

## INTRODUCTION

## EXPOSURES

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In his novel *Disgrace*, J.M. Coetzee tells the story of David Lurie, a literature professor in South Africa whose career comes to an abrupt end after he has an affair with a female undergraduate and is charged with sexual harassment. Lurie moves to the country, where his daughter Lucy has a small farm, and begins volunteering at the local animal shelter, where he assists in euthanizing the scores of animals, mainly dogs, for whom no homes can be found. Lurie has never thought of himself as “a sentimentalist,” as he puts it, and he takes to the work reluctantly. But then, gradually, he becomes absorbed in it.<sup>1</sup> “He had thought he would get used to it,” Coetzee writes. “But that is not what happens. The more killings he assists in, the more jittery

he gets.” Then, one Sunday night as he is driving back from the clinic, it hits him; “he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake. He does not understand what is happening to him.” For reasons he doesn’t understand, “his whole being is gripped by what happens in the [surgical] theatre” (143).

This moment in Coetzee’s emotionally and politically complex novel is a kind of amplification of a passage from his contemporaneous work, *The Lives of Animals*, which serves as a touchstone in the essays that follow. In *The Lives of Animals*, the main character, novelist Elizabeth Costello, is haunted—“wounded,” to use a figure that Cora Diamond highlights in “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy”—by how we treat nonhuman animals in practices such as factory farming, a systemized and mechanized killing that she compares (to the consternation of some) in its scale and its violence to the Holocaust of the Jews during the Second World War. At a dinner after one of her invited public lectures, she is asked by the president of the university whether her vegetarianism “comes out of moral conviction,” and she responds, against the expectations of her hosts, “No, I don’t think so. . . . It comes out of a desire to save my soul.” And when the university administrator politely replies, “Well, I have a great respect for it,” she retorts impatiently, “I’m wearing

leather shoes. I'm carrying a leather purse. I wouldn't have overmuch respect if I were you."<sup>2</sup>

What haunts Costello here, and what suddenly shakes David Lurie to his very soles as he is driving home that night, is the sheer weight and gravity of what has become one of the central ethical issues of our time: our moral responsibilities toward nonhuman animals. But both moments in Coetzee's work insist on something else, too, something that also, in a different way, unsettles the very foundations of what we call "the human," and in so doing reveals the characterization I just offered (of our responsibilities to animals as an "ethical issue") to be a kind of evasion of a problem that is not so easily disposed of. For both moments acknowledge a *second* kind of "unspeakability": not only the unspeakability of how we treat animals in practices such as factory farming but also the unspeakability of the limits of our own thinking in confronting such a reality—the trauma, as Diamond puts it, of "experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability" ("The Difficulty of Reality," ○○○).

Writ large, in the terms of the (post-)Enlightenment philosophical tradition, this is often referred to as the problem of philosophical "skepticism," and part of what Diamond is interested in pressuring here is the extent to which the two questions that anchor this volume (philosophical skepticism and its consequences

for ethics, and the question of our moral responsibilities to nonhuman animals) are and are not versions of the same question. This is not to say that the papers collected here agree on this point; on the contrary, it seems to me that we find three rather different views on this matter—a situation that is brought into particularly sharp focus in John McDowell’s response to both Cavell and Diamond and the extent to which Cavell’s essay does justice to his own insights in this matter. For his part, Cavell has explored the question of skepticism with remarkable nuance and range over the past forty and more years. Working through figures as diverse as Kant, Descartes, Emerson, Wittgenstein, Austin, and Heidegger (among others), Cavell has plumbed the consequences of what it means to do philosophy in the wake of what he calls the Kantian “settlement” with skepticism. As he characterizes it in *In Quest of the Ordinary*, “To settle with skepticism . . . to assure us that we do know the existence of the world, or rather, that what we understand as knowledge is *of* the world, the price Kant asks us to pay is to cede any claim to know the thing in itself, to grant human knowledge is not of things as they are in themselves. You don’t—do you?—have to be a romantic to feel sometimes about that settlement: Thanks for nothing.”<sup>3</sup> But if, on Cavell’s reading of Kant, “reason proves its power to itself, over itself” (30) by logically deriving the difference between the world of mere appearances (phenomena) that we

can know and the world of the *Ding an sich* (noumena), which our knowledge never touches, then we find ourselves in a position that is not just odd but in fact profoundly unsettling, for philosophy in a fundamental sense then fails precisely insofar as it succeeds. We gain knowledge, but only to lose the world.

The question in the wake of skepticism thus becomes: What can it mean to (continue to) do philosophy after philosophy has become, in a certain sense, impossible? One thing it does *not* mean (if we believe the essays collected here) is that such “resistance” of the world (“the difficulty of reality,” to use the phrase Diamond borrows from novelist John Updike) could be dissolved or overcome by ever-more ingenious or accomplished propositional arguments, ever-more refined philosophical concepts. Indeed, to think that it can—to mistake “the difficulty of philosophy” for the “difficulty of reality” (as Diamond suggests is the case with the philosophical “Reflections” published at the end of *The Lives of Animals*)—is to indulge in a “deflection” (to use Cavell’s term) of a reality that impinges upon us—“befalls” us, as Wittgenstein once put it—in ways not masterable by the crafting of analytical arguments. (This is why, Diamond suggests, Elizabeth Costello does not offer an argument in defense of her vegetarianism, and it is also why Costello is quick to point to the inconsistency of her own practices with regard to animal products.) It is that impingement, that

“pressure” of reality, that overtakes David Lurie on the drive back from the clinic. He literally does not know what is happening to him; he has no reasons for it and cannot explain it. And yet it is the most real thing in the world.

These fundamental challenges for (and to) philosophy are sounded by Cavell in his reading of the philosopher most important to him, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who writes in his most important essay, “Experience”: “I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition.” For Cavell, this moment registers the confrontation with skepticism, certainly, but it also voices an understanding of how philosophy must change in the wake of that confrontation. For the “unhandsome” here names not just the Kantian *Ding an sich* but also, Cavell writes, “what happens when we seek to deny the stand-offishness of objects by clutching at them; which is to say, when we conceive thinking, say the application of concepts in judgments, as grasping something.”<sup>4</sup> When we engage in that sort of “deflection,” we only deepen the abyss—“*when we clutch hardest*”—between our thinking and the world that we want to understand. The opposite of clutching, on the other hand—what Cavell will call “the most handsome part of our condition”—is facing the fact that “the demand for unity in our judgments, that our deployment of

concepts, is not the expression of the conditionedness or limitations of our humanness but of the human effort to escape our humanness" (*This New*, 86–87).

We may think that we have left the question of our relation to nonhuman animals behind at this juncture, but as both Cavell and Jacques Derrida remind us in their readings of Heidegger, the figure of the hand in relation to thought and to species difference is a linchpin of philosophical humanism. As Cavell points out, harbored in Heidegger's famous contention that "thinking is a handicraft" is the "fantasy of the applicable [*sic*] thumb" that separates the human from the animal not just anthropologically but also ontologically.<sup>5</sup> As Heidegger writes, in a moment emphasized by Derrida: "Apes, for example, have organs that can grasp, but they have no hand," for their being is subordinated to utility rather than devoted to thought and the reflection on things "as such," which is possible for only for beings who possess language.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the opposite of the "clutching" or "grasping" that will find its apotheosis for Heidegger in the world domination of technology is a thinking that is instead a kind of "reception" or welcoming (Cavell, *Conditions*, 39). Or as Derrida puts it, "If there is a thought of the hand or a hand of thought, as Heidegger gives us to think, it is not of the order of conceptual grasping. Rather this thought of the hand belongs to the essence of the *gift*, of a giving that would give, if this is possible, without

taking hold of anything” (*Geschlecht II*, 173). And thus Heidegger’s insistence, as Cavell reminds us, on “the derivation of the word thinking from a root for thanking,” as if “giving thanks for the gift of thinking” (*Conditions*, 39).

Philosophy can therefore no longer be seen as mastery, as a kind of clutching or grasping via analytical categories and concepts, which seemed, for Heidegger, “a kind of sublimized violence” (*Conditions*, 39). Rather, the duty of thinking is not to “deflect” but to receive and even suffer (remember Costello’s woundedness) what Cavell calls our “exposure” to the world. That Diamond is much attracted to this term is clear not just because she begins her essay with a reading of a poem about a photograph but also because it underscores an important connection between the exposure of our concepts to the confrontation with skepticism and the *physical* exposure to vulnerability and mortality that we suffer because we, like animals, are embodied beings. As Diamond puts it in a key moment in her essay, unpacking her sense of Costello’s startling assertion that “I know what it is like to be a corpse”:

The awareness we each have of being a living body, being “alive to the world”, carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them. This vulnerability is capable of panick-

ing us. To be able to acknowledge it at all, let alone as shared, is wounding; but acknowledging it as shared with other animals, in the presence of what we do to them, is capable not only of panicking one but also of isolating one, as Elizabeth Costello is isolated. Is there any difficulty in seeing why we should not prefer to return to moral debate, in which the livingness and death of animals enter as facts that we treat as relevant in this or that way, not as presences that may unsettle our reason?

("The Difficulty of Reality," ○○○)

But there is yet a *third* type of exposure or finitude that is crucial here as well, as practiced readers of Heidegger (or, for that matter, of Cavell or Derrida) will have already guessed: our exposure—in a radical sense, our *subjection*—to language and writing in ways that bear very directly upon what it means to do philosophy, what philosophy *can* do in the face of these existential and ethical challenges. For one further consequence of everything I have been saying thus far is that the relationship between philosophical thinking ("concepts") and philosophy as a *writing* practice now takes on unprecedented importance (which is why Heidegger and Derrida and Cavell write the way they do—which is to say, "unphilosophically"). Against the backdrop of what is often referred to as the "linguistic turn" in twentieth-century philosophy, there is a direct

line of connection between the problem of philosophical skepticism and the work of Wittgenstein on language, which will prove so important to all three of the philosophers collected here. But it is also on this point, as I will try to bring out later, that crucial differences emerge between this sort of work, emerging as it does out of an especially adventurous wing of the analytical tradition, and poststructuralist philosophy, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida, who construes the consequences of the philosophy-language relation, of our finitude in relation to both, in ways that bear directly upon how we may and may not think our relations to ourselves and to nonhuman animals.

Diamond's earlier work is worth revisiting here in some detail because it addresses even more methodically the relations among language, thinking, and our ethical obligations to nonhuman others that form the focus of this volume. As she insists in an essay from 2001 called "Injustice and Animals," our "grammatical redescription" of a philosophical problem is crucial and in some sense determinative of our ability to do justice to the ethical challenges it entails.<sup>7</sup> In this light, for her, the fundamental question of *justice* issues from an essentially different conceptual realm than the question of "rights." "When genuine issues of justice and injustice are framed in terms of rights," she argues, "they are thereby distorted and trivialized" because of "the underlying tie between rights and a system of entitle-

ment that is concerned, not with evil done to a person, but with how much he or she gets compared to other participants in the system" (121). In rights discourse, she argues, "the *character* of our conflicts is made obscure" by what Wittgenstein would call a poor grammatical description of the problem of justice (124).

Instead, what generates our moral response to animals and their treatment, Diamond argues, is our sense of the mortality and vulnerability that we share with them, of which the brute subjection of the body—in the treatment of animals as mere research tools, say—is perhaps the most poignant testament. For Diamond, the "horror at the conceptualizing of animals as putting nothing in the way of their use as mere stuff" is dependent upon "a comparable horror at human relentlessness and pitiliness in the exercise of power" toward other humans (as, in for example, the torture of other human beings) ("Injustice," 136). What the rights tradition misses, in her view, is that the "capacity to respond to injustice as injustice" depends not on working out (from a safe ontological distance, as it were) who should have a fair share of this or that abstract "good," based upon the possession of this or that abstract "interest" or attribute, but rather on "a recognition of *our own* vulnerability"—a recognition not demanded and in some sense actively avoided by rights-oriented thinking ("Injustice," 121). (And here, of course, we would do well to remember the "wounded" character of Coetzee's

Elizabeth Costello, a rawness that pushes her moral response to our treatment of animals beyond propositional argument—and sometimes beyond the decorum of polite society.)

What such an insight points toward, Diamond contends, is the fact that “there is something wrong with the contrast, taken to be exhaustive, between demanding one’s rights and begging for kindness—begging for what is *merely* kindness. The idea that *those* are the only possibilities is . . . one of the main props of the idea that doing injustice *is* failing to respect rights” (“Injustice,” 129). Contemporary moral theory thus “pushes apart justice, on the one hand, and compassion, love, pity, tenderness, on the other” (131), but Diamond’s understanding of the question “has at its center the idea that a kind of loving attention to another being, a possible victim of injustice, is essential to any understanding of the evil of injustice” (131–32). In fact, she agrees with Simone Weil’s suggestion that “rights can work for justice or for injustice,” that the concept of rights possesses “a kind of moral noncommitment to the good” (128). In an important sense, then, “rights” are beside the point of justice *per se*, and “the language of rights is, one might say, meant to be useful in contexts in which we cannot count on the kind of understanding of evil that depends on loving attention to the victim” (139).

There are, in other words, two different and in fact incommensurable kinds of value here (121)—a point

missed by *both* “sides” of what Diamond calls “that great arena of dissociated thought, contemporary debate about animals’ rights.”<sup>8</sup> The problem with *both* sides of the debate—represented by, say, Peter Singer, on one side, and, on the other, philosopher Michael Leahy and his avatar Thomas O’Hearne in *The Lives of Animals*—is that they are locked into a model of justice in which a being does or does not have rights on the basis of its possession (or lack) of morally significant characteristics that can be empirically derived. Both sides argue “that what is involved in moral thought is knowledge of empirical similarities and differences, and the testing and application of general principles of evaluation.”<sup>9</sup> And so, as Diamond puts it in the essay included here, “the opposite sides in the debate may have more in common than they realize. In the voices we hear in the debate about animal rights, those of people like Singer on the one hand and those of Leahy and the fictional O’Hearne on the other, there is shared a desire for a ‘because’: because animals are this kind of being, or because they are that kind of being, thus-and-such is their standing for our moral thought” (“The Difficulty of Reality,” 000). But what Diamond hears in *both* sets of voices is an evasion of our “exposure” to an arena of moral complexity in which (to quote Cavell) “the other can present me with no mark or feature on the basis of which I can *settle* my attitude” (quoted in “The Difficulty of Reality,” 000).

Part of the reason for that, of course, is that such attitudes are far from the thin, if-P-then-Q abstractions that a certain kind of philosophy takes them to be. They are thick with psychological vexation and rife with contradictory impulses and attachments. So Diamond is concerned to show not just that such a picture of ethics confuses the question of justice with the “mediocre” level of mere rights (“Injustice and Animals,” 121) but also that it bears no resemblance to what she suggests is our moral *life*. For her, proponents of animal rights in the analytical tradition are wrong when they insist that the distinction between human and animal is not ethically fundamental. At the same time, however, those who *oppose* animal rights within that same analytical tradition are wrong about how the difference between humans and animals *is* relevant. “The notion ‘human being’ is of the greatest significance in moral thought” (“Losing Your Concepts,” 264), she argues, but not because it is a “biological notion” (264). Rather, the concept of “human being” is a main source of that moral sensibility that we may *then* be able to extend to nonhuman animals. “We can come to think of killing an animal as in some circumstances at least similar to homicide,” she continues, “but the significance of doing so depends on our already having an idea of what it is to kill a man; and for us (as opposed to abstract Moral Agents) the idea of what it is to kill a man does depend on the sense of human life as special, as some-

thing set apart from what else happens on the planet” (“Experimenting,” 353).

For Diamond, then, it is crucial to take account of “what human beings have *made of* the difference between human beings and animals” (“Experimenting,” 351). As she puts it elsewhere,

if we appeal to people to prevent suffering, and we, in our appeal, try to obliterate the distinction between human beings and animals and just get people to speak or think of “different species of animals,” there is no footing left from which to tell us what we ought to do. . . . The moral expectations of other human beings demand something of me as other than an animal; and we do something like imaginatively read into animals something like such expectations when we think of vegetarianism as enabling us to meet a cow’s eyes. There is nothing wrong with that; there *is* something wrong with trying to keep that response and destroy its foundation.<sup>10</sup>

So for Diamond, it is not by denying the special status of “human being” but rather, as it were, by intensifying it that we can come to think of nonhuman animals not as bearers of “interests” or as “rights holders” but rather as something much more compelling: “fellow creatures.” That phrase “does not mean, biologically, an animal, something with *biological* life,” but rather

our “response to animals as our fellows in mortality, in life on this earth” (“Eating,” 329). And hence, the difference between human and nonhuman animals “may indeed start out as a biological difference, but it becomes something for human thought through being taken up and made something *of*—by generations of human beings, in their practices, their art, their literature, their religion” (“Experimenting,” 351), those practices that enable us to “imaginatively read into animals” expectations that originate, as it were, in the human, the “other than an animal.”

At this juncture, Diamond’s work is worth comparing, I think, with Jacques Derrida’s recent investigations of what he calls “the question of the animal.” At first glance, Derrida’s work seems remarkably consonant with Diamond’s, beginning with three main features. First, Derrida emphasizes, like Diamond, the fundamental ethical bond we have with nonhuman animals as residing in our shared finitude, our vulnerability and mortality as “fellow creatures” (a phrase he, too, invokes at key moments in his argument). Second, Derrida shares with Diamond a certain understanding of what ethics is: not propositionally deriving a set of rules for conduct that apply generically in all cases but rather confronting our “exposure” to a permanent condition in which (to use Cavell’s phrase) “there is no way to settle our attitude.” And third, Derrida also insists that crucial to both of these is “to show,” as Diamond

puts it in an earlier essay, “how philosophical misconceptions about language are connected with blindness to what our conceptual life is like” (“Losing Your Concepts,” 263).

As for the first point, Derrida in his late work turns, oddly enough, to the philosopher who is central to Peter Singer’s work, the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham. But what Derrida draws from Bentham’s famous contention that the fundamental ethical question with animals is not “can they talk?” or “can they reason?” but “can they *suffer*?” is something quite different from (and finally opposed to) Singer’s derivation of animals’ fundamental “interests.” For Derrida, putting the question in this way “changes everything” because philosophy from Aristotle to Levinas has posed the question of the animal in terms of capacities (prototypically, for reason or language), which in turn “determines so many others concerning *power* or *capability* [*pouvoirs*], and *attributes* [*avoirs*]: being able, having the power to give, to die, to bury one’s dead, to dress, to work, to invent a technique.”<sup>11</sup> What makes Bentham’s reframing of the problem so powerful for Derrida is that now “the question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*. It bears witness, manifesting already, as question, the response that testifies to sufferance, a passion, a not-being-able.” “What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability?” he continues; “what is this non-power at the heart of power? . . . What right should be accorded it? To what

extent does it concern us?” It concerns us very directly, of course, because “mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion . . . the anguish of this vulnerability” (“The Animal,” 396).

In Derrida as in Diamond, then, the vulnerability and finitude that we share with nonhuman animals and the compassion that this commonality makes possible are at the very core of the question of ethics—not just “mere” kindness, but *justice*. As Derrida puts it, “what is still presented in such a problematic way as *animal rights*” has a force quite independent of—and if we believe Diamond, quite antithetical to<sup>12</sup>—the philosophical framework that usually accompanies it. For Derrida, as well, the point of the animal rights movement, however flawed its articulation, is “to awaken us to our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general, and precisely to this fundamental compassion that, were we to take it seriously, would have to change even the very basis . . . of the philosophical problematic of the animal” (“The Animal,” 395). And it is this very shifting of the terms of the problematic that Diamond finds Coetzee cagily using the difference between literature and “philosophy” to stage—a fact not quite grasped in her view by the philosophical commentaries appended to the end of *The Lives of Animals*.

This leads, in turn, to the second important point of contact between Diamond's work and Derrida's. For both, the question of the animal requires an alternative conception of ethics to what we find in the liberal justice and rights tradition of analytical philosophy as it manifests itself in work such as Singer's. For Singer, as we have seen, ethics means the application of what Derrida will elsewhere characterize as a "calculable process"<sup>13</sup>—in Singer's case, it is quite literally the utilitarian calculus that would tally up the "interests" of the particular beings in question in a given situation, regardless of their species, and would determine what counts as a just act by calculating which action maximizes the greatest good for the greatest number. In doing so, however, Singer would reduce ethics to the very antithesis of ethics in Diamond's and Derrida's terms because he would overleap what Derrida calls "the ordeal of the undecidable," which "must be gone through by any decision worthy of the name" ("Force," 24). For Derrida, "A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. It might be legal; it would not be just" ("Force," 24). "Ordeal" is indeed the word we want here, which is one reason Diamond rivets our attention more than once on Elizabeth Coetzee's "rawness" of nerves, her sufferance of a responsibility that is both undeniable and unappeasable. But

what the rights view of ethics gives us instead is a “deflection” of this fully ethical ordeal, one in which, as Diamond puts it, “we would be *given* the presence or absence of moral community (or thus-and-such degree or kind of moral community) with animals” (“The Difficulty of Reality,” 000).

Aside from being the very antithesis of the ethical in Diamond’s and Derrida’s sense, such a “calculation,” in its empirical derivation of the shared “interests” of human and nonhuman animals—what Diamond calls our “properties,” our “marks and features” (“The Difficulty of Reality,” 000)—confuses what Diamond calls “biological concepts” with the concepts proper to *ethical* thought. This is what Derrida has in mind (and more, as we are about to see) in his criticism of a “biological continuism, whose sinister connotations we are well aware of,” one that ignores “the abyssal rupture” between human and nonhuman forms of life.<sup>14</sup> He has “thus never believed,” he writes, “in some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal” (“The Animal,” 398).

At this juncture, however—and it is marked quite precisely by Derrida’s emphasis on “what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal”—some fundamental differences between Derrida and Diamond begin to come into view, not least of all in the articulation of this peculiar thing called “the human.” We can begin to get a sense of this difference by returning to the

crucial role that vulnerability, passivity, and mortality play here for both Diamond and Derrida. Let us recall Diamond's contention that "we can come to think of killing an animal as in some circumstances at least similar to homicide, but the significance of doing so depends on our already having an idea of what it is to kill a man" ("Experimenting," 353). Such an idea depends, however, on a relation to our *own* mortality that is rejected in Derrida's work. For Derrida, contra Diamond, we *never* have an idea of what death is *for us*—indeed, death is precisely that which can never be *for us*—and if we did, then the ethical relation to the other would be immediately foreclosed.

This is clearest, perhaps, in Derrida's reading of Heidegger and his concept of "being-toward-death," a concept that appears—but only appears—to do justice to the passivity and finitude in which the ethical resides. As Richard Beardsworth characterizes it, from Derrida's point of view, Heidegger *appropriates* the limit of death "rather than returning it to *the other* of time. In Beardsworth's words, "The existential of 'being-towards-death' is consequently a 'being-able' (*pouvoir-etre*), not the impossibility of all power" whose radical passivity and vulnerability ties the self to the other in an ethical relation. As he explains, for Derrida,

the "impossibility" of death for the ego confirms that the experience of finitude is one of radical

passivity. That the “I” cannot experience its “own” death means, firstly, that death is an immanence *without* horizon, and secondly, that time is that which exceeds my death, that time is the generation which precedes and follows me. . . . Death is not a limit or horizon which, re-cognized, allows the ego to assume the “there” [as in Heidegger’s “being-toward-death”]; it is something that never arrives in the ego’s time, a “not-yet” which confirms the priority of time over the ego, marking, accordingly, the precedence of the other over the ego.<sup>15</sup>

For Derrida, then, “no relation to death can appear as such,” and “if there is no ‘as’ to death,” then the “relation to death is always mediated through an other. The ‘as’ of death always appears *through* an other’s death, *for* another” (Beardsworth, *Derrida*, 118). In Derrida’s words: “The death of the other thus becomes . . . ‘first,’ always first” (quoted in Beardsworth, *Derrida*, 119). Hence, Beardsworth argues, “The recognition of the limit of death is always through another and is, therefore, at the same time the recognition of the other” (118). And since the same is true *of* the other in relation to its *own* death, what this means is that “death *impossibilizes* existence” and does so both for me *and* for the other—since death can no more *be* “for” the other than it can for me (132). But it is, paradoxically, in just this impossibility that the possibility of justice resides, the (as it were) permanent

call of the other in the face of which the subject always arrives “too late.” Or, to put this in somewhat different terms, when Diamond affirms Costello’s assertion that “I know what it is like to be a corpse,” Derrida’s response would be, “No, you don’t. Only the other does, and for that you are held hostage (to use Levinas’s term) in unappeasable ethical debt to the other”—hence the otherwise odd idea of the “gift” of death (to borrow from Derrida’s book by the same title). To put it another way, there is the suggestion in Diamond, I think, that imaginative and literary projection can somehow achieve in this instance what propositional, syllogistic philosophy cannot achieve (the nonconceptual, nonlogical force of “I know what it’s like to be a corpse”), but Derrida would see this, too, as a “deflection” of “exposure”: exposure not just to mortality but also to a certain estranging operation of language, to a *second* kind of finitude whose implications are enormous (a point I’ll return to in a moment).

Such is the full resonance, I think, of Derrida’s contention with regard to Bentham that “the word *can* [*pouvoir*] changes sense and sign here once one asks ‘can they suffer?’ The word wavers henceforth. As soon as such a question is posed what counts is not only the idea of a transitivity or activity (being able to speak, to reason, and so on); *the important thing is rather what impels it towards self-contradiction, something we will later relate back to auto-biography*” (“The

Animal,” 396; emphasis mine). What Derrida has in mind by the “auto-” of “auto-biography” is exemplified, I think, in Diamond’s picture of the human in relation to ethics, a picture in which, as in Heidegger, vulnerability, passivity, and finitude appear to be recuperated as a “being-able” and a “transitivity” that, despite itself, reontologizes the split between the human and the animal, across which the human then reaches, as it were, in an act of benevolence toward an other that we “imagine” is enough like us to warrant ethical treatment. This seems clear enough, for example, in Diamond’s contention, which I mentioned earlier, that “the moral expectations of other human beings demand something of me as other than an animal; and we do something like imaginatively read into animals something like such expectations when we think of vegetarianism as enabling us to meet a cow’s eyes” (“Eating,” 333). And it is also underscored by her contention in the same essay that “our *hearing* the moral appeal of an animal is our hearing it speak—as it were—the language of our fellow human beings” (“Eating,” 333–34).

Part of the strength and attraction of Diamond’s remarkable essay “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” I think, is that it in a sense moves beyond—or perhaps I should say, moves *without*—this sort of formulation of the relations among ethics, language, and species difference. In this sense,

the essay's strength is precisely its weakness. Where the emphasis in earlier essays was on our *ability* (Derrida's *pouvoirs*) to *extend* imaginatively an apparently secure sense of "the human" to animals (hearing them "speak our language," seeing in them expectations of us as "other than animal"), here, when we try to put into words the experience of "the difficulty of reality" that we find bodied forth in Ted Hughes's "Six Young Men" or Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, "the words fail us, the words don't do what we are trying to get them to do. The words make it look as if I am simply unable to see over a wall which happens to separate me from something I very much want to see. But the fact that the words are apparently too weak to do what I am demanding from them does not mean that the experience here of *powerlessness* has been shown to involve a kind of grammatical error" (ooo).

The force of this turn in Diamond's thought and its consequences for ethics can be extended and elaborated, I think, by means of Derrida's work, which would help us to articulate more fully the implications of the fact that there are *two* kinds of finitude here, *two* kinds of passivity and vulnerability, and that the first type (physical vulnerability, embodiment, and eventually mortality) is paradoxically made unavailable, *inappropriate* to us by the very thing that makes it available—namely, a second type of "passivity" or "not being able," which is the finitude we experience in our subjection

to a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language, a technicity which has profound consequences, of course, for what we too hastily think of as “our” concepts, which are therefore in an important sense not “ours” at all.

And here, then, we arrive at the third point of contact—but also finally of difference—between Diamond and Derrida that I noted above: “how philosophical misconceptions about language are connected with blindness to what our conceptual life is like,” to use Diamond’s phrase. For Derrida’s point would be not only that “we” *don’t* have a concept of “the human” but also that it’s a good thing, too, because it is only on the strength of that weakness, you might say, that we are able to avoid both horns of the dilemma brought to light in Diamond’s work: on the one hand, the constant threat of ethnocentrism that a certain understanding of Wittgenstein flirts with (we do what we do because of “what we have made of the difference between humans and animals,” which keeps us from lapsing into “biological continuism”); and, on the other hand, the mining for ethical “universals” that, for philosophers such as Singer and Regan, would attempt to counter this very threat by uncovering first principles of ethics via the anti-ethnocentric autonomy of “reason.” Derrida, I am suggesting, makes available a “third way,” whose response would be that, yes, it is true that what we think of as the “principles” of personhood, morality,

and so on are inseparable from who “we” are, from our discourse as a “mode of life” (to put it in Wittgenstein’s terms). But, at the same time, “we” are not “we”; we are not that “auto-“ of “autobiography” (as in Derrida’s “The Autobiographical Animal”) that humanism “gives to itself.” Rather, “we” are always radically other, already in- or ahuman in our very being—not just in the evolutionary, biological, and zoological fact of our physical vulnerability and mortality, our mammalian existence, of course, but also in our subjection to and constitution in the materiality and technicity of a language that is always on the scene before we are, as a precondition of our subjectivity. And this means that “what *he* calls ‘man,’” what “we” call “we,” always covers over a more radical “not being able” that makes our very conceptual life possible. Even more important, perhaps—at least for the topic at hand—is that this passivity and subjection are shared by humans and nonhumans the moment they begin to interact and communicate by means of any semiotic system. As Derrida puts it in a well-known passage from the interview “‘Eating Well’”:

If one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différance*. These possibilities

or necessities, without which there would be no language, *are themselves not only human*. . . . And what I am proposing here should allow us to take into account scientific knowledge about the complexity of “animal languages,” genetic coding, all forms of marking within which so-called human language, as original as it might be, does not allow us to ‘cut’ once and for all where we would in general like to cut.<sup>16</sup>

There is no need to rehearse here Derrida’s theorization of iterability, *différance*, trace, and so on; rather, I simply want to mark how this second kind of “not being able” renders uncertain and unstable—“unsettled,” in Cavell’s terms—the relationship of the human to itself because it renders unstable not just the boundary between human and animal but also that between the organic and the mechanical or technological. And for these very reasons—because of the estrangement of the “the human” from the “auto-” that “we” give to ourselves—the relation between the human and nonhuman animals is constantly opened anew and, as it were, permanently. It is a “wound,” if you will, that can never be healed. Derrida summarizes this in a 2004 interview:

Beginning with *Of Grammatology*, the elaboration of a new concept of the *trace* had to be extended to the entire field of the living, *or rather to the life/death relation*, beyond the anthropological limits of “spoken”

language. . . . At the time I stressed that the “concepts of writing, trace, gramma, or grapheme” exceeded the opposition “human/nonhuman.” All the deconstructive gestures I have attempted to perform on philosophical texts . . . consist in questioning the self-interested misrecognition of what is called the Animal in general, and the way in which these interpret the border between Man and Animal.<sup>17</sup>

I stress this intercalation of the boundary between the biological/organic and the mechanical/technical in relation to the infra- and transhuman in no small part because Diamond herself is very interested in it—most conspicuously, of course, in her reading of the “exposure” of the photograph in Ted Hughes’s “Six Young Men”—a technological, archival artifact that confronts us with “a shuddering awareness of death and life together” (“The Difficulty of Reality,” ooo). Here, however, Diamond and Derrida pull us in different and perhaps even opposite directions, for Diamond then glosses that “exposure” in terms of Elizabeth Costello’s contention, “I know what it is like to be a corpse”—a contention whose significance she unpacks along the following lines in the final paragraph of her essay, as a kind of rejoinder to pragmatism: “A language, a form of thought, cannot (we may be told) get things right or wrong, fit or fail to fit reality; it can only be more or less useful. What I

want to end with is not exactly a response to that: it is to note how much that coming apart of thought and reality belongs to flesh and blood” (ooo). Derrida’s point, however, is that this “coming apart” is not *just* of flesh and blood but is also born of the fact that our *relation* to flesh and blood is fatefully constituted by a technicity with which it is prosthetically entwined, a diacritical, semiotic machine of language in the broadest sense that exceeds any and all presence, including our own.<sup>18</sup>

That it is “in the broadest sense” can be brought out, I think, by looking briefly at Derrida’s own confrontation with an “exposure” of the sort Diamond is interested in—in this case, an exposure of a piece of film. In a set of conversations with Bernard Stiegler published in English under the title *Echographies of Television*, Derrida is concerned to differ with Roland Barthes’s suggestion in *Camera Lucida* that “the photo is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body which was there proceed radiations that come to touch me, I who am here. . . . A kind of umbilical cord ties the body of the photographic thing to my gaze.”<sup>19</sup> Instead, Derrida insists that “the modern possibility of the photograph joins, in a single system, death and the referent” (*Echographies*, 115). What he means by this rather enigmatic formulation is that a kind of “spectrality” inheres in the technology of the image because of its fundamental iterability:

As soon as there is a technology of the image, visibility brings night. . . . [B]ecause we know that, once it has been taken, captured, this image will be reproducible in our absence, because we know this *already*, we are already haunted by this future, which brings our death. Our disappearance is already here. . . . And this is what makes our experience so strange. We are spectralized by the shot, captured or possessed by spectrality in advance.

What has, dare I say, constantly haunted me in this logic of the specter is that it regularly exceeds all the oppositions between visible and invisible, sensible and insensible. A specter is both visible and invisible, both phenomenal and nonphenomenal: a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance. (117)

Derrida then tells a story that is haunting in its own right about his participation in the Ken McMullen film *Ghostdance*, where he improvised a scene with French actress Pascale Ogier, in which he asks her, “And what about you, do you believe in ghosts?” and she replies “Yes, now I do, yes.” “But imagine the experience I had,” Derrida says,

when, two or three years later, after Pascale Ogier had died, I watched the film again in the United States, at the request of students who wanted to discuss it with me. Suddenly I saw Pascal’s face,

which I knew was a dead woman's face, come onto the screen. She answered my questions: "Do you believe in ghosts?" Practically looking me in the eye, she said to me again, on the big screen: "Yes, now I do, yes." Which now? . . . I had the unnerving sense of the return of her specter, the specter of her specter coming back to say to me—to me here, now: "Now . . . now . . . now, that is to say, in this dark room on another continent, in another world, here, now, yes, believe me, I believe in ghosts."

But at the same time, I know that the first time Pascale said this, already, when she repeated this in my office, already, this spectrality was at work. It was already there, she was already saying this, and she knew, just as we know, that even if she hadn't died in the interval, one day, it would be a dead woman who said, "I am dead," or "I am dead, I know what I'm talking about from where I am, and I'm watching you," and this gaze remained dissymmetrical, exchanged beyond all possible exchange . . . the other gaze met, in an infinite night. (120)

So here is Elizabeth Costello again, then, in a different light: "What I know is what a corpse cannot know: that it is extinct, that it knows nothing and will never know anything anymore. For an instant, before my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, I am alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same

time” (quoted in Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality,” 000). And here is Hughes, by the light of day that is also the light of death, the light of night:

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.

In the end, however—and this is the final difference between the Cavell/Diamond line and Derrida that I will want to mark—Derrida derives from this “dementing” force, which bleeds together organism and machine, living and dead, “prehistoric beast” and one’s own human “instant and heat,” a kind of law or general economy, the fundamentals of which reach all the way back to his earliest work. As he puts it in *Echographies of Television* (and this descends directly from my earlier discussion of the non-appropriability of death that constitutes my indebtedness to the other), this relationship constitutes an “inheritance,” a “genealogy of the law” (122); before the specter of the dead we are “‘before the law,’ without any possible symmetry, without reciprocity” (120):

The wholly other—and the dead person is the wholly other—watches me, concerns me, and concerns or watches me while addressing to me, without however answering me, a prayer or an injunction, an infinite demand, which becomes the law for me: it concerns me, it regards me, it addresses itself only to me at the same time that it exceeds me infinitely and universally, without my being able to exchange a glance with him or with her. (120–21)

This is most obvious, perhaps, in the most well-known example of the spectral phenomenon that Derrida discusses—Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where the relationship between inheritance, law, responsibility, and spectrality is particularly (even Oedipally) pronounced—but it would also seem to be the case with Hughes’s six young men in the photograph, to whom we, as the living, feel a strange kind of responsibility and debt that is unsettling because unanswerable, a point powerfully put in motion early in Diamond’s essay. In Derrida’s words: “the other comes *before* me” (122).

In Derrida’s derivation of a general economy or “law” of “heteronomy” from this spectrality, Diamond and Cavell would no doubt find him seeking his own kind of solace, engaging in his own kind of “deflection” by the force of reason that they see their philosophy as dedicated to resisting. For what is lost in such a foreclosure, in their view, is the rawness testified to by an

Elizabeth Costello and the ethical stakes of attending to that rawness, of not making it (as Diamond might put it) just another example of some general principle. As Cavell has put it elsewhere in his discussion of Derrida's critique of J. L. Austin's "phonocentrism," the problem with the Derridean strategy is that its emphasis on the general economy of iterability is a kind of "deflecting attention, as rushing too quickly away from, the act or encounter entailed in the historical and individual process of inheriting" (*Quest*, 131) a process that involves not the overcoming of the voice but its assumption or "arrogation," as Cavell puts it.<sup>20</sup> For Cavell, the problem with the Derridean general economy—and the critique of phonocentrism is only one example of it—is that it continues the project of metaphysics while announcing metaphysics' demise, and it does so in flight from the "ordinary," the "everyday," and its power to "shoulder us out from our light and heat." "The metaphysician in each of us," Cavell writes, "will use metaphysics to get out of the moral of the ordinary, out of our ordinary moral obligations" (*Passages*, 74–75), out of "the responsibility you bear—or take, or find, or disclaim—for your words" (*Quest*, 135), because metaphysics "names our wish (and the possibility of our wishing) to strip ourselves of the responsibility we have in meaning." "Such courses," Cavell suggests, "seem to give up the game; they do not achieve what freedom, what useful ideal of myself, there may be for me, but seem as self-imposed

as the grandest philosophy—or, as Heidegger might almost have put it, as unself-imposed” (*Quest*, 131).

Given the date of its rendering (1988), Cavell’s observation could not have taken account of Derrida’s later work on the animal, in particular “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)” (2002), which presents less a token for a systematic philosophy than a limit before which we are in a profound sense interrogated and humbled. As Derrida writes of being stared at by his cat (in a moment either famous or notorious, depending on your point of view), he finds himself literally naked and, in Diamond’s terms, exposed:

No, no, my cat, the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or in the bathroom, this cat . . . does not appear here as representative, or ambassador, carrying the immense symbolic responsibility. . . . If I say “it is a real cat” that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. . . . I see it as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized

(“The Animal,” 378–79)

And so, he suggests, “the gaze called animal”—and that qualification, “*called* animal,” is important—

offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse. *I am (following) the apocalypse itself*, that is to say the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict. (“The Animal,” 381–82)

If such is the case, then we are led back, perhaps, to where we began, in all its vexation and rawness: to David Lurie parked on the side of the road, weeping, wondering what has overtaken him; and to Elizabeth Costello, who, in confessing to her son just how haunted she is by the specter of our fellow creatures and the infernal holocaust we have inflicted on them, presses upon herself the question to which this volume offers not an answer, exactly, but a kind of understanding: “I no longer know where I am. . . . Yet I’m not dreaming. I look into your eyes . . . and I see only kindness, human-kindness. Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can’t you? *Why can’t you?*” (69).

## NOTES

1. J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 43. Further references are given in the text.

2. J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. and intro. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 43. Further references are in the text.

3. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 31. Further references are in the text.

4. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Living Batch Press, 1989), 86. Further references are given in the text.

5. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 38–39. Further references are in the text. I have discussed the similarities—but also the important differences—between Cavell and Derrida around Heidegger’s figure of the hand in “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion,” in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 20–21.

6. Jacques Derrida, “Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand,” trans. John P. Leavey Jr., in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 173. Further references are in the text.

7. Cora Diamond, “Injustice and Animals,” in *Slow Cures and Bad Philosophers: Essays on Wittgenstein, Medi-*

*cine, and Bioethics*, ed. Carl Elliott (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 123. Further references are given in the text.

8. Cora Diamond, "Losing Your Concepts," *Ethics* 98, no. 2 (January 1998): 276. Further references are in the text.

9. Cora Diamond, "Experimenting on Animals: A Problem in Ethics," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 350. Further references are given in the text.

10. Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People," in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 333. Further references are given in the text.

11. Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Winter 2002): 386, 395. Further references are given in the text.

12. For Diamond's explicit discussion of animal rights and the difference between animal rights and animal welfare, see "Injustice and Animals," 141–42.

13. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucila Cornell, Michal Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (London: Routledge, 1992), 24. Further references are given in the text.

14. As Derrida has suggested in his reading of Heidegger and the animal in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), those “sinister connotations” of “continuism”—which Heidegger’s humanist separation of human and animal is dead-set against—include racism, the use of naturalism to countenance xenophobia, and much else besides (56).

15. Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996), 130–31. Further references are given in the text.

16. Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or The Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 116–17.

17. Jacques Derrida, “Violence Against Animals,” in Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow . . . : A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 63; emphasis mine.

18. For a brilliant exploration of the technicity and mechanicity of language in relation to prosthetics and the question of technology, see David Wills, *Thinking Back: Dorsality, Technology, Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming), and his earlier volume *Prosthesis* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995).

19. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 76, 80–81; quoted in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 113. Further references are given in the text.

20. On the “arrogation” of voice, see chapter 1 of Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). His engagement with Derrida’s reading of Austin takes place both in Stanley Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), 42–90, and in the chapter “Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice,” in *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 53–128. Further references to both books are in the text.