

TITLE PAGE

Food for Thought: Resourcing Moral Education

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J.M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello is an overtly philosophical novel, at the heart of which are questions concerning the relation of human beings to animals and the discussion of animal rights. The nature of its subject matter and the prominence it gives to dialogue, sometimes of an almost Platonic kind, make it a rich potential resource for moral education. This paper begins by imagining a course based on extracts from the novel, intended for teenage students or older people. It goes on to make suggestions for further reading. There is now a rich secondary literature that has developed in response to central elements in Coetzee's text, involving the work of Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Cora Diamond, Stanley Cavell, John McDowell, Cary Wolfe and Ian Hacking, amongst others. This literature raises questions about the nature of moral philosophy, and it has implications for moral education.

J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* is an overtly philosophical novel, at the heart of which are questions concerning the relation of human beings to animals and the discussion of animal rights. It makes reference to Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Mary Midgley, and to what it is like to be a bat. The nature of its subject matter and the prominence it gives to dialogue, sometimes of an almost Platonic kind, make it a rich potential resource for moral education. This paper begins by imagining a course based on extracts from the novel, intended for teenage students or older people. It goes on to make suggestions for further reading. Here then is the course.

'Food for Thought': course outline

Source material

Whether or not it is right for human beings to eat animals is an issue about which many young people have strong convictions, and it is one that in one way or another involves us all in our everyday lives. Two key chapters in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* provide excellent source material for addressing this question, and these constitute the principal teaching resources for this course. While it is desirable that students read the chapters in questions, these are structured in such a way that it is relatively easy to identify and to extract passages that present crucial stages in the argument. These can be introduced progressively and in conjunction with other curriculum materials as appropriate. Hence what is envisaged is a course in six parts, which for present purposes, and in line with Coetzee's somewhat surprising naming of the chapters in the book, will be referred to as 'lessons'.

Let me begin by setting the scene. Elizabeth Costello is an Australian novelist of some international acclaim, now in her late 60s. Identified to some extent as a feminist writer, her most well-known book is the fourth novel, *The House on Eccles Street* (1969), which retells the story of James Joyce's *Ulysses* from the perspective of Molly Bloom. At the start of Coetzee's novel we see her receiving the prestigious Stowe Award from Altona College in Pennsylvania. Two years later, she is invited to Appleton College in Massachusetts, where, as it happens, her son is an assistant

professor in physics and astronomy. Here she is to give the Gates Lecture, as well as taking part in a seminar in the English Department and in a debate. Provocatively enough—given that her hosts are surely expecting her to speak on feminism or postcolonialism—her topic for the lecture is ‘The Philosophers and the Animals’, while she is to address the English department under the title ‘The Poets and the Animals’.

In what follows a series of extracts from the text is presented, each with a brief introductory gloss. These extracts will form the basis for student discussion. Suggestions of key questions and topics to pursue are provided for each lesson. In view of the extensive literature on these matters, the course could easily be expanded. Clearly it will be necessary to judge the extent and the level of background information to be presented according to the needs and interests of the students.

Lesson One: On the horrors of animal lives

Elizabeth begins her lecture by referring to Franz Kafka’s story ‘Report to an Academy’, in which an educated ape explains to a learned society what it is like to be an ape, explaining the story of his ascent from beast to something approaching man. But this is not a merely humorous introduction, intended to set the audience at ease. She wants to compare her own situation to that of Red Peter, the ape, and the reason for her seriousness in referring to the animal here soon becomes more apparent. So we find her saying (Extract A):

In addressing you on the subject of animals . . . I will pay you the honour of skipping a recital of the horrors of their lives and deaths. Though I have no reason to believe that you have at the forefront of you 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 to 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 centre of this lecture.

Between 1942 and 1945 several million people were put to death in the concentration camps of the Third Reich: at Treblinka alone more than a million and a half, perhaps as many as three million. These are numbers that numb the mind. We have only one death of our own; we can comprehend the deaths of others only one at a time. In the abstract you may be able to count to a million, but we cannot count to a million deaths (p. 63).

She points out the ordinariness of the people around Treblinka who turned a blind eye, how we are all vulnerable to fall into this state of sin, and she continues:

‘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 slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison that 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 Judaeo-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 (pp. 64-65).

She draws attention to the significant reversal in the imagery that captures this for us: by treating human beings, beings created in the image of God, like this, these people made themselves into beasts. And she goes on to elaborate the parallel:

I was taken on a drive around Waltham this morning. It seems a pleasant enough town. I saw no horrors, no drug-testing laboratories, no factory farms, no abattoirs. Yet I am sure they are here. They must be. They simply do not advertise themselves. They are all around us as I speak, only we do not, in a certain sense, know about them.

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

These are hard-hitting words, and it is worth emphasising that they are made in a context where the audience is not expecting to hear them. The following questions are proposed as a means of drawing out the salient issues for this opening lesson:

- i. What is the target of Elizabeth's complaints?
(*Discussion could be steered towards questions concerning the variety of ways in which animals are exploited, problems associated with factory-farming and especially the justifiability of killing animals for food.*)
- ii. Why does Elizabeth choose this as the topic for her lecture when this is clearly not the kind of thing the audience is expecting?
(*The purpose here will be to establish the urgency that is evident in Elizabeth's behaviour, drawing students' attention to the dynamic nature of the presentation of the arguments.*)

Lesson Two: The practicalities of preparing animals for food

In this lesson, and as a means of making more vivid the issues under discussion, an additional resource can be brought in. This is the Channel 4 programme *Kill—Cook—Eat*, in which the audience-participants were led through the complete process of the slaughter, preparation and consumption of meat during a visit to an abattoir. The abattoir had been adapted for the occasion so that the audience experienced the following: first, they watched as a number of sheep were led into the abattoir, slaughtered and prepared for butchery; next, in a room in the abattoir a butcher cut up the meat in preparation for cookery; following this, a chef took cuts of the meat and cooked them for the audience to eat; finally, as those who were willing ate the food,

they were asked about their reactions. The audience included vegetarians and carnivores, as well as waverers of various kinds, and a health inspector talked through the process, commenting (favourably) on the way the slaughter was carried out. Some of the carnivores vowed never to eat meat again; some of the vegetarians were favourably impressed by what they saw; some on both sides had their convictions reinforced. The programme was presented without any obvious editorial line.

Following the showing of the programme to the students, they could be asked:

- i. What if anything have you learned from the programme about how sheep are prepared for food?
(The point here is to establish how much the students gain in terms of factual knowledge.)
- ii. What did you think of the attitudes and arguments of the audience-participants?
(This encourages them to consider both the arguments and the emotional reactions of the participants. They should be asked how far emotional responses should affect decisions about the morality of eating meat.)
- iii. How were you affected by directly seeing these things happen? Has this programme changed your own attitude to eating meat?
(These questions are intended to help students to make clearer and more robust their own positions and to ground these in a more vivid awareness of the practicalities of meat preparation.)

Lesson Three: Eating taboos and cultural difference

We return to the novel in order to consider a discussion at the formal dinner that is held at Appleton College after Elizabeth's lecture, where the connection between religious or cultural identity and dietary restrictions arises. 'The Greeks,' says one participant (Extract B),

had a feeling there was something wrong in slaughter, but thought they could make up for that by ritualizing it. They made a sacrificial offering, gave a percentage to the gods, hoping thereby to keep the rest. . . Ask for the blessing of the gods on the flesh you are about to eat, ask them to declare it clean (p. 86).

Elizabeth responds, quoting, as follows:

And God said: Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you. . . It's convenient. God told us it was OK. . . The problem is to define our difference from animals in general, not just from so-called unclean animals. The ban on certain animals—pigs and so forth—is quite arbitrary. It is simply a signal that we are in a danger area. . . You cannot guess what you may eat or where you may step unless you are in possession of a map, a divine map (*ibid.*).

At this point her daughter-in-law, Norma, who has a PhD in philosophy of mind, interjects:

And maybe . . . the whole notion of cleanness versus uncleanness has a completely different function, namely, to enable certain groups to self-define themselves, negatively, as elected. We are the people who abstain from A or B or C, and by the power of abstinence we mark ourselves off as superior: as a superior caste within the society, for instance. . . The ban on meat that you get in vegetarianism is only an extreme form of dietary ban; . . . and a dietary ban is a quick, simple way for an elite group to define itself. Other people's table habits are unclean, we can't eat or drink with them (p. 87).

On reading this extract, the following questions might be addressed:

- i. Make a list of foods that some people eat but that disgust you.
(Students should be asked to explain the cause of their disgust and to consider how far their disgust is justified.)
- ii. Discuss the ways in which dietary restrictions divide people.
(Students should consider the benefits and the harms associated with such divisions.)
- iii. Are dietary proscriptions moral issues or merely matters of convention?
(This should be amplified to include questions of health and the way these are currently given prominence.)

Lesson Four: The case against animal rights

This lesson considers the formal debate in which Elizabeth takes part, paying particular attention to views advanced by her opponent, the philosopher Thomas O'Hearn. He presents three main arguments against Elizabeth's position, the first of which runs (Extract C):

The notion that we have an obligation to animals themselves to treat them compassionately—as opposed to an obligation to ourselves to do so—is very recent, very Western, and even very Anglo-Saxon. As long as we think that we have access to an ethical universal to which other traditions are blind, and try to impose it on them by means of propaganda or even economic pressure, we are going to meet with resistance, and that resistance will be justified (p. 106).

His second argument is as follows:

In my reading of the scientific literature, efforts to show that animals can think strategically, hold general concepts or communicate symbolically, have had very limited success. . . If so, are not animals, even the higher animals, properly thought of as belonging to another legal and ethical realm entirely rather than being placed in this depressing human subcategory? Isn't there a certain wisdom in the traditional view that says that animals cannot have legal rights because they are not persons, even potential persons, as foetuses are? (p. 107)

Finally, he puts forward the following view:

agitation for animal rights, including the right to life, is so abstract that I find it unconvincing and, finally, idle. Its proponents talk a great deal about our community with animals, but how do they actually live that community? . . . We may certainly *wish* there to be community with animals, but that is not the same thing as living in community with them. It is just a piece of prelapsarian wistfulness (p. 110).

Following the discussion of these extracts, students should:

- i. Summarise the three arguments.
- ii. Construct counter-arguments of their own.

Lesson Five: Questionable comparisons

The last extract to be considered is the text of a letter that is sent to Elizabeth by the poet Abraham Stern, excusing himself for his absence from the formal dinner held in her honour and explaining the reason for this (Extract D):

At the kernel of your lecture, it seemed to me, was the question of breaking bread. If we refuse to break bread with the executioners of Auschwitz, can we continue to break bread with the slaughterers of animals?

You took over for your own purposes the familiar comparison between the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle. The Jews died like cattle, therefore cattle die like Jews, you say. That is a trick with words which I will not accept. You misunderstand the nature of likenesses; I would even say you misunderstand wilfully, to the point of blasphemy. Man is made in the likeness of God. But God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews are treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way.

Forgive me if I am forthright. You said you were old enough not to have time to waste on niceties, and I am an old man too.

Questions to be put in relation to this passage are:

- i. For what reasons does Stern object to Elizabeth's argument?
- ii. How far do you agree with his objections?
- iii. What is your view of his decision not to 'break bread' with Elizabeth—that is, not to attend the dinner held in her honour?

Lesson Six: Arguments and stories

In this final lesson students should be asked to think about the fact that the extracts considered are drawn from a story. They should address the questions:

- i. In what ways does the novelist present the issues to the reader?
(*They should consider the fact that arguments and reactions are presented by characters in the story.*)
- ii. What is the effect of this manner of presentation?

(They should consider how far this method seeks an emotional response from the reader and how far it conceals the author's point of view.)

Note

The sequence of lessons here does not follow the text sequentially but attempts to organise the issues in a manner that will be accessible to students. It needs to be recognised that students may spontaneously raise questions that are out of order. For this reason it may be preferable to maintain some flexibility in the approach and not to settle too rigidly on specific learning outcomes for each lesson.

Further reading

Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* has a surprising history. The two chapters considered above were presented originally as the Tanner Lectures, and they were first published alongside four other essays in an unusual text called *The Lives of Animals*, accompanied by papers by contemporary philosophers specialising in animal rights. Cora Diamond responded to this work with an essay that was published in *Reading Cavell*, a collection edited by Alice Crary and Stanford Shieh. More recently Alice Crary has also edited *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, a *Festschrift* for Cora Diamond, and in this collection there are contributions from Stanley Cavell, who writes in response to sections of Diamond's essay related to *Elizabeth Costello*, and by John McDowell, responding to Cavell on this topic. Most recently, in 2008, *Philosophy and Animal Life* was published, a book that brings together the papers by Diamond, Cavell and McDowell, together with introductory and commentary essays by Cary Wolfe and Ian Hacking. As this last volume makes most abundantly clear, these discussions extend well beyond the theme of animal rights to call into question the relation of the human to the animal, the nature of moral philosophy and moral education, and the relation between philosophy and literature. This is an immensely rich body of work.

Under the title 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy' Diamond explains that she is concerned with a range of phenomena, and these in one way or another have a bearing on the question of the relation of human beings to animals. This has long been a theme of her work, and given that she is a committed vegetarian one might expect her to align herself with those philosophers of animal rights such as Peter Singer, who contributed to the first of the publications mentioned above. In fact, she is motivated here partly by finding herself out of step with the philosophers who contributed to *The Lives of Animals*—that is, especially, out of step with their philosophical approach, at odds with them over what moral philosophy is. In the present essay, whose title borrows its initial phrase from John Updike, she approaches the main topic in a somewhat indirect way, via a reading of a poem by Ted Hughes.

Hughes' 'Six Young Men' contemplates a photograph of friends of the poet's father, out on a holiday jaunt. Six months later, the poem tells us, they were all dead, in the battle-fields of the First World War. The poem draws attention to the relation between these 'celluloid smiles' and imminent death, and to the *memento mori* this provides. Its concluding phrasing is quoted in the essays of Diamond, Cavell and McDowell, and this bears some consideration:

Such contradictory permanent horrors here
Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out
One's own body from its instant and heat.

What interests Diamond is 'the experience of the mind's not being able to encompass something which it encounters' (Diamond, 2008, p. 44). It is possible, of course, as she readily admits, to look at the photograph without being troubled in this way. Introducing a child to the language-game of looking at a photograph involves pointing to it, talking about who the people are, explaining how things were different then, and so on. This is one way in which we come to understand photographs and the part they play in our lives, as well, more generally, as our relation to the past, and this involves, of course, learning that people die. So what, in a sense, is the problem? The horrible contradiction that impresses itself on the poet-speaker, by contrast, is that of someone who can no longer speak within the game: 'Language is shouldered out from the game, as the body from its instant and heat' (p. 45).

It is with this thought that she moves on, in the second part of her paper, to a consideration of *Elizabeth Costello*, specifically of the chapters concerning the use of animals for food. Whereas the respondents to this story in *The Lives of Animals* address the arguments advanced in terms of the more or less familiar territory of moral philosophy, she finds in the hyperbolic and emotionally charged nature of what Elizabeth says a further example of one's body being shouldered out of its instant and heat. In contemplating what she sees as the abject cruelty of the abattoirs, Elizabeth speaks in a register that exceeds the familiar terms of measured argument. She describes herself as a 'wounded animal', only her wound is covered up by her clothes. When questioned about the nature of her concerns, she replies that she is worried about the state of her soul. In a sense then, *she is* the wounded animal, vulnerable and exposed, her body clothed in shame, marked and stigmatised. And this is no mere rhetorical ploy but a rhetorical ploy that touches on something that reverberates thought the human condition. Nor is the turn to the body here a merely incidental matter; it is not just something novelistic, let's say, but internal to the account. As Diamond says,

Coetzee's lectures ask us to inhabit a body. But, just as in considering what death is to an animal we may reject our own capacity to inhabit its body in imagination, so we may, in reading the lectures, reject our own capacity to inhabit the body of the woman confronting, trying to confront, the difficulty of what we do to animals. The deflection into discussion of a moral issue is a deflection which makes our own bodies mere facts—facts which may or may not be thought morally relevant in this or that respect, depending upon the particular moral issue being addressed (as our sentience, for example, might be taken to be relevant to our having 'moral status') (p. 59).

The awareness we have of being a living body carries with it 'exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability', and this is capable of panicking us (p. 74). The force of this is to show how much the 'coming apart of thought' that we are considering belongs to flesh and blood (p. 78).

Diamond's use in this section of her paper of an epigraph from William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* ('Few of us are not in some way infirm, or even

diseased; and our very infirmities help us unexpectedly' (p. 46)) lays the way for an account of Elizabeth's actions that further answers to philosophy:

Costello's responses to arguments can be read as 'replies' in the philosophical sense only by ignoring important features of the story, in particular the kind of weight that such responses have in Costello's thought. In the life of the animal she is, argument does not have the weight we may take it to have in the life of the kind of animal we think of ourselves as being. She sees our reliance on argumentation as a way we may make unavailable to ourselves what it is to be a living animal. And she sees poetry, rather than philosophy, as having the capacity to return us to such a sense of what animal life is (p. 53).

So this, it seems, is a further turn in the ancient quarrel between philosophy and literature, where it may be precisely the disturbance of academic decorum, the offence against propriety—where, say, at the Tanner Lectures the speaker tells a story, or where at a literary gathering a writer rails against the horrors of meat production—that literature can better convey. (A further facet of the academic response to the infringement of propriety is that of the President, urbane and adept, hosting the celebration dinner, who takes the edge off the encounter with the clichéd words: 'A wonderful lecture, Mrs Costello. . . Much food for thought. We look forward to tomorrow's offering' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 90). He has already, as Cavell points out, taken the edge off Emerson by mangling a quotation from 'Self-Reliance'.¹) Diamond turns again then to Ted Hughes as a writer who expresses 'the sense of a difficulty that pushes us beyond what we can think. To attempt to think it is to feel one's thinking come unhinged. Our concepts, our ordinary life with our concepts, pass by this difficulty as if it were not there; the difficulty, if we try to see it, shoulders us out of life, is deadly chilling' (Diamond, 2008, p. 58). And she expresses the influence on her work in this respect of the writings of Stanley Cavell. She refers in particular to Cavell's explorations of scepticism in his readings of *The Winter's Tale* and *Othello*, dwelling particularly on the ideas of deflection and exposure. We shall return to questions of exposure.

Cavell's contribution to the *Festchrift* for Diamond ponders the way that instances of what she calls 'the difficulty of reality' can elicit divergent reactions in people, in some cases threatening to 'freeze or overwhelm understanding and imagination', in others failing to raise (or perhaps succeeding only in raising) an eyebrow (Cavell, 2007, p. 281)—the inordinate, importunate, excessive knowledge characteristic of the former contrasting with an 'unobtrusive or intellectualised or indifferent or stored knowledge' (p. 283). What is at stake in these reactions is not, he claims, something dependent upon differing access to information. He is interested initially in how far this divergence is to be understood in terms of Wittgensteinian seeing-as, as a form of aspect-blindness or of what Cavell himself has called 'soul-blindness'. The sense of gravity in this text, however, pulls especially towards the various ways in which Cavell—following Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin—has sought to understand the ordinary in human existence. And this is neither our ordinary life *with concepts*, of which Diamond has warned, nor the ordinary life eulogised in certain forms of Romanticism; it is an ordinary life into which our vulnerability to scepticism, to self-doubt, to failing to acknowledge what we know, is, as it were, folded back. Food is inevitably part of the ordinary world we inhabit, and the opposed views demonstrated in *Elizabeth Costello* about what we eat and how it is produced help to show how far

the ordinary is not just something *given* but continually a task (p. 283): this is the persistent background scene of our moral life and education.

If we pursue the moral imperatives here, if we expose ourselves to these occasions of inordinate knowledge, we find that we are continually confronted with possibilities of aspect-blindness. And a change of aspect may take diverse forms, not necessarily being of the born-again variety, where a duck becomes a rabbit, suddenly, completely, but sometimes involving more subtle, more Pascalian gradations of change (see Hacking, 2008, p. 145). Such shifts in perspective promise possibilities of moral education that are not exhausted, maybe they are not begun, by rational argument alone. And in any case if it makes sense to speak of inordinate knowledge, this must, so it seems, escape certain proprieties of expression—counter perhaps to the order of a set of moral lessons.

It is this idea of inordinate knowledge that helps to place Elizabeth's plainly offensive comparison between the abattoirs and Treblinka, the hyperbolic expression of a wounded animal. It may not ease the sense of this offensiveness to recall that Sylvia Plath also was criticised for her exploitation of Holocaust imagery in her savage exhumation, in 'Daddy', of her feelings towards her father ('I thought every German was you. / And the language obscene / An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen. / I began to talk like a Jew. / I think I may well be a Jew'); and the offence may be deepened when one recalls, as does Cavell, that Heidegger draws a similar analogy in his 'The Question Concerning Technology' ('Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry. As for its essence, it is the same as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and the death camps, the same thing as the blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs'). Plath goes then to the inner depths of an individual soul-sickness, Heidegger to the outer reaches of general world-sickness, both resorting to offensive excess. McDowell says accurately, but surely too neatly, that Elizabeth is 'over the top'. Can such a clichéd phrase register these inordinate pressures?

Cavell draws attention to the fact that Coetzee begins his novel with a somewhat enigmatic reference to a 'bridging problem', the problem of beginning, the problem of getting from where we are to where we want to be. This is the first of a number of authorial intrusions into the telling of the story. We can imagine that the bridging problem is also to be understood in terms of the need to traverse those contradictions in 'permanent horrors', in our being unhinged, neither beast nor god, in our being out of position, and exposed. McDowell takes Cavell to task for failing to respond to what is at the heart of Diamond's paper, which ironically means failing to realise the extent to which her text is a tribute to Cavell's own work: Cavell focuses too much on the questions of animals and meat, and loses sight in the process of Diamond's larger purpose—her emphasis on that variety of experiences that shoulder us out from our instant and heat. But to generalise the bridging problem in this way is not sufficiently to teach differences, and it fails to recognise the specific efforts Cavell goes to in responding to Diamond's distinctive concerns. To recognise this takes us back to his title, 'Companionable Thinking', embedded in which is the syllable representing bread (*pan*). And from here it is a short bridge to the thought that company involves breaking bread together, and to the question of whom we should break bread with.

Cavell is wilfully domestic (and utterly serious) when, in thinking of his relation to animals, and in turning again to the ordinary, the common, the low, he recalls a squirrel that stole nuts from the bird-feeder positioned on a rope in his own back garden. His fascination with the squirrel's agility and ingenuity led him to watch each day as he broke his own breakfast roll, and he was struck by the thought of this as a kind of companionship. It is surely a striking fact of people's lives today that they are much less in the company of animals than was the case before the coming of mechanised transport and agriculture. McDowell objects to Cavell's assertion that divergences in people's responses to the killing of animals for food are not a matter of information, and he provides examples of new information by which someone might be swayed. I doubt that Cavell would differ over such cases. But the point here is rather to do with familiarity, with the knowledge by acquaintance that companionship involves. It is more difficult—at least, it is different—to kill an animal when you have watched it each day feeding with you. This is not because you have new information.

If eating meat involves the ingestion of the animal, can we pass by the fact that the breaking of bread has sometimes been thought to involve the ingestion of the god? This thought strays into aspects of *Elizabeth Costello* in a way that connects with its explicit concerns with congress between ontological realms, seen most clearly in a chapter airily dismissed by David Lodge as 'whimsical musing on sexual relations between gods and humans in myth' (Lodge, 2003). The chapter, entitled 'Eros', is concerned with Eros' relation to Psyche. Elizabeth, we know, has made clear her concern for her own psyche, her soul. And the opening remarks of her lecture explicitly evoked questions of the 'ascent' of the ape and of the human animal's relation to other animals. So we have within this novel a series of differences between ontological realms: of animals, human beings, gods (with gods becoming swans to have intercourse with human beings, whose animal vulnerability and responsiveness they secretly envy); of real people and fictional characters (with, for example, Robert Duncan, the Black Mountain poet, appearing at the start of this chapter, as someone for whom the fictional Elizabeth once lusted); with the real author and the implied author (who intrudes into the text); the implied reader, the actual reader.

It is somewhat ironic, given the attention to the Hughes poem, that more is not said of Elizabeth's own reference to Hughes' other work, particularly his extensive writing about animals, for this is critical in determining where the novel finds itself in terms of the human relation to the animal. She refers to 'Jaguar' and 'Second Glance at a Jaguar', where there is an imaginative attempt to enter into the being of the animal, in the way that Diamond sometimes seems to require. But in the end Elizabeth finds there to be something too Platonic in the idealised holistic ecology that the poem celebrates, where, say, a hawk holds Creation in its foot and a pike is perfect pike in all parts. Hence, there is something unsatisfactory, incomplete, at odds, out of joint, in her own response to the world, and this manner of being unhinged is not to be cast aside; it is there, as Thoreau might say, in our being beside ourselves but in a sane way. And, we might add, the gradations of seeing-as (absent from animals' seeing), the challenges these imperfections prompt her to and the possibilities they represent, must remain with her continually as a task. This returns us to thoughts of the human being's never being self-contained, of its being exposed both ways, towards the animal and towards the gods.

Hughes' six young men were brought to us through the exposure of the photograph, and they in turn lost their lives through exposure to enemy fire. Elizabeth is exposed as she delivers her lecture, and she risks exposing the wound that her clothes cover—the wound out of which we are all, wailing and crying, first exposed to the world. We are exposed also in our representation, whereas animals are as incapable of representation as they are of being naked, and gods for the most part remain essentially unseen. How like a beast? How like a god? Hinged between the two and inclined from time to time to become unhinged, exposed and out of position, ec-static and capable of ecstasy, the 'little deaths' that the gods can only envy. And representation shadows a further exposure that must be added to this list, and this is the fact that, contrary to what sometimes seem to be the presuppositions of philosophy, human beings—unlike gods or animals—are necessarily exposed to language, which is to say to particular languages in particular places at particular times: we are marked by the signs of what has gone before. For our very ability to think is derived from our initiation into words, whose part-ghostly ontology extends back into a darkness we cannot recover, and whose iterability remains when we are not there, after we are gone. And we are marked by the fact that our words are partial, by the fact that their order is inadequate to inordinate pressures, to 'permanent horrors' we cannot finally escape. These are the very conditions of our being human, and our relation to animals cannot be understood well without seeing this.

In the end it is only a part of Coetzee's novel that foregrounds the question of animal rights, and this needs to be placed in a larger frame. In that frame it is true that the relation between the animal and the human is always in question. So too is the relation to the gods, if this is only to their absence.

The fluent accomplished arguments of the moral philosopher, with the pedagogical equivalent imagined in the first part of this paper, threaten to deflect insight and education into the human condition, while this is something Coetzee's novel achieves. The commentaries I have considered show ways in which not indulgence in but acknowledgement of an inordinate language can turn the attention towards the real, in philosophy and in art, re-sourcing moral education. This involves considering what it is to be a human being and how this relates to the animal. This touches us every day in the food we eat.

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¹ 'Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds,' says the President. Emerson: 'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines' (Emerson, 1982, p. 183).