TEACHING TO UNLEARN COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO MAKE A CLAIM TO COMMUNITY

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Abstract. In this essay Duck-Joo Kwak explores a moral perfectionist approach to citizenship education, which is distinct from liberal and communitarian models. One of educational challenges to this approach is how to cultivate our students’ sense of membership, which is shaped by a thick sense of the good life, while being not merely compatible with but open to the pluralist perspective. Kwak maintains that what is required for this form of membership to society or community is our future citizens’ ability to engage in highly self-reflexive philosophical reflection on the human condition; such reflection gives them the skills necessary to live up to the tension between different selves of diverse origins or within a divided self. Examining Stanley Cavell’s view of political education as an exemplar of the moral perfectionist approach to citizenship education, Kwak shows how the practice of his ordinary language philosophy can be a good way to cultivate this ability by teaching us how to “speak for others” by way of “speaking for oneself.”

Introduction: Moral Perfectionist Approach to Citizenship Education

The possibility of building solidarity across people with differences, whether they be national, ethnic, cultural, racial, or religious differences, has presented a huge challenge to liberal democratic education in our contemporary pluralistic and globalizing world. In emphasizing a sense of community in education, we liberal and democratic educators often fail to show with confidence the source of the solidarity to our students. Physical, social, or psychological walls tend to be built around all sorts of communities in the very name of “community.” Thus, it seems not enough just to invoke community in education. We still need to know and teach what authorizes educators to invoke it. This concerns the founding source of community in the postliberal society.

When we ask about the founding source of community, a communitarian such as Alasdair MacIntyre would pinpoint the “tradition” of the community, defined in terms of “practices,” whereas a political liberal such as John Rawls would suggest “consent” among free and equal individuals based on their enlightened self-interest. But either answer strikes us as too simplistic and not quite responsive to the sense of uneasiness we feel today. In the (post)modern condition of “the world of constant movement, both forced and free, both at the center and the periphery of the global system, societies or communities are increasingly multiple in their nature,”1 having different origins, drawing on differing traditions, coming from different places. In what Andy Hargreaves describes as “the paradox of

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globalization,'2 economic globalization and homogenization tend to lead many of those who cannot share in the benefits of globalization to turn inward to culture, religion, and ethnicity as alternative sources of meaning and identity in the form of narrow nationalism, regionalism, and parochialism. The unprecedented mobility among people from diverse backgrounds driven by economic forces and the unpredictable complexity of their political and cultural conflicts seem to have spread a heightened sense of personal insecurity and to have created a society of suspicious minds.

Thus, merely appealing to community in education in the name of “tradition” or “consent” could either sound hypocritical or mean something quite different, depending upon who invokes it and toward whom it is directed. This problem, at least from the educational point of view, seems to derive from the lack of a common source of authority on the basis of which we invoke community. This means that to invoke community in citizenship education without a sense of who invokes it, toward whom, and on what grounds is problematic; any serious program of citizenship education needs to address the problematic nature of specifying a founding source of community.

However, the two competing models of citizenship education currently dominant in the West seem to fall short of meeting this demand. Along postliberal lines of thought, Terence McLaughlin and J. Mark Halstead formulate them as “nonexpansive” and “expansive” character education, respectively.3 Nonexpansive character education insists on the inculcation of transcultural moral values (such as the personal virtues of justice, honesty, or loyalty) as moral basics, combining Aristotelian ethics and moral cosmopolitanism. It assumes that human beings, wherever they live, share roughly the same psychological makeup and a similar set of moral values and virtues. Expansive character education, on the other hand, downplays the importance of transcultural moral values and virtues and instead emphasizes more expansive values of particular political systems, cultures, or religions. Combining liberal ethics and moral perspectivism, it advocates the cultivation of a perspective-sensitive attitude (that is, tolerance, social and moral responsibility, and political literacy) as a democratic virtue.

I am not sure if personal virtues such as justice, honesty, or loyalty can be properly fostered without being rooted in a particular community with a thick sense of a good life. I also doubt whether teaching tolerance or perspective-sensitive


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political literacy could affect future citizens’ sense of their selfhood in a meaningful way without at the same time leading them into anything-goes relativism. My worry is that both models of citizenship education may end up fostering, at best, our future citizens’ ability to choose and confirm their ways of life, rather than to contest and live up to them, because they are carefully designed to avoid political controversy over “comprehensive” values of the good life in the name of “civic” values.4 What seems to be required in the highly competitive globalizing postliberal society is a stronger sense of membership that allows us to contest given ways of life while being self-reflectively committed to the substantial moral and political orientation of one’s selfhood.

I think one of the most significant educational challenges for this moral perfectionist approach is how to encourage our students to pursue their selfhood based on a thick sense of the good life, while being not merely compatible with but open to the pluralist perspective — or, more accurately, how to educate them in such a way as to prevent them from being partisan, yet not make them neutral. This form of membership in society or community requires that future citizens engage in intensive philosophical reflection on the self and the individual’s relation to society.5 In other words, the political subject today, whether multiculturalist or cosmopolitan, needs to be equipped with a highly self-reflexive philosophical intelligence to survive politically in the increasingly globalizing, politically complicated postliberal society.6

In this essay, I examine Stanley Cavell’s view of political education as exemplifying the moral perfectionist approach to citizenship education in order to see if it can be a plausible alternative to liberal and communitarian models. The essay consists of two parts. In the first part, I attempt to explicate the unique view of the relation of the individual to community that Cavell’s moral perfectionism presupposes. In the second part, I reconstruct how Cavell makes use of the teaching of liberals’ social contract theories as a way of practicing political education.

Cavell’s View of the Relation of the Individual to Community: Agreement and Community

In a highly competitive globalizing society, we are easily driven to have an exaggerated sense of separateness from those in a different political camp, on one hand, and an exaggerated sense of connectedness with those in the same political circle, on the other hand. This exaggerated sense of separateness or connectedness


5. I will use the terms “society” and “community” interchangeably here, following the spirit of Cavell’s moral perfectionism in which the liberal assumption of the distinction between the public and the private tends to be obscured. On the liberal assumption, a “society” of autonomous individuals is considered to be the public realm, while a “community” of those people with a shared view of the good life to be the private realm.

prevents us from speaking for each other, which, I think, is the foundational element for our sense of community. We tend to politicize each other and thereby easily become the victims of the politicized environments ourselves. How often do we face distrust or misunderstanding in speaking to others about political as well as moral issues — distrust because their political interests conflict with our own, misunderstanding because they have a different set of epistemological or moral assumptions about the world? It is very hard to invoke the authority of what I say unless I first succeed in gaining the trust of others to whom I speak. Thus, we can say that the weakening of community so pervasive in our daily life today is manifested in the crisis of our communication, and that the crisis of our communication threatens the authority my words hold for others to whom I speak. Each of us is living in an isolated world of one’s own in which it is almost impossible to make what I say (or myself) intelligible to others. Thus, the matter of invoking community can be said to be narrowed down to the matter of genuine communication with others, that is, getting our meanings across to others in the way that we intend.

Stanley Cavell, known as an ordinary language philosopher, might diagnose that our modern crisis in speaking to each other derives from our forgetfulness of how we can speak for each other. And in response to this crisis, Cavell would propose the philosophical pursuit of criteria governing what we say as a way to recover our ability to speak for each other. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was deeply interested in the philosophical investigation of criteria governing our use of words, Cavell says, “the philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community.”

I think Cavell’s concern with criteria and the way he philosophizes over them deserve serious attention in the context of citizenship education. As the quotation indicates, he views the philosophical pursuit of criteria as an educational device that can enable us to make a claim to community, that is, to speak for others again. In other words, Cavell invites us to pursue the criteria underlying what we say as a way to educate ourselves and thus become learned members of society. So let me reconstruct Cavell’s account and see how this can be accomplished. In doing so, Cavell’s view of the relation of the individual to community will be revealed.

How should we understand Cavell’s statement that the philosophical pursuit of criteria is the quest for community? According to Cavell, Wittgenstein’s work reveals two crucially important points about the criteria governing what we say as we say. One is the antifoundational nature of criteria. For both Wittgenstein and Cavell, there is no ground in the external world for what we say as we say;

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7. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 20 [emphasis added]. This work will be cited as CR in the text for all subsequent references.
it is just the way we say: “It is not founded on anything but itself, on us.”8 The other key point is the astonishing degree of agreement in what we say as we say, that is, in our judgment and in language; we are so attuned to each other in using language, and this is what makes us the kind of creatures that we are — creatures of language — as well as what sustains our form of life as it is.

But what sort of agreement is this agreement in language? How can we characterize it? To understand it better, let me turn to Cavell’s words:

There is a pervasive and systematic background of agreements among us, which we had not realized, or had not known we realize. Wittgenstein sometimes calls them conventions, sometimes rules… The agreement we act upon he calls “agreement in judgments,” and he speaks of our ability to use language as depending upon agreement in “forms of life.” But forms of life, he says, are exactly what have to be “accepted”: they are “given.” (CR, 30)

From the preceding passage, we can characterize the agreement in language as follows: First, the agreement in language we speak is shared by those of us who speak the language; it should be attributed to us, not to the world. Second, it is the kind of agreement that is so pervasive and systematic that we ourselves had not recognized it in using the words or following rules. Third, it is the agreement not on opinions but in judgment, which means that it is agreement in the form of our being attuned to each other or in the way each of us orients our everyday lives, not agreement in our specific views regarding particular subjects. Fourth, being capable of agreeing in language is essential to the way we speak as linguistic creatures, or to our [human] form of life. Finally, our [human] form of life is given, so that we are forced to accept it as long as we live the human life we know. Thus, for Cavell, our agreement in language is the founding source of [human] community, and my membership in the [human] community can be gained only through this agreement in the language we speak.

What does this fact imply about the relation of the I to the us? If our form of life is given to us, and if we are forced to accept it, this seems to imply that my membership in the [human] community is always already given to me, whether or not I recognize it. Is this the only point of our philosophical pursuit of criteria and our discovery about form of life? Cavell certainly rejects this conservative interpretation of Wittgenstein’s criteria and tries to make a distinction between what is socially [conventionally] given and what is humanly [naturally] given in our form of life. The fact “that forms of life are given does not mean only that what we are given are forms of life, but also that our form of life is a given.”9

The former refers to what is humanly given, that is, a form of life shared by all humanity, and the latter to a particular form of life I happen to be born to. According to Sandra Laugier, Cavell’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s form of life is not a conservative reading, rather, it recognizes the mutual implication of “the

natural and the social” in our form of life. When Cavell invites us to undertake the philosophical pursuit of criteria, he expects us to come to see the complexity of the two mutually implicated aspects of our form of life and asks us to suffer from it in such a way as to achieve learned membership in our community.

Let me elaborate on what this means by invoking once again Cavell’s words:

When I remarked that the philosophical search for our criteria is a search for community, I was in effect answering the second question I uncovered in the face of the claim to speak for “the group” — the question, namely, about how I could have been party to the establishing of criteria if I do not recognize that I have and do not know what they are. The answer, in terms of that remark, should best be to make out that there are [what Wittgenstein calls] criteria (i.e. produce some), and to admit that nobody could have established them alone, and that of course whoever is party to them does know what they are (though he or she may not know how to elicit and state them, and not recognize his or her complicity under that description). ([CR, 22])

According to Cavell, then, criteria are given, and even if I do not know that there are criteria governing my use of words, I am already participating in them through language. The fact that there are criteria tells us that there is community since nobody could have established them alone. Just as the criteria are there regardless of my recognizing them, there is a [human] community I already belong to, regardless of my acknowledging it. On the other hand, I do know what the criteria are, if I am asked what governs our use of language, although it would not be that easy for me to clearly articulate them. In other words, in seeking criteria I can rediscover the criteria that I had already known even if I did not know that they were there, and thereby rediscover the community I did not recognize I had belonged to. This is a new discovery about myself as well as my membership in the given community, both social and natural.

With this new self-knowledge regarding my membership, I can now entertain the idea of refusing membership in the social [or conventional] aspect of the given community — that is, the particular form of life that I am subject to — as a way of confirming my membership in the natural [or human] aspect of the given community. But the confirmation of my membership in the human aspect of the given community cannot make sense for its own sake since the membership has no specific reference point to be applied to without the particular community of convention. The confirmation makes sense only when it functions to contest my membership in the conventional aspect of the given community. This means that the discovery of my membership in the human community allows me room to consider the possibility of dissenting against the particular community I belong to, as a way of speaking for others as well as for myself, who belong to the same human community. I would call this a moment of unlearning community, that is, discovering the founding source of community not in the social but in the natural aspect of our agreement. This moment in turn leads us to another moment of making a claim to community, that is, deciding which community I want to associate myself with in order to achieve learned membership.

10. Ibid.
The following passage by Cavell seems to support this line of interpretation:

"I would like to say: if I am to have a native tongue, I have to accept what "my elders" say and do as consequential, and they have to accept, even have to applaud, what I say and do as what they say and do. We do not know in advance what the content of our mutual acceptance is, how far we may be in agreement. I do not know in advance how deep my agreement with myself is, how far responsibility for the language may run. But if I am to have my own voice in it, I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me. The alternative to speaking for myself representatively (for someone else's consent) is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute. (CR, 28)"

The passage seems to describe our membership in two different phases, prior to and after our self-discovery. Even before the self-discovery, membership is given to me even if I do not know what it means to me and what it entails for me. But my self-discovery places me in a position to have my own voice in participating in the given community, that is, speaking for others by way of speaking for myself. The last sentence of the passage sums up well what this would be like by contrasting "speaking for myself representatively" with "having nothing to say," or "being silent" with "being voiceless."

The discovery of my membership in the human community is supposed to recover my own voice, which is itself a way of speaking for others; here my own voice represents the human community because I am speaking as one who has decided to take responsibility as a member of the human community. Even being silent can be a way of speaking for others in the sense that it can be an expression of dissent against the given community. But having nothing to say or being voiceless is to avoid acknowledging oneself as a member of the human community. Thus, for Cavell, the goal of citizenship education is to achieve learned membership, which means for our future citizens to be able to speak for others by way of having their own voice. This is exactly what Cavell means when he says that community, or the agreement it is based on, is something that is at once given and decided.

Given the argument so far, the way Cavell views the relation of the individual to community seems quite different from the ways liberals and communitarians do. Both understand community as based on agreement. But what is the nature of the agreement? Liberals view the nature of the agreement as contractual, that is, that I and others as self-interested individuals come to an agreement with each other; here the primary source of community is self-interested individuals' rational consent. On the other hand, communitarians view the nature of the agreement as harmonious, that is, belonging to a shared tradition; it is not for me to enter into an agreement, but that, as a member of society, I am already participating in an agreement. Thus, while liberals view the matter of which community I belong to as a matter of individual choice, communitarians view it as a matter of being given. The liberal/communitarian debate seems fundamentally to rest on this internal division.

For Cavell, the philosophical problem of agreement can be seen as rooted in this duality. And the problem of duality can be dissolved by Cavell's discovery of the significance of criteria, which function both vertically in relation to the world and horizontally in relation to other people — namely, aligning a speaker
with the world as well as with other people by specifying what will count as an instance of a particular matter of fact or of other minds. But the nature, extent, and security of those alignments are not determined in advance of this philosophical pursuit of criteria, but only with it.\textsuperscript{11} The discovery about criteria not only as our agreement among ourselves but also our agreement in language is accompanied by self-knowledge that my agreement or my membership in a particular form of life is itself given, even if it is my responsibility to become a member of the human community by being attuned to criteria. The realization of this responsibility in turn leads me to participate in the particular community by using my own voice as a way to speak for others. Thus, the philosophical investigation of criteria in pursuit of their significance can be a good way to learn of one’s membership in the human community and to recover one’s way of speaking for others.

**Cavell’s Political Education: “To Speak for Each Other Politically”**

The philosophical investigation of criteria can be educationally designed to help our students develop a sense of membership in the human community by teaching them a way of unlearning/learning community. It can provide a perspective from which they can go beyond their social givenness. Cavell in fact suggests a specific concept of political education that can be used in helping our students develop a sense of membership in specific communities when he problematizes social contract theories. The analogy between Cavell’s interpretation of skepticism in epistemology and his interpretation of social contract theory in political philosophy is striking. Cavell asks us to take seriously skepticism about the world; this emphasis is not meant to deny our capacity to know the world, but to reveal the truth of how we are as creatures of language.\textsuperscript{12} Similarly, Cavell asks us to problematize social contract theory; in doing so, his intent is neither to dismiss the theory nor to deny the importance of individuals’ consent as the basis of their membership in society, but to explore it as a means for learning the truth of how we are as political beings.

According to Cavell, the theories of social contract — posed by David Hume and John Locke as an explanatory, not historical, myth — attempt to respond to the question “Why should I obey the government?” By characterizing society as a construction to which its members have consented, social contract theorists simultaneously put society at a distance from its members and join them closely to it. On the other hand, social contract theories tend to conceptualize the arrangement of society as provisional, contingent, and thereby modifiable. As


\textsuperscript{12} “The truth” here is that our relation to the world is not a matter of knowledge, but a matter of our agreement in language or our attunement to others. The discovery of this truth allows me to see myself as a member of the human community only if I accept the presentness of the world to us and the givenness of the human form of life. What is so educational about this realization is that it brings to us a view that it is my responsibility that I become a member of the human community by means of being attuned to criteria or following rules.
a result, they can invite us to see ourselves as answerable for our government as well as answerable to it. To conceive the membership of the polis in this way involves conceiving of the polis as an arena within which each member might be able to exercise autonomy. For if the polis can act in my name, if its structures, arrangements, and decisions are implemented on my authority (as long as I regard myself as exercising the authority), I must regard the polis and its laws as embodying my will. Thus, for social contract theorists, “citizenship in that case is the same as my autonomy: the polis is the field within which I work out my personal identity and it is the creation of political freedom” (CR, 23).

Cavell’s objection to this early version of social contract theories does not lie in their overemphasis on individual autonomy, as the communitarian critique points out, but in their assumption that society has been perfected in terms of “equality,” “freedom,” and “fraternity.” So Cavell reformulates the main question of the social contract theory as follows: “Given the specific inequalities, lack of freedom, and absence of fraternity in the society to which I have consented, do these outweigh the ‘disadvantages’ of withdrawing my consent?” (CR, 24). Cavell thinks this question is exactly how social contract theory can be useful for our political education, for it invites us to think of advantages in view of which we are understood to have given our consent to obey the government while simultaneously highlighting their absence in our present social circumstances. Thus, according to Cavell, it will also push us to “discover whom I am in community with, and what it is to which I am obedient” (CR, 24), the discovery that Cavell views as essential to political education.

What sort of discovery is this? To clarify what Cavell means by “discover” here, let me specify first what he means by political education:

But whether the private motive of the [social contract] theorist is to justify his conviction that the present is one of those few moments at which a dismantling of the artifact is called for, or whether to justify his view that this is never called for, the philosophical significance of the writing lies in its imparting of political education. It is philosophical because its method is an examination of myself as an attack upon my assumption; it is political because the terms of this self-examination are the terms which reveal me as a member of a polis; it is education not because I learn new information but because I learn that the finding and forming of my knowledge of myself requires the finding and forming of my knowledge of that membership (the depth of my own and the extent of those joined with me). (CR, 25)

According to this passage, Cavell sees the teaching of social contract theory as political in the sense that rehearsing the theory would reveal each of us as a member of a polis who needs to be answerable to the polis. It is also educational in the sense that we learn that discovering ourselves as members of the polis is the necessary condition for discovering my knowledge of myself. In other words, this education brings us to the realization that my political identity is a necessary condition for my personal identity. The distinctive feature of Cavell’s account of political education is that the way we should rehearse the social contract theory is philosophical in the sense that the method is “an examination of myself by an attack upon my assumptions” (CR, 25). In fact, this self-examination can be seen to lead us to discover with which community I should associate myself.
Yet, what sort of self-examination is this? What exactly is the “attack upon my assumptions’’ about?

By following Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophical method of taking “as a philosophical datum the fact that men [that he] can speak for society and that society can speak for him, that they reveal one another’s most private thoughts’’ (CR, 25), Cavell holds that political education is directed toward the self-examination of one’s relation to society. According to Cavell, unlike other social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, Rousseau did not attempt to know what the state of nature is like. Upon showing that what other social contract theorists say about the state of nature is just “a projection of our own states of society or our fantasy of it’’ (CR, 25), Rousseau revealed his interest in knowing our relation to society or understanding how the relation can be known. Finding Rousseau’s approach insightful, Cavell claims that what is important in rehearsing social contract theories for political education is not the discovery of new facts about society; the facts are just there to be had. What should be at stake is the self-examination, that is, the discovery of my position with respect to these facts, or how I know with whom I am in community, and to whom and to what I am in fact obedient.

What is to be noted about the philosophical method Cavell adopts from Rousseau is that it assumes that men can, not ought to, speak for society and vice versa. This means that it is not our natural duty to speak for society, and neither is it the duty of society to speak for us. Yet it shows that we can still speak for society and society can speak for us. This implies two things about Cavell’s understanding of our relation to society. One is the assumption that we are the kind of creatures who are capable of exercising our autonomy in speaking for society, even if doing so is not our duty from nature. The other is the assumption that we may not exercise a general will in speaking for society, even if we try [pretend] to do so:

Since the genuine social contract is not in effect (we could know this by knowing that we are born free and are everywhere in chains) it follows that we are not exercising our general will; and since we are not in a state of nature it follows that we are exercising our will not to the general, but to the particular, to the partial, to the unequal, to private benefit, to privacy. (CR, 26)

I think the preceding passage very accurately describes the way we are in the [post]modern condition, which is likely to lead each of us to obey “the logic of conspiracy,’’ to use Cavell’s term (CR, 26). According to Cavell, we hallucinate the meaning of others to us, for example, pretending to take others as equals, when in fact we cannot. Or we have the illusion of meaning something to one another, for instance, pretending to take each other as free fellow citizens, while each of us is destined to be partial and unequal for our favor in relation to others. In other words, we are implicated in a conspiracy against others without noticing it ourselves.

On the other hand, contradictorily enough, we believe others to be implicated in this conspiracy against us; the conspiracy is perceived to be true only of others against us. In other words, I tend to project onto others or society my own relation to others or society, which is partial, particular, and unequal, without noticing it
myself; I blame others or society for their conspiracy against me, while in fact it is I who conceived the conspiracy against others in the first place, in pursuit of self-preservation. Everything on this earth now looks politicized, and there is no common ground on the basis of which we justify our actions or give consent to each other. The source of this pervasive culture of politicization seems to be our original hallucination of the meaning of others to us as our equals or free fellow citizens. Cavell calls this discovery not a discovery of new knowledge about us, but a new mode of knowledge about us, that is, “a way to use the self as access to the self’s society” (CR, 26).

How is this new mode of knowledge supposed to help our future citizens in their political education? Cavell says that his description of the (post)modern self in the logic of conspiracy is not meant to express that self’s psychological problems (that is, the (post)modern self with split personality); it is rather meant to express grief over a society that conducts itself in this way. Here by society he seems to refer to the way we are collectively being politicized in relation to each other. In other words, the modern self’s journey to the discovery of his or her relation to society is supposed to lead him or her to grief and disappointment. Cavell instructively stresses that the grief should not be for myself, that is, for conspiracies directed against myself; but it should be for society, that is, for the way we collectively happen to be in relation to each other, which willfully denies knowledge of one’s own conspiracy against others.

How can we be cured of this grief or disappointment then? What liberals offer, according to Cavell, is the idea of “consent” or that of “reason.” They say that it is the precondition of consent to society that each individual must give his or her own reason with command of his or her own mind. This means that in order to be able to consent, we need to have the capacity to speak for ourselves. This is why the individual’s autonomy is taken by liberals as the aim of education in modern society. However, as Stephen Mulhall observes, Cavell offers an answer that leads in the opposite direction, holding that “the granting (or withholding) of consent is the precondition, or the condition, of speaking for oneself.” In Cavell’s words,

To speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them — not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind. Who these others are, for whom you speak and by whom you are spoken for, is not known a priori, though it is in practice generally treated as given. To speak for yourself then means risking the rebuff — on some occasion, perhaps once for all — of those for whom you claimed to be speaking; and it means risking having to rebuff — on some occasion, perhaps once for all — those who claimed to be speaking for you. (CR, 27)

According to Cavell, in order to speak for oneself or to achieve autonomy, we first need to be able to consent to others. But since we do not know to whom we will consent before we attempt to speak for ourselves, we need to assume the givenness of our consent to others. This means that to be able to speak our mind at all, we need to take the risk of believing that we belong to a community of

others. This requires us to have courage because it is always possible to be refused by them; it may turn out that I was speaking my mind to the wrong people. On the other hand, the preceding passage tells us that speaking for oneself politically always already assumes the presence of others for whom you are speaking, even if you are speaking to yourself in private. Unlike in speaking for ourselves in the context of religion or morality, speaking for oneself in the political context requires that we assume the presence of others for whom we are speaking. This is because the achievement of consent from others — that is, the creation of community — is the very purpose of speaking for oneself in the political arena. Thus, we can say that speaking for oneself politically means speaking for others in search of the community to which one wants to make a claim.

I think that this sums up well the main characteristics of Cavell’s political education. In Cavell’s view, political education is supposed to teach our future citizens how to look for someone or some group to whom they can give consent or for whom they can speak by way of speaking for themselves — in other words, political education involves teaching how to know with whom I am in community, and to whom and to what I am in fact obedient. It is important to note that which community you should be associated with is not known before you are able to speak for yourself; this is something to be discovered at the risk of being rebuffed by others. In other words, political education is supposed to foster a political subject who is capable not only of speaking for oneself but also of risking rebuff by others. In this sense, Cavell’s political education requires of our future citizens an accomplishment that is both intellectual and moral.

Conclusion: Citizenship Education in the Quest of Community

From what has been argued so far we can draw out a few distinctive features of Cavell’s approach to citizenship education and their educational implications. First, membership in a society or community is considered to be something that must be learned rather than something that is “given” or based on “rational consent”; here the philosophical investigation of criteria can be employed to teach us to realize the ambiguous nature of one’s membership in a particular community in light of one’s imagined membership in the human community at large. Second, this learned membership is based on a new mode of knowledge, that is, one’s knowledge of one’s relation to society; the rehearsing of social contract theories is useful in teaching us to look for a specific community in which each citizen can participate with his or her own voice. Third, Cavell takes philosophical method as pivotal to this education; that is, philosophical reflection on the criteria underlying what we say as well as on our relation to society is in the end supposed to lead us into self-knowledge as a responsible political subject.

I think this approach necessarily involves inviting future citizens to contest the assumptions of their comprehensive views of the good life. The key to Cavell’s political education is to teach our students to be able to speak for others [or to be spoken for by others] by way of speaking for themselves. This means that by being invited to seek their own voices as members of society, they are expected to expose their conviction, to reveal their sense of what must and what cannot be the
case, and to break up their necessity, only to discover a truer necessity of theirs, that is, their own sense of community and their partiality in their membership to it. This is now a kind of membership that dares to entertain the idea that one's rationality in speaking for oneself could be a set of prejudices, even if he or she still pursues the consent of others in search of those who would respond to it. I think that it is a kind of membership with a pluralist streak, which prevents our future citizens from being partisan, yet does not make them neutral.

The discussion so far enables us to see a distinction between a mere withdrawal from community and a withdrawal of consent from it. For Cavell, the granting of consent entails the acknowledgment of others; and the withdrawal of consent — that is, dissent — also entails the same acknowledgment of others. Thus he says, “dissent is not undoing of consent, but a dispute about its consent” (CR, 27). On Cavell's view a mere withdrawal from community is politically problematic because it expresses indifference to others or community, or the neglect of one's responsibility for his or her polis. Whether or not we consent to others, political education is supposed to teach us how to acknowledge others, even those who are not part of our community. This is because even those who are not currently part of our community are always subject to possible future membership in our community. In this sense, what seems to divide us politically is not merely our single-minded pursuit of self-interest; it is rather our lack of self-knowledge not only about our membership in a polis but also about the particularity and partiality of our membership. Thus we can conclude that any serious form of citizenship education needs to be wary not so much of the former (single-minded pursuit of self-interest) as of the latter (self-ignorance).