

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 Gandhi)

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).¹ 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:

¹Since this is a webpage, no page references can be provided.

Rationalist vegetarians² 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

²Like 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.³ 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

³These 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)⁴

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

⁴Even 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.