

Chapter 3

Misology, dialogism and monologism: Costello's (mis-)use of her sources in *The Lives of Animals* and her alleged abuse of reason, Part 1

The symposium is a banquet dialogue, already in existence during the epoch of the Socratic dialogue Dialogic banquet discourse possessed special privileges (originally of a cultic sort): the right to a certain license, ease and familiarity, to a certain frankness, to eccentricity, ambivalence; that is, the combination in one discourse of praise and abuse, of the serious and the comic. The symposium is by nature a purely carnivalistic genre. (Bakhtin, 1984, 120)

In this chapter the claims of the previous chapters will be put to the test in terms of a close reading of *The Lives of Animals*. In the previous chapters, it was argued that Costello's position on animal rights, far from being indefensible and irrational, can be considered reasonable when seen in relation to the work of the leading animal

rights philosophers. It was also argued that far from merely and incoherently using reason to attack reason itself, Costello was attacking the illegitimate use of reason to justify the exploitation and abuse of animals, and that she was criticising a particular form of comprehensive rationalism. It was suggested that the perception that she is irrational can be explained, in part, by considering her to be a Socratic figure, a wise fool, whose aim is not so much to deliver the truth as to provoke people to question their preconceptions and prejudices. Seen in this way, the charge of misology—used in this thesis not so much in its standard sense as a hatred of knowledge but more in Popper’s sense as a mistrust of reasoning and an unwillingness to subject one’s preconceptions to critical examination—against Costello fails, although this will be explored in this and the next chapter in a close reading of *The Lives of Animals*. Furthermore, one critic has raised the charge that Costello misuses certain of her sources (which could also be construed as a type of misology) (Bell, 2006, 176). This, too, will also be investigated in this chapter. Finally, Coetzee’s postmodernist mode will also be studied in this chapter as well as his use of Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas of carnival, dialogism and monologism, and the polyphonic novel, the ideas of this Russian Formalist literary theorist having exerted a profound influence on Coetzee. This will also help to explain Coetzee’s choice of the Platonic (or Socratic) dialogue as the form of *The Lives of Animals* and of Costello as a Socratic figure.

As pointed out in previous chapters, Coetzee’s adopted narrative mode has confused critics concerning his own views on the subject of his lectures and speeches. The multiple levels of reflexivity may seem playfully postmodernist but as Amy Gutmann, the editor of *The Lives of Animals* (with “Reflections”) (1999), points out, “John Coetzee displays the kind of seriousness that can unite aesthetics and ethics” (Coetzee, 1999b, 3). Benjamin Kunkel has also noted the ethical seriousness of Coetzee’s fiction despite its postmodern mode (Kunkel, 1999)¹. The uncertainty inherent in Coetzee’s technique is basically Socratic, and it does not imply a superficial, trivial or playful relativism, but instead is opposed to the authoritarianism of moral certainty. Its aim is to encourage readers to work through the issues themselves rather than subscribe

¹Citations without page numbers refer to web pages.

dogmatically to some principle or position.

Gutmann also points out how the fictional mode of the dialogue enables Coetzee to dramatize the relationships of the various speakers, most significantly those closest to Costello. The power of this narrative mode is that it shows how philosophical points of view are not merely abstract positions but are embodied in thinking, emotional and social beings. It allows several conflicting perspectives to be expressed in all their complexity, without any ultimate resolution. Coetzee writes in “What Is Realism?”:

Realism has never been comfortable with ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can exist only in things. So when it needs to debate ideas, as here, realism is driven to invent situations—walks in the countryside, conversations—in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody them. The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world ... (Coetzee, 2003, 9)

Although he undermines realist conventions, Coetzee, too, stages situations in which ideas can be debated, especially in the dramatic structure of *The Lives of Animals*. It allows various voices, both complementary and contradictory, to express their views, without necessarily any single one dominating, which results in a Bakhtinian polyphony. Furthermore, by adopting the fictional mode of the dialogue, rather than delivering the traditional argumentative or discursive format of the speech and lecture, Coetzee is asserting the power of fiction, both intellectually and emotionally, as a vehicle for serious ethical concerns.

In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee uses Bakhtin’s terms “dialogic” and “monologic”:

Writing is not free expression. There is a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the countervoices in oneself and embarking

upon speech with them. It is some measure of a writer's seriousness whether he does evoke/invoke these countervoices in himself, that is, step down from the position of what Lacan calls 'the subject supposed to know.' Whereas interviewers want speech, a *flow* of speech. That speech they record, take away, edit, censor, cutting out all its waywardness, till what is left conforms to a monologic ideal. (Coetzee, 1992, 65)

Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" or "polyphony" can clearly be applied to *The Lives of Animals*, the different characters representing the countervoices within Coetzee. Costello, Coetzee's persona and alter-ego, it was shown in the previous chapter, expresses many opinions that Coetzee holds concerning animal rights although in a manner that lacks Coetzee's reserve, whereas her son, John, who shares both Coetzee's name and reserved nature, expresses many doubts about Costello's position that Coetzee himself may feel. Norma and O'Hearne represent even more stridently self-critical voices within Coetzee. The other characters all occupy well-defined, contrary and complementary positions on the issue of animal rights.

In two recent interviews, Coetzee re-assesses Bakhtin, implicitly acknowledging his influence:

I have a growing suspicion that Bakhtin attached a deep and specifically religious meaning to the notion which, I suspect, escapes many of those who've taken it over. What dialogism means is, at a technical level, that you don't write from the position of one who knows the answer. That would be, so to speak, to write in a monologue or monologically. In other words, writing dialogically means writing in a manner which respects the knowledge of all who participate in the fiction. It's a notion that comes quite naturally to drama but doesn't come quite so naturally to long works of fiction, because in drama there is a natural dialogue between characters. In fiction, although there's plenty of dialogue, there tends to be some controlling position, either latent or patent, someone who knows what is going on in a way that the characters don't. (Coetzee, 2001, 44)

Thanks to the polyphony of voices in *The Lives of Animals* and its dialogic structure, no controlling position can be identified.

In another interview, Coetzee raises some critical questions about how people interpret Bakhtin's ideas:

Dialogism? More and more I suspect I don't understand the concept. The more I reread Bakhtin, the less I'm sure what dialogism is. . . .

Again, bear in mind that monologue is not necessarily monological, if I understand Bakhtin. Nor is dialogue dialogical. There's a certain kind of monologue in which various voices are evoked and contested and played with that is part of the dialogical. So if I'm interested in monologue, it's not just at a formal level. On the other hand, it's not at the level of whatever it is Bakhtin is talking about, which, I suspect, is finally a religious level. (Coetzee, 1997, 89)

Coetzee's point is borne out by the fact that the middle and later Platonic dialogues tend to be monological, whereas the early dialogues are dialogical. His comment on the religious strand in Bakhtin is extremely interesting, and may help clarify his use of religious terminology in both *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace* despite his disavowal of religion.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism may provide an answer to the question that arose in Chapter 2 of how Costello can be considered a Socratic figure if she asserts the superior power of the poetic imagination above philosophy, and if, as Nietzsche argued, Socrates rejected the poets and the poetic mode for a philosophical one. The problem can perhaps be resolved by an application of Bakhtin's ideas of the polyphonic novel and of the origin of the novel in the Socratic dialogue. Like Nietzsche, Bakhtin sees in Socrates the precursor of science, democracy and modernity, but, whereas Nietzsche disapproves of these characteristics, Bakhtin approves of them. Seen in Bakhtin's terms, there is no contradiction between identifying Costello (and Coetzee) and Socrates, because Costello and Coetzee are novelists, and the Socratic dialogue is, according to Bakhtin, one of the precursors of the novel. Thus, while Socrates

may have been opposed to poetry, he was one of the founders of the novel:

We possess a remarkable document that reflects the simultaneous birth of scientific thinking and of a new artistic-prose model for the novel. These are the Socratic dialogues. For our purpose, everything in this remarkable genre, which was born just as classical antiquity was drawing to a close, is significant. (Bakhtin, 1981, 24)

It should be noted, however, that whereas Nietzsche opposed Socrates to tragedy, Bakhtin opposed the novel (and thus the Socratic dialogue) to epic poetry. He considered epic poetry to be part of a closed, aristocratic, monologic, valorised past, complete and retrospective (Bakhtin, 1981, 15-20). As opposed to that, the novel is popular, dialogic, scientific, open and future-oriented (Bakhtin, 1981, 23, 30-31).

A glance at the characteristics of the Socratic dialogue, as Bakhtin sees it, appears to confirm many of the insights in the last chapter concerning Costello as a Socratic figure. Bakhtin's point that it is characteristic of a Socratic dialogue "that a speaking and conversing man is the central image of the genre" (Bakhtin, 1981, 24) clearly applies to the figure of Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*. His insight that "[c]haracteristic, even canonic, for the genre is the spoken dialogue framed by a dialogized story" (Bakhtin, 1981, 25) is equally evident in the dramatic setting of *The Lives of Animals* (as will be pointed out in detail later in this chapter).

Bakhtin also maintains to be characteristic of a Socratic dialogue "the combination of the image of Socrates, the central hero of the genre, wearing the popular mask of a bewildered fool . . . with the image of a wise man of the most elevated sort" (Bakhtin, 1981, 24) pointing out that "this combination produces the ambivalent image of wise ignorance" (Bakhtin, 1981, 24), all of which fits Costello. Her audience obviously respects her as an accomplished novelist yet finds her discussion of animal rights puzzling or even, for Norma, confused. The contributors to *J.M. Coetzee and the Role of the Public Intellectual* have tried to interpret this image of Costello as the wise fool in various ways. David Attwell argues that Costello is a Moria-figure as appears in Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, standing outside of reason: "The point of

this madness is that it enables things to be said that could not easily be articulated by a public intellectual in the real world; nevertheless her voice *lingers* [his emphasis] as a mark of ethical accountability” (Attwell, 2006, 36). Rosemary Jolly argues that “[t]aking up the challenge of imagining the other, and the ethical demands attendant upon this act, requires us to be vulnerable to Elizabeth Costello’s insight: what we want to say about human society remains outside the realm of the sayable” (Jolly, 2006, 166). Laura Wright argues that Costello’s speech is a rant (Wright, 2006, 196-7)—linked with emotional excess—that destabilises the patriarchal binary oppositions of the rational, philosophical speeches that public lectures usually are (Wright, 2006, 205).

Less obvious, but equally appropriate, to Costello is another feature mentioned by Bakhtin, “the ambivalent self-praise in the Socratic dialogue: I am wiser than everyone, because I know that I know nothing” (Bakhtin, 1981, 24), as will be shown later in this chapter. This has been noted by some of the critics, however. Sam Durrant mentions (without naming it as such) a very Socratic “state of humility or self-doubt that undoes the logic of self-certainty that founds the Cartesian tradition and underwrites the enterprise of colonialism” (Durrant, 2006, 121).

Bakhtin concludes his list of characteristics of the Socratic dialogue:

...It is, finally, profoundly characteristic ...that we have laughter, Socratic irony, the entire system of Socratic degradations combined with a serious, lofty and for the first time truly free investigation of the world, of man and human thought. Socratic laughter (reduced to irony) and Socratic degradations ... bring the world closer and familiarize it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely. (Bakhtin, 1981, 24-25)

The Lives of Animals is particularly rich in irony—although not necessarily Socratic irony—as several critics have noted. For instance, Graham Huggan focuses on *The Lives of Animals* as an animal fable the aesthetic play of which principally consists in multiple levels of irony (Huggan, 2004, 712-13). Thus despite Costello’s criticism of deep ecology as being Platonic, according to Huggan:

The Platonic dilemma remains: in her first lecture, for instance, she becomes, not Red Peter himself, but the idea of Red Peter The ironies begin to multiply again: fables, pushed to their interpretive limits, turn into versions of themselves, thus generating other fables; ecologism itself becomes a fable of the impossible attempt to escape anthropocentric thought. (Huggan, 2004, 713)

Thus in *The Lives of Animals* the irony often functions at a higher level than Costello's consciousness. Her words and deeds, as well as the dramatic situation of the novel and the interrelations of the various characters, are treated ironically by Coetzee himself. The effect is, however, similar to that of Socratic irony, namely to place in question any claims to ultimate authority, to stimulate creative doubt in the reader and to familiarise the world so that it can be explored fearlessly.

Bakhtin also describes Socrates as a new type of "hero-ideologue": "As a rule the hero of a novel is always more or less an ideologue" (Bakhtin, 1981, 38). This is true, at least in part, of Costello, especially as she is presented in *The Lives of Animals*, since she bravely propagates a particular ideological position on animal rights, often in the face of incomprehension, resistance and even hostility.

Bakhtin developed his theory of the polyphonic novel mainly with Dostoevsky in mind, a novelist whom Coetzee also admires, so much so as to have written a novel about him, namely *The Master of Petersburg*. Concerning the relation of Dostoevsky's voice to those of his characters, Bakhtin writes:

. . . Dostoevsky's voice is simply drowned out by all those other voices. Characters are polemicized with, learned from; attempts are made to develop their views into finished systems. The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision. In the consciousness of the critics, the direct and fully weighted signifying power of the characters' words destroys the monologic plane of the novel and calls forth an unmediated

response—as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word. (Bakhtin, 1984, 5)

In *The Lives of Animals* the voices of Costello’s strongest critics, Norma and O’Hearne, are powerfully presented and their autonomy is respected. Indeed, some critics argue that her opponents get the better of Costello, even though Coetzee apparently sympathises far more, or even identifies, with her position. Also, even Costello, who is a persona of Coetzee, has a strikingly independent voice, a voice that differs substantially from the voice in which Coetzee makes public statements or which he adopts in his academic writing. Where her voice is blatant, fanciful and overly emotional, even hysterical, his is subtle, cautious and reserved. Coetzee’s use of polyphony may be the main reason why critics seem unable to work out his own position on animal rights based on a study of *The Lives of Animals* alone and why they have to resort to statements by him taken from other, non-literary texts such as speeches and interviews.

Concerning the independence of his characters, Bakhtin writes that:

Dostoevsky, like Goethe’s Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even rebelling against him. [Bakhtin’s italics] (Bakhtin, 1984, 6)

In Chapter 2, it was seen how the main character, Paul Rayment, resists his author, Elizabeth Costello and, indeed, the author of *Slow Man*, Coetzee himself.

Bakhtin asserts later that “Dostoevsky’s particular gift for hearing and understanding all voices immediately and simultaneously, a gift whose equal we find only in Dante, also permitted him to create the polyphonic novel” (Bakhtin, 1984, 30) and notes that “[t]he polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through” [Bakhtin’s emphasis] (Bakhtin, 1984, 40). This may well be a major influence on Coetzee’s claims for the power of the “sympathetic imagination”. Indeed, Wayne Booth in his

Introduction to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* writes of Bakhtin that “His God-term—though he does not rely on religious language—is something like ‘sympathetic understanding’ or ‘compassionate vision,’ and his way of talking about it is always in terms of the ‘multi-voicedness’ or ‘multi-centredness’ of the world as we experience it” (Bakhtin, 1984, xxi). The problem for Coetzee (or Costello), however, is that if very few poets seem capable of this sympathetic understanding, then how less likely are ordinary people to possess it, and if this is the case, how will the sympathetic imagination help change attitudes towards animals in the broader society? Nonetheless, Bakhtin may be the key to understanding Costello’s claims for the ‘sympathetic imagination’ and it may also help explain Coetzee’s use of religious terminology in both *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace*.

It may be thought that Coetzee’s use of Bakhtin’s ideas of polyphony and dialogism implies that the former has no opinions of his own on animal rights or that he believes that any opinion is as good as another, that his novels are merely playfully postmodernist without any serious ethical engagement. However, the following quotation from Bakhtin should dispel this thought:

We see no special need to point out that the polyphonic approach has nothing in common with relativism (or with dogmatism). But it should be noted that both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism). Polyphony as an *artistic* method lies in an entirely different plane. (Bakhtin, 1984, 69)

Equally significant is the fact that Bakhtin clearly considers the dialogic novel to be an effective vehicle for argument and thus would not perceive argument as belonging exclusively to more discursive philosophical modes of writing. This would appear to validate the argument in previous chapters that Costello’s adopted narrative mode and sympathetic imagination are not necessarily opposed to reason.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin returns to discuss the characteristics of the genre of the Socratic dialogue:

At the base of the genre lies the Socratic notion of the dialogic nature of truth, and the dialogic nature of human thinking about truth. The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to *official* monologism, which pretends to *possess a ready-made truth*, and it is also counterposed to the naive self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. Socrates called himself a *pander*: he brought people together and made them collide in a quarrel, and as a result truth was born; with respect to this emerging truth Socrates called himself a “midwife,” since he assisted at the birth. (Bakhtin, 1984, 110)

Costello clearly plays the role of the Socratic *pander* or midwife in *The Lives of Animals*. She elicits strong responses from Abraham Stern, Norma and O’Hearne, and less heated but equally thought-provoking responses from others, like Elaine Marx and her son, John. The dialogue structure of *The Lives of Animals*, of course, ideally suits this creation of truth through dialogic interaction. However, while most of the characters express strong views on the issue of animal rights, none, except Costello, seems to express any self-doubt, although it can be argued that there is a sense of truth being born in *The Lives of Animals* in the process of the exchange of opinions. It is clear too that this dialogic interaction in *The Lives of Animals* has the power to unsettle readers, shake them out of their complacency and encourage them to question their prejudices and assumptions.

This alone can answer critics who may object that *The Lives of Animals* may be dialogic in form but monologic in substance. Confirming what was pointed out in Chapter 2, Bakhtin distinguishes between the early, middle and late Platonic dialogues and argues, concerning the later dialogues, that “[t]he content often assumed a monologic character that contradicted the form-shaping idea of the genre” whereas “...the dialogue of these earlier periods has not yet been transformed into a simple means for expounding ready-made ideas (for pedagogical purposes) and Socrates has

not yet been transformed into a ‘teacher’ ” (Bakhtin, 1984, 110). Again, Costello is presented in *The Lives of Animals* not so much as a teacher or guru in possession of all the answers, but as a Socratic midwife to ideas who, without having any final answers of her own, provokes others to think about an important issue and to form their own opinions.

Bakhtin goes on to identify other features of the Socratic dialogue. He asserts that the two “basic devices of the Socratic dialogue were the syncrisis ... and the anacrisis”, the syncrisis being the “juxtaposition of various points of view on a specific object” and the anacrisis “a means for eliciting and provoking the words of one’s interlocutor, forcing him to express his opinion and express it thoroughly” (Bakhtin, 1984, 110). It will be shown in detail later how the dramatic structure of *The Lives of Animals* contributes to the syncrisis and how Costello’s provocative approach and words stimulate anacrisis in the novel. Bakhtin argues that “[i]n the Socratic dialogue, the plot situation of the dialogue is sometimes utilized alongside anacrisis, or the provocation of the word by the word, for the same purpose” (Bakhtin, 1984, 111), an insight that also clearly applies to *The Lives of Animals*. He makes special mention of “the situation of [Socrates’] impending death” (Bakhtin, 1984, 111), a motif that was pursued in detail in relation to Costello in Chapter 2. Finally, Bakhtin contends that:

In the Socratic dialogue the idea is organically combined with the image of a person, its carrier (Socrates and other essential participants in the dialogue). The dialogic testing of the idea is simultaneously also the testing of the person who presents it. (Bakhtin, 1984, 111-12)

It will be argued that Coetzee actualises most of these features in *The Lives of Animals*. Indeed, it seems to be the case that he has always aspired to writing polyphonic novels. This seems evident in the two-part structure of *Dusklands* and the three-part structure of *The Life & Times of Michael K*, the dialogic structure of *The Lives of Animals*, the authorial intervention of Costello in *Slow Man* and the tripartite page division in *Diary of a Bad Year*. Considering what Coetzee says in his *Salmagundi*

interview (quoted above), even the apparently monologic forms of *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace* are arguably dialogic in substance.

Aveek Sen notes, in an insightful review of *Diary of a Bad Year*:

The structure is polyphonic—a tribute to Bach, “the spiritual father” Most of its pages are divided initially into two, and then into three sections. Hence, the unfolding of *Diary of a Bad Year* is split into multiple, but simultaneous, levels or voices. Like an orchestral score, this music-haunted book demands to be read from left to right and from top to bottom. And the reader has to work out a way of holding it all together in the head. (Sen, 2007)

Indeed, Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony is indebted to music. Sen does not, however, acknowledge Bakhtin, although he does mention “finally, two profoundly ‘personal’ fragments [in *Diary of a Bad Year*] on the music of Bach (‘It comes as a gift, unearned, unmerited, for free’), and on Dostoevsky and ‘Mother Russia’, who must be thanked ‘for setting before us with such indisputable certainty the standards toward which any serious artist must toil.’” Sen, in fact, concludes his review with a penetrating questioning of the ability of the author of fiction to abscond from a position of power, thereby questioning the basis of Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel and, therefore, of Coetzee’s attempts to write such novels:

“Why is it so hard to say anything about politics from outside politics?” C asks in “On the origins of the state”. But do not C and his creator, JMC, know that the ultimate totalizing system is fiction itself, that it is hard, indeed impossible, for a writer to talk about fiction from outside fiction, to rescue and dignify its creatures from the humiliation of being created? The vanity of power, the vanity of human reason, and the vanity of storytelling, of bringing things to life, become interlocking structures in the intellectual and fictional edifice constructed in the triptych of Coetzee’s last three novels. The irony of C’s self-professed “quietism”, “willed obscurity” and “inner emigration” becomes fully intelligible only in the

light of the knowledge that his creator will not allow himself to look away from. The will to be ruled is inseparable from the will to rule, and together they lie at the heart of fiction, as they do at the heart of everything human and inhuman: “What the great authors are masters of is authority.” (Sen, 2007)

This illuminates Rayment’s image of the author’s (Costello’s) creatures as caged animals in *Slow Man* (quoted in Chapter 2), and explains why Costello (or Coetzee) presents herself as an amanuensis, secretary or midwife, and also why, even though Costello valorizes the sympathetic imagination in *The Lives of Animals*, she questions the power and authority of fiction on many occasions elsewhere. Coetzee is aware of the potential authoritarianism in being an author, hence his espousal of Dostoevsky and Bakhtin’s polyphony. The question to be answered in this and the next chapter is whether Coetzee succeeds in *The Lives of Animals* in creating a truly polyphonic novel by employing the resources of the Socratic dialogue. The fact that critics and reviewers have struggled to work out his own views on the issue of animal rights suggests that he does in fact succeed.

Another question to be addressed is whether Costello misuses her sources in *The Lives of Animals*. According to Michael Bell:

While dramatizing the experience in Costello, Coetzee’s narrative neither endorses nor dissents from her views. And it is similarly neutral on her interpretations of other authors. In drawing other writers into the powerful vortex of her lecture she radically traduces almost all of them and, if she were to be seen as a straightforward mouthpiece for Coetzee, then his readings would be at times questionable and at others disingenuous. For the innocent reader is nowhere tipped off that some of the authors most heavily criticized by Costello have expressed precisely the views she goes on to articulate against them. She unwittingly plagiarizes the very writers she excoriates. But as Costello’s readings they are entirely in character. She misreads her authors because she leaps over their terms and discourse.

Her antipathy to their way of thinking blinds her to what they are saying.

(Bell, 2006, 176)

Bell believes the reason for this is that Costello has already made the leap to a new worldview where humans are recognised to be continuous with animals, whereas many in her audience are much slower in making this conceptual adjustment, hence their hostility to her (Bell, 2006, 176-77). In other terms, taken from a historian of science, Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn, 1970), Costello can be said to have made a *paradigm shift* from an anthropocentric and speciesist worldview to a biocentric one, the two worldviews being *incommensurable*, and hence communication between them being difficult if not impossible.² Bell refers to Wittgenstein, to whom Kuhn is also indebted (Kuhn, 1970, 44-45), “for whom mutual understanding depended on a shared ‘form of life’ ” (Bell, 2006, 182). It may be because Costello does not share the fundamental prejudice of speciesism with her audience that her views are met with hostility and incomprehension. This also explains the two very different responses of readers to *The Lives of Animals*: non-vegetarians tend to be hostile or uncomprehending, whereas vegetarians tend to be sympathetic and understanding. Thus Costello’s perceived misogyny and madness may actually be a result of her operating with different fundamental assumptions, assumptions that she does not share with most of her listeners. Perhaps, since she is apparently aware of the deadlock of rationality when it comes to competing fundamental assumptions, she has to use the poetic faculty of the sympathetic imagination and an appeal to people to look into their hearts, to break the deadlock.

In yet other terms, Peter Singer has called speciesism an ‘ideology’ (Singer, 2002, 236) and writes that we have to make a ‘mental switch’ (Singer, 2002, xxiii) in order to become aware of our prejudices against and our oppression of animals. By opposing the speciesist ideology with her own non-speciesist and radically egalitarian one, Costello can be seen as a hero-ideologue, to use Bakhtin’s terms. Also using Bakhtin’s terms, Costello can be said to be a midwife to a new way of perceiving the world, which she manages by forcing people to confront their deepest prejudices, in

²Kuhn, however, uses the term ‘paradigm’ in a precise scientific sense rather than in the more general sense of a ‘world view.’ See (Northover *et al.*, 2008, 104).

this case speciesism. This suggests that the charges of misology can be turned back on Costello's critics.

Costello's alleged misuse of her sources is the converse of her failure to use philosophical and poetic texts that could support her argument, as was pointed out in Chapter 1. In her case it suggests an intolerance of other voices and threatens to turn her discourse into a monologue, except, as was argued in Chapter 2, she is aware of her own ignorance, like a Socratic figure. In Coetzee's case, however, his device of including references can clearly be seen as polyphonic, since each source represents a new voice, a different point of view, none authoritative and all adding to the complexity of the debate, to the openness of the dialogue. By summoning all these voices and provoking them to speak, Costello, as Socratic midwife, creates a dialogue through which the truth emerges in a Socratic dialectic.

The Lives of Animals has also been described and explored as an academic novel (or novella), (Coetzee, 1999b, 76) because not only does it concern the academia, a speech delivered to an academic audience at an American university by an Australian poet and academic, but it also contains many scholarly footnotes (which appear in the first two editions of *The Lives of Animals*, but which were removed from *Elizabeth Costello*). All of these footnotes refer to discursive pieces, most of them scientific and philosophical, concerning humans' treatment of animals. The rest of the sources are mainly historical and deal largely with the Nazis' treatment of Jews and with Franz Kafka. Besides the discursive material, Costello also alludes to and discusses literary works by Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ted Hughes and Jonathan Swift.

Coetzee makes use of two types of philosophical sources in *The Lives of Animals*. The first concerns pieces about humans' treatment of animals written by various philosophers and thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition. These come mainly from the book co-edited by Tom Regan and Peter Singer (Regan & Singer, 1976), already mentioned in the previous chapter. What is striking about Coetzee's use of this book and extracts from it is that he chooses only excerpts written by the major Western philosophers preceding the twentieth century, and only those that deny animals any rights, despite the book having many passages that are in favour,

if not of animal rights, of treating animals better, and pieces written in the twentieth century.

The second type of philosophical literature Coetzee uses consists of twentieth century philosophical and scientific writings both for and against giving rights to nonhuman animals. The arguments in favour of animal rights come mainly from Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (1993) and the ones against from Michael Leahy (1991). Much of this literature belongs to what can broadly be called the Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-American) tradition of analytic and linguistic philosophy, a tradition the critique of which by MacIntyre seems to have suited Coetzee's purposes, as was argued in Chapter 1. This chapter will investigate in more detail the use to which Coetzee puts his various sources, scientific, literary and philosophical. It may seem as though Costello's use of these sources is monologic, since she evokes each as an authority, but in fact her use of them should be seen as dialogic, since each source is invoked as a fully independent voice, none being privileged above the others, all of them contributing to a polyphony of voices.

While *The Lives of Animals* has been called a Platonic dialogue and an academic novel(la), it is important to remember that it was originally delivered by Coetzee as a pair of Tanner lectures. Thus not only would the topic have surprised Coetzee's audience, who would most probably have been expecting a discussion about fiction rather than animals, but the form would have been very defamiliarizing, in that it is a story about a famous (but fictional) female novelist who has been invited to deliver two lectures at a fictional gathering much like the Tanner Lectures at Princeton University. Coetzee thus imaginatively transforms what is usually a monological mode of philosophical argument, namely the lecture, into something dialogical. This reflexive device creates multiple ironies throughout *The Lives of Animals*, a form of what Bakhtin calls the reduced laughter of the Socratic dialogues, and it also asserts the power of the fictional (narrative) mode over the philosophical mode, itself a major theme of Costello's lectures. It also means that Coetzee's Tanner Lectures are to be seen as dramatic performances rather than merely discursive arguments.

In terms of structure, *The Lives of Animals* is divided into two parts with various dramatic “scenes” or “situations” in each, unified according to the perspective of Costello’s son, John Bernard, an apparently impartial observer, and narrated in the third person, present tense. The first part of *The Lives of Animals*, entitled “The Philosophers and the Animals”, consists of four scenes: John’s fetching his mother from the airport and hosting her; Costello’s lecture (the bulk of the first part) the next day after lunch; questions from the audience; and the supper. The second part, entitled “The Poets and the Animals”, consists of eight scenes: Norma and John’s conversation after the supper; Abraham Stern’s letter awaiting Costello and John the next morning at the university; Costello’s seminar, most of which John misses because he has a class and then a meeting; Costello’s answers to questions on her talk; John and Costello’s conversation while they walk to her last session; the debate between Costello and O’Hearne; John and Norma’s conversation in bed; and John’s taking Costello to the airport early the next morning.

The strength of this structure is that it allows the animal rights debate to be explored in various contexts and from many points of view, the various dramatic contexts furthering both the syncretism, namely the juxtaposition of various points of view, and the anacrisis, namely the provocation of word by word, to use Bakhtin’s terms. The thesis will now proceed with a close analysis of the first part of *The Lives of Animals*, namely “The Philosophers and the Animals.”

While Elizabeth Costello is the central character of *The Lives of Animals*, the events of the two parts of the story are perceived, as has been indicated, from the perspective of her son, John, as is the case in “What Is Realism?” The narrative voice can be described as *erlebte rede*, namely third person intimate, focusing on John’s subjective experience and the words and behaviour of the other characters largely as perceived by John. Thus we do not have direct access to Costello’s subjective thoughts and feelings, as we do in most of the other stories in *Elizabeth Costello*, with the exception of “What Is Realism?” What is striking about John’s perspective is his degree of emotional detachment from the events (although the true extent of his detachment is debatable). His detachment resembles the “blank receptiveness”

that he noted on his mother's face, "a face without personality" (Coetzee, 2003, 4) in "What Is Realism?" thus making John an ideal medium through which the events can be recorded without the author's imposing his interpretations on them. In this way, John as the focus of the narrator is even closer to John the author than Costello is, and thereby seems to complicate the relation of mother/author to child/creation.

However, although he seems admirably neutral and objective, one would expect his emotions to be more fully engaged, since the two other major characters are his mother and wife, who are portrayed as very emotional and passionate, and hostile to each other. His emotional detachment has been interpreted as symptomatic of the abstracted male ego or disembodied intellect, out of touch with his feelings, including the positive emotions of sympathy and compassion, although it could also be seen as representative of his profession of physical scientist.

The first thing to note about the opening scene is the way the characters can be seen, at least in part, as ideologues, not simply in what they say, but in what they represent and embody. For instance, the figures of Costello, the novelist, and Norma, the philosopher, embody the two-part structure of the novel and the battle between the poets and the philosophers. Thus, Costello, a famous novelist, represents poetry, or fiction, and the humanities, but chooses to discuss animal issues:

On the basis of her reputation as a novelist, this fleshy, white-haired lady has been invited to Appleton to speak on any subject she elects; and she has responded by electing to speak, not about herself and her fiction, as her sponsors would no doubt like, but about a hobbyhorse of hers, animals. (Coetzee, 1999b, 16)

The word "hobbyhorse" is disparaging, and it is not clear whether it represents John's attitude or that of the author. Either way, it shows Coetzee's ability to distance himself from the views of his characters—to respect the independence of their voices—even those of Costello's, which were shown in Chapter 1 to correspond very closely to Coetzee's own views. It also indicates a Socratic self-critical attitude.

John Bernard represents science, since he “is assistant professor of physics and astronomy” (Coetzee, 1999b, 16), and his surname may be a reference to the philosopher of science and animals, Bernard Rollin, whose work is cited later in *The Lives of Animals* and who was mentioned in Chapter 2 (although this is not to suggest that John shares Bernard’s interest in animal issues). Norma can be said to represent philosophy, in particular analytic philosophy: “Norma holds a Ph.D. in philosophy with a specialism in the philosophy of mind” (Coetzee, 1999b, 17). Her specialism thus brings her in direct conflict with Costello; indeed, she “is at present writing for a philosophy journal a review essay on language-learning experiments upon primates” (17), which makes her particularly critical of Costello’s focus on apes in her lecture. This conflict is deepened by hostile family relations: “Hostilities are resumed almost at once” (15) and John reflects that “Norma and his mother have never liked each other” (16). Significantly, it is mealtime that brings the hostilities out, a plot situation that Coetzee uses later very effectively in the college dinner to stimulate dialogue on human-animal relations. Furthermore, Norma’s name links her with *nomos*, namely conventions or values (the significance of which will become clear later), whereas John’s occupation links him with facts and science, which may explain his detachment and his apparent indifference to the views of others: “He himself has no opinions one way or the other” (17). Thus the married couple embody the distinction between mind and matter, psyche and physic, value and fact. Indeed, there is conflict even between John and Norma:

Having moved with him to Appleton, she has been unable to find a teaching position. This is a cause of bitterness to her, and of conflict between the two of them. (17)

No doubt, having no teaching post helps to deepen Norma’s feelings of animosity towards Costello, possibly fuelling resentment of the latter’s success. Despite her Ph.D. and her specialism in the philosophy of mind, it would be wrong to take Norma’s criticisms of Costello’s ideas as authoritative, especially because her criticisms are

strongly coloured by her emotional hostility towards her mother-in-law. Norma dismisses Costello's views with terms like "jejune" and "sentimental" (16) and "refuses to change the children's diet to suit what she calls 'your mother's delicate sensibilities' " (16). Nonetheless, Norma has a strong and independent voice on the issue, no matter how much her views may differ from Costello's (or Coetzee's). The views she expresses seem to have an affinity with Anglo-American analytic philosophy, a paradigm for which Costello has little sympathy, especially the views of the philosopher Michael Leahy, as will be seen later.

John's attitude towards his mother is described in much less sympathetic terms in *The Lives of Animals* than it is in "What Is Realism?" In the latter he is seen as her dedicated and loving protector:

He is here, with her, out of love. He cannot imagine her getting through this trial without him at her side. He stands by her because he is her son, her loving son. (Coetzee, 2003, 3)

In *The Lives of Animals*, confirming the idea that he represents the disembodied Kantian intellect, he sees her views merely in terms of rights, thus betraying an unwillingness to engage with them sympathetically:

His mother is entitled to her convictions, he believes. If she wants to spend her declining years making propaganda against cruelty to animals, that is her right. In a few days, blessedly, she will be on her way to her next destination, and he will be able to get back to his work. (Coetzee, 1999b, 17)

In the second dramatic situation, or scene, Costello's lecture (or Coetzee's lecture-within-a-lecture) avoids becoming monological through its fictional setting, its reflexivity, Costello's liberal use of footnotes, her use of different types of sources (literary, scientific, historical and philosophical), and through its perspectivism, namely John's personal observations and Norma's comments to her husband. Thus several voices are brought in to play in a rich polyphony that refuses to privilege any voice and prevents final closure, yet allows the truth to be born in the interplay of dialogue.

Costello's first reference is to a previous speech of Coetzee's, "What Is Realism?", also using the Costello persona, which has been dealt with in Chapter 2. What was omitted, however, was the point that Coetzee himself is distancing himself from his audience, comparing himself to Kafka and Kafka's ape, perhaps suggesting that he is merely aping philosophical behaviour in his Tanner Lectures, hence his fictional mode: rather than deliver a philosophical lecture about fiction, he chooses to deliver a performance in a fictional mode about philosophy (amongst other topics). It is also an example of the rich irony of *The Lives of Animals*.

The second reference is to Frederick Karl's book (Karl, 1991), entitled *Franz Kafka* the subtitle of which—*Representative Man*—Coetzee omits. Coetzee refers again to Karl's book in relation to Kafka's eating habits in the second part of *The Lives of Animals*. This time it is an unmotivated reference since Costello is not lecturing at the time; instead, it is associated with Norma's words to John. Here Coetzee refers to one of Karl's interpretations of "Report to the Academy":

But in larger terms the ape trying to 'ape' others recalls the position of the Prague Jew attempting to imitate the Gentile, to acculturate or assimilate, to take on characteristics that will let him 'get out' of his cage or situation. But the irony is that those he is imitating to achieve manhood are not themselves quite men. (Karl, 1991, 558)

It is clear that Costello represents this source accurately, although she differs from its interpretation of Kafka's ape as merely representing the Jews in early twentieth century Europe, and Franz Kafka in particular, suggesting that Kafka's Ape can be taken literally to be an ape. This would suit her purposes to prove that some artists can enter into the experience of animals by means of the sympathetic imagination. Ironically, however, Franz Kafka's Ape has been humanised and is no longer "merely" an ape. Indeed, Kafka can also then be accused of anthropomorphising his ape. Either way, Red Peter's report to an academy cannot be taken as a representative example of animal experience and, therefore, as a successful instance of the sympathetic imagination's capacity to enter into that type of experience.

After Costello has compared herself to Kafka's Ape, John reflects on how poor her delivery is and dreads what she is about to discuss, namely death. This prepares the reader or listener for what to expect, but also pre-empts criticism about the morbidity of the topic. Costello then says she will spare the audience the details of the horrors of animal production and experimentation, "reminding you only that the horrors I here omit are nevertheless at the center of this lecture" (Coetzee, 1999b, 19) and goes on to discuss the awful scale of the murder of Jews in Nazi concentration camps—"These are numbers that numb the mind" (19)—before discussing the willed ignorance of ordinary people of these atrocities. This section of her speech is indebted to Daniel Goldhagen (Goldhagen, 1996) not only for the numbers involved in the mass slaughter of Jews but also for the language she uses. For instance the word "production facilities" (Coetzee, 1999b, 19) to describe factory farms can be found in Goldhagen (Goldhagen, 1996, 167-68).

Costello concretizes her descriptions by using Treblinka as her example. She maintains that "a sickness of the soul continued to mark that generation [of Germans]" (Coetzee, 1999b, 20), claiming that even those were marked who were ignorant of the evil actions. Now these are very provocative words, and an educated audience like Costello's should already have drawn the conclusion of the analogy, namely that they themselves may be as stained by evil for complicity in the massive abuse of animals as ordinary Germans were for knowing about the genocide. There is no escaping the relentless power of Costello's argument, especially when she goes on to point out how the language of the stockyard and slaughterhouse was used to express outrage at how Jews were mass slaughtered. Of course, her point is that it is wrong not only to treat humans in such a way, but animals too.

Costello does accurately use her source when she says: "There were camps all over the Reich, nearly six thousand in Poland alone, untold thousands in Germany proper. Few Germans lived more than a few kilometers from a camp of some kind" (Coetzee, 1999b, 20). As Goldhagen notes: "Poland alone, the primary site for the vast genocidal slaughter of the Jews, as well as the area which the Germans were transforming into a vast slave plantation, contained over 5,800 camps" (Goldhagen,

1996, 171). He goes on to point out that:

It is not known how many camps existed in Germany, because the research has not been done. In the small state of Hessen alone, it is known that at least 606 camps—one for every five-by-seven-mile area—gave an apocalyptic shape to the physical and social landscape. Berlin, the country’s capital and showpiece, was itself the home to 645 camps just for forced laborers. It would be interesting to ascertain what the mean physical distance was between Germans and a camp, and how little removed the most distant spot in Germany was from a camp. (Goldhagen, 1996, 171)

Goldhagen also contends that “contrary to what much of the scholarly literature suggests, the regime made no serious effort to spare the German people from exposure to these institutions of violence, subjugation and death” (Goldhagen, 1996, 171). Costello is even scrupulous enough to point out that “[n]ot every camp was a death camp” (Coetzee, 1999b, 20). Nonetheless, despite being true to her source, she differs from Goldhagen’s assessment of the respective treatment of Jews and cattle. Goldhagen notes:

The bizarre world of Germany during the Nazi period produced this telling juxtaposition between the solicitude owed animals and the pitilessness and cruelty shown Jews. Orders not to cram Jews too tightly into cattle cars never came the way of the Germans in Poland who deported Jews to their deaths, typically by using kicks and blows to force as many Jews into the railway cars as was possible. The freight cars carried both cattle and Jews. Which of the two was to be handled more decently, more humanely, was clear to all involved. The cows were not to be crushed in the cars because of the food they produced. But this was not the only reason. The Germans, throughout this period, took great pains to ensure that animals were treated decently. In their minds, it was a moral imperative. (Goldhagen, 1996, 270)

Here Goldhagen betrays his speciesism, since animals being loaded into cattle cars to go to their slaughter cannot be said to have been treated “decently” or with “solicitude.” Costello would maintain that the cattle were also treated inhumanely. However, she does not entertain the possibility that Jews were treated even worse than cattle, and that, while Nazis passed laws, signed by Hitler himself, to protect animals from cruelty (Hitler, 1933), Jews were excluded from protection of the law. Charles Patterson exposes as Nazi propaganda the myth that Hitler was a vegetarian and compassionate toward animals (Patterson, 2002, 125-29).

Coetzee could have made much more of Goldhagen, for whom the camps were only one aspect—albeit an important one—of all the institutions of terror and death during the Nazi period. He could have used Goldhagen to show how widespread anti-semitism was at the time and how complicit ordinary Germans were in the persecution and destruction of the Jews. Nonetheless, in what Costello does say, the voice of Goldhagen is clear enough.

Costello goes on to assert of the Germans of the Nazi generation that “[w]e do not accept that people with crimes on their conscience can be healthy and happy”, that “in the very signs of their normality (their healthy appetites, their hearty laughter) we see proof of how deeply seated pollution is in them” (Coetzee, 1999b, 21) and that “It was and is inconceivable that people who *did not know* (in that special sense) about the camps can be fully human” (21). Costello’s use of the word “normality” in this context is very significant, suggesting that an entire society can be morally polluted. It also implies a judgement of Norma’s unwillingness to understand Costello’s viewpoint.

Implicit in her words are the Socratic doctrines that all sins arise from ignorance, that virtue is knowledge and that only the virtuous are happy. The ignorance from which the sin arose was not ignorance of what was happening in the camps, but rather ignorance of oneself, and for this reason the people lost their humanity. “Not knowing” what was happening in the camps meant failing to look into one’s heart, or closing one’s heart to the suffering of others, or a failure to recognise a common humanity with the victims of genocide. Hamlyn explains the apparently paradoxical Socratic doctrine—“the doctrine that the weakness of the will (*akrasia*) is impossible;

if a man is led by passions to do that which he apparently knows he should not do, he cannot really have had that knowledge in the first place”—thus: “Socrates held to this doctrine . . . because he meant by knowledge all that is involved in the ‘know thyself’ and the part that that plays in goodness of soul” (Hamlyn, 1987, 41).

Costello seems to be using the Holocaust analogy to make two crucial points. The first is that just as all Germans were aware of the camps yet chose to ignore them, so everyone today knows about abattoirs and animal laboratories but chooses to put them out of their minds. Second, like the “Germans of a particular generation” (Coetzee, 1999b, 20) it is possible for an entire society to be complicit in evil, as all people who are complicit in the exploitation of animals may be. According to Goldhagen, in Nazi Germany a virulent anti-Semitism was considered “normal” (38).

The story of the White Rose resistance movement in Nazi Germany is quite instructive in showing how Germans were aware of the death camps. The students and lecturers of this resistance movement printed thousands of copies of six different pamphlets condemning the Nazis and the mass murder of Jews, and distributed these widely through the mail and at universities, but they were largely ignored.³ Most of the members of the White Rose were eventually caught by the Nazis and executed. In the case of resisting the exploitation of animals, however, the ultimate sacrifice is not required, but rather a few changes to one’s lifestyle. Thus ordinary people who wish to avoid complicity in animal suffering do not have the excuse of the Germans and Poles that “they did not know, could not afford to know, for their own sake” (19).

Costello then brings her discussion of good and evil home to her audience by mentioning her drive around Waltham that morning, saying that although she saw none of the institutions of animal exploitation, she knows they are there: “They are all around us as we speak, only we do not, in a certain sense, know about them” (21). This, of course, implicates her audience directly in the topic of her speech and completes her analogy between the Holocaust and animal exploitation: “we are

³This information comes from a pamphlet accompanying “The White Rose: Exhibition on the Student Resistance Movement against Hitler, Munich 1942/43” (Weiße Rose Stiftung, 2006).

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” (21).

She goes on to forestall the objection to the analogy which maintains that the killing of animals is justified because their bodies are consumed, whereas Jews were murdered as part of a “metaphysical enterprise” (21). Costello quotes Philippe Lacoue-Barthe on the “purely metaphysical decision” for the Extermination, once again using her source correctly (Lacoue-Barthe, 1990, 17).

Costello moves from discussing the Holocaust to explaining her reasons (ironically) for rejecting the discourse of the Western philosophical rationalist tradition. She paraphrases Aquinas’s argument for the dominion of man over animal:

“I could tell you, for instance, what I think of Saint Thomas’s argument that, because man alone is made in the image of God and partakes in the being of God, how we treat animals is of no importance except insofar as being cruel to animals may accustom us to being cruel to men.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 22)

It is evident that her paraphrase is true to the spirit of the original, for which Coetzee cites Regan and Singer’s *Animal Rights*, which may seem remarkable given the antipathy she expresses towards his way of thinking:

And if any passage of Holy Writ seem to forbid us to be cruel to dumb animals, for instance to kill a bird with its young: this is either to remove man’s thoughts from being cruel to other men, and lest through being cruel to animals one become cruel to human beings (Regan & Singer, 1976, 59)

This argument is very similar to Kant’s views on the matter (Regan, 2001, 13-14). Although Costello’s criticism of Aquinas is meant to be an attack on the rationalism of philosophy, it could be argued that it is more an attack on religion, specifically Christianity. Indeed, it is an attack on the uncritical assumption, originating in the Old Testament, that God has given humankind dominion over the rest of nature, an

assumption that most philosophers in the Western tradition have failed to question (Singer, 2002, 186-87). Thus the independence of Aquinas's voice is respected as part of the polyphony of *The Lives of Animals*.

Costello then poses a rhetorical question to her audience concerning her decision to avoid a philosophical mode in her speech and she answers it by returning to the analogy between herself and Red Peter: "Do I in fact have a choice? If I do not subject my discourse to reason, whatever that is, what is left for me but to gibber and emote and knock over my glass of water and generally make a monkey of myself?" (Coetzee, 1999b, 23). There is here the subdued laughter that Bakhtin identifies as one of the features of a Socratic dialogue. Indeed, there is clearly a Socratic, self-mocking irony. The repetition of question marks and the conjunction "and" contribute to this humorous effect, although at the bottom of it there is a profound ethical seriousness. The questions can be seen as Socratic, provoking the audience to think things through for themselves. The reference to "tail" and "monkey" is amusing but inappropriate, since Red Peter is an ape, not a monkey, and therefore has no tail. Indeed, Kafka, who identifies Red Peter as a chimpanzee, does not make that mistake (Kafka, 2007, 226).

Immediately following her rejection of the philosophical mode, Costello proceeds to narrate a story, a mode she uses several times in her speech, thus asserting the power of fiction over philosophy, imagination over reason. She tells the rather pathetic story of "Srinivasa Ramanujan, born in India in 1887, captured and transported [much like Red Peter was] to Cambridge, England, where unable to tolerate the climate and the diet and the academic regime, he sickened, dying afterwards at the age of thirty-three" (Coetzee, 1999b, 23-4). Despite Ramanujan's being possibly the "greatest intuitive mathematician of our time" (24), Costello doubts that he was closer to God just "because his mind . . . was at one, or more at one than anyone else's we know of, with the being of reason" (22). Once again, Costello concludes her story with a series of questions, thus provoking her listeners to think. She does, however, suggest answers to some of her questions, ones which implicitly ridicule the academic establishment's self-absorption in rationalism. Thus the grand claims to the universality of rationality

are exposed, in a concretised and historicised story, to be nothing more than a certain academic protocol, in which it is implied that trained mathematicians are the apex of humanity. Furthermore, the story implicates this particularised version of rationalism in colonialism and violence.

Costello suggests our admiration for reason is tautological and narcissistic, “a rather narrow self-regenerating intellectual tradition whose forte is reasoning, in the same way that the forte of chess-players is playing chess, which for its own motives it tries to install at the center of the universe” (Coetzee, 1999b, 25), and references a work by Paul Davies, omitting its subtitle (Davies, 1992, 148-50). There is no mention of chess on the page that Costello references, although her words “the great book of nature” (Coetzee, 1999b, 24) echo the following: “ ‘The book of nature,’ opined Galileo, ‘is written in mathematical language’ ” (Davies, 1992, 148). A better reference would be in Chapter 1 where Davies argues for the universe being a rational system—otherwise our rationality and modern science would not be as spectacularly successful as they are (Davies, 1992, 2-3, 7), and poses the question: “If human reasoning reflects something of the structure of the physical world, would it be true to say that the world is a manifestation of reason?” (Davies, 1992, 7).

Davies’s book takes its title and its epigraph from the well known and controversial closing lines of Steven Hawking’s popular book *A Short History of Time*:

If we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would truly know the mind of God. (Davies, 1992, vii)

In Davies’s own words:

I belong to the group of scientists who do not subscribe to a conventional religion but nevertheless deny that the universe is a purposeless accident. Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly

that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. (Davies, 1992, xvi)

And:

The success of the scientific method at unlocking the secrets of nature is so dazzling it can blind us to the greatest scientific miracle of all: *science works*. Scientists themselves normally take it for granted that we live in a rational, ordered cosmos subject to precise laws that can be uncovered by human reasoning. Yet why this should be so remains a tantalizing mystery. Why should human beings have the ability to discover and understand the principles on which the universe runs? [Davies's emphasis] (Davies, 1992, 2)

It is clear why Costello would object to such immodest claims on behalf of reason. Midgley, too, objects to such pseudo-religious pronouncements and has written books (Midgley, 2002b) (Midgley, 1992) taking scientifically-trained authors of popular books on science to task for this. Davies discusses Popper (Davies, 1992, 12) but fails to mention Popper's insights that no theory can ever be conclusively verified, that even the best scientific theories remain no more than tentative approximations to the truth and that all knowledge is conjectural or hypothetical (Popper, 2002b, 249). It is not surprising that Davies refers favourably to Plato throughout his book (Davies, 1992, 21-24, 74-75, 90), since both appear to subscribe to an absolute rationalism, despite Davies's acknowledgement of Popper, whose fallibilist philosophy stands in strong contrast to Plato's unqualified rationalism. Therefore, whereas Costello presents Davies's views fairly, her use of his book does not succeed as a more general attack on philosophers or on scientists who avoid claiming certainty for scientific knowledge and who avoid pseudo-religious pronouncements, or even the rationalist tradition as a whole which she attacks throughout *The Lives of Animals*. The fact that Coetzee has her choose a popular work, less rigorously scientific and with religious undertones, also seems to set science up as a straw man. Nonetheless, in terms of syncrisis, Coetzee respects the independence of Davies's voice, presenting

it as an extreme alternative to Costello's.

Michael Bell's suggestive comment that Costello traduces some of her sources, even while plagiarizing them, has not been borne out so far. One could expect her to represent her historical sources accurately because they support what she says about Nazism, but she also seems to represent accurately the sources whose views she disagrees with, respecting Davies as an independent voice in a polyphony of diverse voices. On the other hand, her use of Davies's book as representative of the philosophers and the scientists as a whole seems to be a misrepresentation, although it can be said to be a fair representation of a certain strand of comprehensive rationalism.

Costello's discussion of reason follows logically on to a discussion of the voicelessness of animals and "the voice of man, raised in reason" (Coetzee, 1999b, 25). She uses a metaphor of war: "Man went to war with the lion and the bull, and after many generations won that war definitively. Today these creatures have no more power" (25). She thus links the voice with reason, voicelessness with powerlessness, and reason, once again, with man's violent dominion over animals. The suggestion is that man's use of the criterion of reason to justify his dominion over animals has no ethical basis other than "might is right." She personifies the defeated animals as captives, heroically refusing to speak to us, except for some of the great apes. Costello thereby returns to Red Peter once more, but this time in relation to the Great Ape Project (Cavalieri & Singer, 1993).

Costello's use of Stephen R.L. Clark's "Apes and the Idea of Kindred" in *The Great Ape Project* seems to be inaccurate, since Clark is not arguing that we treat apes as our equals because we share reason (or any other characteristic) in common with them (Coetzee, 1999b, 26)—indeed, his essay attacks this essentialist kind of thinking—but because we share a common evolutionary history:

The real danger to a decent humanism (that is, to the rule of law, the rejection of oppression and genocide) is not from those who emphasise our kinship with the other apes, but from those who rest the demands of humanism only on resemblance. Resemblances are easily denied or altered; historical relationships are not. (Cavalieri & Singer, 1993, 122)

Thus, while Costello is not completely true to the precise details of Clark's argument, she is true to its spirit, especially to its argument that we should expand our idea of humanity to include the higher apes. Indeed, although she references Clark, she speaks of "voices" in the plural (Coetzee, 1999b, 25, 26), perhaps intending that Clark is somehow representative of the spirit of *The Great Ape Project* as a whole.

The Great Ape Project was founded by Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri in 1993 as "an international attempt to expand the community of beings who we recognize as having certain basic rights, urging in particular that we extend to chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans the rights to life, liberty, and protection from torture" (Singer, 2002, xiii). Peter Singer denies that this focus on the great apes represents a narrowing of his position "that all sentient beings have interests and are entitled to equal consideration of the interests that they have" (Singer, 2002, xiii), arguing that if apes are granted rights then this will be the first step towards the liberation of all sentient beings. In 2006, partly as a result of the Great Ape Project, the Spanish parliament was considering passing a law recognising rights for the great apes (Warwick, 2006, 6), a commitment the re-elected government (2008) has renewed. However, in 2002 Germany was the first European country to recognise animal rights, possibly as a result of the country's Nazi history.

A small inaccuracy can also be found in Costello's list of the rights due to the great apes: "At least those rights that we accord mentally defective specimens of the species *Homo sapiens*: the right to life, the right not to be subjected to pain or harm, the right to equal protection before the law" (Coetzee, 1999b, 26), since according to the "Declaration" in *The Great Ape Project* the rights are actually life, individual liberty and the prohibition of torture (Cavalieri & Singer, 1993, 6). Perhaps Costello (or Coetzee) is making a subtle allusion to Kafka's "Before the Law" in her last item. Perhaps, also, it is because Red Peter, in Kafka's "Report to an Academy," denies that animals possess or comprehend the abstract concept of liberty and instead, when confined, merely seek to escape their confinement:

I deliberately do not say freedom. . . . No, it wasn't freedom I was after.

Just a way out; to the right, to the left, wherever it might be; . . . (Kafka,

2007, 229)

In fact Costello goes on later to discuss the confinement of animals in some detail.

The footnote attached to Costello's words concerning the rights of apes refers to another essay in *The Great Ape Project*, "Personhood, Property and Legal Competence" by Gary L. Francione. Again, it is not entirely clear why Costello included the quotation from this particular article, except perhaps to forestall objections to giving rights to apes on the grounds that they cannot be held legally accountable for their actions, cannot commit crimes, just like "children or mental incompetents" (Cavalieri & Singer, 1993, 256). The article discusses some legal implications of granting certain rights to animals, specifically those rights listed in the "Declaration." It also discusses the case of *State v. LaVasseur* which concerns a student who freed two dolphins from a laboratory's dolphin tanks in Hawaii, a case that Mary Midgley discusses in more detail in an article cited a bit later by Costello. Nonetheless, Costello misrepresents neither the letter nor the spirit of Francione's essay, thus respecting his independent voice.

However, even though Costello is sympathetic to the Great Ape Project, she objects to the way many of the writers equate great apes with children or mental incompetents. She says that "[t]hat is not what Red Peter was striving for when he wrote ... the life history that, in November of 1917, he proposed to read to the Academy of Science. Whatever else it may have been, his report to the academy was not a plea to be treated as a mentally defective human being, a simpleton" (Coetzee, 1999b, 26). It should be remembered that both Peter Singer and Tom Regan use the example of marginal human cases like infants and the severely retarded as analogous to animals in order to justify equal treatment for animals and that this, it was argued, is one reason for Costello's rejection of their approaches to animal rights. She returns to this topic in her debate with O'Hearne the next day (62).

After drawing a comparison between herself and Red Peter, Costello goes on to compare Kafka's Red Peter and Köhler's Sultan, showing how very differently the writer and the scientist perceived their respective apes. In both cases she narrates part of their stories, thus drawing the reader or listener in to a sympathetic understanding

of the apes involved. She fancifully but intriguingly speculates that Kafka may have read Köhler's *The Mentality of Apes* (1917) before writing "Report to an Academy." The references in her footnote are not very helpful and do not settle the question.

However, more importantly, the parallel stories are central to Costello's argument that writers like Kafka—unlike scientists like Köhler—make use of their faculty of the sympathetic imagination to enter into the experience of animals. Kafka enters into Red Peter's experiences by making the ape the narrator of "Report to an Academy." Costello does something similar in recounting Köhler's experiments from the perspective of the ape Sultan, "the best of his pupils, in a certain sense the prototype of Red Peter" (Coetzee, 1999b, 28). By naming Sultan and relating him to Red Peter, Costello humanises him, or at least embodies him as an individual, thereby resisting any temptation to discuss apes in the abstract. She uses the *erlebte rede* narrative voice, narrating events from Sultan's perspective and describing his thoughts, repeatedly using the formation "One thinks: . . ." (28). Her use of "[o]ne" rather than "he" forces the reader or listener to identify more closely with Sultan's thoughts. Furthermore she uses many interrogative sentences, mimicking Sultan's supposed thought processes, but also encouraging the reader to think about the meaningfulness of the narrowly instrumentalist tasks set for Sultan. According to Costello:

"At every turn Sultan is driven to think the less interesting thought. From the purity of speculation (Why do men behave like this?) he is relentlessly propelled toward lower, practical instrumental reason (How does one use this to get that?) and thus to the acceptance of himself primarily as an organism with an appetite that needs to be satisfied." (29)

Thus Sultan is forced to ask "how" rather than "why" questions by the tasks set for him, which Costello will later call "imbecile" (62). Some of the abstract speculation Costello ascribes to Sultan concerns his history of forced confinement which "leads him to ask questions about the justice of the universe and the place of this penal colony [perhaps a reference to another Kafka story, "In the Penal Colony"] in it" and his realisation that "on no account dare he give up, for on his shoulders rests the

responsibility of representing apedom” (29). Although her ascription of metaphysical speculation and “why” questions to Sultan can be considered very fanciful and anthropomorphic, since apes lack the language to formulate such abstract thoughts, Costello is correct to draw attention to the social nature of Sultan’s attempts to solve his tasks, and to question Köhler’s narrowly reductionistic scientific view of the ape. As Midgley notes:

It is right to notice here . . . that tool use, like counting, is rather alien to a chimp’s natural *interests*. His problems are not usually physical, but social, and his attention in a difficulty goes at once to a social solution. Thus, Köhler remarked that he had trouble in keeping his apes to the task of getting the suspended bananas themselves, since their first idea in this predicament was to lead him to them and ask him to lift them down. (Midgley, 2002a, 220-221)

Michael Bell argues that:

Costello imagines a different thought process for Sultan in which, instead of puzzling out how to reach the bananas, he wonders why the keeper has suddenly withdrawn the kindly relationship. By a doubled and reversed anthropomorphizing, she imagines the ape having to work out what the human being is thinking or feeling. Objectively speaking, although she does not conceive it in this way, Costello exercises a bracketed anthropomorphizing. She can have no idea what the ape actually experienced, if such a formulation is even meaningful. Her need is simply to challenge Köhler’s version. (Bell, 2006, 180)

Bell notes further, thus correcting Costello’s characterisation of Köhler:

Costello’s reading of Köhler is at variance with the impression made on most readers by his book. Far from isolating Sultan in the way she suggests, Köhler visits an established group of chimpanzees and ends his study with a long appendix on the sociality of chimps whose import is

stated in the opening sentence: ‘It is hardly an exaggeration to say that a chimpanzee kept in solitude is not a real chimpanzee at all’ (*Mentality*, 282). (Bell, 2006, 181)

Even in this case, however, Bell seems to overstate his case that Costello traduces her sources, since the question is not really about the sociality of chimpanzees but about contrasting human perceptions of them, namely the instrumentalist scientific perspective and the poetic sympathetic imagination. Perhaps, then, she cannot be accused of misrepresenting her source, especially since she does indicate how much Köhler’s voice does differ from hers.

Costello returns to the Kafka/Köhler contrast, pointing out the limitations of the latter’s imagination in trying to understand why his “captive chimpanzees lope around the compound in a circle, for all the world like a military band, some of them as naked as the day they were born, some draped in cords or old strips of cloth that they have picked up, some carrying bits of rubbish” (Coetzee, 1999b, 29). Köhler concludes that the chimpanzees do this to relieve boredom, whereas Costello explains their imitation of humans in Kafka’s terms, without explicitly acknowledging him: “the question that truly occupies [Sultan], as it occupies the rat and the cat and every other animal trapped in the hell of the laboratory or zoo, is: Where is home, and how do I get there?” (30). In “Report to an Academy”, Red Peter states: “I say again: I had no desire to imitate humans; I imitated them because I was looking for a way out of my predicament, and for no other reason” (Kafka, 2007, 233). Costello is not merely trying to understand the chimpanzees, as Köhler is, but to sympathise with them.

Costello goes on to compare Red Peter and Franz Kafka, suggesting that both have sacrificed much in “return for the prodigious overdevelopment of the intellect” (Coetzee, 1999b, 30), “including progeny, succession” (30). She contends:

“Hybrids are, or ought to be, sterile; and Kafka saw both himself and Red Peter as hybrids, as monstrous thinking devices mounted inexplicably on suffering animal bodies. The stare that we meet in all the surviving

photographs of Kafka is a stare of pure surprise: surprise, astonishment, alarm. Of all men Kafka is the most insecure in his humanity. *This*, he seems to say: *this* is the image of God?” (30-31)

At this point Norma comments to John that Costello is rambling, thus breaking the spell of her speech, and providing the reader with an opportunity to reflect critically on her words. Later Norma responds with “a sigh of exasperation” and still later produces a derisive “snort” (32) at the points in Costello’s lecture when she discusses her literalism and her ability to imagine her own death. This can be seen as Coetzee’s polyphonic insistence that no voice is to be privileged; it helps prevent Costello’s speech from becoming a monologue.

The next text to be interrogated by Costello is Thomas Nagel’s famous essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (Nagel, 1979a). Costello notes that “Nagel strikes me as an intelligent and not unsympathetic man” (Coetzee, 1999b, 31) and that she can sympathise with him (Coetzee, 1999b, 35), and hence presumably with his voice.

It is in relation to Nagel, however, that Bell’s contention that Costello traduces her sources seems most accurate, since Nagel’s position is, in fact, quite close to Costello’s and thus her scathing criticism of him seems misguided:

She invokes Blake, Lawrence, and Ted Hughes to affirm the integrity of all animals’ lives and to challenge Thomas Nagel’s philosophical exposure of the anthropomorphic fallacy in his essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” Actually, as Hacking pointed out, Nagel is not her opponent but her ally Nagel argues against materialist reductions of consciousness and makes her point in advance. The phenomenon of consciousness in living beings is irreducible and, in denying that we can know what it is *like* to be a bat, Nagel assumes the creature has *some* mode of phenomenological subjectivity. [Bell’s italics] (Bell, 2006, 177)

Nagel even, like Costello, uses the term “sympathetic imagination” and in a positive way, too, writing that when we “sympathetically imagine [a mental state] . . . we put ourselves into a state that resembles it mentally” (Nagel, 1979a, 176) and that

“[s]olipsism, incidentally, results if one misinterprets sympathetic imagination” (176). As Bell points out, Nagel’s argument against the possibility of reducing mental states to physical states means that one cannot reduce animal experience to mere mechanism, as Descartes tried to do. In Nagel’s own terms, “[t]he fact that we cannot expect ever to accommodate in our language a detailed description of Martian or bat phenomenology should not lead us to dismiss as meaningless the claim that bats and Martians have experiences fully comparable in richness of detail to our own” (170) and “[r]eflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language. We can be compelled to recognize the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them” (171).

Bell’s solution to his charge concerning Costello, that “[s]he unwittingly plagiarizes the very writers she excoriates” (Bell, 2006, 176), is that these men, like Bertrand Russell, “had developed elaborate mental substitutes for sympathetic connection” and that “seen in this light, Costello has a rationale for blanking out Köhler’s emphasis on simian sympathies, or Nagel’s on fullness of being, because they have for her the same hollowness as Lawrence saw in the social concern of Russell” (182). Thus while she appears to misrepresent them, she nonetheless correctly seems to expose a lack of true sympathetic feeling in their writings. In this case it is difficult to assess whether or not Costello respects Köhler and Nagel as independent voices, although the fact she can sense their otherness in terms of their actual sympathies, as opposed to their professed sympathies, suggests that she does.

Costello’s argument that it is possible to imagine one’s own death—to “know what it is like to be a corpse” (Coetzee, 1999b, 32)—and therefore possible to imagine what it is to be like a bat, seems both unconvincing and beside the point. Sam Durrant notes that this imagining oneself into a corpse is a thought experiment from Kant, except whereas Kant argues that our ability to imagine our own death is a triumph of transcendent reason, Costello argues for antitranscendence or, rather, descendance, namely embodiment rather than abstract intellect (Durrant, 2006, 129). The syllogism she uses to illustrate her point is interesting, since it is a classical

example from philosophy (Aristotle) which uses the name “Socrates” rather than the personal pronoun “I”. This may be a subtle hint by Coetzee that Costello is a Socratic figure:

“The knowledge we have is not abstract—‘All human beings are mortal, I am a human being, therefore I am mortal’—but embodied. For a moment we *are* that knowledge.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 32)

However, her more positive emphasis on the fullness of animal being and animal joy is far more convincing: “One name for the experience of full being is *joy*” (33), a state of being which she goes on to contrast with “Descartes’s key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell” (33).

Costello returns to the discussion of confinement: “Fullness of being is a state hard to sustain in confinement” (33). Her emphasis on confinement links the motivation behind Red Peter’s becoming human-like and the incarceration of Jews in concentration camps with the facilities of the animal exploitation industries. Costello continues:

“And indeed it is on creatures least able to bear confinement—creatures who least conform to Descartes’s picture of the soul as a pea in a shell, to which further imprisonment is irrelevant—that we see the most devastating effects: in zoos, in laboratories, institutions where the flow of joy that comes from living not *in* or *as* a body but simply from being an embodied being has no place.” (34)

What is especially significant is that Costello is not using the abstract philosophical terms of pain and pleasure but rather the much fuller term “joy,” which involves not just the mental state of an animal but its freedom to move and to flourish in a suitable environment. It is a term that describes a fully embodied existence and which provides a basis for arguing that animals have inherent—and not merely instrumental—value.

The passage quoted immediately above has a footnote in which Costello quotes from the last page of the first chapter, entitled “Why Look at Animals?”, in John Berger’s *About Looking* (Berger, 1980), concerning the extinguishing of the “look

between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society” (Berger, 1980, 26). John Berger’s essay is a profound and poignant account of the physical and cultural marginalisation and disappearance of animals that have occurred since the nineteenth century, culminating in an account of the modern zoo. Amongst other things he shows how the separation and confinement of animals in the artificial environment of the zoo cage have altered their natures so that they only exhibit “lethargy or hyperactivity” (and certainly not joy) (23). The importance of looking is that it is only through the animal gaze of previous eras that humans developed a sense of self (3). Now that animals have all but disappeared we have lost our connection with the rest of nature. Costello’s quotation cannot do justice to the fullness of Berger’s essay, but she cannot be accused of misrepresenting her source.

Moving rather abruptly from the confinement of animals to the incarceration of Jews in concentration and death camps, Costello returns to the Holocaust analogy:

“The question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common—reason, self-consciousness, a soul—with other animals?⁴ (With the corollary that, if we do not, then we are entitled to treat them as we like, imprisoning them, killing them, dishonoring their corpses.) I return to the death camps. The particular horror of the camps, the horror that convinces us that what went on there was a crime against humanity, is not that despite a humanity shared with their victims, the killers treated them like lice. That is too abstract. The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else.”

(Coetzee, 1999b, 34)

Her point seems to be that the mistake of the perpetrators was not to think of some abstract criterion separating Jews from non-Jews or humans from nonhuman animals, but the failure to sympathise imaginatively with the embodied existence of a suffering being, to close one’s heart to the suffering of an other:

⁴It is strange that she does not mention “sentience” since that is the criterion animal rights activists usually use to justify respectful treatment of animals.

“In other words, they closed their hearts. The heart is the seat of a faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another. Sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object, the ‘another,’ as we can see at once when we think of the object not as a bat (‘Can I share the being of a bat?’) but as another human being. There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it.” (34-35)

The main point of Costello’s speech and of Coetzee’s book is, arguably, to encourage the majority of people, who have the capacity to sympathise imaginatively with others, but who have chosen, as a result of culpable, or willed, ignorance, not to do so, to open their hearts. She asserts, “there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” (33). There are, however, problems with her argument. For one, there is the question of *akrasia*, or weakness of the will: a person may know the right thing to do, but lack the will power to do it. For another, her position threatens to collapse into the cruelty/kindness/compassion position, since just as we cannot expect anyone to be compassionate so we cannot expect anyone to exercise his or her sympathetic imagination. Tom Regan argues that “the morality of what persons do . . . is logically distinct from, and should not be confused with, their ‘mental states,’ including the motives or intentions from which their acts proceed” (Regan, 2004, 199) and “the injunction to be kind to animals must fail to capture or account for the idea that we *owe* it to animals to treat them in certain ways, that treating them thus-and-so is something that is *due* to them” (199). In a way, Costello is privileging a psychological state above moral imperatives. Nonetheless, she seems quite right to emphasise our capacity for imaginative sympathy and to deplore its general neglect. The exercise of the sympathetic imagination can be seen as part of a virtuous life, something neglected by utilitarian and deontological ethics.

There follows a moment of extreme irony, of Bakhtin's "Socratic laughter (reduced to irony)," when Costello, herself a fictional creation, provides as proof of the sympathetic imagination the (fictional) book that she wrote, *The House on Eccles Street*:

"To write that book I had to think my way into the existence of Marion Bloom. Either I succeeded or I did not. If I did not, I cannot imagine why you invited me here today. In any event, the point is, *Marion Bloom never existed*. Marion Bloom was a figment of James Joyce's imagination. If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life." (Coetzee, 1999b, 35)

The rhetorical power of the passage cannot be denied, in particular its multiple ironies, since Coetzee, in his imagining Costello's existence and compelling us to imagine her independent existence, is thereby asserting the power of the sympathetic imagination, even as we protest that Costello herself does not exist, and that, therefore, her imagining Molly Bloom is fictional and cannot be offered as proof of the power of the sympathetic imagination. Furthermore, much of what Costello says there applies to Coetzee himself, especially his being invited to deliver the Tanner Lectures on the strength of his sympathetic imagination, if one accepts the argument that this is the basis for the successful production of literature: "If I did not [succeed], I cannot imagine why you invited me here today." In this way, too, Coetzee asserts the power of fiction above that of philosophy, and brings together his ethical and meta-fictional concerns.

Nonetheless, the logic of Costello's argument is faulty, although it should be noted that Socrates' arguments were also not always sound. For one, "the substrate life" would include plants and perhaps even bacteria and viruses, the existence of which would arguably be impossible for us to enter into. Her example of an oyster is interesting in that it is the same example Peter Singer uses to discuss a possible

limit for the criterion of sentience (Singer, 2002, 174). For another, it is easier to imagine oneself into the being of a fictional human being than into the being of a real nonhuman animal. As Coetzee himself has said in an interview:

The mode of consciousness of nonhuman species is quite different from human consciousness. There is a strong argument to be made that it is impossible for a human being to inhabit the consciousness of an animal, whereas through the faculty of sympathy (fellow-feeling) it is possible for one human being to know quite vividly what it is like to be someone else. Writers are reputed to possess this faculty particularly strongly. If it is indeed impossible—or at least very difficult—to inhabit the consciousness of an animal, then in writing about animals there is a temptation to project upon them feelings and thoughts that may belong only to our own human mind and heart. There is also the temptation to seek in animals what is easiest for human beings to sympathize or empathize with, and consequently to favor those animal species which for one reason or another seem to us to be “almost human” in their mental and emotional processes. So dogs (for example) are treated as “almost human” whereas reptiles are treated as entirely alien. (Coetzee, 2004b)

Indeed, even Dostoevsky’s ability to respect the individual consciousness of others, as pointed out by Bakhtin, seems limited to human beings; and Coetzee’s contribution is controversial in that it extends this faculty to entering into the experience of nonhuman animals.

In the penultimate paragraph of her speech, Costello says:

“I return one last time to the places of death all around us, the places of slaughter to which, in a huge communal effort, we close our hearts. Each day a fresh holocaust, yet, as far as I can see, our moral being is untouched. We do not feel tainted. We can do anything, it seems, and come away clean.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 36)

The Socratic undertones of this passage should be noted, especially in the terms “close our hearts” and “our moral being” (35) in the final paragraph of her speech. Also implicit is the Socratic maxim that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one, since nothing is more important than the purity of one’s soul. The use of pronouns is also significant. In using the plural, Costello implicates everyone in the atrocities, even herself. Her use of pronouns a little earlier is equally significant:

“The horror is that the killers [of the Jews in Nazi Germany] refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, ‘It is *they* in those cattle-cars rattling past.’ They did not say, ‘How would it be if it were I in that cattle-car?’ They did not say, ‘It is I who am in that cattle-car.’ ” (34)

Costello’s speech ends rather abruptly and on a pessimistic note in the suggestion “that we can do anything and get away with it; that there is no punishment” (35). As discussed in Chapter 2, this statement recalls Plato’s *Republic*, which mainly concerns justice, but here Costello suggests that injustice triumphs, that ‘might is right.’ Concerning the speech, John himself reflects:

“A strange ending. . . . A strange ending to a strange talk, he thinks, ill gauged, ill argued. Not her *métier*, argumentation.” (36)

This enables Coetzee to distance himself from Costello’s speech and to respect her as an independent voice, as well as to pre-empt criticism. He further distances himself by not only using a fictional mode, but also by having his narrator, John, criticise his persona, Costello. Several other of Bakhtin’s characterisations of the Socratic dialogue are also realised. A conversing man—in this case woman—is at the centre of the genre and this hero, Costello, can definitely be considered both an ideologist and a wise fool: she is respected for her literary prowess, but her argumentation is criticised as faulty. She conforms to Bakhtin’s notion of a person as the carrier of ideas, the person and her ideas being tested together, since it is not only her speech that matters but also the way she presents it and the way she interacts with the other characters. She even has a moment of ambivalent self-praise: “If I did not [succeed in thinking

my way into the existence of Molly Bloom], I cannot imagine why you invited me here today” (35). The Socratic laughter has already been noted. It has also been argued that Coetzee’s, if not Costello’s, use of sources has helped to prevent her speech from becoming a monologue, since they have been respected as independent voices (and not misrepresented), and hence contributed to the syncrisis, namely the juxtaposition of various points of view. Costello’s apparent attack on reason can likewise be construed as a fallible Socratic critique of the pretensions of an absolute Platonic rationalism, rather than an outright rejection of rationality. Finally, Socrates’ maxims of “virtue is (self-)knowledge,” “all sins arise from ignorance” and “only the virtuous can be happy” were argued to be central to the message of Costello’s speech.

However, Costello’s speech-format does limit the scope for dialogism in Coetzee’s own speech, and so, when her speech ends, Coetzee’s continues, and here he actualises other features of the Socratic dialogue in order to achieve a polyphonic effect. Coetzee continues to use sources even though they are no longer part of Costello’s notes. Freed from the constraints of a monologic speech-format, he makes effective use of various plot situations for both the syncrisis and the anacrisis. The latter he achieves by having Costello function as a Socratic figure, provoking people to express their views and acting as a midwife to their ideas as they emerge in conversations, if not quite quarrels (although Norma is very combative, as is O’Hearne). Of course, Costello continues her role as the central figure of the conversations, the ideologist and the wise fool. In what follows the emphasis will be on the formal devices that Coetzee uses to achieve dialogism, rather than the content of the arguments, which has been and will be dealt with in other chapters.

After Costello’s speech the first plot situation that leads to syncrisis and anacrisis is the dean’s announcement that “Ms. Costello has kindly agreed to take one or two questions from the floor” (36). Costello’s speech has provoked a strong response in Norma, who “has her hand up, is trying to catch the eyes of the dean” (36) and John has to do his utmost to dissuade her from exercising her right to ask a question: “You have a right, just don’t exercise it, it’s not a good idea!” (36). Here we see John, for a moment, transcending the limitations of a Kantian ethics of justice in which rights

can be exercised no matter what, showing some sympathy for his mother: “She’s old, she’s my mother. Please!” (36). No doubt he fears that Norma will try to humiliate Costello in public. Thus Norma’s arguments, as strong as they may be, are equally steeped in emotion, are embodied in her being and influenced by her situation. However, for now John holds her arguments at bay and Norma has to wait for another opportunity to express them.

Instead another man has the opportunity to ask Costello questions, several of which Coetzee’s own audience may have had in mind, and which he thereby pre-empts:

“What wasn’t clear to me,” the man is saying, “is what you are actually targeting. Are you saying we should close down the factory farms? Are you saying we should stop eating meat? Are you saying we should treat animals more humanely, kill them more humanely? Are you saying we should stop experiments *on* animals? Are you saying we should stop experiments *with* animals, even benign psychological experiments like Köhler’s? Can you clarify? Thank you.” (36)

These are all legitimate questions and they show how far Costello’s audience has failed to comprehend her speech. However, her response—“open your heart and listen to what your heart says” (36)—fails to satisfy her questioner and the rest of the audience, as does her subsequent answer with its reference to Montaigne: “I am reminded of something Montaigne said: We think we are playing with the cat, but how do we know that the cat isn’t playing with us? I wish I could think the animals in our laboratories are playing with us. But alas, it isn’t so” (36). Her answer seems to be inconsequential. However, she seems to think that the questioner was looking for reasons based on principles, an approach she consistently rejects (25). Her answers may be meant to provoke us to think about the impact on our humanity of our treatment of animals, and as a Socratic criticism of our presumption, as will be explained below.

Costello's use of Montaigne's longest essay, "Apology for Raimon Sebonde," is unusual, since she uses what appears to be a rather peripheral detail: "When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me?" (Montaigne, 1991, 505). However, this homely example also shows the ability of Montaigne to consider the perspective of the cat, and thus to exercise his faculty of sympathetic imagination. In fact, "Apology" would have admirably suited her attack on absolute rationalism, since its main theme is precisely the presumption of human reason. Interestingly, Peter Singer also refers to this essay and quotes Montaigne's attack on human presumption:

Presumption is our natural and original disease 'Tis by the same vanity of imagination that [man] equals himself to God, attributes himself divine qualities, and withdraws and separates himself from the crowd of other creatures. (Singer, 2002, 199)

Singer also points out that in another of Montaigne's essays, "On Cruelty," he was "among the very few writers since Roman times to assert that cruelty to animals is wrong in itself, quite apart from its tendency to lead to cruelty to human beings" (Singer, 2002, 199).

Montaigne's attack on presumption is very Socratic: "a man who dares to presume that he knows anything, does not even know what knowledge is; that Man, who is nothing yet thinks he is something, misleads and deceives himself" (Montaigne, 1991, 502). In fact, Socrates was the philosopher he respected most, although even he was not spared Montaigne's criticism:

The virtuous actions of Socrates and Cato remain vain and useless, since they did not have, as their end or their aim, love of the true Creator of all things nor obedience to him: they did not know God; the same applies to our concepts and thoughts: they have a body of sorts, but it is a formless mass, unenlightened and without shape, unless accompanied by faith in God and by grace. (Montaigne, 1991, 499)

Furthermore, the title itself of the essay used by Costello echoes Plato's Socratic dialogue the "Apology." Thus Costello does not misrepresent her source but could have made much more of it. Her omissions can be explained by the fact that in the dramatic context of the questions following her speech, she hardly has the time to give a carefully thought-out response since she is thinking on her feet. This is, after all, her first foot note that is not part of her speech.

The next dramatic or plot situation is that of the dinner at the Faculty Club. Bell notes that "[p]artly novel and partly philosophical dialogue, Coetzee's text follows both Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Plato's *Symposium* in drawing on the image of a social act of ingestion if only, in his case, to insist on the corollary of exclusion" (Bell, 2006, 183)—although Christ's last supper is also brought to mind. Thus Bell emphasises the fact that the dinner helps exacerbate Costello's sense of isolation, perhaps taking his cue from Norma's insinuations that Costello's vegetarianism is merely a way of asserting her power and superiority. However, there is much more to the dinner than this, and we have good reason to question Norma's criticisms. In fact, the dinner situation is an excellent device to achieve both synchrisis and anacrisis. Indeed, it is dialogical in form, unlike Costello's speech, and allows several independent voices to be heard, thus contributing to a polyphonic effect. Furthermore, the focus on food and eating naturally leads to conversation about the justification of dietary choices and to animal exploitation issues. It was noted previously that the hostilities between Costello and Norma began precisely at meal time. Invariably strong emotions become involved since meat-eaters resent what they see as the moral posturing of ethical vegetarians; they sometimes feel offended and feel that their deepest values are being questioned, with the evidence of their presumed guilt right in front of their noses. As any ethical vegetarian knows, meal times in the company of meat eaters can be very tense affairs.

Thus in the dinner situation, Costello continues as the central hero-ideologue figure and midwife to the birth of ideas as they emerge during the conversation over dinner. There is also much scope for Socratic laughter, which Coetzee realises adeptly, making use of his narrator, John. The analysis will pay particular attention to the

more formal aspects of the dinner conversation and to characterisation, including Bakhtin's idea of persons as carriers of ideas, which are tested together.

Coetzee's muted humour is most clearly evident in the observations of John as conveyed by the narrator, who notes that at the dinner, John and his wife "will certainly be the most junior, the lowliest"—which seems to be a lighthearted jab at academic hierarchy—and goes on to reflect, "On the other hand, it may be a good thing for him to be present. He may be needed to keep the peace" (Coetzee, 1999b, 37). Thus the reader is ironically forewarned of a possible conflict in which John will have to mediate (it seems almost mock-heroic). The reference to hierarchy seems ironic since the carnivalistic setting of the dialogic banquet levels the playing field, so to speak (Bakhtin, 1984, 120), and permits even the "lowliest" voices to have their say. Bakhtin's idea of carnival is realised on another level, too, since meat (with the exception of fish) is to be excluded from the meal on account of the special guest's vegetarianism, the etymology of "carnival" being "to remove meat."

The narrator continues, "With grim interest he looks forward to seeing how the college will cope with the challenge of the menu" (37) which is soon followed by another humorous reflection: "Are her distinguished guests going to have to fret through the evening, dreaming of the pastrami sandwich or the cold drumstick they will gobble down when they get home?" (38). The grim humour continues with the narrator's observations on John's reflections:

What he dreads is that, during a lull in the conversation, someone will come up with what he calls The Question—"What lead you, Mrs. Costello, to become a vegetarian?"—and that she will then get on her high horse and produce what he and Norma call The Plutarch Response. After that it will be up to him and him alone to repair the damage. (38)

The expression "high horse" echoes that of "hobby horse" that John applied to his mother earlier and is just as disparaging. Coetzee's animal theme revivifies dead metaphors concerning animals. Indeed, Bell notes that: "In *Lives* the bare tautness of the language brings to the surface those dead metaphors that are the most likely

locus of unexamined norms” (Bell, 2006, 188). John’s reproduction of Plutarch’s words is true to the spirit of the original:

You ask of me then for what reason it was that Pythagoras abstained from eating of flesh. I for my part do much admire in what humor, with what soul or reason, the first man with his mouth touched slaughter, and reached to his lips the flesh of a dead animal, and having set before people courses of ghastly corpses and ghosts, could give those parts the names of meat and victuals, that but a little before lowed, cried, moved, and saw; how his sight could endure the blood of the slaughtered, flayed, and mangled bodies; how his smell could bear their scent; and how the very nastiness happened not to offend the taste, while it chewed the sores of others, and participated of the sap and juices of deadly wounds. (Regan & Singer, 1976, 111)

John notes that “Plutarch is a real conversation-stopper: it is the word *juices* that does it. Producing Plutarch is like throwing down the gauntlet; after that, there is no knowing what will happen” (Coetzee, 1999b, 38). In fact, the worst-case scenario that he imagines does not come about. John’s reflections do, however, enable Coetzee to express ideas that would otherwise have been difficult or awkward to accommodate.

John then reflects on his mother’s visit in a way that reveals a lack of charity and magnanimity, indeed, a lack of the very emotional fullness and sympathy that his mother has been advocating. His abstracted nature and his apparent inability to convey true fellow-feeling are emphasised by the repetition of the anaemic word “nice”:

He wishes his mother had not come. It is nice to see her again; it is nice that she should see her grandchildren; it is nice for her to get recognition; but the price he is paying and the price he stands to pay if the visit goes badly seem to him excessive. Why can she not be an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman’s life? If she wants to open her heart to animals, why can’t she stay home and open it to her cats? (38)

One wonders what Costello’s visit really costs John. He does not seem to be able to comprehend the moral seriousness of Costello’s concern for animals; neither her profound concern for animals nor the plight of the animals has touched his heart. In a sense John, like most of Costello’s dinner companions, is guilty of what Heidegger calls “Idle Talk,” inauthentic conversation that does not penetrate beneath the surface of things (Kearney, 1986, 47), since they find her subject interesting and curious but do not really engage with it (except Wunderlich)—for them it remains a purely theoretical and intellectual discussion.

When Ruth Orkin describes the chimpanzee that “insisted on putting a picture of herself with the pictures of humans rather than with the pictures of other apes” (Coetzee, 1999b, 39) Costello once again interprets this in Kafka’s terms of the chimpanzee’s desire to escape confinement (like the humans). The dialogue develops as the others make their contributions, allowing Coetzee to raise issues such as “the fabulous qualities of animals” (39) and “dietary prohibition” (39). Wunderlich argues that dietary prohibitions based on the criterion of cleanness and uncleanness are useful for determining “who belongs and who doesn’t” (40). John surprises himself by making his own contribution—for once he becomes involved, for a moment not being the detached male ego—and suggests that it is “[u]ncleanness and shame” (40), to which Wunderlich agrees, relating shame to the myth of Adam and Eve. Olivia disagrees, suggesting that “[a]nimals are creatures we don’t have sex with. . . . We don’t mix with them” (40). So far, there has been a polyphony of voices, each treated as independent and equal, each adding a valuable insight without any one voice dominating and without final resolution of the issues. This begins to change when Norma begins to speak, pointing out that we do mix with animals because we eat them and that “[t]here are specific kinds of animals that we don’t eat. Surely *those* are the unclean animals, not animals in general” (40). John observes that:

She is right, of course. But wrong: a mistake to bring the conversation back to the matter on the table before them, the food. (40)

John is concerned with keeping the peace, but Norma, as he becomes increasingly aware, is trying to manipulate the conversation for her own purposes. Norma's clever arguments are thus not so much concerned with the truth as with making a personal, and potentially humiliating, attack on Costello. In this case, Norma, the trained philosopher, for all her arguments in favour of rationalism, is more the misologist than Costello, the writer, despite her attack on rationalism.

Wunderlich then introduces the idea (that Coetzee seems to have taken from James Serpell, whom he goes on to cite a little later) that in religion the slaughter of animals was ritualised in the form of sacrifices to the gods in order to assuage the guilt that people felt in slaughtering animals. Of course, as Serpell suggests, the modern slaughterhouse has dispensed with any sense of guilt or shame, although the new god can perhaps be seen as ruthless technical efficiency in the service of increasing production and profits. Costello confirms Wunderlich's views by suggesting that humans invented the gods in order to shift the blame for slaughtering the animals on to them and thereby criticises the paternalism inherent in religion: "They gave us permission to eat flesh. . . . It's not our fault, it's theirs. We're just their children" (41). She cites Serpell (Serpell, 1986) and quotes from the second last chapter of the work, entitled "Licensed to Kill," where various psychological mechanisms are discussed that make the callous exploitation of animals possible: detachment, concealment, misrepresentation and shifting the blame. Serpell's book takes as its starting point the contradiction in people who show affection toward their pets yet think nothing of eating the flesh of other animals:

This book began with a paradox, a paradox exemplified by a society in which a dispassionate, utilitarian attitude to factory-farmed livestock co-exists with affectionate and sympathetic relationships with domestic pets. . . . It was necessary [for the ruthless exploitation of economically useful species] to suppress empathic feeling, to cultivate detachment, to conceal the facts or distort them, and, where possible, to shift the blame for what was happening onto others. Above all, it was necessary to fabricate an image of humanity—especially Western humanity—that was separate and

apart from the rest of creation, sacred and superior, answerable to no one but God and, more recently, Mammon. (Serpell, 1986, 186)

It appears that Costello may find not only the idea of blame shifting in Serpell but also the more general critique of the false image of the superiority of humanity to the rest of nature. This image is as much a religious as a philosophical attitude, and it is not just the criterion of reason that is used to bolster it; biblical scriptures are also used, as is the idea of an immortal soul. It is evident that Costello makes extensive use of Serpell's work in this section of *The Lives of Animals* and remains true to the spirit of her source, but Coetzee also has Norma challenge Serpell's views, as will soon be seen. Costello continues, "It's convenient. God told us it was OK" (Coetzee, 1999b, 41). Her short sentences and colloquial "OK" express her scorn for such a justification. Then:

Silence again. They are waiting for her to go on. She is, after all, the paid entertainer. (41)

The idea that she is a paid entertainer relates Costello to Red Peter, once again, and to the description of her as "an old, tired circus seal" in "What Is Realism?" (Coetzee, 2003, 3), although in that earlier story there was more emphasis on the love that John feels for his mother. The idea of a paid entertainer also trivialises the seriousness of her message. Perhaps Coetzee is implicitly criticising both her audience as well as readers who read his work merely for the pleasure but remain untouched by it ethically. Of course, it could equally well be an instance of his Socratic irony and self-criticism.

Costello points out that the issue of dietary prohibitions is peripheral to the issue of animal exploitation and that the terms "clean" and "unclean" are merely masks for a deeper division between humans and animals:

"Norma is right," says his mother. "The problem is to define our difference from animals in general, not just from so-called unclean animals. The ban on certain animals—pigs and so forth—is quite arbitrary." (Coetzee, 1999b, 41)

An irony inherent in the situation is that Abraham Stern, whose religion considers the meat of pigs to be unclean, is absent from the dinner and refuses to break bread with her, in protest against Costello's holocaust analogies. Costello goes on to discuss dietary prohibitions as taboo. Norma dismisses Costello's comments as mere anthropology and asserts that "[p]eople in the modern world no longer decide their diet on the basis of whether they have divine permission" (41). John begins to question Norma's motives: "Is there a trap she is leading his mother into?" (42). When Costello replies that there is still disgust "which is a version of religious horror" (42), Norma responds that "[d]isgust is not universal" (42). Norma seems to be relativising and trivialising Costello's commitment to vegetarianism. The narrator observes through the medium of John's consciousness that "now Norma is going too far, he thinks, now she is beginning to dominate the conversation to an extent that is totally inappropriate" (42). She argues that perhaps "the whole notion of cleanness versus uncleanness has a completely different function, namely, to enable certain groups to define themselves, negatively, as elite, as elected" (42). There is silence before Norma continues, a silence that suggests that she is over-stepping the bounds of politeness:

"The ban on meat that you get in vegetarianism is only an extreme form of dietary ban," Norma presses on; "and a dietary ban is a quick, simple way for an elite group to define itself. Other people's table habits are unclean, we can't eat or drink with them." (42)

The implication is that Costello's vegetarianism is not so much a moral commitment as a form of snobbery, an assertion of moral superiority or, even, of power. It is an ingenious argument (and innuendo), but it is nothing more than an elaborate *ad hominem*. Here it is Norma who is guilty of misogyny rather than Costello. She is using her rational capacity not to seek the truth but to attack the integrity of an earnest seeker after the truth. She is questioning Costello's motives and impugning the ethical seriousness of her decision to abstain from meat. It is a deflection from the real issue at stake. However, the space Coetzee gives to Norma's criticisms is also evidence of his ability to question his own motives and to respect the independence of

the voices he raises in his fiction, recalling Bakhtin's words concerning Dostoevsky's polyphony where "[c]haracters are polemicized with, learned from" (Bakhtin, 1984, 5). Coetzee then revives a dead metaphor (with muted ironic humour) to describe this destructive use of reason: "Now she is getting really close to the bone" (Coetzee, 1999b, 42). To disarm Norma's relentless and ruthless logic, Costello tells the story of Gandhi's stay in England, thus using a narrative mode to counter Norma's discursive, or argumentative, one. When Norma irritatedly asks Costello what the point of the story is, she replies that:

"Just that Gandhi's vegetarianism can hardly be conceived as the exercise of power. It condemned him to the margins of society. It was his particular genius to incorporate what he found on those margins into his political philosophy." (43)

Norma is silenced for now, but the blond man, who had earlier objected to Costello's mentioning "the fabulous qualities of animals" (39), now objects again that Gandhi is not a good example since "[h]e was a vegetarian because of the promise he made to his mother" (43). This man, as yet unknown to Costello, is O'Hearne, who will debate with her the following day. He already seems a bit combative here. Motherhood is a running theme of Coetzee's Costello pieces, as was especially evident in "What Is Realism?" Here Costello responds: "Don't you think that mothers can have a good influence on their children?" (43). Her statement seems to be a jab at patriarchy and its male-dominated, often oppressive, legal and ethical system. John fails, however, to defend his mother: "There is a moment's silence. It is time for him, the good son, to speak. He does not" (43). Once again he abstracts himself from the emotional situation and betrays his mother, as he betrayed her in "What Is Realism?", and once again the criticism of Costello's views is beside the point: arguing that Gandhi is not a good example fails to touch her point that vegetarianism can be a serious ethical decision. Indeed, O'Hearne seems to be mistaken about Gandhi's ethical commitment to vegetarianism since, as Costello points out, it did become central to his philosophy of *satyagraha*, a view that is confirmed by a vegetarian website (Sannuti, 2006). While

Gandhi was still in London, he discovered a vegetarian restaurant where he bought a copy of Henry Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism*:

The book discussed the moral reasons for being a vegetarian—the inherent violence present in the eating of meat, and the non-violence that could be achieved from abstaining from it. No longer was Gandhi a vegetarian wishing he were a meat-eater. “The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which hence forward became my mission.” Gandhi had decided that *ahimsa*⁵ was his goal. It became the core of his *Satyagrahi* movement, and the core of his life. (Sannuti, 2006)

His vegetarianism freed him to see the world in new ways:

It also allowed him to reverse around the traditional western definition of strength, turning it into the definition that made his movement so powerful. Meat-eating was a type of aggression, which Gandhi once thought was the only key to mastery. After becoming a true vegetarian, and thus discovering the ideas of *ahimsa*, he realized that aggression is a path to mastery for those without self-control. *Ahimsa*, non-violence, is the path to mastery for those with self-control. (Sannuti, 2006)

Thus it is clear that Costello rather than O’Hearne represents Gandhi’s vegetarianism more accurately.

President Garrard tries to compliment Costello on her vegetarianism: “ ‘Well, I have a great respect for it,’ says Garrard. ‘As a way of life’ ” (43). This “way of life” links Costello’s position to virtue ethics. However, Costello refuses to elevate herself, contrary to Norma’s insinuations, by pointing out her leather shoes and purse (43). While Garrard’s response is an attempt to pour oil over troubled water, it is an interesting contribution to the debate on rationality, where consistency of argument is most highly valued by philosophers (and academics generally), although here he applies it to the consistency between one’s words and one’s actions:

⁵*Ahimsa* means “having no ill feeling for any living being, in all manners possible and for all times . . . it should be the desired goal of all seekers” (Sannuti, 2006).

“Consistency,” murmurs Garrard. “Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. Surely one can draw a distinction between eating meat and wearing leather.” (44)

Costello’s response is uncompromising: “Degrees of obscenity” (44). This resembles Socratic self-deprecation, although it lacks the humour of Plato’s dialogues, and is even a bit offensive and rude, since she is implying that the meat-eating habit of her hosts is obscene. However, her use of leather while refusing to eat meat can be considered a serious inconsistency in her position, an inconsistency of the kind that vegans often criticise in vegetarians. Nonetheless, this weakness in her position makes her a more fallible figure, more prepossessing than a vegan.

Garrard is alluding to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay, “Self-Reliance” (1841):

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day.—“Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.”—Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. . . . (Emerson, 1994, 96)

While Emerson can be criticised for under-valuing consistency, his main point is that great thinkers and visionaries must not be bound by tradition, since they are pushing the boundaries of thought and feeling. Costello is in the same position, although on a more modest scale, her apparent inconsistent views leading to much misunderstanding.

Dean Arendt contributes to the debate for the first time, using arguments that Coetzee may have found in Leahy, a philosopher for whom Costello reserves especial dislike, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, although such views are typically raised

by philosophers in the Anglo-American analytic tradition. Arendt accepts that one's dietary choices can have genuine underlying moral concerns "but at the same time one must say that our whole superstructure of concern and belief is a closed book to animals" (Coetzee, 1999b, 44). He continues, using words in which the title of Coetzee's lectures is embedded:

"In the lives of animals, things, good or bad, just happen. So vegetarianism is a very odd transaction, when you come to think of it, with the beneficiaries unaware that they are being benefited. And with no hope of ever becoming aware. Because they live in a vacuum of consciousness."

(44)

In fact, this is not really an argument—at most a question-begging one—but merely a statement of fact, and a very anthropocentric fact at that. Indeed, it is a fact that can be questioned, since different types of animals do have varying degrees of consciousness—what may be lacking in most animals is self-consciousness, since they do not possess language. Arendt and Costello, in fact, both make the mistake of failing to distinguish consciousness from self-consciousness. Costello's response, however, clearly exposes the speciesism underlying Arendt's assertions:

"That is a good point you raise. No consciousness that we would recognize as consciousness. No awareness, as far as we can make out, of a self with a history. What I mind tends to come next. They have no consciousness *therefore*. Therefore what? Therefore we are free to use them for our own ends? Therefore we are free to kill them? Why? What is so special about the form of consciousness we recognize that makes killing a bearer of it a crime while killing an animal goes unpunished? There are moments—"

(44)

Wunderlich then interjects in support of Costello, pointing out that "[b]abies have no self-consciousness, yet we think it a more serious crime to kill a baby than an adult" (44). He does not confuse consciousness and self-consciousness. When Arendt

says “Therefore?” (44), Wunderlich continues: “Therefore all this discussion of consciousness and whether animals have it is just a smoke screen. At bottom we protect our own kind. Thumbs up to human babies, thumbs down to veal calves. Don’t you think so Mrs. Costello?” (45). Wunderlich’s insight is an essential point made by both Peter Singer and Tom Regan, namely, the argument from marginal cases, which has been discussed in Chapter 1. Singer would further agree with Wunderlich that the criterion of self-consciousness (or rationality) is merely a smokescreen, a rationalisation or excuse used to justify speciesist attitudes towards animals. This apparent misuse of rationality can perhaps be seen as a betrayal of reason, a form of misology far worse than Costello’s apparent attack on reason. Although this—the use of reason as a criterion excluding nonhuman animals from the sphere of moral concern—would seem to be the heart of Costello’s attack on rationalism, she merely responds to Wunderlich by saying that she is not sure what she thinks but questions whether humans “really understand the universe better than animals do” (45) (although a case can be made that she tacitly agrees with Wunderlich). Costello’s assertion could be construed as a misological (in the sense of irrational) and paradoxical attack on reason, one that Norma will later latch onto, as will be discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4. However, it has been shown that Norma, more so than Costello, can be accused of misology, since she uses arguments to discredit her opponent rather than to analyse her arguments, while neither Costello’s critique of reason nor her use of her sources was found to be ultimately misological.

The true misology in *The Lives of Animals*, in a sense, lies in the words of the academics who, despite—or perhaps because of—their intellects, refuse to engage seriously with Costello’s views, finding them merely either discomfiting or curious. There is a systematic failure by her audience to take her views to heart, despite her plea to them to open their hearts. Coetzee seems to criticise the academic establishment for failing to question the conventions and values of their profession and of the wider society, at least in relation to the prevailing attitudes towards nonhuman animals. It is this conventionalism that allows the views of a morally committed intellectual like Costello to be trivialised as “interesting” by President Garrard. His



comments are witty but insensitive and patronising in the context of their discussion over dinner of the ethics of eating: “A wonderful lecture, Mrs. Costello . . . much food for thought. We look forward to tomorrow’s offering” (45). Once again attention is drawn to Costello as a performer or an animal to be consumed or sacrificed for the public’s pleasure, like Red Peter, or Kafka, or, for that matter, Coetzee himself.

The first part of *The Lives of Animals* ends with Costello in a Socratic state of uncertainty, questioning the presumption of an absolute rationalism. The debate itself is unresolved but, nonetheless, everyone who has participated in it or observed it, including both Costello’s audience and Coetzee’s readership (and audience), should have gained more insight into the animal rights debate (which, during the dinner, focused mainly on vegetarianism). Thus, in a sense, truth has been born in the dialogue between different ideologues, a polyphony of independent voices, which was facilitated by the dialogic form of the dinner conversation. It was argued that Coetzee even managed to turn the usually monological form of the speech into a dialogue thanks to his use of sources and various fictional devices, not least his persona, Elizabeth Costello, and his narrative focus, John Bernard. Coetzee’s polyphony was well served by his use of the Socratic dialogue, as outlined by Bakhtin, in which Costello featured as the central conversing figure and hero-ideologue, attempting to provoke her listeners to question their speciesism. In Chapter 4, this approach will be applied to the second part of *The Lives of Animals*, namely “The Poets and the Animals.”

Chapter 4

Misology, dialogism and monologism: Costello's (mis-)use of her sources in *The Lives of Animals* and her alleged abuse of reason, Part 2

In Part 1 of *The Lives of Animals*, “The Philosophers and the Animals,” Costello’s voice predominates, polyphony notwithstanding, especially in her speech and at least in the sense of provoking the voices of others to question their prejudices and to justify their attitudes toward animals. In Part 2, “The Poets and the Animals,” her critics have a chance to respond more fully than they could in the restricted format of the dinner conversation, and their responses often seem to get the better of her, and, by implication, Coetzee. Coetzee stages several situations in which Costello is mainly presented as answering questions, as being interrogated by critical voices. This appears to be a reversal of the usual Socratic relation where Socrates is presented as asking the questions. Nonetheless, this interrogative format permits the dialogue to continue and alternative voices to have a full opportunity to express their views, which

are, true to Bakhtin's characterisation of Dostoevsky's polyphony, independent and forceful. Although Costello refers to Rilke, Hughes and Swift, she does not reference them. Most of the sources appear in the context of her debate with O'Hearne.

More generally, if Part 1 saw Costello interrogating philosophy, Part 2 sees philosophy interrogating Costello, although in her responses she often continues her attack on the rationalism of the Western philosophical tradition. Furthermore, although she only mentions Michael Leahy towards the end of Part 2, Leahy's voice is a strong presence throughout the whole piece—indeed, arguably throughout *The Lives of Animals*—since many of his arguments are mouthed by other characters, especially Norma and O'Hearne, even though Costello does not always acknowledge him. The fact that her composure breaks down when she does finally acknowledge him shows how far this section of *The Lives of Animals* is her (and Coetzee's?) response to his philosophy, which is representative of Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-American) analytic philosophy. It is with Leahy that Costello comes to the limits of her sympathetic imagination (as it did earlier with Descartes) and with him that she says she would refuse to break bread, just as Abraham Stern refuses to break bread with her. Leahy's philosophical arguments are coloured by his political conservatism (Pleasants, 2006, 315). He represents the character of the reactionary, the defender of the status quo or establishment, as exemplified by the title of his book, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* (Leahy, 1991). A discussion of his views will come later in the chapter. In contrast to him, Costello embodies the character of the critical outsider, not only provoking questions in others, but providing original and imaginative re-readings of well-known literary texts, often creating narratives as alternatives to the discursive or argumentative analytic mode.

Interestingly Leahy uses Ted Hughes's "Hawk Roosting" as the epigraph of his book and quotes its "falsifying dream" to characterise what he thinks is the liberationists' mistaken ideas about animal rights; thus a philosopher appropriates poetry to support his philosophy. In the concluding sentences of his book, he writes that:

Their [the liberationists'] picture of animals mirrors human beings far more closely than my alternative allows. Theirs is the 'falsifying dream'

that enthusiasts foist upon the hawk despite its own poetic protests. It is time they woke up. (Leahy, 1991, 253)

However, his interpretation and use of the poem can be questioned, just as Costello's use of philosophy can. Later in this chapter, Costello's use of Hughes's two jaguar poems to support her ideas on the "sympathetic imagination" will be examined. Perhaps she can be seen as re-appropriating Hughes from Leahy. In light of these conflicting claims to the poem, it will be necessary to quote "Hawk Roosting" in full:

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction. No falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly –
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads –

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

“Hawk Roosting” seems to be a very different kind of poem from “The Jaguar.” Whereas Costello uses the latter to show how poets can use the sympathetic imagination to enter into the embodied experience of animals, as will be discussed later, “Hawk Roosting” seems not only more disembodied and abstract, solipsistic even (a result of Cartesian egoism), but also more symbolic or metaphorical. Instead of describing a process of how one can come to know the animal other, the poem seems to describe a static state in which one is trapped in one’s own ego: “in sleep [I] rehearse perfect kills and eat” and “[n]othing has changed since I began./ My eye has permitted no change.” If there is any embodiment in “Hawk Roosting” then it is in that the hawk is taken to embody, or personify, the human trait of arrogance resulting from humankind’s dominion over nature, summed up in the line: “[n]o arguments assert my right.” Leahy could not argue that the hawk is thinking its own thoughts since he would be the first to point out that hawks have no language and therefore no (higher order) thoughts (he actually goes even further than this) and no self-consciousness. Leahy arguably misses the poem’s central irony, the fact that it is not endorsing a predatory way of life, but mocking its arrogance and complacency. The “falsifying dream” that the hawk lacks could be a system of morals that would prevent it from seeing the rest of nature in an egoistic, instrumentalist way, namely merely as the means to its own ends, the very philosophy to which Leahy appears to subscribe.

Norma and John continue their discussion of Costello’s attack on reason at the beginning of “The Poets and the Animals.” Norma makes the obvious points about rationality but misses Costello’s most important contention about reason, namely that just because nonhuman animals are not rational this cannot justify our exploitation of them, our using them merely as means to our ends. What is especially interesting in the exchange between Norma and John is the way he functions as a Socratic interlocuter, asking her simple, almost naïve, questions, thereby encouraging her to

express her views more fully and mediating as the truth emerges in the course of their interaction. There is also a sense that he is not content merely to concede Norma's criticisms of his mother's views but is making some attempt to defend her. Coetzee may have Davies, whom he cites in Part 1 of *The Lives of Animals*, in mind when he has Norma argue that the proof of modern science, and by implication rationality, is that it works (Davies, 1992, 2-3, 7):

“[R]ationality is not just, as your mother claims, a game. Reason provides us with real knowledge of the real world. It has been tested, and it works. You are a physicist. You ought to know.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 48)

John agrees, but when he persists in questioning whether there is not a position outside of reason, Norma responds with some exasperation that “[t]here is no position outside of reason where you can stand and lecture about reason and pass judgment on reason” (48). Norma makes a strong case for rationalism, despite Coetzee's evident dissatisfaction with this philosophy, thus showing how he can respect the independent voices of his characters. However, she fails to meet Costello's point that rationality is not a significant criterion for treating humans and nonhuman animals differently from an ethical point of view. When John tells Norma that he is surprised that she “is talking like an old-fashioned rationalist” (49), Norma says she is “merely responding” to his mother's terms (48), indicating how this little scene was provoked by Costello in the Socratic sense of syncrisis and anacrisis.

The next response to Costello's provocative words is that of Abraham Stern, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, missed the College dinner in protest. Norma mentions that she “could feel hackles rising all around me in the audience” (49) when Costello raised the Holocaust analogy, this animal image of angry dogs indicating the audience's hostile reaction, but also suggesting that they are reacting emotionally rather than rationally to her words. The next day John receives a letter from Abraham Stern for his mother. John explains to Costello that Stern is “[a] poet. Quite well-respected, I believe” and adds that “[h]e has been here donkey's years” (49), again using a dead metaphor involving an animal, in this case to emphasize the lengthy

tenure of Stern and his established authority. He is a most suitable figure to stand in opposition to Costello's possibly insensitive use of the Holocaust analogy and to forestall criticism of Coetzee's use of the analogy, not only in being a representative of the Holocaust survivors and their living memory but also in being a respected poet.

His response to Costello is appropriately literary. He refuses to meet her face-to-face but leaves a hand-written note in which he sums up the controversy in a striking but down-to-earth image—that of refusing to break bread with one's enemies—and criticizes her use of the Holocaust analogy. He writes that in reversing the familiar comparison of the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle, Costello willfully misunderstands, to the point of blasphemy, the nature of likenesses and that “[t]he inversion insults the memory of the dead” (50). The language in Stern's note is powerfully direct and simple. Although the tone is one of outrage, it remains polite. Costello has no answer to it but a sigh. It could be argued, however, that she has once again been misunderstood. She certainly does not intend by the analogy to trivialize the mass murder of the Jews, but rather to shock people out of their complacent complicity in what is, in her eyes, the comparable daily atrocities of the animal exploitation industries. In her mind, the most significant differences between the two events are the scale of the destruction of lives and the fact that the abuse of animals is continual rather than a once-off event. In the end, however, Stern's voice is a powerfully independent one, beyond the power of either Coetzee or Costello to answer, and its power is not diminished by the fact that he is always off-stage.

The next dramatic setting is the poetry seminar hosted by the English Department. What is immediately striking is that much of Costello's seminar occurs off-stage because John, the focal point of the narrative voice, misses her lecture, being caught in a departmental meeting of his own. This device enables Coetzee to skip the more monological lecture and proceed instead to the more interesting and dialogic question-and-answer session that follows. If Costello does not at times seem to answer the question of the questioner or to do so indirectly, and sometimes after considerable digressions, this contributes to the polyphonic effect.

While the reader is not told the first question to which Costello is responding,

she links the sympathetic imagination with embodied existence evident in the animal poetry of Ted Hughes: “Hughes is feeling his way toward a different kind of being-in-the-world” (51). She concretizes her discussion with reference to Rilke’s “Der Panter” and to Hughes’s two jaguar poems, although she only discusses “The Jaguar” arguing that:

“With Hughes it is a matter—I emphasize—not of inhabiting another mind but of inhabiting another body. That is the kind of poetry I bring to your attention today: poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him.” (51)

Thus the sympathetic imagination is tightly bound up with the notion of embodied-ness and the ability to enter the bodies, imaginatively, of other beings quite different from one’s own kind, in opposition to the abstract and solipsistic Cartesian egoism.

The next question is asked by a tall young man who poses a dilemma concerning Costello’s use of Hughes, who became a sheep farmer, to promote the cause of animals:

“Either he is just raising sheep as poetic subjects (there is a titter around the room) or he is a real rancher raising sheep for the market: How does this square with what you were saying in your lecture yesterday, when you seemed to be pretty much against killing animals for meat?” (52)

What is striking is the flippant, even facetious, tone of the interrogator and the audience’s amused response, which all suggest that Costello is being mocked, and which fits her characterisation as a Socratic, wise-fool figure.¹ The tall young man’s question can perhaps, at least partly, be seen as lacking in ethical seriousness, intended to embarrass Costello. His insistence on consistency brings to mind President Garrard’s allusion to Emerson, “[c]onsistency is the hobgoblin of small minds” (44), not so much because of the charge itself as the tone in which the young man makes it.

¹The equivalent in Dostoevsky would be the figure of the holy-fool, such as Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Dostoevsky, 2003)

Equally striking is Costello's response to the apparently facetious question. She takes each question seriously and refuses to be provoked, making much more of the question than was intended by the questioner, thereby revealing maturity and a depth of understanding as she answers the "question on another level" (52). Her oblique, or circumlocutionary, approach to answering questions permits Coetzee to explore issues in a dialogic fashion, thereby escaping the limitations of a monological approach. She places Hughes "in a line of poets who celebrate the primitive and repudiate the Western bias towards abstract thought" (52). It will be remembered that this primitivism was discussed in Chapter 1 as an archaic or primitive form of virtue ethics where you, as a hunter, must "honor your antagonist for his strength and bravery" (52). Costello points out the inadequacy of such an ethic, where animals are accorded a form of "respect," to feed the teeming human population of the post-industrial world, and reveals a causal link between the Chicago stockyards and the mass killing techniques used by Nazis in their death camps, thus showing that her linking slaughter houses to Nazi death camps is not 'merely' an analogy, but is historically, causally connected. Costello then returns to the young man's question: "You say: despite the primitivist trappings Hughes is a butcher, and what am I doing in his company?" (53).

Her answer, which touches on the sympathetic imagination, seems mystical and anti-rational:

"I would reply, writers teach us more than they are aware of. By bodying forth the jaguar, Hughes shows us that we too can embody animals—by the process called poetic invention that mingles breath and sense in a way that no one has explained and no one ever will. He shows us how to bring the living body into being within ourselves." (53)

However, she goes on to point out that for all the vividness and earthiness of Hughes's poetry there is something abstract and Platonic about it, since Hughes is concerned with the "jaguarness embodied in this jaguar" (Coetzee, 1999b, 53). Again, Costello shifts from a discussion of Hughes to an exploration of ecology, both of which appear

to contain elements of Platonic abstractness and therefore seem to be at odds with her individualism, as was investigated in Chapter 1, and she even apologises for diverting from the main question: “I’m sorry to go on like this, I am getting way beyond your question, I’ll be through in a moment” (54). Thus her answer to a question about Hughes has enabled Coetzee to touch on issues ranging from primitive and industrialised societies, through the industrialised slaughter of animals and humans, to poetic invention and deep ecology. All of this is meant to provoke an awareness in the reader of the complexity of the issues involved and, since her musings are open-ended, to make his or her own mind up on these issues or investigate them further.

Another dialogic technique is now realised in the form of John’s wandering thoughts. He raises in his own mind an objection to animal rights, one that Costello, therefore, cannot respond to:

Jaguar poems are all very well, he thinks, but you won’t get a bunch of Australians standing around a sheep, listening to its silly baa, writing poems against it. Isn’t that what is so suspect in the whole animal-rights business: that it has to ride on the back of pensive gorillas and sexy jaguars and huggable pandas because the real objects of its concern, chickens and pigs, to say nothing of white rats or prawns, are not newsworthy? (55)

On the one hand, John’s objection can be seen as raising a legitimate concern, but on the other, it can be seen as a misrepresentation or even a parody of the animal rights movement, particularly in the reference to the Australians and the sheep. In fact, the website of an organisation like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (www.peta.org) shows that the main concern is precisely the industrial farming of animals, and Peter Singer focuses on factory farms in Chapter 2 and animal experimentation in Chapter 3 of *Animal Liberation*. Indeed, Peter Singer emphasizes how his focusing on rights for apes in “The Great Ape Project” should not be seen as a step backwards from his commitment to liberating farmed animals.

More significantly, though, Hughes’s farm poetry is ample evidence of how farmed

animals can provide the material for powerful poetry: a bull confined to its stall, a moon calf full of life yet unaware of its fate in the abattoir, an ewe's life-threatening miscarriage, the threat posed by the elements to the survival of livestock. Thus John's beliefs that laboratory and farmed animals are not newsworthy or fit topics for literature are misguided, revealing once again his lack of real engagement with what his mother is trying to say—indeed, a lack of imagination—and representing a widespread misconception of animal rights. The dialogic structure of *The Lives of Animals* enables Coetzee to express such thoughts whether or not he finds them to be misguided. Indeed, it could be argued that John represents a more aloof and sceptical voice within Coetzee himself, and Costello a more painfully engaged one.

The next interrogator is Elaine Marx, who asks a very involved and pointed question. The first part of the question, which asks how Costello can use reason to argue against reason, has been dealt with in Chapter 1. The second part of the question, which asks whether Costello is not being utopian in expecting people to give up meat, has been explored in Chapter 2. The third and final part of her question will be treated here. Costello does not respond to the first part of Elaine's question and instead of answering her directly on the other two parts of her question, she chooses to pursue Elaine's allusion to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, more or less conceding her criticisms, but engaging in a highly imaginative reinterpretation of Swift's work and showing the consequences of embracing our Yahoo nature. Elaine asks in the final part of her question:

“Specifically, my question is: Are you not expecting too much of humankind when you ask us to live without species exploitation, without cruelty? Is it not more human to accept our own humanity—even if it means embracing the carnivorous Yahoo within ourselves—than to end up like Gulliver, pining for a state he can never attain, and for good reason; it is not in his nature, which is human nature?” (Coetzee, 1999b, 55-56)

For all its sophistication, Elaine Marx's question can be challenged in various ways and it is surprising that Costello does not tackle its obvious weaknesses. For one, Elaine's

assumption that there is a universal nature, and that this nature necessarily involves meat eating, can be questioned. There may be no such thing as a universal human nature unconditioned by environment and culture. Nurture may play an even greater role than nature in determining an individual's dietary habits, since there are whole cultures that tend towards or are almost exclusively vegetarian, such as Buddhism and forms of Hinduism. It is true that humans as a species would never have evolved had their hominid ancestors not started to eat meat, but meat eating is not essential to the health or survival of individual human beings. In the end, arguments about it being in our nature to eat meat appear to be examples of bad faith, since they are attempts to evade responsibility for one's choices, to avoid facing the moral challenge of vegetarianism. If there is such a thing as an essential human nature, summed up, for instance, in Aristotle's definition of man being the rational animal, then part of it must involve choice, precisely because of rationality. Furthermore, if one follows Elaine Marx's argument to its logical conclusion, then one should embrace other aspects of one's Yahoo nature, too, such as rape, murder, slavery, torture and waging war. In a liberal democracy, laws are there not to create a utopian society, but to protect individuals from abuse and exploitation both by other individuals and by the state. Likewise, Costello and the animal rights movement do not seek to create a utopia, but to extend the protection of individuals to nonhuman animals, to broaden the scope of the liberal creed, in which individuals are free to pursue their ideas of happiness as long as they do not harm others, to include nonhuman others.

Instead of making these obvious and valid objections and answering Elaine's question directly, Costello chooses to focus on Swift. She uses "grounded" literary analysis and narrative rather than abstract philosophical arguments to answer Elaine's question:

"An interesting question," his mother replies. "I find Swift an intriguing writer. For instance, his 'Modest Proposal.' Whenever there is overwhelming agreement about how to read a book, I prick up my ears." (56)

She then proceeds to read against the 'consensus' view, that 'Modest Proposal' is a



satirical criticism of the brutal way in which the English treated the Irish in Swift's day, and provides her own idiosyncratic reading, that:

“If it is atrocious to kill and eat human babies, why is it not atrocious to kill and eat piglets? If you want Swift to be a dark ironist rather than a facile pamphleteer, you might examine the premises that make his fable so easy to digest.” (56)

Not only is this an original interpretation of ‘Modest Proposal,’ although fanciful, but it is also a statement about literary interpretation and consumption. It could be argued that the “overwhelming agreement” and “consensus” that she speaks of indicate a monologic interpretation of a work, closing its polyphonic potential and censoring the more disturbing interpretations that would make it less “easy to digest.” The reference to “digest” echoes Garrard’s comment that Costello’s lecture provided “much food for thought” (45), which is ironic since Costello’s audience finds her views difficult to digest. Her animal image in “I prick up my ears” is also quite witty. By adding her own idiosyncratic interpretation of canonical pieces, Costello challenges authoritative interpretations and provokes readers to listen to the polyphony of voices in great works of literature. In so doing, she destabilises complacent certainties and encourages a critical rethinking of assumptions and prejudices, thus functioning as a midwife to ideas.

Her interpretation of *Gulliver’s Travels* is equally original and idiosyncratic. Initially she uses Swift to problematise the arbitrariness of the “standard of reason” which has traditionally been used to differentiate between man and beast. Costello argues that Swift subverts this distinction by associating rational beings with horse-like creatures, or Houyhnhnms, and beasts with the human-like Yahoos, and she suggests that Gulliver was expelled from Houyhnhnm society merely on the basis of his appearance, his learning their language and his ability to discourse rationally with them apparently not being considered relevant.

She then proceeds to revise *Gulliver’s Travels* in her own postcolonial narrative, pointing out that “this is a perspective you might expect from an ex-colonial” (57).

This may refer both to Costello as a descendent of the British who colonised Australia and to Coetzee as a descendent of the Dutch who colonised the Cape and later introduced apartheid. In her version, Gulliver returns to the islands of his travels with an expeditionary force, conquers them using violence and begins the process of colonising them. She then asks “What would that do to Swift’s somewhat too neat, somewhat too disembodied, somewhat too unhistorical fable?” (57). What she has done is expose Elaine’s essentialist notions of human nature to historicist revisionism, indicating how supposedly universal human nature is grounded, in fact, on contingencies of history and relations of power, particularly those of subjugation and exploitation. She concludes her answer to Elaine’s question whether we should not simply embrace our Yahoo nature which is our human nature:

“You say there is nothing to do but embrace that status, that nature. Very well, let us do so. But let us also push Swift’s fable to its limits and recognize that, in history, embracing the status of man has entailed slaughtering and enslaving a race of divine or else divinely created beings and bringing down on ourselves a curse thereby.” (57-58)

This seems an oblique answer to Elaine Marx’s question, framed as it is in fabulous terms. It does, however, point out what Costello perceives to be the moral and spiritual cost of humanity’s treatment of animals, namely a cursed or fallen state, an alienation from our better nature, and thus necessitating some form of salvation. This relates to her comment that her vegetarianism comes from a desire to save her soul and it reinforces the idea that she is a prophet of inwardness, a Socratic figure. This ultimate corruption of the human spirit may be the corrupting influence of power and the desire to dominate, an often unwitting embracing of the maxim that ‘might is right.’

When Costello walks with John to his office in between sessions a private space is created in which mother and son can speak intimately about their attitudes toward animal rights and activism, permitting John to ask his mother more pointed and personal questions than public forums tend to allow. Thus the dramatic, dialogic

structure of this scene permits another kind of voice to be heard. John, who has appeared relatively neutral and reserved up until now, begins to interrogate his mother quite ruthlessly and openly. However, as when his thoughts wandered off during his mother's seminar earlier, many of his critical questions are misguided. Nonetheless, this dramatic structure gives Coetzee an opportunity to explore these criticisms which are as widespread as they are mistaken, although they could well represent his own misgivings and doubts about the power of literature to change people's values.

John asks his mother very bluntly, even insensitively, whether she believes "that poetry lessons are going to close down the slaughterhouses?" (58). When she answers in the negative, he asks her why she does it then, asking her whether poetry, like philosophy, is not just another kind of clever talk. He does not really give her a chance to respond but goes on to assert that:

"It seems to me that the level of behavior you want to change is too elementary, too elemental, to be reached by talk. Carnivorousness expresses something truly deep about human beings, just as it does about jaguars. You wouldn't want to put a jaguar on a soybean diet." (58)

John's reduction of vegetarianism to a "soybean diet" is an example of one of his distortions, as is his assertion about carnivorousness being essential to human nature, a fallacy that was discussed earlier. In fact, humans are essentially omnivores. When Costello correctly points out that humans can survive but jaguars will die on a vegetarian diet, John responds with uncharacteristic emotion:

"But they don't *want* a vegetarian diet. They *like* eating meat. There is something atavistically satisfying about it. That's the brutal truth. Just as it's a brutal truth that, in a sense, animals deserve what they get. Why waste your time trying to help them when they won't help themselves? Let them stew in their own juice. If I were asked what the general attitude is toward the animals we eat, I would say: contempt. We treat them badly because we despise them; we despise them because they don't fight back."
(58)

A critic has described John as an ‘objective’ (because disembodied) male intellect (Wright, 2006, 208) who has to mediate between two ranting females, namely his mother and his wife (Wright, 2006, 205-7), but here it is clear that he is ranting, and his rant provides Coetzee with the opportunity to expose the moral emptiness of speciesism. There is considerable irony in his use of “brutal” (twice), since he is applying the term to humans rather than the “brute” beasts. This is reinforced by his use of the word “atavistically” since the term refers to a resemblance to remote ancestors or to a reversion to an earlier type, and echoes Elaine Marx’s suggestion that humans should embrace their Yahoo, meat-eating natures. It entirely misses the ethical dimension of meat-eating and completely ignores the interests and rights of the animals raised and slaughtered for meat.

In Part 1 of *The Lives of Animals*, Costello says she wishes to avoid the kind of cheap talk that polarizes people and sorts them into sheep and goats. Yet this is what she does when she discusses savage, meat-eating Yahoos and civilized, vegetarian Houyhnhnms. Or at least her son John, or Coetzee, divides humankind into the lost (meat-eaters like Yahoos) or the saved (vegetarians like the Houyhnhnms), when he asks his mother why people should not atavistically embrace the Yahoo within themselves. Indeed, Costello does so too when she says that her vegetarianism is based on her desire to save her soul, implying that those who are not vegetarian have polluted their souls, just like those people who turned a blind eye to Nazi atrocities.

It is tempting to condemn John for the ugly picture of human nature and the world that he paints, but, in fact, he is merely expressing honestly the feelings that most humans have on the issue of the treatment of animals, whether they are willing to admit this or not, and whether they are even aware of these, often unconscious, assumptions and values. Costello says that she does not disagree. However, she is not content to accept these “facts” of human nature, but wishes to question them and, Socratic-like, encourage people to question their unconscious prejudices and preconceptions.

Costello then goes on to explore the comparison between animals and prisoners-of-war, thus returning to the idea of confinement treated previously, both in relation

to Red Peter and to the Jews incarcerated in Nazi concentration camps. She points out that:

“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). That war went on for millions of years. We won it definitively only a few hundred years ago, when we invented guns. It is only since victory became absolute that we have been able to cultivate compassion. But our compassion is very thinly spread. Beneath it is a more primitive attitude. The prisoner of war does not belong to our tribe. We can do what we want with him.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 59)

Her reference to Aristotle is the first footnote in Part 2 of *The Lives of Animals*. Although Aristotle’s measured and philosophical language contrasts strikingly with the emotional excess of John’s rant, the sentiments in his text are just as disconcerting as those in John’s, all the more so for its lack of emotion. Once again, the dialogism of *The Lives of Animals* permits a striking contrast of voices, although more in terms of tone than content in this case. Again Costello historicises supposedly universal philosophical claims like those of Aristotle, suggesting that they are based on nothing more ethical than primitive tribalism. This also cautions against an uncritical adoption of virtue ethics, of which Aristotle’s philosophy is the supreme example. When John objects that “one doesn’t kill prisoners of war. One turns them into slaves” (59), Costello once again agrees and pursues the slavery analogy further: “[w]ell, that’s what our captive herds are: slave populations” (59). The slavery analogy was traced back to Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* in Chapter 1, where Ian Hacking’s reservations about this analogy were contrasted with Steven Best’s unhesitant adoption of it. Costello makes a convincing case for animal slavery, but then seems to lose her self-control (and credibility) when she commits the fallacy of anthropomorphism in speaking of rats as though they form pockets of resistance in an ongoing war between humans and animals:

“Rats haven’t surrendered. They fight back. They form underground

units in our sewers. They aren't winning, but they aren't losing either.”

(59)

Of course, her words may be meant by Coetzee to put an ironic and darkly humorous distance between himself and Costello. Thus Socratic irony may, arguably, be reconstituted, in part, as an occasional discrepancy between the views of Coetzee's persona and fictional author Costello and her actual author Coetzee, although it may well indicate a self-critical attitude. It also fits her profile as a wise fool, since to think new thoughts that go against received and majority wisdom is to risk making a fool of oneself.

Costello's last public appearance takes the form of a debate with Thomas O'Hearne. A debate of this kind is well suited to polyphony since two powerful voices, one poetic and the other philosophical, are evoked and no final resolution achieved, thus provoking the reader to make up his or her own mind on the issue.

In the first essay attached to *The Lives of Animals*, Marjorie Garber identifies the work as an academic novel, amongst other things, and discusses the way in which the names playfully refer to actual academics (Coetzee, 1999b, 78-9). Concerning Thomas O'Hearne, she asks: “[c]an he be a relative of animal poet and philosopher Vickie Hearne?” (80). Ian Hacking also discusses the possible composite identity of O'Hearne in a footnote:

Costello debates animal rights with the campus philosopher Thomas O'Hearne; apart from the suggestion of Thomas Aquinas, one can hear, here, Anthony O'Hear (pronounced O'Hare), who is an exponent of Karl Popper, and of course Vickie Hearne. (Hacking, 2000, 24)

However, in his views he most closely (but not exclusively) resembles the academic philosopher Michael P.T. Leahy, for whom Costello has an especial dislike. In fact, the references to Karl Popper, who dismissed British linguistic philosophy as sterile scholasticism and who was highly critical of Leahy's philosopher, Wittgenstein, and to Vickie Hearne, whom Hacking describes as a “wicked iconoclast” (Hacking, 2000, 24), would seem ironically inappropriate, although there could be a veiled criticism

of Popper's rationalism.

The debate begins politely but ends on a note of “acrimony, hostility, bitterness” (Coetzee, 1999b, 66). The arrangement is that:

O’Hearne will have three opportunities to present positions, and his mother three opportunities to reply. Since O’Hearne has had the courtesy to send her a précis beforehand, she knows, broadly speaking, what he will be saying. (60)

O’Hearne’s first point is to criticise the animal-rights movements for failing to recognise its historical nature and “becoming, like the human-rights movement, yet another Western crusade against the rest of the world, claiming universality for what are simply its own standards” (60). He thus uses the same kind of historical argument against Costello that she used earlier against Elaine Marx and John. He points out that other cultures and religious traditions have their own norms (and his use of the word reminds one of the name “Norma”) for the treatment of both humans and animals, and see no need to adopt those of the West. He then goes on to defend Descartes—as Leahy does in his book (Leahy, 1991)—for claiming animals are a different order from humans. O’Hearne argues that “[t]he notion that we have an obligation to animals themselves to treat them compassionately—as opposed to an obligation to ourselves to do so—is very recent, very Western, and even very Anglo-Saxon” (Coetzee, 1999b, 60). O’Hearne’s position is presented very forcefully, testifying to the polyphony of *The Lives of Animals*. However, his argument seems excessively relativistic and historicist, especially for an Anglo-Saxon philosopher, since such philosophers tend to hold reason as a universal, objective standard. Indeed, Costello has shown a keener sensitivity to the embeddedness of norms in history than does O’Hearne: like Elaine, he seems to have an essentialist notion of “traditional” cultures. He does not display an awareness of the fact that as historical conditions change, so too do norms.

In response, Costello acknowledges that O’Hearne’s concerns are substantial and that his account of the history is accurate. The first chapter of James Turner’s *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Turner,

1980) is cited to confirm the historical accuracy, although Turner refers to “Anglo-American” rather than “Anglo-Saxon” (Turner, 1980, xi-xii). Turner opens his Preface with the words:

This book is about people who changed their minds. And ours. I mean not the discarding of a few outworn opinions, but the outgrowing of a way of thinking and feeling [about human-animal relationships] and the emergence of a new, distinctively modern sensibility. (Turner, 1980, xi)

He attributes the change in sensibility to three mutually necessary developments:

It is a commonplace among those interested in the nineteenth century that two revolutionary changes in outlook, among others, helped to transform the Anglo-American mind during those years. One was the realization that human beings are not supranatural but are directly descended from beasts. The other was the rising esteem of science, as a model of intellectual endeavour and as the key to the future of the human race. It is not so widely recognized ... that the nineteenth century was also an era of enhanced sensitiveness about pain. (Turner, 1980, xi)

In terms of *The Lives of Animals*, the irony of this Anglo-American sympathy for the suffering of animals is that, besides pioneering the industrialised slaughterhouse, in the early twentieth century the Anglo-American world produced two very influential schools of thought, namely logical positivism and its psychological counterpart, behaviourism, the latter which Costello scathingly criticises, accusing it of being completely indifferent to the suffering of animals whose bodies it subjects to experimentation in laboratories.²

In opposition to O’Hearne’s relativism, Costello points out how “kindness to animals—and here I use the word *kindness* in its full sense, as an acceptance that we are all of one kind, one nature—has been more widespread than you imply” (Coetzee,

²As Singer points out in *Liberation*, psychological experimentation on animals, which should not be conflated with medical and product testing on animals, is usually pointless.

1999b, 61) both in various cultures and in children generally, pointing out that children “have to be taught it is alright to kill and eat [animals]” (61). She also correctly points out that:

“the discontinuity [Descartes] saw between animals and human beings was the result of incomplete information. The science of Descartes’s day had no acquaintance with the great apes or with higher marine animals, and thus little cause to question the assumption that animals cannot think.”
(61)

This is so because Descartes’s views were necessarily ignorant of the Darwinian revolution in the biological sciences that was still to come.

Concerning ignorance of the great apes and “higher marine animals,” Costello cites an article by Mary Midgley entitled “Persons and Non-persons” in Peter Singer’s *In Defence of Animals* (Singer, 1985, 59), an article that was briefly discussed in Chapter 1 and which considers the possibility of treating dolphins as legal persons. Midgley argues:

When our civilization formed the views on the species barrier which it still largely holds, all the most highly developed non-human animals were simply unknown. Legends apart, it was assumed that whales and dolphins were much like fish. The great apes were not even discovered until the eighteenth century, and real knowledge of their way of living has been acquired only within the last few decades. (Midgley, 1985, 59)

Midgley’s critique of personhood is also worth quoting, since it is echoed by Costello’s comment that some higher mammals can think, even though she rejects intelligence as a criterion of moral worth:

The idea of a person in the almost technical sense required by morality today is the one worked out by Kant in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. It is the idea of a rational being, capable of choice and therefore endowed with dignity, worthy of respect, having rights; one that must be

regarded always as an end in itself, not only as a means to the ends of others. . . .

Now, if intelligence is really so important to the issue, a certain vertigo descends when we ask, ‘Where do we draw the line?’ because intelligence is a matter of degree. Some inhabitants of our own planet, including whales and dolphins, have turned out to be a lot brighter than was once supposed. (Midgley, 1985, 56)

Continuing her discussion of the science of Descartes’s day, and citing Rosemary Rodd, Costello says that:

“ . . . it had no access to the fossil record that would reveal a graded continuum of anthropoid creatures stretching from the higher primates to *Homo sapiens*—anthropoids, one must point out, who were eventually exterminated by man in the course of his rise to power.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 61)

Rodd writes that “[h]istorically, our own species was probably responsible for the elimination of the other ‘men’ normally placed in the genus *Homo*” (Rodd, 1990, 37). Costello substitutes the term “eliminated” with the equally loaded “exterminated” and she uses the emotive phrase “rise to power.” However, she seems to be suggesting that the modern treatment of animals—and possibly the Holocaust too—has primitive and brutal precedents, that it is, in a word, atavistic. It is interesting that Costello insists on using the words “men” and “his” whenever she mentions the violence in human history, and that both sources cited here are written by women. This would accord with her ecofeminist critique of both anthropocentrism and androcentrism. These female voices contribute significantly to the polyphony of *The Lives of Animals* especially in concert against the chorus of male voices devaluing the lives of animals.

Rodd makes a crucial point elsewhere in her book. She discusses the importance of imagination in understanding how absolute the extinction of even an animal’s consciousness is. This follows from the fact that “animals are subjects, not objects, and as such are entities with a particular individual value, independent of their status as

‘containers of utility’ ” (Rodd, 1990, 124). This aligns her very closely with Costello’s views on animal subjectivity and value.

Costello concludes her response to O’Hearne’s first question by conceding his point about “Western cultural arrogance” but opining that “those who pioneered the industrialization of animal lives and the commodification of animal flesh should be at the forefront of trying to atone for it” (Coetzee, 1999b, 61), once again introducing religious language into her evaluation of animal exploitation, suggesting that our treatment of animals has cast us into a state of sin.

Michael P.T. Leahy’s voice is strongly evident in the second and third of O’Hearne’s theses, and Costello is unable to maintain her composure for the first time and seems at times to be unable to answer him. This testifies to the polyphony of *The Lives of Animals* since the independence of his voice is respected despite the repugnance that Costello and, apparently, Coetzee feel for his views. Before continuing with O’Hearne’s arguments, it may be necessary to provide a brief overview of Leahy’s approach.

He takes a Wittgensteinian language-games approach to attack the language used by proponents of animal liberation and animal rights, who, he thinks, have made a wrong turning and are leading their followers in the wrong direction. The concept of “language game” can be defined as follows:

According to [Wittgenstein’s] famous analogy between using language and playing games, we have in both various sets of rules or conventions, and these determine what moves are permissible or impermissible, successes or failures, each set of rules identifying a distinct game. A given move can be judged only according to the rules of the game to which it belongs. Many time-honoured philosophical problems result from judging moves in one game by the rules of another, and can be dissolved only by systematic clarification of the relevant differences; hence clarification should be philosophy’s main aim. (Flew, 1979, 196)

Although very influential, Wittgenstein's notions of language games and of clarification being the main aim of philosophy have not been uncontested, perhaps most tellingly by Karl Popper, for whom philosophy becomes trivial if it is understood no longer to deal with genuine problems (Popper, 2002a, 92-99).

Leahy quotes Wittgenstein at the outset:

Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings. . . . What I have to do then is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger points. (Ludwig Wittgenstein 1980a: 18e) (Leahy, 1991, 1)

He admonishes the animal-rights philosophers for ignoring the work of Wittgenstein who is "a towering figure in contemporary philosophy, competing with Einstein and Freud as the greatest theorist of the present century, and it is incredible that his many references to the nature of animals are almost totally ignored by our liberationists" (Leahy, 1991, 3). Wittgenstein thus becomes an authority upon whose words Leahy bases his philosophical monologue. He goes on to write that he will:

be employing the *type* of argument that disqualifies dogs as authentic sycophants or fawners to undermine the attribution to animals of a whole range of what are often called mental abilities, such as desires, emotions, intentions, preferences, self-awareness, *in the sense in which these terms are used of human beings*. To this escalation of the attack Regan and the others will be seen to be united in implacable opposition. [Leahy's emphasis] (Leahy, 1991, 7-8)

Leahy points out that animals may use communication systems, but that this does not amount to language: "Wittgenstein's seminal notion of *language-games* will be an essential methodological aid in showing that what is at issue here is not something exclusive to our talk about animals but a general feature of our understanding of the way that language works" [Leahy's emphasis] (Leahy, 1991, 13). Later in his book, he discusses Wittgenstein's language games, pointing out that a word has its

meaning not in referring to a reality beyond language but in its position within a rule-governed system, namely a “language game” (104) and quotes Wittgenstein: “the speaking of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (107). He dismisses the “scornful depiction of Wittgenstein and a whole generation of British and American philosophers as ‘linguistic analysts’ ” and points out that “Wittgenstein spends a considerable amount of time debunking the view that language is primarily a system of signs which stand for, or name, something” (110). He adds that “[t]he temptation to think that ‘inner’ processes really hold the key is a metaphysical item of Cartesian excess baggage” (116) and concludes that the fact “[t]hat animals do not use language will be the end of the matter, if we *look and see* free of assumptions about subliminal ‘mental events’ being the essence of thought” (119).

More significantly for *The Lives of Animals*, he questions the claims of scientists who tried to teach great apes ‘Ameslan’ (American Sign Language) in the 1960s and 1970s and emphasizes that it involved sign language and not speech—the latter being essential for human language (Leahy, 1991, 31-32). He points out that the use of signs does not constitute language because it has no syntax and that (the very clever ape) Washoe’s strings of signs cannot be considered sentences: “Now, without language there cannot be self-consciousness and therefore animals cannot be self-conscious, since they lack language (no ‘I’ to indicate the self)” (32-33).

He goes on to argue that their lack of language in the fully human sense of the word means that animals cannot experience pain (29), possess rationality (34-36), have desires (43), have interests (43), entertain beliefs (50-51), be self-aware (146) or even perceive in the fully human sense (148), in short, that their lack of language means that animals are primitive beings and thus cannot be treated as the equals of humans as Singer assumes (20-22).

Leahy also rehabilitates Kant, whom the liberationists, according to him, have treated too harshly (182). According to Leahy, Kant did not teach that we should treat animals merely as means to our own ends but that we should—namely be morally obliged to—treat them with kindness, according to “shadowy near-duties,”

meaning that we have a minimal responsibility to animals in contrast to a full responsibility to humans.

As pointed out previously, Leahy's book, *Against Liberation* is a sophisticated and powerful critique, using Wittgenstein's notion of language games, of the language used by the proponents of animal liberation and animal rights. It may perhaps be partly because of the power of his critique that Costello eschews philosophical language in her lecture and adopts her own approach. However, for all the controlled sophistication of its earlier chapters, Leahy's objectivity seems to break down in his final chapter, the chapter quoted by Costello and which she mentions dismissively in her debate with O'Hearne. For in his eighth and final chapter, entitled "Chapters of Discontent: Eating, Experimenting, Zoos, Bloodsports," he discusses the practical applications of his philosophical analysis, and his extreme conservatism comes through very strongly. Even his style differs markedly from the controlled, neutral tone of previous chapters. He is merely concerned with maintaining the status quo—one is reminded of Aristotle's defence of slavery—and shows a remarkable lack of compassion.

Nigel Pleasants has recently argued that Leahy's use of Wittgenstein to oppose animal liberation is mistaken in certain respects and that Wittgenstein's ideas can, in fact, be used progressively (Pleasants, 2006, 314, 317). However, Coetzee would not have had access to Pleasants's article and thus Leahy's book could have cast him in doubt concerning the effectiveness of philosophy in promoting animal rights, and provided him with another reason for failing to use the animal-rights philosophers discussed in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, Costello, in rejecting rationality as a criterion of moral worth, and the animal liberationists, in making sentience rather than reason the relevant criterion, may considerably weaken many of Leahy's criticisms. This recourse to rationality as a criterion is precisely what Costello questions at the College Dinner and, since O'Hearne was present there, it is surprising that he raises the same point again.

Leahy's voice is clearly evident in O'Hearne's second question, not least because his book is cited in the footnote, although there the words of another British analytic philosopher, Bernard Williams, are quoted, which Leahy uses at the beginning of

Chapter 8 in *Against Liberation*. Coetzee quotes in his footnote:

Before one gets to the question of how animals should be treated, there is the fundamental point that this is the only question there can be: how they should be treated. The choice can only be whether animals benefit from our practices or are harmed by them. (Coetzee, 1999b, 62)

The continuation of the quotation, which Coetzee omits, is very significant, since it contains an incisive criticism of the term “speciesism”:

This is why speciesism is falsely modelled on racism and sexism, which really are prejudices. To suppose that there is an ineliminable white or male understanding of the world, and to think that the only choice is whether blacks or women should benefit from ‘our’ (white, male) practices or be harmed by them: this is already to be prejudiced. But in the case of human relations to animals, the analogues to such thoughts are simply correct. (Leahy, 1991, 208)

This may be partly why Costello does not use the term “speciesism” in *The Lives of Animals*. However, although Williams presents his claim as though it is incontestable, and while it does seem to be a very strong argument, it can nonetheless be challenged since it seems to presuppose an anthropomorphic and paternalistic assumption illegitimately universalised and unaware of its historical conditioning. For one, it seems ultimately to be based on the increasingly criticised attitude of dominion or stewardship towards nature that can be found in the Bible. For another, humans were not always in such a position of power over animals that they could dictate terms to them. As Costello pointed out earlier, the war between men and animals was won by humans “definitively only a few hundred years ago, when we invented guns” (Coetzee, 1999b, 59). Williams’s words come across as very monological and proscriptive, although, by including them as a footnote amongst the polyphony of voices in *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee manages to dialogise and relativise them.

Thus Coetzee puts into O’Hearne’s mouth Williams’s words as quoted by Leahy to reach the conclusion that rights apply directly only to humans and therefore that

animals are not entitled to any rights but are entirely dependent on how we choose to treat them. O’Hearne’s use of Williams’s quotation is not the only way he uses Leahy in his second thesis. His argument—actually part of the premises of the argument, the conclusion of which has just been discussed—that even the smartest great apes cannot master language and hence abstract thought, and therefore “cannot enjoy legal rights because they are not persons, even potential persons, as fetuses are” (62), is very similar to the types of argument used by Leahy.

Not surprisingly, Costello does not attempt to answer O’Hearne on his own terms, since she has rejected the discourse of philosophy, and since she “would first want to interrogate the whole question of rights and how we come to possess them” (62). Indeed, she goes on to dismiss the entire behaviourist enterprise of testing animals in the artificial environment of laboratories, observing that “the program of scientific experimentation that leads you to conclude that animals are imbeciles is profoundly anthropocentric” (62). She notes that if a behaviourist scientist “were to be parachuted into the jungles of Borneo, he or she would be dead of starvation in a week or two” (62), a point offered apparently as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the behaviourists’ idea of intelligence. Her tone has now become almost irritated as she begins to lose her composure, concluding:

“It is the experiments themselves that are imbecile. The behaviorists who design them claim that we understand only by a process of creating abstract models and then testing those models against reality. What nonsense. We understand by immersing ourselves and our intelligence in complexity. There is something self-stultified in the way in which scientific behaviorism recoils from the complexity of life.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 62-3)

Here Coetzee cites two powerful critics of scientific behaviourism, namely the ethologist Donald Griffin and the philosopher of science Bernard Rollin. Griffin’s criticism of behaviourism is quoted in the footnotes. In the pages of *The Unheeded Cry* cited by Coetzee, Rollin provides a sustained critique of behaviourism, showing how it became a dominant ideology in the Anglo-American world in the area of animal studies

despite its divergence from Darwinism and despite the competing discipline of ethology, which observes the behaviour of animals embedded in their natural contexts, an approach with which Costello would presumably agree. Costello would also find agreeable the ample use of anecdote by ethologists, something perceived as a weakness by laboratory-trained behaviourists, even though ethologists are skilled observers and have extensive field experience. There is universal agreement amongst reviewers and critics that the most convincing essay in the “Reflections” of *The Lives of Animals* is that of the ethologist and primatologist Barbara Smuts, precisely because of her personal accounts of meaningful interactions with animals in the field, both wild and domesticated (Smuts, 1999). She confirms many of Costello’s intuitions about animals.

There is another sense in which behaviourist research on animals may be called “imbecile,” or, at least, fundamentally unsound. Peter Singer quotes Alice Heim on the inconsistency, even contradiction, at the heart of psychological research on animals:

The cardinal sin for the experimental psychologist working in the field of “animal behavior” is anthropomorphism. Yet if he did not believe in the analogue of the human being and the lower animal even he, presumably, would find his work largely unjustified. (Singer, 2002, 51)

This means that animals and humans must be sufficiently similar for the results of studies on animals to be applicable to humans, yet if they are sufficiently similar, then animals deserve similar treatment to humans, and may not be experimented upon in the ways they currently are, since treating humans in this way would be considered immoral and abhorrent. On the other hand, if humans and animals are different enough to warrant unequal treatment, then the results of experimentation on animals are not applicable to humans, which is the usual justification of such research.

Rollin, whose Socratic approach to science and common sense was discussed in

Chapter 2, also exposes science as an ideology and debunks the myth—largely propagated by logical positivists and behaviourists—that it is value-free:

As Paul Feyerabend has provocatively argued, dialogue has been replaced by dictatorship, with science assuming the role of expert and ordinary common sense the role of passive recipient, even in political life. (Rollin, 1990, 14)

And:

Contemporary scientists, of course, also share other philosophical and valuational commitments which we have not hitherto discussed. For example, Paul Feyerabend has pointed out, they share the belief that a way of knowing is a *better* and more valuable way of knowing than an approach which does not increase control. (Rollin, 1990, 59)

It is precisely this desire to control and dominate that Costello critiques, amongst other things, in *The Lives of Animals* and Coetzee in much of his fiction, and is one reason why Coetzee adopts Bahktinian ideas of dialogism, polyphony and carnival to oppose official monologism and authority. The ideology of scientism, the belief that scientific knowledge is a superior way of knowing, is one of the discourses of power that Costello criticises.

Not only does Costello reject the discourse of behaviourism, but she resorts, once again, to a narrative as an alternative to O’Heerne’s argumentative mode, once again replacing the abstract and general terms of philosophy with the concrete and particular ones of imaginative literature. She mentions a hen that Albert Camus, as a child, had brought to his grandmother to be slaughtered, the death cry of which led him years later to write an impassioned attack on the guillotine, and “[a]s a result, in part, of that polemic, capital punishment was abolished in France” (Coetzee, 1999b, 63). She concludes with a rhetorical question, asking “[w]ho is to say, then, that the hen did not speak?” (62-3), citing two works by Camus, *The First Man* (Camus, 1995) and “Réflexions sur la guillotine” (Camus, 1965a) from *Essais* (Camus, 1965b). In the former, the killing of the hen involves a kind of rite of passage for the young

narrator, a test of his manliness which he apparently fails. In terms of polyphony, the antithetical voices of poetry and philosophy are strikingly contrasted here. Certainly Leahy would not consider the cries of the hen to be language or speaking, and for good philosophical reasons too. Indeed, Costello's little narrative can be seen as absurd. However, even though Costello's flight of imagination seems fanciful once again, at least it challenges the 'normal' way of perceiving things and provokes her audience and readers to view the world in radically different ways.

O'Hearne's name, it was suggested earlier, may be an ironic reference to Vicki Hearne (although Coetzee does not cite her), another female voice, whom Ian Hacking calls "a wicked iconoclast" (quoted above). Hearne is both philosophically astute and, unlike most academic philosophers, has extensive experience as an animal trainer. In her important book *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name* (1989), which Coetzee is almost certain to have read, she expresses dissatisfaction with Wittgenstein-inspired 'therapeutic' philosophy taught at universities where professors have the task of 'curing' students of erroneous language-usage:

Another habit that students had, curiously, to be cured of was the habit of supposing that one animal might hide from another animal. (I have never known a hunter to be successfully cured of this habit of mind.) I was deeply intrigued by this But it was sternly pointed out to me what a great and anthropomorphic mistake it was to say or think this. In order to be hiding . . . a creature would have to have certain logical concepts that animals simply couldn't have. (Hearne, 1986, 7)

She points out passages written by academic philosophers that show a surprising ignorance of animal behaviour (Hearne, 1986, 11). Her book is an attempt to bridge the huge divide that separates the world (in Wittgensteinian terms, the form of life, or language community) of animal trainers and the world of academic philosophers who, without any field experience, purport to understand animal behaviour. Her voice is unique and valuable, and it is surprising that Coetzee does not make more use of it.

The final thesis of O'Hearne is very complex and multi-levelled, and is clearly

influenced by Leahy. It concerns three main points: the ability to conceive of death, licit and illicit cruelty to animals and a contrast between hunters and animal-rights activists. Costello really only responds to the first part of his question and then proceeds to rant against reason, or against reason as used by philosophers, particularly Leahy, to exclude animals from moral consideration.

O’Hearne begins by arguing that:

“I do not believe that life is as important to animals as it is to us. There is certainly an instinctive struggle against death, which they share with us. But they do not *understand* death as we do, or rather, as we fail to do. There is, in the human mind, a collapse of the imagination, and that collapse of the imagination—graphically evoked in yesterday’s lecture—is the basis of our fear of death” (Coetzee, 1999b, 63)

This is essentially Leahy’s point when he argues that:

Animals must, and can only, remain unaware of their fate since to be even possibly otherwise would involve an understanding of dying, and its implications for one’s desire to continue living. (Leahy, 1991, 219)

It is clear that O’Hearne is turning Costello’s “sympathetic imagination” on its head, using it not to close the gap between humans and nonhuman animals, but to open it more widely. His critique of the sympathetic imagination is also evident in what he continues to argue:

“To animals, death is continuous with life. It is only among certain very imaginative human beings that one encounters a horror of dying so acute that they then project it onto other beings, including animals.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 64)

O’Hearne is surely implying that Costello is one of those “very imaginative human beings” who anthropomorphically project onto animals the horror of the thought of dying. True to the polyphonic nature of *The Lives of Animals* it is also clear that Coetzee is subjecting his own ideas to serious scrutiny, provoking uncertainty

about Costello's "sympathetic imagination" in the minds of his readers and audience. However, it could be argued that O'Hearne has misunderstood the faculty of the sympathetic imagination which involves not so much an intellectual act of projecting one's feelings onto another as achieving an imaginative union with the suffering other; it is an embodied sharing of being rather than a disembodied projection of feelings; it involves becoming the suffering animal through an act of sympathetic imagination rather than perceiving or imagining a suffering animal and then sympathising with it. It could be argued that O'Hearne's intellectualism and rationalism have limited his understanding of the sympathetic imagination.

His second argument builds on his first thesis, that "[i]t is licit to kill animals ... because their lives are not as important to them as our lives are to us" but that "[g]ratuitous cruelty ... I would regard as illicit" (64). He concludes that:

"Therefore it is quite appropriate that we should agitate for the humane treatment of animals, even and particularly in the slaughterhouses. This has for a long time been the goal of animal welfare organizations, and I salute them for it." (64)

What O'Hearne says seems to be quite reasonable according to conventional morality, and Leahy's voice comes through very clearly here, but from the point of view of someone who has actually investigated conditions on factory farms, in slaughterhouses and in experimental laboratories, his words come across as ignorant, complacent and hypocritical, which may partly be why Costello reacts with such passion to his arguments. For one, it is impossible to treat animals on factory farms, in slaughterhouses and in laboratories humanely. These institutions are inherently inhumane, cruel and exploitative; the term "humane slaughter" is an oxymoron. For another, it is doubtful that O'Hearne plans to become actively involved when he says that "we should agitate for the humane treatment of animals," and, when he salutes welfare organizations that do so, one has the impression that he does so from the sidelines. Finally, he distinguishes between animal-welfare and, implicitly, animal-rights organisations, which he later goes on to attack. Animal-rights activists point out the contradiction

in how animal-welfare organisations accept that animals may be humanely exploited, thus failing to recognise the inherent value of animal subjectivity and perpetuating the instrumentalist attitude toward animals. Thus the apparent reasonableness of O’Hearne’s conventional position can be seriously challenged and his use of reason exposed as rationalisation, as justifying prejudices and preconceptions that he is not prepared to scrutinise seriously. Also, his views show a failure of imagination on his part to sympathise with the suffering of animals or a failure actually to have visited factory farms, slaughterhouses or laboratories.

O’Hearne’s final thesis also echoes Leahy’s conservatism and he apologises in advance to Costello for the harshness of what he has to say. Again he presents his position forcefully, attesting to the polyphony of *The Lives of Animals*, but again he displays certain limitations in his understanding of the issues. Costello does not even respond to this part of his argument. Once again, he ironically reverses a position of Costello’s, this time her charge that abstract rationalism is behind the exploitation of animals. Amongst the various types of animal lovers he distinguishes between:

“On the one hand, hunters, people who value animals at a very elementary, unreflective level; who spend hours watching them and tracking them; and who, after they have killed them, get pleasure from the taste of their flesh. On the other hand, people who have little contact with animals, or at least with those species they are concerned to protect, like poultry and livestock, yet want all animals to lead—in an economic vacuum—a utopian life in which everyone is miraculously fed and no one preys on anyone else.

“Of the two, which, I ask, loves animals more?” (Coetzee, 1999b, 64)

There is an initial absurdity in the idea that one can display love towards animals by hunting and killing them. Furthermore, his portrayal of hunters is just as utopian as the supposed “community with animals” he alleges members of the animal-rights movement to hold, since hunters derive their pleasure not so much from eating the flesh of their prey but from killing them. Indeed, trophy hunters are not concerned

with meat at all, but with the trophy. O’Hearne fails to acknowledge the sordidness of the trophy-hunting industry, often involving canned hunting (Pickover, 2005, 35-48). Hunting is tied up with atavistic notions of manliness and war, as Costello so clearly puts it in her private conversation with John and in her discussion of deep ecology. Despite their claim that they respect nature, hunters usually justify their hunting by arguing that (wild) animals and conservation have to pay for themselves, which is, once again, a utilitarian and instrumentalist justification. O’Hearne’s discussion of hunters is also unfair to Costello in another way, since in Part 1 she explicitly stated that there was something attractive about hunting at a primitive ethical level. However, she was not talking about trophy hunting which is just another animal-exploitation industry.

O’Hearne professes a concern for “the troublingly abstract nature of the concern for animals in the animal-rights movement” (Coetzee, 1999b, 64) accusing it of an abstract utopianism or “prelapsarian wistfulness” (65). He asserts of the animal-rights movement that:

“Its proponents talk a great deal about our community with animals, but how do they really live that community? Thomas Aquinas says that friendship between human beings and animals is impossible, and I tend to agree. You can be friends neither with a Martian nor with a bat, for the simple reason that you have too little in common with them” (65).

Again his argument seems forceful, a powerfully independent voice that Costello, and even Coetzee, sometimes seem unable to answer. In fact, Costello does not attempt to answer this part of O’Hearne’s question, as has been pointed out already. Nonetheless, once again, it is susceptible to serious criticisms. For one, O’Hearne does not point out that Aristotle, upon whose views of friendship Thomas Aquinas’s argument cited in the footnote is based, also writes that friendship is only possible between equals, that is between free male citizens of the same social class within a Greek city-state, thus excluding women, children and slaves from friendship with these men (and possibly from any kind of friendship, since these peripheral people

would lack excellence according to Aristotle). For another, his claim that animal-rights activists talk a great deal about community with animals is a parody of the animal-rights movement, since it aims at the removal (or reform) of institutions of exploitation rather than the creation of utopias where animals and humans live in harmony. In fact, there are such institutions, called animal refuges, where animals liberated from laboratories, factory farms and abusive pet owners are rehabilitated and live in community with humans, but they are not the primary aim of the liberation effort.³ It is not animal-rights activists who are abstracted or disconnected from the realities of factory farms and laboratories, but ordinary consumers who have no clear idea of the source in animal suffering of many of the products they buy, consumers whose willed ignorance, according to Costello, resembles that of those who turned a blind eye to the victimisation of the Jews by the Nazis. The fact that he mentions “an economic vacuum” shows how entrenched is his instrumentalist attitude to animals as well as a lack of awareness of the wastefulness and inefficiency of the intensive farming of animals.⁴ Finally, humans do form close bonds with animals, dogs, for example, as Ian Hacking (Hacking, 2000, 24) and Barbara Smuts (Smuts, 1999) have pointed out.

Although Costello does not respond in words to O’Hearne’s final criticism, her heated reaction shows that she has been moved to anger by it. Instead she responds to his first assertion, denying that death does not matter as much to animals as it does to humans and emphasizing, once again, the inherent value of embodied animal experience:

“Anyone who says that life matters less to animals than it does to us has not held in his hands an animal fighting for its life. The whole of the being of the animal is thrown into that fight, without reserve. When you say that the fight lacks a dimension of intellectual or imaginative horror, I agree. It is not the mode of being of animals to have an intellectual

³Jeffrey Masson describes some of these refuges as well as cases of human-animal friendships in *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon* (Masson, 2005).

⁴See, for instance, the *United Nations Food and Agriculture Report* (2006), entitled *Livestock’s Long Shadow*, and Frances Moore Lappé’s *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971).

horror: their whole being is in the living flesh.

“If I do not convince you, that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabridged, unintellectual nature, of that animal being. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language; and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner.” (65)

Leahy, and O’Hearne, would consider her use of the word “executioner” to be anthropomorphic and melodramatic but she also uses more concrete language to try to engage their imaginations, such as walking “flank by flank,” “beside the beast,” “prodded,” and “chute.” There is a sense that Costello and the philosophers are speaking different, incommensurable languages, that they inhabit different language communities, different forms of life, and cannot fully comprehend each other, for Costello rejects the very criterion of abstract thought that the philosophers hang so much upon. Perhaps this is part of the polyphony of *The Lives of Animals*, since both positions are powerfully evoked and no ultimate resolution is reached, thus provoking the readers and audience to think seriously through the issues themselves.

Costello returns to her critique of academia (reminding one of Hearne’s playful mockery, quoted earlier, of the professors, such as Leahy and O’Hearne, locked in a Wittgensteinian paradigm) when she goes on to say that:

“You say that death does not matter to an animal because the animal does not understand death. I am reminded of one of the academic philosophers I read in preparing for yesterday’s lecture. It was a depressing experience. It awoke in me a quite Swiftian response. If this is the best that human philosophy can offer, I said to myself, I would rather go and live among horses.” (65)

She is referring to Leahy who maintains that a calf, removed from its mother soon after birth, cannot be said to miss her, since it has no grasp of the meaning of concepts such as presence and absence, self and other. Leahy does not exactly put it in these

terms, but Costello conveys his meaning and tone closely enough as is evident in the following quotation from Leahy:

...to describe their [the calves'] state as one of *missing their mothers* sounds suspiciously like hyperbole designed to wring illicit sympathy from the reader. ... The calf is supposed to miss its mother as it might be said of a 4-year-language-user: a grasp of the significance of its mother, her absence and hoped-for return, and so on. This is something that not even a Washoe or Lucy, far less a baby calf, begins to approach. [Leahy's emphasis] (Leahy, 1991, 218)

Costello could use her notion of embodiedness to counter the absent Leahy's objections, but she chooses instead, perhaps coming to the end of her patience, to be abusive towards him, even though he is absent and she is merely paraphrasing his ideas. She suggests that he is a racist and speciesist for arguing that creatures can be excluded from moral consideration if they cannot make the subject/object distinction, that is, if they have no language and thus no self-consciousness. She asks: "What sort of philosophy is this? Throw it out, I say. What good do its piddling distinctions do?" and "I would not fall over myself to break bread with him" (Coetzee, 1999b, 66) (thereby, ironically, echoing Stern's own objections to her). The fictional format of *The Lives of Animals* and Coetzee's adoption of Costello as his persona permit this break in academic decorum, since he can always claim that the insults were made by Costello and not himself. However, it seems clear that Coetzee himself strongly disapproves of Leahy's philosophy.

Costello cites Leahy and paraphrases his reasons for opposing the idea of banning the slaughtering of animals for meat. Here Leahy is considering the social and economic costs, in utilitarian terms, of imposing vegetarianism throughout the world. Her summary is accurate enough although her tone differs, particularly in the last point. Where she paraphrases Leahy as writing that "the countryside would be less attractive without its customary flocks and herds fattening themselves as they wait to

die” (Coetzee, 1999b, 66), Leahy actually writes that “the idea of the English countryside, valuable to many as a source of beauty, history, and national pride would also be transformed. Sheep would no longer safely graze nor would spring lambs nor calves” (Leahy, 1991, 214). Costello’s account is more brutally honest while Leahy’s is sentimental and dishonest. His depiction of sheep, calves and lambs safely grazing is a distortion of the realities of factory farms where the animals are largely confined indoors, and veal calves in crates. There is a sense that Leahy trivialises the issues of farming with animals, because when he considers one liberationist’s suggestion that sheep country be profitably reforested with nut-trees, he remarks that “[r]ural Britain would more and more resemble parts of the American mid-west. Life would be strange indeed” (Leahy, 1991, 214).

Costello’s response here contrasts markedly with her calm response to the tall, young man whose facetious question raised after her poetry seminar failed to provoke her. She continues her tirade against Leahy, breaking all academic protocols, by returning to her attack on reason, answering in the negative her own question whether she would be prepared to reason with him:

“On the present occasion, however, I am not sure if I want to concede that I share reason with my opponent. Not when reason is what underpins the whole philosophical tradition to which he belongs If the last common ground that I have with him is reason, and if reason is what sets me apart from the veal calf, then thank you but no thank you, I’ll talk to someone else” (Coetzee, 1999b, 66-7)

Her use of the conjunction “if” is unintentionally ironic, since it is a logical connector in arguments, although her ‘argument’ can hardly be called logical. Indeed, her uncontrolled display of emotion and her tirade against reason only damage her credibility, straining even her depiction as a wise fool, but they do permit an honest display of feeling that the protocols of academia tend to prohibit. It would seem here that she is rejecting reason completely, but it should be seen more specifically as a rejection of a particular form of rationalism, the abstract and intellectual rationalism

of the philosophical tradition in general, and Anglo-American analytic philosophy in particular, and the arguably arbitrary use of reason as a criterion to exclude animals from moral consideration. In the latter sense her tirade is justified. However, it could be argued that the very polyphony of *The Lives of Animals* makes it possible for independent voices like those of Leahy and O’Hearne to overwhelm not just Costello but Coetzee himself.

The detached and petty observations of John, which contrast with his mother’s full-hearted involvement, provide a distancing perspective on the scene, with a hint of muted, ironic, Socratic laughter:

He, John Bernard, is sure that is not what Arendt or his committee wanted. Well, they should have asked him before they invited his mother. He could have told them. (Coetzee, 1999b, 67)

The second last scene has John and Norma, once again late at night, discussing his mother. Like Costello, Norma also gives in to a rant, an anacrisis provoked by Costello’s lecture the previous day. She returns to the suggestion she raised at the dinner, that Costello is trying to foist her eccentric ideas of diet onto other people as an “exercise in power” (67) and she dismisses her ideas as mere “food-faddism” (67). When John, desperate to sleep but not willing to betray his mother yet again, tries to defend her by suggesting that she is perfectly sincere, Norma retorts that Costello has no self-insight and that “[m]ad people are sincere” (67), revealing once again the perception that she is a fool, although from Norma’s perspective there is no “wisdom” in her folly. Norma’s comments on Costello are illogical and unfair, although they do represent a widespread view that meat-eaters have of vegetarians. In fact, Costello’s vegetarianism is not eccentric, but is part of a growing tendency in the Western world. Norma also fails to acknowledge the ethical seriousness of Costello’s views on diet. Of course, Norma is correct to question the motives of vegetarians, since it is not simply their actions, when it comes to dietary choices, but the reasons for their actions that are important. One can be vegetarian for health reasons, or as a gesture of imagined superiority or merely because one dislikes the taste of meat, rather than out of respect

for the lives of animals. However, Norma has no reason to doubt Costello's sincerity and ethical seriousness, as John points out. For all her philosophical training—and perhaps because of it—she is unable to escape her rationalist preconceptions and prejudices. It is therefore arguable that Norma's description of Costello as having no self-insight ironically applies to her and not her mother-in-law.

John tries to defend Costello, but also fails to represent her accurately when he argues that:

“I don't see any difference . . . between her revulsion from eating meat and my own revulsion from eating snails or locusts. I have no insight into my motives and I couldn't care less. I just find it disgusting.” (67)

The irony is that during dinner the previous evening it was Costello herself who mentioned disgust (which is an aesthetic category) as a residue of religious guilt feelings for killing animals, whereas it is John who now talks of disgust, despite Norma's criticisms of Costello's use of this idea. He, too, fails to acknowledge the ethical seriousness of his mother's position which is not based on mere personal preferences, or taste, but on serious ethical grounds. However, he does then suggest to Norma that she should try to see Costello as a preacher or social reformer rather than an eccentric, indicating that he has some idea that hers is an ethical stance. This provokes Norma to respond that John should “take a look at all the other preachers and their crazy schemes for dividing mankind up into the saved and the damned” (68), salvation being a recurring motif in *The Lives of Animals*, as discussed earlier. She then compares Costello to Noah: “Elizabeth Costello and her Second Ark, with her cats and dogs and wolves, none of whom, of course, has ever been guilty of the sin of eating flesh, to saying nothing of the malaria virus and the rabies virus and the HI virus, which she will want to save so that she can restock her Brave New World” (68). John correctly points out that she is ranting, although she denies it. Her portrayal of Costello is obviously a travesty, but it also permits Coetzee, in dialogic mode, to investigate his own motives and those of his persona, and also perhaps to forestall similar criticisms. Norma then returns once again to her idea that Costello is playing

a power game, comparing her to Franza Kafka, whose hunger artistry is described in the footnote and will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

The word “normal” appears three times on the next two pages, reinforcing the notion of Norma as a defender of conventional morality. The first is a quotation in the footnotes referring to Franz Kafka’s hunger artistry: “What [Kafka] required was a regimen of eccentric food habits that were at odds with the ‘normal’ dinner table habits of his family” (68). This suits her accusation earlier that Costello’s dietary prescriptions, like Kafka’s, are a mere power game (42-3). The second is when John consoles Norma that “[a] few hours from now and she’ll be gone, then we can return to normal” (68). Of course, Costello has given good reasons in her lectures, conversations and debate to doubt the ethical justifiability of what they consider normal. The third one occurs when Costello is questioning her own sanity while John is driving her to the airport: “I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them” (68). This reinforces the idea that she is a wise fool, or even a mad person, at least according to people bound by the framework of conventional morality, but also that—like the prophet or fool—she is not entirely disconnected. Unfortunately, she has failed to get her various auditors to look into their hearts and to question their deepest prejudices, that is to develop the self-insight that Norma accuses her of lacking.

This suggests that for all her obvious intelligence and philosophical training, Norma is very conventional, unable to challenge the norms of the society in which she has grown up, unlike her artistic mother-in-law. Thus Coetzee suggests that the poetic imagination, in this case, is more able to re-conceive the framework of one’s society while philosophy often becomes—as in the case of Aristotle on slavery and Leahy on animals—a defence of the status quo, thus betraying (according to Peter Singer) its critical function. Just as importantly, it shows Costello’s Socratic uncertainty, as opposed to the strident self-confidence of Norma’s pronouncements on the issues raised by her mother-in-law.

As opposed to the conventionality of Norma, there is the apparent eccentricity, or

inspired madness, of Costello, facilitated by the sympathetic imagination, an imagination of such power that it threatens to overwhelm her sanity and sense of self. When John asks his mother why she has “become so intense about this animal business” (69) she responds that she dare not express her true thoughts on this matter, and when he asks her what she means she says:

“It’s that I no longer know where I am. I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet everyday I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money.” (69)

Once again she can be guilty of anthropomorphism in comparing animal carcasses to human corpses, but then again she can be seen as exposing the speciesism behind this distinction, unearthing deep prejudices and preconceptions that most people would prefer to remain buried. And yet, it seems as though her sympathetic imagination is getting the better of her, especially in her next horrifying words:

“It is as if I were to visit friends, and to make some polite remark about the lamp in their living room, and they were to say, ‘Yes, it’s nice, isn’t it? Polish-Jewish skin it’s made of, we find that’s best, the skins of young Polish-Jewish virgins.’ And then I go to the bathroom and the soap-wraper says, ‘Treblinka—100% human stearate.’ Am I dreaming, I say to myself? What kind of house is this?” (69)

It is as though she has taken Isaac Bashevis Singer’s words, “In relation to [the animals], all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka,” to heart and imaginatively comprehended the enormity of the comparison, unlike her auditors who respond to her continual references to the Holocaust with indifference, incomprehension, resentment, umbrage or outrage.

On the one hand, her sympathetic imagination may have revealed to her a truth of the most mind-numbing horror; on the other, it may have put such pressure on her sense of normality that it has brought her to doubt her own sense of self and sanity:

“Yet I’m not dreaming. I look into your eyes, into Norma’s, into the children’s, and I see only kindness, human-kindness. Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can’t you? *Why can’t you?*” [Coetzee’s emphasis] (69)

There seems to be a titanic battle within Costello’s soul between the independent and mutually antagonistic voices of conventional morality which justifies the brutal exploitation of animals on a massive scale and her vision of a more enlightened humanity where such exploitation is unacceptable. The polyphony can be perceived at a higher level too, Costello representing, in the form of Bakhtin’s concept of the hero-ideologue, Coetzee’s belief in a new, kinder morality opposed to the voices of the status quo like Norma, O’Hearne and Leahy, representing his genuine doubts that such a morality is possible or even justifiable. While a sympathetic reading of Costello’s views has been presented in this chapter, the undoubted strength of her rivals’ positions has been acknowledged. More specifically, Costello has been shown to be a Socratic figure and *The Lives of Animals* to resemble a Socratic dialogue, where, through anacrisis and syncretism, she provokes responses in other characters that cause the truth to be born in a dialogic exchange of juxtaposed viewpoints, and where she challenges her audience to look into their hearts and critically examine their most deeply entrenched preconceptions. In the end, true to the early Socratic dialogues, no final resolution is achieved and the reader is left with a disturbing sense of uncertainty, but not a trivial relativity. Yet while the destination is uncertain, there can be no doubt about the effectiveness with which the polyphony of voices on the issue of animal exploitation has been provocatively presented for Coetzee’s audience and readership.