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Skepticism, Grammatical Criteria, and Politics in Stanley Cavell[1]

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Abstract

Stanley Cavell reads Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as a collection of philosophical responses to the threat of skepticism. However, he criticizes the widely held anti-skeptical interpretations of Wittgenstein for reducing the problem of skepticism to an intellectual riddle to be solved. Cavell claims that Wittgenstein's arguments do not defeat the skeptical threat but reveals what he calls 'the truth of skepticism' according to which our relation to the world as language users cannot be reduced to that of mere knowing. The truth of skepticism points to political and social dimensions of the threat of skepticism which are ignored in both skeptical and anti-skeptical arguments. Cavell shows how skepticism is a form of epistemological mistrust towards politically and socially established grammatical criteria. The skeptic totally repudiates the epistemic authority of grammatical criteria, and the anti-skeptic endorses it unconditionally. Cavell criticizes both of them for ignoring language users' moral and political participation in the formation of grammatical criteria. He refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory to discuss the moral and political dimensions of language users' relations to grammatical criteria, and argues that the vulnerability of our grammatical criteria to the skeptical threat is not a deficiency as the skeptic and the anti-skeptic seem to think alike, but an inherent condition of our speech acts.

Keywords: Stanley Cavell, Political Philosophy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Skepticism, Ludwig Wittgenstein

Stanley Cavell'de Şüphecilik, Gramer Kriterleri ve Politika

Öz

Stanley Cavell, Ludwig Wittgenstein'ın *Felsefi Soruşturmalar* eserini şüphecilik tehdidine karşı verilen felsefi tepkiler toplamı olarak okur. Ancak şüpheciliğin çözülecek entelektüel bir bilmeceye indirgendiği, şüpheciliğe karşı geliştirilen yaygın Wittgenstein yorumlarını eleştirir. Ona göre Wittgenstein'ın argümanları şüpheci tehdidi defetmez, tersine, Wittgenstein'ın argümanları dil kullanan varlıklar olarak dünyayla ilişkimizin yalnızca bir bilme ilişkisine indirgenemeyeceğini belirten 'şüpheciliğin hakikatini' ortaya çıkarır. Bu hakikat hem şüpheci hem de şüphecilik karşıtı argümanlarda ihmal edilen şüpheci tehdidin politik ve toplumsal boyutlarına işaret eder. Cavell şüpheciliğin politik ve toplumsal olarak inşa edilmiş gramer kriterlerine karşı geliştirilen epistemolojik bir güvensizlik olduğunu gösterir. Şüpheci argümanlar gramer kriterlerinin epistemolojik otoritesini tamamen reddederken, şüpheciliğe karşı argümanlar bu otoriteyi koşulsuz destekler. Cavell her ikisini de dil kullanıcılarının gramer kriterlerinin oluşumundaki ahlaki ve politik katılımlarını ihmal etmekle eleştirir. Cavell, Jean-Jacques Rousseau'nun toplumsal sözleşme kuramına referansla, dil kullanıcılarının gramer kriterleriyle ilişkilerinin ahlaki ve politik boyutlarını tartışır, ve gramer kriterlerinin şüphecilik tehdidi karşısındaki kırılganlığının şüpheci ve şüpheciliğe karşı argümanlarda anlaşıldığı gibi bir eksiklik olmadığını, tersine dil edimlerimizin içkin bir koşulu olduğunu savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Stanley Cavell, Politik Felsefe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Şüphecilik, Ludwig Wittgenstein

[1] The following is an edited and modified chapter taken from my unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, *The Politics of Grammar: A Comparison of Wittgenstein and Foucault*, submitted in 2013 to Vanderbilt University Philosophy Department, Nashville US.

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Introduction

In his seminal work, *The Claim of Reason*[3], Stanley Cavell takes the question of skepticism, or rather in his own words the threat of skepticism, to be the central theme of modern philosophy, and accordingly he reads Wittgenstein's *Investigations* as a collection of responses to various claims of skepticism. The skeptic is dissatisfied with the ways objects and subjects are available and accessible in our ordinary practices and interactions. For the skeptic, the forms of availability and accessibility of objects and subjects in our ordinary practices cannot satisfy the standards of epistemic certainty and, therefore both things as objects and the other minds as subjects are, in reality, unavailable and inaccessible. At least in principle, a rigorous epistemic questioning cannot exclusively rule out the possibility that the object we reach out toward and the subject we interact with are mirages of our own making, because the linguistic forms that make our relationships to objects and subjects possible are not sound in terms of our epistemic standards for certainty.

According to Cavell, Wittgenstein's philosophical inquiries into the grammar of ordinary language do not defeat the threat of skepticism. As we know and recognize the world in language and by grammatical criteria, our claims (of knowledge and reason and morality) are infinitely vulnerable to the doubts of the skeptic. Cavell thinks that the undefeatability of the skeptic's claims reveals what he calls 'the truth of skepticism', or '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."[4] Knowledge of the world, by itself, cannot sustain our relationship to the world. In this sense, Cavell understands the skeptical impulse as an anxious philosophical response to an over-intellectualization of our relations with the world and to each other. In short, when language users' relations to the world are reduced to language users' epistemic capabilities and consequently to structures of knowledge, the skeptical impulse invades the field of thought uncontrollably.

1.Skepticism Reformulated

Cavell thinks that the message of the skeptical impulse can be understood in two ways. The skeptical conclusion 'We cannot know that the world exists' can be a premise to two opposing arguments. One can deduce that "we cannot know the world exists, and hence that perhaps there isn't one."[5] This argument is motivated by the historical disappearance of some sources of (mostly traditional and religious) authority that used to establish our mode of relationship to the world. For Cavell, their disappearance and the empty space they left behind amounts to a feeling of the 'loss of the presentness'. Accordingly, when the epistemic authority fails to stand behind the claim that the world exists, this failure is taken to be the absence of the world itself by those who believe that the epistemic form (the form of the object of knowledge) is the only available and accessible form of existence for human beings. The loss of the presentness projects itself, in empiricist and rationalist strains of skeptical philosophy alike, as the crisis of the knowing subject the certainty of whose perception by the senses is in question. The world starts emerging as something outside, and the possible human connections with it appear to be established on the grounds of whatever we perceive through the senses. Yet, the 'shocking' realization, what Kant calls a scandal, is that the world that is present to the senses is not the world we ordinari-

[3] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[4] Cavell, *The Claim*, 241.

[5] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 324.

ly have and share with each other. This is because "the presentness achieved by certainty of the senses cannot compensate for the presentness which had been elaborated through our old absorption in the world."[6]

Cavell thinks, however, that the critical content of the skeptical impulse can be revealed only when we interpret its message the other way around. The conclusion of the skeptical argument, "we cannot know that the world exists", can be a premise of the equally rational conclusion that "[the world's] presentness to us cannot be a function of knowing."[7] Reformulated in this manner, what the skeptic expresses is no longer an epistemic crisis in our knowledge claims, but a manifestation of the crisis in the ways we connect to the world and to other language users. In this sense, for Cavell, skepticism is a call for philosophy to articulate ways other than knowing in which we relate to the world and to the other language users. Cavell takes Wittgenstein's concept of form of life to be the central therapeutic concept that relates the world and the mind. "In Wittgenstein's view the gap between mind and the world is closed, or the distortion between them straightened, in the appreciation and acceptance of particular human forms of life, human 'convention'."[8] Accordingly, Cavell says that "the world is to be accepted; as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged."[9] One does not accept the existence of the world as such, just for the sake of accepting it. Only by accepting a form of life, can one accept the existence of the world. The world must be given, before it becomes a subject for our philosophical inquiries into its existence or non-existence. This means that only in a certain form of life can the skeptic voice communicable claims about the existence of the world. Thus Cavell urges us to look at the form of life that gives the skeptic a world the existence of which can be refuted based on what we can know about it.

What can be the mode of acceptance of the world that is not offensive to our epistemic capabilities? For Cavell, the mind is stuck in a world whose presentness is apparent and cannot be rejected in the ordinary experience of language users. Yet, the presentness of the world cannot be supported and sustained within the frames of our structures of knowledge. In this context, Cavell refers to Kant's concept of the thing-in-itself to exemplify a philosophical mode of acceptance. In his understanding of Kant, the thing-in-itself is not an ontological enigma, but a description of the conditions of saying something about the world.

> The reason we cannot say what the thing is in itself is not that there is something we do not in fact know, but that we have deprived ourselves of the conditions for saying anything in particular. There is nothing we cannot say. That doesn't mean that we can say everything; there is no everything to be said. There is nothing we cannot know. That does not mean we can know everything; there is no everything, no totality of facts or things, to be known.[10]

Accepting that the world exists means acceptance of a form of life. In this sense, when we accept that the world exists we accept a particular world which is given to us as having a history established in a form of life. The skeptic desires to say something without saying anything particular that would reveal the space- and time-bound context from which she speaks. Cavell's point in referring to Kant is that the limitations that the skeptic takes to be the failure of our knowledge are what make our speech, and hence, knowledge possible. In the same fashion, Cavell thinks that there is a positive message in Kant's insight about the limits of knowledge.

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[6] Cavell, *Must We*, 323.

[7] Cavell, *Must We,* 324.

[8] Cavell, *The Claim*, 109.

[9] Cavell, *Must We*, 324.

[10] Cavell, *The Claim*, 239.

The limitations of our epistemic capacity points to the fact that "there are human capacities and responsibilities and desires which reveal the world but which are not exhausted in the capacity of knowing things."[11]

Cavell describes an encounter between a 'thing' and a philosopher who tries to transcend the appearance of it to capture its existence, She wonders about the thing's solitary existence when she is not there to experience it. She wants to have knowledge of it outside its mode of presentness to her, as if the mode of presentness of the thing (its place in time and space, its shape and color, its name, its size, in short everything that we can say about it) is external to it. She says: "*That* – that thing there – is what it is. It *is*, in itself, none of the things we *say* it is. It escapes language in the end."[12] For Cavell, what the philosopher problematizes is not exactly the existence of the thing, but rather its accessibility: "…It is *there*, all right, but inaccessible."[13] The philosopher cannot reach the thing present right before her eyes, not because the distance between the thing and her experience of the thing is impassable, but because whenever she makes an attempt to reach the thing, the distance between her and the thing collapses, making it impossible for the philosopher to distinguish the thing from her experience of it. The philosopher thinks that there is a lack in her experience of the thing, because the thing 'escapes language in the end.' However, what lacks in her experience is not the (full) presentness of the thing, but her acceptance of the conditions of its presentness. The presentness of the thing requires not only the sheer physical existence of it but also the interests, desires, and responsibilities of the philosopher. When she withholds her investment in the thing, she cannot maintain its existence in her experience. As we will see below, the lack of acceptance is a manifestation of her distrust to the grammar of her language.

2. Skepticism and Grammatical Criteria

At the heart of Cavell's discussion of skepticism lies the issue of grammatical criteria that govern applications of our concepts in different contexts. The skeptic questions the validity and correctness of the statements of facts we express in language. She does not question the validity and correctness of any specific claims we make about the world, but the possibility of making any claims about the world as such. She asks on what grounds we could be certain in believing that any stated fact actually exists in the world. In the mind of the skeptic, there is an unbridgeable gap between the world and the statements we make about the world.

One might argue at this point that Wittgenstein's approach to grammatical criteria satisfies the skeptic's demands for certainty. If someone who appears to be in pain meets our grammatical criteria for cases in which we legitimately apply our concept of pain, then, she is in pain beyond any doubt. In other words, we cannot legitimately play the language game of doubting the existence of something such as the tomato sitting on the table before my eyes or the pain of someone who is wincing, when the relevant context meets the grammatical criteria for the relevant concept. It is perfectly possible that the tomato on the table could be an illusion, and the person who is wincing could be an actor rehearsing for a role. But mistaking the mirage of a tomato for a real one and a rehearsal of pain behavior for the real pain are possible only if there are contexts in which we correctly assert that there is a tomato on the table or someone is in pain. In short, if it is possible to apply the wrong concept in a given context, then, it must be possible to apply the right one. The skeptic might reply

[11] Cavell, *The Claim*, 54.

[12] Cavell, *The Claim*., 238.

[13] Cavell, *The Claim*., 239.

that her point is not about the application of the wrong concept in a given context, but the applicability of any concept at all. Yet, questioning the applicability of each and every possible concept is questioning the possibility of any possible speech including the skeptic's own voice. In this sense, the skeptic's arguments against the applicability of all of our concepts are self-defeating, because they undermine the possibility of playing any language game, including that of doubting. If doubting the certainty of our knowledge claims is possible, then certainty must exist as a possibility.

Instead of taking sides between the skeptic and the anti-skeptic arguments, Cavell develops voices of acknowledgement as a philosophical response to both the skeptic and the anti-skeptic. He starts with Wittgenstein's statement that "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 judgements."[14] For Cavell, this statement means that "only a creature that *can* judge of value *can* state a fact."[15] The possibility of making a statement of fact depends on our capability of judging, which is, in Cavell, language users' ability to use grammatical criteria in appropriately projecting words to different contexts. In using language, we judge whether the context is within the range of projection that the concept we use can sustain. This, in return, means that the language user's ability to state a fact requires her to be a member of a normative community. Because the individual language user acquires language by acquiring the grammatical criteria of such a normative community, the grammatical criteria of the normative community precede, both logically and chronologically, the individual language user's speech acts. However, for Cavell, the normative community is not a static whole, but a historically rooted network of attunements among various language users. Language users, Cavell claims, leap from one context to another by projecting words into different contexts, and whether a language user's leap is too far or too short is a matter of attunement with the relevant members of the normative community. The force behind the grammatical criteria is the collective attunement among the members of a linguistic community. In this sense, the question of meaningfulness or meaninglessness of a speech act is a question about whether the normative community recognizes and acknowledges its own voice in the speech of the individual language user and whether the individual language user is able to express herself in the voice of her normative community. This is why the individual language user's meaning claims are claims to be a member of a certain community. In principle, all speech acts are only meaning *claims* pending confirmation or rejection by the relevant language user(s) the speech act is directed to.

Needless to say, this vision of language and its relation to the world does not satisfy the skeptic. On the contrary, it seems to confirm the skeptic's worry that our words do not reach out to the world, and instead, they get stuck circulating in our communicative exchanges. In the skeptic's mind, what we take to be statements that describe how things are in the world express nothing but historically contingent judgments about the world upon which our normative community happens to agree. In this sense, when the skeptic refuses to share our convictions about the identity or the existence of a thing, what she actually refuses is the binding force of our criteria that make our judgment about the identity and the existence of the thing possible. Notice that the skeptic does not question if we apply the appropriate criteria in our judgment. Her worry is that any set of criteria is appropriate as long as it is shared and agreed upon by all relevant language users. It is possible to repudiate the authority of these criteria, because the binding force of grammatical criteria stem from the

[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 242.

[15] Cavell, *The Claim,* 15.

contingent (i.e. space and time bound) fact that at a certain moment in history and a certain place in the world, members of a normative community share them.[16] What the skeptic is dissatisfied with is the worldly and contingent character of the binding force of grammatical criteria which offers intelligibility only for and to a particular normative community, but not intelligibility of the world independently from what the members of the normative community say about it.

3.Grammatical Criteria and the Making of a World

In Cavell's portrayal of skepticism, grammatical criteria emerge as the central target of skeptical arguments. He claims that our grammatical criteria do not have immunity on rational grounds against the claims of the skeptic. However, for Cavell, the vulnerability of our grammatical criteria is not a defect of our language. On the contrary, what makes our language vulnerable to the claims of the skeptic is precisely what makes it tightly systematic and incredibly flexible at the same time. To elucidate the vulnerability of grammatical criteria in Wittgenstein, Cavell provides random instances of the ordinary uses of the notion of criterion in various contexts such as a diving competition, the policy of admission in a university, a history book, etc. Relying on these instances, he defines what the concept of criterion means:

> ... criteria are specifications a given person or group sets up on the basis of which (by means of, in terms of which) to judge (assess, settle) whether something has a particular status or value. Different formulations bring it closer to other regions of Wittgenstein's surface rhetoric: Certain specifications are what a person or group mean by (what they call, count as) a thing's having a certain status; the specifications define the status; the status consists in satisfying those specifications.[17]

Wittgenstein's use of the concept of criterion is both similar and dissimilar to the uses of the concept in these examples. Cavell asks us to pay attention to the differences between the ordinary uses of the concept of criterion and Wittgenstein's grammatical criteria to elucidate what is at stake in Wittgenstein's discussion.

Cavell identifies three such differences:

(*i*) Most of the time, our ordinary uses of the concept of criterion differ from the concept of standard. Standards determine to what extent the relevant criteria are satisfied. In Wittgenstein's grammatical criteria, there is no "separate stage at which one might, explicitly or implicitly, appeal to the application of standards. To have criteria, in this sense, for something's being so is to know whether, in an individual case, the criteria do or do not apply."[18] In the example of diving competition, judges are obliged to apply some standards to determine how well the diver enters into the water. They express their judgments in the grades they give to each diver. Their grades are expected to differ over how well each diver satisfies the standards of an excellent dive. However, judges cannot differ from each other "over whether excellence of entry into the water is a criterion of the excellence of a dive."[19]

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[16] For Cavell, the truth of skepticism is also the truth of human finitude. The skeptic's discovery of the time and space bound character of our language and knowledge is also the discovery of human finitude. The skeptic's refusal of grammatical criteria is due to her inability to come to terms with her finitude. In order to render our finitude intelligible, she demands knowledge of it. The Wittgensteinian philosophical therapy is to show that the appropriate response to render our finitude intelligible is the acknowledgement of it.

[17] Cavell, *The Claim*., 9.

[18] Cavell, *The Claim*., 13.

[19] Cavell, *The Claim*., 12.

(*ii*) In the ordinary uses of the concept of criteria, the object in question is a known object from the very beginning. In these cases, the point of applying criteria is to evaluate the object and assign status and ranking to it. In Cavell's example of the university admission policy, the criteria provide grounds to evaluate qualities of students on a consistent basis, but they do not give rise to the question what is subsumed under the concept of student. Wittgenstein's grammatical criteria do not provide such evaluative parameters, but they specify conditions under which something is legitimately subsumed under a concept. In this sense, "in using ordinary or official criteria we *start out* with a known kind of object whereas in using Wittgensteinian criteria we *end up* knowing a kind of object."[20]

(*iii*) In the ordinary ways we use the concept of criteria, the authority that establishes and applies the relevant criteria is an easily recognizable specialized agency in the form of an institution, a group of people, or a knowledgeable person. This also means that the source of authority that is responsible for establishing and application of criteria is also the source of authority that is able to change relevant criteria and their application when, for various reasons, such a change is required or desired. In Wittgenstein's discussions of grammatical criteria, the authority is always the ordinary language user who is authorized by the mere fact that she is a competent speaker. The individual language user neither determines nor applies the criteria by herself, and therefore her authority resides in her linguistic relations to a normative community which sets the grammatical criteria and responds to their applications either affirming or rebuffing. As opposed to ordinary criteria, Wittgenstein's criteria are deeply rooted in the history and organization of the normative community, and therefore changes in them are not a matter of a decision made by a visible and recognizable agency, but basically a matter of historical events and shifts in the organization of the relations within the normative community.

Cavell's discussion of the differences between ordinary uses of the concept of criteria and Wittgenstein's criteria points to the former's function of identification and the latter's place in constructing our ordinary world. Hence, for him, Wittgenstein's criteria are grammatical criteria in the sense that they "do not relate a name to an object, but various concepts to the concept of that object."[21] Wittgenstein's criteria are coordinates of a concept within the conceptual space. The everyday uses of the concept of criterion are more about what occupies an already given and known conceptual space at a certain moment, whereas Wittgenstein's grammatical criteria are what unfold the conceptual space as such. Therefore when

> …you do not know the grammatical criteria of Wittgensteinian objects, then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects überhaupt; you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no *object* of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to: the possibility of finding out what it is officially called is not yet open to you.[22]

For Cavell, the capability to use a concept competently and the capability to recognize an object under a concept are based on the same capacity to be absorbed in a form of life. The emergence of an object in our lives means putting new marks and limits in our conceptual space. These new marks and limits are made possible by prior marks and limits which are sustained and maintained by a certain form of life.

[20] Cavell, *The Claim*., 16.

[21] Cavell, *The Claim*., 76.

[22] Cavell, *The Claim*., 77.

4. Grammatical Criteria and Politics

Objects emerge in our world only in a shared social space, and the shared social space is made possible by our shared judgments. In other words, our agreement in judging what kind of an object a thing is is the ground on which the object in question has a place in our world. In Cavell's questioning the character of our agreement, the political dimensions of our ordinary world start emerging. He establishes parallelisms between social contract theories and Wittgenstein's idea of agreement according to which our capability and capacity to use language have indispensable political dimensions. This, in return, means that our capacity and capability to think, imagine, and act politically have fundamental indispensable grammatical dimensions.

Grammatical criteria are binding to the members of a normative community that establishes them and controls their application in various linguistic contexts. Grammatical criteria order and classify the human surrounding and render it a shared habitable world. At the same time, it is also grammatical criteria that tell what justice is, what equality is, and what beauty is. In this sense, as much as grammatical criteria project our interests, needs, and desires to our surrounding, they also project our struggles, agonies, and discontents. Cavell claims that Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy points to 'us', the competent language users, as a normative collective that establishes grammatical criteria and has authority on their applications. "It is for [Wittgenstein], always *we* who 'establish' the criteria under investigation."[23] But who is this 'we' that pervasively exists in the voice of each and every language user? And what does it have to do with politics?

To answer these questions, I start with a passage by Cavell which explains what 'the claim of reason' is.

> The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community. And the claim to community is always a search for the basis upon which it can or has been established. I have nothing more to go on than my conviction, my sense that I make sense. It may prove to be the case that I am wrong, that my conviction isolates me, from all others, from myself. That will not be the same as a discovery that I am dogmatic or egomaniacal. The wish and search for community, are the wish and search for reason.[24]

'The philosophical appeal to what we say' is a trademark of ordinary language philosophy. In a more or less standard understanding of ordinary language philosophy, the emergence of philosophical problems is due to the philosopher's use of our ordinary concepts outside their appropriate contexts, which thereby exceeds the effective range of their application. Because our ordinary concepts fail to reach the aims the philosopher has established, the philosopher tries to compensate by establishing philosophical concepts like the essence, the universal, and the form. However, they only bring more philosophical puzzlements in train. Against this movement, the task of ordinary language philosophy is to show that what seems to be the failure of our ordinary concepts is, in fact, the failure of the philosopher to come to terms with our predicament as language users. Ordinary language philosophy, in this sense, shows to the philosopher that her established philosophical aims are phantasmatic expressions of her philosophical frustrations and her philosophical concepts are pointless efforts to avoid facing human finitude.

What distinguishes Cavell's account of ordinary language philosophy is that he finds it problematic, and indeed patronizing, to ask the modern philosopher (who is always the skeptic in Cavell) to come back to the

[23] Cavell, *The Claim*., 18.

[24] Cavell, *The Claim*., 20.

terrain of the ordinary, to recognize, acknowledge, and conform to the authority of the ordinary, as if the terrain of the ordinary and its authority were not the origins of the skeptical questions in the first place. In short, Cavell accepts that the skeptical perspective is a result of a metaphysical exile where the modes of the binding authority of the ordinary cannot respond to our inquiries. Yet, the skeptical demand is not a call to prove and re-prove that the metaphysical exile is not habitable by language users. The skeptic herself would be the first to declare the inhabitability of the metaphysical exile. Rather, the skeptical demand is to reconsider the habitability of the ordinary. The invitation (the call) to the skeptic to return to the ordinary, as if the ordinary were peacefully free from philosophical questions, does nothing but cause the skeptic to recite her well established arguments that have sent her to her metaphysical exile in the first place. Cavell sides with the skeptic and expresses his protest:

> The skeptic does not gleefully and mindlessly forgo the world we share, or thought we shared; he is neither the knave Austin took him to be, nor the fool the pragmatists took him for, nor the simpleton he seems to men of culture and of the world. He forgoes the world for just the reason that the world is important, that it is the scene and stage of connection with the present; he finds that it vanishes exactly with the effort to *make* it present.[25]

The skeptic, then, is the tragic hero because, like the tragic hero's deeds, the skeptic's words cannot be redeemed by her community. As the irredeemability of the tragic deed is not an answer to the tragic question, but its cause, and as it reveals the conditions of redemption that refuse to accommodate the tragic deed, the failure of the ordinary to meet the epistemic demands of the skeptic reveals more about the demands of the ordinary on us than the demands of the skeptic. The skeptic's metaphysical exile is an avoidance of the demands of and consequent responsibilities to the ordinary. Acceptance of the existence of the world (or, at least, a world) is a demand of the ordinary and the skeptic refuses to meet this demand.

In a self-reflexive maneuver, instead of problematizing the voice of the skeptic which questions the legitimacy of the demands of the ordinary, Cavell problematizes the voice of the ordinary language philosopher. The first thing Cavell questions in the voice of the ordinary language philosopher with regard to the 'necessity' to accept the existence of the world is that she has unquestioned, and indeed unquestionable, confidence in her knowledge about how 'we' use our ordinary words in ordinary contexts. What is the source of her confidence? Cavell's point is that her confidence has nothing to do with her philosophical training and skills. The philosopher cannot claim to know more than any other language user knows about her language. All the philosopher can claim is that she looks more closely at, and demands more from, what we say. In other words, the degree of grammatical knowledge which is sufficient to be an ordinary language user is also sufficient to be an ordinary language philosopher. The criteria she voices belong to a normative community, and her confidence lies in her conviction that she can represent her normative community in voicing the criteria of her language. Even if she has never asked for and 'we' have never given her the right to speak for us (in the name of us), she is fully authorized in saying 'we say X, when…'. In this sense, the precondition to speak is to have the ability to speak for a normative community, and each and every competent speaker, either explicitly or implicitly, speaks claiming to be representing her normative community. In other words, communication between language users is their claims on each other to be representatives of the same normative community.

The individual language user's ability to speak in the name of her normative community relies on her conviction that when she formulates and reveals grammatical criteria she voices the agreement of her norma-

[25] Cavell, *Must We*, 323.

tive community. The authority with which she says 'We say X, when…' is the authority of the agreement among the members of her normative community. It is in this sense that Cavell defines philosophical appeal to grammatical criteria as a claim to community, and the skeptical appeal as a disclaim to community. In discovering and formulating grammatical criteria, the ordinary language philosopher makes a claim about the collective agreement about her normative community. According to Cavell, such grammatical claims *about* community have to be claims *to* community, because what is voiced is not a plain grammatical given, but our investment and commitment to the normative community. In this sense, when the ordinary language philosopher talks about a necessity to accept the existence of the world, it is a necessity to be in community with other language users. This is because the world, the existence of which is at stake in the discussion between the skeptic and the ordinary language philosopher, is a shared world the refusal of which has to mean withdrawal of our commitment to and investment in the sharing parties.

The possibility of the meaningful individual voice relies upon the confirmation of the relevant language users representing the normative community, to which the ordinary language philosopher makes a claim. If another philosopher disagrees with her grammatical claims about criteria, they have no ultimate authority to appeal to other than 'us'. "If two are in disagreement they vie with one another for the same confirmation. The only source of confirmation here is ourselves. And each of us is fully authoritative in this struggle."[26] For Cavell, such well established disagreements, i.e. struggles about what we ordinarily mean signifies not only an intellectual quarrel, but the fact that the disagreeing parties are dissatisfied and disappointed about the social space they share. The point is not that language users who share the same social space cannot disagree with each other about the meaning of words, or that such a disagreement cannot be expressed without fracturing the social ground both parties stand on. It is that the social space and our meaning claims are mutually constructive of each other. We cannot keep disagreeing forever without repudiating the social bond. Furthermore, this means that the social space that makes our encounter with each other possible is itself possible on the basis of our acknowledging and recognizing each other's authority in using words. What keeps us together, happily or unhappily, is the fact that we are authorized by the same grammar whose criterial structure is the common ground we stand on. In this sense, Cavell's discussion of grammatical criteria is a discussion of sociality as such.

Cavell thinks that our calling grammatical criteria 'our' criteria depends not only on our ability to acknowledge them as such, but also on our ability to repudiate them. "If we could not repudiate them, they would not be ours, in the way we discover them to be, they would not be our responsibility."[27] In this sense, the skeptic's total repudiation of our criteria and the ordinary language philosopher's total endorsement of them arrive by different paths to the same point of avoidance of the responsibility of 'meaning what we say'. The skeptical and anti-skeptical positions with regard to grammatical criteria fail to accommodate the politics of knowing the world and of knowing each other. The skeptic claims that the presentness of the world is sustained and maintained by the ways we share it, and therefore what becomes intelligible through our acts of knowing is the ways in which we share the world, and not the world itself. The ordinary language philosopher protests that what we call knowledge is a way to share the world by having shared criteria, therefore the skeptic's wish to know the world without sharing it is an impossible wish.

[26] Cavell, *Must We*, 18.

[27] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 5.

For Cavell, neither party takes our moral/political commitments into the consideration when they appeal to our grammatical criteria as a source of (dis)trust in knowing the world. Cavell, by contrast, evokes the place of the concept of agreement in social contract theories to describe the place of the normative community in our speech acts. At first sight, this is a surprising move because one can easily point to incommensurable elements between social contract theories and Wittgenstein's account of language. For example, as Cavell himself argues, in Wittgenstein, one cannot make a distinction between nature and convention in the forms of life language users have. For language users, the conventional is the natural and vice versa. In other words, our 'state of nature' is to be conventional. It is obvious that 'the state of nature' in social contract theories cannot be easily accommodated within a Wittgensteinian framework. Why does Cavell risk possible and plausible objections, and suggest that the concept of agreement in social contract theories is a good context to understand Wittgenstein's concept of agreement?

Cavell utilizes not so much the answers but the questions social contract theories pose to dismantle both the image of the normative community as a barrier to our knowledge claims and its image as a shelter for them. Our appeal to the criteria of our normative community is neither epistemologically void as the skeptic is anxious about, nor epistemologically ensuring as the ordinary language philosopher wishes for. The 'we' that resonates in our speech acts is not Descartes' deceiving devil, nor is it the Platonic realm of forms that substantiate our knowledge claims. The 'we' is a projection of our need to be in community with others. One important aspect of Wittgensteinian criteria is that they are mythic projections which emerge when we need an account of our judgments. We do not appeal to grammatical criteria to form our judgments. On the contrary, we appeal to grammatical criteria when there is a crisis in sharing our judgments. In this sense, criteria are to be discovered in our mythic projections of a 'we' that would rectify our judgments as well as who is included in (and excluded from) the projected 'we'. In this sense, the normative community is not the guarantor of the unity of our speech and of the validity of our knowledge claims. On the contrary, appeals to the normative community are indicative of how fragile the ways we share the world are and how capable language users are to disunite on their judgments.

In a normative community where the shared judgments among language users are total, and never lead to a crisis situation, the fact that they have shared judgments would be incomprehensible to the members of that normative community. Consequently, the issue of grammatical criteria would not be an intelligible object of philosophical inquiry. In Cavell's view, the working of our language excludes such an option. As mentioned before, Wittgenstein's criteria are inquiries into the possible relations we can establish among several concepts. Language use is projection of concepts into new contexts which is made possible by the capacity of our concepts to be combined with each other in different configurations. To be sure, the systematicity of the intra-conceptual relations is crucial to our use of language. However, a conceptual systematicity that cannot accommodate elasticity, and hence forces us to establish the same relations again and again would result in a stuttering speech that repeats itself forever failing to connect to the context it is directed to. The conditions of total agreement are the conditions of speechlessness. It is the elasticity of our concepts in combining with each other that allows the language user to communicate her own singular point by uttering words that are neither singular nor exclusively hers. The fact that there is always a possibility of rebuff points not only to the fragility of her meaning claim, but the fragility of the language user's relations to her normative community. The fragility of our relationship to our normative community is not an effect of our ability to say something new with old

words. On the contrary, our ability to speak something anew is an effect of the fragility of our relationship with our normative community. For Cavell, the openness of our shared judgments to repudiation is a fragility that enables us to be a part of the normative community as competent speakers whose speech acts are not the empty reproductions of accepted combination of words, but projections the range of which cannot be known *a priori*.

Cavell's philosophical interest in social contract theories, especially Rousseau's, is not due to their explanatory capacity with regard to social facts. Rather, Cavell takes them to be myths expressive of a 'we' to which we appeal to discover 'our' criteria. The concept of agreement in social contract theories is suggested as a philosophical response to a set of questions which are similar to the set of questions Wittgenstein responds to by offering the concept of agreement. The idea of a social contract is a solution to a problem.

> How to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before. This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract holds the solution.[28]

One may interpret this question as pointing to the conditions of a form of politically justifiable 'obedience' which is only possible when a citizen follows the rules of the public realm simply by obeying herself. The conditions under which the social contract requires the citizen to obey must be the same conditions under which she is motivated to obey by her own reasoning. Understood in this way, social contract theories seek rational forms of obedience as the basis of a politics which promises social order as well as autonomy. However, Cavell thinks that the key question is not obeying but the possibility of disobeying: "Given the specific inequalities, and lacks of freedom and absence of fraternity in the society to which I have consented, do these outweigh the 'the disadvantages' of withdrawing my consent? This is the question the theorists of the social contract teach us to ask…"[29] Reformulated in this way, social contract theories show, on the one hand, how deeply a member of society is united with it. On the other hand, however, social contract theories put the society at a distance where the individual member is able to see it as an 'artifact' rendering it open for political interventions. As Wittgenstein's idea of agreement in searching for shared criteria evokes our responsibility in saying what we say, the idea of agreement on a social contract holds the consent-givers responsible for their consent. It is a myth that allows reformulation of our political responsibility for social interactions which we have found ourselves participating. The moral/political questions social contract theories pose have also an epistemological dimension, because the question how one can know herself becomes a question of how one can recognize a society as her own. In this sense the contract is not merely about political actors' interests but also their self-intelligibility.

Cavell thinks that Rousseau was the deepest among the social contract theorists because he did not claim to know how the state of nature was or how the leap from the state of nature to the civil life happened, if it ever happened. Rousseau, as opposed to Locke and Hume, is able to find a way to transform the liberal - utilitarian question into a public ethical/political question. Cavell argues that all Rousseau claims to know is his own relation to his society. Rousseau's 'philosophical datum' is that the individual members of a society can speak for it and vice versa, and, in this sense, the ordinary language philosopher, in her claim to speak of criteria in the name of her community, shares the same 'philosophical datum' with Rousseau. His philosophical aim is

[28] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. M. W. Cranston (New York: Penguin Classics, 1968), 60.

[29] Cavell, *The Claim,* 24.

to question how it is possible that the individual and society can mirror each other. In other words, in neither case is the aim to discover new facts about society. The social contract is an inquiry into the character of normative relations between the individual and her society. This is, for Cavell, the discovery of an original mode of knowledge, '…a way to use the self as access to the self's society.'[30] Likewise, ordinary language philosophy shows that the language user's authority to speak for herself and her authority to speak for us are indistinguishable from each other. Cavell claims that "the alternative to speaking for yourself politically, is not: speaking for yourself privately…The alternative is having nothing (political) to say."[31] If I cannot recognize in the voice of the language user the voice of the community which I recognize as my own, she is not completely available and accessible to me as a competent speaker. By talking to me, she not only makes a claim to a community, but also a claim on me to belong to the community with her.

Concluding Remarks

What Cavell finds intriguing in social contract theories is that each speech act directed to us gives us an opportunity to participate or repudiate to participate to the normative community in different forms, changing the very form of the normative community itself. This is because the normative community appealed to in our speech acts is not predetermined. The form of the normative community comes into being in a piecemeal fashion through our responses. This is why Cavell identifies the appeal to criteria as a 'wish and search for community and reason'. When we engage in a conversation, our responses are indicative not only of what kind of a normative community we belong to, but also what kind of a normative community we wish to belong to. We may be total strangers and you may be just asking for directions to find a coffee shop. Or you may be a guardian repeating the disciplinary orders of the prison and I an inmate. In either case, the community we belong to together is not there until I respond to you. To be sure, neither of us knows who else belongs to that community. Yet, the form of our appeal to the community, (the form of our availability and accessibility to each other as competent speakers, is what shapes the form of community that comes into being in the medium of our mutual responsiveness to each other. The fact that we participate across our differences in the formation of the normative community shows that the binding authority of the normative community that demands us to be available and accessible is not uniform and homogeneous. My unwillingness or failure to respond to a request for directions to the coffee shop could be impolite at worst, while the unwillingness or failure of the speaking subject to respond, for instance, in a disciplinary context such as the military, the factory, the school, and the asylum may be defined as an act punishable by solitary confinement. By not responding, the subject both repudiates to participate to one normative community and simultaneously seeks and wishes for a resisting normative community.

[30] Cavell, *The Claim*, 26.

[31] Cavell, *The Claim*, 27 – 8.

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