

*Skepticism
and Perceptual
Faith: Henry
David
Thoreau and
Stanley Cavell
on Seeing and
Believing*

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The dispute between those who believe that the world was created by God and those who think it came into being of its own accord deals with phenomena that go beyond our reason and experience. Much more real is the line separating those who doubt being as it is granted to man (no matter how or by whom) from those who accept it without reservation.

—Milan Kundera¹

And how is skepticism to be overcome here?
By love.

—Martha Nussbaum²

Abstract

Thoreau's journal contains a number of passages which explore the nature of perception, developing a response to skeptical doubt. The world outside the human mind is real, and there is nothing illusory about its perceived beauty and meaning. In this essay, I draw upon the work of Stanley Cavell (among others) in order to frame Thoreau's reflections within the context of the skeptical questions he seeks to address. Value is not a subjective projection, but it also cannot be perceived without the appropriate kind of emotional orientation or attunement toward the world: that is, an attitude of trust or acceptance. Without this affective receptivity, or "perceptual faith," our knowledge of reality is limited. The beliefs we hold onto in the face of objective uncertainty establish the framework within which we make particular evaluations, and in this sense they are a necessary condition of practical reason. Every understanding has its mood.

Keywords: Thoreau, Cavell, James, Kierkegaard, Shakespeare, Perception, Value, Emotion, Doubt, Love, Belief

I. *Belief as a Disease*

When he states that “it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once,”³ Descartes uses the language of intimate betrayal to characterize his own relationship with sensory experience. Never again, he tells us, will he be so naïve as to rely upon the evidence of the senses, because they have violated his trust before. In *Walden*, Thoreau assures his philosophical readers that we should not go around “doubting the evidence of our senses,” and he entertains the idea of an evil demon for no longer than he imagines that he might be dreaming.⁴ Yet he shares the Cartesian aspiration to find a solid grounding for knowledge, and to recover a connection to the world that is lost to us when we doubt its existence. Furthermore, the “connection with things” that Thoreau seeks to recover will be inadequate if it includes nothing beyond the mere assurance that an external world exists.⁵ As he sees it, the philosopher who hopes to articulate a convincing response to skeptical doubt must also explain how the perceived beauty and meaning of things are more than an illusion. It is toward this goal that he continues to investigate and reflect upon the nature of perception throughout numerous journal entries extended over several years. In addition to giving us a more complete picture of Thoreau’s thought, this material also helps us to situate him in relation to mainstream modern philosophy. Before turning to Thoreau’s journal, therefore, I would like to frame it within the context of the skeptical problems to which he is offering a serious if unconventional response.

One rhetorical maneuver available to the skeptic is to portray insufficiently well-grounded belief as a kind of disease, which can be healed with the tonic of skeptical doubt. An example of this is found in Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in which the character named Philo asks: how can the “jarring and discordant” phenomena of life as we know it suffice to prove the existence of a benign deity?⁶ Having raised this unanswerable question, Philo sits back in triumph, obviously thinking that he has played his ace. He has just finished dispensing with a standard version of the argument from design, according to which the proof of God’s existence is based on evidence which suggests that the universe is beautiful and well-ordered. And the preceding few pages of Hume’s text are filled with passages worthy of Schopenhauer, who claims that religious faith must be “shipwrecked” on “the evil and suffering of the world.”⁷ One of the characters is even moved to quote the following lines from Book XI of *Paradise Lost*, where Milton lists some of the mental and physical afflictions that have befallen humanity ever since the Fall:

Intestine stone and ulcer, colic-pangs,
 Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,
 And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy,
 Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence.⁸

Somewhat later in the conversation, Philo offers a litany of his own, which also contains nine disorders of body and mind: he mentions “gouts, gravels, megrims, toothaches, rheumatisms, spleen, melancholy, discontent, [and] superstition.”⁹ Combining the two lists, we have a total of eighteen afflictions, one of which—remarkably enough—is *superstition*. Unwarranted belief, in other words, is not only one of the miseries of human existence, but it also counts as another piece of evidence in favor of skeptical doubt! In this context, Hume may be alluding to religious belief in particular, but if the term “superstition” refers more generally to any ill-founded or gratuitous belief, then Hume must classify as superstitious many of our ordinary beliefs about the world. As he admits, “in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of understanding”; so it is not only beliefs about the beauty and orderliness of the universe that are superstitious, but also beliefs about the effect of one billiard-ball upon another, about the coldness of snow, and so forth.¹⁰ And if we are not rationally justified in claiming to know that the sun will rise tomorrow, then we certainly cannot arrive at the conclusion that life is worth living without relying upon a leap of faith.

What the skeptical argument assumes is something like this: the more afflictions you can list, the more reason you have to doubt the value of being as a whole. My objection to this type of reckoning, as to Nietzsche’s remark that without music life would be a mistake,¹¹ is that it assumes that we *can* settle such an ultimate question by itemizing the better and worse aspects of existence and seeing which category outweighs the other. Yet what enables us to acknowledge the world’s goodness, and therefore—as Cavell would say—to love it, is not any “objective” certainty that it *is* good, or lovable, or worthy of being affirmed.¹² Our acceptance of the world cannot rest on any proof that the world is acceptable, for there is no such proof to be given. That is why no variety of skepticism can be decisively refuted. However, the scandal of philosophy is not so much the failure of such attempted refutations as the presumption behind them: namely, that what we need is a rigorous counterargument, in order to put an end to skepticism once and for all.

For consider what the skeptic is asking us to do. He or she is inviting us “to reduce the rich diversity of our world to the sheer presence of something . . . devoid of every aspect that fascinates or repels, facilitates or impedes, disturbs or crushes or evokes wonder,” and then to doubt the very existence of this bare and inert reality.¹³ Even someone who is pessimistic about the argument from design may object that the skeptic is making an unreasonable demand. William James, for instance, argues that our “acceptance of the universe” requires a kind of faith that we should not reject on skeptical grounds, even though only “Leibnizes with their heads buried in monstrous wigs” could be so prepos-

terous as to believe that it is the best of all possible worlds.¹⁴ To a pragmatist such as James, and to other like-minded philosophers—including Thoreau, as we shall see—it is the *refusal* to believe anything that has not been adequately proven that represents a sort of cognitive disease. Far from being mere hindrances to clear thinking, the beliefs that we accept on trust have an epistemological significance that deserves to be further explored. My belief that I am *not* currently dreaming, for instance, is not one fact among others whose accuracy I can immediately verify: it is taken for granted as part of my entire outlook on the world.

Outside of the abstract, self-contained realm of logical and mathematical propositions, our beliefs about empirical reality always involve some possibility of error.¹⁵ In practical reasoning, then, an important role is played by the sort of conviction that persists despite a lack of adequate evidence. As another American philosopher argues, “faith” is the appropriate term for such a cognitive attitude, since it “goes beyond evidence that can be presented to *any* possible observer.”¹⁶ When we give our assent to a belief of this kind, we implicitly reject the skeptic’s demand for absolute certainty.¹⁷ Since the beliefs we hold onto in the face of objective uncertainty establish the framework within which we make rational evaluations, they are a necessary condition of practical reason. If “superstition” refers to the holding of beliefs despite some evidence to the contrary, then it is not always an intellectual vice. Hume should not have included it with kidney stones and migraines on his list of diseases, as if it were self-evident that all of these belong in the same ontological category: that is, conditions that ought to seem disagreeable to any reasonable person.

II. Falling in Love with the World

What is required in order to prevail over the threat of skeptical doubt is not overwhelming evidence so much as a certain sort of emotional orientation or attunement toward the world: that is, an attitude of trust or acceptance. This claim may at first glance seem irrelevant to the question of how it is possible to gain knowledge, but—as I hope to explain in greater detail—some things will not appear manifest to us unless we encounter them with the right kind of affective disposition. Stanley Cavell suggests that we can learn something about how to overcome skepticism by looking at what it takes to love, trust, or simply acknowledge the existence of another person. Because we cannot *know* that the world exists, we ought to conclude that “the world is to be *accepted*, as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged.”¹⁸ Cavell therefore considers literary works such as Thoreau’s *Walden*, Kierkegaard’s *Repetition*, and many of Shakespeare’s plays as part of the ongoing conversation in modern philosophy about the nature and limits of human knowledge.¹⁹ For instance, *Repetition* is

largely preoccupied with the problem of faith: specifically, the faith that is involved in making a commitment to another person, or in achieving a reconciliation with the world. According to this epistolary novella, it is when we are nearest to an experience of supreme happiness that we are liable to be thrown into profound doubt:

I got up feeling unusually well one morning. My sense of well-being increased incomparably until noon; at precisely one o'clock, I was at the peak. . . . Every mood rested in my soul with melodic resonance. All existence seemed to have fallen in love with me, and everything quivered in fateful rapport with my being.²⁰

At that instant, Kierkegaard's narrator claims, he was distracted by something that began to irritate one of his eyes: what it was, he does not know, but whether it was an eyelash or a speck of dust, it had the effect of sending him "almost into the abyss of despair."²¹ Later, we move from a moment of despair over a trivial annoyance to a tragedy of much larger dimensions, as the other main character in *Repetition* contemplates the Book of Job, asking: "When all of life collapsed around you and lay like broken pottery at your feet . . . did you immediately have this interpretation of love, this cheerful boldness of trust and faith?"²² Once it is agreed that even a slight imperfection in the world amounts to a solid argument against religious belief, a speck of dust in the eye is conclusive evidence in favor of doubt, no less than Job's loss of everything he treasured most.

But this is not where the burden of proof ought to be placed: Kierkegaard praises Job for upholding a religious interpretation of what has happened, which means "tracing everything to God" in a spirit of gratitude.²³ Job's faith is able to survive even in the worst of circumstances, precisely because it is not susceptible to empirical disproof; in positivistic terms, it is not verifiable. It plays the role of an axiomatic premise, or a basic principle of interpretation, much like the belief that life is worth living (whether or not it is transparently good). The faith of Job goes beyond what is warranted by the available evidence, and has the practical effect of making it possible for him to accept the universe. As we are told in another of Cavell's favorite Kierkegaardian texts, a person who searches for signs of "omnipotence and wisdom" will also find "much that troubles and disturbs"; that is, the objective evidence is decidedly mixed.²⁴ But where it is impossible to know with total certainty, it may be reasonable to believe: indeed, this trust in an objective uncertainty might be described as the essence of faith. Knowing that skeptical distrust is liable to close us off to whatever is most wondrous about the world, Thoreau submits that "we may safely trust a good deal more than we do."²⁵ When we are disposed to make a charitable interpretation of things, we ensure that their positive value will not be lost on us.

Admittedly, the skeptic is right to point out that there are always grounds for doubt. But although we “can be deceived by believing what is untrue,” we can also be “deceived by *not* believing what *is* true,” as Kierkegaard reminds us.²⁶ For his part, James agrees that a dose of skepticism can work as a healthy corrective for the “vulgarly optimistic” mind; however, he quickly adds that, as anything other than the antidote to “an opposite excess,” skepticism is “unacceptable,” since our apprehension of the truth is limited when we ignore what is disclosed to the passionate mind.²⁷ To hold a belief while knowing that it is not indubitable is to shut one’s eyes to those reasons for not believing. According to Cavell, this gesture is a better response to skepticism than it might initially appear to be:

To live in the face of doubt, eyes happily shut, would be to fall in love with the world. And if you find that you have fallen in love with the world, then you would be ill-advised to offer an argument of its worth by praising its Design. Because you are bound to fall out of love with your argument, and you may thereupon forget that the world is wonder enough, as it stands. Or not.²⁸

That last sentence is crucial: the world may or may not be wonderful enough to fall in love with. But, practically speaking, why should we not adopt gratitude or acceptance rather than skeptical distrust as a basic habit of mind? In his essay “The Will to Believe,” James contends that “a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth, if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.”²⁹ Hardening our hearts against the possibility of being deceived, we prevent ourselves from knowing the “reasons of love” that simply do not exist from a dispassionate vantage point.³⁰ This is why the mood of openness in which one embraces the world—as opposed to that of the skeptic, who remains at a distance—is worth cultivating, regardless of its objective warrant.

In the absence of any “scientific proof” to back it up, the conviction that life is worth living is the kind of belief that is likely to find itself confirmed, since our attitude toward the world is itself a part of the equation—in other words, it is one aspect of reality.³¹ The truth about the universe will vary to some degree depending upon the disposition with which we approach it. Faith and doubt, then, can be identified as different basic attitudes or compartments toward the world, each of which has its own distinct emotional tone. As Kierkegaard argues, “all understanding depends on how one is disposed toward something.”³² The skeptic really does feel “a hollow at the heart of reality”; she perceives an abyss “between herself and the world, a sense of its insignificance or nothingness.”³³ Just as a skeptical bias condemns us to experience uncanny doubts, a perspective of faith, or passionate receptivity, makes

things apparent to us that would otherwise go unknown. Some habits of mind are sources of blindness, but others can be “vehicles of vision, which attune us to certain possibilities of meaning”;³⁴ and those who have fallen in love with the world are more open to finding that life is meaningful, or even beautiful.

III. The Aesthetics of Perception

Anticipating Heidegger’s insight that “every understanding has its mood,” Thoreau rejects skepticism in favor of an emotional mode of knowing.³⁵ He notes in a late journal entry that different frames of mind, even “morbid states,” render us “peculiarly fitted for certain investigations,” and thus “better able to deal with certain phenomena.”³⁶ Because there are “innumerable avenues to a perception of the truth,” we “need to reconsider our experience from many points of view and in various moods” in order to understand the world more fully.³⁷ There is justification for saying that our emotional state influences even our observations of the natural world, since the content of what is noticed and the quality of how it appears to us both depend to some degree on our affective disposition.³⁸ For Thoreau, the ideal state of mind is that of the person who sustains “a meticulous and discerning awareness of the particularities of nature,” knowing that “every perception bears an enormous weight of significance.”³⁹ He urges his reader never to “underrate the value of a fact,” since it may eventually “blossom into a truth.”⁴⁰ This phrase ought to give us pause: *the value of a fact*. Truthfulness does not consist in the accumulation of neutral data, but in the perception of facts that can flower into meaningful knowledge. What matters is to be “sensible to the finest influence” (TJ, 2/14/1851) so that one can accurately perceive the beauty of the universe. Agreeing with Simone Weil that “the only organ of contact with existence is acceptance or love,”⁴¹ Thoreau encourages us not to worry that our love of the world will “be unrequited or ill-bestowed” (TJ, 3/5/1841). He tells us that we may safely trust a great deal more than we do in our dubious moods: it is only when we “begin to love nature again,” he attests, that “life becomes again credible” and worthy of belief (TJ, 1/7/1855). Loving trust or receptivity, according to Thoreau, is the prerequisite for overcoming skeptical doubt. “Faith is sight and knowledge,” he writes, exclaiming, “how much virtue there is in simply seeing!”⁴² The natural philosopher should only expect to find beauty and order in concrete phenomena—in order to do so, however, he or she must cultivate the ability to perceive things with the right emotional comportment.

Like Kierkegaard, Thoreau laments that philosophy has lost its way in the age of modern skepticism.⁴³ One of the common precepts of ancient philosophy that was jettisoned by Descartes is that a person “could not have access to the truth” without undertaking a process of

self-purification that would render him “susceptible to knowing” it.⁴⁴ This is a matter of developing eyes that are capable of seeing beauty and meaning in the simplest of phenomena. Due to his belief that “the perception of beauty is a moral test,” Thoreau often scolds himself—or humanity in general—for failing in this respect: “how much of beauty . . . on which our eyes daily rest goes unperceived by us?” (TJ, 6/21/1852 & 8/1/1860). Noticing that his sensory awareness is less acute than it was during his youth, he wonders if a child might pick “its first flower with an insight into its beauty and significance which the subsequent botanist never retains” (TJ, 2/5/1852). A reliable knower, for Thoreau, is someone who has become emotionally attuned to every feature of the place where he or she is situated. There is “as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate,” he assures us, but “not a grain more.”⁴⁵ The “objects which one person will see from a particular hilltop are just as different from those which another will see as the persons are different,” since things are concealed from us “not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray as because we do not bring our minds and eyes to bear on them.”⁴⁶ An observer who is capable of giving a poetic and lively description of things will consequently find himself “in a living and beautiful world” (TJ, 12/31/1859). What we perceive is not only contingent on where we are located: it also depends upon our way of seeing.

Observing that another person is in pain, for instance, involves more than having the appropriate physiological equipment and facing in the right direction: it also requires a certain kind of emotional receptivity.⁴⁷ This is because, as Thoreau points out, “there is no such thing as pure *objective* observation. Your observation, to be interesting, i.e. to be significant, must be *subjective*” (TJ, 5/6/1854).⁴⁸ James echoes this sentiment when he states that “what we need is practical reality, reality for ourselves; and, to have that, an object must not only appear, but it must appear both *interesting* and *important*.”⁴⁹ For both authors, a true account of lived experience must do justice to all the qualities of objects that the human mind is capable of perceiving. This includes their length, weight, and other quantifiable properties, but also their color and scent, and even their beauty and significance. “We must look a long time before we can see,” Thoreau counsels, adding that the natural philosopher ought to “know nature better by his finer organization”; that is, he should “smell, taste, see, hear, feel better than other men.”⁵⁰ The virtue of such acute perception is that it will enhance the quality of our knowledge and experience.

“If there is not something mystical in your explanation,” Thoreau writes, “something unexplainable to the understanding,” then “it is quite insufficient” (TJ, 12/25/1851). Here we begin to see what Cavell has in mind when he claims that Thoreau is an embarrassment to “what we have learned to call philosophy,” since his work embodies “a mode

of conceptual accuracy” and “an idea of rigor” that are foreign to the academic establishment.⁵¹ Although he admires the precision of scientific measurement, he wonders if the results it delivers are bound to be “something less than the vague poetic” (TJ, 1/5/1850). After all, he says, “the truest description, and that by which another living man can most readily recognize a flower, is the unmeasured and eloquent one which the sight of it inspires” (TJ, 10/13/1860). In principle, a naturalistic approach to the world should be able to capture its beauty and significance; in practice, however, it may be “impossible for the same person to see things from the poet’s point of view and that of the man of science” (TJ, 2/18/1852). In that case, the best we can do is attempt to convey our intimations of the truth about reality, and be willing to run the risk of sounding obscure: “the words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant, and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures.”⁵² Nor should we confine our awareness to that which can be described with mathematical exactitude: the highest knowledge available to us, Thoreau proposes, may be a “revelation of the insufficiency of all that we had called knowledge before; an indefinite sense of the grandeur and glory of the universe. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun” (TJ, 2/27/1851).

Because all perception has a subjective aspect, the world can be defined as a sphere centered around each perceiver: wherever we are located, “the universe is built around us, and we are central still” (TJ, 8/24/1841).⁵³ This does not mean that we are trapped inside of our own consciousness, or that our sense of reality is entirely fabricated and not accountable to any external constraints; the point is that it is only through the lens of our own subjectivity that we have access to the outside world. There *is* no presupposition-free access to concrete evidence, no way of seeing things except from a particular standpoint. All of Thoreau’s experience in the field enabled him to arrive at the realization “that he, the supposedly neutral observer, was always and unavoidably in the center of the observation.”⁵⁴ On his view, such qualities as beauty and color are not merely “projected” onto things by the beholder: flowers, for instance, are indeed beautiful and colorful. However, beauty—like color—comes to light only where there is an alert observer to perceive it. Rainbows, also, are colorful: but “an actual rainbow requires an actual perceiver for it to be seen and, more importantly, significant.”⁵⁵ Noting that “when the phenomenon was not observed, it was not at all,” Thoreau says that “the philosopher for whom rainbows, etc., can be explained away, never saw them” (TJ, 4/19/1852 & 11/5/1857). He adds in the latter entry that “the point of interest” with such appearances “is somewhere *between* me and them”: that is, between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. These words bring him very close to the position of another philosopher for whom the phenomenon of the rainbow shows us something about perception in general.

Thus it is true, e.g., that when during a rain accompanied by sunshine we see a rainbow, we will call it a mere appearance, while calling the rain the thing in itself. And this is indeed correct, provided that we here take the concept of a thing in itself as meaning only something physical. . . . But suppose that we take this empirical something as such, and that—without being concerned about its being the same for the sense of every human being—we ask whether it presents also an object in itself. . . . In that case our question about the presentation's relation to the object is transcendental, and the answer is: not only are these drops mere appearances; rather, even their round shape, and indeed the space in which they fall, are nothing in themselves. They are, rather, mere modifications, or foundations, of our sensible intuition.⁵⁶

To argue that a rainbow is a phenomenal appearance is not to dismiss it as a mere illusion—after all, the same can be said about the raindrops themselves—but to make room for it within an account of objective reality.⁵⁷ If Thoreau is “the American heir to Kant’s critical philosophy,” as he has been called (and not only by Cavell) it is because his analysis of the observer’s relation to the phenomenon which is being observed develops what is fundamentally a Kantian insight.⁵⁸ And he also offers an original response to the chief problem of modern philosophy, since he recognizes that knowledge depends on “the individual’s *ability* to see,” and that “the world as known” is “radically dependent on character.”⁵⁹ This is why, if one were asked to identify the cardinal virtue of Thoreau’s philosophy, it would be hard to come up with a better candidate than *awareness*. “It is something,” he writes, “to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do.”⁶⁰ And we should not assume that the literary process of articulating a view of the world is distinct from the practical task of inhabiting it. As Thoreau demonstrates, the project of envisioning and describing a way of life is bound up with the discipline of living.

Since the viewpoint of each perceiver is “part of the meaning of the world,” Thoreau asks: “Who can say what *is*? He can only say *how* he *sees*.”⁶¹ Truth is radically perspective-dependent, and to the degree that our outlooks differ we can only be expected to live in different worlds. The world of a happy person is not the same as that of an unhappy one. As William James would agree, “neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands.”⁶² Any human view of things is inevitably a limited one; but we should avoid the failures of knowledge that ensue from a blindness in our mode of vision. What matters is not where you are looking, but what you see—and it is highly important to avoid being “blind to the

significant phenomena” that are always before us (TJ, 8/5/1851). Witnessing the emergence of positivism and its paradigm of neutral objectivity, Thoreau seeks “to preserve an enchanted world and to place the passionate observer in the center of his or her universe.”⁶³ Practical wisdom thus requires a specific kind of emotional attunement: not a species of wishful thinking, but an orientation toward the world in which everything is regarded in the most favorable light. When we are in the right state of mind, according to Thoreau, we “see things as they are, grand and beautiful,” and we perceive the sort of meaningful truth that is worthy of being remembered (TJ, 1/7/1857). This “attitude toward phenomena” is an affective disposition that can be deliberately cultivated, even if it is a stance that we are not always able to take.⁶⁴ The person who manages to develop and sustain this perceptual faith will gain access to many “significant facts” (TJ, 3/28/1857) that are unknowable from the vantage point of dispassionate reason. By contrast, to lack the capacity for “poetic perception” (TJ, 8/28/1851) is to live in an impoverished world.

IV. Beyond a Reasonable Doubt

After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been endeavoring in vain to answer in my sleep, as what—how—when—where? But there was dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad windows with serene and satisfied face, and no question on *her* lips. I awoke to an answered question, to Nature and daylight. The snow lying deep on the earth dotted with young pines, and the very slope of the hill on which my house is placed, seemed to say, Forward! Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask. She has long ago taken her resolution.⁶⁵

This passage, from the opening of the chapter in *Walden* called “The Pond in Winter,” shows Thoreau encountering something other than a correspondence between self and world. He wakes up plagued by questioning, and then witnesses what he describes as an answered question—but, significantly, not an answer to *his* question. His perplexity is a feature of the human condition; it is something that *we* bring to the world, and that we cannot always expect the world to answer. So what does it take to inhabit a standpoint from which life seems meaningful and indubitably real? When we fall out of touch with the external world, what we are dealing with is a failure of something other than reason: it is as if an erotic bond has been broken. We already know that our commonsense belief in a world of mind-independent objects “cannot be legitimated by experience, nor by logic, nor by any combination of the two.”⁶⁶ What, then, is to be done? Even Hume concedes that there is such a thing as “*excessive* skepticism,”⁶⁷ and Cavell seems to think

that some of our best philosophical efforts ought to be devoted to talking ourselves back into a passionate engagement with the world despite its uncertain reality and value. Philosophical writing is intended to express the author's sense of life, and this is what metaphysics in the old-fashioned style was trying to do: to give an account of how the world is, to explain why it makes sense to see it this way. Once we grasp what kind of resolution can be found for our most profound doubts, it remains for us to develop a kind of faith that can be sustained in practice—not in a momentary “leap,” but through the ongoing effort to give a cogent and persuasive account of what we believe.

Turning to a Cavellian example, Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale* introduces us to a character who, through a lack of faith, has brought about the annihilation of his world. Leontes is just the kind of skeptical fanatic that no sane person should wish to be, since he represents an “intelligence gone mad” in search of absolute certainty.⁶⁸ From the moment when he declares, “All's true that is mistrusted,” until later on when he admits, “I have too much believed mine own suspicion,” he takes the life out of a warm, familiar world and turns it into stone (II.i.59 & III.ii.167). He casts doubt on his wife, refusing to recognize her daughter as his own child, and he accuses his best friends of treachery. Like Othello in his jealousy, Leontes claims that it would have been better not to have learned the awful truth (II.i.49–56):

Alack, for lesser knowledge! How accursed
 In being so blest! There may be in the cup
 A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,
 And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
 Is not infected; but if one present
 Th' abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known
 How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,
 With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.

“Of the fabulous significance of these lines,” Cavell remarks, “I note here just the skeptic's sense, as for example voiced by David Hume, of being cursed, or sickened, in knowing more than his fellows about the fact of knowing itself.”⁶⁹ Of course, the problem in Leontes' case has been caused by nothing other than his own distrust. And what exactly is the matter with him, anyway? When Descartes says, “I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false,” we are supposed to agree that this sounds reasonable enough.⁷⁰ Even if Leontes had access to DNA evidence that suggested the child was quite likely his own, this would not amount to a “completely certain and indubitable” truth: the evidence might indicate a strong probability, but it does not *prove* anything.⁷¹ Besides, Leontes doesn't have access to a DNA test, so he cannot be positively sure that he is the father

of Hermione's child. For that matter, he cannot know with absolute certainty that he isn't dreaming, or that what he takes to be other people are not robots (or statues), and he can't be entirely certain that the external world exists, much less that it is trustworthy and deserving of his emotional investments.

Leontes does have a problem, though: it is not that he knows only too well how imperfectly certain are his less skeptical beliefs, but that he cannot submit to and affirm this imperfect certainty. As Dewey points out, the quest for certainty can be motivated by an anxious longing to escape from the realm of contingency and change, in favor of taking refuge in the safe haven of detachment.⁷² What Leontes is suffering has a cure, namely to "acknowledge his child as his, to own it, something every normal parent will do . . . (though, come to think about it, most of us lack the knock-down evidence we may take ourselves to possess, in this case as in the case of owning that the world exists)."⁷³ Just as we love a person without knowing for certain that he or she is deserving of our love, or that any good will come of it, we find ourselves bound to the world—and quite committed to its existence—by virtue of something other than knowledge: or, as Cavell says, not what we ordinarily think of as knowing.⁷⁴ No one can prove anything about the world by the light of clear and distinct reason, or by the ostensible certainty of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, other people *can* perhaps "confirm for me that the world exists and I in it, but only on condition that I let them."⁷⁵ This is why, once he turns away from humane assurance and demands absolute proof, Leontes is already lost.

The skeptic rejects what normally qualifies as knowledge because it seems imperfectly certain and limited. Yet, as Stephen Mulhall explains, "it would make sense to think of the conditions of human knowledge as limitations only if we could conceive of another perspective upon the world that did not require them; and philosophers from Kant onward have variously striven to show that there is no such perspective."⁷⁶ Fortunately for Leontes, not all is lost, as he discovers when he eventually comes around to viewing things in a more charitable light. Speaking of this kind of transformation in a person's way of seeing, Rush Rhees comments: "If such a change comes, it is not because he sees any *reason* for it. I do not know what a 'reason' would be, here. . . . He sees that another attitude is possible, that is all."⁷⁷ Through his faith, his willingness to believe in Hermione's unlikely reappearance, Leontes allows her to come back to life.

To refuse to accept the sort of truth available from a limited standpoint is to reject the possibility of human knowledge altogether. It would be legitimate for the believer to say to the skeptic: I admit that I cannot *know* that God and the world exist, or that this is my daughter, but (then again) I also don't have absolute justification for believing that the ground is solid and the stove is hot and the sun will rise tomor-

row. If the lack of certainty doesn't stop me from holding these everyday beliefs, then it really shouldn't keep me from forming beliefs about those more important matters. It is admittedly unsettling to find out that one was wrong about something or other, but we must take the risk of being wrong in order to escape from the abyss of skeptical doubt. "I cannot be more certain than I am of some beliefs, so that when I say I know, what I am expressing is not some further unattainable range of belief," according to Cavell; rather, "in saying I know, I commit myself differently. . . . And if I refuse ever to take such steps, I am not being *cautious*, but irresponsible or obsessive."⁷⁸ In another journal entry, Thoreau makes a similar point:

I know of no redeeming qualities in me but a sincere love for some things, and when I am reproved I have to fall back on this ground. This is my argument in reserve for all cases. My love is invulnerable. . . . Therein I am whole and entire. Therein I am God-propped. (TJ, 12/15/1841)

What situates us in a context of meaningful experience are the convictions that we accept on trust; in this sense, there is an element of faith in even the most ordinary knowledge. However naïve it might be to imagine that we have the power to create our own reality without any constraints, it is true that the lens through which we are looking goes some way toward determining what we see. As Thoreau writes, "A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts."⁷⁹ By recognizing the limits of what we can know with certainty, we open ourselves to a wider horizon of experience. The "boundaries of the actual are no more fixed and rigid than the elasticity of our imaginations" (TJ, 5/31/1853).

Sometimes the world makes it easier for us to overcome our skeptical bias: for instance, in *The Winter's Tale*, when Leontes finally has another opportunity to acknowledge his daughter, it has been sixteen years since she had been abandoned in her infancy. And now, she is such a beautiful sight—not only for her father, but for anyone with eyes to see—that another character remarks that, if she were to "begin a sect," she would be able to convert *anyone* into a zealous believer (V.i.134–137). That is, as long as they were receptive to the idea, and did not resist being convinced.⁸⁰ Perceptual faith has the power to transform our whole perspective, enabling us to perceive things that may not otherwise have been evident. "The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. . . . *They are the highest reality.*"⁸¹ When a literary philosopher such as Thoreau succeeds at transforming our sense of the world, it is not so much because he offers absolutely conclusive proofs as because he can influence us readers "at the level of affect, and hence of con-

viction.”⁸² He reminds us that, if philosophy cannot speak to our deepest beliefs, then it will be irrelevant to the very questions that it asks us to take seriously.

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NOTES

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1. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. by Michael Heim (New York: Harper, 1991), p. 247.

2. *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 274.

3. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 14.

4. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 250 [“Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors”]. See also *Walden*, pp. 172–73 [“The Ponds”] & 273–74 [“The Pond in Winter”], on demons and dreams. On Thoreau's relation to Cartesian skepticism, see Rick Anthony Furtak, “Thoreau's Emotional Stoicism,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 17 (2003): 123.

5. Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), pp. 50–51. See also Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 84: “Epistemology is obliged to keep aesthetics under control, as if to guard against the thought that there is something more [and better] seeing can be, or provide, than evidence for claims to know, especially claims that particular objects exist.”

6. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), p. 66.

7. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), vol. 2, p. 590.

8. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 60.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64. “Gravels” are kidney stones, by the way; “megrimms” are migraine headaches; and “marasmus” (in the prior quotation) refers to the process of wasting away.

10. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 27.

11. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. by Richard Polt (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 10. As for Nietzsche's related claim, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon, this invites the question: to whom? Someone for whom experience is constantly enjoyable? And who might that be? I myself suffer from about half of the afflictions listed in Hume's *Dialogues*—plenty of things to be grateful for, but also plenty of grounds for metaphysical pessimism. Most people would end up

with similarly mixed results, confirming that the “objective” evidence is indeed ambiguous.

12. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 431. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “In the Name,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John Caputo & Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 32.

13. James Reid, “Ethical Criticism in Heidegger’s Early Freiburg Lectures,” *Review of Metaphysics* 59 (2005): 40. On the “scandal of philosophy,” see Heidegger’s response to Kant in 43 of *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 247–49.

14. On “acceptance of the universe,” see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Library of America, 1990), p. 44. On theodicy, see “Is Life Worth Living?” in *James and Dewey on Belief and Experience*, ed. John Capps & Donald Capps (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 81–84.

15. Kant would presumably agree, due to the distinction between conviction and certainty that he draws in the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method,” where mathematics is cited as an area in which it is absurd to hold mere opinions. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Werner L. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), A820–23 / B848–51. Cf. William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. G. H. Bird (London: Everyman, 1995), p. 258.

16. John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), pp. 20–21.

17. What it comes down to is this: “The skeptic claims that such-and-such requirements cannot be met; the non-skeptic insists that such-and-such requirements are inappropriate.” John Greco, “How to Be a Pragmatist: C. I. Lewis and Humean Skepticism,” *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society* 42 (2006): 31.

18. Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 324. As Wittgenstein points out, “my *life* consists in my being content to accept many things”; and when he adds that a form of life “is only possible if one trusts something,” he notes: “I did not say [if one] ‘can trust something’.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper, 1969), 344 & 509. My emphasis.

19. For his canonical list of texts in “moral perfectionism,” which also includes *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*, and several of Emerson’s essays, see Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 5.

20. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology*, in one volume with *Fear and Trembling*, trans. by Howard Hong & Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 173.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 173–74.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

23. Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. by Howard Hong & Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 115–24.

24. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by Howard Hong & Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 203–204.

25. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 10 [“Economy”].

26. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. by Howard Hong & Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 5. My emphasis.
27. Russell Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 76–78.
28. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, pp. 430–31.
29. William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *Selected Writings*, p. 268. On knowledge and acknowledgment, see also Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §378.
30. The “passion of love is the most familiar and extreme example” of the transformation and enhancement of the world that takes place for an emotional person; on the other hand, to an observer stripped of all emotion, the universe would appear stale, flat, and “without significance.” James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 140–41. Cf. Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 37–38.
31. James, “Is Life Worth Living?” in *James and Dewey on Belief and Experience*, pp. 91–93. Dewey agrees that, since knowing is an interactive process, our “so-called means of verification” are “integrally constituent parts of the object,” and not only in exceptional cases. See, e.g., David Hildebrand, *Beyond Realism and Antirealism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), p. 52. Cf. Ronald Hall, *The Human Embrace* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2000), p. 169: “our attitude toward things is an element in the constitution of what there is.”
32. Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals & Papers*, trans. by Howard Hong & Edna Hong, 7 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–78), §4554.
33. Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 263. This loss of reality, Michael Fischer proposes, may be exactly what the skeptic secretly wants to bring about, so as to avoid having to deal with the weight of the world: see *Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 83–85.
34. Victor Kestenbaum, *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 81.
35. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §67, p. 385.
36. Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, ed. Bradford Torrey & Francis Allen, 14 vols. (New York: Dover, 1962), 7/18/1859. Hereafter abbreviated TJ and cited by date of entry.
37. TJ, 9/4/1851 & 3/24/1857. James also observes that we “feel things differently” in different moods and states of awareness: this is one case in which his “enormous and largely unadmitted” debt to earlier American thought is apparent, as Russell Goodman points out. See *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition*, p. 63.
38. Alison Jaggar has made an analogous point in the context of feminist epistemology: see “Love and Knowledge,” in *Gender/Body/Knowledge*, ed. Alison Jaggar & Susan Bordo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 154.
39. David M. Robinson, *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 100–101. James would seem to concur with Thoreau that “the place of the divine in the world must be . . . organic and intimate.”—*A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 18.
40. “Natural History of Massachusetts,” in *Collected Essays and Poems*, ed. Elizabeth H. Witherell (New York: Library of America, 2001), p. 41. By developing the virtues of alertness and keen vision, “we deepen our knowledge and appre-

ciation of the landscape,” as Philip Cafaro comments. See *Thoreau's Living Ethics* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 63.

41. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 1963), p. 57.

42. TJ, 4/10/1841. “There is no creed so false but faith can make it true,” he adds (TJ, 8/28/1841); for instance, “it is the faith with which we take medicine that cures us” (TJ, 6/27/1852). These two passages alone could support volumes of commentary, for reasons that lie outside the terrain of my present essay.

43. “There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live.”—Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 14 [“Economy”]. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Journals & Papers*, §3314: “In the old days people loved wisdom, now they love the name of philosopher.”

44. Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. by Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 278–79.

45. Thoreau, “Autumnal Tints,” in *Collected Essays and Poems*, pp. 393–94.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

47. Cf. Anthony Rudd, *Expressing the World: Skepticism, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), p. 121.

48. See also TJ, 5/1/1854, in which Thoreau notes that objects “seen with a microscope begin to be insignificant,” adding that this is not the route to reliable knowledge. On the other hand, he might agree that even microscopic investigation could be genuinely revealing, as long as it was undertaken with an emotional sense of connectedness to the object of study: see Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 115–17.

49. William James, “The Psychology of Belief,” p. 66.

50. “Natural History of Massachusetts,” p. 41. Cf. Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), p. 151: “Perhaps . . . what we call feeling or mood . . . is more reasonable—that is, more intelligently perceptive—because more open to Being than all that reason which . . . was misinterpreted as being rational.”

51. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, p. 14.

52. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 316 [“Conclusion”]. See also TJ, 12/11/1855: “It is only necessary to behold thus the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair’s breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance.”

53. Objects “do not, by themselves, make a world; worlds are ‘made’ by the interaction . . . of the creative self and the world.”—H. Daniel Peck, *Thoreau's Morning Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 122–23. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. by William Alston & George Nakhnikian (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), pp. 9–10: “It really makes no sense at all to talk about things which are ‘simply there’ and just need to be ‘seen.’ On the contrary, this ‘simply being there’ consists of certain mental processes of specific and changing structure, such as perception, imagination, memory . . . things come to be *constituted* in these mental processes.”

54. Robert Kuhn McGregor, *A Wider View of the Universe: Thoreau's Study of Nature* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 113. Yet again, James is in harmony with Thoreau on this point: “The *fons et origo* of all reality,” he writes, “is *ourselves* . . . as thinkers with emotional reaction.” See “The Psychology of Belief,” p. 67.

55. Peter Blakemore, "Reading Home," in *Thoreau's Sense of Place*, ed. Richard Schneider (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), p. 117.
56. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A45–46 / B63.
57. Among the least convincing arguments in favor of distrusting sensory experience are those that refer to alleged perceptual illusions, as when Descartes claims that "the sun appears to me to be quite small." *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 27. As J. L. Austin says, it may look like a small object placed at arm's length, but it doesn't look the way a small object would if it were as far away as the sun actually is: see *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 41.
58. Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 136. See also Alfred Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 152.
59. Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing*, pp. 4–5. See also Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 212–13.
60. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 88 ["Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"].
61. TJ, 11/4/1852 & 12/4/1846. Nor is it easy to distinguish exactly what the object and the subject contribute to a perception: "A slight sound at evening lifts me up by the ears, and makes life seem inexpressibly serene and grand. It may be in Uranus, or it may be in the shutter" (TJ, 7/12/1841).
62. James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in *Selected Writings*, p. 337.
63. Alfred Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing*, p. 20.
64. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p. 361. Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses the term "perceptual faith" to describe this "opening to the world" in *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 35–36.
65. Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 273 ["The Pond in Winter"].
66. Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 84.
67. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 111. For his part, Descartes ultimately decides that his "hyperbolic doubts . . . ought to be rejected as ludicrous." *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 58.
68. Heidegger uses this phrase to characterize Descartes in the *Meditations*. See *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. by Daniel Dahlstrom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 33. References to *The Winter's Tale* give Act, Scene, and Line numbers in parentheses. I cite the Folger Shakespeare Library edition (New York: Washington Square Press, 1998).
69. Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 197.
70. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 13. Cf. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, p. 85.
71. As another character in Hume's *Dialogues* points out, even if "an articulate voice were heard in the clouds," speaking to every nation in its own language at once and uttering thoughts that were supremely beautiful and significant, this

would not prove that the words had proceeded from an intelligent source. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 23.

72. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Putnam, 1960), p. 185. Of course, the madness that afflicts Shakespeare's protagonist may not be an entirely irrational one: as J. V. Cunningham observes, Hamlet harbors doubts "not because he is irresolute, but because he is reasonable." See *Woe or Wonder* (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1951), pp. 127–28.

73. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, p. 203. See also Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 168–69: "Ethical conviction, like any other form of *being convinced*, must have some aspect of passivity to it, must in some sense come to you."

74. *The Claim of Reason*, p. 241.

75. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), p. 52.

76. Mulhall, "Reading, Writing, Re-membling: What Cavell and Heidegger Call Thinking," in *Ordinary Language Criticism*, ed. Kenneth Dauber & Walter Jost (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), p. 118.

77. Rhees, "Gratitude and Ingratitude for Existence," in *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 162–64.

78. *Themes Out of School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 214. What is difficult is "to realize the groundlessness of our believing," while understanding that this is not a good reason to relinquish all of our beliefs. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 166.

79. *Walden*, p. 303 ["Spring"].

80. As Paulina says to Leontes, "It is required / You do awake your faith" (V.iii.118–119).

81. *Walden*, p. 208 ["Higher Laws"]. My emphasis.

82. Edward Mooney, "Acknowledgment, Suffering, and Praise," in *Soundings* 88 (2005): 406. See also Garrett Stewart, "The Avoidance of Stanley Cavell," in *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, ed. Russell Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 153–55.

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