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J.M. COETZEE AND ANIMAL RIGHTS: ELIZABETH  
COSTELLO'S CHALLENGE TO PHILOSOPHY

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# Abstract

The thesis relates Coetzee's focus on animals to his more familiar themes of the possibility of fiction as a vehicle for serious ethical issues, the interrogation of power and authority, a concern for the voiceless and the marginalised, a keen sense of justice and the question of secular salvation. The concepts developed in substantial analyses of *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace* are thereafter applied to several other works of Coetzee.

The thesis attempts to position J.M. Coetzee within the animal rights debate and to assess his use of his problematic persona, Elizabeth Costello, who controversially uses reason to attack the rationalism of the Western philosophical tradition and who espouses the sympathetic imagination as a means of developing respect for animals. Costello's challenge to the philosophers is problematised by being traced back to Plato's original formulation of the opposition between philosophers and poets. It is argued that Costello represents a fallible Socratic figure who critiques not reason *per se* but an unqualified rationalism. This characterisation of Costello explains her preoccupation with raising the ethical awareness of her audience, as midwife to the birth of ideas, and perceptions of her as a wise fool, a characterisation that is confirmed by the use of Bakhtin's notion of the Socratic dialogue as one of the precursors of the modern novel. Along with the Platonic/Socratic binary, Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony, dialogism and monologism are applied to analyses of Coetzee's fiction, which, in keeping with his anti-authoritarianism, is shown to be polyphonic.

Costello's apparently insensitive and repeated comparison of industrialised animal farms to Nazi concentration camps is likewise scrutinised. It is argued that the point of the comparison is to question the normality and humanity of societies that



choose to ignore the suffering of animals in the animal exploitation industries. Her raising the question of this willed ignorance is related to Socrates' maxim that evil is a result of ignorance, and Coetzee's concern with the psychic cost to their humanity of those complicit in these industries is considered. David Lurie's evocation of Holocaust imagery in *Disgrace* is also examined, as is the role of art and the sympathetic imagination in attaining a degree of grace.

Platonic ideas on eros, beauty, art and immortality are found to be central to Coetzee's fiction, not only to that relating to Costello but also to *Disgrace* and much of his other work. While acknowledging the importance of Plato, Coetzee continuously extends, tests and subverts his ideas, frequently subjecting them to carnivalistic play. Unexpected connections are made between Coetzee's conception of the parent-child relationship, both biological and intellectual, and his notions of creativity, power and justice. Ideas of eating and fasting are explored in his fiction and related to the hunger-artistry of Franz Kafka. Coetzee's ideas on animals, writing and diet are found to be essential to his notions of secular salvation and an ethical way of life.

### *Keywords*

J.M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello, Mikhail Bakhtin, Franz Kafka, Platonic, Socratic, eros, midwife, ethics, animal rights, liberalism, humanism, humanity, rationalism, sympathetic imagination, Holocaust, disgrace, grace, secular salvation, polyphony, dialogism, monologism, hunger-artistry

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## Chapter 1

# Positioning Elizabeth Costello in the animal rights debate: J.M. Coetzee's (non-)use of the philosophers and poets in *The Lives of Animals*

Let me add *entirely* parenthetically that I, as a person, as a personality, am overwhelmed, that my thinking is thrown into confusion and helplessness, by the fact of suffering in the world, and not only human suffering. These fictional constructions of mine are paltry, ludicrous defenses against that being-overwhelmed, and, to me, transparently so. (Coetzee, 1992, 248)

In his thoughts, Herman spoke a eulogy for the mouse who had shared a portion of her life with him and who, because of him, had left this earth. “What do they know—all those scholars, all those philosophers, all the leaders of the world—about such as you? They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to

be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka. And yet man demands compassion from heaven.” (Singer, 1984b, 271)

This chapter aims to position J.M. Coetzee in the animal rights debate, adopting more an ecocritical approach, as outlined by Graham Huggan (Huggan, 2004), than a purely postcolonial one, as exemplified by Attwell’s work (Attwell, 1993). In order to do so, it will have to consider the most relevant modern philosophers (and philosophies) and the poets whose work Coetzee does not explicitly acknowledge in *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee, 1999b). The discussion will begin with the influential works of the leading animal rights philosophers. Peter Singer’s utilitarian and Tom Regan’s rights-based approaches to animal rights will initially be examined in relation to *The Lives of Animals*. This will be followed by an exploration of approaches that share with Coetzee (and Costello, apparently his fictional persona) a rejection of appeals to ethical principles, namely the approaches of Mary Midgley and of ecofeminism.

The apparent inadequacies of the utilitarian and rights-based approaches will necessitate a look at one of the other major modern ethical schools of thought, namely virtue ethics, represented in this chapter by Anette Baier and Alasdair MacIntyre. While MacIntyre does not say much about animals in his important work, *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 2007), it will be argued that this work is crucial to Coetzee’s rejection of Enlightenment rationalism and of its rights-based and utilitarian philosophies. Furthermore, MacIntyre’s alternative philosophy of virtue ethics may help to solve some other problems raised in *The Lives of Animals*, since Coetzee’s work is by no means *merely* about animal rights, nor should the work be read *merely* as an argument and its dramatic structure be ignored. However, this chapter will focus on positioning Coetzee intellectually, reserving a literary analysis for later chapters.

This chapter will also attempt to assess Coetzee’s contribution to the animal rights debate, in particular, his controversial and paradoxical attack on the rationalist tradition in Western philosophy and his pitting poetic “sympathetic imagination” against reason. This opposition between philosophy and poetry will be problematised by showing how dependent philosophers sometimes are on images and imagination,



and by demonstrating how reasonable the poetic mode can be.

Positioning Coetzee in the animal rights debate is complicated by the fact that he expresses his views through what appears to be his controversial persona and alter-ego, Elizabeth Costello. Some reviewers are hesitant to identify her views with those of Coetzee (Kunkel, 1999) (Webb, May 19, 1999),<sup>1</sup> believing that Coetzee uses the fictional mode of the philosophical dialogue in order to express more extreme views than he himself would be prepared to admit to. Peter Singer expresses just such an opinion in his essay in the “Reflections” section of *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee, 1999b, 91). Yet many of the attacks on Costello’s arguments are *ad hominem* and deliberately misinterpret her or make no sympathetic attempt to understand what she is trying to communicate. She faces not so much rational, intelligent criticism—although she faces that too—as hostile, wilful incomprehension or mere indifference. Furthermore, her own approach is excessively hostile toward the philosophical tradition of rationality, and Coetzee makes no attempt to use the intellectual and moral authority of those philosophers and poets whose ideas and words could have strengthened Costello’s case.

Furthermore, it will be argued that even though Coetzee maintains an ironic distance between himself and his persona Elizabeth Costello, even though she is far more outspoken and blatant than Coetzee when making public statements on important issues, and despite the numerous critics cautioning against attempts to ascertain Coetzee’s own views on animal rights, his views do seem to coincide quite closely with those of Costello. The views expressed by Coetzee in an interview with him after he received the Nobel Prize in 2003 and a speech of his that was read at the opening of an art exhibition in Sydney, Australia, in early 2007 will be provided as evidence for this. Finally, it will be argued that, in testing the limits of rationality, Coetzee can be perceived, perhaps paradoxically, as contributing to the self-critical rationalist tradition. In exploring our treatment of nonhuman animals, Coetzee goes to the heart of what it means to be human, critiquing our identity as the rational animal.

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<sup>1</sup>Since these are web pages, no page references can be provided.

In preparation for a more detailed textual analysis of Coetzee's use of his sources in *The Lives of Animals* in Chapters 3 and 4, it will be necessary to outline very briefly the positions of the animal rights philosophers whom Coetzee ostensibly fails to use, namely Peter Singer and Tom Regan, and to suggest reasons why he may have done so.

Peter Singer is not referred to in the text of *The Lives of Animals*, but has an essay in the "Reflections" section of *The Lives of Animals* and is the co-editor, with Tom Regan, of a collection of essays on animals, that is frequently cited in the footnotes of the novel (Regan & Singer, 1976). Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) has been called "the Bible of animal liberation" (Singer, 2002) and if one reads *The Lives of Animals* after having read this seminal work in the animal liberation movement, one will see that Costello's views are neither extreme nor idiosyncratic, but rather are shared by animal activists throughout the world. Coetzee could have found a powerful ally in Peter Singer. Indeed, it will be argued that the profound influence of *Animal Liberation* can be perceived throughout *The Lives of Animals*.

For instance, just as Costello dedicates a large section of her speech to attack the tradition of western philosophers for their speciesism<sup>2</sup> (although she does not herself use this term) and for their use of the criterion of rationality to exclude nonhuman animals from moral consideration, so does Singer spend an entire chapter criticising the western thinkers for the same speciesism. In criticising the western philosophical tradition, Singer writes:

Philosophy ought to question the basic assumptions of the age. Thinking through, critically and carefully, what most of us take for granted is, I believe, the chief task of philosophy, and the task that makes philosophy a worthwhile activity. Regrettably, philosophy does not always live up to its historic role. Aristotle's defense of slavery will always stand as a reminder that philosophers are human beings and are subject to all the preconceptions of the society to which they belong. Sometimes they

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<sup>2</sup>A term coined by Richard Ryder in 1970 referring to (human) prejudice against animals of other species.

succeed in breaking free of the prevailing ideology: more often they become its most sophisticated defenders. (Singer, 2002, 236)

His insight that speciesism is an ideology helps to explain why Costello struggles to communicate with her audience and to persuade them of the existence—let alone the injustice—of their speciesism. In *The Lives of Animals* Coetzee shows how a novelist—primarily himself but also his fictional creation, Elizabeth Costello—can—indeed, should—also powerfully challenge the preconceptions of a society.

Yet, whereas Singer insists on using reason to convince people of the wrongness of speciesism, Costello appears, controversially, to reject reason, relying instead on the sympathetic imagination. She explicitly rejects philosophical discourse even though she simultaneously expresses her need for it:

“I want to find a way of speaking to fellow human beings that will be cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical . . . . Such a language is available to me, I know. It is the language of Aristotle and Porphyry, of Augustine and Aquinas, of Descartes and Bentham, of, in our day, Mary Midgley and Tom Regan. It is a philosophical language . . . . I could fall back on that language, as I have said, in the unoriginal, secondhand manner which is the best I can manage . . . . [However, b]oth reason and seven decades of life experiences tell me that reason is neither the being of the universe nor the being of God . . . . And if this is so, if that is what I believe, then why should I bow to reason this afternoon and content myself with embroidering on the discourse of the old philosophers?”  
(Coetzee, 1999b, 22-23)

Costello’s inconsistent use of the philosophical and argumentative mode—her use of reason to attack reason—has been much criticized both within the novel, not least by her daughter-in-law, Norma, and by reviewers and critics of the novel, most notably by Peter Singer in an essay attached to the “Reflections” section of *Lives*. Coetzee pre-empted some of these criticisms in the person of Elaine Marx, who addresses Costello after her talk on “The Poets and the Animals”:

“In your lecture [yesterday] you argued that various criteria—Does this creature have reason? Does this creature have speech?—have been used in bad faith to justify distinctions that have no real basis, between Homo and other primates, for example, and thus to justify exploitation.

“Yet the very fact that you can be arguing against this reasoning, exposing its falsity, means that you put a certain faith in the power of reason, of true reason as opposed to false reason.” (55)

While Costello’s inconsistency in her use of reason may well be criticised, her rejection of rationality as a criterion justifying the unequal treatment of animals is perfectly justifiable and, indeed, is shared by Peter Singer. Significantly, Elaine Marx’s words also echo very closely those of Jeremy Bentham, Peter Singer’s philosophical father, so to speak, whom Singer quotes when criticizing the criteria people use to justify, or rationalise, their exploitation of animals: “[t]he question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but Can they suffer?” (Singer, 2002, 8).

Furthermore, while Costello does not use the term “speciesism” at any stage, it is implicit in much of what she says, most clearly when she asserts, during the debate with O’Hearne, that:

“To me, a philosopher who says that the distinction between a human and nonhuman depends on whether you have a white or black skin, and a philosopher who says that the distinction between human and nonhuman depends on whether or not you know the difference between a subject and a predicate, are more alike than they are unlike.” (66)

Thus, it is on rationality where Singer appears to differ most from Costello. He points out:

The core of this book is the claim that to discriminate against beings solely on account of their species is a form of prejudice, immoral and indefensible. I have not been content to put forward this claim as a bare assertion, or as a statement of my own personal view, which others

may or may not choose to accept. I have *argued* for it, appealing to reason rather than to emotion or sentiment. I have chosen this path, not because I am unaware of the importance of kind feelings and sentiments of respect towards other creatures, but because reason is more universal and compelling in its appeal. Greatly as I admire those who have eliminated speciesism from their lives purely because their sympathetic concern for others reaches out to all sentient creatures, I do not think that an appeal to sympathy and good-heartedness alone will convince most people of the wrongness of speciesism. [Singer's emphasis] (Singer, 2002, 243)

This would seem to point out a fatal weakness in Costello's position, her appeals to "sympathetic imagination" and to her audience to "open your heart and listen to what your heart says" (Coetzee, 1999b, 37). However, if Singer's argument is supposed to be so compelling on a rational level, one might ask why so many philosophers resist it and why speciesism is still the dominant attitude in western society.

It is precisely because Coetzee suspects that reason is not compelling that he has Costello try a different approach, using imaginative comparisons rather than arguments. One can intellectually believe that animals suffer and yet not be emotionally moved by it; Coetzee's difficult task is to move his readership. Nonetheless, Costello does not simply use the sympathetic imagination to encourage the audience to enter into the being of a suffering animal,<sup>3</sup> as Singer does so well in his chapters on animal experimentation and animal farming. Equally importantly, she uses a controversial and striking analogy to try to convince those in her audience who use animal products that they are as complicit in evil as the Germans who either actively or passively supported the Nazis in their murder of the Jews. It may be that Costello is asking her audience not so much to sympathise with the suffering of animals as to distance themselves from anti-semitism (and racism and sexism), and therefore from speciesism. Nor is Costello's attack on rationalism an attack on reason *per se* but rather an attack on the idea of reason as a morally significant characteristic justifying

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<sup>3</sup>Namely, Red Peter and Sultan, the chimpanzees, the hypothetical cases of the bat and Molly Bloom, the chicken that protests when its throat is cut and the cattle that Costello asks us to walk beside "flank to flank" on the way to be slaughtered.

the different treatment of human and nonhuman animals. Thus, if we accept that Singer's argument is rational, and we accept that Costello is arguing a similar point, but merely using different means, then we must conclude that Costello's views are also rational.

Furthermore, although Singer insists that his approach is to convince people to abandon their speciesist habits by sheer force of reason (or argument), several images (analogies, or similarities) are central to his argument. Most fundamentally, he compares the treatment of animals with the treatment of African slaves, with the subordination of women, and with the genocide against the Jews, namely with racism, sexism and genocidal anti-Semitism. Corresponding to the former two forms of prejudice are the respective liberation movements, namely the abolition of slavery and Civil Rights Movement, and Women's Liberation. Pointing out the fact that many of the original feminists were vegetarians, Singer notes:

Indeed, the overlap between leaders of movements against the oppression of blacks and women, and leaders of movements against cruelty to animals, is extensive; so extensive as to provide an unexpected form of confirmation of the parallel between racism, sexism, and speciesism. (Singer, 2002, 221)

Costello's animal rights activism therefore follows quite naturally from her feminism. Also, on the way to the debate with O'Hearne, Costello and her son discuss different analogies to describe our use of animals: "we treat them like prisoners of war" (Coetzee, 1999b, 58) and "Well, that's what our captive herds are: slave populations" (Coetzee, 1999b, 59). Singer points out what he sees as the moral backwardness of the United States of America concerning animal welfare, making the historical precedent behind the slavery analogy very explicit and pointed:

As the USA lagged behind the civilized world in outlawing human slavery, so the United States now lags behind in softening the unrestrained brutalities of animal slavery. (Singer, 2002, 79)

Coetzee may well have taken the slavery comparison from Singer (although Aristotle also explicitly excludes women, slaves and animals from his moral order). What makes

Singer's slavery analogy particularly powerful is that it is not a 'mere' analogy, but one rooted in American history, which includes brutal oppression and exploitation that Americans would rather forget. It is not just a comparison, but suggests a causal link between contemporary American attitudes to animals today with attitudes towards slaves in their past. It has an emotive force that reinforces the argument against speciesism, although it may alienate readers rather than win them over, since it is such a blunt challenge to their values.

On the one hand some critics have reservations about this analogy. Ian Hacking writes:

I am worried by the analogy with slavery, but not to the same extent as my confusion over comparisons to genocide. It is not to be forgotten that our pets, our dogs 'off lead,' our lap dogs, and our domestic animals have all been created by us, for us, and along with us. ... These animals are part of the human community, to whom we have responsibilities and for whom we must have respect. We are now their stewards, but they are neither our serfs nor our slaves." (Hacking, 2000, 24)

While Hacking may be right about our pets and working animals, he is surely mistaken about farmed animals, which are not merely used, but callously exploited. Nonetheless, his reservations are echoed by another critic:

The work of some animal-rights activists, notably Peter Singer, is marked by a similarly loose—and potentially dangerous—use of anthropomorphic analogy. In his book *Animal Liberation*, for example, Singer sees vivisection in the same perspective as "the atrocities of the Roman gladiatorial arenas or the eighteenth-century slave trade." (Huggan, 2004, 726)

On the other hand, the slavery analogy is taken very seriously by a philosopher like Steven Best (Best, 2006), who compares in detail the domestication of animals to the enslavement of humans, claiming too that there is a causal connection. Being a radical abolitionist, Best, however, may possibly be taking the analogy to extremes.

Costello is criticised both by Norma and by Abraham Stern, an elderly Jewish academic, for evoking the Holocaust analogy, in which she compares the suffering of animals on factory farms and in laboratories to the suffering of Jews in Nazi death camps. Coetzee pointedly chooses to expose her to such criticism, allowing those voices to be heard, rather than indicate that the analogy had been made before, most notably by Peter Singer and Isaac Bashevis Singer, both of whom, having origins in European Jewry, lost family in the Holocaust. Reading Singer's *Animal Liberation* convinces one that Costello is not representing an extreme position, nor are her words meant metaphorically or hyperbolically:

“Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed, dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 21)

Coetzee is well aware of the sensitivity of raising the Holocaust analogy. In an essay in *Stranger Shores* (2002), he writes that:

When Aharon Appelfeld began writing in the early 1960s, the Holocaust did not count, in Israel, as a fitting subject for fiction. . . . Combined with this public silence was a feeling that there was something indecent in representing the Holocaust, that the subject ought to be, if not beyond the reach of language, at least out of bounds to anyone who had not lived through it. (Coetzee, 2002a, 212)

Nonetheless, Coetzee once again asserts the power of fiction to attain the truth, to say the unsayable: “Faith in the power of fiction to recover and restore the wounded self—‘to give the tortured person back his human form, which was snatched away from him’—has since been the core of Appelfeld’s work” (Coetzee, 2002a, 214).

In discussing vivisection, Peter Singer claims that after Nazism the experimentation on live subjects was transferred to experiments on animals, and in this context



quotes Isaac Bashevis Singer's controversial words: "In their behavior towards creatures, all men [are] Nazis" (Singer, 2002, 83-84). Singer also mentions Dr Bernhard Grzimek who:

likened the ignorance of Germans about these [factory] farms to the ignorance of an earlier generation of Germans to another atrocity, also hidden away from most eyes; and in most cases, no doubt, it is not the inability to find out what is going on as much as a desire not to know facts that may lie heavily on one's conscience that is responsible for the lack of awareness; as well as, of course, the comforting thought that, after all, it is not members of one's own race (species) that are the victims of whatever it is that goes on in those places. (Singer, 2002, 217)

This is very similar to Costello's discussion of the "willed ignorance" of people during the Holocaust:

"The people who lived in the countryside around Treblinka—Poles, for the most part—said that they did not know what was going on in the camp; said that, while in a general way they might have guessed what was going on, they did not know for sure; said that, while in a sense they might have known, in another sense they did not know, could not afford to know, for their own sake.

...

"It is not because they waged an expansionist war and lost it, that Germans of a certain generation are still regarded as standing a little outside humanity, as having to do or be something special before they can be readmitted to the human fold. They lost their humanity, in our eyes, because of a certain willed ignorance on their part. Under the circumstances of Hitler's kind of war, ignorance may have been a useful survival mechanism, but that is an excuse which, with admirable moral rigor, we refuse to accept." (Coetzee, 1999b, 19-20)

Besides the common idea of “willed ignorance,” the similarity of Singer’s phrase “an earlier generation of Germans” and Costello’s “Germans of a certain generation” suggests a possible influence of Singer on Coetzee. This notion of “willed ignorance” will be explored further in a later chapter. It is sufficient for now to note the link between “willed ignorance” and ideologies such as anti-Semitism, racism and speciesism; and of how ideology and prejudice help people to close their hearts to the persecution and exploitation of others. It is by making analogies between these different types of prejudice that Costello moves her audience most, but moves them more to anger and resentment than to understanding.

In discussing the opposition between a discursive philosophical mode and an imaginative poetic mode, it should be noted that it is on the basis of *similarity* with humans in some significant characteristic that one can justify the fair treatment of animals. In Singer’s view, following Jeremy Bentham, it is the capacity for suffering rather than the ability to reason that is significant (Singer, 2002, 7). Also, animals, as sentient but non-rational beings, are no different from marginal cases of humans, namely infants, the severely retarded and the insane. The similarity of animals with this group of humans justifies treatment equal to that enjoyed by these non-rational human beings. Ultimately, Singer’s position is based on the principle of the equal consideration of interests:

If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. (Singer, 2002, 8)

The question is why does Coetzee not permit Costello to make use of the arguments and moral authority of Peter Singer? An obvious reason would be the fact that Singer’s position is based on utilitarianism which is a form of instrumentalist rationalism that Costello is at pains to reject, since the cruel efficiency of the modern factory farm is based precisely on this way of thinking. Furthermore, from a

utilitarian position, the suffering of the animal could be outweighed by the greater happiness the death of the animal will bring to the numerous people who eat it, although Singer argues that the animal's interest in its own life outweighs the relatively trivial aesthetic interests of the people who gain pleasure from eating it. Also, from a utilitarian point of view individuals are replaceable, since it is the sum total of pleasure and pain of all those concerned that is important rather than individual pain and pleasure. Singer emphasizes that suffering and killing are distinct ethical issues and that whereas the ability to reason and the possession of self-consciousness may be irrelevant to the issue of suffering or the inflicting of pain, they are not irrelevant when it comes to the question of killing a being (Singer, 2002, 20-21). Thus Singer argues for the alleviation of suffering of animals rather than against killing them painlessly for food. Coetzee has Costello reject this way of thinking, no doubt, since he values the embodied, individual existence of animals:

“To be a living bat is to be full of being; being fully a bat is like being fully human, which is also to be full of being. Bat-being in the first case, human-being in the second, maybe; but those are secondary considerations. To be full of being is to live as a body-soul. One name for the experience of full being is *joy*.”

“To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal—and we are all animals—is an embodied soul.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 33)

However, it will be argued in a later chapter that the main reason for Coetzee's having Costello avoid evoking moral authorities in the animal liberation movement is his general distrust of our need to find authorities and moral principles rather than think through and feel the issues ourselves.

In contrast to Peter Singer's utilitarian approach is the deontological<sup>4</sup> approach of Tom Regan, put forward in *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983). Tom Regan and Mary Midgley are mentioned by Costello in the text of *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee,

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<sup>4</sup>Deontology is “[t]he ethical theory taking duty as the basis of morality; the view that some acts are morally obligatory regardless of their consequences. . . . deontological ethics can be contrasted with any sort of utilitarianism, which must always be teleological” (Flew, 1979, 88-89).

1999b, 22). However, she does not discuss their work in the body of the text, although she cites an essay by Midgley entitled “Persons and Non-persons” (Coetzee, 1999b, 61). She also frequently cites *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, the collection of animal-related literature that Peter Singer and Tom Regan co-edited, in the footnotes of *The Lives of Animals*.

Regan makes use of a vivid metaphor to explain the difference between the utilitarian and rights-based approaches. One should imagine individuals as receptacles and the pain and pleasure that they experience as the liquid content of the receptacles (Regan, 2004, 205-06). Utilitarians would value the content of the receptacles, believing the receptacles themselves to be replaceable:

Sentient but nonself-conscious beings . . . Singer believes, *are* mere receptacles of what is good (pleasures) and evil (pain). They are “cups” that, from moment to moment, contain either the bitter (pain) or the sweet (pleasure), and to destroy them is merely to destroy something that contains (experiences) what is valuable. (Regan, 2004, 208)

Deontologists, or Kantians, like Regan, would value the receptacles, and thus the individual sentient beings, themselves.

It is interesting, and possibly part of the reflexive play of the literature surrounding *The Lives of Animals*, that in his essay in “Reflections”, Peter Singer uses an image of receptacles, a bottle of soya milk and a bottle of Kahlúa (a type of liqueur), to explain the utilitarian position to his daughter, Naomi, arguing that some experiences, namely human ones (the Kahlúa), are more valuable than others (the animals, or milk). When Naomi tries to defend Costello’s position, that killing a human cannot be worse than killing a bat, Singer argues:

“Yes it can. If I pour the rest of this soymilk down the sink, I’ve emptied the container; and if I do the same to that bottle of Kahlúa you and your friends are fond of drinking when we are out, I’d empty it too. But you’d care more about the loss of the Kahlúa. The value that is lost when something is emptied depends on what was there when it was full, and

there is more to human existence than there is to bat existence.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 90)

This striking use of a comparison both clearly shows the difference between Singer’s and Costello’s views on the value of the lives of animals and indicates how useful images or comparisons can be to philosophers when illustrating important concepts. It also qualifies any simplistic opposition between a discursive philosophical mode and imaginative poetic modes. Indeed, Costello describes herself thus: “. . . like most writers, I have a literal cast of mind” (Coetzee, 1999b, 32).

Regan’s position, like Costello’s, is far more egalitarian than Singer’s. For Regan, the rights of animals are based on a principle of justice grounded in the notion of inherent value. What gives animals—and Regan, for argument sake, limits these to healthy mammals of one year and older—inherent value is that they meet the subject-of-a-life criterion which marks a relevant similarity (Regan, 2004, 245). That is, Regan contends that the capacity for subjective experience is the basis of inherent value and that all creatures with this capacity deserve to be treated equally. Thus, for Regan (as for Singer), rationality is not a morally significant criterion, and it cannot therefore justify the unequal treatment of animals and the consequent exploitation of nonhuman animals by humans. He, too, mentions marginal cases of humans to justify equal treatment with animals.

Regan’s rights-based position is a valuable complement to Singer’s utilitarianism and rectifies the latter’s devaluing of the individual animal’s experience. Taken together these two philosophical contributions help significantly to advance the struggle for animal liberation yet Coetzee does not give them due acknowledgement, possibly so that he can advance his case for the sympathetic imagination instead. Yet Regan also discusses the imagination argument (Regan, 2004, 64-67), contending that it is possible to imagine oneself into the experience of an animal, and mentions Nagel’s bat, both of which would endorse Costello’s claims for the sympathetic imagination. Nonetheless, Costello’s suspicion of principles would dissuade her from invoking the authority of Regan even though his position would seem to share so much with hers:

“I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles,” his mother says. “If principles are what you want to take away from this talk, I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 37)

Costello also objects to treating animals as equivalent to severely retarded human beings, although she is referring more specifically to behaviourist experiments that conclude that animals are imbeciles (Coetzee, 1999b, 62).

Finally, a central weakness of Regan’s position—and Singer’s—is the fact that the principles they use to argue for animal rights, the deontological and utilitarian principles respectively, have been used by others for exactly the opposite purpose, namely to justify the exploitation of animals. In Regan’s case, his reliance on Kantianism is perhaps fatally hampered by the fact that, for Kant, ultimate value in the universe resides only in the good will of persons—that is, in the autonomous rational individual—and only human beings are capable of personhood (Kant, 1964, 61). For Kant, only persons are capable of making rational, moral choices, thanks to their possession of rationality, and only persons deserve moral consideration. Thus nonhuman animals lie outside of the moral community. At most, we have only indirect duties to animals, namely we should not treat animals cruelly in case this accustoms us to treat humans with cruelty. Furthermore, Regan’s abolitionist approach to the use of animals may well seem too absolutist for someone like Costello.

Mary Midgley is mentioned both in the text of *The Lives of Animals* and is cited in the notes. There is much in the approach that informs Midgley’s *Beast and Man* (first published in 1978) (Midgley, 2002a) with which Coetzee would presumably agree. Like Costello (and Coetzee), Midgley is suspicious of an appeal to fundamental moral principles as a basis for justifying the better treatment of animals. Like Costello, she prefers moral intuitions to moral theories—she calls our natural affection towards animals “sentiment”—although, unlike Costello, she does not reject rationality. Midgley’s approach has a subtlety that undermines binary oppositions. Thus she would reject the simplistic opposition of reason and emotion, or of philosophy and poetry. The following quotation, employing a striking image, illustrates her approach:

I want to get away from the essentially colonial picture (used by Blake) in which an imported governor, named Reason, imposes order on a chaotic tribe of Passions or Instincts. The colonial picture, which is Plato's, was handed down through the Stoics, Descartes and Spinoza, to Kant. (Midgley, 2002a, 250)

It is precisely this idea of reason that Costello attacks. However, it is a stereotyped idea of reason, in contrast to Midgley's more balanced treatment of reason and emotion, an approach which avoids the extremes of Kant's rationalised ethical system and Hume's irrational, emotivist ethics. Nonetheless, it is an influential idea of reason which is perhaps why Coetzee has Costello attack it so vehemently. This stereotyped, ultimately Platonic, idea of reason will be more fully explored in Chapter 2 when Coetzee's use of Platonic texts will be explored in more detail. It should suffice for now to note that what Midgley, and arguably Costello, is attacking is the privileging of reason above all other elements of the human soul, including emotion, will and imagination. It is fair to assume that Midgley is also criticising Aristotle's reductionistic definition of man as the rational animal.

Not being permitted by Coetzee to acknowledge Midgley or to position herself within an accepted tradition of thought, and, instead, by presenting herself as an isolated (hence eccentric) voice, Costello invites incomprehension of her attack on reason, although it is may be that many of those in her audience lack Midgley's subtlety and, instead, hold the stereotyped view of reason that Costello criticises.

In the section of her introduction entitled "Equality is not Sameness" Midgley writes:

That homogenizing approach to equality—so popular in the Enlightenment—flows from an unrealistic attempt to treat people as abstract, standard social entities, divorced from nature. It enforces the sharp division between mind and body, between culture and nature, between thought and feeling, which is the bad side of our inheritance from the Age of Reason. (Midgley, 2002a, xxv)

Both Midgley and Costello attack the privileged position of an abstract idea of reason and of persons as disembodied intellects in modern society and academia. However, they do not exile reason so much as dethrone it in order to make it equal to all the other constituents in a democratic body politic. Nor do Costello and Midgley simply reverse the hierarchical privileging of reason above body or emotion but rather treat these as equals, hence their notions of “embodied intellects” (Midgley, 2002a, xlii) and the “embodied soul” (Coetzee, 1999b, 33).

There is an echo of Costello’s enigmatic comment that her vegetarianism comes not out of moral conviction but “out of a desire to save my soul” (Coetzee, 1999b, 43) in the last sentence of Mary Midgley’s “Introduction to the First Edition” of *Beast and Man*: “I conclude that man can neither be understood nor saved alone” (Midgley, 2002a, xlii). While Midgley is referring to man’s relation to nature, she is also referring to a kind of non-religious salvation in the way that Costello apparently does. Furthermore, the reference to saving one’s own soul is very significant, suggesting a Socratic idea of human salvation through critical self-interrogation.

Midgley also acknowledges the power of the human imagination. She describes the emotional complexity (but not chaos) of conflicting human desires and needs, and adds:

Imagination and conceptual thought intensify all the conflicts by multiplying the options, by letting us form all manner of incompatible schemes and allowing us to know what we are missing, and also by greatly increasing our powers of self-deception. As against that, they can give us self-knowledge, which is our strongest card in the attempt to sort conflicts out. It is to deepen that self-knowledge that I want to use comparison with other species. (Midgley, 2002a, 272)

Midgley’s acknowledgement of the importance of the imagination, no less than that of reason, is also significant, although she would not go so far as to privilege it above reason, as Costello appears to do. Indeed, Costello’s main point is that the faculty of sympathetic imagination, a faculty (good) poets possess in abundance, rather



than reason enables humans to escape their speciesist prejudices and enter into animal experience. On the other hand, Costello's claim that "there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination" (Coetzee, 1999b, 35) seems extravagant. On one thing they would presumably agree, though, and that is the limitations of a certain narrow form of humanism, insofar as it is merely anthropocentric and pits reason against our "animal passions" (Abrams, 1971, 73-74), to sympathise with other animals. Indeed, Peter Singer notes, in his chapter entitled "Man's Dominion," that with the emergence of humanism during the Renaissance, notwithstanding some compassionate exceptions such as Montaigne, whom Coetzee cites in *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee, 1999b, 37), "...the absolute nadir was still to come" (Singer, 2002, 200) in terms of the cruel treatment of animals. This low point on the treatment of animals is evident in Descartes who, himself, dissected living animals (Singer, 2002, 201), arguing that they are mere automata. Indeed, Costello is especially scathing towards Descartes and his modern heirs, such as the behaviourists (Coetzee, 1999b, 60-62).

A large part of Midgley's *Beast and Man* concerns the significance of the biological sciences—especially ethology and sociobiology—for a study of humanity and values. It is clear from the citations in *The Lives of Animals* that Coetzee also read widely in the biological literature. Like Costello—and following Darwin—Midgley sees humankind as merely one type of animal amongst many, continuous with them in terms of evolutionary development. Critical of sociobiologists' tendency to reduce human nature to mere animal nature, Midgley nonetheless writes:

Yet of course there are also good things in Sociobiology. It does in principle emphasize our continuity with the rest of nature. It resists the strange segregation of humans from their kindred that has deformed much of Enlightenment thought, a segregation which has indeed terribly delayed our realization of environmental damage itself. It can be linked, too, with increasing public concern about the suffering we inflict on animals. ... It is, then, surely time for the political left, and for intellectuals in the social sciences and humanities, to see that our continuity with nature is an important fact in the world, a fact quite distinct from those objectionable

ideologies—not just the sociobiological one—that have, at one time and another, distorted and exploited it. (Midgley, 2002a, xxiv)

Costello, too, emphasizes humanity’s continuity with the rest of nature when she criticises the limitations of Descartes’s understanding of man’s place in nature:

“Getting back to Descartes, I would only want to say that the discontinuity he 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 mammals, and thus little cause to question the assumption that animals cannot think. And of course 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 exterminated by man in the course of his rise to power.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 61)

An important difference between these extracts is that whereas Midgley emphasizes harm to the environment, Costello emphasizes our continuity with animals and barely mentions environmental damage in *The Lives of Animals*. In fact, Costello is very careful to keep the issues of environmentalism, or ecology, and animal rights separate, even though ecological arguments can provide powerful reasons against industrialised agriculture in general, and industrialised meat production in particular. Peter Singer enumerates these reasons in *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 2002, 164-69) but, like Costello, refuses to take them as morally decisive next to the suffering of animals. Indeed, Rosemary Rodd, the writer whom Costello cites in the quotation above in relation to humankind’s extermination of other anthropoids, also criticises in a chapter entitled “Animals as Part of the Environment” the tendency to see animals merely as part of nature (Rodd, 1990). In *The Lives of Animals* when Costello provides a lengthy answer to a question arising from her poetry seminar, her son John notes her “antiecologism” (Coetzee, 1999b, 55) when she criticises, as “Platonic” (Coetzee, 1999b, 54), the abstractness of ecologists’ own ideas of nature which leads them to devalue the individuality of each animal:

“The irony is a terrible one. An ecological philosophy that tells us to live side by side with other creatures justifies itself by appealing to an idea, an idea of a higher order than any living creature. An idea, finally—and this is the crushing twist to the irony—which no creature except Man is capable of comprehending. Every living creature fights for its own, individual life, refuses, by fighting, to accede to the idea that the salmon or the gnat is of a lower order of importance than the idea of the salmon or the idea of the gnat. But when we see the salmon fighting for its life, we say, it is just programmed to fight; we say, with Aquinas, it is locked into natural slavery; we say, it lacks self-consciousness.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 54)

As will be shown below, both Midgley and Costello would have reason to distrust the machismo and patriarchy apparently inherent in deep ecology,<sup>5</sup> and would appear to have much in common with ecofeminism, although both of them seem to possess an individuality and maturity that cannot be simply equated with any particular movement or school of thought. Coetzee’s use of the word “Man” in the above quotation is especially significant. First, the fact that the “M” is capitalised suggests humankind’s presumption, their arrogant belief that they “stand above” the rest of nature. Second, the word suggests that men, or masculinity, are specifically to blame, an insight that will be further developed later.

It is important to discuss deep ecology in a bit more detail, because despite Costello’s criticism of it, there is much in it that coincides with her position:

... Devall and Sessions [important figures in the deep ecology movement] argue that the concept of the isolated, atomistic individual, which arises out of the anthropocentric traditions of Western philosophy, is false to the facts of all life’s embeddedness in the larger life community. People are not independent bits of mind existing by themselves; they are enmeshed in

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<sup>5</sup>Deep ecology is an eco-centric intellectual movement opposed to the anthropocentrism and instrumentalism inherent in modern Western society and to industrialism’s exploitative and destructive relation to nature.

networks of relationships that bind them both to their evolutionary past and to their ecological present. . . . Moreover, the natural world does not exist “for us,” as a storehouse of renewable human resources (a view that is symptomatic of a “shallow” view of humanity’s relationship to nature); we are inseparable from the natural environment (a view that indicates a “deeper” understanding of what it means to be human). (Regan, 2001, 20)

Costello would agree with deep ecology’s rejection of the instrumentalist attitude towards nature, with their rejection of the concept of the atomistic individual (as will be shown later) and with their concern with what it means to be human. However, she has been shown (above) to expose the abstractness of their own ideas of nature which leads them to devaluing the individuality of each animal. Her discussion of the value of bat-being above shows why she would reject this devaluing of animal experience. She would agree, however, that individuals are embedded, but not completely submerged, in their environment.

The apparent inconsistency of Costello’s views—she condemns the exploitation of animals (Coetzee, 1999b, 21) yet uses leather shoes and purse (Coetzee, 1999b, 43); she criticises deep ecology (Coetzee, 1999b, 61) yet seems to approve of the pro-hunting stance that some deep ecologists would endorse (Coetzee, 1999b, 52)—suggests that it will not be easy to position her ideologically. Nonetheless, as will be seen, Costello’s position (and Coetzee’s and Midgley’s) has much affinity with ecofeminism, a form of feminism that radically challenges the basis of liberalism, in particular the masculine “myth of the isolated individual,” and which deplores all forms of oppression and exploitation:

... Like other “isms,” ecofeminism is not a monolithic position . . . ; instead, it represents a number of defining tendencies, including in particular a principled stance that puts its advocates on the side of those who historically have been victims of oppression. For obvious reasons, women are pictured as among the oppressed, but the scope of ecofeminism’s concern

is not limited to women by any means. Ecofeminists maintain that the same ideology that sanctions oppression based on gender also sanctions oppression based on race, class, and physical abilities, among other things. Moreover, they believe that this same ideology sanctions the oppression of nature in general and of nonhuman animals in particular. (Regan, 2001, 21)

Presumably, there is little here that either Costello or Coetzee would disagree with. Indeed, in many of his novels Coetzee sides with the oppressed, the voiceless and the marginalised, often the victims of patriarchy and colonialism. Costello's concern for animals clearly shows that she identifies with the victims of oppression. The extract continues:

... As does deep ecology, ecofeminism challenges the myth of the isolated individual existing apart from the world and instead affirms the interconnectedness of all life. Moreover, no less than deep ecologists, ecofeminists abjure the overintellectualization of the moral life characteristic of traditional moral theories, with their abstract, universal, and impartial fundamental principles. But whereas deep ecologists locate the fundamental cause of moral theory's misstep in anthropomorphism (human-centeredness), ecofeminists argue that its real cause is androcentricism (male-centeredness). (Regan, 2001, 21-22)

While Costello does not emphasise the interconnectedness of all life and values the individual, she certainly rejects the idea of a disembodied intellect and the intellectualisation of morals in the form of abstract principles. Furthermore, as an important (fictional) feminist writer, she can be expected to spurn androcentricism, although her views turn out to be more complex than that.

Concerning the disembodied intellect:

Ecofeminists believe they offer a deeper account of the moral life than do deep ecologists, one that goes to the very foundations of Western moral theorizing. The idea of "the rights of the individual" is diagnosed as a

symptom of patriarchal thought, rooted as it is in the (male) myth of the isolated individual. A moral paradigm shift occurs when, instead of asserting rights, we freely and lovingly choose to take care of and assume responsibility for victims of oppression, both within and beyond the extended human family, other animals included. (Regan, 2001, 22)

Much of Costello's criticism is directed at this ideal of the disembodied intellect, of the isolated individual, which can be traced back to Descartes. According to Costello:

“To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being—not a consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly thinking machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation—a heavily affective sensation—of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes' key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 33)

Concerning ecofeminism's claim that the mistake in moral theory is androcentricism, rather than deep ecology's anthropomorphism:

Nowhere is this difference clearer than in the case of sport or recreational hunting. Devall and Sessions celebrate the value of this practice as a means of bonding ever closer with the natural world, of discovering “self in Self”; ecofeminists, by contrast, detect in the hunt the vestiges of patriarchy—the male's need to dominate and subdue. More fundamentally, there is the lingering suspicion that deep ecologists continue to view the value of the natural world instrumentally, as a means to greater self-awareness and self-knowledge. In this respect, and despite appearances to the contrary, deep ecology does not represent a “paradigm shift” away from the anthropocentric worldview it aspires to replace. (Regan, 2001, 22)

Even Costello's qualified endorsement of hunting and bullfighting should be seen in relation to the bigger evil of factory farming. Concerning hunting and bullfighting, Costello notes that:

“We call this primitivism. It is an attitude that is easy to criticize, to mock. It is deeply masculine, masculinist. Its ramifications into politics are to be mistrusted. But when all is said and done, there remains something attractive about it at an ethical level.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 52)

Her openness to bullfighting and hunting cautions a too hasty positioning of Costello no matter how close she may seem to be to a position, such as ecofeminism. In saying that “[i]ts ramifications into politics are to be mistrusted,” Costello is no doubt hinting at the links between this masculinist and anti-intellectualist primitivist “philosophy” and fascism and Nazism. A less generous reading would point out the apparent contradiction in Costello’s views, since she clearly and repeatedly draws the analogy between Nazism and speciesism with the strongest condemnation of both. On the other hand, it says much for the openness of Coetzee to opposing ideas and suggests a generosity of spirit that is willing seriously to consider the perspective even of those considered the enemy. There are other aspects, too, in her character that resist any simple positioning of her in terms of the animal rights debate, in particular her vegetarianism being linked to her concern with her own salvation, a problem that will be dealt with in a later chapter. While this concern with her own salvation may seem selfish and her qualified endorsement of bullfighting and hunting may seem retrogressive, these may actually be related to a third major modern ethical school of thought, namely virtue ethics (of which ecofeminism is a form), a major contender to the schools of utilitarian and deontological ethics discussed earlier in this chapter.

The work of the feminist philosopher Anette Baier can be characterised as a form of virtue ethics (Hursthouse, 2008)<sup>6</sup>. Following the research of the psychologist Carol Gilligan, Baier proposes a feminine ethic of care as an alternative to the masculine ethic of justice which is the predominant ethic in modern, western societies and which, according to feminists, favours adult, white, westernised men. This Kantian liberal ethic of justice is based on the respect for persons, a person being defined as a rational autonomous will. Since only persons are capable of moral agency, only persons deserve respect; namely, deserve to be treated as ends and not merely as means. Baier argues

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<sup>6</sup>This reference is taken from a website, and thus no page reference can be provided.

that it will not be sufficient to supplement the ethic of justice with the ethic of care, or for the ethic of justice merely to tolerate the ethic of care, because then the relations of inequality and male domination will merely persist:

So far I have discussed three reasons women have not to be content to pursue their own values within the framework of the liberal morality. The first was its dubious record. The second was its inattention to relations of inequality or its pretence to equality. The third reason is its exaggeration of the scope of choice, or its inattention to unchosen relations... The fourth feature of the Gilligan challenge to liberal orthodoxy is a challenge to its typical *rationalism*, or intellectualism, to its assumption that we need not worry what passions persons have, as long as their rational wills can control them. (Olen & Barry, 1992, 45)

This is a profound critique of the Western liberal ethic and, it will be argued, close to Costello's (and Midgley's) position on animal rights, especially her rejection of rationality as a decisive moral criterion, namely the Kantian definition of a person as a rational, autonomous will. It is the problem of the over-intellectualised Western ideal of personhood that causes Costello's audience, most of them intellectuals themselves, to be so uncomprehending of her views.

*Slow Man* (Coetzee, 2005) can also be considered a critique of the Kantian ethics of justice since we see in the character of Paul Rayment, an adult white man who has lost a considerable part of his (physical) autonomy due to the accident that led to the loss of one of his legs, and caused him to become dependent on an immigrant, female nurse, a peripheral person in a society ruled by a Kantian ethics of justice. Significantly, however, he has not lost his financial independence, which allows him to retain some degree of autonomy. Paul Rayment is a product of the Kantian ethic, an isolated, lonely and emotionally under-developed intellect, a disembodied being, despite being so tied to his crippled body.

Another powerful (and controversial) critique of the philosophical basis of liberalism and of the impoverished language of analytic philosophy can be found in



Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (first published in 1981), a seminal work of virtue ethics that Coetzee quotes and discusses in the essay "Taking Offense" in his collection of essays on censorship, *Giving Offense* (Coetzee, 2006). While Coetzee makes use of *After Virtue* in relation to the issue of pornography, he also takes it as a more general critique of liberal ethics and Enlightenment rationalism. It will be argued that MacIntyre's ideas are central to Costello's argument in *The Lives of Animals*, not only negatively in offering a profound critique of liberal rationalism, but also positively in offering an alternative to liberal ethics, namely a form of virtue ethics that makes ample use of aesthetic concepts. MacIntyre argues that we are living in the Weberian age, the age of the Protestant work ethic, namely of managerialism and economic rationalisation, and proposes a return to an Aristotelian-type virtue ethics. Coetzee disapproves of the deleterious effects of bureaucratic rationalisation on universities — "Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization" (Coetzee, 1999a, 3)—and Midgley dismisses this ethic as the "present battery-egg system of academic production" (Midgley, 2002a, xxx). Since Coetzee's collection of essays was published in 1996, *After Virtue* may well have had a significant influence on him while he was writing *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace*, both of which were published in 1999.

The most obvious relevance of *After Virtue* to the argument pursued by Costello and Coetzee in *The Lives of Animals* is MacIntyre's argument that there is no rational way to choose between modern moral positions or principles, and that there is therefore no rational basis for liberalism's claims to moral universality. This, of course, completely undermines Peter Singer's use of utilitarian principles and Tom Regan's use of the Kantian respect for persons in order to provide an ethical basis for animal rights, and can also explain why Coetzee avoids having Costello use these philosophers in her own argument. Of course, Costello does not merely attack Enlightenment rationalism, but the rationalism of the entire Western philosophical tradition. In "Taking Offense," Coetzee considers the possibility of extreme relativism when he quotes Alasdair MacIntyre:

From our rival conclusions we can argue back to our rival premises; but

when we do arrive at our premises argument ceases and the invocation of one premise against another becomes a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion. (Coetzee, 2006, 22)

Coetzee elaborates:

Another name for MacIntyre's emotivism, the doctrine that moral judgments have no basis save in emotional attitudes, that is, save in the emotional orientation of the subject toward the world, is perspectivism. As a particular form of relativism, perspectivism may be more characteristic of moral discourse today than the pure emotivism Warnock alludes to. . . . But it is also a common feature of post-liberal moral philosophy, with its deep suspicion of foundational principles and in particular the axioms of liberalism. (Coetzee, 2006, 23)

Indeed, MacIntyre's claim to expose 'natural rights' or 'human rights' (MacIntyre, 2007, 69-70) and 'utility' (MacIntyre, 2007, 70) as moral fictions may help to explain why Coetzee avoids appealing to utilitarian and rights-based principles in arguing against the abuse and exploitation of animals. According to MacIntyre, these moral fictions, then, have no basis in rationality, but are merely one more type of manipulative technique to impose one's own personal views and preferences on others:

But if the concept of rights and that of utility are a matching pair of incommensurable fictions, it will be the case that the moral idiom employed can at best provide a semblance of rationality for the modern political process, but not its reality. The mock rationality of the debate conceals the arbitrariness of the will and power at work in its resolution. (MacIntyre, 2007, 71)

Coetzee, as a novelist, may well have found especially interesting MacIntyre's philosophical revisionism, whereby philosophical claims are assessed according to literary standards and terms, an idea which is central to *The Lives of Animals* and which will be returned to later.

It is tempting to transfer these ideas from *Giving Offense* to *The Lives of Animals* and to interpret Coetzee's presentation of Costello to be an emotivist and relativist one, especially in the context of Costello's apparent attack on reason. However, this interpretation will be resisted in this thesis, especially since a purely relativist position would not necessarily require one to take the interests of animals seriously, nor would it permit the condemnation of Nazism, both of which would undermine Costello's argument. Indeed, a purely Nietzschean emotivism in which all that counts is the will to power was used by Nazis to justify the mass murder of Jews. Thus Costello, could not seriously, or consistently, be espousing an emotivist, relativist position. On the other hand, she is certainly suggesting that the justification for our exploitation of animals has no moral basis other than 'might is right.' As a fallible figure she is aware of the uncertainty concerning ethical principles and yet is also profoundly aware of the suffering of animals.

In fact, however, the manner in which Coetzee uses MacIntyre in *Giving Offense* is misleading, since MacIntyre does not himself espouse an emotivist position, but rather presents a Nietzschean-style emotivism as the only alternative to an Aristotelian-type virtue ethics once one accepts that the Enlightenment project of utilitarianism and Kantianism has failed:

For, as I argued earlier, it was because a moral tradition of which Aristotle's thought was the intellectual core was repudiated during the transitions of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries that the Enlightenment project of discovering new rational secular foundations for morality had to be undertaken. And it was because that project failed, because the views advanced by its most intellectually powerful protagonists, and more especially by Kant, could not be sustained in the face of rational criticism that Nietzsche and all his existentialist and emotivist successors were able to mount their apparently successful critique of all previous morality. Hence the defensibility of the Nietzschean position turns *in the end* on the answer to the question: was it right in the first place to reject Aristotle? [MacIntyre's emphasis] (MacIntyre, 2007, 117)

Thus, MacIntyre's position is not actually pluralistic, offering neo-Aristotelianism as merely one more moral framework from which to choose amongst several others, including utilitarianism, Kantianism and contractarianism. *After Virtue* not only provides Coetzee with a negative weapon against liberalism, but also offers a positive alternative in its place, namely an Aristotelian-type virtue ethics. Of course, it seems implausible that Costello would subscribe to any form of Aristotelianism, including Thomism, since she is scathing towards Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas's views on animals (Coetzee, 1999b, 22). In fact, however, there is nothing essential to Aristotelianism or virtue ethics that precludes the respectful treatment of animals:

There is no reason, according to neo-Aristotelianism, that animals should not be treated as 'ends in themselves,' or as having intrinsic value, just as other human beings, and truth, and knowledge, and virtue itself, are. (Hursthouse, 1987, 244)

Indeed, it will be argued in a later chapter that Costello herself pursues a form of virtue ethics, but a Socratic rather than Aristotelian one. Nonetheless, Hursthouse's suggestion that we adopt 'animal concern' as a new virtue seems somewhat arbitrary. Costello would also presumably find this approach limited, since it is concerned not with the animal's being in itself, but only insofar as it has an impact on our character or virtue.

Returning to MacIntyre's fertile suggestion that liberal moral principles are mere fictions, it is interesting to note that Coetzee, too, presents dignity as an artificial construct or fiction in "Taking Offense":

The fiction of dignity helps to define humanity and the status of humanity helps to define human rights. There is thus a real sense in which an affront to our dignity strikes at our rights. Yet when, outraged at such affront, we stand on our rights and demand redress, we would do well to remember how insubstantial the dignity is on which those rights are based. (Coetzee, 2006, 14)

He intriguingly suggests that the way we insist on our dignity is a means of differentiating ourselves from animals. He also suggests that one day we may accord animals dignity too (Coetzee, 2006, 14).

In this same essay, Coetzee uses the Erasmian image of life as a drama:

Life, says Erasmus's Folly, is theater: we each have lines to say and a part to play. One kind of actor, recognising that he is in a play will go on playing nevertheless; another kind of actor, shocked to find he is participating in an illusion, will try to step off the stage and out of the play. The second actor is mistaken. For there is nothing outside the theater. . . . (Coetzee, 2006, 15)

Coetzee's Erasmian (and Shakespearean) observation resonates strongly with a similar observation by MacIntyre:

In life, as both Aristotle and Engels noted, we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. (MacIntyre, 2007, 213)

This is part of MacIntyre's critique of the abstract and impoverished language of behaviourism and analytic philosophy, and their failure to provide an adequate discourse for understanding human action and meaning. In its place MacIntyre offers what is in his view a far richer and more complex Aristotelian, teleological and poetic understanding of human life whereby individual lives gain meaning by being expressed in narratives, embedded in the context of a broader community, with a shared history and *telos* or purpose, and in which virtues and vices help or hinder the individual to achieve *eudamonia* (variously defined as 'flourishing', 'fortune' or 'happiness') (MacIntyre, 2007, 148). The good life consists at least in part of the pursuit of excellence. MacIntyre criticises behaviourism for taking 'intention' out of behaviour and analytic, speech-act philosophy for taking action out of context. For MacIntyre, actions require intentions, contexts and histories, namely narratives (which can be classified under different genres) in order to be meaningful and intelligible. He is partly applying

Aristotelian poetics, but to human life rather than merely to drama and poetry. He continues later, further developing the idea of life as a drama and a narrative:

A central thesis then begins to emerge: man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. . . . We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. (MacIntyre, 2007, 216)

All of this powerfully reinforces Elizabeth Costello’s poetic challenge to the philosophers in *The Lives of Animals*. In particular her critique of the Cartesian and Kantian idea of the disembodied intellect, summed up in the abstract idea of ‘personhood,’ is countered by the fully embodied and (socially and historically) embedded concept of ‘character.’ MacIntyre points out how the modern liberal individualist notion of disembodied personhood enables some modern Americans to evade responsibility for their enrichment at the expense of black slaves and of young Germans likewise to evade responsibility for the Holocaust (MacIntyre, 2007, 220-21), since they fail to acknowledge that their identity is at least partly constituted by their history and the narratives that make up their histories. Costello faces a similar difficulty in *The Lives of Animals* when she tries to convince her audience that they are implicated in “an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it . . .” (Coetzee, 1999b, 21).

A further implication of MacIntyre’s claim that one’s life should be construed as a narrative is that one’s life should be accountable, namely that one should be able to provide an account of it and compare it with others’ accounts. This is precisely what Costello does in “At the Gate” in *Elizabeth Costello*, although as is usual in Coetzee’s fictions, this idea is presented with layers of complexity, since not only does it refer to Kafka’s “Before the Law,” but it concerns a writer’s own attempt

to provide an account of her own life, and therefore implicates the author, Coetzee. Thus Coetzee defends his life of creating fictions through his writer-persona, Costello. Furthermore, a narrative must be given of a life of creating narratives, a true account of a life of creating fictions. Even though Costello's account seems inconclusive, merely by producing an account at all, however tentative, she creates a meaningful narrative.

Besides a critique of liberal rationalism and the provision of an alternative virtue ethics for human life in which poetic terms guarantee meaningfulness, MacIntyre's ideas provide a coherent framework for integrating other aspects of *The Lives of Animals*. Not only is *After Virtue* a work of philosophical revisionism often in literary terms, but it begins with the word "Imagine" (MacIntyre, 2007, 1) and then proceeds to provide a narrative of a world in which science has become completely fragmented as a result of a historical catastrophe, and then proceeds to suggest a similar type of disruption and fragmentation has occurred in modern moral discourse and society. As in *The Lives of Animals*, here the imagination is given precedence above discursive philosophical discourse. Furthermore, MacIntyre makes frequent use of striking comparisons and literary references in bolstering his arguments, in contrast to what some may deem the arid style of analytic philosophy. Very important is the fact that MacIntyre repudiates the philosophical tradition (analytic philosophy) within which he was trained, and this is the same tradition that Costello repudiates in *The Lives of Animals*, and from a similar position in which aesthetic concepts are central.

MacIntyre's approach can also help to explain Costello's tendency, in her 'philosophical' lecture, to create narratives rather than merely discuss concepts in an abstract, discursive mode. It may help us understand why Coetzee chooses a narrative mode for his own Tanner lectures (and others) which traditionally are expected to be philosophical. It illuminates Coetzee's operating within—but critically challenging—a tradition of academic discourse, since MacIntyre shows that individuals are always embedded in institutions, traditions, family relationships and histories (MacIntyre, 2007, 222). Of course, it also explains why she is alone, lonely and isolated, since she does not appear to fit easily into any of these traditions or institutions.

Again, it helps to remind the reader of Coetzee's (and Costello's) ethical seriousness, his concern for the question of what constitutes the good life for humankind, not only in relation to questions of fundamental moral principles but also in terms of a *practical* virtue ethics. Indeed, one of MacIntyre's main criticisms of the liberal ethic is that, unlike an Aristotelian ethic, it provides no detailed idea of how one is to live a good or meaningful life. Virtue ethics may thus help to explain both Coetzee's rejection of utilitarian and Kantian arguments for animal rights and the reason he puts in Costello's mouth to explain her vegetarianism, namely that "[i]t comes out of a desire to save my soul" (Coetzee, 1999b, 43). MacIntyre explains the importance of sentiment in virtue ethics:

Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is not, as Kant was later to think, to act against inclination; it is to act from inclination formed by the cultivation of the virtues. Moral education is an 'éducation sentimentale.'  
(MacIntyre, 2007, 149)

Finally, it may also help to explain why she insists that animals, as embodied souls, can experience joy—"One name for the experience of full being is *joy*" (Coetzee, 1999b, 33)—since, if humans possess a *telos* and can experience flourishing, there is no reason why nonhuman animals cannot too. This explains her positive emphasis on animal well-being, rather than merely dwelling negatively on the suffering of animals. She seems to be suggesting a broadening of the moral community to include animals, a community in which both humans and animals can flourish together.

Costello's position in the animal rights debate can now be summed up. Her attempts to expose what she sees as the moral and logical bankruptcy of speciesism, in particular the illegitimate use of the criterion of rationality to exclude nonhuman animals from moral consideration, ally her with Singer. Costello's insistence on "embodiedness" shows the continuity between humans and nonhuman animals and aligns her not only with Mary Midgley, but also with Tom Regan and the ecologists. However, she shares with Regan a belief in the value of individual animal subjectivity



and does not follow deep ecologists who value the environment above the individual interests of animals. Nonetheless, in her refusal to espouse principles, in her emphasis on sentiment and intuitions and on animal joy, indeed in her being embodied as an ageing woman, Costello most closely resembles Midgley. Finally, Costello seems closely aligned with ecofeminism and its form of virtue ethics. In the end, however, she cannot be comfortably placed within any single school of thought.

Both Midgley and Costello differ from Singer and Regan in their suspicion of liberalism (that is, its moral philosophy based on utilitarian or Kantian principles), and instead seem to represent a form of ecofeminism, which, while not rejecting reason *per se*, displaces the overintellectualised, disembodied idea of reason originating with Descartes and crystalized in the Enlightenment. Furthermore, aware of the limitations of anthropocentrism in taking animal interests seriously, Costello is also concerned with the impact on our humanity, our humaneness, of our treatment of animals. In a later chapter, this idea of humanity will be traced back to Socrates. In demonstrating the closeness of Costello's views on animal rights with the various philosophers, whose views converge despite differences in principles and approaches, and especially with Midgley, it has been shown how reasonable Costello's position on this issue is, notwithstanding her inconsistencies. It will be argued that Coetzee's views coincide quite closely with Costello's, despite his ironic distancing from his persona and despite her strident public statements that contrast so strikingly with Coetzee's famous elusiveness.

The chapter thus far has broadly covered the arguments of some of the most important pro-animal philosophers. Their arguments have not merely been presented in a purely discursive mode since their literary qualities—in particular their use of important comparisons to further their arguments—have also been discussed. Nonetheless, the embodiedness and embeddedness of these ideas in the characters and dramatic structure of *The Lives of Animals* still need to be explored, although this must wait for the next chapters. In the meantime, however, it should be clear that an initial attempt has been made to characterise the persona of Elizabeth Costello, as is evident from the comparison of her with Mary Midgley. The Socratic characteristics

of these two figures have already been hinted at, and a deeper exploration of this characterisation will form the substance of Chapter 2.

So far the argument has been limited to philosophers, although with the discussion of MacIntyre the transition to the poets had already begun. The chapter now turns to the poets whose authority Costello fails to make use of. The figures of the Roman philosopher Plutarch, and the animal activists and compassionate vegetarians, Tom Regan and Peter Singer, give the lie to Costello's suggestion that poets are more likely to sympathise with animal suffering than philosophers. It is also unlikely that most poets or authors, at least in the West, are compassionate vegetarians. Notable examples are Tolstoy, Franz Kafka and George Bernard Shaw, but they are notable for being exceptions.

It remains to discuss the poets, or writers, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Coetzee himself. Both authors received the Nobel prize for literature, Singer in 1978 and Coetzee in 2003, both admired Dostoevsky's work (a fact which will be illuminated later in relation to Bakhtin's dialogism), and both became passionate and compassionate vegetarians. The epigraphs of this chapter both illustrate the ability of these writers to sympathise with the suffering of animals. The quotation from Coetzee, in the first person and present tense, establishes the immediacy of his moral confusion at his imagining the amount of suffering in the world. Coetzee's words help to convey a truly profound awareness of the suffering of others, an awareness that is heightened by his powerful imaginative sympathy, a moral sympathy that refuses to ignore human complicity in much of this suffering. This emphasis on the awareness of suffering "and not just human suffering" resembles the Buddha's compassion in response to the suffering of others.

The extract from Singer's "The Letter Writer," in the third and second persons, past tense, helps emphasize Herman's sense of desolation at what he mistakenly believes to be the death of a mouse with whom he had shared his home. The quotation from Isaac Bashevis Singer is justly (in)famous. It is so often quoted out of context that it has almost lost its power to shock. Perhaps it is for this reason that Coetzee re-works the Nazi analogy in *The Lives of Animals*, and develops it in detail,

rather than merely quoting Singer and relying on his moral authority. In reworking the analogy, Coetzee revives it so that it regains its power to move and defamiliarise readers, thereby forcing them to think about its lesson anew, forcing them to engage with it once more, hopefully helping them to achieve enlightenment. It is certainly not meant as “cheap point-scoring,” contrary to what Costello says after pointing out that it is as little consolation to animals that their bodies are eaten after they are killed as it is to the dead of Treblinka that their bodies were used to make soap and their hair to stuff mattresses:

“Pardon me, I repeat. That is the last cheap point I will be scoring. I know how talk of this kind polarizes people, and cheap point-scoring only makes it worse. I want to find a way of speaking to fellow human beings that will be cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical, that will bring enlightenment rather than seeking to divide us into the righteous and the sinners, the saved and the damned, the sheep and the goats.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 22)

Ironically, despite this, her audience appears to take offence, to be offended, rather than to take her message to heart, namely to consider the suffering of nonhuman animals. Costello’s use of the word “enlightenment” in this extract appears to be more in line with Buddhism than with European eighteenth century rationalism, Buddhism being a form of oriental virtue ethics.

The fact that Costello chooses to mention Treblinka gives credence to the idea that Coetzee had Singer’s story in mind when he discussed the Holocaust. In Singer’s story, “The Letter Writer,” from *The Seance and Other Stories* (Singer, 1984b), the protagonist is Herman Gombiner, who features in other stories of Singer. He is an ageing, gentle, Jewish man who was born in Kalomin, Poland, but now lives in New York, and whose entire family perished in the Holocaust. He is alone and lonely, working for a Jewish publishing house. His loneliness, due mainly to the loss of his family, is emphasized by constant awareness of the spirits of the dead and his correspondence with strangers, (mainly) women who share his interest in the psychic

and the paranormal: “Now, since Hitler had killed off all of his family, he had no relatives to write letters to. He wrote letters to total strangers” (Singer, 1984a, 253).

It is not surprising, given his loneliness, that Herman befriends a mouse, although for him it is not merely a mouse, but a “she.” Earlier in the story, Herman expresses a concern that the mouse may damage the books that cover the floors of his flat and that she may breed. However, neither fear is realised and she becomes his companion: “Every night Herman set out for her a piece of bread, a small slice of cheese, and a saucer of water to keep her from eating the books” (Singer, 1984a, 251). When he falls ill, he neglects to feed her, and thus, after he recovers, believes, mistakenly, that the mouse has died, hence his eulogy to her. The fact that he is concerned about her even while he is seriously ill and unable to take care of himself emphasizes his respect for the individual existence of the mouse “who had shared a portion of her life with him” (Singer, 1984a, 271).

It is surely no chance that Singer chooses as Herman’s companion a creature usually considered vermin. His fears earlier in the story that she may breed and become a threat to his property, may allude to the Nazis’ and Germans’ similar characterisation of Jews as vermin. It is surely suggested, too, that Herman is more sensitive to the life of another animal because he has lost all his family in the Holocaust. Nonetheless, “The Letter Writer” demonstrates the extent to which an author can sympathise imaginatively with the being of a nonhuman animal, and it is surprising that Coetzee did not refer to Singer’s story in defence of Costello’s “sympathetic imagination.” If one is tempted to trivialise Herman’s feelings for the mouse, then one can arguably be exposing oneself as a speciesist, and as one who holds as cheap the lives of animals other than those like oneself.

Instead, the author and the animal from literature with whom Costello most closely identifies are Kafka—“of all men Kafka is the most insecure in his humanity” (Coetzee, 1999b, 30-31)—and Kafka’s ape, Red Peter, both of whom aptly express Costello’s uncomfortable feelings in front of an audience whose humanity is, for her, in question for their indifference to and willed ignorance of the massive suffering of animals that they tacitly support. However, this will be explored in a later chapter.

Finally, the question of Coetzee's own views on animal rights remains. Against the reviewers and critics who suggest that Coetzee used Costello as a device to express extreme views that he himself does not hold, it will be argued here that Coetzee's and Costello's views on animal rights are virtually identical. The main evidence for this is a speech written by Coetzee, but delivered by Hugo Weaving, entitled "A Word from J.M. Coetzee," at the opening of an art exhibition (Coetzee, 2007b) and an interview with *Satya* (Coetzee, 2004b) one of the two interviews to which Coetzee agreed when he visited Denmark to receive the Nobel Prize in 2003.<sup>7</sup>

In the interview with *Satya*, Coetzee acknowledges the difficulty of representing animal consciousness in literature and points out that animals fulfil only a peripheral role in his literature, except for *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace*, mainly because their role in society is also peripheral. In answer to the question whether he sees connections between different types of oppression, Coetzee answers:

We are not by nature cruel. In order to be cruel we have to close our hearts to the suffering of the other. It is not inherently easier to close our sympathies as we wring the neck of the chicken we are going to eat than it is to close off our sympathies to the man we send to the electric chair ...but we have evolved psychic, social and philosophical mechanisms to cope with killing poultry that, for complex reasons, we use to allow us to kill human beings only in time of war.

In answer to the questions:

*What is your relation to animal rights philosophy? In what way do you think fiction can contribute to the question?*

Coetzee responds:

Strictly speaking, my interest is not in legal rights for animals but in a change of heart towards animals. The most important of all rights is the

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<sup>7</sup>Since these extracts are from are web pages, page references cannot be provided.

right to life, and I cannot foresee a day when domesticated animals will be granted that right in law. If you concede that the animal rights movement can never succeed in this primary goal, then it seems that the best we can achieve is to show to as many people as we can what the spiritual and psychic cost is of continuing to treat animals as we do, and thus perhaps to change their hearts.

In the speech he wrote for the opening of the *Voicelless* exhibition, Coetzee uses his own voice, even though he adopts the persona of a public intellectual, rather than that of a fictional creation like Costello, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the speech.

In the speech, Coetzee opens by stating that “it is obvious that there is something badly wrong in relations between human beings and other animals.” Although the main thrust of the speech is to criticize the industrialised farming of animals, he mentions other exploitative animal industries “that we might also call cruel and inhuman but for the fact that *inhuman* is the wrong word, such practices are all too human.” This shows his continued interest in humanity, in humaneness, perhaps the main concern of Costello too.

He points out the culpability of all the people who maintain these industries and support them by buying their products, including the people who are sickened by the cruelty of the industry but try to avoid thinking about it and shield their children from the truth, “because as we all know children have tender hearts and are easily moved.”

Coetzee then makes the connection between our treatment of animals and the treatment of Jews by the Nazis, saying that “we have already had one warning on the grandest scale that there is something deeply, cosmically wrong with regarding and treating fellow human beings as mere units of any kind.” He elaborates: “It came when in the middle of the twentieth century a group of powerful men in Germany had the bright idea of adapting the methods of the industrial stockyard, as pioneered and perfected in Chicago, to the slaughter—or what they preferred to call the *processing*—of human beings.” Echoing Costello, Coetzee continues:

Of course we cried out in horror when we found out about this. We cried: *What a terrible crime, to treat human beings like cattle! If only we had known beforehand!* But our cry should more accurately have been: *What a terrible crime, to treat human beings like units in an industrial process!* And that cry should have had a postscript: *What a terrible crime, come to think of it, to treat any living being like a unit in an industrial process!* [Coetzee's emphases]

Coetzee goes on to praise the *Voiceless* organization for working towards the amelioration of animal suffering and exploitation, and raising the consciousness of ordinary people. He expresses hope in the good hearts of children: "Children have tender hearts, that is to say, children have hearts that have not yet been hardened by years of cruel and unnatural battering." Perhaps unexpectedly, Coetzee's words endorse Peter Singer's view that children are reluctant to eat meat when they first encounter it: "[o]ne hopes, as knowledge of nutrition spreads, more parents will realize that on this issue their children may be wiser than they are" (Singer, 2002, 226). Singer relates an account of the son of Lawrence Kohlberg<sup>8</sup> who initially resisted his father's efforts to convince him to eat meat:

Lawrence Kohlberg, a Harvard psychologist noted for his work on moral development, relates his son, at the age of four, made his first moral commitment, and refused to eat meat because, as he said, "it's bad to kill animals." It took Kohlberg six months to talk his son out of his position, which Kohlberg says was based on a failure to make a proper distinction between justified and unjustified killing, and indicates that his son was only at the most primitive stage of moral development. (Singer, 2002, 226)

In later chapters, Coetzee's concern with children in relation to his fiction will be explored. In his speech, he contends that "[i]n the struggle to rid ourselves of the

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<sup>8</sup>His work on the psychology of moral development was famously criticised by the feminist Carol Gilligan, as discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to Anette Baier.

blight of the animal-products industry, the crucial battle is for the hearts and minds of the young, and it is a battle that can easily be won.” Here, as in Coetzee’s interview with *Satya* discussed above, one is reminded of Costello’s plea to her audience “to open your hearts and listen to what your heart says” (Coetzee, 1999b, 37). He mentions the unusual nature of the animal liberation movement, namely that its beneficiaries will remain unaware of their indebtedness to their liberators: “So, even though we may feel very close to our fellow creatures as we act for them, this remains a human enterprise from beginning to end.”

He concludes with words that confirm that he—and therefore Costello, too, as has been argued in this chapter—does not reject reason:

It is an enterprise in which we are increasingly making use of the faculty where we have an indubitable advantage over other creatures: the faculty of abstract thought. This age will be looked back on, I am convinced, as one in which huge steps were made in our thinking about relations between human and non-human living beings, in a range of fields from the philosophy of mind to ethics and jurisprudence. With such a flow of intellectual energy joining in with the practical energies of organizations like Voiceless, it is impossible to believe that we cannot effect a change in the present sad, sorry and selfish treatment of animals.



## Chapter 2

# Elizabeth Costello as a Socratic figure: Eros, Maieusis and Death in *The Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*

SOCRATES: “But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this: that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he [the oracle at Delphi] is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us ‘the wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless.’ ” (*Apology*: 23b) (Plato, 1959, 52)

This chapter will continue, following from Chapter 1, to problematise the terms of the debate, namely the opposition, taken from Plato, between philosophers and poets, reason and imagination, and reflected in the two-part structure of *The Lives of Animals*. However, whereas Chapter 1 explored contemporary philosophical texts in relation to Coetzee’s fiction, this chapter will focus on the influence of Platonic texts on Coetzee. The chapter will also attempt to explain why Coetzee uses the controversial and apparently counter-productive figure of Elizabeth Costello to express his

views in *The Lives of Animals*. The chapter aims to locate, to a greater degree than has been done before, the problems raised in *The Lives of Animals* as originating more in Costello's audience than in herself. Related to this is the question of the role of the public intellectual, particularly one who, like Costello, seems to stand outside of the establishment.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Coetzee critiques academia, and in particular the humanities, in the first four "lessons" of *Elizabeth Costello*.

It will be argued that the assumption that Costello is a Socratic figure may help to resolve these problems. Proof that Costello is a Socratic figure will be provided from Coetzee's novels, *The Lives of Animals* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and *Slow Man* (2005). Thus, whereas the previous chapter focused on the philosophical positioning of Costello and Coetzee in relation to the animal rights debate, this chapter will be concerned more with the literary questions of genre, the characterisation of Costello, the relation of Coetzee to his persona, Costello, and Coetzee's use of Platonic texts.

Concerning the genre, David Lodge, in a review of *Elizabeth Costello*, describes it as "a cross between a campus novel and a Platonic dialogue" and writes that "In Lessons Three and Four, 'The Lives of Animals,' the novel comes closest to the Platonic dialogue form" (Lodge, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Garber in her essay in the "Reflections" section of *Lives* writes that, "[a]nother familiar genre to which Coetzee's lectures are related is, of course, the philosophical dialogue. It is Plato who most famously invites the comparison of poet and philosopher, and not to the advantage of the poet" (Garber, 1999, 79-80). These insights will be developed in more detail in this chapter.

Elizabeth Costello first made her appearance as a fictional stand-in for Coetzee when he delivered the Ben Belitt lecture at Bennington, entitled "What Is Realism?" (1996), later reprinted as the first chapter/lecture of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). In the Ben Belitt lecture, Elizabeth Costello delivers the Appleton Award speech at Appleton College in 1995 whereas in *Elizabeth Costello*, she receives the Stowe Award

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<sup>1</sup>This theme is the subject of a collection of essays edited by Jane Poyner (Poyner, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Citations without page numbers refer to web pages.

at Altona College. (Is this carelessness on Coetzee's part, or post-modern inconsistency?) Coetzee adopted this same persona when he delivered the Tanner Lectures at Princeton University, 1997-98, which were later published as *The Lives of Animals* (1998), *The Lives of Animals* (with "Reflections") (1999) and as chapters/lectures 3 and 4 of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). This time Costello delivers the Gates Lectures at Appleton College, and this time Costello's son, John, does not accompany her as he does in "What Is Realism?", but hosts her because he is employed at the College (although in "What Is Realism?" he is employed at Altona College). In both cases, however, the real narrator of the fictions remains elusive, but is focused through the consciousness of Costello's son, John, whose name is a reflexive reference to the actual author of the fiction and presenter of the speech, J.M. Coetzee. He adopted a similar fictional mode when he delivered his Nobel Prize acceptance speech (2003), except this time his persona was Man Friday from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Derek Attridge cautions against a simplistic allegorising of Coetzee's fiction (Attridge, 2005, 34-35), and this may seem to preclude interpreting Costello as a Socratic figure. Nonetheless, it will be argued that the evidence for Costello as a Socratic figure seems very strong. Furthermore, if, as discussed in Chapter 1, MacIntyre is right that every age has its stock characters—and he suggests that the contemporary dominant characters are the bureaucratic manager, the aesthete and the therapist—then perhaps there can be counter-characters too. The Socratic figure would be one such character, set in opposition to the authorities and experts of the modern era.

The figure of Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee's fictional academic persona, has proved to be very controversial. Both her audience in *The Lives of Animals* and reviewers of this work have found her attack on reason to be excessive and her Holocaust analogy offensive. Abraham Stern, a character in *The Lives of Animals*, an ageing Jewish poet and academic, is so offended that he withdraws in protest from the dinner in Costello's honour and leaves a note for Costello which John finds the next day:

If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camp in a cheap way. (Coetzee, 1999b, 50)

Reviewers and critics like Douglas Cruikshank have considered her case for the sympathetic imagination to be inconclusive or unconvincing (Cruikshank, 1999). Her views have been met with ridicule or indifference, even hostility, both within *The Lives of Animals* and by reviewers of the work. She has been dismissed by some reviewers and critics of *The Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, and even by characters within those works, as a mad old woman, irrational, confused, a ranter. In *Slow Man*, the protagonist, Paul Rayment, on meeting her for the first time, thinks to himself: “*Who is this madwoman I have let into my home?* [Coetzee’s italics]” (81). In *The Lives of Animals*, Costello is criticised mainly by her philosophically trained daughter-in-law, Norma, as irrational: “There is no position outside of reason where you can stand and lecture about reason and pass judgment on reason” (48). Even more disturbing is her own son’s lack of imaginative sympathy for her suffering as a result of her beliefs, a suffering heightened by her ability, as a poet, to imagine herself into the being of other suffering animals. The same is true of the reception of *Elizabeth Costello*, where the two parts of *The Lives of Animals* were reprinted, alongside additional “lessons”, as “Lesson 3” and “Lesson 4”. Furthermore, many critics have been unable to clarify Costello’s views in relation to Coetzee’s and have professed an inability to decide whether his adopted fictional mode indicates commitment or confusion.

In contrast to the reviews which immediately followed the publication of *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*, the critics in *J.M Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* tend to have a more considered and thoughtful appraisal of Costello. The editor of the collection, Jane Poyner, mentions Socrates as one of the first in the Western tradition of the public intellectual (Poyner, 2006, 8), but no one in the collection pursues this idea much further, despite making occasional Socratic insights, and none explicitly identifies Costello as a Socratic figure. Moreover, most of the critics in this collection still tend to see her as standing outside of reason. Dominic Head argues that “Coetzee seeks to make his readers uneasy about the self-interest implicit in humanist reason and rationality, but, in another unsettling manoeuvre, he takes us beyond a straightforward rational and literal engagement

with the arguments” (110). Rosemary Jolly argues that Coetzee points out that “this cult of instrumental rationalism is neither logical nor ethical and that its consequence is violence” (158). Michael Bell contends that Costello misrepresents her authors, and dismisses some even though she plagiarizes them (176), a contention that will be tested in Chapter 3, and argues that “Costello’s problem is that her conviction must not be understood by others as a possible ‘position’; it must be felt apodictically as a living truth to which there is no alternative” (186).

The feminist vegetarian Laura Wright emphasizes the dramatic context of the speech and Coetzee’s use of a female voice to present his views. She argues that Costello’s speech is a rant (196-7)—linked with emotional excess—that destabilises (205) the patriarchal binary oppositions of the rational, philosophical speeches that public lectures usually are, and points out that Norma also rants, while John’s apparent objectivity as mediator between his mother and his wife is owing to his male abstractness (208). In one of the last essays of the collection, Lucy Graham argues that “by representing the writer as an intermediary, as a ‘medium,’ Coetzee stages an abdication from a position of authorial power” (233). Many of the insights in her essay resonate with ideas from Plato’s *Symposium*, although she does not explicitly acknowledge Plato. Some of these Platonic ideas include: the text as the child of the author in his/her desire for immortality (221, 222), intellectual and biological conception, the intermediary between opposites (225), the medium (223), and possibly even Coetzee as midwife to the birth of ideas.

This chapter intends to show, in a different way from Chapter 1, how reasonable Costello’s position is, despite its apparent rejection of reason, and to show how important imagination and emotion are to the debate, not only for the poets but also for the philosophers. Crucial to this purpose will be the use of Plato’s dialogues, to which Coetzee refers often, both implicitly and explicitly, in his critical writings and his novels. The relation between Plato the author and Socrates his main speaker in the early and middle dialogues will contribute to an understanding of the relation between Coetzee the author and Costello his persona. It will be necessary to distinguish between the unmistakable Socratic figure of the early Platonic dialogues and

the Socrates of the middle Platonic dialogues who becomes Plato's mouthpiece, and who eventually disappears in the late dialogues.<sup>3</sup> The opposition between philosophers and poets is complicated by the fact that Plato was not just a great philosopher but also a masterful poet, and it will be argued that Costello strongly resembles a fallible Socratic rather than an infallible Platonic figure, although she differs from Socrates in that she refuses to privilege a philosophical mode above a poetic one. Also, in Coetzee's fictional world, Costello is a writer, whereas Socrates left no writings behind, preferring to engage directly and dialectically with his interlocutors in the pursuit of virtue. On the other hand, both Costello and Socrates survive exclusively in the writings of Coetzee and Plato (and Xenophon), respectively, although Socrates was a historical figure, whereas Costello is purely a fictional creation, despite some similarities to Coetzee.

Besides the early Platonic, or Socratic, dialogues (which will be discussed later), the relevant middle Platonic dialogues are the *Republic*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. From the *Republic* come the opposition between the philosophers and the poets and the concern with justice that are crucial to *The Lives of Animals*. The Platonic ideas of eros as the desire for immortality and the motive behind human creativity, and of Socrates as midwife to the birth of ideas and virtue, originate in the *Symposium* and are central both to *Elizabeth Costello* and to *Slow Man*. Finally, the *Phaedrus*, to which Coetzee refers explicitly in *Slow Man*, concerns eros, creatively inspired madness and the opposition between philosophy and rhetoric. While this chapter will focus on the *content* of these dialogues, Chapter 3 will focus on Coetzee's choice of the dialogue *form* in *The Lives of Animals*.

The origin of the word "academy" is also significant here, since it was the name of the first school of higher learning, established by Plato himself in the grove of Akademos, outside Athens. It can be argued that Plato represents the academic establishment, where reason is a means by which authorities can assert their power, and Socrates, the critical outsider who is not bound to any institution, as seems to be

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<sup>3</sup>This scheme is a product of nineteenth century German scholarship and has been challenged in the twentieth century (Borchert, 2006, Volume 9, 107), although this need not invalidate the Platonic/Socratic distinction.

the case of Costello. This establishment view of the academic that Coetzee appears to be criticising is in stark contrast with the critical, decidedly Socratic, intellectual that he describes in *Giving Offense* (Coetzee, 2006), with reference to the philosopher Sir Karl Popper, whom he quotes:

I must teach myself to distrust the dangerous intuitive feeling or conviction that it is I who am right. I must distrust this feeling however strong it may be. Indeed, the stronger it is, the more I should mistrust it, because the stronger it is, the greater is the danger that I may deceive myself; and, with it, the danger that I may become an intolerant fanatic. (Coetzee, 2006, 3)

Coetzee then provides an ambivalent description of the modern secular rationalist intellectual: “Complacent and yet not complacent, intellectuals of the kind I describe, pointing to the Apollonian ‘Know thyself,’ criticize and encourage criticism of the foundations of their own belief systems” (3). This reference to the Apollonian ‘Know thyself’ makes a clear link to Socrates, as will be shown later. Coetzee then goes on to point out weaknesses of the secular, liberal “tolerance”, namely that it requires that one respects the differences of others’ beliefs without really trying to understand those beliefs, namely, not respecting those beliefs themselves (6):

This tolerance—which, depending on how you look at it, is either deeply civilized or complacent, hypocritical, and patronizing—is a consequence of the security intellectuals feel about rational secularism within whose horizons they live, their confidence that it can provide explanations for most things, and therefore—in its own terms, which can attach ultimate importance to being able to explain things—that it cannot itself be the object of some other method of explanation more all-inclusive than itself. As the unframed framer, reason is a form of power with no in-built sense of what the experience of powerlessness might be like. (4)

It seems to be precisely this lack of an in-built sense of powerlessness that impedes Costello's audience from being able to imagine or sympathise with the almost completely disempowered position of animals in the modern world. It is clear, too, that this assumed position of power is implicit in Kant's definition of persons as rational, autonomous individuals, an assumption which ecofeminism and an ethics of care criticise, as was shown in Chapter 1, although Kant was concerned to show the limits of reason.

Costello, too, criticises this privileged position of reason (in an extract quoted in Chapter 1) when she explains to her audience why she has chosen not to employ the terms of philosophy in her speech (Coetzee, 1999b, 23). She elaborates later:

“Yet, although I see that the best way to win acceptance from this learned gathering would be for me to join myself, like a tributary stream running into a great river, to the great Western discourse of man versus beast, of reason versus unreason, something in me resists, foreseeing in that step the concession of the entire battle.

“For, seen from the outside, from a being who is alien to it, reason is simply a vast tautology. Of course reason will validate reason as the first principle of the universe—what else should it do? Dethrone itself? Reasoning systems, as systems of totality, do not have that power. If there were a position from which reason could attack and dethrone itself, reason would already have occupied that position; otherwise it would not be total.” (25)

It is these pronouncements of Costello that so confound her audience and that lead to Norma's criticisms, quoted earlier in the chapter. What Costello says seems ironical or paradoxical, even self-contradictory, especially since she goes on to provide arguments for her views. It will be argued here, however, that Costello's attack is on a certain conception of absolute reason, which can be described as Platonic, and that her position is aligned more closely with a more humble and modest Socratic rationality, precisely a version of rationalism as promoted by Karl Popper, despite Coetzee's



apparent ambivalence about this philosopher as expressed earlier, that recognises its own limitations, and hence the possibility of powerlessness (Popper, 1966, 132). Indeed, Coetzee could have made use of Popper's distinction between uncritical or comprehensive rationalism and a critical rationalism:

Uncritical or comprehensive rationalism can be described as the attitude of the person who says 'I am not prepared to accept anything that cannot be defended by means of argument or experience.' We can express this also in the form of the principle that any assumption which cannot be supported either by argument or experience is to be discarded. Now it is easy to see that this principle of an uncritical rationalism is inconsistent; for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or experience, it implies that it should itself be discarded. ... Uncritical rationalism is therefore logically untenable; and since a purely logical argument can show this, uncritical rationalism can be defeated by its own chosen weapon, argument.

This criticism may be generalized. Since all argument must proceed from assumptions, it is plainly impossible to demand that all assumptions should be based on argument. (Popper, 2003, 254-55)

Popper contends that his robust form of critical rationalism, with its rejection of the principle of sufficient reason, avoids such paradoxes. He also claims that his fallibilist<sup>4</sup> idea of rationality, which admits the inevitability of human error and human fallibility, is Socratic, as opposed to the Platonic privileging of an infallible idea of reason. Popper also explicitly aligns his own critical rationalism with Socrates' fallible approach, and claims that "[t]he spirit of science is that of Socrates" (Popper, 2003, 269). He also aligns rationalism with imagination and humanitarianism (264-65), and opposes it to irrationalism, misanthropy and misogyny (in his special sense of a hatred of reasoning). Of course, the limitations of Popper's emphasis on individualism and rationalism will be clear from the discussion in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, it will be

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<sup>4</sup>Popper sees himself as part of a tradition of "fallibilist" philosophers, including Socrates, Kant and Peirce, philosophers who emphasize the essentially tentative, conjectural nature of knowledge.

argued that Costello's critical attitude toward (an unqualified) rationalism has much in common with Popper's and Socrates', especially in their ceaseless attempts to uncover and critique sources of authority.

The Socratic concern for *maieusis*, namely intellectual midwifery, is evident in Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (first published in 1971), a book upon which Peter Singer relies heavily in *Animal Liberation* for his facts on the damage caused to the environment and poor people by modern industrial farming (agribusiness) and for his advice on a healthy vegetarian diet. In the Preface to this book Lappé uses language that alludes to Socrates; the last section of her Preface is entitled "Midwives to the New". She writes that to get to the ideas that have led to world hunger there has to be dialogue:

*... But how do we get to these ideas?*

My answer in part became: "through talk." We must talk in order to surface underlying assumptions, to nudge ourselves and each other to reflect upon the reasons *why* we think and act as we do. We must talk in order to discover whether our ideas have simply become unexamined habits of mind, habits which thwart instead of aid effective living. [Lappé's emphasis] (Lappé, 1991, xx)

This is clearly an allusion to Socrates, namely the emphasis on dialogue, on Socrates' maieutic technique of people helping each other give birth to new ideas and eliminating the false ones. Lappé writes that "[i]f we are in the midst of a historic shift in understanding, the death of the old worldview and the birth of the new, I believe we can each become conscious midwives to the birth (Lappé, 1991, xxx). This also seems to describe what Coetzee, through his persona of Costello, is doing in *The Lives of Animals*, forcing his readers and audience to question their most deeply buried assumptions and to undergo the uncomfortable process of re-conceiving them, giving birth to new ideas, escaping the anthropocentric worldview.

Finally, there is a strong democratic, anti-authority undercurrent in Lappé's book that suits both Coetzee's and Costello's anti-establishment attitudes. She specifically

criticises the food experts and political advisers who seem to lack an understanding of how food shortages—despite over-production of food—are a result of unequal power relations in the world. Lappé, having researched modern agricultural production independently of any agricultural institution, has been able, as she sees it, to avoid becoming beholden, as the experts apparently are, to any establishment view of food shortage.

A like-minded approach, this time to scientific authority, can be found in Bernard Rollin's *The Unheeded Cry*, a book Coetzee uses in *The Lives of Animals* to criticise psychological experimentation on animals. Rollin approves of a Socratic, common-sensical critique of scientific common-sense:

...I have become convinced on the basis of my own activities that one could elicit acquiescence from scientists to such a theory through rational dialogue, which would help them lay bare their own moral assumptions and what follows from these, something typically unrecognized by most of us, scientists and non-scientists alike, even including philosophers. Thus I have seen my task as Socratic; in Plato's judicious metaphor, as helping people recollect and appropriate in conscious fashion what they already carry within them. (Rollin, 1990, Preface, xi)

Certainly, Lappé and Rollin find the Socratic figure appealing in their battles against the experts and the authority of science, and Coetzee seems to follow a similar approach in the use of his Costello persona.

However, Coetzee's use of his Platonic sources is not merely related to the Socratic figure, but also to more specifically Platonic topics. Before continuing to explore Costello as a Socratic figure, the thesis will briefly discuss the relevance of Platonic texts to Coetzee's work. Coetzee's concern for justice, the main theme of Plato's *Republic*, is evident in much of his fiction, in particular the plight of the powerless and marginalised. It is clear, for instance, in the magistrate's concern for the barbarian slave and prisoners in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as this quotation from *Doubling the Point* demonstrates:

Why does one choose the side of justice when it is not in one's material interest to? The magistrate gives the rather Platonic answer: because we are born with the idea of justice. (Coetzee, 1992, 395)

In *The Lives of Animals* the marginalised has come to include nonhuman animals. Costello is convinced that a crime of stupefying proportions is being perpetrated against animals. Her challenge is to extend justice to nonhuman animals, at least to those most like humans. Whereas Socrates, Plato's mouthpiece in the *Republic*, spends the entire dialogue arguing for justice, namely that it is better to live justly and appear to be unjust than to be unjust (with all the material rewards that follow) and yet appear to be just, Costello concludes her speech with "The evidence points in the opposite direction: that we can do anything and get away with it; that there is no punishment" (Coetzee, 1999b, 35)

However, as important as the *Republic* may be to *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee reserves some of his strongest criticism for Platonism. In "The Philosophers and the Animals" Plato's rationalism is subjected to a scathing critique:

"I could ask what Saint Thomas takes to be the being of God, to which he will reply that the being of God is reason. Likewise Plato, likewise Descartes, in their different ways. The universe is built upon reason. God is a God of reason. The fact that through the application of reason we can come to understand the rules by which the universe works proves that reason and the universe are of the same being. And the fact that animals, lacking reason, cannot understand the universe but have simply to follow its rules blindly, proves that, unlike man, they are part of it but not part of its being: that man is godlike, animals thinglike." (Coetzee, 1999b, 22-23)

In "The Poets and the Animals" Costello criticises the ecological approach to animals as thoroughly Platonic, as was discussed in Chapter 1, namely as holistic and abstract, since it assumes only humans can understand the place of living organisms in the whole picture of nature and therefore alone have the right to manage animal

populations, but not the human population. In fact, Plato also reserved the right of the philosopher-rulers to manage human populations, using techniques and institutions such as infanticide, selective breeding and the abolition of the family. These Platonic ideas are in strong contrast to the modest image of Socrates as a midwife, and demonstrate the potential authoritarianism of a utopian society organised according to an unrestrained rationalism. In “The Poets and the Animals”, Elaine Marx implicitly criticises just such a utopian society:

“But which of us would want to live in Houyhnhnm-land, with its rational vegetarianism and its rational government and its rational approach to love, marriage and death? Would even a horse want to live in such a perfectly regulated, totalitarian society? More pertinently for us, what is the track record of totally regulated societies? Is it not a fact that they either collapse or else turn militaristic?” (Coetzee, 1999b, 55)

Despite its Swiftian clothing, this echoes the authoritarian and utopian society Plato describes in the *Republic*. However, this can be considered to be a parody of a rationally organised society. Indeed, Popper would argue that totalitarian, or closed, societies are irrational, paradoxically often because they appeal to an unqualified rationalism, and that a truly rational, open society is based on a critical rationalism, and is egalitarian and pluralistic. This is in marked contrast to Plato’s inegalitarian and uniform utopian society where justice is defined as the agreement between the three classes of society that the wise, and between the three parts of the soul that reason, should rule. Unlike in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, in the *Republic* desire is presented as the enemy of reason. It is from this utopian society that Plato banishes the poets as purveyors of pleasure and illusions, and from which Coetzee derives the two-part structure of *The Lives of Animals*. As Popper has pointed out, Plato’s concept of justice is aesthetic:

Nowhere do we find this aestheticism more strongly than in Plato. Plato was an artist; and like many of the best artists, he tried to visualize a model, the ‘divine original’ of his work, and to ‘copy’ it faithfully. . . . What

Plato describes as dialectics is, in the main, the intellectual intuition of the world of pure beauty. His trained philosophers are men who ‘have seen the truth of what is beautiful and just, and good,’ and can bring it down from heaven to earth. Politics, to Plato, is the Royal Art. . . . It is an art of composition, like music, painting, or architecture. The Platonic politician composes cities, for beauty’s sake. (Popper, 1966, 165)

As beautiful as this image of the artist-politician appears to be, Popper criticises it as inegalitarian and authoritarian. The philosopher-ruler is given complete power to recreate the ideal society from scratch like an artist, based on his exclusive knowledge of the Ideal Form in heaven, and without regard to the needs of individuals (166-67). This also suggests that not only philosophers (who subscribe to a comprehensive rationalism) but artists, too, may be tempted by authoritarianism, at least in the sense of being the ultimate authority in the imaginative worlds they create. Indeed, this authoritarianism seems inherent in the notion of an author, a problem of which Coetzee is aware and which will be explored later.

Thus, Elaine Marx may have a valid point, namely that one ought not to impose ethical vegetarianism on a society, but it is misdirected if it is intended as a criticism of Costello’s position, since she has gone to great lengths to reject reason as a decisive criterion of moral worth and as the sole means to live an ethical life. However, it is incorrect to construe the animal rights movement as imposing vegetarianism on free citizens. Rather, it should be seen as protecting the interests and rights of nonhuman animals, protecting animals from exploitation, although this may well result in the outlawing of meat eating. Nonetheless, it is evident that just as Coetzee distrusts commitment to ethical principles, so too is he suspicious of certain notions of justice. His, and Costello’s, aim is to change the heart of individuals by means of sentiment, fiction and the sympathetic imagination rather than impose a large-scale, utopian change on society as supposedly dictated by reason.

This leads to the paradox at the heart of the *Republic*, namely, despite having exiled the poets from the ideal society, and despite having subordinated imagination to reason, Plato is unable to explain the central truth of his metaphysical system

without resorting to his three famous images, those of the sun, the divided line, and the cave. According to the divided line images, the products of imagination are at a third remove from reality, since they are imitations of physical things, which are imitations of mathematical objects, which in turn are imitations of the pure Forms. According to Plato, it is reason which frees one of the prisoners (Socrates) from believing to be real the shadows projected onto the back of the cave and allows him to ascend even past the manufactured objects the reality of whose shadows he used to believe in, to the outer world illuminated by the sun where he can gaze at real things (the Forms) and eventually at the sun itself (the Form of the Good). Even though Socrates is the central character of the *Republic*, he is merely Plato's mouthpiece at this stage. Socrates himself avoided metaphysical philosophy and adhered, instead, to ethics (like Costello).

In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee reinterprets the Platonic image of the cave in a striking way:

I don't believe that any form of lasting community can exist where people do not share the same sense of what is just and what is not just. To put it another way, community has its basis in an awareness and acceptance of a common justice. You use the word faith. Let me be more cautious and stay with awareness: awareness of an idea of justice, somewhere, that transcends laws and lawmaking. Such an awareness is not absent from our lives. But where I see it, I see it mainly as flickering or dimmed—the kind of awareness you would have if you were a prisoner in a cave, say, watching the shadows of ideas flickering on the walls. To be a herald you would have to have slipped your chains for a while and wandered about in the real world. I am not a herald of community or anything else, as you correctly recognize. I am someone who has intimations of freedom (as every chained prisoner has) and constructs representations—which are shadows themselves—of people slipping their chains and turning to the light. (Coetzee, 1992, 340-41)

Coetzee's interpretation is more modest than Plato's. He may portray himself as a Socratic figure but, unlike the Platonic Socrates, he does not make the Platonic ascent to the vision of the sun. He does not claim to have exclusive access to the truth, nor that he alone has intimations of freedom. He does not see himself as a philosopher-ruler whose exclusive access to the vision of the Good gives him the right to reshape society according to the ideal Forms. Rather, he admits that he merely constructs representations that allow other people to free themselves from false beliefs and prejudices, which is precisely what Elizabeth Costello attempts to do in *The Lives of Animals*. In this sense he is like the early Socrates who aimed not to reconstruct society according to an ideal Form, but rather to free individuals from their prejudices. But he differs from Socrates in that his chosen mode is imagination, the creation of images, rather than reason. Even here, however, Socrates' fallible mode of reasoning differs from Plato's infallible rationalism, the type of rationalism Costello criticises so harshly. While Costello may prefer imagination to argument—or may refuse to privilege reason over imagination, this does not make her approach unreasonable, as was argued in Chapter 1. Indeed, her modest aims are far more reasonable—and humane—than the utopianism that follows from Plato's rationalism. It is the difference between a democratic and an authoritarian approach.

What, then, is the Socratic spirit and how is Socrates akin to Elizabeth Costello? It will be useful to follow Nietzsche's characterization of the Socratic spirit in *The Birth of Tragedy*, since he continued in that work the battle between the philosophers and the poets. In his "Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech" Coetzee asserts the power of the imagination to enable a writer to escape the "deformed and stunted" society of apartheid. He goes on to quote Nietzsche:

We have art, said Nietzsche, so that we shall not die of the truth. In South Africa there is now too much truth for art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination. (Coetzee, 1992, 99)



In *The Lives of Animals* the truth that threatens to overwhelm Costello's imagination is the scale of suffering and death that humans cause to animals on a daily basis (Coetzee, 1999b, 69).

Nietzsche lamented the triumph of Socrates' rational and scientific discourse over the emotive and artistic discourse, the conflict between Socratic and Dionysian replacing the older poetic conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian (although the Socratic has much in common with the Apollonian):

For in a certain sense Euripides was but a mask, while the divinity which spoke through him was neither Dionysos nor Apollo but a brand new daemon called Socrates. Thenceforward the real antagonism was between the Dionysiac spirit and the Socratic, and tragedy was to perish in the conflict. (Nietzsche, 1956, 77)

This suggests that Costello *cannot* be identified as a Socratic figure, since her claims for poetry pit her against Socrates. This problem will be explored further in Chapter 3. Nietzsche sums up Socrates' optimistic, ethical and rationalistic philosophy:

Consider the consequences of the Socratic maxims: "Virtue is knowledge; all sins arise from ignorance; only the virtuous are happy"—these three basic formulations of optimism spell the death of tragedy. (Nietzsche, 1956, 88)

Nietzsche elaborates further, summarising and interpreting the story of Socrates as preserved in Plato's early dialogue, the *Apology*:

It was Socrates who expressed most clearly this radically new prestige of knowledge and conscious intelligence when he claimed to be the only one who acknowledged to himself that he knew nothing. He roamed all over Athens, visiting the most distinguished statesman, orators, poets and artists, and found everywhere merely the presumption of knowledge. He was amazed to discover that all these celebrities lacked true and certain knowledge of their callings and pursued those callings by sheer instinct

... From this point of view Socrates was forced to condemn both the prevailing art and the prevailing ethics ... Socrates believed it was his mission to correct the situation: a solitary man, arrogantly superior and herald of a radically dissimilar culture, art, and ethics. (Nietzsche, 1956, 83)

Costello, too, is perceived as “arrogantly superior” and as heralding in an alien set of values, those of animal rights in opposition to a blindly anthropocentric culture, and both figures made many enemies in courageously questioning the prejudices of the people around them. However, the characterization of both Socrates and Costello as arrogant will be contested. This “arrogance” can be seen as a projection on to Costello and Socrates (and Coetzee for that matter) of certain members of their audience, resentful of having their prejudices and ignorance exposed. In the case of Socrates this arrogance can be seen as a later Platonic addition which conflicts with the Socratic figure of the early dialogues who seems genuinely uncertain and humble in his knowledge (or lack thereof), as is evident in the epigraph to this chapter. Likewise, Costello seems to be earnestly trying to penetrate the darkness of ignorance and prejudice with the light of her imaginative sympathy and is willing to admit that she does not know for certain that she is right: “Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad!” (Coetzee, 1999b, 69).

She may also be ironically aware that some her images may be fanciful—for instance when she gives anthropomorphic thoughts to the ape, Sultan:

“In his deepest being Sultan is not interested in the banana problem. Only the experimenter’s single-minded regimentation forces him to concentrate on it. The question that truly occupies him, as it occupies the rat and the cat and every other animal trapped in the hell of the laboratory or the zoo, is: Where is home, and how do I get there?” (Coetzee, 1999b, 30)

The point is that she is trying to get her audience to think, to imagine and to feel in new ways about something people do not care to consider at all, namely their use and abuse of animals; indeed, she wants people to imagine how it would feel to be in the position of an exploited animal, a position of powerlessness. The mission she

feels she has to awaken people from their dogmatic slumbers (like Kant) is expressed by Socrates:

“It is literally true (even if it sounds rather comical) that God has specially appointed me to this city, as though it were a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly; and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproofing every one of you. You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life.” (*Apology*: 31a)

Socrates’ philosophy was inspired by the Apollonian injunction “Know Thyself”, words which appear above the entrance to the temple of the Oracle of Delphi. Socrates had consulted the Oracle in order to know who was the wisest man in Greece and was told that he, Socrates, was. In trying to disprove the Oracle, Socrates came to realise that the Oracle was right, because only Socrates knew that he knew nothing. The method of disproof, or refutation, is characteristically Socratic, and it is also the method adopted by Costello, which is why her position can be called reasonable. She does not so much try to disprove reason (which is impossible) as to refute its claim to infallibility and its claim to differentiate humans from animals and thereby justify the exploitation of animals. She can be said to be opposing a phallogocentric idea of reason.

A contemporary philosopher, D.W. Hamlyn, provides an illuminating account of Socrates, supplementing that of Nietzsche, which also helps to explain Costello’s character:

Socrates professes a deep concern with the saying that was written above the temple at Delphi: —‘Know thyself’. It seems clear that Socrates would probably not have counted something as knowledge unless it had that connection with self-knowledge. Hence, insofar as virtue is knowledge, and knowledge implies self-knowledge, virtue must involve both a knowledge

of and a care for oneself, for one's soul. That may indeed be Socrates' central message, and this view fits in with what Kierkegaard was later to see as so important in Socrates. It makes Socrates a prophet of inwardness and of a concern for one's real self. (Hamlyn, 1987, 39)

A further quotation may help explain why Costello does not accept the utilitarian and deontological defences of animal rights, since they are based on principles and rules:

It is a possible view that Socrates did not think that complete definitions of moral virtues, and thus definite rules to guide conduct, were possible; hence the negative conclusion of the dialogues. That view fits in with the Kierkegaardian view of Socrates that I referred to above. It is no good looking for rules or principles to guide conduct. It is of more importance, and of greater efficacy, to look into oneself, with the aim of acquiring a good character, of producing a good soul. (Hamlyn, 1987, 40)

In Socrates' own words:

“Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?” (*Apology*: 28e)

This must be part of the solution of Costello's reply to President Gerrard:

“But your own vegetarianism, Mrs. Costello,” says President Gerrard, pouring oil on troubled waters: “it comes out of moral conviction, does it not?”

“No, I don't think so,” says his mother. “It comes out of a desire to save my soul.”

Now there truly is a silence ... (Coetzee, 1999b, 43)

This is a Socratic and humanistic, or secular, idea of salvation rather than a theocentric and religious one.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Costello's notion of "willed ignorance" powerfully raises the Socratic idea of "virtue is knowledge" in relation to ordinary Germans who allowed Nazism to flourish (just as ordinary meat-eaters today allow daily atrocities to occur):

"In Germany, we say, a certain line was crossed which took people beyond the ordinary murderousness and cruelty of warfare into a state that we can only call sin . . . It marked those citizens of the Reich who had committed evil actions, but also those who, for whatever reason, were in ignorance of those actions. It thus marked, for practical purposes, every citizen of the Reich. Only those in the camps were innocent." (Coetzee, 1999b, 20)

It is not surprising that Costello's audience resent her comparing them with those ordinary Germans. It was precisely because of acting the gadfly, as Costello does, that Socrates made influential enemies, who eventually had him executed. Of course, most philosophers find the Socratic maxim that "one cannot knowingly do evil" to be paradoxical, although it has a remarkable similarity with a Buddhist precept, namely that evil, or suffering, is a result of ignorance (Rahula, 1978, 3).

Nietzsche argued that such was Socrates' effect on Plato that "the young tragic poet . . . burned all his writings in order to qualify as a student of Socrates" but that "[a]lthough [Plato] did not lag behind the naïve cynicism of his master in the condemnation of tragedy and art in general, nevertheless his creative gifts forced him to develop an art form deeply akin to the existing forms which he had repudiated," namely the Platonic dialogue (Nietzsche, 1956, 87).

Finally, discussing Socrates' last days Nietzsche considers the possibility of a Socratic artist and concludes by framing these questions for Socrates:

"Have I been too ready to view what was unintelligible to me as being devoid of meaning? Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom, after all, from which the logician is excluded? Perhaps art must be seen as the necessary

complement of rational discourse?” (Nietzsche, 1956, 90)

It is the last question that links Socrates closely with Elizabeth Costello, despite her attack on reason. The Platonic dialogue is the perfect medium for the combination of the rational and the imaginative, and it is no wonder, then, that Coetzee chose it for *The Lives of Animals*, not to displace reason, but to achieve a proper balance between reason and imagination. The further significance of Coetzee’s choice of the Platonic dialogue will be explored in Chapter 3. The mode of the dialogue will also offer a solution to the apparent contradiction in claiming that Costello is a Socratic figure, and yet promotes poetry above philosophy, whereas Socrates did the opposite.

While Nietzsche’s characterization of Socrates is largely accurate, it needs to be emphasized that, for all Socrates’ emphasis on reason and knowledge, the results of his reasoning in the early Platonic dialogues were entirely negative, the destruction of false assumptions rather than the establishment of certain truths. It is also important to keep in mind the Socratic paradox that he alone is wise since he alone knows that he knows nothing. Elizabeth Costello shares these essentially negative Socratic characteristics, as will be shown later.

Nietzsche could also be challenged for overstating Socrates’ faith in reason. Socrates did not seem to have much faith in the ability of reason to reveal the secrets of nature and thus limited his investigation—like the other sophists—to value and human convention, to persuasion and prescription rather than explanation and description. Like Socrates and unlike the Sophists, at least as Plato depicts them, Costello shows a deep ethical commitment. The Sophists were aware that, unlike the unchangeable laws of nature, human laws are more or less arbitrary conventions, norms, and that these can be changed and broken. It is significant that Coetzee chooses the name “Norma” for Costello’s philosophical daughter-in-law who seems incapable of questioning conventional norms, particularly in relation to animals, unlike her poetic mother-in-law whose sympathetic imagination empowers her to see beyond the boundaries of the traditional moral framework.

It remains to produce the proof that Coetzee does, in fact, depict Costello as a Socratic figure in *The Lives of Animals*, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*. The links

between eros, maieusis and death, in the chapter's title, should also become clear. It will not always be easy to separate the Socratic and Platonic Socrates, and so perhaps a brief explanation is necessary. In the middle dialogues, the considerable artistry of which one should bear in mind, Plato has begun to reinterpret Socrates in accordance with his metaphysical theory of Forms. As mentioned above, eros, which was seen as the enemy of reason in the *Republic*, becomes the focus of praise in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Here Socrates' maieusis (midwifery) consists no longer merely in helping his interlocuters to deliver ideas, but rather in being a medium between the realm of impermanent things and the realm of eternal Forms, between opinion and knowledge, mortality and immortality. Socrates has become a teacher and an authority.

The Platonic Socrates argues that: "Given our agreement that the aim of love [Eros] is the *permanent* [his italics] possession of goodness for oneself, it necessarily follows that we desire immortality along with goodness, and consequently the aim of love has to be immortality as well" (*Symposium*: 207a). Those who are physically pregnant produce children, whereas those who are mentally pregnant produce virtue, especially wisdom (*Symposium*: 209a). In the most general sense, art defines all creative human activity, even philosophy. Every creative human act is thus motivated by the desire to extend one's mortal existence, whether this is expressed in having children, making laws for city-states or discoveries in science, or achieving immortal fame in war. These children of one's activities, especially those of one's mind, will continue long after one has died. Paradoxically, one is even prepared to die for one's children in order to ensure one's posterity.

It may be that Plato's keen awareness of the distinction between mortality and immortality, transience and permanence, was strongly conditioned by Socrates' execution. Certainly an awareness—and a prefiguring—of Socrates' death is evident in most of Plato's dialogues. There is also a strong sense of Costello's mortality in all the pieces that Coetzee has written involving her, expressed mainly in terms of her ageing appearance and her tiredness.

It will be seen that Coetzee is interested in both the Socratic and the Platonic Socrates. Also, he is interested in the idea of art as a means to immortality that comes from the *Symposium* rather than art as illusion that comes from the *Republic*. However, it will be seen that Coetzee expresses doubt as to the power of art to achieve immortality, which may seem to align him with Plato's dismissal of art as illusion in the *Republic*. For Coetzee, the real power of art is not the achievement of personal immortality, but its ethical power to enter into the being of others.

The analysis will begin with "What Is Realism?", because it was first published in 1997, before being republished in *Elizabeth Costello* in 2003. The Platonic and Socratic ideas clearly evident in this story reinforce the contention that Costello functions, at least in part, as a Socratic figure in *The Lives of Animals*. Indeed, Coetzee refers to this story in the very first footnote of *The Lives of Animals*, thus further supporting this view. In "What Is Realism?", Platonic ideas are essential to the story. Although Coetzee, or the narrator, keeps disrupting its realist mode and drawing attention to the fact that it is a performance, hence suggesting that realism—and indeed all fiction—deals with illusions, there are moments when the power of fiction to achieve immortality is asserted, although always ironically, since Costello, the author, is also a work of fiction, as is her famous novel:

*Eccles Street* is a great novel; it will live, perhaps, as long as *Ulysses*; it will certainly be around long after its maker is in the grave. He was only a child when she wrote it. It unsettles and dizzies him to think that the same being that engendered *Eccles Street* engendered him. (Coetzee, 2003, 11)

The Platonic ideas of achieving immortality through one's physical and mental offspring are clearly evident here. However, there are many levels of irony—and it should be remembered that Plato, too, was a master of irony. A particularly rich irony here is the fact that Costello's son, John, is also her parent since he is a stand-in for Costello's author, J.M. Coetzee. Thus Coetzee complicates the idea of origins, suggesting that he is his own parent, disrupting the realist mode with post-modernist



reflexivity. This reflexivity is reinforced by the fact that the title of Costello's speech is the same as the title of Coetzee's story.

Costello opens her speech on a very Platonic note when she explains how excited she was in the knowledge that the deposit copies of her first novel would guarantee her a degree of permanence when placed on the shelves in the great libraries, particularly the British Museum:

“What lay behind my concern about deposit copies was the wish that, even if I myself should be knocked over by a bus the next day, this first-born of mine would have a home where it could snooze, if fate so decreed, for the next hundred years, and no one would come poking with a stick to see if it was still alive.

“That was the one side of my telephone call: if I, this mortal shell, am going to die, let me at least live on through my creations.” (17)

However, the narrator goes on to note that “Elizabeth Costello proceeds to reflect on the transience of fame” (17) pointing out how even the British Museum will one day cease to exist, and even before then the books would have been destroyed, “After which it will be as if they had never existed” (17). This idea of the transience of all (physical) things is also part of Platonism, and Buddhism. However, whereas Plato offers immortality through the contemplation of the Form of the Good thanks to philosophical dialectic, Buddhism has no such illusions, but rather offers liberation from one's fear of transience and annihilation. These ideas will be explored in relation to Coetzee's fiction in a later chapter. Whereas for Plato, eros, or desire, is a bridge between mortality and immortality, for Buddhism desire itself is an illusion (Rahula, 1978, 18).

She goes on to claim that realism is dead, that the “word-mirror is broken, irreparably, it seems” (Coetzee, 2003, 19) and that:

“There is every reason, then, for me to feel less than certain about myself as I stand before you. Despite this splendid award, for which I am deeply grateful, despite the promise it makes that, gathered into the illustrious

company of those who have won it before me, I am beyond time's envious grasp, we all know, if we are being realistic, that it is only a matter of time before the books which you honour, and with whose genesis I have had something to do, will cease to be read and eventually cease to be remembered." (20)

Again the Platonic concern with transience and permanence is evident, but so, too, is a Socratic uncertainty and humility, and an awareness of mortality.

There follows the scene where John allows Susan Moebius to seduce him while knowing she does so in order to get closer to his mother. The dialogue is striking in the way it works out both Socratic and Platonic ideas. It is Platonic in the way that eros is the means by which Susan approaches the divine secret in Costello, the secret to her immortality through her fictions. The dialogue is Socratic in the sense that it consists of a dialectical exchange of views without final closure. They are arguing whether or not an author can transcend his or her sexuality (which is a reflection on Coetzee's adoption of his female persona, Costello). The dialogue gives birth in John to the crucial truth about the power of fiction, a truth which is essential for an understanding of Costello's "sympathetic imagination" in *The Lives of Animals*:

"But my mother has been a man," he persists. "She has also been a dog. She can think her way into other people, into other existences. I have read her; I know. It is within her powers. Isn't that what is most important about fiction: that it takes us out of ourselves, into other lives?" (22-23)

However, it could be argued that that is the power of philosophy, too. In Plato's *Symposium* we see how the desiring ego, how eros, can transcend itself, through the exercise of virtue, and achieve a mystical union with immortality, through a vision of the Good. This has striking similarities with Buddhism, which also aims at the annihilation of the self through following the Eightfold Path, a programme of virtue. Nonetheless, Plato and Buddhism achieve this because they devalue individuality, whereas for Costello, and presumably for Coetzee, embodied individuality is inherently valuable. Furthermore, modern philosophy has been burdened, since Descartes

formulated his “Cogito ergo sum,” with the problems of solipsism, namely, the problems of the isolated ego and the impossibility of knowing the other, or even the reality behind appearances. Also, art has for Coetzee and Costello an ethical function, just as philosophy has for Socrates, although whereas for Socrates it is ‘knowing oneself,’ for Coetzee and Costello it is also ‘knowing the other.’

Furthermore, Coetzee has Costello in the second-last lecture/chapter of *Elizabeth Costello*, entitled “Eros,” questioning, Socratic-like, the limitations of the sympathetic imagination:

Are there other modes of being besides what we call human into which we can enter; and if there are not, what does that say about us and our limitations? She does not know much about Kant, but it sounds to her a Kantian kind of question. If her ear is right, then inwardness started its run with the man from Königsberg and ended, more or less, with Wittgenstein the Viennese destroyer. (Coetzee, 2003, 188)

There are also strong erotic overtones to the dialogue between John and Susan, although not homo-erotic, as it is in the *Symposium*:

The drift of the conversation has changed. They are no longer speaking about writing, if they ever were.

“What do you think?” she says. “What does your experience tell you? And is difference such a bad thing? If there were no difference, what would become of desire?”

She looks him candidly in the eye. It is time to move. He stands up; she puts her glass down, slowly stands up too. As she passes him he takes her elbow, and at the touch a shock runs through him, dizzying him. (23)

During the night, while Susan is sleeping beside him, John awakes feeling sad at his betrayal of his mother (this may suggest that she is a Christ figure or may be a reference to King Duncan, in which case John would be Macbeth) and thinks about the image of sleep from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in the Platonic terms of a brain-child:

*Sleep*, he thinks, *that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care*. What an extraordinary way of putting it! Not all the monkeys in the world picking away at typewriters all their lives would come up with those words in that arrangement. Out of the dark emerging, out of nowhere: first not there, then there, like a newborn child, heart working, brain working, all the processes of that intricate electrochemical labyrinth working. A miracle. He closes his eyes. (27)

The reference to the monkeys echoes Costello's discussion of Kafka's ape, suggesting that artistic creation is what separates humans from other animals. In fact, however, this passage describes the divine creative spark in genuine artists like Costello (ironically, since she is a work of fiction) and Shakespeare, a creativity which transcends ordinary humanness. The comparison of the work of art to a living child, or animal, also echoes Plato's description of what makes a successful speech (although it is relevant to all works of art):

But I think you would agree that any speech ought to have its own organic shape, like a living being; it must not be without either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to fit one another and the work as a whole. (*Phaedrus*: 264) (Plato, 1973, 79)

The morning following their night of love-making, John and Susan speak over breakfast:

"I will tell you what I really think. I think you are baffled, even if you won't admit it, by the mystery of the divine in the human. You know there is something special about my mother—that is what draws you to her—yet when you meet her she turns out to be just an ordinary old woman. You can't square the two. You want an explanation. You want a clue, a sign, if not from her then from me. That is what is going on. It's all right, I don't mind."

...

“You really are her son, aren’t you? Do you write too?”

“You mean, am I touched by the god? No. But yes, I am her son. Not a foundling, not an adoptee. Out of her very body I came, caterwauling.”

(28)

(The use of the word “really” is very ironic in relation to the title and subject matter of this story.) Costello is seen as both a mortal and a divine figure (besides having produced both biological and mental children in a bid for immortality). In her speech she described her first novel as her “first-born”, but John is, biologically speaking, her first-born. However, there is something deeper about Coetzee’s description of John as Costello’s child. Despite the fact that Costello is actually a brain-child of John Coetzee, he presents himself as the child of Costello. This curious inversion is not merely post-modern reflexivity, but has a deeper significance that will be explored later in relation to Coetzee’s use of the term “amanuensis” in *The Lives of Animals*.

Susan’s fascination with the divine in Costello strongly echoes the fascination, expressed by Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, that people have for Socrates, who embodies the daemon Eros and thus provides a bridge between mortality and immortality. Alcibiades rudely joins the drinking party in the *Symposium* and interrupts the men who are competing with each other with speeches in praise of Eros. Socrates is the last to speak and he deliberately eschews a poetic mode, relying on a philosophical one instead. Alcibiades then insists on delivering a speech in praise of Socrates:

“The Socrates of your experience is in the habit of falling in love with good-looking people, and he’s constantly hanging around them in a stupor; secondly, he’s completely ignorant and has no knowledge at all. Do you see how Silenus-like he looks? The resemblance is striking. The point is, this is just an outer coating, like the outside shell of those carved Sileni. But if he were opened up, my friends, you’d find him chock-full of self-control inside. . . .

“I don’t know if any of you has seen the genuine Socrates, opened up to reveal the effigies he has inside, but I saw them once, and they struck

me as so divine, so glorious, so gorgeous and wonderful that—to cut a long story short—I felt I should obey him in everything.” (*Symposium*: 216d-217a)

Of course, the divine Socrates is the Platonic, infallible Socrates, rather than the human and fallible Socrates. The same tension exists in perceptions of Costello. John praises the divine in his mother to Susan, but keeps to himself his less flattering perceptions of her ageing appearance and even brutally realistic descriptions of her moments of ugliness:

He can see up her nostrils, into her mouth, down the back of her throat. And what he cannot see he can imagine: the gullet, pink and ugly, contracting as it swallows, like a python, drawing things down to the pear-shaped belly-sac. He draws away, tightens his own belt, sits up, facing forward. No, he tells himself, that is not where I come from, that is not it. (34)

Costello’s prize-acceptance “performance” over, she gets ready to return home:

She has won, more or less. On foreign turf too. An away win. She can come home with her true self safe, leaving behind an image, false, like all images. (30)

John asks himself, “What is the truth of his mother? He does not know, and at the deepest level, he does not want to know” (30). He keeps his opinions secret, comparing her to the sibyl or oracle (31), describing himself as her devoted servant. His reference to the frenzy also recalls the Dionysian references to Socrates that Alcibiades makes in the *Symposium*. John reflects:

He does not hate her. He serves at her shrine, cleaning up the petals, collecting the offerings, putting the widow’s mites together, ready to bank. He may not share in the frenzy, but he worships too.

A mouthpiece for the divine. But *sibyl* is not the right word for her. Nor is *oracle*. Too Greco-Roman. His mother is not in the Greco-Roman

mould. Tibet or India more like it: a god incarnated in a child, wheeled from village to village to be applauded, venerated. (31)

This may seem fatal to the thesis that Costello is a Socratic figure—rather than, perhaps, a Buddha or Christ figure—but there is no reason why one should take John’s word as final. In fact, the essential openness of Coetzee’s writings to many voices, and his absconding from any position of authority will be argued as Socratic in Chapter 3. Furthermore, it has been argued that Costello is a fallible Socratic figure rather than the infallible and divine Platonic Socrates. Finally, John’s comment that “His mother is not in the Greco-Roman mould” can be taken ironically.

The story of Socrates may also illuminate other aspects of Elizabeth Costello, as depicted in *The Lives of Animals*, namely references to her embodiedness and her mortality. Whereas Plato remains a shadowy figure, a disembodied intellect, in western literature, Socrates, thanks largely to the poetic prowess of Plato, is a vivid creation: bulging-eyed, snub-nosed, stocky and bare-footed, solidly embodied. In the *Theaetetus*, Theodorus compares Socrates to an Athenian youth:

But as it is—and I hope you will take this in good part—he isn’t good looking, but he looks like you! He’s snub-nosed and his eyes bulge, though not so much as yours. (143e)

In the *Symposium* Alcibiades, one of the most beautiful but immoral men in Greece, compares Socrates, physically unattractive but with a beautiful character, to the Sileni and Satyrs (*Symposium*: 215a), which “were commonly portrayed in Greek art with a snub nose and bulging eyes” (Plato, 1994, 91).

A similar relation stands between Coetzee and Costello. Despite his undeniable intellectual contributions as a public intellectual, Coetzee himself remains a retiring and shadowy figure. Costello, on the other hand, is described as heavily embodied throughout *Elizabeth Costello* and *The Lives of Animals*. Behind every Platonic dialogue in which Socrates appears there is an awareness of the fact that Socrates will be executed by the Athenian democracy for impiety and corruption of the youth. This fact adds a further level of complexity to the dialogues, often in the form of irony. A

similar sense of Costello’s mortality, alongside a declining sense of desire, accompanies all of Coetzee’s works in which she appears. So while Costello cannot be said to become a martyr for her beliefs as Socrates did, there is nonetheless a sense in which she is dying for her beliefs. Her own mortality—and sense of her own mortality—heightens her sympathy for the animals that are being bred in vast numbers and, when still young and healthy, are being exploited for hunting, experimentation, testing and slaughter. However, while Socrates was always described as energetic (his iron constitution was famous), cheerful and humorous, Costello is described as perpetually tired, even exhausted:

After the long flight, she is looking her age. She has never taken care of her appearance; she used to be able to get away with it; now it shows. Old and tired. (Coetzee, 2003, 3)

Her hair has a greasy, lifeless look. (Coetzee, 2003, 3)

These descriptions continue in the very first paragraph of *The Lives of Animals*:

He is waiting at the gate when her flight comes in. Two years have passed since he last saw his mother; despite himself, he is shocked at how she has aged. Her hair, which had had streaks of gray in it, is now entirely white; her shoulders stoop; her flesh has grown flabby.

...

“A long flight,” he remarks. “You must be exhausted.”

“Ready to sleep,” she says; and indeed, en route, she falls asleep briefly, her head slumped against the window. (Coetzee, 1999b, 15)

Just before she speaks, she is introduced by Elaine Marx:

Then it is the turn of Elizabeth Costello. To him she looks old and tired. Sitting in the front row beside his wife, he tries to will strength into her. (18)



Death is also a recurrent topic of her speeches. In a sense, *The Lives of Animals* reads like a *memento mori* for Coetzee himself. John suspects what his mother is about to speak about:

He does not look forward to what is coming. He does not want to hear his mother talking about death. Furthermore, he has a strong sense that her audience—which consists, after all, mainly of young people—wants death-talk even less. (19)

He is right, because Costello goes on to compare the mass slaughter of animals in abattoirs to the mass slaughter of Jews in Nazi death camps. Throughout her speech, she mentions and discusses the Nazi death camps (19, 20, 21, 26, 34, 69). She returns to a discussion of death when she talks about Nagel's bat-being:

“What I know is what a corpse cannot know: that it is extinct, that it knows nothing and will never know anything anymore. For an instant, before my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, I am alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same time.” (32)

After her speech is over, and the floor has been opened to questions, John dissuades his wife from asking a question:

“She can't just be allowed to get away with it! She's confused!”

“She's old, she's my mother. Please!”

Behind them someone is already speaking. He turns and sees a tall, bearded man. God Knows, he thinks, why his mother ever agreed to field questions from the floor. She ought to know that public lectures draw kooks and crazies like flies to a corpse. (36)

At the dinner, John thinks of Plutarch's words:

“You ask me why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you can put into your mouth the corpse of a dead animal, astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallowed the juices of death-wounds.” (38)

The closing paragraph of *The Lives of Animals* ends on a note which seems to foreshadow death:

They are not yet on the expressway. He pulls the car over, switches off the engine, takes his mother in his arms. He inhales the smell of cold cream, of old flesh. “There, there,” he whispers in her ear. “There, there. It will soon be over.” (69)

Some reviewers have argued that all Costello’s talking about the lives of animals can be more or less reduced to her own isolation, loneliness and awareness of her own mortality, and that all she needed was compassionate contact with another human being (Webb, May 19, 1999). While this may be true, it is only part of a correct interpretation, and a minor part at that, since it evades confronting the ethical importance of what she has to say.

In *Slow Man* Costello returns revived. However, before going on to discuss *Slow Man*, it will first be necessary to discuss Coetzee’s use of the term “amanueusis” in *The Lives of Animals*. When Costello begins her speech, she returns to her use of Kafka previously in another speech, “What Is Realism?” (referenced as Coetzee’s story in the first footnote of *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee, 1999b, 18)), once again identifying with Kafka’s ape, Red Peter. In both cases she points out her similarity with Red Peter, namely that they are both paid entertainers performing before a learned audience.

Later in her speech, when she returns again to Kafka, she uses the term “amanueusis” twice with reference to the relationship between Kafka and his fictional creation, the ape, Red Peter:

“That is not what Red Peter was striving for when he wrote, through his amanueusis Franz Kafka, 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.

“Red Peter was not an investigator of primate behaviour but a branded,

marked, wounded animal presenting himself as speaking testimony to a gathering of scholars. I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak.

“If Red Peter took it upon himself to make the arduous descent from the silence of the beasts to the gabble of reason in the spirit of the scapegoat, the chosen one, then his amanuensis was a scapegoat from birth, with a presentiment, a *Vorgefühl*, for the massacre of the chosen people that was to take place so soon after his death. So let me, to prove my goodwill, my credentials, make a gesture in the direction of scholarship, backed up with footnotes”—here, in an uncharacteristic gesture, his mother raises and brandishes the text of her lecture in the air—“on the origins of Red Peter.” (26)

A definition of “amanuensis” is “a person employed to take dictation or to copy manuscripts”, but the etymology is even more interesting: “from the phrase *servus a manu* slave at hand (that is, handwriting)” (*Collins English Dictionary* 3rd ed., 1991: 45). The use of this term is unusual since it suggests that Kafka, the author, takes dictation from Red Peter, his fictional creation. The same applies to the relation between Coetzee, the author, and his fictional creation, Costello. In both cases the normal causal relationship between author and character, creator and creature, is reversed. This is repeated in the way, mentioned above, that Coetzee presents himself in “What Is Realism?” as a creature of Costello and is reinforced in *The Lives of Animals* when Costello mentions “footnotes” in which Coetzee’s own name appears as the first footnote. The author, usually seen as the master, becomes the slave, or servant, to his or her creature. And yet in both “What Is Realism?” and *Slow Man* these creatures are presented as caged animals.

This puzzle can perhaps be resolved by conceiving the authors as Socratic midwives—and it should be noted that Socrates’ own mother, significantly, may have been a midwife—who assist in the birth, but from their own minds, their imaginations, of

these fictional creations, Coetzee of Costello and Kafka of Red Peter. These creatures then have an artistic integrity, a life of their own, that the authors then have to represent faithfully. The authors have to respect the individual voices and independent being of their creations. (This idea will be pursued further in Chapter 3.) They must come across as living animals and not just the *ideas* of animals. In “What Is Realism?”, Costello argues that the greatness of Kafka is that “Kafka stays awake during the gaps when we are sleeping” (32) and one is reminded of John’s vision of the birth of an idea as though it were a living being, and of Plato’s comparison of a good speech to a properly formed living organism. However, the apparently inverted relationship between creator and creature may perhaps be best explained in relation to Costello’s description of herself as “secretary of the invisible” in “At the Gate,” the eighth and last lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*, which will be discussed later. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Anya, employed as John Coetzee’s secretary, performs a similar function, although she also embodies Platonic beauty that inspires Coetzee to creativity. The name “Anya” is Sanskrit for “inexhaustible,” although its meaning in Russian, as a shortened version of “Anna,” meaning “graceful or bringing goodness,” would seem more suited for Coetzee’s ideas on secular salvation and grace.

Another obscure reference in the “amanuensis” extract is to Costello’s wound. Red Peter’s physical wound is from the injuries he sustained when he was captured (he was shot). But there seems to be a suggestion that both Red Peter and Costello carry a further, spiritual wound, a wound that separates them from their respective audiences, and which somehow seems bound up with their humanity. In Red Peter’s case humanity has been forced upon him. In Costello’s case she, like Kafka (Coetzee, 1999b, 30-31), seems insecure in her humanity. It may also refer to her being a woman and therefore not fully a man. Her use of the words “gabble of reason” is unflattering, suggesting perhaps that Red Peter’s descent from apelike state to humanity was not worth the cost. Perhaps both Costello and Red Peter are literally only aping rationality, both women and animals having been excluded from reason by the Western philosophical tradition, in which case Costello can only ape a philosopher and “gabble” if she tries to use reason like a trained philosopher.

A quotation from Fredrick Karl, whose biography of Kafka Costello cites twice in *The Lives of Animals*, may help more fully illuminate the reference to “wound.” Karl comments on the significance of the wound of the patient in Kafka’s “A Country Doctor”:

The revelation of the wound suggests the festering, hidden nature of an injury, that universal, metonymic Kafkan wound. This wound lies behind all efforts of individual will, all assertions of independent action, all choice, all attempts at happiness or at controlling circumstance. Every dimension of life must eventually come back to the hidden wound, which ends only in death itself. One can never escape the wound, or withdraw from its inevitability; it is the “other” in all transactions, although one must hope and go forward as though no such wound exists. (Kafka, 2007, 552-3)

Thus this wound represents human suffering and, ultimately, mortality. It is a sign of our human fallibility, imperfection and incompleteness, which link us with the animals and differentiate us from the gods. Yet, through our reason and imagination, we aspire, tragically, to godlike status.

Stephen Mulhall, an academic philosopher who has taken seriously the challenge to philosophy in *The Lives of Animals*, although in terms of metaphysics rather than ethics, also very plausibly interprets the wound as the pain Costello feels as a consequence of her knowledge of what animals are suffering at the hands of humans and of human indifference to this (Mulhall, 2009, 70):

But the open wound that most thoroughly pervades her lecture, and that threatens to poison the hospitality of the college and family alike, is her sense of the continuing human treatment of animals in farms, trawlers, abattoirs, and laboratories throughout the world—the sadistic games we play around the production of meat for food—as comparable to the Holocaust. (Mulhall, 2009, 55)

The link between the wounded self and the Holocaust is reiterated in the critical writings of Coetzee whose discussion of Appelfeld’s work has been mentioned earlier.

Coetzee offers art as a means of salvation from the wound; he once again asserts the power of fiction to attain the truth, to say the unsayable: “Faith in the power of fiction to recover and restore the wounded self—‘to give the tortured person back his human form, which was snatched away from him’—has since been the core of Appelfeld’s work” (Coetzee, 2002a, 214).

Also in the “amanuensis” extract, the word “scapegoat” is applied both to Kafka and Red Peter, and hence, by extension, to Costello herself. Mulhall notes that Costello’s:

...idea of herself as scapegoat—a creature familiar to Jewish and Christian thought as the beast who bears the burden of our sins, and bears away our pollutedness by accepting that pollution itself—invokes (in all seriousness, as well as in the accents of irony and self-pity) a theological perspective that recurs throughout her visit. (Mulhall, 2009, 55)

While this may suggest she is a Christ figure, it could also be taken to suggest that she is a Socratic figure who, like Socrates, died a martyr for his beliefs, the innocent victim of an unjust society, bearing their sins with him to his death. The idea of the scapegoat will be pursued further in Chapter 6.

Perhaps the most decisive proof that Coetzee intends Costello as a Socratic figure can be found in *Slow Man*, published in 2005.<sup>5</sup> Coetzee makes liberal use of Platonic and Socratic ideas, appropriating philosophy for literary purposes, truth in the service of fiction, in a comical yet serious manner. *Slow Man* is about love and the rebirth of love in a wounded soul (and body), which is a main theme in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, to which Paul Rayment ironically refers:

A memory comes back to him of the cover of a book he used to own, a popular edition of Plato. It showed a chariot drawn by two steeds, a black steed with flashing eyes and distended nostrils representing the base appetites, and a white steed of calmer mien representing the less easily

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<sup>5</sup>The novel is set in 2000, since Paul Rayment, the story’s passionless and maimed protagonist, mentions that Costello is seventy-two and was born in 1928 (120).

identifiable nobler passions. Standing in the chariot, gripping the reins, was a young man with a half-bared torso and a Grecian nose and a fillet around his brow, representing presumably the self, that which calls itself *I*. Well, in his book, the book of himself, the book of his life, if that ever comes to be written, the picture will be more humdrum than in Plato. Himself, the one he calls Paul Rayment, will be seated on a wagon hitched to a mob of nags and drays that huff and puff, some barely pulling their weight. After sixty years of waking up every blessed morning, munching their ration of oats, pissing and shitting, then being harnessed for the day's haul, Paul Rayment's team would have had enough. (Coetzee, 2005, 53)

Rayment had been reflecting how wasted his life has been, especially since he has had no children, that is, has not been stirred to creative activity through the passion of love. In fact, earlier he had reflected that he was:

“All in all, not a man of passion. He is not sure he has ever liked passion, or approved of it. Passion: foreign territory; a comical but unavoidable affliction like mumps, that one hopes to undergo while still young, in one of its milder, less ruinous varieties, so as not to catch it more seriously later on. Dogs in the grip of passion coupling, hapless grins on their faces, their tongues hanging out.” (45-46)

Then, Rayment falls in love with his Croatian nurse, Marijana, whose third and youngest child, a daughter, is named Ljuba, which is Croatian for love. Whereas homo-erotic love is the theme of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, Rayment falls in love with his female nurse, but also with her son, Drago (Croatian for “dear”)—the beautiful youth—and with her family (her younger daughter is named after cupid). He offers to sponsor Drago's studies, much like the older male lover of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* would offer advancement in society to his young beloved in return for his sexual favours. When he proposes to sponsor the studies of Drago, Marijana's eldest child, and son, and states as his reason that he loves Marijana (76-77), she leaves and is absent for a while. During her absence Elizabeth Costello, calling

herself a “doubting Thomas” (81), arrives to advise Rayment against pursuing his “unsuitable passion” (85, 89, 99) for Marijana, much to his irritation. In terms of the *Phaedrus* dialogue, Costello resembles Socrates, and Rayment, Phaedrus. The way she interferes in Rayment’s private affairs resembles both the way the voice (god or daemon or conscience) in Socrates’ head dissuaded him from making certain choices rather than prescribing what he should do, as well as the way Socrates himself interfered in people’s private affairs in order to urge them on to self-knowledge and virtue:

“It may seem curious that I should go round giving advice like this and busying myself in people’s private affairs, and yet never venture publicly to address you as a whole and advise on matters of state. The reason for this is what you have often heard me say before on many other occasions: that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience, which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. It began in my early childhood—a sort of voice which comes to me; and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on.” (*Apology*: 31d) (Plato, 1959, 63-64)

As Costello says:

“Most of the time you won’t notice that I am here. Just a touch on the shoulder, now and then, left or right, to keep you on the path.” (87)

Costello also speaks and behaves, in *Slow Man*, in other ways which strongly recall the Socrates of the *Symposium*. Enacting her function of amanuensis, or secretary of the invisible, or midwife of ideas, she tells Paul Rayment to make a better case for his life so she can have something to write about:

“What case would you prefer me to make?” he says. “What story would make me worthy of your attention?”

“How must I know? Think of something.”

Idiot woman! He ought to throw her out.



“Push!” she urges.

Push? Push what? *Push!* is what you say to a woman in labour.

“Push the mortal envelope,” she says. “Magill Road, the very portal to the abode of the dead: how did you feel as you tumbled through the air? Did the whole of your life flash before you? How did it seem to you in retrospect, the life you were about to depart?” (83)

The fact she asks him questions suggests the Socratic didactic method, and her asking him to “push” alludes to her role of Socratic midwife trying to help Rayment give birth to virtuous ideas, even though he is ‘merely’ a fictional creation. Once again, Coetzee presents his fictional creations as being at least partly self-originating and as having a degree of independence from their author. He humorously investigates the nature of artistic creation by having Costello, herself a creation of Coetzee, take artistic responsibility for her creation, Paul Rayment, telling him that she cannot leave him alone because he came to her:

“*I came to you? You came to me!*”

“Shush, don’t shout, the neighbours will think you are beating me.” She slumps into a chair. “I’m sorry. I am intruding, I know. You came to me, that is all I can say. You occurred to me—a man with a bad leg and no future and an unsuitable passion. That was where it started. Where we go from there I have no idea. Have you any proposal?” (85)

Costello tries to dissuade Rayment from rash actions that could possibly destroy the Jokić family and tries to set him up with a woman called Marianna, who like Paul is lonely and incomplete (she has lost her sight). Here Costello is acting the match-maker, although, despite one amorous meeting in the dark in Paul’s flat, the match turns out to be a dead-end and Paul suspects that Costello has set them up as a “biologico-literary experiment” (114):

Eros. Why does the sight of the beautiful call eros into life? Why does the spectacle of the hideous strangle desire? Does intercourse with the

beautiful elevate us, make better people of us, or is it by embracing the diseased, the mutilated, the repulsive that we improve ourselves? What questions! Is that why the Costello woman has brought the two of them together: not for the vulgar comedy of a man and a woman with parts of their bodies missing doing their best to interlock, but in order that, once the sexual business has been got out of the way, they can hold a philosophy class, lying in each other's arms discoursing about beauty, love, and goodness?

Although Coetzee seems to make fun of Platonic philosophy, *Slow Man* is true to the comical spirit of the Socratic dialogue, as will be argued in Chapter 3. Rayment later remonstrates with Costello:

“You treat me like a puppet,” he complains. “You treat everyone like a puppet. You make up stories and bully us into playing them out for you. You should open a puppet theatre, or a zoo. There must be plenty of old zoos for sale, now that they have fallen out of fashion. Buy one, and put us in cages with our names on them. *Paul Rayment: canis infelix. Marrianna Popova: pseudocaeca (migratory)*. And so forth. Rows and rows of cages holding the people who have, as you put it, *come to you* in the course of your career as a liar and fabulator. You could charge admission. You could make a living out of it. Parents could bring their children at weekends to gawp at us and throw peanuts. Easier than writing books that no one reads.” (117)

Although comically petulant, this charge is also serious, since it suggests that Costello (and therefore Coetzee?) is a tyrannical author, a dictator rather than a scribe. However, the fact that Costello allows one of her creations to make such a complaint against her, suggests the opposite, that she is open to all voices, even to that of this character with whom she can sympathise so little. Indeed, so much so does Costello refuse to assert her authorial authority that when she proposes to live with Rayment and asks him whether they have found love, he has the final word:

He examines her, then he examines his heart. “No,” he says at last, “this is not love. This is something else. Something less.

“And that is your last word, do you think? No hopes of budging you?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“But what am I going to do without you?”

She seems to be smiling, but her lips are trembling too.

“That is up to you, Elizabeth. There are plenty of fish in the ocean, so I hear. But as for me, as for now: goodbye.” And he leans forward and kisses her thrice in the formal manner he was taught as a child, left right left. (263)

A final point about *Slow Man* is that when Rayment and Costello finally visit the Jokić family at the end of the novel, Marijiana is not pleased to see them and says bluntly, “So, you bring your secretary” (243). Rayment replies: “Elizabeth is not my secretary and has never been. She is just a friend”, although he does add soon after: “Yes, Elizabeth knows me better than I know myself. I need barely open my mouth” (243). The relationship between author and character, creator and creation seems to be one of familiarity, friendship, rather than authority. This also counts for the relationship between Coetzee and his persona, Costello. The significance of the reference to “secretary” will be evident from the previous discussion of Coetzee’s use of “amanuensis” in *The Lives of Animals* and in the analysis of “At the Gate” which is to follow.

Returning to the idea of the author as amanuensis, one should see it in relation to Coetzee’s story, “At the Gate,” published in 2003 in *Elizabeth Costello*. Although this story is an allusion to Kafka’s “Before the Law” (Kafka, 2007) and is related to Coetzee’s concern with confessional literature, it also arguably has another precedent in Plato’s *Apology*, a Socratic monologue, wherein Socrates has to provide an account—a defence—of his life and values to the democratic Athenian court. One is reminded of MacIntyre’s assertion, quoted in Chapter 1, that narrative gives meaning

to one's life, of which one can be expected to provide an account, and of MacIntyre's contention that one's life consists of the roles or performances that one plays, since the idea of performance is repeated throughout *Elizabeth Costello* and especially in "At the Gate". Indeed, it could be argued that "At the Gate" has more in common with Plato's *Apology* than Kafka's "Before the Law", since in Kafka's story the protagonist never has an opportunity to state his case before the judges, whereas Costello does, and she is not so much confessing as making a plea for fiction.

In this story, Costello arrives at a small Italian or Austro-Hungarian fictional town, whose artificiality and clichéd appearances are continually emphasized, where she is expected to write a statement of her beliefs which will first have to be judged before a board of examiners before she can pass through a portal to, possibly, the afterlife or eternity. Once again Costello is in transit—she seems never to be at home—and this reminds one of MacIntyre's point that the narrative of the journey is an important one (MacIntyre, 2007, 175-76). The reference to Odysseus later in the story seems to confirm this idea of Costello as a perpetual traveller, perhaps not so much a pilgrim or wanderer as a quester after the truth.

The judges, or examiners do not find her first statement acceptable, apparently believing she lacks commitment:

"I am a writer, and what I write is what I hear. I am a secretary of the invisible, one of many secretaries over the ages. That is my calling: dictation secretary. It is not for me to interrogate, to judge what is given me. I merely write down the words and then test them, test their soundness, to make sure I have heard right.

"Secretary of the invisible: not my own phrase, I hasten to say. I borrow it from a secretary of a higher order, Czeslaw Milosz, a poet, perhaps known to you, to whom it was dictated years ago." (199)

She insists that she can hold no beliefs, for professional reasons, since she is a writer, and beliefs merely interfere with her occupation of recording what she hears. One judge asks her what effect she thinks this lack of beliefs has on her humanity, to

which she replies “On my humanity? Is that of consequence? What I offer to those who read me, what I contribute to their humanity, outweighs, I would hope, my own emptiness in that respect” (201). She is immediately labelled “cynical,” a label she resists, and accepts only in a “technical sense” but insists “as regards other people, as regards humankind or humanity, no, I do not believe I am cynical at all” (201). This appears to suggest, contrary to what she has said, that Costello does seem to believe in humanity and the power of fiction to extend humanity. She appears to be a Socratic figure who delivers ideas from others rather than imposing her own ideas on them. Thus the secretary of the invisible, the amanuensis and the midwife are one and the same, sharing in common the function of an assistant to an other.

The judges seem to be trying to get her to make an ethical commitment, to concede that her fiction serves an ethical end, and not merely one of entertainment. Then they attempt to elicit a political commitment from her when they ask her for her thoughts on the extermination of the old Tasmanians, to which she responds, reiterating her appeal in *The Lives of Animals* to her audience to “open your heart and listen to what your heart says” (37):

“Let me add, for your edification: beliefs are not the only ethical supports we have. We can rely on our hearts as well. That is all. I have nothing more to say.” (203)

She does, however, eventually make a statement about the old Tasmanians, but in a way which only reiterates her initial statement that she is a secretary of the invisible:

“The aboriginal people of Tasmania are today counted among the invisible, the invisible whose secretary I am, one of many such. Every morning I seat myself at my desk and ready myself for the summons of the day. That is a secretary’s way of life, and mine. When the old Tasmanians summon me, if they choose to summon me, I will be ready and I will write, to the best of my ability.” (203-4)

She points out that she is as ready to record the voices of the perpetrators as she is of the victims, to which one of the examiners responds: “You do not judge between

the murderer and the victim? Is that what it is to be a secretary: to write down whatever you are told? To be bankrupt of conscience?" (204). It is a confirmation of her commitment to humanity that Costello points out that the guilty suffer too and a testament to her artistic integrity that she does not give in to what the judges seem to demand of her. The reference to conscience seems to be a Socratic echo, as was discussed in *Slow Man* above. Not surprisingly, her first petition is unsuccessful, and so she spends much time revising it, until she decides one day to take a different approach:

Since she boasts that she is secretary of the invisible, let her concentrate her attention, turn it inward. What voice does she hear from the invisible today? (Coetzee, 2003, 210)

In the end she finds she can believe, at least momentarily, in the embodied, if fictional, being of animals, of "the favourite ram of the king of Ithaca" (211) whose throat has just been slit and of the frogs that live in the mudflats of the Dulgannon in Australia. She goes on to make vivid descriptions of both the ram that Odysseus slaughters in the underworld as a sacrifice to Tiresius and the endless life-cycle of the frogs of the Dulgannon (entombment in the mud, revival in the rains, and mating). Both descriptions are vividly alive and concretely described, yet both are fictional. She refuses to allegorize the frogs' life-cycle, insisting that "it is because of their indifference to me that I believe in them" (217). Perhaps she is forced to admit her animal nature and to find no consoling illusion of immortality through art or in an immortal rational human soul, to admit that there is no escape from the endless biological cycle of birth, sex and death. It seems as though Costello's salvation is somehow bound up with animals rather than in literature, as her final vision reveals:

She has a vision of the gate, the far side of the gate, the side she is denied. At the foot of the gate, blocking the way, lies stretched out a dog, an old dog, his lion-coloured hide scarred from innumerable mangleings. His eyes are closed, he is resting, snoozing. Beyond him is nothing but a desert of sand and stone, to infinity. It is her first vision in a long while, and she

does not trust it, does not trust in particular the anagram GOD-DOG.

*Too literary*, she thinks again. A curse on literature! (224-5)

Despite Costello's curse, despite the fact that she does not trust the vision, and despite the realistic description of the dog—indeed, perhaps because of the realism<sup>6</sup>—the dog seems to be a literary allusion to Odysseus' dog, Argus, who has waited nineteen years for his master's return. This suggests that Costello has eventually arrived home, although to a faithful, old dog in an endless wasteland:

Stretched on the ground close to where they stood talking, there lay a dog, who now pricked up his ears and raised his head. Argus was his name. Odysseus himself had owned and trained him, though he had sailed for holy Illium before he could reap the reward of his patience. In years gone by the young huntsmen had often taken him out after wild goats, deer, and hares. But now, in his owner's absence, he lay abandoned on the heaps of dung from the mules and cattle . . . . There, full of vermin, lay Argus the hound. But directly he became aware of Odysseus' presence, he wagged his tail and dropped his ears, though he lacked the strength now to come any nearer to his master. Yet Odysseus saw him out of the corner of his eye, and brushed a tear away without showing any sign of emotion to the swineherd . . . . As for Argus, he had no sooner set eyes on Odysseus after those nineteen years than he succumbed to the black hand of death. (Homer, 1948, Book XVII, 266-339)

Costello's vision of the dog follows soon after her revelation: "*Fidelities*. Now that she has brought it out, she recognizes it as the word on which all hinges" (224). Not only does the word refer to the truthfulness, or faithfulness to the truth, demanded of all writers, but it also refers to the proverbial faithfulness of the dog, and hence to the deepest human-animal bond, a term not relating to rights or duties, but to the virtue terminology of patience, trust, faith and fidelity. Our humanity is bound up with

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<sup>6</sup>Erich Auerbach traced back the origins of realism in Western literature to the *Odyssey* in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Auerbach, 1968).

how we relate to other animals, and thus with a recognition of our animal nature. Perhaps there is a third significance to “fidelity”, namely, Costello’s steadfastness to her profession, her “doggedness” as her son notes in “What Is Realism?”:

Now the scene has changed. He has grown up. He is no longer outside the door but inside, observing her as she sits, back to the window, confronting, day after day, year after year, while her hair slowly goes from black to grey, the blank page. What doggedness, he thinks! She deserves the medal, no doubt about that, this medal and many more. For valour beyond the call of duty. (Coetzee, 2003, 4-5)

In her insistence that she is “secretary of the invisible” Costello resembles the Platonic Socrates, a daemonic medium between the immortal, invisible realm and the mortal, visible one. Diotima explains to Socrates that Love (Eros) is neither a god nor a mortal, but a daemon:

“An important spirit, Socrates. All spirits occupy the middle ground between humans and gods.”

“And what’s their function?” I asked.

“They translate and carry messages from men to gods and gods to men. They convey men’s prayers and the gods’ instructions, and men’s offerings and the gods’ returns on these offerings. As mediators between the two, they fill the remaining space, and so make the universe an interconnected whole. . . . Divinity and humanity cannot meet directly; the gods only communicate and converse with men . . . by means of spirits.”  
(*Symposium*: 202e-203a) (Plato, 1994, 43-4)

Nonetheless, the messages Costello conveys are not from the invisible other world, but from the invisible of this world, often the voiceless, like animals, whom she can only access through her imagination. She is not concerned with other-worldly, disembodied voices, but this-worldly, embodied and embedded voices, dead or alive, victims or perpetrators, fictional or historical. Indeed, the human Socrates, like Costello, is



as opposed to the authority of the other world as he is to the authorities of this world. Nor is there any salvation to be found in an afterlife, in immortality, these being illusions as unreal as the fictions Costello has spent her life spinning. She is midwife not to immortal Forms, but to mortal voices, and to the being of the voiceless. However, the power of the imagination lies not only in its ability to evoke and listen to other voices, and to enter into the being of others, including the voiceless, but also to use fiction to expose fictions, in particular the fiction that rationality is a divine spark that lifts humankind above the rest of nature, and thus, in showing our continuity with animal kind, enables us to reclaim our mortality, our fallibility and our humanity.

The similarities between Costello and Socrates are striking, and are more telling than their differences. Like Socrates, Costello tries to prompt people to realise their humanity, to open their hearts to the suffering of animals. She, like Socrates, faces prejudice, in her case the prejudice of speciesism, which she tries to dispel with counter-illusions. Her method differs from his: she uses images and the imagination (although she also uses argument) whereas he used dialectic and reasoning; but both work to the same end, namely the questioning of prejudices and false beliefs. In exposing ignorance and prejudice, both make enemies. Both function as prophets of inwardness, reminding people to take care of their souls and both appear to be wise fools. By presenting Costello as a fallible Socratic figure, Coetzee unmasks the pretensions of an unqualified rationalism and presents a more modest, more humane picture of humanity.

## 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)<sup>1</sup>. 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

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<sup>1</sup>Citations 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup>Kuhn, 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 synchrisis, 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup>This 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?<sup>4</sup> (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:

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<sup>4</sup>It 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*<sup>5</sup> 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:

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<sup>5</sup>*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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup>The 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](http://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.<sup>2</sup>

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,

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<sup>2</sup>As 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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

<sup>4</sup>See, 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.



## Chapter 5

# The Possibility of Secular Salvation in the Writings and Fiction of J.M. Coetzee: Sister Bridget's Challenge to Humanism

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me,  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

John Newton (1779)

The verses in the epigraph are from a Christian hymn written by the former captain of a slave ship involved in the Atlantic slave trade who eventually converted to Christianity and repented his role in the slave trade for the rest of his life. His hymn is based on a prayer by King David (1 Chronicles 17: 16-17) and expresses gratitude for moments of grace in which he was saved from sin. His work as a priest inspired William Wilberforce, whose efforts to abolish the slave trade in Britain eventually succeeded in 1823. Newton's story raises interesting questions about personal and general complicity in an evil institution such as slavery, considered normal at the

time, and whether there is the need for divine intervention, or moments of grace, to achieve salvation, questions at the heart of much of Coetzee's writing.

The question of (secular) salvation is one of the most difficult ones in Coetzee's writings. It is not clear why a secular writer like Coetzee should feel the need to use the biblical narrative of the fall, grace and redemption at all. However, he does use such religious terminology in secular contexts, and so this needs to be explored. It is fair to ask, then, what exactly his protagonists need to be saved from. Is it from their guilt at being (unwillingly) complicit in exploitative and brutal social, political and economic structures, such as colonialism, Nazism, apartheid and the industrialised farming of animals? Is it from being perpetrators or victims in these systems? Does salvation relate to suffering and death? Or is the disgrace being born into a world that is fallen and inherently imperfect, if not evil? Is Coetzee concerned with the salvation not only of his protagonists but also of the entire world they inhabit? It will be argued, in the following chapter, that the state of disgrace in *Disgrace* is realised at all levels, that the novel depicts an entire world in a fallen state requiring salvation, but without the possibility of divine intervention or grace. It is just such a fallen world that Elizabeth Costello tries to bring to her audience's attention in *The Lives of Animals*. This raises the further question whether the vision of the world in these two novels is inescapably pessimistic, whether there is any space for optimism.

In the interview preceding his essay, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky," in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee distinguishes between religious and secular confessions (Coetzee, 1992, 251-52) and relates confession to a process of transgression, penance and absolution (251). He also distinguishes between confession, memoir and apology as separate autobiographical modes and acknowledges Montaigne in this context (252). Of course, the dialogue, or interview, preceding the essay is a form of confession for Coetzee himself. In the "Introduction" to *Doubling*, David Attwell offers grace as one way of achieving closure but acknowledges, with Coetzee, the difficulty of transferring religious terms to a non-religious context (11).

Coetzee concludes his essay thus: "True confession does not come from the sterile

monologue of the self or from the dialogue of the self with its own self-doubt, but . . . from faith and grace” (291). Attwell reiterates the need for grace in the interview that precedes the essay and the lack of a secular equivalent (247). Coetzee’s answer to this involves the body and the pain that it can feel:

Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not,’ and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. (248)

He continues:

Not grace, then, but at least the body. Let me put it baldly: in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. . . . [I]t is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable. (248)

The latter extract is followed by the parenthetical words that provided the first epigraph to Chapter 1 and together they suggest that Coetzee is concerned with the problem of suffering at the deepest level, at the level at which the idea of suffering and its removal (hence salvation) are at the heart of Buddhist teachings and of Christian theodicies. His sentiments are echoed by the words of Isaac Bashevis Singer, a writer for whom Coetzee appears to have a close affinity even though he does not explicitly acknowledge him:

The same questions are bothering me today as they did fifty years ago. Why is one born? Why does one suffer? In my case, the suffering of animals also makes me very sad. I’m a vegetarian, you know. When I see how little attention people pay to animals, and how easily they make peace with man being allowed to do with animals whatever he wants because he keeps a knife or a gun, it gives me a feeling of misery and sometimes anger with the Almighty. I say “Do you need your glory to be connected with so much suffering of creatures without glory, just innocent creatures

who would like to pass a few years in peace?” I feel that animals are as bewildered as we are except that they have no words for it. I would say that all life is asking: “What am I doing here?” (*Newsweek* interview, 16 October 1978 after winning the Nobel Prize in literature) <sup>1</sup>

Coetzee emphasizes the importance of Dostoevsky in achieving closure to the apparent endlessness of confession:

Against the endlessness of skepticism Dostoevsky poses the closure not of confession but of absolution and therefore of the intervention of grace in the world. In that sense Dostoevsky is not a psychological novelist at all . . . . To the extent that I am taken as a political novelist, it may be because I take it as given that people must be treated as fully responsible beings: psychology is no excuse. Politics, in its wise stupidity, is at one with religion here: one man, one soul: no half-measures. What saves me from a merely stupid stupidity, I would hope, is a measure of charity, which is, I suppose, the way in which grace allegorizes itself in the world. (Coetzee, 1992, 249)

However, when Attwell asks Coetzee later in the interview whether the ending of *Age of Iron* can be interpreted allegorically as representing the intervention of grace and whether Elizabeth Curren can be seen to have achieved absolution, Coetzee is evasive about the possibility of grace:

As for your question about absolution for Elizabeth, the end of the novel seems to me more troubled (in the sense that the sea can be troubled) than you imply. But here I am stepping onto precarious ground, on precarious water; I had better stop. As for grace, no, regrettably no: I am not a Christian, or not yet. (250)

This leads to the question of how salvation is possible in a post-Christian world without recourse to the idea of God’s saving grace. It has been pointed out that

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<sup>1</sup>Since this quotation comes from the International Vegetarian Union website (IVU), no page reference can be provided.

Montaigne, an author important to Coetzee not merely on the issue of confession but also in attacking the presumption of humans (generally) and rationalist philosophers (specifically), as well—as we have seen—as being one of the few European men of letters to condemn cruelty to animals, argued that without God’s grace there can be no salvation (Montaigne, 1991, 499). Although he admired Socrates more than any other philosopher he could not accord him the saintly status that Erasmus did, and he felt that Socratic wisdom cannot lead to salvation, since Socrates was ignorant of the Truth of the Catholic Church (Montaigne, 1991, xvii). Nonetheless, as was argued in earlier chapters, the very unattainability of any ultimate “Truth,” means that the most trustworthy guide humans can have is a fallible figure such as Socrates who does not presume to possess the truth but rather tries to provoke others to seek the truth and to question their most deeply held assumptions and prejudices. It was argued that Elizabeth Costello performs just such a role in *The Lives of Animals*, except as a writer and poet rather than a philosopher. Thus Coetzee, like Isaac Bashevis Singer, has faith in art, or poetry, as a possible means of salvation, not in the sense of attaining bliss in the afterlife, but virtue, morality and justice in this life. In particular, the poet strives to instil compassion or empathy in his or her readers for the characters he or she creates through the sympathetic imagination. In terms of *Disgrace* this applies not only to Lurie and his opera but also to Coetzee’s novel and his readership.

In a series of penetrating Levinasian analyses of *Disgrace*, Mike Marais argues that art can facilitate “self-substituting responsibility,” where one overcomes domination of the other by sacrificing oneself for the other. However, he also points out that there is the danger that fiction can completely dominate the other by failing to respect the other’s alterity (Marais, June 2000). This is why Dostoevsky’s polyphony is so important to Coetzee, since it mitigates the author’s complete domination of his or her subject. Indeed, (the desire for) domination is perhaps one of the most significant sources of evil in the world and one of the central problems that Coetzee explores in his novels.

Typically, Coetzee problematizes the idea of salvation through art and the humanities throughout his work but most explicitly in “The Humanities in Africa,” which appears as Lesson 5 in *Elizabeth Costello*, where Elizabeth Costello’s sister, Blanche, now a Catholic nun known as Sister Bridget, is offered an honorary doctorate in the humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand in recognition of her work with HIV-infected children at the Hospital of the Blessed Mary on the Hill, in Marianhill, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Her voice is a striking example of Coetzee’s use of polyphony since it is a very powerful indictment of the humanities in which Coetzee has invested his life’s work. Indeed, it can be seen as a piece of confession on his part. In her speech she notes how embattled humanity departments are in Africa and throughout the world (no doubt partly as a result of “the great rationalization” that Lurie mentions in *Disgrace*), but instead of offering any consolation she goes on to attack *litterae humaniores* or “humane studies” as irrelevant to life and as a false route to salvation, having departed, during the Renaissance, from their original aim of biblical textual scholarship, namely the correct interpretation, understanding and translation of the Word of God:

“The message I bring is that you lost your way long ago, perhaps as long as five centuries ago. The handful of men among whom the movement originated of whom you represent, I fear, the sad tail—those men were animated, at least at first, by the purpose of finding the True Word, by which they understood then, and I understand now, the redemptive word.

“That word cannot be found in the classics, whether you understand the classics to mean Homer and Sophocles or whether you understand them to mean Homer and Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. . . .

“... The *studia humanitatis* have taken a long time to die, but now, at the end of the second millennium of our era, they are truly on their deathbed. All the more bitter should be that death, I would say, since it has been brought about by the monster enthroned by those very studies as first and animating principle of the universe: the monster of reason,

mechanical reason. But that is another story for another day.” (Coetzee, 2003, 122-23)

In the dinner that follows the graduation ceremony, reminiscent of the dinner in *The Lives of Animals*, the professor seated next to Elizabeth Costello asserts, contra Sister Bridget, that the faculties of the humanities are relevant to a secular age and are the core of the modern university. Costello reflects to herself that “if she were asked to name the core of the university today, its core discipline, she would say it was money-making” (Coetzee, 2003, 125). This reflection of Costello’s, her sister’s comment on “the monster of reason, mechanical reason” (which resembles Costello’s own denouncing of reason in *The Lives of Animals*), and David Lurie’s scornful remarks on “the great rationalization” (Coetzee, 1999a, 3) and “emasculated institution of learning” (4) in *Disgrace* are part of Coetzee’s critique of the managerial approach to running universities and society, originating in Enlightenment rationalism, although in a reductive form of it, namely a narrow utilitarianism. It will be argued that this is a major part of the fallen nature of the globalized world that Coetzee criticizes in his later novels.

When Costello asks the professor to consider her sister’s interesting claim that there was “[s]omething wrong with placing hopes and expectations on the humanities that they could never fulfill” (Coetzee, 2003, 125), he replies, without really engaging with Blanche’s challenge—indeed misrepresenting her position as fatalism—and without acknowledging that the idea of a fallen human nature is an idea borrowed by the humanities from the Bible, and, in fact, relying on clichés and a reference to Alexander Pope’s “Essay on Man”:

“The proper study of mankind is man,’ says Professor Godwin. ‘And the nature of man is a fallen nature. Even your sister would agree with that. But that should not prevent us from trying—trying to improve. Your sister wants us to give up on man and go back to God. . . . She wants us to plunge back into the Christian fatalism of what I would call the Low Middle Ages.’” (125)

Costello then recounts her own youth when she and her fellow students would look to literature for salvation, even if some of the authors turned out to be false prophets like Lawrence and his “dark gods” (126-27):

“What I mean to say is that in our truest reading, as students, we searched the page for guidance, guidance in perplexity. We found it in Lawrence, or we found it in Eliot, the early Eliot: a different kind of guidance, perhaps, but guidance nevertheless in how to live our lives. . . .

“If the humanities want to survive, surely it is those energies and that craving for guidance that they must respond to: a craving that is, in the end, a quest for salvation.” (127)

Costello’s mentioning salvation in this secular context echoes her earlier comments in *The Lives of Animals* about the need for salvation and will hopefully help to illuminate the idea of salvation in *Disgrace*.

When the Dean, who overhears Costello, asks whether she thinks the future of the humanities is dark, she replies that “[f]or my one part, I would say that it is enough for books to teach us about ourselves” and immediately goes on to reflect that “[t]eaching us about ourselves: what else is that but *studium humanitatis*?” (128).

The Socratic overtones of Costello’s words are quite clear, reinforcing the insights of previous chapters that Costello is a Socratic figure, except in terms of poetry rather than philosophy, and in terms of Bakhtin’s polyphony, the latter exemplified in the dinner conversation just being described. Sister Bridget has a pointed reply:

“I do not need to consult novels,” says her sister, “to know what pettiness, what baseness, what cruelty human beings are capable of. That is where we start, all of us. We are fallen creatures. If the study of mankind amounts to no more than picturing to us our darker potential, I have better things to spend my time on. If on the other hand the study of mankind is to be a study in what reborn man can be, that is another story.” (128)



When a young man suggests that the humanities, as the technique of reading and interpretation, are best suited to helping people through this modern, multi-cultural age, Sister Bridget expresses her disapproval of the early humanist scholars who, while they were not crypto-atheists, were crypto-relativists in that, instead of respecting Christ's universality, they relativised him in his historical context (130). She also mentions those scholars who thought that:

“Greece provided a better civilizational ideal than Judaeo-Christianity. Or, for that matter, those who believed that mankind had lost its way and should go back to its primitive roots and make a fresh start. In other words, the anthropologists.” (130)

The Dean interrupts the conversation and it ends with Sister Bridget's intolerant views. Despite having the final say, her narrow fundamentalism leaves a bad taste in the mouths of her auditors, not least her sister. Elizabeth Costello finds equally disconcerting her private conversation with her sister immediately following the dinner and her visit, the next day, to the Marianhill Hospital, where she experiences first hand her sister's idea of salvation.

In their conversation after the dinner, Blanche points out what she sees as the failure of Hellenism, which, according to her, was “the one alternative to the Christian vision that humanism was able to offer” (131). Costello replies:

“But Hellenism was surely just a phase in the history of the humanities. Larger, more inclusive visions of what human life can be have emerged since then. The classless society, for instance. Or a world from which poverty, disease, illiteracy, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and the rest of the bad litany have been exorcised. I am not putting in a plea for either of these visions. I am just pointing out that people cannot live without hope, or perhaps without illusions. If you turned to any of those people we had lunch with and asked them, as humanists or at least as card-carrying practitioners of the humanities, to state the goal of all their efforts, surely they would reply that, however indirectly, they strive to

improve the lot of mankind.” (132)

Blanche replies:

“Yes. And therein they reveal themselves as true followers of their humanist forebears. Who offered a secular vision of salvation. Rebirth without the intervention of Christ. By the workings of man alone. Renaissance. . . . Well, it cannot be done.” (133)

When Costello suggests that Blanche sees damnation for all of those who seek salvation outside of the Catholic Church, her sister concludes:

“I said nothing of damnation. I am talking only about history, about the record of the humanist enterprise. It cannot be done. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salvatio.*” (133)

The divergence between Costello and her sister’s worldviews is especially evident in their different attitudes to art. Costello is appalled by the single-minded devotion of Joseph, the resident carver at Marianhill, to carving the same image of the crucified Christ his whole life until arthritis ends his craft: “What does it do to a person’s—if I dare to use the word—*soul* to spend his working life carving a man in agony over and over again?” (137). Blanche replies at length, concluding, “Which of us, I now ask, will Jesus be most gladdened to welcome into his kingdom: Joseph, with his wasted hands, or you, or me?” (138). In all of her conversations, Blanche shows no uncertainty as to the existence of God. Her fundamentalist certainty is in strong contrast to Costello’s Socratic fallibility and is all the more repellent for it. Against Blanche’s vision of art serving religion, Costello pits the Greek ideal of bodily youth and beauty:

“I am asking what you, you yourself, have against beauty. Why should people not be able to look at a work of art and think to themselves, *That is what we as a species are capable of being, that is what I am capable of being*, rather than looking at it and thinking to themselves, *My God, I*

*am going to die, I am going to be eaten by worms?"* [Coetzee's emphases]  
(139)

Blanche argues that Greek ideals were not foreign to the Zulus, and that “when Europeans first came in contact with the Zulus, educated Europeans, men from England with public-school educations behind them, they thought they had rediscovered the Greeks” (140). Yet, according to Blanche, when the colonial administrators offered the Zulus a kind of secular salvation, the elimination of disease, poverty and decay through reason and the sciences, the Zulus chose Christ instead because they knew better, because “they [especially African women] suffer and he [Christ] suffers with them” (141). When Costello asks whether it is not because he promises them another, better life after death, Blanche replies, “No. To the people who come to Marianhill I promise nothing except that we will help them bear their cross” (141). This is a stark, unattractive vision of salvation, which has no place for Greek ideals of beauty or of the redemptive powers of art and appears to preclude the possibility of secular salvation. It also seems a bit naïve in failing to locate the source of African poverty and suffering in colonialism and Apartheid, apparently assuming that such suffering is inevitable. Despite Blanche’s powerful critique of humanism, this thesis will try to develop Coetzee’s case for secular salvation through art, making use not only of Christian ideas of salvation (translated in a secular context) but also those of Hellenism and of anthropology.

Blanche is relentless. Instead of trying to part with her sister amicably—most likely their last parting before they die—she takes the opportunity to have the last word, speaking on behalf of the Africans:

“... remember it is what they have made of him, they, the ordinary people. What they have made of him and what he has let them make of him. Out of love. ... Ordinary people do not want the Greeks. They do not want the realm of pure forms. They do not want marble statues. They want someone who suffers like them. Like them and for them.

...

“You backed a loser, my dear. If you had put your money on a different Greek you might still have stood a chance. Orpheus rather than Apollo. The ecstatic instead of the rational. Someone who changes form, changes colour, according to his surroundings. Someone who can die but then come back. A chameleon. A phoenix. Someone who appeals to women. Because it is women who live closest to the ground. Someone who moves among the people, whom they can touch—put their hand into the side of, feel the wound, smell the blood. But you didn’t, and you lost. You went for the wrong Greeks, Elizabeth.” (144-45)

There is a marked lack of humanity, even charity, in Blanche’s parting comments. In a sense, however, Costello has the last say, although in a letter that she never sends to Blanche, and a letter which she nonetheless censors, excluding the part where she describes how she tried to share her naked, erotic beauty with a man, a friend of her mother, on his deathbed in hospital. As in the rest of the stories relating to Costello, aging and death are ever-present realities in “The Humanities in Africa.” It is arguable that Costello shows greater compassion because of the very personal nature of her giving of herself to another individual, whereas Blanche is serving a higher cause than that of the suffering individual. She concludes her first letter with the conviction that:

“The humanities teach us humanity. After the centuries-long Christian night, the humanities give us back our beauty, our human beauty. That was what you forgot to say. That is what the Greeks teach us, Blanche, the right Greeks. Think about it.” (151)

Like “The Humanities in Africa,” *Disgrace* is set in post-apartheid South Africa. It is clear from the analysis of the former work that making a case for secular salvation in *Disgrace* will be very challenging. In fact, some critics, like Elizabeth Lowry in “Like a Dog,” have concluded that *Disgrace* is a completely pessimistic novel. She notes that:

Coetzee's fiction is in many ways informed by an old-fashioned liberal-humanist vision. The novels demonstrate clearly that absolute power over the other, power without pity, is always asserted at great cost. . . . The world being jettisoned is that of David Lurie and Mrs Curren, with its interest in Romantic poetry and the classics—a world whose humanist values have failed to resolve the conflict between coloniser and colonised. And yet these very values—a respect for the individual, sympathy, restraint—become the measure of what is missing, in human terms, in the revolution. (Lowry, 1999)<sup>2</sup>

In order to ascertain how Coetzee can realise the ideal of secular salvation in *Disgrace*, it will be necessary first to explore in more detail the nature of the fallen world in which the novel is set. It will be necessary to widen the scope of the concept of disgrace from a narrow application to David Lurie to a broader application to the very milieu and ethos he inhabits. It is a layered ethos that will require a sociological, historical, mythological and anthropological excavation, using the very tools of the humanities that Blanche dismisses. Indeed, the biblical narratives that form the basis of her faith will also be subject to such an analysis, which will use some of the insights that Elizabeth Costello and Coetzee offer in *The Lives of Animals* in order to attempt to ascertain the origins and meaning of humanity and its fallen nature. It will trace not just one but several moments in human history when humans have fallen into ever deeper disgrace. It will also seek in history, most notably in Hellenistic philosophy (despite Blanche), for an ethics of secular salvation, using these as a basis for Lucy Lurie's vision of the world and for bridging the divide between humans and animals that the Judaeo-Christian tradition has enforced.<sup>3</sup> The thesis will then explore how Coetzee attempts to find salvation in animals.

It was when humankind's prehuman ancestors started eating meat that they obtained the protein necessary for the cerebral boost that eventually led to their dominance as a species. This is true even though humankind's prehuman ancestors most

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<sup>2</sup>Since this extract is taken from a webpage, no page reference can be provided.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Singer subjects the biblical attitude of domination over animals and nature to a sustained critique in *Animal Liberation*.

probably did not kill their own prey but started off as scavengers. Nonetheless, in a sense the very foundations of humanity are based on violence. Paradoxically, that choice to start eating meat has given humans the power to choose to abstain from meat, which they do not need in order to survive or even, indeed, to thrive. It can be argued that humankind's fall from grace occurred not when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but rather when the pre-human ancestors started eating meat, thereby gaining the knowledge of good and evil. Nonetheless, even in the biblical myth the fall from grace of Adam and Eve was accompanied by the inclusion of meat in their previously vegetarian—indeed fruitarian—diet. Thus meat-eating is a concession to humankind's fallen and sinful nature. Peter Singer and Elizabeth Costello would argue that this myth is merely an excuse for eating meat, a biblically sanctified excuse for a brutal practice in order to ease the conscience of those participating in it. However, it could be argued that in order to live a less sinful, more perfect, virtuous and compassionate life, believers in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition should abstain from meat in an attempt to recover the prelapsarian state of grace. This may help to cast light on Costello's vegetarianism: for her, meat-eating represents a fall into sin, and salvation consists, at least in part, in abstaining from eating meat. A quotation from Isaac Bashevis Singer helps to illuminate further Costello's comment on salvation being the motivation behind her vegetarianism:

The only justification for killing animals is the fact that man can keep a knife or an axe in his hands and is shrewd enough and selfish enough to do slaughter for what he thinks is his own good. The Old Testament has many passages where the passion for meat is considered to be evil. According to the Bible, it was only a compromise with so-called human nature that God had allowed people to eat meat. ...

...I personally am very pessimistic about the hope that humanity's disregard for animals will end soon. I'm sometimes afraid that we are approaching an epoch when the hunting of human beings may become

a sport. But it is good that there are some people who express a deep protest against the killing and torturing of the helpless, playing with their fear of death, enjoying their misery. Even if God or nature sides with the killers, the vegetarian is saying: I protest the ways of God and man. We may admire God's wisdom but we are not obliged to praise what seems to us His lack of mercy. It may be that somewhere the Almighty has an answer for what He is doing. It may be that one day we shall grasp His answer. But as long as we don't understand it, we shouldn't agree and we shouldn't flatter Him. (Giehl, 1979, Foreword)

Coetzee appears to share Isaac Bashevis Singer's highly principled attitude to vegetarianism as well as his pessimism that things will not change for the better soon. Besides helping to explain Costello's comments on her vegetarianism, it also may help to understand her "GOD-DOG" anagram in "At the Gate," showing how a change in our attitude towards animals along with our conception of God is absolutely necessary for our salvation. This will be explored further in the next chapter. Isaac Bashevis Singer expresses these ideas with great power, linking vegetarianism with justice, both human and divine:

When a human kills an animal for food, he is neglecting his own hunger for justice. Man prays for mercy, but is unwilling to extend it to others. Why should man then expect mercy from God? It's unfair to expect something that you are not willing to give. It is inconsistent.

I can never accept inconsistency or injustice. Even if it comes from God. If there would come a voice from God saying, "I'm against vegetarianism!" I would say, "Well, I am for it!" This is how strongly I feel in this regard. (Rosen, 1997, Preface)

It could also be argued, as it is in James Serpell's *In the Company of Animals*, one of the books used by Costello in *The Lives of Animals*, that the fall from grace, or a second fall, occurred when humankind was forced to make the shift from hunter-gathering to cultivation, which was accompanied by the domestication of animals.

The relatively care-free existence of the hunter and gatherer, whose needs were provided for directly by nature, was replaced by the difficult and labour-intensive existence of the cultivator, dependent on the vagaries of climate and weather and requiring careful planning and social organisation. Again there is a biblical parallel for this traumatic shift in human society in the story of Cain, the cultivator, and Abel, the hunter and, significantly, the one favoured by God. The murder of Abel by Cain marks this painful shift from hunting to cultivation, and is accompanied by Cain's fall into utter disgrace, indeed, a cursed state. With the agricultural revolution and the rise of civilization came new forms of violence: hierarchy,<sup>4</sup> the division of labour, the domestication of animals, slavery, centralised government, taxes, empire and war.

Besides the biblical parallels to what anthropology has learned about the history of humankind, there are similar precedents in the myth of ancient Greece, particularly in Hesiod, who traced the ages of man, from the Golden Age ruled by Kronos, to the Ages of Silver and Bronze ruled by Zeus and to the Age of Iron, each subsequent age representing a degeneration of the previous. The pessimism of these ancient myths contrasts starkly with the modern belief in progress through science. Significantly, Coetzee has named a novel *Age of Iron*, which is set in the dying days of apartheid, the ethos of which is certainly degenerate. In Hesiod's Golden Age, however, vegetarianism was part of the blessed way of life.

The next great revolution was the Industrial Revolution, which pessimists may see as the latest in the series of falls into sin that humanity has made. This revolution was accompanied by the revolution in science and by an acceleration in colonialism (apartheid being a late development of colonialism), culminating in the triumph of rationalism in the Enlightenment, a narrowly instrumentalist form of this being the origin of the managerialism touched on earlier in this chapter. This pessimistic view of these revolutions, of course, runs counter to the optimistic liberal belief in progress in science and civilization, and it is perhaps hypocritical of critics and scholars to enjoy

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<sup>4</sup>According to the philosopher Steve Best, hierarchy rather than class, sex or race is the most basic reason underlying all forms of oppression in the world, both of humans and nonhumans. Indeed, he argued at the launch of Animal Rights Africa, at the Wits Origins Centre, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2008, that the slavery of humans was preceded by the domestication of animals, the two institutions sharing the language and techniques of violence and bondage.



the benefits of modern technology and civilization while criticising the science and rationalism behind them. Nonetheless, the Enlightenment belief in progress through science was powerfully brought into question by the ravages of colonialism, two world wars, the rise of totalitarianism, the invention of weapons of mass destruction and the Nazi genocide with its numerous imitators throughout the twentieth century. Coetzee makes it clear through the mouth of Costello in *The Lives of Animals* that science has been disgraced by its complicity in the animal exploitation industries, not only in testing on animals and vivisection but also in the technical “refinement” of animal factories. In this thesis, this pessimism will be characterised as Nietzschean and the optimism as Socratic, continuing the opposition of these two figures from Chapter 2. It should be remembered, too, that in Chapter 1, Alasdair MacIntyre was quoted as arguing that since the Kantian and utilitarian philosophies have failed to resolve basic ethical problems, the stark choice remains between a Nietzschean or an Aristotelian ethics.

As discussed in previous chapters, Costello repeatedly compares the factory farms and slaughter houses of modern agriculture to the death camps of the Holocaust in *The Lives of Animals*, thus damning the industrialised farming of animals in the strongest possible terms. As pointed out in Chapter 4, she says that the originators of this industry should be foremost among those seeking atonement (Coetzee, 1999b, 61). For Costello, in these farms, as in the Nazi death camps, we see human nature fallen to its lowest level, both in terms of the people who run and profit from these farms and the consumers who buy their products. Modern factory farms are “triumphs” of instrumentalist rationalism in terms of the supposed efficiency with which they are run. Indeed, the apparent efficiency of the Chicago slaughter houses, their disassembly lines, was apparently the inspiration behind Fordism, namely Henry Ford’s assembly line, which revolutionised industrial production in the twentieth century, and which was taken to even further “scientific” extremes in the form of Taylorism.<sup>5</sup> Costello

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<sup>5</sup>Scientific management (also called Taylorism or the Taylor system) is a theory of management that analyzes and synthesizes workflows, with the objective of improving labour productivity.

discusses the relatively more honorable but less efficient modes of hunting and bull-fighting as means of acquiring meat for human consumption, pointing out that “we are too many” (Coetzee, 1999b, 52). Interestingly, her words are echoed in *Disgrace* by those of Bev Shaw: “there are just too many of them” (85) and the narrator: “*because we are too menny*” (146), except here they are referring to dogs rather than humans. She then goes on to point out that:

“We need factories of death; we need factory animals. Chicago showed us the way; it was from the Chicago stockyards that the Nazis learned how to process bodies.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 53)

In fact, we do not need these factories of death because we do not need to eat meat in order to live healthily. Our decision to eat meat is not moral but aesthetic, in that we like the taste of flesh. In his speech in Sydney 2007, Coetzee himself points to the psychic cost of our complicity in the meat industry:

To any thinking person, it must be obvious there is something terribly wrong with relations between human beings and the animals they rely on for food. It must also be obvious that in the past 100 or 150 years, whatever is wrong has become wrong on a huge scale, as traditional animal husbandry has been turned into an industry using industrial methods of production.

There are many other ways in which our relationship with animals is wrong (to name two: the fur trade and experimentation on animals in laboratories), but the food industry, which turns living animals into what it euphemistically calls animal products and by-products, dwarfs all others in the number of individual animal lives it affects. (Coetzee, 2007b)<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the sheer scale of the meat industry beggars the imagination since it is estimated that in 2008 over 50 billion animals were slaughtered for food. However, Frances Moore Lappé shows how the apparent efficiency of industrial farming is an

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<sup>6</sup>Since this quotation is from a web page, no page references can be given.

illusion. It puts small farmers out of work, uses at least half of the world's grain and water supplies, pollutes the environment, including water, on a massive scale, and contributes towards, rather than solves, the problems of world hunger and impoverishment. She points out that farming animals, especially cattle, for meat is so inefficient that it is like "a protein factory in reverse" (Lappé, 1991, 67). Coetzee, however, does not mention the environmental costs and economic inefficiency of industrialised farming, since he is concerned mainly with the abuse and destruction of individual animal lives. His apparent rejection of ecology in *The Lives of Animals* may be, in part, because it also seems to fall into the managerial mode, aiming to replace the inefficiencies of industrial production with a more effective management of resources by means, for instance, of recycling and a less wasteful use of natural resources. Indeed, Costello speaks in *The Lives of Animals* of "the managers of ecology" (Coetzee, 1999b, 54), repeating the word "managers," when criticising ecological philosophies.

The relevance to *Disgrace* of this discussion of industrialised agriculture and its comparison with the Holocaust becomes clear when Lurie explicitly describes his and Bev's euthanasing of the dogs and his incineration of the dogs' corpses as *Lösung* (Coetzee, 1999a, 142), a word used by the Nazis to describe their policy of genocide against the Jews, the "final solution." Lurie's use of this word in this context is highly problematic, in much the same way that Costello's is in *The Lives of Animals*, although in both cases it is meant to show instrumentalist rationalism taken to its logical, brutal conclusion. It is surprising that Derek Attridge does not discuss the references to the Holocaust when he analyses the ethos of *Disgrace*, because he does bring to attention the many references in the novel to the "times" in which it is set; indeed, he goes so far as to entitle his chapter on the novel "Age of Bronze, State of Grace" and relates it to Coetzee's earlier novel, *Age of Iron* (Attridge, 2005, 162). He insists, however, that Coetzee's apparent pessimism in *Disgrace* is not directed towards the post-apartheid South African government, but towards the dominant ethos of the world, which the South African government is merely following. This

is the ethos of managerialism and globalisation, as previously discussed, which originates ultimately in a utilitarianism and instrumentalist application of rationalism of the eighteenth century European Enlightenment, although it represents a particularly reductionistic version of it. It is clear that Coetzee perceives this bureaucratic managerialism as the latest in the series of falls from grace in human history and it shows how Lurie's personal disgrace is part of a broader picture, of an entire world fallen from grace, most clearly evident in the disgraceful treatment of the less powerful members of society, namely women, children, animals and the poor.

Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of managerialism, mentioned in Chapter 1, can clearly be applied to the moral vision in *Disgrace*. The managerial approach, a business mode of working, that MacIntyre relates to Weber's Protestant work ethic and personifies as the character of the "bureaucratic manager," has arguably infected every aspect of modern life from running schools, universities and hospitals to government and agriculture. It basically represents a capitalist business model triumphant after the collapse of communism (symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) and applied to all aspects of contemporary life. Indeed, it can be seen as a form of American or Anglo-Saxon economic and cultural imperialism, which places profits above people, animals and the environment, reducing them all to mere "resources." It is arguably deeply opposed to humanity and humanism, as well as to a true environmentalism, where nature is not seen merely as a means to human ends but as an end in itself.

Mike Marais, citing an article by Jane Taylor, provides a more philosophical view of this vision of a fallen world, linking the violence in South Africa to the European Enlightenment's legacy of the autonomy of the individual:

What is at issue here is the notion that society is made up of what Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz ... refers to as "monads", each one a living consciousness separated totally from every other consciousness. Taylor (1999:25) maintains that *Disgrace* examines the alienating consequences of this divorce of self from other: "We are required to consider when reading this novel, what are the implications for our social and subjective

identities, when we live, as we do, enclaved off from one another, defensive, having shut ourselves against sympathy, no longer ready to stop at the scene of an accident, for fear of our own safety.” The principal consequence of this failure of sympathetic identification with other beings is violence. In fact, the sealing off of imaginative identification is a “necessary precondition for us to engage in the long-term and sustained business of slaughter” (Taylor 1999:25). (Marais, June 2000)<sup>7</sup>

Using the philosophy of Levinas, Marais argues that “[w]hether ethics is construed in terms of compassion or, in Emmanuel Levinas’s terms, as a self-substituting responsibility for the other (1981), the South African society described in *Age of Iron* is distinguished by the absence of ethical action” and that “[i]n *Disgrace*, exactly this point is made about post-apartheid South Africa by the rape scenes” (Marais, June 2000). He goes on to argue that “ethical action, in this text’s conception, derives from the exposure of the monadic subject to an otherness on which it cannot foreclose” and concludes that “[a]n initial reading of *Disgrace* would seem to suggest that the character Lurie undergoes a similar development from monadic subjectivity to self-substituting responsibility in the course of this novel.” Marais goes on to develop his Levinasian analysis with increasing sophistication in subsequent articles, although he comes increasingly to view Lurie’s moral growth as problematic. He also argues that Coetzee shows in *The Master of Petersburg* that Levinas’s ideas can be applied to animals, in particular Dostoevsky’s response to the dog that howls in the night where he comes to the “realisation that he can only love his son, Pavel, by loving every sentient being” (8) and “[w]hile this encounter does not lead to Dostoevsky’s assumption of responsibility for the dog, it *does* suggest that non-human animals are able to place humans under obligation” (8-9).

In his review of two books by Attridge, Marais points out that while “Levinas’s absolute other is ‘God’ ” (Marais, 2005, 94), Blanchot revises Levinas’s ideas to suit a secular context:

[Blanchot’s] understanding of absolute alterity is certainly *not* grounded

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<sup>7</sup>Since these quotations come from a webpage, no page references are available.

in notions of divinity. According to Blanchot, alterity is absolute because it is ultimately irreducible. (94)

Thus, it seems possible to argue a case for secular salvation in *Disgrace*, as Marais does, using Levinasian terms as developed by Blanchot.

Derek Attridge makes some important observations about the embeddedness of the word “grace” in the title of the novel and in numerous other instances: Lurie’s ex-wife mis-remembering Lucy’s lover’s name as “Grace,” a dog’s “period of grace” at the clinic, the “*coup de grâce*” that the intruder fails to deliver to the dog he wounds in its throat, Lurie’s considering that castration is not a “graceful solution” to the urgings of desire and the fact that “ageing is not a graceful business” (Attridge, 2005, 177-78). Attridge notes that among the many verbal doublets that Coetzee includes in his novel, “we don’t find disgrace/grace” even though it seems as if “the term is present in a ghostly way through much of the text” (178). He continues:

“Grace” is not, as it happens, the opposite of “disgrace.” The opposite of disgrace is something like “honor”; the *OED* definition of “disgrace” links it frequently with “dishonor.” Public shame, in other words, is contrasted with, and can only be canceled by, public esteem, disgrace is redeemed by honor. Lurie spurns the opportunity to escape disgrace by means of public confession, and he makes little attempt to regain a position of public honor after his shaming. (178)

Considering the bleakness and apparent pessimism of *Disgrace*, it may be difficult to imagine what kind of moral vision Coetzee can be offering to his readers, what kind of salvation. Nonetheless, perhaps a case can be made, not merely in terms of Lurie’s apparent reform but in terms of his daughter, Lucy’s, chosen life. It will be argued that in the figure of Lucy we see a reduced Socratic-Costello character and that as the Cynics stand to Socrates, so Lucy stands to Costello. In fact, a great variety of ethical systems, in various relations of conflict, complementarity and co-operation, can be identified in *Disgrace*, embodied not only in particular characters, who often hold apparently incompatible value systems within themselves, but embedded within

the very structure of the world they inhabit.

Some of the most important of these value systems are, on the one hand, Enlightenment utilitarianism and deontology explained earlier as well as Romanticism which reacted against them, and, on the other hand, various forms of virtue ethics, including Platonism, Aristotelianism, Cynicism, Christianity, an ethics of care, ecofeminism and African *ubuntu*. Peter Singer's connection to utilitarianism and Tom Regan's link to Kantianism should also be kept in mind. There are elements, too, of Hume and Nietzsche.

The ethics of justice, which is largely Kantian and can be described as masculine, and the ethics of care, which can be described as feminine and whose emphasis on care should not be confused with the "mercy that is to season justice" (Baier, 1992, 40) were briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Hume's emotivism has also been remarked on earlier, his assertion that reason should be a slave to the passions. In Hume's view, values and ends are linked to our desires which are non-rational, and reason merely becomes instrumental in determining the means to achieve our ends. This would appear to position Hume with instrumentalist rationalism. However, his idea that we should develop our sentiments towards humanity and compassion is very important too, and links him with Enlightenment sentimentalism, which developed as a corrective to its valorization of reason.

Then, there is also a more traditional tension between love and law, and between pagan *eros* and Christian *caritas*. These various forms of European ethics are modified by the African context and ethos of *Disgrace*, evident especially in the figure of Petrus, who combines traditional African values and practices like *ubuntu*, communalism, African Christianity and polygamy, with modern western ones like the Protestant work ethic (evident in his efficient use of a tractor to plough his fields) and individual self-advancement. Finally, there are the ethical practices of family, friendship and patriarchy at work at a very basic level in *Disgrace*. The philosophy of Cynicism, however, may require further explanation.

A similar sense of social dislocation to that evident in the postapartheid milieu of *Disgrace* was experienced at the break-up of the world of the Greek city-state and

its subsumption within the Hellenistic Empire. All societies undergoing fundamental change reveal a similar feeling of dislocation, one which is felt most keenly by those people who were in a privileged position in the previous order. Coetzee's apparent pessimism would seem to conflict with his apparent humanism and has been seen as damaging to the project of nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa. He has been labelled as a reactionary, wrongly so according to the consensus view in a special edition of a journal on *Disgrace* (Attridge, 2002) edited by Derek Attridge. As a white intellectual Coetzee may have occupied a privileged place in Apartheid South Africa, but as an English academic, he was not a member of the ruling group and so cannot be said to have held much political power.

Rosemary Jolly argues that both the ANC and David Lurie are mistaken to see Lucy's rape in racial terms and that the novel is not about racial violence but gender violence, which is a correlative to violence against nonhuman animals. She argues:

*Disgrace* examines the extent to which the related concepts of humanity and humanitarianism on the one hand and patriarchal culture on the other are essentially constitutive of one another. The novel interrogates what to be humane might mean without recourse to the species boundary between human and nonhuman animals, what acting as a humanitarian might mean without invoking public testimony and the law as watchdogs, and how our sense of ourselves as human is radically undermined by our addiction to a cult of the rational—what Coetzee's recent work identifies as an irrational fetishization of instrumentalization, a profoundly secular addiction to the god of efficiency. (Jolly, 2006, 150)

She goes on to argue that Coetzee is not simply concerned to bring others not previously considered persons (selves) into the sphere of the ethical community, but to interrogate the idea of the self as an ethical category, thus rejecting the liberal approach (145).

At times of change, the previously empowered or privileged classes often move from politics to ethics, from action to contemplation. Bertrand Russell describes



just such a process that occurred when power passed from the individual Greek city-states to the Macedonian Empire: “When political power passed into the hands of the Macedonians, Greek philosophers, as was natural, turned aside from politics and devoted themselves more to the problem of individual virtue or salvation” (Russell, 1945, 230). Besides this emphasis on individual virtue and salvation, what is specifically relevant to *Disgrace* is the philosophy of the Cynics. Russell writes about the Cynics, and Diogenes, in particular, who looked to Socrates as their model, both for his wealth of virtue and his material poverty:

He decided to live like a dog, and was therefore called a “cynic,” which mean “canine.” He rejected all conventions—whether of religion, of manners, of dress, of housing, of food, or of decency. [He lived in] a large pitcher, of the sort used in primitive times for burial. He lived, like an Indian fakir, by begging. He proclaimed his brotherhood, not only with the whole human race, but also with animals. (231)

This link of the Cynics to dogs may help to understand Coetzee’s idea of salvation as developed in *Disgrace* and elsewhere, not only in Lurie’s caring for the dogs in the animal shelter but also in his having to learn to free himself from his bondage to Eros, his belief in an ethic of self-gratification, which was the original cause of his fall into disgrace. Fascinatingly, in an interview with David Attwell on the essay on confession in *Doubling the Point*, but with reference to his writing as autobiography, Coetzee says that “[i]n the terms brought into prominence in the essay, the debate is between cynicism and grace. Cynicism: the denial of any ultimate basis for values. Grace: a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness” (Coetzee, 1992, 392). In a sense, these two terms get a radical reworking in *Disgrace*, neither being privileged, but both being transformed, grace into a secular form, and cynicism into something more positive as in the special sense explained below:

The teaching of Diogenes was by no means what we now call “cynical”—quite the contrary. He had an ardent passion for “virtue,” in comparison with which he held worldly goods of no account. He sought virtue and

moral freedom in liberation from desire: be indifferent to the goods that fortune has to bestow, and you will be emancipated from fear. (231)

It is clear that this philosophy has certain affinities with Buddhism and with Taoism. What is important for Coetzee is the link with salvation, a process not of embracing a (most probably illusory) promise of an afterlife or a spiritual reality, but of accepting the base materiality of existence, rejecting all conventions and illusions, and placing one's faith in earthly virtue, and not for any reward, either on earth or in heaven. A positive aspect of this form of ethics is the realisation of the kinship of all living creatures and the development of a mutual respect; hence it offers salvation from the prejudices of speciesism. Through vegetarianism it also offers salvation from complicity in an exploitative system where animals are used for food.

Interestingly, Cynics rejected the formal and theoretical reasoning of other philosophers, preferring instead “the *chreia* ...; the diatribe ...and Menippean Satire” (Borchert, 2006, 613). This reinforces the link between Costello and these philosophers, through Socrates, since she also shows a disrespect for the technical philosophical mode, preferring more emotive modes as the Cynics did—the rant being one of them, as discussed in earlier chapters. Furthermore, Bakhtin also singled out the Menippean Satire as one of the sources of the novel, in the tradition of the Socratic dialogue, to which genre, it was argued in earlier chapters, *The Lives of Animals* belongs.

The following description of Cynic philosophy also can be applied to a great extent to the figure of Elizabeth Costello:

Essentially individualistic and largely anti-social in advocating independence from any community, Cynicism was the most radical philosophy of spiritual security offered to fill the social and moral vacuum created in the fourth century BCE by the dissolution of the city-state political organism. ... The Cynic saw himself as ‘scout and herald of God,’ dedicating his own labors as a reconnaissance for others to follow; he was the ‘watchdog of mankind’ to bark at illusion, the ‘surgeon’ whose knife sliced

the cancer of cant from the minds of others. Cynics deliberately adopted shamelessly shocking extremes of speech and action to jolt the attention and illustrate their attack on convention. (Borchert, 2006, 616)

This description suits not only the figure of Costello, particularly in her repeated evocation of the Holocaust analogy, but also, in many respects, the biting satire of Jonathan Swift, particularly his outrageous piece, “A Modest Proposal,” which, as mentioned earlier, Costello discusses in *The Lives of Animals*, and his character, Gulliver, whose preference at the end of *Gulliver’s Travels* to commune with his horses rather than humans, is echoed by Costello in *The Lives of Animals*:

“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.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 65)

The example of Swift also cautions against a complete rejection of the European Enlightenment for spawning utilitarianism and Kantianism, since it is just as important for its emphasis on sentiment, perhaps in reaction to what some may deem its excessive rationalism, which may have paved the way for the strong emphasis on passions of the Romantic movement. Besides, the two Enlightenment philosophies, forming part of liberalism, have been responsible for much good in the world: social reform, the ending of child labour and slavery, the extension of the franchise and the rule of law. Nonetheless, it could be argued that liberating ideas are often manipulated by the powerful to serve their own interests, that just as the aristocracy and monarchy used Christianity to justify their power during the Middle Ages, so have the ideals of liberalism, nationalism and democracy sometimes been manipulated to serve the interests of the wealthy and the powerful in the modern age, for instance, the ideologies of free market capitalism and of National Socialism. The ideology of managerialism, in particular, can be seen, in part, to be the latest technique to concentrate wealth in

the hands of a few. The philosophy of Cynicism, for all its apparent passivity, helps one achieve salvation from the corrupting influence of power and from complicity in exploitative systems of power.

Russell's criticisms of the apparent pessimism and political impotency of Cynicism may partly be based on his own historical situation, his optimism stemming from his being a part of the liberal, rationalist, utilitarian tradition (his god-father was the utilitarian John Stuart Mill) and a privileged (but not uncritical) beneficiary of the British Empire. Nonetheless, his criticism in his brilliantly polemical essay on the Romantic movement, that "Man is not a solitary animal, and so long as social life survives, self-realization cannot be the supreme principle of ethics" (Russell, 1945, 684), can validly be applied to David Lurie in *Disgrace*, particularly in his Romantic justification for taking advantage of his student, Melanie, namely that "I became a servant of Eros" (Coetzee, 1999a, 52) and that "I was enriched by the experience" (56).

As closely applicable as the Cynic ethic seems to *Disgrace*, one should be wary of imposing it uncritically on the novel. Indeed, aspects of it do not seem to fit with the ecofeminism that Lucy apparently embraces, since whereas ecofeminism, a form of the ethics of care, insists on the interdependence of all people and living systems, Cynicism is very much concerned with the independence of the virtuous soul, which resembles, perhaps only superficially though, the Kantian autonomous rational individual that ecofeminism rejects. Nonetheless, a closer look may reveal a more fundamental common ground between these two ethics, not least in their recognising a kinship with animals and a desire to live closer to nature. In any case, there is no reason why Coetzee's characters need embody single, unified and consistent ethical theories, since in real life people hold all kinds of conflicting beliefs and values with little regard for consistency (unless they are philosophers), and usually without even being fully conscious of them. There is no reason why Lucy should not embody inconsistent systems of ethics. Indeed, in a novel, characters are often portrayed in a process of change, and a tension between conflicting beliefs and values is often an essential driving force behind their development. If in *The Lives of Animals*,

characters can be said to embody clearly differentiated, monolithic positions (except Costello, as was shown in Chapter 1), in *Disgrace* the interplay between different values systems is far more complex and dynamic, evident in the profound ethical change that occurs in David Lurie and, to a lesser extent, Lucy.

Finally, it is necessary, in light of the supposed deep pessimism of *Disgrace*, to consider the philosophy of Schopenhauer. His pessimism, his emphasis on the superior power of will above reason (which he shares with Nietzsche and Freud), his focus on suffering and his concern for kindness to animals are all clearly relevant to *Disgrace*, as are his observations that egoism is the norm, that loving kindness (or compassion) is as rare as it is valuable and that malice is unique to humans. Almost unique in the pre-twentieth century western philosophical tradition, he advocated kindness to animals. Russell notes, somewhat pejoratively, that Schopenhauer's philosophy owes much to Buddhism and that it has a "certain temperamental affinity with that of the Hellenistic age; it is tired and valetudinarian, valuing peace more than victory, and quietism more than attempts at reform, which he regards as inevitably futile" (Russell, 1945, 753). Russell continues, pointing out that in Schopenhauer's philosophy:

There is no such thing as happiness, for an unfulfilled wish causes pain, and attainment brings only satiety. Instinct urges men to procreation, which brings into existence a new occasion for suffering and death; that is why shame is associated with the sexual act. (Russell, 1945, 756)

However, there is some form of salvation or, at least, escape:

To the good man, the veil of Maya (illusion) has become transparent; he sees that all things are one, and that the distinction between himself and another is only apparent. He reaches this insight by love, which is always sympathy, and has to do with the pain of others. When the veil of Maya is lifted, a man takes on the suffering of the whole world. In the good man, knowledge of the whole quiets all volition; his will turns away from life and denies his own nature. "There arises within him a horror of the nature of which his own phenomenal existence is an expression, the kernel and

inner nature of that world which is recognized as full of misery.” (Russell, 1945, 756)

There is a strong resonance between Schopenhauer’s emphasis on suffering and compassion and the actions of Lurie in Bev Shaw’s animal clinic, as will be discussed in the next chapter. What is important to note, however, is that the pessimism of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche stands in strong contrast to the optimism of Socrates, who believed in the power of science and reason to improve the world. The work of Camille Paglia, who develops Schopenhauer’s insights in terms of Nietzsche’s distinction between the Apollonian and Dionysian, will help to develop the idea of an erotic imagination, which will be opposed to Costello’s sympathetic imagination. It will be argued that the polyphony of *Disgrace* consists, at least in part, precisely in holding these two possibilities, the pessimistic and the optimistic, in a taut harmony without trying to achieve any final resolution.

Hopefully, this overview of the relevant philosophies and versions of ethics will help illuminate *Disgrace*, at least in terms of its ethical complexity. Most critics have analysed the novel mainly in terms of Levinasian and Christian ethics transferred to a secular context, opposing these to a modern form of utilitarianism. While this is obviously a very fruitful approach, it seems unnecessarily limited, and it faces serious problems, not least the question of how one can expect grace if one has rejected Christianity. In particular, no sustained attempt has been made to picture a positive moral vision in *Disgrace*, perhaps because of its apparently deeply pessimistic nature. Nonetheless, if Isaac Bashevis Singer’s words in the epigraph of the following chapter are to be taken seriously, such an attempt should be made.

If one can take Costello’s comments in “As a Woman Grows Older” (2004) as expressing Coetzee’s own thoughts on the matter, one must conclude that he is not too pleased with his novels being judged as being “bleak” and, presumably, pessimistic. Costello has been asked by her son, John, and her daughter, Helen, to meet them in Nice, France, where her daughter lives, and she correctly suspects that they want to offer to look after her when she becomes too old to look after herself. She is conversing with John as they walk along the Promenade des Anglais. When she mentions to

him that she has become trapped in a cliché, John asks her what she means, and she responds:

“I do not want to go into it, it is too depressing. The cliché of the stuck record, that has no meaning anymore because there are no gramophone needles or gramophones. The word that echoes back to me from all quarters is ‘bleak.’ Her message to the world is unremittingly bleak. What does it mean, bleak? A word that belongs to a winter landscape yet has somehow become attached to me. It is like a little mongrel that trails behind, yapping, and won’t be shaken off. I am dogged by it. It will follow me to the grave. It will stand at the lip of the grave, peering in and yapping *bleak, bleak, bleak!*” (Coetzee, 2004a, 11)

This story gives Coetzee an opportunity to express his feelings about the general critical perception of his work and an opportunity to reply to his critics, whom Costello humorously describes as yapping dogs. If she is a dogged writer, her critics, too, are dogged in characterising her as bleak.

Later she is driving with her daughter through the countryside, the beauty of which becomes the subject of their conversation. Characteristically, Costello expresses doubts about her lifelong pursuit of beauty:

“The question I find myself asking now is, What good has it done me, all this beauty? Is beauty not just another consumable, like wine? One drinks it in, one drinks it down, it gives one a brief, pleasing, heady feeling, but what does it leave behind? The residue of wine is, excuse the word, piss; what is the residue of beauty? What is the good of it? Does beauty make us better people?” (12)

Costello’s questioning of the link between beauty and ethics is particularly significant, suggesting that she, and presumably Coetzee, think writing should have a moral function beyond, or in addition to, the mere production of beautiful artifacts. This may provide a clue to Coetzee’s idea of salvation, which somehow involves art. Helen provides an answer to Costello’s questions:

“Before you tell me your answer to the question, Mother, shall I tell you mine? Because I think I know what you are going to say. You are going to say that beauty has done you no good that you can see, that one of these days you are going to find yourself at heaven’s gate with your hands empty and a big question mark over your head. . . .

“The answer you will not give—because it would be out of character for Elizabeth Costello—is that what you have produced as a writer not only has a beauty of its own—a limited beauty, granted, it is not poetry, but beauty nevertheless, shapeliness, clarity, economy—but has also changed the lives of others, made them better human beings, or slightly better human beings. It is not just I who say so. Other people say so too, strangers. To me, to my face. Not because what you write contains lessons but because it *is* a lesson.

“You teach people how to feel. By dint of grace. The grace of the pen as it follows the movements of thought.” (12)

The reference to grace in the context of writing rather than a religious one may help to explain Coetzee’s idea of secular salvation. Costello reflects to herself that Helen’s words sound rather old-fashioned and Aristotelian, and she replies:

“It is sweet of you to say so, Helen, sweet of you to reassure me. Not a life wasted after all. Of course I am not convinced. As you say, if I could be convinced I would not be myself. But that is no consolation. I am not in a happy mood, as you can see. In my present mood, the life I have followed looks misconceived from beginning to end, and not in a particularly interesting way either. If one truly wants to be a better person, it now seems to me, there must be less roundabout ways of getting there than by darkening thousands of pages with prose.” (12)

On the one hand, this can be seen as Coetzee expressing doubt in the ability of art in general and fiction in particular to make the world a better place, questioning the Nietzschean idea that only art can bring meaning to an otherwise meaningless





universe. On the other hand, however, it can be seen as gentle, ironic Socratic self-mockery that places our salvation, our potential for moral growth, precisely in the recognition of our finitude and uncertainty.

## Chapter 6

# Animals and Secular Salvation in *Disgrace*

The pessimism of the creative person is not decadence, but a mighty passion for the redemption of man. While the poet entertains he continues to search for eternal truths, for the essence of being. In his own fashion he tries to solve the riddle of our time and change, to find an answer to suffering, to reveal love in the very abyss of cruelty and injustice. Strange as these words may sound, I often play with the idea that when all the social theories collapse and wars and revolutions leave humanity in utter gloom, the poet—whom Plato banned from his Republic—may rise up to save us all. (Isaac Bashevis Singer, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 1978)

Both *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace* were published in 1999 and both deal with human-animal relations, although in apparently very different ways. For all its emphasis on embodiedness, *The Lives of Animals* deals with animals in a very abstract way, that is, in the frame of a lecture, and one sympathetic critic, Barbara Smuts, whose essay is attached as one of the “Reflections” on *The Lives of Animals*, notes that “none of the characters ever mentions a personal encounter with an animal” (Coetzee, 1999b, 107). Smuts, a primatologist, goes on to narrate her extensive personal experiences with baboons in the wild and with her dog, confirming many of

Costello's insights about sympathetic imagination and the complexity of nonhuman animal experience. The critical consensus seems to be that this apparent shortfall in *The Lives of Animals* is more than made up for in *Disgrace* where the disgraced protagonist, David Lurie, ends up spending most of his time caring for the animals in an animal shelter, ironically performing the community service that he had initially refused to do when requested to do so by the disciplinary committee earlier in the novel as a public act of contrition. However, it will be more valuable to see *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace* in terms of complementing each other rather than in a relation of opposition. Thus, in this chapter, the insights and conceptual framework developed in previous chapters, which dealt with much of the fiction involving Elizabeth Costello, will be used to illuminate *Disgrace*, and the latter will help to cast light on the former, most notably in the difficult question of the role animals play in human (secular) salvation.

To continue the metaphor of illumination, the figure of Costello, an enlightened character (if only in the Socratic sense of a wise fool), will be contrasted with David Lurie, a type of Everyman figure, the figure of a fool who has to embark on a journey of self-discovery, from the darkness of ignorance to a state approaching enlightenment, or at least a degree of self-knowledge. Lurie has to achieve the state of enlightened self-questioning that characterises Costello; whereas she is at the forefront of developing a new ethics involving animals, he is saddled with anthropocentric and speciesist attitudes; indeed, he is trapped in the egoistic Romantic philosophy of self-realisation. In a way, Lurie resembles Costello's son, John, an intelligent but disconnected and relatively unenlightened intellect. In a similar way to which John Bernard stands in contrast to his mother, Elizabeth Costello, Lurie stands in contrast to his daughter, Lucy, whose vegetarian and ecofeminist worldview is hinted at in *Disgrace* and which Lurie barely begins to understand, but begins to move towards by the end of the novel. In both cases it is the female figure, whether mother or daughter, who has to enlighten the male, whether father or son, much like the figure of Sophy, or wisdom (like the figure of Philosophy in Boethius' *The Consolations of Philosophy*), was always personified as a woman. The comparatively enlightened worldview of Lucy is

evident in her name, which refers to illumination. It will be argued that Lurie's erotic imagination, which leads to his fall from grace, also provides, paradoxically, the basis for his partial rehabilitation in its transformation into a sympathetic imagination. The erotic versus the sympathetic imagination can perhaps tentatively be aligned with the Platonic and Socratic philosophies, a conjecture that will be tested against close critical analysis of *Disgrace*.

Throughout the novel we are aware of Lurie's failure to comprehend the alterity of his daughter, especially the decisions she makes about her body and property. While most critics have focused on Lucy's role as a victim of patriarchal and racist violence, in this chapter she will be presented as a more active figure with a positive voice and vision of her own. It will be necessary to liberate her voice from the uncomprehending and limiting perspective of her father, whose point of view necessarily dominates the third person intimate narrative, to a greater extent even than does John Bernard's in *The Lives of Animals*. This will help to reveal the polyphony of *Disgrace*. It will be argued that the dialogism in *Disgrace* is evident not so much in the juxtaposition of different characters' perspectives, as it is in *The Lives of Animals*, but a more subtle process involving the opposing voices within Lurie's consciousness, an opposition which enables a dialectical development from ignorance to (a degree of) enlightenment. Perhaps one can characterise the dialogism in *The Lives of Animals* as static and public and in *Disgrace* as dynamic and private.

Besides the relative degrees of enlightenment, Costello and Lurie display other important differences. Costello is a famous female author and feminist vegetarian who loves her cats, whereas Lurie is a sexually predatory, meat-eating, misogynistic male and obscure Romantic scholar, initially indifferent to animals but who comes to feel an attachment to the dogs in his care. Despite the differences between Costello and Lurie, there are equally significant similarities. Both are ageing academics—in 1999 she is 71 years old (born in 1928) and he is 52 (born in 1947)—in post-colonial societies and both have troubled relations with their children. Both are aware of the waning of desire (Eros) and of the approach of death. Both have to stand before a committee to give an account—or a confession—of their actions which both of them

resist. Finally, both appear to find or seek salvation in relation not to God but to animals.

It will be argued that at the beginning of the novel, David Lurie subscribes to a mixed set of values: a form of Romantic self-realisation, in particular the sexually predatory one of Lord Byron, a utilitarian approach to his sexual relations with the prostitute Soraya, and a minimal Kantian ethic of duty in relation to his work at the college at which he teaches. Implicitly he adheres to an ethics of justice, since within it his rights are protected by the rule of law, although he explicitly rejects it when he faces the university committee, justifying his violation of the rights of the student he has sexually taken advantage of, with reference to his Romanticism. Indeed, he strongly resembles Leibniz's monadic isolated ego. When his own daughter is raped, however, he is quick to resort to the language of an ethics of justice, failing to recognise that he was guilty of a similar violation of a female's rights. Furthermore, after the rape he is much concerned with the notions of "honour" and "dishonour," terms from virtue ethics. Underlying his ethical beliefs is a metaphysical, Judaeo-Christian belief in the human soul, or individual, as a special creation, separate from the rest of nature and a belief in the possibility of disembodied, immortal souls. Initially there is very little evidence of any Judaeo-Christian love or compassion in his make-up (Attridge suggests, on the basis of his surname, that he is Jewish), yet by the end of the novel we see him working towards an ethics of care (not specifically an ecofeminist one), although there is also a movement towards Cynicism, in the philosophical sense.

Like Paul Rayment in *Slow Man*, David Lurie is a divorced, unloved, loveless, lonely, ageing man, a disembodied intellect in the Kantian mode, a monadic individual, and, like him, has a strongly erotic imagination. Significantly, however, Lurie has a child, a grown up daughter, whereas Rayment is childless. Both these men need to transcend the limitations of their egoism and their eroticism, and develop a connectedness with others by means of charity or sympathetic imagination or, as Marais calls it, a self-substituting responsibility. This includes coming to terms with their own animal nature not only in the Eros they share with animals but also in their common mortality. Lurie has to realise that the ideas of an immortal soul and

an afterlife may be illusions, and that souls are necessarily embodied, that the idea of disembodied souls may well be incoherent. Thus Lurie's growing awareness of the individuality of animals will also be traced and related to his growing self-awareness.

At the beginning of *Disgrace* Lurie is shown to be almost completely self-centred and complacent, concerned exclusively with his own needs, as the opening lines reveal: "For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well" (Coetzee, 1999a, 1). Concerning the prostitute Soraya, whom he visits once a week, he reflects that "he finds her entirely satisfactory" (1). His complacency is evident in his reflections on his happiness (a central concept both to ancient virtue ethics and modern utilitarianism):

He is in good health, his mind is clear. By profession he is, or has been, a scholar, and scholarship still engages, intermittently, the core of him. He lives within his income, within his temperament, within his emotional means. Is he happy? By most measurements, yes, he believes he is. However, he has not forgotten the last chorus of *Oedipus*: Call no man happy until he is dead. (2)

His erotic desires also seek to express themselves in the form of music, an opera on Byron: "What he wants to write is music; *Byron in Italy*, a meditation on love between the sexes in the form of a chamber opera" (4). His complacency is reinforced again later, when he reflects on his weekly visits to Soraya, a prostitute:

It surprises him that ninety minutes a week of a woman's company are enough to make him happy, who used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage. His needs turn out to be quite light, after all, light and fleeting, like those of a butterfly. No emotion, or none but the deepest, the most unguessed-at: a ground bass of contentedness, like the hum of traffic that lulls the city-dweller to sleep, or like the silence of the night to countryfolk. (5)

When he intrudes into her private life it poisons their relationship; her two children "become presences between them, playing quiet as shadows in a corner of the room

where their mother and the strange man couple” (6). This shift in perspective shows that Lurie has some kind of conscience as well as some sympathetic imagination, imagining how he must appear to her children: she is no longer merely a prostitute but a mother. Her individuation disturbs him. The reference to the children as if they were ghosts also echoes his thoughts about his declining attractiveness: “Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost” (7). These references to ghostly presences show that Lurie believes in the possibility of disembodied spirits, which is linked to his belief that humans are superior to animals since they are not *merely* embodied. It also reveals a conflict within him between his academic abstractedness and an unconscious desire to be more fully grounded or connected with others, with individual, concrete existence.

Eventually Soraya refuses to see him any more. He returns to the “agency” to find a substitute, but he cannot find a satisfactory replacement; besides the generic name “Soraya” the commodification of sex is evident in the description that there are “lots of exotics to choose from—Malaysian, Thai, Chinese, you name it” (8). These generic terms deny the women their individuality and there may be the seeds of Lurie’s future moral growth in the fact that he values the individual qualities of his Soraya and wishes to know more about her as an individual. After a disastrous and short-lived affair with the new departmental secretary, he considers the possibility of castration (only hypothetically though) to solve the problem of his animal needs:

He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business. A clearing of the decks, at least, so that one can turn one’s mind to the proper business of the old: preparing to die.

Might one approach a doctor and ask for it? A simple enough operation, surely: they do it to animals every day, and animals survive well enough, if one ignores a certain residue of sadness. (9)

His thoughts on animals are rather abstract, anthropomorphic and sentimental at

this stage: he projects onto the abstract category of “animals” his own anxieties and sadness about his waning opportunities for sex. Significantly, his thoughts on castration echo his thoughts on the “emasculated institution of learning” (4) at which he teaches. He does not consider the possibility of a virtuous abstention from sex, the exercise of self-discipline that the Cynics apparently practised, but, instead, a “technical” solution, typical of an instrumentalist, technocratic society. His failure to control his erotic impulse, his “animal” passion, which will lead him into disgrace, is foreshadowed by some striking animal imagery when he phones Soraya and she screams at him never to phone her again with a shrillness that appals him: “But then what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen’s nest, into the home of her cubs?” (10).

When he brings Melanie home he is fully aware of the enormity of the situation:

...the girl he has brought home is not just thirty years his junior: she is a student, his student, under his tutelage. No matter what passes between them now, they will have to meet again as teacher and pupil. Is he prepared for that? (12)

Lurie is clearly taking advantage of his student, using his academic authority and patriarchal status in pursuit of his passion, since he is no longer a youthful lover on equal terms with his beloved. The image of ghosts is repeated when Lurie shows Melanie the video of the dancers:

Two dancers on a bare stage move through their steps. Recorded by a stroboscopic camera their images, ghosts of their movements, fan out behind them like wingbeats. It is a film he saw a quarter of a century ago but is still captivated by it: the instant of the present and the past of that instant, caught in the same space. (14-15)

Lurie uses music, wine and conversation, full of erotic innuendos, to seduce Melanie, justifying his request to her to spend the night with him on the grounds that:

‘Because a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.’ (16)



This is specious reasoning merely serving his erotic impulses. However, he destroys the erotic atmosphere with his overly literary words:

‘From fairest creatures we desire increase,’ he says, ‘that thereby beauty’s rose might never die.’

Not a good move. Her smile loses its playful, mobile quality. The pentameter, whose cadence once served so well to oil the serpent’s words, now only estranges. (16)

There is the suggestion that his literary background has blinded him to the concrete realities of the situation: he justifies his dubious behaviour with idealistic and poetic sentiments. The reference to the serpents not only alludes to the temptation of Eve by Satan, but it also echoes Lurie’s earlier description of his sexual intercourse with Soraya as “rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (3). This connection between Lurie and Satan (and also, by implication, Byron) is ironically presented later when Lurie gives a class on Byron’s Lucifer while Melanie’s boyfriend sits in the lecture theatre.

His strong moral awareness that what he is doing is wrong is clear in the opening words of Chapter 3: “That is where he should end it. But he does not” (18). There is a powerful conflict between his conscience and his desire, and even though his desire wins, it does show that he has a conscience. He obtains her telephone number, thus breaching the confidentiality of student records. When he phones her, she answers “Hello”:

In the one word he hears all her uncertainty. Too young. She will not know how to deal with him; he ought to let her go. But he is in the grip of something. Beauty’s rose: the poem drives straight as an arrow. She does not own herself; perhaps he does not own himself either. (18)

The problematic morality of what he is doing is further complicated by descriptions of her child-like body and the extreme age difference between the two of them: “Her hips are as slim as a twelve-year-old’s” (19) and “*A child!* he thinks: *No more than*

*a child! What am I doing?* Yet his heart lurches with desire” (20). Still later: “He makes a bed for her in his daughter’s room” (26) and, much later, when she stays over at his house:

He sits down on the bed, draws her to him. In his arms she begins to sob miserably. Despite all, he feels a tingling of desire. ‘There, there,’ he whispers, trying to comfort her. ‘Tell me what is wrong.’ Almost he says, ‘Tell Daddy what is wrong.’ (26)

The reference to “Daddy” not only indicates the patriarchal power that Lurie has abused but also suggests an incestuous paedophilia, particularly since Melanie is in his daughter’s bed.

On the first occasion he has sex with Melanie, it is clear that she is an unwilling partner. When he takes her to lunch, “[a]t the restaurant she has no appetite, stares out glumly over the sea” (19). When they first have sex, the act is described purely from his perspective and according to his needs and desires: “though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion” (19). Her shame is evident in the way she averts her face when she leaves. He is completely indifferent to her feelings; she is merely the object of his desire.

Situational irony is evident in his discussion of the verb “usurp upon” (21) in his class about Wordsworth’s experience of the summit of Mont Blanc, since his definition of the verb perfectly sums up his relations with Melanie: “*usurp upon* means to intrude or encroach upon. *Usurp*, to take over entirely, is the perfective of *usurp upon*; usurping completes the act of usurping upon” (21), although the irony escapes Lurie. He is more aware, however, of the ironic relevance to his relationship with Melanie of his discussion of Romantic imagination, idealism and sense-experience, of the unfallen world of pure forms and the fallen world of sense experience, and of a need to wed the two, a process that he will undergo by the end of the novel: he will escape his lofty and abstract literary solipsism and get his hands dirtied dealing with the bodies of dogs. Also, his idealisation—or perhaps, rather, degradation—of

women merely as sexual objects, his narrow preoccupation with physical beauty, will also be grounded—and cured—by his affair with the unattractive Bev Shaw.

Lurie justifies his actions to himself while secretly watching Melanie practise for the play in the darkened auditorium:

An unseemly business, sitting in the dark spying on a girl (unbidden the word *letching* comes to him). Yet the old men whose company he seems to be on the point of joining, the tramps and drifters with their stained raincoats and cracked false teeth and hairy earholes—all of them were once upon a time children of God. Can they be blamed for clinging to the last to their place at the sweet banquet of the senses? (24)

His depiction of old men is extremely unflattering, even ludicrous, and he does not seem to consider the possibility of a dignified old age. It is a fallacious justification for his desires, and one too literary to be sincere. Melanie's performance does excite him, though, and the next day he appears at her flat without warning. Melanie's unwillingness to have sex on the second occasion is clear:

He has given her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her. When he takes her in his arms, her limbs crumple like a marionette's. Words heavy as clubs thud into the delicate whorl of her ear. 'No, not now!' she says, struggling. 'My cousin will be back!' (24-25)

And:

She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes. . . .

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away. (25)

The allusion to his lecture on Wordsworth is unmistakable in the word “intruder” and the other imagery is equally violent: “crumple,” “clubs,” “thud,” “die” and “jaws of the fox.” The reference to the marionette emphasizes Lurie’s dominance of Melanie.

However, there is a difference on the third occasion, when she stays over at his house:

He makes love to her one more time, on the bed in his daughter’s room. It is good, as good as the first time; he is beginning to learn the way her body moves. She is quick, and greedy for experience. If he does not sense in her a fully sexual appetite, that is only because she is young. One moment stands out in recollection, when she hooks a leg behind his buttocks to draw him in closer: as the tendon of her inner thigh tightens against him, he feels a surge of joy and desire. Who knows, he thinks: there might, despite all, be a future. (29)

The notion of the moment that stands out in recollection appears to refer once again to Romanticism, to the power of the poetic imagination to recollect experience in all its intensity. Despite the morally objectionable actions of Lurie, there is a dark, ironic humour in his reflection, in the moment of climax, a moment when one’s rational capacities are at their weakest and one is least able to plan for the future, that he may have a future with her. Here she is depicted as a willing participant in the sexual act, although there is the suggestion that she has lost her innocence, that Lurie has corrupted her. The fact remains that he has taken advantage of her and abused his position of trust. It also appears that she is beginning to manipulate him, because the same afternoon, her boyfriend pays Lurie a menacing visit in his office. When she reappears in class her boyfriend accompanies her, and, intensely ironically, the theme of the lecture is the scandalous life of Byron: “Scandal: A pity that must be his theme, but he is in no state to improvise” (31). (Lucifer’s name shares the same root as Lucy’s.) Particularly ironic is his discussion of Byron’s depiction of Lucifer since the description fits him perfectly too. Also ironic is the fact that Melanie’s boyfriend, a stranger to the class, answers Lurie’s questions: “ ‘So what kind of creature is this

Lucifer?’ ” (33):

‘He does what he feels like. He doesn’t care if it’s good or bad. He just does it.’ (33)

It is obvious that the young man is speaking not just about Lucifer but Lurie. This is confirmed by Lurie’s reply:

‘Exactly. Good or bad, he just does it. He doesn’t act on principle but on impulse, and the source of his impulse is dark to him. Read a few lines further: “His madness was not of the head, but heart.” A mad heart. What is a mad heart?’ (33)

One gets the impression that Lurie’s reading in Romantic literature has confused rather than enlightened him, that it has led him astray, that the source of his impulse is dark to *him* and that *his* heart is mad. His lecture reads almost like a personal confession or apology:

‘Note that we are not asked to condemn this being with the mad heart, this being with whom there is something constitutionally wrong. On the contrary, we are invited to understand and sympathize. But there is a limit to sympathy. For though he lives among us, he is not one of us. He is exactly what he calls himself: a *thing*, that is a monster. Finally, Byron will suggest, it will not be possible to love him, not in the deeper, more human sense of the word. He will be condemned to solitude.’ (32-33)

This passage is also prophetic about the fate of Lurie: he will become outlawed for his disgraceful transgression and isolated from everyone. Coetzee makes the connections between fallen creatures explicit: “Byron, Lucifer, Cain, it is all the same to them” (34). Lurie could have added his own name to the list, which significantly includes Cain, who was mentioned in the previous chapter.

Coetzee describes twice how Lurie’s heart goes out to Melanie, describing her as a “poor little bird” (32) and “*my little dove*” (34). There is, once again, a strong irony when Lurie reprimands Melanie for missing a test, “Melanie, I have responsibilities”

(35) but she gets up defiantly and leaves: “Responsibilities: she does not dignify the word with a reply” (35). Like Lucifer, Lurie has put impulse above principle, erotic love above the rule of law, but hypocritically resorts to the language of justice to try to avoid getting into trouble himself.

His fall into personal disgrace deepens, as does the dark irony, when he fails to tell the truth to Melanie’s father on the telephone, after Mr Isaacs asks him to find out what is wrong with his daughter, and he thinks to himself: “*I am the worm in the apple*, I should have said” (37). The disgrace becomes public when Isaacs confronts him openly:

‘We put our children in the hands of you people because we think we can trust you. If we can’t trust the university, who can we trust? We never thought we were sending our daughter into a nest of vipers.’ (38)

Lurie is unable to respond and reflects instead: “A viper: how can he deny it?” (38). This may be a reference once again to Satan, this time in the garden of Eden. In fact, he had initially met Melanie in the “old college gardens” (11) and “[w]hen he made the first move, in the college gardens, he had thought of it as a quick little affair—quickly in, quickly out” (27). However, the metaphor of the viper, or snake, also betrays a speciesist mentality shared by Isaacs and Lurie. For Lurie, animals are merely abstractions and allegorical, an attitude that will be challenged by his work in the animal shelter.

Soon he receives from the Vice-Rector’s office notification of a complaint against him by a student under the charge of harassment. Accompanying the notification are legal documents representing the beginnings of legal proceedings against him. His Romantic ethic of Eros has led to a stark clash with an ethics of justice, and he struggles to concentrate when reading the copies of the code and constitution. Instead, he imagines how Melanie, her father and her cousin went and laid charges against him, flattering himself that Melanie did so reluctantly. He operates much more comfortably in an imaginative mode.

It is clear that the procedures are fair to both victim and perpetrator, yet Lurie

makes no attempt to assert his rights within this ethics of justice. He makes no attempt to defend himself or have a lawyer represent him in the initial meeting with the Vice-Chancellor and later when he faces the committee. This seems quite foolish on his part, perhaps suggesting a disrespect for the rule of law and ethics of justice, or even a devilish pride and intransigence, but can also be seen as a consistent adherence to his romantic ethic of passion. It is clear that certain female colleagues would like to go further in punishing him than the law permits:

Elaine Winter takes her cue. She has never liked him; she regards him as a hangover from the past, the sooner cleared away, the better. (40)

Later, during the actual hearing, Dr Farodia Rassool says: “If he is simply going through the motions, I urge that we impose the severest penalty” (51), even though the hearing has no power to punish or pass sentence. Their dislike, no doubt, also stems from the nature of his offence; there is a sense of female solidarity, especially evident in the “Rape Awareness Week” (43) organized by the students on campus. On the other hand, his male colleagues try to protect him as much as the law permits and to advise him how to act in his own interests, as they perceive it, even suggesting that he hires a female lawyer to represent him, advice which he ignores. There seems, disturbingly, to be some male solidarity, fraternity set against sorority, although Lurie rejects Hakim’s moral support: “He has known Hakim for years, they used to play tennis together in his tennis-playing days, but he is in no mood now for male chumminess” (42). Perhaps Coetzee is suggesting that an ethics of justice inevitably leads to scenarios of conflicting rights, although the idea of the battle of the sexes is as old as literature.

Some critics have interpreted the committee of enquiry allegorically, seeing a similarity in David Lurie’s refusal to show contrition to the refusal of white South Africans to refuse to show contrition for their complicity in apartheid. Indeed, his stubbornness before the committee resembles the refusal of many white South Africans to accept the very terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, Boehmer makes a strong case for an alternative reading:

[I]n *Disgrace* ...secular atonement is proposed as an alternative to the public and Christianized ritual of redemption through confession, of reconciliation through a possibly self-serving catharsis, or ‘real actions,’ which the TRC, for example, has offered. (Boehmer, 2006, 137)

Lurie is appalled when his lawyer suggests he consider “sensitivity training. Community service. Counselling” (43) and dismisses it arrogantly and contemptuously. Yet by the end of the novel he is doing voluntary community service by working in the dog shelter, except by then it is a sincere and meaningful private act whereas if he had agreed to it earlier it would have been merely an insincere public display. Perhaps it is the apparent hypocrisy, the lip service to political correctness, that prompts him to dig in his heels. His response, “To fix me? To cure me? To cure me of inappropriate desires?” (43), is an allusion to the castration of animals, but “inappropriate desires” is also a phrase that will recur throughout *Slow Man*.

He has lunch with his ex-wife Rosalind and when he mentions the possibility of spending the holiday with Lucy, his daughter from his first marriage, she raises the topic of the trouble he is in:

‘Don’t expect sympathy from me, David, and don’t expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age. Everyone’s hand will be against you, and why not? Really, how *could you?*’ (44)

Lurie has to admit to himself that she may be right, even though he does not like her tone of “passionate recrimination” (44), which shows some capacity for self-criticism within him. Despite the references to the times in which they are living (which Attridge has remarked upon), a time of bureaucratic managerialism and an impersonal, puritanical ethics of justice, Lurie still insists on his Romantic ethic of passionate love, almost petulantly: “You haven’t asked whether I love her. Aren’t you supposed to ask that as well?” (45). He defends Melanie against Rosalind’s comment that she is dragging his name through the mud, to which Rosalind responds:

‘Don’t blame her! Whose side are you on? Of course I blame her! I



blame you and I blame her. The whole thing is disgraceful from beginning to end. Disgraceful and vulgar too. And I'm not sorry for saying so.' (45)

Rosalind uses the word, "disgraceful," and is the first character to use a form of the title word of the novel, a word that Lurie will apply to himself, thereby branding himself with something like the mark of Cain, a fallen state that he will come to accept as permanent, as Boehmer argues. Rosalind appears to have embraced the sexual Puritanism behind bureaucratic managerialism. She has, however, functioned something like a conscience to Lurie, and he has been forced to perceive the situation differently. What he suppresses, however, is the fact that Melanie was not an equal party in this disgrace, but that he had taken advantage of her. He is still blinded by his literary Romantic ideals and by the Byronic assumption of male entitlement. The language of disgrace is echoed by Lurie himself when he imaginatively adds to the newspaper report that Rosalind brings to his attention the next day:

David Lurie (1945-?), commentator upon, and disgraced disciple of, William Wordsworth. (46)

The hearing is headed by Manas Mathabane, Professor of Religious Studies, apparently an allusion to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which was also headed by a black man and a religious figure, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It also introduces the idea of a religious, specifically Christian, process of confession and contrition, as examined by Boehmer above. The language of Lurie's reflections is moralistic, that of a Christian virtue ethics, and yet there is no note of contrition or remorse:

He does not feel nervous. On the contrary, he feels quite sure of himself. His heart beats evenly, he has slept well. Vanity, he thinks, the dangerous vanity of the gambler; vanity and self-righteousness. He is going into this in the wrong spirit. But he does not care. (47)

One could also add "pride," the sin that caused Lucifer's downfall. Lurie arrogantly answers Rassool's question whether it is prudent of him to accept Melanie's charge

without reading it: “No. There are more important things in life than being prudent” (49). His pride and arrogance prevent him from accepting counselling and advice, as does his belief that he has done nothing wrong (54): “Frankly, what you want from me is not a response but a confession” (51) and:

‘Then what do you want me to do? Remove what Dr Rassool calls the subtle mockery from my tone? Shed tears of contrition? What will be enough to save me?’ (51-52)

The male members of the committee express their desire to help him and Lurie responds: “In this chorus of goodwill . . . I hear no female voice” (52), once again foregrounding the battle of the sexes. However, he does go on to confess, but in an unrepentant, even defiant, spirit: “I became a servant of Eros” (52). Rassool objects: “Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part” (53). Lurie reflects on the word “abuse,” noting the tone of righteousness with which it is spoken, but in the end he cannot deny that he was in a position of power over Melanie. There seems to be polyphony at work here in the juxtaposition of the different ethical discourses. The hearing appears to involve a complication between the language of rights (the ethic of justice) and the language of virtue ethics, both that of pagan, or Romantic, eros and of Christian contrition. When Swarts intervenes, Lurie responds: “You mean, will I humble myself and ask for clemency?” (54). When Lurie admits guilt but not that he was wrong, Rassool says, “The statement should come from him, in his own words. Then we can see if it comes from his heart” (54), echoing Costello’s appeal to her audience to open their hearts in *Lives*. Lurie responds sceptically: “And you trust yourself to divine that, from the words I use—to divine whether it comes from my heart?” (54). Thus, the hearing ends on an unsatisfactory note with Lurie admitting to guilt but not specifying what he did wrong.

His response to the student reporters following the hearing, who ask him “Are you sorry?” and “Do you regret what you did?” (56), is quite unrepentant: “No,

...I was enriched by the experience” (56). He has not begun to enter into Melanie’s experience of the affair. The animal and hunting imagery that follows suggests that not just Lurie but also the reporters are predatory:

Confessions, apologies: why this thirst for abasement? A hush falls. They circle around him like hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish it off. (56)

The statement drawn up by the committee reads:

‘I acknowledge without reservation serious abuses of the human rights of the complainant, as well as abuse of the authority delegated to me by the university. I sincerely apologize to both parties and accept whatever appropriate penalty may be imposed.’ (57)

However, the Rector is only prepared to accept it if Lurie makes a statement expressing a spirit of repentance. Lurie stubbornly sticks to his position, rejecting the religious discourse of repentance:

‘I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, another universe of discourse.’ (58)

The discourse of an ethics of justice has the final word, although Lurie rejects it in his heart. He also rejects a Christian ethics of confession, adhering to his Romantic ethics of self-realisation, which shares something with the Socratic injunction “Know thyself,” although Socrates would not have approved of the Romantic emphasis on emotion. In a sense Lurie can be understood not simply as stubborn but also as principled in refusing to make an insincere confession of repentance. As Boehmer argues, he will go on to pursue a secular penance later in his work at the animal shelter in a permanent state of disgrace without the chance of absolution. To use the terms taken from “Before the Gate,” Lurie will choose DOG rather than GOD as his path to salvation, living, like Cain, in an perpetual state of sin; as will be

argued later, dogs function as scapegoats in the novel, the bearers of human sin. This would fit Coetzee's discussion of the inescapably endless nature of confession without the possibility of the intervention of grace, except, possibly, through suffering and charity. The concept of "charity," in the sense of selfless or altruistic love, seems to refer once again to Christian ethics, but perhaps a case for a secular kind of charity can be made. This very stubbornness and intransigence of Lurie, resembling that of Lucifer, would make his moral development all the more remarkable, even though he does not come close to Costello's level of enlightenment. He is like an Everyman, very reluctant to change his ways, very complacent in his ignorance—Socrates mocks the complacency of ignorant people in Plato's *Symposium*—and yet makes the first steps towards moral growth, showing how even the most hardened adult, proud in his intellect, can change fundamentally, even late in life.

Lurie's movement from Cape Town to the tiny town of Salem in the Eastern Cape can be seen as a type of ironic pastoral, a movement from the corrupting influences of city life to the supposed purity of country life, the beginning of his "Cynical" transformation to a more virtuous, basic, doglike existence. As an ironic pastoral it resembles *In the Heart of the Country* both in terms of portraying a difficult father-daughter relationship and a moment of climactic violence, the rape of a white woman by a black man. It also recalls *Waiting for the Barbarians* as an example of frontier literature in its being set in the Eastern Cape. However, while these genres of the pastoral and frontier literature are treated ironically by Coetzee, Lurie, who uses the language of these genres, does not do so with any profound irony. His Romantic, erotic imagination seems to be especially out of place in interpreting the conditions of Lucy's chosen way of life in terms he can understand. During the course of his stay there, however, his erotic imagination will be gradually transformed into a more sympathetic imagination, his egoism into altruism. The transformation is only partial but it is remarkable that it can happen at all considering the intransigence of his character and attests to the power of Lurie's imagination. He does not have the benefit of

a Costello-like guiding figure to show him the way to a more enlightened state but has to start his transformation from within, which is possible mainly because of the polyphony of voices within his own consciousness, as is evident in the way he keeps modifying his proposed opera in response to the different voices within him. He does, however, have the example of Lucy and Bev Shaw even though he never fully comprehends their set of values towards which he is initially highly dismissive.

While Lurie idealizes the apparent purity and simplicity of Lucy's way of life, through the retrospective lenses of the pastoral genre and early colonialism, for her, it will be argued, her chosen lifestyle is actually a forward-looking movement towards ecology, as well as an attempt to recreate Eden on Earth, not through sentimental imaginings, but through hard, peasant toil and through an ethical way of life including vegetarianism. On her piece of land Lucy practices autarky (a concept important to the Cynics) and vegetarianism, and cares for animals. Her ideals of non-violence, economic independence and respect for life are embedded in her land. Were she to give up her land and relocate to the Netherlands after her rape, as her father later suggests, she would have given up her dream to create a better world and capitulated to violence. Her stubborn, Cynical refusal to budge and her persistence despite personal violation make her the real hero of the novel. However, the fact that she could not buy the land on her own but that her father "helped her buy her it" (60) already hints at the social framework of patriarchal power in South African society that makes her rape possible—patriarchy translated into male entitlement—and shows that she can only realise her dreams of female independence after some awful compromises.

As her name suggests, Lucy has a far more enlightened complex of beliefs and values than her father, a system of ethics that he cannot fathom, although it is a position towards which David starts moving at the end of the novel despite himself and despite not fully comprehending it. Her position is never, however, fully articulated but is embedded in the place she lives and works and embodied in her actions and words. Her value system is rooted in the African soil, not detached, literary and European like her father's. Ecofeminism's emphasis on the interdependence of

people and its rejection of Kantian autonomy and individualism resemble the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which states that a person is a person because of other persons. Her lesbian form of feminism tends towards independence from men, a sort of female Cynicism, but not from people—her plot of land can be seen as a kind of Island of Lesbos, which is forcefully colonised by men, in much the way Costello suggests the land of the Houyhnhnms in Swift’s story could reasonably be imagined to be forcefully subdued by men (*The Lives of Animals*, 57). After her rape the Cynical strand becomes more dominant even though she appears to give up some of her independence to the patriarch, Petrus. Although she appears to submit to male domination, she nonetheless takes responsibility for the child and in this sense she owns the future, since the child will imbibe her values. Unlike the women at the Technical University of Cape Town, Lucy does not insist on her rights, but rather acts according to an ethics of care, something Lurie fails to understand. Lucy may have been violated but she has not been destroyed and through her child her values will live on. She will maintain a degree of independence and her place on the land. It may be little, but it is enough, and it may be the beginnings of a gradual movement towards a more enlightened society.

Lurie’s literary, Eurocentric preconceptions prevent him from respecting the alterity of his daughter’s home and her way of life. Despite his idealising her lifestyle, he is concerned about her safety in such an isolated place, and expresses approval of her guard dogs and the rifle she has recently bought—Coetzee also takes the opportunity to take a humorous swipe at philosophy, touching on the battle between philosophy and poetry that is so central to *The Lives of Animals*, when Lucy points out that it will not help much during a burglary if two people rather than one are staying in the house and Lurie replies:

‘That’s very philosophical.’

‘Yes. When all else fails, philosophize.’

‘But you have a weapon.’

‘I have a rifle. I’ll show you. I bought it from a neighbour. I haven’t

ever used it, but I have it.’

‘Good. An armed philosopher. I approve.’

Dogs and a gun; bread in the oven and a crop in the earth. Curious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share. (60-61)

Lucy is clearly reluctant to be compelled to own a gun, it being part of a male culture of violence and colonialism, so clearly expressed by Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, and the irony is that it will be used against her to kill the very dogs that are supposed to protect her. The reference to history is one of many references to the times in which Lurie lives, as Attridge has noted, but what is significant here is that Lucy seems to be moving against the times, her organic farming standing in opposition to the hegemony of industrialised farming, her mainly subsistence farming, in opposition to market-oriented cash-crop production, her local production, to international production. Indeed, her farming need not be seen as retrogressive, but as part of an organic revolution in agriculture. After she has shown him the kennels, he thinks:

This is how she makes a living: from the kennels, and from selling flowers and garden produce. Nothing could be more simple. (61)

After being shown the vegetable gardens, Lurie imagines Lucy to be a frontier farmer:

She talks easily about these matters. A frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and daffodils. The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein. Perhaps history has learned a lesson.

They walk back along an irrigation furrow. Lucy’s bare toes grip the red earth, leaving clear prints. A solid woman, embedded in a new life. Good! If this is to be what he leaves behind—this daughter, this woman—then he does not have to be ashamed. (62)

Lurie seems unable to understand his daughter except in such stereotypical and historical terms as “*boervrou*,” “settler,” and “frontier farmer,” thereby failing to recognise her individuality and otherness. Lucy’s solidity and embeddedness stand in strong contrast to the disconnected and abstract life of a city-dweller, particularly an intellectual like Lurie. It is precisely this lack of connection of urban dwellers to the source of their food, their ignorance of how food is produced in post-industrial societies, that makes the cruelties of the industrial farming of animals possible. However, Lurie’s imagination does at least empower him to see in terms of striking visual images the contrast between his urban lifestyle and his daughter’s rural one, and this imagination will help him to begin transcending his own limitations, although it will require the violent and traumatic event of his daughter’s violation to force him to begin making this transformation. His mentioning that he need not be ashamed to leave such a daughter behind is not a reference to his personal disgrace, but rather to the idea in Plato’s *Symposium* that the eros inherent in all living creatures is based on the desire to possess immortality, which manifests itself in the desire to procreate offspring, whether these are biological children, artworks, scientific discoveries, or enduring legislation. This is the self-conscious motive behind his desire to create an opera on Byron, as he tells Lucy:

‘One wants to leave something behind. Or at least a man wants to leave something behind. It’s easier for a woman.’

‘Why is it easier for a woman?’

‘Easier, I mean, to produce something with a life of its own.’ (63)

The irony here is that he is proud of his “creation,” Lucy, despite merely being her father and even though he does not really comprehend her. These Platonic ideas are echoed in “What Is Realism?” as discussed in Chapter 2, when John dreams of the birth of a novel in relation to his mother, Elizabeth Costello. The Platonism is further reinforced here when Lurie admits that work on his opera has not progressed very far since “it’s all in the realm of ideas as yet” (63), the “realm of ideas” being a very Platonic phrase. Thus Lurie’s imagination and love at this stage can still be



characterised as Platonic and erotic, the desire to possess beauty and goodness for oneself, rather than Socratic or altruistic, namely the desire to assist others. This possessive, erotic imagination has been related by Camille Paglia to what she calls the aggressive Western eye, a gaze that separates the subject from a world of others reduced to objects, which is evident in the way Lurie ruthlessly looks at the bodies of women and judges them according to how far they realise a physical ideal of beauty. In contrast to vulgar ideas of “Platonic Love,” the physical, sexual attractiveness—not just the spiritual qualities—of an individual *is* important according to Plato, since it is the starting point in an ascent to ever higher and more abstract ideals of beauty, culminating in the vision of the Form of the Good, or Absolute Beauty. The power of Lurie’s erotic imagination is such that it overwhelms him at certain moments and blinds him to the individuality of women, as it did when he made love to Melanie, and does again when he walks on his own from the farm to the main road:

Without warning a memory of the girl comes back: of her neat little breasts with their upstanding nipples, of her smooth flat belly. A ripple of desire passes through him. Evidently whatever it was is not over yet. (65)

He judges his own daughter whom he hasn’t seen for a year:

For a moment he does not recognise her. A year has passed and she has put on weight. Her hips and breasts are now (he searches for the best word) ample. (59)

Later, after the memory of Melanie overwhelms him, he thinks:

*Ample* is a kind word for Lucy. Soon she will be positively heavy. Letting herself go, as happens when one withdraws from the field of love. (65)

Later, on his first Saturday afternoon, he joins her in her room and reflects that she is “[a] woman in the flower of her years, attractive despite her heaviness, despite the unflattering clothes” (76) and “[a]ttractive . . . yet lost to men” (65). Of course, he is only considering erotic, sexual love here, perhaps a heterosexual version of the

homoerotic love discussed in Plato's *Symposium*, not the vulgarised idea of idealised, "Platonic" love but the fully erotic one of the dialogue. However, he is capable of a more parental love, although this is also ultimately Platonic in that it concerns the extension of one's own existence through one's offspring:

From the day his daughter was born he has felt for her nothing but the most spontaneous, most unstinting love. (76)

His reflections pass through a series of questions concerning her sexuality which he considers but decides against asking her, showing a limit to his willingness to comprehend her or intrude upon her thoughts. When Lurie meets Bev Shaw earlier that Saturday morning he judges her very harshly:

He has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck. He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive. It is a resistance he has had to Lucy's friends before. Nothing to be proud of: a prejudice that has settled in his mind, settled down. His mind has become a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. He ought to chase them out, sweep the premises clean. But he does not care to do so, or does not care enough. (72)

The Platonic love based on attractiveness and the more Christian one of care are both evident in this passage, and it is clear that at this stage Lurie strongly associates with the erotic. Yet he has the insight to recognise that his lack of care is a character fault; it can be called a Socratic insight in recognising one's own limitations, as opposed to Platonic perfectionism. Indeed, this recognition is the germ of his growing toward an ethics of care later in the novel. His dislike of women who make no attempt to look attractive is particularly disturbing, since it assumes that women should present themselves as objects of male desire. When love does transform Lurie's soul it is not by means of Platonic love that transcends the physical love of the beauty manifested in individual bodies, moving ever upwards to a vision of the Idea of Absolute Beauty itself, but rather an altruistic love, charity, that recognises the value of the embodied

existence of individual beings, and not only the embodied souls of human beings. It is a movement not toward abstractness but toward concreteness. The metaphysical counterpart to Lurie's Platonic eroticism is a belief in the possibility of disembodied and immortal souls, a belief he expresses on several occasions, contrasting it with animal bodies which for him lack souls.

His aggressive, objectifying gaze is even more evident when he goes to help Bev in the clinic for the first time, his imagination alive with unflattering images:

Her hair is a mass of little curls. Does she make the curls herself, with tongs? Unlikely: it would take hours every day. They must grow that way. He has never seen such *tessitura* from close by. The veins on her ears are visible as a filigree of red and purple. The veins of her nose too. And then a chin that comes straight out of her chest, like a pouter pigeon's. As an ensemble, remarkably unattractive. (81-2)

If Lurie tends to value women according to their degree of attractiveness, thus not respecting their individuality, he barely notices animals as individual beings at all, referring to the dogs in their kennel by the generic term, although he does notice how one of them, a bulldog bitch, seems bored. It is Lucy who individualises, perhaps even humanises, the dog:

'Katy? She's abandoned. The owners have done a bunk. Account unpaid for months. I don't know what I'm going to do about her. Try to find her a home, I suppose. She's sulking, but otherwise she's all right. She gets taken out every day for exercise. By me or Petrus. It's part of the package. (62)

There seems no suggestion that Lucy is considering having Katy "put down;" indeed, she later suggests she will adopt her. Katy is later humanised again when they take her on a walk the next day and she struggles to defecate: "The bitch continues to strain, hanging her tongue out, glancing around shiftily as if ashamed to be watched" (68). Wendy Woodward, in a book about the portrayal of animal subjectivity in South African literature, points out that, with the exception of Katy and the lame

dog, Driepoot, the animals in *Disgrace* are not individuated. Furthermore, Katy and Driepoot, despite being individuated, are not portrayed as agents, namely initiators of actions or autonomous subjects, nor does Coetzee attempt to enter into their subjective experience (Woodward, 2008, 128-29). Thus, while *Disgrace* goes further than *The Lives of Animals* in describing actual experiences with animals, it still does so from a human perspective.

Lurie also pays no attention when Lucy first mentions her “help” (60) and only asks about him when she mentions his name (62). She mentions that he is her “new assistant. In fact, since March co-proprietor. Quite a fellow” (62). Lurie soon has an opportunity to talk to Petrus who tells him:

‘I look after the dogs and I work in the garden. Yes.’ Petrus gives a broad smile. ‘I am the gardener and the dog-man.’ He reflects for a moment. ‘The dog-man,’ he repeats, savouring the phrase. (64)

The word “gardener” reminds one of the protagonist in *Life & Times of Michael K*. However, Petrus is no mere worker and he grows in stature as the novel progresses, but not always in a positive light, and always as the uncontested patriarch. Lucy mentions that he has another wife and family in Adelaide, establishing Petrus as a polygamist and a man of some substance in African terms. His role as “dog-man” will, significantly, be taken over by Lurie.

Lucy invites Lurie to stay on her farm as long as he likes. When he says he would not like to outstay his welcome as a visitor, she suggests they call it “refuge” (65) to which he replies: “You mean asylum? It’s not as bad as that, Lucy. I’m not a fugitive” (66) and tells her how he refused the administration’s compromise offer of taking counselling, pronouncing melodramatically (as he admits to himself) that he would rather be shot, but stopping short of suggesting that they would like to have him castrated. Lucy finds this extreme and he explains that:

‘These are puritanical times. Private life is public business. Prurience is respectable, prurience and sentiment. They wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact. I wouldn’t oblige.’

(66)

Once again there is a reference to the times in which they live, but its being specified as “puritanical times” clearly links it with the Weberian, Protestant work ethic critiqued by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* and by Coetzee in his most recent novels. Earlier in *Disgrace* it was criticised for its role in the “great rationalisation” and for its valorization of work. Here Lurie expresses his disgust toward the ethic’s denigration of sex, or sensuality. Lucy responds to her father’s stubbornness, saying “[y]ou shouldn’t be so unbending, David. It isn’t heroic to be unbending” (66) but invites him to stay on the farm for as long as he likes on whatever terms he chooses. She is remarkably unjudgmental about his affair with Melanie, apparently viewing her as an equal participant, which distances her from the women at the university who were quick to condemn Lurie. This is clear again in their conversation when they walk the dogs the next day, when she asks him “Why did she denounce you?” (69). When she asks whether he has thought of getting married again (to someone of his age), he justifies himself:

‘Do you remember Blake?’ he says. ‘Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires’?

‘Why do you quote that to me?’

‘Unacted desires can turn as ugly in the old as in the young.’

‘Therefore?’

‘Every woman I have been close to has taught me something about myself. To that extent they have made me a better person.’

‘I hope you are not claiming the reverse as well. That knowing you has turned your women into better people.’

He looks at her sharply. She smiles. ‘Just joking,’ she says. (69-70)

Despite the “joke,” Lucy is making an important point, hinting at the selfishness of Lurie’s maxim, belying his claim that erotic love has improved his character (which is one of the aims of Platonic love). Lurie uses Blake rather opportunistically to

justify the pursuit of his own sexual gratification, which would not be problematic in itself, so long as his relationships were reciprocal—which was not the case with Melanie—but there is no evidence to suggest that his affairs have ennobled him. His idea of love is completely self-regarding at this stage, which makes his turn towards other-regarding love later in the novel so much more striking.

After selling their produce at the Saturday market, Lucy and her father drop by at Bev and Bill Shaw's house (the Shaws' surname may allude to the vegetarianism and social activism of George Bernard Shaw). Lurie does not look forward to the visit and it is clear that the limits of his sympathetic imagination have already been reached; indeed, that he has preconceived opinions about the Shaws:

The Animal Welfare League, once an active charity in Grahamstown, has had to close down its operation. However, a handful of volunteers led by Bev Shaw still runs a clinic from the old premises.

He has nothing against the animal lovers with whom Lucy has been mixed up as long as he can remember. The world would no doubt be a worse place without them. So when Bev Shaw opens her front door he puts on a good face, though in fact he is repelled by the odours of cat urine and dog mangle and Jeyes Fluid that greet them.

The house is just as he had imagined it would be: rubbishy furniture, a clutter of ornaments . . . . There is not only Bev Shaw, there is Bill Shaw too . . . .

It has been a long morning, he is tired, the last thing he wants to do is trade small talk with these people. (72-3)

Lurie's observations are particularly uncharitable and his attitude toward them patronising. His gaze is hyper-critical, sharpened by moral, or aesthetic, distaste, and it appears as though he believes he can learn nothing of value from them. Starting as he does from an egoistic, Romantic ethic of self-realisation, he cannot comprehend a life of service to others, especially not to nonhuman others. After the visit Lucy discusses Bev with Lurie who notes that her work must be a losing battle. Lucy agrees:

‘Yes, it is. There is no funding any longer. On the list of the nation’s priorities, animals come nowhere.’

‘She must get despondent. You too.’

‘Yes. No. Does it matter? The animals she helps aren’t despondent. They are greatly relieved.’

‘That’s wonderful, then. I’m sorry, my child, I just find it hard to whip up an interest in the subject. It’s admirable, what you do, what she does, but to me animal-welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat.’ (73)

He is surprised at his outburst, which is callous to the point of being offensive, especially in light of his virtual rape of Melanie and the rape of his own daughter to come, and in its expression of casual violence towards animals, let alone its dismissiveness toward those who do difficult and soul-destroying work in (under-funded) animal clinics. This lack of concern with animals is thus linked to a lack of concern with people, specifically women, and is related not only to individuals like Lurie but to the ethos of South Africa and the priorities of its government. Rosemary Jolly makes the point that in the traditions of Western representations, and others, “that which is female, coporeal, black, and/or otherwise antirational (and therefore antimale) is allied with that which is animal” (Jolly, 2006, 150) and that “[t]he war on women in South Africa occupies the same discursive space as the war on animals in Elizabeth Costello’s discourse” (166). The words of Mahatma Ghandi come to mind, that one can measure the moral progress of a nation according to how it treats its animals (quoted in the epigraph to Chapter 7). Lurie’s reference to Lucy as “my child” in this context also seems patronising and his praise of animal-welfare people seems insincere. It is not clear that he is aware of the difference between animal welfare, which accepts the use of animals for human ends as long as it is done kindly, and animal rights, which rejects the idea that animals should be seen merely as means to human ends. Lucy notes that her father thinks she should be doing something better with her life, that

he does not approve of her friends because they will not lead her to a “higher life” (74). When he denies this, she asserts:

‘But it is true. They are not going to lead me to a higher life, and the reason is, there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals. That’s the example that people like Bev try to set. That’s the example I try to follow. To share some of our human privilege with the beasts. I don’t want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us.’ (74)

There are echoes both of *The Lives of Animals* and of “The Humanities in Africa” in Lucy’s words, especially in her hint about the suffering that humans inflict on animals. Bev Shaw resembles Sister Bridget, except without the religious fundamentalism. Both devote their lives to relieving suffering amongst the powerless and marginalised without expectation of recognition or profit, although it is unlikely that Sister Bridget would consider the suffering of animals to be of much moral significance, since her Catholicism denies the possibility that they can possess immortal souls. On the other hand, Bev is unlikely to believe in an afterlife. However, if Sister Bridget believes she serves a higher cause in the form of God, Bev and Lucy believe in no such higher cause. The ultimate object of their cause is not transcendent but descendent, not an abstract and disembodied immortal, perfect, supreme Being, but concrete and embodied mortal, imperfect, suffering beings. For them the capacity for suffering of the individual animal, a capacity they share with humans, is sufficient cause, and the fact of suffering is their ultimate authority. It is worth quoting Coetzee again in this respect:

[I]n South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. . . . [I]t is not that one *grants* the authority of the suffering body: the suffering body *takes* this authority: that is its power. To use other words: its power is undeniable. (Coetzee, 1992, 248)

This cuts against not only a religion like Christianity but also against a Platonic notion of a “higher life,” the exemplum of the Hellenism that Sister Bridget criticises



in “The Humanities in Africa,” where one’s erotic desire prompts one to ascend through ever higher objects of beauty, culminating in a vision of the Form of the Good. Lucy’s seems to be an extreme position, like the Cynicism of Diogenes, since it apparently questions the value of the highest products of civilisation: art, science and philosophy. It also thereby questions the value of Lurie’s own artistic project, his opera on Byron, an evaluation that appears to be confirmed by the decreasing ambition of his project as the novel progresses. This is not to say that the opera is unimportant but only that its significance changes in emphasis, mainly from an assertion of Byron’s (and therefore of Lurie’s) sexual prowess to the suffering, many years later, of the Contessa who was one of his conquests. In the end, Lucy is asserting the importance of a moral rather than an aesthetic life, the sharing of the suffering of others rather than the indulging of one’s own desires. It does thus closely resemble Buddhism, and Lucy’s mentioning the possibility of coming back as a dog or pig seems to reinforce such an interpretation, although it could be argued that she mentions this merely as a “thought experiment.” Lurie responds:

‘Lucy, my dearest, don’t be cross. Yes, I agree, this is the only life there is. As for animals, by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different. So if we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we feel guilty or fear retribution.’ (74)

Lurie’s response is described as a “homily” and can perhaps be dismissed as sanctimonious, complacent and insincere, especially his prescription that we should be kind to animals. He has not begun seriously to question his speciesism, his belief in human supremacy. His language is not that of animal rights but a human-centred virtue ethics, as evident in his use of the words “kindness” and “generosity.” It is significant that Lucy “seems about to respond to his homily, but then does not” and that “[they] arrive at the house in silence” (74). The silence indicates that the limits of sympathy and discussion have been reached. Lurie, complacent in his prejudices,

is not prepared seriously to consider his daughter's perspective, a situation similar to that faced by Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*, except this time the readers perceive it from the perspective of an unsympathetic Everyman figure, whose own views on animals most likely coincide with those of the majority of them. Thus the readers are asked to identify with the protagonist of the novel, at least in terms of his views on animals, an unsettling identification that may force them to reflect on their own attitudes toward animals. The silence suggests that Lucy and Lurie are speaking from within incommensurable paradigms: Lurie is limited by the presuppositions (including that of speciesism) of his anthropocentric paradigm, unable as yet to make a shift toward a biocentric one. This also suggests the limits of rationality, an important theme in *The Lives of Animals*. As the events later in the novel will attest, the beginning of the shift from one paradigm to another will not be a result of reasoned, abstract discussion, but of lived, embodied experience, particularly of suffering and the attendant emotions.

The masculinist (to use a term coined by Costello in *The Lives of Animals*) ethos of South African society is emphasized by the televised broadcast of the soccer match that clearly bores Lurie: "Saturday afternoon in South Africa: a time consecrated to men and their pleasures" (75) and, when the match is over and Petrus changes the channel: "Boxing: two tiny men, so tiny that they barely come up to the referee's chest, circle, leap in, belabour each other" (75). This celebration of male physicality contributes to the framework of patriarchy and male entitlement that forms the background ethos of the novel and that makes Lucy's rape possible. The aloof and mocking attitude toward these televised displays of machismo is associated with Lurie's perspective by means of the third person intimate narrator. Lurie no doubt dismisses these sport broadcasts as examples of popular and "low" culture, and yet he cannot see the link between them and his own attitude of male entitlement, evident in his attitude toward women and in his interest in the "high" culture of his Byronic opera, Byron not only being famous as a Romantic poet but also infamous for his female "conquests."

Bored with the televised sport, Lurie joins his daughter in her bedroom and they

discuss how he can spend his time. He agrees to help with the dogs, particularly with the dog meat with which Lucy admits to having difficulty (suggesting she is vegetarian), to help Petrus establish his lands, for which he can be expected to be paid since Petrus has recently received a land grant, and to help Bev at the clinic, even though he feels they will not “hit it off” (76-77). Petrus’s increasing wealth and power in relation to Lucy are emphasized when she says that “I’m not sure I can afford him any more” (77), indicating his growing patriarchal stature. Concerning working at the clinic, Lucy points out that it will not be necessary for her father to hit it off with Bev, that he should not expect to be paid and that he “will have to do it out of the goodness of [his] heart” (77). Lurie’s reply is pointedly ironic:

‘I’m dubious, Lucy. It sounds suspiciously like community service. It sounds like someone trying to make reparation for past misdeeds.’

‘As to our motives, David, I can assure you, the animals at the clinic won’t query them. They won’t ask and they won’t care.’

‘All right, I’ll do it. But only as long as I don’t have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself. I’ll do it on that basis.’ His hand still rests on her foot; now he grips her ankle tight. ‘Understood?’

She gives him what he can only call a sweet smile. ‘So you are determined to go on being bad. Mad, bad, and dangerous to know. I promise, no one will ask you to change.’ (77)

Thus Lurie’s intransigence is emphasized and his association with Byron’s Lucifer is reinforced; Lucy’s use of the words “bad” and “mad” echoes his lecture on Byron’s Satan, an “erring spirit” (32) with a “mad heart” (33). However, he does agree to help with the work in the clinic and it will eventually cause a profound change in his heart, reforming him despite himself, and serving, too, as the community service that he has resisted so fiercely.

Lucy later finds him fast asleep in Katy’s cage. When he says that she is difficult to befriend, Lucy replies:

‘Poor old Katy, she’s in mourning. No one wants her, and she knows it. The irony is, she must have offspring all over the district who would be happy to share their homes with her. But it’s not in their power to invite her. They are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system. They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things.’

Lucy insists on humanising the dogs, using the pronouns “she” and “who” rather than “it” and “that” as well as the term “mourning” (“pining” would be the traditional term). Philosophers like Leahy would dismiss this as anthropomorphism and Lurie, who shares their anthropocentric world view, insists on a distinction between immortal human souls and mortal animal souls:

‘The Church Fathers had a long debate about them, and decided they don’t have proper souls,’ he observes. ‘Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them.’

Lucy shrugs. ‘I’m not sure that I have a soul. I wouldn’t know a soul if I saw one.’

‘That’s not true. You are a soul. We are all souls. We are souls before we are born.’

She regards him oddly. (78-9)

However, he can provide no other justification for his views on souls than the (patriarchal) authority of the Church Fathers, who did not have the benefit of Darwin’s theory of evolution, which shows the continuity between animals and humans and denies the dogma of humankind as a special creation. Indeed, Lurie’s idea that we are souls before we are born is decidedly Platonic or Neoplatonic in contrast to the official Aristotelianism of the Catholic Church. Lurie’s views are surprisingly outdated yet he does not attempt to interrogate Lucy on her views but rather dismisses them with his reference to the Church Fathers. Thus Lucy remains an unknown to Lurie, beyond his epistemological horizons, and her world of knowledge and experience is

largely closed to Lurie on account of his preconceptions. Lucy's ideas seem more in tune with science, modernity and Darwinism, although Buddhism also denies the existence of an immortal, or enduring, soul. One can extend Rosemary Jolly's analysis (discussed above) in noting that the Platonic binary of soul/body and the Aristotelian of form/matter may well have originated in the heaven/earth binary of ancient Greek myth, and that in each of the binary pairs, the left-hand term, associated with the rational and active masculine principle, is privileged above the right-hand one, associated with the irrational and passive feminine principle. Thus Lurie's belief in disembodied souls and his belief that animals' souls are tied to their bodies are ultimately patriarchal ideas since they assert the superiority of soul over body, and hence masculine over feminine.

Lucy links dogs and gods in a sentence—"They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things"—which relates to the theme of achieving salvation through animals, although here the instrumentalisation of animals is emphasized. This may be a reference to the distinction made by Kant, as discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to Midgley, between persons and things, persons having moral status, and animals, being classified as non-persons, having none, being treated instead as possessions and property. However, Lurie is not yet ready to consider showing respect for animal subjectivity.

When Lurie asks Lucy whether she ever puts animals down, she replies that Bev has taken this task upon her because no one else will do it, even though "[i]t cuts her up terribly" (79) and suggests that Bev is a more interesting person even in his own terms than Lurie gives her credit for. A "shadow of grief" then falls over Lurie and he apologises to Lucy for having failed to be a better guide in her life. He does, however, agree to help, although not with the best feelings. Nonetheless, it is his work at the clinic that initiates the transformation of his character even though he starts there merely as a result of a need to relieve his boredom and even though he finds Bev physically repulsive. He even finds her ideas ridiculous. When they have to restrain a dog, Bev says, "Think comforting thoughts, think strong thoughts. They can smell what you are thinking" (81). He thinks to himself, "They can smell what

you are thinking: what nonsense” (81) and when she thanks him, saying “You have a good presence. I sense that you like animals” (81), he replies extremely callously: “Do I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them” (81). These are the words of someone who has not begun to take the interests of animals seriously, to consider the implications of their being subjects in their own right, and who is openly malicious towards someone who truly does care. While she ponders his words he objectifies her with an unsympathetic gaze, noting her physical unattractiveness in detail, and is surprised that she answers his sarcastic comment:

‘Yes, we eat up a lot of animals in this country,’ she says. ‘It doesn’t seem to do us much good. I’m not sure how we will justify it to them.’  
(82)

Lurie is almost bemused by her answer and thinks to himself:

Justify it? When? At the Great Reckoning? He would be curious to hear more, but this is not the time. (82)

Later, after she disagrees with his attempted consolation in suggesting that the goat they are unable to treat is born prepared for its death and says, “ ‘I’m not sure. I don’t think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted’ ” (84), he thinks:

Things are beginning to fall into place. He has a first inkling of the task this ugly little woman has set herself. This bleak building is a place not of healing—her doctoring is too amateurish for that—but of last resort. . . . Bev Shaw, not a veterinarian but a priestess, full of New Age mumbo jumbo, trying, absurdly, to lighten the load of Africa’s suffering beasts. Lucy thought he would find her interesting. But Lucy is wrong. Interesting is not the word. (84)

Once again the limits of Lurie’s sympathetic imagination are clear. He subjects not just Bev’s name and looks to scorn and ridicule but also her words, without trying

to interpret them sympathetically. The irony is that he will become the very “dog-psychoomp” (146) the idea of which he ridicules now. All Bev actually seems to be saying is that the animals should be treated with especial kindness while they are being put down. Likewise, he finds the wrong emphasis in her words on the numbers of animals eaten in the country. Bev’s point is that this excessive meat-eating is symptomatic of the culture of violence in the country; like Costello, she is pointing out the psychic cost to people of their mistreatment and abuse of animals; her point is mainly a moral one. However, Lurie insists on giving it a metaphysical gloss, “seeing the world through metaphysical glasses” as Jolly calls it (Jolly, 2006, 164), and thus can treat it with ridicule. While Jolly is right to blame Lurie’s metaphysical preconceptions, his literary imagination is just as culpable in doing violence to otherness. Nonetheless, the fact that he engages her in conversation, especially when he helps with feeding the dogs after Bev has finished in the clinic, and the fact that she says things that he finds difficult to accommodate, show that he has the potential to begin the process of transcending the limits of his sympathetic imagination, that he has started to recognise her otherness, if not to understand it. Later on he even adopts her expression about dogs being able to smell one’s thoughts (142, 156, 193).

This glimmering of sympathy is also evident in his perceptions of the goat, another animal that is more fully individualised in *Disgrace* than the generic “dogs”:

The goat, a fullgrown buck, can barely walk. One half of his scrotum, yellow and purple, is swollen like a balloon; the other half is a mass of caked blood and dirt. He has been savaged by dogs, the old woman says.

But he seems bright enough, cheery, combative. (82)

Besides being individualised, the goat is also a symbol of fertility, even of male sexual prowess, and it is significant that, because he cannot be healed without being rendered sterile, his owner decides against treatment and takes him home to be slaughtered. The goat, like the lame dog Lurie later befriends, also symbolises the threat of social castration for his “inappropriate desires” that Lurie so strongly resists, but which began with the loss of his good looks and will be completed later when his face is

burned. Bev has a moment of sympathetic communication with the goat through touch, a moment of communication that transcends the species barrier and which Lurie does not ridicule:

She kneels down again beside the goat, nuzzles his throat, stroking the throat upward with her own hair. The goat trembles but is still. She motions to the woman to let go of the horns. The woman obeys. The goat does not stir.

She is whispering. ‘What do you say, my friend?’ he hears her say. ‘What do you say? Is it enough?’

The goat stands stock still as if hypnotised. Bev Shaw continues to stroke him with her head. She seems to have lapsed into a trance of her own. (83)

Indeed, much later, after Lucy’s rape, Lurie remembers this incident with respect: “He remembers Bev Shaw nuzzling the old billy-goat with the ravaged testicles, stroking him, comforting him, entering into his life. How does she get it right, this communion with animals?” (126). Bev is clearly upset about the fate of the goat and also individualises, even humanises, him: “ ‘Such a good old fellow, so brave and straight and confident!’ ” (83). Lurie reflects on the name “lethal” given to the euthanasing drug that is used for bad cases, relating it to “the waters of Lethe” (83) and, to his surprise, tries to comfort her, thus indicating the beginnings of his transcending the limits of his sympathy. The idea of the sacrificial goat will also reappear in “At the Gate” in *Elizabeth Costello*, where Costello specifically points, when asked to justify her life of writing fiction, to the individuality of the ram that Ulysses slaughters in order to allow him to visit Hades, an event that seems to be prefigured here when the ram is mentioned in connection with Lethe. The description of the blowfly grubs writhing in the ram’s damaged scrotum in Bev’s clinic appears to be an allusion to the wound, discussed in Chapter 2, of the young man in Kafka’s “A Country Doctor”: “Worms, the length and thickness of my little finger, roseate and also coated with blood, are writhing against the inside of the wound, with little white heads, and



many, many little legs. Poor boy, it's not going to be possible to help you" (Kafka, 2007, 189). There is also the figure of the scapegoat, which will be discussed below. Nonetheless, despite his multiple symbolic significance in *Disgrace*, the goat remains solidly individuated.

The stirrings of Lurie's sympathetic imagination are clear when he returns home and retires early but cannot sleep and instead tries to imagine the life, particularly the sex life (although here it is more the erotic than sympathetic imagination at work), of his daughter and of the burden he, as her father, must be on her, seeing her as "his second salvation, the bride of his youth reborn" (86). His sleeplessness may be an indication of how deeply he has been moved by his experiences that day and he sits up late, unable to be inspired when reading Byron's letters on his affair with Teresa: "In adultery, all the tedium of marriage rediscovered" (87). In a sense it is an answer to Lucy's question whether he is considering marrying again, and it reveals a degree of misogyny in his character. It is clear that he cannot see that the pursuit of Eros can offer no salvation since it is posited on the possession of the good for oneself, and on the possession of personal immortality (even though these can, for Plato, only be obtained through the exercise of virtue). For Plato, the possession of immortality, namely the salvation of the soul from its mortal body, involves a movement from imperfect, impermanent physical bodies toward disembodied, perfect, eternal abstractions. Salvation through animals is the very opposite of Platonic salvation and also differs from Christian salvation as it involves the recognition that there are no immortal souls but, instead, that souls are embodied and mortal like all other animals. This means that the value of lives resides in their individuality, mortality and embodiedness rather than in the supposed possession of an immortal soul and in the existence of an afterlife; that is, their value lies precisely in their limited existence, their animality, in their actual dog-like, rather than their imagined god-like, nature.

Indeed, the idea of violence may be inherent in the notion of eros (as Camille Paglia asserts (Paglia, 1990, 18)), in the sense that it involves the possession of good things for oneself, and hence fails to acknowledge the other, although Plato does

try to transcend the limitations of the egoism inherent in eros by arguing that the ultimate goal of desire is the Good. This possibly inherent moral flaw in the notion of eros is powerfully and ironically dramatised in Chapter 11, when Lucy is raped soon after Lurie talks about the “rights of desire” (89), which links his violation of Melanie with the three intruders’ violation of Lucy. Paglia makes the interesting points that the idea of eros applies specifically to men, and that eros is necessarily linked with possession and aggression. This is borne out by studies of animal behaviour, especially the behaviour of male mammals who spend much of their time marking their territory which they are prepared to defend with force in order to protect their females and offspring, in order to perpetuate the survival of their genetic material. Indeed, much later Lucy suggests about her rapists that “I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me” (158). Thus the events later in the chapter cast a very dark shadow over the words Lurie uses to justify his affair with Melanie and he tells her: “My case rests on the rights of desire . . . . On the god who makes even the small birds quiver” (89). However, he keeps the following thoughts to himself:

*I was a servant of Eros: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? It was a god who acted through me. What vanity! Yet not a lie, not entirely. In the whole wretched business there was something generous that was doing its best to flower. If only he had known the time would be so short! (89)*

Instead, he tells Lucy the story of a dog that was beaten whenever he became excited by bitches on heat, until he had been conditioned to deny his own nature. When Lucy asks him whether the moral of the story is that “males should be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked” (90), a question that echoes the judgement of the committee (“ungovernable impulse” (52)), he denies this but has no other plausible explanation. In fact, he concedes another possibility, “[t]hat desire is a burden we could well do without, ” to which Lucy responds that “that is a view I incline towards myself” (90), reinforcing her link with the philosophy of the Cynics. She then compares her father

to a scapegoat: "...you are safely expelled. Your colleagues can breathe easy again, while the scapegoat wanders in the wilderness" (90-91). Her application of this image to her father seems mistaken, since he is clearly bearing his personal sins, not the sins of the community. However, earlier, in response to Lurie's suggestion that he would rather be shot than make a public confession, she says:

'Shot? For having an affair with a student? A bit extreme, don't you think, David? It must go on all the time. It certainly went on when I was a student. If they prosecuted every case the profession would be decimated.' (66)

This suggests that Lurie can be seen as a scapegoat, at least in Lucy's terms. Her father does, however, dispute her terms:

'I don't think scapegoating is the best description,' he says cautiously. 'Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat's back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods. Then the gods died, and all of a sudden you had to cleanse the city without divine help. Real actions were demanded instead of symbolism. The censor was born, in the Roman sense. Watchfulness became the watchword: the watchfulness of all over all. Purgation was replaced by the purge.'

He is getting carried away; he is lecturing. 'Anyway,' he concludes, 'having said farewell to the city, what do I find myself doing in the wilderness? Doctoring dogs. Playing right-hand man to a woman who specializes in sterilization and euthanasia.' (91)

Boehmer quotes and discusses these words on scapegoating, arguing that "Lurie's statement is crucial as it pulls together a number of the chief questions posed in the novel. How do we achieve moral cleansing in both an individual and a collective capacity in a secular age? What are the modern methods of purging?" (Boehmer,

2006, 133-37). She goes on to suggest that these modern methods are merely theatrical and contends that the answers to these questions provided by the novel seem to her, “symbolically at least, to be fairly traditional” (137), namely in relation to women and dogs, whose bodies are forced to bear the sins of the community. This relates particularly to Lucy, who is raped despite her innocence; the sins of the forefathers (and not just her own father) are visited on her.

Chris Danta provides an affirmative answer to the question whether Lurie can be considered a scapegoat, starting with the idea of Kafka as a writer and scapegoat who writes from the suffering and mortal animal’s perspective:

Whether by dint of an unfortunate translation by Tindale, the word *scapegoat* nonetheless attests in the most economical fashion possible to the embeddedness of the animal within the story of human identity. Insofar as the scapegoat injects animality into the drama of human salvation, it might be considered the narrative animal par excellence. Given that the sins of the community are also the stories of the community, the scapegoat’s sacrificial journey into the wilderness may be viewed as opening up a figurative space between the human and the animal, the very irreducibility of which allows for narrative itself to unfold. The sins (or the stories) of the community enter into the body of the scapegoat so as to become finite and pass away; the scapegoat thereby identifies the suffering body of the sacrificial animal as the starting point or condition of possibility for a story. (Danta, 2007, 722-23)

He concludes his essay:

The scapegoat, I have been arguing, is above all else a sign of unredeemed finitude; each becoming-animal of the human is also a becoming-sacrificial-animal and, as such, a becoming-corpse. (735)

In euthanasing—sacrificing—the dogs, in particular the individuated Driepoot who is described being carried in Lurie’s arms like a sacrificial lamb, Lurie is coming to

terms with his own mortality. Thus the term “scapegoat” can be applied to Lurie as much as Lucy.

The conversation between Lurie and Lucy ends when they meet three men on the path, men whom Lucy does not recognise, and a threatening atmosphere is created. The men pass on, but when Lurie and Lucy return home, the men are waiting for them, taunting the dogs in the cages. Lucy puts the dobermans into the cage, a move that Lurie thinks is brave but not necessarily wise. The men force their way into the house on the pretext of needing to make a phone call and lock themselves inside with Lucy. From now the narrative is confined to Lurie’s limited perspective, he himself being confined to a toilet when he tries to force his way into the house and they knock him unconscious. When he comes to, he is tortured by the thought of what the men may be doing to Lucy. His helplessness is emphasized by the vivid thoughts and images produced by his strong imagination. He can see, however, when he stands on the toilet seat, one of the men casually, not angrily but calculatedly, shooting the dogs in the cages, not bothering to finish off one who is wounded in the throat. The violence perpetrated on Lucy is also perpetrated, in different ways, on Lurie and the dogs. The violence perpetrated on Lurie seems particularly pointless—he is set alight—and it seems to be an act of cold malice. An overpowering sense of the injustice of the violence is created despite—or even because of—Coetzee’s lucid and factual, cool and detached style. There is a complete failure of the men to identify imaginatively with the suffering of their victims, a complete failure to respect the value of individual subjectivity and rights, both human and canine. In fact, it may be more accurate to characterise their acts as calculated malice, behaviour, according to Schopenhauer, of which only humans are capable.

Lurie tries to justify what has happened, to come to terms with their personal violation by trying, paradoxically, to depersonalise it:

A risk to own anything; a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold

on to the theory and to the comforts of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them. (98)

What is important, too, is that Lurie is excluded from what Lucy experiences. Perhaps this exclusion is Coetzee's way of suggesting that male writers cannot do justice to certain female experiences, indeed, should not attempt to enter into such experiences out of respect for women. In fact, from the moment of her rape, Lucy becomes a closed book to both her biological father, Lurie, and her authorial father, Coetzee. When Lurie tries to embrace Lucy on two occasions immediately after her rape, she wriggles loose initially and later "she is stiff as a pole, yielding nothing" (99). Her first words are directed to the dogs in the dog-pens: "My darlings, my darlings!" (97), words which are echoed by him: "My dearest child!" (97) and "My dearest, my dearest" (98). Her concern for the dogs in her care is striking considering she has just been raped. Her refusal to accept the embrace of her father may be an aversion to physical contact with men.

When Lucy does eventually speak to her father it is to ask him to tell only his story to the police:

'You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me,' she repeats.

'You're making a mistake,' he says in a voice that is fast descending to a croak.

'No I'm not,' she says. (99)

Lucy walks to her neighbour, Ettinger, for help to take her to the police and Lurie to the hospital. Ettinger represents a stock figure of Eastern Cape literature, a tough old farmer of German origin with a decidedly colonialist, or apartheid, mindset. Patting his Beretta in its holster at his hip, he tells Lurie that: "The best is, you save yourself, because the police are not going to save you, not any more, you can

be sure” (100). His idea of salvation is decidedly lacking in imagination, and echoes the rugged individualism both of the Wild West and of the Eastern Cape frontier farmer, armed with gun and, no doubt, Bible. It is a bleak picture of armed siege by “the natives,” not really a vision of salvation at all. Privately Lurie doubts that a gun would have saved them; more likely it would have left them dead. Ettinger’s picture of life in South Africa has evidently been rejected by Lucy in her lifestyle; she certainly does not perceive herself as a frontier farmer or *boervrou* as Lurie sees her; indeed, her lesbianism precludes the possibility of being a farmer’s wife. Later, however, Lurie reconsiders, resorting to the security clichés of contemporary South Africa, both suburban and rural:

They ought to install bars, security gates, a perimeter fence, as Ettinger has done. They ought to turn the farmhouse into a fortress. Lucy ought to buy a pistol and a two-way radio, and take shooting lessons. But will she ever consent? She is here because she loves the land and the old, *ländliche* way of life. If that way of life is doomed, what is left for her to love? (113)

To fortify her plot of land would be to capitulate to the imperatives of the security industry and to embrace the mentality of the besieged, to perpetuate the “vast circulatory system,” as Lurie puts it, the stakes becoming ever higher, the security industry itself being a symptom of the industrialization that Lucy’s ecological way of life rejects. The fact that Ettinger’s wife is dead and his children have returned to Germany suggests that Ettinger’s way of life has no future, literally and figuratively. Later, reflecting on Petrus’s possible plans to buy up the land of his neighbours, Lurie thinks to himself: “...Ettinger will die one of these days, and the Ettinger son has fled” (117). Still later, Lucy says, “It is just a matter of time before Ettinger is found with a bullet in his back” (204).

Indeed, Ettinger’s way of life is premised on a similar moral atomism to Lurie’s, the idea of the autonomous rational individual who must look after himself, who is

independent rather than inter-dependent. As if in contradiction to Lurie's individualism, Lucy appears the stronger person after the rape and twice has to speak to her father "as if to a child—a child or an old man" (104). Lurie is profoundly moved when Bill Shaw comes to fetch him from the hospital and asks him without irony: "What else are friends for? You would have done the same" (102). He reflects deeply on the Old English roots of the word "friend" and realizes the importance of inclusive friendship and interdependence, ideas excluded from his Romantic philosophy of self-realisation. He and Lucy stay that night at the Shaws and at midnight he has a vision of Lucy appealing to him to save her, a vision so vivid that he disturbs the others and insists on seeing Lucy, who dismisses his "dream" and sends him back to bed. Nonetheless, his metaphysical belief in the possibility of disembodied spirits has him reflect that: "Is it possible that Lucy's soul did indeed leave her body and come to him? May people who do not believe in souls yet have them, and may their souls lead an independent life?" (104). It is clear that he is suffering from trauma, since his thoughts are almost incoherent, motivated, no doubt, by his feeling that he has failed in his fatherly duty to protect his daughter, which explains why he then goes and sits beside Lucy's bed for the rest of the night.

The next morning he reflects on his daughter's lesbianism:

Not for the first time, he wonders whether women would not be happier living in communities of women, accepting visits from men only when they choose. Perhaps he is wrong to think of Lucy as a homosexual. Perhaps she simply prefers female company. Or perhaps that is all that lesbians are: women who have no need of men. (104)

It seems as though his sympathetic imagination is straining seriously to understand his daughter, even when she is more closed to him than ever before. However, he fails to understand her when he tries to press her to know whether she has taken contraceptive medication, since she flares up in anger, most likely at his proprietary attitude towards her. She is also irritated by his suggestion that they cannot return to the farm and continue with their lives "[b]ecause it's not a good idea. It's not safe"



(105):

‘It was never safe, and it’s not an idea, good or bad. I’m not going back for the sake of an idea. I’m just going back.’

Sitting up in her borrowed nightdress, she confronts him, neck stiff, eyes glittering. Not her father’s little girl, not any longer. (105)

Lucy’s concreteness stands in strong contrast to her father’s tendency to think in literary terms and metaphysical abstractions. She is as rooted and embodied as her father is abstracted and detached. Lurie’s vivid imagination is evident in the way he broods on his own suffering, yet he is unable to extend this faculty to enter into Lucy’s experience, let alone Melanie’s. What he describes himself as experiencing could well have been applied to both of these women, except multiplied many times over:

He has a sense that, inside him, a vital organ has been bruised, abused—perhaps even his heart. For the first time he has a taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future. Slumped on a plastic chair amid the stench of chicken feathers and rotting apples, he feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop. (107)

He is in a state of despair, a word he uses himself (108). The word “despair” presupposes a Christian virtue ethics, since it is the opposite of hope, one of the three theological virtues. Despair is a failure not only of hope, but also of faith and love, and, as a loss of faith in God, is traditionally considered a deadly sin. However, Lurie uses the word in a secular context, which implies a loss of faith in humanity, a loss of hope for the future of humanity, and a closing off of love of one’s fellow human beings. His slumped posture reminds one of Melanie’s arms hanging loosely when he had his way with her. The decayed and rotting garden, like his own burned body, however, functions not only as an objective correlative of his despair, but also as a symbol of the corrupted garden of Eden, of fallen human nature. Reflecting that he will have

to manage the farm until Lucy has recovered sufficiently, he thinks: “Lucy’s future, his future, the future of the land as a whole—it is a matter of indifference, he wants to say; let it all go to the dogs, I do not care” (107). There is no irony in his use of the expression about the dogs, and it will be echoed later by Lucy’s determination to live “like a dog” (205).

His metaphysical abstractions are also evident in his intensified thinking about ghosts: “In a while the organism will repair itself, and I, the ghost within it, will be my old self again. But the truth, he knows, is otherwise. His pleasure in living has been snuffed out” (107). The juxtaposition of the modern biological term, “organism,” with the incommensurable, pre-modern spiritualist term, “ghost,” is a striking example of his inability to comprehend a modern, biocentric worldview that has no need for notions such as the “soul,” the “ghost in the machine.” Later he thinks: “If the ghosts of Lucy’s violators still hover in her bedroom, then surely they ought to be chased out, not allowed to take it over as their sanctum” (111). Later still when trying to engage Petrus in a discussion about the rape, Lurie says: “I find it hard to believe they [the rapists] arrived out of nowhere, and did what they did, and disappeared afterwards like ghosts” (118). Lurie offers his bedroom to Lucy and moves into hers, since she will not stay in her bedroom, nor the back room with the freezer in which the frozen meat for the massacred dogs is kept. Lurie seems to assume that she will not stay in the back room because it will remind her of the slaughtered dogs but does not make a connection between the violence done to him and Lucy and the violence done to the animals who end up as dog meat. Again we see the limits of his sympathetic imagination, despite the fact that he struggles to cook unfamiliar dishes for Lucy “because she refuses to touch meat” (121): just as she was never comfortable with owning a firearm, so she was never comfortable with preparing the meat for the dogs. Her vegetarianism has, if anything, been reinforced by the rape, as she feels she can no longer stay in the room close to the freezer in which the meat for the dogs is kept: thus a link between male violence and meat-eating is made. While Lurie is concerned with ghosts, disembodied spirits, Lucy is concerned about the embodied existence of animals.

More significant is the way Lucy refuses to mention the rape to the police when they come to investigate the house and take her statement, even though it is clear that they are aware of it:

They are of her generation, but edgy of her nevertheless, as if she were a creature polluted and her pollution could leap across to them, soil them. (108)

And:

In Lucy's bedroom the double bed is stripped bare. *The scene of the crime*, he thinks to himself; and, as if reading the thought, the policemen avert their eyes, pass on. (109)

The attitude of the police, their willed ignorance, seems to make them, as representatives of the police, complicit, to a degree, in the violence done to women in South Africa, as represented by Lucy. It is similar to the willed ignorance that Costello mentions in relation to the systematic and large-scale violence done to animals on a daily basis that otherwise decent people prefer to ignore. However, Lucy's silence on the rape also seems to make her complicit in this "war on women," as Jolly puts it, which is what Lurie struggles to understand. He says to her: "I am sure you have your reasons, but in a wider context are you sure this is the best course?" (110). He reflects bitterly on how the three men will react when they follow how their attack is being presented in the media:

It will dawn on them that over the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket. *Too ashamed*, they will say to each other, *too ashamed to tell*, and they will chuckle luxuriously, recollecting their exploit. Is Lucy prepared to concede them that victory? (110)

Lurie conceives of the rape in terms of macho bravado—"chuckling luxuriously," "exploit," "victory"—terms which Lucy would reject, showing once again his inability to understand the rape from her perspective. He tries to speak to Lucy about this:

As gently as he can, he offers his question again. ‘Lucy, my dearest, why don’t you want to tell? It was a crime. There is no shame in being the object of a crime. You did not choose to be the object. You are an innocent party.’ (111)

In fact, despite Lurie’s words, the entire community perceives Lucy as being in a state of disgrace. Later, when she asks her father and Petrus to go to the market in her place, Lurie thinks he knows the reason:

She does not reply. She would rather hide her face, and he knows why. Because of the disgrace. Because of the shame. That is what their visitors have achieved; that is what they have done to this confident, modern young woman. Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for. (115)

Critics have commented on the symmetry between Lurie’s violation of Melanie and the men’s violation of his own daughter. The connection is reinforced by the fact that Lurie chooses to occupy the room in which she was raped (111, 199) and that the third time he makes love to Melanie it is “on the bed in his daughter’s room” (29). In contrast, there is the asymmetry of their respective states of disgrace: he is the guilty perpetrator, she an innocent victim. While his state of disgrace is perfectly justified, it is an indictment on the community to consider Lucy to be disgraced, since the disgrace belongs to her attackers.

Despite this asymmetry, both of them insist on keeping their thoughts on their disgrace private, a fact that Lurie, ironically, fails to understand in Lucy’s case. She explains to him why she will not mention the rape as long as he does not raise the question again: “The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone” (112). Lurie persists, however, using a series of metaphors and biblical allusions in an attempt to get her to change her mind, suggesting she is hoping that if she accepts

her violation meekly this will ward off future attacks. She rejects his imagery and talk of vengeance, but he still persists, asking, “Then help me. Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?” (112), raising the idea of Lucy as a scapegoat for white guilt incurred by apartheid, although he does not call it this. Once again, her response indicates the divide between the way they perceive the world: “No. You keep misreading me. Guilt and salvation are abstractions. Until you make an effort to see that, I can’t help you” (112).

Later, when one of the assailants, the boy, turns up at Petrus’s party Lurie cannot understand why Lucy does not phone the police as he insists she does. He asserts: “You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it” (133). Lucy, in turn, insists on her privacy:

‘Don’t shout at me, David. This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself—not to you, not to anyone else. (133)

The concept of “privacy” is crucial here. For Lurie, privacy may mean the right to keep his thoughts to himself (to his ghostly self), but for Lucy the word refers to the integrity of her body and the right to choose what happens to her body. Apparently Lucy has had an abortion before as she tells her father, much later, after his visit to Cape Town, breaking the news that she is pregnant: “But I am not having an abortion. That is something I am not prepared to go through with again” (198). Taken aback by the news both of her pregnancy and her previous abortion, he asks her why she has chosen to keep the child: “Why? I am a woman, David. Do you think I hate children? Should I choose against the child because of who its father is?” (198). It appears that she chooses to keep the child because of her commitment to the singularity of embodied life.

Once again, however, Lurie’s literary imagination prevents him from understanding Lucy’s point of view. He remembers Lucy’s claim that the three men are not

robbers but rapists—“they *do* rape” (158):

Well, Lucy was wrong. They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself. And now, lo and behold, *the child!* Already he is calling it *the child* when it is no more than a worm in his daughter’s womb. What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog’s urine? (199)

The idea of male mammals marking their territory has already been discussed above. These lines also echo Lurie’s thoughts in response to Ryan’s provocative words to him, “Stay with your own kind” (194), after he has returned to Cape Town and tries to watch Melanie’s performance in the play at the Dock Theatre, which was not long before used as cold storage for the carcasses of pigs and cattle:

*Your own kind*: who is the boy to tell him who his kind are? What does he know of the force that drives the utmost strangers into each other’s arms, making them kin, kind, beyond all prudence? *Omnis gens quaecumque se in se perfecere vult*. The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman’s body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven. (194)

These lines clearly link Lurie’s taking advantage of Melanie with the men’s rape of Lucy, and though the thoughts are Lurie’s the irony apparently escapes him. What really bothers him is that this is how his line, his *name*, is going to end: it offends his Platonic notion of leaving something behind that will endure beyond his death:

A father without the sense to have a son: is this how it is all going to end, is this how his line is going to run out, like water dribbling into the earth? (199)

Even in this Platonism there seems to be an instrumentalist rationalism, one’s offspring serving merely as a means to one’s own ends, namely as a means to one’s

personal immortality, rather than as being valuable in themselves. However, by the end he has accepted his mortality, when he sees his daughter working like a peasant in the field:

So: once she was only a little tadpole in her mother's body, and now here she is, solid in her existence, more solid than he has ever been. With luck she will last a long time, long beyond him. When he is dead she will, with luck, still be here doing her ordinary tasks among the flowerbeds. And from within her will have issued another existence, that with luck will be just as solid, just as long-lasting. So it will go on, a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten. (217)

Lurie thinks his sex with Melanie was unlike the rapists' violation of Lucy since he was driven by love and they by hatred. He fails to see the essential similarity between his and their actions, though, in both cases the men were treating the women merely as means to their ends, failing to respect them as subjects in their own right. At no stage did he consider using a condom to protect Melanie, yet he is very concerned that Lucy may fall pregnant and contract a venereal disease or HIV/Aids. Yet he deceives himself that his use of Melanie was in service of Eros, of some higher force and for his ennoblement. In a sense the men's burning of Lurie can be seen as appropriate, linking his possession of Melanie with theirs of Lucy, his burn-marks becoming physical signs of his own disgrace, the mark of Cain, so to say.

Jolly discusses how Costello critiques the way Sultan in *The Lives of Animals* is both treated instrumentally, as the subject of an experiment, and forced to view the world in instrumental terms, to solve problems in an instrumental way, namely as a means to gratify his desires (Jolly, 2006, 158-9). She goes on to show how a similar critique of instrumentalization is applied to women in *Disgrace*. She shows how Lurie can overlook the reality of Melanie's unwilling body and, therefore, of the rape of her body by forming an image or metaphysical notion of her in his mind during the act (160). She points out how Lucy refuses to reconceive her rape in metaphysical terms.

Much later, when reflecting on her ordeal, what strikes Lucy most is the degree of hatred the men showed towards her even though they knew nothing about her as an individual:

‘It was so personal,’ she says. ‘It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was ...expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them.’

Lurie attempts to console her:

‘It was history speaking through them,’ he offers at last. ‘A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors.’ (156)

Jolly argues:

Yet Lurie has only inklings of his complicity in a sexual economy that preys on women. He views the rape purely as a consequence of racial difference, while Lucy sees it as an attempt to subjugate her as a woman living alone, easy prey for men who may seek to exact from her ‘a price’ for her aping of a man’s independence. (Jolly, 2006, 164)

Jolly relates this “war on women in South Africa” (166) to Costello’s perceptions that a whole society is blind to massive daily atrocities on nonhuman animals partly as a result of “economies of instrumentalism” (167).

These “economies of instrumentalism” are implicit in the term “tax collectors” that Lucy uses when her father tries to dissuade her from staying “[b]ecause that would be an invitation to them to return”:

She broods a long while before she answers. ‘But isn’t there another way of looking at it, David? What if ... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors.



Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves.’ (158)

Durrant points out the limitations of Lurie’s sympathetic imagination in that he can imagine himself into the being of one of his daughter’s rapists, but not into the being of his daughter as the victim of rape (Durrant, 2006, 119-120). As Durrant notes, this, paradoxically, is not the failure of the sympathetic imagination but its (albeit modest) success, since it involves the recognition of its own limitations and is therefore perhaps a small step toward enlightenment. Even though Mike Marais would presumably agree with Durrant’s interpretation, he problematizes Lurie’s “development” even further, highlighting the apparent discrepancy between two passages which seem both to assert and deny Lurie’s ability to enter into Lucy’s experience of the rape (Marais, 2006, 77). In the first Lurie seems to succeed in this task:

Lucy was frightened, frightened near to death. Her voice choked, she could not breathe, her limbs went numb. *This is not happening*, she said to herself as the men forced her down; *it is a dream, a nightmare*. (160)

However the second passage which occurs soon after the first suggests that Lurie is not able to enter into Lucy’s experience:

*You don’t understand, you weren’t there*, says Bev. Well, she is mistaken. Lucy’s intuition is right after all: he does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman? (160)

In fact, it is precisely a discrepancy like this that has led Marais to challenge the standard interpretation of *Disgrace*, that Lurie’s progress from egoism to altruism, from self-regarding love, to other-regarding love, or self-substituting responsibility through self-sacrifice, is more or less straightforward. Instead, he argues that “*Disgrace* undermines, even as it installs, the possibility of this development and thereby questions the ability of the imagination to achieve what it is supposed to achieve” (Marais,

2006, 76). Perhaps a better solution to the apparent discrepancy is to recognise that while Lurie is able to imagine Lucy's experience, he is not able to identify with her position of being a victim of rape, but rather more honestly and darkly admits that he identifies with the rapists; that if he were presented with the choice between being an innocent victim of rape or a criminal perpetrator of rape, he would choose the latter.

A further failure of Lurie's imagination which should be discussed is his imaginative projection into Lucy's future, a vividly imagined but impoverished vision, which he contrasts with Petrus's efficiency in managing his new farm but which the reader should not take at face value:

Against this new Petrus what chance does Lucy stand? ... If she had any sense she would quit: approach the Land Bank, work out a deal, consign the farm to Petrus, return to civilization. She could branch out into cats. She could even go back to what she and her friends did in their hippie days: ethnic weaving, ethnic pot-decoration, ethnic basket-weaving; selling beads to tourists.

Defeated. It is not hard to imagine Lucy in ten years' time: a heavy woman with lines of sadness on her face, wearing clothes long out of fashion, talking to her pets, eating alone. Not much of a life. But better than passing her days in fear of the next attack, when the dogs will not be enough to protect her and no one will answer the telephone. (151-52)

It seems fair to say that Lurie underestimates and misunderstands his daughter, paternalistically trying to impose his view of things onto her; indeed, his conversations with her can be considered monologic from his side. In fact, Lucy tells him so herself and keeps certain information to herself, such as her plan to keep the baby, because she believes her father will not understand. Indeed, their communication can be considered incommensurable, in that they have completely different terms of reference, so that it is no surprise that their verbal dialogue breaks down and they are forced to communicate through letters. Lurie initiates this correspondence after their return

home from the false call about his car, pleading to Lucy to change her mind about staying on the farm:

‘Dearest Lucy, With all the love in the world, I must say the following. You are on the brink of a dangerous error. You wish to humble yourself before history. But the road you are following is the wrong one. It will strip you of all honour; you will not be able to live with yourself. I plead with you, listen to me.

‘Your father.’ (160)

Lucy’s response is very instructive:

‘Dear David, You have not been listening to me. I am not the person you know. I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away.

‘You do not see this, and I do not know what more I can do to make you see. . . .

‘Yes, the road I am on may be the wrong one. But if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life.

‘I cannot be your child for ever. You cannot be a father for ever. I know you mean well, but you are not the guide I need, not at this time.

‘Yours, Lucy.’ (161)

Whereas Lurie imagines a defeated future for his daughter, she refuses to capitulate to his vision of the future, asserting her independence from him as her father and from men generally.

The instrumentalization of women and animals, as Jolly calls it, and the indifference to the suffering of the individual are not limited to Lurie and the rapists; they are part of the Weberian ethos of the novel. Its pervasiveness in South Africa is evident in Petrus’s return as patriarch, and the passing of power from Lucy to Petrus, from a white South African woman to an African man. His growth in stature is traced

from his starting out as Lucy's "dog-man" and living in a barn on her farm, to his acquisition of half of her land, to his relinquishing his position as "dog-man" (129), to Lurie asking him to consider being Lucy's "farm-manager" (152-53), to the erection of his own house which "must cast a long shadow" (197), to Lucy's willingness to hand over her title deeds to him, as her dowry, and become his third wife (204-05). It should be noted, however, that in African marriages the wife does not provide a dowry; rather, the husband must pay *lobola*, or a "bride price," to the family of his wife-to-be in compensation for the labour the family will lose when the daughter leaves the household and in recognition of future labour in the form of children that the wife will bring to her new family. However, since Lucy is lesbian, she cannot be expected to have further children and so her paying a dowry can perhaps be justified in this way. His adoption of a Protestant work ethic is evident when Lucy calls Petrus a "penny-pincher. In the old days it would have been an ox" (124) (when he slaughters two sheep for his party) and when Lurie notes the efficient way in which he ploughs his fields:

All very swift and business-like; all very unlike Africa. In olden days, that is to say ten years ago, it would have taken him days with a hand-plough and oxen. (151)

His indifference to the suffering both of Lucy and of the sheep that he has bought for slaughter is indexical of how women and animals are treated instrumentally in South Africa: he says to Lurie that "you are all right now" (114) but Lurie waits in vain for him to ask "*And how is Lucy?*" (115). Instead Petrus asks whether Lucy is going to the market the next day, pointing out, insensitively, that "she will lose her stall if she does not go" (115). Lurie has ambivalent feelings toward Petrus, liking his solid, peasant nature (as his imagination colours it) yet suspecting that Petrus knows more about the rape than he lets on, speculating that he may even have employed the rapists in a bid to take over Lucy's land: "Petrus has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy have no place" (118). Lurie becomes silently enraged when Petrus refuses to acknowledge that what was done to Lucy was a "*violation*" and an

“*outrage*” (119).

That a new relationship is at hand is evident at the party which Petrus throws to celebrate the transfer of land to his ownership. He says to Lucy when she and Lurie arrive at the party “No more dogs. I am not any more the dog-man” (129) and after his wife opens their gift, he says “Lucy is our benefactor” (129) a word which must have been used with some irony and which Lurie finds distasteful. Petrus’s proprietary and slightly contemptuous attitude towards women is revealed when he says of his pregnant wife’s baby-to-be that “[w]e hope he will be a boy” (130). When Lurie asks what Petrus has against girls, he says:

‘We are praying for a boy . . . Always it is best if the first one is a boy. Then he can show his sisters—show them how to behave. Yes.’ He pauses. ‘A girl is very expensive.’ He rubs thumb and forefinger together. ‘Always money, money, money.’ (130)

He seems to assume that women and girls must always be dependent on men for money, and seems to resent the fact that they should be compensated for the work they do in the household. However, he makes an exception of Lucy, although her female independence must be an affront to his world view:

‘No, a boy is better. Except your daughter. Your daughter is different. Your daughter is as good as a boy. Almost!’ He laughs at his sally. ‘Hey, Lucy!’ (130)

Lucy is embarrassed and moves off to dance. The conversation, which Petrus dominates monologically, shows that he is deeply patriarchal and misogynistic, thoroughly part of the “economies of instrumentalism” in relation to women.

These same values are demonstrated in the way he treats the sheep he has bought, since he is prepared to tie them to a post for three days in the sun without water or grazing. Initially annoyed by the constant bleating of the suffering sheep, Lurie eventually forms a bond with them, becoming concerned about the callousness with which Petrus treats them, although Lucy points out his own hypocrisy in preferring

not to meet the animals that will be slaughtered on his behalf. Lurie moves them to where they can drink and graze. He reflects:

The sheep spend the rest of the day near the dam where he has tethered them. The next morning they are back on the barren patch beside the stable.

Presumably they have until Saturday morning, two days. It seems a miserable way to spend the last two days of one's life. Country ways—that is what Lucy calls this kind of thing. He has other words: indifference, hardheartedness. (125)

This hardheartedness is linked with the “economies of instrumentalism,” and the hardheartedness toward animals of country dwellers is no more to blame for the suffering of animals than the indifference of city dwellers to the source of their food. Indeed, the rural folk are less hypocritical than the urbanites. A little later he thinks to himself:

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians, he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. (126)

He ponders Bev's ability to commune with animals and wonders how she manages it:

The sun beats down on his face in all its springtime radiance. Do I have to change, he thinks? Do I have to become like Bev Shaw? (126)

For the first time he is considering changing his character. He even considers not going to the party in order not to have to eat the bodies of the two sheep, a notion to which Lucy responds by saying that “Petrus and his guests are certainly not going to give up their mutton chops out of deference to you and your sensibilities” (127), echoing Norma's criticism of Costello's “sensibilities” in *The Lives of Animals*. What

seems to be bothering Lurie is that these sheep are not abstractions but embodied, sentient, singular beings. On the day of the party when he can smell the sheep being cooked he wonders whether he should mourn for them but “[l]ooking into his heart, he can find only a vague sadness” (127), a phrase echoing Costello in *The Lives of Animals* when she asks her audience to open their hearts and listen to what their hearts say (Coetzee, 1999b, 37). Finally, when, at the party, he is served the mutton chops on a plate, he thinks to himself: “I am going to eat this . . . I am going to eat it and ask forgiveness afterwards” (131). Just as he thinks this Lucy is at his side asking to leave because she has seen one of her assailants. This juxtapositioning once again links the violence done to Lucy, and therefore women generally, with the violence done to animals, and Petrus’s protection of the boy—whom Lurie persists in describing in animal terms like “running-dog” (131), “jackal boy” (202), “swine” (207) and “jackal” (208, 217)—implies an implicit tolerance of violence to women. Along with the event of Lucy’s rape, this event is a turning point for Lurie in terms of his sensitivity toward others. It is not, however, a perfect transition and he still has lapses. For instance, when he sees Melanie’s sister he feels surges of desire and when he catches Pollux peeping at Lucy he assaults him.

Lurie’s change is evident in his new attitude to animals, his new attitude to Bev, with whom he has an affair despite his earlier physical revulsion, and the shift in perspective in his Byronic opera from Byron to Teresa, from the sexually predatory male (who dies) to the mourning female. His opera becomes increasingly down-scaled, until he eventually admits that it is going nowhere. However, it does not matter any more. He no longer has the overwhelming erotic need to leave something behind, to endure beyond death. Thus Lurie manages to shift perspective, a shift from the erotic to the sympathetic imagination, from self to other, male to female. It is a shift from eros to a secular caritas which prepares him for his self-abasement before Melanie’s sister, Desiree, and her mother, even though he still feels a twinge of eros when he sees Desiree. His pride, selfishness and intransigence have all been put to one side. He has changed despite himself, despite his initial refusal to change, and he is doing far more community service and in far better a spirit at the dog shelter than

he would have done had he accepted the conditions of the university committee. He has changed profoundly and deeply, although these are only the initial steps towards enlightenment.

When Lurie goes to see Mr Isaacs at the school at which he is headmaster, he has no clear idea of why he is going there except “to say what is on my heart” (165), which turns out to be a confession, or perhaps an apology, for his treatment of Melanie. His first attempt is far too literary to be sincere and seems to be yet another justification of his Romantic ethic of service to Eros: “She struck a fire in me” (166). He elaborates:

‘A fire: what is remarkable about that? If a fire goes out, you strike a match and start another one. That is how I used to think. Yet in the olden days people worshipped fire. They thought twice before letting a flame die, a flame-god. It was that kind of flame your daughter kindled in me. Not hot enough to burn me up, but real: real fire.’

Burned—burnt—burnt up.(166)

This confession could hardly be expected to please the father of the girl with whom he has had an affair, and Mr Isaacs begins to ask him what he thinks he is doing and notes “how are the mighty fallen” (167), but nonetheless asks him to “[b]reak bread with us” (167). Lurie is ironically unaware of the association of his fiery passion for Melanie and his own burning by his assailants, but he acknowledges to himself the validity of the comment that he is fallen, which is a reference to the theme of the fall from grace. Isaacs’s offering to break bread with Lurie is a generous, Christian gesture, and contrasts with the refusals to break bread in *Lives*.

When Lurie arrives at their house with a bottle of wine in hand, he notices that the Isaacs’ household (like Petrus’s farm) is frugally run, according to the Weberian Protestant work ethic:

They are teetotal, clearly. He should have thought of that. A tight little petit-bourgeois household, frugal, prudent. The car washed, the lawn mowed, savings in the bank. (168)



Lurie awkwardly joins them in saying grace, his awkwardness suggesting once more his lack of religion. After dinner, when Desiree and her mother leave the table, Lurie eventually apologizes to Isaacs for what he put his daughter through:

‘One more word, then I am finished. It could have turned out differently, I believe, between the two of us, despite our ages. But there was something I failed to supply, something’—he hunts for the word—‘lyrical. I lack the lyrical. I manage love too well. Even when I burn I don’t sing, if you understand me. For which I am sorry. I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologize for the grief I have caused you and Mrs Isaacs. I ask for your pardon.’

*Wonderful* is not right. Better would be *exemplary*. (171)

Isaacs is glad that he has apologized but is not yet satisfied and asks Lurie what God would want from him. Lurie’s reply establishes the basis of a secular salvation, which was discussed earlier in this chapter both in terms of Coetzee’s notion of the endlessness of confession and Boehmer’s application of the idea to *Disgrace* in relation to the TRC (with the implication that white South Africans, who benefited from Apartheid, must live in a continual state of disgrace):

‘As for God, I am not a believer, so I will have to translate what you call God and God’s wishes into my own terms. In my own terms, I am being punished for what happened between myself and your daughter. I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself. It is not a punishment I have refused. I do not murmur against it. On the contrary, I am living it out from day to day, trying to accept disgrace as my state of being. Is it enough for God, do you think, that I live in disgrace without term?’ (172)

Isaacs says that Lurie would have to ask God and suggests that it was God’s doing that Lurie decided, on a whim, as he was passing through George, to visit the Isaacs family. Lurie denies this and decides he dislikes Isaacs when he suggests it is easy

to ask him, Melanie's soft-hearted father, for forgiveness. Lurie then goes into the bedroom in which Desiree and her mother are "doing something with a skein of wool" (173) and "[w]ith careful ceremony he gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor" (173). There is almost something classical about this act of abasement and in the reference to wool (the three Fates, Penelope's tapestry) and it marks Lurie's acknowledgement of the wrongness of his treatment of women as means to his ends, although he still has a twinge of desire when he looks into Desiree's eye. However, this apology is all the more meaningful for going against his nature, his Romantic philosophy of service to Eros; in fact, it can be seen as a repudiation of that philosophy.

His apology also shows how there can be no hope of religious salvation from sin, no hope of transcendence, but that secular salvation involves living with one's sin, and constantly trying to better oneself through service to others. In effect, Lurie has rejected the illusion of salvation through God, or the god Eros, and embraced his mortal, imperfect nature in choosing to live like a dog, which is reflected in his self-abasement before Mrs Isaacs and Desiree. His apology and its acceptance by the Isaacs family are further notes of optimism in the novel.

Lurie's modifications to his opera indicate his change in heart, the expansion of his sympathetic imagination, and reflect his changing situation. They also show his openness to the polyphony of voices within him, including that of Teresa, and he becomes, in a sense, her amanuensis. Clearly he had initially identified with Byron, who, as mentioned earlier, was infamous for his sexual exploits. His initial idea was to have Byron and Teresa living together in her husband's home, she still young and beautiful, he with a waning desire for her. However, "Byron, in the new version, is long dead; Teresa's sole remaining claim to immortality, and the solace of her lonely nights, is the chestful of letters and memorabilia she keeps under her bed, what she calls her *reliqui*, which her grand-nieces are meant to open after her death and peruse with awe" (181). He describes her as "a dumpy little widow" and "[w]ith her heavy bust, her stocky trunk, her abbreviated legs, she looks more like a peasant, a *contadina* than an aristocrat" (181). Lurie asks himself "Is this the heroine he has been seeking

all the time? Will an older Teresa engage his heart as his heart is now?” (181) because she has lost her youthful beauty and tellingly resembles Bev, with whom Lurie has recently had an affair. Indeed, it echoes an earlier incident when Lucy finds him asleep in the cage with Katy and says to him that Bev is a more interesting person than he thinks even in his own terms, prompting him to think about what his terms are: “That dumpy little women with ugly voices deserve to be ignored?” (79). He ponders:

Can he find it in his heart to love this plain, ordinary woman? Can he love her enough to write a music for her? If he cannot, what is left for him? (182)

In fact, he does come to love this image of an older, plainer Teresa, so much so, that when he eventually realises that the opera is going nowhere, he feels genuine sympathy for her:

Poor Teresa? Poor aching girl! He has brought her back from the grave, promised her another life, and now he is failing her. He hopes she will find it in her heart to forgive him. (214)

This echoes his hope that the dogs that he left behind him in the shelter will be able to forgive him for abandoning their bodies to a dishonourable treatment at the incinerator. The end of the opera may seem a failure in one sense, but in another, it does not matter. It shows that he has overcome his Platonic and erotic striving for immortality, whether in his acts of artistic creation or his sexual desires. He has overcome the same desire that has fed into his instrumentalist attitude to his relationships with women, especially the one with Melanie that led to his disgrace. The dead Byron figure represents the death of his predatory sexuality, of his erotic imagination, and his adoption of Teresa’s point of view represents the extension of his sympathetic imagination, his ability to perceive things from a woman’s perspective, a perspective that has up until then been closed to him. No doubt Lucy’s rape was the turning point in this shift of perspective and made it possible, opening him up to polyphony, to alternative voices within him. Earlier in the novel his erotic

imagination clearly overpowered his sympathetic imagination, although his twinges of conscience have been noted earlier in the chapter. Here the roles have been reversed. While his erotic imagination is not yet quite extinguished—witness his surges of desire towards Desiree—it has been subordinated to his sympathetic imagination. In his conversations with others, Lurie has tended to engage in monologue (much like Petrus) and Lucy herself tells him he has not been listening to her, yet he has the potential for dialogue as is witnessed by the voices within him when he comes to shifting perspective in his opera, when he opens himself up to alternative voices. Indeed, the voice of Byron’s daughter, Allegra, comes unbidden, the “inconvenience” (186) of which is an indictment of Byron’s irresponsible way of life.

Lurie had initially thought that he would be positioned between Teresa’s passion and Byron’s desire for oblivion, “but he was wrong. It is not the erotic that is calling to him after all, nor the elegaic, but the comic” (184). This represents his relinquishing the erotic but may also introduce a note of optimism. Through his opera he also articulates the fact that the poets led him astray: “*Out of the poets I learned to love*, chants Byron in his cracked monotone, nine syllables on C natural; but life, I found (descending chromatically to F), is another story” (185), admitting that his literary imagination has deceived him. It is also a repudiation of the Platonic belief in the possibility of the soul’s possession of immortality, an acceptance of his own mortality, and thus his kinship with dogs, rather than with gods, or God. Indeed, despite his erotic desire for immortality—he uses the word often, especially in connection with Teresa and his opera (181, 185, 209, 214)—he realizes that “[n]othing has to last forever” (211), an insight typical of both Buddhism and Cynicism. When he assaults Pollux, he relapses into his erotic or passionate mode (since aggression is closely related to eros), and he notes that while “Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not with honour” (209), a term from virtue ethics taking precedence over the rule of law. However, the female figure of Teresa provides him with guidance:

That is why he must listen to Teresa. Teresa may be the last one left who can save him. Teresa is past honour. She pushes her breasts to the sun; she plays the banjo in front of the servants and does not care if they

smirk. She has immortal longings, and sings her longings. She will not be dead. (209)

What he has to learn from Teresa, and from his own daughter, is how to live without honour—or, at least, to be able to imagine living without honour—like a dog, and how to respect the other. Marais argues that just as Dostoevsky in *The Master of Petersburg* learns that he cannot love Pavel without loving all sentient creatures, including the dog that howls during the night, so must Lurie realise that he cannot love Lucy without loving her rapists, Pollux and Petrus, even as he is beginning to love the dogs with which he works (Marais, 2001, 12). Platonic love is an exclusive or aristocratic love of the abstract Beauty that all beautiful things (bodies, artworks, laws, knowledge) share in common; Christian, or Socratic, love is an inclusive or egalitarian love of all concrete, individual embodied souls, irrespective of their participation in Beauty. Of course, there is the danger that this universal love, like “the love of humanity,” in its very generality becomes abstract and vacuous.

It should be noted, too, that, according to philosophers like Kant, Singer and Regan, love, care and compassion are character traits and not ethical categories, traits that they collapse into the cruelty/kindness discourse of animal welfare, that one should treat others properly not because of our possession of a quality like kindness or compassion, but because we are morally obliged to do so. On the other hand, this emphasis on terms such as love, kindness and compassion can be seen as a recognition of the importance of a virtue ethics of care, where such positive sentiments are encouraged to grow, as opposed to a Kantian ethics of justice, which merely insists on a minimal rule of law. Indeed, it is difficult to see how such virtues can flourish in the Weberian, instrumentalist ethos which forms the background to the novel. However, this makes Lurie’s moral development, in these terms, all the more remarkable, and provides some hope for the future, despite some critics seeing the novel as “a deeply pessimistic book” (Lowry, 1999).

Another problem is that Attridge and Marais emphasize the fact that the change from self-regarding to other-regarding is not something that a person has control over; it just happens to one, and can perhaps be called an act of grace (Marais, 2001, 10,

11)(Attridge, 2005, 182). Philosophers of ethics would not find this satisfactory, since to them an act is only moral if it involves a deliberate, rational choice. However, one could perhaps argue that Lurie has chosen to place himself in a situation—helping Bev in the clinic, for instance—that allows him to develop ethically despite himself. Nonetheless, it seems to render moral agency arbitrary and inexplicable.

All the same, the opera represents another important turning point in Lurie’s moral development. His changed attitude is evident when he returns to the farm after having been expelled for assaulting Pollux. By the end of the novel he has relinquished his paternal, proprietary attitude toward Lucy and comes to respect her independence and decisions, one of the positive, if mutedly so, moments in the novel, although it seems to follow an epiphany:

The wind drops. There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready-made for a Sargent or a Bonnard. City boys like him; but even city boys can recognize beauty when they see it, can have their breath taken away. (218)

The references to artists and beauty here may be a subtle suggestion that salvation can be obtained through art. Lucy asks him to tea: “She makes the offer as if he were a visitor. Good. Visitorship, visitation: a new footing, a new start” (218). As Sue Kossew points out:

It is only when he acknowledges his “visitorship” rather than his rights of fatherhood and ownership that he feels like he has made a “new footing, a new start” (218). It is Lucy’s acknowledgement, too, of her having to share the land, to make compromises, that enables her to make tentative steps towards overcoming her disgrace and finding a way to live in a future South Africa that does not entail just guilt and punishment. (Kossew, 2003, 161)

Kossew's insights can be developed further, namely that *Disgrace* is not only about the moral growth of Lurie and Lucy but also about life, fertility, birth and children and the relation of these to literature. Furthermore, Jolly's insight that the novel presents the abuse of women and animals as correlative can also be extended to include the abuse of children. Marais' insight that Lurie's Lucy bears some relation to Wordsworth's Lucy prompts the question of why Lurie, a devotee of Wordsworth, would name his daughter after a girl who died a child. It is evident, too, that Lucy has fashioned her life very differently from the way her father has his, possibly even in opposition to his:

As a child Lucy had been quiet and self-effacing, observing him but never, as far as he knew, judging him. Now, in her middle twenties, she has begun to separate. The dogs, the gardening, the astrology books, the asexual clothes: in each he recognizes a statement of independence, considered, purposeful. The turn away from men too. Making her own life. Good! He approves! (88-9)

Even though he appears to approve of her independence, there is a hint of paternalism in his thoughts, and Lucy's rape puts his approval to a severe test, which he fails, since he repeatedly and monologically tries to dissuade her from staying on the farm (103, 155, 157, 158, 160, 204); indeed, once he even asks Petrus whether he is prepared to manage Lucy's farm while she is away, even though he has not obtained her consent to do so (152-53). Lurie finds Lucy's newly found independence surprising because she was always a quiet child. However, there are constant suggestions, even by Lurie, that he has not been a good father and guide for his daughter. Finally, when he professes surprise at the name of the boy, Pollux, Lucy bursts out:

'P-O-L-L-U-X. And David, can we have some relief from that terrible irony of yours?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Of course you do. For years you used it against me when I was a child, to mortify me. You can't have forgotten.' (200)

The irony used by Lurie against Lucy can be considered a mild form of child abuse: Lucy certainly suggests as much.<sup>1</sup> Lurie's affair with Melanie also borders on child abuse. As was noted in the analysis earlier in this chapter, on several occasions Lurie describes Melanie as a child, emphasizing the narrowness of her hips. Also, his reactions to Melanie's even younger sister, Desiree (reminiscent of Nabokov's *Lolita*), are very disconcerting, suggesting paedophilia. Disturbingly, Lurie's ex-wife, Rosalind, describes Melanie as just his type, referring to her "cunning little weasel body" (189). Furthermore, Lurie's assault of Pollux can also be considered child abuse. Lucy calls him a "disturbed child" (208) as opposed to Lurie's abusive epithets of "jackal" and "Deficient. Mentally deficient" (208). Lucy has already admitted that Pollux was not one of her rapists and that he was with her two assailants only to learn. This suggests that he is not a man yet, that he is still a boy, despite his evident malevolence. Lurie fails to consider that a child is usually completely shaped by the society or community in which he or she is born and thus cannot be held completely responsible for his or her actions. It is all too easy for a parent or adult to impose his or her will on a child. Significantly, it is Lurie's assault of Pollux that causes Lucy to kick her father out of her house, allowing him back later only as a visitor. Equally significant are the terms on which he is expelled, since they present Lurie as being sacrificed so that Lucy can attain some peace:

'I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace.'

'And am I part of what you are prepared to sacrifice?'

She shrugs. 'I didn't say it, you said it.'

'Then I'll pack my bags.' (208)

Thus, Lurie has to relinquish his paternalism and develop a respect not just for women but for children too, and not just his own daughter. While he failed to respect her otherness as a child and fails to respect Pollux's otherness, he does try to respect

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<sup>1</sup>Franz Kafka makes a similar accusation in "Letter to His Father," claiming his father Hermann used irony to intimidate his children (Karl, 1991, 609).



her independence once she grows up, this being a further modest note of optimism in the novel. Thus *Disgrace* should be seen as much an indictment of the abuse of children as it is of the abuse of women and animals; in fact, it presents a critique of all disempowered or marginalised members of society.

Perhaps that is why Lucy decides to keep the child, not out of a mere respect for life, but for the care of one of the most powerless members of society, the unborn child. Her favouring of the child's right to life above her right to privacy reinforces her privileging an ethics of care above an ethics of justice, a choice perhaps caused by the abortion she has had as referred to earlier. It is significant that she has kept this news from her father and when he asks why she has done so she says:

‘...David, I can't run my life according to whether or not you like what I do. Not any more. You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. ...I am not a minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions.’ (198)

Lucy is prepared to respect the alterity of the child inside her even though it was conceived in rape, something which Lurie struggles to understand. Furthermore, she has re-shaped something good from evil, transformed a child conceived in violence and hatred into a symbol of hope and renewal for the future. The child will root Lucy more firmly in South African soil and strengthen her bond with Petrus's family, a bond which will provide her child with a birthright to the land. Thus Lucy's pregnancy, in the bigger picture, especially in how she chooses to deal with it, can also be seen as a muted note of optimism.

In the same way that he has to learn respect for biological children, Lurie has to learn respect for his brainchild, the opera, *Byron in Italy*, which initially seems to be a mere projection of his own sexuality, completely divorced from the southern African context. He has to learn to listen to the voices of his creatures, to respect their alterity, without dominating them as the Author or authority. In Bakhtinian

terms, he must avoid a monologue, dictating to his creatures, but establish a dialogue with them, which he does eventually achieve, as has already been explored. The same applies to Coetzee, as discussed in previous chapters, namely his commitment to dialogism in order to avoid dominating his text; like Coetzee and Costello, Lurie must become a secretary to the invisible, an amanuensis to his creatures. This he must do by relinquishing his Platonism, where the artwork, like biological children, is merely the means to furthering the immortality of the parents, whether creator or parent, implying an instrumentalist attitude to one's children. Lurie does relinquish this attitude toward both his biological daughter and his brainchild, the opera. He relinquishes his position of power and establishes a relation of equality, recognising the alterity of his daughter and his artwork. His new openness is evident not only in the shift of protagonist from Byron to Teresa, but also in his shift from imitating European music and using a piano to using a township banjo which Teresa ends up playing. He relinquishes his Platonism for Socratism, monologue for dialogue, for not only did Socrates portray himself as a midwife (rather than originator or creator) of ideas, and thus a humble assistant in their birth rather than their proud father, but his metaphor gives precedence to his own mother, who, as has been mentioned earlier, was also a midwife, thus acknowledging the importance of women, both in procreation and delivery of children.

Finally, *Disgrace* portrays not only Lurie's relinquishment of his rights as a father over Lucy, but also suggests the relinquishment of the paternalism of white liberal South African men over black South Africans. This is thematized in the novel in the word "boy" in relation not to Pollux but to adults. After Lucy's rape, Ettinger says he will send a "boy" to fix her kombi and Lurie notes that "[i]n the past he has seen Lucy fly into a rage at the use of the word *boy*. Now she does not react" (109). Again, when Lurie is helping Petrus to dig holes for pipes, he asks him whether he will build his house himself. Petrus replies that housebuilding requires skills and that "[f]or digging you just have to be a boy" (152). Lurie reflects:

Petrus speaks the word with real amusement. Once he was a boy [as an adult under apartheid], now he is no longer. Now he can play at being

one, as Marie Antoinette could play at being a milkmaid. (152)

Lurie is aware of the “historical piquancy” (77) of this shift of power when Lucy suggests he asks to work for Petrus for pay and when he assists Petrus with work on the farm in the role of the unskilled helper, a *handlanger* (136).

Thus *Disgrace* is optimistic in showing the end of the paternalism of colonialism in relation not only to Africans, but also to women, children, animals and artworks. This is symbolized by Lurie’s moral change. However, this optimism is not unqualified, for in place of Lurie’s paternalism, we see the continuation of patriarchy in the form of Petrus, whose name, in alluding to the first Pope, Peter, suggests that people like him will be the rock on which the new South Africa will be built. However, while it suggests that the battle against the injustice and inequality of racism has shown some success the same is not true for the battles against sexism, homophobia, classism, speciesism and ageism. However, Lurie’s transformation gives some modest hope for a more general transformation.

When Lurie speaks to Petrus the day after the party he begins to develop a disliking for his “dominating personality” (137), ironically unaware that the term can be applied to him too, especially in his relentless, monologic efforts to persuade Lucy to leave the farm, despite her clear intention to stay. The mantle of patriarchal privilege has shifted from Lurie to Petrus, which is indexical of the power shift in South Africa from white male to black male, patriarchy remaining in place. He does, however, have a valid point, in that Lucy’s assailants should be brought to justice. Nonetheless, there does seem to be some inconsistency, of which he seems unaware, because he is now asserting the rule of law, whereas previously, when justifying his use of Melanie, he had asserted the “rights of desire.” Petrus insists that the boy is not a thief, refusing to acknowledge Lucy’s rape, and concludes “He is too young, you cannot put him in jail” (138). Much later, after Lurie returns from Cape Town on suspecting something is not right, only to discover that Lucy is pregnant, he again confronts Petrus who finally admits that the boy, Pollux, is a relative, noting: “You come to look after your child. I also look after my child” (201). Despite the false symmetry that Petrus paints—Lucy is a victim while Pollux is a perpetrator, Lucy is

literally Lurie's child while Pollux is only figuratively the child of Petrus—his words point to a more basic level of ethics than the Western rule of law and justice, the ethics of family (for want of a better term). It is a valid point because it shows how Lurie's supposed abstract desire for justice may be no more than a desire to protect his own child, or worse, a desire for revenge on her attackers. Indeed, Petrus's recourse to family ethics, a particularly African polygamistic concept, in particular his offer to marry Lucy and thus provide her with his protection, promises closure to the whole affair, and can even be seen as a generous offer.

Lurie, however, sees the offer as opportunistic blackmail, since it will involve Lucy's handing over her title deeds to Petrus. Lucy accepts the offer on the condition that the house remains hers—that no one may enter it without her permission, not even Petrus—and that she can keep the kennels. Thus she relinquishes her right to the land, but not her right to stay on it, and her child will also become Petrus's responsibility. Lurie offers one last time to send her to Holland, an offer she rejects once again, displaying a stubbornness that she shares with her father. He finally accepts her wishes, saying how humiliating it is: "Such high hopes, and to end like this" (204). Lucy has the final word:

'Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.'

'Like a dog.'

'Yes, like a dog.' (205)

Critics like Elizabeth Lowry have seen this as a very pessimistic passage. However, it could be interpreted more positively. After all, it seems to be a speciesist prejudice that a dog's life is necessarily inferior to a human's, although Peter Singer sees more value in the life of a healthy human than that of a healthy dog (Singer, 1999, 90). As Durrant writes: "According to Lucy, reconciliation, or at least co-habitation, in postapartheid South Africa is dependent on the relinquishing of privilege, on learning

to live ‘like a dog’ (*Disgrace*, 205)” (Durrant, 2006, 127). Although he does not use the terms, Durrant makes many Socratic and Cynical insights in his essay, in which he compares *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Age of Iron*, *The Lives of Animals* and *Disgrace*, relating ethics to ignorance (and fallibility). In particular he argues for the limits of the sympathetic imagination, as opposed to Costello’s claim that there are no limits to it, paradoxically claiming, however, that the very recognition of these limits forces one to recognise the alterity of the other (similar to what Marais argues). These insights can be extended further if one accepts the argument in Chapter Two that Costello is a Socratic figure and, by extension, that Lucy is, in a sense, her disciple, just as the Cynics, most famously Diogenes, were disciples of Socrates.

*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volume 2* has a useful discussion of the Cynics, “the dog philosophers”: “The Cynics believed that happiness was to be found in ‘virtuous action,’ which was the practical expression of self-realization (*arete* and ‘know thyself’)” (Borchert, 2006, 616). It notes that Cynics were opposed to the conventions and artificialities of ordinary, ‘normal’ life. Cynicism was concerned with individual suffering: “Freedom was secured by ‘following nature’ by means of self-discipline, the end of which was self-sufficiency (*autarkia*); since man was vulnerable and perverted through his emotions and desires, happiness could be guaranteed only by the understanding and strength of mind to want nothing, lack nothing” and “hence, the most characteristic feature of Cynicism was an asceticism that sought to reduce physical wants to a minimum, as in the case of the animals after which Cynics were named, and to achieve spiritual independence like gods” (616). Thus, according to the Cynics, one can only become like gods by living like dogs.

It is interesting that Costello, in “At the Gate,” when accused of being cynical in her attitude to writing, says:

‘About myself, yes, I may well be cynical, in a technical sense. I cannot afford to take myself too seriously, or my motives. But as regards other people, as regards humankind or humanity, no, I do not believe I am cynical at all.’ (Coetzee, 2003, 201)

Referring to herself as cynical may be a reference to her “doggedness” (that her son, John, notes in “What Is Realism?”) or fidelity (as was argued in Chapter 3) as a writer, or it could be an allusion to the Cynics in a “technical sense.” Lucy tries to achieve a Cynical autonomy in her chosen way of life in the autarky she practises on her farm, an ecofeminist autonomy that includes independence from men. Like most ideals, however, it is not perfectly attainable, and she is forced to make some difficult compromises to keep her ideal alive, but it can be argued that she succeeds. The Platonic idealism of her lesbian Republic must settle for a Socratic, or Cynical, imperfectionism. In fact, she becomes even more Cynical in relinquishing her land (but not her house—even Diogenes had some form of shelter), making her less tied to material possessions and closer to nature, and thus freer to exercise virtue. The Cynical overtones should be noted in her words when she answers Lurie after he asks her whether she has begun to love her child:

‘Love will grow—one can trust Mother Nature for that. I am determined to be a good mother, David. A good mother and a good person. You should try to be a good person too.’

A good person. Not a bad resolution to make, in dark times. (216)

Her reduced, but not abject, state is one that she shares with the characters of several of Coetzee’s novels: Michael K, the Magistrate, Elizabeth Curren and, not least, her father Lurie, who is also reduced to the state of a dog and dog-man by the end of the novel. His conversion to Cynicism is accompanied by the relinquishing of his philosophy of devotion to Eros. In each case, Coetzee suggests that one can only come to know oneself, to grow ethically, if one is able or willing to be reduced to the state of a dog, or to imagine oneself in such a reduced state. One can only find the god within oneself by relinquishing all irrelevancies and exposing oneself, through suffering, to the bedrock of being. One can only discover one’s humanity by temporarily losing it, by occupying a position of powerlessness or sharing the suffering of others.

Of course, the dogs are not presented in purely positive terms in *Disgrace* and Coetzee refuses to idealise them. Lucy’s dogs are all watch dogs—“working dogs”

(61)—whose job is to protect property, which firmly places them in the “economies of instrumentalism,” which is opposed to Cynical autarky. The old ram’s injury was a result of an attack by a pack of dogs; his owner tells Bev that “[e]very night the dogs come” (82). Also, Lucy describes her own rapists as dogs, in trying to understand why they raped her with such hatred:

‘They spur each other on. That’s probably why they do it together.  
Like dogs in a pack.’ (159)

Furthermore, Lucy’s rape is described in Lurie’s imagination as an attack by dogs:

... the men, for their part, drank up her terror, revelled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror. *Call your dogs!* They said to her. *Go on, call your dogs! No dogs? Then let us show you dogs!* (160)

Finally, Katy attacks Pollux. In these cases the dogs represent male aggression. Thus dogs represent both the godlike and beastlike sides of human nature, particularly masculine nature. Coetzee is thus under no illusions about a dog’s life and nature. Of course, the dogs should not simply be seen as representing aspects of human nature, and it is in respecting their singularity that Lurie achieves his salvation.

Lurie’s shift in sensibility is especially clear in his work with the dogs, who, like women, are victims of an instrumentalist ethos: they are discarded when no longer useful and handed to Bev for *Lösung* (142, 218). This term, which refers to the Nazi’s “Final Solution” of genocide for the Jews, is highly problematic, and echoes its controversial use by Costello in *The Lives of Animals*. It is controversially linked with euthanasia, since many, if not most, of the dogs handed to Bev are not maimed or unhealthy. The fact is that they suffer “most of all from their own fertility. There are simply too many of them” (142). Lurie reflects on his chosen task of incinerating the corpses of the dogs:

The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: *because we are too menny*. That is where he enters their lives. He may not be their

saviour, the one for whom they are not too many, but he is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves, once even Bev Shaw has washed her hands of them. A dog-man, Petrus once called himself. Well, now he has become a dog-man; a dog under-taker; a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*<sup>2</sup>. (146)

The fact that even Bev washes her hands of the dogs, alludes to Pontius Pilate's washing his hands of their guilt for condemning Jesus, and thus links the dogs, with Jesus, to the idea of the scapegoat. The Jews were similarly scapegoated in Europe, and not only during the Nazi period: Costello points out that Kafka's scapegoating was a *Vorgefühl* of what was to come (Coetzee, 1999b, 26). Once again Isaac Bashevis Singer's words help to elucidate this metaphor of genocide, that "[i]n relation to [animals], all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka." The suggestion is that a world in which animals are brought into being only to be killed and slaughtered on a massive scale is a fallen world, a world in disgrace, a world in which few people are untouched by the sin of instrumentalizing other sentient beings. If Lurie is moved by his work at the clinic but unmoved by the animals he eats, it is because he is personally acquainted with the animals he helps to dispose of; he recognizes their subjectivity, and he finds that instead of becoming insensitized to the killing, "[t]he more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets" (142). He is not prepared to leave the bodies on the dump for the incinerator crew to dispose of: "[h]e is not prepared to inflict such dishonour upon them" (144), nor is he prepared to let the crew break the limbs of the dogs with their spades before feeding them into the incinerator. He reflects:

Why has he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop off the bags at the dump and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; and what do dogs know about honour and dishonour anyway?

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<sup>2</sup>Gandhi, to whom Costello refers in *The Lives of Animals* in relation to vegetarianism, Kafka and fasting, tried to raise the status of the untouchables in India, giving them the name *harijan*, which means "children of God," and publishing a weekly paper called *Harijan*.



For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing. (145-46)

Attridge, in an attempt to identify whether Lurie does achieve a state of grace in the novel, as opposed to redemption from dishonour, goes on to argue that:

Grace is by definition something given, not something earned, in the way that Lurie has earned this moment of optimism in his relationship with his daughter. Grace is a blessing you do not deserve, and though you may seek for grace, it comes, if it comes at all, unsought. (180)

He concludes that Lurie does achieve something like a state of grace by the end of the novel in his work with the dogs, in his realisation of the value of the singularity of individual lives, and in the respect he shows for the bodies of the euthanased dogs despite the apparent worthlessness of his efforts. He argues that Lurie's concern with incinerating the corpses of the dogs "is not a practical commitment to improving the world, but a profound need to preserve the ethical integrity of the self" (187) and compares this with Costello's vegetarianism coming from a desire to save her soul. Finally, Attridge points out that "[i]t's precisely the notion of *cost*, the measurement of profit and loss, that Coetzee questions in *Disgrace* and that literature puts to the test" (191). Grace, in not being something earned, cuts against the Weberian, instrumentalist vision of society, a world that can be said to have fallen into a state of disgrace.

However, this interpretation of the ending of *Disgrace*, in which Lurie can be said to have achieved a degree of salvation, is complicated by comparisons of "sacrificing" the dogs with the mass killing of Jews in the Holocaust. Few of the critics referred to in this thesis discuss the Holocaust analogy in relation to *Disgrace*; if they do so, it is almost exclusively in relation to *Lives*. Even in a collection of critical essays like *J.M. Coetzee and the Role of the Public Intellectual* (Poyner, 2006), only one critic, Michael Bell, discusses the Holocaust analogy in relation to *Disgrace*, and then only in the concluding page of his article in which he expresses his distaste for the word

“Holocaust” and claims that he also finds that “the conclusion of *Disgrace* has the force of a sudden kick in the stomach”:

Lurie’s final remark about the dog (“I am giving him up”) resists, as far as I can see, analytic articulation (*Disgrace*, 220). Obliquely invoking the Shoah, it speaks from the abyss of the self, combining both betrayal and abnegation within a transcendent, but not religious, implication of sacrifice. He does not know whether he is acting selfishly or generously at the level of motivation, but he is willing to do the right thing; the desire being focused precisely by the objective triviality of the occasion. Costello has something similar in mind when she speaks not of moral conviction but of saving her soul (*Lives*, 43). (Bell, 2006, 188)

It seems significant that it is Lurie, himself most probably Jewish, who compares the euthanasia of the dogs to the mass murder of Jews. Presumably Bell means the killing of the dogs is trivial only relative to the killing of the Jews, but Coetzee would not have evoked the analogy lightly, would not have dared making it, if he considered the euthanasing of the dogs to be trivial in itself. Bell’s observations about Costello’s use of the Holocaust analogy can equally be applied to *Disgrace*:

By allowing Costello to use the Shoah to express her anguish about animals, Coetzee is using the animal theme to illuminate not just the psychology of the Shoah, or apartheid, but of the historical judgments made about them. How many of those who sincerely subscribe to the antiracist culture of the late twentieth century would have done so at the beginning of it? How many are exercising independent moral responsibility and how many are animated, like the earlier perpetrators, by the mass emotions of their own day? (Bell, 2006, 186)

Thus, Coetzee uses the analogy, as did Isaac Bashevis Singer most famously before him, to challenge his readers to question their own norms and prejudices, not only in relation to race, class, sex and age, but also to species, to consider the psychic cost

to themselves of their complicity in the exploitation of animals, as well as the animal suffering that their complicity necessitates.

In an essay in which he brilliantly parodies both Kafka's "Report to an Academy" and Coetzee's use of it in *The Lives of Animals*, Gareth Cornwell adopts the perspective of a dog (who resembles not just Red Peter but also the canine narrator of "Investigations of a Dog" (Kafka, 1973)) who expresses his or her dissatisfaction with Lurie's assistance in the killing of the dogs being described as an act of self-sacrifice and of "love" (Coetzee, 1999a, 219), and of the general critical acceptance of these terms:

*Love? Who in their right mind murders out of love? This, in a nutshell, is the curse of your human language—the way in which it enables you to delude yourselves into believing that something is so merely because you say it is so. Is it otiose to point out that what makes it possible for Lurie and Bev Shaw to believe that they are acting out of love is the unexamined assumption that they have absolute, ethically-sactioned authority over the animals in their charge—an authority that allows even for large-scale murder? (Cornwell, 2008, 135)*

Concerning the closing lines of the novel, in which Lurie carries the individualised dog, Driepoot, in his arms like a sacrificial lamb to be euthanased, telling Bev that "Yes, I am giving him up" (220), Cornwell's canine speaker says:

It is apparently orthodox to read this scene as marking another step in David Lurie's ethical education, a further stage in the process of self-renunciation on which he has embarked: he is giving up the dog to death *not because he wants to but in order to spare the animal further suffering*. In other words, Lurie's is an act of benevolent self-sacrifice.

I hope I have already said enough to indicate the level of self-delusion that such a reading entails. . . .

I must reiterate my suspicion that, if nobody else does, at least Coetzee sees this. And in my dog's-eye view, this complicates and darkens

the central thematic motif of ethical awakening while simultaneously compounding the disgrace in which the human world of the book is seemingly irredemiably sunk. (Cornwell, 2008, 136)

Driepoot can perhaps more precisely be described as a sacrificial scapegoat, since, though innocent himself, he bears the sins of humankind; indeed his very own killing is one of the sins that he is forced to bear. However, Lurie's "euthanasing" of "Driepoot" can, ambivalently, also be interpreted both in utilitarian terms of being "cruel to be kind" and in terms of an ethics of care. Cornwell is right to suggest that it is not just Lurie but the entire world he inhabits that is sunk into a state of disgrace. However, perhaps it is premature to call the world irredeemable. The world depicted in *Disgrace* is, indeed, in a state of disgrace for treating others, and not just human others, as expendable, merely as means to ends, but while the mass of humanity turns a blind eye to the injustices exercised daily on millions of animals, there are those, like Bev Shaw and Lurie, who face the truth and in showing kindness to the animals discarded by other people, at great personal psychic cost and for no personal gain, open themselves to the possibility of grace and achieve some degree of redemption for themselves, and thus perhaps even for the world. After all, if someone as intransigent as Lurie, who was linked with Lucifer at the beginning of the novel, can make the first steps toward ethical transformation, evident in the awakening of his sympathetic imagination in relation to the two Persian sheep and the dogs in the clinic, in his learning to respect the alterity and independence of his biological daughter and the brainchild of his opera, in his renunciation of his devotion to Eros, in his acceptance of the ending of white privilege, in eventually apologising wholeheartedly to Melanie's family, in accepting his permanent state of disgrace and in resisting instrumentalist rationalism (however modestly), then there is perhaps a glimmer of hope.

Boehmer argues that in Lurie's actions towards the dogs, "[h]e achieves, in Elizabeth Costello's terms, an unconscious redemption from evil: his self becomes a site on which pity is staged" (Boehmer, 2006, 141). She concludes, "[i]n short, *Disgrace* along with Coetzee's published essays since 1999, proposes animals as the essential



third term in the reconciliation of human self and human other, where reconciliation equates with the embodying of an elastic and generous kindness” (141). This modest form of salvation is realised in *Disgrace* in various ways, emblematised in the GOD-DOG anagram (and palindrome). It consists in the recognition of our kinship with animals, our common finitude and shared capacity for suffering and joy. It also requires that we question our deepest prejudices—not just racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and ageism, but, deepest of all, speciesism—and our most cherished beliefs, most notably the beliefs in an immortal soul and in God. For in recognising our kinship with dogs rather than gods, we recognise our mortal, imperfect nature and thereby discover the true value of finite existence and the need for kindness and compassion.

While Lurie has not reached Elizabeth Costello’s level of moral progress, he has started taking the first steps in that direction, which includes admitting that he has made mistakes, analogous to the Socratic wisdom of recognising one’s ignorance. His movement, no matter how faltering and tentative, was traced from an inclination of Platonic perfectionism to that of Socratic fallibility, from abstract idealism to concrete embodiedness, from an erotic to a sympathetic imagination, from egoism to altruism, from monadic atomism to self-substituting responsibility, from Romantic self-realisation to Cynical self-realisation. This can be seen both in his development toward and Lucy’s consolidation of an ethics of care and Cynicism, in the historical sense. This movement, which involves the recognition of the other, can also be traced, in Bakhtinian terms, from the monologic to the dialogic. Indeed, it is art, music (the opera) in Lurie’s case, and writing in Coetzee’s case, that permits the moment of grace that can lead to salvation, a moment in which one recognises the mortality one shares with animals. Indeed, this may shed some light on the epigraph of the previous chapter, the extract from the hymn “Amazing Grace,” where the moment of grace is bound up with music: “how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”

In *Disgrace*, the movement from monologic to dialogic is not only embodied in Lurie’s personal development, but in Coetzee’s treatment of his material, in his combining all these antithetical and conflicting forces within the greater polyphony of his



novel. In such a novel deep pessimism can co-exist with modest optimism without any final resolution. It seems clear, then, that this novel exemplifies the words of Isaac Bashevis Singer in the epigraph of this chapter, namely that “[t]he pessimism of the creative person is not decadence, but a mighty passion for the redemption of man. . . . In his own fashion he tries to solve the riddle of our time and change, to find an answer to suffering, to reveal love in the very abyss of cruelty and injustice. . . . [W]hen all the social theories collapse and wars and revolutions leave humanity in utter gloom, the poet . . . may rise up to save us all.”

## Chapter 7

# J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Eating

A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones—and South Africa treated its imprisoned African citizens like animals. (Mandela, 1994, 187)

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated. (Mahatma Ghandi)

As the unframed framer, reason is a form of power with no in-built sense of what the experience of powerlessness might be like. (Coetzee, 2006, 4)

The phrase “the ethics of eating” does not straightforwardly capture Coetzee’s approach to this subject in his writings, since he approaches it, as he does the question of animal rights, from an oblique angle and on various levels. Indeed, his approach is as much ethical as it is political, ideological, economic, ecological, aesthetic and religious, the term “religious” to be understood in a secular sense and in terms of dietary taboos. This will prove frustrating for anyone who wants a more or less straightforward statement on the ethics of eating, just as *The Lives of Animals* proved frustrating for anyone looking forward to a straightforward statement on the issue of animal rights. However, Coetzee purposefully avoids a straightforward approach in

order to get his readership to view the subject from new perspectives and to make new and unexpected connections. Furthermore, his ethics of eating is often linked with a sympathy for animals, an imaginative sympathising with the suffering animal and an enlarging of the readers' sentiments in relation to animals. Key to Coetzee's approach are questions of individual salvation and (the misuse of) power. Essential, too, is the idea of the hunger artist, especially as exemplified by Franz Kafka, whose influence on Coetzee's fiction is profound. Thus this chapter will focus on related issues that Coetzee raises in his writing: the slaughter of animals, hunting, the ideologies of meat-eating and vegetarianism, and hunger-artistry.

Intriguingly, Coetzee suggests in "Meat Country" that "[t]he question of whether we should eat meat is not a serious question" (Coetzee, 1995, 46), since meat-eating is part of human nature. However, this claim is belied by the frequency and seriousness with which he deals with the issues of meat-eating and violence towards animals in the rest of his writings; indeed, it is belied by the very article in which the statement appears. Referring to "Meat Country," Jennifer Schuessler notes that "[w]hile Coetzee (who gives virtually no interviews) is a vegetarian, an earlier essay suggests an ambiguous view of the animal rights question that is more in keeping with the taut balancing of arguments and utter lack of consolation that characterizes his novels" (Schuessler, 2003). She goes on to contrast Costello's confrontational attitude towards meat-eaters with Coetzee's more ambivalent approach in "Meat Country," suggesting that "the essay almost reads like an apology for meat-eating." Nevertheless Coetzee's claim that eating meat is part of human nature is unconvincing and problematic, and the tone of the essay seems to be one of light-hearted irony, as he explores the various aspects of meat-eating, gently mocking the inconsistencies and ambivalences inherent in Western attitudes to meat-eating. While he appears here not to take his vegetarianism too seriously, the evidence of his other writings suggests that he takes very seriously the suffering of animals that results from a meat-centred diet.

In "Meat Country" Coetzee argues that the Western meat-centred diet is an outgrowth of colonialism, the settlers being those who had been deprived of meat in their



home countries and who sought to acquire meat in the colonies: “Europeans emigrated to the colonies for a variety of reasons. Most vivid of these was the promise that there they could have meat whenever they wanted” (Coetzee, 1995, 52). He also argues, not entirely with tongue-in-cheek, that the reason for peace in Western democracies is because “these are the societies that have made available enough animal protein to satisfy the cravings of the overwhelming majority of the citizens” (Coetzee, 1995, 51). Considering the subsequent economic and military success of the colonial societies, especially the United States, it is no wonder that meat-eating is considered prestigious, just as its association with aristocracy and power in the Middle Ages gave it prestige.

Even Mahatma Gandhi flirted with meat-eating before he developed his philosophy of *satyagraha*, despite his parents’ wishes and in secret, because he believed that vegetarianism had weakened the Indians, enabling the meat-eating British to conquer them, and that to resist them with force, Indians would have to start eating meat (Sannuti, 2006).<sup>1</sup> Excessive meat-eating has become associated with masculinity and nationalism in the West, and the ideology of the meat-centred diet has been successfully exported by the United States through aggressive marketing by American food companies (Lappé, 1991, 90, 93). In a recent interview (2008) concerning the Canadian seal slaughter, Coetzee notes the irony that “[a]t the same time that a segment of the educated middle class in the West is having second thoughts about treating animals as if they are things, demand for ‘animal products’—that is, pieces of dead animals—grows apace among newly prosperous peoples of the world who until very recently felt themselves starved of meat” (Coetzee, 2008).

Although Coetzee, through the figure of Costello in *The Lives of Animals*, questions the “normality” of the intensive farming of animals for moral reasons, he could just as well have questioned the “normality” of world food production, the wastefulness of which has been mentioned in previous chapters. Indeed, he does discuss the wastefulness of feeding grain to stock in “Meat Country,” but does not simply condemn it:

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<sup>1</sup>Since this is a webpage, no page references can be provided.

Rationalist vegetarians<sup>2</sup> like to point to the foolishness of feeding stock on grain. In energy terms, they say, it takes ten calories to provide one calorie when corn is converted into flesh. But this is just a datum, without meaning in itself. There are two absolutely opposed ways of interpreting it, giving it meaning. One is that people are unenlightened and wasteful. The other is, in the words of Marvin Harris, who has written a history of mankind as a struggle for protein, that ‘people honour and crave animal foods more than plant foods and are willing to lavish a disproportionate share of their energy and wealth on producing them.’ (Coetzee, 1995, 46-47)

Nonetheless, Coetzee’s ethics of eating, as presented in his novels, involves not indulging in food but in deliberately depriving oneself of certain types of food, or even from food generally as a form of self-discipline or hunger-artistry. This approach to food relates to forms of ancient virtue ethics.

Coetzee treats the details of the meat industry very briefly in his fiction and alludes to the suffering of animals rather than describes it in much detail in Costello’s speech in *The Lives of Animals* and in his speech in Sydney in 2007. Perhaps he does so in order to avoid merely knee-jerk reactions to the violence and cruelty in animal farming through sensationalist descriptions, or perhaps he feels this has been done sufficiently by other writers, in particular Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*, or perhaps he wishes the reader to imagine the conditions for themselves. Even when he does discuss the domestic farming of chickens in *Boyhood* and the industrial farming of chickens in *Age of Iron* he does not dwell on the details, although his descriptions are sufficiently powerful to convey a sense of animal suffering and human indifference to that suffering.

While Costello mentions factory farms she does not describe them in any detail, leaving it to her audience’s imagination:

“In addressing you on the subject of animals . . . I will pay you the honor of skipping a recital of the horrors of their lives and deaths. Though

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<sup>2</sup>Like Frances Moore Lappé, no doubt.

I have no reason to believe that you have at the forefront of your minds what is being done to animals at this moment in production facilities (I hesitate to call them farms any longer), in abattoirs, in trawlers, in laboratories, all over the world, I will take it that you concede me the rhetorical power to evoke these horrors and bring them home to you with adequate force, and leave it at that, reminding you only that the horrors I here omit are nevertheless at the center of this lecture.” (Coetzee, 1999b, 19)

In his Sydney speech, Coetzee distinguishes between those who oppose factory farming, those few who believe it is acceptable, and the vast majority who do not want to think about it:

And then there are the vast majority, people who in one degree or another support the industrial use of animals by making use of the products of that industry but are nevertheless a little sickened, a little queasy, when they think of what happens on factory farms and abattoirs and therefore arrange their lives in such a way that they are reminded of farms as little as possible, and do their best to ensure that their children are kept in the dark too, because as we all know children have tender hearts and are easily moved. (Coetzee, 2007b)

Despite the fact that Coetzee leaves the details of what happens on factory farms to his audience’s imagination in *The Lives of Animals*, there are several vivid descriptions of the slaughter of and violence to animals in his other fiction. In *Age of Iron*, when Elizabeth Curren, the narrator of the novel (whose initials and name have been related to those of Elizabeth Costello), takes her domestic worker, Florence, to see her husband, she discovers that he works in a chicken production and slaughter facility:

It was late on a Saturday afternoon. From the parking lot we followed a dusty track past two long, low sheds to a third shed, where a man in blue overalls stood in a wire enclosure with chickens—pullets really—milling

around his legs. The girl, Hope, tugged herself free, dashed ahead and gripped the mesh. Between the man and Florence something passed: a glance, a question, a recognition.

But there was no time for greetings. He, William, Florence's husband, had a job and the job could not be interrupted. His job was to pounce on a chicken, swing it upside down, grip the struggling body between his knees, twist a wire band around its legs, and pass it on to a second, younger man, who would hang it, squawking and flapping, on a hook on a clattering overhead conveyor that took it deeper into the shed, where a third man in oilskins splashed with blood gripped its head, drew its neck taut, and cut it through with a knife so small it seemed part of his hand, tossing the head in the same movement into a bin full of other dead heads. (Coetzee, 1998a, 41-42)

The description of the slaughter is not at all sensationalised, yet Mrs Curren and the girl stare with morbid fascination at the mechanised and industrialised slaughter and the callous indifference of the men to the lives of the chickens in their "care." Coetzee describes them as "pullets," meaning a young hen, less than a year old, thus emphasizing how briefly they have lived before being slaughtered. Curren's reflections on this process both emphasize the particularity of the killing, by referring to William's daily routine and considering the possibility of her own complicity in it, and the huge, impersonal scale of it, by mentioning the number of days and years that William has spent doing his job and the amount of carcasses, intestines and feathers that result from the process:

This was William's work, and this I saw before I had the time or the presence of mind to ask whether I wanted to see it. For six days of the week this was what he did. He bound the legs of chickens. Or perhaps he took turns with the other men and hung chickens from hooks or cut off heads. For three hundred rand a month plus rations. A work he had been doing for fifteen years. So it was not inconceivable that some of the

bodies that I had stuffed with bread crumbs and egg yolk and sage and rubbed with oil and garlic had been held, at the last, between the legs of this man, the father of Florence's children. Who got up at five in the morning, while I was still asleep, to hose out the pans under the cages, fill the feed troughs, sweep the sheds, and then, after breakfast, begin the slaughtering, the plucking and cleaning, the freezing of thousands of carcasses, the packing of thousands of heads and feet, miles of intestines, mountains of feathers.

I should have left at once, when I saw what was going on. I should have driven off and done my best to forget all about it. But instead I stood at the wire enclosure, fascinated, as the three men dealt out death to the flightless birds. And beside me the child, her fingers gripping the mesh, drank in the sight too.

So hard and yet so easy, killing, dying. (Coetzee, 1998a, 42)

What is particularly interesting is the way Curren emphasizes the fact that this man who "dealt out death to the flightless birds" is also the man who has fathered Florence's children, thus contrasting life and death. What is also possibly suggested is that people exploited by the oppressive system of apartheid can themselves become participants in another oppressive system, although their role in the exploitation of chickens is that of low-paid workers performing dehumanising work, another form of their own exploitation. Although she does not explicitly state it, oppressive power relations are evident in this piece: men over animals, (white) owners over (black) workers. Coetzee appears to be criticising the easy violence tolerated at all levels in South African society, violence resulting from the abuse of power, violence from which no-one is exempt either as perpetrators, collaborators or victims.

While Elizabeth Costello explicitly and continuously compares factory farms to Nazi death camps, the narrator in *Age of Iron* appears to be implicitly comparing factory farms in South Africa to the exploitation of Africans during apartheid. By

comparing the cruelty of factory farms to apartheid oppression, Coetzee is destabilizing the institutions of factory farms, the violence and cruelty of which most South Africans ignore and consider normal. Especially disturbing is the way the girl, ironically named Hope, watches the scene of slaughter with such eagerness, thus reinforcing Coetzee's belief that children who have good hearts by nature are taught by the adults to close their hearts to animal suffering, thereby creating a new generation of people indifferent to animal suffering. Of course, the fact that Coetzee describes this scene shows that he has not lost his childlike sensitivity to animal suffering and is an assertion of the power of the sympathetic imagination.

Blood becomes the link between violence to people and violence to animals. Later, when Mrs Curren takes Bheki to the casualty ward, after he has been knocked off his bicycle by policemen and is bleeding heavily from his forehead, she observes and reflects:

It was early on a Saturday evening, but already the casualties were trickling in. A man in white shoes and a rumpled black suit spat blood steadily into a dish. A youth on a stretcher, naked to the waist, his belt open, held a wad of sodden cloth to his belly. Blood on the floor, blood on the benches. What did our timid thimbleful count for beside this torrent of black blood? Child Snowdrop lost in the cavern of blood, and her mother lost too. A country prodigal of blood. Florence's husband in yellow oilskins and boots, wading through blood. Oxen keeling over, their throats split, hurling last jets into the air like whales. The dry earth soaking up the blood of its creatures. A land that drinks rivers of blood and is never sated. (Coetzee, 1998a, 62-3)

Once again, the point is not to cheapen human life by linking the violence done to animals to the violence done to humans, but to show how violence and abuse can become the norms in a society.

The opening chapter of *Boyhood* also describes the co-existence of two oppressive systems: patriarchy and the exploitation of animals. The person involved in exploiting

animals, the narrator's mother, is the object of masculine ridicule, including the narrator's, for wanting to ride a bicycle in order not to be confined to her house. His mother's forcing her hens to lay is described on the first two pages of the novel. While the narrator's indifference to the lives of the ants that he sucks up with his mother's vacuum follows soon after, the fact that Coetzee remembers the scenes of the animals suggests that he never became completely indifferent to their suffering, assuming that he can be identified with the narrator of his autobiographical novel or memoir (the work is generically ambiguous):

At the bottom of the yard they put up a poultry-run and instal three hens, which are supposed to lay eggs for them. But the hens do not flourish. Rainwater, unable to seep away in the clay, stands in pools in the yard. The poultry-run turns into an evil-smelling morass. The hens develop gross swellings on their legs, like elephant-skin. Sickly and cross, they cease to lay. His mother consults her sister in Stellenbosch, who says they will return to laying only after the horny shells under their tongues have been cut out. So one after another his mother takes the hens between her knees, presses their jowls till they open their beaks, and with the point of a paring-knife picks at their tongues. The hens shriek and struggle, their eyes bulging. He shudders and turns away. He thinks of his mother slapping stewing-steak down on the kitchen counter and cutting it into cubes; he thinks of her bloody fingers. (Coetzee, 1998b, 1-2)

In the boy narrator's imagination, his mother's treatment of the hens is associated with her hands bloodied from handling steak. Interestingly, like William in *Age of Iron*, the narrator's mother holds the hens between her knees while she forces her will on them, and the small knife she uses resembles in its size the knife used by William's co-worker. Thus the suffering of animals at the hands of humans features in some of Coetzee's child narrator's earliest memories, perhaps showing the germ of the sympathetic imagination.

Some of Coetzee's most vivid childhood memories are of his paternal grandfather's

farm, although the descriptions are organised with a mature adult's understanding, showing the change from subsistence agriculture to a less diversified, more industrialised, more market-orientated one, the new ethos showing a complete indifference to the individual lives of the animals, reducing them to mere commodities:

On his first visit to the farm, while his grandfather was still alive, all the barnyard animals of his story-books were still there: horses, donkeys, cows with their calves, pigs, ducks, a colony of hens with a cock that crowed to greet the sun, nanny-goats and bearded billy-goats. Then, after his grandfather's death, the barnyard animals began to dwindle, till nothing was left but sheep. First the horses were sold, then the pigs were turned into pork (he watched his uncle shoot the last pig: the bullet took it behind the ear: it gave a grunt and a great fart and collapsed, first on its knees, then on its side, quivering). After that the cows went, and the ducks.

The reason was the wool price. The Japanese were paying a pound a pound for wool: it was easier to buy a tractor than keep horses, easier to drive to Fraserburg Road in the new Studebaker and buy frozen butter and powdered milk than milk a cow and churn the cream. Only sheep mattered, sheep with their golden fleece. (Coetzee, 1998b, 81-2)

There is a sense of the loss of an age of innocence and its replacement with a more commercialised age, where farm animals are increasingly reduced to mere commodities. Despite the shooting of the pig being bracketed, the vividness of the description—effective in the individualised nature of the killing—shows how strong an impression it makes upon the boy narrator. The pig's fart makes the scene obscene rather than comical, and echoes the killing of the pigs in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, where defecation is associated with violence and death. The slaughter of the sheep likewise makes a strong impression on the narrator:

Every Friday a sheep is slaughtered for the people of the farm. He goes along with Ros and Uncle Son to pick out the one that is to die; then



he stands by and watches as, in the slaughtering-place behind the shed, out of sight of the house, Freek holds down the legs while Ros, with his harmless-looking little pocket-knife, cuts its throat, and then both men hold tight as the animal kicks and struggles and coughs while its lifeblood gushes out. He continues to watch as Ros flays the still warm body and hangs the carcass from the Seringa tree and splits it open and tugs the insides out into a basin: the great blue stomach full of grass, the intestines (from the bowel he squeezes out the last few droppings that the sheep did not have time to drop), the heart, the liver, the kidneys—all the things that a sheep has inside it and that he has inside him too. (Coetzee, 1998b, 98)

The details, once again, are not sensationalistic. Rather, the style of the passage resembles Hemingway's with its matter-of-fact descriptions and ample use of the conjunction "and." Thus the closing phrases of the paragraph come as quite a jolt to the reader since an unexpected connection is made between the organs of the freshly slaughtered sheep and the narrator's own. This is a particularly powerful moment of imaginative sympathy, since the comparison concerns not an abstract term like "life" but the concretely embodied "organs." The phrase "out of sight of the house" suggests there is something shameful about the slaughter and the "harmless-looking little pocket" knife echoes the knife in *Age of Iron* and the paring knife the narrator's mother uses on her hens. The smallness of the knives is contrasted with their devastating effectiveness, and it may not be stretching the interpretation to suggest that the knives are phallic, indirect references to the patriarchy that underlies this violence (the biblical patriarchs having been shepherds):

Ros uses the same knife to castrate the lambs. That event he watches too. The young lambs and their mothers are rounded up and penned. Then Ros moves among them, snatching lambs by the hind leg, one by one, pressing them to the ground while they bleat in terror, one despairing wail after another, and slitting open the scrotum. His head bobs down,

he catches the testicles in his teeth and tugs them out. They look like two little jellyfish trailing blue and red blood-vessels.

He slices off the tail as well, while he is about it, and tosses it aside, leaving a bloody stump.

With his short legs, his baggy, castoff pants cut off below the knees, his homemade shoes and tattered felt hat, Ros shuffles about the pen like a clown, picking out the lambs, doctoring them pitilessly. At the end of the operation the lambs stand sore and bleeding by their mothers' side, who have done nothing to protect them. Ros folds his pocket-knife. The job is done; he wears a tight little smile. (Coetzee, 1998b, 98-99)

The clownish figure of Ros and his “tight little smile” serve only to heighten the sense of horror and revulsion that the narrator experiences. However, there is also the suggestion that poor workers must do the dirty work in castrating and killing the sheep while the owners enjoy the profits of the wool sold and the flesh of the animals slaughtered. The castration helps to control the sheep and represents, like their slaughter, the total dominion of man over the lives and deaths of animals. The narrator almost personifies the suffering lambs, perhaps identifying with them since he himself is only a child who needs his mother's protection, with the words “despairing wail” and “the lambs stand sore and bleeding by their mothers' side, who have done nothing to protect them.” His queasiness is clear, although he later admits:

He himself likes meat. He looks forward to the tinkle of the bell at midday and the huge repast it announces: dishes of roast potatoes, yellow rice with raisins, sweet potatoes with caramel sauce, pumpkin with brown sugar and soft bread cubes, sweet-and-sour beans, beetroot salad, and, at the centre, in pride of place, a great platter of mutton with gravy to pour over it. (101)

This description exemplifies the meat-centred diet, an apt supplement to Derrida's phallogocentrism, combining as it does patriarchal domination of society with dominion over animals. Perhaps the term carnivorphallogocentric is due for coining.

Earlier Coetzee describes how “pigs were turned into pork” and here he shows how the slaughtered sheep has been turned into “mutton.” The history of English has allowed euphemistic meat-words to replace the names of the animals from which the meat comes. This occurred most notably during the Norman conquest when the French word for the animal became the name of the meat and the Anglo-Saxon word was kept for the animal itself. This symbolised the power relations between the Norman conquerors and the subjugated Anglo-Saxons, the new, meat-eating aristocracy superior to the indigenous farmers of animals. Today, however, these euphemistic terms—“pork,” “mutton,” “beef,” “veal,” and “venison”—help disconnect the name of the meat from the name of the animal, allowing people to avoid thinking about the living creatures that are the source of their meat, and there can be no doubt that Coetzee is aware of this in his choice of words. Once again he shows, if rather subtly, the power relations and illusions of language that permit violence and exploitation to thrive. He continues:

Yet after seeing Ros slaughtering sheep he no longer likes to handle raw meat. Back in Worcester he prefers not to go into butchers’ shops. He is repelled by the casual ease with which the butcher slaps down a cut of meat on the counter, slices it, rolls it up in brown paper, writes a price on it. When he hears the grating whine of the bandsaw cutting through bone, he wants to stop his ears. He does not mind looking at livers, whose function in the body is vague, but he turns his eyes away from the hearts in the display case, and particularly from the trays of offal. Even on the farm he refuses to eat offal, though it is considered a great delicacy. (101)

The boy narrator’s ambivalence toward meat is especially clear here: he likes to eat cooked meat but cannot stand touching raw meat and finds offensive the way butchers handle the remains of killed animals without any respect. His repugnance towards touching raw meat appears to be based on a moral repugnance of the casual violence done to animals in order to produce the meat. This tension, not quite a contradiction, in the narrator’s psyche does not show a character weakness, though. Rather it shows

how the society in which he has been brought up has created these divisions in his soul. He is the victim of his society's inconsistent and hypocritical attitudes towards animals.<sup>3</sup> In a sense he is a victim of psycho-social violence; he has been betrayed by his society into eating meat despite his inherent love of living, breathing animals; when he was first fed meat, he lost his innocence and became complicit in violence and abuse towards animals. On the other hand, he has held onto some vestiges of his innocence thanks to his sympathetic imagination, and, in his adult life, will use that to regain some of his lost innocence.

The narrator displays his sympathetic imagination when he tries to enter into the subjective experience of the sheep:

He does not understand why sheep accept their fate, why they never rebel but instead go meekly to their death. If buck know that there is nothing worse on earth than falling into the hands of men, and to their last breath struggle to escape, why are sheep so stupid? They are animals, after all, they have the sharp senses of animals: why do they not hear the last bleatings of the victim behind the shed, smell its blood, and take note?

Sometimes when he is among the sheep—when they have been rounded up to be dipped, and are penned tight and cannot get away—he wants to whisper to them, warn them of what lies in store. But then in their yellow eyes he catches a glimpse of something that silences him: a resignation, a foreknowledge not only of what happens to sheep at the hands of Ros behind the shed, but of what awaits them at the end of the long, thirsty ride to Cape Town on the transport lorry. They know it all, down to the finest detail, and yet they submit. They have calculated the price and are prepared to pay it—the price of being on earth, the price of being alive.  
(101-02)

Once again the description is highly concretised—“the hands of Ros behind the shed,” “the long, thirsty trip to Cape Town on the transport lorry”— but it also seems

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<sup>3</sup>These attitudes were traced by James Serpell in a book entitled *In the Company of Animals*, cited by Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*.

somewhat anthropomorphised: “accept their fate,” “never rebel,” “a resignation, a foreknowledge,” “they know it all, down to the finest detail,” “[t]hey have calculated the price and are prepared to pay it.” The poignancy of this passage lies in the fact that the sheep do not know the details of their fate, but have nonetheless submitted totally to the total power of their human masters, simply because they are physically unable to resist. What is significant about his imaginative sympathy is not its accuracy but simply the fact that he tries to enter into their experience and sympathises with their fate. Also, in the course of the paragraph he moves from a position where he wonders “why are sheep so stupid?” to one where he comes to believe that they know their fate, showing a newly discovered tragic respect for them. The common belief is that sheep are stupid, but he has managed to transcend the limitations of that disrespectful viewpoint thanks to his sympathetic imagination. The word “price” here echoes an earlier passage, quoted above, explaining why the narrator’s uncle specialised in sheep farming—“[t]he reason was the wool price”—and emphasizes the commodification of the sheep, their reduction to mere instrumentalist value, an attitude that the narrator resists in this passage.

In *Diary of a Bad Year*, in the first part of the piece, “On the Slaughter of Animals,” Coetzee describes a cooking programme from a vegetarian’s point of view, evoking Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of “estrangement” to express how alienating such shows can appear:

To most of us, what we see when we watch cooking programmes on television looks perfectly normal: kitchen utensils on the one hand, items of food on the other, on their way to being transformed into cooked food. But to someone unused to eating meat, the spectacle must be highly unnatural. For among the fruit and vegetables and oils and herbs and spices lie chunks of flesh hacked mere days ago from the body of some creature killed purposefully and with violence. Animal flesh looks much the same as human flesh (why should it not?). So, to the eye unused to carnivore cuisine, the inference does not come automatically (“naturally”) that the flesh on display is cut from a carcass (animal) rather than from a corpse

(human).

It is important that not everyone should lose this way of seeing the kitchen—seeing it with what Viktor Shklovsky would call an estranged eye, as a place where, after the murders, the bodies of the dead are brought to be done up (disguised) before they are devoured (we rarely eat flesh raw; indeed, raw flesh is dangerous to our health). (Coetzee, 2007a, 63)

Coetzee goes on to demonstrate the importance of being able to see conventional things in new ways—an imaginative shift also discussed in “Meat Country” (Coetzee, 1995, 47-8)—in the second part of the entry entitled “On the slaughter of animals,” where he exposes the inconsistency and hypocrisy, even the lack of self-knowledge, of Westerners, in this case Australians, in their attitudes towards the slaughter of the cattle that they export to Egypt:

On national television a few nights ago, amid the cooking programmes, a documentary was broadcast about what goes on in the abattoir in Port Said where cattle exported to Egypt from Australia meet their end. A reporter with a camera hidden in his backpack filmed scenes of cattle having their hind tendons slashed in order to make controlling them easier; in addition he claimed to have footage, too gruesome to broadcast, of a beast being stabbed in the eye, and the knife embedded in the eye socket then being used to twist the head to present the throat to the butcher’s knife.

The veterinary supervisor of the slaughterhouse was interviewed. Unaware of the secret filming, he denied that anything untoward ever took place there. His slaughterhouse was a model establishment, he said. (Coetzee, 2007a, 64)

Thus far, Coetzee appears to be endorsing the Australian attitude of outrage: the veterinary supervisor is exposed as a liar and the Egyptians as brutal and barbaric. However, the turning point of the passage is the reaction of the Australians to their concern with what happens in Port Said slaughterhouse:

Atrocities at the Port Said facility, and in the live export trade in general, have for a while been a source of concern to Australians. Cattle exporters have even donated to the slaughterhouse a killing-bed, a huge mechanism that traps the animal between bars and then lifts and rotates it bodily to make the death stroke easier. The killing-bed stands unused. The slaughterers found it too much trouble. (64-65)

Instead of questioning the way they profit from the cattle trade, or reconsidering exporting cattle to such countries or examining their own meat-eating habits, they provide a typically Western, technological “solution” to the abuse of their cattle, a slaughter-machine. Finally, Coetzee provides a larger context in which he shows why the cattle have their tendons hacked and in which he sympathises with the cattle, having exposed the hypocrisy of the Australians and, perhaps, their latent racism toward the dark-skinned Egyptian slaughterers:

It is too much to expect that a single fifteen-minute television programme should have a lasting effect on the conduct of the cattle trade. It would be ludicrous to expect hardened Egyptian abattoir workers to single out cattle from Australia for special, gentler treatment during their last hour on earth. And indeed common sense is on the workers’ side. If an animal is going to have its throat cut, does it really matter that it has its leg tendons cut too? The notion of compassionate killing is riddled with absurdities. What well-meaning welfare campaigners seem to desire is that the beast should arrive before its executioner in a calm state of mind, and that death should overtake it before it realizes what is going on. But how can an animal be in a calm state of mind after being goaded off a ship onto the back of a truck and driven through teeming streets to a strange place reeking of blood and death? The animal is confused and desperate and no doubt difficult to control. That is why it has its tendons hacked. (65)

Another issue raised in *Boyhood* concerning animals is hunting. The boy thinks: “[b]est of all on the farm, best of everything is the hunting” (Coetzee, 1998b, 87).

His uncle's heavy Lee-Enfield rifle is too powerful, so he has to borrow a neighbour's old .22. Despite his enthusiasm, however, the boy is inept at hunting:

He never manages to hit anything with this gun except frogs in the dam and muisvöels. Yet never does he lives [sic] more intensely than in the early mornings when he and his father set off with their guns up the dry bed of the Boesmansrivier in search of game: steenbok, duiker, hares, and, on the bare slopes of the hills, korhaan. (Coetzee, 1998b, 87)

Once again we see a child being initiated into a violent practice without being made aware of the ethical problems entailed. Once again, it can be seen as a betrayal by the adults of his childhood innocence, although the tone seems light-hearted. The name "Boesmansrivier" also seems to be ironic, since the land is not owned by Bushmen but by white men who are now hunting game just as their predecessors hunted Bushmen in previous years, as described in Coetzee's "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" in *Dusklands*. The Bushmen, or Khoisan have been reduced to the status of servants. This deeper, darker narrative contrasts effectively the childish exuberance of the boy. Coetzee's childhood experiences also provide him with "bush credibility," the personal experience with which he can justify his views on respect for animal life. His experiences may also help explain why Costello is lenient toward hunting while roundly condemning factory farming, since at least with hunting the game has a chance to escape (hence the concept of the fair chase) and the hunter personally kills his prey. This is, however, an idealised version of hunting, the reality often being rather more sordid, as Michelle Pickover points out in the first chapter of *Animal Rights in South Africa* (Pickover, 2005). Even in *Boyhood*, however, one can see the sordidness, even illegality, of hunting practices creeping in, because they go out hunting an endangered bird:

They are hunting the fabled paauw. However, since paauw are sighted only once or twice a year—so rare are they, indeed, that there is a fine of fifty pounds for shooting them, if you are caught—they settle for korhaan.

(88)



Furthermore, the narrator notes that “[t]he only variety of hunting at which they do succeed is hunting by night, which, he discovers, is shameful and not to be boasted about” (89). They use shameful means to shoot a steenbok in a lucerne field at night:

They tell themselves it is acceptable to hunt in this way because the buck are a pest, eating lucerne that should go to the sheep. But when he sees how tiny the dead buck is, no larger than a poodle, he knows the argument is hollow. They hunt by night because they are not good enough to shoot anything by day. (89)

Here Coetzee touches on the self-deception that hunters sometimes indulge in, like the elephant hunter discussed by Mary Midgley in *Animals and Why They Matter*, who, after immobilising an elephant and taking his time to kill it, reflects that “[he] was now a chief over boundless forests” (Midgley, 1983, 15). The word “shameful” also shows how hunters tend to use concepts from virtue ethics, where right and wrong are related to the individual hunter’s character rather than to the rights of the animals themselves, permitting the hunters to disregard the rights of the animals completely. The darker side of hunting—its very dark colonialist past and its present apartheid context—is subtly suggested in *Boyhood* by the narrator when the boy’s gun jams and the Coloured servants, Ros and Freek, will not handle the gun to help him, refusing to explain themselves to him. When he asks his Uncle Son, all he does is shake his head and say: “You mustn’t ask them to touch guns ... They know they mustn’t” (Coetzee, 1998b, 90).

In “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” in *Dusklands* part of the darker side of the history of hunting is made clear. While *Boyhood* presents Coetzee’s childhood self through the filter of his adult eyes, “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” presents the descendant’s view of his forefather, in each case there being an ironical distancing between character and author in relation to the character’s enthusiasm for hunting. In *Dusklands*, however, the charm of Coetzee’s childhood hunting is replaced with the horror of hunting Bushmen. Jacobus Coetzee contrasts Hottentots with Bushmen and justifies his hunting the latter by equating them with baboons, even though he has

just said that Bushmen have more religion than Hottentots:

The Bushman is a different creature, a wild animal with an animal's soul. Sometimes in the lambing season baboons come down from the mountains and to please their appetite savage the ewes, bite the snouts off the lambs, tear the dog's throats open if they interfere. Then you have to walk around the veld killing your own flock, a hundred lambs at a time. Bushmen have the same nature. If they have a grudge against a farmer they come in the night, drive off as many head as they can eat, and mutilate the rest, cut pieces out of their flesh, stab their eyes, cut the tendons of their legs. Heartless as baboons they are, and the only way to treat them is like beasts. (Coetzee, 1998c, 58)

What Jacobus does not explain is why the Bushmen may have a grudge against a farmer, and it only becomes clear later why the savagery of the Bushmen may merely be an echo of the brutality of the Dutch colonists, and a result, no doubt, ultimately of conflict over land, the Bushmen's hunter-gathering being incompatible with the Dutch settlers' pastoralism. The baboons attack the sheep because the sheep cannot defend themselves; they have been made weak thanks to humankind's domestication of them and rely on people's protection. However, in return for people's protection the sheep become reduced to mere commodities, as indicated by Jacobus's use of the synecdochic word "head." What is most disturbing, however, is not just his assertion that it is acceptable to treat the Bushmen like beasts but the further assumption that one may treat animals anyway one likes. This prefigures Costello's criticism of people who protested that the Nazis treated Jews like cattle (Coetzee, 1999b, 20), as though it does not matter how people treat animals, and Coetzee's same point in the Sydney speech (Coetzee, 2007b).

Jacobus Coetzee provides chilling advice on how to hunt Bushmen: "The only sure way to kill a Bushman is to catch him in the open where your horse can run him down," "It is only when you hunt them as you hunt jackals that you can really clear a stretch of country" and "In a game like that you must be prepared to risk a horse or

two to their arrows” (Coetzee, 1998c, 58-60). Thus Bushmen are equated with other “vermin” like jackals and killing them is described as a “game.” He elaborates:

There is no excuse for losing men when you are hunting Bushmen. The cardinal rule is simple: to get them in the open and make sure there are enough of you. Good men have died for neglecting that rule. Bushman poison takes a long time to work, but it is deadly. I have seen a man lie three days in agony, his whole body swollen up, screaming for death, and nothing to be done for him. After I had seen that I knew there was no more cause for softness. A bullet is too good for a Bushman. They took one alive once after a herder had been killed and tied him over a fire and roasted him. They even basted him in his own fat. Then they offered him to the Hottentots; but he was too sinewy, they said, to eat. (Coetzee, 1998c, 60)

The phrases “good men” and “cause for softness” must surely be interpreted ironically, especially in the light of the settlers’ roasting of the Bushman and in their cannibalistic gesture. There is no evidence that that particular Bushman was even guilty of killing the herder, and even if he was, the reaction of the settlers far exceeds the limits of human decency.

After falling ill with fever amongst the “wild” (read “free”) Hottentots, Jacobus has strange but lucid dreams: “From the fertile but on the whole effete topos of dreaming oneself and the world I progressed to an exposition of my career as tamer of the wild” (Coetzee, 1998c, 78). He notes that he loses his sense of boundaries in the wild: “What is there that is not me? I am a transparent sac with a black core full of images and a gun” (79). He then indulges in megalomaniac metaphysical speculations about the gun, which seems a mockery of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* and Levinas’s recognition of the face of the other (which says “Do not kill me”), falling prey to delusions like the elephant hunter discussed by Midgley:

The gun stands for the hope that there exists that which is other than oneself. The gun is our last defence against isolation within the travelling

sphere. The gun is our mediator with the world and therefore our saviour. The tidings of the gun: such-and-such is outside, have no fear. The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us. It does so by laying at our feet all the evidence we need of a dying and therefore a living world. (79)

It is absurd that in order to acknowledge the other, one has to kill the other, and that one's salvation should be through the death of the other, particularly through killing others. Nonetheless, his torrent of speculations continues:

I move through the wilderness with my gun at the shoulder of my eye and slay elephants, hippopotami, rhinoceroses, buffalo, lions, leopards, dogs, giraffes, antelope and buck of all descriptions, fowl of all descriptions, hares, and snakes; I leave behind me a mountain of skin, bones, inedible gristle, and excrement. All this is my dispersed pyramid to life. It is my life's work, my incessant proclamation of the otherness of the dead and therefore of the otherness of life. A bush too, no doubt, is alive. From a practical point of view, however, a gun is useless against it. There are other extensions of the self that might be efficacious against bushes and trees and turn their death into a hymn of life, a flame-throwing device for example. But as for a gun, a charge of shot into a tree means nothing, the tree does not bleed, it is undisturbed, it lives trapped in its own treeness, out there and therefore in here. Otherwise with the hare that pants out its life at one's feet. The death of the hare is the logic of salvation. For either he was living out there and dying into a world of objects, and I am content; or he was living within me and would not die within me, for we know that no man ever yet hated his own flesh, that flesh will not kill itself, that every suicide is a declaration of the otherness of killer from victim. The death of the hare is the meat of my dogs. The hare dies to keep my soul from merging with the world. All honour to the hare. Nor is he an easy shot. (79-80)

This is an abstract, metaphysical justification for the historical violence entailed by

colonialism, a justification of subjugation through the gun. At the same time the final sentence, “Nor is he an easy shot,” emphasizes the absurdity of the speculations. This piece also appears to include a parody of Christian salvation, since whereas Christ sacrificed himself to save others, here others are sacrificed to save oneself. Thus the inflated egoism of Jacobus is revealed, despite his pseudo-philosophical arguments against Cartesian solipsism. Also, it shows how shallow is his understanding of his own alleged Christianity. Further, the mentality of the hunter and settler is clearly corrupted by the superior power of his gun over the living creatures in his surroundings. The gun does not, in fact, bring one closer to others, but helps to keep them at a distance, indeed, helps to slay them from a distance. Jacobus Coetzee’s speculations are evidence of massive self-delusion.

He proceeds to claim that “[o]ur commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard or farm” and that “I am a hunter, a domesticator of the wilderness, a hero of enumeration” (80), meaning that through counting the numbers of animals he has killed, he manages to control the boundlessness of the wild. Once again, we see the self-deception of a hunter. The words “commerce” and “enterprise” suggest the commodification of nature that Coetzee criticises in his various novels. The master-slave relationship at the heart of colonialism becomes clear in his next thoughts:

Savages do not have guns. This is the effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer’s mastery of space. The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation. The African highland is flat, the approach of the savage across space continuous. From the fringes of the horizon he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life.  
(80-81)

What Jacobus Coetzee could also mention here is that white hunters were usually on horseback, as Jacobus himself usually was, thus elevating them above the foot-bound

indigenous people, contributing to their sense of superiority. As Jacob Bronowski puts it in *The Ascent of Man*:

For the rider visibly is more than a man: he is head-high above others, and he moves with bewildering power so that he bestrides the living world. When the plants and the animals of the village had been tamed for human use, mounting the horse was a more than human gesture, the symbolic act of dominance over the total creation. . . .

We cannot hope to recapture today the terror that the mounted horse struck into the Middle East and Eastern Europe when it first appeared. . . . In a sense, warfare was created by the horse, as a nomad activity. (Bronowski, 1981, 49-50)

However, it is typical of Jacobus's egoism that he fails to acknowledge his dependence on others, especially animal others. Besides Jacobus and his fellow settlers who accompany him on his punitive expedition to the settlement of the "wild" Hottentots, the only other mounted figure is the Hottentot chief, indicating his superior status in the Hottentot community, and he is mounted on the less impressive ox. During the Middle Ages, a similar relation of master-servant stood between knight, literally a mounted soldier (chevalier), and peasant. Also, hunting was one of the prerogatives of the aristocracy, whereas peasants were usually limited to a grain-based diet. John MacKenzie writes that "[t]he Normans introduced the notion of the Hunt as an essential element of the royal prerogative and reserved vast forest tracts for the purpose" (MacKenzie, 1988, 13). During the Norman invasion of England, mounted Norman knights defeated Anglo-Saxon foot-bound soldiers.

Coetzee inverts this hierarchy in *The Lives of Animals* by invoking Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* where noble vegetarian horse-like creatures rule the savage, meat-eating, man-like Yahoos: vegetarianism is associated with nobility and meat-eating with savagery and servitude (Gulliver chooses a compromise diet of grain and milk). Also, in *Slow Man*, Coetzee highly ironizes Plato's metaphor of the soul as the rational human charioteer controlling the noble horse representing spiritedness and

the ignoble horse representing desire, by hooking Rayment's wagon (more humble and peasant-like than a war chariot) to old nags. Thus he critiques the whole tradition of human (and male) domination of horses, nature and the passions. In *Boyhood*, the boy finds himself sympathising not with the hero Wolraad Woltemade, but his horse:

South Africa is a country without heroes. Wolraad Woltemade would perhaps count as a hero if he did not have such a funny name. Swimming out into the stormy sea time and again to save hapless sailors is certainly courageous: but did the courage belong to the man or to the horse? The thought of Wolraad Woltemade's white horse steadfastly plunging back into the waves (he loves the redoubled, steady force of *steadfast*) brings a lump to his throat. (Coetzee, 1998b, 108-09)

The work of Kafka is always in the background of Coetzee's own writings. In his short story "An Old Journal" (or "An Old Manuscript") (Kafka, 2007), Kafka's narrator expresses his revulsion towards meat-eating nomads and their meat-eating horses that arrive in the city. Frederick Karl suggests that the Emperor figure in the story represents Franz Joseph and the nomads, the imminent collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but also Kafka's meat-eating family (Karl, 1991, 560-61). The city-dwellers are terrified of the barbarians and ensure a constant flow of meat for them in case they resort to cannibalism. On one occasion in the story the butcher provides a living ox and the nomads eat it alive. Thus Kafka, one of Coetzee's most highly regarded authors, associates meat-eating with barbarism, violence and domination. It is interesting that in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate refuses to eat the flesh of one of the horses that dies while he leads the expedition to return the Barbarian girl to the tribesmen. Of course, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee shows the barbarism at the heart of civilization, thus problematizing the barbarian-civilized binary.

It seems unlikely that the master-slave relationship can overcome the subject-object division, since slaves and servants become mere means to the ends of the master, especially if servitude is enforced by the gun. Indeed, the gun is used to

eliminate anyone who resists one's will. Certainly, Jacobus shows no understanding of his Hottentot servants. When he completes his monologic speculations on the gun and his role as "civiliser" of the wilderness he dismisses his most faithful servant's reaction:

To this sermon Klawer returned not a word but suggested humbly that it was late, I should sleep. Klawer had lived at my elbow since I was a boy; we had lived much the same outward life; but he understood nothing. I dismissed him. (Coetzee, 1998c, 80)

The bankruptcy of Jacobus's world-view is most evident in the punitive expedition he leads against the Hottentot community, since the Hottentots are summarily shot, once again an unjustified punishment, or at least one hugely out of scale when compared to what he suffered at their hands, without even considering his own blame. While the collective punishment of the Hottentots reveals the settlers' racism and hence a failure to acknowledge their otherness as a group, the individual execution of his former servants reveals a failure to respect their individual otherness. Again, they are executed merely for resisting Jacobus's will and for the rudeness of their dismissal of him when he decided earlier to leave the Hottentot settlement. However, their complete submission to him once he has the upper hand once again, thanks to his gun, awakens some pity in him, which he compares to the pity he feels when killing helpless birds:

As a child one is taught how to dispose of wounded birds. One takes the bird by the neck between index and middle fingers, with the head in one's palm. Then one flings the bird downward, snapping the wrist as if spinning a top. Usually the body flies clean off, leaving the head behind. But if one is squeamish and uses too little force the bird persists in life, its neck flayed, its trachea crushed. The thin red necks of such birds always awoke compassion and distaste in me. I revolted from repeating the snap, and untidier modes of annihilation like stamping the head flat sent rills down my spine. So I would stand there cuddling the expiring creature in



my hands, venting on it the tears of my pity for all tiny helpless suffering things, until it passed away.

Such was the emotion reawoken [sic] in me by him [Plaatjie] whose passage from this world I had so unkindly botched but who was on his way on his way [sic]. (105)

This fascinating passage reveals both the childhood innocence, pity and compassion that Jacobus has had to suppress in order to become a hunter and killer, and the delusive pity that he can only feel for a victim of his violence when it is completely in his power, completely at his mercy. It is not the success but the failure of the sympathetic imagination. Any redeeming aspects of this piece are obliterated by the self-deceptions that he constructs to justify killing the Hottentots, presenting himself as God's instrument of justice:

What did the deaths of all these people achieve?

Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality. No more than any other man do I enjoy killing; but I have taken it upon myself to be the one to pull the trigger, performing this sacrifice for myself and my countrymen, who exist, and committing upon the dark folk the murders we have all wished. All are guilty, without exception. I include the Hottentots. Who knows for what unimaginable crimes of the spirit they died, through me? God's judgment is just, irreprehensible, and incomprehensible. His mercy pays no heed to merit. I am a tool in the hands of history. (106)

His complete self-deception is very clear in this passage in his arrogant Calvinist assumption that he is amongst God's elect, that he is God's instrument of justice even though he admits God's will is incomprehensible, and that he does not know what crimes the Hottentots may have committed to deserve their deaths at his hands. His true motives lie in his admitted self-assertion, his desire to exert his power over others who denied him. Thus J.M. Coetzee reveals the dark and self-deceptive heart

of the hunter and settler (and, by extension, that of apartheid ideology at which time the novel was published), a heart that justifies the mass slaughter both of humans and animals. While Jacobus Coetzee shows a failure of the sympathetic imagination, J.M. Coetzee, by entering into the heart of his forefather, displays the power of the sympathetic imagination to enter not only into the experience of the victim but also the perpetrator of violence.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, however, Coetzee shows little sympathy for the agents of Empire, who perpetrate violence in the name of civilization, revealing themselves to be the real barbarians, in the sense of lacking moral restraint, rather than the nomadic tribesmen. When the Magistrate eventually delivers the barbarian girl to the tribesmen, he notes the complete dependence of their lifestyles on animals:

She interprets to the old man while I wait. His companions have dismounted but he still sits on his horse, the enormous old gun on its strap on his back. Stirrups, saddle, bridle, reins: no metal, but bone and fire-hardened wood sewn with gut, lashed with thongs. Bodies clothed in wool and the hides of animals and nourished from infancy on meat and milk, foreign to the suave touch of cotton, the virtues of the placid grains and fruits: these are the people being pushed off the plains into the mountains by the spread of Empire. (Coetzee, 2000, 78)

By contrast, the novel opens with the Magistrate engaging Colonel Joll (ironically named, since, unlike Jove or Jupiter, he is anything but jovial or jolly, nor is he just) in a conversation about hunting, which they practise not out of necessity but for the sheer pleasure of killing, since they have nothing else in common to talk about. Joll narrates enthusiastically a monumentally destructive and wasteful hunt in which he participated:

He tells me about the last great drive he rode in, when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot ('Which was a pity'). (Coetzee, 2000, 1)

His "pity" expresses not sympathy, nor Jacobus Coetzee's sentiment in *Dusklands*

when he botches the breaking of the birds' necks, but a utilitarian sense of the waste of leaving the carcasses to rot. Hunting here is for pleasure and a display of imperial power rather than for subsistence, as in the case of the tribesmen. This description resembles the massive hunts of the imperialist powers in the nineteenth century and early-twentieth centuries. MacKenzie notes that even the killing was hierarchical: no one was allowed to bag more animals than a person of higher social status or political rank (MacKenzie, 1988, 194). In the United States, the mass slaughter (speciecide) of bison served an even darker purpose, that of genocide, both of which can be considered to be forerunners of the genocides of the twentieth century, including the Nazi holocaust to which Costello repeatedly refers. American settlers realised that every bison dead was one less Native American, since the indigenous tribesmen were dependent on the bison for their subsistence. Carolyn Merchant notes that “[i]n 1867, one member of the U.S. Army is said to have given orders to his troops to ‘kill every buffalo you can. Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone’ ” (Merchant, 2002, 19). Thus, one way of pushing the barbarians off the plains and into the mountains involves the mass killing of wild animals on the plains, allowing the cultivation of the plains at the same time.

The Magistrate loses his initial enthusiasm for hunting, most probably because he comes to associate hunting with the violence of the Empire that he serves. This war between two ways of life, the cultivator versus the nomad (which was the main dynamic of history during the entire Middle Ages (McEvedy, 1961, 11)), is implicit in the following description by the Magistrate:

A generation ago there were antelope and hares in such numbers that watchmen with dogs had to patrol the fields by night to protect the young wheat. But under pressure from the settlement, particularly from dogs running wild and hunting in packs, the antelope have retreated eastward and northward to the lower reaches of the river and the far shore. Now the hunter must be prepared to ride at least an hour before he can begin his stalk. (Coetzee, 2000, 41)

It is clear that the Magistrate's enthusiasm for hunting is linked with his feelings of masculinity:

Sometimes, on a good morning, I am enabled to live again all the strength and swiftness of my manhood. Like a wraith I glide from brake to brake. Shod in boots that have soaked in thirty years of grease, I wade through icy water. Over my coat I wear my huge old bearskin. Rime forms on my beard but my fingers are warm in their mittens. My eyes are sharp, my hearing is keen. I sniff the air like a hound, I feel a pure exhilaration. (42)

He comes across a waterbuck, an old ram, a mature male like the Magistrate, the ram being unaware of the hunter's presence. There follows a moment that strongly resembles the moment in the film *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978), when the seasoned soldier, freshly home from the horrors of the Vietnamese war, is out hunting and has a magnificent stag in his sights and, despite his lifelong enthusiasm for hunting, hesitates, in a frozen moment, and is unable to shoot the stag but fires the shot into the air instead. The Magistrate describes his inability to shoot the ram:

I am barely attuned yet to my surroundings; still, as the ram lifts himself, folding his forelegs under his chest, I slide the gun up and sight behind his shoulder. The movement is smooth and steady, but perhaps the sun glints on the barrel, for in his descent he turns his head and sees me. His hooves touch ice with a click, his jaw stops in mid-motion, we gaze at each other.

My pulse does not quicken: evidently it is not important to me that the ram die.

He chews again, a single scythe of the jaws, and stops. In the clear silence of the morning I find an obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of my consciousness. With the buck before me suspended in immobility, there seems to be time for all things, time even to turn my gaze inward and see what it is that has robbed the hunt of its savour: the sense that this has become no longer a morning's hunting but an occasion on which

either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim; that for the duration of this frozen moment the stars are locked in a configuration in which events are not themselves but stand for other things. Behind my paltry cover I stand trying to shrug off this irritating and uncanny feeling, till the buck wheels and with a whisk of his tail and a brief splash of hooves disappears unto the tall reeds. (Coetzee, 2000, 42-3)

Afterwards, he tries unsuccessfully to discuss this incident with the barbarian girl that he has taken into his protection: “Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms” (43). While he feels some connection between himself and the ram—they are both ageing males—there is more to his inability to shoot the rams than this. In fact, the incident seems to be a turning point of sorts when the Magistrate has started to disassociate himself from the violence sanctioned by the Empire that is symbolised by hunting for pleasure. In particular, his sensitivity to the pointless suffering imposed by Colonel Joll on his prisoners seems to have made him sensitive to the casual killing of animals. He has come to question the morality of imposing one’s will on other living things merely because one can. Perhaps he has come to respect the singularity of individual life, of the life of that particular ram. The word “ram” also appears to prefigure the old ram in Bev’s clinic in *Disgrace* and Costello’s discussion in “Before the Gate” of the ram that Ulysses slaughters, each creature, like the waterbuck here, being highly individualised. It also causes the Magistrate to reassess the meaning of masculinity and humanity. He moves from the understanding that masculinity is an assertion of physical power (like that of Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*) to the Socratic understanding that it involves the pursuit of justice, even if one becomes the victim of injustice, as he does after he is arrested for returning the barbarian girl to the tribesmen.

Even though the horses are harshly treated during the arduous journey to return the barbarian girl to the tribesmen, the Magistrate, as mentioned earlier, cannot bring himself to eat the flesh of one of the horses that dies:

By the seventh day we are making our way through the salt wastes. We lose another horse. The men, tired of the monotonous beans and flour-cakes, ask to slaughter it for food. I give my permission but do not join in. ‘I will go on ahead with the horses,’ I say. Let them enjoy their feast. Let me not hinder them from imagining it is my throat they cut, my bowels they tear out, my bones they crack. Perhaps they will be friendlier afterwards. (81)

This is something like, but not quite, a sympathetic identification with the horse, since the horse becomes, in his imagination, a sacrifice-substitute for himself. Nonetheless, it does indicate a revulsion toward what animals suffer at the hands of men.

The Magistrate is arrested by soldiers of the Empire when he returns for “treasonously consorting with the enemy” (85). Yet this pleases him:

I am aware of the sources of my elation: my alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, I have set myself in opposition, the bond is broken, I am a free man. Who would not smile? But what a dangerous joy! It should not be so easy to attain salvation. (85)

The word “salvation” explains the irony, or paradox, in his feeling free despite being imprisoned, since, even though he becomes physically confined, he is liberated from his position of authority in an unjust system. This is one of the forms of salvation that Coetzee explores throughout his fiction, not only in human relations but also in the relation of humans to animals. Indeed, with his incarceration, the magistrate finds himself treated increasingly like an animal: “I guzzle my food like a dog. A bestial life is turning me into a beast” (87). He is beginning to discover the experience of extreme powerlessness, the position occupied by animals in the modern world. If anything this heightens his sense of justice and injustice.

He describes the public humiliation and torture of some captured barbarians, who are treated with unbelievable barbarism: a loop of wire has been run through the cheeks and hands of each prisoner, making “them meek as lambs” (113). He notes how the citizens are disgraced by wanting to watch the spectacle and describes how he

tries to intervene (in the name of decency) when he sees Colonel Joll brandish a four-pound hammer, presumably to pulp the feet of the prisoners (116). The Magistrate tries to remind the people of their humanity but is himself beaten by soldiers while he shouts: “You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast” (117) and reflects: “It occurs to me that we crush insects beneath our feet, miracles of creation too, beetles, worms, cockroaches, ants, in their various ways” (118). He appears to be questioning not only how humans should not be treated like beasts, but how beasts too should be treated with respect. He finds himself unable to address the crowd and as he is dragged back to his cell he reflects:

What would I have said if they had let me go on? That it is worse to beat a man’s feet to pulp than to kill him in combat? That it brings shame on everyone when a girl is permitted to flog a man? That spectacles of cruelty corrupt the hearts of the innocent? ... Would I have dared to demand justice for these ridiculous barbarian prisoners with their backsides in the air? *Justice*: once that word is uttered, where will it all end? ... The old magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and imprisoned, impregably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt. (118)

Costello touches on similar themes in *The Lives of Animals*, including justice, virtue, the hearts of the innocent and occupying a position of Socratic fallibility or doubt. In particular, she extends the notion of justice to include our treatment of animals. She shares many characteristics with the Magistrate besides their relatively advanced age. Just as she is considered hysterical and irrational, so Joll asserts that the Magistrate will not be seen as “the One Just Man” but as “a clown, a madman. ... You look like an old beggar-man, a refuse-scavenger” (124) after his intervention in the public torture of the barbarians. The Magistrate also becomes a Cynic-figure—not only is he described as being reduced to a dog-like state but he is woken on one occasion by a dog which licks his face when he sleeps overnight in one of the fisherfolk’s abandoned huts (147)—hence prefiguring Lurie’s becoming the “dog-man” in *Disgrace*. Just as the

question of breaking bread is raised in *The Lives of Animals*, so the Magistrate persists in asking Mandel, a senior police officer, how he can break bread with ordinary, innocent people after a day's torture without some ritual purging, “[s]ome kind of purging of one’s soul too—that is how I have imagined it. Otherwise how would it be possible to return to everyday life—to sit down at a table, for instance, and break bread with one’s family or one’s comrades,” to which Mandel responds by shoving him violently, shouting “You fucking old lunatic! Get out! Go and die somewhere!” (138). Just as Costello’s standing outside of reason permits her to criticise reason, as some critics have argued, so the Magistrate’s standing in a position of powerlessness, having relinquished his position of authority, permits him to criticise those who abuse power or who occupy unjust positions of authority.

The Magistrate does, however, learn some important lessons about humanity from his torturers, particularly the truth that he occupies a physical body like any animal:

In my suffering there is nothing ennobling. Little of what I call suffering is even pain. . . . But my torturers were not interested in degrees of pain. They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself. . . . They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal. (126)

This prefigures Costello’s ideas on embodiment and Lucy Lurie’s statement that “[t]his is the only life there is. Which we share with animals” (Coetzee, 1999a, 74). The point is that respect is due to humans not merely because they have reason, but because they are embodied, and this embodiment humans share with animals. The violation of a human’s body is a supreme injustice and so too should the violation of an animal’s body be considered. Thus the idea of humanity is bound up with being embodied, with having animal functions.



Having suffered injustice, the Magistrate is able to reflect critically on an incident in his previous position of power as a magistrate, when he lectured a peasant soldier who had gone AWOL about the law being greater than the individual, even the judge:

I had no doubt, myself, then, that each one of us, man, woman, child, perhaps even the poor old horse turning the mill-wheel, knew what was just: all creatures come into the world bringing with them the memory of justice. ‘But we live in a world of laws,’ I said to my poor prisoner, ‘a world of the second-best. There is nothing we can do about that. We are fallen creatures. All we can do is uphold the laws, all of us, without allowing the memory of justice to fade.’ (152)

The ideas of justice described in this passage are Platonic. In the *Republic*, a middle dialogue, Plato expresses the belief that an ideal society could train philosopher-rulers to govern society thanks to their intensive training in philosophy that would enable them to grasp the Ideal Form of Justice and shape society with this Idea in mind (*Republic: 473d*) (Plato, 1968, 153). However, in the *Laws*, a late dialogue, he had apparently abandoned this ideal and replaced his philosopher-rulers with the rule of law, perhaps because of his own failed attempts to intervene in Mediterranean politics, trying to turn rulers into philosophers. Both ideas are pessimistic, since even the utopianism of Plato’s *Republic* assumes that society is in a state of degeneration which can only be stopped by handing complete power to a philosopher-ruler elite, the ordinary individual being fallen and untrustworthy. However, the Magistrate, having been reduced to a dog-like state, as promoted by Socrates’ followers, the Cynics, has moved from a pessimistic and authoritarian Platonic notion of justice to a democratic Socratic notion of justice, from serving an ideal of justice, however difficult to comprehend, to the Socratic notion that it is better to suffer an injustice than to perpetrate one, a notion which can be extended to animals too.

Finally, the thesis must deal with Coetzee’s ideas on ethical and religious attitudes to eating, which are linked to individual salvation, in a secular sense, and are related, somehow, to Kafka’s ideas of hunger artistry. The texts to be explored are *Youth, Life*

& *Times of Michael K*, “Meat Country” and *The Lives of Animals*. *Youth* stands midway in Coetzee’s autobiography between *Boyhood* and “Remembering Texas” (Coetzee, 1992). Coetzee appears to have named his two memoirs after Tolstoy’s own autobiographical works entitled *Boyhood* and *Youth*, and it may be significant, in this context, that Tolstoy was a vegetarian.

In *Youth*, the protagonist’s attitude towards women is very important. Firstly, he wants to escape the influence of his mother (including, symbolically, his Mother country) and, secondly, he wants to have intense erotic affairs with women in order to cause him to write poetry. Concerning the first, he even describes himself as an island (Coetzee, 2002b, 3)—thus linking himself with Leibniz’s monadic individualism—and achieves his independence (as an autonomous Kantian will) through earning his own income and by controlling the preparation of his food. His friend Ganapathy, likewise an aspiring “disembodied,” rational, intellect, fails to achieve the food independence that John does, and hence is starving to death. Concerning the second, John perceives women merely as means to his ends, both for his sexual pleasure (which fails) and as Muses for his poetry writing (which also fails). Perhaps the lessons he learns are that “no man is an island” and that he should respect women. Significantly, Mahatma Ghandi’s philosophy of *satyagraha* (soul force) began when he realised that he was trying to dominate his wife, who met his domination with passive resistance. Both John and Ganapathy resemble Franz Kafka, the eldest—and hence privileged—son in a Jewish household, but Ganapathy even more so in his self-starvation that resembles Kafka’s hunger-artistry.

Although John calls his diet “simple common sense,” it is clear that eating for him is not so much a matter of pleasure as it is an exercise of *sophrosyny*, or self-discipline, one of the four natural virtues, a key virtue in ancient virtue ethics, and not only for Plato, to whom he refers in the passage. However, his diet is also an aesthetic, or artistic, statement, since he not only attempts to write poetry, but consciously tries to shape his life as if it were an artwork. He seems to believe that an artist requires a self-disciplined way of life in order to write. Thus, John’s ethics and aesthetics of eating coincide. At the same time his diet and his ability to feed himself are assertions

of his independence, as a young man. It is also significant that his meals are clearly not meat-centred, even though not vegetarian, still less vegan:

The needs of the body he treats as a matter of simple common sense. Every Sunday he boils up marrow bones and beans and celery to make a big pot of soup, enough to last the week. On Fridays he visits Salt River market for a box of apples or guavas or whatever fruit is in season. Every morning the milkman leaves a pint of milk on his doorstep. When he has a surplus of milk he hangs it in an old nylon stocking and turns it into cheese. For the rest he buys bread at the corner shop. It is a diet Rousseau would approve of, or Plato. . . .

He is proving something: that each man is an island; that you don't need parents. (Coetzee, 2002b, 2-3)

When he leaves Cape Town to work as a programmer for IBM in London, he tries to maintain his dietary discipline although his colleagues have different tastes: "His own inclination is toward the Lyons brasserie on Tottenham Court Road, where one can visit the salad bar as often as one likes. But Schmidt's in Charlotte Street is the preferred haunt of the IBM programmers" (50). Nonetheless, with an income, he can rent a room and cook for himself. Again, meat does not dominate his meals; even the sausages he eats are processed and partly vegetable:

His diet is unvarying: apples, oats porridge, bread and cheese, and spiced sausages called chipolatas, which he fries over the cooker. He prefers chipolatas to real sausages because they do not need to be refrigerated. Nor do they ooze grease when they fry. He suspects there is lots of potato flour mixed in with the ground meat. But potato flour is not bad for one. (51-2)

One day he is invited to dinner by the Indian couple living below him. He accepts their invitation but is anxious about the spicy curry he expects to be served:

When he arrives, he is at once put at his ease. The family is from South India; they are vegetarians. Hot spices are not an essential part of Indian

cuisine, explains his host: they were introduced only to hide the taste of rotting meat. South Indian food is quite gentle on the palate. And indeed, so it proves to be. What is set before him—coconut soup spiced with cardamom and cloves, an omelette—is positively milky. (94)

This incident may be important in being his first close exposure to vegetarianism. The revelation that hot spices, which he is predisposed to dislike, were originally intended to disguise the smell and taste of rotting meat appears to have made an impression on him. However, what is most significant about the incident, in relation to the ethics or etiquette of eating, is that he feels unable to reciprocate their generosity in inviting him, partly because he only knows how to cook frugally for himself. He wonders whether there is something wrong with his nature and whether he should change his nature:

But is it his nature? He doubts that. It does not feel like nature, it feels like a sickness, a moral sickness: meanness, poverty of spirit, no different in its essence from his coldness with women. Can one make art out of a sickness like that? And if one can, what does that say about art? (95)

This shows the bankruptcy of his self-centred approach to eating, one whose ethic of self-discipline serves only his personal needs, and thus the poverty of his philosophy that “each man is an island” (3). It is the result not so much of his nature as it is of the choices he has made and adhered to, although it is possible that his nature did shape these choices. Perhaps he lacks the magnanimity, or greatness of spirit, of Mahatma Gandhi. The idea of “moral sickness” seems paradoxical, since sickness implies one is not in control of one’s body whereas “moral” presupposes the freedom to choose, to control one’s life. However, one saving grace is his ability to interrogate himself, to show doubt. Another is the sympathetic imagination that he still has to discover, and which will help him to transcend his egoism and to start writing. The very fact that Coetzee has written this memoir shows that salvation can be achieved through art, that the youthful Coetzee’s poverty of spirit can be both the subject of and transformed through art. Through the sympathetic imagination, the artist

can transcend his or her own limitations, even laugh at himself or herself, and find a salvation of sorts.

John's attempts to live on aesthetic terms, and Coetzee's ability to laugh at his youthful self, are further evident in the way he changes his diet in deference to Ford Madox Ford, on whose works he is writing his Master's dissertation:

Ford says that the civilization of Provence owes its lightness and grace to a diet of fish and olive oil and garlic. In his new lodgings in Highgate, out of deference to Ford, he buys fish fingers instead of sausages, fries them in olive oil instead of butter, sprinkles garlic salt over them. (136)

Particularly humorous is his substitution of processed food, fish fingers, for natural food, fish, perhaps suggesting that his lifestyle is not so much an artwork as artificial, especially as he tries to imitate other writers.

After John leaves IBM and enjoys a period of joblessness in London, the Home Office insists he find a new job or leave England, and so he finds a position as programmer in the British company International Computers, "Britain's reply to IBM" (142). There he meets an Indian called Ganapathy who, because he has an American degree in computer science, is considered especially valuable by the company even though he does not appear to work hard and is often absent from work. John visits Ganapathy during one of his absences and discovers that Ganapathy is starving in a room full of reeking rubbish bags:

Ganapathy offers him tap-water because he has run out of tea and coffee. He has also run out of food. He does not buy food, except for bananas, because, it emerges, he does not cook—does not like cooking, does not know how to cook. The rubbish bags contain, for the most part, banana peels. That is what he lives on: bananas, chocolate, and, when he has it, tea. It is not the way he would like to live. In India he lived at home, and his mother and sisters took care of him. In America, in Columbus, Ohio, he lived in what he calls a dormitory, where food appeared at regular intervals. If you were hungry between meals you went out and bought a

hamburger. (146)

Whereas John can cook for himself but not for others, Ganapathy cannot cook even for himself. As a result of his dependence on others to cook for him, he is starving. He exemplifies the disembodied intellect, a highly educated creature of industrial civilization, disconnected from the source of his nourishment, and correspondingly disempowered. His dependence on his mother and sisters back home, in his Mother country, also shows their confinement, as females, to domestic roles. Despite his advanced computer knowledge he is ignorant of the basics of nutrition and cooking. His name may be a combination of “Gandhi” and “apathy.” Indeed, he may be a parody of Gandhi since Gandhi also studied abroad (in London) where he struggled to find vegetarian food and later in his life went on fasts in order to make political statements. However, whereas Gandhi was able to incorporate vegetarianism in his powerful political philosophy of *satyagraha*, as Coetzee points out in “Meat Country” and Costello in *The Lives of Animals*, Ganapathy is apolitical and apathetic, too weak willed even to take the rubbish out. John feels a genuine concern for him, perhaps the awakening if not of the sympathetic imagination then at least of sympathy in him for the first time:

He asks Ganapathy whether he is ill. Ganapathy brushes aside his concern: he wears the dressing-gown for warmth, that is all. But he is not convinced. Now that he knows about the bananas, he sees Ganapathy with new eyes. Ganapathy is as tiny as a sparrow, with not a spare ounce of flesh. His face is gaunt. If he is not ill, he is at least starving. Behold: in Bracknell, in the heart of the Home Counties, a man is starving because he is too incompetent to feed himself. (147)

Out of his concern for his health, John invites Ganapathy for lunch the next day and prepares a meal for him (making up, in a sense, for his earlier failure to invite the Indian couple). However, Ganapathy does not arrive and John’s imagination is forced to recognise the otherness of Ganapathy, whose mind he realises he cannot begin to comprehend. At the very end of the memoir he realises that:

He and Ganapathy are two sides of the same coin: Ganapathy starving not because he is cut off from Mother India but because he doesn't eat properly, because despite his M.Sc. in computer science he doesn't know about vitamins and minerals and amino acids; and he's locked into an attenuating endgame, playing himself, with each move, further into a corner and into defeat. One of these days the ambulance men will call at Ganapathy's flat and bring him out on a stretcher with a sheet over his face. When they have fetched Ganapathy they might as well come and fetch him too. (168-9)

However, he also realises by the end of the memoir that "his failure as a writer and his failure as a lover are so closely parallel that they might as well be the same thing" (Coetzee, 2002b, 166) and that in order to write:

What more is required than a kind of stupid, insensitive doggedness, as lover, as writer, together with a readiness to fail and fail again?

What is wrong with him is that he is not prepared to fail. (167)

Ironically, his alleged inability to write becomes the very subject of, and thus is belied by, the memoir itself. He also appears, once again, to have moved from a position of Platonic perfectionism to Socratic fallibility, both in his realisation that he must be prepared to accept failure and in his realisation that success in writing is not so much due to flashes of inspiration but to an "insensitive doggedness," the word "doggedness" echoing not only John Bernard's description of his mother in "What Is Realism?" but also the dog-nature of Socrates' Cynical followers.

The figure of Ganapathy seems to echo, ironically, both the hunger-artistry of Kafka and the political fasting, even hunger strikes, of Gandhi, both of which, in turn, seem to coalesce in the figure of Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K*. (1983). This novel may mark the moment when Coetzee himself became a committed vegetarian. In a review of this novel, entitled "The Idea of Gardening" (Gordimer, 1984), Nadine Gordimer argues that the initial "K" "has no reference, nor need it

have, to Kafka” (Gordimer, 1984) and that the novel is, at least in part, an allegory about ecology and respect for nature, and concludes that:

All along, dying Michael K has been growing. It began when he fertilized the earth with the burden of his mother’s ashes; that, hidden to him, was his real reason to be. The only time he is tempted to join history—to tag behind the guerrilla band when he sees them leaving the farm—he knows he will not go “because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why.” Beyond all creeds and moralities, this work of art asserts, there is only one: to keep the earth alive, and only one salvation, the survival that comes from her. Michael K is a gardener “because that is my nature”: the nature of civilized man, versus the hunter, the nomad. Hope is a seed. That’s all. That’s everything. It’s better to live on your knees, planting something . . . ? (Gordimer, 1984)

Persuasive though this allegorical interpretation may be, one should be cautious in view of Coetzee’s later misgivings about ecology as expressed most notably through the mouth of Costello in *The Lives of Animals*. Furthermore, Costello does not speak of universal salvation through the abstract idea of ecology (namely gardening) but an individual salvation through embodiedness and art. Nonetheless, in a sense, Michael does appear to belong to, or even represent, the pagan, cyclical time of nature (the passage of day and night, and of the seasons) rather than the patriarchal, Judaeo-Christian notion of history and linear time. Indeed, he even refuses to tell the story of his life to the sympathetic doctor (Coetzee, 1998d, 140)

However, Gordimer surely underestimates the influence of Kafka on the novel, since the Kafkaesque undertones of the novel and its various allusions to Kafka are very pronounced. Like Gregor Samsa in “Metamorphosis,” Michael K has to sacrifice himself in service to his family (though in Michael’s case there is only his mother).



Like Josef K in “The Trial” and the protagonist in “Before the Law,” Michael finds himself confronted by a callous and disempowering (apartheid) bureaucracy when he tries to obtain permits for himself and his mother to leave Cape Town. His lack of control over the circumstances concerning his mother’s death and cremation can be called Kafkaesque, as can the apparently accidental nature of the way he discovers the Visagies’ farm and the fact that he is never sure it is the right farm (Coetzee, 1998d, 116). Like the mole narrator in “The Burrow,” Michael tries to hide from the world by creating a burrow once he finds himself on a farm in the countryside: he is described as a mole (105) and his hiding place as a burrow (100, 101, 105, 107, 110-19). He begins to prefer darkness to light, preferring a nocturnal existence: “waking up sometimes in the daytime and peering outdoors, he would wince at the sharpness of the light and withdraw to his bed with a strange green glow behind his eyelids” (103) and when he spies the freedom fighters he is filled with fear, “thinking only: Let darkness fall soon, let the earth swallow me up and protect me” (107). Very significantly, like the protagonists of several of Kafka’s stories, Michael transforms himself into a harmless animal in an attempt to escape the inhumanity of people and a dehumanising society. Finally, and most significantly, Michael is, like the character in Kafka’s “A Hunger-Artist,” indeed, like Kafka himself, a hunger-artist who comes to assert himself and his own identity through his diet: he is almost perpetually hungry and later is in a virtually permanent state of fasting. However, unlike Kafka, who also asserted himself through writing, Michael K asserts himself through gardening, both of these being creative, artistic acts, leading to individual salvation.

Even while he was a pupil in Huis Norenius, Michael, like all the resident students, was in a permanent state of hunger, where “[h]unger had turned them into animals” (68). After he loses his job as gardener and especially while he carries his mother to the farm on which she supposedly was born, his access to food seems to be determined by chance. At times he does have money to buy food, but the money becomes useless to him once he isolates himself on the farm. His task, once his mother has died and been buried, is to take control of his own life, and, radically, that means not acquiring the power or money to buy food, but to grow it himself. From being a mere decorative

gardener he becomes a cultivator. Indeed, he seems to metamorphose into a seed himself: “I am becoming smaller and harder and dryer every day” (67). Eventually, he achieves liberation even from the need to eat food; in fact, his starvation is so deep that his body can no longer even accept food. Thus he empowers himself in the passive way that Karl speaks of as the “Kafkaesque”:

In ways unlike Emerson’s representative man, Kafka, the twentieth-century version, is a person who marshals his weaknesses so forcefully he becomes a pillar of strength. He is a man whose passivity and inaction disguise tremendous reserves of inner power. (Karl, 1991, 757)<sup>4</sup>

He achieves salvation, namely liberation, not only from the oppressive system of apartheid, that reserves different quality food for imprisoned people based on their race, but from the even broader evil of industrialised agricultural production where food is commodified and monopolised. Whereas the Magistrate achieves salvation from an evil Imperial bureaucracy by relinquishing his position of authority in the system, Michael K, who was always a marginalized member of the apartheid system and a victim of its structures, achieves liberation by removing himself from human society altogether, even from the rare moments of charity (30, 47-8, 71, 182), and entering into a communion with nature. Also, his idleness represents an escape from the Weberian work ethic (66, 115, 116).

Although Michael is not a vegetarian initially—he kills small birds and a goat, and eats insects when he temporarily has to leave the farm—he becomes one by default, since he finds he can only eat what he has grown himself from seeds. His killing of the goat he finds distasteful and wasteful when the carcass begins to rot after he is incapacitated by a cold he catches after drowning the goat in the water of the dam one night: the goat’s body is described as a “corpse” when he removes it from the water and instead of finding warm body-heat when he butchers it, he “encountered again the clammy wetness of marsh-mud” (55). Eventually he buries the carcass, reflecting on the waste of meat, thereafter only killing small birds and eating insects

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<sup>4</sup>Even though Karl’s book, *Franz Kafka: Representative Man*, was published in 1991, it sheds a remarkable light on *Life & Times of Michael K*, which was published in 1983.

for meat. This incident does, however, represent a turning point in Michael's life, symbolized by the shift from burying a carcass, which cannot grow, to burying seeds, which do grow. (The symbolism of the burial of human corpses seems to have its origins in the pagan fertility cults of ancient agricultural communities, expressing the hope that the deceased will be reborn into an afterlife, like the sprouting of a buried seed.) He appears to evolve from hunter to cultivator (59), from omnivore to vegan, although he cultivates vegetables (and one legume) rather than grain. Like Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, Michael is a civilizer of the wilderness, but in a very different sense: where Jacobus is actively violent and destructive, Michael is passively creative.

The mole narrator in Kafka's "The Burrow" is proud not just of the network of tunnels he has created for his protection but also of the stores of food he has managed to collect. Likewise, Michael becomes very proud of the vegetables that he grows, calling them his "children" (118). Like the mole, too, neither the safety of his burrow nor the security of his supplies of food is certain. An important difference, however, is that Coetzee goes further than Kafka in that Michael, unlike the mole, has the added anxiety of keeping his growing food hidden. Indeed, both his hidden vegetables and his burrow are discovered by the white soldiers who are hunting for the "insurgents" (or "freedom fighters") who camped on the farm one night. From then on, the narrative focus shifts from Michael to the doctor in whose care he is placed.

During his first exile from the farm, when the Visagie boy returns to his parents' farm and tries to turn Michael into a "body-servant" (65), Michael most regrets the fact that his crops will die, and when he returns, after a brief spell as a hermit in the mountains and then a longer period as an inmate first of a hospital and then of a labour camp, he speaks of the "cemetery" (101) of his first crop and, after taking further precautions to conceal his new crop of vegetables, "[i]n his burrow he lay thinking of these poor second children of his beginning their struggle upward through the dark earth toward the sun" (101). While interred in the labour camp, he finds himself sympathizing with the young, short, plump girl in the camp who refuses to eat food for three days after her baby dies (89). Back on the farm he considers

the possibility of fatherhood (104) but, like Kafka, decides against it (an act which Costello approves of in *The Lives of Animals* (30)), since it would be impossible to raise a child “in the heart of the country” (Coetzee, 1998d, 104) (a reference to his earlier novel). However, he considers his vegetables his children: he describes his twin melons as sisters: “It seemed to him that he loved these two, which he thought of as two sisters, even more than the pumpkins” (113) and “[h]e ate these two children on successive days” (118). He calls the first pumpkin to ripen “the firstborn” (echoing Costello’s name for her first novel) and when he roasts strips of it, “[s]peaking the words he had been taught, directing them no longer upward but to the earth on which he knelt, he prayed: For what we are about to receive make us truly thankful” (113). Thus, Coetzee radically subverts Plato’s idea of having progeny in an attempt to extend one’s existence beyond one’s death, since Michael’s children are expected to nourish his own life now, rather than extend it after death. His artworks, the vegetables, are potentially self-perpetuating, since Michael collects their seeds, after eating their flesh, for replanting: a biological eternity as an alternative to Plato’s undying realm of eternal, pure Forms. As a further complication, however, Michael eventually even loses the desire to eat the fruit of his own hands: “He awoke in the afternoon feeling no hunger” (118) and “[h]e had no appetite; eating, picking up things and forcing them down his gullet into his body, seemed a strange activity” (119). Equally significant is his directing his prayer to the maternal earth rather than to the paternal, even patriarchal, sky. When he eats:

He chewed with tears of joy in his eyes. The best, he thought, the very best pumpkin I have tasted. For the first time since he had arrived in the country he found pleasure in eating. (113)

As suggested above, Michael’s vegetarianism is not a conscious decision but is more or less inevitable as a result of other decisions he has made, namely to grow his own food directly from the earth from seeds. In a sense, his decision to become vegetarian grows organically from his preferred situation: it is an embodied and embedded decision and it suggests that morality and goodness grow from the heart

rather than being a product of intellect or reason. However, just as these decisions liberate him from the oppressive systems of apartheid and food production in which he was a disempowered and marginalised member, so too do they free him from complicity in the meat industry that oppresses animals.

The secret to Michael's inability to eat anything other than what he gathers or grows himself is partly guessed by the doctor. When his commander, Noël, a good-hearted and reluctant bureaucrat, says that he should just leave Michael to starve, the doctor replies:

‘It’s not a question of dying,’ I said. ‘It’s not that he wants to die. He just doesn’t like the food here. Profoundly does not like it. He won’t even take babyfood. Maybe he only eats the bread of freedom.’

An awkward silence fell between the two of us.

‘Maybe you and I wouldn’t like camp food either,’ I persisted.

‘You saw him when they brought him in,’ said Noël. ‘He was a skeleton even then. He was living by himself on that farm of his free as a bird, eating the bread of freedom, yet he arrived here looking like a skeleton. He looked like someone out of Dachau.’ (146)

Indeed, the various labour camps in which Michael finds himself interred resemble Nazi labour camps; there are “children with bones sticking out of their bodies” (88) and a convoy brings new prisoners to the camp in “cattle trucks” (159). Also significant, in light of the connection that Costello makes in *The Lives of Animals* between the confinement of Jews and the confinement of animals, the people confined in the camps described in *Life & Times of Michael K* are described as “monkeys” (92) and as being “shut up like animals in a cage” (88). The description of the camps also makes a connection between the Nazis’ treatment of the Jews and the apartheid state’s treatment of African citizens.

Despite Noël’s disagreement, the doctor is right to believe that Michael would prefer to starve in freedom (on his farm surrounded by his vegetable offspring) than

be fed confined in a dehumanising labour camp. After Michael has escaped, the doctor records an elaborate apology to him in his journal:

As time passed, however, I slowly began to see the originality of the resistance you offered. You were not a hero and did not pretend to be, not even a hero of fasting. In fact, you did not resist at all. . . . *Why?* I asked myself: why will this man not eat when he is plainly starving? Then as I watched you day after day I slowly began to understand the truth: that you were crying secretly, unknown to your conscious self (forgive the term), for a different kind of food that no camp could supply. Your will remained pliant but your body was crying to be fed its own food, and only that. Now I had been taught that the body contains no ambivalence. The body, I had been taught, wants only to live. Suicide, I had understood, is an act not of the body against itself but of the will against the body. Yet here I beheld a body that was going to die rather than change its nature. . . . You did not want to die, but you were dying. You were like a bunny-rabbit sewn up in the carcase of an ox, suffocating no doubt, but starving too, amid all those basketfuls of meat, for the true food. (163-4)

The resistance to which he refers resembles more closely Kafka's individual passive resistance than Gandhi's mass passive resistance, although it shares the commitment to the non-violence of both. The passage also emphasizes Michael's embodiedness: he is no disembodied intellect, like David Lurie in *Disgrace* or John in some of the Costello pieces. The image the doctor uses is particularly striking, since it suggests that Michael is a harmless vegetarian creature entrapped in a violent system, starving because he cannot sustain himself on the products of violence. The doctor continues, using another striking image to express Michael's liberation from systems of power and violence, neither perpetrating nor submitting to oppression:

Slowly as your persistent *No*, day after day, gathered weight, I began to feel that you were more than just another patient, another casualty of the war, another brick in the pyramid of sacrifice that someone would

eventually climb and stand straddle-legged on top of, roaring and beating his chest and announcing himself emperor of all he surveyed. (164)

Michael refuses to be part of such a system by neither resisting nor submitting to the brutal tyrant-figure that stands on top of the pyramid of sacrifice.

However, Michael remains an enigma to the doctor. He imagines himself pursuing him, in vain, trying to interpret him:

Let me tell you the meaning of the sacred and alluring garden that blooms in the heart of the desert and produces the food of life. The garden for which you are presently heading is nowhere and everywhere except in the camps. It is another name for the only place where you belong, Michaels, where you do not feel homeless. It is off every map, no road leads to it that is merely a road, and only you know the way. (166)

The garden to which the doctor refers may be located in Michael's heart, or in a reality radically different from the current one. Throughout the novel Michael is called a child and a baby (88, 135) or is associated with children (76-77, 124, 139), and his mother's over-protectiveness toward him may have harmed him and kept him stunted, as the doctor suggests (150): he can only bloom and flourish once she has died. However, by remaining child-like, he has retained the good heart of a child to which Coetzee refers in his "Voiceless" speech and his interview with *Satya*.

Michael does, however, have the final word, although only in his imagination (he will most probably die of starvation in Cape Town), since he imagines returning to the farm, with a companion (perhaps the father he never had), starting from scratch, using a spoon to bring water up from the well (since the soldiers blew up the pump), thus demonstrating the indomitability and incorruptibility of his good heart.

So far it may seem as though Franz Kafka's "The Burrow" (Kafka, 1973), of all his stories, has the strongest influence on *Life & Times of Michael K*. However, it is arguable that the work that most influenced Coetzee when he wrote *Michael K* is "A Hunger-Artist." Indeed, that story appears to be embedded into the very structure of *The Lives of Animals* too: Kafka's hunger-artistry is mentioned both during the

dinner at the end of Part 1 and at the end of Part 2 by Norma, and Costello discusses Rilke's "Der Panter" and Hughes's "The Jaguar" near the beginning of Part 2. Thus, "A Hunger-Artist" foreshadows not only *Michael K* and *The Lives of Animals*, but also Rilke's "Der Panter" and Hughes's "The Jaguar," since the hunger-artist's place in the cage is taken by a vital panther who seems "to have brought its own sense of freedom with it" (Kafka, 2007, 262) and has "a love of life" (263) that the hunger-artist seems to lack. Frederick Karl, who quotes Rilke at the beginning of almost every chapter of his book on Kafka, confirms the link between "A Hunger-Artist" and Rilke's "Der Panter" (Karl, 1991, 681). The reason for the hunger-artist's feats of starvation is not ethical but, surprisingly, "because I couldn't find any food I liked" (262), which seems absurdly trivial, although it foreshadows Michael K's similar inability to eat camp food. The significance of "A Hunger-Artist" appears to be that the spectators are not interested in, in fact do not even notice, the hunger-artist, who has been relegated to a side-show in the circus stalls, despite his incredible feat of starvation (far beyond the stipulated forty days), and prefer, instead, to move straight to the cages containing wild animals. The crowd prefers to watch the big cats being fed raw meat, thus exposing their love of violence and their atavistic carnivorousness, in fact, their brutality. The figure of the starving hunger-artist also prefigures the confinement and starvation of the Jews in Nazi death camps. Karl argues that "A Hunger-Artist" sums up Kafka's own life's work as both writer-artist and hunger-artist:

The artist, finally, is savior. Without him, the public degenerates into a mob, into blood lust, into the lowest forms of behavior, identifying with the savage and the primitive.

Kafka has intuited that art, however bizarre its forms, is the means by which the public can be restrained from its atavistic tastes, from the degeneracy and disintegration implicit in what a public is. The artist's calling is not only spiritual and salvational, it has social and political implications. (Karl, 1991, 677)

What inhumanity did Kafka seek to escape through his diet and his writing? What



pollution did he wish to purify himself from? What salvation did his diet and his writing offer him? What was the significance of his transforming himself into small, harmless animals in his fiction? The answer seems to be that he sought salvation from a dehumanising society, a society that could lead to the Holocaust, a world which, Karl suggests not implausibly, Kafka prophetically prefigured in his life and writings, a world he associated with carnivorousness. Thus, the reader is led ineluctably back to the image of the Holocaust that lies at the heart of *The Lives of Animals*. In a passage, which was briefly quoted in a discussion of willed ignorance in Chapter 3 but will be quoted more fully here, Costello asserts:

“ ‘They went like sheep to the slaughter.’ ‘They died like animals.’ ‘The Nazi butchers killed them.’ Denunciation of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and the slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals.

“We—even we in Australia—belong to a civilization deeply rooted in Greek and Judeo-Christian religious thought. We may not, all of us, believe in pollution, we may not believe in sin, but we do believe in their psychic correlates. We accept without question that the psyche (or soul) touched with guilty knowledge cannot be well. We do not accept that people with crimes on their conscience can be healthy and happy. We look (or used to look) askance at Germans of a certain generation because they are, in a sense, polluted; in the very signs of their normality (their healthy appetites, their hearty laughter) we see proof of how deeply seated pollution is in them.

“It was and is inconceivable that people *who did not know* (in that special sense) about the camps can be fully human. In our chosen metaphors, it was they and not their victims who were the beasts. By treating fellow human beings, beings created in the image of God, like beasts, they had

themselves become beasts.” (20-21)

According to Costello (as discussed in Chapter 3) the “healthy appetites” of the polluted German generation, and, by implication, of the present generation of people who eat meat and use other animal products, are a sign of their pollution; their very sense of “normality” is corrupt. It is this pollution that explains her vegetarianism as a desire to save her soul; her aesthetic disgust at meat-eating is based on moral revulsion towards the implications that meat-eating has both for the animals and the people who eat them, including a closing of their hearts and a failure of their sympathetic imaginations, in other words, a failure of their humanity. While this answer may seem to avoid the question of animal rights and seem too self-centred or anthropocentric, it may nonetheless be the case that a truly moral reform of a society must start with the individual. Nor is Coetzee merely concerned with the psychic cost to individuals of their complicity in animal exploitation, but he is concerned with the suffering and potential joy of the animals too. Also, one’s individual choices, as moral agent and consumer in an industrial age, are powerful statements, protests against unjust and exploitative systems and assertions of one’s commitment to humanity. Isaac Bashevis Singer says about his vegetarianism that:

This is my protest against the conduct of the world. To be a vegetarian is to disagree—to disagree with the course of things today. Nuclear power, starvation, cruelty—we must make a statement against these things. Vegetarianism is my statement. And I think it’s a strong one. (Rosen, 1997, Preface)

Peter Singer argues:

Becoming a vegetarian is not merely a symbolic gesture. Nor is it an attempt to isolate oneself from the ugly realities of the world, to keep oneself pure and so without responsibility for the cruelty and carnage all around. Becoming a vegetarian is a highly practical and effective step one can take toward ending both the killing of nonhuman animals and the infliction of suffering upon them. (Singer, 2002, 161)

He adds that “vegetarians know that they do, by their actions, contribute to a reduction in the suffering and slaughter of animals, whether or not they live to see their efforts spark off a mass boycott of meat and an end to cruelty in farming” (164).

Nonetheless, vegetarianism has its critics. In *Lives*, Norma tries to dismiss it as mere “food-faddism” and as a Kafkaesque form of superior statement, an assertion of power and elitism (Coetzee, 1999b, 67-68). Stephen Webb, in a review of *The Lives of Animals*, discusses the reasons why the early Christian Church decided not to espouse vegetarianism:

First, they wanted to distinguish themselves from Judaism, and in their missionary zeal they did not want to be hindered by dietary rules. . . .

Second, gnostic groups used vegetarianism as a means of claiming moral purity and separating themselves from the cares of this world. Gnostics thought the world was beyond the grace of God, and so they restricted their diet as one way of turning their backs on the world. Many modern vegetarians also seem to use this commendable diet as a way of claiming moral superiority and expressing a deep sense of alienation from the world. Somehow Christians need to find a way of talking about diet that does not lapse into legalism or utopianism.

Christian compassion should be rooted not in dogmatic claims about the equality of humans and animals or in escapist flights from the realities of this world, but in our ability to be compassionate, to reach out and care for other beings. Until the church can articulate such an alternative to the modern animal rights movement, the gnostic version of vegetarianism will remain alive and well, as Coetzee’s story illustrates. (Webb, May 19, 1999)

Webb’s suggestion that Costello’s position—which he clearly does not wish to identify with Coetzee’s—is legalistic, utopian and gnostic appears to be the result of a superficial reading of *The Lives of Animals*, one which fails to place this novel within the context of all his other work. He appears to be privileging Norma’s interpretation of

Costello's vegetarianism, failing to respect the polyphony of the novel. Webb seems to be accusing Costello of dogmatism, yet he fails to consider the possibility that his inclusion of Norma's criticisms indicates precisely Coetzee's ability to engage in self-criticism and to avoid a position of certainty. Furthermore, to label the vegetarianism of animal rights activists as "legalistic" and "utopian" is a misrepresentation as the quotations from Peter Singer and Isaac Bashevis Singer testify.

Nevertheless, suspicions of the motives of (some) vegetarians may remain and it may be useful to consider, in this regard, Martha Nussbaum's capabilities theory of morality. She subjects Platonism's goal of self-sufficient rationalism to a sustained critique and prefers the Socratic to the Platonic in moral education (Borchert, 2006, Vol. 6, 681). She argues that "[t]he highest moral paradigms are not figures as the saints or Gandhi, but those who, like Nehru, found the good life in human finitude and limitation" (681). For Nussbaum, rigorist or ascetic moralism, whether in Gandhi or Plato, betrays a violence toward the self that may undermine morality and compassion (680). While there are public perceptions that Coetzee and Kafka are aloof and elitist (like Plato), their writings provide evidence of another side, that of the fallible and humane (like Socrates), of their ability to identify with the powerless and the suffering.

Coetzee emphasizes the aesthetics of eating—for him, like Kafka, art is ethics, is a way of life—but in a profounder sense than that of eating whatever one likes (itself contradicted by irrational Western taboos, as Coetzee points out in "Meat Country," like avoiding horsemeat, cat meat, dog meat, and so on). For Coetzee, and Kafka, one is defined by what one eats, or, rather, by what one does not eat; eating is a form of self-discipline in which one deliberately deprives oneself of food in general and meat in particular as a statement that is at once aesthetic, moral and political. This approach to eating links Coetzee to a type of vegetarian virtue ethics akin to that practised by the Cynics and Buddhists, if not to the extreme self-renunciation and fasting practised by Gandhi and other ascetics, and by Kafka. It is a moral form of self-renunciation in a world that threatens to deny one's humanity and, for Coetzee, Kafka and Isaac Bashevis Singer, art, no less than diet, is a means to salvation.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Costello's challenge to philosophy appears to be directed at the Western philosophical rationalist tradition in general, as originated by Plato, and British analytic philosophy, behaviourism and the ideology of scientism in particular. However, in her very attack on philosophy, she acknowledges its importance. She mentions Plato in critical terms at least twice in *The Lives of Animals* and yet acknowledges him in the titles of her two-part lecture structure as the originator of the opposition between the philosophers and the poets. Thus even in this criticism of Plato there is deference. Coetzee, himself, appears to have a deep admiration for Plato's philosophy as can be seen in his use of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* in many of his Costello pieces, although his admiration may well be directed more at Plato's artistic than his philosophical achievements. For Plato's philosophy, particularly his middle dialogues, can be seen as art of the greatest power, the images of which—the cave, the sun, the charioteer, the midwife—have had a profound influence not only on Western philosophy but literature too.

Thus, Coetzee's attitude toward philosophy appears to be ambivalent. Nor does he simply privilege poetry (or fiction) above philosophy despite Costello's attack on the latter, not least because, as has been shown, Costello's position for enlarging our sympathies for animals is reasonable, but also because he often appears to question the power of fiction not merely to create an illusion of reality but to serve a moral purpose. Furthermore, Coetzee appears to present Costello as a Socratic figure, hence,

once again, acknowledging the influence of Plato, although, perhaps, ironically, since the Platonic and the Socratic can be seen to be opposed to one another. These figures may well represent conflicting impulses not only in Plato's philosophy but also, most probably, within Coetzee too: the demotic and the elitist, the fallible and the perfectionist. For as much as Coetzee is aware of the fallibility and the imperfection of people, he is equally hopeful about the power of art to improve humankind, and committed to the pursuit of perfection in the creation of literary artworks, although he retains a sceptical distance, a sense of uncertainty.

Characterising Costello as a Socratic figure and Coetzee as promoting polyphony and dialogism may, ironically, be seen as imposing, especially in its certitude, a monologic interpretation on an elusive and ambivalent author. The same, too, can be said of asserting with such confidence the influence of Kafka's fiction on Coetzee, especially since this appears to entail that Kafka is something of an authority for the later writer, despite his distrust of authority (his own included). However, whenever Coetzee has invoked the authority of writers, whether Kafka or Swift, Plato or Socrates, he has interrogated them and applied their ideas in novel and creative ways, extending and deepening their insights into life and literature. If Coetzee shares the earlier writer's dislike for meat and seeks to separate himself from those who atavistically partake of meat, if he shares his belief that vegetarianism is an important political statement and a crucial part of self-realisation (though not to the extremes of Kafka's self-renunciation), if both have a respect for animal bodies since they share with human bodies a mortality and fragility, Coetzee nonetheless goes further than Kafka. For whereas the latter suggests that people turn themselves into animals to escape society's inhumanity, that society turns people into animals and treats them like animals, Coetzee suggests that society should not even treat animals in such ways, that our humanity is bound up not just with how we treat humans but also with how we treat animals, that when we mistreat animals, we lose our humanity.

The interpretation of Costello as the mouthpiece of Coetzee's thoughts and feelings about the treatment of animals, analogous to Socrates becoming Plato's mouthpiece in his middle dialogues, can also appear to be a monologic imposition on the text,

although Costello has been shown to be uncertain about her own thoughts on the issues of animal ethics and is open to a polyphony of voices within herself, as well as the polyphony of voices in the dialogic structure of *The Lives of Animals*. In a sense, Costello represents in part the return of the repressed in Coetzee: she says what he wishes he could say but is constrained by academic conventions not to say. Thus in all the public lectures in which Coetzee adopts a persona, he arguably expresses his true feelings (and misgivings) about issues close to his heart, in ways that academic convention proscribes, but fiction permits. This is one way in which he asserts the power of fiction, even though he questions it on other occasions.

There appears to be a tension between Coetzee's idea that art can save us by instilling doubt in us, namely Socratic self-questioning—hence provoking us to examine our preconceptions and prejudices (including speciesism)—and his notion that the suffering of the body saves us from the endless cycle of self-doubt (specifically in relation to confession). However, a closer look will show that these positions are perfectly compatible. On the one hand, pain and suffering can be considered to be epistemologically and ethically fundamental (an evil that cannot be doubted). On the other hand, language (whether poetic, political, philosophical, scientific or religious) can be used to create illusions that mystify and justify this pain and suffering, including the infliction of these on others. However, Coetzee's fiction is written precisely to dispel such illusions and self-deceptions with more humane images of his own. In particular, a work like *The Lives of Animals* is meant, in part, to instil doubt in Coetzee's readership about the legitimacy of the elaborate justifications for the exploitation of animals constructed by philosophical, scientific and religious discourses in Western society.

It was shown in earlier chapters how Coetzee makes use of Bakhtin's notions of polyphony, monologism and dialogism to subvert and criticise these authoritative discourses. While Bakhtin's idea of carnival has not been applied to an analysis of Coetzee's fiction as much as the other concepts, carnival has an unexpected relevance to Coetzee's work. For not only is authority subverted in carnival and all discourses (or voices) equalised, but the etymology of the word itself, “the setting aside of meat,”

links Coetzee's concerns with writing and diet.

It may be objected that if Romantic self-realisation is criticised in the figure of David Lurie in *Disgrace*, then why should Cynical self-realisation not also be condemned since both are ethics based on a similar ground? There are at least two answers to this, however. The first is that Coetzee can see the value in both and attempts to balance them in a creative tension. The second, which can be seen as an elaboration of the first answer, is that they are opposite forms of self-realisation. Whereas the Romantic seeks self-realisation through self-assertion, the expression of violent emotions and the aggressive possession of beauty, the Cynical, like the Kafkan, involves the renunciation of desire and strong emotions, and the renunciation of things of material beauty. As opposed to Romantic valorization of the self, the Cynics reduced the importance of the self, even though they, like the Romantics, pitted themselves against civilization and convention. Indeed, even in his self-renunciation and passivity, Kafka paradoxically appears to elevate himself in his opposition to society.

Nonetheless, Kafka—and the Cynics—present a radical alternative to the prevalent, arguably reductionistic and dehumanizing, notion of an individual as merely an appetitive unit in a consumerist, post-industrial society. They provide moral restraint and self-renunciation as checks to unconstrained appetite and unrestrained egoism, and also temper the excesses of an unqualified rationalism. In their kinship with animals, Kafka, Costello and the Cynics question the ideas of an essentially rational human being, and in their imaginative transformation into animal form they question even the idea of a substantial self. This reduction, rather than limiting the self, opens it up to endless possibilities, including, most importantly, that of moral growth through the exercise of the sympathetic imagination. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is through recognising our kinship with animals that we discover our humanity. The exercise of our imaginations, perhaps an exclusively human capacity, which can deceive, delude and alienate us, can also lead us back to our community with animals, not as the lord of creation but as one remarkable kind of creature amongst many.



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