Serious Words for Serious Subjects:

Stanley Cavell and the human voice in education

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

UCL Institute of Education

University College London

2018

Abstract

The thesis problematises education as a site of seriousness. It subjects notions of seriousness conventionally associated with education to critical scrutiny and subsequently goes beyond traditional distinctions of the serious and non-serious to reimagine seriousness in educational theory and practice. In liberal education, seriousness is understood in terms of developing rationality through theoretical activities that are underpinned by a concern for truth via the rigorous procedures of critical thinking. In progressive theory, seriousness is identified with purposeful, goal-oriented practices and procedures. Seriousness is thus associated with making earnest impersonal demands on the learner to which he or she responds accordingly. This, together with the view that what is personal is necessarily vulnerable to distortion and partiality, has placed limits on the first-person expression of seriousness within education. The thesis argues that seriousness is not only characterised by a responsiveness to demands for clarity but also the importance of having something to say. As such, we are already responsive in ourselves to demands for lucidity and coherence. Furthermore, seriousness emerges not only in our rational attention but in the play and possibilities of the human body. Our judgments and responses may take embodied rather than linguistic form. The key concept for elucidating this account of seriousness is Stanley Cavell's theorisation of the human voice. Through critical readings of Cavell, as well as Raimond Gaita, J.L. Austin, Derrida and Wittgenstein, the thesis brings together ideas of seriousness and voice in terms of what is personal and impersonal. It draws on drama education for an understanding of how personal and impersonal notions of seriousness are located within artistic practice and aesthetic judgment, opening the way for a richer sense of first-person expression that gives weight to the playful and non-serious alongside the serious.

Statement of Originality

I, Adrian Skilbeck, hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Adrian Skilbeck

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Acknowledgements

Many people have played their part in helping me to complete the thesis and I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to them all for their kindness and support.

Firstly, I would like to thank Paul Standish. Paul's cajoling, coaxing and all-round encouragement has enabled me to formulate and then shepherd the ideas that are presented in the thesis. He has helped me believe that the work I am doing has value and has given me the confidence to share it with others. The care and attention he has given to my various outpourings has seen me through the ups and downs of a process that has had moments of great elation and extreme doubt. The quality of my writing and thinking are immeasurably better for his indefatigable interest in the ideas of the thesis, be it in supervisions, via email, over the phone or in lengthy conversations. As a mentor and, I hope, friend, I will be forever in his debt for the many kindnesses he has shown.

I extend my thanks to the other members of the Centre for Philosophy of Education at UCL Institute of Education, both staff and fellow doctoral researchers. Over the years their commitment to the exploration of education from varied philosophical perspectives has been exemplary and inspirational. I would also like to thank my students, particularly in the early years of the Education Studies B.A., for helping me to realise that the desire to do well means so much more than the chasing of grades. The thesis also owes much to the many discussions with colleagues and academics at the many conferences, seminars, and colloquia I have been fortunate to attend. I thank them all for the fruitful conversations and discussions, for the probing questions and positive feedback. I feel privileged to have found a community of scholars (people!) who have made me feel welcome and whose own seriousness is evident in stimulating and rigorous philosophy of education.

I would also like to thank the journal editors who have given me the opportunity to publish and the anonymous reviewers who have offered thoughtful and considered comments on my work. In particular, I would like to thank Jeff Stickney for his editorial input.

Finally, special thanks go to my wife Beth Worrall and my children, Rosie and Jordi. They have also lived with the thesis. This journey is at an end for them as well as myself and I think they are quite relieved!

Introduction

Your identity is formed when you decide your attitude towards serious questions. That is something known to everybody who has not forgotten about their childhood. (Henning Mankell, "Quicksand")

I would like to begin with two stories which locate philosophical thinking in relation to education, although they do not directly concern the formal teaching of philosophy. In doing so, the two stories invite us to reflect on what it means to describe something in terms of its seriousness and personal significance for the individual. The first concerns the novelist Henning Mankell. In January 2014 Mankell, author of the Wallander crime novel series, as well as being a children's author, dramatist and political activist, was diagnosed with cancer. What was to be his last book, *Quicksand,* is an autobiographical meditation that moves between past, present and future as the onset of the illness and its treatment leads him to reflect on his own mortality and experience of time. In the early chapters, Mankell turns to his childhood and to the significance of moments, particularly around the age of eight and nine, that shaped the person he had become, the person now facing his own death. Reflecting on this period he writes,

> When I was eight or nine years old I passed through a period in which I kept thinking about what kind of death frightened me most of all. That is nothing remarkable – people have such thoughts at that age. Life and death begin to be serious topics that one needs to come to terms with. Children are extremely serious creatures. Not least when they reach the age when they slowly take the step that changes them into conscious human beings – conscious of the fact that they have an identity that cannot be changed. Over the years what one looks like in a mirror changes, but behind that mirror image is always the real you.
>
> Your identity is formed when you decide your attitude towards serious questions. That is known to everybody who has not forgotten about their childhood (Mankell, 2015, loc. 226 – 233).

One story he recounts occurs on a winter's morning. He is on his way to school when he is suddenly stopped in his tracks by a thought. He describes it as follows:

> As I stand there that freezing-cold morning fifty seven years ago I experience one of those vital moments that will affect the rest of my life. I recall the situation in minute detail, as if the images had been branded into my memory. I am suddenly possessed by unexpected insight. It is as if somebody has given me a good shaking. The words come into my head of their own accord.
>
> 'I am myself and no one else. I am me.'
>
> At that moment I find my identity. Until then my thoughts had been childish, as they were meant to be. Now the situation was entirely different. (Identity is necessary in order to develop awareness.) I am myself and nobody else. I cannot be exchanged for anybody else. Life has suddenly become a serious matter (loc. 201 – 213).

Is it a philosophical insight? It is not a systematic insight, nor one obviously derived from a line of argumentation. We might best describe it as an epiphany, an awakening to a truth. I would like to call it philosophical because its pitch strikes me as philosophical. However, this is not because it expresses a thought about personal identity and personal identity is a philosophical topic. It sounds nonsensical. However, it is clearly not meant to be. Mankell brings out the intensity and profundity it had for his nine-year old self and how he was struck by it, as a moment when he saw something of his own being in the world. Whatever it is, it makes him late for school and he has to come up with an excuse for why he is late. He does so and sits down at his desk, telling no one of what he experienced. It becomes a secret, something personal and private that he carries with him, his consciousness awakened to his identity and the separateness of his self, his finitude. Whilst Mankell's reflections are in part framed by consideration of the nature of identity, more importantly is what the seriousness of these thoughts meant for him and that he expresses their significance in these terms.

The second story is taken from Sean Steel's book *The Pursuit of Wisdom and Happiness in Education*. Steel describes the experience of one of his students, a boy called Jim, recollecting his early years in school,

> Jim, fourteen, looked back on his earlier school career: "I couldn't get my teachers to take my questions and ideas seriously. I thought this was what school

was going to be about. There was such a big deal about going off to first grade, but I kept waiting for us to talk about life – you know, why we're all here, what this world's about. The nature of the universe. Things like that. When I'd ask or say my ideas just to sort of get things going, there would be dead silence." (Steel, 2014, p. 1)

Steel paints a picture of a boy's frustration within education systems that are driven by assessment, of teaching to the test, of getting answers right, of teachers held to account by parents, senior management and governments. Perhaps this is not unreasonable: is it not the function of education to ensure nations can be competitive and innovative in the fields of technology and science, to develop critical, analytical thinkers and creative problem-solvers in useful, practical ways? These are important attributes. Nor is there anything to say someone might not come to philosophy through these areas of educational experience. After all, before turning to philosophy, Wittgenstein studied aeronautical engineering. Perhaps Steel is overstating things. He does not think so:

> the entire machinery of schools is designed to impress upon students the seriousness and significance of questions we pose to them; by focusing on these mandated questions and by answering them successfully, students can earn good grades; they earn accolades from their parents, teachers and peers; they can gain admittance to the "right school" and thereby secure "a good job" (Steel, 2014, p. 2)

In such circumstances it is not surprising that the kind of questions to which Jim was open and which puzzled, troubled and attracted him are deemed irrelevant in "getting ahead", in the light of which Steel questions whether the questions of a young boy should matter, or if they do, whether the personal promptings of those questions and moments of insight should remain a private matter beyond the reach and touch of an education conducted in public? Henning Mankell's reflections suggest they do matter and that in mattering to him as he confronted his mortality after being diagnosed with terminal cancer, they should matter to us. Yet at the same time, Mankell describes a moment that was deeply personal and private. This was not something he could reveal to his teacher and school friends, at least, not in school. Steel's response to Jim is to argue it is not enough to ask the big questions, to foster dialogue, to conceive of philosophy as teaching critical thinking in which the student learns to spot fallacies; neither is the formal teaching of philosophy sufficient nor even the methodologies of

Philosophy 4 Children. Rather, it is about the pursuit of wisdom, by which he means that in philosophical thought we must risk exposing ourselves to others if the pursuit of wisdom is to retain an emphasis on the personal nature of thought in relation to experience, as distinct from a predominantly impersonal character. For Steel, to take steps in philosophy, wherever one takes them, is to resist a straightforward impersonal version of learning expressed in terms of a teacher's lesson plans, aims and objectives, outcomes and targets. This must not be the experience of either teacher or student. At stake is a disciplining of thought that is both personal and impersonal in its search for clarity and in taking steps. To take steps is to both follow a path and to create paths of one's own.

And yet even where the importance of this is acknowledged, for example in how a particular theorisation of education is used to inform approaches to classroom activity, it can go wrong. In a more mundane example, Jan Derry describes a religious education class in which pupils are working on the topic of The Bible in order to develop an understanding of the practices and beliefs of different faith communities. With the teacher under the influence of Deweyan inflected ideas about active learning, the pupils are asked to "construct their own bibles". The contents will illustrate their understanding of the functions of the different kinds of writing that are found in the Bible, such as laws, prophecy and so on. Derry writes that,

> The children proceeded to make a variety of 'bibles', including a fashion bible in which the concept of law is illustrated with pictures under which are sentences with rules about the age it is acceptable to wear particular items of clothing. The concept of prophecy in this fashion bible, becomes predictions about when a particular fashion shop will go bankrupt and be replaced by another (Derry, 2016, p. 133).

Something seems to have gone wrong, captured in Derry's description of the students exhibiting their 'bibles' and in the ironic tone of her observation 'Thus ends the children's study of the Bible' (ibid.). What has taken place seems shallow and trivial, an impoverished outcome of an impoverished conception of knowledge, learning and the curriculum. Derry's own, rich discussion, defends Dewey against the accusation that he (and the progressivism associated with him) is to blame for this because his educational theory supposedly licences an anything goes kind of approach to learning in which students construct their own knowledge in the light of their own

interests without any kind of normative constraints or regard to the truth. There is, Derry argues, a 'gulf between the way that Dewey has been received and what he actually intended' (p.136). Not only does Derry defend Dewey but draws on areas of his work that are seldom acknowledged in order to chart a path through the sectarianism of contemporary education. Derry argues that there is an attention to normativity in Dewey's work that is missing from Deweyan inspired pedagogical practices where there appear to be 'no constraints on what is to be known and how it will be learnt. Whatever the children construct counts as *their* 'Bible'' (p. 144). We must not forget his attention to the significance of the child's experience but it should be recognised that Dewey is <u>not</u> indifferent to the domain specific norms of fields of knowledge.

I want to complement Derry's account. What is at stake is not just a question of what should and should not count as domain specific knowledge, any relation it might have to meaning-making and its faithfulness or otherwise to Deweyan theory; at some level, there has been a failure of seriousness. The problem can be expressed as one of depth. Despite the picture that Derry paints, the failure is not at the level of the slapdash or the formally inadequate. The lesson may have been carefully planned and the students may have worked with purpose, care and diligence in creating beautifully designed pieces of work that they are proud to share with their classmates and which may, in that sense even if no other, demonstrate an understanding of the significance of the Bible. The thoughtlessness is of a different kind. Conceptually, it is superficial and shallow. How we come to recognise and acknowledge this as an issue and the role that conceptions of seriousness in education might play in both causing and freeing us from such failures is one of the key concerns of the thesis.

There is a further question - as educators how can we do justice to the different ways in which the knowledge we impart has a seriousness for those we teach, beyond the instrumental or even the purposeful? Should we? As well as highlighting the tensions within current educational theory and practice, Derry's essay proposes ways in which we might do so. By rethinking how we understand the teacher's role in orientating the student's personal pursuit of interests within a field of knowledge to whose normative constraints those interests are responsive, we might ourselves begin to re-orientate our understanding of the relationship between the personal and impersonal in education. Thus, what characterises the student's pursuit of interests is no longer an anything goes kind of freewheeling constructivism but a carefully directed

use of reason that attempts to do justice to both the normative constraints of a knowledge domain and the needs of the child to experience things for him or herself.

However, I want to take this further, because I want to accommodate the kind of experiences Henning Mankell and Sean Steel describe and which are so clearly absent in Derry's example. The challenge is how to accommodate the kind of personal seriousness that they describe, which may already be characterised by a willingness to reason about such experiences but whose claim to attention is nevertheless not completely captured by a requirement that we reason about it. Neither is it fully captured by the language of interest and engagement. The concept of seriousness that I am seeking to articulate does not easily find its expression in the educational context. The challenge I address in the thesis is firstly, to provide an account of why it matters that, alongside mastery of content and becoming a skilled practitioner within a discipline, one takes responsibility for expressing one's personal seriousness in language that is both sensitive to the normative constraints of the discipline and, more problematically, to the impulses that call for its expression. Secondly, I ask whether it is possible to do so in an educational context with a concept of education that depends on a necessary distance between teacher, student and content.

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The aim of the thesis

For the philosophers of the so-called "London school" of philosophy of education and their associates, seriousness was a linguistic marker with particular associations in the conceptual analysis of education that developed in the 1960s and 70s. Robert Dearden (1970) discussed seriousness in relation to the concept of play and its educational value, Paul Hirst (1970) contrasted the non-seriousness of games with the serious 'business of living', whilst in *Ethics and Education*, Richard Peters (1970) did both and characterised seriousness as a kind of responsiveness to the human condition significant enough to require curriculum content to be continuous with it in his arguments for theoretical activities. John Wilson (Wilson, 1998) went even further, arguing seriousness had a foundational place in the concept of education. For Wilson seriousness is a '*disposition to address and act on the world by the use of reason*' (Wilson, 1998, p. 143) and it is the task of education to develop this disposition. Education inculcates a spirit or attitude of seriousness in the student by bringing a particular kind of philosophical quality to the personal relationship of teacher and pupil

that enables the young person to distinguish what is serious from what is fantasy in the holding of beliefs and the acquisition of knowledge (Wilson, 1979). Broadly speaking we might call this conceptual analysis and, despite its context, its character is essentially impersonal.

And yet in the preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein remarked that 'if my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine, then I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property' (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 4e). Assuming that Wittgenstein was not making an observation about plagiarism but a more substantial one about the significance to his work of its first-person expression then how are we to understand what is important about his remarks bearing his own stamp so as to be taken seriously? How are we to understand what is personal and serious about them in the face of academic impersonality of the kind advocated by Wilson *et al.*?

The aim of the thesis is to examine the ways in which seriousness as a concept and value is taken to condition practices of teaching and learning with reference to how we characterise what is appropriately personal and impersonal in education. I will bring these together with reference to Stanley Cavell's thematising of the voice and its place in his philosophical writings. Seriousness, as Wilson expresses it, is a particular kind of cognitive achievement based on the ability to use reason and apply it to the world. Its impersonal character, success and failure is judged by the ability of the student to reason and think critically. The thesis will argue against identifying seriousness with an impersonal conception of reason, not only because it misconstrues what is significant to the individual in thinking well and thinking badly on such things as moral and aesthetic questions, but also because it fails to acknowledge the different ways in which seriousness can be expressed and responded to as such, for example through the body in gesture and in works of art, as well as in ordinary personal expression. Therefore, it will argue that a more personal concept of seriousness operates within the educational context than that envisaged by Wilson and others. This does not exclude the rational nor does it exclude the impersonal. Both will be important in different ways. However, I am interested in reimagining the relationship between the personal and impersonal in education and their claims to seriousness. Ultimately, through the work of Stanley Cavell and Raimond Gaita, I will defend a personal, ethically construed concept of seriousness in which attention is given to the presence of the human voice and body in

education and a richer sense of the interplay and tension between the personal and impersonal in human seriousness that is continuous with its presence in our everyday lives.

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The crisis of seriousness in the modern world? What crisis?

Is this possible? According to Luciana Regina, 'The conceptual crisis affecting seriousness is one of the major features that characterise our time' (Regina, 2016, p. 391). Writing in an editorial capacity, in an edition of the online journal *Spaziofilosofico* dedicated to the subject, Regina claims that seriousness is a concept suffering from 'a condition of extreme vagueness'. This vagueness means it is no longer a concept we can turn to in order to *accurately* educate individuals 'to the kind of *respect due* to reality in all its manifestations' (ibid.). We no longer know what is serious, or rather we no longer know how to invoke seriousness, or trust its cognate forms as part of our epistemic, critical vocabulary in naming features of the world as they manifest themselves to us and in our encounters and responses to them. Perhaps more worrying is the thought that, whilst in ourselves we might feel we know what is and is not serious, the significance and attention given to aspects of our culture causes us to doubt ourselves. Our judgments neither coincide with nor are reinforced by those of the wider culture. For Regina, our experience of being trapped between dogmatism and relativism, together with the anxieties and suspicions associated with both, means we 'look away from ideas and focus on things', attracted to what is 'simply factual, neither true nor false, neither serious nor fatuous, neither good nor bad, neither just nor unjust' (p. 392). In no longer being able to speak seriously, we seem to have come apart from the world. Our voice is lost. Our seriousness is denied and frustrated because it appears we no longer have any possibility of seeing things as they really are. Meaning is not so much deferred as simply avoided.

Regina's concern is not with the exceptional, the headline and the catastrophic, all of whose seriousness she takes to speak unproblematically for itself, but the everyday. Here, matters are less certain. Regina is troubled by the apparent irrelevance of seriousness to everyday affairs, its lack of disclosure and obvious manifestation in lives where 'passive acceptance of the contingency of judgments and criteria peacefully co-exists with a rough and unreflective load of strong … values' (ibid.). Thus conceived, what we utter will never be any more than 'opinion', that is, we are

condemned to never quite meaning what we say, unable to stand behind our words, operating in contexts where we are unable to speak seriously or be confident of being taken seriously, including by ourselves. If seriousness is embodied in qualities of thought and attention that enable us to non-dogmatically express ourselves with a greater degree of certainty than 'opinion' implies, and if our habits and practices do not permit this, then our words lack meaning and our lives would appear to lack seriousness. The challenge of countering this is that we do not fall back on extracting values from a 'dusty old code of inviolable norms' (ibid.). Rather, true seriousness lies in our desire and ability to 'negotiate on any topic. To think is to negotiate and to negotiate is to think. Both have to do with true seriousness, that is, with seriousness as a concept.' (ibid.)

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Seriousness, thought and dialogue: the personal and impersonal

What forms might this negotiation take? One example is provided by Raimond Gaita in the form of Socrates as he is represented in Plato's dialogues. Gaita describes how,

> Socrates called his partners in conversation to a kind of seriousness: they could respond to that call only if they spoke in an effort of disciplined lucidity out of what they had made of themselves. That does not mean that he wanted them to voice their sincere personal opinion. Their sincere personal opinions were worthless unless constrained by the discipline of thought and character which conditions the proper contrast between what is personal and what is impersonal in moral thought and discussion. (Gaita, 1991, p. 280)

Not all forms of thought will be informed by such considerations. Sincerity, speaking personally and a certain kind of presence in one's own life are not fundamental to the assessment and evaluation of the kind of knowledge and reasoning that exists in what Gaita (2002) terms the 'realm of the factual' and the realm of the logical. However, in the 'realm of meaning', with which Gaita contrasts the realm of the factual, such concerns take their place alongside the factual and appropriate consideration of the adequation of our thought and language to reality. It would perhaps be strange if coming to understand the meaning of our actions and fully appreciating their significance did not require at least some acknowledgment of the facts. It would be equally strange (at

least in western traditions of thought) if we did not believe that determining how things are could in some way be achieved through the use of reason. In characterising the seriousness of our thought on such matters, we reach, Gaita suggests, for 'metaphors of obedience, attunement and correspondence to reality' (Gaita, 1991, p. 309). However, Gaita does so in order to challenge both the status of the factual and the place of reason in how we understand what such a call to seriousness might be. In *The Philosopher's Dog* (Gaita, 2003), he argues why.

Gaita begins by reflecting on the notion of what it *means* to do something, in the sense of understanding its significance. He offers as an example how one person might confront another person about the significance of their refusal to give money to a homeless person. Or take the example of two people discussing the plight of refugees and the claims their status makes on us. One might argue that yes, it is a terrible situation but that doesn't mean we have to let them into our country nor do we have any obligations towards them. The other is shocked and responds by saying "Don't you know what it means to be homeless, to have lost everything, to suffer a perilous journey, to have nowhere to go," and so on. It is Gaita's point that '…when we appeal to someone to appreciate the meaning or significance of what they are doing or have done, the facts are visible and not in dispute' (p. 95). It is their meaning and significance that are in question; that is to say, what matters is how the facts enter into our coming to see things as they really are.

So why does this matter? Gaita describes the case of a woman who has a terminal illness and who is 'trying to live the last few months of her life bravely and lucidly' (p. 97). She is a woman for whom the meaning of her life is important. Gaita describes her as a woman for whom 'much of her past has been lived in acknowledgment of the need for us to be lucid if we are to honour our humanity' (ibid.). She wants to resist false consolation or the temptation to deny the reality of what is happening to her and so she 'seeks knowledge of the facts' (p. 97) and to know the truth of her condition. Her doctor gives her the facts - she only has a couple of months to live. She accepts the prognosis. This does not mean she is sanguine about her fate; there is, for her, a terror to the reality of death that needs to be acknowledged. To argue otherwise, for example by denying, as Socrates does, that death is an evil or to think in the manner of Dylan Thomas's exhortation to rage against the dying of the light, is, for her, to reach for false consolation. The woman is not averse to consideration of these

perspectives on facing up to death, but part of trying to see things as they are requires her to acknowledge, think through, and attend to her sense of the terror of death, rather than simply use these alternative perspectives to deny the reality it possesses for her. Gaita writes,

> To think rigorously about her imminent death and what it means she must of course be true to the facts. She mustn't fudge them, or let painful ones slip to the back of her mind. She must think rationally, that is logically, to see what follows logically from what. Because all efforts at understanding are rendered worthless if one is careless about how one moves from one thought to another. But in addition to this she must avoid sentimentality and never indulge her disposition to pathos. Always she must resist cliché and that laziness of spirit which, even in her crisis, can make her tone-deaf to it and encourage her to collude with the many ways that words can fail her need for lucidity. (pp. 98-99)

This might be taken to imply that what is required is the kind of thinking that led the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins to advocate teaching philosophy in schools in order to enable people "to distinguish between truthful language and illusory rhetoric" (Humphreys, 2016). Regina's notion of negotiation might be usefully invoked but Gaita's articulation of the problem provides a greater sense of why this matters to the individual. However, Gaita is not offering a picture of thought that contrasts reason and emotion as a contrast between what it is to think well and what it is to think badly in such matters. The need for lucidity requires the woman not only to attend to how thought follows logically from thought but also to acknowledge what she feels, by conducting her thinking in the light of it, attending to its 'tone' in how she articulates what her death means to her and how the facts enter into her understanding of this. It is the way in which these aspects of her condition are taken into consideration that characterises the quality of her seriousness. There is a place for reason and clarity of thought but that is to be found in the quality of her attention to what she feels, not an avoidance of those feelings. There will be ways in which both the woman's thought and emotion stand in relationship to the facts that are manifestly an expression of her seriousness just as there will be ways that indicate a flight from its demand for expression of how things are.

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The claim of seriousness: between subjectivity and objectivity, the personal and the impersonal

In a similar vein, Regina argues that 'as a concept, seriousness demands an effort of harmonisation between an objective and a subjective side' (Regina, 2016, p. 391). It is not clear how we are to understand the idea of "harmonisation" other than by reference to the quality of our responsiveness to the events of our lives. However, that does not need to be understood as solely a critical response to the facts of our lives. Nor should the objective aspect of this be understood merely as a set of facts: facts in themselves 'convey nothing'. Seriousness is to be located in what Regina refers to as 'communication… between an idea embodied in and revealed by reality and the subjects therein implicated' (ibid.). This is a puzzling statement. We might wonder on the one hand what kind of ideas are thus embodied and on the other how we experience these responses as themselves embodying our seriousness. Regina describes our responsiveness to the call to seriousness as a work of 'attention and research' (p. 392). This is what it means 'to think about what is truly serious in one's experiences' (ibid.). The distinction between 'research' and 'attention' in this context is perhaps a puzzling one but indicates one way of interpreting it is as a distinction between the rational and other forms of response, such as (but not limited to) the emotional.

How then are we to articulate the success or failure of our thought in such terms? It is for this reason that Gaita speaks of the importance of 'metaphors of obedience, attunement and correspondence to reality', not only to our conceptions of serious inquiry but to those aspects of our lives where such understanding is internal to our sense of its significance, such as our mortality. However, Gaita is not thinking in strictly verificationist or propositional terms. Indeed, he argues that to do so is itself,

> … a distortion of that natural way of speaking which characterises the fact that we distinguish serious thinking from reverie, day-dreaming, etc. by its disciplined obedience to 'how things are' – 'to reality'. But if we ask what it is for thought to be attuned to reality, in keeping with reality, in touch with reality and so on, then we must look to the grammar of the *categorically various* critical concepts with which we mark our sense of what it is to think well and think badly. (Gaita, 1991, p. 309)

In the previous quotation Gaita offers some indication of the kind of critical concepts we might employ – sentimentality, pathos, cliché and so forth. If, however, there are

various ways in which our thought might fail in this respect, from either internal or external promptings, does this not suggest that what is required are ways of thinking that are immune to such failures, ways of eliminating the personal in a neutral form of language whose critical assessment does not require such a vocabulary i.e. formal logic or a form of natural language that comes close to it? Gaita is suspicious of these tendencies. Why so?

The call to seriousness is not a call to work harder, think harder, scrunch up one's eyebrows, *pay* more attention, limit one's response to formal critical thinking and so forth. The call to seriousness is a call to attend to language, thought and action in the light of an attunement to reality which is itself ethically conditioned in the language we use to describe the way in which reality is present or available to us. It is therefore a call to attend to the world. However, it is Gaita's point that such an attunement is not an attunement to the facts as such. It does not rule out appropriate consideration and expression of the facts but is concerned less with their facticity and more with their meaning. The seriousness of what their reality means is reflected, for example, in those occasions when we talk of "facing up to reality". Our seriousness is not to be understood solely in terms of its rational character if that means ruling out the responsiveness of feeling, but nor does it assume that feeling must be present. There is also no assumption that reality will be immediately present and transparent to us; it may be a struggle to attain the kind of lucidity that Gaita argues is important for the individual.

As well as a suspicion about the distorting effects of emotion on our ability to see things as they are, perhaps it is this idea of an attunement to reality that leads us to place emphasis on what is impersonal as what lies outside us or seems to have an existence independent of any one perspective upon it. Does this not mean that questions of truth and falsity cannot be so easily dismissed in gauging the accuracy of language and assertion in relation to reality? Elsewhere, and in a similar vein, Gaita speaks of 'truth as a need of the soul' (Gaita, 2002, p. 240). Rather than the realm of meaning, Gaita speaks of 'the inner life, the life of the soul', which 'consists of our emotions – love grief, joy and, of course intellectual passion' (ibid.). He argues that these features of our lives, insofar as we think of them as constitutive of an inner life, are themselves in part constituted by reflection, for example on whether we are really in love and not just infatuated, or that our grief is genuine rather than shot through with sentimentality.

As Gaita says, 'we are required to be lucid about our inner lives under pain of superficiality' (ibid.).

Internal to our understanding of what it means to have an inner life is that what is expressed in terms of it is deeply personal. Paradoxically, however, it is that very profundity that claims us in a seriousness that requires of us that we try to see things 'as they are' rather than as we would like them to be, requiring thought that is 'disciplined by critical concepts that individualise the thinker' (p. 257). Gaita suggests that it is the success of our attempt to be objective that realises our distinct individuality.

There appears to be a paradox between an essentially personal inner life and the clarity of thought demanded of it that is generated by the common and natural assumption that truth and thought which aims at it are essentially impersonal. Gaita illustrates this with reference to Simone Weil's assertion in *Human Personality* that,

> What is sacred in science is truth; what is sacred in art is beauty. Truth and beauty are impersonal. All this is too obvious.

> If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality. If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all.

> Perfection is impersonal (Weil, 2005, p. 75).

Wittgenstein wanted his work to bear his stamp. This would seem to put him at odds with Weil. However, what he did not see as personal in his work was his personality, at least not in the psychological sense that Weil herself is attacking. Gaita questions Weil's assumption. Whilst one can argue that even in ethics our thought must be impersonal to resist what Iris Murdoch called the 'fat relentless ego' in the 'struggle to see things as they are' (Gaita, 2002, p. 258), he claims 'there is also point in saying that when truth and truthfulness are inseparable – when we are thinking about the human spirit – thought is essentially personal' (ibid.). Gaita cautions about such rigid distinctions between the personal and impersonal in matters of value; we should resist stating outright that it is one or the other. Rather, 'attention to the critical vocabulary that tells in its various applications what thinking well and thinking badly come to will in some contexts incline us to emphasise the way thought is personal and in others to emphasise the way it is impersonal.' (ibid.). In this I take him to be closer to the spirit

in which Wittgenstein intends us to at least consider how his work might bear his stamp, as an expression of his seriousness.

We can see in both Gaita and Regina an idea of seriousness as existing in a liminal state between the personal and the impersonal, subjective and objective. For Regina, it is a harmonisation; for Gaita, it is to be responsive to notions of thinking well and thinking badly in particular contexts. Gaita is not suggesting these perspectives can so easily be brought into harmony. Rather, we must judge what is required of us in the light of how we understand what it is to think well and badly. Our seriousness is a matter of attunement.

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Seriousness and voice: introducing Stanley Cavell

Questions of attunement, the tension between the personal and impersonal, the nature of seriousness and our relationship to the world in and through language are present in the work of Stanley Cavell, captured, for example, in Cavell's well-known comments in *The Claim of Reason* where he writes that,

> In philosophizing, I have to bring my own language and life into imagination. What I require is a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I may imagine them; and at the same time to confront my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me: to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me.
>
> This seems to me a task that warrants the name of philosophy. It is also the description of something we might call education. (Cavell, 1979, p. 125)

What matters is that I am able to confront my culture's criteria with my words and my life, that is, with my seriousness as it manifests itself in my having a voice in my life, what Gaita terms the 'realisation of a distinctive individuality' (Gaita, 2002, p. 256). This is a quite different kind of achievement to that envisaged by Wilson. In the course of the thesis I will draw on the insights of its hard-won character as well as outlining Cavell's account of both how it is achieved and how that achievement can never be fully secured in the way that Wilson and the philosophers of the London school assumed (and Regina hopes).

One of the key arguments of the thesis is that we have to live with this liminal uncertainty in ways that are problematical for education. Timothy Gould echoes Gaita when he characterises the struggle between the personal and impersonal voices in Cavell's work as in part a struggle to find the personal through the impersonal but also as a struggle to find one's own voice and take one's own steps whilst also acknowledging the influence of others in providing the methods for pursuing one's own inquiry and inheriting theirs. For Gould, what is important in Cavell's work is how 'we have to relinquish the personal element in order… to know the self'` (Gould, 1998, p. 26.). Thus, the writer is not struggling to assert or achieve a personal element but rather it is the personal with which the author is struggling. He sees quite different senses of the personal and impersonal coming into play in Cavell's "method", and that, for those who are aware of this,

> The struggle for the impersonality of philosophical method is a struggle of persons or selves within oneself, a struggle for a perspective on the self. It is only from a particular sort of angle that such a perspective will seem to be best characterized as a "merely" personal one' (p. 27).

For Gould, we not only host the voices of those who influence us but struggle to assert ourselves in relation to them, assimilating, revising, reinventing whilst at the same time acknowledging, something he sees as 'a struggle between our philosophical inheritance and our philosophical autonomy' (ibid.). Here is the Wittgensteinian challenge that our remarks must bear our own stamp.

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Substance and Seriousness in Drama Education

What links these various reflections together is that something important about the personal and impersonal qualities of seriousness and its relation to Cavellian voice needs fuller articulation in the context of education. They are only partially captured by the role accorded to the development of rationality. Equally they are only partially captured by the role accorded to personal and social education, arguments for personalised learning and the importance of personal relationships in the educational context. If these philosophical insights about the personal and impersonal are of value when considered in the light of Cavellian voice and our ideas of seriousness then it forces the question as to whether these considerations should be understood as

important educational ones, represent an educational blind-spot or even whether they lie beyond the reach of formal education.

In the essay 'Knowing and Acknowledging' Stanley Cavell speaks of 'the specific plight of mind and circumstance within which a human being gives voice to his condition' (Cavell, 2002, p. 240) and that for the ordinary language philosopher the task is to discover what this very specific plight of mind and circumstance might be.

I do not know whether my specific plight of mind and circumstance qualifies in the sense that Cavell intends, a sense of deep disquiet. After twenty years as a drama teacher I was struggling to see the point of what I was doing or what I wanted to achieve. Teaching had become an endless cycle of stress and anxiety. The processes of preparing students for examination dominated all other considerations. The work had lost all meaning other than what grade would be achieved. Results days were not days of celebration but days of relief at the thought of having got out of jail for another year. Teaching had become a joyless slog. What I was doing was trivial. My work struck me as lacking substance and seriousness. Two thoughts occurred to me. The first was whether there was something inherent in the subject that led me to feel like this and no amount of rethinking and re-evaluation could change this: it could never be serious to me or give me what I wanted. The second was whether there was something inherently reductive about educational processes as construed within the institutional framework of schooling, that an impersonal focus on grades and academic achievement was ultimately soul-destroying i.e. that teaching was not for me, I had done my best and it was time to walk away. But if this combination – of drama and education – could not provide me things in which I could find my seriousness, what could? And yet I was mindful that some of the most transformative and powerful experiences of my life had been in educational contexts where I had been challenged to rethink and re-evaluate what was important to me in how I should live my life, experiences that affected my whole being, mental and physical, emotional and intellectual, in so far as these tired dichotomies can come close to expressing the totality of my experiences.

I find this plight of mind and circumstance mirrored in the discipline itself, if not in quite the same terms and without such a strong personal inflection. The drama educationist Gavin Bolton has characterised the history of drama education as 'a search for substance' (Bolton, 2008, p. 45). Bolton does not say what he means by "substance", allowing the term to carry the weight of its possible meanings without further

refinement. Thus, it could be a search for what has educational significance, for content that is suitably educational, for an ideal pedagogy, for a body of knowledge and associated practices that would comprise a discipline. We might think of it as a search for what can be measured by the 'metrics of seriousness that … dictate the academic landscape' (Holm and Veldstra, 2015, p. 2). Equally we might view it as a search for substance in the expressive possibilities of the human voice and body; for example, that through drama, students may find the voice that will enable them to express substantial perspectives on their experience of the world that others in turn can take seriously i.e. that students have something to say about issues that are worth addressing and in so doing make their own claims upon us and, perhaps more importantly, each other.

Drama educationist Michael Anderson describes this as a search for 'truth and authenticity' and it matters because through 'truthful and authentic pedagogies' that engender 'critical hope', the young can 'rewrite the world' (Anderson, 2012, p. 152). Anderson argues that there are two foundations anchoring drama education. On the one hand is the aesthetics of drama and theatre. It is, claims Anderson, a robust and dynamic art form that is very much alive and prominent in society and schools. The second is 'the power of drama for learning'; by which young people can 'appraise the world and learn to be participants in the world as it changes, not as passengers but as drivers' (p. 150). Drama, he claims, teaches an active rather than passive response to the world – 'it develops informed optimism that helps students to understand the world through their minds, bodies and emotions' (p. 151). For Anderson,

> … drama education is vital, not because it helps us do sums better or get on better with our workmates (although these things are important) but because it allows us to craft lies that tell the truth about ourselves and about our community. It speaks a truth that some will not enjoy hearing but it is truth all the same.' (p. 152)

Bolton argues that there is no single method for achieving work that is appropriately substantial, no such thing as the one correct drama pedagogy, a point he draws from Kathleen Gallagher (Gallagher, 2003). Rather, drama activity is given substance by the claims that are made for it in the contexts in which it is applied and the ends to which it is put, contexts such as classrooms, prisons, refugee camps, hospitals, local communities and so on. Bolton cites Larry O' Farrell's observation that,

> Numerous testimonies have been given by teachers, artists, social workers, therapists and psychologists, working in refugee camps, bomb shelters, hospitals and improvised schools, on their use of drama to help children and young people to express their feelings of pain, loss, sorrow and anger and to declare their will to live and their hope for the future (O' Farrell, 2002, cited in Bolton, 2008, p. 57).

However, Bolton cautions that whilst such a view is encouraging, its idealism needs to take into account the careful judgement demanded of and required in drama interventions, judgements reflected in,

> Choice of subtext, choice of point of entry, choice of dramatic form, choice of convention, choice of texts, degree of persistence, pace of working, degree of student responsibility, extent and style of leader's input, timing and modes of reflection (Bolton, pp. 57-58).

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there has been a powerful utopian dimension to the engagement of drama practitioners, driving an emancipatory agenda. Monica Prendergast underpins her ideas of utopian drama by drawing on Charles Taylor's idea of the social imaginary, which Taylor describes as,

> The way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends…. The social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. (Taylor, 2004, cited in Prendergast, 2011, pp. 65-66)

One aspect of this utopic imaginary in drama education is the rhetoric of hope. We have already had evidence of this from Anderson's writings but it is also evident in the work of others – Helen Nicholson (2016) speaks of "networks of hope" and Kathleen Gallagher talks of "radical hope". It is important to recognise the backdrop to such claims, namely the sites of intervention in marginalised communities, with the disenfranchised, refugees, prisoners and so on. The rhetoric of hope has obvious associations with the rhetoric of transformation and emancipation. The point I wish to make is that these sites where theory meets practice, informing and embodying the other, are sites of seriousness. They make claims, demand our attention and consideration, position us in a particular relation to them. Nevertheless, they are not

uncontested. Around them swirl ethical and aesthetic issues, issues of ownership and social justice, of voice, colonialism, race, gender and power. However, these too reflect the metrics of seriousness in the academy in bridging theory and practice.

In Bolton's terms, they are part of the continuing story of the search for substance. However, one could also conceive of it as a search for seriousness. For "substance" substitute seriousness and for "shadow", another term that Bolton uses in his discussion, substitute non-seriousness. This is, in part, a similar kind of concern – why should drama be taken seriously in an educational context? However, it also gestures towards features of the subject that are less external and more internal to its being what it is. In particular any claims to the seriousness of drama appear to fly in the face of its many non-serious qualities – the play, the pretence, the emphasis on forms of personal rather than impersonal expression, the pleasure and fun, the humour and laughter. There is a suspicion that drama itself, no matter what its redeeming qualities, is essentially a non-serious activity. Kathleen Gallagher interprets this through the lens of gender as she writes,

> Drama is a gendered subject, not masculine like maths and sciences, which are hard, of the mind, *not for girls*. Despite countless examples of the power of drama in the lives of both girls and boys, its stigma as lacking weight and seriousness prevails. This view of drama as frill is particularly prevalent in western educational thought (Gallagher, 2002, p. 4).

Gallagher cites Walter Pitman's puzzlement about how artistic activity is viewed in schools in the light of a 'hierarchy of knowledge that places the measurable and objective at the top, leaving the experiential and subjective at the bottom' (Pitman, 1998, cited in Gallagher, 2002, p. 4). It is Pitman's view that the arts tend to be viewed in schools as play, entertainment and relaxation, and yet what he saw in arts classrooms were rigorous activities that stretched the mental and emotional capacities of students who were fully engaged with 'a seriousness, an intensity that was wondrous to behold', where student performances could leave an adult audience awestruck. Why then were the arts seen as unimportant i.e. non-serious?

One of the difficulties that drama education faces is the general tendency to negatively employ certain terms that are associated with it in relation to a contrasting constellation of states that include seriousness but which also extend to notions of

sincerity, authenticity, presence or, in the following example, "intensity". The comments are made by Irit Rogoff in a discussion with Gavin Butt on the topic of seriousness in art. In their wide-ranging discussion Rogoff and Butt speculate 'what seriousness might be about, instead of assuming that it is an attitude well known to us' (Rogoff and Butt, 2013, p. 14). What counts as serious? Where is that seriousness located? What does it look like? How does it sound? Is it even desirable? The context for their discussion is the waning cultural influence of postmodernism. Rogoff and Butt come to the discussion from different perspectives. Butt is more open to the ways in which non-serious forms of expression can possess a seriousness that they are normally denied and seeks to reimagine our understanding of the camp and performative as forms of seriousness. Rogoff, the more formal of the two academics, is equally resistant to displays of 'heavy-duty gravitas [and] performances of profound learnedness' (p. 12) and sees 'the antidote to a so-called lack of seriousness' (ibid.) as lying in a 'reinfusing of the art sphere with a form of intensity' (p. 14), which she sees as a move 'away from theatrics, dramatics, spectacle' (p. 15). Butt gently reprimands her for what appears to be an expression of anti-theatrical prejudice in the way 'theatricality is habitually cast as that which can't be taken seriously, because it's identified with unreality, superficiality and a lack of depth'. (p. 19). Rogoff later clarifies her position by indicating that her use of theatricality is intended to imply a surface response that fails to deepen.

One of their shared aims is a desire to avoid the technics of the academy in reimagining seriousness. Anton Franks has accused the drama research community of relying on similar hierarchies and dualisms. Franks (2015) echoes Gallagher *et al.*'s acknowledgment that the inadequate attention paid to the body in drama education reflects the way in which 'Western thinking from Plato onward has effectively separated mind from body, privileging the former over the latter. The body, however, is inseparable from knowledge and culture and bears the imprint of both' (Gallagher *et al.*, 2017). Franks suggests that we need to look 'for the ways in which the presence and co-presence of bodies make meaning and contribute to learning in drama.' (Franks, 2015, p. 312). Franks' concern was that,

> there was a tendency to see right through the bodily presence of students to get
> at learning. The ghostliness of the body …as emblematic of the continued
> dominance of a dualistic view of and hierarchical model of learning, one that

separates mind from body. It is as if the making of meaning and processes of learning can be entirely abstracted from the social and individual bodies of students.

It is, rather, a holistic view of bodily presence and co-presence that is indivisible from thinking and feeling. It is to emphasise both the materiality and plasticity of the meaning making body, its mutability in action and perception and its profound implication in learning.' (ibid.)

The reason for introducing these reflections on the current state of drama education is that I will use drama to draw out some of the important Cavellian aspects of the thesis, for example what Richard Eldridge has described as 'fully expressive action, aiming at exemplariness of voicing' (Eldridge, 2003, p. 2) and what Cavell himself has described as the 'spiritual struggle, specifically with the contrary depths of oneself' (Cavell, 1989, p. 37) in conceiving of philosophy as 'the effort to enact more humanly expressive possibilities' (Eldridge, 2003, p. 2), an effort that, if one abandons prejudicial theories about 'how philosophy has to look' makes it necessary that 'the question of what achieves philosophical conviction must at all times be on your mind'(Conant, 1989, cited in Rothman, 2003, p. 208). Thus, the question of whether the thesis succeeds or fails in securing conviction will not simply be about the quality of formal argumentation but also about the depth of the work and what can and cannot be taken seriously. Does it have anything to say about education, in particular drama education? How does it account for the play of the serious and non-serious, the personal and impersonal, the movement between thought and action, thought and expression, text and body? Does it have anything to say about philosophy? Is it even philosophical?

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The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of an introduction, ten chapters and a conclusion. **Chapter 1** considers various treatments of seriousness in philosophical literature. Seriousness is introduced as a philosophical rather than psychological theme although it is unclear whether seriousness should be understood as a concept or value or something that partakes of both. With respect to the philosophical text, it appears initially as a concern with style, tone and register, with implications not only for what counts as philosophy

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but also what represents good philosophical and educational practice in the analytical tradition.

Chapter 2 problematises the theorisation of seriousness as a concept and value in analytical philosophy of education. R.S. Peters locates seriousness in impersonal concepts of reason, method and criteria into which the student is initiated. For John Wilson, the student-teacher relationship provides the foundation for educational practice, ensuring a serious mind-set towards learning. Seriousness for Peters means coming to care for one's academic inheritance, by internalising and becoming a guardian for external standards and having a concern for truth, whilst for Wilson it is taking one's thinking seriously in the light of the rigorous criteria of rational argument.

Chapter 3 introduces the work of Stanley Cavell on seriousness and outlines how a more personal understanding of seriousness is possible, whilst emphasising a necessary tension with the impersonal. It places Cavell's original concern with seriousness, sincerity and authenticity in the same mid-century period as French existentialism but identifies features of Cavell's thought that distinguish it both from continental philosophy of the period and from the London School philosophers. The chapter traces the development of Cavell's attempts, under the influence of Austin and subsequently Wittgenstein, to establish the significance of the first-person perspective in reaction to the impersonality of Anglo-American analytical philosophy.

Chapter 4 evaluates the significance of Cavell's thematisation of the reclamation of the human voice in philosophy. The connections between Cavell's ordinary language and Kantian philosophical inheritance are identified in early work on the "universal voice" of critical judgment. Different views on the emergence of the thematic of voice are examined in the accounts of voice provided by Stephen Mulhall, Espen Hammer and Timothy Gould. This allows me to highlight some of the tensions between the personal and impersonal in Cavell's work and the difficulty of accounting for his theorisation of voice in purely personal or impersonal terms. Cavell's deepening understanding of the significance for his work of voice is explored in discussion of Wittgensteinian criteria and Cavellian attunement, locating the voice beyond the purely theoretical in the shared practices of our social and communal life.

Chapter 5 extends discussion of these themes through Cavell's commentary on the dispute between Derrida and Searle over Austin's exclusion of the non-serious from

his theory of performative utterance, focusing in particular on Austin's exclusion of utterances spoken on stage by the actor. Whilst both Derrida and Austin are suspicious of conventional claims for seriousness, Austin believes it is possible but the moves he makes in order to support his argument allow Derrida to challenge him at the structural level of language. Seriousness begins to emerge as a concept that may of necessity be unstable and contested, a condition that should be acknowledged rather than lamented. The significance for coming to know the world of non-serious activities such as the pretence at the heart of Drama Education are taken to exemplify this.

Chapter 6 critically applies Cavell's theorizing of voice to Dewey's treatment of playfulness and seriousness in teaching and learning. Dewey argues that the combination of playfulness and seriousness represents the ideal mental attitude of the artist, teacher and pupil. The thesis argues that, alongside the conventional classroom skills of the teacher and a concern for achieving learning outcomes, the teacher requires an authentic presence attuned to the seriousness of subject matter and the ethical limits of the playful. It is both an internal attunement and an attunement with others in mutuality. This is reflected in my discussion of two scenes from Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* (2006).

Chapter 7 discusses Raimond Gaita's work on moral seriousness and its significance for education. Gaita argues for a personal conception of seriousness which does not abandon the impersonal characteristics of reasoning but incorporates them into the idea of the personal as necessarily disciplined by the need to see things as they are. Whilst others have been equally critical of academic moral philosophy, Gaita seeks to rehabilitate our critical practices in his account of the seriousness of first-person expression in moral deliberation. I assess the opportunity Gaita's work provides for rethinking ethical education in ways that are continuous with the expression of ethical seriousness in our lives.

Chapter 8 extends the discussion of moral and aesthetic education in relation to seriousness via reflection on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* emphasising how we might understand the disciplined notion of the personal perspective through the ideas of Emersonian moral perfectionism. I create philosophical space for the importance of *how* we say things as an adjunct to the attention we pay to *what* is said, drawing on Cavell's discussions of perfectionism and passionate utterance. The drama classroom

can help, not by bringing out the inherently dramatic and conflictual nature of moral dilemmas as 'hard cases', but through heightened awareness that the personal voice, the individual's moral presence in his/her thought, is in part located in possibilities of that thought's physical expression.

Chapter 9 develops the discussion of theatricality in relation to seriousness, voice and expression. I critically discuss the renewed claims for the place of theatricality in contemporary drama education as both an aesthetic necessity and a powerful vehicle for reimagining social relations in what has been described as a pedagogy of critical hope and optimism. Theatricality is taken to condition authentic expression rather than requiring a departure from it. Learning to do so is described in terms of proximity in contrast to the technics of distance. The chapter concludes by bringing together Cavell and Wittgenstein in relation to drama teaching and the seriousness of the perspective of art as distinct from that of science.

Chapter 10 draws together the themes of seriousness, voice, the personal and the impersonal through the trope of ventriloquism in relation to higher education. Cavell's discussion of the repression of the female voice and the struggle to distinguish one's own voice from its influences are used to examine the challenges of learning how to express oneself and find one's voice both collectively and individually in academic contexts.

CHAPTER ONE

Philosophy and Seriousness

A Modest Proposal

In the middle of the swinging sixties, *British Analytical Philosophy*, edited by Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore, was published. Its aim was to introduce and exemplify some of the then current trends in British analytical philosophy for a Continental audience and reflect what were perceived as the tensions between a broadly empiricist approach and the linguistic turn which was proceeding under the influence of Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin. It was the latter, known prosaically as ordinary language philosophy, with its critical interest in how philosophical problems might be illuminated through close analytical attention to ordinary language that led to one of the main issues addressed in the editors' introduction: the problem of style.

Acknowledging that what is taken to distinguish English-speaking philosophy from Continental philosophy is often quite clichéd, it is the editors' opinion that nonetheless, the clichés gesture towards a truth. That truth is the 'genuine divergence between a rather matter-of-fact tone in the British style, and the darker more intense note… struck by much writing on the continent' (Williams and Montefiore, 1966, p. 5) However, this distinction is not solely one of academic tone and style or rather, 'tone' and 'style'. What is at stake is more substantial and looks beyond the simplistic views that British philosophy is banal and superficial or Continental philosophy is pretentious and obscure. The divergence, the editors argue, reflects 'a genuine disagreement about what constitutes seriousness in philosophy' (ibid.) Williams and Montefiore are concerned with identifying what is philosophically serious and distinctively British about how academic practices are understood and therefore how British philosophers take their understanding of philosophical seriousness to be reflected in both their methods and style of philosophy. It could be said that this is not simply how their philosophy appears or even how it is organised but how it sounds. It is not merely the joint engagement with others in a subject that is both taught and researched in a university – that is true of philosophy throughout Europe. What matters is how the

demands, responsibilities and limitations on those involved are to be interpreted. It here that Williams and Montefiore detect differences of tone and pitch and therefore, by implication, in seriousness.

One particular focus is the notion of intensity[1] and its relation to the literary. They write that continental philosophers are driven to 'heighten the intensity of our awareness of what we see and feel in certain situations by description of what is in fact an intense awareness of such things' (p. 14). In contrast,

> Seriousness and intensity are for the British outlook certainly different: … a serious representation of the world is not the representation of the world of intensity. On the contrary, it is a representation of the world which takes seriously the way that the world presents itself to ordinary, practical concerns of common life (ibid.).

Williams and Montefiore contrast Sartre's description of the intensity of the experience of negation in a man looking for an absent friend in a cafe with a situation where 'one finds that one's shoes are not under the bed'. This would be the British approach. The continental approach is marked by 'a certain emotional intensity and single-mindedness' whereas the English philosopher seeks enlightenment and understanding in 'humdrum applications'. Not too distant from the humdrum and the everyday is a wry and dry sense of humour that lies at the heart of a detached appreciation of life's little absurdities. The demand made on the British philosopher is that on the occasions of the humdrum, one's descriptions must 'match precisely the unexciting everyday character of such incidents'. They conclude by saying,

> The aim is indeed to reflect on everyday consciousness, but it will be a falsification of that to represent it, in reflective description, as intense: for everyday consciousness is not intense. The essence of ordinary experience emerges in its ordinariness, and ordinary experience – it is a simple tautology to say – is where most of our concepts do their work (ibid.).

There are several things to note. Firstly, this description and justification of what is representatively serious in British philosophy is itself the result of an expressed rejection of the spirit of Wittgensteinian philosophy in favour of the Austinian in the

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[1] Intensity was the idea taken by Irit Rogoff to be synonymous with seriousness in her exchange with Gavin Butt, discussed in the introduction.

inheritance of what has come to be known as ordinary language philosophy. It is a rejection of the temperament and approach of the one and embracing of the other that is manifested less in terms of philosophical content and more in terms of style, a preference for one voice over another. It reflects a difference between the depth of Wittgenstein's personal commitment and the 'powerfully individual and pungent quality of his writing' (p. 12) and the academic dryness and droll humour characteristic of the Austinian, with its 'deliberate rejection of the literary and the dramatic' (ibid.) and the lightness with which it wears its seriousness. It is a rejection of the philosophical agonising of the metaphysical temper aiming at depth of insight and an embracing of the scholarly man with a respect for the world of affairs.

Secondly, this involves the very specific rejection of any kind of literary perception being brought to bear on the style of the philosophical text. Making the concept or the idea come to life by the use of dramatic and striking examples or dramatic and striking descriptions of examples is to be avoided as a matter of conscience, as the following bears out,

> The adoption of a relatively sober and undramatic style and an objective form of argument responds to the demands, not just (as some critics urge) of academic respectability, but of a professional conscience. This point raises, in fact, the whole question of how philosophy can honestly be taught at all (p. 13).

Therefore, from the British perspective, philosophical seriousness allows for 'the availability of the subject in objective instruction and rational discussion… a view whose emphasis is on the colleague rather than on the master' (ibid.). It is perhaps, in its unstated and understated assumption, an idea or ideal of conversation.

Thirdly, rather belatedly and begrudgingly, Williams and Montefiore concede that whilst this approach might suit some areas of academic philosophy, it might not suit all. Their stated view is that,

> For many of the concepts and features of human thought studied by philosophy, this general attitude of the British philosopher must be correct. Yet it obviously has its dangers. For there are other aspects of human experience in which intensity of consciousness is itself, one might say, part of the issue, and where it will be a contrary falsification to suppose that the most everyday styles of

thought were the most revealing. Such may well be the case with moral and aesthetic experience, and to some extent with politics (p. 15)

This reflection might be thought to lead to a deeper discussion of style, the difficulty of expression and its relation to representation and description. Instead, it matter-of-factly refers to a revival in political philosophy, saying little about whether this has led to any difference in how philosophical discussion is conducted or how philosophy is to be presented and represented more generally. And similarly, style is again avoided in their half-hearted analysis of the crisis in moral philosophy, the editors preferring to shunt the discussion towards an impersonal sociological explanation of why moral philosophy had become 'formal, demure and unadventurous' (p. 16).

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A Personal Statement

In many ways, the genesis of the thesis was over thirty-five years ago when I first attended Raimond Gaita's lectures on moral philosophy. Gaita made an impression on my life that has remained with me. Both the man and his work possessed a seriousness that I have seldom encountered. It was not just the content of the lectures that had this impact but his tone, the discursive manner of his presentation and, later, the quality and style of his writing. I would like to call this his voice, and it spoke to me with a profundity that resonated deep within me. It was a personal voice, and spoke to me personally, but what I took from it could also be described as impersonal, in the way Gaita exemplified, in his own person, qualities of seriousness that were present in his distinctively discursive yet disciplined critical attention to philosophical and moral thought. Gaita did not turn my philosophical assumptions upside down. At that point, I barely knew what philosophy was. He turned my life upside down, his words and presence making me question everything about myself.

It may well be that ultimately this thesis is my attempt to belatedly discover whether education can ever be the place where I can find my voice and yet it was in an educational setting that I experienced this sea-change in my understanding of myself. What must education be for me in order for me to hear the sound of my own seriousness and not find it ridiculous? First and foremost, I ask this of myself as a teacher, questioning the nature of my presence and my relationship both to my students and the subject I teach, Drama and Theatre Studies. I also ask it more generally of conceptions

of education, of teaching and of learning, of what takes place within educational institutions and what it is for.

The context for my experiences was my exposure to moral philosophy, so it is important not to lose sight of what was so distinctive about Gaita's lectures and his teaching. Whilst others, such as Williams and Martha Nussbaum, were equally critical of academic moral philosophy in this period, Gaita was the philosopher for whom it was paramount that we reconsider our critical practices in the light of an understanding of morality as possessing a seriousness that was internal to its claims on us. This was not the matter-of-fact urbane seriousness of British analytical philosophy, and moral philosophy was clearly undergoing an upheaval in the years following the 1960s survey of British philosophy. However, Gaita's work, unlike that of Williams and Nussbaum, did not involve either a rejection of what had become the central tenets of moral theory, as Williams proposed, or the rejection of mainstream philosophical practices in favour of the exemplary moral qualities of particular works of literature, albeit underpinned by Aristotelian virtue ethics, as argued for by Nussbaum. Instead it directed our attention to the ways in which language expresses our deepest moral sensibilities and the discrepancy between this and what Peter Winch called 'the terms of epistemic appraisal characteristic of academic philosophy' (Winch, 1991). All this I was exposed to in my first year as an undergraduate. Years later the material I had been fortunate to listen to (and been so troubled by) in lectures was published as *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* and I was once again re-acquainted with the power of Gaita's thought through his writing. Through examples within discussions of slavery, the Holocaust, the nature of evil but also goodness and love, Gaita effectively revealed how the critical vocabulary of moral philosophy was inadequate to the task of elucidating a sense of 'goodness beyond virtue and evil beyond vice' (Gaita, 1991, p. 202) and more generally that sense of seriousness we take to be characteristic of moral matters and which we find in art, literature, religion and the possibilities of natural language.

For example, one of the discrepancies that Gaita has addressed in his work is the inadequate articulation of the variety of ways in which our moral understanding may be deepened. By this he means the way in which certain realities may be revealed to us which require us to acknowledge the cognitive aspects of our emotional responses as well as those characterised as thought, that emotions are not just 'emotions'. Gaita wrote of Kant that,

When Kant said that even in the presence of Jesus he would need to step back and turn inwards to listen to the deliverance of Reason, he was partly right and partly wrong. He was right insofar as he wished to stress that the acknowledgment of Jesus could not be a blind response, but he was wrong to think that insofar as we responded because we were moved, then to that extent we responded blindly. He was right insofar as he thought that a lucid response was that because of its obedience to the critical grammar of *thought* (Reason), but he was wrong insofar as he thought that critical grammar was conditioned by an a priori conception of what it is to think well and what it is to think badly which excluded feeling as something extraneous to it (p. 45).

We need to understand Gaita's arguments for the place of emotion in moral responsiveness through what he takes to be mainstream philosophical conceptions of thought and what is and is not internal to their critical assessment. Thus, when he speaks of there being many forms of serious and lucid moral response that may claim us, he is not ruling out our felt responses, which is what he takes others to have mistakenly done, including Kant, whose picture of a rational will 'misconstrues the nature of moral and spiritual energy and what conditions it' (p. 146), leading to, for example, 'a manifestly inadequate conception of the seriousness of murder – that the fact that someone is dead matters only because it brings our action under the moral law.' (p. 147).

Given the significance of Gaita's work for me, it may be wondered why I have chosen to weight the thesis towards Stanley Cavell rather than Gaita. This is not to impute any kind of profound disagreement with Gaita. His work continues to illuminate my thinking and in many ways, it is my reading of Gaita that has given me my possibility of a voice, the recognition and acknowledgment of its seriousness and the difficulties of sustaining it through unrewarding times. However, Gaita is not primarily interested in the expressive qualities of seriousness, the way in which it is connected to the expressive and relational nature of voice and body. It is Cavell who has most fully addressed the moral seriousness of the voice as philosophically significant for our understanding of what it means to be human – in finding or acquiring it, possessing it and the risk of losing it or having it denied. It is the significance of this for education and for myself that I wish to address in the thesis.

It is frustrating that Gaita has limited his discussion of emotion to its relation to the critical grammar of moral thought and responsiveness, tending to exclude the extent

to which he takes this to be an expressive response and how this is co-existent with a more obviously cognitive response. There must be a sense in which he does, given what I have said about what must be taken on trust and the risks we face of being conned or deceived, uncertain as to whether what is being expressed is genuine. Emotions we suffer, like remorse, guilt, shame, sorrow, grief, as well as expressions of love and joy, all of which might reflect ways in which we come to see how we are claimed or how another can claim us, are powerfully experienced in their physical and mental forms and are taken to be indicative of a serious or lucid moral understanding. We assume, for example, that anyone found guilty of a terrible crime should express remorse, and if they fail to do so they are either in complete denial about what they have done, do not understand its gravity or are pathological. There is a sense in which the experience of remorse is embodied and not solely characterised through our understanding, or perhaps that our understanding reflects a perspective on our actions that is conditioned by the intensity of our felt response to recognising what we have done.

It is not that the voice is not present in Gaita's discussion of moral seriousness. This is particularly true in his discussions of Plato, oratory and the character of Socrates. Socrates is a pivotal figure for Gaita and at the heart of this is the question of what it is to be present in one's speech, in what sense my words are my own and how I am taken to be standing behind my words or failing to do so. On the one hand Gaita characterises Socrates as someone who 'insists that those with whom he discusses philosophy must say what they believe rather than reporting what others had said or proposing hypothetical positions… He required the same of himself' (Gaita, 1991, p. 279). On the other, the kind of seriousness that Socrates called for in those with whom he conversed was not about voicing sincerely held personal opinions. Gaita describes Socrates' requirement as 'an effort of disciplined lucidity out of what they had made of themselves' (p. 280) and that 'their sincere personal opinions were worthless unless constrained by the discipline of thought and character which conditions the proper contrast between what is personal and what is impersonal in moral thought and discussion' (ibid.). Part of this is the way in which we are present in our words, alive and openly responsive to the presence and words of others and that not to be so is to deprive 'what we say of the authority necessary for its serious consideration' (p. 276). This is not a matter of extracting propositional content from the manner of its expression but to speak out of one's own individuality and importantly 'the capacity to

answer seriously under Socratic examination requires that the ethical subject – one who understands and is responsive to the requirements of morality – be more than a rational agent' (p. 277), a point to which I will return in discussing the significance of seriousness in Kierkegaard's thought.

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Kierkegaardian seriousness

In discussing what Socrates wanted of his interlocutors Gaita draws on the work of Kierkegaard in arguing that 'the ethical subject is… a human being under the discipline of the ethical requirement to become an individual' (p. 285). Kierkegaard is perhaps the philosopher who has given the most sustained attention to the place of seriousness (or "earnestness") in ethical thought and human existence, in its relation to irony, to which it is initially opposed but to which it is later understood as standing in a dialectical relationship, and jest, with which it comes to be harmonised in an ideal form of true seriousness. Gaita further acknowledges Kierkegaard's influence 'in thinking that Socrates' requirement that his interlocutors be utterly serious, is the requirement that they rise to the individuality which, is not so much a mark of the dignity of their humanity, as it is of its *reality*' (ibid.). How are we to understand that the reality of our individuality is the mark of our seriousness? Michael Theunissen offers us a possible way in which we might understand how this Kierkegaardian idea of reality expresses our individuality and is conditioned by our seriousness. Reality, he writes,

> is not a self-perpetuating external configuration which a person can devote attention to callously or indifferently. Rather, reality manifests itself as a motivation for ethical action and as a reason for religious faith. In short, seriousness is what constitutes reality and this leads to Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication – reality can only be communicated as a serious "call to the realization of one's own existence" (Theunissen, cited in Egenberger, 2012, p. 189).

What does Theunissen mean? He means that our understanding of what we call reality is an expression of what we take to be serious, in the light of which we take our actions to be ethical. It is our capacity for seriousness that conditions what we take to be reality. For Kierkegaard, the personal nature of seriousness and its ethical construal lie in being

able to ask oneself about the kind of life one is living, understanding the ethical as willing the Good via the form of the question "What kind of life am I living?" The question is not merely an autobiographical one. Rather, 'it asks you above all else, it asks you first and foremost, whether you really live in such a way that you are capable of answering that question, in such a way that the question truthfully exists for you' (Walker, 1985, p. 132). Stressing the demand for truthfulness both in asking and responding to the question is, as Jeremy Walker suggests, to stress its seriousness. It is only in doing so that an individual can hope to achieve the transparency of self-awareness that is the knowledge that one gains by seriously putting the question to oneself. Discussing this further, Walker posits that when Kierkegaard argues that the sense in which we should understand what he means by "seriously" is "ethically", 'it is tempting to suppose that he is trading on our ordinary, though vague, ideas about what the ethical is and using these ideas to identify a special sense for the idea of seriousness' (ibid.). Walker repudiates this. Instead Kierkegaard 'is trying to use the idea of seriousness, together with related ideas like the idea of choice, to give sense to the idea of the ethical (the ideas of good and evil, right and wrong)' (ibid.).

Gordon Marin, discussing Kierkegaard's text *At A Graveside*, grapples with the complexity of Kierkegaard's understanding of the work of seriousness in its relation to our emotional states. It is Marin's view that Kierkegaard presents earnestness 'as a kind of meta-cognition' (Marin, 2011, p. 154), but of what? Seriousness exists in a certain corrective contrast to transitory emotions, even intense ones such as grief over the death of a loved one. The earnest individual has an observing ego and is 'capable of recognising that he or she is in the snares of a mood that might take them down the wrong path' (ibid.). It is through this recognition that we are able to pull ourselves out of a mood and correct the perception of how things are through the mood we are in. The phrasing is slightly odd but the point is an important one. Seriousness on this account is not itself a mood but is a watchful presence that is inseparable from certain facts of our lives whose significance is not accounted for by their biological reality alone but the meaning they possess for us. This meaning may well be marked by particularly powerful emotions but they do not, in themselves, constitute or limit the nature of our serious response which, as Gaita indicates, is characterised, if not necessarily by a fully clarified lucidity, then by a desire for it in the light of the significance these features of our lives have and the emotions they arouse in us.

Seriousness, for Kierkegaard, is thus something that is learned, for example in the idea of my own death, and it is this disciplining of our thought that characterises the kind of seriousness that is an antidote to mawkishness and sentimentality: 'Earnestness and earnestness alone is what recommends mentally walking over your own grave' (p. 153).

As indicated, there is another aspect to Kierkegaard's philosophical interest in seriousness that I can only touch on here and that is its relationship to the concept of irony. In early work such as *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard sets irony and seriousness against each other as opposites. Kierkegaard associates irony with 'a breaking free from and a critical stance towards finite actuality' (Connell, 2000, p. 129). Kierkegaard not only juxtaposes irony with seriousness but also includes jest. As Michael Strawser points out, 'the presence of jest in seriousness and seriousness in jest characterises the ironist precisely' (Strawser, 1996, p. 218), quoting Kierkegaard's comment that "the ironist hides his jest in earnestness, his earnestness in jest". However, there is implicitly an even stronger claim, made in *Stages on Life's Way*, that true seriousness is the unity of jest and seriousness. If we are to take these two statements together it suggests that seriousness is conditioned by the possibility of its negation through irony, in our being alert to what is genuinely worthy of our attention as serious and what attempts to claim us as a kind of pseudo seriousness. In this way Kierkegaard dissociates seriousness from having a specifically literal or essential meaning, allowing an equal significance in the expression of meaning for the play in language that indicates otherwise.

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Sartre, de Beauvoir, the spirit of seriousness and the serious man

The ambivalent attitude towards seriousness that we find in Kierkegaard's work acquires a wholly negative character in the work of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, particularly in Kierkegaard's association of seriousness with the finite actuality to which the desire for freedom located in irony is opposed. In the concluding section of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that we must repudiate what he termed the 'spirit of seriousness' (L'*Esprit de Serieux*) as contradictory to the nature of human existence as revealed to us by ontology and existential psychoanalysis. These 'reveal to the moral agent that he is the being by whom values exist' (Sartre, 1986, p. 627). In contrast to this, the spirit of seriousness 'considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity, and it transfers the quality of "desirable" from the

ontological structure of things to their simple material constitution' (p. 626). As such, 'the result of the serious attitude, which as we know rules the world, is to cause the symbolic values of things to be drunk in by their empirical idiosyncrasy as ink by a blotter' (ibid.). As an example, Sartre gives bread, which is seen as desirable 'because it is *necessary* to live (a value written in an intelligible heaven) and because bread *is* nourishing' (ibid.). Sartre's point is that we allow the fact that bread is nourishing and has a given meaning ascribed to it in our culture as if ordained from beyond to determine its being understood as desirable per se. We have as it were allowed the material reality and social inscriptions of meaning and value to determine our own evaluation as given to us rather than chosen by us. In so doing we free ourselves from the anguish of choosing, denying or hiding our nature from itself.

Jonathan Webber argues we should understand Sartre's use of the term 'seriousness' in the context of how bad faith manifests itself in experience. Our values are contingently dependent on the projects that we are pursuing at any given moment in our adult lives and can be revised. Values can be understood in two ways. Webber writes,

> One is to recognise their dependence on the way one sees the world but take this to reflect one's own fixed nature. This is to take values as independent of one's own contingent choices, but not to take them as the same for everyone since people may differ in their fixed natures. The other is to deny the dependence of values on the way one sees the world but rather to reverse this direction of explanation by taking the values to be objective facts about the world and one's awareness of values to be recognition of such objective facts. (Webber, 2013, pp. 98–99)

It is this latter that Sartre refers to as seriousness. Seriousness is not bad faith *in toto* but one strategy of bad faith, one way of refusing to acknowledge that values are and can be freely chosen. Seriousness is therefore a strategy of fixing that which in its reality is not fixed, one's freedom and being in the world. Examples of people who are serious in this sense come from opposite ends of the political spectrum, with, on the one hand, revolutionaries finding the world objectively wrong and requiring an objectively right kind of structure and, on the other, those he terms 'possessors', who take the current structure of the world to be objectively right. According to Sartre, both types of individual are hiding the consciousness of their freedom from themselves.

Thus, there is a sense in which seriousness as Sartre conceives of it as a strategy of bad faith requires the serious person to fabricate or construct the world as serious i.e. as imposing values to which one cannot but submit. Webber describes this as 'fabricating evidence of the objectivity of values in the form of cultural objects that make demands on us, for example, alarm clocks, signboards, tax forms, policemen' (p. 99). Bad faith is therefore not restricted to attitudes towards others but includes physical constructions in the world. Under this account a person's sense of their own seriousness is determined by the seriousness of those things to which they attend. However, for Sartre this is a wholly negative feature of how and why we come to value things.

In *the Ethics of Ambiguity* (1976), Simone de Beauvoir devotes a section of the text to a critique of seriousness and its relation to freedom and she does so in similar terms to Sartre. De Beauvoir even claims that Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is 'in large part a description of the serious man and his universe' (De Beauvoir, 1976, p. 46) and it is 'the serious man' who is her target.

The plight of the serious man, claims de Beauvoir, is that he was once a child. As a child he found himself,

> cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees' (p. 35).

From this, de Beauvoir argues that 'this means that the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit of seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things' (ibid.), echoing Sartre's comments. This does not mean that the child is himself serious and 'on the contrary, he is allowed to play, to expend his existence freely. In his child's circle, he feels that he can passionately pursue and joyfully attain goals which he has set up for himself.' (ibid.) However, it is in the crisis of adolescence that the child has to assume responsibility for his or her subjectivity and is forced to confront, for the first time, the moral choice between freedom and facticity. It is the failure of the serious person that they choose facticity over freedom. De Beauvoir's quote that 'Ethics is the triumph of freedom over facticity' (p. 44) is a rejection of what she sees as the attitude of the serious man, who has simply submerged his freedom in the contents of society. De Beauvoir lays various charges at the door of

the serious man, for example that 'he is afraid of engaging himself in a project…[and] is thereby led to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world' (ibid.), or that 'the serious man's dishonesty issues from his being obliged ceaselessly to renew the denial of this freedom' (p. 47) De Beauvoir is conscious of echoing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as well as being aware of the influence of Sartre,

> The serious man gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values which would be unconditioned. He imagines that the accession to these values likewise permanently confers value upon himself. Shielded with "rights", he fulfils himself as a being who is escaping from the stress of existence (p. 46).

In more impersonal terms de Beauvoir argues that 'there is the serious from the moment that freedom denies itself to the advantage of ends which one claims are absolute' (ibid.).

De Beauvoir makes the point that being serious is not necessarily about adopting the values of others but is also seen when someone chooses to adhere to values which, although new, are treated with the same kind of certainty as older ones. The problem lies not in the idea of the tradition of values but in the fixation on them, a fixity that is expressed in terms of their possessing a seriousness which in turn demands they are taken seriously.

<p align="center">*****</p>

What does it mean to be serious? A dictionary definition.

One thing that has emerged in this initial discussion of the idea of seriousness is a considerable ambivalence and sometimes antagonism towards it. We seem to have profoundly mixed feelings about it. As George Connell writes of Kierkegaard,

> On the one hand, seriousness carries a host of positive associations. It is honesty vs. imposture, concern vs. indifference, authenticity vs. inauthenticity, commitment vs. experimentation, weight vs. "unbearable lightness", significance vs. meaninglessness. On the other hand, seriousness carries equally strong negative and even ludicrous associations. It is pompous and pedantic, smug and self-content, pretentious and pharasaical, fatuous and finicky. Ironically, in its very humourlessness, this second seriousness is an inexhaustible source of humour' (Connell, 2000, p. 116).

What is seriousness and what does it mean to be serious? The Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 3ʳᵈ Edition, March 2013) tells us that etymologically the word has its roots in the Latin 'seriosus'. In its various English forms – ceryous, seryous, seryouse – it dates back to at least the fifteenth century, as do its cognates 'seriousness' and 'seriously'. Other forms have fallen into disuse, such as 'seriosity', a variation on 'seriousness' and the superlative 'seriousest'. It is etymologically associated with the Old English *swaer*, meaning heavy, which is closely related to the German *schwer*, which has the same meaning. However, it has other associations beyond that of heaviness and weight. At the time when Kierkegaard was writing, and later, most infamously, Oscar Wilde, it is associated with the idea of earnestness. Both the Old English *eornest* and the German *ernst* connote combat, or duel. When said of persons, seriousness means,

1. of grave or solemn disposition or intention; having depth or solidity of character, not light or superficial.
2. Earnestly bent or applied (to the pursuit of something); keen
3. Staid, steady, reliable.
4. Earnest about the things of religion.
5. Of grave demeanour or aspect.

However, the word is not only used to describe persons or a state of mind but also a state of affairs, an event in the world and when said of these things it describes something,

1. Requiring earnest thought, consideration, or application.
2. Inducing or associated with grave or solemn thoughts.
3. Weighty, important, grave; (of quantity or degree) considerable, not trifling.
4. Attended with danger; giving cause for anxiety.

To take something seriously is to treat it 'with earnest thought or application; with serious intent; in earnest, earnestly; with gravity; not lightly, superficially or jocosely'. 'Seriousness' is 'the quality or condition of being serious; gravity or earnestness of purpose, thought or conduct; importance, weightiness'. The serious is 'that which is serious, the serious side of life, etc.'.

The dictionary speaks of earnestness, solemnity and gravity, qualities that are desirable and attractive, yet also undesirable and unattractive and, as I suggested, there

is a deep ambivalence towards them. This is not a problem of meaning or a contested understanding of the concept: a native speaker has little difficulty in using the words appropriately without a second's thought. However, perhaps we need to be wary of the dictionary itself. Allon White, applying a phrase of Bakhtin's, referred to seriousness as 'the dismal sacred word' (White, 1993, p. 128), arguing that it is a linguistic phenomenon which is reproduced through the functioning of language that,

> always has more to do with power than with content. The authority to designate what is to be taken seriously (and the authority to enforce reverential solemnity in certain contexts) is a way of creating and maintaining power' (ibid.).

White identifies Samuel Johnson's occasional jokes in his dictionary as playing 'upon the transgression of the rule of solemnity in dictionaries themselves' (ibid.). White's topic was the nature of dictionaries and the self-referential character of language but his point has a more general significance for our understanding of education. It is that certain kinds of language and the means by which we explain them, take place in a register that is intended to exclude that which disrupts such an assimilation. For White,

> the point of interest is not the commonplace idea that dominant forms of language dominate, but rather how the difference is inaugurated and maintained in educational institutions of language. In the separation of high and low, 'high' is defined as serious and difficult while 'low' is usually defined as comic and easy (p. 129).

This may seem both obvious and of little interest. However, White argues, such distinctions matter because 'life itself hangs in the balance'. He continues,

> What in fact is happening in this distinction between two kinds of language is the creation of a hierarchy by the high language such that seriousness – what is to be taken seriously – is defined, literally, *in its own words*. These dictionaries encoded in their very form a decisive ideological manoeuvre: they installed, in the very heart of language, not only a distinction on the grounds of seriousness but the very principle of seriousness itself. Words and things in themselves are neither serious nor comic, but the ability, the power, to legislate what shall be deemed serious is a key to hegemonic control' (p. 130).

White draws our attention to the way in which language itself directs us towards what is serious and non-serious in the sense of what is taken to be important, not so much identifying and aligning itself with human ontology but defining it and pinning it down. I will return to this later when discussing seriousness and playfulness in education, but just to note for now White's point that 'the social reproduction of seriousness is a key process in education' (p. 131). Yet at the same time it may be our awareness of the limitations of dictionary definition that allows for the paradoxical play of observations about seriousness, as exemplified in the following quotes,

> "Seriousness is the only refuge of the shallow" – Oscar Wilde

> "It is a curious fact that people are never so trivial as when they take themselves seriously" - Oscar Wilde

> "Anyone who takes themselves too seriously always runs the risk of looking ridiculous; anyone who can consistently laugh at themselves does not" - Vaclav Havel

> "Humour and High Seriousness… Perfect bedfellows I think. Though I usually phrase it in terms of comedy and darkness. Comedy without darkness rapidly becomes trivial. And darkness without comedy becomes unbearable" - Mark Haddon

> "It is not so important to be serious as it is to be serious about the important things. The monkey wears an expression of seriousness that would do credit to any college student but the monkey is serious because it itches" - Robert Hutchins

The kind of rigid divisions that the dictionary and the thesaurus present us with, whilst useful, do not reflect the way such meanings play out in our lives, where there is often far more of an interplay and fluidity in movement between the serious and the non-serious, something of the dialectical relationship that Kierkegaard identified and to which we might add the over-serious, that is, taking things too seriously rather than not seriously enough. The different attitudes to seriousness illustrated by the quotations belie the rather straightforward divisions of the dictionary. The work of Sartre and De Beauvoir, together with the earlier discussion of Regina, suggests our relationship to what is genuinely serious is more complex: what is important, what matters and how our taking them to be so is revealed in our lives. Seriousness begins to appear less stable

and always vulnerable to the threat of its antonymic possibilities in its embodiment in human speech and action. If that is the case, how do we understand what is not serious? Seriousness as opposed to what? One could say seriousness as opposed to insincerity, triviality, superficiality, playfulness, joking, light-heartedness. However, here too there is a question of what is appropriate and inappropriate in taking things seriously, including oneself. There is a sense of the ease with which we slip from the serious to the non-serious, the ease with which we are vulnerable to self-deception about our own seriousness as well as that which we take to be serious, rendering both absurd. There is also a sense of the need to be on our guard as to what is or is not serious along with an acknowledgment that humour is one of the ways in which we do maintain our guard and laughter our registering of this. We need to be open to the movement between the serious and the non-serious, a movement which can be fraught with difficulties but which, at another level, embodies our seriousness as measured by the appropriateness of our response to what claims us in seriousness. This presupposes that the serious marks what is desirable and the non-serious what is undesirable; the quotes undermine this simplistic picture.

Summary

In this chapter I have distinguished how different philosophers have discussed the concept and value of seriousness. Its most extensive treatment is seen in continental existential philosophy, initially in the work of Kierkegaard and then subsequently by those he directly or indirectly influenced, in particular Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Seriousness for the existentialists is not primarily a problem in academic philosophy but is located in the conditions of our existence as social beings and what our human being commits us to. The spirit of seriousness is one of the expressions of bad faith in the drama of our attempts to escape the full implications and responsibilities of our humanity. The more specific and troublesome issue of how philosophical thought should be appropriately expressed in order to convey its seriousness and to be taken seriously was introduced via reflection on the distinctions drawn between British analytical philosophy and continental philosophy in terms of tone, pitch and register. The criticisms of continental philosophy made by certain British analytical philosophers are carried into consideration of what is appropriately serious and philosophical in the practice of philosophy. The more detached and laconic tone of Anglophone philosophy was justified by them in terms of its dialogical egalitarianism,

which they contrasted with the more authoritarian intensity of the continental tradition. However, the inadequacy of the analytical approach to areas of philosophical inquiry like aesthetics, ethics and politics was acknowledged, implying that the literary rather than literal qualities of continental philosophy might be better suited to conveying what is at stake in these areas. Thus, at the heart of the question about the seriousness of philosophy is a question about how philosophy should be expressed if it is to be philosophy that makes serious claims upon us i.e. what should philosophy sound like as a response to what matters and is serious in human life?

CHAPTER 2

Seriousness, Philosophy of Education and the "London School"

On the seriousness of worthwhile activities

'Education, it has been argued, involves the initiation of others into worth-while activities.' (Peters, 1970, 144).

For Richard Peters, 'worth-while activities' were serious activities. He offers various overlapping explanations for what he means by this and how theoretical activities fulfil this requirement:

- 'They illuminate other areas of life and contribute to the quality of living' (Peters, 1970: 159)
- 'There is an immense amount to know, and if it is properly assimilated, it constantly throws light on, widens and deepens one's view of countless other things' (Peters, 1970: 159)
- 'Because they consist largely in the explanation, assessment, and illumination of the different facets of life. They thus insensibly change a man's view of the world' (Peters, 1970: 160)

Michael Hand (2011) has described these as instrumental reasons for the justification of theoretical activities as worthwhile activities, arguing that Peters arrives at them following the failure of the hedonistic and transcendental arguments in which Peters deploys the character of the serious man as a justificatory strategy.

Before embarking on a discussion of seriousness as embodied in the figure of the serious man, I want to say something about the kind of activities for which Peters was seeking justification in terms of a certain concept of education. What were they? They included science, history, literary appreciation, philosophy and 'other such cultural activities', which he characterised as 'disinterested pursuits'. Disinterest, with its sense of impartiality, neutrality and objectivity, not only ascribes a value to these

activities that lies outside any supposed instrumental personal advantage to be gained from participation, but also implies that such engagement will be appropriately impersonal, dispassionate and detached.

However, the picture is more complicated than simply offering a particular characterisation of what certain activities have in common. For whom are these activities intrinsically worthwhile and serious? When Peters argues that education involves the initiation of others into worthwhile activities he does so by reference to the kind of person whose seriousness is evident in a concern for the truth and the kind of activities which are likewise concerned with the truth. As such, each guarantees the seriousness of the other, through the likely participation of the serious person in these disciplines on the one hand and the recognition by the participants of the authoritative standards of the discipline on the other, most notably its claims to truth and to knowledge. The seriousness of both can be summed up in the phrase "disinterested pursuit", a phrase intended to capture the ideal attitude of the serious person and the typical procedure of the worthwhile activity. This would be a methodology whose impersonal procedures are available to anyone who is suitably trained and its model is that of the sciences. Indeed, coming to see how those procedures apply to oneself is part of what it means to be trained in a discipline and requires an acknowledgment that the voice in which one presents one's findings and establishes one's credentials is an impersonal one now appropriately in accord with disciplinary criteria.

In order to understand how Peters arrived at this, we need to ask who the serious person is, what they represent and how the figure functions in Peters' arguments. The serious person is a hypothetical someone who is committed to the impersonal deployment of reason when faced with the question of "why do this rather than that?", the question that lies at the heart of Peters' discussion of the intrinsic value of worthwhile activities in general and the superiority of theoretical activities over other kinds of intrinsically valuable activities, most notably sports and games.

Am I jumping the gun and conflating two of the argumentative strategies that Peters employs in his attempts to justify theoretical activities, both of which depend on an *ad hominem* characterisation of the serious person? Prior to the serious man of the transcendental arguments with his concern for truth there is the serious man of the hedonistic arguments for whom the answer to the question "why do this rather than that?" depends on considerations of the extent to which intrinsically worthwhile activities are pleasurable, satisfying and can hold boredom at bay, such that,

> An activity must go on for a time and if one is deciding to spend time in one way rather than another surely questions relating to boredom must be relevant. From this point of view there must be some kind of preference for activities which are capable of holding a person's attention for a certain span of time, and which provide constant sources of pleasure and satisfaction (Peters, 1970, p. 156).

There are plenty of activities that could fit the bill on this account, not all of which would be theoretical activities. Peters continues,

> Anyone, therefore, who is thinking seriously about how to spend his time cannot but go for activities which afford rich opportunities for employing his wits, resources and sensitivities in situations in which there is a premium on unpredictability and opportunities for skill (ibid.).

However, as Ray Elliott points out, theoretical activities may not be pleasurable. Indeed, 'Anxiety is frequently the prevailing mood, and confusion, and dead-ends, disappointments, lack of inspiration, and lack of energy combine to generate wretchedness' (Elliott, 1977, p. 10, cited in Hand, 2011, p. 108). Wretchedness and anxiety notwithstanding, Peters could argue that moments of uncertainty and misery are part of what is involved in the satisfaction of rising to a challenge such as is presented by theoretical inquiry. John Wilson also questions Peters' use of boredom as a criterion for judging the extent to which activities were worthwhile or not,

> [It] is odd to describe the satisfaction of the 'necessary appetites' as boring just because there is less opportunity for discrimination, skill and 'standards'. They are boring only to those who insist on such things: and why should we not represent this as some kind of neurotic compulsion?' (Wilson, 1979, p. 138)

Ultimately the serious person of the hedonistic arguments is inadequate to the justificatory task and Peters turns to the serious person of the transcendental arguments as a more effective judge for the worthwhileness of theoretical activities. This serious person is presumed to be equipped for such tasks, committed not only to arriving at a decision about what to do in the light of general principles which distinguish between good and bad reasons for doing something, but able to recognise such general, principled reasons as being applicable to themselves. A principle is general if 'what ought to be done in any particular situation or by any particular person ought to be done

in any other situation or by any other person unless there is some relevant difference in the situation or person in question'. (Peters, 1970, p. 122). The rationality of the person who is committed to taking practical reason seriously through such a process is in contrast to the person who has come to a decision whimsically or by 'individual fiat'. Such a person cannot be said to have arrived at a decision but has simply "plumped" for it. Whilst the idea of commanding oneself by fiat in such contexts is rather puzzling if not unintelligible, a decision notionally falling under one or other construal is thereby not a serious one because it is not rationally derived and therefore does not exhibit the requisite concern for the truth.

This reveals what is serious about theoretical activities for the serious person. They are rational activities 'in which there is a concern for what is true or false, appropriate, correct or incorrect' (Peters, p. 165). As such they provide an appropriate context for what matters to the serious person. As Peters writes,

> For how can a serious practical question be asked unless a man also wants to acquaint himself as well as he can with the situation out of which the question arises and of the facts of various kinds which provide the framework for possible answers? The various theoretical enquiries are explorations of these different facets of his experience. (Peters, p. 164).

Why should these things matter to the serious person? What is the justification for serious engagement in practical discourse in so far as a commitment to truth is presupposed by such engagement? Is this just another, rather weak *ad hominem* justification? (Hand, p. 112). Peters has an answer for this. We do not go through life unreflectively plumping and relying on what others say because we will find ourselves following 'procedures which are inappropriate to demands that are admitted, and must be admitted by anyone who takes part in human life' (Peters, p. 253, cited in Hand, p. 112).

This then, is a picture of mature judgement. Not only is this how the serious person chooses to spend his time and these are the kind of activities on which he spends it, but this is how the serious man judges and these are the contexts in which he will exercise his judgment. The purpose of education is therefore to bring individual students to a suitably similar maturity and the best way to achieve that is through the kind of process that is characterised as an initiation.

These arguments have been criticised on a number of points. Michael Hand lists three in his own discussion of Peters (Hand 2012, p. 111 – 112).

1   The first problem is concerned with the *ad hominem* nature of the transcendental argument to which we drew attention earlier. It is a justification only to those who already ask, 'Why do this rather than that?'…[But] it is easy, and common, for people to avoid raising this question at all (Downie *et al.*, 1974, p. 46).

2   [The transcendental arguments] do not much help us because they are too tightly conceived – that is, they move within too small a circle. If, or insofar as, anyone is serious in the required sense, the conclusions may follow; but many people are often not very serious, and we want arguments to show why, or how far, or when, they ought to be (Wilson, 1979, p. 137).

3   It only trivialises education if it is argued that a commitment to certain activities deemed to be educationally valuable is presupposed by the justificatory question. For such an argument does not tell us why education is justified except in the sense that it is necessary to answering justificatory questions. What is needed is an account which will display for us the importance of justificatory questions (Kleinig, 1982, p. 87).

One answer to the criticism, that not everyone will ask these questions or be appropriately serious, is to see Peters as offering us his own version of the Aristotelian *ho spoudaios*, the serious man whose standing is such that his or her judgment is to be taken seriously, a variation on Hume's ideal observer and the utilitarian competent judge. In the light of conflicting and possibly irresoluble arguments, invoking such a figure might offer a stronger form of an *ad hominem* claim, suitably characterised. However, we can see the problems that beset Peters in attempting this. Peters himself denies that a concern for truth is all that matters or that, as a value, it trumps all others, writing that 'There is also the consideration of interests – especially of those who suffer, justice, love, and the more hedonistic or 'vital' values constitutive of people's interests' (Peters, 1977, p. 37 cited in Hand, p. 113).

Not only is this a problem for the justification of the worthwhileness of theoretical activities but it has considerable implications for how we understand

seriousness and what it means to be serious. How does Peters deal with these? Despite seeking intrinsic justifications for the worthwhileness of theoretical activities, he is forced to consider more instrumental reasons that go beyond the hedonistic and the transcendental. These were the reasons presented at the beginning of the chapter. I will shortly return to consideration of the terms in which Peters expresses them but, assuming the transformative effects of initiation into the relevant practices, I want to consider how this is to be achieved?

Peters locates the seriousness of educational activities in 'the shared impersonality both of the content that is handed on and of the criteria by reference to which it is criticised and developed' (Peters, 1970, p. 52). Whilst both content and procedures are intersubjective, this consists of 'experienced persons turning the eye of others outwards to what is essentially independent of persons' (p. 54). In this way initiates are placed 'on the inside of a form of thought or awareness by a wide variety of processes.' In order to avoid the suspicion that this is simply a traditional form of education re-emerging in response to the challenges and perceived shortcomings of progressivism, Peters argues that this still involves 'some kind of consciousness and consent on the part of the initiate' (ibid.). Thus, he cannot be accused of advocating a variation on the passive transmission of knowledge. Nevertheless, Peters is troubled, acknowledging that this picture of intersubjectivity appeared to leave little room for the personal, which he conceives as being concerned with individual potentiality and realization and the significance of the personal relationship between teacher and student.

How then, does Peters attempt to make room for the personal in education, given the impersonal nature of intersubjectivity, based as it is on the allegiance to impersonal criteria and standards as the medium through which the teacher teaches and the learner learns? Peters tackles this is in two stages, firstly through an examination of education and the emphasis on the individual and secondly through a discussion of education and personal relationships. Both begin by addressing a similar accusation to which he acknowledges a response is required, on the one hand that 'it might be said that this account of education which has stressed the intersubjective content of education, does too little justice to the personal element in it' and on the other that 'there are many who emphasize the importance of personal relationships in teaching and it might be thought that the foregoing account is oblivious of them in its stress on impersonal standards to which both teacher and taught owe allegiance'(p. 57-58).

Peters contrasts both the individual and the personal with the impersonal. Vis-a-vis the individual, the aim of education might be 'to develop the potentialities of each individual or to enable the individual to realize himself' (p. 55). Peters wonders whether this runs contrary to the concept of education he had been outlining but suggests that it is one thing to respect individual difference and each individual's unique viewpoint on the world, together with the aspirations, abilities and inclinations that are peculiar to him' (p. 55), but quite another to do so 'when confronted with abilities such as those of a lotus-eater or a Marquis de Sade... His plea for self-realization is a plea for the principle of options within a range of activities and modes of conduct that are thought to be desirable… or at least not undesirable' (p. 55–56).

Moreover, even if there are limits on the development of the self and the extent to which it is an aim of education to indiscriminately foster self-realization and thus on the content or matter of education, what about its manner? To what extent should teaching acknowledge individuality in the manner of teaching? Here Peters admits there might be room for manoeuvre, but perhaps only for younger children, writing,

> In the early stages of education, especially while the minds of young children are comparatively unformed by public traditions, the importance of individual differences is paramount. Hence the relevance of activity methods which cater well for individual idiosyncrasies and divergent rates of growth. Such a 'child-centred' approach is as appropriate in dealing with the backward or difficult adolescent as it is with the infant stage. For the crucial difference is not one of age, but of cognitive structure, and of degrees of initiation into public and differentiated modes of thought. (p. 56)

Peters also associates an over-concern for individuality with a similarly excessive concern for creativity. Whilst acknowledging 'the importance of individual inventiveness and creativity' (p. 57) he argues that we can only speak meaningfully about creativity if the individual 'is brought up in a tradition which enables him to see and find a way round a problem when it arises.' (ibid.) For Peters individual inventiveness 'can only emerge against a background of a public tradition which has provided both the milieu for problems and the procedures for tackling them' (ibid.). Once again, we hear a tone of ratiocination in the characterisation of the desirability of a human trait within an educational context. Creativity is useful in so far as it enhances the solving of problems, where 'problems' are of a kind which both requires and permits their being solved by strictly rational processes.

Thirdly Peters considers the development of character. Here he argues that for an individual, character represents one's own distinctive style of rule-following. However, it represents an emphasis, an individualized pattern, which is drawn from a public pool - 'Character-traits are internalized social rules such as honesty, punctuality, truthfulness, and selfishness… the rules which he imposes [on himself] are those into which he has been initiated since the dawn of his life as a social being.' (p. 57)

We see that Peters is driven to contextualise arguments for the personal and individual in terms of the social and impersonal and that the former is underpinned by the latter; the social and the impersonal are prior to the personal and the individual. There is nothing in the idea of character that is to be absolutely valued for, let us say, its innateness (an aspect of the mind which Peters describes in personal terms in the context of education with regard to the pedagogical claims and recognition that are made on its behalf). Instead, it is to be understood in terms of acculturation and as an aspect of social practice and therefore acquires its value with reference to more impersonal social terms.

Turning to education and personal relationships, what we find in Peters is a rigid demarcation of what belongs to the impersonal domain of the methods, practices, content, procedures and criteria of the initiation into worthwhile activities and what does not. Nevertheless, Peters is perhaps more troubled by questions of demarcation than might at first appear. He begins by acknowledging a concern that the importance of personal relationships in education is downplayed by the 'stress on impersonal standards to which both teacher and taught owe allegiance'. Peters argues that being able to form 'satisfactory personal relationships' is necessary in order to avoid being warped or stunted in what one does'. Peters equates this to loving and being loved and if those needs are not satisfied 'the individual will be prone to distortions of belief' and 'his attempts to learn things will also be hampered by his lack of trust and confidence' (p. 58).

Leaving aside the question of whether the character of such relationships in educational contexts should be one of loving and being loved or whether in reality it ever is, Peters suggested that 'a firm basis of love and trust, together with a continuing education in personal relationships, is therefore a crucial underpinning to any other more specific educational enterprise' (ibid.). Such a basis enables a teacher to do his job effectively. But if this is true of any caring profession, Peters needs to clarify 'what

is specific to a *teacher's* relationship with his pupils' (ibid.). It is here we start to feel the tension. Peters writes,

> Usually an educational situation is a form of group experience. At its developed stages, when all are to varying degrees on the inside of a form of thought or awareness, it is a shared exploration conducted in accordance with rigorous canons, in which all are united by common zeal (ibid.).

What characterises the teacher's relationships with his or her students is not then a liking of greater or lesser degree of individual students but 'a respect for them as persons'. What does he mean? 'Respect of persons is the feeling awakened when another is regarded as a distinctive centre of consciousness' (p. 59). Are we any the wiser? Peters expands,

> It is connected with the awareness one has that each man has his own aspirations, his own viewpoint on the world; that each man takes pride in his achievements, however idiosyncratic they may be. To respect a person is to realize all this and care' (ibid.).

The tone is one of anxiety bordering on fear: that on the one hand allegiance to impersonal standards may lead to impoverished or unacceptable behaviour and on the other, that by being overly concerned with encouraging and motivating the student, those tasked with the job of teaching, or initiating, will lose sight of educational standards and content, a loss which might be represented by, for example, a lack of impartiality or rigour.

Three times Peters qualifies comments about the personal with references to the impersonal, thereby 'placing the emphasis [on the personal] in perspective.' He writes 'it is a shared exploration, conducted in accordance with rigorous canons; the teacher must be unswerving in his allegiance to the principles which mark out his 'holy ground'' (ibid.) and 'he must care about the principles of his discipline and about his pupil's viewpoint on the world' (ibid.). Yet it is interesting that Peters softens his account by speaking of 'the awareness that one is confronted with developing centres of consciousness'[2] as some kind of slightly begrudging and

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[2] Elsewhere Peters refers to students as 'distinctive centres of consciousness, with peculiar idiosyncratic purposes and feelings that criss-cross their institutional roles. Each is bound up with and takes pride of some sort in his own achievements; each one mirrors the world from a distinctive point of view' (Peters, 'Education as initiation' in Authority, Responsibility and Education, 1973, p. 101.) Prior to this he has stated that 'The teacher is not a detached operator who is bringing about some kind of result in another person which is external to him. His task is to try to get others on the inside

awkwardly impersonal qualification of the unswerving allegiance to the principles which are said to mark out the holy-ground. The following, rather lengthy quote in which Peters describes how a teacher/initiator should conduct himself with his students, contains much that is germane to the discussion,

> … especially in the early stages of initiation, he must not be brutal in applying them to the halting or misdirected ventures of his pupils. For that would be to disregard how such a contribution looks to its author, to trample on another's inchoate formulation of what he thinks or feels. People learn by committing themselves and finding out where they are mistaken. Much can be done to anticipate criticism by rehearsals in the imagination. But there is a sense in which no one quite knows what he thinks or feels until he has made a view his own by identifying himself with it and defending it in public. To take a hatchet to a pupil's contribution, before he has much equipment to defend it, is not only likely to arrest or warp his growth in this form of thought; it is also to be insensitive to him as a person (ibid.).

If we now return to the initial statements about what is serious about worthwhile activities, it is unclear what must take place for the student to experience activities in this way. This harks back to the example provided by Derry, where the problem is not necessarily one of rationality but of depth and superficiality. What kind of teaching is required? What kind of understanding of subject matter and what kind of responsiveness is demanded of the student? It is in part to answer these kinds of question that John Wilson develops his ideas on education and seriousness.

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Seriousness and the foundations of education

As I suggested, other philosophers have examined the notion of seriousness more fully in the educational context but they have tended to take their orientation from Peters. One such is John Wilson. Wilson claims that education is suffering from a sickness that has hitherto not been diagnosed because its practitioners do not even know or recognise

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of a public form of life that he shares and considers to be worth-while. In science, it is truth that matters, not what any individual believes to be true; in morals it is justice, not the pronouncements of any individual' (p. 100). It is to address the inconsistencies in these comments that the thesis focuses on the descriptions of the personal and the impersonal and their relationship to seriousness in the form of the serious man.

they are ill. They are suffering from a lack of seriousness and a surfeit of fantasy. As a remedy, Wilson offers an account of seriousness that is centred on reason, personal relationships and the demand for conceptual clarity in our thinking. This leads him to advocate a philosophical construct for understanding seriousness as foundational for educational practices in an argument that focuses less on the content of education and more on the nature of the relationship between teacher and pupil. It also leads him to tentatively formulate practices that might appropriately embody and enact this conception and restore education to good health. Not surprisingly, the diagnosis that Wilson offers has led others to be rather chary about acknowledging the substance of his ideas. Acknowledging that "serious" was an important word in John Wilson's vocabulary, Robin Barrow understands Wilson to be claiming that what is lacking in educational research and theory is the ability to give serious attention to 'what we think we mean by what we say and do' (Barrow, 1999, p. 79). He describes an attention that is 'painstaking, authentic, committed, passionate, detailed, intelligent' (ibid.). However, he carefully refrains from discussing Wilson's account of the practices he associates with this, declaring it to be water in which he neither wished nor dared to swim. That water, in which both educators and educated alike are swimming, is a sea of fantasy that is taken for reality, much as the inhabitants of Plato's cave took the shadows cast on the wall to be reality. The cure for such thinking will be a form of psychoanalysis that we should perhaps call conceptual philosophical counselling rather than philosophical analysis. Sufferers will be cured of their fantasies and will acquire the seriousness required to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate foundations for the holding of beliefs. These strong philosophical foundations will provide a secure basis of certainty from which to educationally proceed.

Wilson examines the supposedly problematical nature of seriousness in education more than once. 'Seriousness and Fantasy' appears as a chapter in *Preface to the Philosophy of Education* (1979) and Seriousness and the Foundations of Education' was published in 1998. Essentially his argument boils down to a view of education as being in need of a kind of therapeutic intervention along the lines of psychoanalysis but in the form of conceptual analysis that will cure both teacher and student of a tendency to settle for accounts of reality that have been subjected to less than rigorous scrutiny. If Peters is arguing for a connection between the serious person and the content of the curriculum, then Wilson's concern is to create the right kind of

person with the necessary seriousness to meet the challenges of such a curriculum. To do so requires intervention by the teacher/mentor at a more personal level. Thus, he starts with seriousness as an outcome of the personal relationship between teacher and pupil/student, understood in terms of love and friendship. In this respect Wilson takes the personal aspect of education more seriously than Peters, who is suspicious that good personal relationships are 'in danger of becoming a substitute for teaching them something' (Peters, 1973, p. 101) and for whom 'what is required of the teacher…is respect for persons, not intimate relations with his pupils' (ibid.).

Wilson begins by discussing how to define what he calls this 'thing or feature, which seems to be fundamental for human life and to have been largely neglected' (Wilson, 1998, p. 143) He wonders whether it is 'a virtue, a state of mind, a talent or capacity or disposition' (ibid.). He goes with disposition and offers as a definition that it is a '*disposition to address and act on the world by the use of reason*' (ibid.). This disposition is seriousness. In being serious we address and act on the world by the use of reason.

The next step is to identify what the serious person does in being serious. It is here the idea of monitoring is introduced. The serious person monitors their life. Such a person is described as detaching himself 'from the immediacy of the enterprise' (p. 143). The serious person 'concentrates, pays attention…and wants to learn' (ibid.). This learning amounts to getting the 'concepts clear' and, in questionably Wittgensteinian terminology, getting 'the feel of the forms of life' (ibid.) in the acquisition of knowledge. As an example of the kind of things that the serious person might want to acquire knowledge of, Wilson suggests love and friendship. The serious person is characterised as not only wanting to 'get the concepts clear,' but 'to act and feel' (pp. 143–144) as well. This will require examining one's own feelings and emotions. In broad terms monitoring is a rational scrutiny of one's thinking and feeling.

Wilson offers two routes to achieving this kind of monitoring. One is via academic disciplines and he identifies philosophy and psychology as best representing/embodying the kind of conceptual and psychological analysis that are internal to this idea. In relation to love and friendship, one should study the works of the greats like Plato and Aristotle, for example the *Symposium* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as more recent theorists like Freud. The serious person might also try to gain insight via great works of fiction – reading novels and plays, for example. The second route is via discourse with others, which Wilson describes as '*sharing* the

inquiry' (p. 144). The advantage of this is that others can help me to guard against self-delusion and the distortions of subjectivity and can assist me in my task of getting the concepts straight. At this point Wilson introduces an additional feature to the idea of monitoring, that it must be 'deep and extensive' (ibid.)

Such monitoring, Wilson argues, is difficult and challenging. It requires us to enjoy submitting ourselves to rational scrutiny, both on our own and with others. It requires us to be open to the changes and shifts in our perspectives that monitoring brings about. It requires what he calls 'a kind of courage backed by a kind of love' (p. 147). For Wilson, 'seriousness …requires my submission to …. the discipline of reason and the various forms of reason as they mediate reality to me. And that contrasts with my trying to force or distort reality into whatever shape is more comfortable to me.' (p. 145)

Wilson is somewhat troubled by some of the possibilities implicit in the way seriousness and its cognate forms are employed in ordinary language that suggest a more problematical relation to rationality, to the extent that rationality can appear to be excluded by them. If seriousness is to be understood as a particular kind of rational disposition of the mind which implies particular uses of language and form of expression, then the way we use the language of seriousness to indicate the nature of commitment, for example, might lead us to doubt that the relationship is quite so straightforward. It calls into question the extent to which our understanding of individual psychology, the relationship of the self to others and the nature of (for example, political and moral) commitment are mediated by a vocal and physical embodiment that expresses the seriousness these features may possess for us. Toneless, voiceless, expressionless reason no longer seems to adequately capture what it means to take something seriously. Wilson is forced to rethink his account of seriousness in order to resist the implications of this, as can be seen in his discussion of earnestness and passion. In offering an alternative diagnosis of the problem of politically motivated seriousness to Sartre and de Beauvoir, he writes,

> I have spent some time in expanding the notion of seriousness, partly because it is fatally easy to assimilate it to the idea of being earnest or passionate. Of course, it does involve that; but the earnestness and passion has to be focussed on more than some particular cause or set of substantive values. To be morally (or politically) serious cannot only mean that I feel and act with passion in

advancing some cause, whether that cause be the preservation of wildlife or the suppression of Jews. It must at least include the idea of being serious about morality (or) politics itself. And this returns us again to the notion of subjecting ourselves to the various disciplines that constitute the appropriate monitoring. (p. 151)

Wilson's fear seems to be one of surfeit and deficit, particularly in relation to ethics and that the expression of commitment is neither good or bad in itself. Something more is required to evaluate and shed light upon any claims made. That something is reason. Wilson's grappling with the problem at this point has a Humean quality to it in terms of how he tries to place reason and emotion in relation to each other and still hold onto a concept of seriousness. Thus, on the one hand commitment as extremism is equated with an excessive, distorted sense of seriousness which he equates with the passionate holding and expression of beliefs. This is to be resisted. However, on the other, this leads him to consider the importance of being roused to action in our concept of monitoring rather than admitting a more passive conception of it as understanding. The fear is that this might be interpreted as apathy and therefore lack the seriousness that embodied action expresses. Wilson is grappling with an understanding of seriousness as an embodied concept that is at odds with its characterisation as a disposition towards reason insofar as that implies an idealised set of behaviours which excludes what he views as the risks of more impassioned expression but which might lead to passive reflection that excludes action. This more emotional expression of seriousness threatens to undermine the particular concept of seriousness as a kind of self-monitoring that is foundational for educational practices. Wilson's solution is to allow for the passionate expression of moral beliefs and particular commitments but to shift the emphasis to the meta-reflective as a form of monitoring so that 'the idea of being serious about morality (or politics) itself' (ibid.) re-establishes the rational content of appropriate monitoring so as to guard against a characterisation of this as indifference or apathy.

What is the role of education in such practices? It was Wilson's view at the time he was writing – the late 1990s – that the institutional structures, which should exist 'to promote the kind of shared relationship and personal engagement that lies behind and sustains seriousness,' (pp. 147–148) were ill-equipped to do so. It was not just that they were ill-equipped but were actively involved in the peddling of fantasies where 'improper mental processes' were only accidentally co-extensive with the truth.

Somewhat bizarrely, the picture Wilson has in mind is not one of 'unformed desires, fears, hopes and so on' but something like 'a connected story, pattern or dream-world which has a life of its own in the mind' (Wilson, 1979, p. 173). In order to explain the world, we tell ourselves stories and take these to be reality. This is what he took to be the state of education at the time he was writing.

What then did he have in mind as a corrective in order to facilitate the kind of monitoring that embodied seriousness as he characterised it? Wilson offers us two pictures. Firstly, he suggests that every child should have a kind of confessor figure in their educational lives, something between a personal tutor, analyst and counsellor. The job of such a person is not to act as a mentor in the sense of offering encouragement and boosting self-esteem but to assist the child in monitoring and examining himself deeply. Very specifically, this means helping the child to examine his concepts and emotions. This is a task or a relationship that requires closeness and trust. Secondly, children should be taught the relevant disciplines that facilitate such self-scrutiny: 'the disciplines of understanding one's concepts and emotions' (Wilson, 1998, p. 153). Wilson balks at calling them "philosophy" and "psychology" - that would be too pompous and academic - nevertheless, it is what he is referring to. Why have schools and institutions not been in a position to actually do this? It was not because of staffing issues or the suitability of such courses, whatever they are, but because of an intellectual failure, that they 'do not properly *understand* seriousness or the need for it' (ibid.). Educators are prone to the same fantasies about what we take to be knowledge as their students.

What is interesting are the kind of areas where Wilson believes we need to plunge in at the deep end and in which he feels he can only vaguely address the issue of seriousness – for example, personal relationships (love and friendship), or areas marked vaguely by such terms as "morality", "politics", and "ideology". He thinks he would have been better off starting on non-controversial arts and crafts as well as science and medicine. These are areas that have been successfully institutionalised, which Wilson takes as a mark of a seriousness that is commonly understood and around which there is common consent – that 'we now know what counts as a serious scientist, or historian or medical practitioner' (p. 148). What it is to be serious in those fields is no longer contested. Norms, standards, criteria are enshrined in practices that are shared by those professions. This implies it is only a contingent feature of other areas that their

seriousness is contested and that, with time, such issues will be resolved and standards confirmed and institutionalised. This will be achieved by rational processes.

It is this that I wish to contest. Wilson is right that the question of seriousness pertains to what he describes as the vagaries of the ethical and the political. However, this does not mean that having commitments, making a claim, stating a case, all require the individual to nail his or her colours to the mast, as Peters suggested. Claims that are made in seriousness must be capable of being taken seriously. The question is, what is to be taken seriously and by whom? Does the seriousness of a perspective depend upon its validity, its truth or on something different again? Is it merely procedural or does it depend on identifying myself with a particular point of view, as if failing to do so is to disown my thought and the possibilities of owning it? The implication is that I must identify with a particular set of beliefs if I am to own my thought. Wilson advises we turn to the arts and literature to seek insight into those most profound regions of the self and our relationships with others. What is the nature of artistic seriousness in this respect, such that we turn to these works for insight? Their claim upon us, our turning to them for insight, our sense of their truth, is not simply based on their formal rational content. However, before developing this line of thought, I want to turn to more general criticism of Wilson's conception of seriousness as it is revealed in his understanding of the foundational function of conceptual analysis in education.

Criticisms of the way in which Wilson characterises reason and locates it within favoured academic disciplines and practices have appeared elsewhere, for example 'Perspectives on the Philosophy of Education' in the *Oxford Review of Education* (2003*)*. Paul Standish argues that in consideration of disciplinary enquiry, 'the kind of engagement that characterises disciplinary enquiry has affective dimensions that are belied by the separation of reason and feeling – and this desirably so.' (Standish, 2006, p. 268),

This may appear to be an irrelevant criticism with regard to Wilson's association of reason with seriousness but when he very specifically divides serious enquiry into the disciplines of philosophy and psychology, with the procedures of the former catering for our concepts and the latter our emotions, one has to question not only this rigid demarcation but also the way in which the two disciplines are best signposted by particular procedures in helping us orientate ourselves in a way that might resemble seriousness. Standish continues, 'to the extent that the term 'reason' appears to name something with rigorous precision, it is in danger of covering over the

range of thinking, including matters of affect, that properly contribute to its ends' (p. ibid.). He suggests that Wilson is employing reductive and empty formalistic strategies in his thinking about reasoning that are both not obvious in his own use of rhetorical flourishes but also give an account of philosophy whereby, 'if philosophy were primarily a matter of understanding what a syllogism is and of reasoning well in its terms, it could deliver no direct substantive engagement with questions of values' (p. 273). It also fails to take into account the rich variety of philosophical practices even within the analytical tradition, '… if philosophy is confined to explaining the criteria of reason in terms of the logic of judgements, the problem remains of how to describe whatever it is that such diverse thinkers as Aristotle, Onora O'Neill, John Searle, John Rawls, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Robert Nozick and Ludwig Wittgenstein are doing when they manifestly – and imaginatively – go beyond these bounds' (p. 268).

Standish extends this point when he analyses the way in which Wilson drew upon Hirst's 'forms of knowledge' thesis. Standish argues that Hirst partly characterised these forms 'in terms of their forms of reasoning' and that if it is the case that these forms imply different logical disciplines then we cannot assume that reasoning is 'all of a piece' and 'hence philosophy cannot be the unique province of reasoning' (p. 273).

Even if we allow that reason is integral to the idea of seriousness that Wilson is advancing, if Standish's interpretation of Hirst is right, it does not follow that seriousness is fundamentally embodied in the kind of rationality embodied by conceptual analysis as Wilson characterised it. Thus, one can question the account of seriousness as it is found within philosophy and as it is found in other areas of the curriculum and cultural life.

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The Serious Scientist and the Seriousness of Science

In order to clarify the nature of my criticism of Wilson's expression of seriousness as co-extensive with reason of a certain kind, I want to examine his assertion that the problem with questions of value is their indeterminacy, by reflecting upon what Wilson took to be undeniable, that 'we now know what counts as a serious scientist'. The example is taken from a play by the British playwright Caryl Churchill. *Love and Information* (Churchill, 2012) examines the status of knowledge in contemporary culture, raising questions about the ethical significance of what it means

to know someone or something and how this is both expressed and understood in the life of a culture. The extract is a scene called 'Lab'. A scientist discusses her research on the brain and whether a mental state such as memory can literally be seen as a corresponding brain state. She does so by injecting a radioactive liquid into the brains of day old chicks and observing their feeding behaviour. As part of this process she takes the chicks and snips off their heads while they are alive, then removes their brains and slices them up for future study. It is a grotesque picture, made all the more grotesque by its being staged as a light-hearted, flirtatious conversation with an interlocutor over a glass of wine on a hot summer's day.

It would be easy to criticise the piece as doing little more than creating an ill-informed picture of nasty scientific bogeymen, reflecting a perennial unease with the capacity of science to outstrip our values, understanding, and the concrete practices they inform. However, there is more to this than merely highlighting the immorality of the suffering of other creatures for the advancement of human knowledge of questionable value.

The failure that is being highlighted is a failure of seriousness. By this I mean there is an absence of critical self-awareness and a lack of depth in the understanding of the scientist and her interlocutor. The setting serves to bring this out. I am not denying conversation is often light; not every conversation should be deep and meaningful. However, I would argue Churchill is drawing our attention to what happens when we fail to recognise those occasions when such conversation should be appropriately serious and what is implied about its failure to be so. Churchill hints at this in what the characters often seem to be on the verge of saying, or actually do say and then dismiss. It is not my intention to argue that neuroscientists are not serious in their work. Nonetheless, Churchill gives us a short study of someone who happens to be a neuroscientist and is serious about her work but who is unable or unwilling to look too deeply into what she does. Rush Rhees wrote the following about assumptions of profundity in science,

> If the discoveries of science really did show us what the world is like, they would be profoundly important in a way that has nothing to do with the health and happiness of mankind. They do not do that. And the illusion that they do has helped men to lose their sense of profundity and to confuse it with what is sham. (Rhees, 1969, p. 8)

Rhees was not claiming that science could not be deep. However, he was trying to suggest that questions about what the world is like are not just questions about physical features in the world but are in part an attempt to understand our own existence in the world and in part an attempt to understand what we are faced with – 'the world'. We might think of neuroscience and the puzzles it seeks to address in a similar fashion. My point is that the seriousness and importance of science, in this case the study of the brain, cannot be accounted for simply by indicating the kind of investigation that is carried out in the laboratory and what does or does not count as establishing truth in science. Rhees continues,

> The deep problems which a scientist may recognise are problems of his science, and they do not stand by themselves. The depth of what he has said about them does not depend so much on whether his answers can be accepted just as they were given. In one sense, it does not matter whether they were right or wrong. Of course, the scientist's work could not be deep if he were indifferent to that himself. It would not be serious investigation at all. But the profundity of his work lies rather in his perception of what sort of answers they are (p. 10).

Churchill's scientist does not lack seriousness because she is indifferent to the nature of her work or lacks rationality, but because of her perception of the answers that her work provides. That in itself does not make her work irrelevant, but in giving us, the audience, a different perspective on what the scientist has learned about learning and the brain, we realise that the problems of the work and its associated seriousness cannot be characterised by scientific investigation itself. Wilson's notion of deep and serious monitoring does not address such concerns, firstly remaining as it does at the level of the procedural and secondly because he assumes that reason and seriousness are identical and interchangeable in our judgments. Do we know what counts as a serious scientist? Not exactly.

Where Wilson's notion of seriousness might be thought to have some purchase on academic practices lies, as Padraig Hogan suggests in his paper 'Education as a discipline of thought and action,' in Wilson's demand that we distinguish between 'conceptions of education that equate it with what currently goes on in schools, or with the current priorities of a ministry of education, or with one's preferred intellectual leanings' (Hogan, 2006, p. 255) and the need to treat education as something 'in its own right.' It was perhaps this that drives Wilson's insistence that what was lacking in

current educational practice was a lack of seriousness. Hogan suggests that 'the voice that Wilson articulates and defends… finds its locus classicus in the educational work of Socrates' (p. 256). Hogan refers to the Apology as 'an eloquent and suggestive testament to the integrity of learning and teaching' (ibid.). Moreover,

> It is notable …. That human learning, and the kinds of action that most worthily advance it, reveal themselves here not mainly as a field of skills, or even as a profession. More importantly, they become disclosed as active interplays that offer possibilities for a distinctive way of life' (ibid.)

This insight of Hogan's begins to help us make sense of what Wilson is arguing for in his idea of seriousness. It does not fit comfortably with the conception of philosophy or for that matter psychology as academic disciplines or subjects in the context that Wilson describes for the reasons I have outlined. Perhaps something else is going on that is not clearly articulated and it is the idea of philosophy as a distinctive way of life. A preparation for education is a preparation for a certain kind of life. Wilson's profound difficulty is equating a normative account of the seriousness of educational practice with one style of philosophical reasoning.

Summary

In this chapter I have developed my analysis of the idea of seriousness within the specific domain of philosophy of education. R.S. Peters and John Wilson identify seriousness primarily with the use of reason. To take something seriously is to employ reason. The uses to which Peters puts the figure of the serious man are discussed and then criticised. Criticisms of Peters' hedonistic arguments reflect a concern for whether theoretical activities really are pleasurable (Elliott) and whether boredom reflects the state of mind of the individual rather than anything intrinsic to the activity (Wilson). Peters' second account, the instrumental or transcendental argument, is criticised for lacking any relevant kind of generality (Downie), a lack of clarity as to why seriousness should be the defining disposition when it seems to be so lacking in most people (Wilson) and for failing to establish why these kinds of justificatory questions should be asked of education in the first place (Kleinig). Wilson's criticism of Peters that precisely what is lacking are people who are equipped to take things seriously drives his discussion of the need to equip children with the disposition of seriousness, thus making them fit to carry out the kind of conceptual analysis that characterises seriousness in education. It is argued that Wilson is wrong to identify this with any one

kind of philosophical method or that questions about seriousness can be settled by appealing to those disciplines, for example the sciences where we know what characterises the serious person, in this case the serious scientist.

CHAPTER 3

Stanley Cavell and Seriousness – the Personal and the Impersonal

In the previous chapter I discussed the significance of the term 'seriousness' for Richard Peters and John Wilson. This led to consideration of how Peters and his associates have used ideas of seriousness, rationality, the personal and impersonal in their discussion of education. This was in part to set the scene for discussion of the work of Stanley Cavell and how Cavell might provide an answer to the perceived shortcomings of Peters *et al*. In addition, it was to highlight some broadly similar concerns in Cavell's work in terms of what it is to find one's voice in one's work and one's life, the extent to which the seriousness of that voice is to be understood as personal and/or impersonal, embodied in its expression, responsive to reason. It is also to inquire into the extent to which these voices are claimed by education and make a claim on it. Whilst Peters offers a rich and complex picture of what is personal and impersonal in education that is genuinely driven by a concern for what is serious in education, it is nevertheless an inadequate picture of how the individual locates him or herself not only in their education but also in their life and therefore how one's education is to be understood and expressed in terms of one's life. In developing this argument, I will draw on Cavell's work which, whilst not continually concerned with formal aspects of education, is characterised by a seriousness about what it means to be educated, about what is personal and impersonal in education, how we acknowledge and avoid the claims of reason, the nature of such claims as well as the claims of others and the need to find our own voice and establish our own presence in our words and in our lives with an appropriate seriousness.

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Stanley Cavell and seriousness: first thoughts

In the late 1980s Stanley Cavell observed of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy that,

the spiritual fervour or seriousness of his writing is internal to his teaching, say the manner (or method) to the substance, and that something in the very professionalization of philosophy debars professional philosophers from taking his seriousness seriously (Cavell, 1989, p. 30).

Gordon Bearn (Bearn, 1998) has argued that a similar concern for seriousness has been a guiding influence on the development of Stanley Cavell's thought and the constellation of philosophical questions that have emerged from it, concerns with voice, language, scepticism, criteria, the significance of the arts to our lives and the nature of philosophical seriousness itself. This relatively unacknowledged feature of Cavell's work is of greater significance than has been appreciated, perhaps initially even by Cavell. Returning to it thematically in his later career, Cavell has come to see how a concern for such things as tone and pitch in philosophy can be understood not only in terms of his longstanding desire to examine issues around the notion of voice but also reflects a similar, longstanding concern with philosophical seriousness. Intuitively one reads this as a concern for something other than truth and validity and the formal aspects of argumentation, the kind of concerns that exemplify seriousness for Wilson and Peters. For Cavell, there is more at stake that does not specifically exclude those aspects of philosophical thought but which is not limited by them and which in turn puts to question what it is to make and be responsive to claims of reason, introducing an attentiveness to tone and register in how philosophy expresses itself that is itself constitutive of what it means to do philosophy and to express one's thought.

It has been only retrospectively that Cavell has attempted to explicate the association between seriousness and his philosophical development when he discusses the impact of being taught by J. L. Austin, writing that,

Austin's teaching was the occasion for me on which to ask, somehow differently from any way in which I had been able to ask it before, whether I was *serious* about philosophy – not quite as measured by its importance (to the world, or to my society, or to me), but as measured by a question I felt a new confidence in being able to pose to myself, and which itself posed questions, since it was as obscure as it was fervent. It presented itself as the question whether I could speak philosophically and mean every word I said. Is this a sensible test in choosing a career? Or even in choosing, or seeing that you have chosen, a friend? And does it mean I have – before I speak – to ask whether I am sincere

in my words, whether I want all of their consequences, put to no matter what scrutiny? Who would say *anything* under such conditions? (Cavell, 1994, p. 60)

What precisely was Cavell asking himself? It was not whether a career as a philosopher would be worthwhile - it might or might not be. Nor was it simply a question of what it meant to speak in the terms provided by the academic discipline of philosophy i.e. whether Cavell could take himself seriously in using these forms of language and practices that marked the profession's sense of its own seriousness and whether his seriousness could find its fullest expression in the terms and practices available to him at that point in the mid twentieth century. In one sense, he could – he had chosen to pursue it – but always with a doubt about whether it was right for him or he for it. Would the language he was inheriting enable him to be serious, a question connected to, but distinct from, how one might understand one's positioning of oneself within a discipline and one's use of language within the discipline and in one's life? It was also a question about language more generally and what it means to inherit a mother tongue, a first language. This is not a question that normally troubles us: that was the point. We trust language to be there for us and ourselves to use it competently. We may sometimes struggle to find the right word or expression when required but on the whole, these are isolated occasions. Why then did philosophy seem so mistrustful of ordinary language and consider us so philosophically incoherent as users of it? Thus, it was also a question Cavell was putting to himself about himself as a speaker of a language – what did he know, what didn't he know, what could he be confident in asserting, what not so, what could he mean and could he be confident he really did mean it? As such it was a personal question. However, Cavell's understanding of what it means for something to be personal extends well beyond certain narrow distinctions between interest and disinterest, partiality and impartiality, rationality and fantasy, seriousness and play.

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Positivism and Verificationism: Cavell's philosophical background

Cavell has characterised the philosophical climate pre- and post-World War Two as totally dominated by an all-pervasive positivism dedicated to the logical clarification of natural science on the basis that, as Espen Hammer notes,

> … it seemed evident that satisfactory theory-formation in science presupposes the achievement of a perfectly formal perspicuity. This implied that natural

language had to be replaced by formalized systems or be revised through logical unmasking of formal disorder.' (Hammer, 2002, p.3)

More to the point, it was only through the 'rigorously defined domains of science' that any claims for something to count as knowledge could be assessed, analysed and tested against 'a standing body of scientific belief.' (ibid.). Even more radically, verificationist theory argued that 'statements about the world for which the exact conditions of empirical verifiability cannot be specified in advance were regarded as simply meaningless' (ibid.). Since they contained no empirically verifiable content, in that no observations of the world would demonstrate their truth or falsehood, they were nonsensical. Thus, what had traditionally given philosophy relevance – concerns of a religious, ethical, aesthetic and metaphysical nature – were deemed unworthy of serious consideration, opening up a gap, best characterised as suspicion, between academic philosophy and the wider culture. Ordinary language was deemed inferior to philosophical language and its own preferred lingua franca, the constructed language of logic and the analysis that proceeded from it. As Hammer further relates, 'logical positivism did not just threaten the integrity of the 'higher' achievements of culture… on this view, everyday life, with its endlessly intricate networks of expressions, reactions and responses, could not function as a source of meaning and orientation to human existence' (ibid.).

In the light of the subsequent attacks on logical positivism it is easy to dismiss the arrogance and insensibility of positivist philosophers and their bewitchment with the possibility of a fully transparent and perfectly formed perspicuity that would secure a perfect correspondence between language and the world, truth and falsehood. However, I want to take a brief look at what the positivists took to be serious in their enterprise and some of the reasons for it. There is not the space to look in detail at this, simply to note one or two important concerns that lay behind the rise of positivism.

Richard Creath identifies three features from the early twentieth century that shaped the philosophical outlook of the logical positivists. Firstly, the rise of autonomous scientific disciplines in the course of the nineteenth century, their pursuit as distinct professions, their impact on European society and their separation from what had been known as natural philosophy, raised questions about what therefore remained of philosophy. With psychology also emerging as a new scientific discipline and with significant new developments in mathematics, what was philosophy to consist of? One answer was something akin to metaphysics, with the thought that what was remaindered

after the sciences had divided up the world was somehow more profound and important than could be touched by the empirical methods of the sciences. The positivists rejected this. The spirit in which they viewed philosophy was very much that of the Enlightenment. As Creath describes, the positivists 'were eager to conceive of their enterprise as scientific and to engage in philosophy only insofar as it was scientific' (Creath, [online]). Exactly how was to be part of its task to discover. Secondly, the picture was complicated by developments within the sciences and mathematics, especially the rise of relativity in physics and non-Euclidean geometries in mathematics. The positivists were faced with the challenge of how to integrate mathematics into a predominantly empirical enterprise and determining what methods were to characterise philosophical analysis? Thirdly, the period in which positivism established itself as the dominant philosophical form in Europe and perhaps more significantly later in America was one of deep social, political and cultural upheaval. Not since the French Revolution had Europe experienced such a level of convulsion. The events of World War 1 had been disastrous for Europe as they were followed in turn by the economic turmoil and political unrest of the 1920s and 30s, culminating in the horrors of World War Two. Together with radical departures in the arts and more general social changes, there were powerful impulses for change but which also led to powerful resistances. Among positivists there was a conviction that their cultures were incapable of the necessary reform and renewal because, as Creath puts it, 'people were in effect enslaved by unscientific, metaphysical ways of thinking. Such ways of thinking might be exemplified in theology, in the racial hatreds of the day, in conceptions of property and in traditional ideas about the "proper" roles of men and women in society.' (ibid.). Therefore, to articulate scientific beliefs and to have a commitment to scientific methods was not only to mark out an academic position but was a political act as well. 'To articulate scientific methods and a scientific conception of philosophy was an essential first step in the reform of society and in the emancipation of mankind' (ibid.)

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The attack on positivism

However, even as the influence of positivism was reaching its zenith, reaction to it had begun. The most significant within the Anglo-American tradition was ordinary language or Oxford philosophy, led by Gilbert Ryle and J. L. Austin. In his paper *A*

Plea for Excuses (Austin, 1961) Austin sought to justify some of the features of ordinary language philosophy that marked its practices. To proceed from ordinary language was to examine 'what we should say when, and so why and what we should mean by it' (Austin, 1961, p. 129). It therefore took the particular context of utterance and the specific nature of what was said and to whom as relevant to more general philosophical analysis. Such attention to detail would reveal not only features of the speakers but also about the world in which and about which language was employed, that 'when we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not merely at words, (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about' (p. 130). Such critical attention to language was necessary because 'words are not … facts or things; we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realise their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can re-look at the world without blinkers' (ibid.). By doing so 'we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena' (ibid.). What was the justification for placing so much emphasis on ordinary language? Austin offered a quasi-historical, almost mythical account of the conceptual seriousness of language that 'our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations' (ibid.). Our ordinary language thus functions as a repository for our understanding of the lives we lead or are destined to lead and acknowledges a seriousness in the edifice of language. However, it has to be recognised from Austin's use of words like 'distinctions' and 'connexions' in relation to the idea that things are worth marking, that we should be careful about understanding this kind of evaluation as being a moral or ethical one. Austin is cannily avoiding this, for reasons which will be discussed in the next chapter when I examine Cavell's later discussion of Austin and seriousness in *A Pitch of Philosophy*.

However, as with Cavell, there are grounds for interpreting Austin in the light of a concern for seriousness. After Austin's untimely death in 1960, Stuart Hampshire wrote that,

> [Austin] was constitutionally unable to refrain from applying the same standards of truth and accuracy to a philosophical argument, sentence by sentence, as he would have applied to any other serious subject matter. He could

not have adopted a special tone of voice, or attitude of mind, for philosophical questions. (Hampshire, 1960)

Guy Longworth interprets this as saying that what mattered to Austin was that 'in attempting to make out positions and arguments, philosophers should meet ordinary standards of truth, accuracy, and so forth.' (Longworth, [online]). The challenge to philosophers was either to,

'make use of an ordinary vocabulary, or ordinary concepts, in order to make claims or judgments that are, according to ordinary standards, at least true (or accurate, etc.); or to do the serious work required to set up an appropriate technical vocabulary and then use it to say things that are by appropriate standards true (accurate, etc.)' (ibid.)

And they might fail in this task. However, whilst they might fail in this, the failure is of a different order. Longworth's interpretation associates seriousness with the demands that are made on the philosopher by the nature of the discipline. However, the extent to which notions like truth and accuracy are themselves taken to be expressions of what it means to take something seriously applies to our lives taken as a whole, not in their compartmentalised forms. What binds together the ordinary, the philosophical and our use of language is that it reflects an understanding of what it means to treat seriously what claims us in seriousness. What can we say characterises serious subject-matter if not the demands that it makes upon us to which we either rise or fail and whose seriousness we recognise in responding as we do? For Austin, there was nothing distinctly serious about the demands of philosophical discourse. Its difficulties, the formal and technical challenges it posed, made no greater demands on us in this respect than what might confront us in our use of language in other parts of our lives. Philosophy itself is no less vulnerable to accusations of triviality despite the trappings of seriousness i.e. a concern for truth, for reason, for the validity of arguments and so on than forms of acknowledgment or failure of acknowledgment in other areas of our lives. Austin's challenge is that in offering a set of procedures based on ordinary language he takes ordinary language to already possess a seriousness that is denied to it by the philosophical practices to which he was opposed. Furthermore, he challenges the idea that ordinary language cannot provide us with the means to adequately formulate these. Austin's work on specific philosophical topics is characterised by firstly making connections between the general philosophical terms in which a particular discourse was being conducted and the more specific terms with which

judgments on such matters are ordinarily made and secondly to provide sufficiently many examples of such judgments in a sufficient variety of cases in order to appropriately address the philosophical question that was posed, as revealed through ordinary language.

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Seriousness and playfulness - not quite philosophy

Firstly, not only did this alert Cavell to how he could proceed in philosophy, it provided him with a method, whose form and adaptation will be discussed in due course. Secondly, the challenge Austin posed to philosophy as it was then being conducted and which had an equally powerful impact on Cavell, lay in the tone with which his thought was expressed – light, urbane and ironic, laced with wit and humour. It is interesting that if we trace Cavell's philosophical inheritance we can see on the one hand Austin's light touch and on the other the more obvious seriousness of Wittgenstein. Elsewhere, Cavell has said of his experience of Austin's classes,

> After I had "given up" (so I called it) music for philosophy, working in Austin's classes was the time for me in philosophy when the common rigors of exercise acquired the seriousness and playfulness – the continuous mutuality – that I had counted on in musical performance. This may have meant to me that what was happening in Austin's classes was not, as it lay, quite philosophy (Cavell, 2010, p. 323).

This is the moment when Cavell not only discovers his own philosophical voice but what will be serious for him in pursuing philosophy, returning the human voice to philosophy, bringing with it a responsibility for what we say and having a voice in our own lives and history. Cavell's encounter with Austin both liberates him and gives him new-found responsibilities. The mutuality of seriousness and playfulness in language and relationships reflects this tension and instability. Cavell's light touch, his drawing on popular culture, on Hollywood comedy, for example, direct us to a playfulness that lies at the heart of his seriousness and a seriousness that lies at the heart of his playfulness. The paradox is not the point, rather the mutual conditioning of the one by the other. This is not just a matter of stylistic ornamentation. One can see this in considering Cavell's example from the essay 'Music Discomposed' of a modern composer of music living at the edge of a wood, wearing a wig and working by candlelight (Cavell, 1969/2002). Cavell's point is a serious one about authenticity and

sincerity, but it is made with a sense of humour attuned to the absurd, particularly when we imagine such a person taking themselves seriously. Yet, if we are thinking of the general tone of Cavellian philosophy, we tend to assume the greater influence of the Wittgensteinian over the Austinian. Áine Mahon suggests that 'the potentially playful sides of Cavell are in danger of being slighted' (Mahon, 2014, p. 11). It is too simplistic to see Cavell as earnest and engaged, even over-earnest and excessively gloomy. Cavell has himself recognised this tendency in himself, together with a desire to resist it. In an anecdote, he describes a conversation with his father, who had flown from Atlanta to visit him at Berkeley after the end of his first marriage. They are sitting in what sounds like a fairly spartan apartment. For Cavell, what takes place is something of a turning point in a relationship that had never been particularly close. The two men talk about both sides of the family. Cavell characterises his father's side as serious, orthodox, business-like and successful (his father was not) and his mother's side as playful, unorthodox, artistic and unsuccessful (his mother was). Towards the end of their time together, Cavell's father asks him what he wants. Cavell replies that he wants to put together the two sides of the family, to which his father replies "That's too much".

There are many ways in which the anecdote could be understood, given Cavell's parents enjoyed a stormy and difficult relationship, as did Cavell with his father. Cavell describes the moment with his father as one in which he felt its 'seriousness and sincerity... We were forgiving each other.' (Cavell, 1994, p. 30). The subtitle of the book is 'Autobiographical Exercises'. There is perhaps something inadequate in my having referred to this story as an anecdote, as if the recounting of events in one's life is no more than the mere telling of stories. There is also the question of what Cavell took himself to be meaning when he spoke of putting the two sides of the family together. He did not speak of bringing them together. He is talking of accommodating these two sides of his inheritance within his own person. It would be simple to understand this as a desire to harmonise the serious and the playful. To be serious and to be playful, to have these two attitudes to life, two ways of being with oneself and with others, both alive within oneself. Is it too much? Can we? Should we?

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Seriousness and Theatricality – Cavell's early aesthetics
Returning to Cavell's reflections on the impact that Austin made on him, it is puzzling that Cavell chooses not to speak of seriousness but expresses himself in terms

of sincerity, given that seriousness might be the more apposite expression for what he was finding in Austin's methodology? One possible reason is that it does not differentiate his thinking from any other philosopher, any one of whom could claim to be serious and point to their own practices as embodying seriousness. The way in which the practices of ordinary language philosophy embody its seriousness is part of Cavell's unfolding project, one that needed to be demonstrated before it could be asserted. As he writes of Austin, 'One might put the task of showing thinking in the aftermath of thinking as showing how to assert importance or seriousness in the repudiation of our established ideas of importance and of seriousness' (Cavell, 1995, p. 48).

However, there is also the fact that philosophical seriousness and associated ideas of depth and profundity were themselves being subjected to scrutiny by the ordinary language philosophers and it is to this that Cavell returns in his later work, when he had a clearer sense of what had been at stake in the challenge laid down by ordinary language philosophy and where he felt the need to defend it in these terms against an attack from Jacques Derrida.

A further thought is that sincerity invokes a more personal sense of one's relationship to language, unlike the notion of one's seriousness, which can be understood in both a personal and impersonal sense. It is also intimately connected to questions of authenticity and fraudulence that can be seen in Cavell's earliest work on aesthetics. It is here that the question of seriousness first emerges.

What then is the question of seriousness that Cavell is attempting to articulate? In an accompanying piece to the essay in which Bearn first raised the significance of seriousness as a guiding concern in his work, Bearn (2000) provides a further insight into the development of Cavell's thinking on seriousness and the extent to which it is both present from his earliest work and undergoes modification as he becomes increasingly influenced by the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*.

The initial sense in which Cavell understands seriousness is in terms of authenticity and in this he associates himself with Austin who, he writes, 'conveys the impression that the philosophers he is attacking are not really that, one may say, they have written inauthentically' (Cavell, 2002, p. 109). To the objection that seriousness and authenticity are philosophically irrelevant terms of criticism when compared to more conventional terms like "contradiction", "circular" and so on, Cavell argues that Austin's terms of criticism reflect something new in philosophical criticism, indicative

of a self-conscious extension of the range of philosophical activity, with attention being 'shifted from the character of a philosopher's argument to the character of the philosopher arguing' (p. 110), a shift that Cavell hopes will 'open a new literary-philosophical criticism' (ibid.) but whose relevance will itself 'become a philosophical problem' (ibid.). Cavell associates the terms with what is "genuine" (p. xxvii) and also with what is "sincere" (p. xxx). Seriousness is, for example, to be contrasted with theatricality and it is in aesthetics that his earliest substantial engagement with seriousness and its surrounding conceptual terrain occurs. The troublesome presence of theatricality is entangled from the outset with the question of seriousness. Under the influence of art historian Michael Fried, Cavell specifically links modernism to both theatricality and seriousness in a footnote to his essay on Lear. Cavell's discussion of modernist art in conventional terms of seriousness and theatricality places him squarely in the anti-theatrical camp. Cavell's gloss on Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood' (Fried, 1967). is that 'the place of art is now pervasively threatened by the production of objects whose hold upon us is theatrical, and that serious modernist art survives only in its ability to defeat theater' (Cavell, 2002, p. 333). For Fried the theatrical work of art 'aspires not to defeat or suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary to project objecthood as such' (Fried, 1968 [1967], p. 120). As such 'it depends for its completion and fulfilment as an aesthetic object on the presence of a spectator' (Auslander, 1997, p. 50).

One of the key concerns of modernism across different art forms was its perception of itself in relation to its past. As Cavell writes in the foreword to *Must We Mean What We Say?* the beginning of the modern is characterised,

> as a moment in which history and its conventions can no longer be taken for granted; the time in which music and painting and poetry (like nations) have to define themselves against their pasts; the beginning of the moment in which each of the arts becomes its own subject' (Cavell, 2002, p. xxxvi).

With this comes an anxiety about not only how things should be expressed but also what can be expressed and what counts as art. The modernist artist is forced to acknowledge a confrontation with the limits and limitations of their chosen art form in work that can, as Gordon Bearn explained, 'hold its own against the achievements of the past' (Bearn, 1998, p. 298). The significance of the past for the modernist artist is not that he or she rejects the past but accepts the accomplishments of the past 'as setting

the tasks of the present, or setting the terms in which present activity has its meaning and acquires its standards' (Cavell, 2002, p. xxxiv). Thus, the task of the modern artist,

> as of the contemporary critic, is to find what his art finally depends upon; it doesn't matter that we haven't *a priori* criteria for defining a painting, what matters is that the criteria are something we must discover in the continuity of painting itself' (p. 219).

We lack the criteria because of the manner in which the modernist artist challenges 'the art of which it is the inheritor and voice' (ibid.). However, whatever answers we find to this question depend on a prior need, which is to discover what objects we accept as genuine within any given art, and why we accept them i.e. what do we require in order to accept something as a work of art in the sense of it carrying 'the intentions and consequences of art' (ibid.). In *The World Viewed*, Cavell says of genuine, serious art,

> The quality or condition I wish to emphasize here comes out of my speaking of total thereness as an event of the wholly open, and of the declaration of simultaneity. The quality I have in mind might be expressed as openness achieved through instantaneousness – which is a way of characterizing the candid. The candid has a reverse feature as well: that it must occur independently of me or any audience, that it must be complete without me, in that sense closed to me.' (Cavell, 1971, p. 111)

The language is strange. How do these ideas of thereness, openness, simultaneity and candidness work? What, in the experiencing of the work of art, are they intended to capture? What is it that non-theatrical, serious art possesses that theatrical art lacks, assuming lack is the appropriate contrast? In being somehow 'complete' and exhibiting 'total thereness' what precisely does it not call for from its audience? Does it even need or want an audience?

Lest we think that Cavell (and similarly Fried) is solely concerned with theatricality in the context of fine art and sculpture, he also refers to the necessity for modern drama that, 'theater is to defeat theater' and that 'damnation lies not in a particular form of theater, but in theatricality as such' (Cavell, 2002, p. 160). Why? How had this state of affairs come about? When Fried (1967) wrote that the success and survival of the arts depended on their capacity to defeat theatre, he continued,

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than within theatre itself, where the need to defeat what I have been calling theatre has chiefly made itself felt as the need to establish a drastically different relation to its audience. (The relevant texts are, of course, Brecht and Artaud.) For theatre has an audience – it exists for one – in a way the other arts do not; in fact, this more than anything else is what modernist sensibility finds intolerable in art generally (Fried, 1967, pp. 139-140).

To Artaud and Brecht, Cavell added Beckett. What all three writers had in common was a desire/need to challenge the relationship between the actor and the audience. However, if we look at the comment with which Cavell followed up those on thereness and the candid, we can see the picture is not quite so straightforward. Cavell writes,

…candidness in acting was achieved by the actor's complete concentration within the character, absolutely denying any control of my awareness upon him. When theatrical conventions lost their naturalness and became matters of mutual complicity between actor and audience, then serious drama had to deny my control openly – by removing, say, any "character" for the actor to disappear into (Beckett), or by explicitly wedging the mutual consciousness of actor and audience between the actor and his character (Brecht) (Cavell, 1971 p. 111).

Therefore, if the relationship with an audience required reconfiguration, it would seem a characteristically modernist relationship between stage and audience was already in place, insofar as the fourth wall permitted the kind of candidness of naturalism. Something had clearly gone wrong in some sense that required the audience to be challenged, unsettled, defied, by what takes place. If the work of the artist reflected his/her uneasy relationship to the achievements of the past then the audience too had to be placed in a troubled relationship to the work of art, to share what Cavell has called the "burden of modernism" (Cavell, 2002, p. 187). The burden is to acknowledge that one's judgment of the work of art takes place in the presence of the 'threat of the non-serious, here called fraudulence' (Bearn, 2000, p. 299). Its source is not the rejection of the past but the shadow cast by a past whose accomplishments are palpable but whose criteria are no longer available. However, Cavell's point is that 'modernism only makes explicit what has always been true of art' (Cavell, 2002, p. 189). Is its seriousness irrevocably doomed if its theatricality is considered inadequate as a medium for our seriousness? And if this is true of modern art, is it not also true for the modern artist

and by extension, modern man? Are we doomed to theatricalising our lives? In a sense, Cavell does not want to answer that question, because it may not have an answer. Take the following from *The World Viewed*, where he writes,

> The interesting question, in a world beset by seriousness – by fraudulent claims to its possession, and by nauseated mockings of those claims, and by hearty or worldly efforts to deny its existence – is whether room continues to be made for the genuine article, and whether we will know it when we see it. (I promise not to mind being told again that solemnity is not really seriousness, on condition that I not be asked to believe that cynicism and slapdash really are). (Cavell, 1971, p. 132)

Nothing is settled, perhaps nothing can be and yet Cavell holds out a hope that it might be. The criteria for what is serious and what is not and what therefore can be taken to make claims on us accordingly, cannot be presumed, nor can it be presumed that we have immediate access to what makes something genuine or fraudulent.

Cavell's understanding of the epochal nature of the problems he has raised extends beyond the world of modern(ist) art. Towards the end of 'Music Discomposed', Cavell writes that 'the task of the modern artist, as of the modern man, is to find something he can be sincere and serious in; something he can mean. And he may not at all.' (Cavell, 2002, p. 212). Sincerity, seriousness and meaning are used synonymously. They are an expression of what is important in human life as well as art. That it is a task to find our seriousness in 'something' suggests it is active and relational, an engagement in human practice, with others and with oneself, in making, doing, thinking, living. The reference to the modern man as distinct from the artist suggests it is not solely located in one's work but in one's existence and the living of a life. As such it touches upon both the personal and the impersonal, although the precise nature of this remains to be revealed, for example in those moments when we mean something. Cavell notes that we are not guaranteed success but the nature of our failure and its implications for our professional, personal and communal life likewise remain to be spelt out, as indeed does our success.

I want to return to the example of the bewigged modern composer. Prior to his comment about modern man and seriousness, Cavell wonders why composers can no longer write like Mozart. His bald conclusion is simply that no one does. Suppose someone did, someone 'living at the edge of an obscure wood, by candlelight, with a

wig on. What would our response to him be? We wouldn't take him seriously as an artist? Nobody could mean such music now, be sincere in making it?' (p. 211) His concern is not with appearance but the impossibility of taking anything as definitively marking out what is genuine and what is phony in the work of art and the artist who produces it. Certainly not sincerity, for this would simply confirm our sense of the madness or perversity of the individual concerned. Cavell's prompts are not statements, they are questions. It is easy to read them as statements but that is what Cavell is asking us to ponder. What are the signs by which we judge art as good (or bad) art, genuine or fraudulent? How do we know what is serious? How do we know who is the serious or sincere artist? We know what it is not but do we know what it is? Cavell writes,

> We can no longer be sure that any artist is sincere – we haven't convention or technique or appeal to go on any longer: anyone could fake it. And this means that modern art, if and where it exists, forces the issue of sincerity, depriving the artist and his audience of every measure except absolute attention to one's experience and absolute honesty in expressing it. (ibid.)

This leaves us relying on very unreliable notions of sincerity in determining the importance of what is meant. Is it a matter of expressing strong feelings in artistic form? But we know that the quality of a work of art has little to do with the power of the sentiments expressed, at least in an unmediated sense of what was felt. Then again, we assume a work must speak to us powerfully, must communicate something of an artist's relationship to his subject-matter. However, what if the artist subsequently disowns the work of art? Will he or she stand by their words, stand by the sentiments that prompted their expression and makes them sincere? Even if the artist stands by their work, how can that help us decide if it is good or not? Can sincerity prove anything? More problematically, 'it can prove madness or evil as well as purity or authenticity' (p. 212). We are thrown back onto more impersonal considerations in articulating how the work of art claims us in serious response or is rejected for failing to do so.

Why then, does Cavell spend time discussing sincerity when it seems such a flawed concept, so vulnerable to faking, so incapable of standing as any kind of guarantee of aesthetic and moral value and seriousness. It has been suggested to me (in conversation with Paul Standish) that Cavell's use of sincerity is of its time and was not overlaid with the scepticism that views it as an empty effect of speech signifying nothing. For Cavell, it is tied to the importance of our being accountable and that 'I am responsible for ensuring that my words, legible as anyone else's, are not counterfeits of

themselves, that they are backed by my meaning, here and now' (Cavell, 2004, p. 202). This leaves open whether I am to take it seriously on those terms or whether I am to judge in more impersonal terms.

The modern composer, labouring away in a wig and feverishly composing by candlelight could hardly fail to be anything but theatrical and unwittingly comical. It is a fine example of Cavell's humour at work. The problem of theatricality as a tendency, a temptation or even a strategy to which human beings are prone, is present in Cavell's work from the outset, where it is both acknowledged and resisted. Theatricality of both the everyday and in art will continue to haunt his thought; however, it will undergo modification as Cavell comes to understand how the theatricalisation of our existence is a response to the standing threat of scepticism.

Initially, Cavell's understanding of the risk of theatricalisation in the everyday is conditioned by his sense of the ethical in human relationships and how we are present to and with others. The theatricality of art poses aesthetic problems for the relationship between the artist and the spectator and the status of the work of art as being serious. However, the distinctions between the two theatres of the theatrical - the everyday world and the world of art - are not clear cut and in Cavell's work fact and fiction, art and nature, theatricality and seriousness are interwoven. The problem Cavell poses with regard to modern art as to how we determine what is genuine and what is fraudulent is as germane to the nature of our relationships with each other as it is to judgment of art. When Cavell speaks of the 'total thereness' of the work of art in *The World Viewed* (Cavell, 1971, p. 109) the question of its authenticity, in the sense of its being meant, of its being genuine and not fraudulent, of its being present to us, comes to the fore.

Summary

In this chapter, the work of Stanley Cavell has been introduced, together with the idea that seriousness has been a guiding consideration for Cavell throughout his career. Cavell's early work is situated in the context of post-war positivism and the reaction against it in what becomes known as ordinary language philosophy. The attraction for Cavell of J.L. Austin's work and philosophical presence is captured in Cavell's acknowledgment that not only did his encounter with Austin allow the question of seriousness to emerge in his own work but also permitted a more playful engagement with philosophical issues in general, liberating him but bringing with it new-found responsibilities. Cavell's initial referencing of seriousness is located in his critical

examination of the impact of modernism in art, music and literature as well as philosophy. Seriousness is understood in terms of sincerity, authenticity and, in painting and sculpture, the total thereness of the work of art. Such seriousness is as much a challenge for the modern person as it is for the artist and the Cavellian equivalent of Sartrean bad faith is theatricality, by which Cavell identifies the insincere and inauthentic and the incompleteness of the artwork in the absence of the viewer.

CHAPTER 4

Stanley Cavell and the Return of the Human Voice

One of the implications of Peters' comments on the individual is that individuality is denied as a relevant consideration when initiating the young into the practices of their elders and that the individual voice in all its complexity and personal ambivalence is suppressed in favour of an impersonal, rational one. I have identified a tension between this and Peters' awareness of the individual as a 'distinct centre of consciousness', a consciousness that is absorbed in the rationalist picture of the educated mind. Cavell, by contrast, suggests that one of the fundamental aims from his very earliest work has been to assert the right of the individual to their own voice and the right to take upon him or herself to speak both for oneself and for others. Along with these rights and responsibilities will come the difficulties and challenges of doing so, accompanied by the possibility of failure. How then does this differ from Peters *et al*? Being a reasoned voice will certainly be an important part of this but it will not be the only part and the way in which I take its seriousness to lie in other features, potentialities, risks and anxieties of the voice and not solely in its formal rational qualities will be discussed, as will the educational implications of Cavellian voice. Toril Moi gives some indication of the extent of this when she writes,

> Rather than offering a theory of the subject, Cavell provides a magnificent exploration of *voice*, in philosophy and in our lives. By looking in detail at use, language-games, grammar, forms of life, Cavell offers magisterial explorations of muteness and silence; listening and hearing; finding or failing to find a voice; the joy of finding the words for a conversation; the pain of being forced to speak, or of being forced to remain silent; the risk of speaking; the desire for understanding and the experience of misunderstanding; the fear of being unknown and the fear of becoming known; the search for attunement with other voices; speaking for oneself and speaking for others; our responsibility for what

we say and for the way we listen to others; acknowledgment and avoidance; and love. (Moi, 2017, pp. 61–62)

If the contested nature of seriousness has been a guiding feature of Cavell's life and work throughout his career so too has the concept of voice. It will be the task of the thesis to draw out the significance of the connection between the two, its moral character and the burden of responsibility it calls for. In this chapter I will establish some of the contours of the concept of voice as it has unfolded in Cavell's work.

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Ordinary language philosophy and the universal voice

Given Cavell's subsequent reflections on his earlier work, the finding of his philosophical voice through his encounter with Austin and the returning of the voice to philosophy that *The Claim of Reason* represents, it is tempting to regard voice as a perennial theme in Cavell's work. However, Timothy Gould (1998) has cautioned against seeing the apparent pervasiveness of voice in this light. Rather, we should see the appeal to the voice in Cavell's early understanding of ordinary language philosophy as 'latent but obscured' (Gould, 1998, p. 62). Nevertheless, it is possible to track its emergence and its growing significance for Cavell.

The latency of voice in Cavell's first forays in ordinary language philosophy is perhaps in part due to the philosophical language that was available to him in Anglophone philosophy at the time and the nature of the philosophical debates into which he was venturing. One of his early moves which will have significance for the later development of voice is the idea that native speakers of a language can themselves be the authority for what is said in that language and that philosophers as members of a linguistic community are as qualified as any other member of the community to make claims about what is or can be said. That is not to say we will always use our language correctly and that there will be times when, for example, we are unable to find the right word, but there is nothing inherently inadequate thereby in our being the source of evidence about what we say and what we mean when we say something. Furthermore, it is by using language with its usual meaning that we are able to make inferences and draw conclusions i.e. communicate with each other. We learn these things in learning and mastering a language. Finding words we want to use to say what we want to say is not a matter of being free to give words whatever meaning we choose but learning what

can intelligibly be said in given contexts. Finding the right words carries the further implication that,

> our utterances are (or, if we are feeling perverse, or tempted to speak carelessly, or chafing under an effort of honesty, let us say must be) meant; that they are an essential part of what we mean when we say something. And what we mean (intend) to say, like what we mean (intend) to do, is something we are responsible for (Cavell, 2002, p. 32).

This comment from *Must We Mean What We Say?* ([1969]/2002) is perhaps the earliest expression in Cavell's work of the idea that we are responsible for what we intend or mean in saying (and doing) something, that the relationship between the words I use, my choice of those words as a native speaker of a language and my utterance of those words in particular contexts with and to particular people is one that I am responsible for. The nature of that responsibility and its ramifications has yet to fully emerge at this point, as have the implications of certain features of the relationship between my words and what they express, most notably in the expression of scepticism.

The idea of voice is more explicitly addressed in 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', in which Cavell discusses the significance of the Kantian idea of the "universal voice" as the voice that is demanded of us in making claims of aesthetic judgment, that in expressing an aesthetic judgment, the individual judges "not merely for himself but for all men". Moreover, Cavell writes, 'Kant's "universal voice" is, with perhaps a slight shift of accent, what we hear in the philosopher's claims about 'what we say' (p. 94).

From the outset Cavell is alive to the risks and dangers posed by the claim to speak with a universal voice, the potential cost of making claims in such a voice, 'the difficulties of finding them [the judgments] and the risk of explicit isolation' (p. 89). Likewise, from the outset this kind of claim in this kind of voice is not limited to the aesthetic, but is also a feature of the moral and the political. Art, morality and politics will all provide contexts in which we can find our voices but may also be where we encounter disappointment, isolation, the suppression of our voice and its rejection as speaking for others. As indicated in the opening chapter, these were the three areas that were identified by Williams and Montefiore where the 'intensity of consciousness' could be understood as making demands on our expression that required us to take such expression seriously, both as speakers and listeners, participants and observers. It is this intensity that troubles Wilson so much. What I also take from Cavell's early raising of

the problematic of the universal voice in these contexts is the latent presence of the question of seriousness, of what is to count as speaking seriously in these specific realms where the claim of the personal and impersonal in the voice is at stake.

It is tempting to think of Cavell as having secured certain routes for himself in proceeding philosophically through his early engagement with Austinian and Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy but perhaps Stephen Mulhall (1994) is closer to the truth when he speaks of a more unsettled sense of the mysteriousness of the powers at work in the methodology of ordinary language philosophy as Cavell interprets and begins his own inheritance of it. Mulhall suggests that Cavell's defence is not intended to dissipate the mystery but to draw out its sources more clearly. He indicates three important features of this for the future development of Cavell's work: 'the sense in which the ordinary language philosopher is drawing upon a species of self-knowledge, the sense in which she can speak for others, and the sense in which her utterances can reveal the true nature of matters of fact.' (Mulhall, 1994, p. 20) The claims are not only mysterious but powerful. Is this an unwarranted arrogation or a natural assumption of an inheritance (mine or anyone's) of a mother tongue? What qualifies me to speak authoritatively, to take myself as having an authority to speak on behalf of myself and others, to make claims and counter-claims? Cavell's early engagement with ordinary language philosophy witnesses Cavell not only beginning to philosophically clear a space for a concept of authoritative personal utterance as distinct from the impersonal, formal requirements of, in this case, verificationist theory, but also beginning to rethink the nature of first and third person conceptions of what claims us in seriousness. In acknowledging the authority of such speech as emanating from our status as native users of a mother tongue, it identifies it as capable of being taken seriously. However, that is not to say that it licences the idiosyncratic, the partial, the biased, the incoherent and so forth, as if the impersonal forms of rationality make no claims on us. Rather, the nature of what is serious is to be discovered in encounters between speakers of a language, and this cannot be fully accounted for by a purely personal or impersonal account. Rather, there is an interplay between the two.

How are we to understand this? What is the interplay, the tension, the nature of the fluidity? One can see the difficulty if we look at how it has been discussed by commentators. Espen Hammer offers an impersonal reading of Cavell's first essay, writing that we are held responsible for our utterances 'in terms of observing and respecting the necessary implications of our utterances' (Hammer, 2002, p. 8). We have

no choice in this if we want to make sense. The language itself, as it were, commits us to meaning what is implied by our utterances; it is 'a vision of language, whereby speakers, in their production of strings of meaningful utterances, are guided along by impersonal rules of some sort' (p. 9). What Hammer detects at this point is the tone of impersonal Austinian insistence in Cavell's writing, one of playing to the rules and that 'the relevant sense in which we are to be held responsible for our utterances is in terms of observing and respecting the necessary implication' (p. 8). These are implications which we have no choice but to acknowledge and respect because the language itself makes the choice for us if we want to make sense to others who are guided by the rules of the same language. It is by following the rules whose understanding we share with other users of the language that we make ourselves intelligible.

It is only when Cavell turns to reading Wittgenstein, Hammer suggests, that 'Cavell starts to reject such a view of language in favour of a conception of individual response and judgment within a shared form of life' (p. 9). Thus, Hammer argues,

> to be responsible for one's own utterances then becomes not simply a matter of being responsible to the material inferences provided by a given linguistic structure, but of accepting that the commitments and obligations we project in a given speech act are expressions of who we are, and that the position of authority ought not to lie with an impersonal body of rules… but with the subject of the enunciation itself' (ibid.).

This sounds as if Hammer is now arguing that the picture of us as language users who willingly submit to an impersonal set of rules in order to be effective semantic operators makes few personal demands on us as speakers of a language. Much more is at stake in our being a member of a community of language-users that cannot be accounted for by impersonal rule-following and therefore we should take the subject of what is uttered to be the source of authority. However, there is an ambiguity in Hammer's 'not simply' that suggests it is not a case of either/or but a troubled acknowledgment of the interplay between the two conceptions of what is claiming us, something that Hammer does not fully explore. It is difficult to capture in language the idea that two contrasting perspectives are being held in tension, requiring the exercise of judgment to determine which is to do the work of expressing our seriousness and commitment on a given matter. Furthermore, if it is to be the subject of the enunciation that holds the position of authority for any utterance and it is a question of who rather than what is to give the utterance its authority, then the question that still requires answering is how we

conceive of the subject in taking them to possess authority? What is the character of such speech? How can we not in some sense require a degree of impersonality but if we do, how should that be characterised?

This is the difficulty that confronts Mulhall in his discussion of the personal and impersonal character of what Cavell refers to as 'a kind of self-knowledge'. Mulhall's comments are in response to Cavell's claim that the kind of knowledge a language user possesses in virtue of being a speaker of a mother tongue is a kind of self-knowledge. Cavell writes,

> if it is accepted that "a language" (a natural language) is what the native speakers of a language speak, and that speaking a language is a matter of practical mastery, then such questions as "What should we say if …?" or "In what circumstances would we call…?" asked of someone who has mastered the language (for example, oneself) is a request for the person to say something about himself, describe what he does. So, the different methods are methods for acquiring self-knowledge' (Cavell, 2002, p. 66)

As Mulhall points out, knowledge of the self is more usually construed in terms of such things as 'a person's awareness of her character, an acquaintance with the state of her particular heart and soul' (Mulhall, 1994, p. 4). In order to try and clarify Cavell's striking methodological claim, Mulhall offers the analogy of the carpenter. If we ask a carpenter how she would construct a piece of furniture, she might describe it in terms of her mastery of her craft. However, why would we take this to be revealing anything about her knowledge of herself as distinct from her knowledge of her craft, as something typifying not only her own practice but that of any decent carpenter, allowing of course for variations in practice rather than supposing there is only one way of proceeding skilfully? This sounds like knowledge rather than self-knowledge, 'something objective or impersonal rather than personal' (p. 5) and therefore we need to clarify how it might be conceived as an expression of self-knowledge, characteristically personal rather than impersonal. He begins as follows,

> in order to claim that the carpenter's responses are essentially impersonal, one must be assuming that the capacity they manifest is essentially impersonal – detachable from the person of the carpenter; one must, in other words, think of her expertise as expressible in a body of theoretical rules which anyone may in principle grasp and deploy – so that the authority of our carpenter's words and deeds rests not upon anything specific to her but upon what she knows. (ibid.)

Mulhall thus equates the impersonal with 'a body of theoretical rules' that others may acquire an understanding of and subsequently deploy. He wonders, however, why the carpenter's authority should be a matter of possessing an expertise that is expressible as an abstracted set of principles? Why can it not also rest on 'her capacity to exercise right judgment from case to case in a manner that cannot be captured by or reduced to routines'? (ibid.) Mulhall suggests that the apprenticeship picture in which the apprentice absorbs 'the example of the master's practice in a wide variety of circumstances rather than studying textbooks' is more realistic and that such methods depend upon 'the specific responses of particular people rather than on a body of abstract principles' (ibid.). If we understand this as a matter of know-how rather than knowing-that, we can understand the carpenter's exercise of practical mastery as displaying an aspect of her self. What this raises, and it will be of considerable importance for Cavell's later work, is the question of the nature of the written text, its status relative to the spoken word and the claim to authority of both. The personal nature of what is revealed in Mulhall's example is given an embodied context, the apprentice working with the expert carpenter, being guided by her, presumably observing, perhaps copying, asking questions, being corrected and so forth, seeking approval, learning about materials, the nature of wood and so on, acquiring an education in a craft. What could represent its equivalent in written form? How to achieve that personal presence in one's writing? Is it desirable?

This assumes that what the carpenter knows in a personal capacity is communicable in some way. Mulhall wonders what might transpire if the carpenter possessed a knowledge and understanding so rare and specialised that it makes its communication impossible. If it is claimed that a native speaker's practical mastery of words displays an impersonal knowledge of language in the sense of its being drawn from what is commonly available rather than special to any one individual, then it could be argued that the master craftsman simply possesses skills and knowledge beyond the reach of the ordinary speaker which is therefore not expressible or communicable in an impersonal form. This would leave the question of the impersonal content of such knowledge of language untouched. Mulhall suggests this is not what Cavell is arguing, but that any competent speaker of a language can come to the understandings that are required if we are to understand how the individual speaker aligns him or herself with what it is intelligible to say in a given language, what it means to successfully align one's words to others and to the world.

Mulhall suggests Cavell would not object to the disanalogy but would argue that 'it does not licence the idea that linguistic competence is essentially impersonal in the sense to which he objects' (p. 6) Why not? Mulhall argues that whilst we can accept that the capacity to become a competent speaker is widely available (and so impersonal in not being rare or associated with specific individuals), it does not follow that it is therefore 'a system of precisely defined and wholly transparent linguistic principles' (ibid.) because this 'misrepresents the way in which the capacity for speech is ultimately based on the speaker's self-reliance' (p. 7).

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Gould on Cavell and Voice

In describing Wittgensteinian language-games as methods for acquiring self-knowledge, Cavell is shocked by the thought that 'knowing oneself is something for which there are methods – something, therefore that can be taught (though not in obvious ways) and practiced.' In discussing Cavell's own method in this light Timothy Gould struggles to clarify the nature of the relationship between the personal and impersonal, claiming that the method is 'not quite as something impersonal' but is 'something that exists beyond the possession of a particular person' (Gould, 1998, p. 26) Gould insists not only that this method is something that can be taught to another but 'must be', before retreating somewhat from this necessity to its being at least communicable. Furthermore, as something that can be practised it is also something that can be followed. Moreover, in following, we 'assume the burden of another thinker's knowledge' (ibid.). However, therein lies a tension between the burden of another thinker's influence and the need in assuming use of a method that the steps that have to be taken are one's own, by and for oneself, even where one is tracing the steps of another. Method as Gould describes it thus has the character of being both personal and impersonal.

Gould is alive to there being a struggle between the personal and impersonal but interestingly he characterises this not as one might expect, as a struggle for the personal in Cavell's method but for the impersonal. For Gould, what is at stake in Cavell's adoption of the methods of ordinary language philosophy is not the presence or absence of the self per se, but something more scandalous that is akin to the idea of method that he identifies in Freudian psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein's own method. What is scandalous, according to Gould, is 'the presence of impersonal methods of

providing access to the self'. (ibid.) and that 'in Cavell's vision, we have to relinquish the personal element in order, exactly, to know the self' (ibid.). Thus, the writer is not struggling to assert or achieve a personal element but rather it is the personal that the author 'is struggling with' (ibid.)

How are we to understand what senses of the personal and impersonal we are working with, given that many philosophers will already be alive to the dangers of the personal in their professional life and may indeed have been attracted to philosophy in the first place because of a certain kind of impersonal methodology that enables a certain kind of clarity in thinking about what can be highly personal issues? It is too easy to think of the personal as simply a general term encompassing self-indulgence, self-centredness, bias, partiality and so forth, just as it is too easy to think of the impersonal as being characterised by the methods of analytical philosophy. What characterises disciplined thought and is its only form of expression the philosophical? (It will be Cavell's claim that serious, disciplined thought is not confined to philosophy and indeed that philosophy is as vulnerable to its own possibility of non-seriousness as other forms of expression.) It is Gould's opinion that on the one hand the pervasive presence of the personal, understood in these conventional terms, represents an enormous problem for philosophy and on the other that if one sees method as a set of rules and steps that can be used as and when, then one is unlikely to be perplexed about the kind of questions that Cavell invites us to consider in his exploration of what it means to inherit a method. Gould sees quite different senses of the personal and impersonal coming into play in Cavellian method, and that, for those who are aware of this,

> The struggle for the impersonality of philosophical method is a struggle of persons or selves within oneself, a struggle for a perspective on the self. It is only from a particular sort of angle that such a perspective will seem to be best characterized as a "merely" personal one.' (p. 27)

For Gould, there is also a sense in which we not only host the voices of those who influence us but struggle to assert ourselves in relation to them, assimilating, revising, reinventing whilst at the same time acknowledging, something he sees as 'a struggle between our philosophical inheritance and our philosophical autonomy' (ibid.). Our philosophical seriousness is to be located in recognising and acknowledging these competing demands on our reflection and there is a sense in which the struggle for

perspective on our thinking selves is a struggle that may never be fully resolved, but is something to which we continually return.

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Criteria, Claim and the return of the human voice to philosophy

Cavell's sense of the worth of *The Claim of Reason* (1979) was that it existed 'to help bring the human voice back into philosophy' (Cavell, 1994, p. 58). If he had not yet fully recognised all the points of connection between the significance of voice in ordinary language philosophy and the possibilities (as well as responsibilities) presented by the Kantian universal voice in its claims to authoritative judgment, by the time *The Claim of Reason* is published voice is playing not only a more substantial part in the development of his own philosophical thinking but is also contributing to the emergence of the distinctive Cavellian philosophical voice. We can see this vividly in Cavell's discussion of criteria and judgment where the authority inherited in one's being a member of a linguistic community is extended and given more concrete treatment in one's being a member of a political community.

Cavell identifies seven functioning elements in the ordinary idea of a criterion. Among them are the idea of criteria as providing sources of authority, the mode of acceptance of an authority, an epistemic goal and what he calls the 'status concept'. He glosses his own ideas as follows,

> On this lay-out, 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… Certain specifications are what a person or group mean by (what they call, count as) a thing's having a certain status. (Cavell, 1979, p. 9)

Cavell's claim is that Wittgenstein's insight is 'that all our knowledge, everything we assert or question (or doubt or wonder about…) is governed not merely by what we understand as "evidence" or "truth conditions", but by criteria' (p. 14). It will be my contention that criteria are themselves an expression of our seriousness, in the sense that 'without the control of criteria in applying concepts, we would not know what counts as evidence for any claim, nor for what claims evidence is needed' (ibid.). These will be the contested grounds on which judgments are made and crucially, voiced. Furthermore, Cavell argues that for Wittgenstein, it is 'always *we* who "establish" the

criteria under investigation' (p. 18), criteria that are "ours" and whose authority is established by 'the human group as such, the human being generally' (ibid.). As such, says Cavell, 'when I voice them, [the criteria] I do so, or take myself to do so as a member of that group, a representative human' (ibid.). We see how Cavell is beginning to see voice as that which binds together individual human beings in community, mediating the criteria through which the seriousness of our being is expressed.

In wondering what gives me the right to speak for the group of which I am a member, one hears the authoritative tones of the Kantian universal voice being projected into the appeals of the ordinary language philosopher as expressive of the nature of community itself. Thus, in appealing to "what we say when…", the ordinary language philosopher offers something as an instance of what we say to which we can agree and accept or deny and reject and does so in a context where 'the only source of confirmation here is ourselves' (p. 19) and that 'each of us is fully authoritative in this struggle' (ibid.). Voice thus becomes part of the contested nature of criteria in both establishing one's right to speak for others as well as oneself and the possibility of that voice being denied and one's right rejected. Part of what it is to take something seriously and be taken seriously by others lies in the projection and reception of that voice. Thus, for Cavell, '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' (p. 20). It is in part through voice that one comes to discover one's position with regard to who speaks for me in a given community, for whom I can speak and the nature of consent and its refusal in a society. Through this I come to know 'with whom I am in community, and to whom and to what I am I fact obedient.' (p. 25). Furthermore, Cavell argues, '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.' (p. 27) This raises the question of whether finding your own voice includes the discovery of that part of one's voice that enables you to speak for others or is it initially about finding one's own voice as an individual, a voice that for whatever reason strikes one as one's own and from there finding out what its points of contact are with others, voicing the secrets (and desires) of others as well as revealing one's own, as Cavell says of Wittgenstein's achievement. Criteria thus lie at the heart of considerations of identity and belonging.

Cavell suggests that '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' (ibid.). As in his earlier work he reprises his warning about the risks involved, advising that,

> the political is likely to be heart-breaking 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.' (ibid.)

For Cavell, the acquisition of a voice is possible through the acquisition of a language, one's mother tongue, and in acquiring a language one acquires a community in which one finds one's voice. To acquire a voice in a community is to be both recognised and to take responsibility. It is also to engage in the contesting of those things in which one has chosen to have a voice. Cavell writes,

> 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 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 my 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. (p. 28)

Part of that sense of voice lies in the almost miraculous nature of agreement in judgement, not in coming to agreement on a particular occasion, 'but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones' that a group of humans 'are mutually voiced… mutually attuned' (p. 32).

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Pitching perfectly and losing one's voice
This idea of attunement, the tuning of voices in order to pitch them perfectly within the context of a community, is returned to in *A Pitch of Philosophy* (1994), a series of

essays that Cavell called 'autobiographical exercises'. Perfect pitch eluded Cavell as a musician and he hints that his coming to philosophy was a search for an equivalent. Perhaps this explains his incessant questioning of how the seriousness of philosophy and its concerns are made manifest and expressed in the tone or pitch of the philosophical voice. Cavell's voice thus finds its own expression in 'the tone of philosophy and about my right to take that tone' (Cavell, 1994, p. 3). This tone is one that he recognises has long been at odds with mainstream Anglophone philosophy. At this point in his later work, Cavell is less concerned with situating the voice in its social context, the first-person plural, but is considering the autobiographical nature of philosophy in the face of philosophy's ambivalence towards such a construal of its voice. In certain respects, Cavell is returning to two of his earlier treatments of voice, namely the character of the Kantian universal voice and the question of what gives me the right to speak on behalf of anyone else. As he comments,

> Who beside myself could give me the authority to speak for us? To verify that in practice we are each in a position to give ourselves the right, take it from ourselves, as it were, was the mission of the first essay I wrote in philosophy… the one in which I found my philosophical voice, or the track of it.' (p. 9)

Cavell associates the claim to that right as one of arrogance but cautions that philosophy, or rather, philosophers, have sometimes been tempted to conflate the importance of philosophy, its seriousness, with their own self-importance and have perhaps been guilty of taking themselves too seriously. Cavell is here giving voice to a tension between the claim to philosophical seriousness of the personal voice – the autobiographical voice – and the impersonal voice – the voice that is expressed in terms of universality and generality. Thus the question of what gives me a right to a voice in my own history will, for the philosopher who takes this question seriously, become a question of what gives me a right to speak philosophically from within an autobiographical sense of my relation to my words; that my seriousness is expressed through a certain kind of attention to my personal voice rather than attempting to repress any trace of it in seeking an ideal impersonal tone which is generally taken to be the appropriate tone for philosophy. This raises the question as to whether this is a problem shared by many. If, for example, one sees philosophy as a series of problems to be encountered, pondered, solved and despatched, then the autobiographical presence of the voice in one's philosophical words is irrelevant. If the dictates of formal

reason are the means to solving those problems, then any consideration of feeling in speech and conduct will be external to the nature of the problem. It may provide a heightened sense of what is at stake but is otherwise irrelevant. If the question of a personal voice in one's writing is not philosophically important then questions of style will not be important as distinct from an overriding concern for clarity and rigour as key qualities in a text. It is, therefore, a question of what is and is not to count as philosophy. This is also for me, speaking autobiographically, one of the fundamental questions that I have faced, both with regard to my own philosophical thinking and what I take to be good thinking and my work as a drama teacher and latterly in teaching philosophy.

It is difficult to do justice to the wide-ranging treatment of voice in this late work. Perhaps what Cavell is most concerned to articulate is the deepening sense of not only finding one's voice but 'the standing threat of not finding it, or not recognizing it, or of its not being acknowledged' (p. 37). At its most extreme that standing threat is one of madness in finding oneself without a voice, unable to make oneself be intelligible to others, to be heard. The intensity of expression or its repression at the heart of madness perhaps requires a greater frame of reference than measured philosophical (in the case of this book, anecdotal) prose and Cavell turns to film in the form of 1940s Hollywood melodrama and the world of opera to address the nature of this failure of acknowledgment in the denial and stifling of the female voice.

However, this is a risk that is constitutive of what it is to have a voice. In discussion with Richard Fleming, Cavell says the following,

> I keep coming back to aspects of the idea that the having of a language is an allegory of the having of a self. What does it mean for either a language or a self to be said to be mine? The question comes up in the Austin-Derrida material when I say that Austin is aware not just that I abandon my words to others but that I am abandoned to them, in them. That is a way I take Austin's picture of my hand being tethered to my voice or breath … I recognize words as mine when I see that I have to forgo them to use them. Pawn them and redeem them to own them… The breath is of course an ancient image of the soul or self…the self is… breathed in and out.' (Cavell, 1995, p. 103).

The picture of pawning and redeeming our words and its association with breath is important for what I wish to argue for in the significance of drama education. In the thesis, I will seek to draw out the significance of the performed and performing voice

through discussion of the expressive nature of the voice and what Cavell terms passionate utterance and its 'invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire' (Cavell, 2005, p. 185). To paraphrase his comments on opera "Who speaks, the actor, the character?"

Summary

This chapter represents the final part of the foundational section of the thesis, placing voice alongside the personal and impersonal in my outline of seriousness in education. The ideas of the personal and the impersonal have been developed in relation to seriousness through discussion of their significance in the work of Stanley Cavell. The rigid distinctions with which Peters characterises initiation into worthwhile activities are shown to be more fluid and problematical. The trajectory of voice as an emergent and then central theme in Cavell's work is presented as a struggle to achieve an impersonal quality to the personal voice, as the individual engages both with those aspects of thought which may succumb to bias, idiosyncrasy and to incoherence and distinguishing his or her own thought from what has gone before and influenced it. Interpretations of Cavellian voice that are weighted towards an impersonal construal are discussed and then rejected in favour of a more complex picture of inheritance and arrogation that emphasises the socially situated and criterion governed claims to speak for oneself and for others that is underpinned by Austinian and Wittgenstein in ordinary language philosophy. The difficulties, risks and challenges associated with doing so are evaluated in relation to the Cavellian concept of attunement of one's voice to those of others, a metonym for our ongoing agreement and the grounds for potential disagreement.

CHAPTER 5

Seriousness, Non-seriousness and Drama Education

A View from the Ministry

> *"[I]t is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to get you through the examination, which, after all, is what school is all about. ... "And what good's theory going to be in the real world?" said Harry loudly, his fist in the air again. Professor Umbridge looked up. "This is school, Mr Potter, not the real world," she said softly. (Rowling, 2014: p. 226)*

Exactly how or even if the 'real world' should enter into what is taught and how it is taught is a recurring question for teacher and policymaker alike. Is education - schooling - a preparation for the real world and adult life or a refuge from it? What aspects of the real world should enter into the classroom and why? What should be excluded? What exactly are we talking about? Relevance? Experience? Interests? Skill-sets? Creativity and problem-solving? Use of technology? At what point should education be required to have an impact in the real world? What is distinctive in our picture or understanding of the real world that makes education appear as a separate realm required to justify its activities and practices in terms of that world, or as in the case of Professor Umbridge, to resist it?

Underpinning discussion about such things as the aims of education, intrinsic and extrinsic value, the content of the curriculum, styles of pedagogy and so on is a concern that the practices of education should reflect what we take to be serious about education. Seriousness itself is internal to our understanding of the concept of education, but the claims we make in the light of it are highly contested. Both Harry Potter and Professor Umbridge take education seriously but fundamentally disagree about where that seriousness lies, to the extent that both would probably think the

other's position is not serious even if sincerely expressed; the one little more than play, the other ineffectual. The question of seriousness as a justificatory feature internal to what should be taught was raised by Richard Peters. As Michael Hand (2015) has recently noted, Peters took it to be 'a conceptual point that the curriculum of an educational institution will comprise a range of academic disciplines' (Hand, 2015, p. 51). For Peters the seriousness he saw as intrinsic to theoretical pursuits was itself an expression of the commitment to truth in the serious person. The serious person and the seriousness of the academic pursuit were thus well-matched, because the 'person who asks seriously the question 'Why do this rather than that?' (Peters, 1966, p. 161) finds 'that these sorts of inquiries are all, in their different ways, relevant to answering the sort of question he is asking' (ibid.).

Nowadays, we are less directly troubled as to whether curriculum content should be determined by a concern with seriousness where seriousness means a narrowly conceived concern for the truth. It is better described as a concern for accuracy than truth. However, the question of the extent to which the curriculum and education more generally should be open to real world concerns, which may be understood in a variety of different ways, is important in expressing our seriousness. Our sense of seriousness and our sense of reality seem bound together. However, in articulating this in relation to education there is a danger we can become caught up in fruitless contrasts between the useful and useless, practical and theoretical, abstract and concrete. There is much more that could be said about these dichotomies and how they play out in wider political discourses but my aim here is to entangle them in two alternative kinds of dichotomy: firstly, Austinian/Derridean seriousness and non-seriousness and secondly, the Cavellian distinction between contexts of claim and non-claim in the making of assertions. Doing so will both acknowledge Professor Umbridge's insight that what takes place in an educational context is not to be accounted for solely in terms of 'the real world' and resist her conclusion that certain kinds of activity should therefore be privileged over others. My focus for this will be drama education, as it sits in problematic proximity to the assumptions I have outlined and the alternative dichotomies I have indicated. Its embodied fictional practices and shifting perspectives will bring us again and again to consideration of the relation between reality, pretence fantasy, together with the role of the imagination in coming to understand the real world and acquiring knowledge of it i.e. that to take the world seriously is to enter into it

imaginatively and playfully, not just theoretically or pragmatically. Whilst my focus will be Drama, with its props, costumes and inherent theatricality, the degree to which imagination, pretence and play are constitutive of reality, is something for consideration across the curriculum.

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The serious and non-serious

In *Signature, Event, Context (SEC)*, (Derrida, 1977) Jacques Derrida critically discusses passages from J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*, taking issue with Austin's exclusion of certain kinds of speaking from his general theory of 'speech-acts'. Austin attempts to provide a classification of human utterance in order to overcome the then dominant assumption that all utterances, or at least those cases 'worth considering', are essentially descriptions or representations of 'inward' intentions or meaning or statements about the world. Austin terms these constative utterances and in his initial explication distinguishes them from what he terms performative utterances, that is, utterances such as 'I do', made when a bride and groom make their wedding vows and which do not merely report an 'inward and spiritual' action but are to be understood as enacting something in their own right. Judgement of the validity or success of such utterances is not to be made in terms of their being true or false in respect of what is separate from or prior to the utterance itself but in their being felicitous or infelicitous. As Judith Wolfe explains,

> The felicity 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') (Wolfe, 2013, pp. 250-251).

She continues, '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.' (p. 251). Rather, it is meant to exclude situations that Austin views as 'parasitic' upon ordinary language use, 'such as stage recitations or jokes' (ibid.).

Why should these present a problem? Intuitively something sounds correct about prioritising what is uttered in real contexts from what is only expressed in pretence and play and by prioritising, I mean taking it more seriously. This was the point that Robert Dearden made so emphatically. To understand why it is worth stepping back to reflect on Austin's framing of his discussion. Austin employs the notion of seriousness to both support his arguments for the performative and to negatively characterise the view he is opposing, on the one hand using it to capture something of the ordinary circumstances in which utterances are made and on the other to critique the idea of an 'inward and spiritual' intentionality that supposedly gives assertions their force. Austin wants to resist the idea that the success of the performative depends on the words being spoken 'seriously' so as to be taken seriously because the performative would then collapse into the descriptive but it is still essential for the possibility of its success, that is, its enactment of something in the world, that we must not be joking or, for example, writing a poem, to which he adds that we must not be acting on stage.

To some extent the answer to this lies in the influence of Frege. In his essay 'The Thought', Frege introduces the notion of force to the context of 'the logic and limits of communication' (Glendinning, 1998, p. 35). Sentences with force are those that communicate thoughts and for Frege, a thought is something for which 'the question of truth arises' (Frege, 1956, p. 292). In effect, Frege limits the notion of force in sentences to the very thing that Austin seeks to oppose in his attempt to articulate the force of performative communication, that is, sentences which 'state something' (p. 293) about how things are in the world i.e. in reality. Frege's concern was to distinguish between what he took to be the genuine communication of thoughts and merely apparent acts of communication, given that words in themselves could not guarantee 'real assertive force'. Something more was required to be present, namely that the thought being expressed is actually put forward as true. However, as Frege recognised, the same sentence could just as easily be uttered without assertive force, and therefore not seriously, as it could be uttered seriously, and therefore with an assertive force. To exemplify this, Frege drew on the world of the theatre, making his point thus,

> As stage thunder is only apparent thunder and a stage fight is only an apparent
> fight, so stage assertion is only apparent assertion. It is only acting, only fancy.
> In his part the actor asserts nothing, nor does he lie, even if he says something

of whose falsehood he is convinced… Therefore, it must still always be asked, about what is presented in the form of an indicative sentence, whether it really contains an assertion. And this question must be answered in the negative if the requisite seriousness is lacking. (p. 294)

For my purposes, I want to draw attention to Frege's positioning of the theatrical in relation to the problem of seriousness in human speech and his assertion that what takes place and is said on stage is not real, is in some sense counterfeit rather than genuine and only has the appearance of genuine assertion. Problematically what is uttered can neither be true nor false because it is not uttered in seriousness. When I speak on stage in role, my words cannot be taken seriously because I am not serious in speaking them, because I cannot be making any kind of truth claim. This lack of so called seriousness in the theatrical utterance will prove to be just as problematical for Austin when he opposes the Fregean position through the contrast he draws between the performative and the constative. Characterising the conditions for the successful performance of an utterance will prove to be a difficult task. Austin wants to resist the idea that the success of the performative depends on the words being spoken 'seriously' so as to be taken seriously because the performative would then collapse into the descriptive but it is still essential for the possibility of its success, that is, something in the world, that we must not be joking or, for example, writing a poem, to which he adds, *pace* Frege, that we must not be acting on stage.

It is therefore hard not to think that somewhere in the picture is a requirement that in order to take what someone says seriously we must perceive their words as having been uttered in seriousness. The question is whether we think of this as 'the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual act', Austin's somewhat ironic picture of intentionality, or in terms of a quasi-legalistic commitment to the terms under which our social practices are constituted, for example in the swearing of marriage vows. The alternative is that our seriousness and the claims we make to and on each other should be understood as something more than either of these positions admit. Furthermore, rightly or wrongly, certain metaphysical assumptions about what is real and what is not real in both Austin's position and the position with which he contrasts the speech act, become discernible. Austin acknowledges his difficulty as follows,

…as utterances [as opposed to acts] our performances are *also* heir to certain other kinds of ill, which infect *all* utterances. And these likewise, though again

they might be brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in many ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of *etiolations* of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performance utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (Austin, 1962, pp. 21-22)

Austin's acknowledgement that all utterances are potentially at risk from what he terms certain kinds of 'ills' would appear to undermine his own theory at the outset. He nonetheless thinks of the theory as operating under ideal conditions where language will not go astray or fail, that is, under optimally felicitous conditions. However, to do so he has to exclude those ills to which all utterances are heir from the general account he is positing. It is this attempt to structure the ordinary as a kind of ideal realm of felicitous utterance that Derrida finds so suspicious. His criticism centres both on the assumptions that permit this ring-fencing of what is to count as an ordinary circumstance and also its implications, such that it excludes amongst other 'things', the actor on the stage. Derrida's comment is that,

ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, "non-serious" citation (on stage, in a poem, in a soliloquy), is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather a general iterability – without which there would not even be a "successful" performative. '(Derrida, 1977, p. 17)

Derrida's accusation is substantial, that Austin can only manufacture the ordinariness of a circumstance by 'defining the 'threat' of iterability as a possibility that might not be realised, rather than [as] a risk that is essential to what it means to count as an utterance at all' (Wolfe, 2013, pp. 252-253). Austin's concern is not with the force of language in asserting something but with the force of the performative to enact something. Derrida's point is that it is not so easy for Austin to escape the same kind of problems that he has himself so pointedly identified in the descriptive.

What then is at stake when Derrida opposes Austin's strategy of exclusion with a contrasting theory of general citationality or iterability? Like Austin, Derrida is also concerned with how meaning is effectively (or ineffectively) communicated between people. If we understand language as a signifying system of signs, then of necessity a sign relies on a history of use in acquiring and communicating meaning. It is repeated and is repeatable. That is its general condition. However, this in itself does not guarantee unambiguous iteration. Whilst what is being communicated will usually be unproblematic and clear, this will not always be the case. We can so easily strike the wrong tone, hit the wrong note or not be sure if we have found the right words, even in our own thinking; we can misunderstand what is said to us, etc. This is not to claim a thorough-going scepticism: it is simply to describe the circumstances in which meaning is possible. It is the more formal risks of this that Austin is trying to exclude but this risk is constitutive of the very possibility of the exclusion and inclusion – that is, of the move he is making.

Both Cavell and John Searle have sought to defend Austin against Derrida's attack, arguing that Austin's exclusionary move was merely a methodological deferral, not an attempt to metaphysically underwrite a theory in a problematic way in order to create an ideal of the ordinary circumstance in which our being able to mean what we say is put beyond doubt. Searle calls it 'a matter of research strategy' whilst Cavell labels it a matter of 'contingent convenience'. Derrida's response to Searle in *Limited Inc.* reveals how unsuccessful this defence has proved.

One of Derrida's objections is Searle's claim of a self-evident, necessary order of logical dependence that means, as Derrida characterises Searle's position, 'we must begin with the "standard", the "serious", the "normal", etc. and we must begin by excluding the "non-standard", the "non-serious", the "abnormal", the parasitical.' (Derrida, 1977, p. 90) Searle writes, 'The existence of the pretended form of the speech act is logically dependent on the possibility of the non-pretended speech act in the same way that any pretended form of behaviour is dependent on non-pretended forms of behaviour'. (Searle 1977, cited in Derrida pp. 90-91). Thus 'there could not, for example, be promises made by actors in a play if there were not the possibility of promises made in real life' (p. 91).

Derrida's response is to accuse Searle of dogmatism, that 'nothing allows one to say that the relation of the positive values to those which are opposed to them…' including that of the "non pretended forms to the "pretended forms", should be

described as one of logical dependence' (ibid.). As Jonathan Culler argues, taking up Derrida's position, whilst this order is how we customarily see things and as I suggested earlier my intuitions are with Searle on this, one could argue the dependency works just as well the other way, such that

> If it were not possible for a character in a play to make a promise, there could be no promises in real life, for what makes it possible to promise…is the existence of a conventional procedure, of formulas one can repeat. For me to be able to make a promise in "real life", there must be iterable procedures or formulas, such as are used on stage… "serious" behaviour is a special case of role-playing.' (Culler, 1982, p. 119).

If the success of the "standard case", for example, of promising, depends on it being a recognisable repetition of a conventional procedure, the actor's performance on stage is just such a procedure. Being ontologically unsettled by its fictional context is simply part of its condition. Culler contends, 'The possibility of "serious" performatives depends upon the possibility of performances, because performatives depend upon the iterability that is most explicitly manifested in performances.' (ibid.). As Derrida himself argues,

> a standard act depends as much upon the possibility of being repeated, and thus potentially (éventuellement) of being mimed, feigned, cited, played, simulated, parasited, etc., as the latter possibility depends upon the possibility said to be opposed to it. And both of them "depend" upon the structure of iterability which, once again, undermines the simplicity of the oppositions and alternative distinctions. (Derrida, 1977, p. 92)

Derrida does not want to preserve the distinctions between different domains of linguistic activity. "Real life", however we are to understand it, is not to be privileged over other contexts like the theatrical and literary in so far as it gives utterances a seriousness that they are taken to lack in other contexts. Rather, it is what is taken to characterise the real that must be destabilised. Not only is real life a somewhat porous notion, but the things that Austin sought to exclude from "real life" are internal to it,

> Parasitism does not need the theater or literature to appear. Tied to iterability, this possibility obtains constantly as we can verify at every moment, including this one. A promise that could not be reiterated (was not reiterable) a moment

afterwards would not be a promise, and therein resides the possibility of parasitism, even in … "real life", that "real life" about which Sarl is so certain, so inimitably (almost, not quite) confident of knowing what it is, where it begins and where it ends; as though the meaning of these words ("real life") could immediately be a subject of unanimity, without the slightest risk of parasitism; as though literature, theater, deceit, infidelity, hypocrisy, infelicity, parasitism and the simulation of real life were not part of real life! (pp. 89-90)

Derrida is claiming that it is internal to the structure of the realm of the serious – the successful enactment of language in ordinary circumstances – that it includes the kinds of non-serious possibility that Austin sought to exclude in his characterisation of the ordinary. The possibility of the theatrical and its playful mimesis, its refusal to be bound, is inherently part of the ordinary, the non-serious an inherent feature of the serious, the parasitical present in the standard. If Derrida is right and that what Austin takes to be a transgression of the ordinary is actually part of the essential structure of every event capable of communicating, what are the implications for how we understand our lives and register perceived distinctions of reality following this destabilising of serious/non-serious, real/pretend dichotomisation? Glendinning reassures us that 'this does not mean that ordinary language and life is not serious or is really fictional' (Glendinning, 1998, p. 40) i.e. we might be worried that because the ordinariness of our lives cannot be guaranteed by such assurances, nevertheless we can always use language to unambiguously communicate meaning to each other; or that whilst in being vulnerable to ambiguity we are vulnerable to non-seriousness, it is not such a problem in reality. This is mistaken: it is precisely the risk to which we are vulnerable. It is not simply that we might be pulled up for not being serious or that we find ourselves not being taken seriously, disturbing enough as that is, but that our lives may be turned upside down by the realisation that something in our lives might not be real (or everything in the case of the character Truman Burbank in the 1998 film *The Truman Show*). And, as Derrida suggests, there may be many shades of these things at work in our lives most of the time, including our sense of ourselves.

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Claim and non-claim

The second of the entanglements I want to discuss is the contrast that Cavell draws between epistemological contexts in which he describes a "claim" as having been

made and contexts in which claims are only apparently made, which he describes as contexts of "non-claim". It is the problematical nature of the latter that troubles him in its presumption of a "human seriousness" that he takes to be misplaced. In *Stanley Cavell and The Claim of Literature*, David Rudrum reflects on two basic questions inspired by Cavell's use of term "claim", namely 'what is a claim and what is the importance of claiming' (Rudrum, 2013, p. 16) He writes,

> To stake a claim is metaphorically to stick one's neck on the block: it is to make a statement in the public domain that asserts something one believes to be the case and about which one presumably feels strongly enough to declare it openly and publicly (ibid.)

The nature of such claims has been of concern to Cavell throughout his career. In his early work Cavell understands this in terms of an analysis of the Kantian universal voice, where 'the problem of the critic, as of the artist, is not to discount his subjectivity, but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement but to master it in exemplary ways' (Cavell, 2002. p. 94). Later, Cavell writes that, in making a claim, 'One person, risking exposure to rebuff, singles out another, through the expression of an emotion and a claim of value, to respond in kind, that is, with appropriate emotion and action (if mainly of speech) here and now' (Cavell, 2005, p. 26) To do so is to risk rebuke, not only from others but also from myself and there is a fragility and vulnerability in making such a judgment to which I expose myself. Such is the risk of rebuttal and rejection in 'the arrogation of the right to speak for others' (p. 9).

It is this picture of the context of claim that I wish to develop. It may seem a rather bizarre leap but I want to do so through reflections on Cavell's account of marriage. Austin offers the example of 'I do' as uttered in the marriage ceremony as an example of a successful speech act, albeit with certain provisos, that I must not be joking or acting on stage, for example. Leaving aside the sense that there is something inherently and temptingly theatrical about getting married that, for better or worse, can never be wholly avoided, the words of a ceremony, uttered by the correct person under the correct circumstances will, for Cavell, give us a very limited picture of what constitutes a marriage. What will be of importance is how one understands what it means to be a husband, what it means to be a wife, how one understands one's commitments and the claims that are made on us by the other in the light of this. It is in his writings on film that Cavell develops his thinking on marriage, in particular

Pursuits of Happiness (1981) and *Contested Tears* (1996), where he explores classic Hollywood films from the 1930s and 40s which share the common theme of a relationship in crisis. If we view these films through a Cavellian eye we might take them to be asking what constitutes a marriage, to which Cavell's answer is that it is constituted by a 'willingness for remarriage' (Cavell, 1996, p. 11), what Rudrum describes as 'an everyday commitment to reaffirming and rediscovering what brings and binds the couple together' (Rudrum, p. 151). Cavell expresses it as follows,

> What makes marriage worth reaffirming is a diurnal devotedness that involves friendship, play, surprise and mutual education, all manifested in the pair's mode of conversing with each other (not just in words) (Cavell, 2005, pp. 121-122)

Rudrum suggests being in a marriage is a risk that therefore requires an everyday questioning of why one is in a relationship, whether the relationship should continue and that in making a commitment to living one's life with another 'we bind ourselves to a lifelong commitment to an everyday questioning of that commitment' (Rudrum, p. 152). This strikes me as a rather thoughtless comment and a misrepresentation of Cavell's understanding of how marriage is constituted by the many and varied claims we make on each other. Yes, there may be moments of crisis when the future of the relationship is at stake but to suggest that this requires a permanent state of doubt about the state of the marriage is to invite trouble of its own kind. Who would live with anyone on these terms? What kind of commitment would it be? What kind of seriousness is at stake in such a claim? Why should it not, for example, be constituted in a certain kind of shared story-telling about the relationship, its joys and its disappointments, its beginning, its continuity and its end?

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The Claim of Drama

I want to now pull some of these thoughts together in relation to drama education. The broader context for Cavell's discussion of marriage is the association he draws between what constitutes living in a marriage and what constitutes living in a democracy. Whilst there is limited room to explore this here, what I draw from this broader discussion is how Cavell's description of the conversation of marriage is intended to analogously reflect what it means to be part of any community, the nature of the claims that may be

made on us and by us as part of a community and what it means to affirm or reject one's part in this. In connecting this with drama education I am not making a set of unrealistic, grandiose claims that fail to illuminate what takes place in the dramatic and theatrical space, the relationship between students and between teacher and students. The key point is that, as with Cavellian marriage, the criteria for understanding when a claim is being made or one is claimed by another may not be so easily captured by conventional assumptions about what is real and not real. Firstly, I want to say something about how the claims for drama are usually made.

The claims that are made by and for and about drama in an educational context are often made in the light of implicit and explicit assumptions about 'real life', for example in its contribution to personal development. Drama provides a safe environment for the fostering of skills that are not easily acquired in the classroom, such as emotional expression and imaginative spontaneity. Safe from what? Presumably some aspect of what is real. I will return to this point. The ambiguous relationship between the pretence of drama and education is apparent in publications like Patrice Baldwin's *With Drama In Mind*: *Real learning in imagined worlds* (Baldwin, 2008) in which drama pedagogy is informed by, as well as applied to, a range of cognitive educational outcomes and John O' Toole and Julie Dunn's *Pretending to Learn* (O' Toole and Dunn, 2015). Both employ the apparent paradox implicit in the juxtaposition of the pretence of drama and the reality of learning but with the implicit understanding that the imaginary and pretend are of instrumental value.

My thought is that these do not provide reasons for doing drama but excuses. Why do I say this? Firstly, what is elided if not totally avoided is any recognition that it is essential rather than accidental to what takes place that it is pretence. There are many occasions upon which one may stand in front of a group of people. What in particular about standing in front of a group of people and playing a character in a production or an improvised scene in class, speaking someone else's words, wearing someone else's clothes, develops self-confidence? Or is it just another occasion which taken cumulatively with other similar occasions has the desired effect? Secondly, what is ultimately of value, at least in an educational context, is settled by appeal to what has worth in the real world. The same kind of logical priority that Derrida criticises in Searle's defence of Austin appears to be at work in the justification of drama as an educational activity. The reasons offered are excuses because they acquire their value despite the part that pretence plays and in the light of things that we believe to be

important for our flourishing in the real world, a world that is presumably not contaminated by the risk of the non-serious and the theatrical, as if these things were not part of real life and were not what made these activities possible.

It could be argued that I am overstating my case. Take the example of the safe environment. O'Toole describes Drama as being 'about creating models – models of behaviour and action that can be practised and performed safely' (O' Toole and Dunn, loc 221 of 6818, Kindle), whilst Baldwin suggests drama 'provides a powerful and unique, playful yet serious, social forum which is distanced safely from the child through role-play' (Baldwin, p. 11). The idea is that students can try out a 'range of attitudes, viewpoints and opinions …that are then attributable to the fictitious characters presented, rather than staying attached to the children themselves.' (ibid.). The safety is explained by locating it in the understanding that in playing a role it is the character speaking, not the performer. The performer is expressing a character's point of view, not the performer's own. In this respect, the context would appear to be both non-serious and non-claim, not only in there being no actual repercussions but also that nothing is genuinely expressed. Intuitively this makes sense. Nothing is being claimed although many things might be learned. Is that not enough? And is it not enough that what takes place in a fictional world protects those involved. As Frege observed, a stage fight is not a real fight. The very care and attention that goes into making it seem real and at the same time ensure no one is hurt would appear to confirm this. Is this not good enough as well as appropriate when working with young people? I want to resist this picture of perfect safety and the implication that what takes place in drama has the character of non-claim and non- seriousness simply because it is a form of pretence whose seriousness is couched in reassuring caveats. Why? Because it risks denying its possibility as a voice in or perspective on the world, with that element of danger that Cavell emphasised is part of finding one's voice in one's work, art, morality and politics. It reinforces the picture of the ultimate emptiness of the pretended expression in the context of the plenitude of the learning experience. It is too easy to suppress the risks inherent in drama as a subject and educational tool. I want to hold on to something of Derrida's remark that in order to pretend, I actually do the thing and therefore I have only pretended to pretend. This sounds like gobbledygook. However, I take it to mean that in order to effectively pretend I invest something of what I understand as the reality of an action into my performance of it when acting. This is not a matter of mimetically

copying something in order to convincingly deceive but testing what it is to bring it to life. Cavell echoes this when discussing the ontology of film,

> It is a poor idea of fantasy which takes it to be a world apart from reality, a world clearly showing its unreality. Fantasy is precisely what reality can be confused with. It is through fantasy that our conviction of the worth of reality is established; to forgo fantasies would be to forgo our touch with the world. (Cavell, 1971, p. 85)

Markus Gabriel's comment on this is instructive, that, 'The meaning of art can be sought neither in the idea that art is entertainment nor in the idea that it imitates reality and is therefore less real, merely fictional or possible' (Gabriel, 2015, p. 188). There is something of Derrida's rejection of the Platonic ordering of reality in Gabriel's reflection on Cavell's thoughts on the relationship between reality and fantasy. However, from a Cavellian perspective, it is important that in our fantasies we remain in touch with the world and do not lose our sense of its reality, as expressed in ordinary language. However, what we take to be reality is something that has to be tested, available for reaffirmation or reconsideration. To this end Cavell wrote,

> in philosophising, I have to bring my own language and life into imagination. What I require is a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I may imagine them; and at the same time to confront my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me: to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me.

> This seems to me a task that warrants the name of philosophy. It is also the description of something we might call education' (Cavell, 1979, p. 125)

I want to suggest that this can also be a task for drama education, imagined as something akin to the conditions of a Cavellian marriage in which students are discovering what means are available to them to both reaffirm and rediscover what binds them together, in playfulness as well as seriousness, as well as convene in critical examination the culture that they are inheriting in order to articulate their place in it. Drama is a means by which they can both affirm and reaffirm their being part of a community whilst providing them with the means to critique their culture. In order to do so the drama has to be constantly brought alive, must be constantly engaging, must be something new,

but must also allow for echoes of past work and for what seemingly lies beyond the educational framing of the activity to animate its presence – friendship, play, surprise and mutual education - learning from each other, responding to ideas, developing and discovering forms of expression. In this way drama education involves the constant coming together of individuals to test and explore the conditions under which they live, what the world is, what reality is. However, testing reality is testing those things which comprise reality. This requires a willingness to acknowledge that the real world, as ordinarily understood, is itself structured in part through imaginative constructions, fictions and fantasies. Our ideas of what it is to be, for example, a parent (or of romance, or what courage or cowardice are, for example) depends in part upon images of parents, sustained through fiction in various ways, just as our ideas of what school is or could be might in part be constructed from the fantasies contained in the novels of J.K. Rowling or the Harry Potter films.

In our early learning, there is play-acting and pretence, drama, all the time, a world of possibilities. Then, after a few years, as Vygotsky and others have observed, things become more serious. Those possibilities are closed down. We teach and are taught how things are. However, through drama and other fictional forms we are once again acquainted with possibilities. Seeing the possibilities of things is internal to knowing what they are and internal to their testing.

This openness to possibilities depends upon and demands an openness and intimacy reflected in activities and dialogue in which the making of claims on and with and against each other takes centre stage. Central to this is the status of drama as pretence but it also involves risk. It is this that is suppressed in the justifications that are offered for the subject in an educational context. The challenge for the teacher is to create the conditions under which students feel willing and prepared to take risks. Expressing oneself means something more than just 'being yourself'. It provides students with the artistic means to critically reflect on their own possibilities as well as the possibilities of their culture whilst also enjoying their own sense of community. This means not discounting their subjectivity, perhaps not even mastering it, but including it, exploring its reality and its fictions and bringing it to bear on their collective and individual work.

Summary

This chapter argues for the importance of play, pretence and fantasy beyond its usual context of early years education, specifically in the form of drama education, although the implications of the argument are not limited to this sphere of activity. Whilst early years play theory understands this as a process, subsequent stages of education take the meaning of things to be a given about which we must acquire knowledge. Thus, as we mature, we come to know the world by narrowing down the possibilities of what things can be to us. Our desire to fix the meaning of things in order to ensure our effective functioning in the world is taken to be a mark of our seriousness, in an echo of Sartre's *l'esprit de serieux*. J.L. Austin's speculative disruption of this positivist account of language is shown to be insufficiently robust to resist Derrida's challenge, that seriousness and non-seriousness cannot be so easily identified and corralled in language use. Derrida's point is that seriousness and non-seriousness exist at all times as possibilities of language and that such things as pretence and fantasy are woven into the fabric of our existence. This, together with Stanley Cavell's account of the public nature of agreement and disagreement of criteria in language, allows us to see how a subject like Drama can have an important educational role. It can enable young people to challenge conventional assumptions and provide them with an alternative vocabulary with which to express their seriousness, drawing on humour, pretence and fantasy.

CHAPTER 6

Seriousness, Playfulness and the Role of the Teacher

Take a look at a child playing, or an artist, musician, or athlete. Are they serious about what they are doing? You bet. But they are playing too. The highest activities of human beings and some of their greatest accomplishments, in fact, are play… The philosopher John Dewey got it right: 'To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition'. (John Morreall, 1997 p. 11)

Play and Work in the Curriculum

John Dewey's comment that the ideal mental state harmonises seriousness and playfulness is often quoted approvingly with little questioning of its assumptions or implications. There is a danger in such statements that their aura of wisdom, far from offering a valuable insight, dissuades us from thinking with greater care about what is being claimed. For what or whom is it an ideal mental state? Is its value to be reckoned in instrumental or non-instrumental terms? How would such thinking manifest itself in the activities of the classroom? Addressing the role of the teacher, what part does the teacher play in facilitating this state? What kind of teaching methods will be employed? What kind of personal qualities must the teacher possess and how is the relationship between teacher and students is to be imagined? Given the topic that is my concern, it is clear that one way to proceed in the discussion of these questions would be to assemble a commentary on the various ways in which Dewey writes about play and work and playfulness and seriousness. Indeed, there is a significant secondary literature that would be pertinent to this for example Greene (1989), Jackson (2000) Granger (2006) (Hansen, 2006, 2007) This would be an interesting and valuable project, but it is not the primary concern here. Instead the purpose of the chapter is to forge new lines of

enquiry, in particular in relation to how playfulness and seriousness are manifested in contemporary education and the ethical conditions on such manifestations.

Dewey's discussion of the nature of play and work in the curriculum in *Democracy and Education* ([1916], 2011) reflects his thinking on some of these questions. Dewey dedicates a chapter to consideration of 'Play and Work in the Curriculum' in which he argues against thinking of the two as distinctive features of human activity with only the latter suited for educational purposes, highlighting what Thomas S. Henricks has described as 'the unfortunate consequences of schools' attempts to separate these two themes' (Henricks, 2015, p. 156). This was more than a purely theoretical issue for Dewey; at the time of writing, in the early twentieth century, pressure had been brought to bear on more conventional schooling from a number of different sources, most notably the educational reformers in the Manual Training Movement. Dewey was also responding to current research in child psychology and his own teaching experience in the classroom. As a result of this wider reconsideration about what should be taught, new kinds of activity, which Dewey refers to as 'active occupations' (Dewey, 2011, p. 108), had been introduced into schools and the curriculum. Dewey itemises these as,

> …work with paper, cardboard, wood, leather, cloth, yarns, clay and sand, and the metals, with and without tools. Processes employed are folding, cutting, pricking, measuring, modelling, pattern-making, heating and cooling, and the operation characteristic of such tools as the hammer, saw, file etc. Outdoor excursions, gardening, cooking, sewing, printing, book-binding, weaving, painting, drawing, singing, dramatization, storytelling, reading and writing as active pursuits with social aims (not as mere exercises for acquiring skill for future use). (p. 109).

Not everyone agreed that such activities were suitably educational and Dewey himself voices concern and spends considerable time and effort rethinking their educational worth. Dewey acknowledges that the inclusion of more practical activities in the curriculum and school environment, particularly those associated with play such as games, drama and construction, had made school much more enjoyable for children and made managing them far less onerous as well as seemingly enhancing their learning. However, the down-side is a suspicion that schools were being tempted to use such activities simply to make life easier and provide relief from the strain and tedium of formal school work. Such activities therefore need a more rigorous justification. To do so requires

reconsideration not only of how we understand play as an active occupation but also how we understand work, particularly in the educational context. Play and work were to be understood not as antithetical but as only appearing so in the light of 'undesirable social conditions' (p. 112).

Clearly one of the dominant factors in such a picture is that of economic necessity. It is Dewey's thought that our conventional notions of work and play have become distorted by the pressures of economic necessity in a modern industrial society. Goncu and Perone write that the onset of the Industrial Revolution had the effect of categorising leisure and labour as separate activities, 'with different values attached to each'. Thus 'consistent hard work was seen as essential for the maintenance of livelihood, the betterment of self, and the spiritual life, whereas any time spent on play was considered a waste (Dewey, 1916; Turner; 1982; Sutton-Smith, 1993, cited in Göncü and Perone, 2005). Dewey believes that what he terms 'active occupations' potentially possess much greater educational value; whilst in life they might be valued as enjoyable and pleasurable outlets, in an educational context they have the capacity to engage the whole pupil, bodily, emotionally and imaginatively, thus affording opportunities for intellectual and social development. Therefore, absence of economic pressures in the educational context of the school means activities which normally possess an instrumental value in wider society can be pursued for their own sake and enable such growth to occur. Dewey suggests that by incorporating these activities into the curriculum the natural outcome of acquiring knowledge through activities done for their own sake will be to enhance the experience of learning, with play activities no longer carrying the stigma of lacking purpose and work activities no longer carrying the stigma of drudgery and coercion. Play and work will co-exist as harmonious characteristics of activities done for their own sake within the educational context. Finally, and importantly, 'work which remains permeated with the play attitude is art— in quality if not in conventional designation' (p. 114).

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Seriousness and Playfulness in the mind and in the classroom

However, in *How We Think* (1910) the emphasis on the relative importance of play and work as physical activities and their interconnectedness is internalised as Dewey considers the relationship between playfulness and seriousness as states of mind. It is Dewey's claim that 'Playfulness is a more important consideration than play'

(Dewey, 1910, p. 162), in that playfulness is 'an attitude of mind' (ibid.) whereas play is only 'a passing outward manifestation of this attitude' (ibid.). We might wonder why Dewey appears to privilege the attitude over the activity? The answer lies in Dewey's picture of child development in which the child's playful attitude towards things in the world is understood as an expression of the plasticity of freedom, which Dewey generally refers to more specifically to as 'free mental play'. The kind of playfulness that Dewey initially imagines, is that of pretend play in early childhood in which things acquire meaning through becoming ''vehicles of suggestion'' (ibid.), for example when the 'child plays horse with a broom and cars with chairs' (ibid.). Again, Dewey is mindful of the suspicion that such activities are often viewed as no more than child's play in which the child loses themselves in 'an imaginary world alongside the world of actual things' (ibid.) and feels compelled to provide an educational rationale for activities whose value for the child seems wholly reflected in their serious absorption as well as seeking to accommodate these seemingly antithetical states. To do so, he argues work should also be understood as an attitude of mind, an orientation towards activity. The psychological equivalent to characterising activities as work is to characterise the attitude of work as seriousness.

Dewey develops this thought through his interpretation of the general view that the origins of art are to be found in children's play. This leads him to suggest that 'harmony of mental playfulness and seriousness describes the artistic ideal' (p. 220). The unspoken assumption therefore is that children's play is itself a harmonization of seriousness and playfulness. In this, Dewey echoes the thoughts of other philosophers and writers who have sought to express not only something important and vital about childhood but also a sense of what is lost and what must be rediscovered in adulthood through the paradoxical juxtaposition of the playful and the serious. Such thoughts are exemplified in the following quotes,

'Children at play are not playing about. Their games should be seen as their most serious-minded activity'.

—Michel de Montaigne.

'Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play'.

—Heraclitus.

'Man's maturity: to have rediscovered the seriousness he possessed as a child at play'.

—Friedrich Nietzsche.

Dewey is not taking up these thoughts directly. His point is not so much that these qualities have become lost but are divided and displaced in contemporary industrial society. It is from a distorted and divided perspective that adults construct the educational experiences of children. What seems conjoined and natural in the young child becomes dichotomized and estranged in the adult. Thus, Dewey must work with dichotomy, estrangement and paradox in order to resist and then resolve them in the ideal mental state. An education that seeks to replicate the natural responsiveness of the child to its world but within the classroom in its broadest sense, is the desired aim.

What precisely does he hope to achieve? As Henricks suggests, 'Work is activity that focuses on products or results. Play focuses on processes' (p. 156). Therefore, one thought is that he is illustrating an ideal blend of process and product within the classroom environment. Given he understands schools as having essentially failed to achieve this, Dewey seeks a model for the kind of engagement he advocates. What permits him to do so is that in the general picture of adult necessity that forms the background to classroom activity, one type of individual stands out as not having succumbed so utterly to these necessities: the artist. The artist retains the childlike capacity to respond openly with both seriousness and playfulness to the world and is able to turn responsiveness into the products of art. The picture is of an ideal synthesis of artistic inspiration and artistic technique that produces the successful work of art, together with an assumption that the work of art will be complete. Too much concern for or too little skill in, the execution of technical aspects and the work will be unsuccessful. Likewise, if not enough inspiration or imagination has gone into the work of art, it will also be judged a failure, revealing little about its subject matter. Its final form will be an expression of its means and ends. In Deweyan terms it is in the harmony of means and ends that we have the attitude of the artist. Importantly for the more general account of thinking within the classroom that Dewey is articulating, this attitude 'may be displayed in all activities, even though not conventionally designated arts' (p. 220). Thus 'History, literature, and geography, the principles of science, nay, even geometry and arithmetic, are full of matters that must be imaginatively realized if they are realized at all' (p. 224).

The Role of the Teacher

Given this is the ideal balance of mental forces that Dewey wants students to exhibit, what then is the role of the teacher? Dewey first identifies teaching as an art and then characterises the true teacher as an artist whose claim to be one 'is measured by his ability to foster the attitude of the artist in those who study with him, whether they be youth or little children' (p. 220). This might immediately give us cause for suspicion as it appears to suggest the teacher's primary concern is not with what is learned—the end product—whatever it may be, or even in what can be measured and assessed, but in developing the right attitudes towards the work i.e., Dewey is expressing a concern for the style or skills of learning and not the specific subject content of what is learned. However, ultimately Dewey argues that 'the difficulty and reward of the teacher' (p. 221) is 'to nurture inspiring aim and executive into harmony with each other' (ibid.). Thus, the task of the teacher is not simply to develop the right kind of orientation towards activities but to achieve an ideal balance between the inspiration and vision necessary to engage and animate students and provide them with the guidance essential to acquiring mastery over the means of executing that which they have been inspired to produce within a particular subject or academic discipline. It is both a difficulty and a reward. It is not easy but it is worth pursuing.

Dewey's proposal appears to imply that each subject, in its own way, is best taught through an ideal blending of the playful and the serious. The problem is not Gradgrindian facts as such but the way in which those facts are presented and taught, leaving little room for imaginative play upon them. The role of the teacher is to create opportunities for this in the classroom. It is the playful that engages the interest of the student, encourages inquiry, exploration, experimentation, encourages students to question their assumptions about a topic, unsettles prior knowledge and opens up students to the possibility of new knowledge. It is the serious that ensures learning is absorbed in terms of clearly identifiable ends. The student may be puzzled, curious, bewildered, amazed, encouraged to speculate and so forth but this will be in order to meet those ends. Thus, while Dewey seeks to liberate both the student and the teacher from the drudgery of unsatisfactorily motivated tasks, so that the experience of learning will be much the better for the ideally playful orientation towards varied educational activities, the student's experience of education still reflects a purposeful harmony of process and

product. It is important that such purposefulness does not become programmed and that, as Paul Standish reminds us (2003), Dewey views education as involving a 'freeing activity' (p. 227) in which the teacher is able to 'let his mind come to close quarters with the pupil's mind and the subject matter' (Dewey, 1916, pp. 108–109 in Standish, p. 227).

A good example of how pedagogical practice can be understood as harmonising the serious and the playful in this purposeful way is found in Outstanding Teaching: Engaging Learners by Andy Griffith and Mark Burns (Griffith and Burns, 2012). In the chapter 'Sir, I really enjoyed that lesson' Griffith and Burns discuss how outstanding teachers make use of play and playfulness in order to enhance the learning experiences of their students. They give lots of fun examples of techniques employed, techniques that help students feel more secure and 'more likely to take the kinds of risk that enable accelerated learning' (p. 114), making them 'more open to speculating, hypothesising, creating and being open to sharing their learning' (ibid.) Their claim is that,

> Play is a serious business. Encouraging play and playfulness will help students not only get more enjoyment from their learning but also more progress. Using playful methods in our teaching can get students to be more alert, more interested, more engaged and into more flow. Play can also become a more desirable habit for both teachers and students, enabling them to value playful ways of exploring learning and living. (p. 120)

In the course of offering useful advice to the teacher about such things as targeted use of games, acquiring a sense of humour and relaxed persona, modelling playfulness and developing clowning and stand-up skills, they present an example of how play is used by a teacher to enable more serious work, in this case the practical study of a Shakespeare text,

> Anne Riley knows that when she wants her GCSE English students to act out a scene from Romeo and Juliet she has to warm them up first. She gets students to simply walk past each other. Then she asks them to walk past each other and make eye contact. And then she asks students to walk past each other with a swagger. She gradually builds engagement before any dialogue from the script is spoken. (p. 98)

As described the serious educational work is the acting out of the scene. Its educational aim might be, for example, to examine the nature of Shakespeare's characterisation or how themes are represented through staging, how vocal techniques and use of physicality can help to establish character, context, tension etc. Committed and engaged involvement will then enable the students to write with insight about the play, drawing on their own experience. This is the engagement that is referred to. The teacher breaks down the component parts, particularly those that are difficult to sustain or require the students to be warmed up. Thus, it is a step by step introduction to what is required in the scene to make it convincing—the making and breaking of eye contact, the use of appropriate body language, movement and gesture, hopefully leading to convincing and appropriate expression of dialogue.

Of course, it is not enough to simply do the exercises. You can walk, make eye contact, swagger, badly. The students may be embarrassed and not take it seriously, undervaluing the work. Their work itself may be ineffectual. The teacher knows this. The exercises target what is most difficult—holding eye contact in close proximity, keeping a straight face, enjoying the swagger, playing with it threateningly. They are therefore something more than just a warm-up. In gradually building engagement the exercises will come to constitute part of the scene and are bound up both with the representation of the text through its physical and vocal embodiment and with taking it seriously.

This might appear to present a good example of what Dewey was seeking to justify. It draws on an activity like drama, it harmonises the preparatory process and the end product, reflecting a harmony of seriousness and playfulness in the students themselves and between teacher and students. As a result of their engagement the students will be able to successfully respond to the formal educational demands that will be made on them, for example in being able to answer an exam question in a literature paper with insight and understanding. However, as I have described it, a further aspect has been introduced in the idea that the work itself required a certain responsiveness that is internal to what it means to work well within the subject. It is something more akin to the seriousness of the child at play, absorbed and completely at home in the playfulness of the work, enjoying it in the moment for its own sake and not just for what will be produced as a result of it. Akin, but not identical with; rather, the work itself may condition how we understand what is appropriately serious and playful in our approaches to it and to only see it in instrumental terms will be to distort our

understanding of what is significant in the work and what it demands of us. This therefore raises a question about whether Dewey's harmonising of seriousness and playfulness risks an unintended instrumentality that obscures important aspects of the relationship of teacher and student to subject content that are not so easily accommodated by such dominant approaches.

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The Problem of Seriousness

As exemplified in the discussion of Griffith and Burns, it seems natural to focus on the nature of play and the playful, how they are understood and represented, how they are to be employed, what their educational value is and how they are to appropriately illuminate and enhance the student's experience of education and learning. After all, As Fiachra Long has pointed out (Long, 2013, p. 19), the ancient Greeks linked the word *paidia*, meaning play, to the word *paideia*, meaning education and formation, with both words referring back to the Greek word for child, *pais*. We have long since progressed beyond the narrow Aristotelian, not to say puritanical, view of play as merely recreational, in the light of the work of Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, D.W. Winnicott and others. Rather, as Long argues, 'it is perhaps better to think of play as enhancing the creativity of any activity and lessening its drudgery and for this reason 'child's play' is a feature of all human behaviour' (ibid.). As exemplified by imagination, creativity and humour, the speculative and light-hearted spirit of playfulness is a familiar feature of educational discourse and would seem to reflect the attitude of the Deweyan artist. However, it is currently more likely to be discussed and justified in the light of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, having been liberated from its progressive Deweyan roots and latter-day suspicions of its detrimental effect on serious academic learning and the acquisition of knowledge. Notwithstanding this rehabilitation and embracing of play and playfulness in providing the means towards more respected contemporary educational ends, I want to introduce what I will call the problem of seriousness and how it might shed some light on what Dewey intends when talking about the teacher as an artist. In doing so I hope to unsettle the conventional sense in which he understands the relationship of process to product, means to ends as an essentially purposeful one. To do so we need to look beyond the ways in which Dewey appears to derive his idea of seriousness from the characterisation of work. The

problem, I hasten to add, is not one of Dewey's making but my own sense of the limitation of thinking of seriousness in terms of an attitude of purposefulness.

What appears to be missing from Dewey's account of how we orientate ourselves to educational activities is a sense of the different ways we might be claimed by what we are doing, more specifically that our orientation to activity may not be so tidily packaged. For example, it matters that on occasions our orientation, understood as that which drives us to express ourselves, is something more than interest or curiosity and is attuned to the ethical significance of what we are teaching and studying. This may make non-instrumental or non-purposeful claims on both teacher and student alike i.e. that what we are expressing and how we express ourselves matters to us, is personally important and is not solely in response to the demands of conventional academic ends. This may permit a harmony of playfulness and seriousness but it may also draw out considerable tensions between the attributes of mind idealised in the attitude of the artist as an educational ideal and a seriousness that is appropriate to the material and which may find expression in non-serious forms. This need not just be an ethical response. It could equally be religious, aesthetic, political, but it is the ethical that resonates in what follows.

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Seriousness and Playfulness in *The History Boys*

This is illustrated in two scenes from Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* (Bennett/Hytner, 2006) *The History Boys*, which began life as a stage play at the National Theatre in London before being made into a film, follows the preparation of a group of teenage boys for their entrance examinations for Oxford and Cambridge. The film itself defies easy categorization. It is both serious and funny. Stylistically, it appears at first glance to be naturalistic but it is also the case that where the school context, notably but not exclusively the classroom, becomes a place for a kind of excess, naturalism gives way to a style of performance that is more exaggerated and theatrical than would be the case in a standard classroom. This can be seen not only in the musical performances and dramatic improvisations but also in the reciting of poetry and the uses to which it is put. This more overtly theatrical style serves not only to heighten the dramatic impact of the film but also directs us to one of Bennett's concerns, namely the value that our experiences in education have for our lives in general. One of the key themes, the clash of perspectives on the purpose and aims of education, is played out in

the relationships the boys enjoy with on the one hand, Hector, their unconventional English teacher from whom they get 'culture', and Irwin, the smart supply teacher brought in by the head teacher to give the boys 'polish' and 'edge'. Let us now turn to the two scenes.

Scene 1

The scene takes place an hour into the film. Hector has been forced to share a class with Irwin. We do not see a lesson as such, but a discussion about the content of a lesson. The boys are silent, uncertain as to what is expected of them, very aware that the two teachers demand very different orientations towards the activities that take place in their classrooms. Irwin proposes they discuss the Holocaust. What emerges are two vigorously argued perspectives on the nature of seriousness within an educational context. On the one hand is the view that the Holocaust is a subject like any other and therefore permits a detached, speculative, exploratory play in its treatment. On the other is the thought that it is not an event like any other, therefore how one discusses it and what can be said about it demands a seriousness that is internal to acknowledgment of the horror it represents which is characterised by thoughtfulness and not cleverness.

The scene begins awkwardly. The boys are paralyzed by uncertainty about what is expected of them and are unable to make a decision about what they should discuss, the normal procedure in their General Studies lessons. As Tibbs (played by James Corden) says, 'Depends if you want us to be thoughtful, or smart'. Irwin suggests discussing the Holocaust. This provokes Hector to question how it is possible to teach such a subject. Crowther's response to this, that it can be treated as a subject and therefore studied like any other, prompts Scripps to point out that it is not a subject like any other. Hector is clearly quite horrified by the educational rendering of the experience of the Holocaust in which schools go on trips to concentration camps and children eat crisps and drink coke, to which Crowther responds that in this respect such places are no different from other educational attractions that cater for school visits. What troubles Hector is that nothing about our normal everyday life and behaviour seems appropriate at the sites of such monumental suffering and evil. This leads briefly to speculation about what might be appropriate. Hector's embracing of the idea that silence may be the only appropriate acknowledgment is scorned by Dakin who is at this point infatuated with Irwin's cleverness and disillusioned by Hector's shambolic pedagogy.

Hector's forceful reaction to Dakin is to denigrate his comment as flip, glib journalism. However, Hector's own idea for acknowledging the Holocaust, as an unprecedented horror like no other, is criticized in turn for being conventional and banal.

The discussion then turns briefly to the ethical nature of the language of criticism. To speak of placing events in proportion or context in order to provide explanations is seen by Posner as tantamount to explaining away the events of the Holocaust, reducing their significance to one of cause and effect, thus trivializing the significance of what took place. What he perceives as a failure of seriousness is legitimized by educational practices and values; Irwin is impressed by these arguments as if they are moves in a more disinterested conception of conversation and more than once murmurs 'Good point' in response. Both Posner and Scripps object to this. Posner tells Irwin he is not making a 'good point' but means what he says whilst Scripps insists that what matters in the discussion is that what is said is true. Irwin's reaction is to tell Scripps to distance himself from the material, insisting that the job of the historian is to provide a perspective on events and to do so with no guarantee that this will not change as new interpretations are put forward. Nothing in this respect can be definitive, everything is open to revision, including the meaning of the Holocaust.

In educational terms, providing and working with perspectives on historical events requires an appropriately academic critical distancing of oneself from the material that one is studying and about which one is speaking regardless of the nature of those events and what constitutes 'primary evidence'. We must do so in order to ensure our views do not become rigid and dogmatic but are open to reflection, re-evaluation and fresh perspectives. This implies that Irwin does not take their first-person protestations seriously, regarding them as the expression of entrenched opinion, no matter how sincerely expressed. Academic study is to be conducted in the third person through argument and the provision of perspectives. From Irwin's perspective Hector's point of view is old-fashioned and clichéd. Far better to look for fresh insight that will shed new light on source material and which treats the Holocaust as just one topic amongst many about which they may or may not be questioned. The scene ends with Dakin sidling up to Irwin and sycophantically telling him how he's won the argument, putting Hector in his place, as if that is what was at stake in the conversation.

Scene 2

Bennett and Hytner balance the outcome of the discussion on the Holocaust with a scene in which we are shown how the seriousness appropriate to subject content can be expressed in more personal terms. The boys have been on a trip to a ruined monastery. On their return Hector is summoned to the Head teacher's office. His tendency to inappropriately touch the boys when giving them a lift home on his motorbike has been spotted and reported. The headmaster is furious but does not want to risk damaging the school's reputation by sacking Hector. Instead Hector's retirement will be brought forward and the incident hushed up. Hector exits and goes into the classroom to teach an after-school lesson. Posner has stayed behind and so they have a one to one lesson on a poem by Thomas Hardy, 'Drummer Hodge'. Having learned the poem, about a young soldier who dies and is buried in a foreign country, Posner recites it off by heart and they discuss it. Hector makes the connection between himself and Hardy when Posner asks him how old he was when he wrote the poem to which Hector replies, 'about 60, my age I suppose. A saddish life, though not unappreciated'. The significance of compound adjectives for Hector, mentioned earlier in the film by Dorothy Lintott, becomes apparent. Having described Hodge as 'uncoffined' to indicate the rough and ready nature of his death and burial, Hector gives further examples of Hardy's use of the grammatical form—'Unkissed. Unrejoicing. Unconfessed. Unembraced'. It is evident he is talking about himself and in describing the technique as giving the poem a sense of 'not sharing' and being 'out of it' he expresses something of his own experience to which Posner can relate through his reading of the poem—'I felt that a bit'. Hector then says 'the best moments in reading are when you come across something—a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things that you'd thought special and particular to you. And here it is set down by someone else, a person you've never met, maybe even someone long dead'. He describes the experience as being 'as if a hand has come out and taken yours'. As Hector reaches out his own hand, Posner motions as if to reach out and touch it, before hesitating. It is a moment of empathy and shared understanding. As Posner recites the last verse once again, its usefulness lies beyond Irwin's exhortations to turn such knowledge into gobbets to be inserted into essays but exists as an expression of a shared understanding of what it feels like to be an outsider, not quite 'in the swim'.

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Intrinsic and extrinsic seriousness

Can Dewey help us understand what distinguishes Hector and Irwin in exemplifying how seriousness and playfulness are present within the classroom? Both are unorthodox and the film makes both visions of education compelling. Whilst Hector's approach will offer the greater integrity, the boys also need Irwin's approach to give them a chance of successfully passing their entrance examinations. However, if the two visions are complimentary there is also a tension between them that requires acknowledging. It is too simplistic to think of this as a tension between the intentional/purposive and the aimless, despite Dakin's reference to Hector as a 'shambles'. Hans Joas (1996) in *The Creativity of Action* speaks of Dewey and 'the non-teleological interpretation of the intentionality of action', that is, having purposes but not specifically fixed ones. Hector's teaching does not lack intention or purpose, rather it lacks the fixed purposes and goal-directed thrust of Irwin's. There is something attractive and dynamic about the scenes in the film depicting Irwin's lessons with the boys. His methods encourage the free play of thinking on subject matter, the boys are engaged and he encourages them to make good use of the knowledge of both high and low culture that Hector has provided for them to make interesting connections. In seeking to touch their souls and be touched in return, Hector's teaching risks exposure and rejection; Irwin's risk is that of professional failure.

Where then does this leave us with regard to Dewey's harmonising of the serious and the playful in his description of the mind and learning? Does Dewey's line of thought take a similar course to the kind of view that characterises contemporary thinking about pedagogy, subject knowledge and subject content which is that what matters is students acquiring designated knowledge by any means possible? Irwin in this respect exemplifies mainstream attitudes to teaching and learning, one that Dewey's perspective would seemingly countenance. It is interesting how we are told in the film that Irwin ultimately becomes well-known as a television historian and yet, as Scripps observes, his methods essentially involved the application of a formula for turning conventional ideas on their head and arguing the contrary in a convincing manner i.e., there is something non-serious about Irwin's teaching despite appearances to the contrary.

I gave an example earlier that described how teachers should model playfulness. Such exhortations operate with a tacit assumption that playfulness and seriousness are

not only distinguishable but that what we understand as seriousness does not require the same sort of attention. After all, who needs advice on how to be serious? It is all too easy to be serious; the problem is not a lack of seriousness but its totalizing presence in the demand that all experiences in school must be educational and accountable as such. It is this which means we require reminders to relax and be playful. It is of course important that these playful experiences are themselves educational. This was Dewey's concern also. In this respect, it might be useful to think of a further contrast in the teaching of Hector and Irwin, between what is personal and impersonal. As indicated, Irwin's method involves a distancing of oneself from subject matter in order to acquire a critical perspective on it. Hector reflects a concern for what is personal in education. It requires an approach to content rather than a distancing from it. It is a place for exploration of personal thought and feeling in discussion. It is Irwin who theatricalizes his teaching whilst Hector seeks more authentic experiences in the classroom. In this respect, there are a number of things about the scene that are worth mentioning. It takes place in a social setting. It is staged in a democratic circle which could also be understood as a place for performing. The teachers provide an opportunity for the students to speak. The scene presents a contrast between speaking personally and speaking impersonally. The latter is a recognizable feature of education, the former less so. I do not mean that students do not have passionate discussions about issues but the personal voice—'it isn't 'good', sir. I mean it'—is not the voice desired for and by the ends of education whereas the impersonal voice—'Good point'—is. However, it seems to me that the impersonal voice is not the voice that expresses the attitude of the artist. The artist's voice is a personal voice married to the skilled use of technique. This attunement between what the artist seeks to express and how this is achieved is what enables the personal voice to emerge and provides the value found within the artistic activity. For the teacher, this is the same. It is this that makes Dewey's claim to artistry in teaching credible, not the more impersonal management required to harmonise playfulness and seriousness.

I do not think that Dewey conceives of the different subjects in the spirit of each being just like any other and therefore suited to an impersonal imposition of a style of pedagogy, the kind of thing that is happening across academy chains in England, for example, where schools within a chain come together to ensure subjects are taught in more or less the same way across the members of the chain. In seeking to introduce the

imaginative and the playful there is an awareness that the experience of education can be so much more than, for example, teaching to the test. The danger represented here, however, is not one of drudgery but of the 'flip' or the 'glib', not only in what marks the difference between the provision of occasions for making a good point and the provision of opportunities to mean it but from the teacher's perspective having a bearing upon the planning of lessons and the employment of strategies and techniques.

The kind of attunement I am advocating is both an attunement to the deeper significance and possibility of what it means to be a teacher as manifested in what one seeks to develop in one's students but also to oneself and one's own voice. Both are important and we see that in *The History Boys*, not only in the playing out of the two perspectives but also in the sense that it forces us to consider our own voice as teachers. If we only think of the Deweyan attitude of the artist in the impersonal sense then the kind of seriousness that is internal to the personal expression of claims about art, ethics, morality and politics remains unheard, at least in an educational context.

Such an attunement allows for playfulness and humour as well as seriousness. It is an attunement between the individual and others in mutuality and with him or herself. This suggests there is something important about the nature of conversation that takes place between teacher and students. It is to this that I want to turn through consideration of conversation and mutuality in the work of Stanley Cavell via Michael Oakeshott's observations about seriousness and playfulness in conversation and further comments offered by Paul Standish.

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Conversation

What remains unclear is how the teacher is to achieve the harmonization of seriousness and playfulness and what its value is. What is it about the artist that makes it worth pursuing? Furthermore, none of this explains why the artist is the model. Why not the scientist? Why not the mathematician? Why not the historian, an Irwin, if academic models are to serve as models of thinking in the classroom? Or even the philosopher, playing with ideas, testing theories with thought experiments, reasoning rigorously? Why not anyone committed to unsettling preconceived ideas, encouraging speculative thinking, provoking students to new ways of understanding? Perhaps we can get a sense of its worth in Chris Higgins's discussion of a well-known quote from Michael Oakeshott. Higgins turns to Oakeshott in the light of comments by Dewey on what it

means to see teaching as a vocation. Oakeshott is explaining his imagining of human activity through the metaphor of conversation,

> The image of human activity and intercourse as a conversation will, perhaps, appear both frivolous and unduly sceptical. This understanding of activity as composed, in the last resort, of inconsequent adventures, often put by for another day but never concluded, and of the participants as playfellows moved, not be a belief in the evanescence of error and imperfection but only by their loyalty and affection to one another, may seem to neglect the passion and the seriousness with which, for example, both scientific and practical enterprises are often pursued and the memorable achievements they have yielded… Although a degree of scepticism cannot be denied, the appearance of frivolity is due, I think, to a misconception about conversation. As I understand it, the excellence of this conversation (as of others) springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness. Each voice represents a serious engagement (though it is serious not merely in respect of its being pursued for the conclusion it promises); and without the seriousness the conversation would lack impetus. But in its participation in the conversation, each voice learns to be playful, learns to understand itself conversationally and to recognise itself as a voice among voices. As with children, who are great conversationalists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness is only play (Oakeshott, [1959] 1991, pp. 492-493 in Higgins, pp. 439-441).

What leads Higgins to quote Oakeshott at such length is his wondering what members of the conversation can be if not 'question-answerers and problem-solvers' (p. 439), that is, thinkers whose criticality is understood through a particular set of concepts and associated practices that are suited to educational norms. Oakeshott's point, argues Higgins (2010), is that no one voice i.e., no one discipline, of the likes of science, literature and history, should dominate the 'ongoing conversation through which human beings attempt to understand themselves… The voice of science, for instance, must not be allowed to reduce the conversation to inquiry; nor should the voice of practicality be allowed to take over the conversation…' (p. 439).

Higgins is impressed by Oakeshott's picture of conversation as a 'stirring image of self-understanding through serious play' (p. 441), writing that,

When Oakeshott says that children are great conversationalists, he does not mean that they are friendly and chatty, he means that they are interested in the different 'voices', that they are interested in self-understanding, and they have not yet learned the pernicious adult distinction between labour and leisure. They still know how to be serious in their play and playful in their seriousness…Teaching offers a constant check against the dominance of one voice, and against the tendency for the great human questions to become mere academic topics. Teaching forces one to see one's discipline from the eyes of the uninitiated and to ponder how the voice of one's discipline contributes to the conversation. (ibid.).

Dewey is not describing a discipline and its practices but a mental state so what he says need not be at odds with this picture of conversation. But without looking at what is of value in what follows or is produced as a result of that mental state it might appear to be a rather empty assertion. This need not be the case. Dewey's thought is that such a spirit of enquiry is best enabled if it is carried out in the spirit with which the artist works, open to new ideas, open to making new associations, leading to moral and intellectual growth and development. However, the example of Hector is intended to prompt a different kind of thought about how we should understand the harmonization of seriousness and playfulness. This takes us beyond the playful as a pedagogical strategy to be employed as enabling the more serious business of learning. Rather it is internal to learning and the experience of education that it is open to both serious and playful approaches and perspectives.

An observation made by Stanley Cavell develops this further. Cavell said of his experience of J.L. Austin's classes in the mid-1950s that,

After I had 'given up' (so I called it) music for philosophy, working in Austin's classes was the time for me in philosophy when the common rigors of exercise acquired the seriousness and playfulness—the continuous mutuality—that I had counted on in musical performance. This may have meant to me that what was happening in Austin's classes was not, as it lay, quite philosophy. (Cavell, 2010, p. 323).

It is interesting that when looking back at this period in later life, Cavell also identifies it as the moment when he not only discovered his own philosophical voice

but what would be serious for him in pursuing philosophy, the idea of returning the human voice to philosophy, bringing with it a responsibility for as well as a possibility of meaning what we say and having a voice in our own lives and history. In taking the human voice seriously Cavell is taking its possibilities seriously and this includes the playful as much as it includes the serious. Therefore, there is a sense in which Cavell's encounter with Austin both liberates him and gives him new found responsibilities and the mutuality of seriousness and playfulness in our language and relationships reflects that. Dewey argues that the role of the teacher is to inculcate the artistic ideal of harmonising the two and the success of the teacher is measured by his or her ability to achieve this. I do not know how this would be measured or assessed other than by experiencing the atmosphere in a classroom and bringing one's own judgments to bear on what is taking place, the spirit in which it is done and what is appropriate.

This recalls Cavell's thinking on marriage that was discussed in the previous chapter, in which play and mutual education are present in the way the couple converse with each other and provides us with a valuable picture of what the relationship between teacher and pupils might look like. It should be said that whilst many and varied forms of claim are captured in the idea of conversation it would be a mistake to think of its seriousness only in terms of its being earnest or 'deep'. Whilst it must admit of these possibilities it is also present in the willingness to play, in friendship, to surprise and be surprised and in a mutual education. Its seriousness is found in its intimacy and the openness of each to the other.

In this way, the relationship between teacher and students might capture something of both Dewey and Oakeshott. It does, however, leave open how we are to understand the nature of seriousness in such conversation. I want to draw on an example from Paul Standish for how we might understand it, which I believe takes us beyond the impersonal sense in which we might understand it as purposefulness but as something internal to our capacity to respond and attend to each other. Standish asks us to imagine the following encounter between an adult and a young child,

> You are sitting at your desk at home working and a small child, not quite
> two years old, comes hurriedly into the room. He is distressed, struggling
> to say something, barely able to find any words, and you listen, able to
> discern only fragments of sense. But, it is clear, he is imploring you to listen,
> repeating these same sounds excitedly, and finally they coalesce into a

sentence you can understand; 'Ella put the dinosaur down the toilet'. He has come to you, it turns out, not to seek your help in rescuing the dinosaur, for his mother, you soon find out, has already done that. He has come to tell you what has happened. He is registering from your reaction the importance of what has happened, and in so doing finding out something about what the world is like. But he is also, in finding something to say, discovering the world as something we can speak about and discovering himself as having something to say…Having something to say, and realising that one can say something, are breakthrough moments in the life of the young child, where they are not just repeating or playing with the sounds that they hear but saying something about the world… This is having something to speak about, and it is difficult to imagine what, in the absence of this, a conversation could be like. (Standish, 2015, p. 492).

What Standish draws out is how significant it is for our understanding conversation that we experience ourselves as having something to say. What is important is not just being able to say things but finding there is a world to say something about. They are mutually dependent and come to light together. Both are necessary for seriousness. This is what drives Posner to express his frustration with Irwin, because Irwin's 'Good point' fails to acknowledge the nature of Posner's seriousness in expressing his point of view. My point is not that all conversation is of this kind but that what is to count as conversation, and what is to count as seriousness in the classroom must admit of this possibility and is not to be determined solely by lesson objectives and learning outcomes. It is perhaps this that justifies the model of the artist more than that of the scientist or the mathematician, that it is internal to our evaluation of the work of the artist that he or she has something to say, that there is something worth attending to. It is not simply that the artist's purposefulness is what matters but that its purposefulness is directed towards something whose completion requires a finished state in order that it might say something meaningful, playfully or otherwise. That Dewey does not fully explicate this is to be regretted. It suggests a limitation in what he takes to be serious and playful in human activity in an educational context which derives not from limitations in what it means to be playful but what it means to be serious. Nevertheless, that Dewey directs us towards this as a means of articulating our experience in a spirit of freedom and in the light of our capacity for growth is to be welcomed.

It is evident that although I have returned to Dewey in my concluding comments, the nature of the content I am addressing and the style of the writing that is being addressed seeks to look beyond the framework that Dewey provides in his discussion of seriousness and playfulness. Dewey's undeniably affirmative attitude towards the importance of both seriousness and playfulness is couched in rather sombre tones. The blandness of his prose and its flat descriptive style serves to restrict the way in which the serious and the playful can be realised in his writing and therefore how their mutuality can be understood. In the hundred years since *Democracy and Education* was written, the significance of play and seriousness, and their interrelation, has come to take new forms and present new challenges, both within the educational context and the wider social and cultural setting. Dewey knew nothing of confessional and reality television, social media and the internet; he knew nothing of the politics of soundbites and spin; he knew nothing of virtual reality. Our world is one in which the equivocation between play and seriousness is peculiarly significant for our lives and world. It is incumbent on anyone interested in taking ideas from Dewey forward for the twenty-first century to be ready to move beyond the letter of what he says to see how these ideas might be developed in new ways and contexts. As such it is appropriate to consider those ideas in their limitations. The approach to their subject matter of writers like Alan Bennett and philosophers like Cavell allows such themes to emerge more vividly through the care with which their words are chosen and what they take to be serious in so doing. Both have distinctive voices through which their perspectives on human life are expressed. Their voices are both personal and impersonal, crafted and animated, serious and playful, ethical and aesthetic. This is not to deny the significance of both work and play, playfulness and seriousness for Dewey's understanding of the art of teaching. Dewey's reflections on seriousness and playfulness provide the very useful bare bones for a general framing of their significance. The aim of the chapter has been to put flesh on this, and bring it to life.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the relative merits of seriousness and playfulness in the classroom. This was done initially via reflection on John Dewey's attempt to dissolve the historically conditioned impact of the distinction between work and play on the content of the school curriculum. Dewey's reimagining of this distinction allows him

to promote the educational value of embodied, practical activities that were associated with the world of work and include a number of physical and artistic activities more generally frowned upon within education, such as drama, dance and singing. Dewey's resistance to commonplace dichotomies leads him to rethink the mental states associated with work and play. The chapter develops and engages with Dewey's arguments that the ideal mental state in the classroom combines seriousness and playfulness, and it is the job of the teacher, pictured as an artist, to facilitate this. Whilst I accept the importance of this and offer examples of current practice in drama education that embody it, my analysis is more finely grained. I argue that Dewey fails to provide an account of how the realisation of this ideal mental state in the classroom is ethically conditioned. Through an extended discussion of two scenes from the film version of Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys (2007)*, I argue that when the Deweyan teacher assesses how best to approach subject content, s/he may experience a tension between the pedagogical and intellectual ideal of speculative playfulness and purposeful seriousness on the one hand and the moral seriousness of the topic on the other. This line of thought is developed by further reflection on how we can understand conversation and discussion as both ethically conditioned and allowing for the interplay of the serious and the playful in our exchanges. Acknowledging the importance of our having something to say requires us to attend to the tone, register and pitch of what is said as well as its reasoned claims, and that what is serious in thought may be expressed, and make its claims, in a variety of ways, not just the formally rational.

CHAPTER 7

Seriousness, the Personal and the Impersonal in Moral Education

Speaking for oneself

In comments subsequent to giving his 1929 Lecture on Ethics, Wittgenstein told Friedrich Waismann that it was essential to 'speak for oneself' on ethical matters. 'Ethics', he had said in the concluding paragraph of the lecture, 'so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolutely valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense.' (Wittgenstein, 1965, p. 12). However, Wittgenstein ambiguously finished by saying that ethics 'is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.' (ibid.). Commenting on this to Waismann, he remarked, 'At the end of my lecture on ethics, I spoke in the first person. I believe that is quite essential. Here nothing more can be established. I can only appear as a person speaking for myself.' (Waismann, 1965, p. 16)

I want to highlight two features from within and without the lecture. Firstly, the ethical, however it is characterized, is something Wittgenstein respects. Secondly, it is essentially expressed in the first person and not the third person. This is a perspective that is at odds with one prevailing strand of moral education, although at first glance that might not appear to be the case when it would seem students often are encouraged to voice their own opinions.

It is taken as an unremarkable commonplace that moral issues are necessarily serious in addition to being complex and difficult and one's thinking should duly reflect that. In order to come to a clear understanding of particular issues and to assess the views expressed, thinking should be rational, coherent and free from emotional distortion or personal bias. The teaching of ethics in the English school curriculum, usually but not always as part of Religious Studies, encourages just such

an attitude. Appropriately serious issues are included in syllabus material - for younger students, topics like the environment, global warming and human rights and for older students, social issues with a substantial moral character, such as euthanasia and abortion. Students debate the issues, weigh up the arguments and arrive at conclusions. They engage with ethical theory and contemporary analysis and commentary. In this way, they learn to think critically, construct arguments, weigh up evidence and provide their teachers with material by which they can be assessed in their capacity to do just those things. Placing this in the wider picture, the development of such skills in rational/critical thinking can be seen as an important contribution to preparing children to lead active autonomous adult lives by equipping them with the kind of transferrable critical thinking skills that will empower them, as citizens in the adult world, to make informed decisions about complex issues and to detect falsehood and bias in the arguments of others. Therefore, if one aims in one's teaching to encourage students to think independently and freely for themselves, on this account one will be teaching them the formal skills of rational argument, how to construct and support arguments, how to provide counter-examples, how to make a case, how to derive one's conclusion from one's premises and how to analyse the work of others. Our taking seriously such requirements for our thought is therefore demonstrated in an approach which is rigorous, disciplined and essentially impersonal even when students are encouraged to express their own views.

What could be wrong? I will argue it gives a distorted picture of the nature of ethical thinking while appearing to be educationally sound. Why might this be so and what is the nature of the misrepresentation? It is distorted because it locates the seriousness of moral thought solely within the subject matter that Rush Rhees referred to as 'issues of life and death' and in an impersonal, anonymizing characterization of reasoning on such issues which is capable of exhibiting appropriate rigour and analytical clarity and assessable as such. In so doing, it reflects an impoverished concept of the way in which the personal nature of such thought is conceived, which leads to the exclusion of the first-person presence of the individual in their own thought, in effect silencing the personal voice as intrinsic to the assessment of the individual's moral thought in both spoken and written form. I will argue for a richer notion of the personal which makes clear why both reason and emotion are internal to the idea of ethical seriousness and the idea of having a

voice, notwithstanding some of the difficulties in giving an ethically conditioned account of personal presence. However, I will consider whether the demand for such a presence in ethical 'debate' is necessarily a good thing for reasons to do with the nature of institutional learning and the age and experience of students. Whether or not it is ultimately a good thing, the underlying point is that this conception of ethical thinking is not visible in moral education because the teaching of ethics is modelled on an academic tradition that has rejected this approach to talking about ethics, the place of the personal within moral deliberation and the different forms it can take. If it were present, I believe it would open up possibilities with respect to our conceptions of moral seriousness and how it is represented, which would free moral thought from its obsession with theory, without diminishing consideration of what is most serious in our lives.

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The rehearsal of moral thinking

My general concern is captured in the following quote from the Australian philosopher Raimond Gaita, who has written extensively on the theme of the personal in ethics. Of the conception of ethical thought I question, Gaita says that it,

> treats the difficulty of seeing what (morally) to do as a difficulty for thought which is no different in kind for the person whose problem it is than for a class of moral philosophy students rehearsing an exercise in 'practical ethics.' And this is because of a general conception of what thinking is and of the way in which it is impersonal: thinking has to do with propositions, their truth-value and their logical bearing upon one another, and these can be assessed by anyone with the requisite capacities of mind, none of which make necessary reference to the individual who has them. Hence it is felt that, if we are to understand the way in which morality is personal, then we must locate its personal character somewhere other than in thought. (Gaita, 1989, pp. 130–131).

The idea of a class of moral philosophy students rehearsing an exercise in practical ethics is what I take to be the model employed in the teaching of ethics to sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds in the English education system, as part of either Religious Studies or Philosophy courses. Similar practices typically epitomize what is widely understood as dealing with ethical 'issues', and they are commonly found

in the ethics components in vocational courses, most obviously in medical ethics and dealing with hard case dilemmas.

There is little reference to the idea of a first-person concept of ethics in the language of course descriptions and the academic features that students are required to demonstrate in their work. The following quotes are taken from one of the syllabus course descriptions Students will 'recall, select and deploy specified knowledge' 'identify, investigate and analyse questions and issues arising from the course of study', 'interpret and evaluate … concepts, issues and ideas, the relevance of arguments and the views of scholars', 'communicate, using reasoned arguments substantiated by evidence'. (OCR, 2008, GCE Religious Studies v2)

The aim is to provide a good grounding in the skills of moral reasoning and to prescribe objective standards in such reasoning by which students can be examined. The emphasis is on reasoning and, more generally, the cognitive skills of critical thinking. Students study the canonical theories of utilitarianism, Kantian deontology and Aristotelian virtue ethics and apply their knowledge of the theories to specific moral problems which come with their own associated moral challenges in order to draw out strengths and weaknesses of the general ethical theory being applied. The following are typical of the kind of questions students are required to answer:

Kant's theory of ethics is not a useful approach to abortion. Discuss.

A relativist approach to the issues raised by abortion leads to wrong moral choices. Discuss.

If we take the first question, about the usefulness of Kantian ethics, it looks as if it might at least acknowledge some of the more nuanced personal complexities of the issue. In one of the main textbooks for this syllabus, Jill Oliphant discusses how one might begin to reflect on the question. She writes:

Abortion would be hard to universalise, as there are so many different situations and motivations for obtaining an abortion – all consideration of emotions is to be disregarded and yet abortion is an emotional decision, especially in situations where the mother has been raped, is very young or is carrying a severely disabled foetus. (Oliphant, 2007, p. 100)

This might seem to be a very quick rejoinder to the earlier point, in that students are being encouraged to reflect on a more personal conception of an ethical problem that makes it more than a mere exercise. The criticism of the formal rational nature of Kantian morality and the function of universalization presents an opportunity for the student to consider the place of emotions in moral deliberation and enter into a discussion of the personal perspective through their moral imagination – their capacity to imagine what it would be like to be faced with the complexity of someone else's position and the way in which the moral picks up on the determining factors of particular circumstances.

This is not the case. The examples – rape, teenage sex and disability – are three typical, well-trodden examples from the literature, taken from specific arguments they are intended to exemplify – the sanctity of life, the rights of the mother and the quality of life. They should be serious, but removed from their function as examples within argument they appear exposed as lurid, sensational and over-dramatic, designed either to unsettle or support the serious work, that of rational argument and counter-argument, but not serious in themselves or worthy of being taken seriously as indicative of something that substantially enters into the academic nature of the problem, which is one of how to give an appropriately reasoned account of the problems. As Gaita suggests, the way in which such examples are intended to function, and I would add in the classroom as well as in their original context, does little more than 'add a dramatic psychological dimension' to a 'deliberative difficulty' where 'their application in moral deliberation leaves their "cognitive" grammar unaffected' (Gaita, 1989, p. 127). It can do so because of the essentially impersonal way in which such deliberation is philosophically conceived, which is then replicated in the kind of reasoning that students are expected to exhibit in their study of ethics. This is not to underplay the potency of such examples in the rhetoric of public ethics, but it is unclear how such features will enter into a serious account of moral deliberation in personal consideration about what to do.

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Reason, emotion and the individual perspective

That sounds as if I am arguing for a notion of the personal in which emotions are taken seriously in a manner that is reflected in the tone of debate as well as its content,

that rather than engaging in an ethical shouting match, students should respond as if they are dealing with someone in the grip of a 'real-life' dilemma, handling discussion with an appropriate sensitivity to the tone and expression of their comments in the language they use. In one respect, I am. If the personal character of emotions is important in an account of what it is to engage in serious reflection on ethical matters, any serious account of the personal in ethics must assign a role to the place of both the emotions and the language of emotion in moral deliberation in order to redress the balance of the impersonal. However, I do not want to suggest that the personal voice is predominantly emotional or that the inclusion of such language is what marks the ethically serious nature of the personal. One still needs to be clear about what is ethically significant in our understanding of the reality of 'real-life' that claims serious response from those concerned and how moral theory distorts the ethical in failing to adequately reflect the way in which reality is itself ethically conditioned, as opposed to its presenting us with purely pragmatic or scientific problems, for example. I do not want to confuse a call for moral seriousness in the concept of the personal with a requirement that we should engage sympathetically or empathetically with each other in the classroom. They are distinct forms of engagement that may at times be co-existent, and their independent presence in the classroom is something I will address later. Gaita's comments on the place of emotions in ethical thought are instructive. He writes that,

> in matters of value we often learn by being moved, and our being moved is not merely the dramatic occasion of or introduction to a proposition which can be assessed according to critical categories, whose grammar excludes our being moved as extraneous to the cognitive content of the proposition. None of which means that we must surrender critical judgement. (Gaita, 1989, pp. 136–137)

These are still matters of value and as such, regardless of whatever emotions are experienced by someone faced with a moral problem, such emotions are still subject to critical reflection as to what a person has reason to do or believe. I do not want to argue that all examples within the discourse are of this nature. What troubles me is that the way students are encouraged to discuss moral issues does not adequately reflect how such problems are serious to the individual. It is desirable for us to be clear in our thinking, but conceptual clarification is usually conceived as a philosophical concern rather than a lived concern: the problem is the way in which the personal is eliminated as an integral aspect of the moral nature of a decision and the assumption

that conceptual complexity and the need for conceptual clarity are alone what make such questions difficult. How then might we offer a substantial notion of speaking in the first person that locates the seriousness of such speech in personal presence and not 'elsewhere'? Recent work by Matthew Pianalto in this area attempts an account of how this might be done (Pianalto, 2011).

Pianalto's paper is a response to Wittgenstein's lecture. He begins by distinguishing speaking for oneself from other forms of speech, which include, but are not exhausted by, such things as 'speaking as an expert (or authority), speaking on behalf of another person or group…, and speaking hypothetically (as in the case of many philosophical arguments and in debate' (Pianalto, 2011, p. 255). These formal and contextual variations, of which speaking personally is one, are also broadly characterized by the possibility of their being sincere forms of speaking and therefore invite contrast with descriptions of insincere speech that differ in intention and tone, if not necessarily content. However, Pianalto's more important contrast for the idea of speaking personally is with 'other sincere ways of speaking', modes of speech which reflect our serious concern, demand our respect and serious attention but which can best be characterized without necessary reference to the speaker. As such they are distinct from speaking where some kind of personal perspective is internal to the authoritative nature of the speech, both in intention and reception.

For example, to speak as an expert or on behalf of others is to speak out of one's cognitive capacities, including one's knowledge and experience and mastery in a profession. Sincerity in such instances is not a relevant consideration. If I go to see my doctor I hope he or she will have a good 'bedside manner', but I also want an accurate diagnosis or appropriate advice. If my car needs repairing I want the problem identified and fixed. I hope I will be dealt with honestly and decently. While there are basic human qualities we expect as part of the interaction, what ultimately matters is that the person has the requisite knowledge and can be trusted accordingly.

However, the way in which we talk of speaking for oneself on ethical matters seems to demand more than just speaking accurately from a body of knowledge or even just speaking from experience. Sincerity might be thought to be a relevant factor here, that is, we mean what we say. But while one might be sincere in holding certain views, they may still be poorly reasoned, sentimental or simply not have the meaning which we thought they possessed. Being sincere does not guarantee that our

views will or should be taken seriously or that we will not end up looking foolish. But neither is it clear how knowledge as the expression of facts about the world helps either. The problem in cases like abortion is not scientific facts per se but what those facts mean to us and how moral considerations enter into our understanding of them. While some features of our life seem to unproblematically admit a quite clear factual description and characterization, Pianalto suggests that for other features fact and value appear entangled and our choice of language and the concepts we use to identify facts as relevant considerations communicates the way in which we evaluate these considerations,

> A clear example of this latter kind of difference is the varying ways people will refer to a fetus – whether as a baby, a person, a human being, none of the above, etc. – depending upon their views on the permissibility of abortion. (p. 260)

This alerts us to the way in which speaking for oneself is much more than just sincerity. But what is it? Pianalto suggests we consider how, in offering our views to others, we are bearing witness 'for a particular ethical orientation toward the world' (p. 259). In speaking ethically 'we do more than simply describe our attitudes, experiences and values, but also recommend them to others' (ibid.). Thus, speaking for oneself is more than just the expression of feelings, insofar as they are just expressions. We are trying to justify our views, 'make them intelligible to others or likewise trying to understand or critique the position of others' (p. 260). We do so through the language we use as well as how we structure it, not simply to persuade but to best represent our perspective.

What then are the features of an individual's perspective such that speaking out of that perspective is to speak for oneself and demands we take such speech seriously? From where in our language, tone and presence does the morally authoritative nature of our speech emerge? I raise this point because it is difficult to see how tieing the notion of speaking for oneself can be ethically conditioned by the idea that it expresses a perspective on the world unless we understand such a perspective as itself ethically conditioned. Otherwise it is no more than opinion and it could be any kind of subjective perspective, just as the notion of bearing witness needs to be ethically conditioned or it is equally empty as an expression of an ethical perspective. What is it that thought and speech must reflect if they are to have an ethical character and is there a metaphysical emptiness in the way the idea of a personal perspective is expressed? This is a charge that has been levelled at the notion of speaking personally that Raimond Gaita has

articulated and which has in turn influenced Pianalto's thinking on the personal voice in ethics. Christopher Hamilton for one (Hamilton, 2008), has argued that Gaita's claim that one can only speak from a personal perspective about the ethical character of events in one's life is open to considerable doubt.

Hamilton's criticism is focused on a passage in Gaita's *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*. During a discussion of goodness and virtue, Gaita describes his experience of seeing a nun talking to patients in a psychiatric unit where he worked as a volunteer. It was not only that her compassion for those afflicted was visible in 'the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body' (Gaita, 2002, p. 18) but that her demeanour revealed a love which made their humanity visible in a way that would not invite the thought, as Gaita suggests might otherwise have been the case, that it would have been better for these patients if they had not been born. Striving years later to make philosophical sense of this, Gaita finds moral theory inadequate to the task of offering him 'proof' he can point to in order to explain why he characterized the nun's behaviour as he did in what it revealed about the patients. There are no metaphysical or empirical properties one can ascribe to the patients to justify the nun's compassion as he experienced it. He could not indicate facts about the patients which revealed them to be our human equals and therefore 'rightly the objects of our non-condescending treatment' (p. 21). What was revealed to him was 'the quality of her love'. Gaita recognizes the difficulty this might present, because he continues,

> But if someone were now to ask me what informs my sense that they were rightly
> the objects of such treatment, I can appeal only to the purity of her love. For me,
> the purity of her love proved the reality of what it revealed. I have to say, 'for
> me', because one must speak personally about such matters. That after all is the
> nature of witness. (pp. 21–22)

Hamilton is troubled by the claim that all one can do is 'speak personally'. He characterizes this as 'a vision of the moral world whose tone is one of absolute conviction' (Hamilton, 2008, p. 193), but that very little is being said with such claims. This thought recalls the quotes from Wittgenstein which opened the essay and that in reflecting the 'tendency of the human mind' that Wittgenstein was so much in sympathy with, little can be said about how things are in the world when, as Gaita himself admits, 'from the point of view of the speculative intelligence I am going around in ever

darkening circles, because I allow for no independent justification of her attitude' (Gaita, 2002, p. 22).

Hamilton's criticism draws attention to several potential problems in Gaita's concept of speaking personally. Gaita, Hamilton argues, is not entitled to any substantial claim about how things are by using such rhetoric as he does. There is a sleight of hand at work; in saying I can do nothing other than speak for myself, I am in fact making absolute claims about what I am describing and the perspective from which I am speaking. Secondly, Hamilton believes there is an implicit claim to the plural 'we' in Gaita's use of the singular 'I' that he is not entitled to make in so far as his invocation of the way in which he speaks personally reflects an absolute claim on behalf of others. Hamilton argues rather that 'one's temperament will colour deeply how one interprets the example and what its lessons are supposed to be' (p. 193). The implicit 'we' should be replaced by something like 'I, given the kind of person I am, cannot help thinking that I and the rest of you ought to be judged in the light of the absolutely pure' (ibid.). I cannot therefore be speaking *for* anyone but only *of* someone – me. If one does not take that step, it is not clear who the 'I' is in the first-person perspective and what we are seriously claimed by. Hamilton jokingly speculates that it could be 'the man with laundry bills' or the authorial voice of the book or even just this section of the book, a distinct authorial voice from other books by the same author. What is it that gives the claim to be speaking personally its morally serious presence? 'To say that one speaks personally is not yet, as such, to settle anything about who is speaking' (ibid.). Hamilton suggests that 'what Gaita means, at least in part, is that he is speaking out of his deepest sense of things, out of his all-things- considered, best judgments, and that others may not share this way of looking at things' (ibid.). Hamilton's concern is that such ways of talking about moral perception simply invite doubt 'rather than confidence in one's own judgment' (p. 194) and there is an emptiness and lack of clarity at the heart of such speech – 'a kind of vertiginous free-fall in which nothing is really made clear save the fact that nothing is made clear' (p. 193). This links to the third problem, which underlies the first two – that invoking the personal in itself says very little about the ethical conditioning of such speech and presence. But if so, what does?

The first way to make clear what is unclear is to assert that the first-person perspective must itself be a morally conditioned perspective and cannot merely be

a sufficient condition for calling such speech moral. The difficulty in establishing how one can ever be sure of this is the problem of 'the man with laundry bills' – that one's speech and action might be shaped by reasons that have nothing to do with moral concerns. Furthermore, on the basis that one feature of our taking moral thought seriously is that notions of partiality and impartiality are themselves moral considerations, 'the man with laundry bills' represents an irreducible partiality that skews any claims to views being objective in as much as they are understood as personal, and there is nothing in the first-person concept of authoritative speech by which to assess this or deny it as a valid expression of how someone views the world. I do not think for one moment that Hamilton is asking us to take 'the man with laundry bills' seriously as expressing a moral perspective. His point is that we cannot know how the immediate circumstances of someone's life motivate someone to speak and act as they do if all we have is their word, taken on trust. It is not that metaphysical claims about the moral character of personal presence cannot be taken as trumping compelling psychological reasons for acting as we do; there are no meaningful metaphysical properties to underpin these claims in the first place. The metaphysical emptiness at the heart of such claims invalidates the idea of a moral perspective in such speech as somehow distinct from individual moral psychology. It is merely subjective.

It is a strong attack, but it is mistaken. The personal is never merely personal nor is it reducible to individual psychology. As such it can apply to 'the man with the laundry bills' (who could be a professor of moral philosophy), just as easily as it might to a student in an ethics class who is having boyfriend troubles or problems with her parents. However, it is one thing to assert this, another to demonstrate it. We need to know what the features of this conditioning consist of. It would be a mistake to completely dismiss the idea of 'the man with laundry bills' as an irrelevance in assessing what can and cannot count as justifiable reasons in moral deliberation. If such features of our lives are contingent, they are not *de facto* irrelevant. However, the extent to which the events and circumstances of our lives do enter into our ethical reflection is conditioned by our understanding of what kind of things can have moral depth and seriousness and the way in which our arriving at an answer reflects this. The way in which reasons for action are understood to be valid moral reasons is itself morally conditioned by their being reasons that have depth and seriousness. This is

something we have to discover through our reflection and is open to both questioning by oneself and others and subsequent modification in the light of reflection. The extent to which aspects of our lives are perceived as trivial or significant, relevant or irrelevant in moral deliberation is part of the process of such reflection, and our understanding of them as such is located in the epistemic vocabulary through which we express this understanding.

Hamilton would not, I think, be satisfied. That the authoritative nature of the personal voice can be caricatured in this way presents a problem of absurdity as well as scepticism. There is nothing to say that a person's perspective might not be pragmatic, instrumental, relative or just plain ridiculous and laughable. If I say to someone 'That's wrong!' and they say, with a look of surprise, 'Wrong? What, morally wrong?' that surprise may be personal but can also come from a perspective that sees decisions about action in pragmatic terms. Political decisions are a good example of this. But in moral matters we are expressing something more than a pragmatic sense of right and wrong. We are inviting someone to perceive something differently. We are offering them a picture of what counts as serious in our own lives, what considerations place limits on what we can and cannot conceive of doing. How is this achieved? Pianalto gives us some idea of what this might be when he suggests that it might consist of 'what he or she (the speaker) takes to be the basis for this way of judging' (Pianalto, 2011, p. 263). He rightly suggests 'a single discrete judgment' would not appear to do justice to this, although it might of course depend on the circumstances. But presumably our speaking in our own voice, taken as authoritatively speaking, is something more than the number of judgements that are made. We need to look at how we assess an individual's account of their judgement and the language we use to do so. If we cannot judge in this way and the vocabulary of critical thinking is inadequate/irrelevant, how do we judge, how do we speak authoritatively and how is it ethically conditioned? Pianalto offers some possibilities. We can, for example, identify those perspectives 'that are characterized by sensitivity, coherence, consistency and conscientiousness' and distinguish them from those 'that are superficial and steeped in sentimentality, dogmatism and incoherence' (ibid.). Pianalto argues that while we might not be able to establish a perspective as 'absolutely true or correct', these characteristics 'licence us in treating it as a perspective that deserves to be taken seriously (and respected) as a worthy way of

looking at and responding to the world' (ibid.). Furthermore, being known as a person for whom truth matters will enter into our taking the moral claims of such a person seriously. This will not, I fear, satisfy Hamilton, for whom the sceptical problem remains.

Discussing comments on moral deliberation made by Rush Rhees, Gaita describes the confusion that Rhees engendered by arguing that moral judgements could be both personal, absolute and still substantially open to disagreement and the possibility of being wrong. Gaita quotes Rhees as follows,

> They thought that I was saying that any condemnation of a man's action ('That was a foul thing to do') is just an explanation of 'how I see it'; and that, of course, others may see it in a different way 'which is just as good'. As though I had said there are no real disagreements on moral questions. Or: as though I do not deny what another man says when (e.g.) he praises the action which I condemn. It is always hard to see how people can mistake your meaning so completely. (Rhees, 1969, pp. 95–96 in Gaita, 1989, p. 124)

Gaita comments that one will be confused by what Rhees said, firstly, if one thinks that objectivity is essentially impersonal; secondly, if one thinks that morality is not serious unless it is objective; and, thirdly, in response to the first two, if one thinks that morality is personal only because each one of us must choose our morality and that morality acquires its seriousness from such a view. What is here being subverted are the considerations that are normally opposed to each other as conflicting accounts. What is being argued for is a concept of moral seriousness in which the impersonal is internal to the concept of the personal and in turn both ethically conditions and is ethically conditioned by an understanding of how we are individually claimed by what is serious in moral reflection. Hamilton's account does not do justice to the disciplined nature of Gaita's understanding of personal speech because in characterizing the first- person ethical perspective as a psychological one, the perspective becomes both partial and open to doubt as an expression of a specifically moral motivation and intention. To be sure, the context in which Gaita used such language invites such scepticism, but we have fuller, more robust accounts of the personal elsewhere in Gaita's writings on which to draw.

If we are working from within an ethical perspective, the terms on which we assess the worth of a perspective cannot acquire their status merely from any propositional status they possess in the propositional realm. This has the implication

that the diverse aspects of authoritatively speaking for oneself, for example certain emotional responses and certain fundamental notions that are internal to the idea of truth such as objectivity and impartiality, are themselves ethically conditioned. Thus, it becomes an ethical requirement that in speaking from a personal perspective one is not only sensitive to the emotional content of one's thought but also that one's views are carefully considered and in both spoken and written form a concern for the truth can be detected as internal to what is being said. It matters to oneself that one is lucid and intellectually disciplined in the articulation of one's thought and not deluded about how things are in reality. The intended parody of Hamilton's invocation of 'the man with laundry bills' when applied to the seemingly absolute nature of Gaita's concept of the personal is effective because it depends on an idea of speech as the undisciplined expression of an inner motivation which is not accessible to scrutiny, or if it is, it is only in the context of an absence of a metaphysic of moral presence that renders the personal as no more than an expression of self- centred, highly partial wants and needs, best understood through psychology. But the demand that in order to assess the veracity of what he experienced when witnessing the nun, others should be able to report on a similarly transformative experience, misses the point because it fails to recognize the way in which it is internal to Gaita's concept of the personal that the content of the claim and its truthfulness are available to others because of the kind of speech that is enacted in speaking personally. We are never the sole arbiters of what is morally serious. In what follows I will discuss how Gaita's work responds to such challenges and I will place it within the context of the teaching of ethics. In so doing I hope to offer a portrait of the ethically serious individual rather than a caricature and how such a person is ethically present in the language and tone of their speech.

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The personal and impersonal in the classroom

At the start of this chapter I raised a doubt about whether the problems I see associated with the established way of approaching ethical thinking were necessarily a bad thing in the context of 'the classroom'. This in turn implies a doubt regarding the place of the personal in moral education with which I have opposed the traditional account, even though I suggest this should be taken far more seriously than it has been to date. As a metonym for a whole range of interpersonal

encounters, 'the classroom' is itself conditioned by an understanding of the limits of the personal and the impersonal and what is accordingly acceptable or unacceptable. My worry is that the concept of the personal that I have taken from the work of Gaita and others cuts across this traditional understanding and is therefore a potential source of confusion and misunderstanding. As previously indicated, a call for moral seriousness should not be confused with a requirement that we engage with each other in a sympathetic and empathetic manner. The danger is that in doing the latter one thinks one is doing the former and that such engagement is what it means to take another person seriously. Bringing these two aspects of engagement together points to the difficulty of conceptualizing the personal so as not to give undue weight to emotional expression because that leads to detaching such expression from the critical context in which issues are discussed, that is, that when someone is speaking personally the level of exposure taking place renders serious critical engagement inappropriately insensitive and requires a sympathetic/empathetic response instead – one might engage in a form of (philosophical) counselling but that is not the same as serious philosophical discussion, which in turn is not the same as debate, where the possibility of vigorous, impassioned speech is a patina for essentially impersonal engagement. and misunderstanding.

My question is whether young people at this age have the experience or capacity to both speak for themselves and equally importantly can listen to someone who is speaking personally, understood as more than merely offering an opinion in an exam class within an institution. How will it be 'heard' in the right way? There is a strong possibility of students experiencing exposure in circumstances where there would not be appropriate support or understanding of this conception of the ethical voice. But why should I be so concerned about 'exposure' in what is no more than the normal, everyday nature of classroom discussion, debate, agreement and disagreement? To understand this, I will return to Gaita and to the idea that to speak personally is to speak out of what he calls 'an historically *achieved* individuality' (Gaita, 1989, p. 135), in which 'one cannot acquire moral knowledge in any sense that would make one morally knowledgeable. It is more natural to speak of a depth of moral understanding, or of wisdom' (Gaita, 1989, p. 134). It is perfectly possible to become more knowledgeable in the study of ethics as it is currently conceived and examined. One can do so in a fairly

short space of time and be academically successful. But in Gaita's account, the deepening of our moral understanding takes time and it does so in the life of an individual. The idea of 'experience', therefore, is ethically conditioned by what it means for our understanding to deepen, which requires the kind of attention and reflection on the events of our lives that Hamilton's example of the 'man with laundry bills' does not touch, even as Hamilton accuses Gaita of failing to offer a sufficiently objective and verifiable account of ethical realities. The problem is not whether students have limited experience in terms of the kind of things that have happened to them, which may be a lot, but whether they have the conceptual understanding and maturity that will enable them to reflect seriously on features of their own lives and those of others in such a way as to both express a depth of understanding in their own moral perspective and 'hear' when someone else is speaking from such a perspective. My argument is that if this happens through the kind of teaching of ethics that is currently in place, it will do so only accidentally, because our lives are only accidentally relevant to the kind of problems that students are presented with for engagement with the theory they are required to analyse and apply.

However, if one is unsure if personally held views can be appropriately respected or adequately expressed at this stage, then perhaps the discussion and debating of such issues through a theoretical framework is more appropriate. On such a view, we have the rough and tumble of essentially impersonal debate contrasted with the more therapeutic approach. Taken individually as phenomenon of impersonal and personal engagement, they represent a distortion of what is serious in the personal conception of moral thought that I have articulated and how it might be developed. Taken together and suitably conditioned, both may exist within the concept of the personal I have been arguing for, along the lines Rhees suggested.

While it is important that one needs to be able to trust those one is with, it is also essential that one can question and challenge without feeling one is treading on egg-shells when presented with other members of a class speaking for themselves. However, that is why it is important to understand the way in which speaking for oneself is disciplined. It has to be understood that speaking for oneself is not a form of confession or therapy or merely an expression of emotion. When one is saying 'This is what I think/believe' and taking responsibility for that thought, what matters is

that a critical vocabulary is in place that is broad enough to assess both the coherence of the structure of argumentation but also other ways in which the perspective might be expressed, for example the choice of language used, the nature of description and the characterization of the issue. It is in this way that we are present in our thought in the first person. This is not the case when one looks at the criteria by which students are currently assessed. Gaita argues:

> To have something to say is to be present in what one says and to those to whom one is speaking, and that means that what one says has, at the crux, to be taken on trust. It has to be taken on trust not because, contingently, there are no means of checking it, but because what is said is not extractable from the manner of its disclosure. (Gaita, 1989, p. 136)

I am not sure it is even a matter of trust but a matter of paying very close attention to both what is said and how it is said, the form of argument and the expression of the personal concern. However, when one looks at the vocabulary of cognitive engagement that I outlined at the start of the chapter, there are limits to the language of rationality, which we have seen addressed by Pianalto.

Someone might argue that much of what I have said is beside the point, that what matters is to achieve conceptual clarity on issues that are emotionally, morally and intellectually challenging, and if we are to have disciplined discussion on emotive issues that generate heated, potentially frank exchanges, we must avoid the emotional in favour of clear-headed, calm, rational debate that is conducted in a spirit of intellectual rigour and care for logic and coherence. The best way to achieve that cool, critical distance in form, tone and content is through an impersonal, theoretical approach. On this account students are being initiated into a tradition or discourse, a field of knowledge with its own intellectual requirements. This is a stage where students acquire philosophical concepts and analytical skills and it is a period they must go through before they can begin to critique the way in which such knowledge is constructed and expressed. However, theoretical perspectives themselves need to have the capacity to speak to us in a way that is living and resonant just as the issues themselves are taken to be part of a lively contemporary social and cultural debate that crosses over into areas of public policy, the arts, the law, medicine and so on.

I am aware that this approach has to stretch across a range of 'issues', such as euthanasia, bioethics, just war, stem-cell research and so on, and while some of

these raise similar questions to those I have raised with abortion - that speaking for oneself is an irreducibly important part of the reality of the issue, others might appear to be less of this kind and the voice of the expert becomes important. However, if we essentially occupy our own perspective on the world then it would be rash to suggest that we can speak as experts or occupy the territory of experts on ethical matters independent of our own ethical perspective on such matters. While clearly someone can speak with considerable knowledge, it is from the characterization of speaking for oneself I have outlined that one's perspective is ethical. It is therefore important to enable students to discuss and write in a manner that pays due attention to ways in which personal perspectives can be articulated and which reflect Gaita's concern that it should be a disciplined enactment in speech and action.

Given the difficulties that could be envisaged by asking students to articulate personal perspectives, there is a fundamental pedagogical issue that would need resolving. It is about creating the right environment. I would suggest this is an ethical requirement and as such it is more than the normal classroom management requirements of maintaining good order, ensuring clear aims and objectives, keeping discussion focused, lively, thoughtful and relevant and so on. It would also involve developing certain attributes in one's students that enable them to work in the kind of environment that reflects a critical understanding and consciousness of the features of speaking for oneself that I have claimed are ethically important, for example being able to distinguish between what is 'characterised by sensitivity, coherence, consistency and conscientiousness' and what is superficial and 'steeped in sentimentality, dogmatism and incoherence'. Establishing the right kind of tone is vital. I am not suggesting any of this is easy to achieve. It raises many questions, for example, about the nature of sensitivity and attention and about the way in which critical tone is understood in the epistemic vocabulary of moral seriousness.

Summary

In this chapter I have sketched the differences in two approaches to ethical seriousness, the dominant impersonal model of moral philosophy which is to be found in the classroom, and the more nuanced idea of the personal in ethics, which emerges in the question of how and whether we can make sense of speaking seriously from a

personal perspective in ethical matters, so as to be taken seriously. The defining character of the former is that of the expert, the philosophical advisor who speaks from what they know. The character of the latter is that of the wise person, who speaks out of the life they have lived. The wider question to be answered is whether such a model is useful or desirable for students in educational settings. A key argument in the chapter is that the educationally sound pedagogical methods of moral theory, the essentially impersonal and objective qualities that characterise academic moral philosophy, distort our understanding of what is personal about ethical judgment and how ethical considerations inform our deliberation on matters that are important to us. I defend Gaita against Christopher Hamilton's criticism that Gaita's account of speaking personally as a form of moral testimony is empty in that it is unavailable to anyone else's scrutiny, by arguing that such scrutiny is available to us in considering not only what kind of things can have moral depth and seriousness but how this is revealed to us in the critical epistemic vocabulary by which we evaluate such claims. The way in which Gaita discusses Rush Rhees's claim that moral judgments can be both personal, absolute and still open to criticism emphasises an aspect of his moral thought that echoes Cavell's account of Emersonian moral perfectionism, which I develop in the following chapter through discussion via drama education of what it means to speak from a first-person perspective in moral deliberation that is both situated and embodied.

CHAPTER 8

Serious Words for Serious Subjects

> NORA.   We've been married eight years. *Does it occur to you that*
>
> *this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife,*
>
> *have ever had a serious talk together?*
>
> HELMER.   *Serious? What do you mean, serious?*
>
> NORA.   *In eight whole years – no, longer – ever since we first met –*
>
> *we have never exchanged a serious word on a serious subject.*
>
> **Ibsen: A Doll's House**

Drama as moral education

Joe Winston's work on drama as moral education represents the most substantial contemporary account of how drama as both a pedagogy and academic subject can contribute to the moral development of young people (Winston, 1995, 1996, 1999). In his paper *Theorising Drama as Moral Education* (Winston, 1999) Winston posed the problem that whilst it had long been assumed within schools that drama could make an important contribution to moral education, there was little theory or analysis to support this idea. In a wide-ranging survey of influential moral thought and how drama might foster the kind of behaviours and sensibilities they projected, Winston examined variously: the role of narrative in the moral imagination, the significance of drama as a rule and convention-governed discipline for moral development, its status as a public and communal art form and its contribution to the development of a sensibility to the place of reason and emotion in moral understanding. As part of this, Winston discussed the role of dialogue in such education and contrasted two attitudes towards its assumed benefits in helping to form a moral child. The first was Joseph Levy's account of how, down the ages, be it in Ancient Greece or in medieval liturgical practice, the power of dialogue had been recognised as a force for moral instruction.

As an example, Levy gave that of the Jesuits who 'took pains to write and present plays in which the weight of opposing arguments was almost equal, in order that the audience have practice in deciding hard cases' (Levy 1997, p. 73). It could be argued that this has continued in modern educational practice through the pedagogical strategies of 'structured dialogue of various kinds; debates, role plays and simulations, for example' (Winston, 1997, p. 468). The picture is of a quite impersonal, detached approach to the subject matter, albeit animated and informed by dramatic pedagogy. By contrast, Winston cites Colby (1987) as arguing that, 'these methods usually fail to engage students fully in the predicament under study as they encourage entrenched attitudes and rational detachment' (p. 468). Instead, what is required if genuine moral education is to take place, is 'good dramatic dialogue'. This dialogue can be either improvised in the classroom or taken from a script. Equally important is that it must be 'reasoned with passion and be genuinely open-ended; in other words, it must fully engage those participating but the issue in focus must remain morally ambivalent' (ibid.). As an example of this, Winston concludes with the following,

> …in the final scene of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora discovers what she thinks, feels and intends to do with her future through her passionate dialogue with her husband. The choice she makes – to leave her children as well as her husband – is as morally ambiguous for a contemporary audience as it was provocative and challenging for audiences 100 years ago. (ibid.)

It is not just that the play text serves as a conduit for moral education but that in meeting the demand that the dialogue should be played convincingly, students will engage with both the issues in the text and what is morally at stake in the life of particular characters at a particular moment of crisis. The nature of that engagement is implicitly directed towards performing the role but elsewhere Winston suggests that the full range of exploratory strategies that are available within drama pedagogy can be brought to bear– embodied performance, discussion, improvisation, rehearsal techniques and so on. The picture, albeit imprecise, is of a more personal characterisation of moral deliberation reflected in dialogue that is impassioned, suggesting some kind of identification with characters caught up in a morally charged situation is necessary for the possibility of deeper moral understanding. The phrase 'good dramatic dialogue' is an ambiguous one. Does it refer to the quality of the writing at a particularly dramatic moment of a play? Does it refer in a more general

way to the kind of qualities we would associate with a well-written play, itself a contentious phrase? Does it refer to the emotional qualities expressed in the writing? Does it refer to the truthfulness of the dialogue, that it expresses what is at stake within a particular context? It is difficult to know quite what it means, while intuitively we do know what it means – that there is a seriousness to what is at stake for the characters. This is different from it just being a hard case in which two conflicting perspectives can be weighed up and judged.

However, this line of thought raises difficulties with regard to both the dramatic/theatrical context for moral education and the nature of such education. Firstly, if we are to attend to the expressive aspects of the text with students in order to identify the reasons for a character's emotional and mental state at a given moment we need to be clear 'how – or even if – drama brings anything particular of *itself*' (Winston, 1997, p. 460) into this picture of moral engagement as personal engagement. Like the text of any play, it can be discussed, read and written about without any requirement that it be performed or with any sense that these activities are diminished by the absence of performance. Such will be the case with Cavell. Nevertheless, there may still be a place for embodied performance alongside other forms of engagement. The question is, to what end? The picture of moral engagement that Winston gestures to in Colby takes the more passionate expression of a perspective as exemplifying a less detached, more personal approach, thereby identifying the individual with the expression of his/her own thought. Working with the expressive possibilities of drama would therefore offer scope for the exploration of the personal nature of a moral perspective. However, what precisely characterises such engagement? In what way is it 'fuller'? How does paying attention to the expression of values, beliefs, desires etc. contribute to a deeper understanding of them? What further insights might arise from such engagement with the dramatic text? Of course, none of this may be relevant if we believe there is little more to Winston and Colby's thinking than that drama offers opportunities to employ pedagogical strategies that are more entertaining and playful but which still lead to essentially impersonal reflection for which ideas of the personal and the expressive are merely instrumental. However, if we understand moral deliberation to be personal in a richer and more profound sense, it is unclear how the artifice and theatricality of drama cannot but distort this understanding. Granted we hopefully won't mistake the words of the character for our own, which would be

comical and tragic in equal measure, but it would fail to address why it matters that both my words and their expression can be, in an important sense, my own and it is in the nature of passionate dialogue that the other is claimed by this (a claim they can reject). I will try to offer an answer in the course of the paper to the problem of how the nature of the passionate and the personal can be understood within a theatrical and dramatic context.

Ibsen's seminal text is one of the films and plays that Stanley Cavell uses to discuss moral reasoning in *Cities of Words*, in which he places readings of the texts alongside classical philosophical works in order that they serve to illuminate each other and in particular bring out aspects of Cavell's ideas on moral perfectionism. I will begin by reflecting on Cavell's discussion of *A Doll's House*. I will examine an aspect of this in more detail, Cavell's offer of conversation to Nora. This leads into a consideration of Cavell's arguments for the significance of the expressive in speech and why this offers a fresh perspective on the use of drama in moral education.

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Cavell's discussion of *A Doll's House*

Whilst Cavell's ultimate aim is to give an account of Nora's actions in the light of a moral perfectionist perspective, Cavell's initial pedagogical focus is the extent to which a Kantian deontological analysis might be apposite to an understanding of Nora's circumstances and the decision she makes. He begins by identifying how the Kantian moral law – the categorical imperative – requires the imposition of a law of reason in order to express "the reality of duty". Our self-reflexive recognition of the content of this self-imposed imposition is expressed in its apparent obviousness – Kant's claim that "I know at once what it contains" (Ak. 420 in Cavell, 2004, p. 250). Cavell points out that well-known expressions of the categorical imperative – "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will it become a universal law" or "… act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature" (Ak. 421, ibid.), are not in reality very obvious ways of expressing to ourselves what the world would be like if everyone did as we are thinking of doing. Whilst the idea of a maxim might be fairly intelligible, the idea of a universal law as an attempt to express what is binding on an individual and Kant's assertion that "I know at once what it contains", seems less apparent.

It is to explore this lack of obviousness about "I know at once what it contains" that Cavell begins by offering us possible articulations of the maxim, for example "If your husband disappoints you, leave him". He dismisses this as tantamount to saying that we have no concept of marriage. He then offers an array of possible expressions. Each reflects Cavell's attempt to capture in Kantian terms how Nora's decision to walk out on her family might be expressed depending on what we take to be the salient features of her deliberation i.e. what comes closest to expressing the perspective that explains why she has to leave as it might be expressed in a Kantian maxim, the voice of the universal captured in the voice of the particular.

(1)   'If your husband disappoints you, leave him.

(2)   If your husband disappoints you and accuses you of talking like a child, leave him.

(3)   When your husband shows his unheroic nature and accuses you in effect of being incompetent to raise the children you have had together, leave both him and them.

(4)   When you feel that the world you have shared has been shattered, that your judgement and confidence have been so undermined that you are no longer capable of understanding whether you belong there or nowhere, that the idea of sharing intimacies with this man suggests violation, and the idea of rearing children a mystery, but there is one ray of possibility that somewhere you could learn to think and speak again, then leave that world to find that place.' (my numbering, p. 252)

One can see something strange taking place. The more personal and specific the maxim becomes in its attention to particular features, the more compelling it becomes as a reason why anyone might walk out on their family. The underlying point Cavell is making is that framing this as a 'law of nature' adds nothing to it as an expression of a perspective that is not already capable of dictating the course of Nora's action. Willing it for others or being unwilling to do so does not change anything about how it is for her. Its moral seriousness does not require this kind of universalising character; it already possesses a force, clarity and compulsion of its own. If the universal character does enter into her deliberation it may well be from her own particular understanding of what a marriage should be, of what it means to be a wife or a husband, of the way in

which the idea and reality of love denote what features of a person's life can honour and dishonour them, features which are quite different from those assumed by her husband. It is as if the deeper and more personal an expression of her pain and sense of dishonour this becomes, the more universal its appeal to what anyone in that situation might feel compelled to do.

Nevertheless, one way of understanding the presence of a universalising maxim is that it is intended to make the private nature of the deliberation public, to enable its revelation. It is an attempt to overcome scepticism regarding the possible self-serving nature of the deliberation. Free of any self-serving character it can then be taken seriously or equally, dismissed as trivial, selfish and so on. However, it might be far easier simply to ask, "how do I know Nora is serious about what she intends to do?" or, "how can I take seriously what she is saying?" Furthermore, Nora still has to make the decision even if everyone else in the world either would or would not make it. Cavell's answer to this is 'not the construction of a law she is prepared to see become universally controlling but an offer of conversation, or of imagination' (p. 253).

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Cavell's offer of conversation

Why does Cavell believe the offer of conversation to Nora would be an appropriate turn? It is, 'to help determine whether what may appear as conditions of such a law are in fact determinative and fixed conditions of her life, or whether there are possibilities of change other than the ultimate change she has arrived at' (ibid.). It is a conversation that takes seriously the deepest expression of Nora's sense of dishonour. Cavell's offer of conversation, as opposed to the constructing of a law, describes a position from which he can take Nora's thought seriously. He cannot rely on the impersonal character of a universalising maxim in order to understand how something matters to her or to assess the validity of what she is thinking therefore he needs access to her thoughts in the way she is present to him in conversation,

> … we are to see that her decision is not based solely on inclination or disaffection, but rather on the contrary, to recognise that there are powerful inclinations and affections in play that she is precisely resisting, and to consider both that she may or may not be transparent to herself in weighing her desires and that she is going to have to act one way or another in partial darkness to herself. (ibid.)

Cavell is open to her as someone who understands why it matters to exchange serious words on serious subjects and how this might be effected. In so doing he is acknowledging the moral and psychological perspective from which she views her life, distinguishing it from say, a principle that she can apply, a calculation she can make or even the words of a priest or the guidance of social mores. It acknowledges her singularity, that is, not just her individuality as a separate person with her own characteristics, beliefs and desires, but the fact that circumstance has brought her to this point, where she uniquely is placed and which she uniquely must face up to. However, that perspective is not something that in its singularity can be characterised as distorted by emotion. Her place in her world may well be as she sees it. It is the work of conversation for that to be revealed. For Cavell 'we have to be assured that we know all we can about how she herself perceives her condition' (p. 254).

What might characterise such conversation and why is Cavell's imagination also something to offer Nora in contrast to rules and principles? How is he to know that she is serious? It is not just through what she says but also how she expresses it. It is here that the possibility of passionate utterance enters the picture and demands to be taken seriously. The claim that her presence makes on him in conversation demands he attends to both the content of her speech and its expression if the demand for intelligibility is to be fully acknowledged. Why? To answer this in part I will turn to Cavell's discussion of passionate utterance and performativity.

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Cavell on passionate utterance

Towards the end of the chapter 'Performative and Passionate Utterance' in *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow*, Cavell summarises what he hopes to achieve in taking J. L. Austin's picture of performative utterance in *How To Do Things With Words* beyond the ritualization of performance and into the expressive realms of passionate utterance, effecting a move from 'an offer of participation in the order of law' to 'an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire.' There is a sense that Cavell has been leading us towards certain moral considerations for language which he now makes explicit,

> …if what I have been aiming at is indeed some fragment of a view of
> expression, of recognising language as everywhere revealing desire – and I am
> prepared to persist farther than I am perhaps prepared to recognise, in regarding
> cries of pain, or prolonged silences, or sobs, as "preverbal" calls for help, or as

traces of rage, perhaps at oneself, …- this is because the view is meant in service of something I want from moral theory, namely a systematic recognition of speech as confrontation, as demanding, as owed (not only, but perhaps especially, when it is molded in the form of moral reasons, and even when it proceeds out of sincere cooperation, as in Paul Grice's study of rational conversation, each instance of which directs, and risks, if not costs, blood.') (Cavell, 2005, p. 187).

We can thus start to see how the language of passionate utterance echoes the language of moral perfectionism through its invocation of confrontation, especially in its moral manifestations and even in the nature of rational conversation, which would appear to be a minimally risk-taking enterprise. I take Cavell's demand as being a demand for seriousness, and the price to pay for taking each other seriously is the risk of discomfort, disagreement and failure to find common ground. It is in this sense that I understand the open-endedness of dramatic activity in this particular context. I think this is quite different from Winston's characterisation of dialogue as ambivalent, which tells us little about what it is for something to be at stake in being undecided, what might be agonising in the deliberation and that there may be genuine, unresolved disagreement.

In order to make sense of this I want to outline how Cavell underpins his ideas regarding passionate utterance by drawing on J.L. Austin's ideas of performative utterance. Of specific interest to Cavell is the relationship between Austin's idea of the illocutionary speech act and the perlocutionary speech act, that in saying something for a particular reason – the illocutionary - we may also be performing a different kind of act – the perlocutionary. Such an act produces "certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention or purpose of producing them." (Austin cited in Cavell, 2005 p. 169). As an example, Cavell offers the following,

To say "I warn you" (locutionary) is to warn you (illocutionary), and it may, further (as perlocutionary) alarm you or exasperate you or intimidate you, which are surely not illocutions; as it may further convince you (that I am serious in my concern) and persuade you (to take action) which are also not illocutions. (ibid.)

It is Cavell's belief that Austin's main concern was with the illocutionary and that he was less interested in the perlocutionary and how its effects made themselves felt. Cavell himself is not troubled so much by what this implicitly says about Austin's avoidance of the significance of the expressive as he is by what he perceives to be a general philosophical disdain for the idea that something is or can be asserted in the expressive content of speech and a general philosophical belief that the expressive can somehow be detached from the utterance without making any difference to what is uttered. It is to counter this perception that he wishes to develop Austin's ideas about the perlocutionary act 'with a view toward letting it play a larger role in determining our sense of the effects of speech in and as action' (p. 176) To do so Cavell proposes 'to extend Austin's theory of performative utterances to take account of… passionate utterances, one or more groups of which will be emotive utterances' (ibid.). The aim is not only to develop Austin's ideas but to take a thought from emotivist theory and turn it in a quite different direction, from a perception of emotional utterance as a negation of serious dialogue to one in which it becomes an invitation to partake in it.

Cavell offers a series of analogues to Austin's illocutionary criteria in order to justify his perlocutionary account of passionate utterance and that 'there are conditions for passionate utterances corresponding to the conditions Austin lists as the six conditions for the felicity of performative utterances' (p. 177). At first glance, it appears to be little more than a free for all. Instead of Austin's first illocutionary condition, that 'there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect… to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances,' (p. 180) Cavell offers 'There is no accepted conventional procedure and effect. The speaker is on his or her own to create the desired effect'. For Austin's second condition, that 'the particular persons and circumstances must be appropriate for the invocation of the procedure', Cavell offers 'in the absence of an accepted conventional procedure, there are no antecedent specified persons. Appropriateness is to be decided in each case; it is at issue in each. I am not invoking a procedure but inviting an exchange'. Hence, 'I must declare myself to have standing with you (be appropriate) in the given case' and 'I therewith single you out as appropriate in the given case.' Not only can I not just say these things to anyone, my expression is also appropriately directed at you. It is to you that these things have to be said and the possibility that I can at least try to make myself intelligible to you by saying these things

in this way is what singles you out. It must also be the case, Cavell argues, that 'In speaking from my passion I must actually be suffering the passion (evincing, expressing, not to say displaying it…)' and that I can 'Demand from you a response in kind' (pp. 180 - 182 for all).

Finally, as a last perlocutionary condition, Cavell adds that

> You may contest my invitation to exchange, at any or all of the points marked by the list of conditions… for example, deny that I have standing with you, or question my consciousness of my passion, or dismiss the demand for the kind of response I seek, or ask to postpone it, or worse. I may or may not have further means of response (we may understand such exchanges as instances of, or attempts at, moral education). (p. 182)

The point of these 'rules' is that they 'stake our relationship in the ways outlined' (ibid.). In terms of the speech act, passionate expression appropriately singles out another and claims them in an exchange where there are no formal conventions by which to guide us and it is the expressive nature of that singling out to direct us to what is serious in such utterance. He writes, '… failure to have singled you out appropriately in passionate utterance characteristically puts the future of our relationship, as part of my identity, or of my existence, more radically at stake.' (p. 184.)

As such it is a call to seriousness that goes beyond that of the illocutionary and addresses itself to the other as someone whom it is intelligible to address in that way. It is to give significance to a range of possible ways in which I may speak to you. This can include silence as/and a refusal or denial of engagement, for example, Nora's 'I don't love you any more', a refusal which in the realm of the perlocutionary, becomes part of the performance. In the perlocutionary, as opposed to the illocutionary performative, 'In the mode of passionate exchange there is no final word, no uptake or turndown, until a line is drawn, a withdrawal is effected, perhaps in turn to be revoked' (p. 183). Cavell uses as his examples lines and scenes drawn from opera, which is the 'world in which passionate utterance has its cultural apotheosis' (p. 180). I have chosen to illustrate points from *A Doll's House*, although my aim is not to use the text solely to illustrate points of theory but to follow the trail that Cavell creates in order to justify the use of the text in certain approaches to moral education.

Cavell suggests that 'From the root of speech, in each utterance of revelation and confrontation, two paths spring: that of the responsibilities of implication; and that of the right of desire' (p. 184). The invitation extended to us is to ensure in our speech that 'we shall not stop at what we should or ought to say, nor at what we may and do say, but take in what we must and dare not say, or are too confused or too tame or wild or terrorized to say or to think to say (p. 185).' Furthermore,

> In acknowledging a mode of speech in or through which, by acknowledging my desire in confronting you, I declare my standing with you and single you out, demanding a response in kind from you, and a response now, so making myself vulnerable to your rebuke, thus staking our future, I mean to be following one of Austin's ambitious statements of methodological aim: "The total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (Austin, p. 148, cited in Cavell, p. 185).

As such, speech works on the 'feelings, thoughts and actions of others coevally with its design in revealing our desires to others and to ourselves' (p. 186). From the tone of the writing, this is an ethically conditioned form of speech in its totality. From here it is a short step to the argument I addressed at the start of this section, that much more is taking place in our expression than a certain kind of analysis allows for. To attend to the literal content of moral dialogue and not attend to its expressive features is to lose something of what is at stake in the dialogue and is to limit the engagement that is possible with the material. We are simply not attending to all the features of moral utterance that are at work in our seriously claiming others in moral dialogue and conversation when we focus solely on the content of speech as that which claims us. However, that is not to say these 'additional' features are stable or fixed, nor is their seriousness guaranteed. It is this that drives Cavell's account of the passionate in utterance.

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Perfectionism and passionate utterance

Returning specifically to the moral life, Cavell writes that,

> … if we are to confront Nora as an end, not merely as a means to illustrate our own theories or inclinations, namely if we are to offer her our imagination and

conversation, we have to be assured that she knows all she can about how she herself perceives her condition. (Cavell 2004, p. 254).

I take this need for assurance to connect to a point Cavell makes earlier in *Cities of Words* when writing about Emerson. Cavell writes, 'What I characterized as making oneself intelligible is the interpretation moral perfectionism gives to the idea of moral reasoning, the demand for providing reasons for one's conduct, for the justification of one's life' (p. 24). It is in this respect that perfectionism counts as a register of the moral alongside other, more classical accounts associated with 'calculations of consequences, interpretation of motives and principles' (p. 25). What matters is that the demand for justification is a 'moral demand', both an acknowledgment of and a call to acknowledge what is serious.

Cavell is seeking to articulate what he might find justifiably suitable as a serious attempt to make one's conduct and perspective visible to the world. However, what distinguishes perfectionism as an expression of moral thought from other forms of moral theory is that, 'Perfectionism proposes confrontation and conversation as the means of determining whether we can live together, accept one another into the aspirations of our lives' (p. 24). It is a demand we make on ourselves as well as others.

Confrontation, together with conversation, begins to direct our attention more vividly to the significance of the expressive as integral to the seriousness and understanding of the individual's perspective on their lives. Cavell's interpretation of Socrates' question to Euthyphro, "What kind of disagreement, my friend, causes hatred and anger" is not to argue that solutions to disagreement must be found that avoid such heated expressions of deeply held and felt points of view as ethical conditions for speech but that,

> … the context for moral argument or reasoning, one in which there is a willingness to understand and to be understood, may be difficult to maintain. A further implication I draw is that hatred and anger are not essentially irrational but may clearly be called for. To live a moral life should not require that we become Socrateses or Buddhas or Christs, all but unprovokable. But we are asked to make even justified anger and hatred intelligible, and to be responsible for their expression in our lives, and sometimes, not always and everywhere, to put them aside. (pp. 25-26)

This is dangerous and provocative stuff and of course one of the difficulties with what I am trying to do and with what Cavell appears to be demanding lies in the relationship between what is possible and permissible in fictional settings, what the implications might be for the everyday and to what extent the conduct of such discourses is ethically conditioned. That is certainly the case if we only focus on Cavell's use of the word 'hatred'. If we focus on the use of 'anger' and that the expression of anger in our vocal tone and choice of language demands to be acknowledged as an expression of a perspective on one's life, then we can begin to understand how drama might be an appropriate vehicle for engaging in depth with the difficulties of moral speech through the expressive possibilities of the art-form and its place in schools, whether as a subject or as a pedagogy.

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Why Drama?

Dialogue and conversation are a feature of all classrooms and we carry the possibilities of expressive exchange wherever we go, 'readable in every sound and gesture' (p. 186). As Ian Munday has pointed out (Munday, 2009), there are dangers inherent in reducing moral dialogue to 'a bloodless … take on morality' (Munday, p. 71). Such approaches to moral education sever it from 'worldly exchanges.' They fail to acknowledge the fullness of students' engagement with moral issues, most notably in the way that 'language and exchange are at the heart of our moral lives' (ibid.). Munday's criticism echoes that of Cavell's regarding a perspective that is able to dismiss the expressive qualities of the voice in the relationship between language and speech because rational content is abstracted from the very exchanges and contexts by which students identify the moral seriousness of an issue. Munday is not, however, addressing what takes place in a drama classroom, but the classroom discussion of moral issues generally. Indeed, it could be argued that what he describes conforms more readily to Austin's criteria for seriousness, which excludes as non-serious utterances that are '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on a stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy' (Austin, 1976, p. 22). And yet it is to the stage and other forms of fiction that Cavell turns as imaginary and imaginative environments for the confrontation of perfectionism and the confrontation of passionate utterance. To what extent is such a turn an acknowledgment of how we mark the seriousness of our perspectives on the world and how is the student to engage with them?

In the context of drama, it is quite natural to think that what is demanded of the student in their engagement with dramatic dialogue is to enter into the (moral) psychology of the character, their drives, desires, objectives and so on. This might suggest, following Winston, that what is taking place is an education in the emotions, along the lines suggested by Best, where,

> Emotional feelings are not separate from or opposed to cognition and understanding, but, on the contrary, emotional feelings are cognitive in kind, in that they are expressions of a certain understanding of their objects. (Best, 1992, p. 9 cited in Winston, 1999, p. 469)

As such, argues Winston, 'Moral action is determined as much by feeling as it is by reason and the two operate together to inform agency' (p. 469). Winston cites Levy's comments that '… an extensive education of the feelings would produce better deliberators on moral issues, because their well of information is deeper and wider than mere thought can produce.'" (Levy, p. 73 in Winston, p. 470)). Seen in this light Winston gestures towards Alastair MacIntyre. The idea that acquiring particular virtues is to acquire certain emotional responses is expressed as '"Moral education is an "education sentimentale"' (MacIntyre 1981, p. 149). Winston is happy to characterise such emotional virtues as are acquired through participation and discussion as essentially other-regarding, qualities such as 'sympathy, benevolence, generosity of spirit' (Winston, 1999, p. 470). Furthermore,

> Through their active involvement in drama, as audience or participants [both features of the drama classroom – AS], young people can learn to know pity, admiration, indignation, repulsion by feeling them in particular contexts. They can thus learn… to recognise these feelings and the kind of social actions that inspire them. (ibid.)

Winston's point is an important one. He is aware of the complexity of moral responses and his framing of them is intended to clear a space for the importance of learning about moral emotions in an educational context, along the lines suggested by Colby, against a picture of reason as rational detachment and through 'good dramatic dialogue'. It is thus an attempt to clear a space for our paying attention to how we say things alongside what we say. My discussion of Cavell, perfectionism and passionate utterance supports this. So why am I not entirely happy and feel this would be a somewhat misleading

lesson to draw from Cavell's discussion of *A Doll's House* and the common ground to be found in his work on moral perfectionism, passionate utterance and the exchange of speech? There are two reasons. Firstly, I want to suggest it fails to acknowledge what it is for something to be a serious subject for someone and presupposes a seriousness that may or may not turn out to be the case. That remains to be discovered and it does so for the second reason, that fundamental to the exchange of passionate utterance and its invitation is the possibility of being educated by the other. It is not a simple and straightforward invitation. Nora's recognition of the impossibility of this is one of the reasons impelling her to leave: Torvald cannot teach her, she must find her own way to learn. The complexity is one of thought and not just emotion and it is the expressive possibilities of the dialogue that indicate this even when it is a dispassionate, cold steeliness and absence of tonal range that communicates her withdrawal from the possibility of serious words on serious subjects as she recognises he is incapable of responding reciprocally to her more demonstrative expressions of anger and confusion. Such a tone should be understood as a choice of expression that reveals an attitude towards a perspective on a life. Far more is claimed in such exchange than that the student who is studying the text, through active participation and discussion, will come to a laudably greater understanding of the cognitive nature of emotional states and thereby be more sensitive to the emotional aspects of moral deliberation. The student is learning what it is to inhabit a moral perspective whose seriousness is revealed through the expressive speech of one character to another and where a response is demanded of the other as being owed. The students have to find what makes these playing choices meaningful and that will not be possible if attention is paid to the emotionally charged nature of a situation and not to the idea of speech 'as owed' and which '… risks, if not costs, blood'. This attention to the expressive qualities required is not as such an attention to emotions but an attention to how the character is exposed by their words and their expression, revealing what counts for them in their deliberation.

Summary

In this chapter I have argued that, through the lens of Cavellian passionate utterance, we can see how drama education embodies the kind of attention to the expressive nature of dialogue that reveals what is at stake in the holding and expressing of a personal

perspective. Drama education allows us to access a richer understanding of what is serious in dialogue, beyond an idea that its educational soundness is best understood as an exchange of views in which 'no one perspective [is] allowed to dominate, set or close the moral agenda' (Winston, 1999, p. 468). As an invitation made from one person to another to participate in dialogue, passionate utterance is open to refusal as well as acceptance, to being closed off as well as acknowledged, rejected as well as taken up. One of the arguments that is often put forward for the use of drama to explore moral issues is that it provides a safe place for the expression of conflicting points of view and contains them through the distancing of role-play and fictionalisation (Arts Council, 2003, Bennathan, 2012). I have argued that Cavell's work on passionate utterance encourages us to be less afraid of the expression of strong opinion and that this sits well with the confrontational nature of moral perfectionism that he describes. Both are highly personal but also moderated – by context and appropriateness on the one hand and by the demand that we give an account of ourselves on the other. However, to understand the force of both, I have suggested it is necessary to engage with the possibilities of their expression and that means to risk vulnerability and expose ourselves, for example through imaginative engagement with a theatrical text, to the conditions under which such expression is required or demanded of us. This undoubtedly has risks, but it should be part of the educational nature of drama that it is also about taking risks, the risk contained both in the invitation to participate in the disorder of desire and the responsibility of implication.

Notes

1   The open-ended and aporetic nature of Socratic dialogue, for example, has been described by Robert Talisse as a 'critical adventure into the unknown' to which we invite our students. However, whilst Talisse speaks of allowing engagement in and with the dialogical form to 'stimulate the students' philosophical imagination', he feels the need to point out this does not mean 'the dialogists refuse to attend to the arguments presented in the dialogues', perhaps worried there is something unserious about the more speculative following 'where the dialogical encounter with the text leads'. Rather, 'the dialogical mode seeks an integration between the dramatic and argumentative elements of Plato's

dialogues' (Talisse, 2003, pp164 – 165). In a similar vein Richard Smith cautions against viewing Socratic dialogue as licensing a playful approach to dialogical engagement in philosophy with children, arguing there is an ambivalence and instability between the playful and the serious in Socratic dialogue (Smith, 2011). My aim is to draw attention to how the animating of a text through voice and body may bring out a personal dimension to moral argument which is philosophically justified and which might otherwise be missed in a purely philosophical setting.

2   Branlislav Jakovljevic suggests the decision has already been made before the final conversation between Nora and Helmer takes place. He argues that Nora's 'decisive and momentous break… happens on the outside, offstage, in a reality broader than the one contained by the visual field of representation that is the theatrical stage... The stage permits us to see only the rehearsal, the promise of performance'. The authentic moment of decision, the 'leap', cannot be represented, therefore, contra Winston, is not discovered in the onstage action. All that Nora can do therefore is rehearse the arguments that led to it and the reasons why she must leave. (Jakovljevic (2003) p. 440.)

3   Cavell's critique of Kantian ethics is not a rejection of it. As he writes of moral perfectionism in the introduction to *Cities of Words*, 'I do not conceive of this as an alternative to Kantianism or utilitarianism (Kant and John Stuart Mill both have deep perfectionist strains in their views) but rather as emphasizing that aspect of moral choice having to do, as it is sometimes put, with being true to oneself, or as Michel Foucault has put the view, caring for the self'. (S. Cavell *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters On A Register Of The Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2004), p11.)

CHAPTER 9

Seriousness, Voice, Theatricality and Drama Education

Speak the speech, I pray you as I pronounced it to you – trippingly on the tongue…Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observation: that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own age, and the very body of his time his form and pressure… O there be players I have seen play and heard others praise that …have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. (Hamlet Act 3, Scene 2)

Drama and Education

In recent years there has been a sense of crisis in drama education in England after a period of rapprochement between the different strands of the subject. Uncertainty over its status in the hostile environment of a revamped curriculum reflecting the familiar prejudice that drama education is of minor importance, concern about its relevance and ability to offer opportunities to say anything in the face of various global crises and finally concern that the development of classroom drama as an art form has come to a standstill have led leading practitioners to question its purpose and aims. As one response to this crisis, I will consider how the idea of theatricality, once anathema to drama practitioners, loaded with negative connotations and above all non-serious, is being reconceived as a tool for a socially and politically oriented transformational critical pedagogy. However, in this chapter I will argue that this

overlooks the significance to the individual of vocal and physical expression and the possibilities offered through a more personal approach in the subject, one that nevertheless is still located in an understanding of theatricality rather than its rejection. To do so I will attempt to tease out what I see as a tension between Stanley Cavell's use of the term "theatricality" on the one hand and his discussion of "theatricalization" on the other which, given his concern for the audience of philosophy, must include his own work.

Theatricality has long carried negative connotations. Dating back to antiquity, performance has been viewed as 'illusory, deceptive, exaggerated, artificial or affected'. (Davis and Postlewait, 2003, p. 4). It has been negatively associated with 'the acts and practices of role-playing, illusion, false appearance, masquerade, façade, and impersonation' (ibid.). Historically the use of words like "theatrical" and "theatricality" has established an opposition with concepts of what is natural, true and sincere. As has been pointed out in the field of academic theatre studies,

> Almost invariably, the polarity between the natural (or the real) and the theatrical (or the artificial) carries a moral as well as an aesthetic judgement, with the idea of the natural serving, of course, as the positive pole in the equation. The natural is also the realm of the sincere and the true (p. 17).

and that a series of related antinomies are in operation, such as,

> real versus false, genuine versus fake, intrinsic versus extrinsic, original versus imitative, true versus counterfeit, honest versus dishonest, sincere versus devious, accurate versus distorted, revealed versus disguised, face versus mask, serious versus playful, and essential versus artificial. All things theatrical are on the negative end of the polarity' (ibid.).

A further indication of why this might be lies in a second critique of the theatrical, distinct from the first. If the first critique of the theatrical is in terms of its showy excess, the second emphasises its essential lack, an 'inner emptiness, a deficiency or absence of that to which it refers' (p. 5). Plato's criticism of mimesis is precisely of this kind, that the theatre, in attempting 'to evoke the "factual" or real world' fails to do so 'because the Real is not located in the visual and tangible conditions of the material world' (p. 4).

However, advocates for the transformational possibilities of drama and theatre pedagogy have led a renewed interest in the nature of theatricality, in particular the opportunities it creates for critical engagement with social issues. Helen Nicholson has turned to some of the recent literature on theatricality to argue that 'a renewed case can be made for introducing theatricality into education' (Nicholson, 2009, p. 50) in that it can be a vehicle or medium for cultural criticism which aims at what is appropriate and necessary for the times in which we live. In support, Nicholson cites Josette Feral's observation that,

> It [theatricality] creates disjuncture where our ordinary perception sees only unity between signs and their meanings. It replaces uniformity with duality. It perceives the friction and tensions between the various worlds it observes, and obliges us to see it differently (Feral, 2002, p. 11).

For Nicholson, the value and seriousness of theatricality within drama and theatre education lies in providing the creative imagination with the means to critically engage with its world. She draws on Paul Ricoeur's carefully nuanced argument that whilst the imagination plays a role in the preservation and ordering of 'specific ideologies or narratives by perpetuating images and stories that represent the dominant tradition of a culture or society' (Nicholson, p. 49), it also has a disruptive function, that helps us re-think the nature of our social life' (pp. 49 – 50). This utopian imaginary disrupts assumptions about shared or commonly-held ideologies. Its task, writes Nicholson,

> … is to further a new social imaginary by asking questions about the ideological meanings of the symbols, histories, celebrations, rituals and other forms of theatrical and non-theatrical performance that sustain contemporary society, and by using the insights gained to imagine new possibilities (p. 50).

How are we to understand the role of theatricality in cultural criticism and why is this educationally relevant and serious? Feral argues that theatricality should be understood either as 'a mode of production or a mode of reception' (Feral, 2002, p. 6) i.e. something intentional that occurs in the process of creation or something that occurs in the response of the spectator and which is dependent on his/her subjectivity. Thus 'theatricality is not a property… that belongs to the object, the body, the space or the subject…. It is only graspable as a process' (p. 12). Feral concludes that 'In this permanent movement between meaning and its displacement, between the same and the different, alterity arises from the heart of sameness and theatricality is born.' (ibid.).

In the context of education, the linking of theatricality and the social imagination thus enables young people to raise critical questions about the performative society in which they live and it is in the unpredictable qualities of live theatre and the drama classroom that the everyday and the conventional can potentially be disrupted.

In Nicholson's words, one hears echoes of Maxine Greene's more general thematising of the transformational possibilities of arts education, in which 'works of art have a potential for evoking an intimation of a better order of things... a consciousness of possibility' (Greene, 2001, p. 117). Such potentiality - moral, social and political - depends on a sensibility that is open to these possibilities and it is the function of an aesthetic education that it should develop this in ways that will '... empower persons (alone or in a community) to know enough to notice what there is to be noticed' when 'participating imaginatively' (ibid.). This strong moral sensibility, is also found in the work of leading drama educationist Jonathan Neelands, working with the stated aim 'that through their artistic transformations of time, space and self in drama, young people can find the voice, confidence and tools to transform their worlds and stories' (Neelands, 2010, p. xxi). Neelands' work on the use of conventions has provided drama practitioners with a set of classroom tools that have enabled students to critically engage with issues, embodying critical distantiation within the context of creative work. Whilst Neelands has resisted direct reference to theatricality, we can see from certain comments he makes on Hamlet's advice to the players in Shakespeare's play that he has something like it in mind in his discussing how young people can undergo transformational experiences through drama education.

In an essay entitled 'Mirror, Dynamo or Lens', Neelands put a collection of metaphors under the spotlight in order to best express the potential of theatre as a form of social pedagogy for students, practitioners and audiences alike and which would offer possibilities for the kind of social, political and moral change he desires. Neelands begins his discussion with what is perhaps the most well-known of pedagogical metaphors for theatre, that of holding a mirror up to nature, an image taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Hamlet invites a group of travelling actors to perform a tragedy in front of the royal court which parallels his uncle's murder of Hamlet's father, in order to 'catch the conscience of the king'. So that they may do so successfully Hamlet offers his advice to the players regarding the manner of their acting – '*Speak the speech…*'. Neelands' gloss on this is interesting. He writes that,

The metaphor of theatre as mirror offers a particular take on the ideas of accuracy and relevance, which is that theatre merely reflects us to ourselves. There is a suggestion that the life-likeness of a mirrored reflection is a guarantee of its accuracy, authenticity and naturalness (p. 144).

and interprets Hamlet's comments as demanding,

the players adopt what would become known as a 'naturalistic' style of performance without any exaggerated or 'unreal' gestures. In Hamlet's mind the 'truth' of events will be confirmed by the 'realism' of the playing. The more life-like the actions, the more convincing the argument of his story. Hamlet imagines that by stripping away all that is artificial in the players' performance, they will appear to be more authentic; more true to life. And this criterion of authenticity and 'life-likeness' is still key to our aesthetic judgments of theatre (ibid.).

Neelands suggests that Hamlet is distinguishing between a 'serious literary theatre' and the profane tastes and preferences of the lower orders' (ibid.). Theatrical naturalism is thus a superior kind of representation suitable for an educated elite. The association that Neelands makes between this and drama in education is that the latter has also fallen for the 'cultural power of the 'mirror' and the naturalistic fallacy it contains – that behavioural realism is more accurate and truthful than other styles of theatre representation', the idea being that whatever work students do in drama, the more life-like and realistic its presentation, the greater its impact and educational value will be. He therefore criticises drama in education as holding to the belief that 'by 'living through' human experiences in a realistic and life-like way in real-time young people will discover the truth of human existences which they can only imagine and never in reality know' (p. 146). What is so wrong with this? For Neelands it means operating under an illusion. The illusion is that in acting as if we were experiencing another person's experiences in the here and now, we take ourselves to be walking in the shoes of others in a manner that is authentic and life-like. Neelands acknowledges that whilst we may develop educationally valuable insights into the lives of others through empathy and understanding 'we can only ever learn more about our personal and collective self through imagining ourselves differently' (ibid.) and this is not achieved by behavioural naturalism but 'more stylised and self-reflexive forms of theatre' (ibid.). A kind of artless or even artful identification of actor and character or sense of sameness

in imaginative engagement will not do this. We do not learn how our own lives may be transformed from identifying with others but by seeing ourselves differently.

Later in the essay Neelands reworks the metaphor of the image further in supporting his conclusion that it is the artificial nature of theatre rather than its realism which gives theatre its power. For Neelands, 'Theatre gives human shape and form to experience in order to hold it for a while as if it was reflected in a mirror but as an abominable imitation of humanity not as lived experience itself' (p. 149). Another way in which we might understand artificiality and the abominable nature of the imitation of humanity is as theatricality. It is in the distortions and stylisations effected by theatricality that we see ourselves clearly. Accuracy/truth and relevance thus seem to be best served by non-naturalistic styles of drama that reveal us to ourselves and thus hold out the possibility of transformation. It would be better, therefore, if Hamlet's advice to the players is ignored, or, if not ignored, then it is unclear to what purpose we should understand Hamlet's specific request to *suit the action to the word and the word to the action.*

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The Burden of Life

Stanley Cavell has also commented, somewhat differently, on Hamlet's advice to the players. Cavell wrote,

> We might think of the burden as holding, as it were, a mirror up to nature. Why assume just that Hamlet's picture urges us players to imitate, that is, copy or reproduce, (human) nature? His concern over those who "imitated humanity so abominably" is not alone that we not imitate human beings badly, but that we not become imitation members of the human species, abominations; as if to imitate, or represent – that is, to participate in – the species well is a condition of being human. (Cavell, 2003, p. 221)

What is the burden? In Cavell's words, it is 'the life of the world' and 'its burden is not its size, but its specificness. It is no bigger a burden than the responsibility for what Emerson and Thoreau call the life of our words' (ibid.). Cavell concludes that,

> Such is Shakespearean theater's stake in the acting, or playing, of humans. Then Hamlet's picture of the mirror held up to nature asks us to see if the mirror as it

were clouds, to determine whether nature is breathing (still, again) – asks us to be things affected by the question (ibid.).

The direction of Cavell's comments appears on the surface to be quite similar to Neelands. Cavell too, questions the traditional understanding of the metaphor of the mirror. It is no more an invitation to mimicry for Cavell than it is for Neelands. In both there is a moral sensibility at work that distinguishes between what is desirable and undesirable in human existence. Cavell's search for authenticity seems to mirror Neelands' search for truth. But whilst for Neelands it demands a move away from the ordinary towards something distorted and abominable in order to better see the state of our humanity and the possibility of redeeming it, for Cavell it requires us to draw closer, close enough to be able to tell if there is indeed still life, in a second mirror image that he takes from King Lear, where Lear calls out for a mirror to see if his daughter Cordelia is still breathing. For Neelands the educational import of drama seems to require a withdrawal from such attention. I want to suggest that such withdrawal is quite typical of the theoretical work that takes place in drama, with little attention given to the significance of vocal and physical expression.

It is of course in the nature of the theoretical that it works with abstraction and generality rather than specificity. It is also the case that drama educationists have tended to see in the voice and body an instrumentality put to the service of aims that align the theory and practice of drama with more general educational aims. Nevertheless, it is against this tendency that I want to redirect our attention through discussion of Stanley Cavell's insights on the significance of the specificity of human expression, focussing in particular on the Cavellian idea of perfect pitch. Cavell has made a parallel point to this in relation to the literary criticism of plays that,

> How could any serious critic ever have forgotten that to care about a specific character is to care about the utterly specific words he says and when he says them; or that we care about the utterly specific words of a play because certain men and women are having to give voice to them (Cavell, 2002, p. 269).

Cavell links this forgetfulness to what he describes as the difficulty of 'attending with utter specificity to the person now before you, or to yourself' (ibid.). Whilst there is a teasing note to this, Cavell is also quite serious in drawing attention to the significance

of what we say, to whom and on what occasion, for understanding our humanity, a significance that lies in its specificity rather than generality.

What I am trying to do here is provide a bridge between the earlier discussion of theatricality and its newly acquired value for learning in the transformational possibilities it offers through its artifice, distantiation and distortion and a more human, proximate understanding that Cavell's thinking invites. In doing so I am not discussing the teaching of vocal and physical acting skills per se. This is already done to a greater or lesser extent and is an important part of drama education, especially at more advanced levels. The aim is to provide and examine reasons for attending to vocal and physical expression beyond the importance of using a set of skills well rather than badly. In one sense, I am questioning the reductive sense in which vocality and physicality have come to be understood, practised and discussed by students and teachers alike as 'skills'. In another I am questioning why in certain modes of drama teaching they have been given very little attention at all. I will locate my own understanding of attentiveness as a feature of educational drama not in a superficial reclaiming of naturalism that denies the theatrical but in the heightened artificiality of performance that Neelands advocates, with its attendant risk of a theatricality he does not name. I will do so through discussion of the Cavellian conceptualisation of perfect pitch.

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Perfect pitch, self and others

Perfect pitch is of course a term derived from music. Also known as absolute pitch it describes the phenomenon of being able to identify or recreate a given note without the aid of reference notes that surround it. Cavell was a precocious young jazz musician, playing in and leading bands in his hometown of Sacramento, California. His first degree was in music and it was a crisis of confidence in his abilities as a composer that led him to turn more seriously to philosophy. He had inherited his musical talent from his mother, who was also a musician. However, one thing she possessed that he did not inherit was perfect pitch and he was deeply troubled by this. But as he says of it, 'Yet I felt there must be something I was meant to do that required an equivalent of the enigmatic faculty of perfect pitch' (Cavell, 1994, p. 21). He ultimately finds it in ordinary language philosophy and in attentiveness to the idea of the human voice. As such he says, 'certain questions of ear that run through my life – questions of the

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realities and fantasies of perfect pitch… become… questions of the detection of voice' (p. 30). Cavell relates this "ear" to discernment in being able to comprehend subtle differences in meaning, between, for example, 'the difference between doing something by mistake or by accident, or between doing something willingly or voluntarily' (p. 21).

For Cavell, it contains the idea of, as it were, walking on one's own, of one's words being one's own, the burden and responsibility that he refers to in his discussion of Hamlet's advice on acting. How are we to understand this idea? Martin Gustafsson's insight is that 'having perfect pitch involves a peculiar mixture of self-reliance and vulnerability. He who has perfect pitch trusts his own perceptual capacity' (Gustafsson, 2005, p. 367). One does not need to consult, but becomes one's own authority. Part of this burden is that such speech is ethically conditioned, guarding against insufferable arrogance, dogmatism and so on. It also expresses a concern with the democratisation of utterance, of the possibility of speaking for others in speaking for oneself. To lose it, or not possess it, is, argues Gustafsson, to risk finding oneself outside a community, or, far worse, to risk 'an even more profound disintegration of his, or his fellow-speakers', sanity' (ibid.).

Cavell's comments and the Austinian heritage that he alludes to in the attunement of his own ear to Austinian examples mean perfect pitch has been understood as an attunement of judgment. However, such attunement is not agreement per se between myself and others but rather, in speaking for myself my speaking is, as Paul Standish remarks (2009), 'dedicated toward my community' and 'such speaking, such conversation [is] the very medium in which I might come to realise what my projects might be.' Naoko Saito relates it to the prophetic sense of Emerson's maxim of "speaking with necessity", understood as being 'an invitation to trust one's Whim' (Saito, 2009, p. 285). This means trusting one's taste or judgment or perspective, not in the detrimental sense whim normally has. Saito locates the finding of perfect pitch in moments of crisis when the individual stands 'on the critical border of the attained and unattained (but attainable) self', driven to find a critical language in experiences she characterises as aesthetic. Standish relates it to the expression of judgment when he places this thought more explicitly in an educational context and wonders whether students can ever 'learn to speak their latent conviction' (Standish, 2009, p. 290). Standish views current practices in education as an obstacle to the finding of perfect

pitch. His response to his own question is a negative but qualified 'not if our assessment does nothing more than target an exhaustive checklist of criteria. Not if what we teach is ready-made, easily digestible, and plainly transparent…But you can lead your students out of that world to find a place where they may learn to speak (again)' (ibid.).

Cavell's notion of perfect pitch as an expression of attunement has been understood less in terms of the expressive possibilities of the human voice and body and more in terms of the idea of judgment and finding one's own critical voice. However, the idea of perfect pitch is not limited simply to recognition but also includes reproduction, for example in being able to sing the right note. I want to extend this into human expression more generally, as indeed Cavell has done in his theorising of performative utterance.

Considered in the light of Cavell's comments on Hamlet's advice to the players, our burden is to ensure our words are alive and we are alive to them, that our language has not gone dead on us, that it can still serve to express the disorders of desire in which one claims others as the appropriate object of utterance. This is also the actor's burden (which includes the student in the drama classroom), that in his/her vocal and physical expression he or she not only brings a character's words to life but embodies a whole being in the very condition of theatricality. At the same time, it is also the actor's burden to suit the word to the action and the action to the word. This is not simply to pitch words perfectly but one's expression more generally. It speaks of a care and attention to what we say and more generally express, to whom and on what occasion, that has been suppressed in philosophy and which has its echoes in a similar unease in the history of drama education with the risk of theatricality and the educational dangers it has been taken to present. I believe this unease to be understandable but mistaken and that the finding of perfect pitch requires an exposure to the risk of theatricality not simply because such pitching may on the one hand come perilously close to it but because theatricality is a condition of any expression that is to be valued in the way Cavellian perfect pitch is valued, as an authentic, sincere expression of a human perspective expressed in the first person.

There is of course a considerable irony in that we are often working in drama education with other people's words. In Cavellian terms that is our inheritance. The important educational aspect of this is that through working with other people's words, attending to them closely and giving life to them, students can come to an understanding

of what it is to speak not only with the seriousness that is implicit in Cavellian perfect pitch but in many other ways in which pitch declares itself, for example humorously, in righteous anger and so on. Moreover, the potential is always there for us to do this. Drama represents the acknowledgment of this and the extent of its possibilities as a response to human experience of the world and one's being in the world. Such a range of expression is not easily available in the more conventional classroom. In coming to understand how characters are moved to speak from passion and in other appropriately pitched ways, students can come to understand how locating this in vocal and physical expression not only requires the risk of theatricality and artifice but is conditioned by its possibility. Without risk, it is flat and lifeless, no longer breathing. This means resisting the temptation to necessarily give separate accounts of what is said and how it is expressed but also allowing for it when appropriate. The first requires the suppression of expression in our understanding or perfect pitch in terms of a straightforward consideration of the meaning of the words on the page or as part of a text. Of course, such accounts have their place in discussion, reflection and analysis of texts and performances. The second reduces the relationship to one of convention, skill or technique, the creation of effects made possible by the framing of genre, style, form. This also has its place. Therefore, might this not be the case anyway? Might someone not simply be good at pretending, a talented, intelligent, culturally astute actor – a politician perhaps? It can't be ruled out. Neither, however, should the possibility that through pretending we learn how to become more authentic, learning not only how to inhabit our words but how words can be inhabited more generally. Within the context of drama this does not mitigate against understanding the work of the actor in terms of skills, of craft and the acquisition of relevant knowledge, it is its condition, underpinning the work of actor and student alike within theatrical genres and accounting for its absence when the emptiness of theatricality is invoked. As Cavell has said of Shakespeare's plays, they,

> Are conventional in the way that their language is grammatical, in a way that a football game satisfies the rules of football: one has to know them to understand what is happening, but consulting them will not tell you who plays or speaks well and who mechanically, nor why a given remark or a particular play was made here, nor who won and who lost. You have to know something more for that, and you have to look' (Cavell, 2003, p. 48).

How we come to know something more, as a result of learning how to look, is a task of education. If we are to understand how notions of theatricality condition the interplay of the relationship between thought and expression in the finding of perfect pitch, then we must not ignore the external framing of what is taking place in the artifice of conventions, genre and style. Working with pre-existing words on a page requires analysing, interpreting and understanding in the light of the realities of the art form. This is not to deny its importance in relation to broader educational aims but that will only take us so far in recognising what it is to speak well and speak mechanically, without thought or soul.

Returning to Cavell's treatment of Hamlet's advice to the players. David Rudrum writes,

> Meditating on the conventions of acting in plays turns out to be an invitation not only to meditate on the relation in which those conventions stand to the conventions of our everyday lives but also an occasion to reflect on the relationship between theatricality and subjectivity itself (Rudrum, 2013, p. 54).

In theatricalizing our existence, with its attendant risks of becoming ludicrous, we may find proof that nature, in the form of our own human being, is still breathing. It is in the vitality of perfect pitch that we find its transformational impact, ironically located in an artifice that is distinct both from the naturalism Neelands rejects and the necessarily abominable nature of imitation he advances. Cavell's invitation is more human and asks that we look and listen to ourselves, take up the burden of responsibility for our words, attend to their contexts and to the manner and pitching of their utterance. It offers valuable learning opportunities that are an education in themselves but more than this it requires our constant vigilance to ensure that it, and we, stay alive.

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Cavell and Wittgensteinian seriousness

I want to link these observations to Cavell's understanding of Wittgenstein. The suspicion remains that there is still something superficial and trivial about drama and theatre that fails to claim us in seriousness. However, what emerges in Cavell's Wittgensteinian inheritance is an aesthetic, ethical and philosophical concern with language and human expression, with questions of personal and impersonal voice, with

the significance of presence and meaning in our relationships with others and with the importance to our sense of our humanity that we are expressive beings who can be claimed by others in serious response. What he shares with Wittgenstein is a sense of the value of the arts and the value of the teacher-student relationship in learning to be human. In his essay 'Love and Teaching: renewing a common world' (2012), Raimond Gaita, another philosopher influenced by Wittgenstein, describes how we grow into our humanity by 'rising to its requirements, necessarily with others' (Gaita, 2012, p. 762). In the light of this I am turning my attention to the part that drama education can play in helping students grow into their humanity and as Tilghman (1991) says, make a space for the 'distinction between what is truly important and what is trivial' (Tilghman,1991, p.16). An example from *Culture and Value* helps bring this out. Wittgenstein invites us to reflect that,

> Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing someone who thinks himself unobserved engaged in some quite simple everyday activity. Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up and we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes, - surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful…We could be seeing life itself. – But then we do this every day and it makes not the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from that point of view…The work of art compels us – as one might say – to see it in the right perspective, but without art the object is a piece of nature like any other (CV §6e).

We are asked to imagine an everyday occurrence. There is nothing unusual or peculiar about what is happening in front of us. But in viewing these actions on stage both what we see and the attention we pay are transformed. We look and watch differently. We observe and attend in a way that is not our normal mode of seeing, something 'at once both uncanny and wonderful'. And yet, Wittgenstein says, this is readily available to us – 'we do this every day and it makes not the slightest impression on us'. The point is, we do not normally see what is in front of us or attend to ourselves in this way. We do not, in general, take the opportunity to do so. We may not even realise this until we see it from the perspective of art and then something revelatory strikes us. We may

realise we have missed its significance or meaning. What may strike us is that we have failed to distinguish between what is important and what is trivial, failed to see something in a face or a look or a gesture. Equally what may strike us is something altogether more joyful.

It is not just that the work of art directs our attention to the everyday things to which we are oblivious but it does so in ways that intensify and bring out a significance that might otherwise not strike us. The artist places before us those things that strike him or her in ways that enable us to feel and respond to the nature of this impact, its meaning and its force. In seeing something from the perspective of art we are asked not only to notice and attend to it but to do so through a specific medium. We are being invited to discern something in what lies before us and to respond to it. Our response may be thoughtful, reflective, delight, shock, amusement and so on.

This is what the teacher can do. In selecting materials for teaching and learning the teacher says, 'look at this', 'have you ever noticed…?', 'this struck me', 'what do you think about this?' The drama teacher has an array of strategies and techniques available for use in the classroom but just as important is how the teacher directs the attention of students towards what he or she takes to be important and of interest, towards what is striking. The challenge for the teacher is twofold. One is to develop the discernment and understanding that will equip students with the means to recognise such perspectives. The second is to provide them with the means to create perspectives for themselves and for others, students not only learning to appreciate the difference between what is imaginative and dull, well-executed and poorly executed in their own and other people's work but also to discern what is serious and what is trivial.

It is ironic that after years of questionable educational status, the championing of drama through its recently discovered associations with cognitive psychology and the neurosciences has led to a greater acceptance of it in mainstream education. For example, drama is seen to possess an instrumental value in theories of embodied learning and in the cognitive management of emotion. It is this kind of scientific explanation that Wittgenstein is trying to resist. The right perspective is not one given to us via a scientific account of the instrumental nature of, in the case of drama, the expressive human voice and body. Underpinning drama practices with scientific research lends the subject a spurious educational seriousness that belies its real seriousness.

The challenge for the teacher is to create the conditions under which students feel willing and prepared to expose themselves to the risks involved in making claims through their art. How are we to understand this? Wittgenstein's comment about Shakespeare might be illuminating in this respect. He writes, 'Shakespeare, one might say displays the dance of human passions. For this reason, he has to be objective, otherwise he would not so much display the dance of human passions – as perhaps talk about it. But he displays it to us in a dance, not naturalistically' (CV p. 42e). This represents a quite different picture of the value of drama education to that championed by the advocates of 'embodied learning' and the 'management of the emotions'.

As an epigraph for the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein chose a line from his fellow countryman Johann Nestroy's play *Der Schützling* (*The Protégé*). 'The trouble about progress is that it always looks much greater than it really is' (PI, epigraph). Commentators have speculated on the reason for this; for example, that it was intended as a reference to certain features of his thought, his concept of progress, or, as Norman Malcolm (2001) believed, that Wittgenstein felt the importance of any advances he had made in philosophy to be over-exaggerated by those who were close to him. The play opens with the main character Gottlieb Herb in a small, whitewashed room with only a bed and a table, the kind of Spartan setting Wittgenstein might have sought for himself. Herb has recently given up his job as a village schoolteacher and vents his frustration at not being able to educate is pupils to his own satisfaction, again offering a parallel with Wittgenstein's own life in the 1920s. Andrew Barker (2013) offers the thought that Wittgenstein is inviting his more curious readers 'to refer to a play in which he saw so much of himself reflected' (Barker, 2013, p. 143). But refer to it in what way? The ambiguity of the title – 'The Protégé' - would be a good place to start. Wittgenstein came to attention as the protégé of Bertrand Russell, the young man who would carry on the older man's work. Instead he reacted against it, making his own distinctive mark and setting philosophy on a different path, rejecting what Russell took to be requisite for philosophical seriousness, its proximation to the language of science. Or we might view the reference in the light of the aforementioned example from *Culture and Value*. In seeing something on stage we may see ourselves from a changed, unaccustomed perspective. We may, in effect, see ourselves. Is Wittgenstein asking us to see ourselves differently or see ourselves more clearly through our reading of his work or even to see the work differently? Elsewhere in *Culture and Value* (CV

§24e) he tells us 'work on philosophy… is really more work on oneself. On one's conceptions. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them)'. Might he not be seeking to offer us a way of seeing ourselves through methods that are akin to the right perspective of art rather than the correctness of science?

One other possibility is to see the epigraph in the context of the play itself. The play is a farce. Wittgenstein, by now a towering figure in philosophy and renowned for his serious disposition, was taking a line from a comedy as a motto for what he knows will be an important, serious piece of philosophical writing. It is an extraordinary thing to do. If Wittgenstein is inviting us to reflect on the nature of progress, or his own progress, he does so by stepping outside the seriousness of the philosophical and framing it through the comedic. In doing so he is inviting us to reflect on the nature of its seriousness. Is he serious? Or is he playing with us. I suggest he is doing both. I do not mean to imply that we should approach his philosophy playfully. I mean that questions of seriousness and non-seriousness are features of language that defy the idea of progress as something linear and must always be returned to as an ever-present flux in language games, of which philosophy is one and drama another. Philosophy represents one locus for questions of seriousness and non-seriousness, drama and the arts another. Wittgenstein himself remarked 'A typical American film, naive and silly, can – for all its silliness and even *by means of* it – be instructive. A fatuous, self-conscious English film can teach nothing. I have often learnt a lesson from a silly American film' (CV §57e). Wittgenstein is challenging the idea that coming to see what is serious can only to be achieved through the use of language based on the procedures of science or that there is only one tone in which one can be educated. One expression of his attitude to this is the following, 'People nowadays think, scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to entertain them. *That the latter have something to teach them;* that never occurs to them' (CV p.36e). What better way to do so than by framing the spiritual fervour of his own philosophical seriousness with a line from a comedy!

Drama engages us in deliberation as to what is important and what is trivial and how this is revealed to us. Its art lies in articulating our sense of the precariousness of what things mean. The same words may admit of seriousness and non-seriousness, may be laughed at or wept over. The same action in one context may be viewed as tragic but in another becomes farcical. Drama does not assume the superiority of one response

over another but calls them into question. It does so playfully and seriously and it is in the different registers of our play and seriousness that we learn what it means to be human.

Summary

In Chapter 9 an argument has been made, contra Cavell, for a more positive account of the value of theatricality in drama pedagogy and artistic expression. Following critical discussion of the renewed claims for the place of theatricality in contemporary drama education as both an aesthetic necessity and a powerful vehicle for reimagining social relations, theatricality is taken to condition authentic expression rather than represent a departure from it. The chapter concluded by bringing together Cavell and Wittgenstein in relation to drama teaching and the seriousness of the perspective of art as distinct from that of science. Throughout his life Wittgenstein regarded philosophy's attraction to science with suspicion. Demonstrating his shrewd and mischievous ear for the serious and the absurd, Wittgenstein chose a quote from the Austrian playwright Johann Nestroy, a writer renowned for his comedies, as the epigraph for *Philosophical Investigations*. Framing his work with the words of a farceur suggests Wittgenstein wanted to resist his work being read with a toneless literalism akin to the reasoning of science, the epitome of serious thinking for associates like Russell. Careful attention reveals the play of voices heard in the text not only mark out contrasting positions in various arguments but allow for the expression of different registers of philosophical seriousness, including humour and irony. It is argued that such play in human expression is exemplified in drama practices.

CHAPTER 10

Seriousness, Voice and Ventriloquism: Making Ourselves Intelligible in Higher Education

"If my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine, then I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property." (Wittgenstein, 2009)

Bearing my stamp

In the preface to *Philosophical Investigations* Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted that 'if my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine, then I do not wish to lay any further claim to them as my property' (Wittgenstein, 2009: 4e). Assuming that Wittgenstein was not making an observation about plagiarism but a more substantial philosophical point about the significance to his work of what was personal in its expression, however this is construed, it appears to be a deliberately provocative statement for a philosopher to make. After all, isn't one important measure of philosophical and academic seriousness the extent to which the personal is renounced? As Timothy Gould remarks, 'For some philosophical minds – and not necessarily the worst – "the personal" is simply another name for the self-centered or the self-indulgent' (Gould, 1998, p. 26). Whilst such comments do not make clear just what it is that is being indulged and what failure of thought has been identified, the implication is that within the idea of the personal are forms of human expression, whether thought, speech or action, that are essentially irrelevant in assessing the quality and coherence of philosophical and academic argument. It is not just the clarity of such thought that requires it to be purged of the personal but its status as serious academic work. And yet, in the words of the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, 'human beings are everywhere condemned to expression, to meaning' (Cavell, 1979, p. 357) and Toril Moi notes that 'for Wittgenstein, gestures and activities inflect our words: language

cannot be isolated from our tone, our facial expressions, or from what we do with our bodies as we speak or remain silent' (Moi, 2017, p. 187). How then, are we to understand what is both personal and serious about Wittgenstein's remarks in the context of the academy, with which Wittgenstein had an uneasy and interrupted relationship?

If we were to think of metaphors to describe the role of a teacher or lecturer, ventriloquist would most likely not appear on the list. Metaphors such as those employed by John Dewey in the course of his writings - "artist," "lover," "navigator," "gardener," "composer," builder," (Scott Johnson, 2007 p. 69), might seem more appropriate at different times, but not ventriloquist. The use of ventriloquism as a metaphor or analogy for educational processes, interactions, and relationships is invariably negative and pejorative. It carries within it associations with coercion, denial of agency, with passivity, voicelessness, the inanimate. It conjures up images of wooden dummies and the illusion of conversation, monologue dressed up, but not completely disguised, as dialogue, the subjective performed as the intersubjective. As such it seems the very antithesis of what education should be. Much educational thinking about aims has been concerned with resisting models of puppetry and ventriloquism – concerns for autonomy, authenticity, freedom, critical thinking and personal development all carry with them a powerful sense of agency, intentionality and rationality, of animated human beings not waiting to be animated but provided with the means to animate themselves, not waiting for life to be breathed into them but breathing on their own, not waiting to be lifted from a mute state but given a voice. Somewhere in the picture Wittgenstein's words resonate powerfully - what matters is that our remarks bear our own stamp and that we resist the temptation to ventriloquize or be ventriloquized.

The obstacles may be many, both personal and institutional. Let me give a brief, general example: there is a sense that whilst the seminar is a useful part of an academic programme, it is not always taken as seriously as the lecture. Lectures will be presented by an established academic, seminars will more often than not be handed over to a doctoral student acting as a teaching assistant; lectures will be well-attended, seminars may or may not be, depending on the time of day, the ability and experience of the teaching assistant, the pressure of assignment deadlines or even legal requirements; the content of lectures will be referenced as authoritative, but not the incisive or

illuminating remark made in the seminar. The implication is that what takes place in the seminar is of less importance. Implicitly the forms that it takes are viewed as secondary to the forms and practices of the lecture, and the words of both seminar tutor and undergraduate students as less valuable in this context. What is said by the participants in conversation and discussion counts for less than what was heard, seen, noted down or recorded in the lecture hall. We don't take it so seriously because there is no single authoritative presence in the room. Yet this is the space where we are free to discuss, to analyse, evaluate, speculate, imagine or simply dwell on ideas and theoretical perspectives. We try to make sense of what we do and do not understand, do and do not believe and do so in discussion with others. It is here we can start to find our voice.

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Calibrating the world and ventriloquism

How should we understand what matters here? It is for individuals to gauge the relative significance of the lecture versus the seminar but it is more than this. How are we to understand the experience of the seminar, what is going on in the seminar, what is at stake in that experience? Andrew Taylor suggests that 'The nature of the relationship we have with the world is continually calibrated through our sense of how we inhabit it' (Taylor, 2013, p. 191). In doing so we measure and weigh up our experience of the world, which includes ourselves and others. It is an embodied inhabiting that acknowledges and attends to the physical and vocal, material and immaterial, felt, spoken and thought. The question arises about the criteria to be employed for the purposes of such calibration. What is to count in our calibration of our relationship with the world? I wish to argue that in part this relates to the finding of the right register for one's words as they reflect our thought. This also implies discovering what this range of register is. Speaking opens up the possibility of discovering what might count as criteria here, which cannot be broached in a purely intellectual way. One has to feel the effect(s) of speaking in a certain way or of adopting a certain expression. One does so by gauging the effect on others, both in one's speech and in one's writing.

This raises its own challenges; how do we make our remarks our own within an academic discipline; how are we to negotiate its conceptual frameworks, its vocabulary and terminology, its history and traditions, even the people who work in it? The idea of

speaking for oneself seems far removed from being ventriloquized. Yet a more accurate picture of language means that we must begin with words that are given to us, imposed on us by the society into which we come. Such conditions are also part of what it means to come into a discipline or field. Certain aspects of the relationship between the teacher and student appear to depend on possibilities of ventriloquism – the provision of the language one can adopt and the means of expression by which one can feel just that effect I referred to above, the presentation of knowledge, the provision of structures and methods for the articulation of ideas and concepts, the development of expertise. I do not mean that the teacher is simply putting words into the mouths of students and treating them as dummies. In being initiated into an academic field, we encounter conversations that are already ongoing, where we do not know quite what to say and so we begin by saying what the others are saying: their words speak for us. The very possibility of using criteria depends on the possibility of their ventriloquizing judgment, speaking through us but also permitting us to speak. A certain idea of ventriloquism therefore seems important for the transmission and communication of knowledge, at least at a basic level of understanding of what it is to teach, to learn and to be educated, as well as to judge and assess. Might there not in fact be something ambivalently attractive in the metaphor?

The following two quotes illustrate something of the tension. The first is taken from Stanley Cavell's essay 'The Interminable Shakespearean Text' in *Philosophy The Day After Tomorrow* (2005), the second revisits Timothy Gould's *Hearing Things* (1998):

> Lacan's image of empty as opposed to full speech seems counter to his [Wittgenstein's] idea that what is empty in my speech is that the words on my lips are those of another – which suggests that because I am usurped (possessed) by others, filled with their words, my words are empty of me. (This is what I picture Emerson to mean in his outburst against conforming repetitiveness: "Every word they say chagrins us.") (Cavell, 2005, p. 60)

> The struggle for the impersonality of philosophical method is a struggle of persons or selves within oneself, a struggle for a perspective on the self. It is only from a particular sort of angle that such a perspective will seem to be best characterised as a merely "personal" one. At the same time, the struggle over

method occurs between selves, between those who bequeathed us the methods, and our need to be revising and reinventing them. (Gould, 1998, p. 27)

The first quote appears to gesture towards an imagined, idealised picture of what it means to speak for oneself, to have a voice. Cavell speaks of our being 'purged of our swallowed words' (Cavell, 2005, p. 60). This is open to more than one reading. Cavell might mean I am no longer reliant on those words that I have been made to take in and adopt, whether knowingly or simply through my absorption in everyday life. Alternatively, we could read this as pointing to the words I should have used but did not, whether by avoidance or because I held back for some or other reason, a relationship to my words from which I now find catharsis. However, his tone is questioning rather than assertive, wondering what it would mean to undergo a process that would make my words my own. The question is itself a curious one. What kind of purifying process would we be describing? Why is it necessary? For whom? For the child? For the adolescent? For the adult, the teacher, the student? Furthermore, is it even completely possible or desirable and, if desirable, why?

On the other hand, the second quote presents us with a picture of struggle with no clear sense of resolution. The picture becomes even more complicated when we realise that the struggle for a personal voice is actually a struggle for an impersonal quality in that voice, a separating of oneself from the various voices that one has ingested and will continue to ingest. Perhaps the serious subject can be conceived as one who can speak or who has achieved his/her own voice.

The first quote seems to hold out the possibility of achieving a voice that one can call one's own, the second casts doubt on this being anything other than an ongoing struggle. If the serious subject is one who has achieved his/her own voice, then the non-serious subject is one who has not. The picture of struggle implies we are tossed between seriousness and non-seriousness in our relation to ourselves and to others. Our voices may be heard or may remain unacknowledged. We may succeed in making ourselves intelligible to others or we may fail miserably. In Cavellian terms it reflects the 'search for one's unattained but attainable self' (Dahl, 2011, pp. 97-99).

The nature of that struggle is captured in Cavell's citation of Derrida on discipleship, taking this to mean the period when one starts to speak and, ironically or otherwise, acquire a voice.

The disciple's consciousness, when he starts, I would not say to dispute, but to engage in dialogue with the master or better, to articulate the interminable and silent dialogue which made him into a disciple – this disciple's consciousness is an unhappy consciousness…As a disciple, he is challenged by the master who speaks within him and before him, to reproach him for making this challenge and to reject it in advance, having elaborated it before him. (Derrida 1978, p. 31 in Cavell, 1996, p. 63)

It is not a happy picture. It risks many things, and the context for both Derrida's discussion and Cavell's citation is that of madness. Cavell's diagnosis of this as an aspect of voice and the horror it evokes, lies in a relationship to language in which, from fantasy or fear, we may find ourselves gripped by 'the terror of absolute inexpressiveness, suffocation, which at the same time reveals itself as a terror of absolute expressiveness, unconditioned exposure; they are the extreme states of voicelessness' (Cavell, 1996, p. 43). He speaks of our 'inability to withstand the voices of others, as if fearing their takeover' (Cavell, 1994, p. 139) as a mark of how in losing our grip on language our grip on the world is loosened.

The tension is thus a tension between a desire to empty or purge our words of the presence of others and acknowledging that the presence of others in our words is a necessary condition of even imagining such a possibility. It is also a tension between an idea of what is personal in the possession of one's voice and what is impersonal. Its seriousness lies in how we manage our own voice in relation to that of others. Cavell sees this as much in a pluralistic as in a singular form, that the voice as a mode of thought and expression is a form of reception as well as giving and that,

the logic of human intimacy, or separateness – call this the field of serious and playful conversation or exchange – that to exchange understanding with another is to share pain with that other, and that to take pleasure from another is to extend that pleasure. And what reason is there to enter this logic in a particular case? No reason. (Cavell, 1996, p. 221)

Given this complexity and challenge of acquiring a voice and the risks it appears to entail, call this growing up, such conversations and exchanges seem to be quite limited in certain spheres of education. The attraction of ventriloquism becomes apparent in the light of how much seems to be at stake in our possessing a voice to the

extent that speaking is apt to become unbearable. It is Austin, Cavell claims, who sees that,

> the voice … will always escape me and will forever find its way back to me. As if the price of having once spoken, or remarked, taken something as remarkable (worth noting, yours to note, about which to make an ado) is to have spoken forever, to have taken on the responsibility for speaking further, the responsibility of responsiveness, of answerability, to make yourself intelligible (Cavell, 1994, p. 126).

However, Asja Szafraniec cautions that,

> To live is to engage in a movement between controlling one's words and being controlled by them... To mean every word one says is to assume responsibility for the (criterial) implications of what one says, while in full awareness that these implications may change, that they remain in need of our future interventions, and that they are potentially infinite, so that what we say always exceeds our control (Szafraniec, 2007, p. 372).

I am answerable for what I have said and I am responsible for the continuing circulation of my words. In taking on this responsibility I own them by acknowledging them. To do so is to acknowledge that I must mean them. Nevertheless, that things may go wrong for me in what I say and that I am responsible for the consequences of this is a condition of my being able to say anything in the first place and for my words to bear my mark. The question is whether teacher and student can live with the demands and implications of this in the educational context. If my words always have the potential to outstrip what I mean in using them when I send them out into the world, what will remind me of this is the way they are returned to me as being my words, by which I can gauge their impact. The circulation of words between teacher and student puts pressure on the ownership of one's words and how to accommodate meaning what one says flexibly but not too flexibly.

Amanda Fulford has described the prevalence of another kind of ventriloquism in Higher Education in the use of writing frames (Fulford, 2009). Fulford highlights the ubiquity of the writing frame within education and how it has been put to a variety of purposes. Whilst in schools it is used as a developmental tool, in Higher Education it has become a tool of assessment. Fulford expresses an unease about the use of such

tools past a certain level where, drawing an analogy from language teaching, authentic speaking is required beyond the prompts, structures and phrases of the frame. Fulford's concern is that the writing frame, ostensibly a tool for empowering and freeing the hitherto silenced voice, may ultimately be something of a chimera in which a state of voicelessness is re-enforced, existing as a form of what Paul Standish has called 'tokenistic' expression (Standish, 2004, p. 91) and what Fulford describes as mere reproduction of discourses. Rather, the writing voice should express what matters to the writer and, taking a lead from Gould, that it involves struggle and difficulty. To do so requires an attention to features of the writing. 'as a notion that incorporates aspects of personal expressiveness, writing style, as authenticity, but also as a more complex term that is concerned with the person an individual is; with her having a language; the relationships she has with her community; her responsibility to her language and her society, that is, her responsibility to say what she means' (Fulford, 2009, p. 82). Fulford calls for the need to recognise the importance for writing of artistry and craft. To craft one's writing is to work both personally and impersonally. It is to care for the work.

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Having a style and possessing a language

I want to develop two ideas that Fulford raises, one concerning style and the other with what it means to have a language. Emerson observed of style that 'A man's style is his mind's voice. Wooden minds have wooden voices' (Emerson, 1910-1914 p. 457). Reflecting upon Emerson's seeming conflation of the physical voice and the voice of written expression as they reveal the mind, Richard Shusterman offers the following:

> if Emerson here defines style through the notion of mind, it is not to deny the somatic [bodily] dimension of style. Style is essentially embodied, as Emerson's reference to voice clearly implies. Vocalization is clearly a bodily act, involving one's breath, vocal chords and mouth. Moreover, the materiality of the mind's expression in style is further suggested in Emerson's reference to wooden minds and wooden voices. (Shusterman, 2012, p. 315)

Style then, is 'not merely a means of writing or making other kinds of signs, style has become an aesthetic quality whose creation and appreciation forms part of the end of writing' (pp. 315-316). Is Wittgenstein's concern an aesthetic one? I do not think so if this implies that there are considerations beyond what is being said. Opposing Emerson,

we have the view of his friend Henry David Thoreau, whose attitude was 'Who cares what a man's style is, so [long as] he is intelligible.' (Thoreau, 1894, p. 99) What matters for Thoreau is not a particular writing style but a writer's ability to make him or herself intelligible. From this perspective, a concern with style may not serve to enhance and communicate one's thought but contort it, with the attendant risk of becoming 'synonymous with artifice, pretension…feigning and falseness' (Shusterman, 2012, p. 321.). An excessive concern with style thus risks a theatricality that distances it from more natural expression when what is required is a kind of plain-speaking artlessness, a more honest reflection of its author's personality.

Thus, one conditioning feature of style is that it should not merely be an end in itself or betray an excessive concern with form and not content. The speaker/writer must have something to say, a thought echoed by Fulford. Therefore, a further conditioning feature is that not just anything goes. The writer must be able to make him or herself intelligible, as Thoreau demands. Shusterman's account of style edges towards this, arguing that how we inhabit our body is an integral expression of character, not just an external representation of it. He writes that, 'character is not merely a secret inner essence but rather something intrinsically expressed or constituted through somatic behaviour, demeanor or attitude' (p. 319). If character is synonymous with personality then embodied style – the way in which the human form is inhabited by a particular person with a particular body- can indeed be seen not as 'a merely superficial adornment to the self but a core dimension of one's personality' (p. 333)

This does not answer Thoreau's point about the need to make ourselves intelligible, which exposes us to the judgement of others in more impersonal ways. If we are to defend what is important in the personal and human personality, it seems we must do so on impersonal grounds, for example by reference to the truth. Wittgenstein's highly personal approach to philosophy was itself defended on these grounds by Norman Malcolm, who justifies his comment that what made Wittgenstein 'an awesome and even terrible person, both as a teacher and in personal relationships, was his ruthless integrity' (Malcolm, 2001, p. 26), an integrity whose severity was the expression of a passionate love of truth.

Shusterman echoes the idea that embodiment and personality, seemingly quite distinct, are actually deeply intertwined,

As form is contrasted with content, style is often opposed to substance, and identified with the external and inessential. It is thus associated with surface rather than depth, with appearance not reality, with artificial technique rather than with authentic soul. But if somatic style… extends into the deepest habits of feeling, perception and action that constitute the self, then it should be seen as an integral dimension of the individual, the expression of her particular spirit. Spirit indeed seems fundamental to the notion of style. If style is the man himself, then it includes his spirit. As Emerson spoke of style as expressing the mind's voice, so Wittgenstein insists that the creation or improvement of an artistic style is essentially different from mere improvement in technique or technology because "spirit plays no part" in these latter.' (Shusterman, 2012, pp. 333-334)

In taking a religious turn, Shusterman's language leaves behind the psychologism of personality and character and speaks instead of spirit and soul in attempting to capture the significance of animated embodiment and the relationship of inner and outer. Wittgenstein's desire that his remarks bear his stamp might then be understood as a struggle for the expression of the spirit that lies within the embodied soul, a struggle to give voice to what is personal in thought.

No doubt there are many who would object to this kind of language. However, I want to continue this line of thought in relation to the second of Fulford's points, about our having a language, and to think of it in terms of who we are. Shusterman has spoken of breath and spirit. Their shared etymological roots are evident in English: to breathe is also to respire, aspire and inspire, and in the last two the connection to the inner life of the spirit is evident in their associated meanings. Breathing, Paul Standish reminds us, 'demonstrates with peculiar immediacy the relationship between inside and outside, whose vitality and measure depends upon a regulation of the fluctuating pressure of air. It prompts also an understanding of thought and reality, as of speaking and writing, not so much as stable structure but as propulsive force, of a gathering and issue of productive energy step after step' (Standish, 2017, p. 6).

Of course, the embodied mechanics of speaking and writing are the same whether they are my words or those of others. Nor does the task of animating them bring them necessarily closer to being my own words and bearing my own stamp – I could just be a good actor, if that is what I want to be. What matters, as Fulford pointed

out, is that we acknowledge our responsibility for meaning what we say in making our words our own in both spoken and written forms.

Is this not asking too much of student work and that to demand so much of it is to misunderstand the purpose of academic work and its processes? This will be more exploratory and more concerned with the imperfections of acquiring and developing a voice within the context of an academic discipline with its own demands. Is originality so important? The stakes are not this high, either personally or academically, in the initial stages of life in higher education. Elsewhere, Emerson writes of literature that, 'The original is not original. There is imitation, model and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history' (Emerson, 2010, p. 94). Nevertheless, he diagnoses a problem, that we have become decentred in our lives, dislocated from our experiences. We do not register our experience authentically but live via quotations. Emerson uses this idea to suggest we are at a remove from our experiences, that we do not claim them as our own and hence disown them as ours. We live 'as foreigners in the world of truth, and quote thoughts, and thus disown them' (p. 99). As students are initiated into an academic discipline and finding their feet as well as their voices, it may be difficult for them not to be ventriloquized by the words of others in order to feel more secure. Cavell acknowledges this tension. It is part of the struggle to find one's own voice and not disown it. It is a tension that exists in Emersonian perfectionism between originality and conformity in the relationship between one's lived present, inherited past and desired future. On the one hand, Cavell writes, 'the problem of imitation haunts philosophy's establishment in Plato, and in a further form it is in full flower in the work of Emerson and the work he inspired in Nietzsche…. It arises in the question whether I have found the identity of my voice, whether I am saying what I think or only quoting some saint or sage' (Cavell, 2004, p. 209). On the other, 'Perfectionism, as in Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator*, requires the guidance or inspiration of an other, a figure both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer call the true man. Nietzsche speaks of this figure as a teacher and as an exemplar. What ensures that we are not merely imitating, mimicking, this example?' (ibid.). Nothing, except that we continually offer up our words to others, taking responsibility for speaking further, being responsive, making ourselves answerable, endeavouring to make ourselves intelligible.

Where does this leave us, particularly in the educational context? Brandon Labelle links the materiality of the voice to the materiality of the written word, observing that 'While I may "speak" of the voice and the mouth, it is through writing that I lay out such thoughts, and so it is through writing that I exercise my mouth, as well as my right to speech: to tune my voice to the cultures around me, and to explore how this voice can take shape through not only the seriousness of discourse, but also laughter's hilarity, whisper's ghostly manners, the yawn's contagion.' (Labelle, 2014, p. 187).

Nevertheless, in discussing the ventriloquized voice we find ourselves both in the material and non-material realm of signs. They are material in that they must take some physical form, as marks or as sound waves but they are non-material in that there is no essential form they must have. One person's voice may say the same words as another's but can have a different pitch, a different accent, etc. It cannot be in terms of any kind of essence, determined identity or body. As Connor remarks, 'the voice is at once immaterial – it is energy and substance – and full of the body's presence (its warmth, elasticity and sensitivity)' (Connor, 2000, p. 42).

Labelle's comments echo those of Cavell, for whom the possibilities and difficulties of attunement are precisely what is at stake in our shared, communal existence. For Cavell, it is embodiment that creates the very possibility of community in the norms and practices of embodied life, to which we adjust and which are in turn adjusted to meet our requirements. It is not an abstracted notion of community but one present in the form of life we lead. As Robert Chodat writes, 'One does not [in Cavell] befriend or wed a language, nation, culture, or anything else that cannot (say) sip coffee, draw a picture, examine a map, laugh at a joke, love a grandchild' (Chodat, 2008, p. 174).

To see this simply in terms of social conventions is to see only part of the picture. Of far greater significance is the Wittgensteinian concept of the *Lebensform* – "form of life", together with his declaration that 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life'. This includes social practices but Toril Moi puts it in even stronger terms: 'to take "forms of life" to mean "social conventions" is to turn the concept into a mere shadow of itself' (Moi, 2017, p. 54). The form of life is intended to capture much more than this, inviting us 'to rethink the role conventions play in our lives, and to consider afresh what we share (and don't share) with others' (ibid:). Moi draws on Cavell's

account of the *Lebensform* to argue that it means 'both our cultural practices *and* their connectedness to the natural conditions of our lives' (p. 55). Cavell is aware of the misunderstandings surrounding how Wittgenstein uses the concept of "forms of life" and identifies two dimensions; the 'ethnological or horizontal', which would include social norms and conventions, and the "biological or vertical". Whilst the emphasis will always be on (human) *life*, 'some practices are more intrinsically connected to our biology or anatomy, to the very shape of our bodies, than others' (ibid.). As Cavell discusses it,

> The biological or vertical sense of form of life recalls difference between the human and so-called "lower" or "higher" forms of life, between, say, poking at your food, perhaps with a fork, and pawing at it, or pecking at it. Here the romance of the hand and its apposable thumb comes into play, and of the upright posture and of the eyes set for heaven; but also the specific strength and scale of the human body and of the human sense and of the human voice (Cavell, 1989, pp. 41-42).

Thus, we grow up to share,

> routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an appeal, when an explanation.' (Cavell, 2002, p. 52)

To learn to speak and to learn how to inhabit our bodies with others are thus part of what it means to be initiated into the practices of a particular culture, family or social group, including the educational.

I have attempted to draw out the importance for education of the relationship between the metonymic voice of the mind and its material expression. I have done so by focusing on the temptation of ventriloquism for teacher and learner alike, a temptation that has become more difficult to resist as the economic relationship between the university and its customers has changed. Whilst I have argued that the possibility of ventriloquism is structurally conditioned by the ways in which we come into language as speakers of a mother tongue, of which teaching and learning, formal or otherwise, is an important aspect, I have stressed that it must be guarded against. The struggle to find one's voice in an academic discipline is not simply a matter of

disembodied knowledge but about developing an awareness of how we inhabit our words as we are initiated into academic practices. This requires acknowledging the extent to which my words can bear my stamp in such contexts and resisting the pressure and temptation to repress my voice whilst recognising the legitimate criteria for its expression, criteria which are nevertheless subject to our scrutiny and agreement for their ongoing relevance.

As Cavell says, 'until we are capable of serious speech again – i.e. are re-born… our words do not carry our conviction, we cannot fully back them, because either we are careless of our convictions, or think we haven't any, or imagine they are inexpressible. They are merely unutterable' (Cavell, 1981, p. 34). This essay represents an attempt to capture what is serious in the speech of a speaking body and why it matters.

With this in mind, picture a seminar. Among the participants are four students. Student 1 is just passing the time, playing with her phone, texting and chatting online, and is not interested. Student 2 hangs on to the tutor's words, and is nervous about speaking, especially when the talkative ones seem to know this material so much better. Student 3 is the person who has paid attention in the lecture, done the background reading, wants to succeed and comes up with all the right answers (with a kind of knowingness). Student 4 is a bit nervous, wants to say something, is not sure whether what she wants to say is relevant or appropriate, knows she does not want simply to give the expected answers (the right answers), and knows also that she does not want to just shine by scoring points off others, but has a sense that there is something here worth discussing and wants to find out how this matters, generally and for her as an individual.

I do not pass judgement on any of them. As broadly drawn caricatures they represent aspects of how we experience the university seminar. To speak seriously is not to necessarily know the answers or say the right things but to find ways of speaking for oneself in one's own words, animating one's speech with a sense of what matters and exposing one's views to others in offering them up for discussion and agreement or disagreement.

Summary

Wittgenstein's comment about the importance of his work bearing his own stamp is returned to in the final chapter, which focuses on the difficulties of establishing oneself and finding one's voice, with particular reference to the experience of being a student in higher education. Schusterman's identification of voice with individual style is used to develop connections between the material and immaterial voice. Stanley Cavell's discussion of breath and its etymological relation to the notion of geist, or spirit, is drawn upon to break down the dualistic treatment of the voice in terms of its materialism on the one hand and its metaphorical manifestation of mind on the other. Standish's sense of this as a propulsive force and gathering of energy reinforces the relationship between spoken and written expression as manifestations not just of thought but of a presence and vitality in articulating what matters to us. The challenges of achieving an individual voice are problematised and exemplified in terms of the teaching and learning spaces of higher education.

Conclusion

What conclusions were reached?

This thesis has shown that the conventional ways in which seriousness has been understood in education – as analytical, evaluative and critical – should also be viewed as part of an internal disciplining of the expression of thought which appropriately includes, rather than excludes, situated emotion and gesture. This takes us beyond a simplistic picture of the external, impersonal, rational disciplining of an unruly soul to the acknowledgment that there is a personal aspect to such seriousness in individuals for whom knowledge of the self as well as the world requires clarity in thought and expression in the struggle to find a lucid personal voice. Whilst the difficulties and challenges of this both within and beyond education have been primarily explored with reference to drama education, the thesis is not specifically addressed to drama educators, and I will consider the more general conclusions before turning to the significance of the work for drama education.

The thesis took as its starting point the idea that all activities characterised as educational are conditioned by a concern for their seriousness. Conventionally these have been considered suitably serious if they facilitate and develop the use of analytical, evaluative and more generally critical and technical skills, in order to further knowledge and understanding that is deemed worthwhile. Whether these activities are primarily understood in terms of the development of skills, the acquisition of knowledge or a combination of the two, they, and their seriousness as educational activities, are essentially understood and valued in objective, impersonal terms. They do not, perhaps cannot or should not, express or account for, what is serious and personal. I did not seek to entirely reject this conventional understanding of seriousness within the educational context but by attending to its limitations, sought a more expansive account of what can be appropriately deemed serious in education in terms of the entanglement of acquiring a personal voice and domain expertise. I did so by addressing the phenomenon of seriousness in education through a philosophical inquiry into the nature of human seriousness. Particular emphasis was placed on the Cavellian notion of voice and the ongoing struggle for its assertion, with reference to Stanley Cavell's discussions of

seriousness at different moments in his career and Raimond Gaita's philosophical exploration of the personal and impersonal in moral thought. I have argued that instead of viewing the personal as representing a cluster of problems for the educator that must be overcome in order to enable students to achieve suitably ideal impersonal forms of expression, for example in argumentative academic writing, there is a constant interplay and struggle between personal and impersonally construed forms of expression and their seriousness. For both Cavell and Gaita, the struggle between the personal and impersonal voice is understood not as a struggle for a desirable assertion of a third person perspective over the first person but is itself constitutive of the first-person perspective. To acknowledge this is to recognise the need to rethink what we mean by the personal and where we locate the claims of the impersonal. This has not been acknowledged within educational contexts, which have traditionally been underpinned by conventional notions of the personal and impersonal and what is appropriate to each.

What follows from this is not the vague acknowledgment of a vague notion of the importance of the personal voice or personal expression but a willingness to recognise and take seriously the forms in which the Cavellian voice is able to make claims on speaker and listener alike and the range of ways in which human seriousness can be expressed. Both Cavell and Gaita characterise this seemingly impersonal demand in more personal terms in what Gaita describes as the demand for lucidity and Cavell characterises as the demand that we constantly check our experience.

The temptation is to assume that, as philosophers, both tend to associate this solely with the quality of our thought and that it is in our thinking that the claims of reason are made. There are times when this is true; whilst Cavell, as I indicated, will speak of checking our experience, he will also speak of our checking our thinking. However, Gaita argues for the importance of the arts in expressing our humanity and much of Cavell's career has been spent exploring the interface between philosophy and other disciplines. Thus, both are willing to contemplate the significance and seriousness of our emotional and embodied responses, as expressed in the arts, which for both are constitutive of the ethical dimension and imperative of these philosophical explorations. In the thesis, I have conveyed this as a willingness to acknowledge both a concern for seriousness as integral to their work and within that an acknowledgment of human expressivity as constitutive of human seriousness. Its seriousness is internal to how we understand the Cavellian notion of voice and, expanding on this, how we

understand what it means to have a voice in one's own history and one's experience of and in the world and the ethical demands it places on us in our chosen forms of expression.

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How were the conclusions reached?

The thesis began with consideration of the treatment of seriousness in a range of philosophical texts as well as more recent treatments of the theme of seriousness in the arts and literature, reflecting doubts about the capacity of contemporary culture to register the significance of our lives in terms of seriousness and indicating how seriousness represents a disputed point of intersection between analytical and continental philosophy.

It moved on to discuss how seriousness has been used as a marker in the philosophy of education in the philosophical writings of the so-called London School of philosophy of education. The strengths and limitations of their understanding of seriousness and what we take to be personal and impersonal in education were considered. The limitations of characterising seriousness as predominantly impersonal, firstly in how the individual is situated within their initiation into diverse educational and cultural practices and secondly in the form of conceptual analysis, were emphasised.

The work of Stanley Cavell was introduced in response to this. Although Cavell himself has not made overt connections between seriousness and voice as such, the following two chapters argued that Cavell's account of our problematical relationship to our inheritance of language permits us to make important connections between them. I claimed, following Gordon Bearn, that questions of seriousness have been a guiding consideration in Cavell's work as a whole, including his central work *The Claim of Reason*. The grounding of voice in ordinary language philosophy enables Cavell to situate the personal voice within a pluralistic context. The struggle to find one's voice is the struggle to both acknowledge one's inheritance and strike out on one's own; in terms of relationships with others, it is the challenge of making oneself intelligible to others in the light of the shared criteria of a community of language users and establishing the extent to which one's own words are not only serious and intelligible to oneself but can be taken so by others.

In the following chapter the significance of this for education was discussed through the application of Cavellian and Derridean thought to drama education. This chapter argued that becoming intelligible is not merely determined by the capacity of the individual to use the language of analytical philosophy in relation to what is real but involves a more playful interplay between seriousness and non-seriousness, the real and pretend, through the vocalic body in exchange with others, taking as its model the playful seriousness of the conversation of Cavellian marriage.

This was extended in the discussion of John Dewey's account of playfulness and seriousness and the role of the teacher as an artist in the classroom. I argue that once we get beyond seeing playfulness as tomfoolery, as Dewey suggests we must, it is too easy to simply view playfulness as a necessary corrective to earnest purposefulness and no more. Certain kinds of educational content demand a seriousness for which speculative playfulness is an inappropriate response. By the same token, so too is the reductive sense of teaching and learning that sees the development of impersonal, disinterested critical skills as the fundamental task of the teacher.

The nature of this seriousness and the moral claims it can make on us were developed further in applying Raimond Gaita's account of the personal and impersonal to moral education. I developed the idea of what it means to have a perspective on the world and how the disciplined seriousness of its expression can be understood in disciplined personal terms.

Whilst Gaita's work to a certain extent leaves open the significance of the expressive in our understanding of what it is to speak seriously and claim others in seriousness, Cavell offers a rich account of the significance of human expression. The following chapter, entitled 'Serious Words for Serious Subjects' drew on Cavell to argue for the importance of Drama Education in the light of what it means to speak seriously from a perspective on the world. This requires us to attend to our expressive capacities for reflecting the seriousness of our thought as one of the ways in which the demand for a voice in our experience can be understood as reflecting our responsibility for voicing it and acting upon it.

In the penultimate chapter I argued that in Cavell's work on voice and opera there is a tension between the immanence of the voice and the transcendence of theatricality in which the possibility of seriousness and non-seriousness co-exists. If we

understand the immanent as the opera singer's embodiment of a particular spirit in a particular body through the expressive power of the voice, then this embodiment is also fundamentally theatrical and, I argue, transcendent. The voice is thus fully and authentically embodied and present in a context in which it is also wholly and inauthentically self-aware as the expression of a character, in the playing of a role, within a genre of performance with its own conventions. It is the possibility of theatricality, together with its associated styles and genres, that permits the full inhabiting of the voice.

I extended this analysis in the final chapter to include the embodied expression of gesture, movement and physicality in relation to voice by questioning whether the idea of ventriloquism, generally understood, like theatricality, in a pejorative sense, is always so bad in an educational context. Rather like my discussion of playfulness, I argue that its ethical limitations depend on how we understand what it means for something to personally matter in terms of it being a first-person expression of the voice.

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Where does this leave us with regard to drama education?

The key idea that I have articulated in the course of the thesis is the need for greater attention to be given to the expressive and contextual aspects of what takes place in drama education. In so doing, I have tried to move discussion of drama education beyond the positions and debates that have come to dominate the reasons for its educational justification. This has been achieved by resisting ideas that see drama education as important simply for personal development or the development of cognitive capacities (critical thinking, argument, persuasion, and human qualities like empathy) through the use of what are known as drama skills. I have indicated how these practices place limits on what drama education can and should be, because as educational aims they understate the significance of the ways in which the embodiment at the heart of dramatic activity itself demonstrates a serious understanding of context and perspective, including what it is to *express* a point of view and *inhabit* a perspective on the world. Drama education theory has generally regarded what is learned as detachable from the understanding of the dramatic context and the aesthetic qualities of embodied thought and expression on stage that bring drama and theatre to life: it

fails to acknowledge the seriousness of these activities and the demands they make. More generally these views have also been seen in the suspicion of theatricality and problems of pretence, and an avoidance of the idea that the possibilities of speaking, of sincerity, seriousness and authenticity, depend on there being possibilities of insincerity, non-seriousness and authenticity. Of course, some of these things are not easy to settle ("was that remark a compliment or a subtle slur?"), but this is the territory of human lives.

In the thesis I have established powerful associations between human expressivity and seriousness; that through drama and through the use of dramatic forms, students acquire the capacity to express their perspectives on the wider culture in which they live; that drama can be seen as a serious art form within an educational context; that it depends for its impact on the personal nature of what is expressed; that it does this through embodiment; that it is an education in expression – in voice and bodily movement and gesture – in which the nuances of expressions reveal shades of sincerity and falseness, seriousness and deception, sombreness and humour; that it can do this (seriously) through the use of both serious and non-serious forms, especially through students' understanding of the way that these forms have impact; that it can teach how personal expression is conditioned by impersonal forms and structures (tragedy, burlesque, comedy, etc.); that hence there is a movement of the personal through the impersonal, including or giving shape to our embodied expression – the impersonal structures open possibilities of such expression, and they are not fixed but can be revised and challenged.

It can be seen that the problematic position of drama within education has often been around issues of suspecting it of being mere play, of lacking purposiveness, lacking seriousness as an academic discipline. Yet I have shown that it exemplifies the exploration of seriousness, of what it is to say something seriously. At the same time, it is seen as a useful pedagogical tool for breathing life into more traditional forms of subject-matter (e.g. role-play).

My interest in the voice, expression and seriousness in the context of drama education is that at the heart of the student-teacher encounter it locates the question of what is inherited and what is original. I do not claim that drama education is the only site for such engagement or for such inheritance but, in the proliferation of its forms of expression, it potentially occupies a powerful means of expressing perspectives on a

culture in both the singular and the plural. It does so by means that are both inherited and require reanimation, opening ourselves up to judgment and assessment in terms of what is expressed, how it is e expressed and, in its fictional status, how it captures aspects of reality and words the world.

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Where does this leave us with regard to education more generally?

A major concern in the thesis is how education appears to suppress the personal voice. Hence there is a need to struggle to take the personal voice seriously in educational contexts, especially where work is assessed. This may happen in a variety of ways. What is important is not whether certain argumentative structures are followed but the way that the student can bring a certain subject-matter to life, communicating the vivacity of personal experience through what they write or communicate in other ways (artworks, podcasts, etc.). The crucial thing is how the personal arises, how seriousness arises - as opposed to the seriousness of thinking that I need to do x, y and z in order to get a good grade. In the latter case the question of seriousness in the sense that concerns me does not arise because it would not matter how the student approached the task or experienced it, provided the result was achieved. There is an interplay between the personal aspects of expression and one's ability to use the form one is working in. There is furthermore a seriousness in one's answerability to what one is studying, to the way one is claimed by the subject matter, the demands it makes on us, and how this is reflected in one's work. Hence, the expressiveness here is not self-centred but other-directed, as well as involving a receptivity towards what is studied. It also requires me to consider how I place myself in conversation, in my relation to what others have expressed, what others have themselves found in response to this subject-content. This is very much connected to one's ability to acquire a knowledge and understanding of the medium (Drama and its forms, Physics and its methods) in which one is working.

The reason for focusing on the arts, and drama education in particular, is that whilst at first glance it appears to acknowledge a necessary corrective to conventional assumptions in facilitating an improvised, creative, spontaneous, personal self-expression within a general impersonality in education, at a deeper level it embodies tensions between the personal and impersonal and disrupts such simple categorisations.

Drama education explores the tensions between the personal and impersonal, between the voices we inherit and the finding of our own voice, between quotation and originality, between seriousness and non-seriousness. I have not intentionally set drama education above other art forms/forms of creativity, performance or otherwise, for example Dance, Music, Art, Design or creative writing in English. I take working in drama to be emblematic of the relationship of the individual to the discipline that I am advocating in the thesis. The value to our understanding of education of the ideas at work in Cavell's concept of voice is that they take us beyond the one-sided picture of Richard Peters' idea of education as an initiation into worthwhile activities. Nonetheless, I am interested in drama's unique ways of expressing and questioning the life of a culture and therefore what it means to offer and be given an education in this.

The idea of voice that I have discussed in the thesis lies at the heart of several major questions in the philosophy of education; what it means to be educated, what it means to be autonomous; indeed, what the aims of education should be, because it raises the question of how an individual, or even a group, can acknowledge an inheritance and influences whilst striking out on their own and finding their own ways of going on. Moreover, it raises the question as one that is never entirely settled or stable but which is open to review and re-assessment and as such represents the life of a community, not just an individual.

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Where does this leave us with regard to philosophy?

Perhaps most importantly for me as I try to find my own way in philosophy of education is the importance of the personal/impersonal voice and the need to retrieve the former in philosophy, especially if it is not to become merely a scholarly activity. This is a way of connecting it more generally with practice. As Richard Eldridge observes in comparing Cavell with Richard Rorty, 'in philosophy at its highest levels of accomplishment, voice and sensibility are inseparable from content and argument.' (Eldridge, cover note on Mahon, 2014). How they are inseparable is a question that perhaps cannot be answered, because the entanglement will be different depending on the individual voice, how it is heard, how it is read, how it is understood. Áine Mahon provides an insight on these themes, pointing out that,

… there is a strong resistance in Cavell's work to disciplinary discourse, a strong resistance to any parroted or taken-for-granted terminologies of philosophy. The characteristic weight and resonance of his preferred terms demonstrate instead a commitment to earning every day the meaning of what we say (at least in the sense that we deliberately, almost reverentially, choose our words) and a companion desire that the writing of philosophy might approach the poetic both in scope and in ambition. (Mahon, 2014, p. 157)

Quoting Richard Shusterman, Mahon develops this further in saying that 'writing for Cavell is not merely the setting down of arguments and ideas 'but a deeply personal, deeply ethical work of self-critique and self-transformation'. It is a challenging, a stretching, of one's actual self.' (p. 158). It is perhaps this that gives Cavell's writing its sincere, insistent, serious tone, one where Cavell is seeking out the motivations for argument, both in himself and others, looking to trace those roots, those drives for thought, and it is these personal impulses that he takes seriously.

It is important that philosophical thought connects to our capacity to articulate our experiences and beliefs. There is something intrinsic to the assessment of what we say that we can express our seriousness about what matters personally to us and that part of discovering this is revealed through the attempts to capture this in our expression. It is a form of expression that admits of discipline, for the discipline is a refinement and development of thought and feeling. We need to speak lucidly in ways that other people can take seriously in making claims about how we see the world, how we perceive things. However, this does not mean that our aim should always be to speak in plain English, as if that is the answer to issues of clarity and complexity, or that plainness is best captured by a literalism that represses and avoids difficulties of meaning and expression. It is the search for what adequately captures our seriousness. In challenging conventional notions of the personal and impersonal voice, it disrupts dualisms that have been dominant in philosophy (and hence the wider Western world) these past four hundred years – mind/body, fact/value, subject/object. It places these ideas of seriousness in relation to an appearance of similar themes in the mainstream of analytical philosophy of education (Peters *et al*.) and in educational research and practice more generally.

In my discussions of the themes of pretence and theatricality, I have argued why such features of our lives need to be taken seriously in relation to our understanding of

human being, as Cavell and Derrida have shown. That this is philosophically important, helps to show why drama is important in education! Yet these themes of pretence and theatricality have been side-lined if not repressed in both education and philosophy itself. This reflects an anxiety and lack of understanding about the role of the imagination and its perceived threat to rationality within both philosophy and education.

PostScript

In hindsight, it is easy to look back and think how I might have handled the process of producing a thesis differently. At times, I have struggled with various ways of organising my argument, partly because the paths of thought have crossed one another, back and forth, at various points; hence, different kinds of organisation might have served different readers better. In the end, it was necessary to give these thoughts a certain shape, to follow a line, to bring these words to an end, even though these can never be the final word.

Certainly, if I was beginning today I would be more systematic in my reading. Having identified Cavell as the philosopher upon whose work I was going to build my thesis, I would have analysed how his ideas have been taken up in philosophy of education and how these applications have been received. I would have been more systematic in my initial reading, identifying key features of his research and how these have emerged chronologically and thematically. This would have provided me with an overview of his work and development that would have helped put my own exploration of his ideas into a clearer context, given the complexity and range of his interests.

I would have also been more systematic in identifying the network of interests that have fed into Cavell's own work. Whilst I was aware of his Wittgensteinian connections, the influence of Austin in particular was new to me. What has also become more apparent in the course of my research for the thesis is the influence of Kant from Cavell's earliest days. I have touched on this at times in the thesis and recent academic work has begun to address this. I would also try to locate Cavell more vividly in his American context, without underplaying his European connections. Áine Mahon's recent work on Cavell and Rorty indicates that there is much to be gained from doing so.

However, it is too easy to indulge in breast-beating and I want to reflect on the positive features of my own progress in undertaking the thesis. I was always clear that I wanted to explore the topic of seriousness even though I was very uncertain of its academic purchase or intelligibility as a suitable subject for a thesis. In some respects,

I have had to wait for the academic and wider world to begin catching up with my interests. When I began there were few signs that thematising seriousness as a specific contemporary problematic in academia and education was being given much consideration. Philosophically, only writers like Stanley Cavell and Jacques Derrida had given it extended consideration in recent times, whilst Raimond Gaita was the only philosopher for whom seriousness was an important conditioning aspect of moral reflection that could not be presumed in terms of contemporary academic practice. What has emerged in the course of the thesis is that seriousness is a worthwhile theme not only in philosophy and philosophical literature but also in education and the arts. Perhaps the domain where it currently resonates most powerfully is the political and in such tropes as 'post truth', 'fake news', the claims and counter claims that characterised the Brexit campaign and the conduct and performativity of politicians more generally. Academics and writers are now engaging with it in diverse disciplines, it has been the theme of several academic conferences and journals and philosophers are contributing articles to online magazines on the topic.

As I acknowledged earlier in the thesis, there has been a clear and undeniable autobiographical development of the thesis. My experience of philosophy at Kings College London marked me for life. To find my way (back) to the kind of philosophy I want to pursue has raised the question of what it means to write in a personal, philosophically disciplined manner and whether such writing does indeed constitute philosophy or not and if so, how. Cavell's work on the rehabilitation of Thoreau and Emerson as philosophical thinkers and not just literary essayists and stylists, together with the range over which his own writing has extended and the style in which it has done so, has encouraged me to think that I will be able to find ways of writing and expressing myself that can count as philosophy and that I can count myself as a philosopher. If this is granted, then what I have written testifies to the significance of the autobiographical for philosophy of a certain stripe, and for education too. It shows, on the strength of this, the inseparability of philosophy and education and – as Plato and Wittgenstein knew – the drama that characterises this relationship.

I do not wish to suggest that my writing is now is good as it can be. I know I have to find ways to deepen my thought and bring greater clarity to its expression. As I bring to an end what looks like a thesis there is on the one hand a sense of satisfaction at having done so and on the other a frustration that the problems I have raised will

never quite lie down. However, I cannot complain because there must always be a space in which they can emerge and be vented. In a sense, these are paths that I have travelled not just in writing the thesis but in my personal and professional experience. There have been many times when I felt I was getting nowhere and going around in circles. But in the end, the circling can be seen as a kind of dwelling with the problems, and this, rather than the fantasy of a purely linear trajectory, has been necessary for the progress I have made.

As a result of the thesis I have a clearer understanding of what is currently taking place in research in drama and theatre education and I find my own work sits outside much of the framing of this. Research in drama education is predominantly empirical and there is little philosophical engagement in and with the discipline. Whilst a lot of good work appears to be taking place, I do not find much of academic interest beyond the descriptions of the interventions. That said, I believe there is scope for engagement.

It is easy to say that I should have been more systematic and that it would have been better to have known what I wanted to say before I said it, but the thesis has been a process of finding out what I wanted to say, how to say it, what the obstacles were to that and how to overcome them. The work is not finished; it is just beginning. It represents a start.

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