrida's concerns. Both enact a continual resistance to false hopes for 'completeness'; the contrast (in the description above) lies in the place and role of *images* in this philosophical practice. Derrida's reading method centres on the *subversion* or deconstruction of self-presenting images. For Derrida, language is governed by a version of the paradox of the one and the many. Systems of signification inherently tend toward a signified. However, because an actual, completely self-present signified could never break out of its self-enclosedness into a system of signification, there can be no such signified at the end of a chain of signification (see Derrida 1982, 329; Cavell 1994, 64). 'Inheriting' philosophy, in the deconstructionist tradition, therefore involves maintaining, in paradoxical simultaneity, images of perfection and an acknowledgement of their hollowness. This acceptance of paradox necessitates writing *sous rature* ('under erasure'), a practice that attempts to capture both the necessity and the impossibility of using the ordinary words of our language(s) (see Derrida 1979, xx).

For Cavell, by contrast, the 'inheritance' of philosophy (consciously received from other writers and passed on to his reader) involves *accepting* images, in their pertinence as well as inadequacy, as one's own constructions. The paradigmatic example of this is the image of the Kantian 'line', which figures prominently in Cavell's writings. A particularly instructive example is his 1988 *In Quest of the Ordinary*. Here, Cavell seeks to unsettle the 'Kantian settlement' with scepticism by

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questioning Kant's assertion that there is a realm of 'the thing in itself' closed off to the human mind (Cavell 1988, 47). This assertion, according to Cavell, does not (as Kant intends) exclude scepticism once and for all, but rather repeats or encourages the move of the sceptic by suggesting that the ground (or foundation) of human experience is inaccessible to humans: 'The beginning of skepticism is the insinuation of absence, of a line, or limitation, hence *the creation of want, or desire'* (Cavell 1988, 51, emphasis added). This is facilitated by the paradoxicality of human life with language (Cavell 1988, 40). On the one hand, language, as a quintessentially public medium, always precedes and exceeds individual speakers, involving them in meanings and commitments they can never fully control or even survey. On the other hand, language is the medium or environment with or in which humans express their most personal selves (Cavell 1988, 40).

In other words, there both is and is not a Kantian 'line'. Partly as a natural consequence of their life with language, people are apt to believe in the existence of a separate realm of 'objective', 'external' knowledge unrelated to their own choices and intentions (and thus both determinative of their lives and, if it could be penetrated, able to confer complete knowledge and control). To people in this mindset, the experienced inability to penetrate this realm is taken as proof of the inferiority of common knowledge, sometimes leading to the assertion that we can never have sufficient certainty to trust in the world. However, Cavell argues, what seems like a different, alien realm is really only the ordinary realm of words or language *as it appears when a speaker has disowned it*. If we do not accept our words, in all their ambiguity and prior-ness to any individual speaker, as inescapably our own, Cavell warns, we violently externalise language and thus *create* the supposedly inaccessible realm of the 'thing in itself'. In other words, we impose language on ourselves as fate and tyranny: 'Fate is the exercise of [the] capacity [to give law to ourselves], so that fate is at once the promise and the refusal of freedom' (Cavell 1988, 40). The

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consequence is not that the world vanishes so much as that it dies, growing cold and rigid like the Polar Sea in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (which Cavell reads as an allegory of this problematic in Cavell 1988, 46-8). This Polar Sea beyond or below what Coleridge calls 'the line' evokes the 'definite, as it were, frozen, structure', the 'forced' or 'driven' quality, of ordinary life as experienced by those who have not fully acknowledged their words and relations as their own (Cavell 1988, 48).

Image and Play

Cavell explicitly evokes the contrast between this approach to images and Derrida's in a reflection on the question of 'inheriting' language, and particularly of the importance of 'play' (conceived in very different terms by Cavell and Derrida) as key to the practice of inheritance:

> [T]he play of philosophy, as in the humor or frivolity of Austin and of Wittgenstein, is [a 'field on which the contest of inheritance is shown to be continued, or continuable, within each breast, each text']—as if the inheriting of language is itself formed of the willingness for play, and continues as long as the willingness continues…. By contrast, the play in deconstructionist flights more often feels, to my ear or for my taste, somewhat forced, wilful, *as if in reaction to a picture of a completed inheritance, as if to undo its trauma*. (Cavell 1988, 132; emphasis added)

According to this interpretation, Wittgenstein and Austin's texts (as well as Cavell's own) portray and invite 'inheritance' as a never-completed process of reading (Cavell 1988, 14), characterised by an ever-renewed and developing response to the partial and multifaceted images offered by the writer as reflections and examinations of the ordinary (see e.g. Cavell 1988, 33, 74). To 'receive' these images (including those offered by Cavell here of 'contest', 'field', and 'play') responsively—to be ready to 'play' (along) with them—is to participate in this reflection, and thus to inherit and develop the community they examine. In Derrida's texts, by contrast, 'play' is a

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conscious strategy for subverting the hegemony of images of completion, by exposing them precisely as images or signs, and thus as governed by the logic of difference and deferral (*différance*). In Cavell's reading of Derrida, this strategy does not (as Derrida ostensibly intends) dissolve the primacy of the human subject who inherits language, but merely reflects a particular choice by that subject: it is a means of making room for oneself as inheriting these images precisely by announcing that that inheritance is not yet, and can never yet be, complete. This way of inheriting language, however, is problematic in that its underlying conception of inheritance as intrinsically a matter of 'undoing a trauma' implicitly perpetuates (the category of) trauma as a necessary condition for doing philosophy.[13]

Cavell thus comes to suspect that deconstruction, far from constituting a sophisticated version of inheritance, is in fact a *refusal* fully to participate in the inheritance of language, which involves accepting responsibility for our words despite or within an awareness that our capacity (and willingness) to 'mean what we say' is limited and in many cases inadequate, and thus requires (without being able to guarantee) sympathy and forgiveness from those with whom we engage. Scepticism—the repudiation of this risky and incompletable business—is, for Cavell, an ever-present threat or temptation whose continual overcoming is a necessary part of the process of inheritance. From this perspective, the deconstructionist's unwillingness to let go of (the category of) trauma betokens an abnegation of this responsibility which involves a refusal to engage adequately with the threat or 'truth' of scepticism:

> To decide that [the meaning of a word or expression is] undecidable would be to decide that the conclusion of skepticism is true, that we never know so certainly but that we can doubt. This, to my mind, trivializes the claim of the skeptic, whose power lies not in some decision, but in his apparent discovery of the ineluctable fact that we cannot know; at the same time, it theatricalizes the threat, or the truth, of skepticism: that it names our wish (and the possibility of our wishing) to strip ourselves of the responsibility we have in meaning (or in failing to mean) one thing, or one way, rather than another. (Cavell 1988, 135)

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Cavell's claim, here, is not, as Gordon Bearn claims, that Derrida is himself a sceptic (Bearn 1998, 76), but that Derrida sees himself as beyond the question of scepticism: that he does 'not participat[e] in but…claim[s] too knowing a place in the sphere of the anxiety of identity and existence that philosophy is captivated by' (Cavell 1994, 123). The sceptic 'theatricalizes' the ordinary by treating it as a 'spatialized' present surveyable from a distance. Derrida, according to Cavell, 'theatricalizes' this gesture of theatricalization itself: he regards the sceptical position as merely another human posture vis-à-vis the implacable system of signs that takes its course through and beyond us. This, Cavell protests by means of a quibble, is to underrate the human involvement in this system: it is to insist that the 'condition of possibility of [ordinary words] is simultaneously the condition of their impossibility' (Derrida 1988, 20, as cited in Cavell 1994, 119), rather than acknowledging that the 'conditions of impossibility [of ordinary words] (to block skepticism, to grant presence) are simultaneously their conditions of possibility (to recount a world, one shared)' (Cavell 1994, 119-120).[14] On this latter perspective, iterability is itself a burden of the 'human condition' (Cavell 1988, 37), part of its (ever-threatening) tragedy and (hoped-for) comedy (Cavell 1994, 87; Cavell 1988, 9):

> [Austin's theory of pretending] betokens about utterance or about action that they can suffer, say, imitation (to take that title for the iterative). It betokens, roughly, that human utterances are essentially vulnerable to insincerity and that the realization that we may never know whether others are sincere (I do not exclude the first person) is apt to become unbearable. (Cavell 1994, 92-93)

Conclusion

This account seems to provide a viable alternative to Derrida's deconstructionist vision. While Derrida aims to expose the human subject as an illusion or 'effect' of the impossible ideal of self-presence and 'form', Cavell's account aims to show that

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this ideal is in fact an 'effect', a self-misinterpretation, of humans in their ineluctably social and lingual existence.

However, Cavell's account also elides a number of questions necessary to shoring up his vision against deconstruction. After affirming that 'the world is Eden enough…and what is more, all the world there is' (Cavell 1988, 52), Cavell comments on the ineliminable difficulties arising from the simultaneously public and personal character of language as follows:

> Risks and error are inherent in the human, part of what we conceive human life to be, part of our unsurveyable responsibilities in speech and in evil (in, as Descartes put it, our being provided with free will); and this condemnation to an unsurveyable freedom is not well described by saying that we can never, or can only in a certain class of cases, be certain. If the earth opens and swallows me up, this need not prove that my trust in it was misplaced. What better place for my trust could there be? (The world *was* my certainty. Now my certainty is dead.) (Cavell 1988, 52)

This statement has intense emotional appeal. However, this appeal conceals the fact that Cavell's account does not provide the conditions for using either of its key terms—'trust' and 'responsibility'—in the way he wishes to use them. (He speaks, as it were, outside his own language game.) Cavell himself affirms that the possible meanings of language always precede and exceed the resources and intentions of the individual speaker. As I have argued elsewhere, the demand that the speaker nevertheless accept 'ownership' of his words—an acceptance that involves, according to Cavell, 'unsurveyable responsibilities'—is nearly non-sensical (see Wolfe 2007, 391-4). Similarly, Cavell's defence of trust in the face of the world's untrustworthiness involves two separate convictions: first, that we are beings who can only function by investing ourselves; secondly, that the world is all there is. From the conjunction of the two follows that we must invest ourselves in the world even if it

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turns out to be treacherous, because there is nothing else to do (viz., if we know ourselves at all, we know ourselves as beings in the world). However (*pace* Cavell), the fact that the world can thus disappoint us must mean that our capacity to trust exceeds our ownership of the world, and is therefore not confinable to it.

This is suggested by Cavell's own observation that the Romantics, in contesting Kant's settlement, felt compelled to embrace various forms of animism. Similarly, Emerson argues (though Cavell consistently ignores) that the ordinary is trustworthy precisely because the self is not 'just' itself, but is our only medium for reflecting or participating in something higher ('God' [Emerson 1965, 258], 'the Over-Soul' [280], 'Unity', 'Wisdom', and 'the eternal ONE' [all 281]): 'Great men have always … [trusted] their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through them … [a] transcendent destiny' (259).

In summary, Cavell's appeal to the concepts of 'trust' and 'responsibility'—as, later, of 'authenticity' (Cavell 2004, preface)—exceeds the resources that his vision of the ordinary provides: it is not grounded in, but itself shapes that vision. It thus leaves us with the question of the status of these ideals. If, as Derrida asserts, the image of subjecthood (to which the ideals of trust and responsibility conceptually belong) is inherently false, then Cavell's account, as it stands, is not able to withstand deconstruction: it is, as Derrida claims (and Cavell denies), not independent from but predicated on ideals of perfection (cf. Cavell 2004, 3).

However, Cavell's 'ideal' in turn contains an element that questions Derrida's conception of the 'transcendental signified'. Cavell's ideal of subjecthood, characterised by the terms 'trust' and 'responsibility', is not (like Derrida's) monadic, but inherently communicative and relational: it is not wholly external to 'signification', but on the contrary realised within and by it. In summary, if Derrida

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can criticise Cavell, Cavell in turn draws attention to the irreducible presence of the human subject in Derrida. If, as Geoffrey Bennington writes, the structure of writing 'in its very principle exceeds the resources of any humanist analysis' (Bennington and Derrida 1999, 56), then human persons, in their relatedness, also exceed the resources of deconstruction. Cavell and Derrida's visions, in other words, appear predicated on each other like the famous *Gestalt*-image of a vase and two faces: they cannot come into focus at the same time, but one cannot appear without the other to furnish its background. The questions this raises for our conception both of their own philosophical positions and for the tradition of thought about 'the ordinary' that both inherit in competing ways, have yet to be fully formulated.

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NOTES

[1] The essay was originally published in *Marges de la philosophie* (Derrida 1972b). It was translated twice: by Samuel Webster and Henry Sussman for the first issue of *Glyph* (1977), where it was published together with a reply by John Searle; and by Alan Bass for the English translation of *Marges* (Derrida 1982). The first translation was subsequently reprinted, with a reply to Searle and a later response to a further piece by Searle (but without Searle's essays), in *Limited Inc.* (Derrida 1988). My citations are to this last volume.

[2] The papers are reprinted in Austin 1961, 123-152 and 201-219, respectively.

[3] A similar defence to Cavell's, on this point, is attempted by Searle in his original response to Derrida. The insufficiency of this defence is noted in Bearn 1998, 75 and Glendinning 1998, 38-39, and is also made evident by Derrida's later reading of 'A Plea for Excuses' (in Glendinning 2001, 118). Cavell also advances a second, more substantial objection to Derrida's critique of Austin, which will be discussed below.

[4] For a wonderfully lucid discussion of this deconstruction of the opposition between the 'serious' and the 'non-serious', see Glendinning 1998, 39-40.

[5] On philosophy and psychoanalysis, see, among many other texts, Cavell 2004.

[6] Quoting an unreferenced statement from Emerson.

[7] Henry Staten discusses 'form' as the 'principle of intelligibility', and consequently as an alternative description of Derrida's target (pertinent particularly in light of his early readings of Aristotle and Husserl), in Staten 1985, chapter 1.

[8] The remark was made in response to a direct question about Derrida's continued silence about Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, posed by Stephen Mulhall at the *Ratio* conference 1999 (University of Reading), entitled *Arguing with Derrida*. Although Mulhall's question specifically included Cavell, Derrida did not either in this or in any other published context remark on Cavell's work.

[9] This is the chief shortcoming of Gordon Bearn's (almost unique) attempt to analyse the relation between Cavell and Derrida (Bearn 1998). By simply assimilating Cavellian terms to Derrida's (very different) terminology, Bearn undermines his own (limited) attempt to gauge the tension between their approaches. Other studies relating Cavell's and Derrida's work (in various ways) are Fischer 1989 and Bell 2004; both, however, are primarily attempts to extend Cavell's work to other domains, namely literary scepticism (exemplified, according to Fischer, by post-structuralists such as Paul de Man, Stanley Fish and Derrida himself) and literary theory (including post-colonialism, multiculturalism, and general cultural criticism), respectively.

[10] Cavell wrote about this meeting in a letter to Michael Fischer: 'I was very impressed in the exchanges I had with Derrida those few days that summer, and we got along personally, I thought, notably well, ending on an almost familiar basis. He seemed to have read at least some of *Must We Mean…?*...and gave me a collection of his books and monographs' (Fischer 1989, 143 n.1). Cavell confesses that he tried to read *L'écriture et la différence* after this, but found the French too intricate (*loc. cit.*). See also Cavell 1994, 57.

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[11] See endnotes 8 and 10.

[12] The lecture (entitled 'Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice') was given in 1993 as part of the Jerusalem-Harvard lectures; it is printed in Cavell 1994, 53-127, and partly recapitulated in Cavell 1995, 42-65. Cavell's further comments on Derrida are primarily found in Cavell 1985 and Cavell 1988, 130-136 ('Postscript A: Skepticism and a Word concerning Deconstruction'). For a more detailed history of Cavell's reluctance to speak about the relation between his and Derrida's work, see Bearn 1998, 65-67.

[13] This reading of deconstruction would align Derrida with Augustine and Cavell with Wittgenstein in Stephen Mulhall's reading of the opening of the *Philosophical Investigations* (Mulhall 2001, 29-36; see also Glendinning 2001, 109-116).

[14] From a deconstructionist perspective, Cavell's reversal of Derrida's dictum regarding the possibility or impossibility of ordinary words (Cavell 1994, 119-120, cited above) merely avoids, but does not deflect Derrida's critique. Cavell's reversal depends entirely on a grammatical shift of the word '(im-)possibility' from an intransitive to a transitive use, effecting a silent shift of the terms of interrogation. While Derrida's remark on the possibility/impossibility of ordinary words aims to problematise the integrity or conditions of existence of those words themselves, Cavell's (slightly odd) use of 'possibility' and 'impossibility' in the sense of 'capability' and 'incapability' *presupposes* the integrity of ordinary words and questions merely their scope. This is apt to seem a mere evasion of Derrida's critique.

Dr Judith Wolfe is Tutor in Theology at St John's College, University of Oxford.

Email: judith.wolfe@theology.ox.ac.uk

Judith Wolfe