It happens that people recognize that they are not in agreement with each other and experience a loss of relation in circumstances of various kinds. And when they do, philosophy can begin. Stanley Cavell, however, not only says that philosophy can begin. He expresses a stronger claim, saying that “philosophy begins in loss, in finding yourself at a loss, as [Ludwig] Wittgenstein more or less says. Philosophy that does not so begin is so much talk.”1 And when it begins, according to Cavell, it can untangle conceptual confusions and clarify linguistic practices; it can be tailored to diagnose the history of individuals and groups with the specific aim of articulating the voice of the individual; and it can make it possible for the individual to strive for perfection. However, philosophy does not always begin when people recognize that they are not in agreement with each other or when they experience loss; philosophy cannot get off the ground or come to resolution unless people are willing or have a chance to begin a philosophical inquiry. And when it does not begin, people may find themselves or others to be less open-minded, striving to maintain certain practices, traditions, and narratives instead of making it possible for themselves and others to live alternative or new ways of life, to think differently and continue the endless struggle for transformation. People may even believe or come to believe that they have overcome loss or think it is possible to overcome it. However, I find it reasonable to believe, as Cavell does, that “loss is as such not to be overcome, it is interminable, for every new finding may incur a new loss.” He concludes that “the price is necessarily to give something up, to let go of something, to suffer one’s poverty”; it is to begin philosophy.2 This suggests that you come to understand the need to recover from loss, the need for change and transformation of society and the self, and that you are willing to strive for perfection. This struggle is, however, a process that can never be completed because it is always, according to Cavell, possible to conceptualize yet another higher self to reach for. Moreover, to begin philosophy can also mean that you come to acknowledge what is human and what characterizes humanity, and that, according to Cavell, you come to realize that “the human creature’s basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of


2. Ibid., 114.
as knowing." This suggests, based on my reading of Cavell, that a human being’s relation to him- or herself, others, and the world is better understood in moral than in epistemological terms. However, even though “the human creature’s basis in the world as a whole” is better understood in moral terms, the need for change, for transformation, as a call for morality is, for Cavell, not a call for morality in the sense of fixed principles or finite ends or of knowledge as the basis for action, but a call for morality in terms of self-transcendence — the unknown, what is yet to come, the facelessness of the unattained yet attainable self; it is a need for change in our beliefs and the like, for speaking not only for ourselves but also for others and their/our opportunities to struggle for transformation when necessary; it is a need for an “absolute responsibility of the self to make itself intelligible.” This call — for morality, for moral perfectionism — is a call, Cavell says, for being open to the further self, in oneself and in others, which means holding oneself in knowledge of the need for change; which means, being one who lives in promise, as a sign, or representative human, which in turn means expecting oneself to be, making oneself, intelligible as an inhabitant now also of a further realm. Call this the realm of the human — and to show oneself prepared to recognize others as belonging there; as if we were all teachers or, say, philosophers. (CHU, 125)

This call for morality is not only a call for attentiveness, but also of acknowledgment of and responsiveness, to the voice or rather voices of ourselves as well as of others, which requires courage and “that we become ashamed in a particular way of ourselves, of our present stance” (CHU, 16) so that we make our society and ourselves more human. Shame, Cavell says, “manifests the cost as well as the opportunity in each of us as the representative of each. It is why shame, in Emerson’s discourse — his contradiction of joy — is the natural or inevitable enemy of the attainable self, the treasure of perfectionism for democracy” (CHU, 30). It involves an “expression of disgust with or a disdain for the present state of things so complete as to require not merely reform, but a call for a transformation of things, and before all a transformation of the self — a call that seems so self-absorbed and obscure as to make morality impossible” (CHU, 46). Cavell continues, “The recovery from loss is, in Emerson, as in Freud and in Wittgenstein, a finding of the world, a returning of it, to it.” It is a return to philosophy.


4. Stanley Cavell, Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxvii. This work will be cited as CHU in the text for all subsequent references.

5. Cavell, This New Yet Unapproachable America, 114.
Philosophy, however, does not only begin in loss; when we do not know our way about or even when we recover from loss, this can in itself be a cause of loss. Cavell notes that "Wittgenstein's claim is that philosophy causes us to lose ourselves and that philosophy is philosophy's therapy." This suggests that philosophy does not only begin when human beings experience loss, it can in itself even cause an experience of loss, of giving up something. If this is correct, then philosophy can be both a source and a cause of crisis — of loss — and refers to the philosopher in us who emerges when he or she is at a loss and wants to recover and find his or her way back to intelligibility. Moreover, philosophy does not only begin in loss or cause loss; it is also, as we have seen, a search for the individual who aims to transform him- or herself or the community or education, and who will not be satisfied with him- or herself or society or the system within it (economic, political, or bureaucratic) as long as injustice or misery of any kind exists. It is, however, not an ideal of perfection with fixed ends that motivates or should motivate the individual; it is, rather, an ethical injunction for the individual to explore the possibilities to change conditions and the situation in which he or she takes part, and to react to and act against injustice or discrimination of any sort that would restrict transformation and the drive to change; it is a process in which the individual, the community, and education are constantly in the making with no final predetermined end(s).

Furthermore, Cavell’s view of perfectionism contains the idea of a criticism from within that aims at building the "character to keep the democratic hope alive in the face of disappointment with it" (CHU, 56), and a criticism of an individual or a society that seeks perfection with fixed ends. It is also a criticism of the conventional or conventional forms of life, and of any effort to mold or affect an individual to come to embrace beliefs and values and attitudes of the sort that do not contribute to the cultivation of his or her humanity. It is a critique of a society and its ideals and visions of the good life, of its universalistic claim, and in particular of its efforts to have its members conform to its ideals and visions of conformity itself. In Cavell’s words, "in criticizing my society for its relative disadvantages I am in effect criticizing myself" (CHU, 28). It is, as I read him, a critique of our beliefs, values, and attitudes, as well as of our practices, traditions, and institutions, and of how we form or shape our relations, not only to ourselves but also to each other and the world.

However, even though perfectionism suggests that we should take it upon ourselves to examine what and how we think, it does not mean or suggest that the drive for perfection should aim only or primarily at examining and criticizing the thoughts or even the beliefs and values we hold. It does not even mean or suggest that we should refute the other's way of life. It suggests rather that we should maintain a critical distance and take it upon ourselves to manifest for the

7. Cavell, This New Yet Unapproachable America, 34–35.
other and ourselves another way of living through, for example, writing. Richard Shusterman maintains that

Indeed, Cavell’s perfectionism can be seen as a form of democratic heroism in which self-cultivation encourages us to ever greater efforts to respect the difference, claims, and suffering of others, even if these labors take the form of pursuit of our own further self who is represented in others as “our beyond.”

Hence, perfectionism places “tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one’s society” (CHU, 2), and is, according to Cavell, a heightened sense of your self as well as of the self or voice of the other as a nonconformist being. It proposes “confrontation and conversation as the means of determining whether we can live together, accept one another into aspirations of our lives,” and it invites, as we have seen, self-criticism and discomfort that unsettles the understanding of yourself and others. It makes possible the making of the world as you and others see it in conversation without imposing ourselves on the other or hindering or stopping the force or motivation for continuous transformation. And it is, among other things, through conversation among friends that the transformation of the self and society can happen. This suggests that a transitional self or a self in transition can affect others and that it can reveal the hidden, repressed, or forgotten voices of the self, but at the price of having to admit with humility, and perhaps with shame and guilt, that it is not possible to acknowledge or respond wholeheartedly to each and every voice. There is not even a definite way of finding out which voices to respond to and which ones to leave unanswered. It seems beyond our capacity, and is a reason why human beings, according to Cavell, cannot avoid being ashamed or disgusted and why they cannot avoid experiencing guilt. There will most likely be voices left unanswered, voices that are not acknowledged and not responded to; realizing this can make one feel guilty and ashamed, even disgusted with oneself. It is therefore not only the quality of the attentiveness to the (forgotten, hidden, or discriminated against) voices that is of importance in our relations with others; it is also the quality of our acknowledgment of them and, in particular, of our responsiveness to them. We can, for example, be blind to the different voices, avoid them or ignore them, but we cannot, according to Cavell, avoid our responsibility to them.

The preceding discussion suggests that what we can do, if we want to be responsible, is to move beyond our knowledge, responding not only to what is but also to what is yet to come, to the uncertainty of how one should live and


how one should behave in relation to others as well as yourself. It also suggests that the basic character of the relation among people is tied to our ability or willingness to acknowledge and respond to what has been expressed by the other, and that the refusal to acknowledge and respond to the other is a denial of the other’s claim upon you. Such a refusal means or suggests, as I read Cavell, that the humanity not only of the other but also in ourselves is not respected, that you and the other are made less human; it may even mean that the voice of the human conscience is not respectfully considered, and that the other is condemned to nonexistence.11

When, for example, a person is suffering, he or she makes a claim upon us as persons, as human beings, according to Cavell;12 this calls each of us to acknowledge the suffering of the other and respond to him or her responsibly. And in some cases we do acknowledge the suffering of and respond responsibly to the other, we do express our sympathy for the other’s suffering and offer help. However, in other cases we do not acknowledge the claim that the other makes upon us; it may even be the case that we do not offer help to the other and, further, that we do not respond sympathetically to the other’s suffering. In this engagement with the other, our response reveals the quality of our acknowledgment of and responsiveness to him or her, and goes beyond re-cognition as an act of cognition only. It can be seen as an expression of our understanding of as well as of the quality of our acknowledgment of and responsiveness to the state or condition the other is in, and what he or she needs or wants, and as a demonstration of our humanity.

We respond, of course, in a wide variety of ways, not only to ourselves but also to others. We can act out of interest, fear, anxiety, frustration, boredom, love, a sense of duty, sympathy, and so on, and we can act with a sense of guilt and shame. We demonstrate, for example, a sense of guilt if, in our response, we show that we could have acted differently; and we demonstrate a sense of shame if, in our response, we show that we could have acted differently but did not do so even while knowing that we could. Guilt and shame can be seen as expressions of disgust and a call for change and transformation, in particular, of the way(s) we think about and value others and ourselves and the present state of things, of society and its culture(s). Cavell asserts that “the worst thing we could do is rely on ourselves as we stand — this is simply to be the slaves of our slavishness: it is what makes us spawn” (CHU, 47). He continues, “We must become averse to this conformity, which means convert from it, which means transform our conformity, as if we are to be born [again]” (CHU, 47). This suggests that guilt and shame are directed at conformity and can be seen as the driving force of

perfectionism. It is, however, not only a driving force for change but also a call for radical transformation. Naoko Saito observes that

The fundamental mode of Emersonian [or Cavell’s view on] perfectionist education is neither fear, nor doubt, nor the asceticism that is so much a part of absolutist forms of education; rather it is geared towards trust — trust in prophetic impulse and the creative energy of life, trust in what is yet to come. This is trust not only in personal relationships, but in what experience and nature can bequeath us beyond ourselves.13

The call for transformation, Cavell claims, is initiated not only through conversation but also through reading and writing, and moves us toward our unattained yet attainable self, and discloses to the other another way of living. Reading and writing also illustrate the life of philosophy and the activity of the philosopher, as Cavell notes: “I have wished to understand philosophy not as a set of problems but as a set of texts. This means to me that the contribution of a philosopher — anyway of a creative thinker — to the subject of philosophy is not to be understood as a contribution to, or of, a set of given problems.”14 The value of the contribution of a philosophical text is, according to Cavell, demonstrated through the extent to which it is attentive to, acknowledges, and responds to the human voice, or rather voices of human beings, and “the quality of the texts it arouses.”15 Hence, conversation as well as reading and writing exemplify the practice of self-critique and self-transformation. They call upon us to acknowledge and respond to the ways we understand others and ourselves, and to consider carefully how we are attuned and responsive to each other as well as to objects and events in the world.

It is, as we have seen, a friend who invites us — in conversation, for example — to move beyond the understanding we have of ourselves, others, and the world, who confronts us and our beliefs, values, and attitudes, challenges them and teaches us the value of self-transformation and transformation of society, culture, politics, the economy, and the like. The friend can also remind us of our alignments with others, the world, and ourselves, as well as of the value of exploring and inquiring into how we think and how we acknowledge and respond to others and ourselves, not only in conversation but also through reading and writing. It is through these activities that we can hold out some alternative visions of how we can live our lives, of how we can move beyond ourselves and compel ourselves to consider beliefs, values, and forms of life we perhaps had not encountered before. However, even though reading and writing as well as conversation have a distinct meaning and value for Cavell — of resistance to the state of conformity and of self-critique and self-transformation as well

15. Ibid., 5.
as transformation of society — they do not signify perfectionism itself. Nothing could:

Perfectionism, as I think of it, is not a competing theory of the moral life, but something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life that spans the course of Western thought and concerns what used to be called the state of one's soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one's society. \( \text{CHU, 2} \)

Cavell continues by saying that he has no definition of perfectionism, "no complete list of necessary and sufficient conditions for using the term ... no theory in which a definition of perfectionism would play a useful role [and] no closed list of features that constitute perfectionism" \( \text{CHU, 4} \). He emphasizes instead "an open-ended thematics [in terms of] perfectionism" \( \text{CHU, 4} \) in which he reclaims autonomy of the self and its use of language against conformity, injustice, or discrimination of any kind.

An important issue for Cavell is "whether the voice I lend in recognizing a society as mine, as speaking for me, is my voice, my own" \( \text{CHU, 27} \). Such a voice is personal and autonomous to the extent that it opens up for moral perfectionism in conversation, and through reading and writing, and "frees us from our attachment to the person of the one who brings the message" — that is, frees us "from the person of its author."\(^{16}\) However, it does not only detach us and free us from each other, demonstrating the separateness between us as persons with our own separate voices; moral perfectionism also invokes, as we have seen, a call for an acknowledgment of and responsiveness to the other, in particular to the different voices we have as human beings and as members of different kinds of linguistic communities. It challenges us — his readers — to respond responsibly. And it is to this we now turn.

Cavell has written extensively on matters in philosophy as well as on film criticism and theory, music, literature, and theater, and his philosophy has given rise to numerous publications in, for example, philosophy, and not only for his reading(s) of the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and notions such as agreement or rather attunement, rule-following, practice, and skepticism, but also for his discussions of Thoreau and Emersonian perfectionism. Cavell's work has implications for various strands of philosophy, including aesthetics, epistemology, moral theory, political philosophy, and philosophy of education. And it has also given rise to a number of discussions and responses in the above-mentioned fields.

A primary aim of this symposium is to give voice to philosophers of education who respond through their own writing to various parts of the philosophy of Stanley Cavell. Each one of the contributions stands on its own, and together they illustrate the range, value, and relevance of Cavell's philosophy for philosophical issues and problems related to education and its practice, educational policy, and educational theory. It is therefore an honor for me to present the contributors to this

Duck-Joo Kwak examines Stanley Cavell’s view of political education as an illustration of a moral perfectionist approach to citizenship education and considers whether it is a plausible alternative to communitarian and liberal models. She argues that it is and, further, that Cavell’s ordinary language philosophy can be a good approach to cultivating not only students’ sense of membership but also their ability to reflect philosophically on the human condition. Following Cavell’s approach, Kwak argues, you discover that you are a member of a specific (ethnic, linguistic, political, or religious) community by way of discovering that you are a member of the human community. Thus ordinary language philosophy suggests that you can learn to speak for others by speaking for yourself, or rather that you can learn to speak for yourself and the other politically, as members of the human community.

Naoko Saito and Paul Standish discuss Cavell’s Wittgensteinian approach to skepticism and his account of Emersonian perfectionism as an alternative to nationalism, patriotism, and the identity politics of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. They argue that his antifoundationalism and his idea of philosophy as translation not only destabilize what we believe to be necessary, but can also contribute to the creation of the Great Community of reflective human beings. The latter suggests, according to Saito and Standish, that we (can) continuously readjust and rebuild not only our understanding of others and ourselves but also our understanding of our native language and community through Cavell’s idea of “philosophy as translation.”

Amanda Fulford examines the issue of inter-cultural understanding from the perspective of the philosophy of Stanley Cavell and in particular Naoko Saito’s reading of his philosophy and of Henry David Thoreau’s Walden. She also explores Cavell’s philosophy against the context of the field of literacy studies, particularly the New London Group’s ‘pedagogy of multiliteracies.’ Fulford argues that literacy education and research concerning literacy studies can benefit from the philosophy of Stanley Cavell as interpreted by Naoko Saito. It invokes a sense of encountering the stranger or the strange in the familiar through translation in inter-cultural understanding; thus it invokes the possibility to transform our understanding of the self, to transform our relation to language and others, and, in particular, to transform literacy studies.

Paul Smeyers and Yusef Waghid discuss the notions of “initiation” and “justification” and the postmodern critique of modernist accounts of such notions. They particularly discuss the writings of Michel Foucault, arguing that his notion of the self is somewhat contentious, and they contrast this understanding with that of Cavell, who they claim has a more nuanced view of the relation between the self and the other. They prefer Cavell’s notion of the self, and in particular the relation between the other and the self, because it acknowledges humanity not only in the other but also in the self as a basis for action. This, they suggest,
means that you need to respect the other as well as yourself, and in particular the humanity of each other. Doing so opens us to both attachment and detachment, and thus to a cosmopolitanism that transforms beliefs, values, and particular identities from within.

Viktor Johansson argues that when educational practices break down, teachers and students can be driven toward philosophy or to the beginning of philosophy as a response to anxiety and loss in educational situations. He asserts that philosophy in educational contexts is a matter of practical struggle that can open a space for philosophical reflection by the teacher and the students. Johansson further maintains that children as students, and in particular dissonant children, do not necessarily have to be seen as problematic. Rather, dissonant children should prompt philosophical reflection and can lay the ground for an education for grown-ups to the extent that they call upon teachers to recognize the humanity not only in themselves but also in children, in their students.