

THE ETHICS OF EATING

CONSIDER THE LOBSTER



Is it all right to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure?

WHAT'S MORALLY RELEVANT?

- That the lobster is alive?
- That the lobster could feel pain?
- That the lobster has interests or preferences?

DOES THE LOBSTER FEEL PAIN?

Dick — whose son-in-law happens to be a professional lobsterman and one of the Main Eating Tent's regular suppliers — explains what he and his family feel is the crucial mitigating factor in the whole morality-of-boiling-lobsters-alive issue: "There's a part of the brain in people and animals that lets us feel pain, and lobsters' brains don't have this part." (Wallace, "Consider the Lobster")

[L]obsters do have nociceptors, as well as invertebrate versions of the prostaglandins and major neurotransmitters via which our own brains register pain.

*Lobsters do not, on the other hand, appear to have the equipment for making or absorbing natural opioids like endorphins and enkephalins, which are what more advanced nervous systems use to try to handle intense pain.
(Wallace, "Consider the Lobster")*

There is, after all, a difference between (1) pain as a purely neurological event, and (2) actual suffering, which seems crucially to involve an emotional component, an awareness of pain as unpleasant, as something to fear/dislike/want to avoid. (Wallace, "Consider the Lobster")

IT MATTERS WHETHER LOBSTERS FEEL PAIN IN A WAY BROADLY ANALOGOUS TO HOW HUMANS & OTHER MAMMELS DO

1. True
2. False

DOES PAIN MATTER?

- Causing pain in animals is regarded as bad or illegal only with respect to certain animals

1. A person is guilty of aggravated cruelty to animals when, with no justifiable purpose, he or she intentionally kills or intentionally causes serious physical injury to a companion animal with aggravated cruelty. For purposes of this section, “aggravated cruelty” shall mean conduct which: (i) is intended to cause extreme physical pain; or (ii) is done or carried out in an especially depraved or sadistic manner. (New York Agriculture and Markets Law § 353-a. Aggravated cruelty to animals)

DOES THE STATUS OF AN ANIMAL AS A COMPANION ANIMAL MATTER WITH REGARD TO THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ITS PAIN?

1. Yes
2. No

WHY EAT SOME ANIMALS BUT NOT OTHERS?

- No "companion" animals
- No animals with "significant mental capacities"
- No "taboo" animals

SUFFERING IN NATURE

if suffering is bad for animals when we cause it, it is also bad for them when other animals cause it (McMahan, "The Meat-Eaters")

- If sentience & suffering are sufficient for moral obligation, should we engineer the animal world to be vegetarian? – Should we eliminate carnivorism?

