

WEEK 5 THE ETHICS OF EATING

MORAL STATUS

Moral Status:

deserving of, or otherwise qualifying for, moral consideration

HUMANS & MORAL STATUS

Anthropocentrism:

“The conviction that humans are the pinnacle of evolution, the appropriate yardstick by which to measure the lives of other animals, and the rightful owners of everything that lives”

(Safran Foer, *Eating Animals*) – In short, the belief that humans are the most important (finite) beings in the universe

Speciesism:

the assignment of different values, rights, or special consideration to individuals solely on the basis of their species membership

- Is speciesism like sexism, racism, etc.?

CONSIDER THE LOBSTER



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

WHAT'S MORALLY RELEVANT?

- What might tell us that the lobster has moral status?
 - 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")

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

- Are we unjustifiably projecting our human point of view onto that of the animal's?

the lobster will sometimes try to cling to the container's sides or even to hook its claws over the kettle's rim like a person trying to keep from going over the edge of a roof. And worse is when the lobster's fully immersed. Even if you cover the kettle and turn away, you can usually hear the cover rattling and clanking as the lobster tries to push it off. Or the creature's claws scraping the sides of the kettle as it thrashes around. The lobster, in other words, behaves very much as you or I would behave if we were plunged into boiling water (DFW, "Consider the Lobster")

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

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

1. True
2. False

IS IT OK TO KILL ANIMALS FOR FOOD?

- Easy: Is it ok to kill people for food?
 - No!
 - Hard(?): Is it ok to kill animals for food?
 - ???
-
- What is the difference between a person and (e.g.) a pig, such that it is not okay to the kill the person for food but it *is* ok to kill the pig?

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR RELEVANT DIFFERENCES

1. People are people, and pigs are pigs
 - But this is speciesism, and what justifies speciesism?
2. Humans are stronger/higher up the food chain
 - We don't think it is acceptable for the stronger to hurt the weaker *simply because* the stronger is able to do so
3. Humans are smarter than pigs
 - What about people with cognitive disabilities? Could we kill them for food?
4. We care about other humans
 - But there are some people for whom nobody cares—is it ok to eat *them*?

