WHAT IS ETHICAL thought? For starters, let us say that thought is ethical when it facilitates or promotes the living of an ethical life. It would seem then that ethical thought cannot be captured by its subject matter. It is easy enough, for example, to imagine a run-down social practice that consists in discussing ethical topics in empty ways. Imagine someone who devotes his professional life to writing articles about, say, the difference between just and unjust wars—but whose soul is made coarser in the process. There might be a journal, let us fictionally call it Ethics and Politics, in which professors from different universities vie to place their articles, none of which made any difference in how countries go to war. It is, of course, possible that the reflection that went into those articles helps authors, readers, and students become more ethically sensitive, and this possibility should not be diminished. However, it is easy to imagine a different scenario: one in which the journal functioned mainly as a credentialing agency for university jobs. People who published there would write “outside letters” for other people who published there so that Deans, who cared nothing about the field (other than that their university should be “ranked high”) would approve appointments and promotions.

To make the problem more vivid, imagine a moral or political issue that matters to you—racism, gerrymandering, campaign finance, gay rights, the Middle East, Islamic extremism, mistreatment of animals, the destruction of indigenous cultures. Then imagine that the social circumstances surrounding you shift in such a way that this issue becomes fashionable: clever articles about it appear in the best op-ed pages and book reviews, it is discussed over dinner and at cocktail parties, certain individuals attain celebrity for advocating the
cause—and yet the whole social whirl is somehow cut off from making a difference. In such circumstances we have the appearance of ethical thought; and it is this very appearance that can mislead participants. In such a situation, we would most likely take ourselves to be thinking about ethical issues. After all, we have just read, discussed, or even contributed the latest article on X. Ersatz ethical thought would give us the sense that the space for ethical thought was already filled.

The situation is even worse with novelists. No one is better positioned to profit—in the mundane, literal sense of earning large sums of money, or by winning distinguished literary prizes—from a “sensitive” portrayal of an ethically charged topic, like torture or war. Let us leave to one side the cynical author who uses an ethically charged topic like torture to seek fame and fortune. The problem is more pressing if we imagine a sincere, morally engaged author who would like his writing to correct an injustice. How might that work? Can we not imagine that, precisely as a result of the author’s success as a writer, he will be taken up as a celebrity, and that being “against torture” might become a fashion item among the intelligentsia? It is not impossible that something good should come of this. But it is easy enough for the whole public event to serve as a fashionable substitute for ethical thought, rather than an instance of it. (Imagine the publication party for a book against global warming that ends early so the guests can catch a plane.)

J. M. Coetzee’s literary style is, I think, an attempt to defeat this possibility. And I think we can understand the complexity of his literary form if we see him as trying to communicate ethical thought. That is, he is trying to stimulate genuinely ethical thought in other people. In this essay I want to give at least a preliminary indication of how this might work. In the first instance, I will give a broad overview of how Coetzee’s literary form fits into a philosophical tradition concerned with the contribution of form to ethical thought. Then I will examine one of the central arguments of Diary of a Bad Year concerning the shame of torture, and I will try to show how the form of the book facilitates a reader’s relation to that shame.
There has been speculation in reviews about the relation between JC, the protagonist of *Diary of a Bad Year*, and J. M. Coetzee, its author. JC is, after all, a South African novelist who has recently emigrated to Australia, he is the author of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and hanging on the wall of his bedroom (as seen by his Filipina secretary, Anya) is “a framed scroll in some foreign language (Latin?) with his name in fancy lettering with lots of curlicues and a big red wax seal in the corner.” We know he is JC because that is how he signs two letters—one imploring Anya to come back to his employ after they have had a blow-up, the other inviting her and her lover Alan to dinner to celebrate the completion of the book he has been writing. In private discussion between Anya and Alan, Anya refers to JC as “Señor C” and “El Señor”; and Alan refers to him as Mr. C. At the dinner party, when Alan gets drunk, he calls him “Juan” to his face. As anyone who has read Coetzee’s novel (or even just reviews of it) knows, almost every page is divided into two or three sections, each section written in (and representing) a different voice. The top section is the official voice of the author JC, the exposition of moral opinions that will eventually find their way into his book. Many of them sound as though they could be taken for the voice of Coetzee.

But there is this crucial difference between JC and J. M. Coetzee: JC is willing to publish his *Strong Opinions* as a freestanding book; Coetzee is not. Coetzee is only willing to publish the opinions as authored by JC in the context of a novel in which those very opinions, as well as the act of writing them down and publishing them, are questioned by JC himself as well as by Anya, and are mocked by Alan. Not only that, but JC and his book are embedded among other sections of Coetzee’s book that include JC’s personal musings (from a diary?) about his attraction to Anya and his growing sense of infirmity. What is the meaning of this difference? It is a mistake to treat the different voices represented in these sections simply as a
display of literary virtuosity. The reviewer in the *New York Times Book Review* said that we readers “are manipulated by a form that is coy as well as playful.” This claim is, I think, mistaken. The aim of the style is not for Coetzee to show off—to demonstrate that he, unlike the melancholy, infirm, single-voiced JC, can do postmodern hip. Rather, it is an attempt to defeat the reader’s desire to defer to the “moral authority,” the “novelist” J. M. Coetzee. In an article in the *New York Times*, Rachel Donadio writes, “In a country [South Africa] where every inch of physical and moral ground is contested, Coetzee has been criticized for refusing to play the role of writer-as-statesman, one more easily played by his fellow Nobel laureate, Nadine Gordimer.” The wording is marvelous: for Coetzee has never been explicitly accused of failing to play a role. He has been accused of racism, of letting South Africa down, of not being a moral exemplar. But when I read the criticism, it seems to me that Donadio got it right: what irks people about Coetzee is his refusal to conform to their image of how he should behave as “South African writer,” “Nobel Prize Winner,” “moral conscience.” We need to see this same refusal in his literary style.

JC writes, “Authority must be earned; on the novelist author lies the onus to build up, out of nothing, such authority.” But Coetzee’s authority lies in his ability to divest himself of authority: this is not manipulation, it is certainly not coy, and if “playful” is meant to be the opposite of moral seriousness, it is not playful either. The questions are why he does it and how he does it. Why he does it is, I think, straightforward: he wants to defeat ersatz ethical posturing and promote genuine ethical thought in his reader. How he does this is tricky, and requires some attention.

* * *

Within the Western philosophical tradition, there have been a number of attempts to use literary characters—most notably, at the beginning, in Plato’s dialogues. At the center is the figure of Socrates who claims to know only that he does not know. Not only does Plato,
as authority figure, disappear behind his characters, but the central figure distinguishes himself by eschewing authority when it comes to ethical knowledge. There are of course many other characters, some with worked-out ethical views, but the dialogues are set up so that there is always some question about how those views should be received. This is not simply a literary device to sustain the reader's interest; it is an ethical strategy, an attempt to provoke thought in the reader by defeating any easy desire to defer to the author or to any surrogate for the author in the text. Even the figures within the text need to be handled with dialectical delicacy. If a respected character were to say, "When it comes to ethics, you really need to think for yourself," one can imagine the response, "Anything you say, boss: I really must think for myself!"

Plato was also suspicious of writing as a medium for philosophical activity. In a famous passage at the end of *Phaedrus*, Socrates recounts an Egyptian tale of an ancient time in which King Thamus warns Theuth, the inventor of writing, that students "will imagine they come to know much while for the most part they know nothing." Socrates' worry seems to be that writing, by its very nature, tends to defeat ethical thought. People can read the words, think they know what's at stake, pass the words along to others who think they are being taught—all without friction. There is a mimicking of ethical thought: the reading, reproduction, and transmission of "ethical arguments" that make no difference to how anyone lives. It stands to reason that a philosopher so aware of the dangers of writing would try to find a literary form that would defeat the transmission of ersatz thought.

Entranced as I am with Plato, I think I see a problem with the dialogue form. It can encourage in the reader a sense that he is in the audience, watching the characters debate as though they were up on stage. Rather than being thrown into philosophy's midst, challenged to examine one's beliefs, one can feel like an arbiter, able to choose one's position from among the many presented according to taste. One doesn't have to read the dialogues this way, but (and perhaps
this is a reflection of the times and culture we live in) I have seen generations of students incline toward it.

It has crossed my mind to wonder whether this problem motivated Kierkegaard, a devoted student of Plato, to create pseudonymous authors. Although Kierkegaard wrote many works under his own name, the most famous ones—Fear and Trembling, Either/Or, Repetition, Sickness Unto Death, Philosophical Fragments, Concluding Unscientific Postscript—were all published under pseudonyms. But, at the moment he completes his last pseudonymously authored book, Kierkegaard makes it explicit in a document signed under his own name that the pseudonyms are not pseudonyms for him. Rather, he, Kierkegaard, has created pseudonymous authors who have themselves gone on to write their books. If it could work, the pseudonymous authorship would be an ingenious improvement on the dialogue form, precisely because it breaks down the division between stage and audience. Instead of me watching as two characters debate with each other “on stage,” and adjudicating points to one or the other of them, it is as though one of the characters has come down from the stage—in fact, there is no longer a stage, no longer a character—and he is confronting me. “My pseudonymity,” Kierkegaard tells us in “A First and Last Explanation,” “has not had an accidental basis in my person... but an essential basis in the production itself.”

But why did Kierkegaard write “A First and Last Explanation”? That Kierkegaard felt the need to explain his authorship is, I think, an indication that he thought it had failed. Perhaps the demands made on the reader are too strenuous. Perhaps it is too easy to assume that the pseudonym is just a pen name and too difficult to sustain the recognition that one is being addressed by a literary character.

Might there not be a more forgiving (and thus more successful) way to use this literary form—one that wouldn’t require the self-defeating gesture of a first and last explanation? Perhaps one might put the pseudonymous author along with his book inside a novel in which author and book are both commented upon by various voices.
If this is a literary style aimed at provoking ethical thought in the reader, standing, as I think it does, in a tradition that goes back to Plato’s dialogues and continues through Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship, then it is a misunderstanding of the form to think that it is a clever or irritating literary feat—one in which, if Coetzee were less clever, or less irritating, he would come out from behind his mask and tell us what he meant. But what if his concern were that our concern with what he meant would distract us from our concern with how we should be? If *Diary of a Bad Year* is ethical thinking in action, if it is directed toward stimulating ethical thought in the reader, then it would be a misstep for Coetzee to “step out from behind his mask” and tell us what he meant—not in the sense that he would be exercising bad political or literary judgment, but because there ought to be no mask out from which to step. There would be no content withheld, nothing more to say, and thus an attempt to say what that content was would be to attack the production itself. This is what it would mean to say that the pseudonymous author JC does not have an accidental basis in Coetzee’s person—that is, he is not showing off—but an essential basis in the production itself.

One reason to divide a page is that it gives Coetzee a way to address different parts of our soul at more or less the same time. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates claims rhetoric is a peculiar craft of leading the soul through the power of logos—that is, through speech and argument. And in the *Republic*, he says that education should not be thought of in terms of putting something into another person, but rather as turning the whole soul around. I think we need to see the split page of *Diary of a Bad Year* as a rhetorical move in this Platonic sense. This is Coetzee’s attempt to lead the whole soul.

For the sake of simplicity (and brevity) I am going to focus on two broad movements. If one reads across the top section, one is ostensibly reading *Strong Opinions*, the book that JC will publish in German translation. (One will later read what Anya calls his “Soft Opinions” and JC calls his “Second Diary,” which JC does not
Publish but does share with Anya.) Reading across like this, one is confronted by what I shall call the dialectic of responsibility. I am tempted to say that this is the level of rationality, but that is not quite right. As we shall see, not all of JC’s arguments are rational. But this is the level at which we are presented with (and entangled in) argument. The movement works through logos. However, when we read downward, we encounter a spectacle of embedding. That is, we see how the moral stances that are officially to be presented in the book form are embedded in the fantasies, happenings, musings, and struggles of the author’s day-to-day life. It is that from which a normal book of moral essays would be cut off. I suggest that this imaginary embedding is meant to draw along parts of the reader’s soul that would not be led by argument alone. “That from which” is a phrase Aristotle used to pick out the matter of a living organism. A living human being, for example, is a form-and-matter unity in which the stuff of human life—blood, guts, flesh and bones—realizes itself in self-maintaining form, in human being. The stuff of life is that from which its form emerges and that in which life maintains itself. I want to suggest that Strong Opinions has the form of argument, but that form is an aspect of a living form-and-matter unity which consists of JC’s arguments embedded in the stuff of his life. JC gives us the form; Coetzee gives us the form-and-matter unity. Now why an apprehension of moral arguments as embedded in the life of a fictional character should defeat ersatz ethical thought, and perhaps even promote ethical thought in some, is a puzzle. But to solve that puzzle is to grasp the rhetorical strategy of the book.

Diary of a Bad Year opens at the very same place as the purported book Strong Opinions whose author we will later learn is JC. It is an excursus on the origins of the state.

Every account of the origins of the state starts from the premise that “we”—not we readers but some generic we so wide as to exclude no one—participate in its coming into being. But the fact
is that the only “we” we know—ourselves and the people close
to us—are born into the state; and our forebears too were born
into the state as far back as we can trace. The state is always
there before we are.

JC’s official voice is one of reminder and recognition. He invites us to
share his skepticism about how certain forms of philosophical argu-
ment implicate us in the formation of the state. In the polis version
of chicken and egg, we are told that we came first and, out of our
needs, created a state. JC reminds us that there is no “we” whom we
can recognize as ever wanting or needing to do that. It does not fol-
low that JC’s voice is therefore antiphilosophical. Philosophy is regu-
larly constituted by questioning the uses to which philosophy can be
put. Nor is JC scorning all uses to which a state-of-nature argument
might be put. Rather, he is questioning a particular use, one that
locates our responsibility in the wrong place. If we bear responsibil-
ity, it is not because of some original sin, a mythical act of mythical
ancestors who lived outside the state but nevertheless count as “us.”
I suspect that the intended reader (that is, the reader whom Goetzee
has in mind, whom I will simply call the reader) is one who will enjoy
this opening criticism: who will enjoy the recognition that I or we are
not part of a nonexistent “we” who purportedly carried out this bogus
act. That is, we begin with a satisfying recognition that we are not
who this vindicating story of the state says we are. We are not people
who owe allegiance to the state’s actions because “we” formed it—
and we’re not going to accept an argument that tries to implicate us
on such shabby grounds.

As we move toward the lower part of the page, we also move to
the lower part of the body—and, not incidentally, the “lower” part of
the soul.

My first glimpse of her was in the laundry room. It was mid-
morning on a quiet spring day and I was sitting, watching the
washing go around, when this quite startling young woman
walked in. Startling because the last thing I was expecting was
such an apparition; also because the tomato-red shift she wore was so startling in its brevity.

What could be more ordinary, homogeneous, self-contained than sitting in one's laundry room (as, no doubt, he had often done) watching the washing go around? But this is a world that can be disturbed by a glimpse. There is no doubt that the glimpse is erotic. A week later he happens to see her again “only fleetingly as she passed through the front door in a flash of white slacks that showed off a derrière so near to perfect as to be angelic. God, grant me one wish before I die, I whispered; but then was overtaken with shame at the specificity of the wish, and withdrew it.” If this were only a report of JC's sexual fantasies, he would stand in an odd relation to his own imagination. What, after all, is it to have a wish and then “withdraw” it? For JC's act to make sense, we must take his whispering to be not merely the expression of a wish, but a plea to God. Wishes are not the sort of thing one can withdraw; requests are. But now that the divine has been invoked, we are not just within the realm of sex (are we ever?), but approaching something significant, difficult to name or understand, that, at least in the moment, makes it feel instinctively appropriate to call on God for remedy. JC calls it a “metaphysical ache”:

As I watched her an ache, a metaphysical ache, crept over me that I did nothing to stem. And in an intuitive way she knew about it, knew that in the old man in the plastic chair in the corner there was something personal going on, something to do with age and regret and the tears of things.

If you have never felt a metaphysical ache yourself, or if you are unable to use this occasion to feel such an ache vicariously, or if you are unable to use this occasion imaginatively to anticipate the future onset of such an ache, then this book is not for you. But then why are you wasting your time reading a novel? We need to take seriously the idea that the ache is metaphysical. Though it is a psychological
occurrence, it is not merely that. It is, rather, an ache that can lead us to a richer grasp of what kind of being we are.

In the *Symposium*, Socrates tells of a conversation he had with the priestess Diotoma, who taught him the art of love. "All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age we naturally desire to give birth." But pregnancy and reproduction are the ways that mortal beings participate in immortality. This is a godly affair, and it must occur in beauty, which is in harmony with the divine. Now when someone is pregnant in soul, "he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget." "In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages." Now, for the beautiful young boy of ancient Greek aristocratic society, substitute the hot Filipina in her startlingly brief tomato-red shift and "thongs of the kind that go on the feet." Much later in the book, toward the end of the *Strong Opinions* section, JC writes in the middle section of the page:

Was Anya from 2514 in any but the most farfetched sense the natural mother of the miscellany of opinions I was putting down on paper on commission...? No. The passions and prejudices out of which my opinions grew were laid down long before I first set eyes on Anya, and were by now so strong—that is to say, so settled, so rigid—that aside from the odd word here and there there was no chance that refraction through her gaze could alter their angle.

In one way, this fits the Socratic conception well. For the beautiful other is not a contributor to the pregnancy but the occasion for a long-standing pregnancy to come to term. On this picture, what we would see on the upper part of the page is that to which JC gave birth in the presence of the beautiful Anya. In the lower two sections, we would be witness to the birthing process. The book *Strong Opinions* is then a kind of husk: the externalization into the world of what used to lie inside JC's pregnant soul. Perhaps one reason that published
“moral opinions” can fall flat in terms of ethical thought is that they are cut off from the birthing process.

But in another way JC provides a significant variation on the Socratic theme. For JC is not just erotically bowled over by Anya’s beauty, he is preoccupied with his own aging, physical decay, and death. To be sure, there are intimations of this in Plato: it is because we are mortal creatures that we stretch ourselves to become immortal. It is because we humans know in some sense that we are mortal—we live in the light of that mortality—that our births-in-beauty can be symbolic. Yet JC’s birthing is more mired in anticipations of physical decay and death than anything Plato imagined. Let’s face it: JC is looking for a way to die. JC’s metaphysical ache is the living recognition that in his erotic longing, in all its wild inappropriateness, he is a creature who will soon not be. From the middle section: “Last night I had a bad dream, which I afterwards wrote down, about dying and being guided to the gateway to oblivion by a young woman. What I did not record is the question that occurred to me in the act of writing: Is she the one?”

Diotoma talks of giving birth in beauty; JC is giving birth in beauty in the valley of the shadow of death. He has a fantasy of dying in a whorehouse and being dumped unceremoniously in an alley; after reporting this, he continues, “But no, if the new dream is to be trusted it will not be like that. I will expire in my own bed and be discovered by my typist, who will close my eyes and pick up the telephone to make her report.” It is clear that Anya picks up on the importance of this fantasy. Later, in the lower section, she reports: “He told me one of his dreams, I said to Alan. It was really sad, about dying and his ghost lingering behind, not wanting to leave. I told him he should write it down before he forgets, and work it into his book.”

Is Anya here giving advice to JC or to Coetzee? Coetzee writes about it in Diary of a Bad Year, but JC leaves it out of Strong Opinions.

One might say that she is giving advice to them both, or that Coetzee is the one able to take up her advice, but I don’t think either option is correct. Anya is Coetzee’s creation—who knows in whose presence he gave birth to that beauty. What we have in the fictional
world is Anya giving advice to JC, and I think it is helpful to think of JC as following it after his own fashion. JC's *Strong Opinions* is written in the light of his own decay and death, in the presence of the beautiful Anya. *Strong Opinions* is JC's own being-toward-death: it is what he elects to put forward into the public world in the light of his own imminent demise. His own decay is not what he wants to talk about—that is Coetzee's preoccupation. JC wants to utter the ethical word in the public domain. That is how he wants to spend his last days on earth: in the public domain, writing *Strong Opinions*; in private, entangled with Anya as quasi-Platonic lover. What all this means is far from clear. But the fact that Coetzee lets us see how JC's ethical words are embedded in his living-toward-death allows us at least to explore, in gut-open ways, why taking such a stance might matter.

It is clear from the moment they meet that JC and Anya are in close intuitive contact. As we have already seen, the moment he feels the metaphysical ache, "in an intuitive way she knew all about it." It was something "which she did not particularly like, did not want to evoke," but she could recognize it, feel it. And JC recognizes that she feels it, and is even able to grasp the meaning it has for her:

Had it come from someone different, had it a simpler and blunter meaning, she might have been readier to give it welcome; but from an old man its meaning was too diffuse and melancholy for a nice day when you are in a hurry to get the chores done.

In short, this metaphysical ache is not the private property of JC's imagination: it reaches out to Anya, is instantly recognized by her and responded to in her own imaginative act that is itself immediately recognized by JC. The question is whether this ache is able to reach out, off the page, and entangle the reader. My own sense is that it does; and it helps us import an ethical ache into the *Strong Opinions*.

Even at this early stage, one can see in the form of communication a strategy designed to defeat ersatz ethical thought. In particular, any tendency in the reader to transfer authority to the author
is undermined twice over. Not only is the author of *Strong Opinions* not Coetzee—and thus whatever admiration one has for him cannot directly transfer into admiration for the opinions expressed—but even the purported author JC is shown to be entangling himself in a somewhat melancholy, perhaps pathetic, erotic outreach to a hot little number he happened to glimpse in the laundry. Who knows what place his moral musings have in relation to this human drama? We know immediately that these “strong opinions” are being embedded in a larger context, but we have no idea what the significance of this embedding is. The “strong opinions” do seem to be what JC wants to put in the public domain during a period when he is contemplating his own decay and demise. This we can see not from *Strong Opinions* but from *Diary of a Bad Year*. But is this a final word that he needs to speak, or is it simply an empty motion he is going through as he pursues what really matters to him, a relationship with Anya? There is no answer to this question in the text. Thus, there is no easy way for a reader to take on the strong opinions simply by taking Goetzee’s or JC’s word for it. If we think of ethical thought as something that cannot be accepted on authority, then this is a literary form that defeats a typical way in which ethical thought is itself defeated.

For a similar reason, the form also works against ethical thought becoming routine. With transference of authority, the problem is not only that we are taking a so-called expert’s word for it; the word we take tends to lose vitality. So, to take an example that we shall presently consider in more detail, if we were to take JC’s word for it that “torture is a national dishonor,” how would that stand with our own sense of dishonor? This is the irony of “strong opinions”: opinions can’t be strong simply in virtue of their content. It is possible to “accept” the opinion, yet the strength of the opinion is drained off in the transmission. Certainly, there are many warnings in *Diary of a Bad Year* that the “strong opinions” may just be ersatz ethical thought. JC himself calls the invitation to write *Strong Opinions*, “An opportunity to grumble in public, an opportunity to take magic revenge on the world for declining to conform to my fantasies: how could I refuse?”
Anya warns him that he has “a tone that really turns people off. A know-it-all tone. Everything is cut and dried: *I am the one with all the answers, here is how it is, don’t argue, it won’t get you anywhere.* I know that isn’t how you are in real life, but that is how you come across, and it is not what you want.” And of course, Alan, in his obnoxious tirade, says that *Strong Opinions* is being published in Germany because that country is the last on earth that has any interest in the shriveled musings of a white-bearded guru. Each of the charges has some plausibility. Thus, if JC’s voice—that is, the voice of *Strong Opinions*—is going to gain authority with the reader, it can only come after the reader has grappled with all the warnings against assigning it any authority at all. Ironically, *Diary of a Bad Year* inoculates *Strong Opinions* against being ersatz ethical thought by warning the reader that it might be just that.

Let us return to the dialectic of responsibility, which I have associated with reading horizontally across the pages of *Strong Opinions*. In an entry on Machiavelli, JC writes:

Necessity, *necessità*, is Machiavelli’s guiding principle. The old, pre-Machiavellian position was that the law was supreme. If it so happened that the moral law was sometimes broken, that was unfortunate, but rulers were merely human, after all. The new, Machiavellian position is that infringing the moral law is justified when it is necessary.

Thus is inaugurated the dualism of modern political culture, which simultaneously upholds absolute and relative standards of value. The modern state appeals to morality, to religion and to natural law as the ideological foundation of its existence. At the same time it is prepared to infringe any or all of these in the interest of self-preservation.

JC sees that Machiavelli has trickled down into “ordinary life.” The only people who somehow don’t get it are people he calls “liberal intellectuals”: 
The kind of person who calls talkback radio and justifies the use of torture in the interrogation of prisoners holds the double standard in his mind in exactly the same way: without in the least denying the absolute claims of the Christian ethic (love thy neighbor as thyself), such a person approves freeing the hands of the authorities—the army, the secret police—to do whatever may be necessary to protect the public from enemies of the state.

The typical reaction of liberal intellectuals is to seize on the contradiction here: how can something be both wrong and right, or at least both wrong and OK at the same time? What liberal intellectuals fail to see is that this so-called contradiction expresses the quintessence of the Machiavellian and therefore the modern, a quintessence that has been thoroughly absorbed by the man in the street.

But who are the “liberal intellectuals” JC describes? And to whom is he speaking? Since he talks about them in the third person, it would at least initially seem that JC, in his writing, does not take himself to be addressing them. Rather, he seems to take himself to be addressing a different group—we the intended readers (whoever we turn out to be)—and he is talking about “liberal intellectuals” with us. The sense that we readers are not “liberal intellectuals” is enhanced by JC’s claim, “What liberal intellectuals fail to see. . .” JC implies that we (his readers) can see, merely by his pointing it out, what liberal intellectuals fail to see. And if it were that easy for “liberal intellectuals” to see what they purportedly fail to see, why couldn’t JC call them “you”? Why couldn’t he then address them directly, as he does us (his readers)? He could then say, “What some of you fail to see is. . .” I suspect that JC cannot address “liberal intellectuals” directly—cannot simply point out to them what they have hitherto failed to see—because what they fail to see, they cannot see. That is, they suffer from a kind of blindness. And so if one were somehow to bring this failure to see to the attention of those who are failing to see (that is, to the attention of liberal intellectuals themselves), one would have to use a less direct method than simply pointing to something one already knows one cannot see.
In contemporary political discourse, when someone talks of “liberal intellectuals,” he or she is a conservative commentator, and the point of mentioning them is to pour abuse upon them for the satisfaction of other like-minded conservatives. But this cannot be what JC is doing. His outrage at Guantánamo, to take just one example, means he does not fit the standard mold of a conservative commentator who takes Guantánamo to be a necessity of war. And the fact that he assumes his readers will be sympathetic with his views means this cannot be the standard derogatory usage of “liberal intellectuals.”

Precisely because JC’s use of “liberal intellectuals” doesn’t fit this mold, it ought to raise some curiosity in the reader as to whom he is talking about. And why is he talking about them to us? I would like to suggest that we construe “liberal intellectuals” broadly to include a group that meets three criteria: they are relatively well educated by contemporary standards (that is what makes them “intellectuals”); they place special concern on the dignity and rights of the individual (this is the core value of liberalism); they have some confidence in reason’s ability to understand the world and to give humans the basis for making good decisions (we have seen that they object to the contradictions that “ordinary people” accept as a matter of course).

Note that on this characterization, “liberal intellectuals” would cut across the standard left-right divide. For example, the late Robert Bartley, the legendary editorial-page editor of the Wall Street Journal, called himself a “liberal” in the traditional sense of the term right up to the end of his distinguished conservative career. In the conservative version of liberalism, it is the right of the individual to make up his mind in the marketplace; the left-wing version valorizes the dignity of the individual that argues in favor of universal health care. In each case, what is at stake is some vision of the rights and dignity of the individual. The opposition JC is establishing, then, is not between left and right, but between “liberal intellectuals” and “ordinary people.” What I think JC wants to investigate is the role of the intellect—at least, as it is given social expression in terms of privileged
education—among those who take themselves to value the rights and dignity of the individual.

Although JC sets up an opposition between “liberal intellectuals” and “ordinary people,” it is noteworthy that against neither group will a moral appeal against torture succeed. “If you wish to counter the man in the street, it cannot be by appeal to moral principles... Ordinary life is full of contradictions; ordinary people are used to accommodating them.” In effect, the “ordinary” response to torture is: “yes, torture is a moral outrage; but sometimes it is necessary.” For “liberal intellectuals,” moral appeal fails for a different reason: it is experienced by them as superfluous because they are already against torture and don’t need to be told that it is an outrage. JC tells us how we might nevertheless reach “ordinary people.” To reach ordinary people, instead of making a moral appeal “you must attack the metaphysical, supra-empirical status of necessità and show that to be fraudulent.” If one can show that torture isn’t really necessary for the state’s survival, if you can show that the claim is a fraud, then ordinary people won’t need a further moral argument to be against it. But this kind of rhetorical move won’t work against “liberal intellectuals,” precisely because they don’t think they need convincing. If there were going to be a rhetorical strategy that worked with them, it would have to be one which elicited from them recognition that, after all, they do need convincing—that being absolutely against torture does not preclude the possibility that they are somehow for it. This would be especially difficult for them to see if, as intellectuals, believers in logic, they assumed that their opposition to torture thereby ruled out the possibility that they are somehow also in favor of it.

*While reading Diary of a Bad Year a memory came back to me of my first assignment as a student journalist, trying out for the Yale Daily News. The article was about alleged branding (that is, like cattle) of students as a rite of initiation into a fraternity. “George W. Bush, 1968, the past president of DKE called the branding ‘insignificant.’ Stating that there is little pain, Bush said, ‘there’s no scarring mark, physically or mentally.’” (“No intervention for fraternities,” Yale Daily News, 7 November 1967).
JG thinks Americans are entangled in a national curse—a modern, secular version of blood guilt. Actually, JG is more concerned with shame—the transmission of dishonor—than with guilt. In this modern version, shame is transmitted not through blood, but through citizenship. We are shamed, JC thinks, by the fact that we are citizens of a nation that engages in torture. Of the Bush administration, JC writes:

Their shamelessness is quite extraordinary. Their denials are less than halfhearted. The distinction their hired lawyers draw between torture and coercion is patently insincere, pro forma. In the new dispensation we have created, they implicitly say, the old powers of shame have been abolished. Whatever abhorrence you may feel counts for nothing.

It is here, in JC’s opinion, that each individual American faces the challenge of ethical thought: “how, in the face of this shame to which I am subjected, do I behave? How do I save my honor?” But how does the shamelessness of the Bush administration trickle down and shame me? There are a number of peculiarities in the dynamics of shame. To begin with, shamelessness is shameful. But if the administration is, as JC alleges, shameless, then they will never feel the shame that, JC alleges, attaches to them. That is, there is objective shame that attaches to the administration because of their shameless behavior; but there is also a subjective shame—the experience of being ashamed—that they will never feel (because they are shameless). When it comes to shamelessness, objective and subjective shame necessarily come apart. But now there is a further problem with JC’s claim that the shame has somehow become my shame, something in relation to which I must figure out how to live. Again, there is a split between JC’s claim of objective shame, which attaches to me, and subjective shame, which I can’t yet figure out why I ought to feel. Is this puzzlement my very own form of shamelessness, manifesting itself in a belief that I don’t deserve to feel shame?
JC is, I think, trying to block the assumption that because I oppose George Bush, loathe the administration’s tactics of skirting the law, and abhor torture, I am therefore not responsible for what the government does. On this picture, my ethical thinking has already been done, and though I may be disturbed by my government’s actions, I am comfortable with my judgment of myself. For JC, this tactic won’t work, and he tries to instill in the reader a sense that it is not working.

Dishonor is no respecter of fine distinctions. Dishonor descends upon one’s shoulders and once it has descended no amount of clever pleading will dispel it. In the present climate of whipped-up fear, and in the absence of any ground swell of popular revulsion against torture, political actions by individual citizens seem unlikely to have any practical effect. Yet perhaps, pursued doggedly and in a spirit of outrage, such actions will at least allow people to hold their heads up. Mere symbolic actions, on the other hand—burning the flag, pronouncing the words aloud “I abhor the leaders of my country and dissociate myself from them”—will certainly not be enough.

JC is attacking the liberal idea that the individual can be judged on his own terms, in isolation from the nation into which he happens to be born. His point is not that the nation or the culture will have influenced him or shaped his outlook and thus his complicity. Rather, his claim is that even if the nation has had no influence on him at all, the shame is still his. It attaches to him simply by virtue of his being a citizen. There are thus, for JC, severe limits to an individual’s ability to ward off shame by saying, “It is not mine.” Worse, at least from the point of view of the liberal imagination, these limits may not be rationally justifiable. This is what “liberal intellectuals” cannot see: the fact that I can reason my way out of the shame—after all, I did nothing to deserve it—does not mean that it is not mine. It is there, like a curse or an oracle. It attaches to me simply by virtue of my nationality. JC cites the “deep theme” of Faulkner: “the theft of the land from the Indians or the rape of slave women comes back in
unforeseen form, generations later, to haunt the oppressor.” And he quotes the classicist J.-P. Vernant on the way that the structure of tragic guilt arises from a clash between an ancient religious conception in which an impious act can defile an entire race, and a newer legal conception in which the guilty one is the individual who breaks the law. On JC’s nationalist conception, shame transmits not just across generations, but it also trickles down within a single generation from the political class that sanctions the taboo act to the citizens who may have had little or no say in how the political class operates. How is it fair, one wants to ask, that I should bear the guilt for acts I abhor, committed by leaders I voted against and over whose behavior I have no control? JC’s answer: whether you understand it or not, the shame is yours.

In short, JC plays jujitsu with the liberal imagination. The liberal sensibility wants to start out with the individual—his rights, dignity, and responsibilities—and then ask, “How am I responsible?” JC begins with an accusation of shared shame: “You are dishonored, simply by being part of this tainted ‘we.’ Now figure out how to behave as an individual: for it is given to you to figure out how to deal with the shame you have inherited for acts you did not perform, for acts you abhor.”

In reading JC’s strong opinion, many reactions are possible. One might, for example, dismiss JC as a nutcase, given to oracular pronouncements we could well live without. Or one might “agree” with JC in the service of bolstering a complacent sense of self-righteousness. Really, only one avenue of reaction is blocked: the one that tries to object to JC’s accusation by saying, “The shame could not be mine, because I did nothing to deserve it.” This is essentially the reaction of the “liberal intellectual.” And it cannot be an objection, because JC begins with the premise that this is a shame that attaches to you whether or not you did something to deserve it. One wants to say that it does not make sense that there should be such a thing as shame that genuinely attaches to me, even though I’ve done nothing
to deserve it. But JC already agrees that this shame does not make sense: he does not think it open to rational assessment in this way. Rather, he thinks one must recognize it as there; it attaches to me by virtue of my nationality, independently of my deeds. JC's accusation may be one I refuse to accept, but I cannot refuse it on standard rational grounds. For the accusation does not claim to be rational—in other words, to make sense according to contemporary standards of responsibility. It claims to be true.

What if this accusation were somehow to resonate with me? Wouldn't that only show that I was susceptible to irrational appeals? Perhaps. But it might also serve to bypass a defensive use to which reason can be put. Rationalization is a process that purports to determine on the basis of reasons alone whether or not, say, I ought to feel shame, but it is actually structured so as to arrive at the conclusion I want. To take a salient example, torture is forbidden by U.S. law. And there is widespread agreement that it would be shameful for this country to engage in torture. So, to the question, “Should we feel shame because our government engages in torture?” the official answer is, “Absolutely not; our government clearly forbids the use of torture.” However, in ruling out torture, the law also leaves it unclear what interrogation techniques count as torture. At the time of writing this essay, the interrogation technique known as waterboarding has neither been conclusively ruled in, nor conclusively ruled out. Or, as we shall see, in a peculiar way it has been both ruled out and ruled in. One might think, if torture is so horrible, if engaging in it would be a national disgrace, isn’t it a matter of urgency for us to make up our minds about waterboarding? After all, if waterboarding is not torture, it is certainly an effective interrogation technique, and we could perhaps engage in it more often. If it is torture, we ought to make that determination as soon as possible, so as to ensure it is never used again. Instead the situation is such as to leave us in a murky limbo. Again, on the one hand, waterboarding is absolutely forbidden to the U.S. Military. The Detainee Treatment Act forbids “cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment” of detainees, and requires that interrogation techniques be restricted to those
authorized in the Army Field Manual. The Army Field Manual explicitly prohibits waterboarding. On the other hand, waterboarding has been used by the CIA. It was approved by a Presidential finding in 2002, and then prohibited in 2006 by a directive of the CIA Director Michael Hayden. Even so, at the time of this writing, it has not yet been ruled to be torture. It could presumably be restored as a CIA interrogation technique, should a new director issue a countermanding directive.

This is a complex structure of prohibitions and permissions. It almost looks like the solution to a complex algebraic equation: solve for a situation in which a) torture is forbidden; b) waterboarding is forbidden; c) waterboarding was permitted and could be permitted again; d) there is no contradiction. What is this complexity for? It seems to me that it is the last condition (d) that gives the game away. The law goes to great lengths to avoid the explicit Machiavellian contradiction that JC says “ordinary people” are used to accommodating, namely:

Torture is absolutely forbidden.
Torture is permitted when necessary.

It is as though this complex system were written for those who cannot tolerate this contradiction: that is, for the people JC calls “liberal intellectuals.” It is an attempt to capture all that is needed in the Machiavellian moment without admitting to it. Why not just admit to it? The only answer I can think of is that admitting to it brings with it a sense of shame. The liberal intellectual, as we have seen, is committed to the rights and dignity of the individual; he is also committed to the use of reason. There is thus no way he can both forbid torture and then take it back without disgracing himself (in his own eyes). But then reason is working not merely to determine whether or not a situation is shameful, but also to ward off shame by whatever means possible. It is as though reason has been given a task: torture is forbidden; now use all your resources to show that all
of our behavior (including waterboarding) has been consistent with the prohibition. *

Note that this strategy is very different from a more straightforward one that argues that waterboarding is not torture, and thus ought to be permitted. Then one would allow the military to engage in it as well. It is also different from a strategy that argues that in certain cases torture is necessary. By contrast, the strategy in use is one that forbids torture, but then goes to great lengths to obscure whether waterboarding is or is not torture and gives mixed messages about whether it is or is not permitted. The contradiction is avoided, just so long as we don't look too closely into what is going on or what we are doing.

The national debate has not been explicitly about shame, but about consistency with the law. Three events that have occurred while this essay was being written speak to this point. First, Michael Mukasey was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Attorney General of the United States despite the fact that he refused to say whether or not he considered waterboarding to be torture. He did say that personally he found it repugnant, but he left open the question of whether or not it counts as torture. One might think that if waterboarding might be torture, we should get clear about whether it is or it isn't, and should determine whether a nominee was on the right side of such an important issue before confirming him as Attorney General. But in this instance, being on the “right side” of the issue means being on neither side. Second, according to an AP report of January 2008, the Director of National Intelligence has made the remarkable claim that waterboarding would be torture if used against him but “declined for legal reasons to say whether the technique categorically should be considered torture.” This is what today counts

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* From the Yale Daily News story: The head of the Inter-Fraternity Council said it was more like a cigarette burn and goes away after two or three weeks. Labeling the branding as minor, he stated that it has never caused any medical complications. ‘It’s not as bad as it sounds,’ he said. He asserted that the definition of a physically and mentally degrading act was ‘a matter of interpretation.’"
as judiciousness. Again, one might ask, if Mr. McConnell is so sure waterboarding would be torture if used against him, how could he as a matter of legality remain unclear about whether it is torture for others? And if, as a matter of legality, it is not clear, why doesn't that legality apply in his case? As anyone who has worked his way through these contortions can see, the issue is not that the law is unclear and thus they cannot decide; the law has been written and interpreted so that they can say that they cannot say. JC's point is that consistency with the law has become a fetish whereby "liberal intellectuals" can ward off a sense of shame. Evidence in favor of JC's claim is provided by the third recent event, the report of the CIA's destruction of videotapes of interrogations using waterboarding. Officially, the destruction occurred in order to protect CIA interrogators from retaliation; and there has been some speculation in the press about whether it might also have been done to protect them (or the CIA) against legal redress. But another explanation suggests itself: the CIA (or those who ordered the destruction) correctly understood that its activities should not be seen. The gaze is that under which one experiences shame. And the CIA is part of a complex structure that avoids shame not by avoiding the shameful act but by making it impossible for the public to gaze upon it. If the public were to see the act, they would no longer be able to allow their public leaders to remain vague about whether it was or was not torture. But if public leaders must remain vague, then these images must not be seen. This entire complex edifice—the dance around whether waterboarding is or is not torture—would collapse if the practice became visible to the public.

JC's accusation of national shame blows this kind of casuistry out of the water. In effect, his accusation says, "It doesn't matter what kind of reasons you can find, the shame is yours all the same. It doesn't matter what the legal technicalities are, the shame is yours all the same. It doesn't matter whether the videos have been destroyed, because they have been destroyed for your sake, to protect you from feeling the shame that is yours all the same. Shame on you for using your reason to try to find consistency in your acts. Consistency will not protect you against the shame that is yours all the same."

And to the individual who says, "I don't see why I should bear
the shame; I abhor torture,” we can now see that this is a repetition of what the law says about itself. The law abhors torture and yet has somehow tolerated it. We abhor torture; and what have we tolerated? Can anyone be confident enough to believe that his own “opposition” doesn’t have the same defensive structure as the law? Thus although JC is officially talking to us (his readers) about “liberal intellectuals,” the thought begins to dawn, might he be talking to us, about us? Might we not have a complicity we do not yet recognize?*

* Looking back at that *Yale Daily News* story now, my attention is drawn to a completely different place than it has been before. “Fraternities will be allowed to ‘put their house in order’ without interference from the Yale administration, said Richard C. Carroll, Dean of Undergraduate Affairs, yesterday. Dean Carroll expects to let the Inter-Fraternity Council have complete jurisdiction ‘solving its own problems,’ according to Carroll. . . . ’I suspect the hazing has been sensationalized just a little more than the facts warrant: it may not be as horrendous as it seems. I think there may be an exaggeration of the total picture,’ said Carroll.” This seems to me a perfect specimen of a certain type of academic dean: in the name of giving students responsibility for how they conduct themselves, he absolves himself of responsibility for directing them in any particular way. What if, in response to that incident, Dean Carroll had gone on a loud and public crusade? What if, in his remarks to me, he said instead, “What these young men have done may look innocent, but it is in fact very dangerous. It is a step along the way to coarsening their souls. Here are people who may be future leaders, and they should not be taught to be indifferent to the pain they are inflicting on others. I hope Mr. Bush will come to see this for himself and apologize to those on whom he inflicted pain, even if it was meant to be ‘in fun.’ This cannot be fun; it is morally very serious. His ability to make moral discriminations is at stake.” Such a scenario would have seemed strange at the time; but I cannot help wondering what good it might have done.
Second, we are told of a group, the “liberal intellectuals,” who fail to see the Machiavellian world in which they are entangled precisely because they refuse to accept its contradiction.

Third, we come to see that the law and its complex structure of enforcement and nonenforcement seem to be in place in order to placate the so-called liberal intellectuals’ need for consistency. If the law simply reflected ordinary people’s understanding, it would be much simpler: torture is forbidden, except when it is necessary. But, then, who are these “liberal intellectuals” whom the law is going to such efforts to pacify? And why should they be the people who feel that they have no responsibility for the law?

Fourth, JC makes the accusation that we are entangled in this national shame irrespective of our reasons solely by virtue of citizenship. I take this to be an intentionally scandalous claim. In effect, it says, “Your use of reason does not matter at all; it won’t get you off the hook.” In a funny way, this provides a certain kind of relief. If our reasons don’t matter, then we can at least momentarily take a break from using them to try to justify our innocence. We can at least begin to inquire into how reason has been used to tolerate and sustain this shameful situation.

Finally, this question begins to dawn: have I used reason to tolerate this shameful situation by giving myself reasons to think I am not implicated in this national shame? It is at this moment I begin to wonder whether I am an instance of the “liberal intellectual” I have been reading about. But it is at this moment I cease to be a “liberal intellectual,” precisely because I can now see what the “liberal intellectual” fails to see.

Note that this dialectic requires neither that JC be right that we share a shame solely by virtue of our citizenship, nor that we agree with him. JC and his accusation serve merely as a catalyst for a process by which we slowly come to see that our own reason has been implicated in a motivated structure of not-seeing. What matters is that the accusation—perhaps by its scandalous nature—stimulates us to make this movement. In general, JC seems to think that human injustice requires motivated structures of not-seeing. So, to take
another example dear to his heart: the fact that meat ends up on our dinner table requires that we remain satisfied with at best a vague understanding of how it got there. His strategy helps us see that we are motivated not to see.

Now what does the spectacle of embedding have to do with all of this? That is, what is Coetzee's strategy here, as opposed to JC's? It seems to me that the structure of the answer is obvious: there is something about seeing JC's opinions embedded in the travails of his life that makes those very opinions come to matter to us in ways they might not otherwise. The difficulty is in figuring out how this might be so. Here a comparison with Kafka might be illuminating. Kafka is more concerned with guilt; JC is more concerned with shame. Guilt is more associated with the voice, and Kafka is at his most powerful when he isolates the voice of judgment—"You are guilty!"—from any embedding. Shame, by contrast, requires a gaze. JC's writing provides us with many images to gaze upon. As he himself says, Guantánamo Bay "is more a spectacle than a prisoner-of-war camp: an awful display." But if we are not merely going to look upon shameful situations, but ourselves participate in that sense of shame, we need some imaginative sense of being gazed upon. Arguably, this cannot be provided by a bare gaze (what is that?) as the voice of guilt can be provided by a bare voice. We need to have a sense of who is gazing upon us if we are to think that under his gaze we ought to feel shame. As Bernard Williams pointed out in *Shame and Necessity*, shame must be experienced under the gaze of someone we could imaginatively respect.

And JC earns our respect not simply because of the content of his strong opinions, but because of the honesty with which he faces up to his stumbling efforts to live through what he recognizes to be the end of his life. As readers, we are familiar with the novelistic technique of embedding a moral argument in a larger human drama. For instance, there is the hypocritical preacher whose sermons are at odds with how he lives his life. Or, to take an example closer to home,
it is easy to imagine a David Lodge novel in which a philosophy professor travels all over giving lectures on how ethics is just a projection of our own values onto the world—and has an affair in each town in which he gives the lecture. We might, then, wonder about his psychology: how much does the content of his lecture flow from his need for extramarital affairs? By contrast, JC’s drama deals with more than his personal psychology. He is facing up to his own death. He is trying to understand—and live out—the place of love and creativity as one moves toward death. These are issues that confront us all insofar as we are human. And it is as such that we are moved by him. We are struck not so much by his personal idiosyncrasies as by the demands of being human.

This leads to the final point: the demands of being human require that we respond to metaphysical ache. This is not JC’s peculiarity; we are creatures susceptible to metaphysical ache. And, I want to suggest, there is something about the realistic portrayal of metaphysical ache in another that can serve to stimulate it in ourselves. Though Anya may have been the occasion of JC’s metaphysical ache, she cannot on her own have been its balm. Nothing on its own could have done that. To grasp JC’s metaphysical ache, we need to look at the entire movement of *Diary of a Bad Year*. These include not only the moral cries of *Strong Opinions*, but also the worry that they are ersatz. It includes also the semi-Platonic love affair that develops between JC and Anya. What changes? JC says that the opinions he publishes haven’t changed, but his opinion of his opinions has. And he goes on to write a second diary, not for publication but to share with Anya, a diary that is more personal and passionate than anything in *Strong Opinions*.

There is much in the second diary that is very moving, and we are led to believe that it is his acquaintance with Anya that transformed these thoughts and feelings into written words: “The best proof we have that life is good, and therefore that there may perhaps be a God after all, who has our welfare at heart, is that each of us, on the day we are born, comes to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. It comes as a gift, unearned, unmerited, for free.” There is also awe,
reverence, for Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky that is as passionate as any homage I have read. Anya, for her part, is able to dump the crude Alan, but she is also able to develop into a person who wants to provide the aging author with the company he seeks for his death. The moment of love is the moment of death, around which both lives become organized.

Whatever the residues of JC's political incorrectness, I am struck by this "soft opinion":

Why is it that we—men and women both, but men most of all—are prepared to accept the checks and rebuffs of the real, more and more rebuffs as time goes by, more humiliating each time, yet keep coming back? The answer: because we cannot do without the real thing, the real real thing: because without the real we die as if of thirst.

It is here, I think, that JC names the metaphysical ache, by saying what it is ultimately for: reality. JC is a prime example of how it gets more humiliating: this time around he is caught up in the desire to grasp the reality of his own decay. The ache for reality is, in his case, also the ache that is the reality of his demise. But as he falls apart, he also wants to stand witness to the reality of others: in particular, those nameless others who have been and perhaps still are being tortured, just beyond the horizon of collective awareness. How humiliating is it for us this time, to come back to this reality? Here, I think, we can move from JC to J. M. Coetzee. The entire rhetorical strategy of *Diary of a Bad Year* is devoted to turning this into a genuine ethical question—one to which we will not be comfortable giving an ersatz ethical answer.
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