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<AT>Elizabeth Costello and the Biography of the Moral Philosopher

Imagine someone who informs you that her conversion to vegetarianism began when she read *Charlotte's Web* or viewed the film *Babe*. Both stories invite the reader to celebrate the events surrounding a pig being saved from the butcher. What kind of role would her spectatorship of this book or film have played in her conversion? It is perhaps improbable to suspect that she would have undergone this kind of extreme moral conversion *solely* on the basis of her engagement with one of these fictions; perhaps more likely is the scenario in which her engagement was only one part of a lengthy process of her moral change of mind. In any event, it is certainly possible that our imagined vegetarian would see her encounter with *Charlotte's Web* or *Babe* as playing a *justificatory* role in her conversion. In looking back at her conversion, she might say something like this: "I know that I was young and impressionable, but the way in which the book (or film) made me feel about its characters moved me to further reflect upon animals and the animal industry, and I now realize that it was right to do so." On her own view, at least, her spectatorship motivated *and* warranted her taking the further steps that ultimately led to her conversion. If this is right, then fictional narratives can possess—to at least some degree—what Raimond Gaita refers to as an ethical "authority."[1]

In the first section of this article, I outline one way in which fictional narratives can possess ethical authority. I then appeal to this account, in Section II, to show how J. M. Coetzee's novella *The Lives of Animals* exerts an ethical authority in a distinctive way.[2] The novella follows the visit of an author and scholar, Elizabeth Costello, to Appleton College, where she has been invited to give a series of lectures. In those lectures and intermittent conversations, she discusses, develops, and endorses her complex and challenging attitudes toward animals. Thus, our engagement with Elizabeth Costello is an engagement with a character in the role of *persuader*—a role that philosophers often take in their professional lives. In the final section of the article, I suggest that Elizabeth Costello's ethical authority for us as readers of *The Lives of Animals* points to a source of ethical authority that

philosophers possess, and should further explore and perhaps exploit.

<A>I. A SOURCE OF THE ETHICAL AUTHORITY OF NARRATIVES

One account of the authority of narratives is that an interaction with narratives gives us more of the kind of experiences we get in our day-to-day lives. In a suggestive passage, Martha Nussbaum writes: "Why not life itself? Why can't we investigate whatever we want to investigate by living and reflecting on our lives? . . . One obvious answer was suggested already by Aristotle: we have never lived enough. Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial."[3] I take the thought here to be that the ethical value of fiction derives from the fact that what we get in fictional experience is more of what we get in life. While this is by no means the entirety of Nussbaum's account of the ethical value of fiction, I do not think that it is even *part* of the story. It seems to me that it is wholly misleading to understand our engagements with narratives on the model of our lived experiences of persons and events in the world.

It sometimes happens that a real experience has the kind of authority that reading *Charlotte's Web* or viewing *Babe* had for our imaginary vegetarian. Her conversion might equally, and equally rationally, have begun when she accidentally stumbled into an abattoir. But our engagement with a fictional narrative does not have that kind of content. The ethical power of real experience derives in large part from the fact that the experience is both direct and of the world; in entering the abattoir, we are aware that what we feel is in response to an unmediated encounter with events in the world. In engaging with a fictional narrative, on the contrary, we are fully aware not only that it is a fiction—that what we are privy to is not the world itself—but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, that our access to the events before us is mediated, that this is *someone else's telling* or *presentation* of events. As a consequence, the ethical authority of fiction looks as if it lies not in the realm of moral experience, but in the realm of *moral persuasion*.

Taking this as my cue, I will develop the following suggestion: a spectator's acquaintance with a fictional narrative can play a rationalizing role in her life because the narrative manifests and endorses an *attitude* toward its own characters, events, and context, by way of encouraging the spectator, through her enjoyment of and satisfaction with the narrative, to adopt the same attitude.

<B>*i. Emotions and the Formation of Attitudes Toward a Narrative's Characters.* An attitude is best understood in terms of the dispositions of some person who possesses that attitude. A person with a certain attitude toward something S (a particular or kind of object, property, or event) will be, among other things, *attentive to certain features* of S, *inclined to describe or understand* S in certain ways, disposed to feel certain *emotions* toward S, disposed to certain *beliefs* about S, disposed to *praise* or *blame* S in certain conditions, and disposed to *act* in certain ways toward S. Forgiveness, resentment, compassion, wariness, trust, and admiration are all examples of attitudes that we commonly take to and attribute to other individuals. Racism, sexism, and xenophobia are also

plausibly understood as attitudes toward a certain kind of person. Each of these attitudes in turn manifests itself on occasion in emotions, beliefs, and actions. To be wary of someone, or to have a racist attitude toward her, is to have tendencies to be attentive to certain things she does, to have certain beliefs about her, and to have certain emotions toward her.[4]

As the examples above indicate, attitudes have an *evaluative* component; one's attitude toward something can be said to embody, at least in part, one's evaluation of it. *Resenting* someone, for example, involves adopting a negative, disapproving posture toward her for what she has done, and *admiring* someone involves a disposition to praise her character or actions. A central component in the evaluative feature of attitudes is the tendency of the attitude holder to feel certain emotions toward the object of his attitude. In feeling an emotion one reveals one's evaluation of the emotion's object. That this is so is strongly suggested by examples. The surprising extent of Jones's *grief* over the loss of a pet reveals how valuable the pet was to him. Jones's *shame* or *indignation* reveals his evaluation of his own or someone else's integrity or entitlements. Indeed, Robert Gordon has divided a long list of emotions into the "positive" and the "negative."[5] The appropriateness—in principle, at least—of Gordon's division is a manifestation of the fact that many emotions either themselves express a positive or negative evaluation of something (for example, "loves," "is disgusted") or are a kind of response to the positive or negative status of something of value (for example, "is delighted," "is disappointed"). Accordingly, if in attributing an attitude toward someone, we attribute to him a disposition to feel certain emotions, we are able to identify something about his evaluation of the object of his attitude.

While it is odd to think of narratives as *possessing* attitudes, we can nonetheless think of them as *manifesting* attitudes toward their characters, by inviting their spectators to possess the same attitude.[6] How does a narrative go about doing this? Most fundamentally, it is in the choices made by the narrative's creator (for example, its author) regarding focus and description that a narrative's attitude is revealed.[7] Any telling of a series of events must involve choices as to which information to give spectators about its characters, their properties, their actions, and their contexts. These choices manifest attitudes toward the characters, as they reveal *which* characters deserve *how much* and *what kind* of attention from the spectators. It is here that the analogy introduced earlier between our engagement with narratives and our engagement with a moral persuader becomes most forceful. Exposure to a narrative is exposure to the narrative creator's (perhaps pretended) view of her characters. As such, a narrative necessarily manifests attitudinal evaluations of its characters in the various ways that it invites spectators to follow what they do and what happens to them.

One of the richest mechanisms that a narrative creator can use to influence her spectators to take an attitude toward the narrative's characters is that of encouraging the spectator to respond with certain emotions. To respond with an emotion toward a character, as we have seen, involves taking up certain desires and evaluations toward that character.[8] The intimate relationship between attitudes and emotions thus goes in two directions. It is not just that in possessing an attitude toward something, one

has a tendency to take certain emotions toward it; in coming to feel an emotion toward something, one is likely to thereby take a certain attitude toward it. Therefore, for example, if a narrative portrays a character in such a way that the spectator is encouraged to pity or fear him, it encourages the spectator to form an evaluation of the character as, in part, something *to be pitied* or *to be feared*. This invitation to emotion both reveals the narrative's attitude toward the characters and calls upon spectators to share that attitude, along with the evaluative desires and thoughts that are a part of that attitude.

My suggestion, so far, is that one route from our spectatorship of narratives to the uptake of attitudes toward the narrative's characters goes via the emotions we feel toward those characters. The spectator (i) reads or hears a description of events, or sees them in film or on stage, (ii) emotionally responds to those events, and (iii) forms an attitude toward the characters involved. I do not claim that this three-stage route is the only (or the most common or important) means by which narrative attitudes are manifested, encouraged, and taken up by their spectators. Nonetheless, it is with this mode of attitude formation that I will work in the remainder of this article, as I think that it plays a significant role both in our engagement with *The Lives of Animals* and in our engagement with other philosophers.

<B>*ii. The Normative Power of a Narrative's Invitations*. Both steps in the three-stage route described above are at least potentially reason giving; narrative spectatorship can provide reasons for adopting the attitudes that they manifest. I will argue for this indirectly: the three-stage route to attitudes has two features that *indicate* that it is a reason-giving process. These two features signify the power of our interactions with narratives to provide reasons for the attitudes we take toward their characters.

First, something can provide (or reveal) a reason for something else only if both are related in a certain way: the former must make the latter *intelligible*.[9] Such a relationship holds both between cognitive states and the emotions that they bring about and between emotions and the attitudes that they bring about. In the first place, there is an internal relationship between the way in which we perceive or grasp a description of a character or scene—the *content* of that perception or description—and the emotions that we feel toward that character or scene. This relationship is such that coming to understand the description of a thing that (say) a spectator endorses or would endorse serves to make intelligible the emotions that she takes toward it. The particularity of the description and the resulting emotion matters here; in most contexts, the description 'has large, dripping, exposed fangs' can make intelligible certain emotions—like apprehension or fear—but not others. A similar relationship holds between the emotion of apprehension or fear and certain attitudes that the emotion can bring about toward this thing (for example, as a thing to be avoided or killed); this latter relationship is, like that between descriptions and emotions, a relation between the contents of the emotion and the attitude. Again, it matters what the particular emotion and the particular attitude are: a particular emotion will make certain attitudes but not others intelligible. Accordingly, the descriptions found in a written or

spoken narrative, or the kind of perceptions conveyed in a visual narrative, are candidates for making intelligible both the emotional and attitudinal responses that spectators take to them.

A second indicator of the rationalizing nature of the two-stage process described in the previous subsection is the role of the *spectator's reflection* in a narrative's influence on its spectator's attitudes. When a narrative is successful, the spectator is satisfied by, feels pleasure at, and approves of the narrative's progression, *including* a satisfaction, pleasure, and approval toward the kind of emotional responses that the narrative asks of her.[10] What we might call a "standard" narrative invites us to take certain attitudes toward its characters—partly, as we have seen, in the form of emotions we feel toward them and desires we develop on their behalf—and then has events play out in accordance with those created emotions and desires. The result is—if things go as planned—the spectator's overall pleasure and approval of her experience. She is satisfied both by how the narrative events played themselves out, and in the way the narrative invites her to feel about those events. Therefore, for example, we can imagine a spectator who is shown a character committing a horrifyingly immoral act, upon which she forms an attitude toward that character which involves, in part, the desire for this action to be revenged as the narrative unfolds. A standard narrative will *unquestioningly* fulfill this desire—without, say, leading the spectator to wonder whether she should have formed this desire at all—and the spectator will feel the potency of such a desire's being satisfied. The pleasure that we feel as desires are fulfilled has a tendency to entrench those desires and, as a result, to entrench the emotions and attitudes to which those desires belong. In general, to go through the process of being given a desire, and then to have that desire pleasurably satisfied, is to see something in favor of that desire—namely, the pleasure one gains from its being satisfied. At the end of the narrative, the spectator's attitude toward the character—for example, as *one who should have been revenged*—remains and is entrenched by the pleasure its fulfillment has given her. Nonstandard narratives stray from this process in one or more ways; the narrative unfolds in a way that surprises us, in a way that we did not wish it to, in a way that leads us to question our own responses, or in a way of which we disapprove.

The reason-giving nature of this process is indicated by the fact that the spectator responds not just to the characters within the narrative, but also to *her own* responses to those characters. The overall pleasure that a spectator gains from a narrative is, at least in part, a reflective pleasure, and this reflective pleasure is an implicit endorsement of the kind of emotions and desires that the narrative has asked the spectator to take. As such, it serves as an approval of the narrative itself. A defining characteristic of reasons is that they survive our thinking about their motivating power on us to believe or act. Christine Korsgaard points to this intimate connection between normativity and self-reflection when she writes that "the normative word 'reason' refers to a kind of reflective success."[11] An inclination which is in no way susceptible to reflective approval is not even a *candidate* for a reason. If, then, I feel an *inclination* to take a certain attitude toward a fictional character, whether that inclination counts as *providing a reason for* my taking that attitude depends upon whether I would,

upon reflection, approve of this inclination inclining me to take that attitude.

It is not that a spectator must *actually* reflect upon and approve of the process by which her comprehension of a narrative has led to her emotions and to certain attitudes toward the narrative's characters. Rather, it is the spectator's ability to reflect upon the process and, more importantly, the fact that the process is dependent upon the approval of such reflection that reveals that this process is a reason-giving process. The kinds of mental state-generating processes that deserve to be called "reason-giving" are those that not only take place in reflective creatures, but also that are dependent upon that reflective approval not failing. Reason-giving processes are those that can be reflectively "watched" or monitored with approval, and they are processes that depend upon the absence of disapproval. Accordingly, it is not that your reflecting upon, for example, how a description of a character has led you to form an attitude toward that character itself *generates* your reason for that attitude. Rather, your ability to reflect upon the process is a condition of that process's potential to provide reasons *at all*. If you happen to reflect upon an attitude that a narrative has led you to adopt toward its characters, your reflective approval of this attitude *reveals* to you that (your spectatorship of) the narrative provides you with a reason to adopt this attitude. The ability to survive reflection is a necessary condition upon the reason-giving nature of a process, but reasons can be provided in any given instance without reflection.

I take it to be obvious that the process by which narratives generate evaluative attitudes can survive our reflective awareness of it. Individual narratives, of course, may not survive such reflection: if a narrative does not meet a spectator's second-order scrutiny of what it has inclined her to feel, then she may reject the narrative in its encouragement of her emotions or related attitudes. She may see the narrative's effect upon her as manipulative or sentimental, or she may disapprove of the attitude that the narrative is inviting her to take. For a spectator to come to believe this about herself is for her to disapprove of the sort of interaction that the narrative has invited, and thus to disapprove (overall) of the narrative itself. Put another way, at least *one* locus of narrative criticism must be the appropriateness of the kind of response that a narrative asks its spectators to take toward its characters. A spectator's disapproval of a narrative may manifest itself as an outright refusal to adopt the attitude that the narrative encourages toward its characters.[12] In the absence of such criticism, however, the spectator can be seen to have *allowed* the narrative to affect her attitudes and, at least implicitly, to acknowledge that it has some degree of warrant in doing so; the attitude that the narrative is asking her to take toward its characters is, more or less, an appropriate one to take. Reflective monitoring of one's spectatorship is not failsafe, of course; a spectator may accept an invitation to take a certain attitude toward a character when, all things considered, she should not. Nonetheless, her so taking—her not resisting the taking up of this attitude—is a *prima facie* indication that the narrative gave her a reason to do so.

In sum, a narrative-creator's choices regarding the presentation of her story manifest evaluative attitudes toward the characters and events in the story, and the spectator of the narrative is invited to

adopt these attitudes. The process of spectatorship is characterized by features that suggest that it can provide reasons for the spectator's adoption of these attitudes were the spectator to adopt them. With this picture in hand, we have the start of an account of how it is that our vegetarian's conversion could be both initiated and warranted by her reading *Charlotte's Web* or viewing *Babe*. The fact that she did not consider the attitudes that the narratives invited her to have toward their characters, and the invitations themselves, as unsuitable, indicates that her spectatorship of *Charlotte's Web* or *Babe* resulted in her possessing a reason to take a certain attitude toward the animals in these fictions who were saved or responsible for saving other animals.

<B>*iii. Transferring Attitudes Outside a Narrative.* While I have described a process of narrative presentations leading a spectator to take attitudes toward the narrative's characters, I have said nothing about how a spectator can come to hold attitudes toward things and situations *outside* of the narrative with which she is engaging. How and why did our imagined vegetarian came to think about *real* animals and the appropriateness of taking certain attitudes toward them? This would have been the second, subsequent stage in her conversion; first she formed the attitudes that *Charlotte's Web* or *Babe* invited her to take toward the fictional pigs (or other animals) in the story, and then she *transferred* this attitude toward real pigs (or other animals).

Perhaps the most unsophisticated version of this transfer of attitude is a matter of the spectator's merely noticing relevant similarities between the fictional pigs in *Charlotte's Web* and *Babe*, on the one hand, and real pigs on the other; as Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen have written, "At its simplest, readers just notice that the character-types depicted [in fictions] crop up, more or less, in the world."[13] In fictions like *Charlotte's Web* and *Babe*, this transition will not be a trivial one, as the animals in these fictions have characteristics (like rationality and a use of language) that do not characterize animals in the real world. Indeed, one might disagree with our vegetarian at this point and *deny* that the pig Babe is, actually, relevantly similar to real pigs; Babe is, after all, a conscious reflective agent, and perhaps it is only *this* feature of him that warrants a spectator's attitudes toward him. If this is right, then it may be that while the film *Babe* does authorize our vegetarian's attitudes toward the character Babe, it does not, at the end of the day, authorize such attitudes toward real pigs. Perhaps it will turn out that *Babe* provides us no reason to transfer the attitudes we take toward Babe to real pigs.

There is a great deal more to be said about the differences between adopting an attitude toward fictional characters and adopting it toward real creatures, and about justifying the transition from the former attitude to the latter. However, with regard to the fictional narrative with which I will be concerned in the remainder of this article, many of these issues fall away. While *The Lives of Animals* invites us to take an attitude toward a fictional character, Elizabeth Costello, I will be concerned not with the transition to *things similar to Elizabeth Costello* in the real world, but rather to things *with which Elizabeth Costello is concerned*, namely, real nonhuman animals. While Elizabeth Costello is herself a fictional character, the objects of her moral concern are real animals, the animals of our

world. The attitude we take toward her, I will suggest, provides warrant for taking seriously her attitude toward the real, domesticated animals around us. So, while *The Lives of Animals* does raise issues surrounding the conversion of an attitude toward things fictional to one toward things real, we will see that the issues are different from those raised by our imagined vegetarian and her spectatorship of *Babe* or *Charlotte's Web*.

<A>*II. THE LIVES OF ANIMALS*, ELIZABETH COSTELLO, AND US

The Lives of Animals provides a helpful locus for thinking about our engagement with fictional narratives because it is a narrative whose plot primarily involves a character acting as a moral persuader.[14] Given the tight analogy between, on the one hand, the relationship between a moral informant and her hearer, and on the other hand, the relationship between a narrative and its spectator, *The Lives of Animals* can be seen as exemplifying both relationships at once. In reading *The Lives of Animals*, we are being invited to take an evaluative attitude toward a moral informant who is herself inviting her own audience to take an evaluative attitude toward animals.

While it is perhaps too crude to claim that Elizabeth Costello's aim in her lectures at Appleton College is to *persuade* members of her audience that their moral outlook is deeply misguided, this description is not too far off the mark. She is trying to get the members of her audience to reflect upon and to rethink their attitudes toward animals. As readers, we remain with the narrative because we wish to see how Elizabeth Costello goes about engaging with her audiences, her interlocutors, her dinner companions, her son, and her daughter-in-law on the topic of animals. This, in itself, should make *The Lives of Animals* of interest to philosophers, who like Elizabeth Costello are in the business of something akin to persuasion. Outside of Plato's dialogues, there are few narrative works of literary significance the plots of which center around characters attempting to persuade others.[15]

However, if in thinking about *The Lives of Animals* we focus only on what Elizabeth Costello advocates in her lectures and discussions, then we miss out on the heart of the novella and on the core of its potential moral effect on us.[16] Coetzee's text does not just convey Elizabeth Costello's views, but it is also a *portrayal* of her—of her as an animal, a person, a writer, a believer and thinker, and as someone in pain. Coetzee has given us a narrative that invites us to adopt particular attitudes toward Elizabeth Costello, and the parallels between the strategies Coetzee uses to achieve this with his readers and those that Elizabeth Costello uses with her interlocutors contribute to the richness and power of the novella.

From the first lines of her first lecture, Elizabeth Costello reports her own pain over the animal industry. Discussing Red Peter, the primate narrator of Franz Kafka's short story "Report to an Academy," she says:

<EXT>Red Peter was not an investigator of primate behavior but a branded, marked, wounded animal

presenting himself as speaking testimony to a gathering of scholars. I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak.[17]<end EXT>

Just as Red Peter should be seen as "speaking testimony" to scholars, Elizabeth Costello wants her audience to see her as "speaking testimony" to her audience of scholars. She requests her audience to see her, first, *as an animal*, and secondly, *as a wounded animal*, an animal in pain. One of the main aspects of Coetzee's characterization of Elizabeth Costello is as someone in deep pain about what it is that she wants to call to our attention, namely, the animal industry.

This pain is most powerfully conveyed in the novella's complex usage of a metaphor. One of Elizabeth Costello's primary aims in her first lecture is that of redescribing the animal production industry in such a way as to make evident the depth of its immorality. "Let me say it openly," she declares: <EXT>"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.[18]<end EXT> In part, the intended persuasive power of this sentence is due to the introduction of morally thick words—'degradation' and 'cruelty'—to describe the animal industry. More importantly, however, Elizabeth Costello is here redescribing the animal industry by way of a metaphor: the animal industry, she says, is a holocaust. A metaphor works by claiming that a target object is susceptible to the properties of a new, introduced object. In saying that the animal industry is a holocaust, Elizabeth Costello is inviting us to take the moral attitude appropriate to the Holocaust—that of moral horror—and to apply it to the animal industry that surrounds us.

The Holocaust metaphor appears again as Elizabeth Costello speaks to her son in the final pages of *The Lives of Animals*, but there we have her using it not as a tool of persuasion but as a way of describing her own pained perception of the world around her. She says:

<EXT>I seem to move around perfectly easily among people and to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? . . . Yet every day I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money.[19]<end EXT>

In this painful and deeply personal passage, Elizabeth Costello is confessing to her son how she perceives, for example, leather products and meat: as *corpses*. The word choice here is vital; it brings with it the devastating image of a world filled with cadavers and pieces of carcasses. Were we to see the world as Elizabeth Costello does, we would respond to our surroundings as we would a battlefield, a car bomb, a massacre, or a concentration camp. As the story closes, we realize that her Holocaust metaphor is not just a controversial persuasive device, but in fact thoroughly characterizes *her own*

view of the animal industry. She is horrified by the participation of all of those around her—including her friends and family—in the animal industry. Just as Elizabeth Costello encourages her audience members to "think their way into the being" of animals, Coetzee encourages us to imagine Costello's own disturbing view of the world, and thereby to understand her pain.[20] As a result, some readers will not only come to imaginatively understand her view, but also to have pity, sympathy, and compassion for Elizabeth Costello in virtue of her view.

As she describes with clear desperation her conception of the world to her son, Elizabeth Costello even questions her own sanity:<EXT> "Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! . . . Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can't you? *Why can't you?*"[21]<end EXT> One possible response from a reader, at the end of *The Lives of Animals*, would be to agree with her suspicions: she is, indeed, mad. In this case, the pity that we feel for her would be pity for someone who is delusional or paranoid. However, this is not the only possible response for a reader of the novella. On the contrary, at least some readers, including myself, feel a great deal of *respect* for Elizabeth Costello, her pain, and her actions in the novella. This is the reader with whom I will be concerned in what follows, as it is this reader who, in virtue of this response, has reason to take seriously Costello's attitudes toward animals.

Elizabeth Costello is an older, frail woman, famous for being a writer, who, in accepting an invitation to visit a university, decides neither to rest on her laurels nor to stay within a topic with which she is academically familiar. On the contrary, she chooses a topic that is divisive and controversial, and one which she knows will make many of her audience members roll their eyes. What is more, she well knows she may not be able to answer her interlocutors' questions and challenges to their satisfaction. Notwithstanding all of this, Elizabeth Costello goes ahead with her agenda. As the narrative proceeds, we come to realize that her motivation for having chosen her topic is not in any way self-serving. She has not chosen to discuss our treatment of animals simply for the sake of controversy or to bring herself into the limelight. On the contrary, her motivations are genuine and sincere. She is, as we have seen, deeply hurt by the animal industry. Her talks derive from and express that hurt. Furthermore, Elizabeth Costello is also concerned to state, with as much honesty as she can, *why* she is so hurt by what is happening around her. And this involves speaking not in terms of arguments or reasons (as many philosophers would), but in terms of metaphors, imagination, and emotions.[22] She pushes ahead with nonargumentative strategies of persuasion, well aware that they are likely to be received by her academic audience with a considerable amount of skepticism. Thus, the task that Elizabeth Costello undertakes at Appleton College is brave, sincere, genuine, and honest, and many readers will respond with admiration for her courage in this task.

Notably, the admiration that we feel for Elizabeth Costello is in spite of the fact that Coetzee portrays her as an unlikeable person. There is nothing in *The Lives of Animals* to lead the reader to be fond of her. She is bristly, thin-skinned, impatient, petty, and grumpy. We see her showing no tenderness for her son, her daughter-in-law, or her grandchildren, even after an absence of two years.

Far from making any moves to repair her relationship with her daughter-in-law Norma, we see Elizabeth Costello antagonizing her almost as soon as she arrives at her son's home. Nor do we see anyone showing affection *for* Elizabeth Costello—not even her son—something that, if we were to see it, would lead us to have some affection for her as well.[23] This absence of any fondness for her suggests that our high regard for her is rather a function of the pain she feels toward animals and the task that this pain motivates her to undertake. It is her sincerity, her courage, and her honesty, *with regard to that project* that lead some readers to esteem her.

The kind of respect that certain readers feel for Elizabeth Costello is one version of what Stephen Darwall has called "appraisal respect," which he defines as "an attitude of positive appraisal of a person either judged as a person or *as engaged in some more specific pursuit*."[24] A reader's respect for Elizabeth Costello will be the latter, focused on her in virtue of what she feels and does for animals at Appleton College. It is not respect for *everything* that she says; readers may, indeed, find themselves with nothing but contempt for her in light of her actions toward her son and his family; her obsession with the animal industry manifests itself in more than a trace of misanthropy—certainly enough to make it difficult to respect her *in toto*. What admiration we have for her is solely the result of appreciating both her genuine pain at the animal industry and her courage in her attempt to express, share, and convey that pain with others.

My suggestion is that if a reader appreciates Elizabeth Costello's pain, and if he finds himself with respect for her courage in her attempt to share her attitude—intimately associated with that pain—toward animals, his doing so provides a measure of support for her attitude toward animals. Such a reader has, in virtue of understanding and respecting her, undergone a change in his epistemic position with respect to the attitude she advocates toward animals. My claim is not that we have reason to treat animals better *out of respect for Elizabeth Costello*. It is sometimes true that we have reason to treat an animal well because we respect some person who cares for it (for example, as a pet). However, given that Costello does not exist, it would be very odd for me to claim that we should care about something because she cares about it. The sense in which our admiration for her gives us reason to take seriously her suggestions and outlook is more epistemic than moral.

The strength of this reason should not be overstated. I do not claim that such a reader would be justified in adopting Elizabeth Costello's attitude toward the animal industry *solely on the basis of reading the novella*; seeing her pain for animals as genuine and respecting what that pain motivates her to do may be insufficient, perhaps, to warrant a reader's own adoption of her views on them. It is more likely that having certain responses to Costello will improve a reader's epistemic position in a subtler, weaker manner.

As a start, note that the reader who responds to *The Lives of Animals* in the way that I have described not only would, but *should* have new or at least more reverence for those who themselves possess her moral outlook. A *dismissive* attitude toward those who abhor the animal industry would be in serious tension with a reader's understanding and admiring response to Elizabeth Costello.

Someone who imaginatively understands another person's evaluative attitude toward something and furthermore respects her in the light of that evaluation is in a situation in which he would be disingenuous (or self-deceived) were he to deny that the other's evaluative attitude is to be taken seriously. At a minimum, to meet these two conditions toward another's evaluation of something is to see that it would be worthwhile to further inquire into the merit of so evaluating that thing.

Accordingly, while it is perhaps improbable to imagine a reader who converts to vegetarianism solely on the basis of reading *The Lives of Animals*, we can readily imagine someone, like our earlier reader of *Charlotte's Web*, proceeding through several steps—perhaps involving nonfictional reading, speaking to other vegetarians, or a visit to an abattoir—which together lead her to a complete refusal to participate in the animal industry. How would this person's respect for Elizabeth Costello fit into the overall story of her conversion? She would not be remiss in treating it as *justifying* later stages. Upon being asked about her change, she might say, "I was deeply moved by the remarkable lead character in *The Lives of Animals*. When I finished the book, I both understood and respected her pain at the animal industry. That led me to further explore her attitude toward animals, and I now see that this response was warranted." Our vegetarian's response to the character of Elizabeth Costello survived, and continues to survive, her self-reflection upon the kind of attitude that she ultimately adopted.

It is worth noting that this is precisely the kind of change that Elizabeth Costello herself envisions for her audience. As she says in response to the questioner after her first lecture, "Open your heart and listen to what your heart says."[25] Her aim is to get her audience members to *individually* engage with nonhuman animals and their attitudes toward them. This, it seems to me, is what the reader of *The Lives of Animals* whom I have been describing has reason to do; such a reader's recognition and respect for Elizabeth Costello's pain is something that should lead him to "explore" his own emotional responses to nonhuman animals. We might say that such a reader of *The Lives of Animals* gets something like an *epistemic promise*, a variation of "seek and ye shall find." Elizabeth Costello is making a claim about what we would find if we were to reflect upon how we see and respond to animals. She is telling us that by imaginative understanding and emotional reflection, we will come to see that, like us, animals are "full of being," and we will appreciate properly the depth of the wrong we are doing them.[26] And my suggestion has been that insofar as a reader's attitude toward her is an admiration that derives from recognizing that she is sincere, honest, and possessed of real feeling for what she is doing, and that her feelings and task are genuine, such a reader's following up on Elizabeth Costello's suggestions would not be without warrant.

The fictional Elizabeth Costello is a complex vehicle for an attitude toward real animals, and a certain kind of respect for her amounts to, I have been suggesting, a kind of respect for her attitude. Coetzee's book thus possesses a moral authority while avoiding the issues of fictionality alluded to at the end of Section I. As any philosopher will know from his or her experience in exploring hypothetical positions, one's warrant for coming to take an evaluative attitude seriously need not

depend upon that attitude's being held by a real person.

<A>III. THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER

As I suggested above, *The Lives of Animals* is different from most fictional narratives in that it is largely concerned with the main character's attempts at persuasion. Thus, the attitude that the narrative invites us to take toward Elizabeth Costello is, primarily, toward her *in virtue of her attitudes toward animals*. By leading us to both pity and respect her for her attitudes, Coetzee encourages us to take an approving attitude toward them.

With this in view, it strikes me that one of the most interesting *philosophical* features of *The Lives of Animals* is that it gives us a sophisticated and poignant portrayal of someone doing the kind of thing that many philosophers do at some point or other in their careers—namely, exploring a case for our taking a certain evaluative attitude. This is, obviously, not something that only philosophers do; everyone engages in moral persuasion, testimony, and reflection throughout their lives. However, not all of us do so—in the manner that philosophers do—with a background awareness of the state of discourse in a particular community or communities. While Elizabeth Costello is not a member of the philosophical community, she is well aware of the state of play in this community, and her discussion is structured, as are all of our discussions *qua* academics, by such awareness.

Consequently, I would like to end this article by briefly pointing to the analogy between the portrait that Coetzee gives us of Elizabeth Costello and the depictions that philosophers can and in some cases do possess of each other as persuaders. Like Elizabeth Costello, moral philosophers have character traits as persons who are trying, in their professional capacities, to persuade each other of something. They attribute to each other traits of sincerity or insincerity, courage or cowardice, honesty or disingenuousness, humility or immodesty, openness or intolerance, selfishness or benevolence. Intimately tied up with these character traits are emotions that they feel toward other philosophers as characterized by such traits. Just as we come to feel emotions toward Elizabeth Costello and to attribute traits to her in her capacity as persuader, philosophers do the same toward each other. It follows that whether he or she is aware of it or not, it may be that a philosopher's reception of the work of another moral philosopher is analogous with a reader's engagement with the character of Elizabeth Costello. Accordingly, if I have been right in my claim that a reader's emotions and attitudes toward Elizabeth Costello can do epistemic work in giving him reason to take her attitudes seriously, then it follows that a philosopher's emotions and attitudes toward another can do the same kind of epistemic work.

What we feel and think of Elizabeth Costello is, of course, dictated by her creator, J. M. Coetzee. We are wholly at Coetzee's disposal in the information that we gain of her. This is not usually true of the attitudes that philosophers form of each other. In forming an attitude toward another philosopher, I may know a great deal more about her: her professional history, descriptions of her given to us by

herself, her colleagues, or those who have been taught by her, or I may have met her or heard her speak in person. All of these things can contribute toward the attitude that I form toward another philosopher *qua* persuader, and if the claims of the previous section are correct, such an attitude can be of epistemic consequence. Coetzee can be seen to have reminded us that there is an attitudinal element within our engagement with others that plays an implicit role in our professional lives.

It is a small step from the recognition of what is *already happening* in philosophers' engagement with each other to the suggestion that this attitudinal element in their interpersonal professional lives should be made more explicit in their discourse, that its nature should be explored, and even, perhaps, that it should be more widely exploited than it already is. We can envision the latter suggestion being met in both third-personal (that is, biographical) and first-personal (that is, autobiographical) ways. The third-personal approach would involve writers (philosophers or nonphilosophers) endeavoring to portray a philosopher and her relationship with her subject matter, questions, and positions. While what we might think of as "formal" biographical portrayals—*philosophical* work in which one philosopher portrays another—are not common in our canon, they are nonetheless present, and their presence is momentous: Plato's dialogues are in large part one philosopher's portrayal of another. As does *The Lives of Animals*, many of the Platonic dialogues invite us to follow not only a persuader's (that is, Socrates') engagement with his interlocutors, but also to a complex and sophisticated (that is, Plato's) portrayal of the persuader. Furthermore, it is at least arguable that the attitudes that Plato invites us to take toward Socrates are a substantial element in the epistemic power that the Platonic dialogues can have for us.[27] In contrast to formal portrayals, "informal" third-personal portrayals of (high-profile) philosophers—for example, by journalists or biographers—have long had a presence in our community. They are not insignificant; those who write or lecture on the work of Peter Singer, for example, often mention what they take to be relevant features of his biography.

The first-personal mode of introducing biographical materials into philosophical discourse would involve philosophers creating work that is more personal, more *auto*biographical. There is a long tradition of such work within philosophy, broadly speaking—Augustine's and Rousseau's respective *Confessions*, for example, and Mill's *Autobiography*—and it has proponents today. I am aware of three philosophers who have recently written works in moral philosophy in which their descriptions of themselves, their emotions, and the motives that have led them to and through their work play a prominent role. Eva Feder Kittay's ethical work, much of it culminating in her book *Love's Labor*, has been in part motivated by and includes a great deal of reflection upon her experiences as the mother of someone with disability.[28] Susan Brison wrote her *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, which is about violence, rape, trauma, memory, and personal identity, in the years following her own experience as a victim of violence.[29] Much of Raimond Gaita's philosophical work, like *The Philosopher's Dog*, includes honest and complex comments about himself; Gaita is concerned with conveying to his reader not just the history and details of his concern with his topic, but (where appropriate) the indefinite nature of his conclusions.[30] The autobiographical work in all three cases is

selective. Just as Coetzee limits his characterization of Elizabeth Costello to features that are relevant to her project at Appleton College, these philosophers share with us their narratives, struggles, emotions, and motivations only insofar as they see them to be relevant to the positions they wish us to take seriously. As a consequence, the attitudes we as readers adopt to Kittay, Brison, and Gaita are arguably pertinent to our epistemic situation with respect to their positions.

In sum, work that includes, as Coetzee's narrative does, reference to the features of a persuader that are motivating or structuring her inquiry can lead to the reader's forming emotions and attitudes toward the persuader in response to these details—responses that may have epistemic import. However such portraits come about, whether by the author's own hand or at the hand of another, such portraits at least potentially play the same epistemically rich role that Coetzee's portrait of Elizabeth Costello plays in *The Lives of Animals*. The suggestion that the portrayal of a moral persuader is and in many cases should be central to the context of moral persuasion is, I think, little more than an acknowledgment that some people have access to certain moral features of the world that others may not have, and such access cannot always be wholly shared or given. Such a situation generates the need for moral persuasion, for one person's avowing or pointing out features of the moral world to another. In most cases, this division of epistemic access will be contingent; Elizabeth Costello sees her life experiences as having somehow colluded to make her more sensitive to the plights of animals. This is a sensitivity that many of us do not have, and it is something that she feels she must share with us. Insofar as moral claims are being endorsed in a philosophical discussion, so far will this same kind of division of epistemic access be an aspect—acknowledged or not—of the discussion. In ethical persuasion, as in all persuasion, what the hearer believes or feels about the informant is epistemically relevant. One relies not only upon what the informant says, but also upon who the informant is. Accordingly, insofar as a philosophical discussion looks to have features of ethical persuasion, so far will a philosopher's identity be relevant.[31]

This returns us, one last time, to the lesson of *The Lives of Animals* and the main concern of this article: the *portrait* that we have of an ethical informant—whether she is a fictional character or not—can make a *bona fide* contribution to the epistemic status of the ethical commitments that she is exposing us to. Elizabeth Costello's ability to teach us something about animals is not independent of the portrait that Coetzee gives us of her. And while we as philosophers have wider resources for our portraits of each other, our ability to ethically learn from each other may and perhaps should, in many cases, not be independent of those portraits.[32]

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1. Raimond Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog* (London: Routledge, 2002), passim.

2. J. M. Coetzee, *Lives of Animals* (Princeton University Press, 1999), repr. as Lessons 3 and 4 in *Elizabeth Costello*, ed. J. M. Coetzee (London: Vintage, 2004). Page references will be to the 1999 version.

3. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 47.

4. I have learned much about attitudes from Lucy Allais's work on forgiveness. See, for example, Lucy Allais, "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36 (2008): **[Author: please provide page range]**, Section III, and Allais, "Dissolving Reactive Attitudes: Forgiving and Understanding," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27 (2008): **[Author: please provide page range]**.

5. Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 28.

6. The claims of the next two paragraphs are not new. Berys Gaut has been speaking of artworks as manifesting attitudes in the responses of spectators since his essay "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge University Press, 1998), **[Author: please provide page range]**.

7. I take it to be obvious that an author can create a narrative that manifests attitudes that she neither possesses nor endorses.

8. I am ignoring the debate over whether the spectator's emotions are make-believe or real. Two important entries in this debate are Kendall L. Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 5–27; and Peter Lamarque "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?" *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 21 (1981): 291–304.

9. Defending this claim is the main aim of Lecture 1 of John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. **[Author: Please provide page range]**.

10. It may be that this is not an approval of the narrative *as a whole*, but toward, say, one character and her development.

11. Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 93.

12. This is one of the phenomena known as "imaginative resistance." See, for example, Richard Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," *Philosophical Review* 103 (1994): 75–106.

13. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 136–137.

14. I should be clear that I do not take my reading of *The Lives of Animals* to be a reading of the novella as a whole. While I assume that what I say here will fit into a more encompassing interpretation of the book, I do not pretend that there is a great deal being accomplished by it of which I am unaware.

15. Aside from *The Lives of Animals*, J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961) is the only recent and significant work of fictional prose that I can think of that would potentially reward a focused treatment on the attempt at persuasion at the center of its action.

16. Cora Diamond eloquently attacks this limited view of Coetzee's novella in her "The Difficulty of Philosophy and the Difficulty of Reality," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 1 (2003): 1–26, repr. in Stanley Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life* (Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 43–89.

17. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 26.

18. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 21.

19. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 69. Also see the passage (p. 38) recording that Costello often explains why she is a vegetarian with what she calls "The Plutarch Response."

20. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, pp. 31–37. Also see her final response to the philosopher O'Hearne at p. 65.

21. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 69.

22. See Peter Singer's response to Coetzee's lectures, **[Author: Title for Singer's response?]** printed in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, pp. 85–91.

23. Coetzee encourages both respect for and distance from Costello by having his narrator always refer to her by her full name, as "Elizabeth Costello."

24. Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977): **[Author: Please provide page range]** at p. 44, emphasis added.

25. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 37.

26. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, p. 33.

27. For a very rich attempt to come to grips with this feature of some of the early and transitional dialogues, see Alexander Nehamas, "Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher," and "Socratic Intellectualism," both reprinted in Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

28. Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor* (London: Routledge, 1999).

29. Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

30. Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog*.

31. In such discussions, arguments *ad hominem* will be relevant. For defenses of *ad hominem* arguments, see Christopher M. Johnson, "Reconsidering the *Ad Hominem*," *Philosophy* 84 (2009): **[Author: Please provide page range]**, and Robert C. Solomon, "Nietzsche *ad hominem*: Perspectivism, personality, and ressentiment," in *Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge University Press, 1996) **[Author: Please provide page range]**.

32. Thanks to Bridget Grogan, Andy Lamey, Tom Martin, Stephen Mulhall, Justin Neuman, Samantha Vice, Roger Waters, an audience from the English Department at Rhodes University, and an audience at the "J. M. Coetzee as Moral Philosopher" colloquium at the University of the Witwatersrand (**[Author: Please provide Month, year]**. Thanks also to the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities for hosting me during some of the time that I worked on this article.