

# THE WOUNDED ANIMAL

J. M. COETZEE AND THE DIFFICULTY OF REALITY  
IN LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

*STEPHEN MULHALL*

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## Chapter Five

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT: A THIRD SYMPOSIUM

THREE YEARS AFTER THE Tanner Lectures and responses first appeared in print, Cora Diamond gave a paper at a different kind of symposium—a conference at the New School for Social Research in New York, in honour of Stanley Cavell.<sup>1</sup> The paper was entitled “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy” and has now itself appeared in print, in a much-expanded version of the New School conference proceedings.<sup>2</sup> In it, Coetzee’s Tanner Lectures provide one among a range of examples of what Diamond wants to call (using a phrase from John Updike) “the difficulty of reality,” and of philosophy’s capacity to be deflected from those difficulties precisely because of its characteristic ways of attempting to respond to the claims of reason. Stanley Cavell appears in the paper as one philosopher who is sensitive to philosophy’s tendency so to be deflected, practised at diagnosing its various occurrences (as opposed to being further deflected from their true nature), and so able to avoid succumbing to that tendency. Cavell himself was also at the New School conference, and he took (he actually says that he felt compelled to take) Diamond’s paper as the subject of his contribution to a collection of essays about—call it a disembodied or virtual symposium on—Diamond’s work. His paper, entitled “Companionable Thinking,” accordingly responds both to Diamond’s response to Coetzee and to Coetzee (among other things); and it is in turn the subject of a brief response by John McDowell in the same volume.<sup>3</sup>

At one point in an earlier draft of his essay, Cavell characterized Diamond as one of the original respondents to Coetzee’s Tanner Lectures—as if giving expression not only to his sense of Diamond’s inwardness with Coetzee, but also to the depth of his wish that Coetzee might have been shown that philosophy’s capacity to respond to his writing was not really

<sup>1</sup> I attended this conference, and it was hearing Diamond’s paper that confirmed me in my desire to embark on this project.

<sup>2</sup> A. Crary and S. Shieh, eds., *Reading Cavell* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> A. Crary, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honour of Cora Diamond* (Boston: MIT Press, 2007). Diamond’s, Cavell’s, and McDowell’s papers have now been republished in one volume—Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), hereafter PAL. All page references to these essays are keyed to this volume.

as restricted as Gutmann's and Singer's actual responses must have suggested. Since I share that wish, in this section of the chapter I propose to imagine its fulfilment, to inhabit and extend Cavell's hallucination, by treating Diamond, Cavell, and McDowell as if they had taken on that responsibility—hence, as contributors to an alternative, and in my view far superior, Tanner symposium.

What, then, does Diamond mean by the difficulty of reality?

[T]he phenomena with which I'm concerned [are] experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability. *We take things so*. And the things we take so may simply not, to others, present that kind of difficulty, of being hard or impossible or agonizing to get one's mind around. (PAL, 45–46)

Coetzee's lectures exemplify this phenomenon primarily because, in Diamond's view, they present a woman who is wounded, haunted in her mind, first by what we do to animals, and second by the fact that this horror, which reduces her to a terrible rawness of nerves, is treated as if it were nothing, as simply part of the accepted background of ordinary life, by most other people. Diamond sees clearly that Costello's sense of having her sanity under threat is as much a matter of the second horror as of the first—that an essential part of what is driving her mad is that what she experiences as an inexplicable horror is not so experienced by others, and that this divergence between herself and her fellow human beings is itself painfully inexplicable.

Costello's repeated resort to Holocaust imagery is, therefore, in the first instance Coetzee's way of conveying a sense of what it is like to hang on the frightful, no-man-fathomed cliffs of Costello's mind, from which only the reality of sleep and the thought of death offer her any relief. At the same time, however, it gives us a way of seeing a difficulty of reality to which Costello is blind: for her use of it, in all its offensiveness, suggests that her understanding of what we do to animals seems to throw into shadow the full, painfully inexplicable horror of what we do to each other, as if we could not simultaneously use the Holocaust as an image for what we do to animals and retain a grip on the reality of the Holocaust itself, on what it shows us about what we are (inexplicably, agonizingly) capable of doing to other human beings. In other words, insofar as we strive to keep one sort of difficulty of reality in view, we seem blocked from seeing another; we simply cannot keep both inexplicable horrors in proper focus simultaneously. And this is as true of Costello as it is of at least some of those who find her use of the Holocaust as a figure of comparison utterly offensive.

The character in Coetzee's story who makes this point clear is the one whose contribution to the Appleton College symposium takes the form of his absence from it, and the message that absence is intended to convey—the well-respected poet Abraham Stern, a longtime resident on campus. The morning after the dinner, Costello receives a note from him:

*Dear Mrs. Costello,*

Excuse me for not attending last night's dinner. I have read your books and know you are a serious person, so I do you the credit of taking what you said in your lecture seriously.

At the kernel of your lecture, it seemed to me, was the question of breaking bread. If we refuse to break bread with the executioners of Auschwitz, can we continue to break bread with the slaughterers of animals? You took over for your own purposes the familiar comparison between the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle. The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept. You misunderstand the nature of likenesses; I would even say you misunderstand wilfully, to the point of blasphemy. Man is made in the likeness of God but God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way.

Forgive me if I am forthright. You said that you were old enough not to have time to waste on niceties, and I am an old man too.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Abraham Stern (LA, 49–50)*

It is Cavell who points out an implication of this letter that might otherwise have escaped our attention: the connection between one of its motivating images and the behaviour of its author. For whether we take the breaking of bread in secular or religious terms (as exemplifying the subsumption of nature into culture, or as commemorating an exodus from slavery, or as ingesting the body and blood of divinity), the human communion it embodies, and from which Stern agrees we must banish the Nazis, is one in which he refuses to participate with Costello.

[A]re we to take it that Stern finds Costello's offensive fault of assimilation to warrant assimilating her (receiving a treatment of shunning precisely marking the treatment warranted by) the executioners of Auschwitz, beyond the pale of shared bread? This reaction would seem to make his perception of Costello's fault quite as inordinate as he takes her perception of the slaughterers of animals to be. And/or should this count as Stern's doing what he promised at the outset of his letter to do, namely doing Elizabeth Costello the credit of taking what she said in her lecture seriously? (PAL, 100–101)

From the perspective of Diamond's reading of Coetzee, of course, these perceptions of Stern are not alternatives (as Cavell's "and/or" implicitly acknowledges). For Stern's sense of Costello's analogical use of the Holocaust as painfully, inexplicably horrible is such that he blinds himself to the inordinately monstrous analogy that his own stance towards Costello embodies. Once again, using the Holocaust as a way of bringing one kind of painful difficulty into focus throws into shadow an equally agonizing moral problem.

For both Cavell and Diamond, then, to take Coetzee's lectures seriously as literature (whatever that difficult project might turn out to involve) in the first instance means taking them seriously as a presentation of specific, individual characters; they certainly have opinions and engage in and with arguments of various kinds, but the full significance of the opinions and arguments to which they relate cannot be grasped unless they are grasped in relation to the people who hold, advance, and contest them. On Diamond's view, for example, Stern's characterization of the kernel of Costello's lecture would amount to a failure to appreciate the specific way in which she aims to engage with the canonical patterns of philosophical argument. For he summarizes her use of the Holocaust as follows: "The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say." But this transforms Costello's traumatizing perception into an inference; it makes her expressions of horror pivot upon a "therefore," when in Diamond's view Costello's stance towards philosophy centrally involves a "rejection of the *'therefore'*—[of] arguments that go from characteristics of animals to its therefore being permissible to treat them this or that way" (PAL, 83).

In effect, then, Stern's inordinate indignation at Costello's perceptions leads him to misperceive Costello's real, particular relation to the canonical techniques of reason; it allows him to deflect himself (and us) from any proper appreciation of the force and the limits of her stance towards nonhuman and human animals. And in Diamond's view, Stern here offers us a poet's (and a religious believer's) version of the very phenomenon of which Gutmann and Singer offer us a philosophical inflection. Indeed, for Diamond, such deflections are a besetting, even a defining, temptation of philosophy in its relation to literature—part of what makes acknowledging the reality of that relation so difficult for both parties.

She castigates both Gutmann and Singer for regarding Costello as one particular, dispensable vehicle or container for the presentation of a position on the issue of how we should treat animals—that is, for treating Costello herself, in all her psychological and moral particularity, as of vanishing significance in comparison with the opinions and the fragments of argument that are undeniably embedded in her lecture and her conversation. By putting Coetzee's lectures in the context of argumentative discourse on moral issues, these philosophers move themselves and us away from the various interrelated difficulties of reality that Coetzee's writing

attempts to present, and hence from the specific conception of the human animal (as capable of being wounded and haunted by the real, of suffering a painful inability to comprehend what is nevertheless undeniably there) that emerges from it, in favour of a very different conception (of humans as essentially rational animals, of nonhuman animals as essentially distinct from humanity, and of reality as essentially graspable in its entirety by a specific dimension or aspect of distinctively human rationality) that it cannot even register as one conception to which there might be intelligible and powerful alternatives.

To be sure, there is a hardness or difficulty in the familiar modes of philosophical argumentation, and so the effect of this kind of deflection is not necessarily to relieve us of difficulty. But it is not the kind of difficulty we face when trying to appreciate what Diamond calls the difficulty of reality. In philosophy, the difficulties are real but not hard to understand: they are the difficulties of confronting hard problems, ensuring that arguments are valid or sound, watching out for distortions caused by inappropriate emotional responses, unquestioned assumptions, or assertions ungrounded in reasoning. A difficulty of reality is, on Diamond's view, an apparent resistance by reality to one's ordinary modes of life, which include one's ordinary modes of thinking; to appreciate that kind of difficulty "is to appreciate oneself being shouldered out of how one thinks, how one is apparently supposed to think" (PAL, 58). Costello's immense isolation is in large part a function of how her experience of how we treat animals is such as to compel her to resist any invitation or compulsion to articulate her experience in terms of the resources available in a certain, massively familiar way of thinking, the great river of Reason in Western culture; she aims to rely instead, and to invite her audience to rely, upon our capacity to inhabit in imagination nonhuman animal bodies. And just as we may reject that invitation by requiring whatever results from it to be reformulated in the terms of philosophical argumentation, so we may (in reading his lectures) reject Coetzee's invitation to exercise our capacity to imagine the bodily existence of Elizabeth Costello as she tries to confront the difficulty of what we do to animals, and do so by deflecting the whole business of reading him into the familiar terms of a discussion of difficult moral issues.

As the perspective I adopted in chapter 3 should already have made clear, I do not entirely share Diamond's apparent sense that Costello's relation to philosophical argumentation is absolutely negative. Diamond's way of putting the point is as follows:

She does not engage with others in argument, in the sense in which philosophers do. . . . She comments on the arguments put to her, but goes on from them in directions that suggest her own very different mode of approach. She does not take seriously the conventions of argumentation of a philosophy text, as comes

out in her image of the dead hen speaking in the writings of Camus on the guillotine. (This is clearly, from the point of view of conventions of argumentation, no way to respond to the argumentative point that animals cannot speak for themselves and claim rights for themselves as we can. The image itself is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's image of the rose having teeth in the mouth of the cow that chews up its food and dungs the rose.) (PAL, 52)

I would prefer to say that Costello's lecture does indeed go on from the philosophical arguments made in the canonical texts she confronts, but only after a moment or phase in which she really does take their conventions seriously—specifically by following out their own preferred terms of articulation in such a way as to reveal their internal fissures. And even in those phases of her engagement with philosophers in which she seems most flatly to refuse their preferred terms of articulation, something other than a mere assertion of absolute difference in approach, something more like a kind of response to the argumentative points that so provoke her, seems to me to be under way.

Let us recall in more detail the invocation of Camus to which Diamond refers. Costello makes this move in her final session at Appleton College, which takes the form of a debate with a professor of philosophy named Thomas O'Hearne, who puts forward three positions or theses, to which Costello is invited to reply. The second involves the claim that since animals cannot speak or think in any full-blooded sense of those terms, the panoply of rights concepts simply cannot have any intelligible application to them. Costello's reply culminates in the following suggestion.

As for animals being too dumb and stupid to speak for themselves, consider the following sequence of events. When Albert Camus was a young boy in Algeria, his grandmother told him to bring her one of the hens from the cage in their backyard. He obeyed, then watched her cut off its head with a kitchen knife, catching its blood in a bowl so that the floor would not be dirtied.

The death cry of that hen imprinted itself on the boy's memory so hauntingly that in 1958 he wrote an impassioned attack on the guillotine. As a result, in part, of that polemic, capital punishment was abolished in France. Who is to say, then, that the hen did not speak? (LA, 62)

There is no denying that there is a strong element of flat denial here—an attempt to refuse the terms for thinking with which O'Hearne presents her. But it is worth bearing in mind that this is the penultimate exchange in the final formal encounter of a long sequence of such encounters that have not gone well, and have patently begun to exhaust the rather limited reserves of Costello's patience. So we need not think of her undeniable preemptoriness here as exemplifying her default attitude to philosophy

and its claims throughout her visit, let alone in her lecture. And there is anyway much more to be registered in the content of her response.

To begin with, the Camus story offers the reader a further instance of someone being haunted or wounded by a difficulty of reality. That difficulty may in part be a matter of being struck by a certain conflict in the condition of animals reared in farms and homesteads for human use, in the utterly familiar tension between their being cared for in life and destined for the pot. But it is more immediately a matter of being struck by the simultaneous practicality and odiousness of the grandmother's desire to catch the hen's blood in a bowl; for that entirely understandable concern to avoid besmirching a floor somehow accentuates the brutality of the beheading, crystallizing the hen's status as flesh-for-food that happens to contain large and potentially messy amounts of blood.

The grotesque delicacy of that carefully angled bowl exemplifies the ways in which human civilization can sometimes be seen as dressing up the horrifying realities of its practices in ways that are so blatantly concerned with the appearance of cleanliness that they betray a lingering sense of the underlying uncleanness of what is actually being done. And it is this sense of the perverse human tendency to attempt to deaden self-disgust in ways that actually intensify it that Camus finds himself confronting in a new field—that of human judicial execution. There is here, in other words, the discovery or revelation of an analogy, of the kind Costello so offensively draws between factory farming and the extermination camps of the Holocaust; and it actually helps to bring about revolutionary change.

In short, Camus may not have deployed an argument, in any conventional philosophical sense, but he does present a way of seeing certain connections between the past and the present, the private and the public, and between the nonhuman and the human, with passionate conviction of a kind that elicits a deep and transformative imaginative response in other human beings. But it is not just that this way of seeing the world embodies a perception of fellowship between human and nonhuman animals; Costello's attribution of speech to the hen depends upon the idea that the hen speaks not only in or through the mouth of a human being, but also about and on behalf of human beings rather than her nonhuman fellows. In this sense, the hen speaks through Camus on behalf of mortal creatures in general, the fellowship of animate, embodied existence.

What, however, is happening to the idea of animals as speaking, and so to the idea of speech, in Costello's hands (and mouth)? Diamond usefully compares it to the following example from Wittgenstein:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), hereafter PI.

“A new-born child has no teeth.”—“A goose has no teeth.”—“A rose has no teeth.”—This last at any rate—one would like to say—is obviously true! It is even surer than that a goose has none. And yet it is none so clear. For where should a rose’s teeth have been? The goose has none in its jaw. And neither, of course, has it any in its wings; but no one means that when he says it has no teeth.—Why, suppose one were to say: the cow chews its food and then dungs the rose with it, so the rose has teeth in the mouth of a beast. This would not be absurd, because one has no notion in advance where to look for teeth in a rose. (Connexion with “pain in someone else’s body.”) (PI, 221–22)

On one vision of words and their ordering, the idea of “teeth” has no application to roses: it violates the grammar of our language games with the word. A mode of application to roses can be invented for it, of course; but that amounts to sheer invention, to the construction from scratch of a new and utterly different language game for it. According to another vision of language, closer to Diamond’s and Costello’s hearts, words are inherently capable of projection beyond their familiar contexts, as if there is always already more to their meaning than is captureable in the grammatical rules for particular language games with them. Such projectiveness is guided or governed by the existing ways in which that word relates to a range of other words, insofar as each concrete, realized case of projection is an expression of our willingness to find a point of purchase for some proportion of that range of interrelated expressions, some specific way in which the relevant word can be seen as bringing some inflection of that field of terms into the new context.

The sense in which a rose might be said to have teeth is neither an entirely familiar nor an entirely new application of those words; it is an extension or projection of them that is neither determined by the rules for their use nor forbidden by them. Rather, we are invited to make sense of that expression in the light of our everyday understanding of the relation between teeth and eating, and eating and feeding, in the lives of human and nonhuman animals, crops and flowers, and of the ways in which animals of either kind can help or be utilized by their fellows to eat and to feed. We make an intelligible context for their use, but in a way that feels like a discovery or revelation of a possibility (at once in and of the words, and in and of reality) rather than its essentially arbitrary construction.

What then, of Costello’s concluding question: “Who is to say, then, that the hen did not speak?,” and even more specifically, that it spoke of pain in another’s body (in the beheaded bodies of human beings, but also in the hearts of those contemplating the practice that demands this beheading, and what that practice reveals of the human heart and its perversities)? We might say that her way of presenting this aspect of Camus’ life

in its relation to his writing is an invitation to see that, by seeing how, the idea of speech might find application in such a context—in important part by inviting us to recall our everyday understanding of ways in which the world of our experience can be said to speak to us, to intimate modes of understanding and ways of seeing the world, to indicate possibilities that are at once original and yet utterly natural, even compelling, once delineated. This is an essentially imaginative exercise of speech, which is not to say that it is essentially irrational. For who is to say what counts as “saying” if not those animals whose form of life is complex enough to burden them with speech? And what authority might any of them claim to determine what counts as a legitimate use of this or any other word, that is not equally claimable by any other speaker, simply by virtue of the fact that they are speakers? It is not, then, for philosophy to say that the hen did speak, or that she did not, or that she could not. It is for any and every one of us to judge, by judging whether or not we can accept any specific invitation to find a particular projection of those words worth going along with, something that we can follow.

I have no reason to think that Diamond would disagree with any of the morals I have been drawing from Costello’s invocation of Camus and the hen. But it does seem at least misleading to describe them as not taking seriously the conventions of argumentation; they seem to me to be better characterized as reminders of other familiar, everyday ways of attempting to convince others of one’s way of seeing the world, of the kind that Diamond specifies in her other work (for example, that cited in chapter 1). They would therefore seem to be forms of discourse that philosophy need have no qualms about admitting as modes of thought or ways of reflecting about the world, hence as possible ways of meeting its own distinctive burden—that of acknowledging the claims of reason.

That qualification aside, however, Diamond’s paper goes on to link Costello’s idea of our capacity to inhabit bodily existence in imagination, and of philosophy’s reluctance to acknowledge it, to Stanley Cavell’s lifelong engagement with scepticism. For she sees in his work a related case of someone recognizing and resisting philosophy’s tendency to deflect a difficulty of reality into a difficulty of argumentation, and (even more importantly) of recognizing and resisting forms of resistance to that tendency that are in fact further expressions of it. She cites in particular his treatment of expressions of scepticism about other minds, and certain familiar Wittgensteinian attempts to dismantle or dissolve such forms of scepticism.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The Cavell paper to which she particularly refers is “Knowing and Acknowledging,” in his *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

It is common for sceptics about other minds to claim that we cannot ever know or be certain of what another is feeling, because we cannot ever feel what the other person is feeling. And it is common for Wittgensteinians to respond to such claims by asking whether it makes sense to think of our inability to feel another's feelings as a limitation upon us. It appears to reflect a picture of our relation to another's inner life as analogous to our relation to a flower in a garden on the far side of a wall over which we cannot see or climb; but what the sceptic takes to be an inability is in fact a misperception of the difference between two language games. In the language game with "flower," even if we cannot in fact penetrate beyond the wall, it makes perfect sense to imagine us doing so, and so it makes perfect sense to think of ourselves as at present excluded from that garden; but in the language game with "pain," there is no such thing as occupying the position of another with respect to what that other is feeling, and in fact no such thing as a position that the other has with respect to his pain (he simply has his pain, is in pain). In short, the form of words "I am feeling your pain" simply has no use in the game. We are not unable to be there if there is no "there" where we are unable to be.

Now those Wittgensteinians who respond in this way to the sceptic might well summarize their position by saying that, according to their diagnosis, the sceptic is inherently confused—misusing the words he needs in order to articulate his scepticism. And Cavell would not exactly deny this; rather—and this is what Diamond describes as astonishing—he claims that the truth of this diagnosis about the way the sceptic tends to express himself does not show that the sceptic's experience of powerlessness has been shown to boil down to a simple grammatical error. For since he, as well as any other speaker, already knows and so can be brought to acknowledge the grammatical points of which the Wittgensteinian philosopher has reminded him, why did he call on those particular words in the first place? More particularly, why does a traumatic perception of one's inability to have what another has find expression in the claim that one cannot know what that other has?

In Cavell's view, what is happening is that the sceptic is giving expression to an inordinate experience of metaphysical finitude (our separateness from the other, the "fact" that I am not him or her, and hence that I may—for all that either of us can do—miss his or her suffering, or have my own suffering missed by others) in terms suggestive of an intellectual lack (a picture of myself as locked out from what they are thinking or feeling, so that what is at issue are the limitations of human cognition, not the limits of human acknowledgment). But if an experience of powerlessness is deflected into an expression of ignorance, then simply to point out that the concept of ignorance is here misplaced, and to regard the matter as thereby settled, is precisely to accept the deflected terms in

which the sceptic has given expression to her experience. It therefore amounts to a continuation of that deflection, a way of continuing to miss the difficulty to which that initial deflection is a defensive response.

Diamond thereby presents Cavell as having shown her that what the sceptic sees of the human condition is such that it threatens to unseat his reason; it shoulders him out from our ordinary ways of talking about pain, although it does not render him wordless. But the traditional Wittgensteinian response treats it as a difficulty caused solely by the sceptic's (presumably thoughtless or careless) failure to recall or respect those ordinary ways; and such a response deflects us from considering the possibility that certain aspects of our everyday experience of reality might compel us to repudiate our ordinary language games (without thereby rendering us mute or our experiences empty). By contrast, Cavell takes his way of thinking to be heading towards the conclusion that "scepticism about other minds is not scepticism but tragedy"; otherwise put, it opens up the thought that what philosophy knows as scepticism is presented in literature as tragedy, and hence that philosophy might in this respect find literature indispensable to its own distinctive business.

The particular aspect of Cavell's treatment of scepticism upon which Diamond focuses patently foregrounds the issue of human embodiment (one might less misleadingly say human ensoulment), and so of the human body, since it is this aspect of our metaphysical finitude—the distinctness of our bodies confirming our separateness—to which the sceptic is responsive. At one point, Diamond in fact describes herself as "inviting you to think of what it would be not to be 'deflected' as an inhabiting of a body (one's own, or an imagined other's) in the appreciating of a philosophical difficulty" (PAL, 59). And in his response to Diamond, Cavell picks up on this far from clear line of thought by suggesting a further way of understanding Costello's wound.

That she conceals it under her clothes immediately alerts us to the most obvious, or banal, unlikeness, between her condition and that of other animals, namely just that her species wears clothes. And since what is concealed, and not concealed, under her clothes, we are allowed to assume, is an ageing but otherwise unharmed woman's body, the torment she expresses is somehow to be identified with the very possession of a human body, which is to say, with being human. (PAL, 110)

Cavell draws out two key implications from this reading of Costello's wound. One is that, since Costello claims that her wound is touched on in every word she speaks, and yet every word she speaks are the words of others, common bread, then "to speak, the signature expression of the human life form, is to be victimized by what there is to say, or to fail to say" (PAL, 115). Not to speak of our treatment of animals is to subject

oneself to anguish; but the only words with which one finds that one can speak about that treatment are such as to impute moral insanity. And for Costello, what is at stake in this topic of our treatment of other animals, and so what is at stake in our obligation to talk about it, is the moral status of humanity as such.

This is the second implication that Cavell draws from his interpretation of Costello's wound.

[S]ince the stigmata of [Costello's] suffering are coincident with the possession of the human body, the right to enter such a claim universally to other such possessors, has roughly the logic of a voice in the wilderness, crying out news that may be known to virtually none, but to all virtually. It is a voice invoking a religious, not alone a philosophical, register: it is uninvited, it goes beyond an appeal to experiences we must assume all humans share, or recognize, and it is meant to instil belief and a commentary and community based on belief, yielding a very particular form of passionate utterance, call it prophecy. . . . The right to voice it is not alone an arrogation of a claim every human being should be in a position to make, which philosophy requires of itself, in speaking for all; it is rather a judgement that distances itself from the human as it stands, that finds human company itself touched with noxiousness. (PAL, 111–12)

This returns us to the religious themes first broached by Cavell's interest in Abraham Stern's refusal to break bread with Costello, and it expresses a legitimate anxiety about philosophy's capacity to acknowledge Costello's (and so Coetzee's) ways with words. But it is important to see that Costello's inherently offensive utterance does not absolve her from implication in the crime she perceives, hence in the noxiousness of the human condition as it stands. As Cavell points out, she phrases her indictment in the first-person plural: "Ours is an enterprise without end" (LA, 21); and when she deflects the college president's admiration of her moral purity, she does so by pointing to her leather shoes and handbag. We saw earlier that, on Cavell's reading, Costello's concealment of her wound under her clothes is a pointer to the fact that it is only the human species of animal that wears clothes; so covering one's body with animal skin while abstaining from ingesting animal flesh cannot be defended as a merely superficial form of moral aberration, but rather suggests an internal contradiction of such depth that it pollutes one's humanity. When Costello talks of "degrees of obscenity," it is her reference to "degrees" that fails to convince, not her invocation of that which depraves and corrupts. This is what Diamond refers to as her, and our, sense of human beings as inherently vulnerable to experiences of bitter compromise.

By following out his interest in registering and developing these aspects of Costello's prophetic stance, issues of what he calls "inordinate knowledge." Cavell's discussion tends to remain focused directly on difficulties

of reality that concern our relation to nonhuman animals, and indirectly on the ways in which this relation informs our understanding of ourselves and other human beings. In Diamond's paper, by contrast, while that knot of difficulties is also central, the full range of her examples takes us far beyond this ground of bitter philosophical, moral, and religious compromise with the body and its wounds. John McDowell begins his "Comment on Stanley Cavell's 'Companionable Thinking'" by emphasizing this difference; and he goes on to argue that it amounts to a serious limitation in Cavell's response—one that risks obscuring Diamond's broader aims, and thereby risks obscuring the light she aims to cast on Cavell's own work on scepticism. But I find that I do not share McDowell's perception of risk here, because I do not entirely share either his sense of the risks run by Cavell's narrowness of focus, or his conception of Diamond's larger purpose.

In fact, McDowell is not entirely consistent in specifying exactly what Diamond's purpose is. He concludes his short paper as follows:

The role of Coetzee's Costello in Diamond's paper is not to raise the question whether Costello's unhinging perception is a perception of how things indeed are—that is, whether meat eating is what she thinks she sees it to be, which would certainly have implications about whether we meat eaters should continue with the practice. The role of Coetzee's Costello for Diamond is rather to provide an analogue for the unhinging perceptions of separation and finitude that according to Cavell himself constitute the real point of philosophical scepticism. (PAL, 137–38)

The suggestion here seems to be that Cavell perversely fails to appreciate that his own work is the true subject of Diamond's paper. But this is hardly plausible. Since her paper was first delivered in Cavell's presence at a conference honouring his work, and has since appeared in a collection of essays on that work, it would be hard for him not to know that illuminating his own thought was at least one important part of Diamond's purposes. The question this knowledge posed for Cavell was rather how to acknowledge it—how to respond to that fact about it with due tact, in a way that made manifest the new possibilities opened up for his thinking by her recontextualization of it, and in the particular context of a collection of papers intended to honour Diamond's own lifetime of philosophical work. Evidently enough, his answer was to focus on an example (chosen from the many under discussion in Diamond's paper) that permitted him to engage seriously with a central theme in her wider philosophical writing—that of the moral status of nonhuman animals.

Moreover, without denying Cavell's centrality in Diamond's paper, it seems strange to assume that casting new light on Cavell's work was Diamond's sole concern. For McDowell himself emphasizes that the range of examples she discusses extends far beyond that of Coetzee and Cavell: as

we shall shortly see, it includes several other writers working in a variety of genres other than that of the novel (such as poetry or autobiography). And earlier in his paper, he seems to draw a rather different conclusion from this fact: “Costello figures, for Diamond, only as exemplifying, in a richly elaborated way, something that is also exemplified [in other texts], and the specifics of what obsesses Costello are in a way irrelevant” (PAL, 133).

Here, then, McDowell suggests that Cavell is mistaken not in taking Costello to be Diamond’s real focus when it is in fact Cavell himself, but rather in taking any individual example she discusses to be her real concern, when it is in fact what these various examples are supposed to exemplify that matters most to her. And what, on McDowell’s view, these various difficulties of reality exemplify is the way in which “the special kind of animal life we lead comes into question” (PAL, 134). For in defeating our ordinary capacity to get our minds around reality, difficulties of reality defeat our capacity to capture reality in language; and the capacity to speak (and so the capacity to make sense of things in the way that this capacity to speak enables) is a distinguishing mark of human animals in general. In other words, such difficulties “can dislodge one from living one’s life as a speaking animal” (PAL, 135)—from comfortably inhabiting that special kind of animal existence. It is, McDowell says, as if a beaver found dam building to be beyond its powers; and we can (he thinks) appreciate the particular significance of such difficulties of and for the human condition without sharing Costello’s or Diamond’s sense that eating meat constitutes one of them.

This is a powerful and penetrating perception of one way in which Diamond’s various difficulties of reality might be seen as hanging together, or forming a family. It redefines the nature and depth of our woundedness, by presenting our nature as what makes us so deeply vulnerable to such damage; it explains why Costello—whose vocation makes words a particularly central element of her individual inflection of the human form of life—should be particularly sensitive to such difficulties; and it directs our attention once more to the continuities and discontinuities of human and nonhuman forms of animality. But McDowell’s way of articulating his perception leaves him open to some deep, and potentially damaging, questions.

To begin with, his formulation implies that we can properly appreciate the general nature of our woundedness only if we regard the specific qualities of any particular example of it as irrelevant; and this makes sense only on the assumption that attention to the particularity of an example inherently tends to occlude attention to that which it exemplifies—quite as if generality and particularity must war with one another, in rather the way Plato assumed when presenting the specificity and concreteness of

literary creations as tempting us away from the domain of genuine knowledge (that of the universal, the abstract).

But why assume that one cannot attend to the specificity of an example in a way that permits a proper appreciation of its resemblances and links to other specific examples, and so of what holds them together? There is no reason to assume in advance that Cavell's specific attentiveness to the case of Elizabeth Costello's woundedness must block a perception of how that woundedness relates to our nature as speaking animals; and in fact (as we have seen) he is specifically attentive to Costello as exemplifying our victimization by the human capacity for linguistic expression—a concern that (as McDowell, like anyone familiar with Cavell's work more generally, surely knows) reflects Cavell's wider interest in the ways human beings are marked or branded by speech.

Furthermore, McDowell's own way of characterizing the general nature of our woundedness strongly suggests that the specific case of our relations with nonhuman animals should have a particular significance for anyone interested in that woundedness. For he emphasizes that difficulties of reality can be seen as casting a particularly illuminating light on what he takes to be distinctively human about our form of animality—our relation to language. And Elizabeth Costello's engagement with various philosophical discourses suggesting an abyssal distinction between human and nonhuman animals, not to mention her characterization of Camus' hen as speaking, explicitly isolates for sustained critical questioning the idea of language as a distinguishing mark of the human. If McDowell were not so eager to redirect our attention towards human woundedness in general and away from one particular, and particularly wounding, manifestation of it, he might be forced to attend more closely to Costello's suggestion that we are prone to utilize our inwardness with words to deflect attention from the difficult reality—the uncanny intimacy—of our fellowship with nonhuman animals.

More unease about McDowell's approach is generated when, before attempting to deflect Cavell's, and so our, supposedly inordinate interest in the issue of nonhuman animals and our willingness to eat them, he offers "a brief, and necessarily oversimplified" (PAL, 129) sketch of Diamond's attitude towards eating what she calls our fellow creatures. According to McDowell, just as anyone who thought it might be all right to eat other human beings merely shows that her use of the phrase "human being" does not express everything many of us mean by it, so "for Diamond it is not a matter for debate whether it might be all right to eat our fellow creatures. . . . Those who make meat eating into a philosophical topic of the usual kind just reveal that they do not mean what Diamond means by 'fellow creature'" (PAL, 129). In particular, it is part of what

Diamond means by that term that no form of rearing nonhuman animals for human consumption could possibly be right.

It should not seem to change the situation if we imagine animal husbandry being as it is depicted in a certain genre of children's stories, in which the relations between farmers and their animals are like the relations between people and domestic pets. Such stories necessarily leave unmentioned how the animals' lives end, and if one views animals as Diamond does, one would have to see sending them to be turned into food, however friendly one's previous relations with them were, as a betrayal. Factory farming . . . amplifies the evil of meat eating, but it is not the essential thing. (PAL, 130–31)

But this account of Diamond's views is, it seems to me, so brief and oversimplified that it risks encouraging serious misunderstandings of her position.

First, not all forms of vegetarianism are as radical as Costello's. There is no necessary connection between being a vegetarian and believing that all ways of rearing nonhuman animals for food are impermissible; some vegetarians may abstain from eating meat precisely because of the particular farming methods currently used to produce it, and would rescind that abstention should those methods change. Diamond's various discussions of the ethics of eating meat may suggest, but they do not declare, which version of vegetarianism she personally endorses (and deliberately so, in my view, since it is not clear what philosophical relevance that biographical fact should have); they rather strive to make clear which philosophical approaches to this ethical matter may clarify, and which risk obscuring, the real sources of conflict that it provokes. Certainly, the fact that Diamond finds philosophical illumination in Coetzee's presentation of Costello's radical hostility to eating meat provides no evidence either way. But suppose that McDowell is right in assuming that there are no circumstances in which Diamond would think it permissible to eat meat. Must she therefore (as McDowell appears to suggest) believe that anyone who thinks that there might be such circumstances, and wishes to discuss what they may be, either cannot regard animals as her fellow creatures, or cannot mean what Diamond herself means by that phrase?

Much in Diamond's own writing suggests that this is something like the reverse of her own view. To begin with, she illustrates what she means by regarding nonhuman animals as fellow creatures by quoting a poem by Walter de la Mare about a titmouse (which talks of "this tiny son of life" flitting off "into Time's enormous Nought"), without giving any indication of thinking that the meaning of the vision embodied in the poem is determinable only by establishing its author's views on eating meat. And another of her frequent literary reference points—Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House on the Prairie" books—offer a powerful vi-

sion of a rural American world in which human beings treat the nonhuman animals surrounding them (both domesticated and wild) with compassion, dignity, respect, and even awe, in ways that naturally suggest a perception of them as “fellow creatures.” But these people would be utterly bewildered at the suggestion that eating some of these animals would essentially betray that perception. The question of how the animals they rear for food should be treated is not only intelligible to them, but morally central to their relationship with those animals—as we see when they condemn those among them who treat their livestock with neglect or cruelty, or despise those who hunt for wild game in certain ways. In such a context, the difference between farming and factory farming would be essential, not amplificatory. And they certainly regard some animals as vermin, and so as treatable in ways that cows and sheep, or wolves and cougars, are not. In fact, it is precisely insofar as they relate to their animals in ways that embody such distinctions that they manifest their conception of them as fellow creatures—as each living out different forms of mortal existence, and so as each relating differently to one another and to their human fellows.

To be sure, other human communities might embody different understandings of how to treat nonhuman creatures as our fellows; and those of our contemporaries (such as Elizabeth Costello or Albert Camus, or perhaps even Cora Diamond herself) who are profoundly impressed by the moral claims nonhuman animals make upon us might find this older, rural American vision of that fellowship to be flawed or internally contradictory in certain ways. But that is precisely my, and I think Diamond’s, point. The notion of nonhuman animals as our “fellow creatures” is neither the repository of a single, unified sense to which anyone who grasps the notion must conform, nor a fundamentally multivocal concept that must mean something essentially different to everyone who applies it at all differently; it is rather a relatively stable locus of historically extended, thoughtful contestation.

The idea of animals as our fellow creatures is certainly shared by or at least familiar to many and has been long embedded in our thinking; but its precise range of application and its particular inflections of moral significance have been and are the subject of historical and cultural variation, and of reasonable but real disagreement. For the idea can be employed in various intelligible ways, and each such pattern of use can be comprehensibly extended (and each such extension comprehensibly contested) in various ways—extensions and contestations that differently exploit the way any such pattern of use, as embodied in a human form of life, ties together (or conflicts) with our existing and envisageable ways of employing a range of related ideas (such as “wild animals” or “vermin”). Since there is no reason to assume that any given human community’s

many and varied ways of thinking about and treating nonhuman animals across the full range of its encounters with them—even one for which the idea of “fellow creatures” has real purchase and resonance—will interweave so tightly and coherently as to form an impregnable, monolithic whole (and no reason to view the attainment of such an airless, self-confirming, and profoundly monotonous state of affairs, entirely immune to alteration or unexpected renewals of interest, as either desirable or even conceivable), then we should expect to discover a variety of gaps, points of friction, and even flat-out contradiction that might be utilized in order to reorient our moral imagination in a number of different ways.<sup>6</sup>

This is the vision of words as imaginatively projective that emerged a little earlier in my discussion of Costello’s citation of the story of Camus and the hen. It is utterly central to Diamond’s (and to Cavell’s) conception of language; and yet McDowell’s sketch of Diamond’s stance seems to presuppose a contrary vision—when, for example, he claims that anyone who suggests that some nonhuman animals might be eaten, or that some ways of treating nonhuman animals are worse than others, is seen thereby to reveal that they do not mean what Diamond means by “fellow creature.” For this implies that different ways of understanding what treating nonhuman animals as “fellow creatures” might or should amount to in a given context indicates that the phrase differs sharply and decisively in its meaning when employed by these two speakers—quite as if each is playing a different language game with the same term (so that “fellow creature” is ambiguous in the way “bank” is ambiguous between “money bank” and “riverbank”).

McDowell thereby risks returning Diamond into the hands of Onora O’Neill, and her vision of Wittgensteinian moral philosophers as necessarily presupposing a shared linguistic and moral community, and as rendered utterly impotent by the possibility of linguistic and moral disagreement. For if McDowell’s account were correct, invoking the notion of nonhuman animals as “fellow creatures” would not allow Diamond and her interlocutor even to clarify the nature and extent of their moral disagreement, let alone to find a way of alleviating or overcoming it. Unless they already agree on the meaning and the essential implications of the idea of nonhuman animals as fellow creatures, its invocation could only underline their disagreement, showing each to be armed with a way of meaning the idea that merely reflects her own initial judgement and insulates it and her from that of her interlocutor. (In a similar vein, McDowell tells us that it is only because most of us still use the phrase “human

<sup>6</sup> We will examine in chapter 7 one way in which such internal contestation might be conducted, as it is exemplified in one of Diamond’s more extended discussions of eating meat.

being” in a certain way that the idea of cannibalism is not up for debate [PAL, 129]; so what happens if we stop using the phrase that way, or if some of us start using it differently?)

By contrast, Diamond thinks that, insofar as the idea of nonhuman animals as our fellow creatures makes sense to her and her interlocutor, pointing them both towards a multifarious but familiar (if often overlooked) range of thoughts, feelings, and ways of engaging with animals, it indicates a horizon within which each can make sense to the other, each can account for her own way of understanding that notion and of living out that understanding, and one might even succeed in bringing the other to see that her present way of regarding animals might bear refinement. Such an outcome is not guaranteed; but the traumatic reality of moral disagreement about such matters is difficult enough without characterizing it in terms of a vision of language that appears to remove the very possibility of enhanced understanding of one’s differences, let alone that of alleviating or overcoming the disagreement.

Of course, none of these concerns about McDowell’s way of going on from his initial perception of the broad range of Diamond’s examples of difficulties of reality invalidates that perception. We, too, need to attend to that fact about her discussion; and in particular, we must acknowledge that there is no necessary conjunction in Diamond’s mind between the difficulty of reality and evil, anguish and suffering—say, disvaluation. For according to her account, certain instances of goodness or beauty can throw us, shoulder us out of our ordinary ways of talking and thinking, with equal force.

Diamond cites Czeslaw Milosz talking of beauty as something that should not exist, for which there are no reasons for and indeed reasons against, but which nevertheless undoubtedly exists—so that the architecture of a tree, the slimness of a column crowned with green, or the voices of birds greeting the dawn, which might strike some as the most quotidian of quotidian phenomena, strike Milosz as inexplicable in their reality. She quotes Ruth Kluger’s Holocaust memoir, in which the author records the fact that a young woman’s act of encouraging a terrified child seemed to her incomparable and inexplicable, as well as the fact that many people to whom she tells her tale wonder at her wonder, seeing nothing mysterious in the fact that some people are altruistic. And she refers to the philosopher Roy Holland’s claim that one concept of the miraculous is that of the occurrence of something that is at one and the same time empirically certain and conceptually impossible.<sup>7</sup> The New Testament tale of Christ’s public ministry being initiated at a wedding feast in Cana, where at his

<sup>7</sup> “The Miraculous,” in his *Against Empiricism* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1980).

mother's instigation he turns water into wine, is just such a story: it narrates an occurrence that is impossible for us to grasp in thought, which refuses to fit into our conceptual categories, and yet there it is, happening before our very eyes (and on our very tongue).

One might say with respect to this last case that there are hardly likely to be people who would take such occurrences in their stride. But of course, there will be many people (and not only philosophers) who would rule any such "concept" entirely out of order in advance, because it violates the very idea of a conceptual order in the absence of which the possibility of genuine thought will vanish; and there will be others who are willing to take seriously (or at least, are not willing to—can see no authoritative basis on which to—rule out in advance) the possibility that one's experience might force one to violate one's idea of what a well-ordered concept must be.<sup>8</sup>

There might also be those for whom the key point about our New Testament example is not its putative divine origin, nor its instantiation of a situation that one might meet in one's own experience, but rather the fact that it is a narration—that we relate to it in the first instance as readers or hearers of a story. Whether we think of that story as an accurate report on a real event or not would then be less significant than the fact that we can make sense of it as a story. For not all of us will respond to it as straightforwardly unintelligible qua tale, but rather we may see it as hanging together with literary devices and techniques of a more explicitly modernist nature; they might, in other words, see it as related to the many ways in which the teller of a tale can violate what appear to be the most basic conventions or conditions for narrative intelligibility, and find that readers are (or discover that they are not) willing to go on with him, to continue to find sense and interest in the world of that narrative.

We shall touch on these matters more systematically when we broaden our focus from *The Lives of Animals* to *Elizabeth Costello*, and indeed to the wider range of Coetzee's fiction taken as a whole. In the meantime, however, it is worth stressing that Diamond's primary reason for invoking Holland is to connect the awe that Kluger expresses at the reality of goodness and that Milosz expresses at the reality of beauty with the kind of astonishment and awe one would feel at a miracle. Some difficulties in reality, then, are not ones we would wish to wish away.

Nevertheless, her other major example of such a difficulty—the one that actually opens her essay and prepares the ground for her discussion

<sup>8</sup> For a representative sample of the full spectrum of such responses, cf. the first three essays in R. Gaita, ed., *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch* (London: Routledge, 1990).

of Costello and Coetzee—does concern pain rather than joy. It derives from a poem by Ted Hughes, entitled “Six Young Men.”

The celluloid of a photograph holds them well—  
 Six young men, familiar to their friends.  
 Four decades that have faded and ochre-tinged  
 This photograph have not wrinkled the faces or the hands.  
 Though their cocked hats are not now fashionable,  
 Their shoes shine. One imparts an intimate smile,  
 One chews a grass, one lowers his eyes, bashful,  
 One is ridiculous with cocky pride—  
 Six months after this picture they were all dead.

All are trimmed for a Sunday jaunt. I know  
 That bilberried bank, that thick tree, that black wall,  
 Which are there yet and not changed. From where these sit  
 You hear the water of seven streams fall  
 To the roarer in the bottom, and through all  
 The leafy valley a rumouring of air go.  
 Pictured here, their expressions listen yet,  
 And still that valley has not changed its sound  
 Though their faces are four decades under the ground.

This one was shot in an attack and lay  
 Calling in the wire, then this one, his best friend,  
 Went out to bring him in and was shot too;  
 And this one, the very moment he was warned  
 From potting at tin-cans in no-man’s land,  
 Fell back dead with his rifle-sights shot away.  
 The rest, nobody knows what they came to,  
 But come to the worst they must have done, and held it  
 Closer than their hope; all were killed.

Here see a man’s photograph,  
 The locket of a smile, turned overnight  
 Into the hospital of his mangled last  
 Agony and hours; see bundled in it  
 His mightier-than-a-man dead bulk and weight:  
 And on this one place which keeps him alive  
 (In his Sunday best) see fall war’s worst  
 Thinkable flash and rending, onto his smile  
 Forty years rotting into soil.

That man's not more alive whom you confront  
 And shake by the hand, see hale, hear speak loud,  
 Than any of these six celluloid smiles are,  
 Nor prehistoric or fabulous beast more dead;  
 No thought so vivid as their smoking blood:  
 To regard this photograph might well dement,  
 Such contradictory permanent horrors here  
 Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out  
 One's own body from its instant and heat.

A central link between this poem and Elizabeth Costello's lecture is of course the theme of death—more specifically, the “contradictory permanent horrors” of the imagination of death, and the way in which the photograph exposes the poet, as his poem in turn exposes us, to the impossibility of encompassing in thought the reality of mortality. Furthermore, as we shall see, Hughes's poetry forms a pivotal part of her later seminar, which reflects on the poets and their relation to the reality of nonhuman animals. But these links are complicated by elements in this particular poem that have no counterpart in either stretch of Coetzee's text.

One possibly relevant difference is the fact that the deaths of these six men are the result of war and so may also be thought of as encapsulating a sense of war as senseless, as a perfectly familiar and perennial aspect of human experience that is nevertheless capable of driving us to the point of madness in attempting to encompass its reality in thought. What, after all, is more obvious and entirely to be expected than that human beings should regularly fight with one another to the point of death? And yet what, in another mood, from another perspective, is more resistant to comprehension?

Beyond this, however, there is the central relevance of photography to the poet's sense of exposure. For what is threatening to drive him mad here is the simultaneous sense that no one could be more alive than these six men smiling in front of his eyes, and yet no one and nothing could be more dead; and his ability to see six dead men alive and smiling before his very eyes is possible only because he is looking at a photograph of them taken shortly before they went to war, and to their deaths. It is therefore perfectly possible to describe the situation in a way that makes it seem the very reverse of impossible or insane: what could be more familiar than the idea that the subjects of photographs might be dead? And so what could be more amenable to straightforward description and thought than the idea of dead men smiling in a photograph? As Diamond puts it, the terms of this language game could easily be explained to a young child; and at that stage the “point of view from which she sees a problem is not yet in the game; while that from which the horrible contradiction

impresses itself on the poet-speaker is that of someone who can no longer speak from within the game. Language is shouldered out from the game, as the body from its instant and heat" (PAL, 45). The difficulty of reality that Diamond is trying to locate here is thus inseparable from the fact of photography: the instant and heat of the rending flash that shoulders out language and thought registers both the worst of war (the rifle-barrel and the bomb) and the camera's reliance upon the dazzling light of a flashbulb to take its single exposure. Indeed, the difficulty can arise even when the subjects of a photograph are neither victims of war nor even dead. For what any photograph, by its very nature, can expose us to is the mysterious relation between a photograph and what it is a photograph of—between the real person, object, or environment in front of the camera when the photograph was taken and what the resulting photograph presents to its viewers.

As Diamond is well aware, this issue is central to Stanley Cavell's substantial body of work on film and philosophy. That project finds its initial orientation in a consideration of the material basis of film, and so in reflections on the relation between photographs and reality.<sup>9</sup> And Cavell begins those reflections by claiming that, whereas it makes perfect sense to say that a painting presents us with a likeness of something or someone, it would not be quite right to say that a photograph presents us with a likeness: what Cavell thinks we want to say is that it presents us with the thing itself. A photograph of an object is not, as a painting of it may be, a visual representation of that object (it does not stand for that object, nor form a likeness of it), but rather a visual transcription of it. However, it does not transcribe the sight or look or appearance of an object in the way in which a recording can be said to transcribe the sound of an object; for objects do not have or make sights in the way that objects have or make sounds. There is, one might say, no way of reproducing the "sights" they make without reproducing them; or better, there is nothing of the right sort for a photograph to be a photograph of short of the object itself.

When we look at a photograph of Tom Cruise, we see Tom Cruise—the man before the camera when the photograph was taken; we do not see a representation or reproduction or image or replica of him, we see the man himself. And yet we know that a photograph of Tom Cruise is not Tom Cruise. But saying that amounts only to saying that a photograph is not a human being; who would deny it? And this reminder of what no one could reasonably be expected to have forgotten does not address the real difficulty, which is precisely that of understanding what it is for something to be a *photograph* of Tom Cruise (as opposed to, say, a painting

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The World Viewed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), esp. chaps. 2–4 (hereafter WV).

of him or a recording of his voice). The man himself is not there; but there he is, nevertheless, in the photograph; what seems for all the world to be happening, ontologically speaking, when we look at a photograph is that we see things that are not really there. Cavell finds that he wants to say: The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it. And so the motion-picture camera can make a world present to us from which we are absent, can cause live human beings and real objects in actual spaces to appear to us when they are in fact not there.

These matters would bear much more detailed discussion.<sup>10</sup> But for present purposes, my concern is not to persuade anyone that Cavell's formulations of the matter are correct, or even worthy of further investigation. What interests me is rather the fact that his analysis of photography in its relation to reality is designed from the outset not to dissipate or dissolve the aura of magic and mystery with which he takes it to be imbued, but rather to maintain itself within it. As he puts it: "It may be felt that I make too great a mystery of these objects. My feeling is rather that we have forgotten how mysterious these things are, and in general how *different* things are from one another, as though we had forgotten to value them" (WV, 19). Where his interlocutors elide important differences between aural, pictorial, and photographic representations in such a way as to occlude the specificity of the photographic, in all its mysteriousness, it is precisely Cavell's orienting assumption that obscurities are internal to our experience of photographs and so of film, rather than something blocking our way to a transparent understanding of those phenomena. Hence: "The commitments I set myself as I wrote were, first, to allow obscurities to express themselves as clearly and fervently as I could say, and, second, to be guided by the need to organize and clarify just these obscurities and just this fervour in the progression of my book as a whole" (WV, 162).

The point is not to avoid the achievement of clarity, but to recognize that such clarity that can be achieved must be clarity about just these obscurities, hence clarity that must be the result of working through those obscurities rather than banishing them, and so may result only in making it clearer to both author and reader that obscurity is internal to the phenomenon of photography and so of film. In other words, Cavell sees in the domain of photography as such exactly the kind of difficulty of reality, the possibility of experiencing something that is perfectly everyday as constitutively enigmatic, that Diamond sees as central not only to Coetzee's writing about Costello but to ordinary human experience more generally.

<sup>10</sup> I have developed some of these themes in chapter 9 of my *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

In this respect he registers a general willingness, as a philosopher, to avoid assuming that an appearance of paradox or contradiction or mystery is an infallible sign of a failure of understanding; he remains open to the possibility that appearances can, even in this respect, amount to revelations of reality. But Cavell's way of staying true to the initial obscurities of his experience of photography and film are also strikingly parallel to Coetzee's way of expressing his sense of the inherent paradoxicality of novel-writing. For in response to one sympathetic critic, he makes the following remark: "Stories are defined by their irresponsibility: they are, in the judgement of Swift's Houyhnhnms, 'that which is not.' The *feel* of writing fiction is one of freedom, of irresponsibility, or better, of responsibility towards something that has not yet emerged, that lies somewhere at the end of the road."<sup>11</sup> Coetzee here uses one of his most significant novelistic predecessors to articulate a sense of the negative relation between fictional reality and reality, and of the novelist's paradoxically positive sense of responsibility to the nonexistent reality of his fictions, that is very close to Cavell's sense of film as presenting us with an absent or nonexistent reality. For one of Cavell's ways of making his point about the worlds of film is to declare: "That the projected world does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality. (There is no feature, or set of features, in which it differs. Existence is not a predicate.)" (WV, 24). This final parenthetical remark, recalling Kant's famous criticism of the ontological argument for God's existence, points out that any property possessible by a real object can be possessed by an object in a film, and hence that there is not and cannot be any specifiable respect in which the projected world and the real world differ. So, the reality of the real world is not a property of it any more than unreality is a property of the world of a film. And likewise, to say of a fictional tale that it is not, that neither it nor the people and objects it contains are real, is not to specify a property that those fictional beings lack, any more than to say that they are fictional is to specify a property that they possess but that real beings lack. What, then, are we saying when we say that these projected or narrated worlds do not exist? Can this obscurity be clarified without being dissipated?

For Cavell, it does not follow from his claim about the unreality of the world of film that seeing an object and seeing that object in a film are not distinguishable, any more than Elizabeth Costello is indistinguishable from a real person; what follows is that that undeniable distinction must be made out not in terms of perceptible differences between them, but rather in terms of the different relationships in which we stand to them

<sup>11</sup> *Doubling the Point*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 246 (hereafter DP).

(for example, in the fact that we share neither a space nor a time with the beings of the film—we can neither enter their presence nor their present). It remains to be seen whether, and how far, Coetzee's understanding of narrative fiction can support a parallel elucidation of his claim that stories are that which is not—that the world of a story does not exist. Even at this point, however, it is clear that both Coetzee and Cavell are inclined to align themselves with those who would see the fictionality of fictional persons as making our capacity and willingness to respond to them as we do real people genuinely enigmatic. We shall return to this.