

Absolute Pitch and Exquisite Rightness of Tone

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Leavis knew Wittgenstein from the 1920s to the time of Wittgenstein's death in 1951. But the nature of their encounter leaves the impression of what Michael Bell has called "potentially important unfinished business in their intellectual non-relationship." Their shared suspicion of theory might be thought to have aligned them in their judgements, and in their respective conceptions of philosophy and literature; yet such alignment as there was scarcely prevented misunderstanding. A more important potential connection is to be found, however, in their ideas about language, especially in terms of its relation to imagination and maturity of judgement.

Wittgenstein was apparently looking for someone else. It was because he had not been successful that he had knocked at the Leavises' door, to bide his time there before he looked again. On entering the house, he immediately peered out through the window, into the street. Yet after a moment he was turning and saying abruptly: "You've got a gramophone, I see—I don't suppose you've anything worth playing." And "Then," so Leavis continues the description,

with a marked change of tone, he exclaimed "Ah!": from the repository just at hand he pulled out the album of Schubert's Great C Major Symphony and put the first record on the machine. A moment after the music began to sound he lifted the tone-arm, altered the speed, and lowered the needle on to the record again. He did this several times until he was satisfied. What was characteristic about the performance (Wittgenstein's) was not merely the aplomb with which he ignored our—my wife's and my—apprehensive presence, but the delicate precision with which he performed the manoeuvre. He was, in fact, truly and finely cultivated, and, as part of his obvious cultivation, very musical, and, having absolute pitch, had judged and acted instantaneously on hearing the opening bars.¹

The economy of the example is worthy of note. What happened is at once striking and amusing, and it provides Leavis with the occasion for observations of some precision about Wittgenstein's character. There is nothing here to deny the apprehensiveness that the Leavises felt or, as is intimated just before the incident is introduced, that this behavior might incur "tacit criticism" or "impatience." But these reactions pale in relation to the recognition of the lack of anything in Wittgenstein that was mean or "bourgeois." Instead Leavis relates the "single-minded coolness" of "I don't suppose you've anything worth playing" to a "disinterested regardlessness" and an "innocent egotism" (*MW*, 58-59).

Leavis acknowledges profound respect for Wittgenstein, though this combines with a degree of suspicion of John Maynard Keynes and the

Bloomsbury set, with whom Wittgenstein was spending his time. He explains this specifically in connection with language, commenting on the affected Cockney vowels that Wittgenstein seemed to be picking up. Certainly Wittgenstein was amused by English colloquialisms of one kind or another, and his unsteady attempts at emulation are recorded in some further detail by Ray Monk. In his friendship with Gilbert Pattison, for instance, the inordinate amusement displayed by Wittgenstein at the word “bloody” was evidently indulged in the practice between them of signing off letters “yours bloodily,” “yours in blood,” etc. There is a certain comedy in this, but it is, I think, mostly at Wittgenstein’s expense. There is something off-key in Wittgenstein’s adoptions of these expressions, as though what he is imitating is already a parody and as though he has not quite registered this. In relation to Wittgenstein’s use of the word “bestly,” for example, Cyril Barrett endorses Leavis’s suspicions, though he suggests that this smacks less of Bloomsbury than of P.G. Wodehouse’s “The Drones Club.”²

The element of silliness in this is evident also in a kind of perverse directness. “Give up literary criticism!” was Wittgenstein’s advice to Leavis, which prompted in Leavis the imagined retort: “Give up philosophy, Wittgenstein!” But the sense of silliness is dispelled partly when one remembers that this is exactly what Wittgenstein himself imagined doing: first, and more or less in fact, when, having solved the problems of philosophy, he left Cambridge and went to work for six years as a school-teacher in Austria; and second, in his recurrent expression of the view that there was something shameful about the life he lived on his return to Cambridge, the life of a Cambridge philosopher.

The silliness is also diminished when one thinks of the degree of seriousness there was behind the apparently tit-for-tat response formulating in Leavis’s mind: there was a sense in which he was hostile to philosophy. He recurrently drew on a contrast between philosophy and literary criticism, one expression of which is found in his artfully dismissive response to René Wellek. Leavis writes:

Literary criticism and philosophy seem to me to be quite distinct and different kinds of discipline—at least, I think they ought to be (for while in my innocence I hope that philosophic writing commonly represents a serious discipline, I am quite sure that literary-critical writing commonly doesn’t). This is not to suggest that a literary critic might not, as such, be the better for a philosophic training, but if he were, the advantage, I believe, would manifest itself partly in a surer realization that literary criticism is not philosophy. I pulled up just short of saying “the two disciplines . . .”, a phrase that might suggest too great a simplification: it is no doubt possible to point to valuable writing of various kinds representing varying kinds of alliance between the literary critic and the philosopher. But I am not the less sure that it is necessary to have a strict literary criticism somewhere and to vindicate literary criticism as a distinct and separate discipline.³

In his British Wittgenstein Society Lecture of 2012, Bernard Harrison takes as an epigraph Leavis’s remark: “I think of myself as an anti-philosopher,

which is what a literary critic ought to be.”⁴ I shall say more about Harrison’s discussion shortly, but first it is appropriate to give attention to a more emphatic account of what separates Leavis from philosophy, as is found in Michael Bell’s engaging monograph.⁵

In a central chapter to this work, “Language, Truth and Literature,” Bell suggests that Leavis’s sense that philosophy could not help him much with his work was reinforced by the mutual incomprehension between him and Wittgenstein. But he also finds a “teasing suggestiveness” in the relationship. This is to be found, first, in the tenor of Wittgenstein’s early emphasis on the limits of language, which might be said to imply a hollowing out of space for matters of value, albeit that these are non-sense, and, second, in the emphasis in the later work on the variety of language games and the “agreement in judgements” that makes them possible, which might suggest a movement towards the understanding of language as “creative” that characterizes Leavis’s outlook. There is then, Bell suggests, a sense of “potentially important unfinished business in their intellectual non-relationship” (p. 34). Notwithstanding this suggestion, however, Bell sums up by affirming his view that, even with regard to the later phases of Wittgenstein’s work, it seems unlikely that Leavis would have gained much from Wittgenstein: “Wittgenstein’s tendency to polarise the propositional and the enigmatic missed precisely that sense of significant and purposeful indeterminacy in which Leavis saw the characteristic value of language. Wittgenstein would have given him only, as it were, a negative and outer frame of reference for his concern with the creative dimension of language” (pp. 34-35). There was a far greater affinity, Bell avers, with the phenomenological traditions of thought, and Heidegger’s increasingly intense interest in language is taken as a key potential point of connection.

There may be some truth in this, but at the same time it is difficult to resist the view both that too much is being rolled together and that the force of Wittgenstein’s later work has not been taken on. Wittgenstein’s interest in language, and its centrality to his later work, is far greater than this brief gloss would suggest. Of course the fact that mainstream analytical philosophy has had difficulty in receiving Wittgenstein’s later work, and has sometimes reinterpreted it in its own image, makes Bell’s view, or his account of how the situation must have appeared to Leavis, appear all the more plausible. But it risks a serious distortion of Wittgenstein.

Harrison’s paper leads the reader through the temptations of this negative view but goes on helpfully to show the way in which arguments from Wittgenstein’s later work might be deployed in Leavis’s favor. In a sense this is no surprise. Wittgenstein is concerned to return words from their metaphysical to their everyday use. He is suspicious of theory. He is suspicious of the way that in our thinking, including our thinking in philosophy, it can come to seem, as he puts it in the *Philosophical Investigations* (#97), that:

Thought is surrounded by a halo.—Its essence, logic, presents an order, in fact the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to both world and thought. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience;

no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it—It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not yet appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete, indeed as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is. . .⁶

These words are followed by a parenthesis recalling a paragraph from his earlier work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (5.5563), where he had written: “In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order.—That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety. (Our problems are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)”⁷ But whereas the thought there was committed to a kind of logical atomism, an uncovering by means of logic of the building-blocks of reality, Wittgenstein here immediately stresses that “We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language.” It is as if we were imagining that, in order to see the truth, we must somehow peer more closely or squint. But this unshakeable ideal becomes “a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off” (*PI*, #103). And here again in a further memorable image:

The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*; it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty.—We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground! (#107)

The paragraphs quoted here come comparatively early in the *Investigations*, while later in the text Wittgenstein’s negative remarks about philosophy itself—how we can become “calloused” by doing philosophy (#348), how philosophy can lead us to a dead-end (#436)—suggest ways in which he himself might be deemed an “anti-philosopher”—especially, that is, where philosophy becomes an academic, professionalized discipline. So, yes, it may have suited the philosophical establishment not to take on the force of these words, which is to say not really to read them. After all, had not Wittgenstein’s earlier work been a source of inspiration for the logical positivism that, through the middle decades of the 20th century continued to be the lingua franca of so much professional philosophy? The truncated reading that then ensues is surely the antithesis of the enactive reading that Leavis called for, and it is surprising that he seems to have acquiesced in his own somewhat truncated conception of philosophy.

But we need to proceed carefully here. Wittgenstein warns against the “*preconceived idea of idea of crystalline purity*” and urges: “the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need” (# 108). Yet he is struck by the way that a simile (crystalline purity) can become absorbed into our language, producing a false

appearance, and, in the disquiet this in turn induces, come to press itself upon us with a seeming necessity: against the doubts expressed in “But *This* isn’t how it is!”, we answer, in our bewitchment, “Yes *this* is how it has to be!” (#112):

#113. “But *this* is how it is——” I say to myself over and over again. I feel as though, if only I could fix my gaze absolutely sharply on this fact, get it in focus I must grasp the essence of the matter.

#114. (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.5): “The general form of the proposition is: This is how things are.”——That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.

Now Wittgenstein’s insistence on the problems this phrasing brings with it, which is otherwise articulated in terms of a suspicion of the aura that attaches to the logical “must,” is worth attending to a little further, for at first glance the phrasing in question may seem to chime with words readily associated with Leavis’s characteristic: “It is so, isn’t it? This is how it is, is it not?” Yet—surely it is soon obvious—the interrogative contrasts with the assertoric, and, although Leavis’s style can certainly be strongly assertive, the address to the reader is of a different order and purpose. It should be noted also that one of the striking differences between Wittgenstein’s early and his later work is precisely in the manner of the address: it is as if the *Tractatus* unfolds from within, analytically, not synthetically, in a unity of logical form, and in a way that is in a sense rhetorically self-enclosed; the *Investigations*, by contrast, is a patchwork of remarks, traversing “a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction,” as Wittgenstein states in the Preface. He continues: “—The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings” (*PI*, p. *vii*). Far from being self-enclosed, it offers invitations to the reader in multiple ways: “Imagine this. . . Try thinking this. . . Ask yourself this. . .” Moreover its particular manner of appropriating philosophy’s dialogical form, where the reader is drawn into a kind of self-examination, in which not only is an interlocutor more or less defined but a variety of other voices express questions and hesitations as the journeying proceeds. One way to put this would be to say that the two texts differ in their pedagogy, one with the burden of its argument to impart, the other through occasioning a series of experiences in the reader, as for example where one comes to think something new not through the inexorable force of an argument but because an aspect dawns. The seeing of aspects is the preoccupation of some forty pages in Part II of the book, a preoccupation in which questions of the imagination are never far away. In fact, even at the start of Part I, Wittgenstein is asking us to imagine his tribe of builders. And we try; but then it may come to dawn on us that it is not really clear in what sense we can do this at all. The necessity, possibilities, and limits of the imagination are tested throughout.

This different kind of address shows more clearly what it is that separates the judgements Leavis offers (“This is how it is, is it not?”), with

their characteristic appeal to the reader, from the conclusions the earlier Wittgenstein reaches (“Yes *this* is how it has to *be!*”), where the seemingly inexorable force of the logic makes the reader’s response a matter more or less of indifference. And it explains something about Leavis’s almost visceral response to Wellek’s request for the theory, philosophy, or explanation that would underpin his claims—where the very idea of underpinning may itself betray metaphysical pretensions that need to be excised or exorcised. Leavis and the later Wittgenstein are alike in this respect in that they seek to turn the attention to the stuff of experience, where description, not explanation, will be of the essence. This tells us something about what is going on when we make judgements, about what judgement is.

The animus in Leavis’s response to Wellek finds a focus in part in the subject of Shelley, where Leavis claims to find “no consolation” in Wellek’s appeal to the apparently philosophical and no grounds for reconsidering his judgement that the poetry is “repetitive, vaporous, monotonously self-regarding and often emotionally cheap, and so, in no very long run, boring” (*CP*, p. 221). In *Revaluation*, Leavis had reacted against those who would praise the “intellectual structure” in Shelley’s *To a Skylark* and contrast it with the lack of such qualities in Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale*, and the terms of his praise are particularly pertinent here: “The rich local concreteness is the local manifestation of an inclusive sureness of grasp in the whole. What the detail exhibits is not merely an extraordinary intensity of realization, but also an extraordinary rightness and delicacy of touch; a sureness of touch that is the working of a fine organization.”⁸

These now strike me as moving and convincing words, but I realize that they may not be received in this way. And I need to inject a more personal note here. When I first encountered Leavis, at a time when I was at school and struggling with English literature, I found passages such as this difficult. Such phrasing is, of course, by no means unusual in Leavis. He writes, for example, of John Donne’s “consummate control of intonation, gesture, movement, and larger rhythm” (p. 18). In subsequent years I recollected my difficulty with understanding, or feeling I had grounds for understanding, quite what these words meant or what secured them, by remembering, so I imagined, that Leavis had spoken of Donne’s “exquisite rightness of tone”—an expression that I now concede may have been a concoction of one of my teachers. No matter, for this is the expression that has stayed with me, and it has worked as a kind of metonym for that difficulty I had in finding my feet with literature and criticism. The nature of the difficulty is worth some comment. It was not that I could not understand the words, but they seemed to have the air of an authoritative pronouncement. They seemed to depend too much on their rhetorical form, and the judgement they pressed me to accept was not something I could easily feel or claim as my own. Now in another subject—say, physics—this would have troubled me too, but there at least there seemed some point in depending on the testimony of others. (I was not really likely to doubt it.) Here, by contrast, in matters of aesthetic appreciation, such acquiescence seemed to me to render the exercise void.

The detour I was subsequently to make would draw me towards the sort of philosophy that is represented by A.J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth, and Logic*, for there at least, however difficult I might find it, I could see the way

the argument worked and could feel the force it carried. But that too carried me only so far, unable as it was to deal with so much that is of value—which is to say, with value itself—or, as early on Wittgenstein recognizes, with all that is great and important. And the way out of this impasse is to be found, I think, through attention to the nature of judgement itself.

Here once again we can partially align Leavis with Wittgenstein. In alluding to a possible connection with the *Investigations*, Bell cites Wittgenstein's remark "It is what human beings *say* that is true or false, and they *agree* in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (#241). It is appropriate to add the line that follows: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so" (#242.) What is at stake here is not the kind of judgement that might be offered about, say, Barack Obama's presidency; it is rather to do with the way that, even at a more or less physiological level, human beings find things the same. "It's too hot in this room, isn't it?" And this can extend upwards, as it were, to ethics and aesthetics, and all that is great and important, where we offer and test and seek to strengthen our judgements. "It is so, isn't it?" That we do this is not to say that we are simply seeking to align our judgements, for it is by bringing my response into contact with another's, by articulating that response and trying to say why it is as it is, that I open the possibility of common ground; and this is to cast objectivity and truth in such matters as something not simply to be discovered, not as something pre-given, but as something to be reached for and (only ever) partially to be achieved. In articulating my response I may find that I am not aligned with the others. My words may meet with a rebuff, and what I say may be unintelligible—at least to those in this community in which I find myself, here and now. And there may come a time when, stunted at every turn, I need to turn away and seek community elsewhere. The point is that there is an internal relationship between this offering of my voice, in expressing my judgements, and the possibilities of the *polis*. For the life of the *polis*, at least insofar as this is defensible and democratic, will depend not upon the actions of a collective, still less those of a tyrant, but on the voices of individuals—individuals not in isolation but cognizant of the fact that their own autonomy is dependent upon their offering of their voices in community, painful though this may sometimes be.

Wittgenstein speaks of the way that many important aspects of our lives depend not upon the acquisition of a technique or body of knowledge but rather upon a training in judgements. The role of the teacher here will be to give the right tip, to draw attention to what is salient and sometimes to what is easily overlooked, doing this sometimes in such a way as to bring about a change of aspect. Crucially this will involve an appeal to the learner's imagination in such a way that new possibilities of connection come to light.

In Stanley Cavell's reading of the *Investigations*, such themes are to the fore, and in *The Claim of Reason*⁹ these points are in many respects extended most fully. The double-genitive of Cavell's title bears examination. Reason makes its claims on me, which is to cast reason as somehow external to me; but it is incumbent on me, no less, to be an agent of reason, to contribute my voice in its realization, to make my little contribution to the furtherance of

reason. One of the vices of professionalized philosophy is that it becomes “non-claim”—that is, busies itself with intellectual puzzles, say, classroom exercises in epistemological skepticism (“How do I know there is a table in front of me?”) or fruitless and potentially misleading thought-experiments; these are exercises where nothing is at stake, and where, in the distractions they provide, harm may be done.

For Cavell, aesthetic judgement is in some respects exemplary of what is at stake in this. For, as we saw in connection with my own doubts about whether the “aesthetic education” I was receiving was empty, it is crucial in aesthetic judgement—as it need not be in technical matters such as, say, computer programming—that the judgement be sincerely given. Without this it is a pretense, perhaps a judgement to please the teacher or impress fellow students or pass the exam. And this is another way of saying that such judgement is void. Worse than void, worse than *nothing*, because it is a travesty of what aesthetic judgement should be. The responsibility of judgement that must then be there if aesthetic judgment is to be real models something important for our political lives. If the *polis* depends upon the offering of our voices, we should look to judgements that are genuinely expressed, for such expression will be not only generative of community but crucial for the meaningful lives of individuals themselves. Otherwise put, the good society will be constituted not by rational principle but by the accumulation of good judgement, in which qualities of tradition, criticism, and maturity will be of the essence.

Cavell’s Wittgensteinianism shifts the emphasis slightly from the following of rules (the understandable preoccupation of so much Wittgenstein scholarship) and towards the nature of criteria, where, across vast expanses of our lives, the criteria by which we live are not simply fixed but progressively fashioned through our shared practice and exercise of judgement. In one of the most celebrated passages from *The Claim of Reason*, the culmination of the first of its four parts, Cavell writes:

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. In the face of the questions posed in Augustine, Luther, Rousseau, Thoreau . . . , we are children; we do not know how to go on with them, what ground we may occupy. In this light philosophy becomes the education of grownups. It is as though it must seek perspective upon a natural fact which is all but inevitably misinterpreted—that at an early point in a life a normal body reaches its full strength and height. Why do we take it that because we must then put away childish things, we must put away the prospect of growth and the memory of childhood? The anxiety in teaching, in serious communication, is that I myself require education. And for grownups this is not natural

growth but change. Conversion is a turning of our natural reactions; so it is symbolized as rebirth (*CR*, p. 125).

The shared exercise of judgement is there constantly in the words we use, in the ordinary stuff of conversation. In the turn of conversation there is a continual shaping of our reactions and responses, in which our offering of our voice, our risking of our own judgements, and the tone of our engagement are critical.

If at one time I faltered over what was meant by “tone,” it is now time to bring it more to the fore. It remains a quality that tends to be shunned by certain schooled forms of philosophy. Consider perhaps the following. In an interview with Katherine Dunlop and Scott Shuchart in 1997, Cornel West makes the following remark:

All the philosophers of darkness, I think, very much like the artists of darkness, are going to be relevant for the twenty-first century. Paul Celan’s poetry is going to be central in the next century, Kafka central, Hardy central, the Schellings and Schopenhauers. Not because their conclusions are convincing, but [by] the nature of their wrestling. There’s a sense in which in analytic philosophy we overlook the tonality of the philosopher, and the Schellings and Schopenhauers and Kierkegaards will come back because of their tonality. . .¹⁰

The question of tone is particularly pertinent to what might count as distinctively American philosophy, as opposed to philosophy that happens to go on in America, and the provenance of such observations from a leading black intellectual in the United States surely reflects the significance of distinctively black contributions—in art, social life, language itself—to that distinctiveness. But the point being made also has a wider reference, as West’s naming of European philosophers and writers makes abundantly clear. Let us take note at this point that their tone is said to be tied up with their struggling.

Yet, as I have intimated, the question of tone can be seen as irrelevant to the real business of philosophy, and it is apt to be side-stepped or ignored: tone is a literary matter, after all, it will be said, and so surely no more than an aspect of rhetorical form. In fact, the question tends to be preempted by the uniform application of a prose style that aspires to the condition of logic and that perhaps imagines itself to be toneless. The earnest adoption of such a style is, as we are reminded in Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, not exactly new. He cites a letter to George Santayana in which William James expresses despair regarding “the grey-plaster temperament of our young PhDs, boring each other at seminars, writing those direful reports of literature in the *Philosophical Review* and elsewhere, fed on ‘books of reference’ and never confounding ‘Aesthetik’ with ‘Erkenntnistheorie’.”¹¹ This demarcation of the philosophical territory, not only in institutional, administrative terms but in a legislative categorization of its subject matter, is part of the object of James’s critique. One of the elegant glosses that Rorty provides on the situation at the turn of the 20th century is that the “spirit of playfulness,” the credit for which he

attributes, *inter alia*, to James and Bradley, was “nipped in the bud” (*PMN*, p. 166)—and this especially as a result of the efforts of Russell and Husserl. For students of philosophy in the late 20th century, particularly for those who were readers of, though not card-carrying members of, the analytical school, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* came as a breath of fresh air. For here, Rorty set out a liberating account of the state to which philosophy had come. The book is a painstaking critique of philosophy in which the “epistemological turn” taken by Descartes is identified as inaugurating the characteristic self-understanding of many of those practicing the subject over the next four centuries, especially of those thinking of themselves as philosophers by profession. It achieved this in part because of its tone, for here was a thinker who displayed an intimate, inside knowledge of the discipline in question but also the confidence to reflect on this in a way that deflated its pumped-up, overtly masculine style, and unmasked its metaphysical presuppositions. The deflationary tenor of the prose, and its ease with American idiom, is therapeutic in the best Wittgensteinian sense. The tone of the work is essential to its success, as has, for the most part, been the case with Rorty’s subsequent writings.

Ease with American idiom is evident also in the writings of Cavell, but the tone of his prose is never (merely) therapeutic. It was crucial to him to find a pitch in which he could write philosophy, and with ideas, we might say, pitched to others in conversation. Sometimes this would blur though not destroy the boundaries of the discipline – invoking voices of autobiography and confession, and so involving its practice with the work of testimony. It is no small matter, in Cavell’s eyes, that the *Investigations* begins with an extended quotation from another writer, and hence begins in response (and, we might add, begins in a sense in criticism): to nothing less than the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.

I began this discussion by recalling Wittgenstein’s visit to the Leavises and the gramophone incident. In the telling of the story, Leavis comments on the fact that Wittgenstein had absolute pitch. “Perfect pitch” is perhaps the more familiar expression today. While Leavis is somewhat dismissive of Wittgenstein’s appreciation of literature, the latter’s musical sophistication would not have been in question. But having perfect pitch is another matter. It is not simply the ability to sing or play in tune or to recognize accurately the intervals between notes: it is an attunement to the sound-waves themselves such that the pitch of notes is recognized in an absolute form. While this is obviously a special gift, I understand from musician friends that it can actually hamper a performer. Atmospheric conditions can affect the pitch at which instruments play; moreover, it is sometimes the practice of solo violinists, for example, to play slightly “bright”—that is, fractionally sharper than the other instruments of the orchestra. The symbolism of this in relation to the above discussion of judgement should not go unnoticed. For the account of judgement in Leavis, which I have related to the later Wittgenstein and to Cavell, surely has more to do with the partly relative attunement of voices, where, that is, they are responsive to the pitch of others and not dependent simply on absolute physical regularities.

Wittgenstein’s perfect pitch and the irritation he could cause Leavis—not just domestically but philosophically—seem to relate symbolically at

least to the rigidity of physical laws. The flexible maturing judgement that he came to extol and to exemplify in his later work transcends these limitations. It does indeed give reason further to ponder the “potentially important unfinished business in their intellectual non-relationship.” My discussion of judgement and criteria, pitch and tone, has gestured towards ways in which this might be pursued.

Notes

1. F.R. Leavis, “Memories of Wittgenstein,” p. 58; in Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); pp. 50-67; hereafter abbreviated “MW.”
2. Cyril Barrett, “Wittgenstein, Leavis, and Literature”: 399, *New Literary History* 19.2 (1988): 385-401; hereafter abbreviated “WLL.”
3. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962); p. 212; hereafter abbreviated “CP.”
4. Leavis in *Thought, Words and Creativity*, quoted as an epigraph in Bernard Harrison, “Leavis and Wittgenstein,” International Leavis Conference, 27-28 September 2012, p. 1.
5. Michael Bell, *F.R. Leavis* (London: Routledge, 1988).
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, Blackwell, 1953); hereafter abbreviated as *PI*.
7. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953). Originally published as “Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung”, in *Annalen der Naturphilosophische*, XIV, 3/4, (1921).
8. Leavis, *Revaluation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 229; hereafter abbreviated as *R*.
9. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); hereafter abbreviated as *CR*.
10. “Philosophical Faith in Action,” Cornel West interviewed by Katherine Dunlop and Scott Shuchart (1997), p. 117. In *Philosophers in Conversation: Interviews from the Harvard Review of Philosophy*, ed. S. Phineas Upham, Foreword by Thomas Scanlon (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), pp. 111-125.
11. William James, quoted in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, with an Introduction by Michael Williams (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); hereafter abbreviated to “PMN.”