Exhibiting Wounds

Difficult Realities and Literary Testimony

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Abstract

Cora Diamond introduced the concept of a 'difficult reality' – a reality that disrupts and wounds our capacity for sense-making – in her 2002 essay, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy", in response to misunderstandings of the work of Stanley Cavell and J. M. Coetzee. In the decades since, this concept has been employed and projected into new contexts in many ways, across the disciplines of philosophy, literary theory and criticism, theology, and political theory. However, the breadth of its application and the variety of Diamond's own examples – from fictional lectures about the horrors of industrial agriculture to poetry about war's insanity – present challenges for those seeking to make use of the concept.

Part I of this thesis, 'Cora Diamond's Difficult Realities', suggests a way to make sense of the concept as well as the bewilderment readers can experience in encountering Diamond's essay. I believe that Diamond is pointing us to significant truths about what it is to be sense-making creatures, whose lives and habits of mind can be injured by realities that thwart comprehension. Focusing on Diamond's main examples – a poem about the deaths of six young men in war by Ted Hughes, a novel about our treatment of animals by J. M. Coetzee, and Stanley Cavell's exploration of skepticism about other minds – I aim to identify the grammar of a difficult reality, so that we can see how the concept's later uses shift and extend its meaning. Chapter 1 examines Diamond's introduction of the concept and identifies four guidelines for its application. Chapter 2 focuses on the ways in which our modes of sense-making can turn us away from difficult realities, which Diamond describes using the Cavellian concept of deflection. And Chapter 3 considers how acknowledgment of these injuries to sense-making finds expression in testimony.

Part II, 'Difficult Testimony', projects the concept of a difficult reality into new contexts where testimony both resists and solicits sense-making. This not only illuminates these contexts but deepens our understanding of Diamond's concept. Chapter 4 characterizes Iris Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* as shaped to testify to difficult realities. This explains its baffling architecture and shows the pressure that acknowledgment of difficult realities can exert on philosophy. Chapter 5 turns to Carys Bray's recent climate fiction *When the Lights Go Out*, making the case that it too is shaped to testify to difficult realities and to stage the mutual incomprehension they open onto. This explains its defiance of the expectations we might have for a work of climate fiction and shows the pressure that acknowledgment of difficult realities can exert on literature. I describe both books as exemplary instances of testimony to difficult realities: they exhibit the wounds these realities inflict on sense-making, ask for our acknowledgment as they provoke misinterpretation, and leave us vulnerable to analogous wounds.

In seeing how sufferers of difficult realities testify to their experience by exhibiting their wounds, we can better understand the difficult realities we and our fellows may confront, how they disclose our inscrutability to each other, and what they reveal about the kind of animal we are.

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The glory is God's; the faults are mine.

PART I

Cora Diamond's Difficult Realities

Chapter 1

Difficult Realities

1. Introduction

In 2002, Cora Diamond gave a series of remarks at a symposium dedicated to the inheritance of Wittgenstein and the resources he provides for understanding literary language.[1] There, she pointed to a range of realities that can baffle us, wound our sense-making, and tell us something about the sort of animal we are. Diamond then gave these remarks at a symposium on the work and reception of Stanley Cavell, and they were published as "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy" in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* (2003, hereafter DR).[2] This essay was reprinted a few years later, along with responses to it and reflections occasioned by it, in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (2008). Cary Wolfe's introduction to that collection calls particular attention to ideas of exposure and vulnerability, found in Cavell's work and carried forward by Diamond to think about how we live alongside not only our human but also our non-human others: how our lives are colored by the animal lives we acknowledge or ignore.

This brief genealogy tells us a fair amount about what we can expect to find in Diamond's essay. We can anticipate a concern for literature, in conversation with the legacy of Wittgenstein's understanding of language and our use of concepts. We can expect an engagement with Cavell's writings and especially with notions of exposure and

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[1] "Accounting for literary language: an international interdisciplinary symposium on Wittgenstein and literature", held at the University of East Anglia in September 2002.

[2] This second occasion was the Arendt-Schürmann Memorial Symposium, held at the New School in October 2002 and focused that year on Stanley Cavell.

woundedness; and we can hardly be surprised to discover that engagement reaching toward a consideration of animal life: both our own lives as animals and the lives of the animals, human and non-human, with whom we live. In all this, we might also anticipate an exploration of philosophy as a form or discipline of sense-making that belongs to the human animal. We might expect to find this discipline made difficult, as the title of Diamond's essay suggests, by the difficult realities we encounter.

Even with these expectations in view, though, Diamond's essay looks rather bewildering. She tells us that she is concerned with a "range of phenomena" that will be specified by a series of examples (DR, 1). These examples portray "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" (ibid., 2-3). This doesn't look much like the definitions to which philosophers are generally accustomed. We lack necessary and sufficient criteria by which to distinguish these experiences from other experiences of astonishment. Moreover, it isn't at all clear that Diamond is pointing us to a range of phenomena that hang together. Therefore, it doesn't seem clear that her attempt to draw these experiences together will prove illuminating.

Diamond picks out a name for this range of phenomena: 'the difficulty of reality', a phrase she lifts from John Updike. But we don't seem to have much reason to expect that this phrase will do more than name a fragmented and unwieldly variety. If we then turn to the examples by which Diamond intends to clarify the difficulty of reality, we are likely to find ourselves further puzzled by their extraordinary diversity. In quick succession, just twenty-six pages in *Partial Answers*, Diamond discusses a poem by Ted Hughes, a novel by

J. M. Coetzee, Stanley Cavell's response to skepticism about other minds, Ruth Klüger's Holocaust memoir, a short story by Mary Mann, Czesław Miłosz's descriptions of natural beauty, R. F. Holland's view of Jesus's miraculous transformation of water into wine, and a story by Leonard Woolf about colonialism, racism, and hypocrisy. We might start to wonder what order Diamond could possibly uncover in this variety. Her occasional suggestions about why one example follows another might seem inadequate. And her passing comments about how all these real and fictional experiences form enough of a unity to reveal deep facts about the human animal might just amplify our frustrations.

In Part I of this thesis, I aim to make the best sense of Diamond's essay that I can. I want to acknowledge that this essay offends against the expectations we might have for precise and lucid philosophical prose, while suggesting a way to make sense of Diamond's concept of a difficult reality. That will involve making sense of the ways in which faithful uses of this concept can lead to precisely the sorts of disorientation that readers of Diamond's essay can experience. My sense is that Diamond is drawing our attention to important truths about what it is to be a sense-making creature. We are creatures whose ways of thinking and living can be wounded by realities that defy comprehension. The consequent opacity of self and others can stretch and deepen these wounds. And we can feel a need to exhibit such wounds in anguished, often-wounding speech or writing, to open them to others. But substantial work is required to see how this picture of wounds to sense-making emerges from Diamond's proliferation of examples, and why it couldn't faithfully emerge in another way.

In the past two decades, the concept of a difficult reality has been employed and projected into new contexts in various ways: for example, besides the essays collected in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, see Mulhall 2009, Carnes 2014 and 2020, Lear 2018, Balaska

2019, Zumhagen-Yekplé 2015 and 2020, Matar 2022, and Publicover 2024. The concept has been used by philosophers, literary theorists and critics, theologians, political theorists, and more. It has been used to understand Gregory of Nyssa (Carnes 2014, 170), the nature of motherhood (Carnes 2020, 164), English renaissance tragedy (Publicover 2024, 6), the pitfalls of moral philosophy (Matar 2022, 55), and Virginia Woolf's fiction (Zumhagen-Yekplé 2015). This extraordinary variety intensifies the need for clarifying work. It can be challenging to see what consistency could reasonably belong to the array of uses that have been made of Diamond's concept across all these disciplines.

I will focus on the three major examples Diamond highlights in her essay. My goal is to identify the grammar of a difficult reality. That way, we will be able to see how the concept's subsequent use to describe various phenomena stretches and extends its meaning in ways we may (or may not) ultimately find intelligible. I want to explain the unity and coherence I find in Diamond's essay, all evidence of chaos to the contrary. I will do that by attending to the physiognomy of her main examples. Then, in Part II of this thesis, I ask how we might go on with the concept of a difficult reality. I explore how this can illuminate Iris Murdoch's late and bewildering work, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), and Carys Bray's recent climate fiction, *When the Lights Go Out* (2020). In both cases, I attend particularly to how those injured by difficult realities testify to their experience by exhibiting their wounds.

2. Diamond's Difficulties

By my count, Diamond's essay contains eight examples of "the mind's not being able to encompass something which it encounters" (DR, 2). Of these, three receive by far the most

airtime. These are a poem about war and mortality by Ted Hughes, a novel about our treatment of animals by J. M. Coetzee, and Stanley Cavell's appreciation of skepticism about other minds. Diamond's five other examples, from a Holocaust memoir to an exploration of the wedding at Cana, tail off in various directions and are discussed in considerably less detail. Hughes, Coetzee, and Cavell offer Diamond's main demonstrations of experiences where we are unable to accommodate what we encounter, given our habits of mind and shape of life. There's plenty of perplexing diversity among these three examples. So, if we can discern the ways in which they resemble each other, we may then be in a better position to perceive how the concept of a difficult reality can be used and what it can reveal.

2.1 Ted Hughes's Poem

Diamond's first example is Hughes's poem "Six Young Men" (1957). This poem speaks of men in a photograph. They look vibrantly alive, but they are now dead. They were perhaps dead long before the viewer's time. Although the men appear youthful and animated, all had died six months after the photograph was taken. They were combatants and victims of the First World War.

In one frame of mind, there's no explanatory hurdle here. Six men were alive. Now they aren't. We know how this happens; we are familiar with it, come to expect it in discovering that the poem concerns the First World War. If a child wondered how men who died in war could be smiling in a photograph, we could explain how our concepts of life and death work. We could explain how photographs can capture the likenesses of those who are no longer alive. We might explain that war has been a perpetual part of the human form of life. There may be facts to grieve here, but there isn't any lasting conceptual problem.

However, in another frame of mind, the thought that these six men are no more can be nearly unthinkable. We want to say that these men we meet in the poet's language or the photograph couldn't be less dead, more vital. And yet, they are dead and gone. This can throw our mortality or the tragedy of war into stark relief. Even if we are used to trying to fathom our finitude, we may feel far from up to the task when the strange, contradictory logic of the men in the photograph (so alive, yet long and wholly dead) strikes us here. Likewise, the reality that human beings war against each other can baffle and alienate us. It can isolate us from our fellows who see war as a natural if regrettable feature of human life.

From one vantage point, the poem and photograph raise no stumbling blocks for the adequacy of our concepts to reality. From another, Hughes expresses an experience of a difficult reality. He bears witness to a place where thought and reality diverge. From there, the attempt to make sense of what he encounters looks like a form of madness, and he discovers a need to testify to how the inexplicability of war and morality wound his sense-making. His poetic testimony is the opposite of continued avoidance.

2.2 J. M. Coetzee's Lectures

Consider Diamond's second example. She writes of Coetzee's 1997-1998 Tanner Lectures, published along with responses to them as *The Lives of Animals* (1999). These lectures are in narrative form, and they exhibit the difficult reality of our treatment of animals, especially in industrial farming. They show how we can be wounded or made vulnerable by the perception of this reality. They describe how this can prove isolating. And they picture how those who are wounded can try to recover, defending themselves against a reality that

threatens to render their ways of making sense unserviceable for them, by deflecting what we do to animals into philosophical argument.[3]

The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, first held in 1978, have often been given by philosophers and other academics. They are meant to "contribute to the intellectual and moral life of mankind" (Obert Clark Tanner, quoted in McMurrin 2011, v). Unlike many other Tanner Lecturers (Wallace Stegner, Saul Bellow, and Toni Morrison are notable exceptions), Coetzee is a novelist, and even more exceptionally, his lectures are themselves works of fiction. They are in the voice of a fictional protagonist, Elizabeth Costello, whose literary life extends beyond them (see Coetzee 2003). To complicate matters further, Costello is herself a writer, who appears in the lectures as a guest lecturer, as Coetzee appeared at Princeton to give the Tanner Lectures.

The Lives of Animals is introduced by philosopher Amy Gutmann and includes responses by four academics: Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts. No doubt aware of the need to speak to Coetzee's contributions to 'the intellectual and moral life of mankind', no trifling job description, they address his lectures much as they might the lectures of a moral philosopher presenting a series of arguments about how we ought to treat animals.

Diamond points out how these respondents seem almost inadvertently to interpret Coetzee's lectures as explicating arguments which would, if appropriately extracted from the narrative form in which they are cast, then tell us something about our responsibilities

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[3] On deflection, see DR, 11-13, 18-19. This isn't the place for an in-depth discussion of deflection, a concept Diamond borrows from Cavell (see 2015b), or its relation to philosophical argument; that comes in section 7 of this chapter. Suffice it to say for now that Diamond uses this concept to describe what goes on when we transition from a sense of the difficulty of some reality to "a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity", which may seem to require that we put our sense of difficulty aside (DR, 12).

toward animals and their claims to various rights. Gutmann understands Coetzee to be tackling the moral issue of how we should treat animals. She sees him as offering arguments, framed by a story, that are meant to clarify or settle that issue. Singer similarly interprets Coetzee as personally and unambiguously engaged in moral argument. On his view, Coetzee advocates a radical form of egalitarianism that would level any differences in moral status between humans and other animals. Singer doesn't find this position compelling, and he regards the framing story as basically mendacious. He sees it as a mechanism for Coetzee to distance himself from mediocre arguments and avoid intellectual responsibility. Doniger expresses some emotional resonance in her experience of the lectures; but she begins her response by identifying ideas that she takes to be implicit in them. She detects an argument from our attitudes toward animals to appropriate behaviors concerning them, and she discusses whether this maneuver is legitimate. And Smuts describes the lectures as predominately discoursing about animal rights.

The respondents see the fictional form of Coetzee's lectures as little more than a way to couch arguments in a prose style suited to an audience (though apparently not the audience present at Princeton). Or they see the narrative as a way for Coetzee to creatively separate himself from these arguments. At best, they see it as a nifty way to display some of the phenomenology that could lead one to stop eating meat or to undertake more rigorous projects in animal ethics. The respondents all seem to wish that Coetzee had written an academic paper. None seems to worry much about ascribing Costello's attitudes and offenses to Coetzee, as if the story is not more than propaganda for its author's ethical convictions.

Diamond wants to read Coetzee fully, for what he has written. She doesn't want to give in to these forms of deflection. On her account, Coetzee writes of the "woundedness or

hauntedness" we can discover in confronting what we do to animals (DR, 3). Costello speaks of how a recognition of the character of our life with animals forces on her two nearly unbearable thoughts. First, the thought that her fellow human beings – family members, friends, and neighbors – are culpable for an outrageous crime, at best morally inept. And second, the thought that rather, or simultaneously, she might be losing her grip on everyday life, in effect going mad, while those around her act in perfectly sane (after all, perfectly common) ways. Diamond describes Costello as "a woman haunted by the horror of what we do to animals" (ibid.). She is wounded both by what she knows of this reality and by her knowledge that others are truly not wounded in this way. Costello expresses how this affects her relationships and self-understanding:

> I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet every day I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money.
>
> It is as if I were to visit friends, and to make some polite remark about the lamp in their living room, and they were to say, 'Yes, it's nice, isn't it? Polish-Jewish skin it's made of, we find that's best, the skins of young Polish-Jewish virgins.' And then I go to the bathroom and the soap-wrapper says, 'Treblinka – 100% human stearate.' Am I dreaming, I say to myself? What kind of house is this?
>
> 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?*
>
> (Coetzee 1999, 69)

In this passage, Costello voices her sense of a dawning difficult reality. This is the difficulty of what we – our friends, neighbors, strangers – do to animals. It's the difficulty of what this means for our relationships, the character of human life, and our feeling of being at home or at sea in it.

On the one hand, Costello is thrown by what we do to animals. This leads her to bafflement in life with other people: even, maybe especially, in her life with those she knows best. She is liable to trip up where before she walked surefootedly. Can these people really be accomplices in 'a crime of stupefying proportions', which she feels (outrageously, we may want to say) is analogous to the Holocaust? How Costello went on before with other people – say, joining them for dinner, eating something vegetarian while they ate meat – now strikes her as unconscionable, unserviceable. Her vegetarianism won't touch the apparent monstrousness of her fellows or the abiding reality of what we can do to our fellow creatures.

On the other hand, a difficulty emerges in Costello's self-understanding. This comes out toward the end of the quoted passage: 'This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can't you?' Costello worries that perhaps her alienation from everyday life is a kind of failing ('I must be mad!'). Perhaps the onus is on her to get back in step with the order of human life and industry as she finds it. Other people seem to find it that way without issue. In being out of step with this life, perhaps she, and not this life, has gone awry. Maybe her

friends and family members are simply doing ‘what we do’. Stephen Mulhall comments on this:

> If Costello is right, most of the people she encounters in the world are morally insane, or psychically wounded, with polluted souls; if she is wrong, then she is morally insane – living in a fantasy, dreaming, utterly disoriented. When she really looks at her fellow human beings […] the thought of utterly degraded animals retreats to the realm of fantasy; but when she really attends to her fellow animals and their fate, the thought of human beings as fundamentally normal or well-balanced loses its grip. (2009, 57)

Costello experiences a difficulty in going on as she once did. Indeed, she doesn’t see how she or anyone could go on in the face of the moral insanity of other people, her own possible insanity or inhumanity, the atrocities we commit in animal industry and agriculture, the meat on her child’s plate. Beyond this, part of the trouble is that, as Mulhall says, “she cannot choose between [her sense of what we do to animals and her sense of her fellow human beings], she must endorse both – must see the very normality of her fellows as proof of the depth of their pollution” (ibid.).

Costello’s frequent invocations of the horrors of the Holocaust exhibit her wounds and the ways they distance her from other people. Her reminders that human beings managed to ignore these horrors, as they ignore the horrors of factory farming, exasperate her fellows, just as they provoke the respondents to Coetzee’s lectures. Costello’s Holocaust remarks show how her woundedness is liable to become wounding for those who see no deep

conceptual problem, no cause of bafflement, in our consumption of animals. Far from representing a second-rate argument from analogy, Costello's Holocaust imagery highlights the centrality, for the lectures, of the figure of "the wounded woman, the woman with the haunted mind and the raw nerves" (DR, 5). This is precisely what goes missing in the responses to Coetzee collected in *The Lives of Animals*: the life of the animal Costello, whose ability to make sense of herself, her history, and her world is disrupted by her recognition of the senseless evils of which we are capable, and who exhibits this traumatic disruption in often and unsurprisingly offensive ways.

Costello's references to the Holocaust make the difference between two views of the lectures especially stark. There's the view of the lectures as presenting a set of positions in animal ethics. On that view, these references are little more than the melodramatic enunciations of a radical egalitarianism that has gone off the rails. And there's Diamond's view of the lectures as presenting a wounded human being, for whom these Holocaust references are the wounding corollary of the injuries to her sense-making effected by animal treatment.

The respondents see in Costello a literary device for the advancement of moral problems that can then be discussed in more appropriately philosophical prose, without the complications of this wounded human being. They don't see how the lectures expose the wounds we can receive as our habits of mind come up against what we do to animals and the complementary reality that almost everyone else accepts this treatment as a background feature of human life, nothing at all to be wounded by. This inattention is perfectly understandable, because recognizing Costello's exhibition of her wounds can mean opening ourselves to the frightful possibility of sharing them.

Costello's encounter with the difficult reality of animal treatment leaves her experience "scarred and seamed", so that it "resists understanding, and hence so too does the world it is an experience of and the subject whose experience it is" (Mulhall 2009, 57). This encounter is, or opens onto, an encounter with other difficulties. For example, the look of human life in the face of grave yet ordinary injustice. The work of achieving self-understanding in this life while nevertheless feeling at a critical distance from it. The question of how anyone manages to go on in clear sight of this. These difficulties present themselves in the form of Coetzee's lectures, as they resolutely distance themselves from the expectations one might have for lectures in ways that baffle the respondents (and, we can only imagine, the audience). This is reminiscent of how Diamond's essay offends against the expectations we might have for philosophical writing.

2.3 Stanley Cavell on Other Minds

Diamond locates her third main example of a difficult reality in Cavell's discussion of the traumatizing perception of another's unacknowledged pain. This discussion is the source of the notion of deflection, which Diamond uses to describe how the respondents to Coetzee's lectures (mis)place those lectures in the context of philosophical debates about animal rights.

For Cavell, skepticism about other minds has its root in the terrible realization that another person may be suffering, and that suffering may be entirely unknown or uncared about. And likewise, the recognition that I may be suffering while others are unaware or indifferent to my pain. This recognition of what can happen when I or others are in pain is then deflected as one considers and reconsiders this. Eventually, it assumes the form of a problem that emerges in the language of philosophical skepticism. Philosophical responses

to this skepticism, like attempts to regard it as a confusion, further deflect from the reality into which the skeptic has a fundamental insight. They take another step away from the perception that others can suffer without me knowing or responding, and that I can suffer without sympathy. In short, the reality that we can be mutually uncomprehending. The skeptic sees (and then deflects from) the way that our bodies separate us from each other, the way that we are fellows in this separateness. Then the anti-skeptic, on Cavell's view, deepens the skeptic's deflection by treating it straightforwardly as an issue appropriately discussed in, because original to, the context of abstract philosophical argument.

Deflection describes the movement from appreciating the difficulty of unacknowledged pain to seeing a philosophical problem in the neighborhood and fixing on that. The difficulty of philosophical argument isn't the difficulty of recognizing and acknowledging the reality of other minds and their potential afflictions. The former difficulty is the difficulty of a puzzle to solve, an issue to address, a question for the ages; it's rigorous and demands precision. The latter difficulty is the difficulty of reality's resistance to our sense-making, its disorientation of the ways we think and live and carry on.

Cavell traces deflection from skepticism about other minds and the pain they can undergo to responses to that skepticism. He particularly tracks this deflection to the responses of certain Wittgensteinian philosophers like Norman Malcolm and John Cook. For Malcolm and Cook, the skeptic is basically confused about what we can intelligibly say in the language-game in which we speak of our sensations and the sensations of others, express feelings and say we know how others feel, and name our doubts and certainties. To Cavell's eye, their allegation of confusion simply promotes and solidifies the skeptic's deflection. For

it deflects from the skeptic's agony as well as from their valuable insight that we can fail to understand each other, and that we are alike in this.

Cavell wants to teach us to return the skeptic and anti-skeptic to the human scene where another is out of reach, where we can miss the suffering of our fellows as they can neglect our pain. He does this by showing how appeals to ordinary language cannot get the better of the skeptic. They cannot overcome the skeptic by finding that what the skeptic says contradicts what they usually say (they know that). Nor can these appeals quash skepticism by claiming that the skeptic cannot really mean what they say (this just appears to add insult to injury). However, appeals to ordinary language can clarify what the skeptic means, so they can clarify what it would mean to take the skeptic seriously. They can therefore show us how we might find the ground on which to challenge the skeptic in such a way that they might find a reason to listen, because they see they have been understood (see Cavell 2015b, 221). Here in brief is what Cavell finds to understand in skepticism:

> The skeptic comes up with his scary conclusion – that we can't know what another person is feeling because we can't have the same feeling, feel his pain, feel it in the way he feels it – and we are shocked; we must refute him, he would make it impossible ever to be attended to in the right way. But he doesn't *begin* with a shock. He begins with a full appreciation of the decisively significant facts that I may be suffering when no one else is, and that no one (else) may know (or care?); and that others may be suffering and I not know, which is equally appalling. But then something happens [call this deflection], and instead of pursuing the significance of

> these facts, he is enmeshed – so it may seem – in questions of whether we can have the same suffering, one another's suffering. (Ibid., 228)

Sure, the skeptic's questions and demands may be mistaken or poorly conceived. They may be projecting intelligible words into contexts where we want to say they have become unintelligible. We may have every reason to resist their seemingly impossible request for certainty. Nevertheless, the skeptic begins with a fact that "needs noticing and recording" (ibid., 235). What's more, the anti-skeptic usually responds with "no fact of his own to compete with that" (ibid.). This makes it look as if he is merely denying the facts that fuel the skeptic in the first instance. Cavell thus encourages us to stick to the striking fact that we can fail to acknowledge another's experiences, whether because we ignore them or they conceal them, and that they can fail to acknowledge our experiences. Then we will be able to see that 'I know you're in pain' is less an expression of intellectual certainty and more an expression of sympathy. We will see how the suffering of other people makes claims on us, which require our acknowledgment. And we will see that we are prone to fail in this acknowledgment in all sorts of quotidian ways: for example, through ignorance, apathy, fatigue, callousness, or egotism (ibid., 243). Skepticism about other minds turns out to transfigure the difficult reality that others are like us and yet separate from us. We have ample reason to evade that reality, given its capacity to wound our sense-making and further emphasize the possibility of our mutual incomprehension.

Diamond readily admits that Cavell's response to skepticism about other minds isn't analogous in every way to Coetzee's treatment of the wounded acknowledgment of animal suffering. But in both cases, as in Hughes's testimony to the baffling realities of war and

mortality, Diamond sees “a sense of being shouldered out from our ways of thinking and speaking by a torment of reality” (DR, 20). In these instances, our everyday ways of making sense of the world and ourselves come screeching to a halt, as we encounter a reality we cannot accommodate. This can be intensely wounding because we are characteristically sense-making creatures. The exhibition of that wound is then liable to wound other sense-making creatures, who may not see what we say and so may not find the resources to acknowledge our wounds and come to grips with the ways they have rendered us offensive.

The example of the disturbing perception of neglected pain illuminates the role of what Cavell calls exposure in the experience of difficult realities. The judgment of whether and how another person is suffering involves me as a fellow human being who can suffer. It makes a claim on me, invites my sympathetic acknowledgment and response (or denial), implicates me personally. When we are exposed to another’s pain, there’s no neutral position from which to ascertain the nature or extent of that pain. Our knowledge of the other isn’t assured. And we may want to avoid another’s suffering because acknowledging it could open us to the same wound. Hughes’s desire to brush over the reality of war is exposed by the photograph; his poem, expressing his resultant woundedness, can then threaten to expose us. Costello’s exposure comes out in the vulnerability of her testimony, her struggle to understand her friends and family, her wounding Holocaust imagery, and her concern that she may be going mad. Her exposure can become our exposure. That threat can underlie the desire to transpose Costello’s wounds into the apparently neutral discourse of animal ethics. In experiencing Costello and seeing how those in her life respond to her as they find themselves unable to acknowledge her pain, we can see why we might wish to deflect.

2.4 The Unity of the Examples

Diamond's three main examples – Hughes, Coetzee, and Cavell – may seem united more by her interest in them than by any feature internal to the realities they concern. Her occasional descriptions of how these examples interrelate, plus the lack of stated motivation for why one example follows another, may simply raise suspicions that the concept of a difficult reality points to little more than the author's wide-ranging reading. After all, our understandings of our mortality, industrial farming, and other minds don't at first glance seem tightly related. We might even think the difficulties of industrial farming appear rather more contingent, and hence resolvable, than the difficult fact that human beings are mortal.

I want to suggest that there's a logical structure or grammar in this apparent variety. Diamond's examples bring out a particular species of difficulty we can encounter in our lives as sense-making animals. These examples enable us to identify guidelines for the use of the concept of a difficult reality, so we can go on with it, casting light on additional experiences. But before I propose a grammar to be found in Diamond's seemingly unsystematic essay, we need to consider what kind of criteria we are after, what would count or help as a guideline.

3. Diamond's Methodology

What kind of definitional precision is on offer in Diamond's essay?

We can start by recognizing that Diamond introduces the concept of a difficult reality by means of literary examples: a poem and a set of novelistic lectures are two of her main examples, and almost all her other examples come from poems or stories. It's worth noting that Diamond tends to appeal to these kinds of works when she wants to get difficult realities

into view. They are very often works that feature anguished, first-person testimony. But more simply, it's worth noting that Diamond tends to appeal to examples. She doesn't offer a definition of a difficult reality, and I don't think this is just because she has yet to settle on a satisfying list of necessary and sufficient criteria for the concept's use. Rather, she clarifies the concept by detailing examples because of her view of what the concept is, and more generally of what it is to clarify many of our concepts.

3.1 Inheriting Wittgenstein

Alice Crary describes Diamond as centrally concerned, throughout her career, with the inheritance of Wittgenstein's views about language. In particular, his understanding that the workings of language are best clarified by attention to our ordinary ways of thinking, speaking, and making sense, alongside the world thus disclosed (Crary 2007, 1). Diamond herself says that she began reading and thinking about Wittgenstein in 1965, only a few years after she had completed her degree at Oxford (2019, 1). She has been reading and thinking about him for almost her entire career, and that has colored her work on all manner of subjects, from logic to ethics to religion.

We should expect, then, that Diamond will introduce the concept of a difficult reality in a way that carries forward Wittgenstein's views about how we come to understand and use concepts generally. Moreover, when we recall that her essay had its genesis in a series of remarks on Wittgensteinian conceptions of literary language and their inheritance by Cavell, it's hardly a surprise to discover her resistance to the idea that successfully understanding and applying a concept requires necessary and sufficient criteria. We can see her provision of examples along with descriptions of how those examples relevantly

resemble each other as the fruit of her reading of Wittgenstein's attention to ordinary speech. We can see in it her faithfulness to the fact that we do come to grasp concepts in this way in everyday life.

There are various ways in which we might characterize how Diamond's furnishing of examples can enable us to capably make use of the concept of a difficult reality. I want to offer three of these: three Wittgensteinian pictures of guidelines for the concept's use where these are not necessary and sufficient criteria. Each picture casts light on why Diamond introduces the concept as she does and how her examples could hang together. They aren't mutually exclusive but are parallel ways to understand how Diamond's essay offers us the resources to talk about the difficult realities we may encounter.

3.2 Family Resemblance

First, we could see Diamond's introduction of the concept of a difficult reality as the exhibition of a family-resemblance concept. This is a concept whose application is not unified by a set of uniformly common features but by what Peter Hacker calls a similarity rider which, together with a series of examples, brings out what it is for instances of the concept's application to resemble each other in the right way and hence to be apt (Hacker 1996, 104). In this way, the concept of a difficult reality is like many other concepts defined ostensively. Some of Wittgenstein's examples are the concepts of a game and a number (1967a, §67). And Umberto Eco argues that fascism is another case (2002, 76). The appropriate use of such concepts isn't determined by the presence in those cases of any single quality or list of qualities.

This picture of a family-resemblance concept can forestall a worry about the diversity of ways in which difficult realities can alienate and wound us. To get this worry to look like

a serious problem for those interested in deploying Diamond's concept, we need to accept the dubious presupposition that successfully determining whether the concept's application is apt requires that we locate a list of criteria in each case of application. In other words, the presupposition is that appropriate concept use is determined by the presence of common properties – necessary and sufficient criteria for the concept's application – in any instance that would come under the concept.

The notion of a family-resemblance concept is mainly developed by Wittgenstein in §§66-88 of *Philosophical Investigations* (1967a). On Baker and Hacker's reading, these sections should be seen as "combating the dogma, going back to Socrates and Plato, that there must be something common to everything that falls under a given concept" (2005, 146). This is of course quite rough but it's fair enough as a first pass. These sections aim to undercut the thought that, for a concept to apply to a set of cases, that set must uniformly possess certain features marking out the concept's aptness. This is precisely the thought that would undergird a worry that the diversity of difficult realities (as seen across Diamond's examples) is reason enough to doubt the concept's unity or usefulness.

For Wittgenstein, as Baker and Hacker point out, "explaining a concept-word by means of a series of paradigmatic examples is a perfectly decent and intelligible form of explanation, just as telling someone to stand 'roughly here' is a perfectly decent instruction" (ibid., 147). We may want to know why the examples given are paradigmatic. Then the question why Diamond turns primarily to literature has real force. But that's no reason to worry that providing a series of examples along with a similarity rider doesn't make for a proper definition. Baker and Hacker urge us to "take explanations by example at face value", since we regularly explain words in this way, and these explanations "successfully introduce

and guide the application of legitimate concept-words" (ibid.). We needn't see such explanations as less suitable than merkmal definitions for the provision of rules for use.

Diamond doesn't offer examples to aid the discovery of an abstract idea of a difficult reality which, once distilled, could then be straightforwardly applied. She isn't seeking to construct a concept that would allow us to go on without ever needing to raise questions about whether a case at hand sufficiently resembles prior cases of the concept's use to be intelligible. Instead, Diamond means to help us see how the concept works and can be used, gone on with, and applied in new contexts, by illustrating this in her own practice. Uses of the concept will have resemblances, some of which will widely characterize instances that appropriately fall under the concept (call these similarity riders, criteria, or guidelines). We don't need to seek properties of these instances that would serve in every case to legitimate the concept's application: multiple lines of resemblance allow for a wide range of legitimate applications, while still imposing controls on intelligible use.

Given several overlapping but not necessarily coextensive lines of resemblance or criteria that mark central instances of the concept's use, there will be a penumbra of cases where some but not all these lines are carried forward; hence, there will be room for reasonable disagreement about whether there are enough lines of resemblance to justify the concept's projection. In other cases, there will be no resemblances, or so few resemblances, to prior intelligible instances that it won't be reasonable to treat these cases as examples falling under the concept. To distinguish appropriate uses, we need a series of examples, criteria to guide the concept's use, and some creativity and willingness to attend to patterns of use over time.

The examples that feature in Diamond's introduction of difficult realities can be distributed along this spectrum: some will function as central cases (the deaths of six young men in war, our treatment of nonhuman animals, the unacknowledged pain of our fellows), some will be extensions of the concept that display some but not all of the criteria exhibited by central cases, and there may also be examples featuring few enough criteria that one might reasonably balk. In section 4 of this chapter, I identify the criteria that I believe unify Diamond's central examples. Once we move toward the periphery, where there's greater room for reasonable disagreement, each case has to be treated on its own merits, as we find the concept's use intelligible or fail to understand this use (and its user), and disagreement may persist even after extended conversation.

3.3 Centers of Variation

Try a second picture. In an appendix to his study of the intellectual powers of human beings, the second work in his trilogy on human nature, Peter Hacker explains that the discipline of philosophical anthropology to which his trilogy belongs concerns itself with "the network of concepts in terms of which we conceive of ourselves and of the faculties that constitute our nature" (2013, 436). The philosophical anthropologist endeavors to sketch that network of concepts. They aim to lay bare the ways in which our thinking and speaking can tie that network in knots, and to clarify particular concepts by locating them in the more general network or conceptual landscape. Hacker cites Wittgenstein as having shown us that, once we have a perspicuous overview of the landscape, we can begin to see the paths leading off at various angles from the concept we want to clarify (ibid., 438), That will draw our eye to the concept at the heart of all this variation.

Following Peter Strawson (1992), Hacker names this mode of conceptual analysis 'connective analysis'. The connective analyst perceives that a concept's function can only be understood by detailing its connections with other concepts. We see how a concept works when we see how it integrates (or fails to integrate) with other concepts in a wider conceptual network. Connective analysis offers a "surveyable representation" of the wider network (Hacker 2013, 438). And we can then grasp a relevant concept by observing how it behaves when drawn together with different concepts in different contexts, and how it can be confused with other concepts.

Images of networks and landscapes are central to the methodology of Hacker's trilogy. He traces the grammatical and logical relationships among various concepts: for example, in his study of intellectual powers, the concepts of belief, knowledge, sensation, perception, memory, and imagination. He examines the ways in which these concepts impinge and depend on each other, how they form a whole; for instance, he describes belief as "interwoven with the concepts of rationality, reasonableness and grounds of judgement", as well as with the concept of knowledge, and by seeing these interconnections we can begin to distinguish reasonable, groundless, and dogmatic forms of belief (ibid., 196). In short, Hacker sketches conceptual networks or landscapes so that we can see their nodes or features in the places they can and do occupy in our form of life.

These nodes or features are what Hacker calls "multi-focal concepts, with a number of different, but closely connected, centres of variation" (ibid., 448, emphasis removed). We could think of a center of variation as the constancy found in the intelligible variance of a concept's use. Then we could see Diamond as picturing a center of variation – her notion of difficulty – by showing us, through various examples, the paths that lead off in different

directions from that center and the connections between those paths. She doesn't sketch the landscape in the way Hacker does, as a diligent and methodical cartographer. Nonetheless, she illustrates the network in which the concept of a difficult reality can be used by testing the concept's intelligible variation and suggesting paradigm cases or touchstones for future variation. That can yield enough of a map for us to go on with the concept.

Furthermore, it may be that Diamond resists offering a map or method that would transcend the provision of examples because she mustn't lift the burden of figuring out how to go on with the concept of a difficult reality (and so with the difficulty) off the shoulders of readers. In other words, it could be that Diamond's sketch of the center of variation looks difficult (imprecise, tangled, chaotic) because difficult realities are difficult. Given our exposure to difficult realities and their sufferers, their difficulty will saturate our judgment about the legitimacy of an application of the concept of a difficult reality. Then we could say that Diamond offers a center of variation by describing focal instances of that variation in order to remain faithful to the legitimate exposure we experience in experiencing those wounded by difficult realities.

3.4 Projection

These two pictures – family resemblance and centers of variation – show that there are many ways to explain a term's meaning. The first is Wittgenstein's picture of an everyday pattern of explanation, and the second is a model of explanation refined by Hacker for his philosophical anthropology. Underlying the claim that there are myriad forms of legitimate explanation, we could see, more generally, a picture of meaning typically associated with Cavell's inheritance of Wittgenstein. That picture is characterized by the idea that how we

project our words into new contexts exhibits the sense or order we find in their use (see Cavell 1979, 168-190).

On Cavell's vision of language, when we understand what others mean when they speak of 'feeding the parking meter', we accept their projection of the word 'feeding' into this context. We find their speech intelligible in seeing how this word's ability to combine with other words in the context of (say) 'feeding the cat' has been projected into a novel situation, where it can combine with different words (ibid., 181). Naturally, we might talk instead of 'putting money into the meter', but this wouldn't capture the same network of meanings as talk of 'feeding the meter'. The projection of 'feeding' brings with it certain analogies and conceptual discriminations that aren't present in talk of 'putting'.

For Cavell, no word employed in only one context, in principle unprojectable, could be a word. That said, our projections are limited or regulated. Projections can fail if their links with other words in typical contexts break down on the way to a new context. What might count as an invitation to, or acceptance of, a projection likewise differs between contexts and is similarly controlled. Talk of feeding the meter by offering it seashells instead of coins might strike us as unintelligible. And we might likewise fail to understand talk of the meter refusing to be fed with seashells. What counts as acceptance or refusal of this projection differs from what would count in the case of the projection of 'feeding' into the context of one's pride.

These limits or controls on projection show how a word's grammar constitutes its room for variation in use. Cavell tells us that two facts need to be balanced when it comes to the concepts with which we live. A concept has an "'outer' variance" and an "'inner' constancy" (ibid., 185). It has room for projection which is underwritten by its grammar, its

limited power to intelligibly integrate with other words. Cavell's scare quotes around 'outer' and 'inner' suggest that these two facts are two faces of the same fact about our use of words. The grammar of a word or concept (call this its constancy) is its openness, its power, to combine in indefinite but controlled ways with other words in novel contexts (call this its variance). Thus, by clarifying a concept's room for variance, we can get to grips with its sense, the order we can locate in its use.

With this picture in view, we can see Diamond offering examples of difficult realities to give us a sense of the variance of the concept; attention to this variance can then reveal the concept's constancy. In Diamond's case, it's relevant that an explanation of the concept of a difficult reality by means of examples illustrating criteria for projection leaves readers to figure out how to go on with the concept. Thus, it leaves readers to figure out how to go on with the difficulties, and with life in attention to or neglect of them. This form of explanation puts readers in a position of responsibility for figuring out how to carry on with the concept (or makes this position salient), and that is part of figuring out how to go on with the difficulties to which Diamond points us. Responsibility for how we go on with our words about the difficulties we encounter isn't separate from responsibility for how we live in sight of these difficulties. Uncertainty about whether our application of Diamond's concept is apt, likely to be shared, or might be a mistaken use of words, is internal to the structure of the experience of a difficult reality. That fact is embodied by Costello's worries that she might be losing her hold on life with others.

In response to the worry that the diversity of difficult realities and resultant forms of bewilderment threatens the concept's coherence, the point is not only that this worry follows from missing how Diamond's introduction of the concept is consciously ostensive. It's that

this worry doesn't have the same grip on us once we see it as arising from the very structure of an experience of a difficult reality, and so of a difficulty of how we go on with our words. Part of characterizing the concept's legitimate use and projection will involve characterizing how questions about the legitimacy of this use are tethered to the anxiety of confronting one of its legitimate instances.

On Cavell's picture of language, central instances of difficult realities can take us in different directions, depending on which of the multiple criteria are retained and which lost as we project the concept into heterogenous contexts. By clarifying the central grammar of Diamond's concept (as seen in its variable use across her examples), we will be better able to see sideways projections of it for what they are. This demands an awareness of the relation of the concept to its history. Considering a range of examples to isolate characteristic features will involve tracking these features across the history of the concept's projection. In brief, tracking constancy across variation.

3.5 Three Images of Criteria

We don't need to choose between these three images of the ways in which the concept of a difficult reality can be made precise. I regard lines of family resemblance, centers of variation, and controls on intelligible projection as compatible pictures of the criteria I will identify for the use of Diamond's concept. These are all ways to specify a concept without offering necessary and sufficient criteria. They have in common the suggestion that we look for threads between examples of the concept's use and the shape that emerges as we find this use more or less illuminating of cases. The criteria we can thereby identify to mark out the unity of Diamond's main examples will be guidelines for our further use of the concept.

Those guidelines will always be provisional, as we project the concept into new contexts. Future projections will add detail to our map of the landscape. They will sometimes stray from the center of variation, and they will reshape the concept's constancy over the ongoing history of its application.

With this understanding of the kind of precision we are after, I want to turn to the order I think is discernible in Diamond's use of the concept of a difficult reality.

4. Criteria for the Concept of a Difficult Reality

In Diamond's description of her three main examples as presenting difficult realities, I see four guidelines for the concept's projection. This four-point grammar doesn't constitute a checklist by which to determine beyond doubt whether a feature of reality is difficult in Diamond's sense, as if from a neutral standpoint. Rather, it provides a center of variation from which the question whether further applications of the concept are intelligible can be asked. To put it in another idiom, it provides a set of resemblances we can use to orient ourselves in the conceptual terrain as we extend the concept past Diamond's examples. These four criteria are:

1. Oscillating, coextensive inexplicability and ordinariness.
2. Mutual incomprehension, as this oscillation puts pressure on our understanding of others and ourselves.
3. Temptations to deflection, so we don't have to confront a difficult reality, the opacity of others, and our own opacity.

4. Exposure, as our confrontation with a difficult reality, and with those who suffer and testify to it, implicates us personally and opens us to analogous wounds.

Here's the general picture that emerges when we put these criteria together.

A paradigmatic difficult reality will look utterly ordinary from one perspective while appearing entirely inexplicable from another. For instance, our mortality can seem like the least surprising fact, while on the other hand, it can baffle and traumatize our everyday use of the concepts of life and death. There's no difference in information between these perspectives: both involve the recognition that we die. And I can see this as ordinary at one moment and inexplicable at another, just as my friends can see this as ordinary while I am thrown by it.

The fact that others seem to make sense of realities I find bewildering can isolate me from my fellows. That is, my failure to make sense of those realities can extend to my failure to make sense of those whose sense-making is unharmed by them. Inversely, others can fail to understand me as they fail to understand why I am wounded by a reality they find perfectly comprehensible. In this way, I can also become opaque to myself over time.

The temptation to deflect is likely to be magnified by the stress that an experience of a difficult reality puts on relationships. For creatures who characteristically make sense of the world and each other, and who interpret themselves as sense-makers, experiences of difficult realities exert tremendous pressure to seek out ways to keep making sense, not to be wounded. This deflection may not work or last, and we may feel that our perception of an injurious reality calls us to attentiveness. We can seek to eschew deflection by openly exhibiting our wounds in testimony. This vulnerable testimony can expose others to a

difficult reality where they had seen nothing but the ordinary. That can both solicit and defeat their deflective maneuvers. Confronting a difficult reality involves personal exposure: there's room for acknowledgment and denial. Attempting flight from this situation of exposure can be a natural way to avoid wounds to our sense-making, since the exhibition of those wounds can trouble our thinking and speaking and alienate us from each other.

In the background to this conception of difficult realities as wounds to sense-making is a roughly Wittgensteinian conception of making sense. On that conception, a feature of reality's sense is tied to its place in our form of life and everyday modes of thought. A difficult reality invites us to make sense of it – a normal response to bafflement – and yet enduringly resists the sense we try to make of it. Hence, acknowledging a difficult reality means feeling a loss of sense before it. And this experience of a loss of sense has, in effect, a kind of sense: a place in our lives.

I have painted this picture of the concept of a difficult reality with a very broad brush. It will be helpful to look at each of these four guidelines for projection in more detail, with reference to Diamond's main examples. In the following four sections, I explore each criterion to bring out how it characterizes the unity of those examples.

5. Inexplicability and Ordinariness

Hughes, Coetzee, and Cavell foreground difficulties that sit uneasily with our ways of shaping our lives and making sense of the world. They center reality's capacity to resist our characteristic efforts of sense-making. We find ourselves disoriented and bewildered in the face of what we cannot accommodate. These difficulties "stop us in our tracks", as Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé puts it, leading on from disorientation to a broader, "stranger sense of

woundedness, confoundedness and isolation" (2015, 1116). Like Costello, we feel as if we are at a distance from our form of life, or as if it's at a distance from us. Yet from another perspective, the difficulty that wounds our sense-making looks positively ordinary; and this isn't because we are lacking information or fail to see how some phenomenon stands in need of explanation. Difficult realities are coextensively inexplicable and ordinary, and the oscillation in these perspectives can wound and isolate us further. We can see this oscillation in Diamond's examples.

5.1 Hughes's Contradictory Horrors

Hughes's poem testifies to the baffling horrors of war and the bewildering fact that we die:

> To regard this photograph might well dement,
>
> Such contradictory permanent horrors here
>
> Smile out from the single exposure and shoulder out
>
> One's own body from its instant and heat. (1957, 55)

Hughes voices a feeling of profound alienation. His poem bears witness to an encounter with the difficult reality disclosed by the photograph of the six men. The 'permanent horrors' of mortality and war 'smile out' from the photograph, extending from the vital expressions of the men unaware of their fate. Faced with what Diamond calls the "shuddering awareness of death and life together", Hughes finds himself exposed, out on a limb (DR, 22). Reading his poem, we can find ourselves out on that limb with him.

This isn't because we are searching for an explanation. From one perspective, the fact of our mortality is utterly mundane. It's because our encounter with the poem or photograph whose encountering it records and enacts shoulders us out, as Hughes says, from our everyday ways of comprehending our lives and world. This encounter alienates us from our embodied existence as sense-making animals in a way that no explanation could remedy. If we offered an explanation to Hughes as if to remedy his alienation and woundedness – say, if we tried to explain how photographs work – this might just emphasize that woundedness and our consequent failure to understand each other. For we can be alienated by seeing a difficult reality where others see something as ordinary as a problem to be solved, whether in the world or our psychology. For example, it can be injurious that other people see the problem that nations regard war as a viable way to settle disagreements where we see the inexplicable fact that war belongs to our form of life.

Jonathan Lear describes difficult realities as "not just puzzles that we may never solve", whether these are moral or conceptual, but as "issues for us" that "arrive in the manner of anxious confrontation" (2018, 1199). They aren't issues settleable by means of explanatory accounts or ethical awakening. They are inexplicable *not* in the sense that they are hard puzzles we cannot yet solve or practical problems whose solutions we cannot yet see, but in the sense that explanation and problem-solving don't touch them. To call these difficulties inexplicable isn't to call them so-far unexplained. It's to point to a deeper bafflement I cannot split off from my life, where explanation and problem-solving can be modes of deflection.

Suppose that we could put an end to the incomprehensible evils of war, achieving global full-scale disarmament and accepting as a species that our differences never call for

violence. Even still, the fact that we are capable of senseless killing, the persistence of warfare as part of our form of life, can be enough to wound us. We can be confounded by what we and our fellows can do to each other. We can be baffled by what we have done to each other. We can find warfare's rather prominent place in our form of life inexplicable.

At the same time as we are disoriented by the reality of war or the fact that we die, these realities can look entirely ordinary from another perspective. From one angle, the coexistence of the vitality of the photographed men and their tragic deaths in war – a future they seem to query in smiling out at us – appears banal. Human beings are alive until they aren't. This is no surprise. Nor is it any surprise that photographs can outlive their subjects, picturing as alive those who have long been deceased. Furthermore, we know that human beings war against each other, that peace has been the exception in our history. In sum, Hughes's poem testifies to his bewilderment in confronting what might look obvious, even uninteresting. Like all other humans, six men lived and then died. Like millions of other combatants and alongside millions of civilians, they perished in the First World War. No further explanation is required. What mystery could there be here?

5.2 Costello's Wounds and the Normality of Eating Animals

The same could be said of the character of our life with animals. Although factory farms are a recent (if ubiquitous) invention, we have been leading agricultural lives since Neolithic times and were hunting long before then. Consuming animals isn't a novelty. It's done the world over. Arguments for and against this practice are well-rehearsed, and unless we live in a very unusual community, it comes as no shock that many of our friends and neighbors

participate in it. Like the deaths of the six young men, this looks perfectly comprehensible. We can reconcile our relationships with our friends with the fact that they eat animals.

Yet from Costello's perspective, the reality of our life with animals appears incomprehensible, throwing her life with others into question. It isn't as if Costello misses the routine way in which her fellow human beings consume their fellow creatures. It's precisely her clear-eyed vision of that ordinariness that threatens to shoulder her out from those left unscathed by the reality. Costello and her meat-eating friends have the same information: they know where their food comes from. But she is baffled while they experience no difficulty for sense-making.

I can imagine being in Costello's disoriented shoes and wanting an explanation of how to reconcile my relationships with friends with their consumption of animals. I can imagine wanting to know how to love, or at least live with, the sometimes-cruel people who are my friends and neighbors. Perhaps explanation only looks superfluous if animal treatment is the target of that explanation; perhaps what really needs explaining is how to live in light of that treatment.

But what Costello shows isn't just that explanation looks superfluous given the normality of animal consumption. It's that the idea that a difficult reality presents a problem to solve can be a form of deflection. That's true whether the problem is the reality itself or how to reconcile it with our lives. Diamond's difficulty isn't the difficulty of a problem to fix in the world, in moral theory, or in one's psychology. It's the difficulty of an encounter with what one cannot comprehend.

To be sure, the difficulty of our treatment of animals, like the reality of warfare, might seem to present practical, political problems. We could work to end factory farming, as we

could work to realize full-scale disarmament. But Costello witnesses the difficulty of the character of the life in which factory farming goes on. Even if we managed to generate the political will to abolish this practice, the very fact that other people can slaughter their fellow creatures, that they have done this, might still throw us. Just as the historical fact of the senseless evil of the Holocaust might.

Although animal consumption might appear to present a solvable problem where mortality doesn't, they similarly present difficult realities.[4] Both Hughes and Costello experience a reality that wounds their sense-making. That includes their capacity to explain, solve problems, acquire information, and theorize about morals. These can all be ways to try to maintain a vision of the ordinary – the ordinarily problematic or difficult – rather than confronting the inexplicable and more deeply injurious reality.

When we see how Costello's friends and family members react to her, how this affects her self-understanding, and how the respondents to Coetzee's lectures seem to endorse these reactions, we can see that one way to regard a difficult reality as ordinary, and so avoid it, can be to regard it as a difficulty of individual psychology (see Lear 2018, 1199). Costello has a difficult experience of what we do to animals because she is confronting a real difficulty. The difficulty isn't that she is particularly depressed or anxious while reality itself is perfectly intelligible. However, it might look that way from a perspective that sees the difficulty as ordinary, and the worry that this might be the case forms part of the difficulty for Costello. She encounters a difficulty or insufficiency in our life with concepts as this confronts what it cannot accommodate: our treatment of animals.

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[4] A difference is that solving problems in the world can be a form of deflection when it comes to the reality of meat-eating, less obviously so when it comes to death.

No doubt for Diamond there's a Wittgensteinian background to her construal of this way to continue to see the ordinary. A difficulty in our life with concepts as this comes up against a feature of reality isn't a difficulty of psychology. Our concepts have their life in our form of life, in which we eat animals and find ourselves disoriented by the difficulty of this. The difficulty lies in how reality resists our attempts at easy comprehension, so that we find ourselves unable to go on as we were. And this difficulty can have a place in our form of life. Our very stumbling here can have a home in our life as concept-using animals. As Diamond says, this "coming apart of thought and reality belongs to flesh and blood" (DR, 25). The worry that we are dealing with a purely psychological matter, an issue to do with our response to reality and not reality itself, may arise here. But it isn't at all clear to me that response and reality can typically be distinguished and then opposed here. Besides, I would want to say that difficult realities reveal something about the reality of our human condition.

Lear points to this Wittgensteinian background when he remarks that Diamond picks out "an experience of the inadequacy of our concepts to encompass the reality they are meant to encompass" (2018, 1201). Her essay concerns our experience and expression of features of reality that set in motion our conceptual resources, seem to demand understanding, and yet strike us as unintelligible. These features may strike others, or us from a different vantage point, as perfectly intelligible, because (for example) they look commonplace or challenging only for those with especially anxious psychologies.

For both Hughes and Costello, encountering a difficult reality leads to alienation from everyday modes of life and thought. We saw that Hughes finds himself unable to use the concepts of life and death, peace and war, to make sense of the reality of the six men. He discovers 'contradictory permanent horrors' in the fact that those whom we 'shake by the

hand, see hale, hear speak loud' are 'not more alive' than the men pictured in the photograph, yet 'no prehistoric, or fabulous beast' is 'more dead'. This threatens to 'dement' those who acknowledge the photograph, as they are shouldered out from their sense-making and those who keep making sense.

We can see this pattern in Costello's experience too. In full view of the pervasiveness of factory farming, she finds herself unable to make sense of what we do to animals. She therefore finds herself unable to make sense of her fellow human animals. Her exhibition of this wound to her sense-making unsurprisingly disappoints (to say the least) those looking for a reasoned and reasonable discussion of moral matters. That is to say, those looking to make sense of the senseless evil that injures Costello. Whether other people engage in animal consumption or advocate vegetarianism, whether they are principled egalitarians or proud speciesists, they manage to employ their concepts and habits of mind to comprehend the reality that thoroughly bewilders Costello. They manage to grasp what renders her wounding: offensive in her use of Holocaust imagery, offending against the expectations we might have for academic lectures, offensive to her friends and family. She is baffled by the inexplicability of animal consumption while others – whatever their position on animal rights – see the ordinary, including the ordinarily problematic.

5.3 Cavell and the Perception of Unacknowledged Suffering

Cavell unearths the root of the impulse to regard other minds with skepticism in the awareness that others might be in pain without my knowledge or appropriate response, and that I might be in pain without garnering any sympathy. These are facts we could recognize as wholly unremarkable. It comes as no surprise that we can be ignorant of the suffering of

others, that our suffering can go unacknowledged. We know for certain that we are ignorant of most people's pain, that most people are ignorant of our pain. How could it be otherwise?

A child might imagine that their pain is immediately visible to everyone else, or that no one else can be in pain without their awareness; but once they get a handle on our concepts of pain, other minds, attention, testimony, and first-person experience, once they see that others are like them and yet not them, they will not doubt, in the ordinary course of things, that suffering can go unseen and unacknowledged. Like the facts that we live and die, wage war against each other, take photographs that capture the past, and eat our fellow creatures, this fact can look unreservedly ordinary. And yet, we can be stopped in our tracks by what Cavell calls the "appalling" perception that others can suffer without our acknowledgment (2015b, 228). This bewilderment can represent such an injury to our sense-making, and so to our life with others, that we are led to skepticism as a mode of deflection from the initial perception. Faced with the reality that we can and do often miss each other's pain, we can seek to maintain a vision of the ordinary, even the ordinarily difficult, by transposing our perception into the abstract language of philosophical skepticism. Then what appalled us can become what perplexes us.

I think it's no accident that, given the opportunity to reflect on Cavell's treatment of skepticism about other minds, Diamond turns to Hughes and Costello. For they embody the traumatizing perception of unacknowledged suffering: the suffering of the six men in war, the suffering of animals in industrial farming. When Costello gives voice to that pain, those in her life deflect. The respondents to Coetzee's lectures pursue the less exposed terrain of moral argument. And the skeptic (along with the anti-skeptic) loses sight of the wounding perception that made her skepticism tempting in the first place.

5.4 Oscillation and Reinforcement

In each of these examples, the inexplicable reality is perfectly comprehensible from another perspective. No further explanation is needed; hence no further explanation could resolve the difficulty. Mulhall stresses that “it is internal to something’s harbouring a difficulty of reality that where one person sees a matter of fathomless significance, another sees only banality” (2012, 32).

This coextensive inexplicability and ordinariness can yield the condition that Christa Peterson and Jack Samuel refer to as “real normative alienation” (2021, 100-101). In that condition, one sees the framework in which one exercises one’s agency – in which the consumption of animals may be no big deal or may present a thorny but intelligible moral problem – as incapable of housing one’s sense of oneself or the good life. One can be shouldered out from the evaluative concepts that pervade and extend from one’s form of life, while from another angle, those concepts and our ways of applying them are altogether familiar. This alienation can have a place in one’s form of life: there can be sense or significance to the loss of sense one experiences in encountering a difficult reality (DR, 22). To put it another way, the alienation that results from encountering what we cannot accommodate may be rather ordinary. And the thought that one’s bafflement appears quotidian can then intensify one’s feeling of separateness from everyday life.

This becomes clearer when we return to Costello. She is utterly bewildered by the practice of consuming animals, a fact of human life at present. She cannot comprehend how anyone could knowingly participate in this practice. This threatens to shoulder her out from her friends who engage in it with full awareness. At the same time, human consumption of

animals looks totally unremarkable. This very normality only deepens Costello's bafflement. She is especially puzzled that her friends consume animals as a matter of course, without the slightest hint of wounded astonishment. From another point of view, Costello's bafflement itself looks ordinary. Most of us have at some point looked askance at aspects of human life. Most of us have wondered at the strangeness of our habitual words and deeds. The consumption of animals might seem like a fitting object for this sort of wonder.

The upshot is that not only is a difficult reality characterized by its dual capacity to look inexplicable and ordinary, but ordinariness can support bafflement, and bafflement can appear to be a piece of the ordinary. These aspects can, as it were, bolster each other. Diamond's three main examples bring out both the paradigmatic inexplicability and ordinariness of difficult realities, and how these can oscillate and reinforce each other. It belongs to the grammar of difficult realities to have these coextensive faces, and the woundedness we experience in encountering them is partly due to our dizzying sense of this combination.

6. Mutual Incomprehension

Difficult realities resist various habits of mind and forms of sense-making. We have seen how they can disrupt our use of the concepts of life and death, shatter our sense of our fellows as normal and companionable (that is, not as senseless killers), and solicit the deflections of philosophical skepticism and anti-skepticism. In each of these instances, a difficulty's potential invisibility for others reveals a wider difficulty: that other people are somehow inscrutable, that they can view as ordinary what we view as inexorably baffling. As Wittgenstein remarks, "one human being can be a complete enigma to another" (1967a, 223).

As this difficulty unfolds, it can itself be seen as ordinary, since we all know that we can fall short of understanding each other, fail to "find our feet" with others (ibid.).

In seeing this relationship between the inexplicable and the ordinary, we can see how a difficult reality quickly becomes a difficulty in life with others, who are revealed as opaque to us, not seeing what we see, not wounded as we are. Diamond's examples remind us that at any point we can fail to comprehend others, even those we know well or whose worldviews we mostly share, as they can fail to get their bearings with us. Along similar lines, we can fail to understand ourselves over time. In confronting difficult realities, we can strike ourselves as strangers or worry that we are headed off the deep end, as we come to see the inexplicable where we saw the ordinary (or the reverse).[5] In sum, paradigmatic difficult realities open us to the possibility of mutual incomprehension. Facing and acknowledging them, we are then disposed to fail to comprehend our fellows, just as we become incomprehensible to them. We can likewise become alienated from ourselves. This is, in effect, a logical consequence of the coextensive, oscillating inexplicability and ordinariness of difficult realities. It's how those realities come alive in human fellowship.

Consider the role of mutual incomprehension in Diamond's examples. Costello is a natural starting point, since we witness her social life, her bafflement at others and their bafflement at her, throughout Coetzee's lectures. As she is wounded by what we do to animals, she is shouldered out from her life with others. She sees her friends and neighbors consuming "corpses that they have bought for money" (Coetzee 1999, 69). She worries that they are as ignorant of their collaboration with evil as were the German citizens who, in their inattention, made the Holocaust possible (ibid., 35). Her life with these other people feels

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[5] Simone Weil likens knowledge of this room to see ourselves as strangers to knowledge of forgiveness (2002, 9).

foreign to her. She doesn't see how they can be the perpetrators of the heinous crimes she nevertheless watches them commit, for which they gladly produce evidence. Concurrently, Costello worries that it's not her life with these others that has become unfamiliar, colored by their seemingly appalling crimes, but that she has become a foreigner in this life. In other words, that she has gone mad. This perception is strengthened by the fact that others predictably regard her in just that way.

We can see two ways of being shouldered out here.

1. Seeing one's life as a foreign terrain.
2. Seeing oneself as a foreigner in this familiar terrain.

And in Costello's case, we can see how these run together. The alienation experienced among others is echoed by, can oscillate with, a form of alienation in self-understanding. As Mulhall notes, difficult realities "serve to isolate individuals, disclosing others as opaque to them and themselves as opaque to those others; reality's resistance to our understanding reveals us as essentially resistant to one another's understanding" (2012, 29). When we are confronted with our opacity to others, whose understanding we rely on in countless ways to make sense of ourselves and our experiences, self-opacity can result, as we discover that we are foreigners in the terrain of our own lives. When our modes of thinking and living trip up, modes we share with our fellows and which they may continue to successfully operate, we can find ourselves isolated from and confounding to ourselves. That can deepen our wounds.

With Costello's difficulty in mind, consider the following conversation between a vegetarian child and her omnivorous parent at the dinner table.

Child: You're having a burger for dinner? But that's a cow on your plate!

Parent: Yes, I know that.

Child: No, you don't get it. It's *a cow*!

Parent: Right, the animal we raise and eat.

For the child, consuming meat is unthinkable. But the parent clings to its genuine ordinariness. All the child can say in response is, 'but look again' or 'aren't you as shocked as I am?'. We can hear this in her increasingly insistent tone of voice when she points out that her parent is consuming a fellow creature. The lack of room for argument here, the fact that no exchange of information could do the trick for parent or child, can alienate us not only from our concepts but from each other. We can imagine this affecting the child's self-understanding. Regarding her parent as a decent person, as a role model, she might well begin to wonder whether she is losing her grip on life with others and on morality. This will only be exacerbated if her parent shares that wonder.

This room for mutual incomprehension is apparent in the case of Hughes and his photograph. We can imagine someone who regards the photograph as an entirely ordinary depiction of six soldiers-to-be; perhaps it's a keepsake or family heirloom. Indeed, that's what the photograph seems to have been for Hughes's family. His biographer Jonathan Bate says that his family "cherished an old photo taken [at a favorite camping spot]: it showed six young men in their Sunday best, before the war" (2015, 41). When Hughes says, in his poem, "I know / That bilberried bank, that thick three, that black wall", he means it (1957, 54). Though we might hear echoes of William Wordsworth here – who, in his *An Evening Walk* (1793), elegizes about the "black wall" of "mountain steeps" seen as "the baffl'd vision fails" and night draws in – Hughes speaks primarily from childhood experience.

That the photograph could later baffle Hughes isn't a shock when one learns that his father recounted gruesome war tales "in the goriest detail" when he was as young as four (ibid., 40). But Hughes appears to have put this all out of mind, "later saying that his father never talked about the war" (ibid.). In any event, the regularity with which war was discussed in Hughes's childhood might just have rendered the whole subject unremarkable. Certainly, he was aware of war's prominence in our form of life from his boyhood days. Then one day he comes across the old photograph and sees it as if for the first time. He no longer sees a favorite camping site and six smiling young men. Or rather, in seeing this familiar scene, he finds himself shouldered out from that very familiarity. The photograph becomes an open wound to his sense-making, not because he forgets how photographs work or that war is common, but because the facts of death and war now strike him as utterly inexplicable.

It's all the more inexplicable that others could regard the photograph as ordinary, as Hughes and his family did. Historian Mark Connelly describes Hughes's declaration that the six young men were 'all dead' six months after the photograph was taken as obliterating the meaning of "the peaceful countryside of the photograph" (2002, 7). More accurately, as expressing Hughes's experience of the obliteration of that meaning. Connelly sees Hughes's descriptions of the countryside as unsuccessful attempts to return himself to a vision of the ordinary, ultimately shown up by his persistent bafflement. It's as if, in his woundedness, Hughes is shouldered out not only from death and war but from the ground on which the six young men stand, which he and his family regarded as ordinary (as a treasured place to camp). And so, he is shouldered out from those who can continue to regard that ground as having the sense and significance of 'peaceful countryside'. That's to say, when Hughes experiences an injury to his sense-making, that injury extends to his experience of the

countryside, those who can camp there without bewilderment, his family, and presumably himself only moments before.

The difficulties of mortality and conflict open onto difficulties in his life with others and his self-understanding. When he acknowledges the reality of those six men in their Sunday best, the result can be alienation from life with others who see nothing more baffling than six well-dressed young men whose photograph, like all photographs, pictures the past rather than the present. What is there for Hughes and these others to do except talk past each other? Perhaps that's why his poem refrains from argument or speculation about war and death, from the third-personal, instead exhibiting how these realities wound him and solicit his deflection.

Cavell makes the relationship between difficult realities and mutual incomprehension even clearer, because the difficulty to which he attends concerns the ways in which we can misunderstand and ignore each other, the reality that we can fail to get each other. In essence, Cavell shows how the fact of mutual incomprehension not only attends difficult realities but can become one.

The skeptic about other minds notices that we can miss each other's suffering. Fleeing from this traumatic realization, seeking its transpositions to be found in philosophical discourse, the skeptic misunderstands himself. He loses sight of his original insight, and the anti-skeptic takes that misunderstanding at face value, in turn misunderstanding the skeptic. The anti-skeptic sees skepticism as arising from a basically philosophical or linguistic confusion. Thus, she buys into the skeptic's mistaken self-understanding, his deflections from the original appalling perception. Incomprehension

begets incomprehension, and soon enough we are ironically miles away from the recognition, at once ordinary and baffling, that we can be mutually uncomprehending.

If we widen the view a step further, we can see that Cavell, in coming to understand the skeptic's initial insight, the terrible perception of unacknowledged pain, is likely to speak in ways that are unintelligible to both the skeptic and the anti-skeptic, who operate in a discourse fundamentally shaped to exclude the genuine perception to which Cavell hopes to give voice. Would it then be any surprise if Cavell's critics were to see him as uttering irrelevances, even as offending against their expectations for philosophical work? Wouldn't that just be a further recasting of the scene of mutual incomprehension to which Cavell in fact seeks to return us? After all, on a Wittgensteinian story about understanding another's speech act, one needs to understand the use of another's words and its context; that means understanding the speaker's choice of words, their reasons and desires, and thus the speaker. How could Cavell's critics make sense of what he says, hear what he means, without understanding *him*, wounds and all?

We can see the critic's uncomprehending response as evidence of Cavell's attention to the skeptic's pre-skeptical bafflement. Were we to stage a dialogue between these parties, it might look rather close to the conversation I imagined between the vegetarian child and her parent. It might turn out that Cavell can do little more than point to his (or the skeptic's) wounds, while his critic is left saying that it all looks perfectly ordinary (or ordinarily challenging, for example, in the way a philosophical puzzle is). Cavell doesn't articulate the fear that, because the skeptic and anti-skeptic manage to carry on an engaging conversation, he might be going mad. But we can imagine his isolation from his fellow philosophers, just as we can recognize how skepticism about other minds might be less traumatizing than the

anxiety that, in being baffled by the perception of unacknowledged suffering, we are losing it while other people press on. That is, just as we can recognize that skepticism's appeal.

In all three of Diamond's central examples, then, the experience of a difficult reality becomes – or is – an experience of failing to comprehend others and becoming incomprehensible to them. Where a feature of reality is inexplicable from one perspective and ordinary from another, where there's no education besides the exhibition of a wound that can bridge the difference between these, then the possibility of mutual incomprehension is little to wonder at. Then again, as Cavell shows us, it too can baffle and wound. The reality of relationships can become difficult in Diamond's sense.

7. Deflection and Acknowledgment

The effects of acknowledging a difficulty reality on life with others make deflection even more inviting. I see the temptation to deflection as a criterion for the projection of Diamond's concept. Difficult realities solicit deflection when they put pressure on our capacity to make sense of ourselves, each other, and the world. Their difficulty lies partly in this invitation to sense-making, which they resist from another perspective. The injuries they inflict positively encourage us to seek out the consolations of intelligibility, leave us craving the comprehensible, and yet deny these consolations and this craving. Nothing could be more natural a response to a wound to our sense-making than the attempt to make sense – first of all, of this wound and its source. The forms of possible deflection will be as various as the forms of sense-making that difficult realities can wound. Here, I look to the forms of deflection available in Diamond's examples and in response to them. Then I briefly consider

how we can go on with the criterion and what acknowledgment as deflection's opposite might involve.

7.1 Costello and the Deflections of Argument

Again, Costello is a natural starting point, because not only do Coetzee's lectures offer us characters whose way of relating to Costello is primarily deflective, but those lectures are quite literally bound together with responses to them which appear to ape these deflective maneuvers.

In Coetzee's lectures, modes of argument – especially ethical and philosophical ones – are often pivotally deflective. This is equally true in the responses to those lectures. I recognize that this idea of deflective argument might be particularly strange or uncomfortable for philosophers in the business of argumentative sense-making. I don't want to skirt these feelings too quickly. The thought that argument can be misplaced or unreasonable, that it can be rooted in an attempt to avoid a reality that threatens to wound our characteristic capacities, is far from an endorsement of irrationalism. In Costello's interactions, as in Coetzee's, I see the power of argumentative discourse to shape our thinking in ways that can sometimes be deflective, especially in the vicinity of difficult realities. This is to affirm argument's place in human life and speech by emphasizing the significance of cases where it performs a kind of neglect. In such cases, attention to difficult realities can demand wounded and wounding resistance to the form of a discourse.

On Diamond's view, and against the extractive impulses of the respondents to the Tanner Lectures, the "rawnervedness" that can be heard in Costello's voice isn't incidental to her argumentation (DR, 7). It's not as if her anxieties are merely a neurotic cloak for

arguments that either stand up to impartial philosophical scrutiny or don't. Nor is it that her arguments are incidental to her nerves. For Costello, argument is either a means to cope with the difficulty of our treatment of animals, in effect a form of self-cure, or it's an expression of our woundedness in the face of that treatment, and hence likely to offend interlocutors seeking intellectual debate.

In the course of Coetzee's lectures, Costello does reply to philosophical arguments. This might seem to legitimate responses to her, and to Coetzee, according to which her replies are lacking in rigor, far too personal, and almost never persuasive. She might look like an unskilled participant in philosophical debate, debilitated by her uninhibited emotions. In turn, Coetzee might appear to be intervening in matters far beyond the purview of a novelist: issues central to 'the intellectual and moral life of mankind' which demand the serious treatment that only a coolheaded philosopher can provide.

In response (and could we be surprised if it goes as unheard as Costello's wounded expressions?), Diamond stresses that Costello "does not take seriously the conventions of argumentation of a philosophy text" (ibid., 8). Her replies to arguments are often eccentric and imagistic. They are not meant to affect us as the philosopher intends, persuading or inciting a theory's defense. These replies can only be taken to play the role that the respondents to Coetzee's lectures imagine for them – as arguments themselves, to be assessed for their cogency – if we overlook Costello's view of the significance of argument in our lives. As Diamond says, Costello doesn't think argument possesses "the kind of weight we may take it to have in the life of the kind of animal we think of ourselves as being" (ibid.). Instead, she sees it as potentially covering over our sense of the difficulty of what we do to animals, and so, the character of our lives.

To clarify how argument can deflect and distract from difficult realities, Diamond calls our attention to a utilitarian discourse about infanticide. In this discourse, it's claimed that killing a baby doesn't wrong the baby. This act doesn't contravene the baby's desires, since it cannot yet grasp the decision at issue; it cannot offer (hence cannot be said to refuse) informed consent. Life cannot matter to the baby as it does for us, so killing the baby cannot carry the moral burden of murder. Infanticide may still be wrong, but it doesn't wrong the infant at issue. Diamond comments that her students reject this argument outright when exposed to it. They want to say that *of course* this wrongs the baby. After all, a baby's attachment to life is plain in its struggle to hold on to life. Diamond doesn't see her students wanting to straightforwardly argue with the utilitarian, within the frame of his discourse. She sees in her students' reactions their general

> rejection of the kind of argumentative discourse in which the utilitarian wants the issue cast, a form of discourse in which one's imaginative sense of what might be one's own bodily struggle for life, one's imaginative sense of an animal's struggle for life, cannot be given the role they want it to have. It is as if [the students] felt a kind of evisceration of the meaning of 'wanting to go on living'. (DR, 8, fn. 10)

Diamond's students reject a discourse in which their sense of an infant's attachment to life is to be surrendered before serious argumentative work gets underway. Can we hear Costello in the same register in which Diamond hears these students? I think so, and with our ears tuned to that register, Costello's replies to arguments start to look like attempts to return us

to our sense of an encounter with a difficult reality.[6] They interrupt a discourse that threatens to divert us from what we mean to be acknowledging. They turn us back to what we take to be our focus, which has slipped out of view as we transitioned from a wounded encounter to an argument. Diamond reads Costello's interactions with her fellows as Coetzee's endeavor to display how argumentative discourse can sometimes make "unavailable to us" "our own sense of what it is to be a living animal" alongside other animals whom we systematically mistreat (Coetzee 1999, 65-66; DR, 8). As if this sense is to be left aside when we try to seriously clarify, in a philosophical register, how we should live with these animals.

In Coetzee's tale, a philosophy professor, Thomas O'Hearne, presents an argument that resembles the utilitarian's. O'Hearne is considering whether animals are wronged in being killed, so he is thinking about what animals can know of their mortality. He concedes that there's "certainly in animals an instinctive struggle against death, which they share with us" (Coetzee 1999, 63). But he adds that "they do not *understand* death as we do, or rather, as we fail to do" (ibid.). Diamond must have felt that she had heard these words before! O'Hearne recognizes the sort of struggle that her students don't want to bypass. But he claims that animals cannot be afraid of death as we are, because they don't struggle to understand and cope with it as we do. Therefore, death cannot be bad for them as it is for us.

Costello has several responses to this line of argument, but I want to focus on what springs to her mind first: "Anyone who says that life matters less to animals than it does to us has not held in his hands an animal fighting for its life" (ibid.). This response might look utterly point-missing. O'Hearne hasn't actually said that life matters less to animals. He has said that they don't relate to death as we do (clearly they don't), hence that death isn't a

[6] And perhaps to help us cultivate a sense of "sympathetic imagination" (see Coetzee 1999, 34-35).

struggle for them as it is for us. Costello's immediate response appears to miss that claim entirely; and the claim she seems to take issue with needn't follow from what O'Hearne says. This is precisely the sort of unhinged rejoinder that the respondents to Coetzee's lectures worry about. It looks like a sign of narrative form as an alibi for mediocre, even irresponsible argument.

However, it's possible to see Costello as enraged, perhaps rendered irrational or less than fully intelligible, by what she takes to be an impoverished discourse, in which her sense of animals fighting for their lives isn't welcome or even comprehensible. Acknowledging that feeling of impoverishment, I think it's instructive to take Costello's response, like the response of Diamond's students, to be a denial of a certain mode of sense-making and an expression of the direction of her attention to what has wounded that sense-making. Within the frame of O'Hearne's discourse, Costello's response seems to miss the point. But she means to query the limits and sense of that discourse, its place in the conversation. To that end, it may be crucial that she misses the point, sacrificing the discourse's rationality to express its neglectfulness before the difficulty.

Costello points out how O'Hearne's line of thought could only occur to someone at a remove from the animals to which they take themselves to be attending. She rejects his pretense to derive conclusions about an animal's attachment to life from remote considerations of animal cognition. But in rejecting his argument, she is rejecting the discourse in which he wants the issue cast (or sees it to be cast). She spurns the view implicit in that discourse, and in how others relate to her, that our sense of animals fighting for life and our capacity to imagine our way into this are to be laid aside before serious discussion begins. Costello's complaint isn't about whether O'Hearne's conclusion follows from his

premises. She fails to address that question if indeed she meant to. Rather, she is concerned about whether it's sensible to argue in this way before the difficulty of what we do to animals. She is worried that thinking like O'Hearne, never mind what we make of his specific arguments, might already mean going wrong.[7] Like Diamond's students, Costello doesn't want us to fail to acknowledge the difficulty we think we are considering in transitioning to a discourse shaped to neglect it. She wants to steer clear of a form of sense-making that would rob from us our sense of the struggle for life it's ostensibly about.

O'Hearne appears to recognize that struggle: 'an instinctive struggle against death'. But Costello's concern is that the very form of his discourse and his telling use of the word 'instinctive' (to be contrasted with 'reasonable') discounts that struggle in feigning its acknowledgment. His attempt to engage Costello in principled argument is a natural response to the wounds to sense-making that can result when we encounter those whose sense-making has been wounded by a difficult reality. That Costello's response to that attempt appears wounding – and in this case, entirely point-missing – just shows how the mutual incomprehension that follows from coextensive inexplicability and banality plays itself out, as deflection is both solicited and resisted.

We can see this same dynamic transpiring in the responses to Coetzee's exhibition of Costello's woundedness. There, his portrait of an injuriously inexplicable reality yields both the opacity of his protagonist to her fellows and the opacity of her author to his own fellows, who, faced with these dual opacities, seek the safety of argument, and moreover regard Coetzee as engaged in a perniciously novelistic endeavor in order to distance himself from the mediocre (perhaps outrageous) arguments seen to be embedded in Costello's

[7] On thought's vulnerability to going wrong, see Diamond 2019, especially 226, 236, 266.

pronouncements. For both Costello and Coetzee, then, deflection most straightforwardly takes the form of a movement to an argumentative discourse where expressions of woundedness are excluded, go unacknowledged, or are misunderstood as defective arguments themselves (and hence as originating in that deflective discourse). This is especially clear in the readings of Costello's Holocaust remarks – which voice the ways in which she is rendered senseless by the senseless evil of factory farming – as scandalous and deplorable arguments from analogy. Yet of course, those readings are to be expected, for how could we hear Costello otherwise if we see the ordinary, including the ordinary difficulty of arguments in animal ethics, where she is baffled and alienated?

Coetzee's lectures contain and invite other modes of deflection, as they confront other modes of sense-making. These include modes of deflection that characterize not only individual responses to Costello and Coetzee, but responses engendered by disciplinary modes of sense-making (like those of morality and philosophy) as they are wounded by the realities that confound Costello. For now, though, it's enough to see how Diamond's notion of deflection could provide a center of variation by seeing how one of its primary instances in Coetzee's lectures and their interpretation occurs in the move to argument.

7.2 Cavell and the Flight of the Skeptic

Deflection from the appalling perception of unrecognized suffering can similarly take place, on Cavell's view, in the transposition of that perception to an argumentative discourse, namely that of skepticism (and anti-skepticism) about other minds.

The recognition that other people can experience pain without our knowing or responding appropriately – that "knowledge of others depends on what they express, in word

or behavior” – occurs in daily life (Cavell 2015b, 235). We notice that others may be in pain and not express themselves or may give false expression to what they experience. After all, we can be in pain without expressing ourselves, and we can go to great lengths to conceal the suffering we undergo. This fact can appear altogether banal. We learn it as children, as we discover that the need to notify others about our pain, the possibility of masking this pain, is shared: as we begin to see that we are, as Cavell suggests, fellows in corporeal separateness.

Yet this fact can shoulder us out from the sense we ordinarily make of ourselves and others. We can find ourselves appalled and disturbed by this. And then we can fail to comprehend those who see utter banality, as they fail to comprehend us. The staggering possibility of mutual incomprehension and the horror of isolation can, in effect, bring themselves to life. That propels the invitation to deflection accepted by the skeptic. Better to worry about the abstract reality of other minds than to sustain the injuries to sense-making that result from all this mutual incomprehension and isolation. Better to try to keep making sense of ourselves and our living, breathing fellows as we wrestle together with skeptical problems in the seminar room.

Cavell sees the skeptic moving from the recognition that, in some cases, they won’t know what’s going on in others who know what’s going on in themselves, to the anxiety that they can *never* know what’s going on in someone else. In that anxiety is a reality in need of acknowledgment, and as the anti-skeptic dismisses that reality, regarding the skeptic as little more than muddled, they deepen the deflection. They cement the transposition of the skeptic’s original appalling perception into the discourse of philosophical argument by engaging in that discourse as if it’s the soil that initially nurtured skepticism’s roots. Cavell

tells us that, had the skeptic remained with his awareness that another person may not name or acknowledge their experiences, "he would never become a skeptic" (ibid., 237). He would simply be aware of the fact, ordinary or baffling, "that sometimes we just do not know the experiences of others", and that we are vulnerable to deception and misunderstanding (ibid.). This wouldn't force him to the conclusion that the experiences of others are fundamentally obscure because he doesn't have them himself. That said, the movement to anxiety about that conclusion, to be entertained intellectually (how else?), and away from the awareness that I may not know what (say) my friends and family members are suffering, and so may not respond to their suffering, is a perfectly understandable response to the threats to sense-making that belong to the skeptic's initial insight.

So, we can see the skeptic's impossible demands for certainty as deflecting from the perception that, as Cavell puts it, "certainty is not enough" (ibid., 238, emphasis removed). For what's really at stake is our sympathetic responsiveness to our fellows, our potential failure to react to their pain in ways that acknowledge it. The terrible fact is that this failure usually results not from the (shared) impossibility of ever knowing what another feels, but from human flaws and faults that may be ours, as mundane as emotional coldness, indifference, and selfishness.

We can see deflection from this fact not only in the development of skepticism and anti-skepticism, but in the responses to Cavell's depiction of this development that partly occasioned Diamond's introduction of the difficulty of reality. Would it be any surprise if Cavell's picture of the disorientation of the skeptic in response to the disorienting reality they encounter were to disorient a reader intent on deflecting from that reality? Even congenial readers describe Cavell's portrait of skepticism in *The Claim of Reason* (1979) as

"baffling" and "difficult" (for example, see Bates 1980). And no doubt some are put off by his apparently sympathetic reading of skepticism: his unwillingness to buy into deflection by dismissing it as mere befuddlement. Some readers see his movement from technical or epistemological concerns (for instance about other minds) to "a wider moral space" as proceeding "by means of poetic indirection rather than by the route of strict argument" (Hollander 1980, 581). So, one might add, as advancing a deficient mode of philosophical inquiry, one that belongs more properly to poets. And others simply express an unmet wish for more constructive conclusions, more clearly and decisively defended (Mankin 1985).[8] Cavell himself says that, in the responses to his earliest formulations of the skeptic's insight (among other writing), he "had the unmistakable sense of having said hello a number of times without anyone saying hello back" (2010, 521). Putting that in the language of his own initial greeting, we might say he felt unacknowledged, or even less than fully intelligible to his peers.

It's little wonder that readings of Cavell reiterate the demand O'Hearne seems to make of Costello not to miss the point, to move from premises to conclusions in a way that can be defended dispassionately, that they echo the responses to Coetzee's lectures which fault them for their deficiencies as members of a genre (the philosophical treatise) to which they don't belong, when we see how Cavell's sympathetic portrait of skepticism, his desire to attend to the skeptic's original insight, exhibits wounds to sense-making from which we have every reason to deflect. As in Costello's case, deflection here trades on argument for the disarming transformation of a difficult reality into a problem or puzzle: that is, the substitution of one kind of difficulty for another. Once that substitution has taken place, the

[8] Cavell largely seems to ignore this charge, or perhaps to regard the disruption of Mankin's expectations as belonging to the enterprise in which he is engaged, in his (1985) reply to Mankin.

original kind of difficulty can either be regarded as too ordinary to be interesting (we all know that others can suffer without our acknowledgment) or can be seen to harm its sufferers in such a way that it debars them from reasoned conversation (since we cannot understand why they don't see the ordinary or the argumentatively difficult).

We could see the skeptic's flight from his original perception of a difficult reality as a way for him to try to make himself intelligible. Acknowledgment of that perception would presumably amount to testimony to it and its legitimacy which refuses to sanction and abet its deflective transmutation. Might the register of that refusing testimony lead one to hear poetry in place of philosophy?

7.3 Hughes and Three Modes of Deflection

The example of Hughes's poem offers a projection of the Cavellian notion of deflection into a somewhat different context. Certainly, there are matters that lend themselves to argument in the vicinity of the wounding photograph. But argument doesn't seem to be the natural response to the mutual incomprehension onto which Hughes's difficulty opens. When we are confronted with Hughes's confrontation with the photograph and his bafflement, I can imagine three ways in which we might strive to maintain a vision of the ordinary.

First, we might simply say that Hughes has forgotten how our concepts work. And we might count the fact that others continue to use these concepts without stumbling as evidence of Hughes's idiosyncratic bewilderment. We might imagine that, for at least a moment, Hughes has lost sight of the fact that very lively people die. We might imagine that he has forgotten how photographs work, or that, perhaps due to childhood experiences, he has repressed or overlooked war's prevalence in our history and form of life. In sum, we

might imagine that the poet stands in need of education. Then we might come under the impression that his woundedness won't last for long, since surely, short of some kind of mental disturbance, he will quickly recover his use of concepts – which others use without any problem – as his bafflement fades. He will be able to return to a vision of the peaceful countryside, a favorite camping spot, a family keepsake.

When we discover that this education won't work, because the poet (like Costello) is in possession of all the facts, our frustration is liable to entrench our deflection. That way, we can avoid the potentially injurious perception of mutual incomprehension, perhaps by trying to avoid the recognition that Hughes does indeed have all the facts.

An alternative mode of deflection consists in taking Hughes to be confronting a moral problem: for example, the horrors of war and its needless casualties. We could see his feeling of alienation as the natural byproduct of this confrontation, and we could dismiss its excesses while attending to its focus. We could, for instance, interpret Hughes as portraying the consequences of unjust war to distinguish it from just war, instead of seeing him as baffled by war's insanity. That approach to Hughes's woundedness would mirror the approach of Coetzee's respondents to Costello's woundedness (and to his own apparent withdrawal from her excesses in argument). Were we to solve the moral problem, eliminating war from our form of life, we might be surprised to discover the persistence of Hughes's bafflement at what the history of violence says about the lives and nature of human animals. But since that solution looks a long way off, to say the least, our deflection might have legs. We could easily imagine ourselves to be addressing the source and cause of the poet's wounds. And that fantasy of attention whereby a difficult reality becomes an ethical problem would be both solicited and shown up by those wounds and the peril they pose to our sense-making.

A third mode of deflection is made available by a difficult reality's coextensive inexplicability and ordinariness. Where we see the ordinary and another person is unable to make sense as we are, we could regard that person as suffering from a psychopathology. We could see Hughes's traumatized perception as the consequence of his neuroses, especially if we learn he cannot or will not be educated, and we could thereby quarantine that perception. If Hughes's psychology is what makes his experience difficult, and we don't share that psychology, then we needn't worry about coming to share the wounds reality seems to inflict on him. We could say that Hughes's failure to make sense of the deaths of the six young men is a failure to mourn: after all, mourning is how we return to sense-making on the other side of grief. With this diagnosis in mind, we might then propose various therapies or treatments.

Again, this is a way to see the ordinary – the ordinarily difficult – where Hughes is baffled. It's no surprise that his expression of alienation from the forms of sense-making we share is likely to engender in us the desire to make sense of him in ways that sequester his disorientation. One of these ways to make sense is psychological diagnosis.

There are, then, several ways to miss the force of Hughes's testimony. And like the child at the dinner table, what could he offer in response besides reiterating his unappealing invitation to acknowledge the 'dementing' effects of the photograph's 'contradictory permanent horrors', whose acceptance would seem to involve our own shouldering-out from the sense-making whereby we render ourselves intelligible?

7.4 Deflection's Projection

Like Diamond's concept of a difficult reality, the concept of that reality's denial (call this deflection) will have the unity that belongs to a center of variation. Already we have seen

how Diamond's examples transfigure the notion of deflection as it's used to describe responses to Coetzee and Costello, Cavell and the perceiver of unacknowledged pain, and Hughes.

One feature of constancy across this variation is deflection's use, we might say exploitation, of argument, for example about philosophical or moral puzzles and problems. Another is deflection's positive solicitation by difficult realities and the mutual incomprehension they reveal: its naturalness, given how difficult realities threaten our characteristic capacity to comprehend. A third is the use that deflection makes of disciplinary modes of sense-making, for instance those belonging to philosophy or psychoanalysis, to double down on a vision of the ordinary (including the philosophically perplexing or psychopathological).

As the concept of a difficult reality is projected forward, we should expect the notion of deflection to shift as other modes of response and disciplines of sense-making come into view. Deflection's opposite – the exhibition of wounds by which Diamond's protagonists testify to the difficulties they see – will be no stranger to the variance which is the other face of this constancy. Whether the use of these concepts to describe further cases is intelligible will always be, as Cavell says in another context, "the subject of a quest and the object of an inquest" (1985, 96). That quest will need to be informed, first of all, by the use of these concepts across Diamond's central cases.

8. Exposure

Deflection from difficult realities is made compelling not only by the mutual incomprehension they open onto, but by the exposure we experience in confronting these realities and their sufferers.

Diamond adopts the notion of exposure from Cavell's discussion of skepticism about other minds. Cavell sees skepticism as a way to avoid exposure to other people and their possible pain, where we may acknowledge or neglect that pain. But we aren't just exposed to other people. We are also exposed to what Cavell calls "the concept of the other" (1979, 432). Our knowledge of other minds appears to rely on our assurance in projecting relevant concepts (like suffering) to another's case. However, other people may not provide the conditions – say, the manifestations or expressions of suffering – whereby we can settle our attitude to them and approach assurance. This can make skepticism more tempting, since it reveals that our uncertainties about other people, the limits to reaching assurance about the concept of the other, may be ours.[9] The failure to acknowledge another's experiences may come down to our neglect or callousness, as much as to any feature or lack of the other, and so the apparent discovery that we can never reach the assurance necessary for acknowledgment is made more attractive.

In Cavellian exposure, the assurance we seek in applying the concept of the other isn't provided for us. We find that our knowledge of others can be supplanted, for instance in conversation. We find that we aren't in what we took to be the ideal position: we aren't able to attribute experiences to others as if from beyond the claims and vulnerabilities of that conversation. In short, we see that there's no Archimedean point or neutral stance from which

[9] Cavell writes of coming to see "that what philosophy regards as ignorance of the other" is more often the tragic "avoidance or rejection of the other" (2022, 166).

to finally settle our attitudes to other people. We are personally implicated, can fall short, cannot step beyond the scene where acknowledgment and denial are open possibilities.

In Cavell's discussion, then, we can see two levels or fronts of exposure. Our exposure to other people exposes us to the concept of the other. In other words, our exposure to other people colors our application of concepts to them; the assurance we seek in applying those concepts is made as uneasy and fallible by that exposure as we are made by our exposure to other people.

I think we can see two analogous fronts in Diamond's projection of the concept of exposure in her introduction of difficult realities. First, we are exposed in encountering a difficult reality or its wounded experiencer. This encounter implicates us. It invites deflection just as it calls for acknowledgment. Second, we are exposed in our use of the concept of a difficult reality to describe a specific case. Our exposure to difficult realities and their sufferers colors our judgment of whether the projection of Diamond's concept is apt, because regarding the projection as inapt can always be a way to deny the difficulty, thus to maintain a vision of the ordinary. There's no safe Archimedean point from which to determine whether a feature of reality counts as difficult in Diamond's sense: that judgment doesn't occur outside the space in which deflection and woundedness are live possibilities, where we may judge others as having gone mad and risk this charge ourselves. To say it another way, the uncertainties of projection – the demand to determine whether variable applications of the concept are intelligible over time and in conversation – aren't separable from the exposure to wounds to sense-making we encounter in encountering difficult realities and their wounded and wounding experiencers. Couldn't the threat a difficult reality poses to our sense-making give us ample reason to deny the concept's projection?

The point is that, in encountering a difficult reality as well as in making use of Diamond's concept, there's always a personal risk. Áine Mahon puts it this way:

> Cavellian exposure is interpreted by Diamond to imply a less-than-ideal subject perspective. My decisions or attitudes toward other people are impossible to root in grounds certain or fixed or in any way definitive. When it comes to other people I cannot be sure. I am called upon to take a risk. I am 'exposed,' one could say, I am vulnerable to mistake or to rebuke or even to tragedy. (2015, 231)

The skeptic about other minds demands more certainty than this, while Cavell seeks to acknowledge the exposing perception that solicits this deflective demand. We can see the demand for more certainty than this in Diamond's case as similarly rooted in the exposure of confronting a reality (and another human being) that threatens our comprehension, hence as constitutionally deflective. Diamond relates exposure to our embodiment, and so to the separateness and possibility of mutual incomprehension that belongs to embodied creatures. She says that when we are exposed, we become aware of our "sheer animal vulnerability": our vulnerability to the wounds of others, our vulnerability to denying the experiences of others lest we come to share their wounds (DR, 22). Indeed, Diamond says that the very acknowledgment of this shared vulnerability, which can paradoxically isolate us from each other, can be wounding, and that can make the case for deflection seemingly unimpeachable. Wouldn't it be painful to discover that exposure as much as sense-making characterizes the lives of human animals?

We can see how exposure – put otherwise, persistent room for deflection and acknowledgment – figures in Diamond's examples. Cavell's skeptic is fundamentally in retreat from exposure. They attempt to employ the resources of philosophical sense-making, they demand a neutral standpoint and its attendant certainties, to escape the rather more quotidian doubts and demands of conversation with another, who might wound, deceive, confound, or reveal (we might say expose) their own shortcomings. Hughes is exposed to the difficult realities of death and war by the photograph, and his poem, expressing the wounds of that exposure, can then threaten to expose us. That exposed condition invites our deflection as much as it threatens to expose that deflection as no more than an alternative route to denial, a way to preserve a vision of the ordinary. And echoing Hughes's first-personal exhibition of wounds, Costello's exposure comes out in the rawness and vulnerability of her testimony, to which her and Coetzee's fellows respond so negatively. We might thus see O'Hearne, as well as the respondents to Coetzee's lectures, as deflecting from possible exposure to Costello's injurious realities.

It's striking that two of Diamond's three main examples feature first-personal testimony to reality's wounds to sense-making. And her third example features, if not first-personal testimony, the attempt to acknowledge that testimony's diversion into skeptical demands. Mahon argues that exposure is a particular risk in autobiographical writing, where there's always the danger that the writer reveals too much, leaves herself recklessly available for personal criticism or controversy, in effect over-exposes herself (2015, 231). For the autobiographer, there's always "the possibility that these experiences will not chime or harmonize with the experiences of another" (ibid.). She could always turn out to be

describing utter idiosyncrasies, which bore or baffle readers; and likewise, it could always turn out that readers miss what's genuinely significant in her writing.

We have seen how Cavell saw himself as often unacknowledged by, because baffling to, his peers. In Mahon's words, he worried that he was experienced as "in some way incomprehensible, even inexpressive […] as professionally maverick, if not downright scandalous" (ibid., 232). We might say he was worried that he had been exposed, understood rightly as bafflingly out of tune with his discipline, just as his writing exposed his peers as failing to acknowledge what he had perceived (even of what they had perceived), and therefore as failing to acknowledge him. And this would seem to run parallel to the dynamic we see in Costello's case, where she worries that she is going mad just as she worries that her society has gone off the rails: perceptions she cannot choose between, because both belong to the exposure that attends the experience of a difficult reality (on this, see Mulhall 2009, 57).

That exposure means we cannot transcend the human situation where deflection and acknowledgment are possible. If deflection then involves a retreat from personal exposure, we could expect acknowledgment to make that exposure explicit, to refuse to paper over it, to be basically testimonial: a laying bare of our vulnerability to wounding realities and to each other. But as we have seen, there are potentially as many ways to flee from exposure to difficult realities as there are modes and disciplines of sense-making. If acknowledgment is partly deflection's denial, then we might expect it to look as various. Before we consider acknowledgment of difficult realities in more detail, then, it will be helpful to consider deflection's constancy in variation across Diamond's examples, as different modes of sense-making come into view. With our four-point grammar on hand, we can now ask how

disciplines of sense-making are threatened by exposure to difficult realities and their sufferers.

Chapter 2

Wounds to Sense-making

1. Introduction

Difficult realities resist and disrupt various forms of sense-making. This occurs at different scales. Most simply, Diamond's examples illustrate disruptions to individual sense-making. Hughes finds himself shouldered out from his concepts. Costello is injured by what we do to animals and becomes injurious, we could say incomprehensible, in turn. And Cavell describes how the wounds to sense-making conferred by the skeptic's traumatizing perception of possible suffering prompt their movement into skepticism. In these cases, we confront individuals who suffer from difficult realities: they cannot make sense of those realities and so stop making sense to those who are not similarly bewildered. But in these examples, resistance to sense-making also operates at the more general level of modes or disciplines of sense-making.

1.1 Costello and Wounds to Sense-making

In Coetzee's lectures, argument is one mode of sense-making that the reality of animal treatment appears to destabilize. It's not only that O'Hearne, for example, fails on an individual basis to understand Costello and her failure to understand her fellows. It isn't only that the respondents to the Tanner Lectures fail, each in their own way, to make sense of those lectures as they exhibit Costello's wounds. A mode of sense-making we commonly employ to discourse about what we do to animals is disrupted by the reality it takes itself to concern and is thus revealed as ultimately deflecting from that reality's difficulty.

In addition, Coetzee's lectures bring out how morality as a form of sense-making can be wounded by difficult realities. O'Hearne tries to engage Costello in the sort of argument by which we regularly make sense of the moral issues in our lives. Her point-missing response to that attempted engagement can be seen as expressing her alienation from that mode of sense-making, as if it no longer makes any sense. No doubt, this means that, from O'Hearne's vantage point, it's Costello who no longer makes any sense: she seems to have been rendered unhinged by her traumatizing perception of what looks, if difficult, merely morally difficult, which is to say, resolvable. Her response appears to be out of all proportion to reality. Her awareness that it might look this way – that she might be "making a mountain out of a molehill" (Coetzee 1999, 69) – figures as confirmation of the depraved normality of her fellows. That they could see her as disproportionately wounded simply shows how accustomed they are to crimes of truly "stupefying proportions" (ibid.).

This leads her to see her friends and family members who eat meat as akin to the "Germans and Poles and Ukrainians who did and did not know of the atrocities around them" during the Holocaust (ibid., 35). Like those whose neglectful everydayness was complicit in the horrors of that genocide, Costello's friends and neighbors are, to her eye, morally insane precisely in their sanity. The fact that they manage to go on undisrupted is proof of their depravity. Their desire to engage in reasoned debate about moral matters, their unflagging use of moral modes of sense-making and argument, reveals their monstrosity, whereas her failure to similarly make sense shows her acknowledgment of the horrors of animal industry. For, as Cavell writes, "morality is not designed to evaluate the behavior and interactions of monsters" (1979, 265).

Like the respondents to Coetzee's lectures, we might want to say that Costello's Holocaust analogies present challenges for the use of analogy at all in moral argument (see Garber in Coetzee 1999, 82). We might just want to call them outrageous and insensitive. Indeed, we might think they cast light on Costello's moral and epistemic vices. In the narrative of the lectures, she is taken to task in this way by a poet, Abraham Stern, who refuses to attend dinner with her on the grounds that she has appropriated the horrors of the Holocaust for her own argumentative purposes in ways that belittle – we could say, fail to acknowledge – those horrors. Stern tells Costello:

> 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 willfully, to the point of blasphemy. […] The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way. (Ibid., 49-50)

For Stern, as for Coetzee's respondents, Costello's arguments are poor, perhaps suspiciously so. She misunderstands how analogies work. She commits as simple a fallacy as claiming that apparent similarities between factory farms and death camps obliterate any differences in moral status between non-human animals and human beings. Worse, that fallacious reasoning might seem to endorse the dehumanizing language employed by Nazi propagandists; it might prop up death camps by equating them to something as ordinary as factory farms.

Stern thus regards Costello as a participant in moral argument, even if she is unskilled or unprincipled. He takes the superficial form of her expressions (as arguments) at face value, without any attention to what they express of the experience of their speaker. If Costello's analogies instead exhibit her wounds, and are therefore unsurprisingly wounding, we might then see her, not as a participant in moral sense-making via argument, but as someone for whom that mode of sense-making has itself been injured or made unavailable, shown up as deflective before the scarring reality of what we do to animals. Then we could see her wounded expressions as voicing her refusal to endorse the conversion of the difficulty of that reality to the difficulty of a moral problem.

1.2 Hughes and Wounds to Moral Sense-making

We can see a similar disruption to moral modes of sense-making in the examples of Hughes. Suppose that, in his invocation of one of the young men for whom this jolly photograph became "the hospital of his mangled last / Agony and hours", we hear the moral quandaries to which war gives rise (1957, 54). Wouldn't we be within our rights to hear the poet's disorientation as proper to his perception of the "mass slaughter of the trenches of the First World War", which convinced some that just war was no longer possible (Coates 1997, 81)? If we could see Hughes as expressing the moral problems of unjust war and their effect on him personally, for example tarnishing a favorite camping site, then we might be able to prize melodrama apart from substance and deal with his difficulty in the cooler language of ethical argument.

But then in Hughes's warning that acknowledging the photograph "might well dement", we might see that moral sense-making crucially participates in his disorientation

(1957, 55). We might see that the poet's inability to transform the 'permanent contradictory horrors' exposed by the photograph into the difficulties of moral sense-making is what so badly wounds him. If he could see warfare's injustice in the photograph, he might be perplexed by its prevalence in our form of life; he might discover motivations for advocacy. These would be perfectly comprehensible discoveries, and they would leave Hughes fully intelligible. We might disagree with his conclusions; if he became a pacifist as a result, we might defend just war theory. But this vision is far from finding oneself 'demented' by war's monstrosities. The order of the difficulty of a debate between just war theorists and pacifists is altogether different from the difficulty which belongs to wounds to sense-making that threaten to render us incomprehensible to each other.

Hughes's poetic testimony suggests that the moral mode of sense-making itself has become unavailable to him, as if he is shouldered out from it. The concepts of just and unjust violence fail to capture the reality to which he is exposed as much as the concepts of life and death fail to capture the reality of the six young men. That reality becomes, as it were, morally unthinkable. Then moral sense-making can provide a route to deflection, as we attempt to see in Hughes's trauma the outlines of a moral problematic, and hence the more ordinarily difficult.

1.3 Disruptions to Other Sense-making Disciplines

We have seen how Diamond's examples of difficult realities disrupt not only individual sense-making but at least two more general modes or disciplines of sense-making: argument and morality. But there are further modes of sense-making that difficult realities can solicit

and wound, and as the concept is projected into different contexts, we should expect these to come into view.

One mode whose invitation we might anticipate is psychoanalytic sense-making. After all, those who experience difficult realities can worry that they are going mad, and their fellows, seeing the ordinary where they are baffled, can wonder whether their wounds are just psychic: the consequences more of temperament or neurochemistry than any injurious reality. The following sections turn to Jonathan Lear's projection of Diamond's concept to explore how psychoanalytic sense-making is both solicited and disrupted by difficult realities and their experiencers.

Then I turn to philosophical modes of sense-making, particularly as they concern our invocation of Diamond's concept, and so our attention to the difficulties this concept could disclose. If psychoanalysis can be both made attractive and disoriented by difficult realities, we might suspect that philosophy as a fellow discipline of sense-making won't be immune. Indeed, we might remember Diamond's suggestion in the title of her essay that difficult realities make philosophy difficult.

I conclude this chapter by discussing the possibility of an even more widescale disruption to sense-making, where a difficult reality wounds the conceptual resources that belong to a form of life, writ large. Seeing the various scales at which disruption to sense-making and deflection from this disruption can happen, we will be better able to see what sustained attention to this disruption could amount to; that is, to put flesh on the notion of acknowledgment.

2. Lear's Projection

Jonathan Lear's (2018) way of going on with Diamond's concept foregrounds the worry that experiences of difficult realities can look idiosyncratic. We might be tempted to hear Diamond's talk of difficulty in the register of psychopathology, suspecting that Costello fails to make sense of her world because of her peculiar neuroses.

It's notable that Lear's projection illuminates this worry about psychological idiosyncrasy. Given that he trained as a psychoanalyst at the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis and has served on their faculty, given his teaching for the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute, and given his publications on Freud, loss, mourning, transference, and the role of irony in effecting psychic change, we might think that Lear is the obvious candidate to bring out the psychological aspects of difficult realities and their sufferers (see Gibson 2007 on Lear's interest in psychoanalysis). That gives added weight to his clarification of how these realities disrupt, rather than crown, psychoanalytic sense-making.

We have already seen glimpses of anxiety about potential idiosyncrasy in Diamond's examples. Hughes could strike us as overemotional, and Costello explicitly turns this anxiety on herself. Then, when we use these examples to sketch criteria for Diamond's concept, tracing lines of projection between its uses, this anxiety about idiosyncrasy reaches a fever pitch. It extends from uncertainty about another's experience to uncertainty about the concept itself, much as exposure to another person can extend to exposure to the concept of the other.

That extension is one of my targets here. Lear's consideration of the difficulty of death and the process of mourning can show us that worries about idiosyncrasy needn't imperil the application of Diamond's concept. Far from it, for these anxieties positively

belong to experiences of difficult realities and their experiencers. They manifest the wounds to sense-making, including to psychoanalytic interpretation, that we should expect.

2.1 Aristotelian Difficulties

Lear begins his discussion of difficult realities by outlining a broadly Aristotelian conception of human life and its goods (2018, 1197).[10] This might seem like a strange starting point, explained more by Lear's preoccupations than by Aristotle's dialectical utility. But Lear's Aristotelian picture sheds light on the centrality of sense-making in human life and thereby clarifies the force and magnitude of sense-making's disruption in experiences of difficult realities.

For Lear's Aristotle, human beings can achieve happiness. Not everyone is positioned to live well. There are tragic contingencies in human lives. But enough of us can work toward happiness that it's reasonable to organize our moral and political lives around its cultivation, taking it as a functional regulative ideal (ibid., 1197-1198). Our action, deliberation, and inquiry all aim at happiness as the practical good. And understanding its nature is key to its achievement. For Lear, Aristotelian happiness is the condition of humans who excel at their distinctive activity: sense-making. Happiness is living and acting well which, as rational activity, understands that and how it's living and acting well (ibid., 1197). In a phrase, happy lives are partly constituted by self-awareness of the happy lives they are.

Plainly, human lives contain obstacles and difficulties. But these needn't thwart Aristotelian happiness. Instead, they shape the terrain in which one can live happily. Happy

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[10] I make no claims here about the accuracy of Lear's interpretation of Aristotle. Instead, I seek to clarify the broadly Aristotelian perspective Lear lays out, so that I can distinguish Diamond's conception of difficulty from other kinds of difficulties. My interest here is in *Lear's* Aristotle.

people recognize their fragility and finitude. They skillfully and readily address the challenges they confront. This isn't just preparation for happiness: it can *be* a happy life. More strongly, we might not regard a life without difficulties to confront and overcome as even potentially happy (ibid.). We might see it as lacking the rich texture, the need for grit and perseverance and the labor of achieving self-understanding, that marks out a paradigmatically happy life.

Lear's Aristotle doesn't deny that catastrophes can rule out happiness for even the most virtuous people. He is no utopian dreamer. He knows that life is full of difficulties, some of which can make happiness a fantasy. Sometimes, one cannot achieve happiness, no matter what one does. Circumstances can eliminate aspirations to happiness or make them senseless, like mere parodies of genuine aspiration. In these cases, virtuous people manage difficulties as best they can and maintain a sort of dignity even when happiness isn't achievable (ibid., 1198). One way to try to manage catastrophes is to transform them into tragedies, rendering them intelligible as art and enabling catharsis through the exercise of fear and pity.

We can imagine a spectrum of Aristotelian difficulty ranging from obstacles that structure happy lives to catastrophes that leave happiness out of reach. On one end, there's the limp that an Olympic athlete must overcome to be victorious. On the other end, there's the lightning strike that makes happiness a pipe dream. Between these lies the gamut of human suffering.

Lear wants us to read Diamond as calling our attention to an altogether *different* dimension of difficulty, with no place on this spectrum. That isn't because the spectrum needs extending past lightning strikes that make happiness unattainable. Lear says it's "not

truncated” (ibid., 1198). Rather, Diamond is concerned with experiences of failures to make sense, where the mind confronts what it cannot accommodate. As disruptions of sense-making, these experiences disorient the structure of happiness and unhappiness undergirding the Aristotelian spectrum (and presumably undergirding the moral and political sense-making centered on the achievement of Aristotelian happiness). At the same time, Diamond isn’t singling out a form of alienated madness, which might well belong on the spectrum of Aristotelian difficulty. As Lear emphasizes, Diamond resists the temptation to focus on the psychological condition of those who experience difficulties, at the expense of the reality they experience, to which their suffering testifies (ibid.). She spotlights a kind of difficulty that destabilizes the ways in which we make sense of the more ordinary difficulties in our lives, for example by means of the Aristotelian spectrum.

2.2 Hughes’s Non-Aristotelian Difficulty

Consider Hughes’s encounter with the six young men. The poet’s sense-making is wounded by the gap between the world the photograph depicts and the war that engulfed those depicted. His suffering cannot be located on the Aristotelian spectrum. That isn’t because the spectrum lacks breadth, but because the poet’s experience queries its whole structure. For him, as Lear says, “the structure of happiness and unhappiness, of living in the world, is upended” (ibid., 1199).

The poet sees the photographed men jockeying for a spot in the frame. Their liveliness seems indisputable. Yet he knows what these men couldn’t have known: they died in war only months after their liveliness was captured for posterity. Lear imagines Hughes looking at the photograph, attempting to comprehend mortality and tragic circumstance and

relate to the past. Perhaps he was mourning. Maybe he was cognizant of his father's experience in war. Certainly, "he was in the midst of orienting himself – in time, in space, and in his emotional life" (ibid.). That orientation is part of what looking at old photographs affords.

Instead of achieving a happy accord with the photograph and the facts it records, instead of taking it as a depressing but intelligible token of war's immorality, Hughes finds himself utterly disoriented. Reality baffles him. The concepts he employs in similar situations – concepts of then and now, alive and dead, just and unjust – fail to encompass reality as they usually seem to. He is left with a dawning difficulty alongside the concepts and habits of mind it wounds. He experiences a conceptual breakdown that disables his capacity to make sense of practically significant realities, like death, violence, loss, and transience.

In response, we could regard Hughes as psychologically anguished, which he doubtless is. However, this can lead us to fail to acknowledge that his experience is *of* a reality that wounds his sense-making. Faced with exposure to the difficulty, we can try to persuade ourselves that his is an idiosyncratically tortured experience of an otherwise untroubling world. But Diamond calls the reality difficult, in a way that transcends the Aristotelian spectrum, where idiosyncratically difficult psychologies could find a home. Lear reads her as "trying to awaken us to an experience of inadequacy in human conceptual life itself" (ibid., 1200). Of course, it's tempting to psychologize Hughes's difficulty because, if it's idiosyncratic, then we needn't worry about exposure to it. This is a species of the sense-making that the difficulty and its unintelligible experiencer are bound to solicit.

Lear's Aristotelian picture stresses that our form of life is characterized by sense-making. We are creatures who lead conceptual lives. We act and think in self-understanding, self-interpreting ways. We inhabit modes of thought and develop habits of mind. We use concepts to understand each other and the world. Difficult realities are "at the heart of human life", in Lear's view, because they disrupt our distinctive capacity (ibid., 1201). They demand conceptual understanding while preventing its achievement, empowering us to deflect. In short, they invite what they defeat.

If difficult realities are at the heart of human life because sense-making is, then those realities' disruption of sense-making can hardly be dismissed as idiosyncratic: it's potentially transmissible. Or we could say that difficult realities can be as idiosyncratic as forms of life can be. And as Baker and Hacker remind us, it's "quite pointless" to try to pin down exactly how idiosyncratic forms of life can be, other than not entirely idiosyncratic, because whether two of them count as distinct will always depend on a specific question and context (2009, 223).

We can certainly imagine someone who finds Hughes's photograph emotionally challenging – say, because it recasts a family camping spot as a site of eerie calm before a tragic storm – but not bewildering. This person sees no chasm between our concepts and the reality they confront. The reality is just grisly. That can be a form of ordinariness or Aristotelian difficulty: reality is often grisly. This person might pity the alienated and anguished poet. If Hughes's inability to make sense is idiosyncratic, then his testimony is little threat. His experience of an Aristotelian difficulty, one of psychology, won't contaminate the rest of us. Since the person who sees ordinariness cannot easily correct the poet's perception – because it's not as if Hughes has forgotten that photographs can

unproblematically depict the dead as living, but that this depiction shoulders him out from any sense he might make of it – it's natural for them to fall back on pity and diagnosis.

2.3 Mourning as Sense-making

Death presents plenty of Aristotelian difficulties. We typically cope with these by mourning. When a friend dies, I can be thrown from ordinary life. I grieve, remember, and may regret. Time can heal some of these wounds. Being in community can help. Eventually, I can return to everyday life. If the loss is traumatic enough to significantly wound my sense-making or self-understanding, this return can be fraught with obstacles. I might need support or therapy. And I may never actually make this return: death can rule out happiness. In that case, mourning looks extraordinarily challenging, but it doesn't look inappropriate. I fail to make sense of death, but to make sense wouldn't be to fail.

Death can also present a difficult reality. It can resist and disrupt the sense-making – the mourning – it solicits, as the concepts we deploy fail to capture what we confront. When this difficult reality emerges from the Aristotelian difficulties of grief and transition, it can be tempting to try to transform it back into a condition to surmount, a puzzle to explain, or a loss to mourn, in place of bafflement to acknowledge and endure.

Someone could see only Aristotelian or ordinary difficulties where Hughes is baffled. There might be no information one has that the other lacks. Both could express their experience with the words, 'we are all going to die someday' (cf. Lear 2018, 1201). For the first person, this could express a vision of the ordinary. It could mean that death isn't worth worrying about at present, that the photographed men aren't unique. It could, in effect, use the concept of death as a tranquilizer to brush away the difficulty. For Hughes, these words

could express the thoroughly disorienting sense that we are living creatures who at some unknown but definite point will cease to be for all time. It's even more disorienting that this sense dawns on him just as he is seeking the orientation in history, in the life of his family, that looking at the old photograph might have afforded.

Even in uses of the concept of death that aren't meant to deflect difficulties, we might see a device for containing realities that threaten to break out of thought. In other words, we might see deflective work being done. These uses of the concept are intelligibility-making, and that's what experiences of difficult realities rupture. Although we know that photographs can picture the past as present and the dead as living, Hughes's photograph can "explode the pretense of the concept *death* to be able to do what it is supposed to do" (ibid., 1202). Someone suffering this conceptual breakdown doesn't confront a mystery in need of explanation any more than they confront a loss to mourn. That's likely to leave them all the more alienated from those who see nothing out of the ordinary, because there isn't a puzzle to spell out and solve, only a reality found inexplicable.

When friends die, mourning is our usual response. We step back from everyday routines, immerse ourselves in memories, and express grief. We have practices for this, rituals for coping. On Lear's account of Freud's view, mourning expresses psychological health (ibid., 1203; see also Freud 1957a). The mourner withdraws from ordinary life in bereavement, and in this way, they are like the melancholic. But unlike the melancholic, they eventually return to life. They re-engage with their cares, values, and relationships. Freud sees this as the appropriate reaction to death (1957a, 244). We could put this in an Aristotelian register and call mourning virtuous. To mourn is to live well with the fact of death. It's to find the golden mean between apathy and agony.

Given this, we might wonder whether Hughes's poem expresses or resists mourning. Like tragedy, poetry could be a medium for creating intelligibility: it could be a way to ease and mark a return to ordinary life. On the other hand, it could be a disorienting alarm, voicing an inability or refusal to place oneself in relation to history and mortality, opening one's bewilderment to others. On Lear's reading, Hughes's talk of being shouldered out expresses his bewildered and bewildering resistance to mourning, an inability and unwillingness to mourn. To Freudian eyes, then, Hughes appears psychopathological, rather like the melancholic. He could look like an ideal candidate for therapy, which would help him learn to make sense and get back to his life.

2.4 Freud and the Poet

While the war in which the six young men died was raging in Europe, Freud was writing an essay on transience. That essay registers his clinical disapproval of resistance to mourning. He begins by describing a prewar scene, right around the time the shutter snapped before those six men (1957b, 305). Freud is walking with a poet and his silent companion. The poet admires the rural surroundings (perhaps like those of the Hughes family camping spot) but feels no joy in them. He is anguished by the thought that all the beauty he sees will vanish when winter arrives, as the beauty we create inevitably fades. For the poet, all beauty is laced with brevity.

Freud diagnoses the poet as pathologically resistant to the process whereby one notices the transience of sights and pleasures yet returns to the present, such that impermanence doesn't prevent one from relishing a scene. Put otherwise, the poet is experiencing a "foretaste of mourning" but resists its achievement, and this has a spoiling

effect: he pathologically links happiness to permanence and therefore suffers in a changing world (ibid., 306). The poet's imagination projects the rural panorama into the future, without its present splendor. That tarnishes what could have been his enjoyment. Freud sees the poet as anticipating future decay so that the pleasurable experience of current beauty is denied. What a clinician might call transience anxiety disturbs the poet's capacity to experience joy and unfastens him from his own time. Freud psychologizes the poet's difficulty and thus sees it as therapeutically remediable. That is likely to be particularly attractive if one doesn't see what the poet sees, and if one regards the poet's vision as unreasonable, as Freud does. Unsurprisingly, Freud takes the poet's subsequent resistance to his offered interpretation to count in favor of it, since (to analytic ears) the poet recoils from the painfully accurate thought exposed by the interpretation.

But Lear asks us to consider whether the poet could instead be experiencing a difficult reality: "What if he was in genuine revolt against mourning?" (2018, 1204).[11] If that were the case, would we be surprised to find the psychoanalyst disciplinarily disposed to regard the difficulty as one of psychology? Wouldn't we expect him to view the poet's suffering as an idiosyncratic failure to cope, and hence, to consider the poet in need of therapy or psychiatric intervention? The fact that others are unscathed by the difficulty would only lend this view support.

However, we might ask ourselves if the poet would look any different if he were indeed suffering a difficult reality: for example, the reality of everything's transience and the effect of this on one's values and concerns. Isn't this precisely how it would look if he refused

[11] Lear pulls talk of a revolt directly from Freud (1957b, 306). But this can sound misleadingly optional. Experiencers of difficult realities often feel they cannot help but revolt, lest they deflect. For that reason, I prefer to speak of resistance to mourning.

mourning's false consolations, the sense it might make, in fidelity to his experience of sense-making's disruption? If the poet experiences a difficult reality, then mourning is sure to look like a deflective practice from his perspective, as will a disciplinary mode of sense-making like psychoanalysis, according to which mourning is eminently desirable. Our practices of coping and moving on will seem designed for tranquilization and evasion. That, and not phobic anxiety about future loss, would ground his resistance to mourning.

For Freud, there's a "great riddle" in the pace of our mourning (1967, 306). We don't tend to recover immediately from the deaths of loved ones. Why do we linger in grief? Yet Freud ignores the flip side: he doesn't ask why we ever return to normality after grief and the recognition of transience. This suggests that he sees only Aristotelian difficulties in the poet's experience and thus takes his testimony to express a need – maybe even a desire – for treatment. But the poet may be testifying to a different order of difficulty. Then we could understand Freud's perspective as another way to see and exercise fidelity to the ordinary.

The capacity to see the ordinary where others see the inexplicable is integral to the grammar of Diamond's concept, not an assault on its legitimate use. This opens onto the mutual incomprehension, isolation, and exposure that experiencers can face. The fact that Freud and the poet talk past each other and see different universes needn't threaten the application of Diamond's concept to the poet's case. Indeed, it could affirm that application.

Consider what Freud might make of Hughes. Either Hughes is deranged, irrationally resisting mourning (and his talk of the 'dementing' photograph might corroborate this diagnosis), or he is still mourning and will transition out of it given adequate time and support. Freud leaves no room for the thought that Hughes's poem and the photograph whose confronting it records reveal realities that conceptual thought cannot encompass. The

analyst's steadfast deflection shows that one can find routes to avoid exposure to difficult realities even in times of war. Maybe especially then, given war's capacity to kindle urgent Aristotelian difficulties and make atrocities look more commonplace or statistical.

One way to attempt to avoid taking on Hughes's exposure is to worry about idiosyncrasy. We can fret about whether another's experience of difficulty is legitimate, whether the use of Diamond's concept to describe their experience is valid or intelligible, and so whether their testimony potentially implicates us. Freud exemplifies the response of someone who sees Hughes as overreacting and wonders why he is so worked up about a photograph. Although this is framed as a psychologically sophisticated diagnosis, that doesn't make it other than a way to see and keep seeing the ordinary. In fact, Freud's position may well be internal to experiences of difficulties and their experiencers. The sense-making he engages in may be solicited by the difficulties that experiencers suffer and disclose. We will struggle to make sense of those whose sense-making has been wounded. That leaves no neutral position from which to query an experience of difficulty, as if from beyond exposure, because we can always be the ones seeing ordinariness, including by regarding an experiencer's difficulty as merely psychopathological or Aristotelian. The interpersonal uncertainty of experiences of difficulty can, in effect, indicate them.

We have seen that Freud finds the poet enigmatic, as disciplinary habits of sense-making lead his mind-reading astray. In that connection, we can notice a parallel with Cavell's discussion of the philosophical sublimation of anxieties that belong to life with others. My reply to Freud's vision of psychopathology resembles Cavell's response to worries about unknowable pains and inscrutable others, in attempting to return these worries to the interpersonal context of acknowledgment and vulnerability.

It's not only Freud as the poet's interlocutor who is positioned to see ordinariness, like the person who finds Hughes's photograph merely emotionally challenging. Freud is operating as a psychoanalyst. That provides him with a mode of deflection. The discipline itself begins to look deflective. When psychoanalysis is confronted with sufferers of difficult realities, the analyst isn't enabled to adjudicate the validity of their testimony as if from sideways-on, even as the difficulties invite the analyst to try to escape from interpersonal involvement and exposure. This solicited deflection is little surprise given that psychoanalysis is a form of sense-making interpretation that fixes its gaze on an experiencer's psychological condition.

If psychoanalysis can operate deflectively as it extends the domain of sense-making, we might think that philosophy as a mode of sense-making can likewise inherit difficulties from difficult realities, as Diamond suggests in the title of her essay and as Cavell shows in his discussion of skepticism. For disciplinary and probably temperamental reasons, philosophers will want to make sense of failures to make sense. We might therefore expect to see a philosophical tendency to deflect from difficult realities by sticking to the discipline's normal methods of problem-solving. We might expect to see philosophers treating difficult realities as if they are issues admitting of argumentative discussion, puzzles or problems rather than wounds. This can be made more tempting by the worry that, if difficulties aren't mere fodder for argument, then they might be contagious and more seriously wounding. The desire to call on one's discomfort about the possibility of idiosyncratic experience as a reason to brush aside difficult realities can have a home here.

We can see this more clearly if we notice how my description of Freud must leave open, and perhaps even invites, a form of deflection that may seem to render it

unsatisfactory: skepticism about the concept of a difficult reality itself. This is a way to maintain a vision of the ordinary that can come naturally to philosophy as a sense-making discipline. One might worry that the concept, whose content has been supplied by essentially and perpetually questionable examples, could leave us grasping at air. Then one might find little comfort in being told to rely on interpersonal testimony, with all the vulnerabilities and suspicions that can attend it.

3. Philosophical Deflections

3.1 Skepticism About Diamond's Concept

Freud's walk with the bewildered poet exhibits how room for visions of ordinariness belongs to the grammar of Diamond's concept. In response, a philosopher might seek to occupy a place beyond ordinariness and bewilderment, outside the testimonial scene. They might worry about fixing the meaning of Diamond's concept so that its proper use can be adjudicated without appeal to anxiety-provoking situations of relational exposure and uncertainty. They might demand a method to tell whether any use of the concept is legitimate or intelligible. The fact that Diamond doesn't provide this, that she doesn't even mention why this isn't on offer, might just suggest that all this disorienting smoke points to fire. In the form of Diamond's introduction of the concept, we might see reason for skepticism.

For all its philosophical sophistication, my sense is that this skepticism turns out to be another way to express what Freud expresses: a vision of the ordinary internal to the dynamic of difficult realities and the mutual incomprehension they open onto.

Here, in short, is the appeal of skepticism. I characterized Freud's concerns about psychopathology as native to the context of experiences of difficult realities and their

experiencers. But I don't seem able to judge with certainty whether Freud is in that context. I have detailed three examples to help sketch the grammar of Diamond's concept, but I am not Hughes, Costello, or Cavell's skeptic; I cannot ensure that they confront real difficulties. This means that I appear to be in an unstable position vis-à-vis these examples, leaving open the possibility that they are idiosyncratic after all. This is particularly pressing because I have tied my grammar-sketching exercise to Diamond's provision of examples, while retaining room for the anxiety that these could leave us with next to nothing. I say that Diamond's ostension and projection comes with necessary question marks. That could appear to leave the concept unmoored.

At this point, we might wonder if what we are really facing is suspicion – say, of Costello and Hughes, or even Diamond – rather than skepticism. Merold Westphal distinguishes between suspicion and skepticism in discussing possible reactions to religious claims (1998, 13). On his view, suspicion addresses believers and concerns their motives for belief, while skepticism addresses believed propositions and concerns reasons for belief. However, it's illuminating to see that claims of difficult realities blur the edges of this distinction. If understanding another person's speech act means understanding their choice of words, both their motives and reasons, and thus the speaker themselves, then there's no sure line between incomprehension of another's words and incomprehension of another. Hence, there's no sure line between skepticism and suspicion.

I call this deflective response to Diamond's concept a form of skepticism because that distinguishes it from Freud's anxiety when confronted by the poet's testimony. It emphasizes this response's directedness toward the judgment that there's a difficult reality, the use of Diamond's concept to describe a case. That said, one response to this skepticism

may be to show how it's an inflamed species of suspicion, just as skepticism about other minds can be provoked by more ordinary (and painful) suspicions of the specific others we encounter, who can, for instance, conceal their pain from us.

Given what I have said about the concept of a difficult reality, it's hardly surprising that I don't have an answer to this skeptical anxiety that would shield its sufferer from the demands and risks of encountering sufferers of these difficulties. But what I can say is that the intellectual obligation attending this anxiety won't arise if we see that it mustn't be otherwise, lest we miss the specific strangeness of Diamond's concept, which is tethered to the strangeness of encountering both its instances and those encountering its instances.

No doubt, the provision of examples could be met with skepticism about cases, or with a different emphasis, suspicion about sufferers. We might think Costello's woundedness is rooted, more than anything else, in her peculiar inflexibility or stressful family dynamics, located on the Aristotelian spectrum, while being satisfied that Hughes confronts a legitimate difficult reality. This sort of skepticism must be resolved case by case, in conversation and given a range of other examples. Its availability belongs to the concept's essential projectability and the fact that Diamond gives us a center of variation and not a list of necessary and sufficient criteria. There's no third-personal stance to be taken up here: we can always be the ones seeing ordinariness where others are baffled; we are always interpersonally implicated.

A global form of this skepticism registers discomfort about my inability to guarantee Diamond's examples. The skeptic wants a generally applicable third-personal criterion, and nothing I could offer would be fit for the position of guarantor. But in parallel with Cavell's response to the skeptic about other minds, we might say that anxiety about this indicates a

departure from the anxieties proper to the context of testimony and possible exposure to difficulties. That is, we might perceive in this skeptical anxiety a form of deflection rooted in philosophical modes of sense-making (like the Fregean provision of merkmal definitions).

The uncertainty accompanying Diamond's ostension just *is* one's capacity to see ordinariness where others are baffled. In another register, by means of a different discipline of sense-making, that's the capacity Freud exercises, and it's integral to the concept. The skeptic won't find a position, besides neglect, where exposure to someone potentially experiencing a difficult reality makes no fraught demands on them, just as someone worried about unacknowledged pain won't find a non-deflective position where there's no possibility that they are responsible (for a reason as quotidian as carelessness) for having left another's suffering unanswered. Any account of Diamond's concept must preserve one's capacity to not get why others see difficulty: to find them enigmatic. At the same time, of course, the skeptic's desire for certainty arrives right on schedule, because the use of Diamond's concept solicits the sense-making impelling their anxiety. This is one way in which difficult realities can make philosophy difficult, inviting its ways of extending the reach of intelligibility and yet revealing them as potentially deflective (DR, 22-25).

Demands for more certainty – precisely the assurance that Cavell tells us is both unavailable and highly desirable in situations of exposure – arise from anxieties about potential difficult realities; these are natural sense-making responses to the threat of wounds to one's sense-making. But for that reason, we cannot take these demands seriously and seek to meet them straightforwardly, since that would alter the meaning of judgments of difficulty beyond recognition and hence efface the meaning of these demands themselves. This inability to meet skeptical demands isn't because judgments made by sufferers are imprecise

or fail to implicate us. It's because these demands are rooted in a rejection of the kind of interpersonally anxiety-provoking specificity that belongs to difficult realities.

As Cavell shows us, acknowledging the skeptic would mean acknowledging this rejection as invited by difficult realities, and so it would mean acknowledging this rejection as a response to wounds others may impart. We couldn't acknowledge the skeptic if we took their skepticism to be unrooted in ordinary life, where we all want to keep making sense of the world and our fellows. We could not yield to their demands to fix the difficulty of difficult realities from a neutral vantage and yet recognize that demand as an understandable consequence of the exposure that makes the concept what it is.

As Diamond's difficulties radiate outward, the only spot that's in principle uncontaminated lies outside human relationships, with all their hazards. While philosophers may be tempted to extricate themselves from this vexed arena, the very anxiety that undergirds this temptation belongs to the arena of life with others, whose testimony makes claims on us, whom we can fail to understand as they can fail to understand us. In other words, we should recognize others not only as potential users of Diamond's concept but as potential sufferers of the realities to which that use feels a fitting response. This recognition leaves ample room for uncertainty or suspicion when others testify to their experience. It just calls our attention to a way to fail to take another's testimony seriously: by dismissing it, perhaps as dogmatic, because it lacks the guarantee one mistakenly but understandably demands (one would identify dogmatism by means of that demand).

Cavell offers a similar reply to worries that aesthetic judgments can sound intolerant, and he sees an analogous worry animating positivist accusations that ordinary language philosophers speak dogmatically of 'what we wish to say' in various situations (2015a, 89).

In this respect, judgments of difficulty, which impute universality, implicate others without a guarantee, and therefore come with standing possibilities of companionship and mutual incomprehension, resemble what Cavell discusses under the headings of aesthetic and grammatical judgments. As in those cases, uncertainty about particular testimony is always possible. The legitimacy of any projection is open to question in conversation. But that uncertainty will be tempered by self-examination occasioned by the capacity of other people to describe their experiences in ways that can prove surprisingly authoritative and confronting for us. It will also be tempered by the humbling realization that this exposure is likely to induce a view of difficulties as mere problems for peculiar others – that it can tempt us to see Aristotelian difficulties in lieu of difficult realities. In short, we will see that philosophical modes of sense-making can be solicited and injured by difficult realities, as by the use of Diamond's concept, and our recognition of this can return our skepticism to its roots in anxiety about exposure. That would reveal our insistence on these modes of sense-making as a consequence rather than a repudiation of sense-making's woundedness and hence show up our insistence as a further deflection.

3.2 Distinguishing Between Aristotelian Difficulties and Difficult Realities

Room for this deflective sense-making is partly supplied by our inability to draw any strict and definite line between difficult realities and Aristotelian difficulties.

Lear draws several lessons from the ease with which Freud sees only Aristotelian difficulties. These serve to distinguish, if not to circumscribe, difficult realities from their Aristotelian counterparts. Here are some of these lessons. Experiencers of difficult realities can struggle to express their experience because it's a defeat of solicited sense-making. To

some extent, expression demands intelligibility. Thus, encountering difficult realities can render people unintelligible to those who see ordinariness. What's more, we have ample tools for maintaining visions of the ordinary by deflecting from difficult realities and their sufferers. Lear finds these in psychoanalytic interpretation, and Diamond sees them in philosophical argument. I find them in skepticism about Diamond's concept, and there are plenty in everyday life too: problem-solving and explanation can be some of these mechanisms, and these don't belong to analysts and philosophers alone. That's fitting because difficult realities can turn up all over the place, amid ordinary life: Lear locates one in a hamburger (2018, 1202). And no special occasion is required for a photograph to wound Hughes's sense-making. This makes it even more enticing to regard experiencers of difficult realities as victims of their own idiosyncrasies, because otherwise we are potentially threatened. It should prompt self-examination when we are so enticed.

For all these lessons, the categories of Aristotelian difficulties and difficult realities aren't entirely separable. This isn't because there's a grey area between them, but because Aristotelian difficulties can open onto difficult realities in situations of conceptual breakdown. Inversely, we can flee from difficult realities by trying to transform them into obstacles, problems to solve, or neuroses to mend.

Take the example of Costello. No doubt, we could see Aristotelian difficulties in her suffering. A world where others benefit from cruelty raises hurdles for flourishing. We might respond by advocating vegetarianism. But if we press on these Aristotelian difficulties, we may, like Costello, encounter difficulties that would remain in an herbivorous world: for example, our capacity for barbarism, our abuse of our fellow creatures (which we might call inhumane, paradoxically bringing us closer to other animals), the fact that people we

otherwise respect can fail to see this. These are difficult realities. They injure the sense-making they invite; they call for attention and attract neglect. The inclination to regard Costello as mad can be seen as a response to this injury, an attempt to restore a vision of difficulty captured by the Aristotelian spectrum.

We could try to gloss the difference this way.

Aristotelian difficulties disrupt contingent modes of thought and life, like carnivorous habits of consumption. This disruption is Aristotelian in that it presents a problem or puzzle to overcome, cope with, or work through, for the sake of happiness or flourishing, excellence in sense-making. That might involve lifestyle change, therapy, or political action.

Difficult realities disrupt modes of thought and life in such a way that our sense-making is more deeply or fundamentally wounded; they disrupt the spectrum whereby we might make sense of more ordinary difficulties. They aren't overcome but acknowledged or neglected.

That's to say, we could try to draw a line between contingent and fundamental disruptions to sense-making. However, I doubt such an attempt to draw a neat line will succeed. Some difficult realities appear, at least initially, to resist fairly contingent habits of mind (like seeing other animals as food), while others bring one to the edges of the thinkable (like the fact of our mortality). Difficulties from across this range can lead into each other, just as getting one into focus, and so inhabiting a resisted mode of sense-making, can keep another from view (DR, 10). It isn't easy to differentiate contingent from fundamental structures (or disruptions) of sense-making. When we push on contingent ones, we often get more pervasive ones.

Wittgenstein shows this by imagining a group of wood sellers (1967b, §148). They stack their timber in piles of diverse and apparently random height. Then they sell at a price relative to a pile's area. Imagine that the sellers justify their practice by saying, 'surely you must pay more for more timber'. Then we might take issue with a seemingly contingent structure of their sense-making: what they mean by 'calculating a price'. But we might quickly discover that the whole society of the wood sellers presents a "hitherto unknown kind of insanity", as we find them incomprehensible in more fundamental and thoroughgoing ways (ibid., §152).[12]

Along the same lines, when we push on difficulties that seem to resist fairly contingent modes of thought and life, like those that belong on the Aristotelian spectrum, we may find ourselves utterly shouldered out, confronting difficult realities. Then the urge to revert to a problem to address, perhaps by concentrating on psychological distress or resorting to skepticism, could prove overwhelming.

4. Deflection and Devastation

So far, we have seen that psychoanalytic and philosophical modes of sense-making can provide for the deflection of difficult realities. Even skepticism that Diamond's concept has any meaningful content because her examples could turn out to be idiosyncratic can be just another form of deflection. Whatever this deflection's philosophical complexity, it's potentially another way to preserve the ordinary and evade exposure to wounds.

More generally, Lear might be seen to point us to a sense in which our everyday linguistic practices, like talk of life and death, are tailor-made for deflection insofar as they

[12] Wittgenstein borrows this phrase from Frege's preface to the *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*: see Frege 2013, XVI.

extend from a form of life centered on sense-making, which will predictably paper over the sorts of experiences disclosed by Diamond's protagonists. Our sense that death is discussable, that it can be named and made familiar, might look deflective; we might worry that our denial of death embodied by this concept's role in our sense-making pollutes our whole form of life, revealing our deep evasiveness. But what could it mean to think of one's entire form of life – and not just a certain mode or discipline of sense-making – as thoroughly injured or deflective? Could a difficult reality be not only irreparably but totally wounding?

Consider the following case of conceptual breakdown. Someone confronting a difficult reality might confront the breakdown of her moral universe. Her way of life might collapse, and with it, her capacity to understand herself and her world. Lear discusses the vulnerability we come by in essentially inhabiting modes of life and thought (2006, 6). On his account, we inherit our way of life's vulnerabilities. Its collapse can have ramifications like psychological anguish, but the difficulty of this collapse isn't psychological, as if therapy could help us to locate and inhabit alternative ways to make sense. The breakdown can be such that "things would cease to happen" (ibid., 4). The sense-making structures of a whole culture and form of life can collapse.

Lear sees this more global injury to sense-making in the plight of the Crow nation after the disappearance of the buffalo and confinement to a reservation. He describes how, shortly before his death, Plenty Coups, considered the last of the great Crow chiefs, narrated his early experiences to the ethnographer, pioneer, and advocate Frank Bird Linderman (see Linderman 2002). Although Plenty Coups told Linderman a great deal about his life when the Crow were a thriving nomadic nation, he "refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo" (Linderman, quoted in Lear 2006, 2). He said to Linderman that, after the

disappearance of the buffalo, "the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened" (ibid.).

Lear hears a deep rupture of sense-making in this description of cultural devastation: 'after this nothing happened'. History itself came to an end. This suggests a tight link between the vulnerability of ways of life to collapse (say, as the buffalo disappear) and the vulnerability of structures of sense-making. It brings together one's inhabiting of a mode of life and what one can think, understand, make intelligible. Put otherwise, the case of the Crow is a large-scale analogue of the experiences of conceptual breakdown that Diamond spotlights.

We might regard the Crow as totally wounded. We might see their difficult reality as pervading the loss of their entire form of life, not only as injuring specific modes or disciplines of sense-making. We might take the entirety of their capacity for sense-making – of any event whatsoever – to be at stake. Lear seems to think this, and it's connected to his suggestion that our talk of death might render our whole form of life alienating and deflective, so that none of our ways to make sense is serviceable for us any longer. But I want to sound a hesitant note here. Evidently, the Crow are wounded by a reality that significantly threatens their, and potentially our, sense-making. Yet it seems to me that they can only testify intelligibly (however injuriously) to these wounds, and thereby make a claim on Lear and others, because they aren't totally wounded. The same could be said of Costello and Hughes: their expressions can be wounding, opening difficult realities to view, but that's only because they are decipherable. There would be no need for deflection if Costello were entirely inarticulate, no sense to deflection if Coetzee's lectures didn't expose a loss of sense

whose significance we could acknowledge. Perhaps total injury is possible, but I doubt that testimony to it could be anything except an inarticulate scream or total muteness.

As a projection and large-scale analogue, the case of the Crow can help to further clarify the grammar of Diamond's concept. For example, it looks misguided to suggest that Plenty Coups and the Crow all experienced a merely psychological breakdown, as if they were distressed and baffled by a perfectly intelligible world. And while the difficulty experienced by the Crow appears contingent on its catastrophic position in their form of life, it seems equally misguided to suggest that those inhabiting non-Crow forms of life are altogether immune to the difficulties their testimony can reveal: human cruelty (perhaps that of our ancestors), cultural precarity, xenophobia, our dependence on traditions and our need to envision them projected forward in time, and the relation between the causes of cultural devastation and the modes of life and thought we presently inhabit. These can all wound our sense-making, while they can also look like Aristotelian difficulties: moral problems, psychological injuries, or philosophical puzzles.

To be sure, skeptical anxieties can still arise. Lear cannot guarantee that the Crow experienced a difficult reality. Extra-conversational assurance isn't available here. But it isn't a problem that their testimony leaves us exposed, nor that some will miss what bewilders them. We would expect that exposure and space for denial to attend testimony to legitimate difficult realities. If Plenty Coups's testimony to the Crow's experience of cultural devastation and collapse suggests a difficult reality, then it will paradigmatically leave room for visions of what history has made dishearteningly ordinary. We can see a similar difficulty for modes and disciplines of sense-making in the examples of Hughes, Costello, and Cavell's skeptic, though the breakdowns they experience aren't perfectly analogous. And so, we

should expect that some will see them, too, as simply off their respective rockers, thereby quarantining their suffering.

5. Deflection's Opposite

Diamond's examples and Lear's projection show the different scales at which sense-making and its disruption can occur. As difficult realities wound our capacity to understand each other, the practices of making sense that belong to morality, psychoanalysis, and philosophy can prove deflective. Difficult realities can even injure the very fabric of a culture or form of life. The means of deflection are as various as the modes of sense-making that difficult realities can rupture. But what about deflection's opposite? What would it take to acknowledge a difficult reality, refusing the available modes of deflection and denial to remain faithful to one's bafflement? If Diamond's protagonists present us with varied portraits of acknowledgment, thereby soliciting the varied deflections we have observed, what center of variation do they yield?

The next chapter explores fidelity to sense-making's disruption by difficult realities. Then I turn to the purpose to which Diamond puts the concept of a difficult reality in her essay – as distinct from that concept's four-point grammar – before considering how the concept's grammar might change with intelligible shifts in this purpose and why Diamond's examples center literary testimony.

Chapter 3

Testimony to Difficult Realities

1. Introduction

Diamond's examples involve protagonists – Costello and Coetzee, Hughes, Cavell – who refuse available deflections, remaining faithful to experiences of disrupted sense-making. They acknowledge difficult realities, and as their wounds are thus exposed, they become injurious to others. As others are thereby exposed to the call of acknowledgment, deflection becomes even more inviting. Seeing how these protagonists fail to make sense and charge us with insanity or depravity, we may want even more strongly to insist on our sense-making. At the same time, this insistence belongs to the interpersonal dynamic of confrontation with sufferers of difficult realities.

Diamond's pictures of acknowledgment show how resolute attention to difficult realities can be as various as the forms of deflection from them, that is, as various as the modes of sense-making these realities solicit and confound. Yet, in each of Diamond's main examples, the perception of a difficult reality leads to vulnerable testimony, rather than political action or advocacy, moral or psychological problem-solving, or philosophical speculation – all of which can be forms of deflection. Diamond's protagonists share their wounds, risk exposure, and thereby open themselves to the possibility that others will think they are mad, exasperating, or even perverse (just think of Stern's condemnation of Costello and Singer's criticism of Coetzee). Even as acknowledgment varies across these examples – as Coetzee portrays a wounded writer, that writer provokes her fellows, Hughes pens a confessional poem, and Cavell diagnoses skeptical deflections so we can see their distance

from the difficult reality of life with others – all these perceptions of difficulty seem to find expression in testimony. In each case, there's an exhibition of wounds to sense-making that can then baffle and wound others, and that therefore insistently invites the use of our conceptual resources in deflection.

This chapter explores the relationship between acknowledgment of a difficult reality and testimony in Diamond's examples. From there, I turn to the point of Diamond's essay in the conversation into which it intervenes, focusing on her discussions of embodiment and woundedness. I consider her essay as a work of wounded testimony, ask how the grammar of the concept it introduces might shift as it is projected past her testimony, and attend to the role of literature in her examples.

2. Acknowledgment in Diamond's Examples

2.1 Costello's Testimony

Costello highlights how the difficult reality of factory farming can be transposed into a discourse that distorts its shape, changing it into an Aristotelian or more ordinary difficulty, even as we continue to regard it as our focus. We can think we are dealing with the difficulty even as bafflement has been replaced by intellectual puzzlement, a concern for problem-solving, or plain indifference. Costello offensively likens her fellows to the "Germans and Poles and Ukrainians who did and did not know of the atrocities around them" during the Holocaust (Coetzee 1999, 35). Similarly, we can know and yet not know of the horrors of factory farming. We can see only an obstacle to flourishing where Costello is shouldered out from her concepts and relationships.

When Costello's companions (or Coetzee's colleagues) confront the reality of slaughter in industrial farming, they take themselves to be directly facing the issue as they take it up in argumentative discourse; after all, it's the focus of their discussion. However, Costello observes that this can coincide with distorting the difficult reality or letting it slip from view; she notices how tempting that can be. From that perspective, argumentative discourse appears to promote or sustain the not-quite-aware position that makes atrocities possible, where one isn't baffled by the horror even in seeming to face it squarely. For Costello, the terrible fact here is that those who transform difficult realities into more ameliorable types of difficulty – often without perceiving any transformation – are not haunted by the atrocities (of which they aren't quite aware). Rather, they "get away with it", managing to return to everyday life where this strikes Costello not only as truthfully unavailable but unconscionable (ibid.). Difficult realities become Aristotelian without any sense of remainder. Bafflement is replaced by an experience of the intelligibly challenging or emotionally wearying. Instead of enduring and injuriously expressing what we cannot accommodate, we find ourselves striving to overcome hurdles to happy sense-making.

We can cast light on Costello's acknowledgment by contrasting her wounded and wounding experience with this not-quite-aware position, where deflection enables us to imagine that we are confronting the difficulty head-on. This contrast comes out in a conversation she has with her son John after several of her lectures. She has just finished speaking about Hughes's remarkable attentiveness to the lives of animals in some of his poetry. John is unconvinced that his mother's reading and teaching of Hughes's poetry will have any effect on the industrial cruelty of factory farming. He presses her on the point of this exercise: "Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes are going to close down the

slaughterhouses?" (ibid., 158). She is quick to agree with John: of course teaching and writing poetry aren't effective routes to solving the problem he takes to be troubling her. He asks why she bothers to write and lecture in that case. Moreover, while he knows and seems to respect that Costello quarrels with those who want to prove syllogistically that animals are or aren't ensouled, that she regards this sort of project as entirely detached from the reality of animals attached to their lives, John suspects that poetry is "just another kind of clever talk" (ibid.). In other words, isn't it another way to avoid dealing with the problem? Or we could almost hear him asking, isn't it another way to keep making sense where sense-making trips up?

Costello responds to this line of questioning by fixing on John's perception of a problem that poetry would then be avoiding or talking around. She describes how we treat animals less like objects than like prisoners of war. She characterizes our compassion as thin and at the surface of our attitudes. The point seems to be that shutting down the slaughterhouses wouldn't resolve the fact that we are capable of cruelly slaughtering our fellow creatures, as we are capable of cruelty to each other. It won't change what she notices about the human animal's propensity for senseless violence. John is not at all satisfied with this – seeing an urgent problem, how could he be? – and pushes again. He asks whether Costello is attempting to use literature not to shut down the slaughterhouses but to cure our rather gaunt compassion. Does she really believe that literature will rouse our moral sensibility? This exasperates Costello, who doesn't seem any more inclined or able to cure her fellows than she is to abolish slaughterhouses by means of verse. She replies: "John, I don't know what I want to do. I just don't want to sit silent" (ibid., 59).

I see this reply as an exemplary instance of acknowledgment of a difficult reality. Costello voices the vulnerability and vigilance before disrupted sense-making of which argument could risk disabusing her. Her sense of the difficulty, isolation, and disoriented self-understanding drive her to speak of her condition, while they complicate that speech. She doesn't know exactly how to express her experience – wounds to sense-making are bound to imperil communication – although she suspects that poetry provides more resources for this personal testimony than philosophy does, or perhaps that it's less likely to ease the way into sense-making deflection. But she isn't willing to relinquish her wounds or how they expose her for the sake of argumentative rigor, practical impact, or being understood by her son. John repeatedly invites that relinquishment, but Costello sees this would make her not-quite-aware: it would leave her unable to mark the difficult reality's distortion, so acknowledgment calls for this exposed refusal of John's invitation. One feature of this exposure is that Costello could appear inarticulate, pitiful, or neglectful precisely where she is refusing neglect.

Costello's exhibition of her woundedness elicits a pivot back to purportedly dispassionate argument on John's part, just the insistent sense-making we might expect. "Very well", he says to his mother's display of vulnerability, almost in embarrassment, before turning to the merits and flaws of the analogy between animals and prisoners of war (ibid.). John is evidently made uncomfortable by how Costello's expression of an injury to her self-understanding and life with others makes her look foolish or inconsiderate. Costello's remark exposes him as deflecting from what's personally difficult and exposing for her. It asks him to imagine his way into this difficulty as it pervades her life, while

showing just how unappealing this is, as her failure to exercise our characteristic capacity is laid bare.

From Costello's vantage, John's pivot back to argument registers this discomfort as he asks her (even if the request is implicit in his pivot) to abandon her sense of the difficulty, construing the issue in such a way that her woundedness looks superfluous or counterproductive. John's pivot enables him to be not-quite-aware of the difficult reality, like the bystanders to atrocity Costello references, even while he is directly concerned with the problem the difficulty has become. Nevertheless, this pivot is a perfectly understandable response for someone who sees the ordinary.

Refusing to trade her woundedness for what argument appears to demand, even as she struggles to make herself intelligible, Costello simply speaks for herself and offers her vulnerability: 'I don't know what to do'. Then she reasserts her resistance to letting her wounds go unexpressed and unacknowledged, to disclaiming them: 'I just don't want to sit silent'. She seeks acknowledgment (thereby soliciting deflection) by expressing her trouble with expression in this terrain, revealing that she doesn't know what to do or say, isn't even clear about her own desires. Here, deflection's opposite (hence its bait) is personal, unsettled and unsettling testimony.

2.2 Coetzee's Testimony

Costello's position in her conversation with John parallels Coetzee's authorial position. That's natural enough: Costello testifies to the difficult reality of our treatment of animals, and Coetzee testifies to the difficulty of suffering it by exhibiting its life in Costello's experience. In her response to argument, Costello manifests her wounded attention to the

difficulty, which could make her look rash, naïve, or weak. In his depiction of the character of this wounded attention, Coetzee exposes his audience to the difficulty Costello faces; he writes so we can encounter it for ourselves. That could make him look just as rash or naïve, just as poor at meeting discursive norms. I cannot imagine any of the respondents to the Tanner Lectures taking kindly to a declaration that the lecturer 'doesn't know what he wants to do' but 'just doesn't want to sit silent'. Yet that testimony might be the only way to register how the arguments of the respondents fail to comprehend the lectures, how they reveal Coetzee and his protagonist as incomprehensible (or distort them into comprehension as unskilled participants in argument). Put otherwise, it's precisely by being misheard as naïve or pernicious that Coetzee underlines the exposure of his critics, the very exposure they seek to avoid.

To be sure, Coetzee's testimony won't uniformly affect those exposed to it. Testimony's capacity to disclose difficult realities depends partly on its structure and authority, and partly on the recipient's shape of life, their attention to or denial of various potentially baffling realities, their habits of mind, their time and culture and available modes of sense-making. The category of 'the reader' isn't univocal. The relationship between reader and testimony – testimony's effect – depends as much on a reader's condition as it does on the testimony's form and power.

Still, testimony's revelatory capacity can put significant pressure on writers. Coetzee's disclosure of the difficulty alive in Costello's experience demands creativity and staying power. His prose must contend with our desire to keep seeing ordinariness – for instance, by regarding Costello as mad or her author as banefully evasive – where we might otherwise confront a stumbling block for our ordinary modes of life and thought. His lectures

must brave and also acknowledge the overwhelming attractions of the deflective sense-making solicited by the exposed difficulty and its exposing sufferer. And when that solicitation is accepted by his critics, he must face the fact that mutual incomprehension belongs to the exhibition of wounds they confront in Costello, so that his conversation with his critics is no likelier to resolve this incomprehension than is Costello's conversation with John. This all requires linguistic vigilance and a willingness not to try to transcend the anxiety-provoking scene of acknowledgment and denial, testimony and deflection. In short, it renders Coetzee exposed, subject to his uncomprehending fellows; it makes him look as baffling to them as Costello is.

Where Costello most forcefully exhibits her wounds, and thus where Coetzee's lectures can be most wounding, there's a clear connection between this testimony and the experience that authorizes it. That makes bafflement as transmissible as it is dismissible. We can come to share Costello's wounds as our shared capacities and concepts confront animal treatment, or we can see her as peculiarly bewildered. At times, Costello seems to let this connection between injurious testimony and injured experience drift from center stage, as she gets embroiled in tangential disputes or momentarily loses sight of the way her vision of her fellows as morally insane troubles her communication with them. When this happens, her testimony can seem to lose some of its striking power, its felt proximity to the difficult reality. Discursive norms (like our expectations for the Tanner Lectures) can invite that loss of exposure, and testimony to that loss – as I hear in Costello's response to John – can be part of testimony to the difficult reality, since that difficulty is what makes this loss tempting. Then we might see Costello's proclivity for argumentative rabbit-holes, her resistance to the linear trains of argument favored by her interlocutors, as actually registering her

woundedness by the difficult reality and showing paths to deflection for what they are. Hence, Coetzee's depiction or enactment of this may be the furthest thing from deflection.

Coetzee's depiction of Costello's difficult life in view of animal consumption can wake us up to this difficulty. It can place us in something like her position or make imagining our way into this possible; it can disorient us in something like the way she is disoriented. For that to happen, deflection needs to be made difficult, just as it's solicited. We need to be made uncomfortable in our invited desire to flee exposure, fix on problems, and regard Costello as mad. We need to feel genuine loss in the movement from difficult realities to the Aristotelian spectrum. So, Coetzee must resist settling too much for readers or paving a road into a discourse that would distract from the claims his portrayal of Costello's wounds makes on us – thereby resisting the literary convention of inhabiting fictional other minds as an extension of our sense-making – as Costello resists the transformation of her wounds into impersonal issues to be settled by argument (see Coetzee 1999, 37).

Diamond describes Coetzee's writing in this way:

> Coetzee gives us a profound disturbance of soul, and puts that view into a complex context. What is done by doing so he cannot tell us, he does not know. What response we may have to the difficulties of the lectures, the difficulties of reality, is not something the lectures themselves are meant to settle. (DR, 11)

It's almost as if Diamond is describing Costello here. Like his protagonist, Coetzee 'does not know', doesn't see anything to do with his perception of the difficult reality but to testify to it. He 'doesn't want to sit silent', but his testimony cannot settle our attitudes by proving

the presence of a difficult reality. This provokes deflection, in the same way that Cavell's skeptic is provoked into skepticism by the lack of assurance provided in interpersonal exposure, the fact that other people cannot settle our attitudes to them. Coetzee's portrayal of a life made difficult by an inexplicable reality in this sense mirrors his wounded protagonist's testimony. It can be as bewildering as she is, and that can mark Coetzee's faithfulness to the difficulty and its effects on communication as much as it defies our expectations for lectures that would contribute to the intellectual and moral life of humanity. In essence, that defiance is another face of fidelity to the difficulty.

2.3 Hughes's Testimony

Earlier, I identified three forms of deflection that are available in response to Hughes's poem and the photograph it concerns. We could try to teach Hughes how our concepts work. Discovering that he seems to know what we would teach, we could address the moral problems we think the poem raises. Or we could interpret the poem as voicing the poet's melancholia and offer therapy or other treatment. I read Hughes's poem as resisting each of these forms of deflection, instead offering personal testimony to his wounded sense-making. That testimony is Hughes's acknowledgment of the difficult reality. It's the only way he can voice his experience of being shouldered out without making sense of, and thus distorting or making less permanent, the 'contradictory permanent horrors' he witnesses. Again, we could note that poetry allows Hughes, like Costello, not to make too much sense, in a way that other modes of expression might betray.

Suppose we say that Hughes has forgotten how our concepts function. He has overlooked the fact that photographs can only capture the past or has momentarily failed to

use the concepts of life and death in normal and unproblematic ways. But he tells us that the smiles of the six men are “celluloid” and remarks that four decades have “faded and ochre-tinged / This photograph” (1957, 54). His testimony certainly seems to suggest that he knows perfectly well how photographs work, and yet he finds himself unable to hold together the youthful features of the six men, especially their faces and hands, with their tragic future, now past. Similarly, he hasn’t forgotten that these men have spent “[f]orty years rotting into soil”, that no dinosaur or woolly mammoth is “more dead”, and yet, he testifies that no one we encounter could be “more alive” (ibid., 54-55). How can this be? Hughes gives us nothing more than testimony to his experience of being ‘demented’ by the photograph and consequently ‘shouldered out’. He doesn’t settle our attitude for us; he cannot give us more assurance than what belongs to this testimony.

If we then turn to moral problems in the vicinity of Hughes’s difficulty, we will find that his testimony similarly resists, and yet invites, our sense-making. With respect to some of the men, he says that “nobody knows what they came to, / But come to the worst they must have done” (ibid., 54). He says that, in the photograph, we can “see fall war’s worst / Thinkable flash and rending” (ibid.). We might hear in this a concern for war’s injustice, the scandal that it remains a prevalent part of our form of life. But if we are hoping for a discussion of these issues or a rousing call to action, Hughes will disappoint us. He ends by testifying to his bewildered alienation. Instead of a call to action, we get persistent and unapologetically first-personal bafflement.

That could lead us to a renewed interest in Hughes’s psychology. His testimony won’t settle that. It will always be possible for us to miss the difficult reality by seeing Hughes as mad. In fact, room for that perception guides our application of Diamond’s concept to his

case. On the other hand, the poet testifies to an experience he clearly takes to be shareable, even communicable. “Here see a man’s photograph”, begins one stanza (ibid., 54). “That man’s not more alive whom you confront”, begins another (ibid., 55). Hughes is addressing us, as if there’s an experience for us to get (or not get), wounds to share in or deny. Of course, we could see this as a further symptom of his unhinged condition: how strange that he thinks we are susceptible to his madness! Yet as his testimony seems to suggest, these can be words more of deflection than of diagnosis.

Again, acknowledgment issues in testimony, and that leaves us in the exposed position where acknowledgment and deflection are standing options. This puts a burden on the writer – not to ease the way into deflection, while nevertheless inviting it – and colors his reception, which can be no more impartial, can have no more critical distance, than any response to testimony to a difficult reality, with all its attendant exposure.

2.4 Cavell’s Testimony

Cavell’s acknowledgment of the skeptic’s pre-skeptical insight leads him to describe how testimony to that insight provokes the anxiety that drives its distortion into skepticism. In response to that distortion, Cavell can offer us nothing but attention to the original perception and its uncomfortable exposure. In other words, he testifies, and our response to his testimony can require testimony of us if we are to avoid giving in to sense-making deflection.

When we hear Cavell as offering us more than testimony, something more certain or general, then we start to see him as sympathizing with the skeptic, perhaps even (in the eyes of certain anti-skeptics) as betraying his Wittgensteinian inheritance. We hear his testimony as approaching skepticism and thereby participate in deflection from the painful perception

it voices. This is the same deflection that leads the skeptic from her original perception of unacknowledged pain to the concern that the conditions of others are inevitably veiled. To hear Cavell as testifying to a wounded recognition of the reality of unrecognized suffering, then, is to refuse the deflection that would lead us into skepticism and anti-skepticism, away from the ordinary human scene of testimony and exposure. It's to see the skeptic (and Cavell in his acknowledgment of the skeptic's pain) as a wounded human being, just as Diamond encourages us to see Costello as a wounded and wounding woman, not simply as an unprincipled moralist.

As we have seen, critical responses to Cavell belong to this testimonial scene, as the responses to Coetzee are both solicited and shown up by the wounds he exhibits. Cavell's exhibition of the injuries to sense-making that the skeptic attempts to circumvent provokes the deflections that characterize certain readings of his work – those readings to which Diamond responds by introducing the difficulty of reality. And at the same time, this exhibition asks for our acknowledgment, opens these wounds to us, invites us into bafflement, and in faithfulness to that bafflement, into wounded and wounding testimony, which can be misunderstood as we are misunderstood. We are invited to fail to settle others' attitudes as Cavell cannot settle our attitudes; in that sense, we are invited to take up the position that pre-dates skepticism, to know the place for ourselves. Can we stay there for longer than the skeptic does?

2.5 Turning to Woundedness in Diamond's Essay

Each of Diamond's main examples features testimony whereby someone exhibits the wounds they suffer to their sense-making. Before considering the nature of this testimony

further and asking why Diamond draws her examples from literature, it will be helpful to trace the concepts of embodiment and woundedness that appear in her essay, so that we can better see what it might mean to exhibit a wound (an image projected from the bodily case) in speech or writing. Since Diamond draws these concepts from Cavell and uses them to respond to readings of his work as well as to interrogate replies to Coetzee's lectures, this means asking about the point or purpose to which Diamond puts her examples.

3. Diamond's Purpose: Wounds, Bodies, Lives

Diamond's context-specific purpose in introducing the difficulty of reality can be separated from her concept's four-point grammar. Besides asking how to understand her examples and their unity, seeking guidelines for projection in their variance, we can ask why she develops this concept in the conversation into which she intervenes, why she uses this concept and writes as she does. Along with the concept's grammar, its purpose can shape the provision and description of examples. To understand Diamond's speech act, we can ask about her interests and motivations in this terrain: what drives her to articulate herself in this way?

If we revisit the genesis of Diamond's essay and the occasions at which she first presented this material, we can see her introduction of the difficulty of reality and concern for how it troubles philosophical modes of sense-making as a response to critical readings of Cavell and Coetzee that she regards as uncomprehending. Cavell's critics see him, and he sees himself in their eyes, as "professionally maverick" (Mahon 2015, 232). He fails to meet their expectations for philosophical rigor and precision, and they fail to see how this in fact signals his resistance to them as expectations. Coetzee's critics see him as unskilled at

argument, perhaps as unqualified to give the Tanner Lectures, and as perniciously distracting from these deficiencies by offering fiction in lieu of more direct modes of expression.

Diamond recognizes that Cavell and his critics appear to be talking past each other, in a way that resembles how Coetzee and his critics don't understand each other. Where these writers point to and enact wounds to sense-making, so that their prose comes under immense pressure, their critics see a different order of difficulty, miss the pressure their speech is under, the way it has been wounded, and therefore fail to understand their testimony. Diamond introduces the difficulty of reality to get clear about what's happening in these interactions, these failures to comprehend each other. Additional examples further illuminate how our failure to make sense of reality can disrupt our ability to make sense of each other: the dynamic she sees in these critical encounters. Both Cavell's and Coetzee's critics miss that they are giving us pictures of woundedness rather than arguments that could be assessed impartially and without exposure. Given the risk to sense-making of acknowledging these pictures, the critics' neglect of this is entirely expected. Contagious woundedness will motivate deflection.

In this context, we can see that Diamond centers images of woundedness because these are precisely what readers of Cavell and Coetzee overlook. Cavell portrays skepticism as covering up a wounded perception. Hughes seems almost to feel the wounds of the six young men in his bafflement at the photograph. And Costello says outright that she should be understood, in her lectures, not as a philosopher but as "an animal exhibiting [yet wanting to cover up] a wound", an utterance that Coetzee's critics cannot help but analyze as part of an argument (Coetzee 1999, 26). We could say that Diamond has noticed, in responses to these texts, philosophy's capacity to look away from wounds, its desire to pivot (for

example) from the wounded woman at the center of Coetzee's lectures to debates about animal rights. We could see Diamond as seeking to return us to the scene where our confrontation with a human being whose sense-making has been injured calls for our acknowledgment. In other words, we could see her as pointing to a way in which readers of Cavell and Coetzee find themselves in the skeptic's position, so that her essay is an attempt to draw them back to the human encounter with an inscrutable other.

At this juncture, one might wonder about Diamond's other examples of difficult realities. Cavell, Coetzee, and Hughes give us instances of horror: the horror of another's unacknowledged pain or the pain of going unacknowledged, the horrors of factory farming, and the horrors of war. This might make the language of woundedness sound particularly apt. Indeed, all these examples straightforwardly center wounds: the wounds of other people, the wounds of fellow creatures, the wounds of war's victims and combatants. But what of the examples of goodness or beauty that Diamond tells us also belong to the range of difficult realities (DR, 13)? Czesław Miłosz writes of astonishment at the world's beauty, the perception of trees or animals that are so beautiful that our sense-making is revealed in all its finitude. Ruth Klüger describes the inexplicable kindness of a stranger at Auschwitz. This kindness in such terrifying circumstances astonishes Klüger, and her astonishment astonishes some of those with whom she shares it. Are these examples of wounds to sense-making, or are they better described by words not projected from the case of bodily vulnerability and harm?

It's true that it's harder to see the horrific or ugly in Miłosz's perception of beauty or Klüger's awe at a stranger's goodness, though Diamond suggests it's there, for instance, in the human separateness that these experiences can uncover (DR, 14). But it nevertheless

seems to me that these are instances of wounds to sense-making, that the language of woundedness helpfully brings out aspects of these examples that make them difficult realities. For Diamond, the point is less that the poet perceives a beautiful tree or hears a particularly sweet birdsong, and more that certain perceptions of beauty and goodness can bring us up against the limits of our sense-making just as much as can certain perceptions of horror, as we try and fail to integrate these perceptions into our understanding and life. The language of woundedness isn't meant to imply that such beauty or goodness harms rather than uplifts us; it rather points toward ways in which beauty and goodness can disorient and bewilder us as beings convinced of our capacity to comprehend whatever we encounter.

This experience, even if beauty or goodness is its source, is bound to be wounding for a creature who paradigmatically excels at sense-making. It isn't that talk of woundedness puts an unduly negative slant on the concept of a difficult reality, but that it emphasizes what difficult realities mean in the lives of human animals who make sense of themselves and their world. Talk of difficult realities as (say) challenges rather than wounds to sense-making would obscure how even experiences of beauty and goodness can reveal the fragility of our characteristic capacities, isolate us from our fellows as Klüger is isolated from those bewildered by her astonishment, and lead to vulnerable, deflection-inviting testimony. That's not to mention that difficult realities do more than challenge or stretch us: their coextensive inexplicability and ordinariness confronts us with the frailty of our understanding and the inscrutability of our fellows. Diamond's additional examples show that, while factory farms and warfare can confront us with this, so can singing birds and kind strangers.

With Diamond's images of wounds come images of bodies. The skeptic's wounding insight results from the fact that our bodies separate us from each other. As the photograph

wounds Hughes's sense-making, he tells us that his body is shouldered out "from its instant and heat" (1957, 55). He pictures his injuries using language ordinarily applied to corporeal wounds. And Costello describes her alienation as felt in her body (Coetzee 1999, 33-34). Diamond picks up on Costello's understanding of herself as an animal whose body has been wounded by the ways we wound our fellow creatures. She notices Hughes's avowal of "bodily thrownness from the photograph" (DR, 12). The language to express wounds to sense-making is here projected from the case of bodily wounds.

Diamond also notices bodies in the reception of Coetzee's lectures. She sees the respondents as rejecting their own "capacity to inhabit in imagination the body of a woman confronting, trying to confront, the difficulty of what we do to animals" (ibid., 13). She construes their deflection into moral argument as a deflection from inhabiting their own bodies, which are susceptible to wounds. The respondents don't see how to treat Costello's testimony to her wounded body, her existence as an animal who suffers harm to her characteristic capacities because of what we do to other animals, as anything besides a bewildered attempt to express a fact, which could be better treated in cooler, less bodily language. But in fact, wounded bodies call for sympathy and care, our acknowledgment of their pain, not transformation into facts. That sympathy and care can be as misunderstood in deflection as wounds are; just think of how Cavell's acknowledgment of the skeptic's wounds is misread as appreciating skepticism, and hence as betraying rather than staging his Wittgensteinian inheritance.

Diamond suggests that Costello's testimony expresses her "embodied knowledge", her experience as a wounded animal in fellowship with the animals who suffer in factory farms, while the deflection of Coetzee's respondents from that knowledge manifests in their

disregard for Costello's wounds, parallel to our disregard for the baffling horrors of animal industry (ibid.). Diamond likens acknowledgment of a difficult reality to inhabiting a wounded body, testimony to which is presumably not so different from an expression of pain, and this image and its correspondence to the perception that appalls the skeptic (people could be suffering the pains of difficult realities without our knowledge or care) brings out why deflection can be so enticing.

All this concern for embodiment is linked to the ordinary yet baffling perception of human separateness that can drive skepticism about other minds. After all, as the skeptic notices, our bodies separate us from each other, making expression necessary and deceit possible. Put otherwise, embodiment is linked to the possibility of mutual incomprehension that difficult realities open onto, which Diamond finds played out in Cavell's and Coetzee's encounters with their critics. Our bodies provide the conditions for mutual incomprehension to take root. We could say that, in responses to Cavell and Coetzee, Diamond observes the exile of bodies and their animal passions and pains from philosophy, and we might then see her as writing to reacquaint her own discipline with the bodies that condition the misunderstandings she notices. We could see her essay as trafficking in precisely those passions philosophy seems determined to eclipse, and hence as provoking the very bewilderment she aims to get into focus.

Costello's awareness of her wounded body in relation to the animal bodies that suffer in factory farms could also be described as her awareness that she shares her life as an animal with them. As her embodiment is missed by Coetzee's critics, so, we might say, is the life of the wounded animal Costello alongside the animal lives to which she attends. She imagines her way into what it is to be an animal holding on to life, much as Diamond's students

imagine what it is like to be an infant holding on to life when presented with various utilitarian arguments. Inhabiting a body and being alive run together here.

Indeed, Diamond's three main examples could all be seen as concerning what it is to be alive. Hughes is baffled and disoriented by his sense of what it is to be alive as opposed to dead, by his inability to use these concepts in ordinary ways to capture the reality he confronts in the photograph. Costello is thrown by her sense of what it means to be alive in sharing life with other creatures. And Cavell seeks to return the deflecting skeptic to an awareness of being alive in sharing human life: in being other to others, fellows in the separateness that comes from embodiment. In all three examples, the invitation to deflection appears as an invitation to neglect wounds, deny bodies, and flee from a certain perceived aliveness: that of the six men, that of the animals in industrial farms, that of the person who suffers in secret. In this vein, we might see how our bewilderment at Diamond's essay results from her expression of her life with these examples, as the call to acknowledge these wounds disrupts her own habits of mind. I could see a critic worrying that Diamond's essay is overly colored by her own preoccupations and experiences: in a word, that her life is too glaringly present in the text. But we might see that presence as signaling her attempt to reintroduce philosophy to the lives (for instance, of Cavell and Coetzee) it has passed over. And we might then see our disorientation as belonging to the exposure of this reintroduction.

Diamond's concerns for embodiment and aliveness show how the central image of a wound to sense-making has been projected from the case of a wound to one's body: a wound that could threaten one's life, calls out for acknowledging care, and can be neglected. As part of continuing to see the ordinary, we can hear Diamond's projection of woundedness as little more than melodramatic (as one might hear Costello's utterances). Or we can see how the

use of ordinarily corporeal terms to picture “a profound disturbance of soul” illuminates that disturbance, at the risk that we come to share it (DR, 11). Whether we say, for example, that Coetzee’s critics overlook Costello’s wounded body or neglect her life as an injured animal (and therefore neglect appropriate care), our acceptance of the projection of these corporeal concepts into the context of a disruption to sense-making is not separate from our acknowledgment of that disruption, as our denial of that projection can be involved in deflection from Costello’s difficulty. That Diamond’s protagonists use the language of wounds, bodies, and lives in their testimony can bewilder us, and hence succeed as testimony to a difficult reality, as it can appear simply overdramatic in ways that belong to the mutual incomprehension onto which difficult realities open and to which these protagonists are testifying. These same responses are available when we encounter Diamond’s essay, and this reveals both her profound vulnerability in writing, her exposure to misunderstanding, and her fidelity to the dynamic she highlights.

We can see how talk of wounds relates to vulnerability to incomprehension in the responses to Cavell and Coetzee that prompt Diamond’s introduction of the difficulty of reality. If Cavell is read as moving illicitly from properly epistemic to more diffuse moral issues, that’s at least partly because of his talk of woundedness and exposure, which could seem to belong more to poetry than philosophy (see Hollander 1980, 581). Amy Gutmann sees that “Coetzee dramatizes the increasingly difficult relationships between the aging novelist Elizabeth Costello and her family and professional colleagues”, but she sounds rather like one of those colleagues when she follows up with the claim that “the frame of fiction” allows Coetzee to advance “empirical and philosophical arguments that are relevant [presumably unlike much of the story] to the ethical issue of how human beings should treat

animals": when she sees Costello for little more than the conclusions she defends (Coetzee 1999, 3-4). In these cases, I see a denial of the projection of woundedness, a desire to leave animal bodies and lives off to one side so we can engage in more rigorous argumentation. That belongs to deflection from the difficult realities to which Cavell and Coetzee testify.

From Diamond's perspective, Cavell, Coetzee and Costello, and Hughes can all be seen as exhibiting wounds. That's what their testimony does. These are all examples of wounds suffered in shared embodiment: shared with other human beings, with other animals, with six young men. Hence, they are all instances of the separateness and possibility of mutual incomprehension involved in inhabiting bodies. That could motivate the projection of woundedness from the bodily case (and impel its denial). Diamond's examples center wounded human beings whose pain demands acknowledgment and elicits denial.

As Diamond's concept is projected beyond the context of responses to Cavell and Coetzee, we can expect the image of woundedness at its heart to shift in ways we may or may not find intelligible. The question of whether we find these further uses intelligible will rightly occur within the exposure that belongs to testimony to possible difficulties. The four-point grammar we have identified for Diamond's concept can help to guide our projection, but it cannot settle this question or prove that someone is wounded in a way that justifies the concept's application; after all, exposure is a feature of the concept's grammar. What we can say in advance is that, as the concept of a difficult reality is used for new purposes and in other contexts, there will be questions about how these shifts in purpose and context recast the concept's grammar, whether the concept resembles its prior uses such that its application (and the claims this makes on us) can be accepted. These questions about the concept's shape

over its history cannot be pursued impersonally or impartially, for they bear on our acknowledgment or denial of the difficult realities we might recognize and thus suffer.

Part II of this thesis projects Diamond's concept into new contexts. There, we can ask whether these cases display the same grammar as Diamond's main examples. We can ask what intelligible shifts in the concept's purpose, what projections, are open to us, and see how much further we might go with it. As we see what room there is for intelligible variation in purpose, we will see the possible uses of Diamond's concept more clearly. Before beginning that exercise and looking at further instances of testimony to possible difficulties, though, it's worth considering Diamond's own essay as a work of testimony to difficult realities. Could we see her as, like her protagonists, exhibiting a wound?

4. Diamond's Testimony

This thesis began with an acknowledgment of how disorienting Diamond's essay can be. I said that it might not be clear how or even whether Diamond's examples hang together, that her apparent unwillingness to transcend the provision of examples and offer more general conclusions might just cement our bafflement. I have worked to uncover the constancy in her essay's variety.

At this point, however, it might strike us that Diamond's examples center pieces of writing that have bewildered readers. Indeed, we have seen how that bewilderment (understood as reason for criticism) forms the context in which Diamond intervenes by introducing the difficulty of reality. She endeavors to show how certain appraisals of Cavell and Coetzee are unsurprising responses to exposing testimony to wounds to sense-making. Would it be any more surprising, then, if criticisms of Diamond's essay as (say) insufficiently

rigorous, too exposing or disorienting, could be heard as normal responses to the ways in which her sense-making has been injured by the injuries she describes? If her essay failed to exemplify the room for denial, and hence for acknowledgment, manifest in her examples, couldn't it in fact be charged with betraying the lack of assurance found in the scene of testimony and deflection to which it strives to return us?

I suggest that we are now able to see Diamond's essay as shaped to exhibit wounds, so that readers are left in the exposed condition that comes with the experience of a sufferer of difficult realities. That is, I suggest we can see Diamond not only as gesturing to wounds to sense-making but as herself acknowledging and testifying to these wounds, thereby enacting the exposure to which she seeks to restore Cavell's and Coetzee's critics.

We will be able to see Diamond's essay as a piece of wounded and wounding testimony if we face the significant challenge of bearing witness to difficult realities in ways that don't make deflection too easy. How can someone faithfully testify to a wound to their sense-making in a way that opens that wound to others without, in effect, making too much sense of it? How can one do this within the frame of a sense-making discipline like philosophy? Considering Cavell's category of 'passionate utterances' and Michel Foucault's category of 'parrēsiastic utterances' offers a way forward.

5. Passionate and Parrēsiastic Utterances

When Cavell introduces the concept of a passionate utterance, he doesn't see himself as primarily contributing to the philosophy of language. He isn't trying to enlarge our stock of categories of utterance for the sake of clarifying the workings of what we say. Or at least, he doesn't see this task as separate from contributing to moral thought: he is attempting to

recognize and exhibit “speech as confrontation, as demanding, as owed […], each instance of which directs, and risks, if not costs, blood” (Cavell 2005, 187). The concept of a passionate utterance is to be heard in a moral register. It spotlights how we put ourselves, and so our passions, forward in speech and therefore make a claim on others. It foregrounds how we shape and interpret ourselves and our relationships in conversation.

In this sense, Cavell’s exploration of passionate utterance is a study in language’s perlocutionary effect. It’s a study of what our words do to and for speakers and hearers (ibid., 5). We could think here of Costello’s utterance that she doesn’t know what she wants to do but doesn’t want to sit silent. Those words express her passion: her sense of outrage and frustration, her isolation from her fellows, her awareness of the need for testimony and yet her uncertainty that it will make any sense or difference. This expression puts hearers or readers in a position of responsibility. We are left to come to terms with our own outrage or frustration, our own potential complicity in sitting silent, our neglect or uncertainty or attention in relation to Costello. Her passionate utterance makes a demand on us (are we sitting silent?), which ‘risks, if not costs, blood’, since it exposes us to the difficulty she suffers. There’s no convention that can ultimately guide and determine our response to Costello’s utterance. We are left to own our neglect or acknowledgment, to try to find a way to stand behind ourselves, and for Cavell this openness of response is characteristic of passionate utterances (ibid., 18, 172). In response to a speaker’s passion, we are asked to relate to (which could be to deny) our own passions, to ask ourselves whether we are sitting silent; our freedom is the open possibility of deflection or attention. We can see this freedom in possible responses to Diamond’s essay, which we can dismiss as merely chaotic and inadequately edited or regard as faithful precisely in its apparent disarray.

However, I think there's more going on in Costello's utterance and Diamond's essay than perlocutionary expressions of passions. When Costello says that she doesn't want to sit silent, she is making a claim about the relationship between her speech and her life. She wants her speech to express the baffling truth about what we do to animals as this injuriously pervades her life, and thereby to confront her interlocutor, in this case her son, with the exposure where acknowledgment is called for and deflection is solicited. This concern for the presence of one's life in one's speech is characteristic of what Michel Foucault discusses under the heading of 'parrēsia', a category of truth-telling utterance drawn out by way of example.

Foucault introduces the concept of parrēsia in his (2005) exploration of the ethics of care in the Greco-Roman world. There, he focuses especially on instances of parrēsia found in Euripidean tragedy and Socratic philosophy. Like Diamond's concept of a difficult reality, parrēsia is clarified by a series of paradigmatic instances: for example, Plato's confrontation with the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse. The concept is explicitly open to projection over time. Parrēsia is meant to be "a way of telling the truth" that isn't defined by "the content of the truth as such" (Foucault 2010, 52). Parrēsiastic utterances don't merely assert propositions that hold of the world. In them, the parrēsiast puts herself on the line, risking exposure. She puts the truth of her own life forward in speech and confronts her interlocutor with this close link between life and speech (we could call this testimony). A parrēsiastic utterance's content could be uttered in a context where, or in such a way that, the utterance isn't parrēsiastic. What's essential to parrēsia is that a speaker claims a link between her speaking and living the truth, that a hearer is called into question by this, and that the speaker is faithful to her sense of reality even where this is painful for her and her hearer (cf. Cavell 2005, 18).

Parrēsia expresses one's attempt to live truthfully (to avoid deflection) and confronts interlocutors, who may or may not be attentive, with this truthfulness.

Daniele Lorenzini (2015) identifies seven conditions for the felicitous projection of the concept of parrēsia.

1. The effect of a parrēsiastic utterance is not predictable. It can lead hearers into bafflement, for instance, or it can be brushed aside or explained away. There's room for denial that cannot be overturned by additional information or proof.
2. There's no convention that could guide an interlocutor's response to a parrēsiastic utterance. Interlocutors are left to speak for themselves, to freely own their attention or neglect. On Lorenzini's reading of Foucault, the category of parrēsia emphasizes the "freedom of the individual speaking" for herself about her life and the freedom of any response to this (2015, 262). This is subtly different from the way in which a passionate utterance invites hearers "to improvisation in the disorders of desire" on Cavell's view (2005, 19). For parrēsia confronts hearers, not just with the burdens of improvisation and spontaneity, but with the open question of truthfulness: is my life attentive to this reality?
3. The parrēsiast personally stands behind her utterance and, in so doing, in context, exposes hearers as responsible for their acknowledgment or deflection. Lorenzini calls this the "critical" aspect of a parrēsiastic utterance (2015, 263).
4. To engage in parrēsia is to take a risk whose consequences may be quite unknown or unclear for the speaker. This is true even when there isn't an imbalance of power between conversational partners, as there is between Plato and the despot Dionysius.

As Lorenzini has it, “what we risk in using parrēsia in a friendly conversation, thus questioning our interlocutor’s *ethos*, is nothing less than our friendship, say our life *together*” (ibid., 264).

5. In response to this, parrēsia demands courage: the courage to be truthful, to put one’s life (and wounds) forward, even where this risks friendship, community, harmony, and one’s self-understanding or one’s life, even where it costs blood.
6. Parrēsia is ‘transparent’. The parrēsiast doesn’t seek to overly embellish what she says. Her words are plain, even injuriously so. Her speech and life are integrated. She eschews rhetorical flourishes and modes of sense-making that would disguise or deflect from her sense of reality; she refuses to sever the links among her life, passions, perceptions, and speech. Her life, as it were, speaks through her, and she lets it.
7. A parrēsiastic utterance is an act that manifests or exhibits the truth as the speaker experiences it. Lorenzini calls this condition for the felicitous use of the concept of parrēsia “alethurgy” (ibid., 265). The parrēsiast must take her utterance to be true, but more than this, she must tether herself to this truth, must put herself fully behind it. As Foucault puts it, in parrēsia we see the speaker’s “own form of life rendered manifest, present, perceptible, and active as model in the discourse he delivers” (quoted in ibid.). This doesn’t mean that the speaker must put herself forward as an exemplar – she may put her own neglect or complicity in cruelty forward, that may show the ‘model’ of a life in this terrain – but only that *she* must appear in what she says. It’s her life, perhaps in its shatteredness, that roots her testimony and, so to say, does the speaking.

This last 'alethurgy' condition is tightly related to the penultimate 'transparency' condition. For Lorenzini,

> the parrhesiast manifests his commitment to the truthfulness of what he says, not only in risking a friendship or his own life in order to utter what he thinks to be true, but also through the harmony, through the homophony he displays between his *logos* and his *bios* – that is, between what he thinks and what he says and at the same time between what he says and his real, actual way of living. (Ibid., 266)

The alethurgy and transparency conditions mean, then, that in assessing and responding to a parrēsiastic utterance, we cannot afford to overlook the relation between this utterance and its utterer. We cannot isolate the utterance's truthful content from the speaker and the form of their speech; we cannot come to grips with the meaning of the speech act if we turn away from the speaker who has reasons and motives for speaking in that way in this context. In other words, we cannot prize Costello the wounded woman apart from the reality that wounds her and analyze that reality without any care for the wounded life and speech by which it's disclosed.

These seven conditions for parrēsia – unpredictable effect, freedom of response, criticism and a call to acknowledgment, risk, courage, transparency, and alethurgy – provide a framework that can help us to understand what's going on in Costello's utterance about not sitting silent and in Diamond's crafting of her essay, in brief, in testimony to difficult realities. In both of these cases, it seems to me, these seven conditions clearly obtain.

Costello's Parrēsia

(1) Unpredictable effect.	When Costello tells John she doesn't want to sit silent, she doesn't know how this will affect him or their relationship. (Just as Coetzee doesn't know how his lecture will affect us.)
(2) Freedom of response.	John is free to attend to Costello's wounded life and wounding speech – to acknowledge his mother – or (as he seems to do) to deflect from this.
(3) Criticism and a call to acknowledgment.	Costello's utterance can function as a criticism of John and the sort of discourse in which he tries to engage her. It asks him to acknowledge the inexplicable, disorienting reality of what we do to animals, what this says about our society and form of life.
(4 and 5) Risk and courage.	Costello evidently takes a risk: her relationship with her son is on the line and her speech expresses her vulnerability, as its first clause about not knowing what she wants to do emphasizes. With this not knowing in view, it takes courage not to yield to John's construal of the wounding reality as an issue for argument or a resolvable problem.
(6) Transparency.	Costello is clear and direct. Her life is transparently the source of her words. She speaks from experience; that is the root of her utterance's force or authority.
(7) Alethurgy.	John cannot hope to understand what Costello says, what she expresses of her vision of reality, if he doesn't try to understand her, how she sees her position in the world, her feelings of alienation, and her human desire for acknowledgment.

Diamond's Parrēsia

(1) Unpredictable effect.	Diamond cannot say in advance how her essay will affect readers; she cannot settle how we may go on with her concept, and thus with the difficulties it names and discloses. That inability to settle the questions raised by future projections shapes her introduction of the concept. She is careful not to provide more assurance than exposure can allow for.
(2) Freedom of response.	We are free to attend to Diamond's examples and hear in them her own experience of wounded sense-making, or we can deflect from them: there is, must be, plenty of room for that deflection.
(3) Criticism and a call to acknowledgment.	The very form of Diamond's essay serves as a criticism of criticisms of Cavell and Coetzee on which their prose is seen as formally deficient or inadequate or maverick. In not just saying that their prose is, against their critics, shaped by fidelity to reality, but in enacting that same fidelity and thereby inviting analogous deflections, Diamond calls readers to acknowledge the difficulties she has experienced and the difficulties they present for disciplines of sense-making like philosophy.
(4 and 5) Risk and courage.	Diamond risks – indeed, sees that she must imperil – her essay's intelligibility, as her protagonists find themselves unintelligible to their fellows. It takes courage not to make more sense of difficult realities than faithful testimony to them could, to leave room for deflections that will construe Diamond as, in essence, failing to meet expectations for philosophical writing.
(6) Transparency.	Diamond often speaks for herself: she describes her experience of reading Coetzee's lectures and might be seen as rather too sympathetic to her unhinged protagonists (as Cavell is seen as too sympathetic to the skeptic). The form

	of her essay is transparent too: she refuses modes of sense-making and rhetoric (like the provision of necessary and sufficient conditions and certain understandings of order and clarity) that would deflect from the anxieties and injuries of testimony to wounded lives.
(7) Alethurgy.	Diamond's essay exhibits the truth – the wounding reality – her protagonists reveal; it does that in its very form, which can baffle and call us to responsibility as we project her concept onwards. It isn't clear to me that we can understand Diamond's essay without understanding her experience as this structures her provision and description of examples. I doubt we could understand it without seeing how it puts her in something like Cavell's and Coetzee's position, how that could be a fitting, perhaps the only fitting, response to their critics.

In both of these cases, parrēsia involves resisting (therefore inviting) deflective sense-making by exhibiting attention and making a claim on the potentially deflecting hearer to respond, either to acknowledge or deflect, but to own this response. Parrēsiastic utterances can disclose difficult realities and guide us toward attentiveness, or they can reveal the extent of our distractions. Of course, this isn't to say that parrēsia generally reveals difficult realities. An utterance could satisfy Lorenzini's criteria without being revelatory in this way. Not all hard truths are difficult in Diamond's sense. I am claiming that some parrēsiastic utterances disclose difficult realities; that parrēsia offers an illuminating way to understand testimony to these difficulties as we confront it in Diamond's examples and her provision of them.

We saw that Diamond likens acknowledging a difficult reality to inhabiting one's wounded body, standing by one's embodied sense of vulnerability to such wounds (DR, 13). Francey Russell takes this to mean that, in recognizing a difficult reality, I am, and can see myself as, "that very difficulty, where experiencing reality as incomprehensible just *is* to experience oneself as incomprehensible" (2017, 168). Costello is certainly a case in point, as her alienation from her fellows forces on her the possibility that she has gone mad. She experiences herself as incomprehensible in the eyes of her happily meat-consuming friends, with whom she shares her modes of sense-making, including those that structure her self-understanding. But to say that acknowledging a difficult reality means embodying the difficulty isn't only to say that the opacity of the world and other people tends to open onto self-opacity. It's also to say that genuine recognition of a difficult reality can color one's whole life, wound one in ways that extend beyond the forms of sense-making initially disrupted (think of the wood sellers), and ask for the display of these deep wounds in faithfulness to the difficulty. That's what parrēsia opens to view.

As Costello's and Diamond's parrēsia exhibits their woundedness, it can be wounding to others. Recall that unpredictable effect, criticism, risk, and courage are some of Lorenzini's criteria. In parrēsiastic expressions of difficult realities, one faces up to and exhibits the difficulty one has come to embody, which one has been wounded by and may wound others with; one shows one's wounded self in speech. This disclosure of one's wounds and capacity to wound others shows how testimony to exposure can leave others exposed before the difficulties that have come to light. Certainly, we could deny the projection of the concept of parrēsia to these contexts. But that could be part of deflecting from legitimate testimony to difficult realities: it's not a way out of exposure.

The moral I want to draw from this discussion of parrēsia is that certain kinds of utterance, certain ways of using our words, can serve as instruments for the disclosure of difficult realities, partly by complicating the continuing use of modes of sense-making in deflection. Costello is injured by what her fellows do to animals, and her articulation of this is liable to shock and offend those who want to engage in reasoned debates about animal rights, whose desire to do that is both amplified and exposed by their encounter with Costello. The solicitation of this response – the fact that outrage is as possible or predictable as acknowledgment – is precisely the effect we would expect genuine parrēsia to have on its intended audience. We can see this same pattern in Diamond's essay and possible responses to it. That is, I think, a sign of her fidelity to difficult realities rather than any failure to get them into focus, and so, it must be able to be seen as a failure to get them into focus.

6. Literary Form

Can this tell us anything about why Diamond turns to literature for her examples?

Hughes offers a poem, testimonial in voice and force, about a photograph, which bears witness to a scene: six smiling men, out in the countryside, seemingly oblivious to the horrors of war that would soon engulf them. When Hughes speaks of the difficulty he confronts in the photograph, he exposes us to it. Coetzee offers a novel in the distinctly testimonial form of lectures, whose protagonist testifies in word and deed to her sense of animal lives and their place, or erasure, in human life. When Coetzee exhibits the difficulty of our life with animals in the difficulty of Costello's experience, that difficulty can wound us, or we can deflect from it, as if we have been invited to dinner with Costello ourselves. We aren't looking in on Costello's testimony and responses to it so much as we are, as with

Hughes's poem, hearing that testimony and responding, along with the testifier's fellows, for ourselves.[13]

Diamond finds in literature pieces of first-personal testimony that record experiences of confronting and enduring difficult realities. As records, these pieces also make claims on us; they have the capacity to bewilder us, to invite deflection, and to call for acknowledgment, including our own testimony. It's as if Diamond is looking for the voice of a fellow human being saying, 'I am wounded by this reality, aren't you?' It's as if this voice is the best guide to where difficulties lie, since it can not only describe these difficulties without deflection and express their attendant anxieties and temptations but can make them potentially difficult for us. Diamond's favored literary works are artifacts and instruments of other people's capacity to wound us with their woundedness, to baffle us with their bafflement. These works stage and realize the mutual incomprehension that results from perceptions of difficult realities. Diamond reaches for literary works for the 'transparency' and 'alethurgy' of the testimony she finds there, because they are confronting, particularly when she is responding to philosophical modes of sense-making deflection. Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that Cavell is accused of being more like a poet than a philosopher (Hollander 1980, 581).

Consider how Hughes's poem makes a claim on its reader parallel to the claim the photograph makes on Hughes. The poem's authority to make this claim rests on Hughes's experience of facing a difficult reality himself, one we too could face, and on how the poem expresses the photograph's difficulty, giving it a life in language. Through Hughes's

[13] This might be compared with Cavell's reading of Shakespeare's *Othello*: he finds himself attuned and exposed to Othello's "problems of trust and betrayal, of false isolation and false company, of the desire and the fear of both privacy and of union", not just looking in on them, but called to respond for himself (1979, 453).

testimony to his experience, readers can experience the photograph as wounding their sense-making. This difficulty can also become the poem's: readers can experience the poem disclosing the difficult realities of war and mortality disclosed to Hughes by the photograph.

I see two related ways for literary works to reveal difficult realities and help us resist deflection. First, they can be testimonial in content. A writer, narrator, or character can open a difficult reality to us by bearing witness to it in parrēsia. The text can be an artifact and instrument of the capacity of other people to expose us. The voice of a writer or character can reveal and unsettle, as they share their experience of suffering difficult realities, exhibiting this in skillful testimony or in their failure to communicate as they might wish to, putting their vulnerability before us. Much of Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* is comprised of Costello's testimony in the lectures she gives at the fictional Appleton College. There, she indicts her audience for their failure to sympathetically imagine the lives of the animals suffering gruesomely in factory farms, just as they fail to acknowledge Costello's suffering in attention to this. In those lectures, Costello expresses her experience of this reality in often injurious ways, and Coetzee pictures the various misunderstandings and deflections that result; we also see how Costello's everyday testimony (for instance, in her conversation with John) requests the sympathy of her fellows while making their denial of that sympathy more enticing. Costello's voice, and Coetzee's refusal to subordinate it to the specific demands of the genre of Tanner Lectures, turns *The Lives of Animals* into a machine for provoking the very misunderstandings it pictures.

This suggests that form as well as content can testify. The shape of a literary work, how it provokes or offends against expectations, can bear witness to a difficult reality. Literary works can stage dramatic confrontations without offering resolutions, thereby

drawing out the claims of incompatible, mutually wounding perspectives. Indeed, a lack of care for form could betray otherwise exposing testimony. We can see this care in how Diamond shapes her essay, resisting alternative ways of introducing and clarifying the difficulty of reality. We can see it in Coetzee's lectures, where the narrative form confronts the audience with the person of a wounded lecturer, and where that form's invitation of responses according to which it represents Coetzee's flight from his own mediocre arguments in fact belongs to the dynamic the lectures portray. Form enables Coetzee to expose readers to the bewilderment of encountering Costello; like her testimony, it confronts readers with the call of acknowledgment and the temptation of denial. Moreover, our exposure to the artifacts of that confrontation, as we discover responses to Coetzee bound together with Costello's testimony in *The Lives of Animals*, without any convention for adjudicating between these mutually uncomprehending voices, draws us into this dynamic.

It's true that Diamond's examples have much of their parrēsiastic force in their content. Hughes speaks in his own voice about his experience of being shouldered out by the photograph. Costello speaks first-personally of living with those who eat animals and failing to understand them as they don't understand her. Cavell also speaks for himself, and he seeks to return the skeptic to their own response to another's unacknowledged pain. Still, for all three, form matters a great deal: it matters that Hughes writes a poem that can baffle, that Coetzee offers fiction about a wounded woman rather than a treatise about animal rights, that Cavell can be accused of proceeding more by poetic indirection than by sanctioned modes of philosophical sense-making. We have also seen this with Diamond's essay, whose form testifies (hence bewilders) along with its content. Like her protagonists, she is

concerned to reveal, rather than deflect from, difficult realities, and one feature of that revelation will be an invitation to deflect.

These two ways for literary works to exhibit wounds to sense-making are intertwined. After all, testimony is itself a form, and a work's testimonial content can be an instance of form's testimonial capacity. In each of Diamond's main examples, we see how parrēsiastic utterance hangs together with an attention to form that allows this parrēsia to strike and implicate us. And so, we find ourselves in the vulnerable condition to which Diamond seeks to return critics of Coetzee and Cavell, as each of those writers testifies to the claims of this vulnerability (in response to Costello and the skeptic) and thereby provokes the misunderstandings that draw Diamond's eye.

Then we might expect further projections of Diamond's concept to be particularly invited by contexts where voice and form jointly testify, where a text's bewildering shape leaves us endangered by the wounds it faithfully exhibits and therefore lays it open to the charge that its defiance of norms and expectations, its provocation of misinterpretations, marks it as a failure.

PART II

Difficult Testimony

Introduction to Part II

Part II projects Diamond's concept of a difficult reality into new contexts, where form disrupts genre norms and destabilizes modes of sense-making, enabling testimony. With the concept's grammar as revealed by the variance of Diamond's main examples, an understanding of the purpose to which she puts it, and a sense of the parrēsia acknowledgment can call for, we can now explore further examples to see how we might go on with the concept, and so with the realities to which its application could be fitting.

Chapter 4 characterizes Iris Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) as formally testifying to the difficulty of reality, demonstrating the pressure this exerts on philosophical prose. Chapter 5 argues that Carys Bray's recent climate fiction *When the Lights Go Out* (2020) uses form to stage the mutual incomprehension difficult realities open onto. In each case, I consider how features of these contexts invite the projection of Diamond's concept, and I discuss how that concept then unfolds and changes shape. The work of Part I allows us to better understand these contexts, and this exercise casts light back on difficult realities.

Part II is unified by a concern for how testimony to difficult realities can resist (and may thereby solicit) deflection. Chapter 4 asks how philosophy can resist deflection, and Chapter 5 asks the same of literature. I see *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and *When the Lights Go Out* as exemplary instances of acknowledgment, faithfully exhibiting injuries to sense-making, subverting deflective disciplines, and hence provoking misunderstanding and bewilderment.

These chapters also pick up on the religious register of several of Diamond's more peripheral examples. Projecting the concept of a difficult reality into the contexts of

Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals and *When the Lights Go Out* can clarify why Diamond turns to examples saturated in Christian language and experience to illuminate reality's capacity to impede and wound our understanding.

The exercise – the quest, in Cavell's idiom – of asking how these projections carry and shift the concept's constancy will mean entering the scene where acknowledgment is called for and deflection is tempting. There's no way to query these wounds without taking a risk, making ourselves vulnerable to them.

Chapter 4

Philosophical Testimony: Murdoch's Disorientations

1. Introduction

Iris Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (hereafter MGM) has not been universally esteemed. It received mixed reviews when published and less attention than might have been expected. It remains seldom read even by those familiar with Murdoch's earlier philosophical work, chiefly collected in *The Sovereignty of Good*, and her novels. This might not have concerned Murdoch, who is said to have once quipped that a negative review "is even less important than whether it is raining in Patagonia". Good writing, she thought, is not primarily responsive to audience appeal, lest it sacrifice its aspiration to beauty or regard for truth. Murdoch is far from the only writer to express this sentiment. Wendell Berry, for example, counsels himself, "Any readers / who like your poems, / doubt their judgment" (2001, 270). But even if this is a recognizable and perhaps admirable authorial stance, and even if it extends from negative reviews and unearned praise to outright neglect, I still think that a consideration of why Murdoch's book has gone largely unread and unloved promises to be philosophically revealing.

1.1 A Bewildering Book

MGM would be an exceptionally difficult book to review. After all, as those who try to read it from start to finish are likely to notice, it's not easy to understand as a whole. The book isn't particularly hard to read at the level of sentences or paragraphs, but major challenges arise once one puts it down to reflect on how – indeed, whether – it hangs together.

Although MGM's content is extremely diverse, it does have recurrent and somewhat unifying themes: art and its connection to morality, religion and secularism, attention and meditation, the human animal as image-making, the moral life as a struggle to face reality, and unsurprisingly the relation between ethics and what Murdoch calls 'metaphysics', our activity of crafting and inhabiting pictures of ourselves and our world. To be sure, these are unusual themes for a late twentieth-century work of Anglophone philosophy. But they hardly make the book more unusual than *The Sovereignty of Good* was when it appeared in 1970. I doubt that readers have been so bewildered merely by MGM's content.

The structure and style of MGM are more probable sources of bewilderment. Of course, the book's shape isn't neatly separable from the concerns that animate it, especially given Murdoch's self-consciousness as a stylist and her abiding concern for how philosophy is written. If the form of MGM has stymied readers and interpreters, then it's worth asking about the relation this bears to the text's subject matter and claims.

Structurally, the book appears to be what Henry James might call a "large loose baggy monster" (1908, x). Its orientation is dizzying, and its tenor is centrifugal: a discussion of religious art, for instance, bleeds into an appraisal of novelistic comedy, which yields questions about the self and the inner life. Murdoch leaps back and forth across the history of philosophical and religious thought, making much of connections that others might find tenuous or idiosyncratic. To give an illustrative but by no means unusual example, in just two pages late in the book, Murdoch discusses the philosophers Plato, Heidegger, and Derrida, the poet Hölderlin, the psychoanalyst Jung, and the Buddha (MGM, 472-473).

Murdoch's prose often has the insistent register and enthralling force of a set of central concerns, but it isn't always apparent what these are. Rarely, if ever, does she allow

herself an explicitly programmatic note. Her writing could be described as literary, at least compared to most Anglophone philosophical prose: it's vividly descriptive, occasionally humorous, with sometimes genuinely poetic turns of phrase and plenty of asides. While Murdoch did, on some occasions, attempt to sharply distinguish between her philosophical and literary endeavors, where the former is meant to aim at clarity while the latter aims at a captivating polysemy, it's hard to imagine that distinction faring well when confronted with MGM (see Magee 1978, 230). If it simply aims at clarity of expression, at the ideals of precision and organization that Anglophone philosophy often holds in high esteem, then we seem to be forced to say that it misses the mark.

1.2 The Poor Construction Story

It's natural to ask why Murdoch's book has this shape. One possibility is that it's poorly constructed (as Whitford 1993, 27, and Jones 1993, 687 suggest). Perhaps it's a loose draft that could benefit from more time and a more systematic treatment. For philosophers who cultivate and elevate a maximally crystalline style, this may be a tempting view. When Murdoch's contemporary Elizabeth Anscombe published her short but notoriously opaque monograph *Intention*, some saw the book in precisely this way (see Baier 1960 and Heath 1960). They regarded it as a mediocre first draft, containing some obscure but promising insights, by an author who had failed to give her subject sufficient focus and structure, or who had been too enamored with Wittgenstein's peculiar style to try. We could similarly regard MGM as a work full of interesting remarks poorly arranged. This might be a more surprising conclusion to draw about MGM, since unlike *Intention*, it appeared late in its author's career, after the comparatively streamlined *The Sovereignty of Good*. But we might

suppose that Murdoch lacked the time to do her subject justice (see Jones 1993, 687), that she got over-ambitious (see Strawson 1992, n.p., and Barrett 1994, 111), or that her philosophy was corrupted by her novelistic profession (though MacIntyre 1993, 9 suggests this would be no bad thing).

I worry that this sort of approach is guilty of the very sin it finds in Murdoch: it doesn't give its subject the attention it's due. I doubt it represents an open-minded consideration of Murdoch's writing, just as I doubt it's sufficiently alert to Anscombe's concerns about the form and integrity of philosophical prose. Considerable effort went into composing MGM, first delivered as the 1982 Gifford Lectures before being greatly expanded over nearly a decade and published in book form. Murdoch clearly demonstrates in her earlier writing that she can produce more conventional (if not entirely conventional) book-length work in philosophy, alongside her career-long experiments with literary form; the much more extensive uptake of *The Sovereignty of Good* in mainstream Anglophone philosophy shows this difference from MGM. It seems implausible that the formal distance between these two books is down to growing apathy, lack of focus, or the early signs of Murdoch's very public cognitive decline (on this last possibility, see Garrard, Hodges, Ganesan, and Patterson 2019, 337). It would be one thing if no other interpretation were available. But as an initial reading, this seems deeply uncharitable, informed more by prejudices about how philosophy should look than by any reflective judgment.

It would be more charitable to think, and more compelling to show, that *The Sovereignty of Good* is a failure in its own terms, at least partly because of the way it's written and compiled. Then the thought would be that the distinctive form of MGM has a genuinely philosophical function tethered to the book's content and its author's aims in writing it. My

goal in this chapter is to explore that thought, suggesting a way to understand the philosophical – and, I believe, ethical – purpose of MGM's form. My sense is that the differences between *The Sovereignty of Good* and MGM indicate Murdoch's growing disillusionment with the received genre constraints of Anglophone moral philosophy. This disillusionment is tied to Murdoch's claims in and about ethics, because certain genre constraints hinder the formal experimentation needed for fidelity to the moral concerns she aims to express, for enacting the moral education she describes, and for testifying without consolation to the difficulties and tensions she sees.

1.3 The Mimetic Story

If we are going to accept that the disorienting shape of MGM is purposeful, then we need to know what its purpose could be. The simplest story is that MGM's form is mimetic, somehow imitating its content or themes. Then we might say that *The Sovereignty of Good* errs insofar as its structure betrays its concerns: for instance, insofar as its comparatively tidy architecture betrays its concern for the sheer variety of moral experience. This reading is attractive not only because it's straightforward but also because it places MGM in a recognizable tradition; we could read it in light of the familiar thought that a text's shape shouldn't belie its claims or content, a thought that comes to the fore in literary modernism.

However, this story has two significant problems. First, it leads us into a sort of paradox, which we can escape only by saying that MGM fails in its own terms. In the text, Murdoch articulates a Platonic skepticism of merely mimetic form in art while disavowing any strict dividing line between artistic and philosophical endeavors. So, if MGM's form is merely mimetic, then it would look as if it betrays the book's content: it would therefore look

as if the form is insufficiently mimetic. That would make MGM quite a botched construction. Of course, it's possibly a failure in this way. But I don't want to be forced into saying this so quickly. A second problem is that this story doesn't do much to illuminate MGM's details. It leaves open what content is being formally mirrored and how. It provides no error theory for how readers and reviewers have largely missed this. And it still allows us to read the book's disorganized form as a reason to query the value of its content. In short, this story lacks the explanatory power we are after, and I don't think it sufficiently bears on Murdoch's aims in writing MGM.

This leaves us with a puzzle about the significance of Murdoch's prose. In the following sections, I consider two more cogent answers to this puzzle: the first, which I call the exploratory reading, is drawn from Cora Diamond's (2010) discussion of Murdochian ethics; and the second, which I regard as more promising, is Stephen Mulhall's (1997) perfectionist reading. Although these accounts cast light on Murdoch's prose, I argue that they are both partial stories. To fill them out, I suggest that MGM's form should be seen as an instrument for testimony to difficult realities, and hence that the bewilderment of Murdoch's readers is as much to be expected as the deflective responses to Coetzee's lectures. This also indicates a certain limitation of Diamond's treatment of Murdoch when judged against the standard of her essay on the difficulty of reality.

2. Diamond on Murdochian Exploration

2.1 Exploring the Moral Terrain

In her 1956 "Vision and Choice in Morality", still early in her career, Murdoch concerns herself with how moral philosophers specify their field of inquiry. They do this, she worries,

by identifying that field with a range of phenomena centered on choice and action, or they see this range as paradigmatic of the morally significant. Far from being a disinterested specification of the moral terrain (there can be no such thing for Murdoch), this reflects their or their culture's partiality; it reinforces and legitimizes blind spots. Murdoch perceives what Cora Diamond calls a "narrowness of mind" on the part of her contemporaries, of which they are mostly unaware (2010, 52). This lack of awareness is unsurprising because these philosophers don't regard the thinking that occurs in moral philosophy as a relevant part of the moral or as morally evaluable. So, they miss the moral texture of thinking and the moral tone of the inner life, what Murdoch elsewhere calls one's "quality" of consciousness (MGM, 45, 84, 153; see also Murdoch 1956, 39). They may miss much else besides.[14]

Murdoch doesn't suggest that we find a way to account for such phenomena and then deploy the techniques of modern philosophy to situate and understand them. Rather, we should begin by trying to see – by exploring – what the moral is and could be (Murdoch 1956, 58). In view of this we can then consider the uses of philosophy's technical achievements. At this juncture, Diamond (2010, 52) criticizes Murdoch for inadequately explaining why a reconsideration of the moral will naturally lead us to do justice to what we have previously been unwilling or unable to admit as part of our field of inquiry. But the point, it seems to me, is less the promise of this and more the need to abandon any sharp delineation project, engaging first and perhaps instead in exploration.

[14] Some candidates from Murdoch's work are the ethical importance of love, hospitality to strangers, the relation between moral and religious experience, and the power of imagination.

Later in her career, Murdoch came to believe that all thought and experience has a moral character.[15] If that's right, then it's hard to see how any field of inquiry besides conscious experience could be demarcated as the moral. Of course, we might wonder what character a *moral* character is, and we might focus instead on the kinds of interest moral philosophy takes in things. But the lesson for Murdoch is that moral philosophy elaborates and considers the question of the range of phenomena it studies. That question is not only philosophically significant; it's significantly moral. One way to put this thought is that morally neutral meta-ethics isn't viable (see MGM, 25-26). The question of morality's scope is itself a moral question. Any answer can come up for moral evaluation as well as evaluation as consistent, sufficiently explanatory, or whatever else.

It's true that, in her earlier writing, Murdoch seems to think that a definitive set of phenomena can in principle be demarcated as the moral, never mind its difference from the set offered by contemporary ethics (1956, 33; 1971, 95). But even then, her ambitions for moral philosophy don't restrict its purview to questions about how to act or live alongside so-called meta-ethical questions. After all, meta-ethics as usually practiced supposes a definite field about which there's thought or language to be interrogated. It relies on that field's stability.

Diamond argues that one of Murdoch's key insights, developed across her career, is that views about the moral terrain – its scope, center, or landmarks – typically reflect or are themselves substantially moral views. Dominant ideas of what phenomena belong to ethics reflect understandings of human beings and reality that are substantially moral, and that

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[15] Diamond (2010, 81, n. 5) sees this theme emerging most clearly in MGM, though she thinks it's possible that Murdoch held similar views earlier, in the 1970s and perhaps even when she was working on "Vision and Choice in Morality" (1956).

therefore relate in complex ways to the wider culture and its values. Murdoch responds to this with argument, rich descriptions, genealogical narratives, and perhaps also a style of writing that points us toward what we may not yet see as morally significant: phenomena or concerns whose absence from our consideration is a moral as well as philosophical shortcoming. Examples include romantic and neighborly love, sympathy, the interior battle against egoism, prayer, the making and contemplation of art, and humility.

In line with this exploratory imperative, Murdoch objects to simplistic renderings of how concepts are employed in understanding the world and ourselves. Differences in our ways of sense-making have moral and philosophical weight: "the existence of very different styles of moral thinking" is a central axis for ethical reflection (Diamond 2010, 53). It isn't clear to Murdoch why moral philosophy should be any less various than moral thought, especially given diverse views about moral philosophy's subject matter and the extent to which these are tethered to what we think ethics is and should do (1956, 57; MGM, 492-497). It's unreasonable to try to analyze this variety in a single way. How we write ethics and what we see as morally significant, how we delineate or explore the moral and what we place or find at its center, aren't neatly separable.[16] Imposing uniformity on moral philosophy as a literary genre has a moral and philosophical cost.

2.2 The Domain of Moral Concepts

Why are we inclined to oversimplify morality? Murdoch diagnoses this as partly rooted in a sometimes admirable but easily overindulged philosophical impulse to unify and integrate (on this impulse, see MGM, 1-2). It's fed by partial and potentially shoddy moral pictures or

[16] Martha Nussbaum (1990) makes a similar argument.

anthropologies that overemphasize the leverage of choice and action and underplay the gravity of attention and understanding. Diamond's Murdoch intends to take ordinary language seriously, and that may require us to rethink (and keep rethinking) what it means to do philosophy, including ethics. To maintain the openness needed for this, we must struggle with the seductive tendency to simplify and generalize.

To Murdoch's eye, the domain of moral concepts is "cloudy and shifting" (quoted in Diamond 2010, 54). Philosophy must attend to and not quash these clouds and shifts. Diamond sees this as clarifying the difficulty of trying to philosophically reflect on moral concepts: the challenge of avoiding the "falsification" whereby we fix and operate within a falsely but consolingly secure sense of the moral terrain (ibid.). The fluidity and instability of this terrain make falsification more tempting. For instance, it can be tempting to unify (and so potentially obscure) a domain like that of moral concepts by specifying what 'must' be so in it. Murdoch encourages us to resist that temptation in fidelity to messy and sometimes fragmentary moral reality.

This view of the domain of moral concepts is tied to Murdoch's observation that the moral life can be experienced in dramatically different ways at different times. Our perspective, what we consider significant or peripheral, the direction of our attention – these may change as we change, as our culture and society change. Shifts in moral concepts can be personal as well as historical, and their possibility across a life or a culture's life should figure in moral philosophy's self-understanding. It can be philosophically worthwhile and personally transformative to "recognize the variety of possible modes of vision, of ways of seeing what is of shaping importance in moral life" (ibid.).

Accordingly, our ways of doing ethics should be understood as lying within the moral domain. As Diamond has it, "how we may think philosophically about ethics, and the concepts we may exercise in moral philosophy, are no more given in advance and fixed in their character than is the rest of moral life" (ibid.). Murdoch's objective isn't to add another branch to moral philosophy's family tree, alongside normative theory, meta-ethics, and practical ethics. We are rather to see the moral terrain as perpetually open to conceptions that differ from the ones we have taken for granted. We should attend to how these conceptions reflect or presuppose substantially moral views and images. In a phrase, moral philosophy is part of moral life.

Put like this, this thought might not sound surprising. *Of course* we don't leap beyond moral existence in philosophical reflection. But some may worry that this overextends the moral sphere and thereby contaminates fact-finding philosophy. In response, Diamond reminds us that thinking about what it's like to use our concepts, as we typically do in meta-ethics, depends on our use of those concepts in reflective and often quite sophisticated ways. We cannot reflect on morality without drawing on our command of moral concepts, developed largely outside the seminar room. And we can fail to do justice to the nature or import of these concepts in philosophical contexts. We can have philosophical purity only at the price of starved reflection. On Diamond's (2010, 52) reading of Murdoch (1956, 58), we are better off philosophically and morally if we let exploratory rather than delineating inclinations lead the way.

2.3 Writing Exploratory Ethics

If moral philosophy belongs to moral life in this way, then moral philosophy's language will hardly be distinct from the language we inherit and inhabit as moral creatures. So, it shouldn't surprise us to discover that Murdoch as a writer is "present as a moral being in her philosophical essays" (Diamond 2010, 55). These essays would otherwise be impoverished; they would betray what they apparently claim and concern. Murdoch further insists that one cannot approach truth in ethics without exploring one's temperament, one's whole moral being (1971, 45). We should expect her recognition of this to condition her writing and philosophical activity. Indeed, we might think this shapes the peculiar form of MGM. We will more clearly be able to see how this form might be used to undertake and inspire exploration if we consider the pressure that Murdoch's vision of ethics puts on her (or any) writing practice.

Pressure is put on Murdoch's prose by her observation that what we take to be morally significant depends partly on our "moral activity" (Diamond 2010, 55). This is another reason why the bounds and structure of the terrain into which ethics inquires cannot be fixed – they are open to question and transformation *through* our inquiry and exploration. Hence, our philosophical endeavors can be morally transformative as much as they can express our prior formation and sensibility. This will color the responsibility of the writer. It's liable to shape how and not just what they write, since form can be, in effect, formative for reader and writer alike.

Furthermore, because we cannot say *a priori* in what form of language we will find moral reflection, discourse, or guidance, we need to read and write with an eye to where the moral *might* be. Diamond points out that this has clear implications for philosophical methodology. For one thing, it suggests that exploration – "of what we may see as belonging

to the moral life of human beings" (ibid., 56) – is a crucial part of moral thought and activity.[17] The attempt to fix limits or impose structure on that life prior to exploration isn't just philosophically mistaken. It's a morally evaluable error, a kind of falsification and impoverishment with a moral character; we could call it reckless or close-minded. It shuts us off from the variety of texts (and other things) that can be, in Diamond's idiom, sources of moral guidance.[18] Among these possible sources, Diamond highlights a poem by Walter de la Mare and a line by William Wordsworth. It's a mistake to prevent this poetic language from counting as morally expressive or potentially guiding, and to do so from the start. Instead, we should attend to where a text, image, film, scene, object, or person enters and shapes our moral life, with a willingness to explore and to be surprised. That pursuit will alter a writer's effort and sense of their craft.

We can limit our willingness to explore and the pressure this puts on writing ethics by claiming that, or writing as if, the use of moral concepts presupposes a given and intelligible world. This would be the world in which moral life and thought occur, handed over ready-made for the writer to color with normativity. For Murdoch, this view vastly underestimates the variety of moral differences and offers a crude conception of the relationship between moral thought and reality. In fact, we understand the world and ourselves *in* clarifying and using moral concepts. Differences in moral vocabulary can be differences in the universes we inhabit. This is part of Murdoch's rejection of any neat fact-value distinction: there's not an intelligible world of facts that we could uniformly understand while disagreeing about the right moral concepts to apply to it. Moral disagreements can go all the way down in reality.

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[17] Another way to put this might be to draw a distinction between reflective and determinant judgment in ethics.
[18] On Diamond on guidance, see Burleigh 2024, 111.

The kernel of this vision is that moral language is essential to understanding the world. A central part of moral thought is the exploration of different ways the world can be morally configured, and therefore different ways to talk past each other. Metaphysics, then, doesn't hand a morally indifferent world to moral thought; our understanding of the world's shape and structure is a fruit of the use of moral concepts and is morally evaluable. Metaphysics is a guide to morals in that its history provides a rich laboratory for investigating the uses of moral pictures and capacities, and our pictures of reality guide our decisions and deeds. But by the same token, metaphysical inquiry is a moral exercise. Rejecting the moral weight of this inquiry can be morally expressive and formative. Images of moral thought receiving preconfigured conceptions of (say) death or animals from metaphysics reflect a picture of what we and our world are like – a picture that Murdoch finds philosophical and moral reason to reject. As it explores, ethics can teach metaphysics and epistemology what reality and knowledge are like, what they may be.[19]

A particular form of moral discourse – argument in favor of a particular understanding of the moral life – is stimulated by images of metaphysics handing its findings over to ethics. But Murdoch stresses that this isn't the only form of moral discourse, nor the only morally expressive form of discourse. Moral understandings can be implicit (or partly implicit) in many expressive forms. In this sense, all writing can be heard in a moral register. Our capacity to discover and respond to the morally significant in what we encounter, which Diamond calls our "moral responsiveness", can shape our reading, writing, and conversing without the use of any concepts recognized as distinctively moral, whatever those might be (2010, 63). Besides, Murdoch denies that certain concepts are just given as morally weighty

[19] Diamond (2010, 61) develops this idea – what she calls the "anti-dictation" argument, whereby metaphysics and epistemology have no right simply to dictate to moral thought – in conversation with Korsgaard (1996).

in advocating her exploratory picture of moral thought, a picture that itself expresses a conceivably moral understanding.

Murdoch's vision of moral philosophy must exert a distinctive force on her prose. Since her mode of writing may be morally formative, her decisions of craft are answerable to moral and not only aesthetic considerations. Since she cannot start by identifying the species of language where we can expect to locate moral significance or expression, her writing must attend to the potentially moral register of whatever she experiences or sets down on the page. Since she won't inherit a world to characterize from metaphysics, she must heed how the moral pictures she entertains and develops configure reality; she cannot rely on metaphysics to locate common ground beneath all moral difference and disagreement.

Moreover, Murdoch is under pressure to explore novel ways to write ethics, since this is part and parcel of exploring the moral terrain. That exploration is likely to render her unintelligible as a moral philosopher to peers who don't share her vision of the discipline. Hence, that vision invites its own occlusion, as the pressure it puts on Murdoch's prose pushes that prose beyond the bounds of what her peers recognize (and impose) as moral discourse. Because these pressures are rooted in the exploratory thrust of Murdoch's philosophy, it's reasonable to hope that this thrust will provide a compelling and parsimonious route to explain the form of MGM and its perplexed reception.

One attractive feature of this explanation is that it shows how the form of MGM, far from being the result of cursory editing, is the outworking of its substantive vision. Insofar as Murdoch's goal is to invite us to undertake an exploratory exercise, she couldn't have written MGM according to operative genre norms. The book's form is a testament to its

content, and bewildered responses to the form are precisely what we would expect from Murdoch's characterization of the ways her fellow philosophers operate. The form can also be seen as an instrument of Murdoch's vision, as it helps readers enact the exploration it encourages.

2.4 Limitations of the Exploratory Account

This account raises exegetical questions connected to Murdoch's intellectual itinerary. There are significant stylistic differences between *The Sovereignty of Good* and MGM, and I don't think these are only due to MGM's greater length, construction as a single work, or provenance as the Gifford Lectures. MGM's centrifugal pattern of argument, thorough lack of sequential transitions, vast range, and movement across the history of philosophy toward an internal limit that Murdoch calls 'void' – it's not as if these features of MGM's architecture appear in *The Sovereignty of Good* in nascent form. We could draw plenty of parallels between the two works, but not on all fronts.

The question, then, is whether an extension of Diamond's exploratory motif can account for these distinctive elements of MGM's form. The exploratory story does a fine job of explaining certain aspects of its form and reception, like its willingness to put sources outside Anglophone moral philosophy, including literary and religious texts, in conversation with that tradition and the ensuing disorientation of readers who call that tradition home. But the exploratory story leaves other difficulties of Murdoch's prose lingering, like its persistent repetition of themes and requalification of claims and what one might regard as its serious disorganization; it isn't clear why the imperative to explore rather than delineate would necessitate these bewildering features, which *The Sovereignty of Good*, despite its

compilation of distinct essays, doesn't share. That leaves MGM open to the sorts of criticism I earlier dismissed as uncharitably hasty.

It would be a boon to the exploratory account if we could show that differences between the form of *The Sovereignty of Good* and that of MGM reflect Murdoch's recognition that *The Sovereignty of Good* suffered from formal devices that were insufficiently faithful to its exploratory project. Alternatively, it might be enough to show that *The Sovereignty of Good* is relatively unconcerned with exploration, while MGM is structured according to a fresh exploratory impulse. The first of these stories seems possible, but I cannot find any documentary evidence to back it up. On the other hand, the second story seems implausible given the concerns expressed in Murdoch's earlier writing, and it would be a problem for Diamond's wider account considering how heavily she relies on *The Sovereignty of Good* to trace Murdochian exploration.

These gaps in understanding the shape of MGM would remain even if we could show that exploratory form isn't merely mimetic form revisited – say, because the form plays a part in the moral formation the content advocates – and even if we could argue that MGM does a better job than *The Sovereignty of Good* of being structurally exploratory. I don't think this means we should entirely discard the exploratory account. We have seen how this theme illuminates key aspects of Murdoch's ethics, including her approach to writing and the ways she draws on the work of others. But these worries are manifold and serious enough to prompt us to look elsewhere for a way to make revealing sense of MGM's form. Ideally, that further account will maintain the insights we have drawn from Diamond's inquiry into Murdochian exploration while better capturing MGM's architecture and its particularity in

Murdoch's oeuvre. One account that seems poised to do that is Stephen Mulhall's perfectionist reading, to which I now turn.

3. Perfectionism and the Void

3.1 The Appearance of Disorganization

Mulhall begins with a concern to take seriously the baffling experience of reading MGM: "the reader is likely to have experienced the book as a bewilderingly dense and impenetrable confluence of several seemingly distinct ways of addressing its central concerns" (1997, 219). We are told that Murdoch's moral vision "is not systematically laid out", that its constituents are "endlessly reiterated, revised and qualified" in unpredictable sequences of discussion and analysis as Murdoch considers texts and philosophers "across vast historical vistas" (ibid., 219). In a word, it's a whirlwind.

The point is that MGM might reasonably strike us as a mess. And though one might underline exemplary sentences, passages, or chapters, these stand out from the rest of the book precisely because of formal features – clarity, unity, systematicity – that the book as a whole forgoes. Similarly, although it's easier to comprehend the concerns that animate MGM if one is familiar with Murdoch's earlier work, this avenue to comprehension just illustrates MGM's comparative disorganization, how it stands out from other parts of Murdoch's body of work.

The question, then, is whether this apparent mess is an outworking of the concerns that animate MGM, or whether it rather indicates a failure to clarify and order those concerns on Murdoch's part. To put it another way, the question is whether, in regarding the work as a mess, we are right to regard it as a failure in its author's terms, or whether those terms

instead dictate a form that readers are liable to regard as a mess – in which case, MGM might well succeed in its author's terms. More strongly, those concerns might compel this form.

Mulhall's view is that MGM's apparent disorganization is "a carefully calculated achievement or work of its writing" (ibid., 220). The book has, as he later puts it, a "carefully-wrought unsystematicity" (ibid., 236). Not only is the book's form internally related to its content, so that a more organized treatment would amount to a betrayal of this content; but the book's relation to both its content and readers requires it to look disorganized. This appearance is designed to show up the ideals of maximal organization, linearity, and unity in relation to which MGM strikes one as a mess. MGM aims to show the philosophical and moral failure of certain modes of moral philosophizing, the failure of certain understandings of how a discussion of moral matters should proceed – understandings that privilege delineation, linear argument, unification, and similar ideals. Thus, to criticize the text as disorganized is to judge it in terms of an understanding it seeks to undermine, and hence to miss its real import.

3.2 Murdochian Perfectionism

If the form, then, expresses and embodies the moral vision its author sets out, its success must be judged in view of that vision. Mulhall identifies that vision as a species of perfectionism, and he approaches the perfectionist tenor of MGM by rehearsing some of the claims that Diamond later employs to craft her exploratory reading. These include the claim that the question of the moral life's unity and systematicity is a properly moral question, and so not one that moral reflection can avoid or outsource. They include the claim that metaphysics doesn't simply dictate conceptions of (for example) human beings, minds, or

other animals to morality, because these conceptions are morally evaluable right the way through; any neat distinction between facts and values is thus liable to be not just philosophically but morally suspect. And they include the claim that metaphysical inquiry can train our attention in morally and spiritually salient ways, just as it can distract us with illusions and fantasies, especially fantasies of unity and delineation.

Unlike Diamond, however, Mulhall explicates these claims in the context of MGM's picture of the moral life as riven with tensions between poles or spheres that pull in distinct directions. And so, he draws out these claims in a way specific to MGM's architecture.[20]

3.3 Three Poles of the Moral Life: Axioms, Duty, Eros

The first of the moral life's poles or spheres is characterized by what Murdoch calls axioms. An axiom states a seemingly foundational and self-justifying demand. It brackets the sphere of acceptable public discourse, collective action, and policymaking. The claims that make up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – claims about "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family", for example (United Nations General Assembly 1948) – are paradigmatically axiomatic in Murdoch's sense. This is the pole of the moral life that tends toward politics and away from the inward, the personal, and the systematic.

A second pole of the moral life is characterized by the notion of duty. Like axioms, duties may appear to be or yield self-grounding demands. But unlike axioms, these demands are importantly internal to (or internalized by) a subject, shaping their moral world. Duties are not just pragmatic. My duties are my own; they can make daily and specific demands of

[20] This is not to criticize Diamond. Her main aim isn't to offer an interpretation of any specific text; her account of Murdoch is self-consciously thematic. But this account's utility is nonetheless curtailed by an insufficient distinction, or little distinction at all, between the work collected in *The Sovereignty of Good* and the lectures that became MGM.

me. The pole of duty is necessary for moral functioning, never mind flourishing. Someone who fails to see the possibility or force of demands that contradict desires is leading a morally impoverished life. But duty's moral significance is limited by its tension with the other poles. If we take the sphere of duty to delineate or exhaust the moral terrain, we end up with the Kantianism that Murdoch regards as a kind of impoverishment and distortion (see Mulhall 1997, 223 on this).

This distorting Kantianism fails to attend to a third pole characterized by morally significant experiences, emotions, and perceptions, the moral color of one's whole consciousness, and the ways in which values structure the universe one inhabits and can then inquire into. Murdoch calls this pole eros. Mulhall regards eros as "the true centre of [Murdoch's] moral vision" (ibid., 223). It names what he calls a "fundamental kind of spiritual energy" alive in our everyday experience (ibid.). This energy is constantly purified or corrupted and misdirected in our "moment-by-moment" attentions and distractions (ibid.). Eros lies at the source of Murdoch's opposition to attempts to neatly demarcate facts from values, since the morally salient (and evaluable) texture of our ongoing experience colors the world we perceive and reality we discriminate. This relatedly stands behind her rejection of morally neutral meta-ethics or metaphysical speculation's supposed independence from and priority to ethics, whereby it has a right to hand its finished conceptions to ethics for secondary evaluative coloring.

Our morally salient perceptions of the world fall under the banner of eros; and as we have seen with Diamond, any perception could be morally salient. So, it's naturally under this banner that Murdoch discusses the relationship between goodness and reality, drawing largely on the writings of Simone Weil. Murdoch is concerned with how clarifying our vision

of reality requires us to bridle our prejudices and overcome our self-serving dispositions, moving ever onward toward goodness. We purify the 'spiritual energy' of eros when we practice subverting illusions that eclipse our vision of reality. These illusions keep us from attending to particulars and hinder reality's capacity to query, overwhelm, and transform our modes of sense-making; they are fundamentally distorting.

One school for this purifying practice is art, both its making and appreciation, and the appreciation of beauty more generally. When we learn to admire the beauty of an artwork, we have the artwork's reality – its independence from the self, its cohesion and wholeness – in view; we refuse to assimilate that reality to prior conceptions. Weil's contrast between attention and consumption is at the root of this. When we attend to an artwork and perceive its beauty, we refuse (in Weil's metaphor) to eat and digest the artwork (2002, 149). We want the artwork to last, to remain for others, and we desire to see the artwork more and more as it is without distortions. Here we might think of Weil's desire to see how a landscape looks when she isn't there (ibid., 42). Mulhall puts the point this way: "the experience of the beautiful thus places a check on the ego's desire to ingest reality, to project its own fantasies and desires upon the world in which it finds itself" (1997, 225). Ingestion and egoistic projection hang together here.

To genuinely perceive beauty is to license one's transformation. Murdoch sees this dynamic in any activity that cultivates clarity, accuracy, truthfulness – an unwavering fidelity to the facts. For instance, Weil sees academic study as valuable insofar as it forges morally and spiritually significant attention, regardless of the realities on which one trains one's attention (see 1951b). I think Murdoch would gladly concur. Art and scholarship aside, Murdoch recommends cultivating practical skills – in a Platonic phrase, these bring one

closer to reality – and simply meditating or practicing mindfulness; she encourages people to sit still and practice paying attention to whatever or whoever is before them (MGM, 337).

This practice of attending – and so, as Weil would put it, of not consuming – is meant to starve the ego of habitual fantasies and consolations. This fasting gradually perfects our capacity to see ourselves aright, which, as Mulhall says, "can only be done by recognizing the reality and value of that which is not the self" (1997, 225). This means that a vision of morality centered on eros revolves around the redirection and reorientation of selfish energies away from the self – and thus, a transformation via self-denial through attention to particulars. Given our inability to tear values apart from facts, the alternative is a universe utterly suffused with the distortions of a bloated and ravenous self.[21]

3.4 The Moral Pilgrimage

This picture of the moral life is crucially progressive, even if progress comes in fits and starts, with plateaus aplenty. Murdoch symbolizes the slow modification and conversion of eros, its reorientation in attention, as a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage looks something like this. Certain images, values, phrases, figures, concepts, and understandings of reality structure our moral world. As we attend to particulars in various situations, we come to see these structuring elements as provisional, containing but not yet realizing (perhaps even distorting) an unattained but attainable ideal. As pictures and concepts are revealed as provisional, far from the landing places we took them to be, we become more intimate with reality. We overcome pictures that have turned out to be fantasies as we move toward greater unity, self-transcendence, integrity, and perfection. As Mulhall writes, ideally "every time we cleave to

[21] The Buddhist image of a hungry ghost – a miserable creature driven by animal impulses, insatiable, devouring, and yet starving – comes to mind; see Rotman 2021 for discussion.

a new picture of reality, we become at once certain that it cannot be of the ultimate reality, and so cannot be our stopping-place" (1997, 226). This perfectionist pilgrimage will likely feel like deprivation. It isn't comfortable and doesn't feel like gain to discover that the pictures of reality on which we have built our moral universe are nothing more than partial sketches from oblique angles. Murdochian perfectionism is reality-directed self-deprivation, a continual loss of what consoles.

So, within the sphere of eros, our images are haunted by the seeds of their overcoming. And since that sphere stands in tension with the spheres of axioms and duty, the temptation to unify morality under the banner of eros must be eschewed as a further kind of falsification.

We might ask here whether the erotic movement toward an as-yet-unattained ideal can ever come to a rest. Can the perfection toward which the perfectionist movement is directed ever be more than a shadow? Not really, it seems to me. At least, not if we want to prevent our moral vision from crossing the border into properly religious territory. As the sphere of axioms tends toward the political, Mulhall thinks, the sphere of eros tends toward the religious, and it can tend too far in that direction without the force exerted by other poles. Perhaps partly to stave off this possibility, Murdoch regards the reification of ultimate perfection in the figure of God as another consolation, one that would put a premature stop (and I take that to mean any stop short of death) to the perfectionist movement. Murdochian perfectionism is tireless.[22] Sure, it has its plateaus and resting points, but these are nevertheless on the way.

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[22] The consciousness of the perfectionist might be compared to the kind of constant moral vigilance that Emmanuel Levinas calls "insomnia" (1998, 58).

3.5 Exploration in Perfectionist Terms

The exploratory theme that Diamond locates in Murdoch can be made sense of in terms of this perfectionism. As with any other conception of the moral life, a delineation of the moral terrain will always be provisional at best. We are philosophically and morally better off approaching this terrain as explorers rather than seeking a decisive delineation. The explorer's vigilance as they keep watch for where moral significance may lie can likewise be explained in terms of the perfectionist's vigilance as they look for inevitable signs of the provisional in their understanding. The perfectionist needn't object to Diamond's exploratory thematic but only to suggestions that it's the full story. In brief, perfectionism sets exploration in a wider context.

3.6 Metaphysics

I have said a lot about eros and moral perception, but what might the metaphysics of MGM's title have to do with this on the perfectionist reading?

Insofar as metaphysics seeks a clear picture of reality, it not only supplies moral reflection with a treasure trove of pictures for attention and evaluation; these pictures are morally evaluable, according to whether they are egoic fantasies or honest pictures of reality beyond the reaches of the self. Thus, perfectionism situates the claim that metaphysics doesn't simply hand readymade notions to ethics. As it forges pictures that can be either purifying or degrading for consciousness, metaphysical inquiry is a moral exercise. Hence, the various pictures of the self, human beings, language, artworks, objects, and the like that practitioners of metaphysics have constructed are not prefatory to moral reflection but belong to it. The practice of metaphysics in its concern for reality is part of the moral and

spiritual life of its practitioners, their moral pilgrimage toward perfection. As such, the fruits of this practice are up for moral consideration and judgment. We cannot concern ourselves with reality and avoid morality.

MGM is itself an instance of metaphysical speculation, so it's as morally evaluable as the texts it evaluates and criticizes. Murdoch's consciousness of this places a specific burden on her as a writer – to write in such a way that moral consciousness is enriched rather than corrupted. This task demands attention to particularity. Mulhall points out that, given the book's subject matter, this will primarily be the particularity of phenomena that are central in the moral life, including experiences, practices, ways of living, concepts, habits, and traditions (1997, 230). Murdoch's main responsibility as a writer – and this is a moral as well as intellectual responsibility – is to get these phenomena right. This responsibility follows from the moral vision MGM describes. That vision also has it that metaphysical inquiry and its products need to be considered as part of the substance of moral life and thought, so the way in which MGM merges a discussion of the history of metaphysical speculation with Murdoch's substantive moral vision is an expression of its author's fidelity to the particularity of the spheres of the moral and the metaphysical and their relationship.

Mulhall's Murdoch thinks that the metaphysical pictures whose analysis forms the main tissue of MGM are elaborated to provide unity to the reflections of the philosophers who construct them. Like artworks, these pictures express and satisfy what Murdoch identifies at the outset of MGM as "a deep emotional motive to philosophy, to art, to thinking itself" (MGM, 1). This is the urge to transform what we cannot comprehend or dominate into something single, uniform, and intelligible. Our response to this motive isn't always perfecting. It can degrade moral consciousness. Murdoch's frequent invocations of chance

and death attempt to show up overeager unifications as the consoling fantasies they are. This is generally in the service of a greater unachieved unity. It's an attempt to get the perfectionist motor up and running again.

Murdoch is conscious of this when making sense, but not too much sense, of the texts she analyzes. She is concerned to show how the concepts and imagery of a text make for a unified whole, but a limited one: either because the text obscures what another text foregrounds or because it contains seeds that unsettle its seeming unity. On Mulhall's perfectionist reading, this is why Murdoch refrains from analyzing any text in one go, from a singular angle. Instead, she analyzes texts "in many different phases, from many different angles, with various images and concepts dominating at different stages, and in constant conjunction with other, competing texts" (1997, 235). Murdoch's attempts to do justice to the unity and heterogeneity of texts, and the related unity and heterogeneity of the minds of their authors, enacts the perfectionist (and hence endlessly reiterating) quest for clearer vision.

We can see this at a more general level in Murdoch's attempt to do justice to the unity and heterogeneity of the metaphysical tradition. Her refusal to falsely unify this tradition is, Mulhall says, expressed by MGM's astutely unsystematic form (ibid., 236). Here Mulhall sees MGM as an exemplary instance of the sort of metaphysics it prescribes – which, in Murdoch's terms, proceeds by constructing "a huge hall of reflection full of light and space and fresh air, in which ideas and intuitions can be unsystematically nurtured" (ibid.). While this metaphysical exercise belongs to moral reflection, this reflection must attend to the particular reality of the texts and traditions that make up metaphysics' cultural inheritance and the realities to which it's directed (for example, those of the self, persons, and language).

Any reflection that criticizes a text as insufficiently attentive to one of these realities must attend to both text and reality with greater clarity. It must, for reasons philosophical and moral, try not to earn the same criticism.

3.7 Perfectionist Form

This is Mulhall's story about MGM's bewildering form: "it is this need to avoid self-condemnation that gives *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* its peculiarly disorganized or unsystematic appearance" (1997, 237). Murdoch could not have done justice to her concerns otherwise. Not if she presented a single, unified conceptual system. Not if she provided a single, unified moral idiom and grammar. Not if she understood the texts she examines as univocal and self-consistent objects that belong to a straightforward, progressive, perhaps perfectionistic history. Not if she centered only the multiplicity and fragmentation of these texts without regard for how they hang together.

The form of MGM, then, renders the book a morally and philosophically faithful organ of the vision it expresses – a vision it thereby enacts. This form doesn't only result from an attempt not to betray the book's content; it's due to Murdoch's understanding of her relationship to her readers. A book less riddled with the features that tend to bewilder MGM's readers would suggest that Murdoch could pave a sort of avenue for moral progress, preventing her readers from having to go, as she did, 'the bloody hard way' (see Conant 2002). It would also suggest that her attempt to illuminate the moral terrain is strangely impervious to what she describes as the inevitable finitude and internal tension of any such attempt. What's more, it would risk degrading the moral consciousness of readers, indulging (instead of defeating or disorienting) their taste for false unities and consoling pictures. If

the book is to be instrumental in the reader's perfectionist overcoming of consoling pictures, if it's to be a mechanism for that overcoming and not only a testament to its necessity, then we should expect to find its form precisely as bewildering – as defeating of the images and concepts whereby we readily make sense of a philosophical text and, through it, comprehend our moral and intellectual lives – as readers have found MGM's form.

3.8 The Void

It's only here, with the bulk of the argument behind him and the perfectionist reading sketched, that Mulhall faces the fourth pole of the moral life (1997, 238). Besides axioms, duty, and eros, there's the pole that Murdoch names the void. She introduces the void in the penultimate chapter of MGM, relying on Weil's similar notion of affliction or *malheur* (see Weil 1951a). Murdoch describes the void as a "tract of experience" where one finds despair, irremediable suffering, and desolation (MGM, 498). These are experiences that stand "in opposition to 'transcendence'", not because they are experiences of profound self-absorption, but because they are experiences of a kind of desolation that renders the advice to deny oneself crass if not also superfluous (ibid.).

Mulhall reasons that Murdoch introduces the void in the penultimate chapter of MGM, the last substantial chapter before the book's conclusion (more on that later), so that we don't regard the perfectionist picture she has presented as any kind of stopping point. Ending on the void prevents Murdoch's perfectionist thematic from falsely unifying what's evidently and purposefully a very heterogeneous book. The idea is that Murdoch introduces the void to keep the perfectionist motor running. This encourages readers to go out and beyond – to overcome – MGM itself, kicking away the proverbial ladder. Mulhall calls this

effect an invigoration without consolation: "only thus can [MGM] defeat our attempts to use it as magic" (1997, 239).

There are points in MGM's penultimate chapter where Murdoch herself seems to think this. However, I don't think this account, which recuperates the void for the perfectionist cause, does justice to how radically the void jams the (that is, any) perfectionist motor. I think the void is introduced toward the end of MGM because, as a limit to perfectionist sense-making, it makes the most sense – hits home the hardest – if that sense-making has been given the space to get going.

It helps to consider how Murdoch introduces her discussion of the void, an introduction that differs somewhat from – is less sophisticated than – Mulhall's. She worries that an objector to the whole perfectionist picture will argue that a significant and dark tract of experience has been "left out of too optimistic a picture" (MGM, 498). She gives the objector these words:

> [I]f you are always noticing images of God or Good or seeing spiritual ladders […], you are very lucky. Your view of spiritual refreshment as everywhere available is ridiculously optimistic, even sentimental. It seems to neglect how miserable we are, and also how wicked we are. The average inhabitant of the planet is probably without hope and starving. It is terrible to be human. (Ibid., 498)

This seems to mount a straightforward challenge: can MGM's perfectionism account for the less than rosy facts, the prevalence of evil and inevitability of suffering? Is there room for desolation and affliction? Is this picture perfected or does it stand in need of further revision?

Murdoch considers three answers to that challenge. First, we could say that the void proves or provides an education, and so plays a key part in the wider perfectionist movement. Perhaps it enables us to come close to reality and reorient our desires toward the transcendent and good. Although it may hardly be a romanticizable site of suffering, and is often brutishly mundane, perhaps affliction allows us to make progress in redirecting our energies away from this-worldly concerns; instead of a fantasy of recovering or 'bouncing back', this would be an image of holy suffering. We might picture Simone Weil's largely self-inflicted torture on a factory floor, her attempt to shove her nose into the ground of reality (see Weil 1946). She saw this as a sort of perfecting fire to burn off the slough in, or of, her character. But then we might also picture her fellow workers who had no realistic alternative, the fact that her avoidable presence there might have been a romanticizing gesture.

A second and related answer to the challenge says that it isn't a matter of how we account for the void – we must just accept it – but what we do when we experience it. Murdoch writes: "There are places in lives […] where there is nothing but darkness, the devil has his territory, Christ stopped at Eboli" (MGM, 499). This last phrase refers to the title of Carlo Levi's (1947) memoir, which depicts a place whose inhabitants regard themselves as excluded from Christianity, ethics, something vital in human experience – it's a place to which, as their idiom goes, Christ didn't make it. But this implies that such places can be sequestered, void times pass, some places are graced by the presence of Christ, and we might try to go to them.

A third answer, which Murdoch appears to settle on, is that recognizing the void and refusing to deflect from it is indicative of moral progress, a big step on the perfecting road. Sometimes, she suggests, we might even call the void to mind for this purpose (MGM, 503).

Although this is the answer Murdoch appears most to settle on, it seems to me that she isn't lastingly content with any of these answers. I wonder whether that's because she sees that the challenge to *integrate* the void into the picture hitherto offered solicits a sort of consoling deflection. To some extent, the challenge parallels Murdoch's consideration of whether art can adequately picture, and not beautify and thereby distort, the void. She points out that even Grünewald's grotesque and contorted Jesus crucified is admired for the excellence of its construction, however much it may shock us. Murdoch thinks that tragic poetry and drama come closest to "real awful human suffering", but even then, we might be suspicious about the relation these actually bear to the reality of the void as known by those who suffer it (MGM, 499). In a similar vein, we might wonder (to carry Murdoch's image further) whether the perfectionist can face the land beyond Eboli without recuperating it as part of the wider earth on which Christ did voyage. If art struggles to picture the void – "the strange absolute country of death" (MGM, 501) – philosophy probably will too.

Murdoch writes of prisoners with no term of release, utter personal annihilation, the "joyless imagery" of burning off the self instead of gradually progressing toward its unattained ideal, and the kind of suffering we cannot recover from (MGM, 502). When she writes of these things, I struggle to believe that it could be enough to say, as she initially suggests we might, that "the experience of desolation can be a kind of teaching" (MGM, 500). Furthermore, I struggle to believe that the lesson is that Murdochian perfectionism calls for perfecting, since this move seems to too closely resemble the imagery of the mechanical that Murdoch regards as a good metaphor for degrading fantasy – as if nothing could put a stop to the good old perfectionist cause, as if any hurdle could be assimilated by (and will profit) its machinery (MGM, 502-3).

Murdoch seems to me at her most realistic and least consoling when she tells us that "we must hold on to what has really happened and not cover it with imagining how we are to unhappen it […]. Do not think about righting the balance, but live close to the painful reality" (MGM, 503). She betrays herself, I think, when she follows up with the comparatively teacherly injunction to "try to relate it to what is good" (MGM, 503).[23]

I am skeptical of the idea, or at any rate the universalization of the idea, of "making a spiritual use of one's desolation" (MGM, 503). Reality is sometimes too difficult for that. Yes, seeing voids and refraining from filling them with fantasy can be a major step on the spiritual ladder. And it can be useful, as Murdoch advises, to exchange unperfected ideals for the purifying void (MGM, 506). But the void can also throw us right off the ladder, into a place from which the image of a ladder looks comically cruel, or just like paltry consolation. Whatever we may tell ourselves, in this terrain "one's thoughts return (hopelessly) to the imprisoned and the starving and to experiences of loss, ignominy, or extreme guilt" (MGM, 502).

I think this is a spot where Murdoch is genuinely torn. She wants to maintain a basically perfectionist vision of the moral life. But she also, for reasons partly internal to that vision, doesn't want simply to ingest the void and keep moving on. I don't think this tension – the void's tension with the moral life's other three poles, and eros particularly – is clarified by its subsumption in an otherwise perfectionistic tale.

3.9 Perfecting Perfectionism?

[23] Murdoch's least consoling suggestions remind me of Silouan the Athonite's advice, or the advice he apparently received from God, to 'keep thy mind in hell and despair not'. On this, see Rose 1995, 98.

This is a problem in the perfectionist's own terms. I am suggesting that, at the juncture of the void, the account previously sketched over-unifies MGM and its author. Moreover, attempting to right this over-unification by re-running the perfectionist machinery only reiterates the problem. In other words, I don't think it works to save the general story by regarding its details as imperfect (and hence perfectible).

We might respond by readying our scissors to excise MGM's penultimate chapter and rescue Murdochian perfectionism, so let me emphasize that I think this perfectionism, spelled out in relation to the ideal of a vision of reality in all its particularity and difficulty, would ring hollow if it failed to take seriously how reality's difficulty might mean that our perfectionism contains the germ of its own collapse. If we then construe this as a final act of transcendence, the promise of a perfection that MGM cannot keep and thus invites one toward, then what appeared to be the final perfecting touch, a movement toward unbearable intimacy with reality, seems recuperated for consolation. To use the ladder metaphor again, if we call the ladder's collapse its extension, the reality of that collapse is what we seem inevitably to deflect from.

This means that MGM's form, which on Mulhall's account embodies and enacts the perfectionist vision the book expresses, may well solicit our deflection from the penultimate chapter it nevertheless contains and calls for. That's a puzzling feature of the book, and it's one that the perfectionist account – lying within this dynamic – isn't positioned to explain. The void doesn't merely suggest that MGM's perfectionism is a provisional image of a further, not yet attained perfectionism; it marks a place in the moral life where a perfectionist logic comes to a halt or implodes, where it stops making sense. I am not convinced that Mulhall's perfectionist reading of MGM can avoid recuperating, and hence distorting, that

place as a goad to further perfectionist labors. Since the possibility of this defeat of perfectionist sense-making colors MGM's form, any account of this form needs to properly center this possibility.

What we should seek, then, is an account that maintains (though it might recast) the perfectionist story's insights, including the insights of the exploratory account that it carries forward, while it also explains the presence and import of the penultimate chapter, its capacity to invite and disrupt the perfectionist sense-making the book otherwise seems to recommend. I think an account of MGM's form as testifying to the difficulty of reality can do this. That's where I now turn.

4. Icons and Hammers

Murdoch introduces the void as a part of human experience that might appear to have been omitted from too cheery a picture. Her consideration of the void, then, might naturally serve as MGM's capstone. The void could be a final objection to the book's perfectionist picture. Perhaps answering this objection would leave perfectionism triumphant and make for a fitting conclusion. Or perhaps a consideration of the void would add further nuance to the perfectionist picture, securing it against the charge of reality-denying optimism.

Murdoch observes that the void could have three different roles in a picture of the moral life. It could be a moment in a greater dialectic, finally overcome as part of the perfectionist movement. It could symbolize "real ordinary familiar despair", which the perfectionist needs to take seriously on their pilgrimage (MGM, 504). Or it could serve as the focus of a Weil-inspired asceticism, where sufferers of the void refuse fantasy to face reality in its plain difficulty.

I have argued that the void, far from fulfilling a perfectionist picture, instead undermines that picture – while simultaneously and purposefully rendering it attractive for sense-making creatures. The perfectionist reading can be a form of fantasy that the void both invites, since it wounds our sense-making, and defeats. Murdoch describes the moral life as an "iconoclastic pilgrimage", where we repeatedly move past the icons in which we find meaning and value, discovering in them the seeds of their perpetual overcoming (MGM, 507). On this picture, I don't think the void is just one final hammer for the smashing of icons. Rather, it queries the whole forward movement of perfectionist iconoclasm, revealing its capacity to be an especially pernicious, because especially sophisticated, form of deflection.

However, in thinking about the void's role, I have paid little attention to a fact about the shape of Murdoch's book. It doesn't end with an exploration of the void; that happens in the penultimate chapter. Any travel forward from the void could vitiate the picture I have been painting. So, what could happen in MGM's concluding chapter?

4.1 Murdoch on Religion

The final chapter centers on Murdoch's conception of religion and its future. To see how that could relate to the void, we need to consider what Murdoch says about religion and why that seemed to her an appropriate place for MGM to end.

Like much of MGM, Murdoch's meditation on the void is saturated with religious language. Religious questions don't arise suddenly in the final pages of the book. To be sure, Murdoch says that when we experience extreme suffering, as (she thinks) we are all bound to do at some point, this discloses the ultimately solitary character of our existence, and we

then discover that our religious images and convictions have been consolations designed to shield us from this reality (MGM, 499-502). But even in discussing this, Murdoch consistently appeals to religious images, to words whose sense depends on their embeddedness in contexts of religious life and experience. These are the building blocks of her description of the void.

Here are some examples. Murdoch writes that experience of the void can sometimes be put to creative use when we refrain from acting in our own power (MGM, 503, 506). This happens when we simply wait. Void's utility is a reward for non-striving, loving attention to the difficulty. Murdoch finds this reward for waiting in art, philosophy, and moral discernment; in each case, she refers to it as "grace" or "creation *ex nihilo*" (MGM, 506). These typically religious words capture how intractable difficulties can become sources of illumination, as they prompt us to surrender our own capacities and agendas. They explain why it's wise, on Murdoch's view, to sacrifice imperfections for the void.

Her use of religious language doesn't stop there. Murdoch often seems to want to speak of exposure to the void and exposure to God in one breath: in both cases, our imperfections are, in a Weilian phrase, condemned not just to suffering but to death (MGM, 506). The idea is that exposure to the void, as to God, shows up our icons for the caricatures they are, making it impossible for us to maintain a sort of idolatrous reverence for them. Murdoch calls this idea "characteristically religious" (MGM, 506-7). She also writes of the "mystic Christ" as an image of the Good, as lovable, while switching to images drawn from Socratic philosophy and Buddhism in successive sentences (MGM, 507).

Across these examples, Murdoch appears to be talking about religion or religiosity in general. It's as if all religious language and practice, or at least language and practice

directed against the reign of the ego, belonged to a single sphere of intelligibility. Murdoch's willingness to employ metaphors from Christianity, Buddhism, and Socratic philosophy in equal measure should make us wonder what work these phrases are doing and what Murdoch could mean by 'religion' anyway. It's clear to me that she doesn't use these phrases to mean what religious believers generally take them to mean. This is shown by her claim that an existing God would be "an idol or a demon" (MGM, 508). Even if we can see how someone might think this, it's harder to understand in conjunction with praise for the 'mystic Christ' and prayer's moral efficacy.

How can Murdoch's use of religious language be squared with her claims about God? Murdoch must deny God's existence for the sake of her perfectionism, out of iconoclasm (MGM, 508). If God existed, she argues, consolation would be inescapable, and comfort would be cheap; the void, reality's hard ground, would be a phantasm, rendered negligible by eternity. Instead, we must face reality and acknowledge that God doesn't and mustn't exist. But although God doesn't exist, "what led us to conceive of him does exist and is *constantly* experienced and pictured" (MGM, 508). This is the Good: it's beyond all fantasy and incarnate in ordinary acts of love and compassion. Indeed, Murdoch regards this as the perfected idea of incarnation, borrowing another religious notion for purposes that its everyday users would find rather peculiar.

This brings out Murdoch's progressive view of religious language and practice: she thinks that we can retain much of it once we discard the consolation called God, and we can probably make better use of it too. Consider the Christian case. We can, Murdoch thinks, keep or perfect the figure of Christ (for whom she has great admiration), the idea of incarnation, the essence of prayer, reverence of saints, communities of faith, and the practice

of works of love and mercy, as well as much of the related network of concepts (see MGM, 419-420, 487, 507). More strongly still, we will better understand these and better live them out once we abandon the mythical accretions that have been pasted on for the tradition's digestibility or our comfort.

Initially, two features of this view might seem especially puzzling. First, it might seem strange that Murdoch wants to retain Christian language and practice at all. Why not jettison this tradition, including talk of the 'mystic Christ' and petitionary prayer, and find a secular idiom that does the job? Why insist that Christianity progress, rather than progressing past Christianity? Second, Murdoch seems to think that authentic religious belief is basically impossible in modernity. For example, she writes that "our general awareness of good, or goodness, is with us unreflectively all the time, as a sense of God's presence, or at least existence, *used to be* to all sorts of believers" (MGM, 509, emphasis added). Surely, we might want to say, many religious believers still regard themselves as generally aware of God's presence or existence.

Although these features may seem puzzling, Murdoch's progressive view of religion needs to be understood in light of them. On the one hand, a loss of the Christian tradition would be a terrible moral loss. It would seriously impoverish the conceptual resources and vocabulary available to us to understand ourselves and our world. Christian language enables us to talk in meaningful ways about the religious sphere of existence – the sphere identified for Murdoch by concern for ultimate things – and we cannot simply invent ways to do this. What we have inherited matters. In any case, our world is inescapably structured by Christian understandings, and we cannot just nullify this. We must find a way to move forward from where we find ourselves.

On the other hand, the beliefs of the medieval Christian are no longer at our disposal. The attempt to hold them could be nothing other than a form of self-deceit, a sort of safety blanket or theatrical prop, because secular modernity has made the relevant institutions and conceptual resources unavailable to us. Those beliefs could not mean to us what they meant to medieval Christians. If we cannot escape Christian practice and language, we also cannot (Murdoch thinks) own the Christianity of biblical and apostolic creeds. We cannot have a Christianity centered, for example, on actual awareness of God's presence, or on the claim that Christ will literally return in flesh and blood to judge the living and the dead.

In sum, we are left with a perfectionist Christianity, one that can overcome, for instance, belief in the supernatural. But Murdoch thinks this is still a form of Christianity. The tradition's central themes and images will not vanish but will have "a new and different place as religion is newly understood" (MGM, 510).

Murdoch gives this picture some additional substance by praising A. N. Wilson's "splendidly critical book" *Jesus*, published the same year as MGM. I take it that Wilson's book is meant to exemplify the deliverances of perfectionist Christianity (see MGM, 510). Wilson describes Jesus as a disruptor of social conventions, a sort of tragic hero who met an untimely end for political reasons. He wants to rescue Jesus from the myths spun about him by churches and the Christian tradition, revealing 'the man behind the myth'. This is a Jesus whom modern readers can admire, without belief in all the supernatural goings-on of the Gospels. Wilson's conclusion, Murdoch emphasizes, is that 'Jesus has survived'. Enlightened skepticism and cutting-edge biblical criticism have simply disclosed the Jesus of history, the 'real' Jesus, without the alterations, amplifications, and sheer fabrications of theology and church history. The earthy, prophetic wheat is being separated from the

supernatural, consoling chaff. We don't have to progress past Jesus. Rather, our notion of Jesus can progress once it's stripped of fantasy. We might even keep the virgin birth and Christ's resurrection as enriching metaphors.

Of course, a Christian might read this and wonder in what sense Jesus, never mind Christian language and practice, has really survived Wilson's and Murdoch's treatment. The reader might wonder, as one of Wilson's reviewers does, whether Jesus can weather his transformation into "a Jesus [Wilson and his modern readers] can live with" (Allen 1993).

This sort of worry is likely to be compounded when Murdoch is heard saying that our time demands "a theology which can continue without God" (MGM, 511). What could Murdoch mean by 'theology'? She seems to have in mind a creative self-interpretation of humanity as it discovers and fashions itself.[24] We might wonder how this exercise earns the name of theology. Why not call it ethics or philosophical anthropology? Murdoch doesn't really mind, so long as we are concerned with questions of ultimate importance – for instance, questions about our sense of the sacred and experience of the absolute. These have tended to be the domain of theology; and since we can perfect (hence retain) Christianity while discarding God, the same might be said of theology.

MGM, then, ends with this vision: theology without God, religion without the supernatural, and consequently, a humanity growing into clear-sightedness. Or just about. In fact, Murdoch concludes with a quotation drawn to her attention by Paul Tillich. It's from Psalm 139:

[24] Murdoch's sense of this as a 'theological' exercise is explicitly inspired by Paul Tillich.

> Whither shall I go from thy spirit, whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. (MGM, 512, quoting Ps. 139:7-10)

This seems like a deeply ironic way to close the argument. Murdoch has been arguing for a religiosity that has discarded the false idea of God, and she concludes with lines, cherished by religious believers for millennia, about how we cannot escape God, wherever we go, wherever we progress.

4.2 Stanley Hauerwas on Murdoch

What are we supposed to make of Murdoch's culminating irony and the argument it caps? To see how these pages do more than they might seem to, how they surprisingly extend Murdoch's reflections on the void and its capacity to wound our sense-making, it will be helpful to turn to Stanley Hauerwas's (1997) response to Murdoch's work in general and MGM's religious concerns in particular. That Murdoch provokes this response can tell us a great deal about what MGM may be up to in its final pages.

Hauerwas reads the last chapter of MGM with anxiety. This anxiety concerns Murdoch's influence on his thinking. Hauerwas regards nearly everything significant he has written as in some way inspired by Murdochian insights (1997, 155). Having reached the concluding pages of MGM, though, he wonders whether that has been a wise strategy for a Christian theologian. The question isn't whether a Christian theologian can profitably use

atheist or non-Christian philosophy; that seems decisively settled by Aquinas's use of Aristotle. Rather, the question is whether Murdoch's thinking has shaped Hauerwas's concerns and views in ways that run counter to rightly formed Christian confession and understanding, and therefore faithful theology.

Before reading MGM, Hauerwas understood his differences with Murdoch, such as they are, to stem from his Aristotelian propensities in contrast to her Platonic temperament (ibid., 156). For instance, he tends toward skepticism of mysticism, where Murdoch clearly finds it magnetic. But having read MGM, Hauerwas finds himself increasingly unpersuaded that he can bypass the question whether it's wise for Christians to make use of Murdoch. Initially, he was impressed that Murdoch opposed his enemies. Now he wonders whether that means they are natural friends.

The difference that opens up between Hauerwas and Murdoch might be construed in this way. Christianity is crucially concerned with the historical and creaturely. Its picture of salvation is tied to the story of a concrete people, the Jews, and an event that happened in Roman Palestine on a particular day – an event that, Christians believe, splits time in two. Hauerwas thinks that Murdoch shies away from this (ibid.). Her abstract talk of religion in general and the 'mystic Christ' point away from the specificity, the flesh and blood, the fish and dust and wounded bodies of the Christian story.[25]

Hauerwas's worry about this is piqued by two elements of MGM's final chapter. First and most obviously, its endeavor to theologize without God. And second, its praise of Tillich, whom Hauerwas regards as an adversary, an accommodationist to secularism who thinks the

[25] This may not be all that surprising given Murdoch's attraction to the thought of Simone Weil. At times, Weil seems to regret Christ's Jewishness; and with it, we might think, his humanity, his place and time. However, for an alternative view of Weil's relationship to Judaism, see Yourgrau 2011, 131.

language of the Gospels requires translation into the terms of a culture that's fundamentally at odds with Christianity (see ibid., 157, and Hauerwas 1992, 7-8). These elements lead Hauerwas to want to re-examine whether Murdoch's insights can be more or less uncritically appropriated by Christian theologians. His answer is that they cannot.

On Murdoch's view, Hauerwas thinks, Christianity must look like consolation; and to some extent, the more orthodox, the more consoling (Hauerwas 1997, 160-161). Christianity's pictures of sin and hope – of redemption by the one who shows us our fallenness – will unavoidably appear false. If we are faithful to these pictures, we will seem to be not far advanced on MGM's perfectionist pilgrimage.

Likewise, we might think that Murdochian perfectionism and the progressive view of religion it carries cannot help but appear falsely consoling from a Christian perspective. It looks like a denial of Christ's humanity and salvation's place in the context of Jewish history, and a denial of difficulties for our sense-making – difficulties inherent in Jesus's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, in his specific self-emptying and suffering, in his woundedness. Simply put, it looks like a turn toward comfort where our understanding would otherwise confront its finitude and frailty.

Remember, Murdoch doesn't only think that Christianity has become unbelievable, or that being a Christian is no longer intelligible given the loss of certain practices and forms of life. She also wants to update – or, as Hauerwas sees it, to replace – Christianity, offering a preferable alternative (ibid. 1997, 159). How would this alternative look? Perhaps like this:

> Christianity can continue without a personal God or risen Christ, without beliefs in supernatural places and happenings, such as heaven and life after death, but retaining

> the mystical figure of Christ occupying a place analogous to that of Buddha: a Christ who can console and save, but who is to be found as a living force in each human soul and not in some supernatural elsewhere. (MGM, 419)

Some of this might seem unobjectionable to those who regard themselves as Christians. For example, a Christ who can save, or Christ's life present in each human soul. But some of it will seem disconcerting. We might reasonably wonder whether, as A. N. Wilson proclaims, Jesus has managed to survive. To see this, just consider the following queries. Is Murdoch's 'mystical figure of Christ' Jesus of Nazareth, a poor Galilean who is also the Word made flesh? Does Murdoch mean by 'save' what Christians mean when they speak of Jesus's saving work on the cross? Are 'supernatural places and happenings' so incidental to the Christian story, and thus to Christian practice and experience? Is this really a way for *Christianity* to continue in any legitimate sense of that word?

Murdoch thinks that her updated vision could save Christianity. She doesn't think that an update is anything novel for the Christian tradition, which, she claims, has "always changed itself into something that can be generally believed" (MGM, 419). There are several problems here. We might wonder why we should think this update can or should happen through Murdoch's philosophy: surely there are better routes to change the Christian tradition from within. And we might wonder about the convictions of the Christian who thinks Christianity requires saving by moral philosophy (rather than, say, by the presence and work of Christ or via his church). Moreover, if Christianity has tried, in each age, to transform itself into a generally believable creed, we might wonder whether it has done a good job. Paul noticed that his message about a crucified messiah was "a stumbling block to

the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). For his part, Hauerwas writes that he has, contrary to Murdoch's suggestion, spent his career trying to make Christianity rightly difficult to generally believe (1997, 159).

Together, these issues raise the question whether Murdoch plans to save Christianity at the expense of Christianity, or just by casting off its needless accretions (if that's what they are). Hauerwas thinks the former: Murdoch proposes to save Christianity by, in effect, replacing it with another religion, as humanity finally graduates from its mythologizing childhood (ibid.). He isn't worried that Murdoch is an atheist, but that she is an evangelist for another faith – one that may prove as tempting, as capable of shaping our imagination, as it is contrary to the source of the language and practice it endeavors to save. Hauerwas's concerns run so deep that he wonders whether Christians should even forgo Murdoch's novels; after all, he thinks Murdoch is right about art's power to form our capacities and sensibilities, and he worries that her art can render Christian understandings unintelligible for us (ibid., 162).

Besides its inability to carry the Christian tradition forward, there are two fundamental flaws in Murdoch's alternative faith, on Hauerwas's view. First, it cannot free us from our egoic blind spots because we lack the relevant liberatory resources without God. More importantly, the nature of these blind spots cannot fully be articulated in a non-theistic world (ibid., 165). Christianity lacks these flaws. It recognizes that our defense against self-deceit and false consolation – indeed, our ability to detect these – cannot come solely from within us. These come from God, primarily mediated by the community of believers, the church. Christians are called to resist the world's false consolations *in* knowing that redemption is secured through Jesus's life, cross, and resurrection. Those events don't

depend on us (that's the sense in which Christianity is news), and they enable discernment between truth and mere sentiment.

What response is open to Murdoch here? I think Hauerwas sees that these arguments won't persuade the committed Murdochian (ibid., 166). After all, Murdoch can insist that Christianity is just too hopeful for the steely realism she seeks. Its picture of cosmic salvation doesn't allow us to take the void – perhaps best symbolized by a crucifixion that can be given no further meaning – seriously enough. Then we could say that for Murdoch, as for Weil, Christian faith would be easier if Christ's crucifixion were not followed by his resurrection (see Weil 2014, 34).

If we characterize the argument this way, Christianity looks like a form of deflection from difficult reality. But of course, there's another way to characterize the argument. Although he doesn't really pursue it, this is open to Hauerwas. We could see Murdoch as deflecting from the difficulty – the mystery, the way it wounds ordinary sense-making – found in Christian revelation. We could see Murdoch turning instead to a comforting myth of progress beyond mythology, a fantasy of Christianity without a wounded God. In sum, we could see her hope that humanity will outgrow its attachment to old myths (regarded as consolations) as a turn toward consolation.

So, we have two divergent ways to characterize the difference between Murdoch and the Christian. On one characterization, the Christian deflects from the void Murdoch wants to take seriously. They insist on the perfectionist resurrection to overcome the horror of the crucifixion. In so doing, they neglect the reality of what has happened, the grotesquely ordinary. On another characterization, Murdoch deflects from the difficulties for sense-making that Christianity centers. She insists on the perfectionist overcoming of God as part

of her iconoclastic pilgrimage, making sense in ways that obscure the Christian tradition's revelation of sense-making's vulnerabilities.

I don't see how debate could be possible here, how either party could be convinced by argument. Any argument could be construed as an expression of the urge to turn away from reality, from the ways it wounds sense-making creatures. We appear to be at an impasse, where we cannot reasonably hope that an exchange of reasons will settle who is holding the icon or the hammer.

This impasse surrounds the void, whose recognition reorients our desires toward reality (MGM, 503). It concerns the capacity of religion (and philosophy) to acknowledge or neglect the void, and our capacity to tell the difference between this acknowledgment and neglect. This seems to present a serious hurdle, since we seek a reading of MGM that explains the presence and significance of the void.

4.3 Murdoch's Testimony

In fact, though, I don't think this impasse is a hurdle. Far from it. Instead, I want to suggest that it's illuminating, that MGM's final pages aren't oblivious to this dynamic but rather play into it to call our attention to it. Then the difference between Murdoch and Hauerwas, the fact that MGM provokes Hauerwas's response, would indicate something important about the shape and point of MGM, about how and what it discloses.

From Hauerwas's perspective, Murdoch's refusal of consolation appears to be a turn toward imaginative idolatry. From Murdoch's perspective, Hauerwas's attempt to smash the Murdochian idol appears to be a retreat into fantasy. And this fact, I suggest, shows an essential feature of the reality, the moral terrain, with which MGM has been concerned.

MGM's concluding provocation yields an instance where our ability to converse breaks down, so that we end up talking past each other in a very particular way as we regard each other's realities as deflections. MGM doesn't just gesture to this example; in its final pages, it enacts it. Hauerwas's response, precisely because it may seem so compelling, belongs to this enactment.

Perhaps this shouldn't catch us unawares. We should expect the void to color MGM's argument, structure, and reception. If it didn't, it would formally betray its substantial and overarching concerns. MGM's penultimate chapter is largely *about* the void, about realities, principally tragic ones, that wound our sense-making and force us into positions of isolation, where it becomes harder to tell whether we or other people have lost a grip on reality. MGM's final chapter *embodies* this. Through reflection on religious language and practice, concerns that have echoed throughout prior chapters, the final chapter manifests the difficulty for philosophy – indeed, for reasoned conversation – of the difficulty of reality. It shouldn't surprise us that Murdoch can only witness to this difficulty by putting herself and the whole of MGM on the line. She must solicit an understanding of the text as a piece of utter fantasy or iconography – in some sense, a failure in its own terms. To see this is to read MGM as a work of testimony, one that moreover effects what it concerns.

I think this is why Hauerwas feels that he doesn't know how to adequately enter into argument with Murdoch, that he isn't well equipped to do this (1997, 166). I am not clear that Murdoch means to be having an argument; and the solicited yet unsatisfied desire to engage her in debate is part of MGM's point, a crucial feature of its shape and fidelity to what it's about.

Hauerwas suspects that MGM will best be answered in an imaginative way, by artistic means (ibid., 167). Writers in the mold of Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor stand the best chance at querying Murdoch's vision-shaping imagination. And Hauerwas feels it's important to recognize that these artists depend for their imaginative resources on the faithful lives and communities of practice of ordinary Christians. I agree: the best response to Murdoch from the believing Christian will be artistic, and more specifically, probably literary. But this isn't for merely pragmatic reasons, for example because literature is best able to counter the pernicious attractions of Murdochian prose. Rather, I think it's because Murdoch's book is shaped by her engagement in a form of testimony. MGM is rightly seen as closer to Elizabeth Costello's wounded and wounding lectures than to (for instance) arguments about the epistemology or geopolitics of religious belief.

In testifying to reality as she sees it, Murdoch is also testifying to her experience of alienation and false comfort. By the very form of her book, she testifies to the difficulty of discerning between these and communicating across them for religion and philosophy. In brief, Murdoch testifies both to the difficulty of reality and, in shaping MGM, to the specific difficulty of that difficulty.

It's unsurprising that MGM solicits perfectionist sense-making when it turns to and enacts the void, since this shows that perfectionism can sometimes be a deflective response to the difficulty of reality. And it's unsurprising, too, that MGM solicits the concern that it concludes with consolation, because this just shows the difficulty of the difficulty of reality.

So, my sense is that a compelling response to Murdoch's testimony won't take an argumentative form, as Hauerwas's essay partly does. As we have seen, argument can be just another way to deflect from the difficulty to which someone testifies. A compelling response

to MGM will instead take the form of testimony itself. As Hauerwas (1997, 167) suggests, literary forms of expression may be well suited to this; literature's capacity to witness and thereby make a distinctive claim on readers is doubtless why Diamond looks to literary works for the examples she uses to sketch the concept of a difficult reality in the first place. There are moments of this in Hauerwas's essay, when he expresses his sense of the difficulty and his uncertainties about his own formation by Murdoch's imagination (ibid., 155-157). To my mind, these are the most compelling parts of his essay, because they are spots where Hauerwas is speaking in the same register as Murdoch, where he speaks to her (and so potentially to our) condition. In these parts of his essay, Hauerwas puts himself on the line; he witnesses and doesn't just argue.

4.4 Psalm 139

With this in mind, I want to turn back to the most puzzling part of MGM's last chapter: its culminating quotation of Psalm 139. If we look just beyond the verses that Murdoch quotes (7-10), we find all manner of voids. The psalm is full of testimony to realities that can wound our sense-making and drive us to consolation. Take these examples: the fact that we are wonderfully made (14) yet anxious and liable to offense (23-24); the inescapability of God and the feeling of his absence (19); the idea that God knows all the secrets of our hearts (1), and yet the need to remind God of this (4-5), of what it means for our relationship with him and each other; the desire to move toward God (23) and the desire to flee from his watchful presence (11); God's extraordinary thoughts and our all-too-particular desires (18-19). Like many of the psalms, Psalm 139 is full of personal bafflement. The Psalmist clearly sees this baffled terrain as that of faith.

Why, then, might this be a fitting place for MGM to end? For one thing, I suspect that Murdoch quotes Psalm 139:7-10 because she understands that we won't be progressing past God quite so easily – that her argument about religious consolation is liable to provoke the same charge, that she might be seen as fleeing the wounds of Christian revelation. Insofar as MGM's final pages mean to open onto the void and not just to concern it, this is an apt ending. But I also think the above examples demonstrate that, in certain respects, Psalm 139 and MGM belong to the same genre; they are playing similar games. Both testify to the difficulty of reality and do so in ways that leave this open to readers. In their formal and substantial difficulty, both occasion forms of sense-making that are in fact uncomprehending – that belong, and don't see that they belong, to the very dynamic to which these works testify. MGM's final lines tell us about what the book does through the bewilderment they are bound to provoke.

4.5 Exploration and Perfectionism in Testimonial Terms

Where does this account leave us with respect to the exploratory and perfectionist readings? Diamond's exploratory thematic remains vital to this overall picture because difficult realities can be found all over the place; we cannot conclusively demarcate the terrain where they will appear, so if moral experience and philosophy are to attend to these difficulties, they will need to prioritize open exploration rather than delineation. Likewise, perfectionism remains fundamental to this picture because the woundedness of sense-making creatures confronting difficult realities shows up against the backdrop of the search for consolations, and because the maintenance of the perfectionist motor is one form that deflection from reality may take in moral philosophy – one that MGM solicits and thereby highlights.

Perfectionism can be provoked by difficult realities, but it can also draw us toward them, as we overcome preliminary consolations; it can be a good, perhaps even necessary, way to hammer away our icons, until it becomes one.

4.6 Wounded Testimony

In answer to Hauerwas's concerns about reading Murdoch, then, we can say that what MGM finally does looks much closer to what's at the heart of Christianity on his view – a revelation of our woundedness as sense-making creatures – than what its final pages suggest on their face. And that difference in fact enables MGM to do what it does, turning us toward reality in all its difficulty, where we are liable to talk past each other as I am astonished where you see the ordinary.

On this view, not only is MGM, through its consideration of the void and its enactment of that consideration in its discussion of religion, purposefully constructed; but only through this construction as wounded testimony could it faithfully lead readers to confront the difficulties with which it's fundamentally concerned – the difficulties of reality, and so of philosophy. Only by writing in this way can Murdoch help us avoid what the Psalmist rules out: a flight into difficulty-denying fantasy (Ps. 139:7).

5. Unfolding Diamond's Concept

This exercise of projecting the concept of a difficult reality into the context of MGM has helped to show how that book's bewildering shape is a "carefully calculated achievement or work of its writing", not because it sustains perfectionist sense-making in perpetuity, but because it enacts perfectionism's approach to its own limits, ultimately revealing the ways it

too is subject to the wounds opened by difficult realities (Mulhall 1997, 220). This allows us to see the form of MGM as compelled by the demands of testimony to difficult realities; it allows us to see MGM as exemplary of acknowledgment in philosophical prose.

This is what the projection of Diamond's concept tells us about MGM, but what does this teach us about that concept? In what ways does this projection unfold that concept's implications? First of all, MGM provides us with a fuller picture of the pressure that faithful testimony to difficult realities exerts on philosophical writing. In Diamond's introduction of difficult realities, that pressure is embodied by Cavell, whose prose is shaped by the requirements of acknowledgment of the skeptic's pain, and who therefore opens himself to the misunderstandings that characterize the readings of his work to which Diamond responds. Like Cavell, Murdoch makes herself vulnerable to incomprehension: in the case of MGM, the charge that the book's disorienting shape is the result of inadequate editing. We can see her exposure to that charge as a sign of her fidelity to the difficulty of reality, rather than as confirmation of her failure to write with sufficient lucidity. This casts light back on Cavell's writing, helping us to see how his bewildered critics positively carry out the dynamic he portrays, and so substantiate rather than vitiate his acknowledgment.

With this in mind, we can see MGM (like Diamond's other examples) as incarnating the reality that injures Cavell's skeptic by presenting a problem case for our capacity to make sense of others. The difficulty of acknowledging the void to which MGM's form gives voice – and thus, the challenge of understanding that form – is an instance of the difficulty of acknowledging the wounds of inscrutable others. In our struggle to make sense of Murdoch, and not to deflect by regarding her as inattentive rather than made bewildering in fidelity to her attentive bewilderment, our position is akin to the skeptic's before skepticism takes root;

acknowledgment and deflection are live possibilities for us, as we are exposed to the difficulty MGM discloses.

MGM's resistance to romanticizing the void – which Murdoch says "could also be called 'despair' or 'affliction' or 'dark night'" – returns us to a feature of all three of Diamond's main examples: suffering, which calls for our care and provokes our denial (MGM, 498). Costello testifies to the suffering of our fellow creatures, and her fellows are tempted to turn away from that suffering by turning away from her suffering, as Coetzee's fellows are tempted to neglect the wounded woman at the heart of his lectures. Cavell points us to the suffering of our fellow human beings and the pain of confronting it. And Hughes expresses the suffering of war, its baffling ordinariness. MGM shows how the very fact of suffering as a part of human experience can injure our sense-making and therefore invites the deflection whereby it's seen as (for example) morally or spiritually strengthening, additional grist for the perfectionist mill.

If we recall Diamond's purpose in introducing the concept of a difficult reality, her concern that philosophical modes of sense-making can banish bodies, lives, and wounds to the domain of the pre-rational or merely animal, then we can see Murdoch's reception by Hauerwas as extending this purpose: for Murdoch's pursuit of a Christianity without an incarnate and wounded Christ – her apparent desire to extend the reach of intelligibility by casting aside those aspects of Christian revelation that threaten, precisely in their embodied specificity, to resist our understanding – might be seen as exiling the body from religion, hence as revealing how religious modes of sense-making can become deflective. We could then see Hauerwas's response to Murdoch as seeking to keep Christianity wounding for our sense-making, including in its religious modes. And so, we could see Murdoch and

Hauerwas's mutual incomprehension as an extension into the religious sphere of the ways in which Costello and her colleagues talk past each other.

This points us back to Diamond's examples, particularly those that tail off in various ways from her three main examples. With respect to the unity of these examples, one question that might arise is why religious images and narratives begin to feature. Cavell, Hughes, and Coetzee don't seem to center a religious register – though Costello's encounter with Abraham Stern does briefly raise questions about what it means for humanity to be formed in God's likeness (see Coetzee 1999, 50) – and this distinguishes them from some of Diamond's more peripheral cases, like R. F. Holland's (1965) discussion of Jesus's transformation of water into wine, Ruth Klüger's (2001) perception of a stranger's kindness as shaped by grace, even a quote about the human capacity for infirmity and woundedness found in William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (DR, 3). MGM's conclusion in a religious register, which provokes Hauerwas's assertion of Christianity as significantly wounding our sense-making, suggests that we might understand Diamond's turn to religion as motivated by her concern for places where understanding and language run out. Murdoch's use of the resources of the Christian tradition to describe and enact the void indicates this tradition's emphasis on realities that resist comprehension, both soliciting and injuring consolation. In other words, we might see it as unsurprising that Diamond's search for wounds to sense-making and desire to avoid deflection leads her, like Murdoch, to words whose sense is conditioned by the disorienting loss of sense we experience in confronting a wounded God.

Chapter 5

Narrative Testimony: Carys Bray's Wounded Couple

1. Introduction

Carys Bray's novel *When the Lights Go Out* (2020, hereafter WLGO) has been viewed as an exemplary work of climate fiction. However, unlike many representatives of that burgeoning genre, it doesn't envision a future dystopia in which the effects of global climate change have wreaked havoc on society and led to new and nightmarish forms of human community (as Lanchester 2019 and Zhang 2023 do). Nor does it offer much in the way of inspiration to practical action, advocacy, or fresh hope for our species or planet (as Robinson 2020 and Markley 2023 do). Instead, it centers on a couple, Chris and Emma, whose marriage is exposed to collapse by the threatened collapse of the world around them.

Chris, a landscaper with little history of activism, is baffled by the reality of the climate crisis and the unresponsiveness of his fellows. He cannot understand how they manage to carry on with everyday life, seemingly with ease. He is sometimes pictured as a descendant of the Old Testament prophets, driven to despair by his powerlessness to awaken even his own family to the fate that awaits them, to their indifference. At other times, Chris looks more like a victim than a prophet: he is profoundly wounded and isolated, and this renders him injurious to others, particularly to Emma and their family.

Emma is concerned about the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. She is a seasoned activist, though long retired from campaigning, and she sees many problems that need solving and facts that provoke grief. Mostly, she is bewildered by Chris's bewilderment. She cannot understand how his woundedness so persistently alienates him from her and their children. Her incomprehension takes different forms throughout WLGO: care for what she

regards as Chris's temporary if unrelenting depression; frustration and anger; fear that he has lost his mind; and sorrow that the man she married has changed beyond recognition, revealing his inscrutability and making him much harder to love.

Emma is wounded by Chris's wounded sense-making as this drives a wedge between them. And Chris's wounds are deepened by Emma's ability to continue seeing the significance of ordinary life as well as by her incomprehension. Bray's novel diagrams their unraveling relationship and thus portrays how the perception of a difficult reality opens onto mutual incomprehension in the context of a marriage, where visions of inexplicability and ordinariness are held in especially close, hence especially wounding, proximity.

What's more, WLGO stages this mutual incomprehension formally, as it depicts these incompatible visions without offering any resolution. Its chapters are narrated from Chris and Emma's oscillating and mutually wounding perspectives (as well as the always inconclusive or questionable perspectives of several witnesses to their relationship), with no omniscient narrator or clarity about which perspective to favor. The novel therefore undermines the expectations we might have for a work of climate fiction, exposing the loss of sense we can experience when confronting climate collapse rather than giving that collapse the sense necessary to address it. The result is that acknowledgment and deflection are left open to us, so that we must go on with the difficulty for ourselves. In exposure to Chris and Emma, thereby to the difficulty whose perception imperils their relationship, we are no more able to settle a choice between their conflicting perspectives than they are. We find ourselves not looking in on their marriage, able to arbitrate between them from a neutral vantage, so much as, in effect, brought into the mutual incomprehension they experience, susceptible to bafflement and tempted by denial.

This chapter projects the concept of a difficult reality into the context of Bray's novel. This can clarify her protagonists' failures to understand each other, and it can explain the shape of WLGO as an exemplar of acknowledgment in relation to the wider (deflective) genre of climate fiction. Considering how Diamond's concept illuminates Bray's novel will not only help us to understand that novel and what it enacts, but to see what constancy there might be in this concept's further variation. I begin with the novel, describing (in order) the oscillating inexplicability and ordinariness at its heart, the mutual incomprehension that follows in Chris and Emma's marriage, the deflection thus solicited, the exposure that makes this deflection enticing, and Chris's testimony as it threatens to expose Emma. I then argue that WLGO is shaped by the pressures of testimony to the difficult reality that wounds Chris, and I ask what this reveals about Diamond's concept and my use of it.

2. The Baffling Prophet and Ordinary Life

2.1 From One Apocalypse to Another

Chris's disorientation is rooted in his attempt to acknowledge the reality of the impending climate apocalypse. The world is ending, and his fellow human beings, who have a hand in bringing this about, are oblivious to what they have done and are capable of doing. To make matters worse, even when they seem to recognize this, they manage to stay tethered to their quotidian lives, using their conceptual resources to confront the problems of climate change and treat related anxieties. Their recognition is shown up by their intact sense-making.

Chris is no stranger to the apocalypse. He was raised by devout Christian parents of a rather fundamentalist stripe. He lived under the weight of the apprehension that the world would soon end, and that many unrepentant people would consequently suffer. As a child,

he was constantly watching for signs that would augur this end. His father's life revolved around anticipation of the apocalypse, and twice a month, on his father's Saturdays off work, they would stand in the street handing out leaflets warning of the harrowing judgment that soon awaited passers-by. Most people didn't stop, and those who did mostly seemed to pity Chris's childhood.

Chris always disliked this witnessing, though he was glad to spend time with his father who was otherwise stern and distant, isolated from others by eschatological horizons. For the most part, Chris was "burdened" by expecting the day of reckoning (WLGO, 13). Predictably, then, he became a skeptic in his late teenage years, casting aside the religious ideas of his youth, which he came to see as "old imaginings", basically as consolations that were far from consoling (ibid.). In their place, he discovered the promise of "a whole life: one that had the potential to reach a deliciously mundane conclusion" (ibid., 13-14). Having allayed his anxiety about the rapture that would, he feared, mean the end of everything valuable, he looked forward to aging. In brief, he embraced ordinary life and lived in ordinary time. He met and married Emma. They had two children. They coped with his overbearing parents. Their troubles were wonderfully daily and earthbound.

However, those years of mundanity were not to last. Chris now sees them as an "interlude", a reverie of sorts, between two perceptions of the collapse of life on earth: the religious perception of his childhood and the climate apocalypticism of his maturity (ibid., 14). One vision of the end times has replaced another. Chris regards his newer vision as even less consoling and more wounding, since there's no promise of salvation for anyone. Skepticism and ordinary life form the gulf between these two visions.

In that gulf, Chris and Emma were joined together by their self-understanding as "the rational, reasonable progeny of risible parents" (ibid., 15). They were happy sense-makers, who made sense of their parents as behind the times and their childhoods as providing lessons for what not to do in raising their own children. Chris compares this sense-making to "naming everything, like Adam", as they reveled in the beauty and variety of everyday life, all of it open to understanding (ibid., 16). Their marriage was founded on this shared understanding, and so on Chris's repudiation of his youthful expectation of the sensible world's collapse.

Now, Chris is devoted to sharing "the Bad News" as he was once devoted to sharing the Good News (ibid., 56). It's the subject of his every thought, the terminus of every conversation, and the only theme that animates him, even as it baffles him, alienates him from household responsibilities, and isolates him from Emma and their sons.

While Chris's boyhood prophesying and more recent bewilderment might appear to be miles apart, Emma sees his perception of his fellow human beings as polluted by their insatiable thirst for the earth's resources and bizarrely indifferent to the calamity in store for them as a recasting of the scene of original sin, whereby the younger Chris would have said judgment was first brought upon us. Adam and Eve reached for and consumed the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; we excavate, quarry, and hollow out the planet that would sustain us and all living creatures, were we to safeguard rather than exploit it. If "cursed ground and children brought forth in sorrow" are the consequences of the former sin, why not think the repercussions of the latter sin as it pollutes our form of life will be at least as severe (ibid., 178)? In other words, we might see Chris as having come full circle, back to bafflement at a vision of depraved human beings bringing collapse down

on themselves. As Chris has it, he now sees that the world "was always going to end", just not quite in the way he once anticipated (ibid., 12).

2.2 Emma's Vision of the Ordinary

This isn't a vision Emma shares. It isn't that she is unaware of climate change, impervious to the news, or unconcerned about environmental collapse. Indeed, the area around their home in the North West of England is largely peat bog and chronically flooded. This flooding has affected Chris's landscaping business, hurting the family's already precarious finances, and it has damaged their house. There's plenty to be concerned about, without looking any further afield.

Emma's concerns about the climate lead her to action and lifestyle change. She has become a vegetarian out of concern for her fellow creatures and their habitats, and she resists purchasing a plastic Christmas tree. These everyday actions are part of her attempt to worry only about the problems to which she can make a genuine difference. She is careful to ensure that lifestyle changes inconvenience no one but her, that other people can carry on unperturbed by her actions. This is in stark contrast to Chris, whose actions and words greatly inconvenience and alarm his family.

Back in the day, Emma was a committed protester for all manner of causes. She is all for raising awareness and doesn't see her fellows as behaving with unassailable decency; to her mind, activism is often needed to effect change, though it can be disappointing. In fact, when she was more involved in local causes, it was Chris who saw this as "a complete waste of time" (WLGO, 32). In their relationship, Emma did "the worrying, protesting and

preparing", while Chris saw this as futile or just boring (ibid., 33). Emma was made anxious by the world's problems. Chris was comparably unbothered.

In some ways, that hasn't changed. Although Chris has been wounded by the perception of the coming collapse, he doesn't seem any more inclined to solve concrete problems than he used to be; Emma is still the one who frets about addressing problems. When it comes to the climate, she perceives Aristotelian difficulties – ineffective government, changing weather patterns, a moldy home – and sets about to remedy these as best she can without disrupting others, particularly Chris and their children. These problems are, however challenging, in principle resolvable, and this enables Emma to continue taking pleasure and finding beauty in ordinary life.

2.3 Mutually Wounding Perspectives

Chris is baffled by Emma's vision of the ordinary (including the sorts of difficulties that fit on the Aristotelian spectrum). He cannot understand how she manages to lead a normal life. From his vantage point, she is burying her head in the sand. She lacks the courage to acknowledge reality, and her neglect allows her to go on with her everyday ways of thinking and living. Chris identifies this as "normalcy bias", in essence an ingrained preference for the comprehensible and conventional (ibid., 56). Acknowledgment of what he and his fellows are doing to the planet thus requires parrēsia, especially where his fellows, even his own wife, don't seem alienated and bewildered in ways that would reveal their attention. In this vein, Chris sees himself as responsible for "disrupting normalcy by telling the truth" (ibid.).

He is particularly uncomprehending of those who appear to possess all the information, to be fully aware of what we are doing to the earth, while their everyday lives and understanding of the world nevertheless continue unimpeded. He is disturbed by the "reasonable, well-dressed scientists" he sees on television, because they "don't look panicked" when they predict how long humanity has left (ibid., 57). He sees these scientists as corrupted by the cameras around them; they want to be intelligible to the public, not to alarm anyone, "their powdered foreheads deflecting the light" (ibid.). To Chris's ear, all their talk of statistics and policy deflects more than the light. It signals their deflection from the difficult reality, just as they appear to be facing it. Their sense-making is of a piece with the extracting, controlling impulse driving us toward collapse; they transform disturbing wilderness into sense, expanding our understanding instead of acknowledging what our understanding cannot accommodate.

Like these scientists, Emma sees problems to fix and therefore isn't baffled in the way Chris is. Like them, she has all the relevant information. Her lack of bafflement cannot simply be attributed to ignorance of the bare facts. This infuriates Chris: he is troubled that he cannot provide information to draw Emma into his disorientation; and his recognition that others have the same information without any injury to their sense-making forces on him the question of whether he is losing his grip on reality, rather than seeing it with unusual lucidity.

Yet Chris doesn't see how he could possibly perceive reality while continuing to make sense and live more or less happily as Emma does, as the scientists on television seem to do. When he wonders what's wrong with himself, given that Emma is unscathed by reality, he reminds himself that she must in some way be denying the truth (ibid., 194). But this barely mollifies the injury to his self-understanding that results from being in relationship

with her, because it's plain that she, like the scientists, indeed possesses all the facts, and yet she continues to exercise her sense-making capacity without significant disruption.

One of WLGO's epigraphs alludes to Chris's wounded vigilance: "How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be / When there's no help in truth!" This is from Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Spoken by the blind prophet Teiresias, it's sometimes translated: "How dreadful knowledge is when he that has it is not helped!" (see Sophocles 2020, 52). Like Oedipus, Chris discovers that the truth is not consoling or comforting; instead, it alienates and isolates him. How much more dreadful knowledge of the truth is when others seem to have that knowledge and yet find no occasion to bemoan truth's distance from help, its opposition to the comfort that other people can bring as we jointly seek to understand and better the world. This just furthers Chris's isolation, as he is, from Emma's perspective, "consumed by the idea of everything falling apart" (WLGO, 226).

This leaves Emma to supply the "food, clothing, shelter, love" her family needs (ibid.). She is baffled that Chris is neglecting these needs, while for him, this apparent neglect is the outworking of painful attention to the reality that alienates him. Chris is baffled that Emma is neglecting that reality, while for her, that apparent neglect is the outworking of her requisite attention to the reality of her domestic life. Her bewilderment is deepened by Chris's bewilderment, and his wounds are intensified by her wounds (caused by his injuriousness) and incomprehension.

2.4 One's Bafflement is Another's Banality

Chris is perfectly capable of seeing banality where others see more troubling significance; he doesn't seem especially disposed to bewilderment. When his mother Janet visits, she is

weighed down by her perception that most people – Chris and Emma among them – are ignoring their mortality and the judgment that will follow. Janet reports that Christians all over the world are dreaming about the apocalypse: earthquakes, floods, and wars that will usher in the end. The point is clearly that Chris had better prepare himself; he had better reconcile himself with the Judge before it's too late. Janet is convinced that time is short, and she tries to reawaken in Chris the perception that burdened him in his childhood: she would call this the burden of living in reality.

Chris responds by reciting diverse, considerably more mundane explanations for these dreams and signs. He reminds Janet that earthquakes are a common occurrence, so dreams about them are unremarkable. He tells her that dreams about floods are nothing out of the ordinary. War is, of course, a prevalent feature of our form of life. In sum, Chris sees banality where Janet sees, and where he once saw, deeply troubling realities that others must be warned about. He can make sense of these dreams and signs in ways that Janet cannot, and in ways he couldn't before. And Janet doesn't deny what he says – she knows that earthquakes are common – yet she sees something of "fathomless significance" where her son sees the ordinary (cf. Mulhall 2012, 32).

Even still, Chris cannot understand that where he is now shouldered out, others like Emma see at most ordinary difficulties. He doesn't seem to grasp that he roughly stands in relation to his mother as Emma stands in relation to him. While Chris believes that no problem-solving could ultimately resolve the difficult reality revealed by the climate crisis, that we must rather acknowledge what we can do (and have done) to the world, he tells Janet that Jonah is the prophet he most admires, because he fought back against a tyrannical God. Janet remarks that this didn't do any good in the end: Jonah couldn't deflect from God's will

for him forever. And yet, Chris doesn't seem to notice that, with respect to the climate apocalypse, their positions are reversed.

While for Emma and Janet, to varying extents and for different reasons, climate change calls for problem-solving and opens onto no deeper difficulty, Chris sees that no problem-solving could touch the difficult reality these problems disclose. As Janet says about Jonah's evasion, it won't do any good in the end. It won't change what human beings are able to do to our home. We can try our best to survive the approaching collapse – and Chris becomes a serious if haphazard 'prepper' – but our preparations are often little more than attempts to console ourselves. These coping strategies never work long for Chris. He sees all our "techno-utopianism" as childish deflection from (for instance) the threat that the global supply chain, and with it our way of life, could collapse from the weight of environmental destruction without warning (ibid., 116). Janet is more right than she knows: this difficult reality can be deflected from, but it cannot be remedied.

2.5 Imagination

From Chris's perspective, a vision of Aristotelian difficulties in the vicinity of the reality of climate collapse – which Emma, Janet, and the scientists on television share – obscures our coming end, so that we cannot inhabit the woundedness he experiences. The difficult reality becomes a problem, since our sense of the inexplicable is no help if the serious work of understanding and solving problems is to get underway. We abandon our woundedness, refuse to imagine our way into it, as Coetzee's readers refuse to imagine their way into the life of the animal wounded by what we do to animals. This failure of imagination, based in a flight from exposure, prevents us from confronting the apocalypse.

On Chris's view, when he was making sense of his life and the world around him, he "had a sort of failure of imagination" (WLGO, 133). In this condition, what he was reading and hearing about the threat to our form of life, to any form of life, didn't seem real to him. But now that it seems real, he says, "I don't know how to see the world. Or what words to use to talk about it" (ibid.). This might remind us of Costello's testimony that she doesn't know what she wants to do but doesn't want to sit silent (Coetzee 1999, 59).

Chris can either imagine his way into the collapse of his whole world, come to grips with how bewildering this is and how it shoulders him out from any sense he might make of it, or he can understand the world and those around him and lose sight of the baffling reality that imperils this world, those others, and his understanding. Furthermore, like Costello, Chris cannot simply choose between these perceptions. His perception of the apocalypse reveals his fellows as fundamentally deflecting and polluted by what Emma sees as a recasting of original sin, while his perception of his fellows as normal and continuing to make sense isolates him, as it forces on him the worry that he, and not they, might be going mad. His fellows' normality just looks like proof of their depravity.

This includes Emma, whose normality signals (for Chris) her failure to imagine her way into the difficulty – in short, her shallowness of vision – despite all her talk of empathy and her penchant for reading novels. To his eye, these novels just present another form of distraction, offering consoling sense-making via narrative (more on this later).

2.6 Inexplicability and Ordinariness

Bray thus gives us a picture of oscillating, mutually reinforcing visions of inexplicability and ordinariness.

The injury to Chris's sense-making affects his whole life, especially his relationships with those seemingly oblivious to the reality that wounds him. That injury is exacerbated by his perception that Emma sees nothing more troubling than hard problems, that she manages to keep making sense and leads an ordinary (if not entirely happy) life.

Emma's vision of ordinary difficulties means that Chris looks maddeningly injurious, and she attempts to make sense of his hurtful behavior as the consequence of depression, itself occasioned by the lull in his landscaping business caused by flooding. That she can make sense of him in this way, that she can see the flooding as engendering depression rather than as a token of the end times, simply furthers Chris's isolation. One image of this isolation is that Emma is often pictured at home with her family, while Chris is portrayed outdoors, either trying to warn passers-by about the coming collapse or wandering in the hope of finding work (often a lie by which he conceals his testifying in the streets).

Emma and Chris are, as it were, driven apart as they each help the other to widen the void between them.

3. Mutual Incomprehension

How could these mutually wounding perspectives lead to anything other than mutual incomprehension, amplified by their inevitable and persistent confrontation in the close quarters of a marriage? This section shows how wounds to Chris's sense-making render him injurious to Emma, how she thus fails to understand him, and how their mutual incomprehension leaves no room for argument. I discuss Emma's use of the language of wounds to describe this and distinguish incomprehension from mere annoyance.

3.1 Chris's Injuriousness

Emma finds Chris increasingly hard to bear, as the injury to his sense-making renders him profoundly injurious to others. He is single-minded, at the expense of his relationships. All conversations doggedly return to the question of how other people aren't bewildered as he is and so aren't vigilant before the difficulty. To the soundtrack of the news, Chris comments that earthquakes and hurricanes in far-flung locations will soon affect his family. He pushes television programs and films about the end of the world on Emma and their children, and he has them prepare in chaotic and less than obviously effective ways for societal collapse. Emma's response to all this is often silence, lest she encourage him and further her exposure to the reality that has made him so oblivious to ordinary life. But this just strengthens his desire to share his bewilderment with her, to wake her up to it.

Chris's wounded attention leads to "absurdities" in his family life (WLGO, 58). For example, he attempts to raise rabbits for meat, with no relevant expertise and seemingly little care for whether this could be an effective means to survival. Similarly, he stands in the street trying to raise the alarm when he is meant to be with his sons, and without much concern for whether this makes any difference (it doesn't seem to).

Some of Chris's comments sound outrageous, akin to Costello's Holocaust imagery. When his father dies unexpectedly, he tells his mother that his death was "one of hundreds, coinciding with the unusually high temperatures" (ibid., 91). And if that isn't insensitive enough, he mentions to Emma that, if he could, he would have their sons sterilized, given that their children would come into a world we are capable of destroying (ibid., 133).

Chris's behavior suggests a lack of responsiveness to Emma's feelings or their subordination to his bewilderment. He regularly switches off the power to their home (hence

the novel's title), ostensibly to test how ready Emma and their children are for the end of days, though it's never clear how a power outage is meant to bear on preparedness for the apocalypse. He then lies about the source of the power cuts, inventing stories about why their neighbors have electricity. At a particularly wounding point, Chris shuts off the power just as Emma is preparing to host his side of the family for Christmas.

Many of these actions make little sense. They don't seem to be part of any coherent plan to ready his family for (say) an extreme weather event. The power cuts are an example of this, as is Chris's request that Emma practice frugality at restaurants while he spends more money than they have purchasing strange and impractical survival gadgets online.

Although Chris sees Emma as relatively imperturbable, he wounds her with countless offensive comments and senseless behaviors, so it's hardly surprising that their marriage is falling apart. Clearly, Chris is as wounding as he is wounded.

3.2 Emma's Incomprehension

Experiencing all this injuriousness, Emma struggles to understand Chris. While he is baffled that she can be "smiling at lit candles and curried vegetables" while mass extinction threatens, she tries and fails to draw him into this ordinariness, cheer him up, and reorient him to daily life (ibid., 45).

On her view, we can best prepare for the challenges of climate change by "being decent in the present": learning to cooperate, building resilient communities, befriending neighbors, and strengthening social networks. She offers an analogy with plants that develop mutually beneficial relationships with fungi. Chris sees this as naïve to the point of fantasy and reminds Emma that some plants, far from cooperating with neighbors, instead give off

toxins. It can hardly pass Emma by that Chris seems to be releasing such toxins himself, as he is made indecent by the reality he perceives: that the human form of life has been poisoned by extraction and exploitation of the earth. Cooperation and mutual understanding, of such importance to Emma, are unavailable in her own marriage.

Each time Chris expresses contempt for Emma's hopeful comments, however slight her hope, each time he wounds their relationship, she wonders whether he has finally crossed the line or lost his grip on reality. She worries that she might have to intervene but doesn't see what she could say. She struggles to hold together her image of her husband with his rediscovered role as a doomsday prophet: she cannot make coherent sense of him nor find a way to talk to him about it, as all their conversations inevitably lapse into litanies of terrifying facts that augur the coming collapse. Chris and Emma, unable to reach each other, just end up furthering each other's bewilderment and woundedness.

One way in which Emma's incomprehension of Chris – or his incomprehensibility to her – shows itself is in his apparent loss of his sense of humor. At his urging, they watch a mockumentary centered on a fictional pandemic; he proceeds to take it entirely seriously, not seeming to realize it's a mockumentary. From Emma's perspective, Chris has been inexplicably shouldered out from the sense of humor they used to share, one of her favorite things about him. She cannot understand how he takes the mockumentary seriously, and of course, he cannot understand how she finds any of it comedic.

3.3 No Room for Argument

This mutual incomprehension leaves no room for argument. It's not that Chris has information Emma lacks, nor that she could educate him to better accommodate reality. This is shown by a fable she tells.

In response to Chris's recounting of his teenage realization that his body is bafflingly both his and him, that he is his body and not only its inhabitant, Emma tells a story about aliens who are baffled, arriving on earth, to discover that human beings are made of meat (WLGO, 47-48). The aliens examine people from different regions of the planet and, much to their shock and dismay, it isn't a local aberration: people all over the world are made of meat. In their bewilderment, the aliens describe human speech as 'meat sounds' and singing as 'air passing through meat'. To them, a fact that appears utterly banal to most of us (if oddly stated) is inexplicable and revolting. Indeed, the aliens find it so disturbing that they ignore all radio signals coming from earth as injurious reminders of those bafflingly meaty creatures, so that we seem to be alone in the universe.

This has the look of a difficult reality: one life-form is baffled by what another finds ordinary, and there's no room for argument between these perspectives, since the aliens and humans would presumably agree that human beings are 'made of meat'. This straightforwardly imperils communication; the avoidance of radio signals leads to our isolation.

I think Emma tells this tale because it echoes her own predicament (though it isn't clear to what extent she recognizes the parallels). Chris resembles the aliens, bewildered by a reality that others like Emma see as, at worst, encompassed by the Aristotelian spectrum, open to sense-making. She resembles the human beings who see nothing out of the ordinary,

including the ordinarily challenging. Because they agree on the facts and yet seem to inhabit different universes, their communication breaks down.

Unsurprisingly, Chris doesn't see the point of Emma's fable. Given their mutual incomprehension, how could he? When their son James steps in to ask if they are arguing, Emma tellingly denies this. For they aren't arguing: there's no space for argument here. Even as they agree about the facts (the seas are rising, the polar ice caps are melting), they cannot acknowledge each other's radio signals. Emma's vision of ordinariness baffles Chris; his bafflement baffles her. This makes conversation futile.

WLGO contains other examples of how mutual incomprehension imperils communication and leaves no room for argument. For instance, Emma and Chris agree that he is abandoning hope, yet she sees this as a problem while he sees it as necessary. They soon realize there's nothing further to say. They are of the same view, yet they seem to be occupying different worlds (see ibid., 215).

This point is plainly made when Emma imagines writing to a climate scientist to provide Chris with reassurance, or at least to demonstrate that one can be open-eyed but continue making sense. She rehearses emails asking the expert to persuade Chris that (for example) floods are unlikely to destroy their home in the near future. However, she never sends such an email, because she cannot see what could be done with an answer. If it were expressive of woundedness or seemed catastrophizing, Chris would regard it as vindicating his bewilderment. If it were reassuring, he would regard it as vindicating his view of the "well-dressed scientists" as agents of deflection (ibid., 57). Simply put, he is beyond reasoning with.

3.4 Talk of Wounds

Emma explicitly voices her woundedness in reflecting on Chris's injuriousness and her failure to comprehend him, which leaves her feeling lonely and isolated.

She is outraged to discover that Chris has been responsible for the power cuts, even as she prepares to host his family on Christmas. She describes this recognition as wounding her 'third skin'. This phrase, which she finds in a novel, describes the environment and ordinary life in which she makes sense of herself and others. Her 'first skin' is physical; her 'second skin' is her clothing. Emma has gone out of her way to accommodate what to her mind are Chris's anxieties, and his blatant disregard for her as his behavior becomes less comprehensible is, she says, "piercing" (ibid., 272). It makes her more aware of the gap between them and shatters the self-understanding they shared.

Clearly, Emma's use of the language of piercing wounds is projected from the 'first skin', corporeal context. That said, wounds do eventually become physical in WLGO, as 'third skin' wounds lead to violence when, after a failure to communicate and get to grips with each other, Emma and Chris shove each other with more force than either expects. This is when Emma finally recognizes that her marriage has broken down and may not be recoverable; she fears the disruptions to normality Chris has caused.

Her response is to lock Chris in the garage and conceal his whereabouts. Bray thus presents a remarkable image of mutual incomprehension: Chris finds that the garage door's hinges are on the outside, hence inaccessible to him, and he selected its complex locking system to keep people out, as he stockpiled survival equipment – the very locking system that keeps him in (see ibid., 232). As the locking mechanism he chose to safely store goods

for the apocalypse literally isolates him from his family, his perception of the reality of the world's collapse gives way to the collapse of his own marriage.

3.5 Mutual Annoyance Versus Mutual Incomprehension

Of course, marriages aren't always happy and can collapse for all sorts of reasons; couples don't always understand each other. There are many ways to miss and vex each other that don't involve the perception of difficult realities.

Bray provides a contrasting image to Emma and Chris's marriage in the relationship between Chris's sister Ruth and her husband Rob. Ruth and Rob regularly get on each other's nerves and misunderstand each other; for instance, she finds him absurdly cheery, and he finds her far too critical. But their mutual annoyance is ultimately ameliorable because conversation is possible. Their misunderstandings are rooted in conflicting but hardly mutually unintelligible temperaments. They aren't rooted in mutually wounding and incompatible perceptions of reality. Indeed, Ruth and Rob cooperate in an attempt to make sense of the senseless acts to which Chris is led by his bewilderment, despite the ways in which they irritate and misinterpret each other.

This is very different from Chris and Emma's relationship, where mutual incomprehension (rather than mere mutual annoyance) is the direct and irremediable consequence of coextensive inexplicability and ordinariness. As difficult realities are distinct from Aristotelian difficulties, so incomprehension as the logical consequence of difficult realities is distinct from the annoyance Aristotelian difficulties can yield in a marriage.

4. Deflection

WLGO opens with Emma chancing on Chris as he prophesies on a busy street corner. He is holding a homemade placard, inelegantly repurposed from her protesting days, warning passers-by that the end is near. Presumably he speaks with all the force and denunciation of a Jeremiah, but Emma cannot hear him over the noise of the traffic (a telling image). What's more, he doesn't see her and hasn't told her he has been reprising his role as doomsday prophet; he has let her believe that he is looking for work. Later, a similar scene is described in language that might evoke Chris's boyhood Saturdays with his father:

> In olden times, Chris might have covered his head in dust and ash or donned gloves and a black hatband [the latter, a typical Victorian mourning costume] as a manifestation of his innermost feelings. Today, he stands beside the steps of the north-east colonnade in the relentless, filmy rain. Most people glance at him and look away. (Ibid., 94)

From a distance, Emma worries (rather ironically) that Chris will be misunderstood; she is relieved that most people ignore him, since he looks "more firebrand than friend" (ibid., 4). Yet she is simultaneously distressed that people treat her husband with the disdain they might afford an overzealous street preacher. Struggling to hold the firebrand and the husband together, she imagines that Chris is trying to assuage his own fear by giving it to others: recognizable though pitiable behavior.

On the other hand, Chris sees the avoidance and disdain of passers-by as confirmation of the depth of their denial, not only of their own deaths but of the death of all of us, as they help to eradicate the conditions for life. In essence, he sees them as deflecting.

There are various ways to deflect from the difficult reality of what we do to the planet, as from its injurious sufferers. Chris notices deflection in the scientists on television who, like the bystanders to atrocity Costello indicts and like her son John, are not quite aware of the difficulty even in appearing to face it. Chris sees deflection in those who blithely maintain their everyday lives, even flourish: "the people in town, with their golf umbrellas and fancy coffees, their loaded shopping bags and their several houses" (ibid., 9). Don't they know what we are doing to the earth? The discovery that they don't need informing will only deepen Chris's suspicion that they are deflecting from the difficult reality, lacking (as he sees it) not facts but the courage to confront the inexplicable.

When we are faced with Chris and his testimony in word and deed to the difficulty that wounds him, one available form of deflection is to engage in diagnostic sense-making. We could regard Chris, as we might regard Hughes, as peculiarly and hence remediably wounded. We could look to his psychology.

4.1 Psychological Deflections

Emma reasons that Chris is depressed. After all, the floods, the bleak winter, the ordinary challenges of family life, lingering childhood trauma, and a lack of regular employment could all conspire to trigger depression. When Emma mentions this diagnosis to Chris and offers to help him find support, he predictably replies that he is, far from failing to cope with intelligible realities, just being realistic where reality is baffling. But of course, Emma can take this response to redeem her suspicions about how deeply Chris is sunk in despair.

Emma wonders whether Chris's despair is an eccentric symptom of a mid-life crisis. Perhaps he is anxious about aging and mortality, about the end of *his* world, but is redirecting

this (to try to cope) into anxiety about the end of *the* world. Maybe concern for his own life and its direction is at the root of his injuriousness. Emma recognizes that "stockpiling food and foraging on the beach" isn't a typical response to a mid-life crisis; but she conjectures that it might nevertheless be a way for Chris to distract from his own depressing finitude (ibid., 42). Then he could be understood as rendered irrational, conflating his end with the world's, by a phobic reaction to change and death. That would make him intelligible.

From Emma's vantage, this phobic reaction leads Chris to neglect the realities of domestic life. His claim that she is neglecting the end of the world is then heard as symptomatic of his psychological distress. In short, Emma sees Chris as tarrying in despair rather than coping (we could say mourning) and returning to ordinary life (see ibid., 137).

This is reminiscent of Freud's deflection from the poet wounded by the transience of the landscape around him. Freud interprets the poet as mourning in anticipation of changes to the landscape but failing to complete this mourning and return to quotidian life. The diagnosis is transience anxiety. Similarly, we saw how psychoanalytic forms of sense-making can construe Hughes as failing to complete mourning, and hence as needing therapy or other treatment to enable a return to the everyday.

In like fashion, Chris is described as "already grieving" for our species and the planet (ibid., 18). He is said to be ruminating about "the loss of everything he holds dear" (ibid.). His grief encompasses his job, his family, their home, their land, the whole ordinary terrain of life with other people. Even toward the novel's end, Emma describes Chris as helplessly immersed in "anticipatory grief" (ibid., 309). To Emma's mind, this grief calls for therapy and support, so that Chris can return to the family he is neglecting. But for Chris, that would

mean neglecting the reality his woundedness acknowledges. So, we can see him, like Hughes, as resisting mourning, refusing sense-making's consolations in this terrain.

To be sure, Emma has ample reason to diagnose Chris with depression, since she has ample reason to maintain her vision of the ordinary. Beyond the circumstances that could plausibly yield Chris's depressive condition, there's the fact that someone needs to provide for their family: Emma notes she cannot afford the luxury of existential despair. Moreover, Chris's woundedness is made even less appealing by his injuriousness, so better to understand the wound that engenders his offensive speech and behavior as idiosyncratic and thus incommunicable. With Chris himself wondering if he is behaving appallingly or going mad as he is shouldered out, sometimes seeing his own actions as "inexplicable", it's unsurprising that Emma finds it tempting to fall in with these concerns (ibid., 102).

The suspicion that Chris is depressed or anxious will have even more force if he is seen to be disoriented by problems that concern others (like Emma and climate scientists) without comparable bewilderment; after all, climate anxiety is already widely recognized as a psychopathology (see Taylor 2020). Emma has more reason to see Chris as suffering due to his psychology because she sees Aristotelian difficulties in the vicinity of his bafflement but doesn't see how these difficulties could open onto that bafflement.

4.2 Chris's Temptations to Deflection

Deflection is tempting for Chris too. Toward the end of WLGO, he and Emma have separated, partly because she is sick of being accused of deflection, and partly because their mutual incomprehension has led to tragedy, as Chris's imprisonment in the garage, itself the result of failed communication with Emma, nearly prevents her rescue from the toxic fumes

of a gas fire. In the wake of this, Chris moves out, and Emma dreams of him roaming the earth "like Gilgamesh, overcome with sadness and afraid of death, desperate to solve the puzzle of mortality" (WLGO, 303).

Of course, Emma's dream carries her deflection forward, since Chris doesn't seem intent on solving a puzzle and denies he is acting out of sadness or fear. Rather, he says he has been shouldered out by a clear-eyed vision of reality. In their subsequent confrontation about the power cuts, Emma claims Chris needs help to cope with his anxiety, while he says he will do whatever it takes to awaken his family to the difficult reality.

Chris's separation from Emma makes sense-making deflection even more tempting for him, since his family is at stake: he has a marriage to heal. He worries that this healing is out of reach because the difficult reality will always be, at the very least, in his peripheral vision, and whenever he notices it, he will be wounded and made wounding all over again.

To appease Emma, Chris does briefly surrender to sense-making. He is cajoled into forming a group to undertake such neighborly activities as planting trees and assembling greenhouses, purportedly to stave off environmental crisis in ways that are, as Emma stresses, within his control and agreeable to others. However, this transformation of the difficult reality into a problem to be addressed by cooperation and community engagement doesn't last long. Soon, the void re-opens for Chris, and he finds himself once more alienated from others in all their ordinariness, in this case from those with whom he gardens:

> During a Saturday-afternoon garden blitz, surrounded by cheerful, optimistic people who laughed as they brainstormed 'punny' names for the group – Weed it and Reap, Strawberry Fields Wherever, Another One Fights the Dust – Chris felt himself

> withdrawing. Why was he encouraging a collective delusion that a few raised beds and fruit trees could make a difference to anything? (Ibid., 317)

He sees that he is becoming, like Emma and the scientists, not quite aware of the difficulty as it's transformed into a resolvable problem. As this recognition returns him to the difficulty, isolation from those who see merely ordinary challenges creeps in. He is reminded of his father's obsession with Job, whose injured sense-making distanced him from his consoling fellows, as he finds himself shouldered out again from those who manage to make sense and thus fail to comprehend him as he fails to understand how they go on unbaffled.

Although the threat to his marriage makes deflection more tempting, Chris cannot abandon the reality he has seen. And while he can eventually return to his family, once Emma persuades herself that he is "learning to tend" his despair, we never hear about this from Chris (ibid., 322). Emma's impression that he is slowly beginning to make sense might well indicate her continued deflection, whereby she sees their communication as reparable and their marriage as at least salvageable.

WLGO ends with Emma's potentially deflective vision of a relationship whose troubles belong, whatever their persistence, on the Aristotelian spectrum. Chris is left without any final communication, so the mutual incomprehension at the novel's heart is unresolved: after Chris's renewal of bafflement while out gardening, all we have is Emma's optimism. Chris likely remains bewildered by the difficult reality that has long rendered him, from Emma's perspective, unresponsive to conversation. This would mean that, for him, the difficult reality defeats the deflection solicited by the mutual incomprehension it opens onto, while Emma is left in that deflection, including by fantasizing that Chris is learning to cope

with his sorrow. On the other hand, it could be that Emma finally manages to draw Chris back into ordinary life. We have no way of knowing: any resolution there might have been is ultimately resisted; as far as we can tell, genuine conversation never begins. Bray's refusal to let Chris have the last word leaves us with two incompatible pictures: one where he continues to be baffled as Emma makes deflective sense of him, and one where he has genuinely given in to sense-making; we are given no help to decide between these, no assurance, and so we are left in something like Emma's exposed condition.

5. Exposure

With Emma seeking to brighten Chris's mood and Chris threatening to share his bewilderment, we might hear Emma's desire not to "indulge Chris's apocalyptic fantasies" as a wish to hold on to ordinary life: to avoid being exposed to the reality he has seen in exposure to his suffering (WLGO, 60). After all, if Emma saw that reality as more than fantasy, she might likewise be shouldered out from life with her family.

As Emma and Chris increasingly fail to understand each other, dialogue grows shorter and less meaningful. Chris's typical litanies of the horrors that await us are met with silence, or else Emma flees the room, telling Chris that she cannot bear to hear any more of his wounding testimony. For her, this is the only way to "stay sane" and maintain her view that "most of her caring must be done right here, in this house, on this piece of land, on behalf of these particular people", just what Chris is alienated from (ibid., 135). If she listened to Chris, she might find his alienation contagious and lose her sanity.

Emma's regular reminders to herself to stay sane suggest she isn't entirely convinced that Chris's difficulty is idiosyncratic. At least sometimes, she seems to understand that his

testimony could implicate her, so that she might find herself vulnerable to analogous wounds and shouldered out from ordinary ways of sense-making as Chris is. In other words, her flight from Chris's litanies may be a flight from exposure.

The significance of this flight is evident when Emma's sense-making is at risk and she seems drawn into bewilderment. Listening to Chris, she sometimes begins to see herself as deflecting, and this wounds her self-understanding. For instance, she briefly recognizes her enthusiasm for sewing and reading novels as a diversion from the climate collapse, comparing herself to Nero fiddling while Rome burns (ibid., 66-67). At another point, she notices that, in the flooding around their home, landmarks have begun to disappear. She is struck by the realization that the dry land on which their home sits was artificially carved out of what was England's largest body of fresh water, by nature a treacherous wilderness. It occurs to her that the solid ground under her feet is the result of human intervention, contrived and transient, perhaps much like the sense-making Chris resists. Might his return to that treacherous wilderness be a plunge into reality rather than fantasy?

These moments of risk to Emma's sense-making pass quickly, as the responsibilities of family life restore her to the ordinary. However, they show how she is exposed to the difficult reality in being exposed to its sufferer. No doubt, this makes deflection more enticing, since she is painfully aware of how Chris's woundedness (whatever the diagnosis) alienates him from his family and renders him injurious. Her vision of Chris as mired in treatable depression or coping poorly with intelligible problems can be understood as solicited by the threat of wounds to her sense-making in exposure to Chris. Her feeling that she cannot bear his testimony – at an extreme, locking him in the garage – can similarly be seen as rooted in her vulnerability to the wounds that yield that testimony. And predictably,

from another vantage, this feeling might just be seen as belonging to the frustrations of marriage to a person who has lost their grip on everyday life.

However, if we see Emma's flight as rooted in exposure, then her separation from Chris near WLGO's conclusion looks like a last attempt to quell this exposure; and the fact that this separation doesn't last, and that their reunion occurs without any significant change in their mutually wounding perspectives, suggests Bray's resistance to a resolution that would transcend exposure. The novel's final pages might therefore teach us that any attempt to extricate ourselves from vulnerability to difficult realities and the wounds they create will only ever be a form of deflection ultimately belonging – meaning what it does – within the scene of exposure to these realities and their sufferers.

6. Chris's Testimony

In relationship with Chris, Emma is exposed to the difficult reality of the climate apocalypse, as his woundedness leads him to the testimony that provokes Emma's deflection. She worries that, instead of being open to reassurance and asking for help to cure his bafflement, "he wants to pull her in after him" (WLGO, 134). That's little wonder given that he sees her as avoiding reality, fantasizing while the world burns, hiding away in sewing and reading while the floodwaters rush in. Her deflective sense-making (for example, by diagnosis) only lends greater urgency to Chris's testimony. This is all the more noticeable as conversation breaks down, leaving little but wounding comments and deflective maneuvers at the center of Chris and Emma's encounters. Chris's injurious actions (like turning out the lights) as well as his words might be construed as testifying to the difficult reality, but this section concentrates

on the litanies that mark his verbal testimony, characterizing them as parrēsiastic, one way in which he exhibits his wounds.

6.1 Catastrophic Litanies

Instead of responding to Emma's concerns or engaging in dialogue rooted in their life together, Chris often offers litanies of facts: Emma calls these "Chris's catastrophic litanies" (ibid., 224). The facts that constitute these aren't connected with each other in obvious ways, except that they all point to (and can open onto) the reality Chris suffers. They aren't correlated with the rhythms of any conversation. For instance, one litany includes such fragmentary facts as "increasingly extreme weather events, the decline of wildlife populations, political inertia and, closer to home, the gradual collapse of the lawn-care scheme" that was a mainstay of Chris's business (ibid., 17). Chris typically gives these litanies at inappropriate times, in an injurious manner, and in apparent indifference to whatever Emma has been saying, as if to obliquely reveal her concerns as distractions.

Tempted to deflection, it's possible to hear Chris's litanies as expressions of problems, all of which belong somewhere on the Aristotelian spectrum. Extreme weather events call for advance planning. Biodiversity decline demands regular measurement and careful policymaking. Political inertia might be overcome by raising awareness and putting pressure on multilateral agreements. And perhaps Chris will need to consider another line of work as flooding makes landscaping unpracticable. Emma sometimes hears Chris's litanies in this register: after all, many of these problems concern her. But this understanding is complicated by the lack of obvious connections between the facts Chris lists, the sheer range of issues he touches on (and never more than touches on), his separation from any advocacy

or action (besides ineffective witnessing in the street and haphazard survivalism), and his clear impatience with Emma's inclination to identify and tackle problems. Why list disjointed problems without any clear prompting or interest in addressing them?

Struggling to hear these litanies as expressing social and political problems to solve, we might hear them as expressing anxieties to treat. A manic inventory of all the ways in which society is collapsing as the planet is harmed could be a symptom of underlying anxiety, which fixes on any available catastrophe, from the local to the global. Then we could see the fact that Chris's litanies are given without context or conversational cause, that they are disconnected from any attempt to solve problems, as further evidence of his anxiety. When Emma can no longer hear these litanies as expressing concern for problems, she hears them as fretful utterances, not so much disclosing the world's genuine peril or fragility as disclosing Chris's psychological condition. Her response is then to offer support, and to hope that Chris's distress will pass as the floods eventually recede, work returns, and winter ends.

As we should expect, Chris's response is to deny that he stands in need of therapy, for it cannot help those wounded by realities that are far from intelligible. Those around him who maddeningly continue to make sense are, in his view, deflecting from the reality and consoling themselves. If that consolation is what therapy offers, it should be avoided.

Occasionally, Chris's litanies manage to bypass Emma's interpretation of them as expressing problems or anxieties, wounding her more deeply. Her intermittent realization that she might be deflecting from Chris's acknowledgment of a baffling reality is tellingly revealed by her own litanies: "the polar ice melts and the seas surge" (ibid., 67). There seems to be a clear link between these litanies and exposure to the difficult reality and its sufferer.

6.2 Parrēsia

I suggest that we can understand these litanies as expressions, not of problems or worries, but of wounded attention to the difficult reality of what we do to the planet. That is, we can understand them as parrēsiastic utterances, whereby the deflective sense-making we have considered is resisted (hence invited) and difficult realities can be disclosed. To see this more clearly, consider how Chris's litanies meet Lorenzini's seven guidelines for the felicitous use of the concept of parrēsia.

Chris's Parrēsia

(1) Unpredictable effect.	Chris doesn't know how his litanies will affect Emma or their marriage. They aren't particularly rooted in conversation and their effect varies. Sometimes, they are seen as registering problems or broadcasting anxieties. At other times, they seem to open Emma to the deeper wounds Chris has suffered. There's room for denial, and so for acknowledgment.
(2) Freedom of response.	No convention can guide Emma's response: she is free to see these litanies as manifesting Chris's wounded life in his wounding speech, or she can deflect from his inability or unwillingness to engage in conversation; she can see problems to solve, anxieties to calm, and a marriage in need of assistance. Confronted with the question whether she should be wounded as Chris is, she is left to speak for herself, to own her response or neglect.
(3) Criticism and a call to acknowledgment.	Chris's litanies can function as alarm bells, waking Emma to the difficulty that yields them and implicitly criticizing her neglect, as shown by her ability to get on with ordinary life. As Chris's testimony entreats Emma to acknowledge

	the baffling reality of what we are doing to the planet, what this says about our fellow human beings and extractive society, she is exposed as responsible for her deflection or attention. Chris's litanies go deeper than the listed facts, casting uncomfortable light on his hearer's condition.
(4 and 5) Risk and courage.	Chris's injurious speech risks a great deal: his marriage, his family. His provision of litanies in lieu of engagement in conversation contributes to that risk. His testimony is vulnerable in the sense that, like him, it can easily be misunderstood; indeed, it's often misunderstood by Emma, given her vision of ordinariness. It takes courage for Chris not to capitulate to Emma's perception of despair to overcome and problems to chip away at as best we can.
(6) Transparency.	The integration of Chris's speech and life is shown by the extent to which wounds to his sense-making are exhibited in wounding testimony: for example, litanies that betray a lack of concern for Emma's feelings and alienation from the mutual understanding that undergirded their marriage. That Emma is as uncomprehending of Chris's speech acts as she is of him suggests this transparency.
(7) Alethurgy.	Chris's resistance to the hearing of his litanies as expressing problems or anxieties shows that, more than cataloguing truths, they are a way to tether himself to the truth as he sees it and to express that tethering. They make his woundedness perceptible and offer it as a model of acknowledgment in this terrain. Clearly, Chris actively appears in what he says: this is why Emma often struggles to understand it. She cannot prize the wounded husband apart from his bewildering speech.

Recognizing Chris's litanies as parrēsiastic utterances, we can more clearly see how they open onto the exposure Emma flees. Chris's exhibition of his wounds discloses the difficult reality that has engendered them, and this exhibition thus solicits the deflections of diagnosis; we can see this positive solicitation as signaling his fidelity to the difficulty.

7. Bray's Testimony

Previously, we saw how Coetzee's testimony mirrors and enacts Costello's, while Diamond's essay is shaped by the demands of testimony to the wounds her examples portray. Might we find the same relationship between WLGO's author and its wounded protagonist, so that the novel's shape can be explained by the pressures of faithful testimony to the difficult reality whose consequent mutual incomprehension it pictures? This section first discusses climate fiction as a genre whose norms WLGO flouts as a means of testimony to the difficult reality, before considering literature generally as a potentially deflective discipline of sense-making.

7.1 Climate Fiction

I think we can see WLGO as offending against the expectations we might have for a work of climate fiction. Moreover, I think we can see its inclusion within that genre – which Bray might well have anticipated, despite its resistance to any sense we might make of the climate crisis and its sufferers, despite that it neither inspires advocacy nor calms nerves, and so, despite that it defies the genre's norms – as providing Bray with an opportunity for formal testimony to the difficult reality.

Although climate fiction is a diverse genre, ranging from realistic studies of sustainable living to portraits of dystopian futures, its theorists tend to describe it as

paradigmatically inspiring change, making sense of what could appear bewildering, and functioning as a type of therapy. For example, one of climate fiction's leading theorists, Axel Goodbody, describes the genre (whether in literature or film) as united by the aims "to make climate change real for readers and viewers, and help society adapt to a sustainable way of life" (2020, 131). While Bray's novel may make climate change real for us, opening us to the wounds that reality can cause, I doubt it will help us adapt to more eco-conscious ways of structuring society. Indeed, Chris would see that as another piece of deflection, and if Bray means to encourage readers to pursue problem-solving in this fashion, the shape of her book lets her down, since it suggests that the kind of sense-making in which we would then be engaged might well be little more than deflection from the difficulty her book is meant to make real for us. To put it another way, it's not clear that Bray could affirm both of Goodbody's aims: in her case, each seems to defeat the other.

In their (2019) introduction to the genre of climate fiction, Goodbody and critic Adeline Johns-Putra point us to the value of literature as a practice of sense-making in the context of the climate crisis. They write: "Literature plays a part in helping us meet the challenges with which life confronts us, by interpreting the past, dramatizing the situations and choices of the present, and imagining possible futures" (2019, 7). This is, of course, precisely the sense-making Chris finds objectionable, and WLGO doesn't offer much help in meeting life's challenges: rather, it confronts us with difficulties we cannot meet, calling us to acknowledge these difficulties rather than transposing them into the terrain of resolvable challenges.

According to Goodbody and Johns-Putra, narrative fiction provides "forms of collective sense-making with the capacity to motivate and mobilize readers", in the case of

climate fiction, to address the practical and political problems climate change raises (ibid.). There's no room here for the thought that climate change might disclose the baffling reality of what we can do to our planet, which sense-making cannot accommodate and problem-solving cannot touch. This could corroborate the suspicion that climate fiction can function deflectively.

That suspicion is likely to be reinforced by Goodbody and Johns-Putra's claim that "climate change novels [...] provide what one might think of as a therapeutic space, in which collective Anthropocene anxieties are aired, shared and worked through (ibid., 8). The airing, sharing, and working through of anxieties is just what Emma hopes for, and it's exactly the diagnostic sense-making that Chris resists and that Bray's novel, in refusing resolution, leaving Emma in possible deflection and Chris in alienation, fails to deliver. If WLGO is meant to provide a 'therapeutic space', the fact that its conclusion leaves readers exposed to mutually wounding perspectives suggests a serious failure. Just as, if it's meant to make sense of the climate crisis to motivate action, the lack of interpersonal assurance with which it leaves us, the fact that we can continue to see Emma's problem-solving and the composure of climate scientists as denying reality, suggests the book's failure as climate fiction.

This same issue can be seen in WLGO's reception. Although one critic (Smith 2020, 3) describes the book as "frustrating" and liable to make readers, like Emma, "desperate to switch off" – a sign, we could say, of its testimony – most readers laud the book as "timely" and "written to address the climate crisis" and related problems (Feay 2020, n.p.). BBC Radio 4's 'Open Book' program even had Bray on to discuss how her novel can "offer hope and motivate action to address environmental crisis", though she mostly spoke about Chris's paralysis and loneliness in the face of reality (Open Book 2020, n.p.).

We could see the critical assimilation of Bray's novel to the standard expectations and norms of climate fiction, despite the novel's indictment of those expectations and norms as deflective, as a sign that its critics haven't read it very carefully. How could anyone seriously assume that WLGO is meant to 'motivate action' and 'mobilize readers'? On the other hand, we could see WLGO's reception as a respectable instance of climate fiction as indicating its capacity to solicit deflection – that is, as confirming the force of its testimony to the difficult reality Chris suffers. Since we should expect an invitation to deflection to attend legitimate exposure to difficult realities, we should expect WLGO to be read as a work of narrative sense-making. Since that work also resists this reading, offending against its genre, we should expect some readers (like Smith 2020) to find it more bewildering and wounding than motivating.

These contrasting receptions show how WLGO enacts the mutually incompatible perspectives it pictures, as readers find themselves vulnerable to Chris's wounds and tempted to deflect. Because the novel's form testifies to the difficulty, including by disrupting the very sense-making in which it's meant to be engaged as a work of climate fiction, we are left with the lack of assurance that belongs to exposure: unable to resolve Chris and Emma's marriage from any neutral standpoint, unable to prove definitively or impartially that WLGO succeeds in its testimony to a difficult reality rather than failing in its narrative sense-making, and finally responsible for our acknowledgment or denial.

7.2 Narrative Sense-making

WLGO's defiance of what we might reasonably expect from a work of climate fiction – that it will exercise literature's capacity to extend the reach of intelligibility – raises more general questions about how literary modes of sense-making can prove deflective.

In Bray's story, Emma is often reading novels. When she and Chris were happy sense-makers, she frequently read aloud to him, and novels continue to provide her with resources for understanding her fellow human beings. However, as Chris is shouldered out, he increasingly comes to suspect that these novels are diversions. More than this, he suspects they engage in a form of deflective sense-making, where narrative coherence and resolution cover over reality's bewildering inexplicability and the possibility of mutually incompatible perspectives. Narrative offers a way to expand the reach of our understanding, yet Chris is wounded by what he cannot understand, and he thereby becomes incomprehensible to Emma, as she continues to pursue the understanding novels promise. Even Emma's language for woundedness, like her use of the metaphor of a 'third skin', comes from novels; literature provides the resources by which she understands her suffering and Chris's injuriousness.

It isn't only that we can see Emma's enthusiasm for novels as deflective. We can see Chris's resistance to the sense-making in which these novels engage as illuminating literature itself as a potentially deflective discipline. We could see literature as holding out the promise that human beings are fundamentally intelligible to each other, so that we can, by reading, broaden and deepen our understanding of our fellows. Then we could have renewed hesitations about Diamond's provision of literary examples to introduce the concept of a difficult reality. We could ask how these examples subvert literary as well as philosophical or psychoanalytic modes of sense-making. In light of this, we might notice that Diamond's most extensive literary example, Coetzee's lectures, not only subvert the genre of Tanner

Lectures by using literary modes of expression to disrupt argumentative and philosophical sense-making, but also attack more general shibboleths about literature, like the idea that its value lies in its capacity to tutor us in empathy. We might see how these lectures don't simply rest comfortable with literary modes of sense-making, presenting us with a character who, in calling for our acknowledgment, provokes our incomprehension.

If we see Chris as calling attention to literature's deflective capacity, we might then notice that he does this in the midst of a novel, precisely where we would expect literary modes of sense-making to render him eminently (and edifyingly) comprehensible. And if we don't find him comprehensible, if we see Bray's novel as querying the very discipline that structures our expectations for it, we might see the novel's denial of any resolution, the possibility that Emma's concluding vision is deflective while Chris is left baffled, as a sign of Bray's faithfulness to the reality that distances Chris from Emma's habits of reading.

In other words, we might take WLGO's formal features – its lack of any omniscient or overarching narrator, its narration of chapters from mutually wounding perspectives, its final undoing of any resolution there might have been in Chris and Emma's reunion, and its lingering openness about what side to take – to undermine the very narrative sense-making that Emma's novels offer, and so we might see the novel as wounding our expectations for novels and their characters, and hence as, like Coetzee's Tanner Lectures, drawing readers into the vulnerability to wounds to sense-making it portrays.

8. Projecting Diamond's Concept

This chapter has applied Diamond's concept of a difficult reality to WLGO. That has shed light on the collapsing marriage at the novel's heart, and it has clarified how the novel's

form, which could appear to undercut its status as an exemplary work of climate fiction, in fact defies expectations for such a work in order to faithfully testify to the difficult reality. The novel's resistance to the norms of narrative sense-making, echoing Chris's perception of novelistic neglect, exposes readers to the difficulty.

This exercise has meant projecting Diamond's concept into a new context: that of the climate crisis, a disintegrating marriage, and what might look like an ordinary instance of a popular literary genre. This means we can ask not only what this projection reveals about the context, but what it shows about the constancy of the concept of a difficult reality across additional variation. What does this use of Diamond's concept tell us about that concept?

This section first considers how features of the concept's grammar shift in weight and emphasis in the context of Bray's novel and the climate crisis. Then I discuss this projection's purpose in comparison with Diamond's purpose in introducing the concept. I conclude with a note about what this means for the shape of this thesis.

8.1 Projection into the Context of WLGO

Diamond's three main examples of wounds to sense-making differently emphasize aspects of the concept of a difficult reality. In Costello's case, we see how these wounds become injurious to others, how alienation and isolation follow, and how disciplinary expectations can enable deflection; we see how exposure and the call of acknowledgment put pressure on Coetzee's writing, and how responses to that writing reflect the responses of characters like Thomas O'Hearne, Abraham Stern, and John to the wounded animal at the novel's center. In Hughes's case, we see how difficult realities can expose the modes of sense-making belonging to morality and psychoanalysis as deflective; we see that these realities can strike

at the heart of our form of life and that acknowledgment can require vulnerable testimony. And in Cavell's case, we see how testimony to difficult realities is vulnerable to misunderstanding as we can misunderstand the sufferers of these difficulties; we see how philosophy can deflect, how Diamond's introduction of the concept responds to this, and how her examples foreground protagonists whose suffering minds can be as incomprehensible as another's pain appears to the skeptic. I see the four features of the concept's grammar in each of these examples, but to varying extents and with varying centrality. That's as it should be, since Diamond offers us a center of variation.

The same could be said of the projection of Diamond's concept into the context of Murdoch's bewildering *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992). This projection brings out how the difficulty of difficult realities can disrupt and warp philosophical modes of sense-making, putting immense pressure on testimony to such difficulties and their wounds in philosophical prose. Not only does this clarify the baffling shape of Murdoch's book: it expands our understanding of just how difficult realities can (as Diamond suggests and Cavell embodies) make philosophy difficult. In Murdoch's case, I again see the four features of the concept's grammar, but coextensive inexplicability and ordinariness are especially emphasized as this shapes the critical response to her book (exemplified by Hauerwas). This projection also introduces a theological register and shows how religion can both provide and resist deflective forms of sense-making when confronted with the difficulty of reality.

What then of the projection of Diamond's concept into the context of Bray's novel? Like Costello, Hughes, and the skeptic, Chris presents a case of unacknowledged suffering. He is disoriented by an inexplicable reality that his wife regards as ordinarily challenging, and this opens onto the mutual incomprehension that threatens to shatter their marriage.

Because their eventual separation is never settled, as Bray depicts a reunion without resolution, this mutual incomprehension persists: Chris and Emma's incompatible perspectives remain both incompatible and in close proximity, so that Chris's suffering continues unacknowledged. The intimacy of a marriage amplifies the temptation to deflection and allows us to see Chris's resistance to this in detail as he is alienated from the mutual understanding that underpins and sustains the marriage. Of the four features of the grammar of Diamond's concept, mutual incomprehension seems most central in WLGO, since we are led into an elaborate picture of Chris and Emma's bewilderment at each other.

Emma's vision of ordinariness and various deflections show how acute and immensely challenging problems in the world, as well as formidable psychological problems and plain bad luck, present disruptions to our lives that nevertheless differ from the disruptions to sense-making Diamond highlights. This allows us to see the distinction between Aristotelian difficulties and difficult realities more clearly: even very serious difficulties that we cannot begin to see how to solve, but which nonetheless call for solving, belong on the side of ordinariness. Even the unsettling contingencies our lives are subject to – for instance, our being born into a world where climate collapse is already underway – can be part of the quotidian (if unhappy) fabric of our lives. Chris experiences an altogether different order of difficulty, as he is shouldered out from that whole quotidian fabric.

That difficulty concerns our capacity to render our planet uninhabitable, harming not only our human and non-human fellow creatures but the whole 'third skin' – the environment – in which sense-making is possible. This extends both the concern for fellow creatures and the concern for embodiment (or 'first skin') we see in Diamond's main examples, further unfolding her concept's implications as it is projected beyond those examples. This

projection also carries forward Diamond's concern for embodiment by highlighting questions of gender and family dynamics as a dimension of dealing with possibly inscrutable other minds. We could observe, for instance, that Emma sees Chris as alienated from domestic responsibilities while Chris sees Emma's focus on family life as deflective; we could notice that the gender of Bray's wounding protagonist is distinct from her own, as the gender of Coetzee's wounding protagonist is distinct from his own, as if this difference in gender facilitates the depiction of a baffling human being. We might then see gender and family dynamics as axes along which the mutual incomprehension difficult realities yield can take on flesh.

WLGO calls our attention to literature as a potentially deflective sense-making discipline. This is striking in comparison with Coetzee's Tanner Lectures. For Coetzee, narrative provides a way to query and defy the discourse in which his audience wants the issues of animal ethics cast, and thus a way to faithfully testify to the difficult reality that wounds Costello. While he attacks its shibboleths, literature offers Coetzee tools for offending against the expectations we might have for academic lectures. For Bray, the expectations in force belong to narrative fiction, specifically climate fiction, rather than lectures. This gives us a clearer picture of narrative as a means of deflection. Then we can see Bray's formal resistance to genre norms – like her refusal of any resolution and her undermining of her own narrative by allowing the sense that narrative might be deflective to survive the novel's close – as signaling her faithful testimony to the difficult reality that wounds Chris. With different genre norms and expectations, the resistance to sense-making that characterizes testimony to difficult realities shifts. In both cases, however, we are presented with a protagonist who could strike us as incomprehensible, and who thus subverts

the idea, defended (almost taken for granted) by Goodbody and Johns-Putra, that literature's value consists in its ability to extend our understanding of our fellow human beings and the difficulties we face.

Looking at Diamond's main examples of difficult realities, we might suppose that little more needs to be said about literature's capacity to testify to these realities. However, while those examples show how literary modes of expression provide resources for disrupting psychoanalytic and philosophical deflections, and while Coetzee's lectures show how the call to acknowledge wounds to sense-making puts particular pressure on these modes of expression, the projection of Diamond's concept into the context of WLGO reveals how literary testimony to difficult realities must also disrupt the specific deflections that belong to literature as a practice whereby we make sense of each other and the world.

Furthermore, this projection carries forward features of Diamond's more peripheral examples, showing that they aren't as aberrant as they might initially look. Not only are those examples almost exclusively drawn from literature, but, as we saw in considering *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, they center a religious register, as WLGO does. We can see Chris, like Murdoch, as someone who makes use of concepts (like prophecy and the apocalypse) whose sense derives from their embeddedness in religious discourse, but without any belief in the transcendent God at the heart of this discourse. We can see Chris as moving, throughout his life, between religious and irreligious frames of mind, as each provides temptations and resistances to sense-making, ways to bolster and refuse the consolations that would obscure the disorienting void.

WLGO also returns us to the question raised by Lear's Crow example: could a whole form of life, and not only specific modes or disciplines of sense-making, prove deflective

before the difficulty of reality? Emma suggests that the difficulty of our extractive impulse, baked into our form of life, parallels the difficulty of original sin (yet another religious concept), in that it pollutes the entirety of our ways of thinking and living. If that's right, if what Chris notices is that human life is contaminated by the destabilizing consumption of the creation's resources that precipitated our removal to the east of Eden, then we might think the difficulty he is wounded by is not so much climate change specifically but the fallenness of our form of life. Then it would be no wonder that problem-solving and therapy appear deflective, since they just reiterate the sense-making more fundamentally corrupted by our nature.

I previously sounded a hesitant note about whether a form of life could be thoroughly injured by the difficulty of reality. And clearly, Chris's parrēsiastic expression of his woundedness shows his ability to issue more than a bewildering scream. But WLGO suggests that a form of life might be utterly wounded, and hence utterly given to deflection, in a different way: not that speech peters out into nothingness as sense-making is hampered, but that the sense we make as we speak, whatever we say, is ultimately shown up by the reality of the creatures doing the speaking. It might be that what climate collapse reveals about us exposes the whole exercise of sense-making as part of the extracting and land-clearing impulse whose reality renders Chris incomprehensible to his fellows (and forms the ground under his feet out of the chaos of the waters). It might be that it unearths the assertion of human power involved in expanding the empire of intelligibility. Then it isn't clear what there would be left to say, and we might hear Chris's culminating silence with new ears.

8.2 The Purpose of the Projection

So much for what the projection of Diamond's concept into the context of WLGO reveals about that concept's grammar. What about this projection's purpose? In other words, having seen how the concept's use clarifies Bray's novel and how this exercise then casts light back on the concept, we can ask why I have projected the concept in this way. To better understand the speech act, we can ask about the speaker.

We can start by recalling Diamond's purpose in introducing the concept of a difficult reality. In the context of responses to Cavell and Coetzee, she saw that wounds, bodies, and lives had been exiled from the disciplines of sense-making, particularly philosophy, whose expectations conditioned those responses. By characterizing Cavell and Coetzee as testifying to difficult realities, Diamond exposed these responses as deflections, and thus showed how philosophy struggles to acknowledge wounded animals like the skeptic, Costello, and Hughes. Put otherwise, she showed how philosophy can wind up in the skeptic's position, and how acknowledgment of others' suffering can require vulnerability to precisely the kinds of incomprehension that structure criticisms of Cavell and Coetzee.

In the context of WLGO, what we see is not the exile of bodies from philosophy but the exile of woundedness from narrative. We see how expectations for literature and particularly climate fiction – recognizable in justifications of its value as rooted in its expansion of our sense-making – lead to the sorts of misunderstanding on display in the novel's reception, just as Emma's continued sense-making leads her to fail to comprehend Chris. By characterizing Bray as testifying to the difficult reality of what we do to the planet, and the reality of human life in light of this, we can see the critical response to Bray's novel as carrying the deflection it portrays forward, and so we can see how literature struggles to acknowledge wounded animals as characters we are at a loss to understand. That's to say,

we can see how literature can also land in the skeptic's position, and how acknowledgment of the suffering it cannot bear can require vulnerability to the incomprehension by which WLGO is assimilated to the wider genre of climate fiction, "with the capacity to motivate and mobilize readers" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2019, 7).

Why might I want to call attention to the exile of woundedness from narrative sense-making? This is dangerous territory because, while we will better understand this chapter's projection if we ask about its projector's purpose, I am this projector, and often "the eye sees not itself" (Shakespeare 1908, 12). That said, what I want to call attention to here is that this thesis is full of narratives: I have made sense of Diamond's concept by offering stories about Costello's interactions with her fellows, Hughes's childhood, Cavell's self-understanding, Murdoch's reception by Hauerwas, and Chris and Emma's marriage. Diamond's essay is also full of narratives: these provide the instances whereby she introduces her concept and enables us to go on with it, and she can thereby offend against the expectations we might have for philosophical writing. But even with that offense, there's a risk that the use of narratives, the turn to literature for the provision of examples, employs another form of sense-making that can likewise become deflective. There's a risk that, when all is said and done, the use of these narratives still gives too much sense to the losses of sense they depict.

However, the projection of Diamond's concept into the context of WLGO shows, that certain uses of narrative can call attention to their capacity to cover over woundedness and can thus resist the temptation to deflection. They can do this by refusing to resolve mutually incompatible perspectives, disrupting the modes of sense-making in which literature typically engages, therefore risking the appearance of failure in light of genre norms and exposing readers to the difficulty. Could a work of philosophy that makes use of

such disruptive narratives avoid the temptation to reclaim them for sense-making? Could it thus acknowledge wounds by testifying to their destabilizing presence in these literary instances? Could it bear to leave further projections unsettled, the quest always before us, the difficulty of reality open to readers, and the wounds agape?

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