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ACCOUNTING FOR *THE ROAD*:
TRAGEDY, COURAGE, AND CAVELL'S
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Abstract. The nameless father of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* is repeatedly faced with the difficulty of having to account for a world left desolate after a global catastrophe. The father remains committed to such a world even though it is rife with cannibalism and violence. Yet how can he account for this existence to his son? Why pass on such a way of life? I enlist the ordinary language philosophy of Wittgenstein and Cavell in an effort to account for the father's commitment. I employ the categories of tragedy, courage, and Cavell's notion of acknowledgment to understand the novel's unsettling vision.

We remain unknown to ourselves, we seekers after knowledge, even to ourselves: and with good reason. We have never sought after ourselves—so how should we one day find ourselves? . . . And so we necessarily remain a mystery to ourselves, we fail to understand ourselves, we are *bound* to mistake ourselves.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*¹

There is only one salvation for you: take yourself up, and make yourself responsible for all the sins of men. For indeed it is so, my friend, and the moment you make yourself sincerely responsible for everything and everyone, you will see at once that it is really so, that it is you who are guilty on behalf of all and for all.

—Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*²

THE UNNAMED FATHER IN Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* journeys with his son through a world left desolate by an unidentified global

catastrophe. As the pair treks to the southern region of the United States in an effort to survive the winter, the father is often forced by his son's questions to answer for the state of the world, to give an account for their lives in the midst of the "nothingness and night" that characterize the road they travel.³ The plight of the journey is severe enough, but the father's attempts to provide this account become equally revelatory of his own problematic position in such a world. Through this process of self- and world investigation, the boy becomes for the father a kind of revelation—indeed, the son is called the "word of God" (*TR*, p. 5)—that allows the man to find *himself* in the world, his identity in and complicity with it. Yet the problem raised throughout the novel is how the father will respond to this unsettling vision of reality. Furthermore, why should he pass on this dire way of living to his son? I describe the father's commitment to the world as a version of courage, and I argue that the novel's account of this virtue is the only response available to the father and son as they strive to survive the terrors of the road while also refusing to avoid their place within it. This version of courage, I argue, unseats the notion that self-understanding and ultimately a virtuous life are extraordinary, much less dependent upon transcendental grounds or a metaphysic of morals. Instead, in a way that I compare to the ordinary language philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell, the account of courage that emerges from the father and son's journey affirms the ordinary and commits to the human, despite the violent denials that fill their world.

In an effort to arrive at a clearer understanding of this account of courage, I describe the novel's reading of the world—its vision for what it means to be human—as tragic. I use the term "tragedy" as a description of the preoccupation in McCarthy's later work with epistemic contingency, "metaphysical finitude," and the consequences for denying these limits—that is, the results of the human proclivity for disdaining and even destroying the human. I borrow the phrase "metaphysical finitude" from Stanley Cavell in order to present a specific point of consonance in his and McCarthy's conceptions of being human.⁴ In order to provide a more nuanced analysis of how this conception of tragedy relates to the novel's account of courage, I begin by juxtaposing Cavell's understanding of the tragedy that characterizes being human with what I describe as tragic about *The Road*. With this comparison I aim to avoid forcing McCarthy's work to fit a philosophical schema—i.e., to avoid saying that "tragedy" for Cavell is equivalent to my description of McCarthy's work. This comparison also brings into sharper relief how tragedy (in

an extension beyond its classical literary categorization) is descriptive of the type of courage that the man and his son embody. I then read this view of courage alongside the ethics of “acknowledgment” that Cavell presents in *The Claim of Reason*. The consonance between these two is especially keen, I argue, during scenes of cannibalism in the novel. I conclude by distinguishing the courage of the man and his son from the illusions about hope entailed not only in the man’s dreams but also in a particular school of criticism on *The Road*, which mistakenly obscures the tragic in its efforts to affirm certain hopeful sensibilities.

I

There is no single, systematic definition of the tragic in Cavell’s work. In one of his first uses of the term in *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell differentiates between situations in which the American Civil War might have been “tragic because unnecessary” and the view that it was “tragic because necessary.”⁵ Cavell offers this distinction to demonstrate how moral decisions often operate not only as unfortunate alternatives to human brutality but also within historical uncertainties that unsettle their justifiability. In this passage he is at pains to reiterate his repudiation of the views that morality depends either upon universal principles or that it operates within clear deontological parameters (e.g., one *ought* to go to war because of one’s duty to the nation, to perpetuate its freedoms, etc.). This particular application of tragedy to moral philosophy, despite its different emphases from those of later occurrences in *The Claim of Reason*, nonetheless reveals that Cavell’s underlying concern for invoking the concept centers on self-knowledge. That is, his application of the term suggests a human tendency to misperceive one’s place within the world, to misunderstand the limits and possibilities of being human. Tragedy, in other words, evokes what Cavell understands as an all-too-human mode of denial that leads to destructive rage at the inadequacies of the world, language, and even human finitude. For example, in Cavell’s view, to follow the deontological method of moral reasoning amounts to an attempt to avoid the moral complexity of the human situation by looking for suprahuman, universal principles to determine “right” and “rational” behavior. This moral strategy is tragic, Cavell suggests, in the sense that it is a denial of the human; it avoids the complexity and contingency of the human condition.

Yet Cavell also employs the concept of tragedy in his efforts to account for situations as diverse as Lear’s relationship to Cordelia or the suffering

that human beings sometimes describe as the determinations of Fate. In one particularly revealing passage, Cavell cites several examples from classical literature and focuses his application of the term on the trauma these characters experience when they lose their self-blindness. He explains, in reference to Oedipus's fall, that "the tragedy is that the cost of claiming one's identity may claim one's life," whereas in *Phèdre*, "acknowledgment is forbidden from a different source of law: here everything is known to one, and acknowledgment is forbidden to that one" (*CR*, p. 389). Tragedy in these cases refers to a spectrum of situations where self-knowledge is either damning—as with Oedipus, it leads to the damnation of one's self—or causes one to be damned by others. Cavell suggests, then, that the notion of the tragic is evocative of an ordinary experience: tragic characters such as Oedipus recall humanity's own unsettling encounter with self-knowledge. They are exemplars of an ordinary experience called tragedy by being instances of the common feeling of alienation from one's self and one's world.

Cavell's invocation of the tragic is clearest and most provocative in his analysis of Othello and Desdemona at the end of *The Claim of Reason*. Cavell's purpose with this particular case is to demonstrate a parallel between what he famously calls the "truth of skepticism" and the common experience of tragedy (as opposed to the idea that tragedy is only possible for the extraordinary, as seems to be the case in Aristotle's theory).⁶ Cavell attempts to retain the threat of skepticism, which he primarily understands as philosophical doubt regarding the existence of both the material ("external") world and the minds ("inner" thoughts and affections) of others. Such skepticism finds its home, Cavell says, most overtly in the works of philosophers such as Hume and Descartes. Cavell then argues that previous ordinary language philosophers—he especially has J. L. Austin in mind—have mistakenly dismissed skepticism on the grounds that it misuses language to advance its line of questioning. For Austin, skepticism casts into doubt the existence of objects (e.g., a bullfinch), although such uncertainty is never part of the ordinary use of words. Yet Cavell responds that skepticism in fact is "a response to, or expression of, a real experience which takes hold of human beings" (*CR*, p. 140). Thus, despite other problems with the skeptical argument, it does not undermine itself by distorting the "ordinary" use of words. Cavell explains instead that the truth of skepticism is its underlying mood or mindset, which derives from the experience of being alienated from the world, of finding one's *self* in distinction from it.

Cavell describes the underlying mindset of skepticism as a dissatisfaction with the world, its contingency upon language, and the consequent despair about whether one may *know*—which turns out to be a highly technical verb in Cavell’s writings—the world or another person, even whether one may be known by them. Regarding the first two points of dissatisfaction, he explains: “In philosophizing we come to be dissatisfied with answers which depend upon *our* meaning something by an expression, as though what *we* meant by it were more or less arbitrary” (*CR*, p. 215). The philosophizing skeptic—or the modern philosopher chasing fantasies—wants “meaning” to depend upon something other than the subject and the world that he or she has received through language. The conclusion of Cavell’s analysis is that efforts to secure certainty for our knowledge of others, the external world, and ultimately ourselves at best become failed ventures and at worst violent exploitations. The consequences of such misdirected efforts, Cavell explains, is that the skeptical mindset ultimately amounts to some form of *self*-misunderstanding: “And we take what we have fixed or constructed to be *discoveries* about the world, and take this fixation to reveal the human condition rather than our escape or denial of this condition through the rejection of the human conditions of knowledge and action and the substitution of fantasy” (*CR*, p. 216). Denying the human foundations of knowledge (by, for example, insisting upon its transcendental grounds) amounts to an escape, an evasion of its all-too-human limits.

Cavell understands this account of skepticism to run parallel with tragedy in the sense that both experiences are consequences of “denying the human,” a positioning of one’s self that he describes from the earliest parts of his writings as “avoidance.” To be clearer, Cavell describes tragedy as the nearly ubiquitous “attempt to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation.”⁷ As is the case with skepticism, Cavell’s description of tragedy cites episodes where humans become dissatisfied with themselves, their connections to others, and ultimately with their world. The tragic occurs when these unsettled selves not only avoid the truth about the world but also seek to destroy it. For example, in *The Claim of Reason*, Othello serves as the archetype for such tragic violence because he searches for a kind of metaphysical union between himself and Desdemona that is humanly impossible.⁸ His desire for knowing is violent, Cavell insists, because he desires the world, as if he could grasp and own the thing-in-itself (or the other herself) and not *merely* the language that (putatively) separates him from it (from her). In Cavell’s reading, Othello “cannot forgive Desdemona

for existing, for being separate from him, outside, beyond command, commanding, her captain's captain" (*CR*, p. 491).

Cavell describes Othello's situation as tragic—and thus as skepticism "epitomized" (*CR*, p. 483)—not only because he recognizes her as other, as evoking "the mark of finitude, of separateness" (which are virtually synonymous conditions of being human for Cavell) (*CR*, p. 492). But Othello is also tragic because he seizes an opportunity to oppose what he *knows*: "we must understand Othello . . . to want to believe Iago, to be trying, against his knowledge, to believe him" (*CR*, pp. 488–89). He *knows* that she is flesh and blood, that she is a distinct person who cannot be owned, yet Othello denies this knowledge because of what it would mean for himself: that is, the fact that he, too, is dependent, finite, but separate. Othello's refusal to recognize what he *specifically* knows (i.e., that Desdemona is faithful) is also emblematic of a *general* failure to find his self. Yet Cavell argues that the subsequent tragedy occurs because Othello occupies a situation where denying that knowledge becomes untenable. His denial of (or refusal to acknowledge) Desdemona's faithfulness is a cover for his "terrible certainty" *about* her, about himself (*CR*, p. 493).

Cavell explains, "Tragedy is the place we are not allowed to escape the consequences, or price, of this cover: that the failure to acknowledge a best case of the other is a denial of that other, presaging the death of the other, say by stoning or hanging; and the death of our capacity to acknowledge as such, the turning of our hearts to stone, or their bursting" (*CR*, p. 493). Othello encounters his "metaphysical finitude," but this vision of the conditions of his humanity is so terrible that he denies its reality and avoids it by positing a problem of "intellectual lack" (see *MWM*, p. 263). That is, he raises doubts about whether Desdemona is pure, whether she is a human or an angel—questions that avoid what is already known, or posit certainty as a requirement for knowing, or query whether reality even exists, only in order to evade those certain and unsettling truths. Finally, the only recourse that Othello's avoidance affords is to kill the other, to embody tragedy by embracing the madness of his dissatisfaction with being human (*CR*, p. 496).

Cavell asserts that the analogous dissatisfaction with the world between skepticism and tragedy—that is, with the world given to humanity by its forms of life, or given to humanity by itself—has implications for modern philosophy. In a summary of this connection, he states that "both skepticism and tragedy conclude with the condition of human separation, with a discovering that I am I; and the fact that the alternative to

my acknowledgment of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him" (*CR*, p. 389). Cavell therefore defines tragedy in its literary form to be a "study" of "avoidances" (*CR*, p. 389), and he explains that the tragic response not only denies the world but also attempts to consume it out of despair. Tragedy therefore functions as a response to skepticism, but also it is a parallel problem to the "intellectual lack" that skepticism creates for itself (*MWM*, p. 263). To say this differently, tragedy is an outcome of a philosophical problem even as it is the state of humanity's habitual denial of itself, of its situation. Thus, insofar as Cavell's argument regarding the parallel trajectories of tragedy and skepticism is correct, and to the extent that his trope of the Enlightenment (or the Cartesian) self emphasizes an all-too-human quest for a world (for meaning, knowing, certainty, etc.) outside of itself, then tragedy is "a kind of epistemological problem" that dominates "modern philosophical thought" (*CR*, p. 482). In other words, for Cavell, the history of modern philosophy is itself tragic.

II

Cavell's invocations of the tragic relate to what I find to be characteristic of McCarthy's novel in that *The Road* presents, on the one hand, the nameless man's journey through a fragmented narrative, which I argue emulates and recalls humanity's epistemic contingency. Yet, on the other hand, the novel also evokes the father's horror at finding himself in the world and learning that he is in some way complicit in its self-destruction. While these are strong points of consonance between Cavell and McCarthy, they also allow for significant degrees of difference to emerge from their works. This difference centers on their respective answers to (or formulations of) Cavell's question (which I return to at the conclusion of this section): "Is the cover of skepticism—the conversion of metaphysical finitude into intellectual lack—a denial of the human or an expression of it?" (*CR*, p. 493)

McCarthy's novel is tragic in several ways, but the seeds of its tragedy are embodied in its form, which is a problem for readers in much the same way that memory and knowledge itself are (made into) philosophical problems. The novel consists of fragments of narrative, the father's interior monologues, abstract and apparently omniscient meditations, memories, dreams, and scenes of the quotidian-turned-odd in a ravaged world. The language of *The Road*, much like McCarthy's earlier Tennessee fiction and *Blood Meridian*, has a complex cadence that is

obscure, halted, and strangely rhythmic. The following passage, for example, represents the novel's fragmentary aesthetic quality: "Dark of the invisible moon. The nights now only slightly less black. By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp" (*TR*, p. 32). There is an absence in the form of McCarthy's novel that laments the loss of a presence, and this formalistic absence mirrors the epistemic situation of the protagonists. The prose and the narrative itself are fragmented because this splintered vision is how the characters experience their world—that is, as a loss of continuity with the past, a sense of alienation from the future, and as partially blind men walking in the dark of an obscure present.

The dark, fractured, yet pregnant form of *The Road* has led many commentators to remark that this aspect of the novel offers a larger commentary on what it means to be human; yet the way in which this prominent vein of criticism expresses its extension of the novel's formal characteristics ironically reveals the kind of problem that *The Road* investigates. John Cant, for example, says that McCarthy's handling of the problematic nature of a journey-narrative "gives him ample opportunity to express in rich language that metaphysical profundity that so many commentators have enjoyed."⁹ Cant's commentary is emblematic of a misconception about the novel, particularly in that it is not at all clear what Cant means by "metaphysical profundity." In fact, he goes on to provide examples of strikingly *immanent* language that undermine the supposed metaphysical "depth" that he lauds. As examples of "metaphysical profundity," Cant cites "descriptions of place and landscape," "sentences that are rich in nouns," and the "rhythm" of paragraphs (Cant, p. 267). Thus, what *feels* metaphysical for Cant is *ordinary* to McCarthy's characters in the sense that this style of narration—or this way of imagining oneself in their world—requires expression that is not merely fragmentary but also circumscribed within the quotidian, within the linguistic horizons of the novel. Attempts to register the ordinary experience of the protagonists as "metaphysical" therefore become frustrated insofar as they aim to "mean" something, invest the novel with depth.

Yet there is a sense in which the ordinary and such putative depth oppose one another. As Wittgenstein reflects, "The *deep* aspect of [the search for meaning] readily eludes us" (*PI*, §387).¹⁰ That is, for Wittgenstein, this evasion of the ordinary for the sake of metaphysical depth is not inherent to rationality or nature but concomitant to the mistaken assumptions of the inquiry itself. Both philosophical and literary

investigations of this ilk are wont to find something deep, beyond the surface, in a place that human language only *represents*. In contrast, the narrative is dislocated because it imitates how the characters experience the world. The episodic and fractured nature of the narrative is, in other words, a commentary on epistemic and experiential limits of the human condition, and to describe this aesthetic as “metaphysical” is a denial of the distinctly *human* form of the novel. To follow this particular method of aesthetic criticism, then, is to look for significance in a vision beyond the partial and often dark reality of the world that the father and his son inhabit. Such a “deep” inquiry is necessarily elusive.

In contrast to ascriptions of “metaphysical” significance to McCarthy’s prose, one may alternatively conclude that the fragments of *The Road* are a concerted effort to deny that the category of “narrative” appropriately describes human life, perhaps even resolving that human knowledge is not stable or coherent. Such a reading of the novel’s form maintains that the frequent divisions between each moment along the road demonstrate humanity’s inability to provide a governing order or grammar for its world, as though there were some unavoidable failure at the root of efforts to convey the story. This vein of interpretation—which may be an extension of what is often called (as a schematic trope for argument’s sake) the “Southern” school of criticism on McCarthy’s work¹¹—would thus find the novel to be a revelation of an arbitrary, formless world.

Indeed, there are undoubtedly denials of the world’s dependence upon metaphysical foundations (which are denials that the Southern school of criticism emphasizes), yet this second vein of criticism is tantamount to the skeptic’s dissatisfied objection that the thing-in-itself “is ineluctably hidden from me” (*CR*, p. 239). That is, to interpret the fragmented form and metaphysical denials of *The Road* as epistemic despair is also to express dissatisfaction with the human, albeit in a different way than Kant’s “metaphysical” appraisal of the novel. Such denials are evident, for example, when the narrator says, “The unseen sun cast no shadow” on the world (*TR*, p. 69). This description alludes to Plato’s myth of The Cave, insinuating that the travelers have no access to a transcendent real that illuminates the intelligible world. Furthermore, the only occasions where the adjective “eternal” appears are in descriptions of nothingness, darkness, and ash (*TR*, pp. 55, 80, 94). God, much less transcendent forms, is therefore not a permanent presence in the world of the novel. Yet, paradoxically, this destitute vision of the world does not translate into the absence of God, narrative, or grammar—it is not a denial of anything. Instead, the novel reveals “us” to “ourselves”

by stripping away all pretensions of dependence upon the metaphysical. This revelation is not a repudiation of humanity's ability to *know* but a disclosure of human contingency. To view this exposure as affirming some form or other of nihilism—or perhaps even of poststructuralist unfinalizability—reveals a dissatisfaction with the fact that humanity's "speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than [its own forms of life]" (*MWM*, p. 52). That is, the antinarrative or nihilistic perspective dismisses the human through its mistaken assumption about what constitutes a "something" rather than *nihil*.

Another way of demonstrating this point about the form of *The Road* and, by extension, why the novel's reading of the world is tragic, may be arrived at more clearly by the following analogy: the novel is a narrative in much the same way that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is philosophy. In fact, the forms of each are remarkably similar, at least in the sense that each work is composed of episodic segments that are variously related to one another. As Cavell says, Wittgenstein's style of writing "is not a system and he is not a spectator" (*MWM*, p. 70). Instead, the *Investigations* attempts to establish a dialogue—between Wittgenstein and himself, the reader and herself—that calls philosopher and reader alike into the investigation. Wittgenstein's work thus requires self-analysis: its "philosophical method" is, as Garry Hagberg and others have shown, a penetrating kind of therapy that summons both autobiography and "the impulsions of the traditional philosophical methods and formulations" for its investigative task.¹² But also Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is suggestive of the fragmented world of modern philosophy. Indeed, Stephen Mulhall describes the *Investigations* (along with *The Claim of Reason*) as a modernist text, which is "a half-built edifice whose form acknowledges both its origins in ruins and the completion it foreshadows."¹³ One therefore finds in the fragmented form of the *Investigations* that the modern self—the life of the reader whose world is being interrogated—is itself in ruins, compiled of disquietudes and self-delusions.

The form of the *Investigations* thus requires participation and self-analysis in the midst of a fragmented situation, and this (often painful) mode of arriving at self-knowledge is similar to the difficulty of the road that McCarthy offers his readers. One early, characteristic fragment of *The Road* suggests this similarity: the mode of narration shifts from third-person descriptions of the pair's journey to an interior account of (presumably) the father's thoughts. He reflects, "On this road there

are no godspoke men. They are gone and I am left and they have taken with them the world. Query: How does the never to be differ from what never was?" (*TR*, p. 32). The innovated word "godspoke" and the antiquated syntax ("they have taken with them the world") require the reader to encounter the text slowly, as though it were summoning her to prayer. Yet the father's reflections also suggest the impossibility of prayer, of finding absolute clarity about one's world from God through "godspoke men" or the language they offer. In this way, this fragment establishes a recital, which is characteristic of the remainder of *The Road*, between one's reading of the world and the absence of external grounds for it, between being attentive to the world of the novel and being alienated from it. (There are no external grounds for defining "godspoke," although the language that the reader shares with the novel—and thus one's complicity in sharing the world that makes *The Road* possible—provides a grammar for constructing and imagining what it might mean.)

The father's moment of reflection also achieves a similar mode of arriving at self-knowledge in much the same way as the *Investigations* in its formal statement of a problem: "Query: How does the never to be differ from what never was?" (*TR*, p. 32). His enigmatic "query" is redolent of Wittgenstein's philosophical method. For example, in one remark Wittgenstein writes, "Misleading parallel: the expression of pain is a cry—the expression of thought, a proposition" (*PI*, §317). What Wittgenstein and the man of *The Road* each mean with their respective inquiries requires not only the cultivation of attentiveness to the text in order to follow the (disjointed) skein of thought. These statements also require the reader to be attentive to herself, to find herself in their respective worlds. As Wittgenstein says of his efforts, "What is your aim in philosophy?—To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (*PI*, §309). Philosophy in the wake of Wittgenstein becomes (or returns to) self-discovery through world-discovery. The withholding of such attentiveness—for example, by refusing to read *The Road* because of its horrors—is a denial of participation in the other (whether in the world of the novel or in the argument of the *Investigations*), and thus an avoidance of one's self. To describe the form of *The Road* as an affirmation of meaninglessness because of its metaphysical repudiations or disjointed narration is to remain within the fly-bottle. That line of thinking, *The Road* suggests, is tantamount to clinging to a world that requires something other than itself to be meaningful.

Later episodes in the novel evoke this process of self-discovery as the man finds himself to be complicit in the desolation that riddled the earth. The man and boy rifle through a scorched home not long after becoming convinced that they are going to die, and the father “walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable” (*TR*, p. 130). This terrible vision of “absolute truth” is brought about not only by the desolation of the earth itself but also by the impending expiration of the culture of the past. These absences reveal humanity shorn of its ability to find significance beyond itself. In fact, this “moment” occurs as the man stands in a house bereft of everything except a distended corpse in its basement. “Soggy volumes in a bookcase” also occupy the scene (*TR*, p. 130). What was once a world—a society in microcosm—has now become a flooded tomb for cultural detritus. This vision of “absolute truth” reveals to the man that he and the boy are “blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it” (*TR*, p. 130). They have “borrowed” time and their world in the sense that they are finite, they do not *own* them; but also the pair has “borrowed” the world because they are not able to experience it without the forms of life they share with others, the language they share with those who destroyed it. They are not even able to experience sorrow without “borrowed eyes” and without a language to “word” their pain (see *PI*, §384). The revelation of a “borrowed” world thus reveals that the man and his son are exposed as creatures who are contingent upon the world—they do not have meanings independent of it (see *PI*, §329). Indeed, their contingent existence is constituted by the very world that has destroyed itself, by the language that has made possible the conception and accomplishment of this destruction.

The presence of destroyed “volumes in a bookcase” and the “borrowed” nature of experience further suggests that humanity’s culture culminates in this self-destruction (*TR*, p. 130). For example, the man recalls a time when “he’d stood in the charred ruins of a library where blackened books lay in pools of water. Shelves tipped over. Some rage at the lies arranged in their thousands row on row. He picked up one of the books and thumbed through the heavy bloated pages. He’d not have thought the value of the smallest thing predicated on a world to come. It surprised him. That the space which these things occupied was

itself an expectation" (*TR*, p. 187). The man's reflections suggest that the knowledge of these books is predicated on (i.e., finds its meaning in) a future world of destruction. The value of this library, full of the culmination of various forms of human life, is founded on the world that it has created but also desolated. In one way, this scene depicts the man's astonishment that the same world that has produced these texts—these exemplars of high culture—has also destroyed itself. Works of literature, theology, and philosophy are implicated in the destruction. They contain an "expectation" that arrives in the chaos of the desolate library. Yet, in another way, the same astonishment applies to *The Road* itself. Its existence as a contemporary novel—the fact that we share a language with it, that it is intelligible in our world—is thus a kind of revelation about us as readers and the cultural possibilities of our production of meaning. To pose this revelation as a question, how can contemporary critics account for a world where *The Road* wins the Pulitzer Prize? How is it exemplary for us? In what way does the novel's self-destructive violence—its all-too-human denial of the human—represent contemporary American culture?

McCarthy's reading of the world is tragic because it reveals that to be human is to be enclosed within self-misunderstanding and, as a result, within self-violence. The human genealogy of the novel's world—the fact that it is possible because of our forms of life and through our shared language—suggests that, for McCarthy, the destruction of the world is tragic not because it has an alternative that humanity refuses to follow but because it is the culmination (or a possible predication) of being human. Cavell, in contrast, explains that violence at one's exposure to (or correct recognition of) the world is a response of the human, but not a limit that determines it. For Cavell, encounters with alienation and self-horror "are not tragic unless one makes them so, takes them so; that we are tragic in what we take to be tragic" (*CR*, p. 494). I take this to be Cavell's response (otherwise left unanswered) to his weighty question: "Is the cover of skepticism—the conversion of metaphysical finitude into intellectual lack—a denial of the human or an expression of it?" (*CR*, p. 493).

Cavell seems to conclude *The Claim of Reason* by suggesting that the tragic is an option, a way of being and denying one's being, even though he insists that it is the road most traveled. He clarifies that the difference of the other "can be accepted, and granted, or not" (*CR*, p. 496). However, this answer differs from *The Road* in that the novel seems to suggest that even affirming the human—which is a constituent part of

the man and his son's journey—does not preclude one from participating in the tragic. To be human is to participate in a world predicated on its future destruction. It is, as Nietzsche says, to be “*bound* to mistake ourselves.”¹⁴ For McCarthy, acknowledgment does not avoid tragedy, is not able to stylize the tragic as a lamentable option for being human. This point of difference will, I hope, become clearer in the final sections of this essay.

III

Cavell understands acknowledgment to be a responsible retention of the truth of skepticism—which is that “our relationship to the world is not one of knowing, where that is construed as certainty, the overcoming of Cartesian doubt”¹⁵—while this response also refuses skepticism's final denial of *obtaining* the world. Acknowledgment is instead the response to “the other (simply) as a human being”—as having a body in the world—and the acceptance of that difference, despite the limits and failures that such a recognition exposes of one's self (*CR*, p. 429). Acknowledgment of the humanity of the other is thus also an apprehension of the human that characterizes the posture of one's self; it is the recognition that one cannot bridge consciousnesses, possess the world, or inhabit a certain secure, absolute position in it.

There are significant points of consonance between the response of McCarthy's characters to their tragic situation and Cavell's understanding of acknowledgment. This analogous reaction to tragedy is clearest during scenes of cannibalism in the novel, for one of the father and son's primary criteria for distinguishing between the “good guys” and “bad guys” is ultimately a question of diet. Some ordinary language philosophers have, in a related way, applied Cavell's understanding of acknowledgment to the ethical problems of eating. Cora Diamond, for example, argues that the failure to take seriously the horror that others experience at eating animals, much less the pain that animals themselves experience, is “a repudiation of the everyday.” Diamond describes this repudiation as an act of avoidance in one of two ways: either by making the problem “an intellectualized debate” or by refusing to be “shouldered out from our ways of thinking and speaking by a torment of reality.”¹⁶ Jonathan Tran similarly views “the ways these animals are hidden” by processing plants and the food industry as an avoidance of “reflection” not only on human beings' participation in slaughterhouses; he also posits that this process obscures the animal nature of being human.¹⁷ Eating thus

functions as an occasion either to acknowledge or avoid the human. The son and father's ethic regarding the sources of their sustenance seems to evoke a similar commitment to the human, although their response is perhaps best described as courageous and not necessarily (or only) an act of acknowledgment.

For the boy in *The Road*, one of the central (but rarely spoken) questions about his world is why "we dont eat people" (*TR*, p. 284). In one conversation with his father, the boy asks,

We wouldnt ever eat anybody, would we?
 No. Of course not.
 Even if we were starving?
 We're starving now.
 [...] But we wouldnt.
 No. We wouldnt.
 No matter what.
 No. No matter what.
 Because we're the good guys.
 Yes. And we're carrying the fire.
 And we're carrying the fire. Yes. (*TR*, pp. 128–29)

The father has given an account of the world to his son that precludes cannibalism because they are "carrying the fire" (see also *TR*, p. 83). This enigmatic description becomes more explicable precisely in their relationship to the other last inhabitants of the earth. At one point, the father recalls the burgeoning paucity of food after the global disaster, and readers are left to assume that cannibalism occurs, at least in part, because the world can no longer produce enough nonhuman sustenance. Yet the father and son never consider cannibalism. In fact, when they are near to dying from starvation and encounter "a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (*TR*, p. 198), they only respond with horror. Neither considers cannibalism, despite the fact that the remainder of the world has apparently resorted to this act as a means of survival. The question, in other words, is what makes the father and son different from their world. The remnant of humanity has redefined "food"—it is unknown whether this shift occurs from a forced change in its use of the word or as a further articulation of its pre-apocalyptic habits. But what leads the pair to retain the concept with its nonhuman limits while the rest of the world abandons such a use? How does one account for their difference, even their dissent from the world?

The cannibals in *The Road* are often lean, distrustful of others, “rachitic,” and even animalistic. In one instance, a man stumbles upon the father and his son and the first description of this character is his belt: “The holes in it marked the progress of his emaciation and the leather at one side had a lacquered look to it where he was used to stropping the blade of his knife” (*TR*, p. 63). The withering away of this man evokes not only his physical but also his human—call it his moral—emaciation. He is tattooed with a bird on his neck that was done “by someone with an illformed notion of their appearance” (*TR*, p. 63). This man and his community are disconnected from what used to constitute the human creature, and now he is even less than animal. The father is forced to shoot this “bad guy” because the “rachitic” man holds a knife to the boy’s throat (*TR*, pp. 63, 77). Not long after the episode, the father and son have a telling conversation. The father says,

You have to talk to me.

Okay.

You wanted to know what the bad guys looked like. Now you know. It may happen again. My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand?

Yes.

[...] After a while he looked up. Are we still the good guys?
he said.

Yes. We’re still the good guys. (*TR*, p. 77)

The boy’s concern to be one of “the good guys” suggests not only his sense of guilt for the “rachitic” man’s death but also his desire to distinguish between one kind of killing and another. He wants to know what separates his father, who kills another man to save his son’s life, from the cannibals, who kill and eat human beings because of (or at least originally in response to) a lack of food.

The way in which cannibalism denies the human—the difference between this kind of killing and the father’s action—is clearest in the disturbing episode where the man and his son descend into a cellar where human beings are kept for food. These maimed and frightened hostages, once they realize that the boy and his father are not there to eat them, begin to whisper, “Help us [...]. Please help us” (*TR*, p. 110). The surreal horror of this scene may initially provoke readers to distance themselves from its terror, from the difficulty it causes for the boy and his father. Yet the scene is also depicted in a way that discloses how *ordinary*

the horror is. As they walk onto the porch of this old Southern home before discovering the captives in its basement, the narrative voice states almost incidentally, “Chattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays” (*TR*, p. 106).

The remark is subtle but incisive: the cannibal’s relationship to his food is cast in the same space as the slave owner’s relationship to his property, and both are presented as the ordinary that the man “saw and did not see,” the ordinary that the reader initially sees but does not see (*TR*, p. 109). “All these things” were before the man’s eyes (*TR*, p. 109), yet he missed them because of their ordinariness. As Wittgenstein similarly observes, it is precisely this failure to notice that which has “escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes” that is so characteristic of the human (*PI*, §415). “Huddled against the back wall,” these naked human beings are therefore meant to uncover the father’s ordinary, the truth about the world he inhabits, which his (and our) forms of life make possible (*TR*, p. 110).

The notion of cannibalism has raised questions for Cavell himself regarding humanity’s denial of the human. In his “Cover Letter to Molière’s *Misanthrope*,” Cavell describes Lear’s avoidance of Cordelia as representative of “the image of parents cannibalizing their children.”¹⁸ Similarly, in his comments on Emerson’s essay “Fate,” Cavell insists that the essayist’s argument “yields the perception, or vision, that slavery is a form of cannibalism.”¹⁹ Yet the fact that these are possibilities within a shared language precludes self-exemption and obviates self-righteous exceptionalism.

These shared possibilities are also why the man’s refusal to understand humans as food—indeed, his commitment to the road despite the fact that it is concomitant with a horrifying search for his self within a desolate world—is courageous. To continue on the road requires the man to recognize that he is lost to himself even as he bequeaths to his son a world that has lost a sense of what it means to be human. For example, not long after the disturbing encounter in the cellar, the man and boy enter another “solitary house in a field” (*TR*, p. 132). They walk through the nondescript rooms and then they “came upon themselves in a mirror and he almost raised the pistol. It’s us, Papa, the boy whispered. It’s us” (*TR*, p. 132). The man has forgotten the sight of himself—or what it would be to see himself—and thus has forgotten the look of *a* self. His encounter with the truth about his world has unseated both his self-knowledge and also his humanity. Indeed, such episodes illustrate Thomas Carlson’s point of connection between Augustine, Heidegger,

and *The Road*: only insofar as one “becomes questionable” to one’s self, or affirms one’s “Being-toward-death,” is one able to participate in (and thus find one’s self in) the world.²⁰

IV

The refusal to treat human beings as food is as courageous in a cannibalistic world as is the commitment to “go on” in any world where one finds one’s self implicated in its horrors. To “go on” in such a world is to demonstrate a courageous commitment to the human, to know what it means in particularly dire situations to be human (see *PI*, §154). The man’s frequent repudiation of dreams suggests that certain versions of hope for a better world are not only distractions from one’s complicity in the present but also that these hopes and dreams are inhibitions to the kind of courage necessary to “go on.” Such courage does not acquire the world, does not manifest a destiny, but tries to be human—nothing more, nothing less—within its limits. As the father says to his son, who is reluctant to look in another abandoned house after the earlier disturbing encounters, “This is what the good guys do. They keep trying. They don’t give up” (*TR*, p. 137). Going on in a tragic world, despite one’s vulnerability, inevitable violence, and the likelihood of losing all that one holds most dear—indeed, of losing the “world entire,” for the man describes his son as exactly this (*TR*, p. 6)—requires a kind of courage to “keep trying” despite the absence of hope.

The man’s commitment to courageous living in a destitute world is of course motivated by his love for the boy, but this response is also a commitment to the posterity of the human. For example, the son is the “word of God” for the father (*TR*, p. 5), offering a revelation of the world and an incarnation of a *logos*. Yet the religious overtones of this description later resurface in a peculiar way during the pair’s encounter with the sojourner Ely (as he initially names himself). This enigmatic character evokes the ancient Christian myth of the Wandering Jew condemned to travel in the world until the return of Christ. Indeed, Ely says, “I was always on the road” (*TR*, p. 168), and his name (despite the fact that he later admits it is a false one) recalls a related myth that the prophet Elijah would return at the apocalypse (see Malachi 4:5). Yet, if Ely is the Wandering Jew, he is also one of McCarthy’s dark prophets who expose the obscurity of the world rather than illuminating it. Ely says in an inversion of the Shahada, “There is no God and we are his prophets” (*TR*, p. 170). Thus, like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, Ely has proclaimed the

absence of God from the world. But does he proclaim that “we are his prophets” because humanity’s world does not depend upon gods (a reiterated, symbolic rejection of the need for a metaphysical ground), or because it is godless, predicating a destruction that denies God?

Later in the conversation, Ely says, “Where men cant live gods fare no better. You’ll see. It’s better to be alone. [...] Things will be better when everybody’s gone” (*TR*, p. 172). He suggests that a barren world—one bereft of the burden of gods and humanity—is in fact the highest good. Perhaps Ely concludes that it is “better to be alone” because the burden of the other, whether she is a god or a human, leads inevitably to destruction. Ely argues, “When we’re all gone at last then there’ll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He’ll be out in the road there with nothing to do and nobody to do it to. He’ll say: Where did everybody go? And that’s how it will be. What’s wrong with that?” (*TR*, p. 173). The association of personified death with an abstract humanity suggests that the former is characteristic of the personal existence of the latter. To say this another way, Ely (as a displaced prophet) speaks the truth about the tragic situation of humanity: its existence does in fact predicate its own personal and cosmic destruction.

Yet Ely’s prophetic word is also contrary to the commitments of the father and son. Indeed, as an allusion to the Wandering Jew myth, Ely purportedly ought to be aimless until his encounter with the returned Christ. The son, as the “word of God” (*TR*, p. 5), initially unsettles Ely, although he nonetheless fails to recognize him as a “god” (see *TR*, p. 172). Ely admits, “When I saw that boy I thought that I had died.” The father asks, “You thought he was an angel?” and Ely responds: “I didnt know what he was. I never thought to see a child again. I didnt know that would happen” (*TR*, p. 172). Children on the road are eaten, not protected—imprisoned, not seen. Ely thus becomes a blind, ironic prophet—an inversion of the classical Tiresias—in that he cannot *see* the boy. He is unable to perceive him as an affirmation not of God but of the continuation of humanity within its own self-destructive world. This encounter thus represents the finite position of humanity itself, for Ely’s prophecies reveal that even the prophets of the world cannot see; they are unable to recognize the “word of God.”

Such episodes suggest that the father’s ordinary parental commitment to his son also serves as an attempt to “go on” in his efforts to be human. This courageous response—which is also strikingly domestic, despite the absence of “home”—is at times expressed in the man’s explanations to his son that the difference between “us” and the “bad guys” is that “we’re

carrying the fire" (*TR*, p. 129). Regarding this phrase, Cant argues, "Although individual death must come at the end, collective continuity remains a possibility if the generations can pass on that ardenthearted vitality which is the inherent motor of life" (Cant, p. 279). The problem with this interpretation of "carrying the fire," however, is that the father commits to "keep going" and even releases his son into the world without any prospect that "the generations can pass on" anything (*TR*, p. 278; Cant, p. 279). Cant, in other words, understands the "ardenthearted vitality" of the fire to be hope in the continued existence of humanity. Yet the kind of courage that the father bequeaths to his son, the account he provides in his dying words, is a commitment to the human in the absence of hope: it is a hope against all hope.

The father's commitment suggests that an affirmation of the human requires one to abandon the suprahuman, and this abandonment, it seems, becomes especially difficult in that most versions of hope function as a kind of evasion of this necessity. That is, hope often obscures the fundamental tragedy of being human. Such conceptions of hope—e.g., that there is an "inherent motor of life" to perpetuate the species—amount to a quest to find one's existence elsewhere, in a place other than the world that is rife with the possibility of total self-destruction and denials of the human. The novel's suspicion of hope is epitomized in the man's own repudiation of dream worlds. His dreams are often "so rich in color," a sharp contrast to the eternal gray of the road he walks daily. This contrast leads the man to ask, "How else would death call you?" (*TR*, p. 21). These dreams are illusions that trap and suffocate. The man later explains to his son, "When your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant give up" (*TR*, p. 189).

Hope that the world will be different than the horizons made possible by its human limits is, of course, different than hope for a better possibility of the human. And the parameters of those possibilities may be a point of contention between Cavell and McCarthy. Cavell follows Emerson's perfectionism, which maintains "a grand world of laws is working itself out *next* to ours, as if ours is flush with it."²¹ Yet it seems that, for the father, the only way to survive the present world is to recognize (acknowledge?) that there is no "other waking world and there is no other tale to tell" besides the one of loss (*TR*, p. 32). Arriving at this difference between McCarthy and Cavell may come from speculating how each would understand Wittgenstein's claim, "A *picture* held us

captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (*PI*, §115). For McCarthy, the past tense of this remark does not obscure its present reality. For Cavell, this remark appears as a confession of what is daily conquerable by acknowledging our attunement within the world, by the "work" of having "a self" that is "moving to, and from, nexts."²² This difference may also be another way of expressing McCarthy and Cavell's distinct understandings of the tragedy of being human.

Nonetheless, the father's rejection of dream worlds is also contrary to his wife's despairing mode of thinking. She claims, "You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take" (*TR*, p. 57). She ridicules those who hope by cobbling "together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body." She rivals such an illusory existence with her own response to the world: "As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart" (*TR*, p. 57). In one of the novel's rare uses of the term, hope becomes tenable only as an anticipation of nonexistence. And in fact, as I have already suggested, the other appearances of hope often function precisely in this way—as a vision for a world "that never will be"—that is, as the anticipation of the nonexistent (*TR*, p. 189).

At the end of their discussion, she tells the man, "You have no argument because there is none" (*TR*, p. 57). She then goes into the woods and apparently slits her wrists, while the man does not repudiate her claim. Indeed, he affirms it: "she was right. There was no argument" (*TR*, p. 58). In this refusal to repudiate his wife's claims, hope becomes "the call of languor and death" (*TR*, p. 18); it is shorn of its ability to provide an alternative to her despair. The world that the man and his son inhabit is thus despoiled, hopeless, "secular" (*TR*, p. 177). The ship that they discover at the end of the novel is an ironic reiteration of this situation: it is named *Pajaro de Esperanza* (Bird of Hope). On the one hand, this may function as an allusion to the Holy Spirit, represented as a dove in Christian theology. If this is the case, the mostly spoiled paucity of resources in the ship likely emulates the tragedy of God's presence in the world: the Spirit of God is itself subject to the waste and violence wrought by humanity. On the other hand, the ship may simply offer a metaphor for hope itself. In this case it is rifled through, empty. Either way, the *Pajaro de Esperanza* is a displaced sojourner, a wreckage, and not an argument that refutes the woman's mode of thinking.

The fact that the man never denies the truth of his wife's argument suggests that he affirms it while simultaneously rejecting her *response* to the argument's conclusion. His alternative response to her vision of the world is a type of courage that commits to existence even when hope, like the novel's God, has left the world. It commits to being human even when arguments run out. The father thus affirms the world in a way that is by no means "optimistic,"²³ but instead simply finds its justification in being human, in how he understands human beings as inhabitants of a shared world. The man's commitment, therefore, does not rest upon hope in the metaphysical; he does not need external grounds to justify his existence; he abandons (and cannot find) universal moral principles. Instead, the man and his son are courageous simply by carrying a human fire, by committing to living as contingent, tragic human beings. The road of the father and son is courageous because, in the world of the novel, being human requires one to journey into the "implacable" darkness of an "intestate earth" (*TR*, p. 130). Yet carrying the fire along such a road is also a radical protest: that is, in a reinterpretation of the Prometheus myth, the father and son wrest fire from the gods and return it to humanity.

If my reading of *The Road* is correct, then encountering the novel is akin to what Nietzsche described as a vision of *Weisheit*, of nearly unbearable wisdom.²⁴ The unnamed man experiences a similar difficulty with his vision of the "absolute truth" about the world during his southern flight (*TR*, p. 130). Thus, as the epigraph taken from *The Brothers Karamazov* suggests, the journey of *The Road* requires the father to recognize his own guilt "on behalf of all and for all."²⁵ He embodies a version of courage that commits to existence in the world despite the fact that he has encountered his complicity in its violence, his participation in its tragedy. But also the father's journey through the world—and thus his unsettling self-discovery—is his only means of salvation. To put this in another way, the man's terrible process of finding himself in a desolate world amounts to the only way of preserving his sense of self from becoming desolate. Yet at what cost is this discovery? In reading *The Road*, it seems that to gain one's self involves the courage to affirm the human despite the difficulty and even intolerability of this vision. Thus, as is the case with the man (whose namelessness recalls *ha adam*, the man, the Adam of humanity), reading the novel in this way also entails the possibility of the damnation of the self as much as its salvation. One may lose or find one's self on the road, in the novel. The risk of reading *The Road* is therefore the possibility of being read by it.

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1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.
2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), p. 320.
3. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006), p. 28; hereafter abbreviated *TR*.
4. Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 263; hereafter abbreviated *MWM*.
5. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 377; hereafter abbreviated *CR*.
6. This “extraordinary” understanding of tragedy is apparent in Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, trans. Ingram Bywater (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. 1466–67. Aristotle insists that the tragic hero is not a morally perfect person, but he or she is nonetheless “of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity” (2.13.1453a10–11).
7. Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 58.
8. See also Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, p. 10.
9. John Cant, *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 267; hereafter abbreviated Cant.
10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 118; hereafter abbreviated *PI*, followed by remark number.
11. See Dana Phillips, “History and the Ugly Facts of Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*,” *American Literature* 68, no. 2 (June 1996): 434–36.
12. Garry Hagberg, “On Philosophy as Therapy: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Autobiographical Writing,” *Philosophy and Literature* 27 (April 2003): 198.
13. Stephen Mulhall, “On Refusing to Begin,” in *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, ed. Russell B. Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 32.
14. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 3.
15. Peter Dula, *Cavell, Companionship, and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 133.
16. Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 71. See also Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
17. Jonathan Tran, *Foucault and Theology: Power, Witness, and Christianity* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), p. 134.
18. Stanley Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), p. 104.

19. Stanley Cavell, "Companionable Thinking," in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, p. 116.
20. Thomas A. Carlson, "With the World at Heart: Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* with Augustine and Heidegger," *Religion & Literature* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 2007): 53.
21. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (La Salle: Open Court, 1990), p. 8.
22. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 12.
23. Pace Ashley Kunsal, "'Maps of the World in Its Becoming': Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," *The Journal of Modern Literature* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 57-74.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin, 1993), §7.
25. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 320.