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**Accepted Crimes: An Analysis on the Notion and  
Representation of the Non-Human Animal and its  
Rights in J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* through  
the character of Elizabeth Costello.**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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## **Abstract**

J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* is an academic/metafictional novella that exposes different philosophical questions throughout it. Animal Studies and Ethics have been important topics in academic discussion, especially from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards and Coetzee, with his ability to display controversial issues through his characters, unveils them using Elizabeth Costello. Costello's views on Animal Ethics are uncertain at first sight, due to the dubious psyche of the character. Yet, her ideas might have been influenced by the work of the two most influential Animal Rights theorists, Peter Singer and Tom Regan, and her beliefs are a direct attack on traditional Cartesian Rationalism, the animal industry and the monsters Capitalism has created. Furthermore, her views on this issue might be, in fact, almost identical to Coetzee's. Bearing this in mind, Costello's alienation and her struggles to understand the reasons why people do not comprehend her and her ethical views make of her a representation of the helpless non-human animal that is part of the system but, at the same time, does not belong to it.

**Keywords:** *The Lives of Animals; J.M. Coetzee; Animal Studies; Animal Ethics, Applied Ethics; Ecocriticism; Postcolonialism; Comparative Literature; Cultural Studies; Hermeneutics.*



## 0. Introduction

When John Maxwell Coetzee was invited to contribute in the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Princeton University to speak about animals in 1997 no one expected the following start:

He is waiting at the gate when the flight comes in. Two years have passed since he last saw his mother; despite himself, he is shocked at how she has aged. Her hair, which had streaks of gray in it, is now entirely white; her shoulders stoop; her flesh has grown flabby. They have never been a demonstrative family. A hug, a few murmured words, and the business of greeting is done (Coetzee, 1999:15)

Instead of giving a conventional speech, Coetzee decided to read what would become one of his most celebrated works and a standard for Animal Studies and Ecocriticism issues in literature, *The Lives of Animals*, officially published in 1999. The decision of delivering his lecture through the character of Elizabeth Costello must have caught by surprise most of the attendants of the lectures. This metafictional/academic novella seems to be exposing different points of view in relation with the idea that non-human animals should be entitled to certain rights through the different characters that interact in it and the different essays included in the “Reflections” section. However, the notion of “Animal Rights” implies a much deeper inner meaning entrenched in the perception of society. As Robert C. Jones (2015) points out:

Speciesism involves the belief that members of one’s own species are more valuable than and morally superior to members of another species, a prejudice that often leads to discriminatory practices or institutional oppression. Just as the wrongness of racism consists in discrimination based on a morally irrelevant trait (namely, race), the wrongness of speciesism consists in discrimination based on a morally irrelevant trait, namely, *species membership*. (Jones, 2015:470)

Coetzee has unified in an interesting way ethics and aesthetics to discuss some of the different perspectives that the issue relates with the way human beings treat animals. This can be seen not only in the sense that he is dividing the novella into two different sections -“The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Poets and the Animals”-, being the names of the two different lectures that Elizabeth Costello gives at

Appleton University, but also the not so implicit opposition between the figure of the Philosopher and the figure of the Poet.

In this dissertation I aim to lay bare the notion and representation of the non-human animal, and the rights it should be entitled to through the perspectives and thoughts exposed by Elisabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*. This research discloses the different ideas that are brought into discussion throughout the novella in order to define “Animal Rights”, the role human animals should have towards this notion and to what extent Elisabeth Costello is an alter-ego of Coetzee’s ideas or the non-human animal itself through a close reading of the text. The analysis of these notions presented in *The Lives of Animals* does not only allow us to differentiate -or not- between human and non-human animals and the notion of “rights”, but also to delve into the unavoidable reality of a society that pretends to be trying to defend equality and justice by all means, but that behind closed doors is still justifying the crimes that do not concern the Western white male, since the latter apparently seems to be the only figure in society exempt of discrimination in broad terms.

## 1. Theoretical Framework

### 1.1. Human Animal vs. Non-Human Animal

*When I say that all animals -all sentient creatures- are equal, I mean that they are entitled to equal consideration of interests, whatever those interests may be. Pain is pain, no matter what the species of the being that feels is. But I don't say that all animals have the same interests (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:87).*

With this statement included in the “Reflections” section of *The Lives of Animals*, Peter Singer exposes one of the basic ideas of the Animal Rights and Studies movement. According to this statement, all beings that have the capacity to feel have certain interests. Nevertheless, these interests differ from the interests that the human animal has. This statement also suggests that the differences between the different species should be considered in order to understand which are the different interests that the different species may have, but that the differences regarding these interests should not make them less valuable. Instead, even though Singer exposes some notions regarding the value of life, which will be approached later in this dissertation, the demand of certain interests should be equally considered. Having said that, it is important to define the “human animal” and to see the differences that it may have with the “non-human” animal.

The conflict between “human” and “non-human” has been framed in many literary works from many different periods of time. From classical works such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) to more modern creations such as Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* (2007), the idea of a non-human being that demands to be treated in a different way by human society has been one of the main topics of discussion in literature. Besides, it has also been one of the main topics of discussion in philosophy. Martin Heidegger, one of the fathers of contemporary philosophy published *Letters on Humanism* in 1946. In this work, Heidegger proposes some ideas about the notion of

“human”. According to Sloterdijk (2001) Heidegger points out that the human animal is differentiated from other animals not in species or genus, but in ontology. Therefore, man needs to be considered as an animal with a cultural or metaphysical addition. This statement can be connected with the idea defended and demonstrated by biological science that man is made of cells like any other animal and, consequently, the same rules, needs and biological laws can be applied to it. Likewise, as Rostand (1966) suggests, there is the same level of difference between humans and big apes and between big apes and smaller apes, stating that the main difference between man and, in this case, the apes, is that humans have developed the ability to communicate by articulating words that belong to a certain language, whereas apes –as has been shown in different experiments-, even though it seems they can learn basic sign language, have difficulties in the process of learning how to articulate words<sup>1</sup>.

Then, it can be understood that the basic difference between a human and a non-human animal is that human animals have the capacity to analyze their reality and can understand the notion of existence, the notion of being, from a metaphysical perspective. Moreover, the human being can articulate words in a complex oral language. On the other hand, even though some animals such as dolphins or whales have been reported to develop complex emotional attitudes, they are apparently not able to develop abstract thinking. Hence, they cannot develop a metaphysical perspective of their reality. Apart from that, as mentioned before, they do not have the ability to produce articulated oral words. Unlike non-human animals, human animals are, according to Sloterdijk (2001), “self-fencing, selfshepherding creatures. Wherever they

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<sup>1</sup> Although some animals such as big apes or cetaceans are believed to have a much more complex way of communicating between each other, according to Oostendorp (2015) the way humans put different phonemes together to create an infinite range of different words and sentences, the displacement of the meaning of words and abstract thinking and speech, and the notion of joint attention differentiate human animals from non-human animals.

live, they create parks around themselves. (...) everywhere people must create for themselves rules according to which their comportment is to be governed” (Sloterdijk, 2001:25). This is a key point of the idea of the Human Zoo, a current of thought that perceives our world as a zoo for humans and as a theme park at the same time, controlling human animals.

## **1.2. Non-Human Animals: Singer vs. Regan**

*Can they reason? Nor can they talk? But, can they suffer?* (Bentham, 1823:144).

This statement has been one of the bases of the Animal Rights movement since its beginning. It has been adopted by most of the philosophers and activists of this movement. Two of the most prominent and influential philosophers of the Animal Rights and Animal Studies discipline are Peter Singer, father of the contemporary Animal Rights movement and author of what is considered to be the “Bible” of the Animal Rights movements: *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (1975); and Tom Regan, author of *The Case of Animal Rights* (1983). *The Lives of Animals* seems to be marked by the different thoughts proposed by these two philosophers.

According to Singer, “Ethics requires us to go beyond ‘I’ and ‘you’, the universalizable judgment, the standpoint of the impartial spectator or ideal observer” (Singer, 1979, in Villanueva, 2013:2). The foundation of his ethics is the principle of equality and proposes a utilitarian position that demands us to “account for every sentient being’s interests and to calculate a course of action that has the best consequences for all affected” (Singer in Villanueva, 2013:2). Another key point in Singer’s philosophy is the idea of Equality. According to Singer, equality does not

consider race, sex, gender, intelligence, moral personality or rationality as items of discrimination between humans, who differ as individuals.

For Singer “equality is a basic principle, rather than an assertion of fact”. This principle is applied to animals for the idea that they have interests and these interests should be equally treated, and since all sentient beings should be considered morally, there is no justification for not considering animal sentient beings. In his essay “All Animals are Equal” (1989) Singer claims to “extend to other species the basic principle of equality” (Singer, 1989:1) that human animals understand to be their right. However, relating to the Singer citation in the previous section, Villanueva (2013) states, “Singer’s principle does not require equal treatment, such as giving animals the right to vote, rather it requires equal ‘consideration’. Pain and suffering are bad and should be prevented or minimized, irrespective of the race, sex, or species of the being that suffers” (Villanueva, 2013:3).

Singer also popularized the idea of ‘Speciesism’, it being the discrimination based on species membership, which arbitrarily privileges the interests of one being over another. Speciesism considers animals as less valuable creatures due to their lack of self-consciousness, rationality and autonomy. As Villanueva states, this sort of discrimination could be extended to “‘marginal cases’, that is, infants and intellectually disabled humans, from the moral community” (Villanueva, 2013:4). Singer also believes that neither animals nor humans should be used as food or in experiments.

Therefore, ethical vegetarianism is a fundamental key point in his philosophy. ‘Speciesism’ can also be understood as a movement that fights for equality and against racism and in favor of feminism. Singer also defends utilitarianism as a key concept to act towards the animals. According to Rowlands’ interpretation of Singer’s utilitarian perspective, “the issue is simply one of weighing our relatively trivial preferences for

gustatory satisfaction against the preferences of cattle, pigs, chickens, and the like, for a decent life free from undue suffering” (Rowlands, 2009:54). Hence, it seems that Singer’s utilitarianism is exposing that human animals should abandon the consumption of meat and other non-animal products in order to be consequent with the preferences of the latter.

Yet, according to what Villanueva (2013) states in his essay, Singer proposes four possible reasons in which the value of a person can be above other lives:

Firstly, the impact of killing on others; secondly, the frustration of the victim’s desires and plans for the future; thirdly, the capacity to have desires is a necessary condition for the right to life; and, finally, respect for autonomy (Villanueva, 2013: 5).

This statement does not only imply human beings, but also non-human beings that seem to have these qualities. Some species of cetaceans or primates have been reported to have a strong emotional life. Therefore, the notion of person can also be extended to non-human animals as well. In relation to that, Singer believes that not all animals have the same interests or preferences, and the value of a human’s life is more valuable than that of an animal in terms of major consequences. In his fictional short story/essay published in the “Reflections” section in *The Lives of Animals*, Singer exposes what seems to be a light-hearted conversation with his daughter Naomi during breakfast, where they debate *The Lives of Animals* itself and some philosophical questions regarding Animal Rights. There, while they are dealing with the notion of the value of human life and the value of non-human animals using the value of Max’s life, the Singers’ dog to exemplify it, Naomi points out the following:

Aren’t you saying that these characteristics –being self-aware, planning for the future, and so on- are the ones that *humans* have, and therefore they are more valuable than any that animals have? Max has a better sense of smell than I do. Why isn’t that an objective reason for saving him rather than me? (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:88).

Naomi also states that the loss of life means “the loss of everything” (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:88), to what Singer replies that “there are plenty of dog breeders out

there who breed dogs to meet the demand” (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:88). Then, Singer exposes what would show the reader some other key points in his philosophy according to the value of lives:

I don’t mean that *everything* would be fine if Max were killed and replaced by a puppy. We love Max, and for us no puppy would replace him. But I asked you why painlessly killing is wrong *in itself*. Our distress is a *side effect* of the killing, not something that makes it wrong in itself. (...) Let’s assume the pigs are leading a happy life and are then painlessly killed. For each happy pig killed, a new one is bred, who will lead an equally happy life. So killing the pig does not reduce the total amount of porcine happiness in the world. What is wrong with it? (...) Suppose I grant that pigs and dogs are self-aware to some degree, and do have thoughts about things in the future. That would provide some reason for thinking it intrinsically wrong to kill them –not absolutely wrong, but perhaps quite a serious wrong. Still, there are other animals –chickens maybe, or fish–who can feel pain but don’t have any self-awareness or capacity for thinking about the future. For those animals, you haven’t given me any reason why painless killing would be wrong, if other animals take their place and lead an equally good life (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:89-90).

With this statement, Singer seems to be suggesting that an ecologically-friendly industry that kills animals without suffering and gives them the right to have a fully happy life would be something ethically correct in terms of approaching the right of life that animals should have as long as they are not self-aware of their own existence. Therefore, this also alludes to the current industry that is creating animals just to be products, and its treatment as products is wrong. Nevertheless, Singer also mentions that “the value that is lost when something is emptied depends on what was there when it was full, and there is more to human existence than there is to bat existence” (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:90). With this sentence he makes it clear that human life is more valuable than the life of some other non-human animals. Life is seen as a container that, depending on what it has inside, has one value or another. If a being is aware of its future and its existence, the value of its life is considered higher than the value of the life of a being that lacks this awareness. This statement might also denote that, as Heidegger suggested, since human animals have the ability to think abstractly and critically and, therefore, place themselves in the position of other beings whether they

belong to the same species or not, the value of humans is higher because it can have a repercussion on other species and the environment.

Nevertheless, Singer's principles of equality and utilitarianism have been put into question by some of his contemporaries. If only the palate of humans is considered in order to take a stand towards non-human animals, and the value of a human's life and preferences overtakes the value of most non-human animals, the right of life and the abolition of animal suffering are not guaranteed. As Rowlands points out:

(...) there are more human preferences involved than those of merely gustatory sort. The animal industry is big business. It is uncertain exactly how many people are involved in it, both directly and indirectly, but certainly the number must run into (...) hundreds of thousands. (Rowlands, 2009:54).

Then, he mentions the different humans that might be affected by this industry, such as the people who raise animals, producers and retailers, cage manufacturers and producers, butchers or vets. Consequently, he also takes the interests of the people that depend on the salary of these employees. The interests of these people go beyond taste, since they are crucial to their family economy and welfare.

Although Singer proposes a way to act towards non-human animals in his current of thought, it is not clear how human animals should act if they take into consideration that, according to him, human lives are more valuable than most non-human lives. If that is the case, what happens with the humans that dedicate their lives to the animal industry? Singer makes it clear in his philosophy that animal factories of production are wrong because they do not guarantee a happy, suffering-free life to the animals, and that is when utilitarianism proposes ethical vegetarianism. Yet, if the lives or welfare of human beings are put at risk, what should humans do? Would it be correct to support animal factories of production? As Rowlands specifies:

Singer must take into account the preferences of *everyone* affected by the consequences of altering the animal industry, not just those who happen to be directly involved in it. The short- and long-term global economic consequences of a sudden or gradual

transition to vegetarianism, must be investigated by any utilitarian. For example, it has been shown that the rate of inflation in countries such as the United States follows, quite closely, the price of beef. (Rowlands, 2009:55).

He also mentions that maybe the economic impact of abandoning the consumption of meat would be a rise of its price and, consequently, a rise in inflation that could lead to unemployment, even affecting people that are not involved or connected with the animal industry. He criticizes Singer's ideas by saying that it is not sufficient "to see the issue as a weighing up of the vital interests of animals over the trivial gustatory interests of human beings" (Rowlands, 2009:55), since he is apparently not taking the preferences of everyone affected according to his philosophy.

One of the main problems of utilitarianism is that it can be seen from two different perspectives of one issue. In the case of animals and husbandry, if we balance the two groups concerned –human animals and non-human animals-, the number of animals affected would be higher than the number of humans affected. However, if we consider again that the value of a human life is higher than the value of some non-human species, the question seems to remain unsolved. Then, the principle of equal consideration can also be put into question. Rowlands points out that "utilitarianism is committed to the idea that the treatment an individual deserves is a function of the interests everyone – and not just the individual – has in such treatment. Thus, if a robust concept of equal consideration is to be found, it will have to be in other, non-utilitarian, moral theories" (Rowlands, 2009:57). Therefore, utilitarianism and the concept of equal consideration cannot go hand in hand since one seems to contradict the other to a certain extent.

Regan, on the other hand, defends the idea that non-human animals possess moral rights, therefore, rejecting the notion that "only rational beings possess intrinsic value" (Jones, 2014:471). His philosophy, contrariwise, differs from what Singer

previously exposed. He defends this through the ideas of *subject-of-a-life* and the concept of *inherent value*. According to Regan:

Individuals are subjects-of-a-life if they have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independently of their being the object of anyone else's interests. (Regan, 1983, in Rowlands, 2009:59)

These requirements are not only satisfied by adult humans, but also by young children, mentally disabled people and people in a vegetative state (Rowlands, 2009:59). They also include most mammals, and it can be extrapolated to birds, amphibians and fish in certain ways. Rowlands (2009) makes a difference between the two different approaches of this idea by making a difference between *strong* interpretation, according to which an individual “must satisfy all the conditions listed above in order to qualify as a subject-of-a-life” and *weak* interpretation, in which the individual “must satisfy most of the conditions, but not necessarily all” (Rowlands, 2009:62).

To Regan, being a *subject-of-a-life* implies having an *inherent value*. Nonetheless, it is not necessary to be a subject-of-a-life to be also granted *inherent value*. This concept exposes four different central features behind it:

1. The *inherent value* of a being is independent of their being and the value others give to this individual.
2. The *inherent value* of an individual is not influenced regarding the interests others may have in a certain being.
3. The *inherent value* of a being is not something earned or something that can be trained through individual effort and it, consequently, cannot be lost.

4. The *intrinsic value*. In other words, the *inherent value* of an individual is independent from the value of the experiences the individual has had.

Therefore, we can see that there is a contrast between Singer's utilitarianism and the postulations that Regan proposes. Utilitarianism seems to defend the sacrifice of a being for the greater good of a certain community. In spite of this, if we take into account the four features above, utilitarianism seems rather unjust. To defend this, Regan exposes what he calls the *Respect Principle*. According to this principle, "We are to treat those individuals who have inherent value in ways that respect their inherent value" (Regan, 1983:248). Then, it can be understood that if we treat beings according to a preference-satisfaction scale or according to the utility a being can have to a greater community, we are attacking and not respecting its inherent value. Additionally, harming an individual just because this would satisfy or would bring about the best consequences for a community is the ultimate attack on the inherent value of an individual. According to Jamieson (1990), the Respect Principle "requires not only that we refrain from treating others in ways forbidden by this principle, but also that we come to their defense when they are threatened by moral agents" (Jamieson, 1990:350). Within the Respect Principle, Regan proposes what he denominates as the *Harm Principle*, which states that "we must not harm either moral agents or patients, since to harm them is to treat them in ways which do not respect their inherent value" (Jamieson, 1990:350). This principle also implies that moral agents should defend the beings whose inherent value is not being respected and, consequently, the treatment of it is unjust. That is, if we take this paradigm into account, moral agents should not or, at least do not have, the duty to defend a prey from its predator, since no unjust action is being produced.

Nonetheless, Regan points out some exceptions to this theory. The first one is what he named as the *Miniride Principle*. As Regan states:

Special considerations aside, when we must choose between overriding the rights of many who are innocent or the rights of few who are innocent, and when each affected individual will be harmed in a *prima facie* comparable way, then we ought to choose to override the rights of the few in preference to overriding the rights of the many (Regan, 1983:305).

According to this paradigm, Regan suggests that, since all individuals with inherent value have the same right not to be harmed, if a certain situation leaves no other option, the moral agent should decide to override the right of the smallest group affected. As Rowlands points out, choosing otherwise “would be to imbue the rights of the few with greater value or significance than the same rights of the many” (Rowlands, 2009:72). By doing that, the agents would be acting against the Respect Principle, and therefore, not considering the equal value of the inherent value of a being. Again, the Miniride Principle has special considerations for specific cases regarding the amount of harm of the beings that might be subject of a scenario in which this should be applied.

The last point of Regan’s philosophy that is going to be mentioned in this dissertation is the *Worse-off Principle*:

Special considerations aside, when we must decide to override the rights of the many or the rights of the few who are innocent and when the harm faced by the few would make them worse-off than any of the many would be if the other option were chosen, then we ought to override the rights of the many” (Regan, 1983:208).

With this principle, Regan states that, in terms of harm, we should override the rights of the many if the harm caused to an individual with inherent value is worse-off. Therefore, taking this into account, if we consider for instance the possible death of a being that is considered to have an inherent value, and the non-fatal harm of a larger group of individuals, the single individual that is facing death is worse-off the larger group, so the rights of the larger group need to be overridden in order to respect the equal rights of every being.

To sum up, as Rowlands (2009) points out, “the miniride and worse-off principles can be, roughly, summed up in the following slogan: special considerations aside, when the harms are comparable numbers count, when the harms are not comparable numbers don’t count” (Rowlands, 2009:77).

Singer and Regan differ in some points of their philosophy. Although both of them defend vegetarianism, there are remarkable differences between their approaches towards non-human animals. Singer defends the principle of equality and a utilitarianist perspective. This means that we need to take into account the “greater good” of a community in order to decide over the lives of others, bearing in mind the interests that a being has. Singer also proposed and popularized the notion of ‘Speciecism’ and, even though he does not discriminate any being in terms of species membership, sex or race, he states that the features and interests can differ from one species to another, and that there is more to lose with the death of a person<sup>2</sup> than of certain non-human animals. In contrast, Regan defends a current of thought based on the notions of subject-of-a-life and the inherent value of a being. Regan questions utilitarianism since, if this perspective is applied strictly, it does not give equal moral rights to all sentient beings because it takes into account their desires and interests. Regan postulates that all subjects-of-a-life have an inner inherent value that does not depend on their interests or their experiences, and cannot be lost. According to that, all subjects-of-a-life need to be equally treated because it would be unjust to do it in any other way. Regan also explains two different principles –miniride and worse-off- in order to face situations in which harm, at any level, is unavoidable, death being the ultimate harm.

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<sup>2</sup> For Peter Singer, the condition of person can be extended to some non-human animals.

### 1.3. Non-Human Animals: Coetzee

Coetzee has been openly said to be an Animal Rights advocate and a vegetarian, and he is a member of the Australian non-profit organization “Voiceless, the animal protection institute”. He also tried to become a candidate in the 2014 European Parliament elections for the Dutch Party of Animals, but he was rejected since, even though he is of Afrikaner descent, he is not a Dutch resident. He has dealt with the animals issue not only in *The Lives of Animals* (1999), but also in other novels such as *Age of Iron* (1990), *Disgrace* (1999) or *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

Although his approach has been said to be “as much ethical as it is political, ideological, economic, ecological, aesthetic and religious, the term “religious” to be understood in a secular sense and in terms of dietary taboos” (Northover, 2009:313), little is known about Coetzee’s philosophy towards animals regarding the two big currents of thought proposed by Singer and Regan, since most of what we know has been exposed through his writings by using fictional characters as mouthpieces.

On Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007, Hugo Weaving opened the exhibition ‘Voiceless: I feel therefore I am’ at the Sherman Galleries in Sydney, Australia, with a speech written by Coetzee. In this speech, Coetzee criticized the modern factory farms and the way humans perceive the treatment of animals. He also makes an interesting point through a comparison between factory farming and the Holocaust of Jews during the World War II period:

The transformation of animals into production units dates back to the late 19th century, and since that time we have already had one warning on the grandest scale that there is something deeply, cosmically wrong with regarding and treating fellow beings as mere units of any kind. This warning came so loud and clear that one would have thought it impossible to ignore. It came when in the mid-20th century a group of powerful and bloody-minded men in Germany hit on the idea of adapting the methods of the industrial stockyard, as pioneered and perfected in Chicago, to the slaughter - or what they preferred to call the processing - of human beings. (Coetzee, 2007).

Then Coetzee exposes that everyone was and is still shocked by the actions of Nazis in Germany. But for him, the crime is not to treat human animals as cattle but “to treat any living being like a unit in an industrial process” (Coetzee, 2007), it being not only a crime against nature, but a crime against the basic right of living.

This comparison suggests that the bottom line of the attitude of both factory farms and the Holocaust is the same. It is interesting to see that a similar statement is produced by Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*. Coetzee also connects the way animals are treated and the violence and cruelty in animal factories with South African apartheid. According to Northover (2009), “the narrator in *Age of Iron* appears to be implicitly comparing factory farms in South Africa to the exploitation of Africans during apartheid comparing the cruelty of factory farms to apartheid oppression” (Northover, 2009:319). Having said that, as Northover states, Coetzee argues in his work *Meat Country* (1995) that the “Western meat-centered diet is an outgrowth of colonialism, the settlers being those who had been deprived of meat in their home countries and who sought to acquire meat in the colonies” (Northover, 2009:314). Moreover, he also points out that “Excessive meat-eating has become associated with masculinity and nationalism in the West, and the ideology of the meat-centered diet has been successfully exported by the United States through aggressive marketing by American food companies” (Lappé, 1991, in Northover, 2009:315). Coetzee, who can be considered a postcolonialist writer, conceives meat eating as a consequence of colonialism and an issue related to sexism. Therefore, the ethical vegetarianism that he proposes does not only fight for non-human animals’ moral rights, but also against Western colonialism and neo-colonialist policies attacking what are still colonies dominated by the Western societies and in favor of feminism. If one considers himself or herself anti-racist, anti-colonialist and pro-feminism because these are movements

that fight against discrimination, this moral agent needs to take a stand towards the discrimination and injustices towards non-human animals.

Coetzee regards animals with similar moral rights to the ones humans have. His perspective regarding them can relate to Regan's philosophy bearing in mind that subjects-of-a-life have an inner inherent value that needs to be respected at any cost. Likewise, Coetzee not only opposes factory –and traditional- farming, but he also exposes experimentation on animals in laboratories. He does not develop this statement any further in his speech, but if this statement is taken into account, Coetzee would not completely agree with Singer's utilitarianism. Although Singer is also against animal testing, if we take into account his idea of utilitarianism, testing would be justified if this could help a larger group of people, bearing in mind that, according to him, there is more in a person's life than in a bat's life. Singer's philosophy would also defend traditional farming as we have seen in the previous section, as long as pigs “are leading a happy life and are then painlessly killed” (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:89) and the balance of happiness of the world is weighted in. On the contrary, Coetzee is not making any difference between the value of a human life and the value of the life of an animal, respecting the idea of inherent value that all subjects-of-a-life are to have, as exposed by Regan.

Coetzee defends that humans should take a stand towards the treatment of animals, and he states that:

People need to see that there are alternatives to supporting the animal-products industry, that these alternatives need not involve any sacrifice in health or nutrition, that there is no reason why these alternatives need be costly, and furthermore that what are commonly called sacrifices are not sacrifices at all - that the only sacrifices in the whole picture, in fact, are being made by non-human animals (Coetzee, 2007).

Like Singer and Regan, Coetzee proposes quitting the consumption of animal products, making it clear that the belief that vegetarianism or veganism can affect

human health or nutrition is a fallacy, and that it is not a sacrifice, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to avoid or boycott the animal-products industry. Coetzee precisely indicates that the reality is that non-human animals are the ones that are being sacrificed every day to satisfy human cravings that are not necessary if we take into account the alternative ways that have been developed and are being developed, and the capacity of human beings to think abstractly and understand that something is not right in this industry. As Coetzee points out, most of the people that use animal products are “nevertheless sickened (...) when they think of what happens in factory farms” (Coetzee, 2007). This shows the common dialectic of human beings to believe something is not correct and still do it. This separation can also be seen from a structuralist way if we consider that some of the words that are addressed to animal products do not mention the animal itself (pig-pork, cow-beef-veal, etc). Although these differences occurred during the Norman Conquest “when the French word for the animal became the name of the meat and the Anglo-Saxon word was kept for the animal itself” (Northover, 2009:325), they have been maintained and help, in a way, to separate the animal from the product.

Coetzee finishes his speech by referring to Regan’s idea that inherent value needs to be defended by moral agents in order to preserve justice. He mentions that non-human animals are unaware of what the Animal Rights movement is up to, so they are unlikely to thank the defenders of this movement if it eventually succeeds. Therefore, it is true that animals might not be aware of what is “wrong”. For Coetzee, non-human animals “do certainly not know what is wrong in the same way that we human beings know what is wrong” (Coetzee, 2007). However, and as Heidegger proposed, since human animals can think ontologically, humans (moral agents) have the duty to defend

non-human animals in situations in which their moral rights and their inherent value is being violated in an unjust way.

To put it in a nutshell, Coetzee is an Animal Rights Movement advocate, who, according to his speech in 2007, perceives this issue more in line with what Regan proposed. He seems to go against traditional farming and animal testing under any circumstances, bringing about the notions of subject-of-a-life and inherent value proposed by Regan. He also remarks on Regan's perspective when he proposes at the end of his speech that human animals have to act as moral agents in order to defend the moral rights of non-human animals, no matter if the latter are aware of what is correct or not. Therefore, he might not believe in the utilitarianist perspective proposed by Singer. Coetzee also mentions in his speech the dialectic that exists between what humans think and what humans do. Therefore, he proposes that humans should start to take some stands towards the issue. He, like Singer and Regan, believes and claims for ethical vegetarianism as an action towards the moral rights of non-human animals in order to boycott or, at least, not collaborate with the animal products industry. In his speech, Coetzee also compares the Holocaust with the farming industry practices, an idea that is mentioned in *The Lives of Animals* and, according to Northover (2009), he might also be proposing through his narratives that the cruelty of factory farming can be compared to apartheid or sexism, since these are issues that happened, and still happen, in front of people's eyes and, surprisingly, humans are the ones that seem to be turning a blind eye towards them.

## 2. Elizabeth Costello

### 2.1. The Philosophy Behind the Character

As with Coetzee, it is complicated to label Elizabeth Costello into a certain current or school of thought. Her analysis and interpretation of the non-human animal's moral rights, her use of reason to attack it in an oxymoronic way in order to emphasize the power of imagination and poetry, the way she condemns the exploitation of animals, yet she uses leather objects (Coetzee, 1999:43), and her controversial analogy between factory farms and the Holocaust make her a convoluted character to establish in the Animal Rights debate. Although she seems to be severe against philosophical tradition and reason, as Northover (2009) points out, "her views are, in fact, not that extreme in relation to the work of the leading animal rights philosophers and that they can be defended rationally" (Northover, 2009:28). Nevertheless, her ideas have some basis in Singer and Regan's celebrated works.

When referring to Costello's ideas, Peter Singer mentions in the *Reflections* section of *The Lives of Animals* that "there's a more radical egalitarianism about humans and animals running through her lecture than I would be prepared to defend" (Coetzee, 1999:86). Indeed, even though the notion of speciesism is subconsciously present throughout the novel and Costello agrees with it, her perspective differs from Singer's utilitarian ideas. On the contrary, she mentions the following:

To be a living bat is to be full of being; being fully a bat is like being fully human, which is also to be full of being. Bat-being in the first case, human being in the second, maybe; but those are secondary considerations. To be full of being is to live as a body-soul. One name for the experience of full being is joy. To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal—and we are all animals—is an embodied soul. (Coetzee, 1999:33)

This can relate to the deontological perspective proposed by Regan, and the subject-of-a-life and the inherent value ideas, ideas justifying the value of animal subjectivity without taking into account species membership when it comes to moral

rights. Furthermore, this idea would also justify the equal treatment of children and disabled people, since they are subject-of-a-life and have an inherent value. Hence, their moral rights and interests should be defended. Costello seems to be echoing Mary Midgley's ideas in *Beast and Man* (2002) when she mentions the notions of joy and soul if we take into account that Midgley stated that "man can neither be understood nor saved alone" (Midgley, 2002, in Northover, 2009:18). As Northover (2009) points out, "while Midgley is referring to man's relation to nature, she is also referring to a kind of non-religious salvation in the way that Costello apparently does" (Northover, 2009:18). Costello's ideas seem to be in line with Midgley's and she seems to be arguing that moral vegetarianism is a way to connect with nature and fulfill the "desire to save my [Costello's] soul" (Coetzee, 1999:43). This salvation through awareness and action might be connected with the "Socratic idea of human salvation through critical self-interrogation" (Northover, 2009:18).

She also puts environmentalism into question by attacking the Platonic and Cartesian idea of Man as a superior entity over the others:

We, the managers of ecology (...) understand the greater dance, therefore we can decide how many trout may be fished or how many jaguars may be trapped before the stability dance is upset. The only organism over which we do not claim this power of life and death is Man. Why? Because Man is different. Man understands the dance as the other dancers do not. Man is an intellectual being (Coetzee, 1999:54).

Costello seems to be attacking environmentalism and the idea that, even though it seems to be a current of thought that tries to preserve nature as a whole, it also has an anthropocentric basis, bearing in mind that all the limits are set by humans over other species and human animals seem to have the power over the other non-human beings. Like Singer, Costello does not consider environmentalism as a crucial fact to determine the moral rights of animals and, as Northover (2009) states, "Costello is very careful to keep issues of environmentalism, or ecology, and animal rights separate, even though

ecological arguments can provide powerful reasons against industrialized agriculture in general, and industrialized meat production in particular” (Northover, 2009:20). Therefore, we can label her not as an environmentalist but rather as a person with an animalistic perspective.

For Costello, human and non-human animals are only different in terms of species membership. She sees humankind as another animal product of evolution, as a being made of cells like any other animal. Her Darwinist perspective, however, is not a setback to criticize the Cartesian and Platonic ideas of seeing the non-human animal as different from the human animal. Costello sees differences between human and non-human animals in terms of cognitive activity, and she is aware that the universe as humans perceive it is “built upon reason” (Coetzee, 1999:23), and reason in these terms is clearly anthropocentric. Contrariwise, she does not see why non-human animals are treated as lower than human beings. If rationality is what makes humankind different, “if we are capable of thinking our own death, why on Earth should we not be capable of thinking our way into the life of a bat?” (Coetzee, 1999:32). This statement implies the acceptance of the theories by Heidegger that supported that the main difference between human animals and non-human animals is not species membership but the ability of thinking ontologically. Therefore, with this statement she also criticizes Descartes’s philosophy and his belief in Rationalist thinking as a way of understanding everything. According to Harrison (1992) Descartes insisted all throughout his theory that “animals were automata, and denied them thought and self-consciousness” (Harrison, 1992:219), seeing them more as machines without a language and driven by instincts than as sentient beings. The “Cogito, ergo sum” theory proposed by Descartes claims that a being capable of acquiring this cognitive ability is considered to have the “fullness of being”. Hence, a being that is not able to think in a more metaphysical way, being aware

of its own existence and its own consciousness, is considered a “second-class” (Coetzee, 1999:33) living being. Costello believes that the difference Descartes saw between humans and non-humans animals was “the result of incomplete information” (Coetzee, 1999:61), since, as Costello mentions, “science in Descartes’s days had no acquaintance with the great apes or with higher marine mammals, and thus little cause to question that animals cannot think” (Coetzee, 1999:61). This is one of the key points that Costello opposes when she criticizes traditional Rationalism. For her, “the question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common with other animals? (With the corollary that, if we do not, then we are entitled to treat them as we like, imprisoning them, killing them, dishonoring their corpses.)” (Coetzee, 1999:34).

Costello believes that this question is the reason why humankind sees itself as a superior entity above non-human animals. Related to this, she also attacks captivity:

Fullness of being is a state hard to sustain in confinement. Confinement to prison is the form of punishment that the West favors and does its best to impose on the rest of the world through the means of condemning other forms of punishment (beating, torture, mutilation, execution) as cruel and unnatural. (...) To me it suggests that freedom of the body to move in space is targeted as the point at which reason can most painfully and effectively harm the being of the other. And indeed it is on creatures least able to confinement –creatures who conform least to Descartes’s picture of the soul as a pea imprisoned in a shell, to which further imprisonment is irrelevant – that we see the most devastating effects: in zoos, in laboratories, institutions where the flow of joy that comes from living not in or as a body but simply from being an embodied being has no place (Coetzee, 1999:33).

For Costello, captivity, animal experimentation and production facilities –as she calls factory farms- are a mere product of the anthropocentric perspective that, since human animals are able to think using reason in contrast with the apparent lack of reason of non-human animals, humans have the right to confine them without taking into account their interests as beings. She also states, going back to her Holocaust analogy, that “the horror of those events was that killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims” (Coetzee, 1999:34). For Costello, the main problem was that these individuals “closed their hearts” (Coetzee, 1999:34). According to Costello:

The heart is the seat of a faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another. Sympathy has everything to do with the subject and little to do with the object, the “another”, as we see at once when we think of the object not as a bat (‘Can I share the being of a bat?’) but as another human being. [...] There is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination (Coetzee, 1999:35).

With the notion of *sympathetic imagination*, she claims that human beings, if they are rational and can think, as Heidegger proposed, ontologically, they should place themselves in the position of non-human animals that cannot do so, in order to protect their moral rights. The fact that this *imagination* is an ontological ability but not a rational one, also attacks liberal Rationalism and therefore, philosophy, in contrast with a more imaginative, yet valid current of thought, whether imagination or poetry. Although she is in fact influenced by Singer’s ideas on speciesism, Costello seems to reject the idea of using reason to produce her discourse on animal rights and the wrongness of speciesism as opposed to Singer’s use of reason to convince humanity. This usage of sympathetic imagination, which is in fact based on reason, to attack reason, traditional Rationalism and philosophy is put into doubt by Costello’s daughter-in-law Norma, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy with a specialization in the philosophy of mind, throughout the novel. During the dinner people from the university have after Costello’s first lecture, the ideas of uncleanness of the animal, divine permission and disgust are brought up. According to Olivia Garrard, “animals are creatures we don’t have sex with – that’s how we distinguish them from ourselves. (...) We don’t mix with them. We keep the clean apart from the unclean” (Coetzee, 1999:40). Against this background, Norma exposes that people “do mix with them. We ingest them. We turn their flesh into ours” (Coetzee, 1999:40). Costello agrees with Norma and exposes that the main problem is “to define our difference from animals in general, not just from so-called unclean animals” (Coetzee, 1999:41). She also questions the divine permission of eating or not eating certain animals and states that “there is no logic to a taboo”

(Coetzee, 1999:41). Costello also states that even though “we may have got rid of the gods, we have not got rid of disgust which is a version of religious horror” (Coetzee, 1999:42), to which Norma replies that disgust is not a universal theme, since it can vary from one place to another or it might not exist in some societies. The idea of disgust as some sort of religious horror might relate to the idea that Costello went vegetarian, not from a moral conviction but in order to save her soul (Coetzee, 1999:43). Then Norma criticizes Costello’s vegetarianism through the following statement:

(...) the whole notion of cleanness versus uncleanness has a completely different function, namely, to enable certain groups to self-define themselves, negatively, as elite, as elected. We are the people who abstain from a, b or c, and by that power of abstinence we mark ourselves off as superior: as a superior caste within society, for instance. Like the Brahmins. (...) 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 (Coetzee, 1999:42)

Costello’s views are criticized by Norma, arguing that, even though she wants to achieve some sort of moral equality for animals and people, Costello is also making an elitist difference between vegetarians and meat eaters. Norma seems to see Costello’s views on vegetarianism as similar to the ones of a caste system, similar to the Hindu one. Nonetheless, for Costello vegetarianism is a tool to achieve the Socratic salvation through self-interrogation.

Costello seems to be influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre’s theories. As Northover (2009) exposes, the theories in Virtue Ethics exposed by MacIntyre in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981) might help the reader understand Costello’s rejection of the Enlightenment and her ideas towards animals. MacIntyre exposes the following:

The problems of modern moral theory emerge clearly as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project. On the one hand the individual moral agent, freed from hierarchy and teleology, conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in his moral authority. On the other hand the inherited, if partially transformed rules of morality have to be found some new status, deprived as they have been of their older teleological character and their even more ancient categorical character as expressions of an ultimately divine law. (MacIntyre, 1981:62)

Having said that, he exposes that if these rules cannot be seen in a new status appealing to them rationally, this appeal will be an instrument of mere desire and will. Therefore, these rules ask to be devised into some new teleology or new categorical status, being in this case utilitarianism and a Kantian nature of practical reason. To MacIntyre these two attempts are not valid even though they helped to acquire social and intellectual transformations. Consequently, it can be seen that Costello shares MacIntyre's idea that modern moral principles, in this case utilitarianism and Kantian deontology, do not hold any rational path to make people choose between one or the other. As Northover (2009) points out, "this completely undermines Peter Singer's use of utilitarian principles and Tom Regan's use of a modified Kantian respect for persons in order to provide an ethical basis for animal rights" (Northover, 2009:33).

Costello's rejection of traditional Rationalism in favor of sympathetic imagination can also be connected with MacIntyre's rejection of it and his exaltation of narrative and Aristotelian poetics as a teleological way of explaining life. For MacIntyre, living beings are "like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future" (MacIntyre, 1981:216). Then he mentions the following:

A central thesis then begins to emerge: man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters- roles into which we have been drafted - and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed" (MacIntyre, 1981, in Northover, 2009: 34).

This statement can clarify the tendency Costello has towards narratives over philosophical discourses in *The Lives of Animals* to debate philosophical and moral issues. Furthermore, according to MacIntyre, "an action is always an episode in a

possible history” and “there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources” (MacIntyre, 1981:216). If we take this into consideration, for both Costello and MacIntyre, life can only be understood through literary language, rejecting again the ideas of rationality exposed by traditional rationalism or modern moral principles. In this case, however, and even though his utilitarian perspective is put into question by Costello’s and MacIntyre’s ideas, Singer provides a proper example of how some philosophical issues and perspectives can be understood through literary language. In the *Reflections* sections he uses literary language to show Naomi how his ideas on utilitarianism work and to question Costello’s egalitarian perspective that a human has more in its existence than a bat:

If I pour the rest of this soymilk down the sink, I’ve emptied the container; and if I do the same to that bottle of Kahlúa you and your friends are fond of drinking when we are out, I’d empty it too. But you’d care more about the loss of the Kahlúa. The value that is lost when something is emptied depends on what was there when it was full, and there is more to human existence than there is to bat existence. (Singer in Coetzee, 1999:90)

Having said that, Costello can also be placed in the postcolonial frame. According to Allison Carruth, postcolonial ecocriticism “investigates the confluences of oppressed communities and endangered ecosystems, social movements and environmental crises, as well as human beings and other animals” (Carruth, 2011:201). Costello represents this ideology throughout *The Lives of Animals*. One of the clearest examples is her analogy comparing factory farms and the Holocaust:

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

With this statement Costello exemplifies how animals are an oppressed community that needs to be entitled to some moral rights. This notion of “oppressed community” and the idea of oneself or a community being superior to another being or

community does not only affect non-human animals, but it is the bottom line to understand why money, race, gender, origin or sexual orientation were, and are still, big problems in our world. Hence, this idea can be brought into the study of fields such as feminism, LGTB communities, racism, colonialism and neocolonialism. Costello makes it clear by saying that “well, that’s what our captive herds are: slave populations” (Coetzee, 1999:59). The idea of seeing the treatment of non-human animals comparable to the treatment of slaves is in fact shared by Peter Singer:

Indeed, the overlap between leaders of movements against the oppression of blacks and women, and leaders of movements against cruelty to animals, is extensive; so extensive as to provide an unexpected form of confirmation of the parallel between racism, sexism, and speciesism. (Singer in Northover, 2009:8)

In addition, Costello criticizes the capitalist system and its meat industry for not considering the interests of non-human animals. According to Carruth (2011), Coetzee locates the narrative in the context of the “postindustrial and late capitalism system of husbandry known as the confined feedlot<sup>3</sup> operation” (Carruth, 2011:211). When Costello is drawing her audience to Nazi concentration camps, she is in fact speaking “against the ‘production facilities’ that fuel the contemporary food economy” (Carruth, 2011:212) and is implicitly attacking the United States for being “the world’s largest producer and exporter of meat” (Carruth, 2011: 212), and therefore, she is attacking everyone that is part of the unsustainable system of the meat industry.

In brief, Costello’s philosophy is complicated to label in a specific current of thought. Her ideas can be perceived as contradictory and that she might not be as devoted as she is believed to be to the cause, since she uses products that come from the animal industry. Nevertheless, she seems to ally with Singer when it comes to the notion of speciesism and the idea that there is a connection with anti-speciesism and

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<sup>3</sup> Confined feedlots are a type of animal feeding operation used in intensive farming. According to Carruth (2011), “confined feedlots emerged in the United States during World War II and became pivotal to the rise of the United States as a global food power”. (pp. 210-211)

most of the movements that fight against oppression of a community, minority or being, and therefore, there is a parallelism between racism, sexism and speciesism. Likewise, Costello and Singer view rationality, as Northover states, as an illegitimate criterion “to exclude nonhuman animals from moral consideration” (Northover, 2009:34). However, Costello doesn’t share Singer’s idea of convincing humanity of the wrongness of speciesism through reason. Costello believes in the notion of *sympathetic imagination* according to which if we perceive human beings as rational beings that can think, as Heidegger proposed, ontologically, human animals should place themselves in the position of non-human animals that cannot do so, in order to protect the moral rights of the latter. Through this idea, Costello criticizes traditional Rationalism and the Cartesian perspective of the “Cogito, ergo sum” as a principle to define beings, considering as second-class beings the ones that are not subject to it. Nevertheless, Costello is aware that science in Descartes’s times was not aware and had no knowledge of non-human animals that now we know could be subject to this principle. In spite of this, Costello understands and, in fact, shares a Darwinist perspective that proves that all animals including *Homo Sapiens* are made of cells and they only differ in terms of species, yet, the idea of sympathetic imagination can be questioned, as Norma does, since it might be seen in fact as an attack on reason through the usage of reason.

Having mentioned that, Costello also rejects Singer’s utilitarian perspective and her ideas seem to be closer to Regan’s deontology, considering that all subjects-of-a-life have an inherent value. Her ideas on salvation through ethical vegetarianism seem to have some sort of relationship with Midgley’s ideas in *Beast and Man* (2002) and with the Socratic notion of salvation through self-interrogation, and she also makes a clear separation between morality and ecology, criticizing the latter for being too anthropocentric when it comes to deciding over the lives of non-human animals, human

animals being the only ones exempt from its criteria. She also attacks captivity, animal experimentation and “production facilities” by saying that humans are, apparently, able to think using reason in contrast with the supposed lack of it that non-human animals have. Then, human animals should be able to understand that non-human animals need to be considered as beings with certain moral rights that must be defended. Again, this idea can be related with Regan’s theories. Nevertheless, her rejection of modern moral practices, even though she might share some features with them, and her use of sympathetic imagination in favor of literary language over rational philosophy can be connected with Aristotelian poetics and MacIntyre’s ideas as a teleological way of explaining life.

When it comes to postcolonialism, Costello represents the values of postcolonial ecocriticism as a theoretical current of thought that criticizes all the oppressive movements of human and non-human animals. Within it, she makes a comparison between the Holocaust, slavery and factory farms, and she believes that the bottom line of all these movements is the same. In the same context, she criticizes the capitalist system and the way industry is treating non-human animals, especially in the United States.

## **2.2. Costello vs. Coetzee**

Both Costello and Coetzee are elusive characters and as has been previously shown, they are complicated characters to label in a certain ideological framework. However, and despite the fact he is more conservative and cautious than Costello when he shows his ideology, we can see that, in fact, Costello and Coetzee’s views on animals might be almost identical and, as Northover states, “there is little that either Costello or Coetzee would disagree with” (Northover, 2009:23). Both share Regan’s deontological

perspective in contrast with Singer's utilitarianism and both share the principle that "the most important right is the right of life" (Coetzee, 2004, in Northover, 2009:39), and it should be defended by moral agents. Furthermore, and even though Costello refers to her use of animal products, they both have positioned themselves against animal production facilities and testing. This is again connected with Regan's perspective that all subjects-of-a-life have an inherent value that needs to be respected. Therefore, no testing or abuse should be allowed on these individuals. Referring to this idea, both Costello and Coetzee mention the Holocaust as an analogy of the mistreatment of the animals in factories as entities that exercise a direct discrimination and abuse over beings that are considered inferior just for being members of another species. Consequently, this idea of the Holocaust can be extended to other mistreated social groups such as women, LGTB or black people, and both Costello and Coetzee make sure this is clear by referring to slavery.

Although both Costello and Coetzee believe and put into practice ethical vegetarianism the bottom line of their actions might be a bit different. That is, in fact, one of the few differences, if not the only one, between these two characters. Costello believes in ethical vegetarianism as a tool to reach equality between human and non-human animals' moral rights, but also as a tool to save her soul, making reference to the Socratic idea of salvation through self-interrogation. On the other hand, Coetzee also believes in ethical vegetarianism as an instrument to raise awareness and reach equality between both human and non-human animals in terms of moral rights. Nevertheless, he specifically mentions that it is a tool to boycott the companies and the industry that has been mistreating innocent beings since the start of the Industrial Revolution.

MacIntyre's ideas are also important to both of them. As previously mentioned, Costello's usage of sympathetic imagination, declaring literary language as a way of

understanding over rationalism can refer to the notions of Aristotelian poetics and MacIntyre's ideas about teleology and life. This is in fact what Coetzee is doing throughout the whole of *The Lives of Animals*: He is exposing certain philosophical questions through a narrative and exposing certain points of view related to that.

To conclude, both the character and the author share similar ideas when it comes to the Animals' Rights issue. They both openly criticize the system and expose their ideas about animals and vegetarianism. Nonetheless, and even though their ideas are, in general terms, identical, it would be too ambiguous and unwise to define Costello as Coetzee's alter-ego, since their personalities, emotions and lives seem to be different. Bearing this in mind, I believe that Costello is Coetzee's voice in *The Lives of Animals*, even though further research should be done in relation to this aspect.

### **2.3. Costello as the Non-Human Animal**

The representations of non-human animals in Coetzee's fiction are wide and have been items of further literary analysis. According to Carruth, using Plumwood's ideas, "animals function in Coetzee's fiction as instruments for mostly human drama" (Carruth, 2011:204). If we take this idea into account, Coetzee might want to represent Elizabeth Costello as the non-human animal, a helpless, vulnerable being that tries to fight for her life, to fit into her environment but nevertheless fails to do so.

Costello is presented throughout *The Lives of Animals* as a being that seems to have difficulties to fit in both her professional environment, where other scholars and academics do not seem to understand her, and her personal/familiar environment, where her son John and her daughter-in-law Norma do not share her views either and, in fact, seem to refuse to take her beliefs more seriously. She is described as "gray and tired and confused" (Coetzee, 1999:44), and as Estey-Burt (2015) points out, this could show her

vulnerability. However, where the idea of not fitting in is seen more clearly is at the very end of the novella, where Costello, desolated, falls in her son's arms and cries desperately:

They are not yet on the expressway. He pulls the car over, switches off the engine, takes his mother in his arms. He inhales the smell of cold cream, of old flesh. "There, there," he whispers in her ear. "There, there. It will soon be over." (Coetzee, 1999:69).

In this passage, Costello cries because she does not know who she is anymore. She feels like an outsider since, even though she is having a 'normal' life within society, she does not understand how most of the people she relates with are "participants in a crime of stupefying proportions" (Coetzee, 1999:69). She is confused by the fact that she can see kindness in her relatives' eyes. Nonetheless, they are also active participants of what she considers one of the major crimes against discrimination and injustice. Then, this can be connected with the idea proposed by Nowak-McNeice (2018):

In Coetzee's novels, human characters become animals, reaching beyond the ordinary limitations and revealing the connections with animality that enlarge the definition of the human. (Nowak-McNeice, 2018:12).

That is, Costello can be seen as the helpless animal that tries to fight against the system but is overwhelmed by the way it works and the influence the system and the preconceived ideas about animals have over society and, specially, her loved ones. As Nowak-McNeice also indicates, "becoming human means accepting the animal part" (Nowak-McNeice, 2018:12). This paragraph can also be a representation of an animal that is about to be killed in a slaughterhouse saying goodbye to its offspring. Costello is bidding her son goodbye right before flying back home. She knows she is old, that she is not understood, and that she might not see John again. Her son knows this as well, and the readers can perceive this through the last sentence of the novella where John says to Costello "it will soon be over" (Coetzee, 1999:69). The acceptance of Costello as an animal herself and the deontological way in which she perceives animal moral

rights can also indicate that she is not only an animal –as she is in terms of biology-, but also the personification of the non-human animal. Furthermore, Costello is conscious “of the ways in which animals are unable to protect themselves and how she is complicit in the abuse of their weakness” (Estey-Burt, 2015:238). This can relate to the fact that, although she tries, she cannot protect herself either. She embodies the “animal”, the weak and helpless being attacked by society and its anthropocentric views that would marginalize everything and everyone who tries to go against the grain of Western capitalism and consumerism. This would go in line with Tremaine’s belief that a considerable amount of the human suffering that is portrayed in Coetzee’s writing happens in political terms, but it might be true that suffering is produced “only because we exist and are vulnerable as ‘body-souls’ because of our essential condition of embodiedness” (Tremaine, 2003:598). The reality of existing and being a subject-of-a-life makes both human and non-human animals bound to suffer.

Taking into account that Costello can be approached as the helpless non-human animal, she can also be seen as what Kristeva mentions in her celebrated publication *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) as the ‘object’:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva, 1982:4).

Costello is not understood by the ones surrounding her and she feels like an outsider. She challenges and questions the Western perception of the non-human animals as inferior beings and, hence, she attacks the capitalist and consumerist ideas and order hidden behind the meat industry and factory farms, since they are a product of them. Yet, she still uses products that come from non-human animals. Non-human animals are in a way ‘objects’ in an anthropocentric system. They are considered as

living beings but in most of the cases they are not given the right to bear and enjoy a life. They are in the system but they are not considered to be part of it in moral terms.

To encapsulate this part, Elizabeth Costello can be perceived throughout the novel as a personification of the non-human animal and the struggles these beings suffer in Western anthropocentric society. Costello is aware that she is in biological terms an animal and her egalitarian, Regan-like ideas help the reader to find the simile between her and the idea of the helpless, weak non-human animal that tries to avoid the inevitable reality of suffering and death as a consequence of the surrounding system. She is part of the system and wants to fight for her life and for her rights and beliefs, but Costello is overwhelmed by the sad truth that even the most innocent beings are corrupted by capitalism, consumerism and cannot understand her perception towards non-human animals. That is why she can be seen as the 'abject', an outsider that is part of a system but does not follow or accept the rules or conventional ideas fostered by Western capitalism.

### **3. Conclusions and Further Research**

Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* is a novella infused with a clearly philosophical background regarding the notions of human, non-human and moral rights. Amongst the many different ideas that Coetzee presents through this work, some main currents of thought can be identified. Heidegger's ideas about humanity and ontology are some of the bases that need to be borne in mind in order to understand what can distinguish human animals from non-human animals. The apparent ability of analyzing reality and existence through a metaphysical perspective and the aptness to think in an abstract way that can help humans to contemplate reality through the eyes of another being are

significant features that are apparently not shared by non-human animals. Humans are also thought to be beings that are able to create their own rules in order to be controlled within a society, as the theory of the Human Zoo exposes. Moreover, human animals have the capability of articulating oral sounds in a language which can create a measureless range of words and sentences and can displace the meaning of words, skills that are, as far as it is possible to assume, not shared by non-human animals, not even by mammals that are thought to have some sort of language and a well-developed emotional intelligence such as big apes or cetaceans.

Singer and Regan's ideas seem to be crucial to understand the novella, Costello and Coetzee. Their different approaches towards the moral rights of non-human animals have been fundamental to build up most of the further ideas and literature regarding Animal Studies and Morals. Singer's ideas on equality and utilitarianism are put into question by Regan's egalitarian and deontological ideas. Both are against Speciesism, despite the fact that Singer makes a difference in terms of interests and value between some species and Regan, on the other hand, proposes that all subjects-of-a-life have an inherent value that has to be defended by all moral agents, taking into account the miniride principle and the worse-off principle. Regan also points out that utilitarianism, applied rigorously, does not give equal moral rights to the different beings.

Costello and her ideas are labyrinthine. Her ideas in terms of speciesism go in line with Singer's idea of speciesism connected with the movements that oppress certain social communities, such as sexism, homophobia or racism. In addition, both of them consider that rationality is not enough to exclude non-human animals from moral consideration, even though Singer believes in reason as a tool to convince humanity of the cruelty of speciesism. Costello, on the contrary, attacks traditional Rationalism and Cartesian perspectives through her idea of sympathetic imagination. Nonetheless,

sympathetic imagination can be challenged, since it is in fact based on the use of reason to combat reason. Her ideas on sympathetic imagination and her rejection of traditional Rationalism in favor of literary language seem to be influenced by Aristotelian poetics and MacIntyre's philosophy. Costello allies with Regan's deontology when it comes to her ideas on moral rights and finds self-salvation through vegetarianism. This can be related with the Socratic idea of salvation through self-interrogation. Costello also separates morality and ecology.

For her, ecology and environmentalism are in fact too anthropocentric when it comes to deciding over the lives of non-human animals. Connected with this, Costello rejects captivity, animal experimentation and factory farming. Therefore, she seems to criticize capitalism, consumerism and discrimination through her actions and beliefs, which can be aligned with postcolonial ecocritical ideas.

Coetzee and Costello seem to virtually have the same ideas on non-human animals and their moral rights. However, it would not be correct to label Costello as Coetzee's alter-ego, since their personalities and emotions do not seem to harmonize. They are both evanescent characters and, hence, they are knotty to analyze and place in a certain philosophical school of thought. Both seem to share Regan's egalitarian ideas and have criticized factory farming and animal testing. They both use the Holocaust as a metaphor to picture discrimination and believe that this idea can also explain discrimination in other social strata. Moreover, they are conspicuously influenced by MacIntyre's philosophy and ideas about existence. The only difference that can be seen between them is the reasons why they put ethical vegetarianism into practice. Costello puts it into practice in order to save her soul and reach salvation through self-interrogation, whereas Coetzee does it in order to fight against cruelty and the animal industry.

Costello can also be framed as a personification of the helpless non-human animal and as the 'abject'. Her struggles and feeling of not belonging to her environment might be a parallelism with the struggles and suffering that non-human animals have to undergo in Western capitalist societies. In the last lines of the novella this is made even clearer by the fact that even though she fights to save herself, suffering and death are unavoidable in their environment, and they are even supported or not taken into consideration by people who she believes have a kind heart. Nevertheless, further research needs to be done on this issue.

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