

You are looking at 1-3 of 3 items for: **keywords : claim to community**

## Community and Voice

Andrew Norris

in *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell*

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Item type: chapter

This chapter analyzes Cavell's reception of Rousseau's theory of the general will and the manner in which he uses it to counter dominant conceptions of democracy, freedom, rhetoric, and public reason. Central here is Rousseau's idea that the virtuous citizen can speak for fellow citizens—articulate their shared general will—in much the same way, and with the same limitations, as the ordinary language philosopher who articulates “what we say when.” Cavell develops this in his account of the political “claim to community,” and argues that certain archetypical forms of injustice are best explained by the failure of their perpetrators to properly articulate their own will. The problem here is not one of sincerity, but of self-knowledge. In reviewing these matters, this chapter also clarifies as neither previous commentators nor Cavell himself have the nature and worth of Cavell's critique of the dominant model of contract theory, that of John Rawls.

## Introduction

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The introduction examines why Cavell's contribution to our understanding of politics and practical philosophy has not yet received extensive examination in book form and why it merits such examination

and such a book. It then briefly reviews Cavell's unique approach to philosophy in general and to practical philosophy in particular. It concludes by summarizing the five chapters of the book, and their accounts of Cavell's understanding of, in turn, ordinary language, skepticism, the nature of political claims, Thoreau's achievement in Walden, and the manner in which what he terms Emersonian perfectionism represents a radical reworking of Kant's theory of autonomy.

## Becoming Who We Are

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While a number of books and many articles have been written on the work of Stanley Cavell, this is the first monograph on his contribution to politics and practical philosophy. Though skepticism is Cavell's central topic, he understands it not as an epistemological problem or position but as an existential one. The central question is not what we know or fail to know, but to what extent we have made our lives our own, or failed to do so. Accordingly, Cavell's reception of Austin and Wittgenstein highlights, as other readings of these figures do not, the uncanny nature of the ordinary, the extent to which we ordinarily fail to mean what we say. Bringing this out highlights Cavell's debts to Heidegger and Thompson Clarke, even as it allows for a deeper appreciation of the extent to which Cavell's perfectionism is a rewriting of Rousseau's and Kant's theories of autonomy. This in turn opens up a way of understanding citizenship and political discourse that develops points made more elliptically in the work of Hannah Arendt, and that contrasts in important ways with the positions of liberal thinkers like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas on the one hand, and radical democrats like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on the other.