CONVERSATIONS WITH STANLEY
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What we call thinking may be just a kind of conversation with others and myself. Perhaps it may be simply, or exactly, a conversation in which, and through which, I discover that my reflections on the world are limited and I come into contact with what lies beyond these limits. Such boundaries shift with the conversation, as does our perception of the world. Thinking is a distinctly human task, one that is constitutive of humanity in its confrontation with skepticism — the critical point within critical thinking and a threat to which we as humans are asked to respond on ethical grounds. Perhaps that is why few other intellectual works had the same effect on me as that of Stanley (1926—2018). Discovering The World Viewed was one of the highlights of my student years. I saw this reading suggestion to Andrew Klevan, then my teacher at the University of Kent before his appointment at Oxford. Stanley’s free-way of writing, open thinking and rethinking of things, careful consideration of topics and means, and permanent connection of thought and art to life was engaging. Then came other books. His philosophical contributions, which cannot be defined as a philosophy per se, were elaborated along these lines. That is why he wrote:

“Discussion begins with the feeling that someone is speaking to you, but that you may not be speaking to anyone. Sometimes in a drawer. That is why he wrote:

Cynics about philosophy, and perhaps about humanity, will find that questions without answers are empty; dogmatists will claim to have arrived at answers; perhaps that is why few other intellectual works had the same effect on me as that of Stanley Cavell (1926—2018). Discovering The World Viewed was one of the highlights of my student years. I saw this reading suggestion to Andrew Klevan, then my teacher at the University of Kent before his appointment at Oxford. Stanley’s free-way of writing, open thinking and rethinking of things, careful consideration of topics and means, and permanent connection of thought and art to life was engaging. Then came other books. His philosophical contributions, which cannot be defined as a philosophy per se, were elaborated along these lines. That is why he wrote:

Talking about questions without answers, to which we reply nonetheless, is tantamount to an affirmation that thinking has no end, that it is never-ending human endeavor of conversation. It was in this spirit that a colleague from Canada, Amir Khan, and I began to sketch out a journal of Cavellian studies. “Cavellian” does not describe a complete and closed philosophical system, but points to a field of dialogue opened up by a particular way of philosophizing. We pitched the project to the University of Ottawa, where Amir was affiliated, and that institution became the partner we needed. For the advisory board, we gathered scholars who engaged with Cavell’s thoughts and writings from different academic areas — aesthetics, film studies, literary theory, moral philosophy, political philosophy, theatre studies, theology — Stanley Bates (Middlebury College), who passed away in late 2017, Sarah Bethel (Duke University), Peter Dula (Eastern Mennonite University), Richard Eldridge (Swarthmore College), Adam Gonya (Braemar College), Larry Jackson (The New School), Andrew (University of Oxford), Stephen Mulhall (University of Oxford), Stianne Ngai (Stanford University), Andrew Norris (University of California, Santa Barbara), Lawrence Riu (University of South Carolina), D. N. Rodinick (University of Chicago), and Miguel Tamen (University of Lisbon). The first issue of Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies was published in 2019. Throughout its six published issues, the journal has set up threads of conversation. The opportunities to follow and peer into each of these conversations, we hoped, would keep readers interested. For instance, Stanley new art criticism and philosophical thinking in the other, both as human activities, that is, personal activities, which are inherently dialogical. The publication springs from the same view. He wrote:

This … always, for me, defending the process of criticism, as far as criticism is thought of, as I think of it, as a natural extension of conversation. (And think of conversation as something within which that remark about conversation is naturally in place. This one too.)

For Stanley, philosophy must acknowledge and valorize human expression, particularly in its verbal form. Words have to be intimately charged with life and therefore philosophical thought has to return and be returned to the ordinary. In this sense, all of his writings have direct or indirect autobiographical connections. It is not that when he is thinking philosophically he cannot think beyond his own history. Rather, the meandering a

The moral of film’s image of skepticism is not that reality is a dream and not that reality is obstructed from us, it holds reality before us, i.e., withholds reality before us. […]

The conversation at any point that is open to us in a dialogue with the other, both as human activities, that is, personal activities, which are inherently dialogical. The publication springs from the same view. He wrote:

The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film
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The World Viewed, 19.

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