In the novel carrying the same name, the ageing and somewhat disillusioned writer Elizabeth Costello opens her lecture on animals with the image of the Holocaust: ‘Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them’ (Coetzee 2003, p. 65). The image resonates with much of what the field of animal ethics, within and without of philosophy, has tried to say: ours is an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing.

Yet from a certain perspective, it seems trivial to the point of banality to say that (some) animals are our food – it is not merely a physiological fact that humans can eat animal flesh, or a legal fact that they are allowed to, but simply a fact about our world that many people actually do eat animals. That animals are bred for food or for experiments is no stranger, it might be suggested, than people keeping pets. Different animals enter our lives in different ways. Pets are companion animals; vermin you try to get rid of; the being of lab animals (the name is again telling) is in the lab. ‘Pig being’ involves the fact that we eat them.

A recurrent theme of the otherwise disparate ideas going under such labels as animal ethics or animal rights is the view that many current practices and attitudes to animals are culturally instilled and, above all, that they can change. (On the view that they are the result of illicit forms of anthropocentrism, it would also seem natural to suggest that they should change.) Philosophy has dutifully taken upon itself to explore the nature of our relations to animals – whether our ways are justified or merely biased. Rather than a form of prejudice, Gaita considers the priority of the notion of the human in moral thought an important aspect of our being. He decries Costello as sentimental and offensive to the point of wickedness – not because of the uniqueness of the Holocaust but because we cannot put the killing of animals on a par with human murder. ‘It is true my appeal to sobriety relies on how we now behave and respond, but can anyone even seriously wish that we should respond otherwise?’ (Gaita
2003, p. 198, my it.). What he is concerned with here are the conditions of understanding – the limits of intelligibility which are formed out of our responses. Not anything is thinkable nor any change possible to envision. Sobriety involves the possibility of a reality check – which in turn rests not on independent, neutral facts about the world but on sound judgement. This is simultaneously to point at a difference in the practice of philosophy between justification or rejection through the scrutiny of reason, on the one hand, and exposing meaning through description of our responses, concepts and practices, on the one hand – what Ludwig Wittgenstein summarised as philosophy’s leaving everything as it is. But does description obviate criticism? As Carl Elliott asks, ‘If the philosopher is limited to a kind of conceptual analysis–if philosophy truly “leaves everything as it is”–then we seem to be left without the philosophical tools to press for radical moral change. [How then,] on Wittgenstein’s account, do you move toward changing [morally unsettling] perspectives?’

This is the guiding question of this article: if you find an important lesson in the advice that philosophy not do violence to meaning as it springs from our lives, what room is there for moral criticism and transformation? In order to explore this I will need to introduce a series of different yet related matters. Initiated by Gaita’s suggested restrictions on where we can go in moral though, I will first discuss the question of shared moral responses as forming the limits of what we can at all understand morally, in order to contest a seemingly imperative primacy of the notion of human being. Secondly, I discuss the significance our ways of living has for making sense of moral concern, demands for respect and so on, to say that while significant, it is not so only in a plainly comforting sense. In sections IIIa and b, I explore the significance of ‘intelligibility’ as authority through descriptions which (perhaps) leave little room for leaving everything as it is. Section IV discusses what it means that moral matters are personal. Finally, in the concluding section I return to Costello, the Holocaust, and the place for philosophy in understanding matters of moral change.

[Section I. Generalities and particularities]
[Section Ia. The boundary and beyond.]
Much of western thought has been occupied with formulating characteristics to distinguish humans from the entire remaining natural world. Philosophers critical of current animal exploitative practices have often taken this as their starting point. In view of what humans do
to great numbers of animals and with what seemingly little remorse, it might seem fair to suppose there must be some underlying belief working to separate animals from the human domain of morality. These observations generate a number of questions, such as where moral attitudes to animals originate in and how these attitudes can be elucidated through the notion of a categorical boundary. I will shortly return to these questions. But first I consider Raimond Gaita’s emphasis on the importance of humanity for ethics. While Gaita is critical of an ethics occupied with generalities (general rules), characteristic of much moral philosophy, he retains the idea of a general distinction. For him, this difference between humans and animals is a result of our responses and reactions, which he connects to ideas about soulfulness and individuality as expressed in such things as ‘having a biography’. With Wittgenstein, he characterises our moral responses to one another (to another human being) as attitudes towards a soul: ‘My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. … I am not of the opinion that he has a soul.’ (Wittgenstein xxxx, § xx). Yet on Gaita’s reading, this is intrinsically related to the remark that ‘only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; it is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious’ (Wittgenstein xxx, §281) which he without hesitation takes as an indication of the human form being primary. Accordingly, he holds that the ‘attitude towards a soul’ forms our sense of being of a common human kind and consequently ‘our humanly centred sense of what we find intelligible to say of creatures who are in some respects like, but in others quite unlike, ourselves–other animals, for example’ (Gaita 2002, p. 268). The human form as soulful is here not contrasted only with the picture of the human as a bundle of physical and behavioural traits, but with everything that is not human. Indeed, Gaita says that ‘when we pity a human being in pain then we pity them, irreducibly, as a human being, whereas if we pity a dog, then we pity them not as a dog but as an animal of a certain kind, which would include cats and horses, though not worms’ (Gaita 1999, p. 187; my it.).

This strikes me as an extraordinarily odd thing to say. Odd not only because of the detached sense what it is to respond to an animal as if a mere ‘specimen’, but because he claims this to be conceptual. Thus Gaita:

Attitudes towards a soul mark out a kind. … The responses that form and are formed by our sense of belonging to a common kind cannot be elicited by beings that do not look and behave like us. … This is not because we find it psychologically impossible to

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1 Cf. Cockburn: ‘Only of what behaves can we say it is human.’ Beardsmore, xxx.
2 Cf. note on Berger? (each ox was Ox and lion Lion. First dualism – worship AND subjected.)
ignore appearances [but] because those responses are built into the concepts with which we identify what could be the appropriate objects of our responses (Gaita 2002, p. 268-269, my it.)

To frame this differently, Gaita seems to think that only the human form is soulful, and saying something similar of other beings depends entirely on our ability to identify something humanlike in them, ‘Without hesitation we acknowledge that dogs feel pain; but we are not sure about fleas […] because dogs have faces and eyes and fleas do not.’ It is true as Gaita says, again quoting Wittgenstein [ref.], that one does not comfort an aching hand but the sufferer, looking into his eyes. I think there can be no doubt about the importance this has for understanding our human relations. I do think it is doubtful to say we unhesitatingly believe dogs to be in pain because they have faces we can somehow relate to a human form. A human face is expressive because that is the form of the human soul (though not to exclusion). (‘The human body is the best picture of the human soul.’; W.) It is also true that we from time to time ‘see’ something resembling human features in an animal’s face – such as the sometimes almost irresistible impulse to see a smile on a dog’s face. But the smile is not, as it is not in the case of the human, disconnected from what it expresses: the lips of a dog in severe pain hardly gives the impression of a happy smile. In Milan Kundera’s (1999) The Unbearable Lightness of Being ‘Karenin’s smile’ is her whole being against the understanding of her increasing pain. Dying from cancer, her former enthusiasm vanishes – even for the most important morning ritual of being chased around the house with a croissant in her mouth. But walking on all four with the croissant instead in his mouth, Tomas manages to entice a reaction in her: she snarls playfully. This snarl, to Tereza and Tomas, is her smile: her playfulness (Kundera 1999, p. 279 ff.). Is this merely metaphoric? Compare the description in Segerdahl et al. (2005) of how we sometimes think of behaviour: ‘A dog may great us, but not every animal would do so, and a dog’s greeting is normally different from many human forms of greetings. Children, however, often run to the door and greet homecoming parents in clearly related ways: one has the feeling that if they had a tail, they would wag it’ (Segerdahl et al. 2005, pp. 115-116). This may indicate something about how behaviour is expressive – it is expressive because it calls on us to act, soothes our worries (as did Karenin’s smile).

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3 In some ways this resembles the claims of Michael Leahy (1994) who argues that only within our language games do our words have meanings (esp. chapter 4), and our psychological concepts are ‘human’, he says, in that they are essentially learned in human interaction. ‘[T]he animal variant will be what Wittgenstein calls a deviant or doubtful use’ (p. 115).

4 Cf. also Sharpe 2005, p. 174 ff.
welcomes us or rejects us or intrigues us. But not primarily because it is related to a paradigmatic human form.\(^5\)

For Gaita, however, the matter turns on the question of soulfulness as expressive of a common kind; a common humanity in contrast to animals. ‘Animals’, he says, ‘which are killed do not haunt those who kill them in remorse, for animals lack the individuality which is internal to our sense of human preciousness and which is therefore, internal to our sense of what it is to wrong another’ (Gaita 1991, p. 120). (He goes on to say that animals emerge as individuals only in an attenuated sense; as a kind of projection of our human relationships.) This is a function of the fact that we respond in this way or that; he says, for instance, that no one responds to the slaughter of animals as to murder, as if it e.g. could justify taking up arms. As one example of this, Gaita describes how he imagines we would react if, driving behind an open lorry, we were to discover that it carries animals cramped in small cages. He goes on to contrast this reaction with the horror he expects us to feel if we were to see a human child in one of the cages, which immediately will make us forget all about the animals. This picture is for Gaita part of the central facts that form our understanding of human and animal beings. Gaita’s aim here is to elucidate the conditions for our understanding, appealing to facts about how we ‘actually’ respond (by which he does not mean any response but what we upon reflection realise must be the way we should react; this relates back to his notion of what their appropriate objects are) (Gaita 1991, pp. 177-179). He says this to counter claims that such reactions are the result of deep-seated speciesism; of a cultural bias favouring humans over other beings. Gaita instead appeals to a notion of meaning which manifests itself ‘when we speak of us and them and as it is expressed in the response I described in my example of the child in the cage’ (Gaita 1991, p. 119). A question that quite naturally follows is what our concepts and responses in fact are, and what sense they are indeed ‘ours’.

[Section Ib: One world, one humanity?]

Wittgenstein wrote, in 1914, ‘We tend to take the speech of a Chinese for inarticulate gurgling. Someone who understands Chinese will recognize language in what he hears. Similarly I often cannot discern the humanity in a man’ (Wittgenstein 1980, p. xx). Wittgenstein provides for us an important picture of a human tendency to narrow-mindedness

\(^5\) If we encounter an alien being – including a human being – we of course relate to what we know and may try to ‘guess’ our way to understand its behaviour and intentions. Importantly, however, it is the being, and not the ‘paradigm form’, that serves as a reality check.
– we look for what is familiar, failing to see beyond our expectations. One important point is of course that ‘familiarity’ (likeness) or ‘difference’ here are not fixed entities, but the result of a certain outlook, or spirit, in which we attend to others. The contrast would be between seeing her as an individual rather than e.g. a specimen, an exemplum of a type. This description need not be problematic, but can serve as a reminder of the character or morality. There is also the case of Bobby, in Emmanuel Lévinas’s essay ‘The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights’ (Lévinas ref.). Lévinas describes being in a Nazi camp as a French-Jewish prisoner of war, along with seventy others. While not yet prey to Hitler’s violence owing to their French uniform, in their confinement they were ‘subhuman’ to the people around the camp; villagers and passers-by. But a dog came round to the camp; they called him by the (to French) exotic name Bobby ‘as one does with a cherished dog’. They would see him in the morning and then he was waiting for them as they came back, greeting them with elated yelps. ‘For him’, says Lévinas, ‘there was no doubt that we were men.’ In Lévinas’s description, discerning humanity has little to do with marking out a common kind, though it has everything to do with an attitude towards souls. The picture Lévinas gives us of course portrays a human failure (or more specifically, a refusal) to meet another’s face, but it is significant that it is a dog who meets their eyes and souls when no one else dares, or cares to.

In a response to A Common Humanity which is largely appreciative, Lars Hertzberg draws attention to some aspects he finds problematic in Gaita’s view on morality and the notion of a common humanity: ‘If I appeal for mercy for someone by crying out, “He too is somebody’s son!”, or “Think of how that hurts!”’, I am not invoking a contrast with individuals who are not born of parents or who are incapable of feeling pain. The point of appeals like these is not normally to correct a misidentification but to remind the other of the significance of his actions’ (Hertzberg 2011, p xxx). This is important. Such exclamations don’t provide information about what is morally salient (to be the son of somebody, e.g.) but call someone to question about what they are doing. Again, as Hertzberg says, ‘What we need to recognize is that moral appeals are not contrastive (p. xx).

One could go further and say that there is something deeply troubling in the idea of a togetherness that turns on whom we must exclude. Gaita’s reference to the soulfulness of a human being which we may in some cases, as it were, discern in an attenuated form in animals (the eyes of a dog) revolves around a kind of identification (in a loose sense of the word). This gesture of identification is, in fact, a problem that also much of the literature on
animal ethics struggle with: the issue of anthropocentrism. In spite of the critical stance often taken, anthropocentrism sometimes surfaces in more or less subtle forms. The human failure to take account of animals is often denounced as speciesism, a term coined by Richard Ryder in 1973 to denote a form of discrimination. In many ways this notion rests on a human paradigm (I return to this is in the following section). The discussion on ‘capacities’ represents a human-centred understanding of what is relevant. Karen Davis (Davis 1995) comments on the bias towards ‘thinking’, ‘rationality’ and similar types of capacities and notes how this has led to a fixation with animals which demonstrate capacities for abstraction and logical reasoning. ‘Not only men but women and animal protectionists exhibit a culturally conditioned indifference toward, and prejudice against, creatures whose lives appear too slavishly, too boringly, too stupidly female, “too cowlike.” [W]e regard conscious logical reasoning as the only valid sort of “mind.” Evidence that chimpanzees possess such a mind is a primary reason why many are now insisting that they should be granted “human rights.” Human rights for chimpanzees? Yes. Human rights for chickens? Meaningless.’ (Davis 1995, p. 196).

This is not ultimately a problem specific to philosophy. There is an array of moral attitudes, embodied in expressions that give voice to such self-centredness. Think of the advocacy of gay rights in terms such as ‘they are hard-working, decent people just like the rest of us!’ or the reprobation (of oneself or of others) with the question ‘what would you like if you were the victim?’ The examples are endless; time and again, we’re summoned to see how similar ‘they’ are to ‘us’.

Ideas about ‘sameness’ also surface in morally troublesome ways in universalised notions of ‘humanity’ (characteristic, for example, of some ways of conceptualising human rights). When Gayatri Spivak attempts to show forms of oppression that do not function through immediate, tangible force but rather imply a kind of erasure of the other as subject, she turns to her native India and discourses in the colonial era surrounding the practice of Sati, widow self-immolation. While never common in any caste, this form of self-sacrifice became notorious among the Brits as an exemplification of the cruelty of the ‘Indians’ towards ‘their’ women and of their underdeveloped morality and society. Among the anticolonialists of the native Indian elite, Sati became emblematic of their nostalgia for ‘lost origins’. Spivak’s account is especially helpful in that it highlights a central difficulty of the moral appeal to a shared humanity; the deceptive character of its projected universality. Talk of humanity, and
discourse on human rights, not only fails to address actual problems, but in fact often renders them increasingly invisible. In the case of discourse on Sati, neither party failed to discern the humanity of the Sati women burning themselves on the pyres of their husbands. Their femininity was their humanity – therein lies the tragedy. The gesture of their vindication (the defence of their honour, decency, humanity) simultaneously deprived them of their subjectivity. This ventriloquism – the befitting locution Spivak uses to describe this dynamic of appropriation – is typical also of many discussions raging in Europe over bans on burqa and niqab, the veils worn by some women of certain Islamic traditions. In denouncing a supposed form of oppression by male Muslims over female Muslims, discourse in favour of a ban often talks about the dignity or the rights of women. The underlying implication is that Muslim women cannot decide for themselves, and it would almost seem as if it were uninteresting to know what they actually say – ‘too subdued anyway to know what's best for them’. (In fact, the focus on the veil poses it as the question for a Muslim woman, as if all else – including the restrictions of mobility that a ban often imply – were second to that.) Such vindication of human dignity quite often makes it more difficult to speak about oppression as it may entail other forms of oppression or prejudice. This is not to suggest that Gaita would align with these discourses but only to indicate that there are tensions in the concept of ‘humanity’ which he overlooks.

[Section Ic: ‘Different relations.’]

As noted, Ryder coined the term ‘speciesism’ to define a belief that humans and animals are morally distinct as a prejudice, akin to ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’.⁶ Ryder, for example, denounces speciesism, sexism and racism as comparable forms of discrimination. The general sense of discrimination is treating like cases differently. Here the idea would be that in their (our) oppression of animals, humans fail to take note of the similarities between ‘us’ and ‘them’. ‘In what is relevant they are like us.’ The moral appeal implicit is for animals to be met with dignity – but that form of the argument focuses on whether we can justify treating animals differently from how we treat humans. The ways in which humans wrong each other are of course out-and-out. That humans slaughter also other humans is hardly comforting – in any case, selectiveness in oppression is neither its first nor its foremost offence. In fact, pointing

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⁶ One objection to the notion of speciesism is that the arguments against it rest on a false foundation. Our moral failings towards animals can take different guises and there is no general formula for how we fail to respect animal dignity.
out ‘discrimination’ may on occasion seem more like respect for a principle than for the discriminated being: the principle, for example, of equal consideration – of suffering, of pain, of interests – in which case the respect we encounter is not moral respect but respect, as it were, for ‘rationality’. The criticism is directed at a general distinction – ‘thus we treat humans in contrast to how we treat animals’ – and the suggestion is that we must establish general rules for how we should treat others – ‘humans’ and ‘animals’ quite generally.

While the notion of discrimination has gained considerable ground within the movement for animal rights as well as the philosophical literature on the topic, this description of a tendency within the field of animal ethics is sketchy, to say the least, and principally concerns the mainstream within normative ethics. In outlining a tendency to generalisations I do not claim this tendency is necessarily what motivates animal ethicists. But the thought of a general distinction (between humans and animals) is captivating: seeing all the wrongs that are justified with ‘they’re just animals!’ where a comparative vindication of human dignity is given expression in ‘they’re not animals, they’re human beings!’ makes the distinction seem hard to deny. Of course, considerable efforts in western cultural history have been made to demonstrate humanity’s superiority to animals. In many ways, such distinctions are drawn to justify wrongs. Perhaps it would fair to say that nothing essential in the distinction produces the wrong (or the ways we respond), rather, the distinction is in itself a consequence of the wrong – but the picture is enticing because it seemingly explains why we for example eat animals but not human beings. R.W. Beardsmore (1996) discusses this tendency of debates on the moral status of animals to recur to generalisations. He questions the accuracy of describing ‘human beings’ and ‘animals’ as symmetrically contrastive or responses in the case of either as homogeneous. It is beyond question that responses to animals differ and not all give expression to indifference or contempt. In like manner, relations to human beings are diverse; there is no general way in which we respond to human beings. Beardsmore helpfully considers what it would mean to inquire about differences in how one responds to the suffering of one’s dog or one’s child: ‘Of course there are some differences. … I may, for instance, take off its leather collar in order to make it more comfortable, but I do not put it to bed with a cup of hot chocolate’ (Beardsmore 1996, p. 57). Giving up the preoccupation with

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7 Many writers on our moral relations with animals have departed from very different points. Ecofeminists who challenge anthropocentrism, for example, characteristically call into question rights theory and utilitarianism because of the implicit denigration of the body in favour of the mind (reason), emphasising instead care as the bedrock of ethics. (See e.g. Adams and Donovan xxxx; Kheel 2008?)
general moral principles may help us see the character of moral questions where they arise – where they make themselves pressing. That is, attending to the diverse character of our relations points to something important: what it may mean, for example, to help an animal. If a dog one lives with is frightened it can make sense to keep her close and stroke her to calm her down. Whereas helping a wild animal that has got entangled in barbed wire probably requires touching it as little as possible so as not to frighten it even more. As I read her it is in this spirit Vicki Hearne, writing philosophy out of her experience with training dogs, considers the question of respectful treatment of animals. Specifically she targets rights discourse and inquires about what it means to respect the right of a dog. Demands for rights, she says, often lead to ‘the issuance of bills of rights – the right to an environment, the right not to be used in medical experiments – and other forms of trivialization’ (Hearne 1991, p. xx). She holds that these demands fail to shed any light on what it means to talk about rights. For example, ‘What would it mean to say that an animal has the right to the pursuit of happiness? How would that come about, and in relationship to whom?’ (Hearne 1995, p. 202) What I am interested in here is that her suggestion that the character of that question must depend on what relation we have to a given animal. One will be in a very different position to say something about the animal one lives with in contrast to the squirrels next door. Describing the first as a ‘possessive relation’, she takes care to distinguish it from an idea of an animal as property. The ‘possessive’ here rather indicates something like a responsiveness that makes it possible to know, and to share in, the other’s happiness.

The kind of possessive I have in mind is not like slavery. It does not bind one party while freeing the other. Sometimes people will appeal to the idea of ownership to justify abusing someone—‘She is my wife!’—and there have been laws that sanctified that position, but I think it is more accurate to say that if I abuse my dog on the grounds that she is my dog, then I do not … in fact own the dog, am not owning up to what goes into owning a dog (Hearne 1995, p. 208).

Hearne seems to think of possessives (such as ‘my’) as related to ownership, which one could fairly criticise. But it is of course also related to the fact that the animals people live with are legally defined as property. Yet the differences in relationships between humans on the one hand and humans and animals on the other are not always significant. What Hearne is
pointing to is that we often speak about ‘my son’, ‘my dog’, ‘my friend’ and so on – and that this need to be problematic. It may in fact provide important indications about what kind of questions can arise – what responsibilities one has, or does not have.

There is a problematic tendency, however, in Beardsmore’s (1996) appeal to these kinds of differences (or similarities) in the treatment of one animal or another or an animal and a human being. In his critique of generalising tendencies, he objects to Gaita’s (1991) assertion that even if we, under special circumstances, were to shoot a human being to spare him further suffering (as was reported of an Argentinean soldier in the Falklands War), we would do so in a different spirit to how we would shoot a horse. We wouldn’t, e.g., eat the soldier as we well might in the case of the horse. For it would be absurd, Beardsmore holds, to suggest that under any circumstances where we might shoot a horse to spare it suffering we could also imagine eating it. The idea of eating a race horse that has suffered an accident will ‘appear grotesque unless you have completely lost any sense of the difference between the ways in which we treat animals’ (Beardsmore 1996, p. 47). While Beardsmore writes this in critique of Gaita (1991), Gaita himself makes a similar point in the later published *The Philosopher’s Dog* where he comments on the variation of responses, calling them manifestations ‘of the common fact that we care for our pets and cheerfully eat other animals’ (Gaita 2003, p. 29).

What troubles me is this: People sometimes describe how life with some animal has led to their growing distress over eating others. They may ask themselves why they eat the pig while they could not possibly think of eating their dog. Are they confused? Will they (should they?) be reassured if we let them know that there is nothing odd in this difference, that it is quite intelligible: that some animals are food while others are given names? The sense of callousness, of injustice – even, of the slightly schizophrenic quality of the insight – does not relate to ‘how we usually’ (collectively) think of pigs or hens or any other animal as food, or of the practice of keeping pets. The discomfort expressed primarily relates to a difficulty the person has with eating the pig. This can for example turn on suddenly seeing the pig’s life in another light – why shouldn’t she get to run around, root in the soil and quite generally do what pigs prefer to do? Live pig life as full as possible, we might want to say; have a life whose telos is not determined by its being bred to be my food. Seeing the dog’s happiness may highlight this. Reminders of what we (as a society) do to certain animals do not necessarily help. (Costello’s reminders about the horrors of abattoirs, laboratories and animal factories were neither comforting nor very welcome.)
Critical of the focus on justification and argumentation in much moral philosophy, Cora Diamond has in a number of essays (1978, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 2001, 2008) explored claims made in defence of animals suggesting, in a fairly distinctive way, that perhaps there is some other ‘way of showing [someone] that he does have reason to treat animals better than he is treating them’ (Diamond 1978, p. 471). In many respects her views on moral thought resemble those of Raimond Gaita, who recognises her as inspiration on the topic of animals. Both stress the centrality of humanity in moral thought, and charge traditional moral philosophy with doing violence to our sense of morality. This is what leads Diamond to say, in the essay ‘Eating Meat and Eating People’ (1978)^9, that the philosophy that has tried to erase the difference between humans and animals has mistaken the differences between these for the difference. Empirical observations of similarities, such as those documented by science, have been given the role of proof for our kinship: ‘the only thing such empirical observations can show, or directly prove, is that the differences are less sharp than we have previously thought’ (Diamond 1978, p. 324). The difference, on the other hand, is not a matter for empirical observation and rather makes up one of the many ‘things which go to build our notion of human beings’ (Diamond 1978, p. 470). This difference manifests itself among other things in whom we eat or do not eat, and who is eaten. Her concern is with a certain type of failure to appreciate what is important in moral relations – with respect to human beings as well as animals. Her critique is especially targeted at the idea that capacities are the crucial point for moral relations: the difference between how we treat a human being and an animal is not, she says, because of any specific difference other than their being human and animal, respectively. This is the difference, beyond the many empirical differences we perceive between them and us.

Against this I am claiming that making such distinctions in our mode of treatment is not grounded on a prior recognition of differences but is itself one of the complex human activities through which we come to have the concept of the heartbreaking specialness of human life [, of which Chesterton spoke.] (Diamond 1991a, p. 352).

Diamond instead tries to bring out what she considers to be the conditions for understanding ourselves and other human beings. The project of grounding morality or laying down rules or criteria mistakes the character of morality – that is, the meaning of moral difficulties, doubts, concern, care. The implicit assumption of the foundational view is that we have – or rather, should have – reasons for our moral responses. This implies not only the demand to articulate and scrutinise one’s reasons, but also the mandate that the justification of these reasons take a certain form: a philosophical ‘therefore’. ‘She suffers; therefore I must not hurt her’.

Countering this view of morality and of moral philosophy as an ostensibly neutral space where logic precedes (or dictates) meaning, what Diamond suggests is roughly this: morality is not born out of questions (‘is it right to eat meat?’) but such questions are born out of morality. Or again, born out of the things that matter between us: how we can show love, or pity, or concern, and how we can fail or harm one another. Caring for another makes it possible to see her distress – this is fundamentally different from saying that her distress can be objectively identified and care for her mandated by philosophically formulated criteria. For Diamond, the matter is bound up with our moral notion of what a human being is – e.g. the fact (the moral fact) that a human being is not something we eat. Not to be eaten is not a ‘right’ a human being has, but a facet of her being. We also don’t eat a human being who has died in an accident and thus would not suffer should she be eaten. This fact, that ‘we don’t eat our dead’ is for Diamond one manifestation (but an important one) of what it means that a human being isn’t something we eat. Similarly, if a child is denied a name, she points out, that would not be cruel because of an impartial right to a name, but because the denial would constitute a refusal to allow the child among us: in our world we have names for each other. Such a conception of other people as something not to eat is for Diamond paradigmatic for understanding others, part of which is the fact that ‘We learn what a human being is in–among other ways–sitting at a table where we eat them’ (Diamond 1978, p. 469). What she is saying then is that this is the way we live and we can’t give any special reason for it. This is in many ways important – countless facets of daily life have no particular fundament as in being based on some reason or other as in fact they make up the fundament of meaning. (It would be slightly absurd to demand a justification for why nodding for some peoples means yes and in other cultures no.) What I find troublesome is the suggestion that this fact – that there is no general reason for ‘the things we do’ – would be equal to saying we cannot ask someone (ourselves, for example) for justification. Diamond does not wish to say the way we think of animals must be the way it is. A substantial part of what she has to say is occupied with what she might describe as inherent possibilities of our moral concepts, stretching beyond their
ordinary meaning or their ordinary application.¹⁰ It is in this spirit she presents us with the notion of a fellow being, something kindred to the notion of fellow human beings: ‘we do something like imaginatively read into animals something like such expectations [the moral expectations of other human beings, which demand something of me as other than an animal].’ Yet her view does present the moral possibilities in our relations to animals as dependent on this notion of a difference and on an imaginative extension of concern primarily meant for human beings. Is this what one is confined to if in agreement that meaning arises out of the ways we live rather than determine them? This question of what moral change one can imagine guides the remainder of this section.

While there are critical questions about the description of human beings as something we don’t eat (it is not, for example, a central description of most human moral relations) there is something striking in her reproach of the argument forwarded as a defence of animals but which nonetheless ‘imply that there is absolutely nothing queer, nothing at all odd, in the vegetarian eating the cow that has obligingly been struck by lightning’ (Diamond 1978, p. 468). Nonetheless, Diamond’s reminder of what is important in morality – the importance of being human – perhaps allows for more than one reading. Of course it is as humans we react – which is not equivalent to saying that it is only in relation to other humans that we develop these notions (cf. again Beardsmore 1996). This is not principally an explanation of why it makes sense to talk about (e.g.) vegetarianism in the case of humans but not in relation to lions, but more of a question of what sense can be given to pleas for humanity as in being humane. In this we can perhaps agree with Diamond that it is important that we are human. On the other hand it could be said that the fact that moral reactions have a background – the life we live – is not necessarily a good description (or even a description at all) of my reaction. If anything, it points to the fact that I can react – that there is such a thing as reacting to the plight of another. When something begins to take on a different guise, when I can no longer stand by what I have thought; words or concepts or ways of thinking and acting do not have the same meaning anymore. This is in a way related to the point Richard Beardsmore makes in ‘Art and Family Resemblance’ (1995). He notes that concepts are not linked and intertwined in general, impersonal manners, and that the application of concepts, e.g. ‘sport’, is an expression of what one is prepared to recognise as such: ‘I should not like to open

¹⁰ Mulhall describes Diamond’s conception of language as a view where ‘words are inherently capable of projection beyond their familiar contexts, as if there is always already more to their meaning than is captur[able] in the grammatical rules for particular language games with them’ (Mulhall 2010, p. 76).
myself to the possibility of coming to see bear-baiting or bullfighting as games or sports’ (Beardsmore 1995, p. 208). The character of some activity or other is not a fact we arrive at neutrally. This refusal of associating bullfighting or bear-baiting with football or chess is not a failure of recognising specific facts about it, but of a denial that this should be accepted as one among other sports. Beardsmore adds that ‘[A]n explanation may bring me to see it as a sport, in the sense of seeing that that is how they think of it, and perhaps in the sense of seeing what their reason for this might be’ (Beardsmore 1995, p. xx). The remark stems from a discussion of explanations, where Beardsmore wishes to say that although explanations sometimes achieve the goal of making another see my point of view, it would be mistaken to believe that any explanation could work to convince someone in questions such as that whether bullfighting is a sport. Similarly, I would say that we cannot elucidate a final meaning of practices by saying ‘here, this is what we do and it means such-and-such.’ Often it is enough to say that ‘this is what we do’ (because often what prompts a question is plain curiosity or perhaps puzzlement. ‘Oh, you sing before you drink a tiny cup of alcohol! Now why on earth do you do that?). But a moral worry about ‘what we do’ cannot be dissolved by repeating that this is just the way we do it. Meaning is interpersonal but not collective in this sense, and one’s understanding of ‘our practices’ is by necessity personal – it is not a general we, but I, who have to come to terms with my relation to it (which is also, my relation to others).

It might be fair to claim that the difference between this and what Diamond says is negligible: first and foremost she says there is something prior to being able to hear the appeal of another. She traces this to the human mode of life, which could more or less be said without saying, as she does, that this revolves on discerning that special quality ‘humanity’. But it is important that there are times when we feel the need to disown certain ways of understanding. The very suggestion that we learn what a human being is in that we sit down to eat them, the animals, might well be what makes the notion impossible to live with. If such modes of living constitute the meaning of our concepts – if, for example, seeing a human in the animal’s eye is the best we can do – I might not want that as my mode of life anymore. The words, as it were, fail me.

This is in fact similar to how Diamond, in an essay that both develops her earlier thoughts from ‘Eating Meat’ yet radically parts with them, describes Elizabeth Costello. In ‘The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy’ (Diamond 2008), she contrasts these two difficulties; a difficulty of reality that, so to speak, resists our thinking it, and the
difficulty of philosophy to resist from deflecting the difficulties reality throws us into. Coetzee’s portrayal of Costello is one of her examples of such a difficulty. Hers (Costello’s) is a rawness of nerves, haunted as she is by the horror of what we do to animals and by the added horror of ‘the fact that for nearly everyone, it is as nothing, as the mere accepted background of life’ (Diamond 2008, p. 47). By contrast, philosophy may suggest to us that perhaps she – Costello – is upset, but then, her reaction is merely a subjective point of view, and the ethical importance of it remains to be examined (Diamond 2008, p. 54). And this difficulty that plagues philosophy is an expression of our ‘exposure’ to reality; for example, to the fact that there are no general principles that can establish for us how we must act, tell us what is or isn’t reasonable for us to do with animals – we only have our own responsibility to turn to (Diamond 2008, p. 72). By the end of Coetzee’s story, Costello asks herself whether she is making a mountain out of a molehill. ‘The mind does, though’, says Diamond, ‘have mountains, has frightful no-man-fathomed cliffs’ (Diamond, p. 54). What is so disconcerting for Costello, what unhinges her and wounds her, is not merely the horror of what we are capable of doing to animals, but that she does not know what to make of it. Has she gone mad or is the world truly as mad as it seems to her? This is what Diamond sees as the difficulty of reality (and which sometimes drives us into looking for general principles or rules).

[T]he difficulty lies in the apparent resistance by reality to one’s ordinary mode of life, including one’s ordinary modes of thinking: to appreciate the difficulty is to feel oneself being shouldered out of how one thinks, how one is supposed to think[.] (Diamond 2008, p. 58).

Taking her cue from Stanley Cavell, Diamond cites Norman Malcolm, John Cook and Michael Leahy as philosophers who respond with ‘correctness’ to the experience of dislocation – responding, that is, to the frightening sense of isolation sometimes intellectualised as scepticism, or to the exposure to the lives of animals in our midst, attempting to show these to be philosophically confused positions. What is so liberating about Diamond is that she frames what is askew in much philosophical discourse on animals (and otherwise) without dismissing what is morally pressing in the matter. She does not, for example, say Costello is unhinged, but that she (Costello, or any of us before death or incomprehensible kindness or the horrors of the world) may feel herself become unhinged. Diamond shows another way of putting words to an experience of distress or horror at what is done to animals e.g. in the way she calls into question the notion that animals are food (and
this gut feeling of something troubling in that idea – that one facet of animal being is that they are our food – probably resonates with the reluctance of many vegetarians to eat the cow struck down by lightning, also if these vegetarians explain their vegetarianism as a rational decision based on philosophical principles of respect for rights or maximisation of utility). Yet an experience of distress may not be (merely) unhinging, as if it meant a failure to live the way one should (to understand the order of things). The contrast between what is familiar and comprehensible on the one hand and familiar yet incomprehensible is not equal to a contrasting of harmonious normality (our mutual understanding) and puzzled isolation (I don’t understand them). After all, common sense rather often manifests disturbing propensities (‘It’s only common sense that a man should look to his own interests first’). Sometimes a realisation of all the horrors that take place daunts you, at other times it makes you furious. (I will return to the significance of this.)

My discord with Diamond, then, is not so much over the accuracy of her descriptions. She may or may not be right about what our respective notions of humans and animals are – I do not, in any case, intend to contradict them. What I instead attempt to examine is the framework within which our ethical concepts thrive. This of course includes our concepts of humanity and animality although I do not think that these (or especially, a contrast between them) hold a special place, as Gaita insists they do and Diamond suggest they might. Therefore I open the discussion with related concerns in order to clarify the character of my objections, and turn to Jesper Juul and Valerie Solanas who both explore how destructive values are upheld by a hierarchical framework operating primarily through ‘otherness’.

[Section IIIa. Life as we know it.]
In *Your Competent Child*, the Danish family therapist Jesper Juul starts by laying out what he calls traditional family values. Although superficially the notion of upbringing has changed, these traditional attitudes and values, he says, continue to characterise many of the ways in which parents relate to and interact with their children. That is, the notion of child-rearing has in many ways changed – but not the concept of what a child is. He describes how ideas about upbringing have moved from authority and dominance to democratic participation. Previously the family was a more clearly power structured unity where the man was the head of the family and the parents in power over the children; an entity whose ideal was absence of conflict. These families may often have seemed successful (successful as in free from conflicts, tranquil at the surface), but then only functionally: what people learned was ‘to
respect power, authority and violence – but not other human beings’ (Juul 2000, p. 14). The 1970’s democratic ideals spread to influence also the way child-rearing was conceived, with parents abandoning the previous totalitarianism in favour of more democratic or ‘inclusive’ interplay. But both these takes on upbringing, Juul argues, make the fundamental mistake of assuming that children are not real people from the start but anti-social semi-beings who must be ‘cultivated’ – whether the methods be traditionally authoritarian or democratically permissive – to be real people, i.e. adults. ‘Our fundamental understanding of what kind of beings children are is mistaken’ (Juul 2000, p. 5).

Juul holds that this understanding characterises both popular and scientific notions of child development. It has for example made the concept of an ‘age of defiance’ seem natural. What occurs, says Juul, is that children gradually become independent but parents are not always responsive to this – so they become defiant when their child says ‘Me can!’ (Juul 2000, p. 4). Similarly, he relates ‘teenage rebellion’ and the more clinical notion ‘puberty’ to a conceptual frame of adult control and dominance. ‘The teenage years are described in militaristic, political terms: rebellion, independence, revolution, lack of discipline. This is not surprising. In a power structure in which adults represent stability and are invested with maintaining a conflict-free environment, every progressive development must necessarily be defined as an attack on the establishment’ (Juul 2000, p. 4.) Juul is at pains to point out that it is not parental love he questions, but the language used to clothe it and the forms of interplay which this language makes appear as natural.

Juul is a compassionate and considerate therapist who good-humouredly shares his insights. The differences in appearance to Valerie Solanas’s antagonistic SCUM Manifesto may cause us to overlook a basic aspiration shared by their respective works. The respective difficulties they struggle with come together in this remark which an acquaintance made to his two-year-old child that cried from the sores as he had his nappy changed: ‘Don’t be such a girl!’

Both Juul and Solanas show us how some people are understood as ‘more human’ than others, the price paid for approval, and how destructive relations are taken as intelligible expressions of love. Juul says, on the note of upbringing as a set of rules or methods, ‘Imagine … a man saying to a friend, or to his therapist, “I’m in love with a tall, black-haired woman from Portugal, but I have many problems with her. Can you give me a method so that she will be less difficult to live with?” Clearly, no adult would think of approaching another adult with
this idea in mind’ (Juul 2000, p. 16-17). Solanas is not quite so optimistic, and suggests that a whole set of relationships are in fact instrumentalised through and through: their purpose is to sustain the image of Man’s supremacy. What Solanas describes is a loveless world. At first glance, what she does is banter men and demand their elimination. The *SCUM Manifesto* is often read as a satire, parodying gender roles by turning them around. But we may need to follow her a little longer: she is *both* metaphoric and literal. What she tries to elucidate is how our relations to one another are marked by a concept of human being that ostensibly embraces all humans, yet at a closer look places some humans above others (‘Man’ – male; the human kind). Like Spivak, she forces us to confront what role the concept of humanity plays for example when we speak of dignity, respect or human rights. Solanas is bringing injustice to the fore – but not to say that we must give women equal rights. In a spirit reminiscent of Simone Weil’s remark about the absurdity in imagining a young girl forced into a brothel who’d condemn that injustice by vindicating her rights, Solanas lets us see what is so bizarre in talking about oppression or misogyny as *discrimination*. ‘Discrimination’ makes sense only within the frame of unproblematised notions of ‘justice’, ‘society’, ‘humanity’ and so on. ‘No genuine social revolution can be accomplished by the male,’ she writes, ‘as the male on top wants the status quo, and all the male on the bottom wants is to be the male on top. The male “rebel” is a farce; this is the male’s “society”, made by *him* to satisfy *his* needs. He’s never satisfied, because he’s not capable of being satisfied. Ultimately, what the male “rebel” is rebelling against is being male’ (Solanas 2004, pp. 54-55). What in being male must the male rebel fight? Solanas’s descriptions of men are harsh – egocentrism, incapability of love, friendship or emotional rapport with anyone, and so on – but she also refuses the gesture of vindication of a ‘worthy masculinity’ (Solanas 2004, pp. 49-50); why? As Mari Lindman and Sara Nyman read her, Solanas is concerned with living in bad faith; ‘The male identity expresses a certain form of bad faith. … [O]ne could say that this “bad faith” is seen in how gender automatically gives an identity to a person that s/he can take comfort in’ (Lindman and Nyman 20XX, p. 3). This is not only a matter of masculinity. ‘Daddy’s Girl’ – Solanas’s term for the way woman comply with their own oppression in exchange for male affection and to gain the security of honourability that patriarchy affords them – is as untrue to herself: her yearning for someone else’s approval makes her accept that someone’s definition of her). Nor is it even a plain matter of gender; gender is *one* expression of bad faith. The point is rather that *identity* is a form of bad faith. Often mistaken for true individuality, identity is in fact

11 Avital Ronell’s useful introduction...
always comparative and contrastive: masculinity is essentially about what it is not (not, especially, faggoty or feminine) and thus dependent on this that it ‘is not’. It is about striving to live in accordance with others’ ideals (an obscure ‘collective’s’ ideals); consequently, it constitutes a failure to accept oneself and renders impossible the love for others. True individuality does not need to prove itself, does not, for example, need to prove it is ‘original’ and ‘unique’, distinct from all else. It’s not that in true individuality you ‘know you are’ all those things – original, unique – it is that it really doesn’t matter. People are individuals by the mere fact of their existence and love or friendship are never, in Solanas’s view, a threat to individuality. Being absorbed in others and learning from them doesn’t in any way lessen one’s individuality. This is why relationships mediated by the framework provided by gender are instrumental (they serve identity) and prevent love rather than allow it to flourish. And that is the sense of her claim that ‘Our society is not a community, but merely a collection of isolated family units’, which ‘enables [the male] to try to maintain his pretense of being an individual by becoming a “rugged individualist”, a loner, equating non-cooperation and solitariness with individuality’ (Solanas 2004, pp. 48-50). These are also things, we could say developing Diamond’s suggestion [see p. 11 above], that go to determine what sort of concept ‘human being’ is. Simultaneously, in light of such descriptions of our notion of humanity it is difficult to retain the innocence of ‘just the way things are’. Solanas’s tone is of course provocative, even aggressive, and so perhaps difficult to reconcile oneself with. That is inherent to her point, as she speaks the language of patriarchy as it sounds to her: ‘This is truly as bad as it sounds’. In section III I return to the implications of this.

What then to make of the remark ‘Don’t be such a girl’? Someone, the father in question for example, might say it’s a light-hearted remark about an awkward situation, ‘Don’t cry for nothing’, or even just ‘It’ll be easier and less painful for you if we just get it over with’. But again, what does this amount to saying? The boy is crying, perhaps because of the pain, perhaps because he’s frightened, or he might just be tired. Significantly, he does not get a chance of finding out: what he learns is that his hurt is not worthy of attention. If he, on the other hand, learns to repress it, he becomes the good child his parent wants him to be. What I believe Solanas and Juul both make very clear is how violence is always violence, and how this violence is built into many of our concepts, our ways of responding to each other and ultimately, our ways of being in the world. ‘Just the way we talk’ exposes a form of life. The remainder of this section develops the sense of this.
In criticism of Judith Butler’s view of language, Pär Segerdahl (ref.) holds expressions such as ‘It’s a girl!’ upon a baby’s birth to be trivial remarks which make sense within a form of living. The critique stems from Butler’s discussion of a cartoon strip where a baby is greeted with the exclamation, ‘It’s a lesbian!’. Butler interprets the image as reclaiming the language of heterosexualising law which would have us say, ‘It’s a girl!’. This is in her view connected to a heterosexual matrix where the exclamation is part of a series of ‘girling’, that is, of making a girl out of the baby rather than stating a fact we observe. In Segerdahl’s view, Butler is confused about language. She operates, he suggests, with a view of language as driven by intangible forces (a metaphysical ‘law’) which we are generally unaware of yet dominated by. Segerdahl urges us not to equate ordinary speaking about gender with oppressive norms. He wants to show that by saying ‘It’s a girl!’ one doesn’t commit to a theory about ‘reality as it is’ (does not, for example, claim quite generally that it is the only possible thing that can be said), but that such expressions show how we live. ‘It exposes a form of life’ (Segerdahl xxx, p. xx). It is trivial, Segerdahl says, because from within this mode of life, we can see that the baby is a girl but not that she’s a lesbian. There would be no clear sense of how one would see she is lesbian while there is a clear sense of what it means to see she is a girl. That it means, for example, that the applicable pronoun is ‘she’, whereas a lesbian is identified by her partners – something which a new-born obviously does not have. Segerdahl makes an important point; language is not in and of itself compelling or words in themselves regulative in any mechanistic way. Butler’s point is of course that small children are (hetero)sexualised in manifold ways, which the joke then turns on its head. And Segerdahl fails to capture this discomfort the words can bring. Without subscribing to an idea about language as obliging us to any given form of gender differentiation, it is quite possible that someone should feel awkward from these ways of living and talking – despite (or precisely because of) its familiar ring. Awkward for example because of the inherent connections to other language games such as ‘girl’s toys’, ‘boys will be boys’ or because of, as a friend said, the feeling that you are making others embarrassed when they ‘mistake your child for the opposite sex’ (‘Oh I’m so sorry, the blue shirt made me think…’). Or for that matter, the awkwardness often ensuing when adults ‘mistake’ each other’s gender – sometimes leaving the person who’s been ‘mistook’ with a feeling that she has deceived somebody and has to explain herself.

This points to two things. For one, our practices or ways of speaking cannot be appealed to as a higher authority. That is, there are questions about in what ways ‘our practices’ are normative – as if their meaning were settled by their occurrence. Secondly, what it means to
share something is not always unequivocal. In the context of Butler’s (2004) discussion of Brenda/David, ‘It’s a girl’ seems a fairly bleak outlook. What she describes is a baby boy being genitally damaged by what was meant to be a routine operation, subsequently ‘remodelled’ on the theory of gender plasticity. During her upbringing, the gender of the little child (now a girl) is questioned, among other things, because of an apparent liking for toy guns. Into her teens, the girl herself is hesitant about her gender identity and, this time on a theory of biological gender determination, s/he is subjected to a new period of gender remodelling, female-to-male. This may seem an extraordinary example; in its physiology, perhaps it is. But it shows the normativity of gendered expression. The ‘we’ of ‘the ways we speak and act’ is in many ways exclusionary. It exposes a form of life – for example, the way it can do violence by appropriating meaning. ‘Corrective rape’, for example is one very violent manifestation of a culture where the meaning of gender is strictly controlled and enacted. Does ‘It’s a girl!’ still seem so evidently innocent? Avital Ronell, in her preface to Verso’s edition of the Manifesto, notes that ‘[Solanas] took pleasure in the injurious effects of language and, with Lacanian precision, understood that words are bodies that can be hurled at the other, they can land in the psyche or explode in the soma.’ (Ronell 2005, p. 4) Words can hurt – and if someone says they do, brushing the concern off with ‘it was just a joke’ (as in the case above with the crying child) is not particularly attentive response.

And, as Ola Larsmo says in the aftermath of the tragedy at Utøya in Norway using the metaphor of the language game to describe the rise of a certain racialised discourse: ‘A small number of concepts can be put to use in special ways, where those who participate in the game use certain words as cornerstones or as a ball thrown between the them until that particular game, the team spirit, gives the words their meaning. … Finally, it becomes impossible to think outside the frames set as the rules of the game.’ [ref.] What I take Juul and Solanas to be doing is expose these ‘games’ as the troubled ways they are rather than inevitable reality (as they are sometimes painted to be). In view of such descriptions it may not seem all that tempting to retain the concepts, or the modes of life that embody them, as the cornerstones of our moral understanding.

I now turn to the question of what it means that animals are our food.

[Section IIIb: Another grammar of meat.]

In her Lesbian Ethic: Toward New Values, Sarah Hoagland says, ‘Our judgment, our
perception is directed by the values embedded in the language we use, setting limits to what we might imagine’ (Hoagland 1989, p. xx). She outlines patriarchal values as a system of hierarchy; domination and subordination being key to the institution of heterosexuality. Analysing heterosexism involves more than recognition of women’s victimisation or homophobia. It necessitates an understanding of such things as how women are defined in terms of men, how homosexuality is defined as deviant, and how sexual relations are controlled through taboos in order to maintain the social order. This is the frame of reference within which we live and from which our concepts emanate. Especially, she says, patriarchal values (and much of the opposition to these operating within the framework) depend upon and nurture antagonism. She does not try to disprove these patriarchal values, but expose them and show what makes them seem so natural. Using the Wittgensteinian notion of an axis that is held in place by what surrounds it, Hoagland shows the ways in which patriarchal values are held in place by a system of dominance and subordination. (She does not say everything in our world is in some way characterised by domination but that that is the frame of reference of patriarchal moral values.) In this gesture she hopes to transform perceptions ‘so that existing values cease to make sense’ (which is also what Juul and Solanas do).

This is how I read Carol J. Adams’s *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Adams suggests our notion of meat as food works through an ‘absent referent’; animals are food in an indirect sense through the butchering process which transforms the living animal into edible pieces of flesh. ‘The “absent referent” is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our “meat” separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the “moo” or “cluck” or “baa” away from the meat, to keep something from being seen as having been someone’ (Adams 1990, p. 15?). Like Solanas, Adams is also concerned with how this relates to our notion of ‘humanity’. She takes issue with the dynamics surrounding ‘meat’ and meat-eating through a series of connections between meat-eating and gender – or myths, cultural images of meat-eating and masculinity/femininity. She notes, for example, how meat has been connected to ideals of virility and strength and that, considered to constitute superior nutrition, it has in times in scarcity often been reserved for the males (e.g. the male/s of a family). Within the context of war, meat has at times had a particularly prominent role – Adams relates, e.g., that during World War II the consumption of meat among soldiers was at about two-and-a-half times that of the average civilian (Adams 1990, p. 32). Vegetables, on the other hand, are often invoked as images of weakness or passivity, and more typically perceived as food for women. As
members of a ‘meat eating society’ we are exposed to these images in various ways. That is not to say they will necessarily guide us, but they frequently serve as a background of intelligibility (or unintelligibility) of various practices. In the comedy *But I’m a Cheerleader*, the seventeen-year-old protagonist Megan is suspected of being lesbian as she does not enjoy kissing her boyfriend – and because she takes an interest in vegetarianism. The connection is not, obviously, essential, but plays on an understanding of meat as a symbol of masculinity and subsequently normality, and the abstention from its consumption as a symptom deviance (Högback 2008, p. xx). Adams’s discussion is centred on these types of connections between patriarchy and meat-eating, that is, the relation between ‘male’ and ‘female’ in the context of meat-eating. She also draws parallels between how female experiences of violence or degradation are often described in a meat-related terminology (she cites characterisations of violence towards women in terms such as ‘like a piece of meat’ or ‘the butchering of women’), and how attempts at denouncing oppression of animals are often cloaked in the terms of female oppression (‘the rape of animals’).12

One could of course think of these images as myths that may or may not be connected to certain beliefs that are in turn either sensible or nonsensical. But Adams’s aspiration is rather to take issue with the underlying system of values – that which glorifies violence, domination, and subordination (or, if it doesn’t glorify then naturalises). We don’t need to pin down the matter to a stereotyped understanding of gender dualism (as Adams occasionally seems to want to do – which would in rough terms be that men are self-serving and women caretaking) to see how this relates to Diamond’s discussion of how the concept of animals connects with food – as in her remark that we learn the difference between human beings and animals in that (among other things) ‘we’ *eat* ‘them’. Diamond’s ‘Eating Meat’ shows how this is part of a certain way of living. Adams continues along a similar path to expose further associations between practices and ways of speaking.

Although in different ways, both take the matter out of the arena where it would be treated as a topic for debate and point at the various meanings it has in the ways people live. In ‘The Difficulty of Reality’, Diamond’s account of Elizabeth Costello is at times dramatic; this is inherent to her point. It is also important as a description of how practices can isolate one, and forcefully brings out the simultaneous absurdity in and temptation to stay within the confines

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12 See also Kheel, License to Kill, 91-92. (hunting – sexualised.)
of philosophical debate: ‘Is there any difficulty in seeing why we should not prefer to return
to moral debate, in which the livingness and death of animals enter as facts that we treat as
relevant in this or that way, not as presences that may unseat our reason?’ (Diamond 2008, p.
74). But where Diamond’s (perhaps also Coetzee’s) Costello is desolate before the world,
Adams is after all more hopeful. She points not only at the difficulty of living with a reality,
but at how that reality is characterised by the exercise of violence. That is, the violence she
tries to expose is not a natural factor we must learn to live with but something we can resist.
As Hoagland says, ‘[W]hen we finally understand how a given pattern functions destructively,
we act to change’ (Hoagland 1989, p. 22). At the very end of Coetzee’s novel, the consolation
Costello’s son offers her when she breaks down in tears wondering whether she’s making it all
up is ‘There, there. It will soon be over.’ Diamond contemplates what kind of consolation this
is, suggesting that this is how we should understand Costello’s invocation of the Holocaust –
as imagery of the horror before which there is no consolation but sleep or perhaps only death
(Diamond 2008, p. 54). These difficulties, Diamond suggests, push one beyond the thinkable:
‘To attempt to think it is to feel one’s thinking come unhinged’ (Diamond 2008, p. 58).

But as Juul, Solanas, Hoagland and Adams in their different ways show us, perhaps Costello
could be offered the consolation that she might not be that unhinged after all. (Perhaps only
the unhinged can stomach extreme violence without being noticeably stirred.) One facet of
power is its capacity to define as unhinged (deviant, deranged) those that fail to comply. I am
not arguing directly against Diamond, I think she forcefully describes a difficulty of living in
a world where one does not, as it were, find one’s feet in spite of its apparent naturality. She
puts her finger on the difficulty of feeling simultaneously connected to and disconnected from
others: she speaks not only of reality’s capacity to unhinge but also to wound. But if Costello
seems ‘over the top’, blowing everything out of proportion, it helps, like Spivak urges us, to
explore the perspective from which she seems so difficult to comprehend. In one sense it
would be fairly natural to say that if what the Christmas turkey, or the Christmas pig, brings to
mind is violence and degradation rather than a cosy family festivity, one will quite possibly
feel some ambiguity about the celebration. A practice, or a mode of life, can be utterly
despairing without being bewildering (or without being merely bewildering). Again, it is not a
matter of a failure to understand where the hope is to gain understanding. (This is the
principal contrast I make between Diamond and Solanas.) ‘I know full well what we do and
it’s still fucked up.’ And, as Hoagland says, there is nothing peculiar in wanting to change
what is destructive – it is the clinging to destructive patterns that calls for explanation. Some
may not want to say, then, like Costello’s son does, that it will soon be over, but might suggest something more along the lines of resistance and rebellion. Resistance to the violence against animals which is defended as natural or inevitable, and resistance to the ideological colonisation of reality that would have us believe we are unhinged. That is in fact what the movement for animal rights stands for: a refusal to accept – to accept, among other things, a ‘truth’ imposed by power, or death as the only consolation.

[Section IV. Att besöka en svinfarm: ‘Different worlds’.]

A principal concern above has been to outline problematic tendencies of appropriation of meaning. Moral questions are by necessity personal. People are different; often, we disagree. But then it is important not to jump too hastily to talking about the differences between them as disinterestedly factual or as a curious matter of different ‘lifestyle’ choices. (In a televised debate about the conditions of pigs in Finnish farms, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry suggested, as a solution to the controversy over pig welfare, that we could have happy pigs for those who want them (which would of course be more costly, she threatened, in practice impossible to produce large-scale) and then the ‘regular stuff’ for the rest of the meat-eating population. Cf: ‘But you eat your veggies, so what does it matter to you what happens to the animals other people eat?’ It would be generous to call this confused (yet not unheard of, in so many words). I mention this as an example of a parodied meaning of ‘personal’ as a lifestyle choice.)

Some years ago, activists in Finland filmed animal farms (mainly pig farms) and published the footage for the benefit of the public. In the television debate, mentioned above, following the release of the footage (A-Talk 2009), a representative of the industry, the then Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and two spokeswomen for the principal animal protection groups in Finland met. In many ways, this debate demonstrated some of the typical tendencies of discussions on animal ethics. The industry representative, himself a pig farmer, insisted that the difficulty of the discussion was that they, the debaters, inhabited different worlds. On the one hand, he said, there were ‘the lasses who have never set foot in a pig farm’, and on the other, him, a pig farmer of twenty odd years. A while into the discussion, the presenter addressed the man whose farm was also shown during the programme, summarising the

13 Not uncommonly this is also so in material terms – consider e.g. the fact that during the animal rights campaign to expose pig farming, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry financed a campaign to improve the image of pig flesh with a quarter of a million euros [Possupedia].
reflections of the animal rights advocates, ‘They give your farm a low grade’. In response to which the man said, ‘Yeah. They don’t do it out of meanness. They have their own ideas.’

The gesture is nothing out of the ordinary: we have difficulties understanding each other, sometimes our world-views would seem to clash. Sometimes our lives even look very different. We can contemplate the ways in which we don’t understand each other, where we fail to see what someone means. But there is something odd if our separation is taken as the starting point of our dialogue, as a matter-of-fact: ‘we won’t understand each other’. There is of course no general formula for what it means to understand someone or something, just as there is no general sense of what it means to fail to understand. But understanding does not only arise when people agree. Presumably the pig farmer wanted, in alluding to an abyss of understanding expressed as his experience with pigs in contrast to the supposed unfamiliarity with them of the animal rights activists, to take the edge of the impression the images had made. The public was, after all, shocked, as the promised happiland of pigs was nowhere to be seen; he was there to defend the industry. The innocent television viewer might, like the animal rights activists, be appalled by what they see – in cautioning these viewers of the lasses who haven’t set foot in a farm, the man prompted them to question also their own reaction to the images of the pigs. Bitten tails and crowded pens may look nasty – but don’t jump to conclusions! it’s not as bad as it looks, was the message. Perhaps the public had let themselves be seduced by anthropomorphist sentimentalism?

No doubt there are questions about what it means to understand animal life, and about the role of familiarity. In his discussion on what ‘a natural life’ might mean for the animals we live with, Pär Segerdahl (2009) touches on the topic of anthropomorphism. It’s easy to pity the horse out in the raw autumn air; trying to get the reluctant creature into the stables can show the horse in disagreement over the quality of the weather. But, he says, ‘The sceptic’s fear of anthropomorphism perhaps resembles a phobia (…): the sceptic is not reassured until all mistakes have been eradicated’ (Segerdahl 2009, p. 106, my transl.). We do make mistakes about what animals need, just like we make mistakes about other human beings. That is part of [subjectivity; what it means that the other is an individual subject. I can’t always assume, or just learn a schema: I have to look and see.] The charge of anthropomorphism in pitying pigs, on the other hand, springs from a somewhat different source. It relates to the worry of such writers as Paul Shepard (1973, 1997), the primitivist environmentalist, that in our modern world, people are becoming alienated from animals – that is, from the true nature of
animals. Shepard’s (1997) main thesis is that humans have become what they (we) are because of our evolutionary history as players in a game between predators and prey. The hunt, he says, made us human. Much to his dismay, urbanised people are quite unaware of (or ignore) this fundamental feature of our human nature – he holds they have whole-heartedly bought all the ‘Disneyish dreams’ and projected fantasies in which the modern world is enveloped. The ignorance of or refusal to see these supposed facts about our natural history and psychological make-up is, in Shepard’s view, the source of naivist environmentalist understanding of the natural world and of the idealist confusions espoused by animal rights activists. Failing to see, in his words, the flesh of animals as a food sanctity or refusing to ‘celebrate’ animals by wearing their skins is, for Shepard, a refusal to interact with them – he sees no other modes of relating to animals as anything but Disneyish dreams which necessarily distance us from animals. ‘Man is in part a carnivore: the male of the species is genetically programmed to pursue, attack, and kill for food. To the extent that men do not do so they are not fully human’ (Shepard 1997, p. xxx). (Men for him is literal; the confusions he identifies regarding animals relate to confusions regarding gender.) We may, today, quarrel over how to relate to animals; our ancestors he believes certainly to have had no such qualms. These ideas of an original relation, a more basic or natural way of interacting with animals, often crop up when our treatment of animals is under discussion. Those who don’t hunt them, or raise them for food, are often presented as being ‘out of touch’ with animals. Urban strangers, said John Berger in a spirit similar to Shepherd’s, reproaching these for not understanding that ‘A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork’. Zuckerberg, the IT entrepreneur, made it his personal challenge in 2011 to only eat meat form animals he’d killed himself; Jamie Oliver killed a sheep during broadcast – having cooked thousands of them (his words) he felt he must also kill at least one, ‘otherwise you’re a fake’.

Yet what counts as being knowledgeable is rather obscure. ‘Surely, the farmer, if anyone, will know what harms the animal’. Quite generally, that doesn’t stop farmers from intentionally keeping animals in cramped spaces – sometimes under the pretext of protecting the animals from each other, generally to fit in as many as possible – or feed them antibiotics, ‘to keep them healthy’ yet causing e.g. disruptions in intestinal microflora and immune system. In Finland, as is the case in many countries, sows may be confined in so called sow stalls (during pregnancy) and farrowing crates (for the period of nursing to separate the sow from her piglets) which prevents them from turning around and effectively from any movement beyond standing up and lying down. The aim is to prevent aggression between sows – in reality
caused by the conditions in which they are kept – and sows from lying down on the piglets. These are castrated at a young age, without anaesthetics or pain killers – castration is done to ensure that the flavour of the adult animal’s flesh is not affected by the sex steroid androgenone. Due to overcrowding, hens easily start pecking each other’s feathers, which is painful in itself, and may lead to cannibalism. Incidentally, it is also an economic problem as damaged plumage results in heat loss, adverse impact on egg production as well as ‘wastage’ in the form of dead birds (Mahboub 2004). In many countries, chicks are debeaked to prevent them from pecking at each other.\textsuperscript{14} ‘Harm’ here is often functional – a productive or saleable animal is a healthy animals. (It is in this sense that fur-farmers frequently defend their trade: ‘The animals do well, if they weren’t healthy their fur would be dull and shabby!’) And so on and so forth.

The meaning of being ‘in touch with’ or knowing something is not straightforwardly positive. A hunter can exploit his knowledge of the prey to effectively track it down. The meaning of this is not established by the fact of its possibility. Roger Scruton notes that ‘Traditional forms of hunting often generate and depend upon an ethic of combat, which arises spontaneously in the contest with the quarry. The roots of this ethic lie partly in our piety towards the works of nature. But there is an anticipation too of the human morality of warfare’ (Scruton 1996, p. 91-92). Elizabeth Costello affirms this in a closely related way: ‘We had a war once against the animals, which we called hunting, though in fact war and hunting are the same thing (Aristotle saw it clearly)’ (Coetzee 2003, p. 104). Whether we accept this as a description of hunting as a matter of a dignified relation between predator and prey is in part an open question.

But it is not open in the sense that the descriptions are there for us to choose among and entailing that the discussion must end here so as not to degenerate into mere moralisms on one side and the other. Beardsmore said on the variation of responses to animals, ‘People simply differ here’ (Beardsmore 1996, p. 59). A pig farmer lives in his world, where animals are food; the animal rights activists live in another? Perhaps it is not quite that simple. Stanley Cavell, in a reflection on Diamond’s ‘Difficulty of Reality’, wonders whether there is something like ‘soul-blindness’ to animals. He goes on to suggest (in line with Wittgenstein’s discussion on

\textsuperscript{14} Davis (2005) calls practices such as debeaking, de-toeing, dehorning, castration and dental mutilation – all solutions to problems occasioned by human keeping of the animals – ‘procrustean solutions’ in reference to a bandit in Greek mythology. Procrustes mutilated his victims in order to make them fit his bed. (p. 66-67).
‘seeing as’) that

[T]he extreme variation in human responses to this fact of civilized existence [i.e. the mass production of animals for food] is not a function of any difference in our access to information; no one knows, or can literally see, essentially anything here that the others fail to know or can see. But then if one concludes that the variation is a function of a response to or of an attitude toward information that is shared, one may suppose the issue is of some familiar form of moral disagreement (Cavell 2008, pp. 93-94).

The suggestion that what we encounter is ‘some familiar form of moral disagreement’ is what Diamond questions, and Cavell seems to agree with her. He gives no definite answers as to how we might understand the ‘variation in responses’ but indicates that it is related to Costello’s (and Diamond’s) allusion to bitter but inescapable compromises, not only with regard to animals but to human misery, too. Under the description of ‘turning a blind eye’ one may venture to say that the outrage over the exposure of the conditions on the pig farms reflected the fact that the public understood all too well – something which resonates with the cultural guilt, so to speak, which gives sense to the marketing tricks promoting the flesh of ‘happy animals’ (Cf. ‘fair trade’ – which reflects that the standard of the trade is unjust.) We can try to convince ourselves that the meat does not taste well if an animal has suffered, but hardly deny that so-called delicacies such as veal or foie gras are produced through the infliction of exceptional agony. It may be reasonable to suggest that the notion of animals as ‘things’ is an effect of (perhaps better an aspect of) their treatment, rather than its underlying cause. In fact, as Karen Davis notes, the very fact of the mass conditions under which animals are often raised makes it difficult to understand them as anything but non-individuals:

A fundamental difficulty in drawing attention to the plight of factory-farmed animals is … that every situation in which they appear is a mass situation, one that appears to be, as in reality it is, a limitless expanse of animal suffering and horror. … [A]ll that most people see in looking at animal factories are endless rows of battery-cage hens, wall-to-wall turkeys, thousands of chickens or pigs. … To the public eye, the sheer number and expanse of animals surrounded by metal, wires, dung, dander and dust renders all of them invisible and impersonal. There are no “individuals,” no drama on which to focus, only a scene of abstract suffering (2005, p. 30-31).
However, these are not arguments I intend to pursue in order to ‘prove’ that people do care after all (although I shall have reason to return to these considerations in the last section). I merely wish to point out that it might be too hasty to say that people simply differ, and that there are tensions in ‘our concepts of animals’ – and that, for example, the notion that (some) animals are food frequently is based on a tacit acceptance of its ‘production’ being hidden.\footnote{Cf. also Noélie Vialles’s \textit{From animal to edible}. Suggests that many steps where e.g. butchering and slaughtering separated.}

There is reason to probe a little more this ‘turning a blind eye’. During the TV debate cited above, the two animal rights defenders felt they had to answer to the challenge of their knowledge: they \textit{had} visited farms, their knowledge was based on this or that. They were questioned and probed to defend not only their viewpoints but their right to one. (This again touches upon the question of what it means to ‘know’ and ‘be in touch with’.) Whatever the aptness then of the notion ‘to turn a blind eye’, there are also issues of whose views are socially sanctioned. The space of the discussion on animal ethics is, it could be suggested, colonialised. Not only are there differences between how people respond; as we saw, some responses are given precedence as being ‘more in touch with reality’. The farmer’s reference, during the TV debate, to the (alleged) fact of the lasses who hadn’t visited pig farms is, though hardly subtle, in its own way difficult to resist as it suggests the space for dialogue is limited to the terms it has settled for itself. This is in fact typical of public discourse on animal ethics – more often than not it is those who advocate change who are called into question. After the pig farm campaign (and the TV debates) formal inspections of the farms were carried out. Nearly no breaches of law were documented (that is, what shocked the public was routine in the business). This led to an interesting turn of events: the \textit{activists} were charged with defamation and disturbance of the peace (in approximate translation of Finnish law). The reasoning seemed to be that since the conditions were legal, their exposure was a crime. Nothing in this reading is of course definite – it is, after all, a strategic move on the part of the industry to defend its interests; it makes ‘sense’ within its context. But the many attempts to criminalise activists \footnote{The US even boasts a federal law which effectively criminalises any effort to ‘damage or interfere with’ the operations of an animal enterprise.}; joins forces not only with corporate interests, it resonates with some common ways of conceptualising resistance to animal industries. There is the typical gesture in defence of fur farming, ‘Don’t you come criticise us! It’s a legal trade!’ (This is the conceptual sphere of ecoterrorism.) Spivak talked about ‘epistemic
violence’ (as a description of the silencing of marginalised groups) which may be illuminating here. By claiming right at the start that the lasses hadn’t been to a pig farm, the farmer established this – ‘first-hand observations’ of farms – as a kind of condition of the dialogue. The question of what it means that the animals in question are bred to be human food seemed to recede into the background, as if the allusion to two separate worlds immunised pig farming (in this case) from criticism, because in the farmer’s world, pigs are food.

[Section V. Describing a revolution.]

[Costello on what is both trivial AND absolutely horrifying.]

[Holocaust as an image: ‘trade on the horrors’ or ‘breeding bad blood’ (antagonism) vs. ‘from where I stand things really look this fucked up’ (GT)]

[The false dichotomy between farmer and animal advocate (or similar oppositions)]

[Where philosophy stands in relation to moral change]

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