

affirmation, he also perceived the role of crises in stimulating political developments. He read Plato and Aristotle as products of a crisis in ancient Hellenic society, while Augustine's *City of God* grew out of the crisis of Rome and Christianity, and Hegel marked "the beginning of the modern Western crisis."

And what crisis has stirred so much of the Islamic world to a radical if deviant attempt at religious revitalization? Everyone, Cooper included, seems to give the same answer: the encounter with that oft-cited but seldom defined *deus ex machina* "modernity." Islam-

ic revivalism stirred by non-Muslim success (and, let us add, colonial aggression) has given rise to "direct political action" in the form of terrorism.

Cooper's book is marred by his reliance on secondary sources, including eccentric and marginal works that seek to locate the crisis of Islam in the religion itself. Even so, *New Political Religions* is clearly written, and it includes enough basic information, and enough fresh understanding, to be recommended to all newcomers to the discussion.

—STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

CITIES OF WORDS:

Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life.

By Stanley Cavell. Harvard Univ. Press. 458 pp. \$29.95

Surely no scholar has done more to bring American philosophy into the viewing room than Harvard University's Stanley Cavell. His latest volume reads as if it were a single, pleasantly rambling essay—an integration, extension, and reunion of his earlier writings

on film, particularly *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981), and his writings on Ralph Waldo Emerson, particularly *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (1989) and *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990). If the present edition is less focused than the earlier volumes, its intimate, ambulatory style is equally rewarding.

Cavell explicitly marries, or remarries, philosophy, particularly the notion of moral per-



The Philadelphia Story (1940): A romantic comedy or a study of Emersonian democracy?

fectionism, and films about remarriage. Plato gets paired with *His Girl Friday*, Emerson with *The Philadelphia Story*, John Locke with *Adam's Rib*, and Sigmund Freud with *The Lady Eve*, among others. The philosophical basis of democracy meets what's arguably the most democratic of art forms. Invoking Plato's notion, taken up and transformed by Emerson, of an imaginary city of ideas distinct from the quotidian city of things, Cavell traces the migration of moral perfectionism from ancient Greece to 19th-century Concord and on to 20th-century Hollywood.

The effect is seductive in its fulfillment of a double longing: academe's desire for public visibility and film's desire for recognition as high art. There is a tragic, unstable inevitability to the pairing, like the union of Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe, the brains of philosophy meeting the beauty and glamour of motion pictures. Yet for all its tensions, the union inexplicably endures.

In line with Cavell's vision of the social contract, his work convinces by the magnetism of its ideas rather than by the force of its rhetoric. His thinking often exemplifies the best qualities of the American ethos: its expansive, democratic vision, its drive for self-determination, and its emphasis on both the personal and social dimensions of its moral imagination. For him, as for Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, democracy is tested by basic social relations. The films about remarriage, Cavell convincingly argues, require us to judge whether the marriages depicted manage to fulfill the Romantic and democratic vision of a genuine "union."

Philosophy and film don't need each other, but, like Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant in *The Philadelphia Story*, they have something to say to each other. Cinema, by depicting the existential crises of being human, fulfills moral philosophy's need to be widely understood and applied. With its concentrated temporality, film lends itself particularly well to reflection on lived events and their consequences. And what is philosophy if not, like cinema, an elaborate way of watching ourselves? Both contribute to what Cavell calls the "kind of conversation [that] constitutes the bond that democracy . . . asks of itself." So does this book.

—ELIZABETH WILLIS

CATCH AND RELEASE:
Trout Fishing and the Meaning of Life.
By Mark Kingwell. Viking.
242 pp. \$21.95

Books populated by brothers, fathers, and fish invariably elicit comparisons to Norman McLean's poetic memoir *A River Runs Through It* (1976). *Catch and Release* has those elements, though not the larger-than-life loggers, Indians, prostitutes, and poker players of McLean's Montana youth. But like McLean, University of Toronto philosophy professor Mark Kingwell skillfully merges fishing with insights about love and loss, nature and human finitude, and grace and patience.

Kingwell emphasizes from the start that "This Book Is Not About Fishing," as he titles the first chapter, but rather about "thinking about fishing." The narrative spools around Kingwell's annual fishing trip to British Columbia with his father and two brothers. Fishing, he reflects, invites a "basic restoration of a state of native receptivity" to inward clarity. With a weekend on the water as his aperture, he examines what swims below the surface of life.

Kingwell manages to raise a mundane physical act—sitting silent in a boat with a line in the water—to the level of the metaphysical. His eye for comparisons and distinctions calls to mind a time when philosophy was as much aesthetic experience as rational enterprise. Anglers are like philosophers, he writes, in that "against all odds and evidence, they are liable to cling to methods and arrangements that worked once, or seemed to, yet do so no longer." On the debate over dry flies versus wet flies (dry flies lie on the surface whereas wet flies sink), he writes: "Dry-fly fishing necessarily puts wet-fly fishing down because it is more difficult to master, and therefore the odds against catching any fish at all are markedly high." But given the counterintuitive distinctions of angling (like those of philosophy), "elegantly catching nothing" while pursuing "the mastery of subtle technique" is preferable to inelegantly catching a bucket full of fish.

Kingwell manages to cover a large canvas with fine brush strokes. He muses on masculinity and the comforts of male silence, Aristotle's treatment of the tension between action and contemplation, and the relative virtues of