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BETWEEN PEDAGOGY AND DEMOCRACY:
ON CANONS AND AVERSION TO CONFORMITY IN
ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

ASJA SZAFRANIEC

The particular disdain for official culture ... is itself an expression of democracy and commitment to it.

Stanley Cavell

When does pedagogy end? I take this question to name the real stakes of canon debates: where is the point at which we are self-reliant enough not to need to take recourse to ready-made standards with which we are continuously presented? The contemporary debate about the canon is after all only a small fragment of what has been over the ages one of the most continuous preoccupations of human beings—seeking standards and seeking to transcend them—and it might gain in explicitness by placing itself in this context. A canon, etymologically referring to a reed or a rod, is primarily an instrument of measurement (hence an instrument in support of judgment) and the debate is thereby one of seeking, questioning and accepting or rejecting standards, conceived as conditions of understanding, reading, thinking and of judgment: scientific, legal, religious, aesthetic and ethical.

Burcht Pranger's work testifies to the desire to approach texts with ever greater precision, without concessions to pre-given measuring tools, even if this means having to acknowledge hesitation and admit the perplexities riddling the discourses of his major historical personas: Bernard of Clairvaux, Anselm of Canterbury, Augustine of Hippo. He employs to this end two strategies: on the one hand, relaxing the grip of periodization, suspending any standard temporal presuppositions, so as to uncover the unique voice emitted by the given work; on the other hand, measuring the resonances of thought across time: between Johannes Scottus Eriugena and James Joyce; Augustine and John Henry Newman and Cavell; Pseudo-Dionysius and Ignatius Loyola; Bernard of Clairvaux and Schleiermacher. It is this double gesture of declining recourse to standards in our approaches to history that allowed him to discover and explore those most difficult and problematic features of the early Christian manifestations of thought,

its central points of obscurity: the indeterminacy and artificiality of the “properly” religious, the unfathomability of the sincerity of faith, the indifference—and what he calls the “facelessness”—of devotional practices.

Another focus of Pranger’s work, closely related to this, is the question of the seriousness of texts, their being meant by the author, the author’s taking responsibility for them—all ways of referring us to some core property that would guarantee that the sound they emit from the distant past comes from trustworthy sources. Significantly, Pranger qualifies this core property as “unfathomable,” which is to say, unstandardizable, immeasurable (fathom, just like “canon,” was originally a standard of measurement). This resistance to judgment at the heart of texts is one reason to be suspicious of canons. Another is a common intuition, defended among others by Nietzsche, that to give a work its due, both to find such a work and to judge it on its merit, one should not need a canon: a good ear should suffice. But then the ear itself becomes a standard of measurement and the problem of unfathomability returns: what is it about an ear that can be trusted?¹ Here the core of the canon debates reveals itself as responding to the problems of skepticism: if skepticism always returns to the formula of “how can we be sure that...,” then in this particular case it takes the form of the question of how can we be sure that we know how to judge the work of others and how to judge our own judgment (how can we be sure that our judgments are transmittable, shareable). Then skepticism about canons is the skepticism about the precise interrelation of three sources of our criteria: inheritance (i.e., teaching, pedagogy), individual expression (the inner ear) and the critical evaluation in the public cultural space.

When we consider this, it becomes clear that Pranger’s pursuit and strategies for realizing it bring with themselves the questioning of the canon in its very principle, as the problem of measuring, or in other words,

1 One might say, these texts are in themselves the sources (or the guardians) of their standards, and it is solely by surveying them that we find the measure against which they are to be read. The idea that each text contains an access to its own law was expressed by the readings of literature performed by Jacques Derrida, for example in his reading of Kafka’s “Before the Law.” On that account each literary work produces its own law, instantiates it by internal repetitions to be uncovered in the process of reading; it is those repetitions that present themselves to us as measurement instruments: they are so to speak the rhythms of perspective guiding the reader’s eyes towards the horizon of its law. But even Derrida had to concede that no such intrinsic standard of judgment can exist in isolation, that always at least one other work is needed to confirm, co-sign it, so that we always have to begin with at least two works, a minimal canon. The idea of a canon as a set of points in a particular configuration replaces here the single work viewed as a unique Archimedean point of its own suspension.

the problem of being able to trust any pre-given constellation of points as a focus of approach, but perhaps equally of being able to trust one's own. In this his questions regard not only the canon debate but are also close to the concerns of that strain of philosophy associated with Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin and, more recently, Stanley Cavell, which might arguably be called a philosophy of standards. There is something about Wittgenstein's work that reaches back to the classical Greek origins of not only philosophical but also artistic reflection, to the classical period, in which "canons govern practical activities such as building a temple, and artistic pursuits such as decorating it; contemplative pursuits such as moral philosophy, and early scientific accounts of the laws of nature."² It should suffice to evoke Wittgenstein's continuous preoccupation with the metaphor of a measuring rod (or the standard meter in Paris), including the formulation of his major ideas with help of that metaphor: the definition of propositions, systems of propositions and later language games as yardsticks (initially projected against reality, later, with language games, projected against one another).³ Another case in point is Cavell's later attention to the established centers of the Western canon such as the Bible and Shakespeare, or to the equally canonical set of films of early Hollywood cinema, always accompanied by attention to notions of measurement, counting and re-counting. It is true that the meaning of canon in the earliest Greek thought gradually moved "from mensuration to evaluation,"⁴ (and it is interesting to note that the shift of focus in Wittgenstein's work went, *mutatis mutandis*, in a similar direction—from problems of representation to problems of normativity) but the ordinary language philosophy does not want to forget the origins of the term: the yardstick metaphor (just as the staff of the Kouroo artist in Thoreau's final paragraphs of *Walden* and Cavell's reading of it) is applied to discuss practices, aesthetic and ethical norms *and* the perception of reality, similarly as it was done by Plato or Aristotle.

2 Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon* (London: Athlone, 1991), 9.

3 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, trans. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 317: "I once wrote 'a proposition is laid like a yardstick against reality. Only the outermost tips of the graduation marks touch the object to be measured.' I should now prefer to say: a system of propositions is laid like a yardstick against reality. What I mean by this is: when I lay a yardstick against a spatial object, I apply all the graduation marks simultaneously."

4 Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon*, 10.

Relying on that strain of philosophy, John Gibson, in his “Reading for Life,”⁵ argues that the value of literature resides in its offering a secure, unchangeable context for preservation of standards—from which one may conclude that the value of the literary canon resides in its gathering and protecting archives that in themselves contain another order of standards. Gibson bases his argument on the following remark by Wittgenstein:

there is *one* thing, of which one can say neither that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris.—But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule.—Let us imagine samples of colour being preserved in Paris like the standard metre. We define: “sepia” means the colour of the standard sepia which is there kept hermetically sealed. Then it will make no sense to say of this sample either that it is of this colour or that it is not. We can put it like this: This sample is an instrument of the language used in ascriptions of colour. In this language-game it is not something that is represented, but is an instrument of representation... It is a standard in our language game, something with which a comparison is made. And this may be an important observation, but it is nonetheless an observation concerning our language game—our method of representation.⁶

Gibson claims that our canon of literary works performs a function analogous to the Paris archive in which the standard meter is kept. In it we find preserved “Medea’s madness, Othello’s jealousy, Baldwin’s depiction of a lynching” as well as standard representations of “love, suffering, exploitation or devotion,”⁷ all of them “hermetically sealed” samples that function for us as instruments of representation rather than as representations themselves. Gibson’s argument significantly extends the already wide scope of the yardstick metaphor in Wittgenstein with the consequence of becoming vulnerable to the question of the legitimacy of such an extension. As already mentioned, Wittgenstein himself extended its scope throughout his working career, assigning the status of “measuring rods” first to propositions, then to whole systems of them, still later to language games (suggesting that there is something like a canon of promising, and

5 John Gibson, “Reading for Life,” in John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer, eds., *The Literary Wittgenstein*, (London, Routledge: 2004), 109-124.

6 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), par. 50. Cf. also Cora Diamond, “How Long is the Standard Metre in Paris?” in Timothy G. McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd, eds., *Wittgenstein in America* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).

7 Gibson, “Reading for Life,” 115, 121.

that this canon can be compared with the canon of joking, of apology, of excuses, of saying good-bye).⁸ It is not certain that this permits extending this status to literary representations of, e.g., complex psychological concepts (Othello as the standard of jealousy). In particular, temporal problems arise: there is something questionable about the aligning of the status of devotion of a given literary character as a standard sample of such a human attitude in general, with the status of the standard meter in Paris. Is the meaning of “devotion” really set apart and preserved from change for centuries in the same way, or does it evolve with the way the “game” of devotion evolves? While the meaning (the grammar) of devotion may be “deposited” in a work of literature, it is far from clear that it assures this meaning’s permanence in culture. Perhaps “jealousy” is still for us what it was for Othello, but surely questions can be raised about the permanence of, say, Homeric “hubris.” (Perhaps a distinction could be made between “properly” psychological states like jealousy or madness and more codified forms of behavior like devotion. It might be argued that while the former share their expression with pain and so are not prone to evolve with time, this cannot be said about devotion. But even then the expression of pain may turn out not be free from a grammatical component.)

It is in the context of this question of the possibility of preserving the meaning of all words that have a life in our ordinary language “hermetically sealed,” analogously to the “standard meter” and “sepia,” that the question arises whether indeed, as Gibson puts it, Wittgenstein’s remark on the standard meter in Paris offers a “totally demystified picture.”⁹ There is a strange undecidability here between a standard of measurement perceived as something that is set beyond the ordinary and the same standard being relentlessly chiseled by the ordinary. While the concepts of measurement conform to the former view of the canon (as hermetically sealed), it might be argued that the names of complex psychological concepts and the names of colors, like sepia are closer to the latter view (as

8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 130-131: “Our clear and simple language-games are not preparatory studies for a future regimentation of language – as it were first approximations, ignoring friction and air-resistance. The language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities. For we can avoid ineptness or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison – as, so to speak, a measuring-rod; not as a preconceived idea to which reality must correspond.”

9 Gibson, “Reading for Life,” 119.

a standard constantly chiseled by the ordinary).¹⁰ Has our temptation to metaphysics been successfully appeased or exorcised here? Can our notion of the canon, whether it is a list of works or one particular work (as was the case with the sculptures by Polycleitus that became the canon of the beauty of the human body) or a sample of color or of a psychological state be presented, in view of the life of culture and of the flow of time, in a totally demystified way? (Of course, such a question must inevitably betray a metaphysician in the one who poses it, but then it is the advantage of Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein that metaphysics, like the condition of skepticism, is not there to be eradicated but to be lived.)

As Jan Gorak observes in his *Making of the Modern Canon*, many of the problems of the canon controversy should be traced back to the failure to acknowledge the specificity of distinct conceptions of a canon and the co-existence of a plurality of canons. Indeed, the controversy, when it started in the early eighties, was only superficially directed against any particular fault or penchant of the canon (western, white, male, etc.), and more profoundly against the idea of the canon as such, against the "canonical disposition"¹¹ and against the idea of the constancy of the canons, associated with Marcuse's thesis that "throughout the long history of art, and in spite of changes of taste, there is a standard which remains constant."¹² But it is not the intention of the present paper to repeat here Gorak's work, discussing the most prominent attitudes to the Western Canon in the last century (both those he takes to be endorsing it, in the work of Sir Ernst Gombrich and Northrop Frye, and those remaining critical towards it without rejecting it altogether, as Frank Kermode and Edward Said¹³). Rather, I choose to focus on the ambiguous attitude of certain thinkers towards the already mentioned "canonical disposition" in general, even while they do acknowledge the existence of both the multiple forms of canonicity (with at the one extreme canon conceived as simply a practical blueprint, and at the other as partaking in the realm of Platonic Ideas) and of the plurality of canons (aesthetic, moral, literary, philosophical, theological, etc.). Undeniably, the canon has been blamed many times for propagating ideologies and for being a tool of discrimination, with

10 In the latter case the canon's reshaping or adjustment is not due to some change in a given aspect of reality it represents but in the slow transformation of our grammar of colors.

11 Gorak, *The Making of Modern Canon*, 186.

12 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), x.

13 Gorak, *The Making of Modern Canon*, 7.

its proneness to exclusions dictated by the discourses and institutions in power.¹⁴ But more fundamentally, even before the critique of the canon motivated by the defense of variously conceived “otherness,” the canon was vulnerable to criticism for reasons more Nietzschean (or Hegelian, or generally more romantic) in character: already from the thirties on one notes the emergence of writers such as Albert Cohen and Witold Gombrowicz who criticized its pedagogy of servitude, present in the very idea of the unquestionable worthiness of certain texts and authors and in fact present in the very idea of being instructed about worth *tout court*.¹⁵ The canon would lead to (at least temporary) alienation of our right to proffer a judgment of value, hence of a vital part of our autonomy; in the worst case it would even encourage such alienation. At the same time, it was difficult to deny that we cannot do without canon and pedagogy. While various postmodernisms accepted the status quo of the necessity of such temporary alienation of autonomy they focused on denouncing the pervertibility of canon as an instrument. Recently again the notion of the impossibility to dismiss such an instrument has become more prominent, raising again the question of reconciling the obvious need to trust canons with that which, according to Cavell, expresses our commitment to nothing less than democracy, called by him, after Emerson, “aversion to conformity.”

Let us return to Gibson’s claim that Wittgenstein’s notion of the standard meter, making it possible to understand a canon as a sample lifted out of the everyday world (the specificity of which consists only in the very fact of its being picked out, put aside, archived), offers a demystified picture. Indeed, the measuring instrument that is simply lifted from real life, like a mason’s rule, has nothing mystifying about it. But then an analogy is proposed between its status of a sample and the similar status of the criteria to which our language games constantly appeal, suggesting that the latter are lifted from the ordinary in a similar fashion. This is the sense of

14 Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

15 Gombrowicz’s oeuvre was, from 1937 on, such a vitriolic and exemplary attack on the canon (in fact on any standards in general; and not only, as might be expected, on the easy targets like the standards adhered to by the bourgeoisie, or the pre-war ideals of education, and, precisely, on the sanctities of national literary canon, but also on the standards of “modernity” and -- for Gombrowicz a separate category -- those employed by the very dissidents themselves) that I was surprised to find it included in Bloom’s *Western Canon*. Cf. Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 2005); Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 558.

the canon to which Gibson appeals: just as when Pliny said of Polycleitus that he “made what artists call a canon, or model statue, from which they draw their artistic proportions, as from a sort of standard,”¹⁶ Gibson says about Shakespeare that he provided us with a model of jealousy that became canonical and infused the whole western culture. Analogously, we might say that Augustine provides us with the model of confession and of conversion.

Should we wish to pursue this idea of the canonical works of literature as preserving for us the standards of the more complex entities of meaning to which we constantly refer, we need also to take into account Wittgenstein’s claim that the language games are measuring rods to be compared with one another, hence to be measured *by* one another. Wittgenstein did not specify whether he had in mind types of language games or their occurrences. In the latter case the language game of confession as played by Augustine is liable to revision each time the game is played by someone else, say, Rousseau. This is a motif in Wittgenstein of which Stanley Cavell’s work has derived the ultimate consequences: that our standards undergo a constant process of measuring and being measured in turn.¹⁷ In view of this process, while a measuring rod with the length of one meter arguably can have a stable status, the complex cultural or psychological concepts cannot have it, or at least the degree to which they may have it is limited. Every single public utterance and every literary work may turn out to be the limiting or modifying case for a given standard. When it is used to measure, it is admittedly lifted out of reality, temporarily beyond questioning; but as soon as it is itself measured, put alongside another standard, it returns to reality and can be questioned again. Perhaps it is true that the measuring instrument that is lifted from real life has nothing mystifying about it; but our condition as readers, thinkers and authors of judgment, where the criteria at our disposal constantly oscillate between the condition of being the tool of criticism and its object, still remains, if not mystifying, then at least dizzying. It is my contention that the function

16 Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. 9 of 10, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1961), 168-9 (translation modified).

17 I am not unaware of the distinction Cavell makes both between the notion of ‘standards’ and ‘criteria’ and, within the latter, between the ordinary and the Wittgensteinian notion of criteria. By connecting them all I give expression to the conviction of a (still unexplored) rapport existing between Wittgenstein’s reflections focusing around the metaphor of the yardstick and his notion of the criterion. Cf. Stanley Cavell, “Criteria and Judgment,” in Cavell, *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3-37.

of the canon in ordinary language philosophy is continuously threatened by a resurgence of a certain temporal vertigo, hence, of metaphysics.

It is in my view as a result of having to deal with this dizzying condition of play between stability and dismantling of standards that a certain tension is ineradicable from ordinary language philosophy. This tension can be expressed in the following question: how to avoid bringing together two conflicting attitudes towards the self within this philosophy. On the one hand, the ordinary language philosophy endorses the Nietzschean (or Emersonian) perception of the self as the supreme measure of things and the origin of judgment supervening on any canon. In his "Aversive Thinking," for example, Cavell explicitly promotes aversion to canons as standards of judgment because the only reliable, valid and morally acceptable standard is the individual voice.¹⁸ On the other hand, the very recourse to the ordinary, typical for that strain of philosophy, makes the self appear negligible in the vast play of existing grammars and conventions: especially when it comes to the issue of sincerity of intentions, the contingencies of the self are merely excuses, invalid in the public game of morality. It is enough to remember J.L. Austin's aversion to any reference to the inner self as the standard against which to measure the truth of intention or sincerity, with his credo, "my word is my bond" aimed to combat what Austin called "the metaphysics of excuses." Can the inner sense of judgment defended by Cavell via Nietzsche and Emerson be divorced from the inner ear for the truth of intention attacked by him together with Austin? Admittedly, Cavell does not follow Austin on this latter point but the very path he takes to avoid what he perceives as Austin's bondage to the performative consequences of the spoken word is illuminating.

In another of his texts, "The Politics of Interpretation," Cavell called Austin's way of dealing with his aversion to the conception of the inner as a standard of sincerity "a politics of superficiality, directed accordingly against what Austin would have seen as a politics of profundity and mystification."¹⁹ It might then be said for the purposes of the present context that Austin was the thinker of an outward canon, of public standards: he embraced the guidance of "my word is my bond" as the "standard meter," against the mystifying idea of the primacy of the self. And the

18 Stanley Cavell, "Aversive Thinking; Emersonian Representations in Heidegger and Nietzsche," in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 33-63.

19 Cavell recognized this politics of superficiality as "an element of what I understand the ordinary to be in ordinary language philosophy." See Stanley Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 29.

choice, as Cavell underlined, was not ontological (the denial that there is something like the private inner self) but political (refusing to allow this private inner self to serve as an excuse). But this ‘political’ choice of approach makes the idea of the self as the supreme measure of things also seem merely political, politically opportune. Is this what our individuality boils down to, the fact that we live in democracy, the form of life relying formally on contributions of every individual?

As a result of this tension between two different heritages, Cavell has to find a resolution for those two recourses to the inner, one of which is deemed by him legitimate, the other illegitimate. His resolution is to broaden the scope of what Austin considered to be the “metaphysics of excuses” to all kinds of bondage to standards, both inner and outer: for Cavell, metaphysics (the mystification) is not in the inner as opposed to the outer (the unutterable privacy of the self), or in the outer as opposed to inner (the ideology, the form, the official canon), but in their very separation. Consequently, Cavell must question the separation between the politics of superficiality and the politics of profundity: the inner must express itself on the surface of our shared language, but this expression must remain open for future modifications—so that the inner and the superficial are shown to be intimately interconnected. It is for this reason that in his *Claim of Reason* he undertakes a reexamination of the idea that Wittgenstein criticizes the inner. “What gives the impression that Wittgenstein wishes to deny that the soul is private?”²⁰

And yet, the uneasiness remain. At the end of the day, Cavell insists, with Austin and against Emerson and Nietzsche, that the politics of superficiality is “an element of what I understand the ordinary to be in ordinary language philosophy;”²¹ while he also insists, against Austin, that such superficial adherence to visible standards leads to exchanging one kind of bondage for another, and (with Emerson this time) that “the *particular disdain for official culture* taken in Emerson and in Nietzsche ... *is itself an expression of democracy and commitment to it.*”²² What weighs heavier, the praise of the canonical ordinary or the individualist call for disdain for official culture? What Cavell rejects, together with Austin—the private inner canon as an organ of judgment (metaphysics of excuses)—turns out to be surprisingly close to what he wants, with Emerson, to defend: the projection of the inner defined as pure aversion to all existing canons, to

20 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 329.

21 Stanley Cavell, *Themes Out of School*, 29.

22 Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 50 (emphasis mine).

the canonical disposition (the precondition of democracy). This tension becomes particularly palpable in the conjunction of Cavell's interest in democracy with his investment in the idea of pedagogy. And despite Cavell's insisting on the distinction between the phases of childhood, adolescence and adulthood in human life, his conception of philosophy as the "education of grown-ups" (Cavell's recent title *Pedagogical Letters on the Register of Moral Life* confirmed Hilary Putnam's characterization of Cavell's philosophy²³) makes it clear that pedagogy cannot be seen as limited to a particular age group, that rather it must be seen as an integral part of human culture. The more so, since it is clear, also in Wittgenstein's work, that human culture, and hence also democracy, is not possible without untouchable standards—thereby that it depends on our ability to project and protect canons even while we contest them. Pedagogy requires an emulation of standards (we do not question the table of multiplication) while democracy relies on an aversion to standards.

This unresolved tension between pedagogy and democracy is ultimately the reason for Cavell's often stated propensity to speak without offering a final standard that he motivates by a 'pedagogical patience.' Cavell's intention here seems to be to seek primarily an acknowledgment concerning an agreement on criteria as grounding, in a decisive way, the possibility of our agreement in judgment. Since only via shared criteria is agreement in thesis possible, failing agreement in criteria, it would be absurd to seek agreement in judgment. "Belief is not enough. Either the suggestion penetrates past assessment and becomes part of the sensibility from which assessment proceeds, or it is philosophically useless."²⁴ But there must be an interdependence of criteria and judgments, since our criteria have not fallen from the sky—they are in turn dependent on agreement in judgments. We might say that criteria in Cavell function as sensible intuitions do in Kant: criteria without judgments are blind, judgments without criteria are empty.

While Cavell combats the separation of the domains of the private and the public as the sources of our normativity, he does separate between judgments and criteria, placing them, the reference to them, in two distinct temporal, or transcendental dimensions: when a judgment is proffered, the criteria are only mutely presupposed (we only ask about the

23 Cf. James Conant and Hilary Putnam, eds., *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), lvii.

24 Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 71.

criteria when something in the judgment fails); and in turn the influence of the given utterance on the criteria can only be *nachträglich*, formed on the condition of that judgment. Individual judgments and the criteria on which they are founded never function as measures of one another at the same moment. They always and endlessly refer to one another. If they seem to us to appear together, one should consider that in order for a judgment to be meaningfully questioned, the agreement in criteria it presupposes must be fixed: the criteria and the judgment cannot be questioned at the same time, just as the criteria cannot come to existence simultaneously with a single judgment. Wittgenstein's solution to this problem was similar: that of distributing the gestures of protecting and contesting of standards among different temporal or transcendental realities ("If there's no room here, there is room in another dimension"²⁵). Nothing can be a standard and an object of judgment at the same time.

If we are to trust Wittgenstein's and Cavell's accounts of the interaction between standards and judgments, then the historical shifts in attitudes to canons are transcendently motivated: they reflect the necessary oscillation between the perception of any canon as a tool for judging reality (its status of the tool makes it untouchable) and a set of texts that is an object of judgment. It is only in the second case that we will take the canon to be a tool for preserving orthodoxy. In the first case we will have to take it as it is.

But if metaphysics is defined as neither the inner as opposed to the outer nor the outer as opposed to the inner, but as their very separation itself, one might legitimately ask why the separation between two (temporal or transcendental) dimensions (one in which we are allowed to perceive standards as susceptible to judgment—hence no longer as standards but merely as the things measured—another one in which we are not allowed to do so), is less "metaphysical" than the criticized separation between two (social) dimensions of the inner and the outer. In both cases there is "room in another dimension." It might be argued that the stable separation is replaced in ordinary language philosophy by an unstable one, an oscillation between the two dimensions. (But then the separation in traditional metaphysics, say in Hegelian dialectics, is also one of oscillation.)

I have until now dealt with the problems of the critique of the "canonical disposition" in the name of individual emancipation of readers. In the concluding paragraph of this paper I'd like to address a possible response to this discussion. The major line of response from the defenders of the canon, the accusation that the canon's detractors represent a "school of

25 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, part II, xi (pp. 193-229).

resentment,”²⁶ presents the case differently. According to Harold Bloom, the critique of the canon does not promote individual emancipation but merely ventilates resentment in its classical Nietzschean version. It represents the revolt of the slaves and a slave system of values, solely based on the principle of negation. As Nietzsche puts it himself, the major feature of *ressentiment* is the “reversal of the evaluating glance ... in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world ... its action is based on reaction.”²⁷ On Bloom’s reading it is not the adherence to the canonical disposition that is slavish (in its emulation of the pre-given standards), but the (post-colonialist, feminist, etc.) arguments for the rejection of the canon. Bloom attempts to connect the idea of the canon precisely to that to which it was opposed, the individual emancipation: “the Canon, once we view it as the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written, and forget the canon as a list of books for required study, will be seen as identical with the literary Art of Memory, not with the religious sense of canon.”²⁸ As a result Bloom can reverse the argument about standards—it is not the literary canon that is to be seen as a standard to be suspicious of but the various critical discourses against it—and propose a different perception of the detractors of the canon in terms of an image of resentment.

It seems at first sight that to mobilize Nietzsche in this way against the critics of the canon is fully legitimate and convincing: the really great works cannot be criticized by pointing out that they fail to be something they are not, in the way in Nietzsche that the eagle fails to represent the values of the lamb. But Cavell’s “Aversive Thinking” employs Nietzsche (or rather Nietzsche’s master, Emerson) for an argument precisely opposed to this one. The rejection of standards (aversive thinking) is not a sign of adherence to a “school of resentment,” but a token of an activity that, as Cavell argues, characterizes democracy. On this reading it is precisely disdain for the canon that is a mark of democracy. Emerson gives proof of aversive thinking when he says, “every word they say chagrins us,” and when he presents his own life and work as an alternative standard.

The question that haunts ordinary language philosophy is, when have we read enough, when have we absorbed standards sufficiently so as to

26 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 25ff.

27 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I, 10. I quote from *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 400.

28 *The Western Canon*, 17. It should be noted that one of the characteristics of the spirit of resentment in Nietzsche was a prodigious memory.

be justified in pronouncing our aversion? There is a tension between, on the one hand, an anti-metaphysical (i.e., anti-authoritarian) rejection of canons (just like there are no beaux-arts, just paintings, so there cannot be canon, just works) and, on the other, the pedagogical, normative, political (not just expediency but) necessity of acknowledging the grounds we share.