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The Lobster Considered

Robert C. Jones

The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny.

—Jeremy Bentham

Is it not possible that future generations will regard our present agribusiness and eating practices in much the same way we now view Nero's entertainments or Mengele's experiments?

—David Foster Wallace

The arguments to prove man's superiority cannot shatter this hard fact: in suffering the animals are our equals.

—Peter Singer

In 1941 M. F. K. Fisher first asked us to consider the oyster,[1] not as a moral but as a culinary exploration. Sixty-three years later when David Foster Wallace asked us to consider the lobster[2] for ostensibly similar reasons, the investigation quickly abandoned the gustatory and took a turn toward the philosophical and ethical. In that essay, originally published in *Gourmet* magazine, Wallace challenges us to think deeply about the troubling ethical questions raised by the issue of lobster pain and our moral (mis)treatment of these friendly crustaceans. Since the publication of that essay, research on nonhuman animal sentience has exploded. News reports of the findings of research into animal behavior and cognition are common; 2010 saw the publication of a popular book of the title *Do Fish Feel Pain?*[3] In this essay, I accept Wallace's challenge and argue not only that according to our best

[1] M. F. K. Fisher, *Consider the Oyster* (New York: Still Point Press, 2001).
[2] David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster," in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007), 235–54.
[3] Victoria Braithwaite, *Do Fish Feel Pain?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

science do lobsters feel pain, but also that in light of these findings, the moral status of lobsters—and all crustaceans—is higher than most people imagine and that they are entitled to membership in the moral community.

Moral status explained

When we reflect upon the concept of moral status and contemplate what it means for a being to possess moral status, we imagine a being whose interests must be considered in our moral deliberations. In this sense, the notion of moral status can be thought of as a kind of threshold phenomenon. You either have moral status or you don't; you're either in the club or you're not. Until the last century, philosophers have taken for granted that moral status in this sense is primarily a human affair.[4] (I'll have more to say on this anon.)

But there is another way to make sense of the concept of moral status, one that assumes not an all-or-nothing game but rather *gradations* of moral status. For instance, it makes perfect sense to claim that one being has greater moral status than another, that, for example, a normal adult chimpanzee has greater moral status than an oyster. Used in this sense, "moral status" specifies not only which entities belong to the moral community, but also the degree to which their interests count.

These two senses of moral status reflect a distinction between what philosophers call "moral considerability" and "moral significance."[5] A being is morally considerable just in case she is a bona fide member of the moral community, thus making it possible for her to be wronged in a morally relevant way. In other words, if a being is morally considerable, she is in the moral club. In this sense, the fact that a being is morally considerable places a moral demand on *us*—or more precisely, on anyone who is capable of recognizing his or her moral obligations. Once a being is morally considerable, we may then need to adjudicate questions of relative moral value between kinds of animals, for example, between, say, a chimpanzee and an oyster. Thus, moral significance involves the moral value of the members once admitted to the moral club.

[4] The notion of moral status (or moral standing) is modeled on the notion of legal standing. The seminal work on this concept as applied to nonhuman nature is Richard Stone's "Should Trees Have Standing—Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects," *Southern California Law Review* 45 (1972): 450–502.

[5] To my knowledge, this distinction was first made by Goodpaster in his "On Being Morally Considerable," *The Journal of Philosophy* 75, 6 (1978): 308–25.

Lori Gruen provides us with a nice metaphor here.[6] To establish that a being—any being (a human, a chimpanzee, a lobster, or even a Martian)—is morally considerable (i.e., that it matters morally) is to say that it shows up on our "moral radar screen." But once a being makes it onto our moral radar screen, questions of moral treatment and adjudication of disputes between members become a function the being's moral significance, that is, the strength of the signal and its location on the moral screen. The strength of one's moral signal is determined by those features and capacities deemed valuable by things like one's moral theory (and certain other complex factors).[7]

For utilitarian philosophers such as Peter Singer, all that is required for a being to gain entrance into the moral community is sentience,[8] that is, the capacity for pain and suffering (or pleasure).[9] Beyond sentience, Singer sites capacities such as anticipation, detailed memory, and self-awareness, the possession of which may weight moral significance beyond mere sentience.

Arguing not from a utilitarian stance but from one of inherent rights, Tom Regan argues that the capacity to be the subject of experiences, that is, to be a "subject-of-a-life," is what matters morally.[10] For Regan, individuals are subjects-of-a-life if they possess the ability to experience feelings of pleasure and pain, the capacity for beliefs, desires, perceptions, memory, an emotional life, etc.

Although the two moral theories differ in the role that these criteria play in determining things such as interests, rights, and obligations, what both theories agree on is the moral importance of the possession of the ability to have experiences—a *what it's like* to be that thing—to a being's moral

[6] Lori Gruen, "The Moral Status of Animals," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/moral-animal/.

[7] See Bernice Bovenkerk and Franck L. B. Meijboom, "The Moral Status of Fish. The Importance and Limitations of a Fundamental Discussion for Practical Ethical Questions in Fish Farming," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 25 (2012): 843–60, for a nice discussion of this distinction.

[8] Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

[9] 'Sentience' can mean different things to different people including things like the possession of a certain type of subjectivity or self-awareness. However, in the animal ethics literature, *sentience* is a term of art denoting only the capacity for pain and suffering (or pleasure). Some people (e.g., Descartes) argue that suffering requires something beyond mere sentience, something more complex, a kind of second-order awareness of the self. However, (a) that's not what philosophers writing on animal rights mean by the term, and (b) were that the case, newborn human infants would most likely lack the ability to suffer, and that seems implausible. See my paper "Science, Sentience, and Animal Welfare," *Biology & Philosophy* 28, 1 (2013): 1–30, for details.

[10] Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

considerability. For example, according to Peter Singer's sentientist view, once a being is determined to be sentient, she just *is* morally considerable.

Given this brief background, we can now get clearer on the focus of this essay. The focus of this essay is not on the moral significance of any one individual lobster, nor of any one species of lobster. Nor even of crustaceans as a whole. This is not an essay whose purpose it is to adjudicate whether a lobster has greater moral significance than a human or a chimpanzee or a snail or a flea. This is not an exploration of moral significance at all.

Given that globally we catch, boil alive, and eat about 200 million lobsters annually,[11] when asked to consider the lobster, the issue is certainly not one of moral significance, but of moral considerability since lobsters currently stand outside the moral community. In considering the lobster, the question is whether these "*Alien*-like" crustaceans of Jurassic origin should join us in the club of beings that are morally considerable. In the remainder of this essay, I argue that lobsters are morally considerable, that they should be "in the club," that they should show up on our moral radar screen, that they are indeed members of the moral community.

A little argument

Here's a little argument:

1. Possession of the capacity for pain and suffering makes the possessor morally considerable.
2. Lobsters possess the capacity for pain and suffering.
3. Therefore, lobsters are morally considerable.

[11] Since statistics on lobster "production" (as with figures on the production for food of pigs, cows, chickens, or any land animal) are reported not by the number of actual animals caught (or, in the case of land animals, slaughtered) but by total weight, determining the number (or even an approximation of the number) of lobsters caught globally per year—a figure known as "annual global capture production"—requires a bit of math. According to the folks who keep track of such things, namely the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, about 280,364 tonnes (known in the US as "metric tons") of lobster are captured each year. Converting tonnes to tons (known in the US as "tons" and in the non-US as "short tons") we get a figure of about 309,000 tons of lobster captured globally every year. That's about 600 million pounds of lobster. Now, according to Encyclopedia.com, the average lobster weighs about 3 pounds. That means that globally, about 200 million lobsters are caught each year. Imagine what would happen if the figures on humans killed annually due to genocide, war atrocities, plane crashes, car wrecks, and the like were reported by total weight instead of number of lives lost. By this measure, Stalin murdered—or perhaps we should say, "produced"—about 1.5 million tons of humanity.

Obviously this argument is valid. The question is whether it is sound. That is, are (1) and (2) true? And how might we answer these questions? (1) is a normative claim, a claim of value; (2), an empirical claim. Personally, I think that (1) is rather uncontroversial and needs little if any argument. Nevertheless, later in the essay, I address an objection to (1). That said, if you buy the truth of (1), then the conclusion rests solely on the truth of (2). And since (2) is an empirical question, in arguing for (2) I will marshal our best science on crustacean pain.

Now I'm sure some may see the conclusion of our little argument as obvious and this task unnecessary. However, although René Descartes famously (or notoriously, depending on who you ask) denied animal sentience way back in the seventeenth century,[12] a number of contemporary philosophers (believe it or not) still maintain that nonhuman animals lack the capacity to feel anything at all, let alone suffer.[13] But it's time to leave behind implausible views and turn to the task at hand.

Animals and the moral landscape

Morality-wise, Western philosophical theory has been constructed on the belief that humans are the proper subjects of moral concern because only humans occupy a moral sphere separate from and superior to that of the nonhuman animals. This view, the accepted view—a view known as *human exceptionalism*—commits us to two theses. The first is the claim that humans are unique in their possession of some capacity (or set of capacities) within the physiological or cognitive domains. The second is the claim that the possession of such capacities makes all and only humans morally superior to beings (such as nonhuman animals) who lack such capacities. Importantly, the first claim is largely empirical, and the second, normative. These two claims constitute the two fronts on which those philosophers seeking to expand the moral status of nonhuman animals mount their attacks in an attempt to dismantle the foundations of human exceptionalism.

Central to the strategy employed by philosophers who seek to undermine human exceptionalism and increase the moral status of animals has been to

[12] Though this is the "standard" interpretation of Descartes, recently my colleague Joseph Hwang has come to convince me that perhaps this is too simplistic an interpretation, overstating the case. See also, Peter Harrison, "Descartes on Animals," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 219–27 and Robert Jones, "The Moral Significance of Animal Cognition" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2005).

[13] See, for example, Peter Harrison, "Do Animals Feel Pain?," *Philosophy* 66 (1991): 25–40, and Peter Carruthers, *The Animals Issue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

attack the empirical aspects of human exceptionalism by presenting evidence that demonstrates the possession by some nonhuman animals of some set of morally relevant physiological or cognitive capacities. When successful, arguments of this kind undermine the first prong of the human exceptionalism thesis. Thus, the strategy for those philosophers like Singer and Regan has been to question the existence of a clear distinction between *all* humans and *all* animals with regard to the possession of morally relevant capacities such as sentience and other what-it's-like experiences. These candidate capacities—sentience, self-awareness, memory, and mindreading[14]—although not the only capacities that might bear on the moral status of individuals, represent a solid starting place. Since as we've seen, the first claim that undergirds human exceptionalism—the claim that humans are unique in their possession of some set of morally relevant capacities—is primarily an empirical one, it is quite useful—and in some cases, indispensable—to see what science has to say about which animals possess which capacities. Thus, the empirical data on this question are central to the question of the moral status, moral considerability, moral significance, and moral treatment of nonhuman animals. For example, with regard to sentience, if no clear distinction can be empirically drawn between humans and animals, then the foundations of human exceptionalism will be substantially weakened and the moral status of nonhuman animals increased.

A cautionary note

Although the possession of the capacity for pain and suffering is crucial in determining which things among the furniture of the universe are the proper objects of moral concern, some caution is in order. Since our epistemic access to the mental lives of animals is even more limited than access to each other's minds, we must be cautious about cognitive attributions, and selective about the kinds of evidence for such attributions we have at our disposal. As Wallace notes, reliance on comparative neuroanatomy as a basis for the moral considerability of animals can be fraught:

> Since pain is a totally subjective mental experience, we do not have direct access to anyone or anything's pain but our own; and even just the principles by which we can infer that others experience pain and have

[14] When philosophers talk about mindreading, they're not talking about telepathy, they mean merely the ability to attribute mental states (e.g., beliefs and desires) to others and the understanding that others' beliefs and desires may differ from one's own.

> a legitimate interest in not feeling pain involve hard-core philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, ethics. The fact that even the most highly evolved nonhuman mammals can't use language to communicate with us about their subjective mental experience is only the first layer of additional complication in trying to extend our reasoning about pain and morality to animals. And everything gets progressively more abstract and convolved as we move farther and farther out from the higher-type mammals into cattle and swine and dogs and cats and rodents, and then birds and fish, and finally invertebrates like lobsters.[15]

Although Wallace too quickly assumes that pain is a "totally subjective experience,"[16] he makes clear some of the philosophical challenges of attributing pain to beings other than ourselves. (I will return to this issue later in the essay.) A further worry involves numbers. Only a small fraction of the almost 6,000 extant mammalian species, 10,000 avian species, tens of thousands of reptile and amphibian species, a still greater number of fish species, and millions of insects and spiders have been investigated for sentience. Despite these challenges, comparative biological methods remain the most reliable metric in our understanding of the mental lives of nonhuman animals.

Sentience: Pain and suffering[17]

A solid methodological framework for an investigation into whether an animal is sentient includes investigating whether that animal possesses or exhibits

[15] Wallace, *Consider the Lobster*, 246.

[16] Surprisingly, Wallace's assumption here, which reflects intuitive, pre-theoretic notions of pain—that access to my own internal pain states is a solely introspective affair involving private, subjective experiences about which my epistemic judgments are immune to error and about which I cannot be wrong—can lead to some strange, unintuitive consequences. For example, if my pain sensation is physical (which seems the case), it follows that it is both located in physical, public space and yet logically private, an odd consequence indeed. Yet, if pain is not physical, what sort of thing could it be? A non-spatial, non-physical, spatiotemporally located event? But what might that be? The philosophical literature on the subjectivity of pain is enormous. If you're interested, you should start with Murat Aydede's entry "Pain" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Aydede, Murat, "Pain," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL=http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/pain/.)

[17] See my (2013) for a detailed discussion of animal sentience.

- a central nervous system and other structures and psychoactive chemicals homologous to those known to control pain response in humans (e.g., neuroanatomical (opioid receptors, such as nociceptors) and neurochemical (opioids, such as endorphins and encephalins))[18]
- physiological or behavioral response to noxious[19] (or positive) stimuli, analgesics, and anesthetics.[20]

Although at first glance these properties and capacities may seem to provide a clear framework for investigation, as we've already seen, difficulties quickly arise. Pain is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to understand, not only in ourselves but especially in nonhuman animals.[21] Data on pain present at least two challenges.[22]

The first is that data on the high variability between the physiological mechanisms and the phenomenal aspects of pain are often confounding, raising puzzles about the connection between the two. For example, the very same kind of stimuli can elicit a pain response of widely varying intensity (or none) in different individuals or even in the same individual at different times, making generalizations from humans to animals even more challenging. Although we have a good idea of how the nervous system detects and responds to painful events in humans, exactly how the human brain processes the stimuli and generates the phenomenal aspects of pain induced by injury remains far less clear.

A second challenge presented by the data on the connection between the physiological mechanisms and the phenomenal aspects of pain is abnormalities such as congenital analgesia or, even more puzzling, pain

[18] Endorphins and encephalins are two of the more common substances—found in many organisms—known to have morphine-like analgesic effects.

[19] Noxious stimuli used in pain research on nonhumans include "mechanical" (pricking or probing), "thermal" (heating or freezing), "chemical" (exposure to acidic irritants), and "electrical" (shocking).

[20] Marian Dawkins (2006) presents a clear and persuasive analysis of the scientific basis for assessing suffering in animals, highlighting the plurality of mental states that might be properly described as "suffering," and thus somewhat vaguely (and I think, wisely) characterizes suffering as the "experiencing [of] one of a wide range of extremely unpleasant subjective (mental) states," a definition I wholly endorse.

[21] For clear discussions of some of the difficulties peculiar to assessing animal pain, see Collin Allen's, "Animal pain," *Nous* 38, 4 (2004): 617–43 doi:10.1111/j.0029-4624.2004.00486.x, as well as his "Deciphering animal pain," in *Pain: New Essays on Its Nature and the Methodology of Its Study* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Book/MIT Press, 2005).

[22] For a nice discussion of the difficulties in finding a unified theory of pain, see the Introduction to Aydede's *Pain: New Essays on Its Nature and the Methodology of Its Study* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

asymbolia, a type of dissociation affect involving pain without painfulness. In these bizarre, almost inconceivable cases, a subject *feels* pain but is not *in* pain.[23]

Given these challenges, how might our investigations into the question of animal pain reliably proceed? Common sense suggests that at least mammals and birds are sentient. But what about reptiles? Amphibians? Fish? Invertebrates? Do lobsters feel pain when boiled alive? Scallops, when shucked? Cockroaches, when blasted with insecticide? Here, intuitions begin to break down, and so it seems only science can step in where commonsense intuitions begin to falter.[24]

What exactly is pain?[25]

The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) provides what seems at first blush to be a reasonable definition of pain as "an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage." The IASP definition is followed by a footnote informing us that "pain is always subjective" and that the IASP definition intentionally "avoids tying pain to the stimulus."[26] However, the IASP definition of pain is both physiologically and philosophically problematic since it (a) emphasizes subjective experience and self-report while supporting conflicting philosophical interpretations of pain (e.g., subjectivist and objectivist views of pain), and (b) remains silent on the question of the relationship of the physiological bases of pain to its phenomenal aspects. Yet, given that pain and suffering are likely very old

[23] In his fascinating 2007 book *Feeling Pain and Being in Pain*, Nikola Grahek presents a quite thorough analysis of the empirical literature on such pain abnormalities and the implications of such data for the "hard problem" of consciousness in the context of pain. Some of these cases are truly bizarre and mind-blowing. For example, Grahek discusses cases of people experiencing pain asymbolia who, after suffering brain trauma (or sometimes just people who have been given a whopping dose of morphine), report that they are experiencing pain but are just not bothered by it. That is, they recognize the sensation of pain but are completely immune to suffering from it.

[24] See the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) website "Sentience Mosaic" http://www.animalmosaic.org/sentience/ for an exhaustive number of resources on the scientific literature on nonhuman animal sentience and its connection to animal welfare issues.

[25] The focus here is primarily on physical pain, not emotional or psychic pain, though the distinction between the two is not at all clear. Anyone who has suffered severe grief or heartache knows how much they can really *physically* hurt.

[26] H. Merskey and N. Bogduk, *Classification of Chronic Pain: Descriptions of Chronic Pain Syndromes and Definitions of Pain Terms*, 2nd edn (Seattle: IASP Press, 2011).

phenomena, it would be strange were pain not widespread across varied species, did not provide selective advantage, nor serve a similar adaptive function as it does in humans. In other words, it would be very surprising if we were the only animals that experienced pain. Consequently, an understanding of the basic mechanics of pain is imperative to understanding its role in animal sentience.

The mechanics of pain

Pain in humans is at least a two-step process. The first step involves the stimulation of special receptors called *nociceptors* that transmit injury-detecting electrical impulses to the spinal cord, triggering an automatic reflex response. At this first stage, there are no conscious, phenomenal aspects of the experience. In the second stage, the signal then moves from the spinal cord to the neocortex at which point the phenomenal aspects of pain kick in and we experience the unpleasant sensation associated with tissue damage. Although researchers are clear about the mechanisms involved in the first stage, it is the second stage of the process—the conscious experience of pain—that remains somewhat of a mystery.

In addressing the issue of animal pain, we can start with the questions, "Which animal groups possess nociceptors (or exhibit a 'nociceptive response')?" and "Do they (and if so, how do they) respond to noxious stimuli, analgesics, and anesthetics?" We can further explore which organisms possess neural organs more complex than simple neural nets (e.g., organs such as ganglia, brain masses, or brains), and of these, which possess nociceptor-to-brain pathways. It is time now to turn to the evidence.

Do lobsters feel pain?

A lobster, taxonomically speaking, is a marine crustacean of the family Homaridae, characterized by five pairs of jointed legs, the first pair terminating in large pincerish claws used for subduing prey. Moreover, a crustacean is an aquatic arthropod of the class Crustacea, which comprises crabs, shrimp, barnacles, lobsters, and freshwater crayfish. All this is right there on Wikipedia. And an arthropod is an invertebrate member of the phylum Arthropoda, whose phylum covers insects, spiders, crustaceans, and centipedes/millipedes, all of whose main commonality, besides the absence of a centralized brain-spine assembly, is a chitinous exoskeleton composed of segments, to which appendages are articulated in pairs. The point is

that lobsters are basically giant sea-insects.[27] Given that, a slight digression involving a review of what our best science has to say about sentience in insects may enhance our understanding of the same in crustaceans.[28]

Insects and spiders

The literature on insect and arachnid pain is astonishingly impoverished. For over 30 years, the established view (made so by one Sir Prof. Vincent Brian Wigglesworth)[29] has been that insects by in large do not feel pain. Yet, Wigglesworth goes on to argue that certain insect behaviors (e.g., escape behavior when presented with noxious stimuli) indicate that some insects must experience some form of pain. Eisemann et al.[30] conclude that the evidence "does not appear to support the occurrence in insects of a pain state."[31] However, Tracey et al.[32] and Tobin and Bargmann have discovered nociception in at least some insects, namely *Drosophila*.[33] Neely et al. find nociception in response to thermal noxious stimuli as well as what the researchers refer to as a "pain" gene in *Drosophila*.[34]

[27] Factoid: A lobster's blood is colorless but when exposed to oxygen develops a bluish color.

[28] This FN will almost surely not survive the editing process, but here goes:

> The observant reader may notice that this paragraph is taken almost word-for-word from DFW's own lobster essay. Were I to use quotes and then cite as is customary, the somewhat Wallacean subversive intent of this paragraph would be lost entirely (though perhaps the very insertion of this FN might undermine that intent). In any event, I have chosen to drop this FN acknowledging the origin of this paragraph to avoid the conventional the quote-and-cite option. In fact, even the idea of dropping a FN of this kind is borrowed from DFW. Though it is highly doubtful that the lobster is capable of such recursive meta-thinking, fortunately its moral considerability does not depend upon the possession of these kinds of cognitive abilities.

[29] V. Wigglesworth, "Do Insects Feel Pain?" *Antenna* 1 (1980): 8–9.

[30] C. H. Eisemann, W. K. Jorgensen, D. J. Merritt, M. J. Rice, B. W. Cribb, P. D. Webb and M. P. Zalucki, "Do Insects Feel Pain?—A Biological View," *Cellular and Molecular Life Science* 40, 2 (1984): 164–7.

[31] Despite Eisemann et al.'s conclusion that the evidence "does not appear to support the occurrence in insects of a pain state," tellingly, he advises the "experimental biologist . . . to follow, whenever feasible, Wigglesworth's recommendation that insects have their nervous systems inactivated prior to traumatizing manipulation. This procedure not only facilitates handling, but also guards against the remaining possibility of pain infliction and, equally important, helps to preserve in the experimenter an appropriately respectful attitude towards living organisms whose physiology, though different, and perhaps simpler than our own, is as yet far from completely understood."

[32] W. D. Tracey, R. I. Wilson, G. Laurent and S. Benzer, "*painless*, a *Drosophila* Gene Essential for Nociception," *Cell* 113, 2 (2003): 261–73.

[33] D. M. Tobin and C. I. Bargmann, "Invertebrate Nociception: Behaviors, Neurons and Molecules," *Journal of Neurobiology* 61, 1 (2004): 161–74.

[34] G. G. Neely, A. C. Keene, P. Duchek, E. C. Chang, Q. P. Wang, Y. A. Aksoy, M. Rosenzweig, M. Costigan, C. J. Woolf, P. A. Garrity and J. M. Penninger, "TrpA1&lt Regulates Thermal Nociception in *Drosophila*," *PLoS ONE* 6, 8 (2011): e24343.

In a fascinating 1999 study carried out by V. E. Dyakonova at the Russian Academy of Sciences, opioid receptors and evidence of pain were discovered in crickets.[35] The experimental setup involved Dyakonova noting the amount of time it took before crickets jumped from a hot plate whose temperature was gradually elevated. Dyakonova then administered morphine to the crickets in three separate and increasing doses. His findings indicate that the morphine elongated the period of the avoidance of the hot surface by the crickets (the length of which increased in correlation with higher doses of morphine).[36] Other evidence of insect pain includes evidence of nociception (or, at least, a nociceptive response) in moth larvae,[37] and in their work on spider pain, Eisner and Camazine find that "[t]he sensing mechanism by which spiders detect injected harmful chemicals such as venoms . . . may be fundamentally similar to the one in humans that is coupled with the perception of pain."[38]

Crustaceans

The evidence for lobster pain is persuasive. At the physiological level, crustaceans possess nociceptors, ganglia, and nociceptor-to-ganglia pathways.[39] Although crustacean pain attribution is not yet widely accepted, findings are beginning to support crustacean sentience.

In a recent study, two researchers from Queen's University, Barry Magee and Robert Elwood, found convincing evidence of crustacean sentience.[40] The study reveals that the European shore crab (*Carcinus maenas*) responds to electric shocks and then attempts to avoid them. To avoid being spotted and eaten by seagulls, European shore crabs take shelter during the day under

[35] V. E. Dyakonova, F. Schurmann and D. A. Sakharov, "Effects of Serotonergic and Opioidergic Drugs on Escape Behaviors and Social Status of Male Crickets," *Naturwissenschaften* 86, 9 (1999): 435–37.

[36] Interestingly, the crickets demonstrated a habituation to morphine such that those administered with morphine for just four days did not differ from control crickets in tests on pain sensitivity, and analgesia was achieved only at a higher dose of the morphine for these unfortunate junky crickets.

[37] E. Walters, P. Illich, J. Weeks and M. Lewin, "Defensive Responses of Larval Manduca Sexta and their Sensitization by Noxious Stimuli in the Laboratory and Field," *The Journal of Experimental Biology* 204, 3 (2001): 457–69.

[38] T. Eisner and S. Camazine, "Spider Leg Autotomy Induced by Prey Venom Injection: An Adaptive Response to 'Pain'?" *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 80, 11 (1983): 3382–5.

[39] L. G. Ross and B. Ross, *Anaesthetic and Sedative Techniques for Aquatic Animals*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

[40] Barry Magee and Robert W. Elwood. "Shock avoidance by discrimination learning in the shore crab (*Carcinus maenas*) is consistent with a key criterion for pain," *The Journal of Experimental Biology* 216, 3 (2013): 353–8.

dark rocks. In the study, Magee and Elwood placed ninety crabs in a brightly lit area with the option of scuttling to either of two dark shelters. Once the creatures had taken refuge, half were given an electric shock in the first shelter they chose. It took only two iterations of this routine to produce a significant switch in the crabs' behavior such that those shocked in the previous trial were much more likely to switch shelters than those who hadn't been shocked in the previous trial. The crabs would rather sacrifice the value and security of a dark shelter by venturing into the dangerous light environment than face being shocked again. Even after eight iterations without shock, the crustaceans continued to avoid the shelter where they had been shocked. Magee and Elwood conclude that this is more than a simple reflex reaction to pain, and that all decapod crustaceans—*including lobsters*—would exhibit the same response.[41] And in an earlier 2009 study, Robert Elwood and Mirjam Appel found that the more intensely hermit crabs are electrically shocked, the more willing the crustaceans are to abandon their shells for new shells.[42]

In 2008, a team of researchers led by Stuart Barr (a team that included, once again, Robert Elwood) demonstrated that when the antennae of prawns are exposed to noxious chemical stimuli, the crustaceans respond with increased grooming of the antennae, yet when an anesthetic is applied, the grooming behavior subsides. Barr concluded that such findings are "consistent with the idea that these crustaceans can experience pain."[43] And in a 1988 study, a team of researchers from Buenos Aires demonstrated that injections of analgesic and opioid receptor antagonists into male crabs of the species *Chasmagnathus granulatus* reduced response to electric shock.[44]

What is the inference to best explanation of the results of these studies? Clearly, it would appear that crustaceans—including lobsters—possess the capacity for pain and suffering. If this is so, then by premises (1) and (2) of our little argument, lobsters are morally considerable.

Unfortunately there currently exist no regulations regarding the welfare or treatment of crustaceans, allowing practices in some fisheries that involve the cutting off of claws from live crabs before being thrown back into the sea.

[41] It's worth noting that in response, a spokesman for the European Food Safety Authority pronounced that despite the results of this research, decapods would not be classified as a sentient species and that the subject of pain in crustaceans remained "controversial" and a matter of data interpretation.

[42] R. W. Elwood and M. Appel, "Pain Experience in Hermit Crabs?" *Animal Behaviour* 77, 5 (2009): 1243–6.

[43] S. Barr, P. R. Laming, J. T. Dick and R. W. Elwood, "Nociception or Pain in a Decapod Crustacean?" *Animal Behavior* 75, 3 (2008): 745–51.

[44] M. Lozada, A. Romano and H. Maldonado, "Effect of Morphine and Naloxone on a Defensive Response of the Crab *Chasmagnathus Granulatus*," *Pharmacology Biochemistry and Behavior* 30, 3 (1988): 635–40.

Even if one remains skeptical of crustacean sentience, when it comes to issues of welfare it would be most prudent to employ the precautionary principle regarding our treatment of these animals, erring on the side of caution.[45]

Objections

A number of objections may be raised against both our little argument and the assumptions that undergird the scientific methodology of looking for evidence of pain in nonhuman animals, particularly crustaceans. Let me address just three.

The "why is pain morally relevant?" objection

One common objection to our little argument is directed against premise (1), which, recall, says that possession of the capacity for pain and suffering makes the possessor morally considerable. I hear this objection quite often and it usually goes something like this:

> Why pick out pain as the criterion for moral considerability? There are so many other abilities and capacities that one could see as being morally relevant. Your view might not be speciesist,[46] but it's certainly sentientist, privileging the capacity for pain and suffering over other capacities that might be more morally relevant (such as the capacity for empathy or reciprocal behavior) and ignoring other domains of moral significance such as non-sentient life (e.g., trees) or entire biotic/ecosystems. Focusing on sentience seems arbitrary and ungrounded.

[45] Disturbing factoid: Believe it or not, performing open-heart surgery on neonates without anesthesia was common practice in the US and Europe until the late 1980s. (That's not a misprint!) Surgeons used no anesthesia when operating on infants (since it was "common knowledge" that infants could not feel pain). Instead (and this is the brutal part), doctors would administer paralytic drugs before surgery and no painkiller after surgery. That is, infants would be fully conscious during open-heart surgery but unable to express that they were in pain because they were paralyzed! The reasons that the medical community gave for denying pain in infants included the claims that (a) since babies do not remember pain, pain doesn't matter, and (b) a baby's nervous system is insufficiently developed to experience pain.

[46] Speciesism (analogous to racism and sexism) is the belief that members of one's own species are more valuable than (and morally superior to) members of another species solely in virtue of their being members of the same species as you. Speciesism, it is claimed, often leads to discriminatory prejudice and practices favoring the interests of the members of one's own species and opposing the interests of members of another species. I aspire not to be speciesist.

First, it's important to note what premise (1) does *not* say. It does *not* say that sentience is the *only* morally relevant capacity. Further, it does *not* say that sentience determines moral significance or is the final arbiter in adjudicating between competing interests once we're "in the club." It merely says that the capacity to experience pain and suffering is sufficient for entrance into the sphere of things that are morally considerable. That is, it claims that if you're sentient, you get a ticket into the moral community. Once you're in, then we can weight values by considering various other capacities, properties, and relations to help us determine moral significance and adjudicate moral disputes.

In response to those who see as arbitrary or question the moral importance of the capacity to have experiences (particularly bad experiences), or who cannot clearly find moral relevance wherever there exists a being for whom there is a "what-it's-like" to be that thing (experiences philosophers refer to as *qualia*), I am at a loss. For such folks—those who see the choice of pain as arbitrary—I must ask the reader to reflect on how you would feel about someone who caught stray cats and set them on fire merely because he thought it was fun. Now reflect on *why* you feel that way. If you think that the fact that the cat can suffer isn't sufficient to give you *any* moral reason to refrain from burning her—and that's what you have to say if you reject the sufficiency claim in (1)—then you are a moral monster.

The anthropomorphism objection

Related to the why-is-pain-morally-relevant objection is the anthropomorphism objection directed against premise (2). Recall that premise (2) states that lobsters possess the capacity for pain and suffering. Attributing physiological and mental states like pain and suffering to nonhumans such as lobsters is just so much anthropomorphizing, the objection goes. Pain and suffering are *human* concepts and *human* experiences, and so to attribute these uniquely human characteristics to nonhuman animals is unwarranted, sentimental, and unscientific.

I believe this objection trades on a kind of ambiguity in the term "anthropomorphism." It's helpful here to distinguish *unnecessary anthropomorphism* from *biocentric anthropomorphism*.[47] *Unnecessary anthropomorphism* involves explaining behavior by attributing (what are believed to be uniquely) human traits and characteristics to beings or objects whose behavior can be better explained without such attribution. For example, the explanation of my

[47] The term "biocentric anthropomorphism" comes from Mark Bekoff (2000).

computer's not booting up despite my having pressed the power button is not that my computer is angry with me and refuses to power up out of spite for some transgression on my part, but rather that there is some malfunction with the powering-up mechanism. By contrast, *biocentric anthropomorphism* involves the indispensable use of human terms to explain animals' mental lives, emotions, or feelings. It is in this second sense, not the first, that we attribute pain and suffering to nonhuman animals, and thus premise (2) remains resistant to these kinds of objections.

But I think the larger point here is that it is actually advocates of the anthropomorphism objection who beg the question by assuming that pain may be uniquely human whereas on my view, pain is not at all a uniquely human phenomenon, something we have good reason to believe.

The epistemological objection

Related to the anthropomorphism objection is the epistemological objection, an objection that—as I suggested earlier—is directed against a key foundational assumption underlying the very scientific methodology used to investigate questions of the inner lives of animals. Put simply, the objection asks, how can we *know*? How can we *really know* whether lobsters feel pain? Like the anthropomorphism objection, I believe this objection trades on a kind of ambiguity with regard to knowledge and what it means to know.

Again, as Wallace notes, "the principles by which we can infer that others experience pain and have a legitimate interest in not feeling pain involve hard-core philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, ethics."[48] The epistemological objection is a species of a more general philosophical worry called the problem of other minds that goes like this: Forget about whether I can ever know if an oyster or lobster or chimpanzee can experience pain and suffering. How can I ever know whether *you* or any other human being experiences pain, suffering, or any mental state? How can we ever *really know* about the mental states of people, let alone animals? Despite your wincing and crying out when you hit your thumb with that hammer, for all I know you could be a philosophical zombie, exhibiting all the behaviors consistent with *my* pain experience when I accidentally hit my thumb with a hammer, yet totally devoid of any what-it's-like experience.[49] Or perhaps you're one of the unfortunate few who suffer from Congenital Insensitivity to

[48] Wallace, *Consider the Lobster*, 246.

[49] This is the kind of inner mental life (or should I say lack of inner mental life) that folks like Carruthers and Harrison postulate that animals possess. Though I wholeheartedly believe that a view's being interesting is a virtue of a philosophical theory, this rule of thumb can be trumped in a case where a view is both interesting and implausible.

Pain (CIP), a rare condition in which a person completely lacks the ability to feel physical pain. Perhaps although you suffer from CIP, you are a very good actor, and have learned through careful observation of others' pain behavior to masterfully mimic and exhibit behaviors consistent with pain, although you feel none when the hammer strikes your thumb.

The intuition underlying the problem of other minds is that it appears that I have privileged first-person epistemic access to my own *and only my own* mental states. Thus, to make an inference from my internal mental states to the internal mental states of others is unwarranted given such a limited sample size (namely, one).

To answer the epistemological objection, I don't think it's necessary to solve the mind–body problem or the problem of other minds. As I alluded to, I think the objection trades on a certain kind of ambiguity regarding the meaning of "know." When someone claims that I can never really *know* whether lobsters feel pain, in a sense, they are correct. If what they mean by 'know' requires 100 percent certainty, then they are right; in that sense I do not *know* whether lobsters (or oysters or chimpanzees or other humans) feel pain since I lack epistemic access to their internal mental states. But that's not at all what I or anybody else means when they claim that crustaceans have the capacity to experience pain. What we mean when we say this is something like: given what we know about things like human and animal anatomy, neurophysiology, brain function, biomechanics, etc., it looks from here like lobsters feel pain and bricks don't. That's all we mean.

That's why the findings of science on these issues are indispensible; since science is the best (but not perfect) method we have so far devised to gain insight, understanding, and knowledge of the inner lives of other animals. Construed broadly, the way I know whether you have a mind or whether lobsters feel pain is this: inference from behavior. That's just about the only (reliable) game in town. And the closer the creature in question is to us physiologically, the more reliable our inferences will be in general. Until and unless we develop some kind of Vulcan mind-meld, we're basically S.O.L. on absolute certainty when it comes to other minds; but fortunately we can get by just fine while requiring that our evidence be merely reasonable.

A more sophisticated version of the epistemological objection might go something like this: Look, I'm not trying to be a skeptic and I don't care about absolute certainty. And it's obvious to me that dogs feel pain. But lobsters are a different story. The fact that crustaceans don't groom their antennae when we give them morphine is definitely some evidence, but it's not clear that it's knockdown evidence. Maybe the morphine is merely blocking neural pathways but that the crustaceans don't feel pain.

To this more sophisticated version of the epistemological objection I reply that I agree, the scientific evidence is not knockdown, but it is solid. The ability to experience pain confers selective advantage on the pain-bearer. As we have seen, humans and other vertebrates possess not only pain-firing nerve cells (nociceptors) but also endogenous pain killers (opioids) and opioid receptors. There is a good chance that the reason why arthropods possess things like nociceptors and opioid receptors (and why crickets get hooked on morphine) is the same reason that we do: because they experience pain.[50] All of this is certainly enough to warrant invoking the precautionary principle, calling us to err on the side of lobster pain. And that's all I need and have been arguing for in this essay, a rather biological weak yet morally profound conclusion indeed.

Conclusion

At the close of his essay, Wallace ruminates on whether his unease with the Maine Lobster Festival and, more generally, our treatment of the lobster is warranted or only so much sentimentalism. He further calls into question the foundations for his belief that animals are less morally important than human beings. If my argument here has been successful, it should be clear that Wallace's unease was, in fact, well grounded. If in considering the lobster I have persuaded you that lobsters are at least morally considerable, then I will have at least helped advance the status of lobsters—and crustaceans in general—from that of "things" to "whos." However—to be clear—even if my arguments are successful, nothing I have said here would discourage Wallace's belief that animals are less morally important that human beings. That's an argument for another day.

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[50] This is not to say that all similarly functioning characteristics must have evolved through adaptation. It could be the case that nociceptors and opioid receptors originally evolved for some function other than pain perception, but were then co-opted for that function in vertebrates much later, a process biologists call "exaptation." For example, feathers, which initially evolved for heat regulation, were later co-opted for use in flight. However, there is little evidence that vertebrate pain mechanisms are the result of exaptation and not adaptation.

Consider the Lobster

and Other Essays

David Foster Wallace

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CONSIDER THE LOBSTER

THE ENORMOUS, pungent, and extremely well-marketed Maine Lobster Festival is held every late July in the state's midcoast region, meaning the western side of Penobscot Bay, the nerve stem of Maine's lobster industry. What's called the midcoast runs from Owl's Head and Thomaston in the south to Belfast in the north. (Actually, it might extend all the way up to Bucksport, but we were never able to get farther north than Belfast on Route 1, whose summer traffic is, as you can imagine, unimaginable.) The region's two main communities are Camden, with its very old money and yachty harbor and five-star restaurants and phenomenal B&Bs, and Rockland, a serious old fishing town that hosts the festival every summer in historic Harbor Park, right along the water.[1]

Tourism and lobster are the midcoast region's two main industries, and they're both warm-weather enterprises, and the Maine Lobster Festival represents less an intersection of the industries than a deliberate collision, joyful and lucrative and loud. The

[1] There's a comprehensive native apothegm: "Camden by the sea, Rockland by the smell."

assigned subject of this *Gourmet* article is the 56th Annual MLF, 30 July–3 August 2003, whose official theme this year was "Lighthouses, Laughter, and Lobster." Total paid attendance was over 100,000, due partly to a national CNN spot in June during which a senior editor of *Food & Wine* magazine hailed the MLF as one of the best food-themed galas in the world. 2003 festival highlights: concerts by Lee Ann Womack and Orleans, annual Maine Sea Goddess beauty pageant, Saturday's big parade, Sunday's William G. Atwood Memorial Crate Race, annual Amateur Cooking Competition, carnival rides and midway attractions and food booths, and the MLF's Main Eating Tent, where something over 25,000 pounds of fresh-caught Maine lobster is consumed after preparation in the World's Largest Lobster Cooker near the grounds' north entrance. Also available are lobster rolls, lobster turnovers, lobster sauté, Down East lobster salad, lobster bisque, lobster ravioli, and deep-fried lobster dumplings. Lobster thermidor is obtainable at a sit-down restaurant called the Black Pearl on Harbor Park's northwest wharf. A large all-pine booth sponsored by the Maine Lobster Promotion Council has free pamphlets with recipes, eating tips, and Lobster Fun Facts. The winner of Friday's Amateur Cooking Competition prepares Saffron Lobster Ramekins, the recipe for which is now available for public downloading at www.mainelobsterfestival.com. There are lobster T-shirts and lobster bobblehead dolls and inflatable lobster pool toys and clamp-on lobster hats with big scarlet claws that wobble on springs. Your assigned correspondent saw it all, accompanied by one girlfriend and both his own parents — one of which parents was actually born and raised in Maine, albeit in the extreme northern inland part, which is potato country and a world away from the touristic midcoast.[2]

For practical purposes, everyone knows what a lobster is. As usual, though, there's much more to know than most of us care about —

[2] N.B. All personally connected parties have made it clear from the start that they do not want to be talked about in this article.

it's all a matter of what your interests are. Taxonomically speaking, a lobster is a marine crustacean of the family Homaridae, characterized by five pairs of jointed legs, the first pair terminating in large pincerish claws used for subduing prey. Like many other species of benthic carnivore, lobsters are both hunters and scavengers. They have stalked eyes, gills on their legs, and antennae. There are a dozen or so different kinds worldwide, of which the relevant species here is the Maine lobster, *Homarus americanus*. The name "lobster" comes from the Old English *loppestre*, which is thought to be a corrupt form of the Latin word for locust combined with the Old English *loppe*, which meant spider.

Moreover, a crustacean is an aquatic arthropod of the class Crustacea, which comprises crabs, shrimp, barnacles, lobsters, and freshwater crayfish. All this is right there in the encyclopedia. And arthropods are members of the phylum Arthropoda, which phylum covers insects, spiders, crustaceans, and centipedes/millipedes, all of whose main commonality, besides the absence of a centralized brain-spine assembly, is a chitinous exoskeleton composed of segments, to which appendages are articulated in pairs.

The point is that lobsters are basically giant sea insects.[3] Like most arthropods, they date from the Jurassic period, biologically so much older than mammalia that they might as well be from another planet. And they are — particularly in their natural brown-green state, brandishing their claws like weapons and with thick antennae awhip — not nice to look at. And it's true that they are garbagemen of the sea, eaters of dead stuff,[4] although they'll also eat some live shellfish, certain kinds of injured fish, and sometimes one another.

But they are themselves good eating. Or so we think now. Up until sometime in the 1800s, though, lobster was literally low-class food, eaten only by the poor and institutionalized. Even in the harsh penal environment of early America, some colonies had laws

[3] Midcoasters' native term for a lobster is, in fact, "bug," as in "Come around on Sunday and we'll cook up some bugs."
[4] Factoid: Lobster traps are usually baited with dead herring.

against feeding lobsters to inmates more than once a week because it was thought to be cruel and unusual, like making people eat rats. One reason for their low status was how plentiful lobsters were in old New England. "Unbelievable abundance" is how one source describes the situation, including accounts of Plymouth Pilgrims wading out and capturing all they wanted by hand, and of early Boston's seashore being littered with lobsters after hard storms — these latter were treated as a smelly nuisance and ground up for fertilizer. There is also the fact that premodern lobster was cooked dead and then preserved, usually packed in salt or crude hermetic containers. Maine's earliest lobster industry was based around a dozen such seaside canneries in the 1840s, from which lobster was shipped as far away as California, in demand only because it was cheap and high in protein, basically chewable fuel.

Now, of course, lobster is posh, a delicacy, only a step or two down from caviar. The meat is richer and more substantial than most fish, its taste subtle compared to the marine-gaminess of mussels and clams. In the US pop-food imagination, lobster is now the seafood analog to steak, with which it's so often twinned as Surf 'n' Turf on the really expensive part of the chain steakhouse menu.

In fact, one obvious project of the MLF, and of its omnipresently sponsorial Maine Lobster Promotion Council, is to counter the idea that lobster is unusually luxe or unhealthy or expensive, suitable only for effete palates or the occasional blow-the-diet treat. It is emphasized over and over in presentations and pamphlets at the festival that lobster meat has fewer calories, less cholesterol, and less saturated fat than chicken.[5] And in the Main Eating Tent, you can get a "quarter" (industry shorthand for a 1¼-pound lobster), a four-ounce cup of melted butter, a bag of chips, and a soft roll w/ butter-pat for around $12.00, which is only slightly more expensive than supper at McDonald's.

[5] Of course, the common practice of dipping the lobster meat in melted butter torpedoes all these happy fat-specs, which none of the council's promotional stuff ever mentions, any more than potato industry PR talks about sour cream and bacon bits.

Be apprised, though, that the Maine Lobster Festival's democratization of lobster comes with all the massed inconvenience and aesthetic compromise of real democracy. See, for example, the aforementioned Main Eating Tent, for which there is a constant Disneyland-grade queue, and which turns out to be a square quarter mile of awning-shaded cafeteria lines and rows of long institutional tables at which friend and stranger alike sit cheek by jowl, cracking and chewing and dribbling. It's hot, and the sagged roof traps the steam and the smells, which latter are strong and only partly food-related. It is also loud, and a good percentage of the total noise is masticatory. The suppers come in styrofoam trays, and the soft drinks are iceless and flat, and the coffee is convenience-store coffee in more styrofoam, and the utensils are plastic (there are none of the special long skinny forks for pushing out the tail meat, though a few savvy diners bring their own). Nor do they give you near enough napkins considering how messy lobster is to eat, especially when you're squeezed onto benches alongside children of various ages and vastly different levels of fine-motor development — not to mention the people who've somehow smuggled in their own beer in enormous aisle-blocking coolers, or who all of a sudden produce their own plastic tablecloths and spread them over large portions of tables to try to reserve them (the tables) for their own little groups. And so on. Any one example is no more than a petty inconvenience, of course, but the MLF turns out to be full of irksome little downers like this — see for instance the Main Stage's headliner shows, where it turns out that you have to pay $20 extra for a folding chair if you want to sit down; or the North Tent's mad scramble for the Nyquil-cup-sized samples of finalists' entries handed out after the Cooking Competition; or the much-touted Maine Sea Goddess pageant finals, which turn out to be excruciatingly long and to consist mainly of endless thanks and tributes to local sponsors. Let's not even talk about the grossly inadequate Port-A-San facilities or the fact that there's nowhere to wash your hands before or after eating. What the Maine Lobster Festival really

is is a midlevel county fair with a culinary hook, and in this respect it's not unlike Tidewater crab festivals, Midwest corn festivals, Texas chili festivals, etc., and shares with these venues the core paradox of all teeming commercial demotic events: It's not for everyone.[6] Nothing against the euphoric senior editor of *Food & Wine,* but I'd be surprised if she'd ever actually been here in Harbor Park, amid crowds of people slapping canal-zone mosquitoes as they eat deep-fried Twinkies and watch Professor Paddywhack, on six-foot stilts in a raincoat with plastic lobsters protruding from all directions on springs, terrify their children.

Lobster is essentially a summer food. This is because we now prefer our lobsters fresh, which means they have to be recently caught, which for both tactical and economic reasons takes place at depths less than 25 fathoms. Lobsters tend to be hungriest and most active

[6] In truth, there's a great deal to be said about the differences between working-class Rockland and the heavily populist flavor of its festival versus comfortable and elitist Camden with its expensive view and shops given entirely over to $200 sweaters and great rows of Victorian homes converted to upscale B&Bs. And about these differences as two sides of the great coin that is US tourism. Very little of which will be said here, except to amplify the above-mentioned paradox and to reveal your assigned correspondent's own preferences. I confess that I have never understood why so many people's idea of a fun vacation is to don flip-flops and sunglasses and crawl through maddening traffic to loud, hot, crowded tourist venues in order to sample a "local flavor" that is by definition ruined by the presence of tourists. This may (as my festival companions keep pointing out) all be a matter of personality and hardwired taste: the fact that I do not like tourist venues means that I'll never understand their appeal and so am probably not the one to talk about it (the supposed appeal). But, since this FN will almost surely not survive magazine-editing anyway, here goes:

As I see it, it probably really is good for the soul to be a tourist, even if it's only once in a while. Not good for the soul in a refreshing or enlivening way, though, but rather in a grim, steely-eyed, let's-look-honestly-at-the-facts-and-find-some-way-to-deal-with-them way. My personal experience has not been that traveling around the country is broadening or relaxing, or that radical changes in place and context have a salutary effect, but rather that intranational tourism is radically constricting, and humbling in the hardest way — hostile to my fantasy of being a true individual, of living somehow outside and above it all. (Coming up is the part that my companions find especially unhappy and repellent, a sure way to spoil the fun of vacation travel:) To be a mass tourist, for me, is to become a pure late-date American: alien, ignorant, greedy for something you cannot ever have, disappointed in a way you can never admit. It is to spoil, by way of sheer ontology, the very unspoiledness you are there to experience. It is to impose yourself on places that in all non-economic ways would be better, realer, without you. It is, in lines and gridlock and transaction after transaction, to confront a dimension of yourself that is as inescapable as it is painful: As a tourist, you become economically significant but existentially loathsome, an insect on a dead thing.

(i.e., most trappable) at summer water temperatures of 45–50 degrees. In the autumn, most Maine lobsters migrate out into deeper water, either for warmth or to avoid the heavy waves that pound New England's coast all winter. Some burrow into the bottom. They might hibernate; nobody's sure. Summer is also lobsters' molting season — specifically early- to mid-July. Chitinous arthropods grow by molting, rather the way people have to buy bigger clothes as they age and gain weight. Since lobsters can live to be over 100, they can also get to be quite large, as in 30 pounds or more — though truly senior lobsters are rare now because New England's waters are so heavily trapped.[7] Anyway, hence the culinary distinction between hard- and soft-shell lobsters, the latter sometimes a.k.a. shedders. A soft-shell lobster is one that has recently molted. In midcoast restaurants, the summer menu often offers both kinds, with shedders being slightly cheaper even though they're easier to dismantle and the meat is allegedly sweeter. The reason for the discount is that a molting lobster uses a layer of seawater for insulation while its new shell is hardening, so there's slightly less actual meat when you crack open a shedder, plus a redolent gout of water that gets all over everything and can sometimes jet out lemonlike and catch a tablemate right in the eye. If it's winter or you're buying lobster someplace far from New England, on the other hand, you can almost bet that the lobster is a hard-shell, which for obvious reasons travel better.

As an à la carte entrée, lobster can be baked, broiled, steamed, grilled, sautéed, stir-fried, or microwaved. The most common method, though, is boiling. If you're someone who enjoys having lobster at home, this is probably the way you do it, since boiling is so easy. You need a large kettle w/ cover, which you fill about half full with water (the standard advice is that you want 2.5 quarts of water per lobster). Seawater is optimal, or you can add two tbsp salt per quart from the tap. It also helps to know how much your

[7] Datum: In a good year, the US industry produces around 80,000,000 pounds of lobster, and Maine accounts for more than half that total.

lobsters weigh. You get the water boiling, put in the lobsters one at a time, cover the kettle, and bring it back up to a boil. Then you bank the heat and let the kettle simmer — ten minutes for the first pound of lobster, then three minutes for each pound after that. (This is assuming you've got hard-shell lobsters, which, again, if you don't live between Boston and Halifax is probably what you've got. For shedders, you're supposed to subtract three minutes from the total.) The reason the kettle's lobsters turn scarlet is that boiling somehow suppresses every pigment in their chitin but one. If you want an easy test of whether the lobsters are done, you try pulling on one of their antennae — if it comes out of the head with minimal effort, you're ready to eat.

A detail so obvious that most recipes don't even bother to mention it is that each lobster is supposed to be alive when you put it in the kettle. This is part of lobster's modern appeal — it's the freshest food there is. There's no decomposition between harvesting and eating. And not only do lobsters require no cleaning or dressing or plucking, they're relatively easy for vendors to keep alive. They come up alive in the traps, are placed in containers of seawater, and can — so long as the water's aerated and the animals' claws are pegged or banded to keep them from tearing one another up under the stresses of captivity[8] — survive right up until they're boiled. Most of us have been in supermarkets or restaurants that feature tanks of live lobsters, from which you can pick out your supper while it watches you point. And part of the overall spectacle of the Maine Lobster Festival is that you can see actual lobstermen's vessels docking at the

[8] N.B. Similar reasoning underlies the practice of what's termed "debeaking" broiler chickens and brood hens in modern factory farms. Maximum commercial efficiency requires that enormous poultry populations be confined in unnaturally close quarters, under which conditions many birds go crazy and peck one another to death. As a purely observational side-note, be apprised that debeaking is usually an automated process and that the chickens receive no anesthetic. It's not clear to me whether most *Gourmet* readers know about debeaking, or about related practices like dehorning cattle in commercial feed lots, cropping swine's tails in factory hog farms to keep psychotically bored neighbors from chewing them off, and so forth. It so happens that your assigned correspondent knew almost nothing about standard meat-industry operations before starting work on this article.

wharves along the northeast grounds and unloading fresh-caught product, which is transferred by hand or cart 150 yards to the great clear tanks stacked up around the festival's cooker — which is, as mentioned, billed as the World's Largest Lobster Cooker and can process over 100 lobsters at a time for the Main Eating Tent.

So then here is a question that's all but unavoidable at the World's Largest Lobster Cooker, and may arise in kitchens across the US: Is it all right to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure? A related set of concerns: Is the previous question irksomely PC or sentimental? What does "all right" even mean in this context? Is the whole thing just a matter of personal choice?

As you may or may not know, a certain well-known group called People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals thinks that the morality of lobster-boiling is not just a matter of individual conscience. In fact, one of the very first things we hear about the MLF . . . well, to set the scene: We're coming in by cab from the almost indescribably odd and rustic Knox County Airport[9] very late on the night before the festival opens, sharing the cab with a wealthy political consultant who lives on Vinalhaven Island in the bay half the year (he's headed for the island ferry in Rockland). The consultant and cabdriver are responding to informal journalistic probes about how people who live in the midcoast region actually view the MLF, as in is the festival just a big-dollar tourist thing or is it something local residents look forward to attending, take genuine civic pride in, etc. The cabdriver (who's in his seventies, one of apparently a whole platoon of retirees the cab company puts on to help with the summer rush, and wears a US-flag lapel pin, and drives in what can only be called a very *deliberate* way) assures us that locals do endorse and enjoy the MLF, although he himself hasn't gone in years, and now come to think of it no one he and his wife know has, either. However, the demilocal consultant's been to recent festivals a couple times (one gets the impression it was at his wife's behest), of which his most vivid impression was that

[9] The terminal used to be somebody's house, for example, and the lost-luggage-reporting room was clearly once a pantry.

"you have to line up for an ungodly long time to get your lobsters, and meanwhile there are all these ex–flower children coming up and down along the line handing out pamphlets that say the lobsters die in terrible pain and you shouldn't eat them."

And it turns out that the post-hippies of the consultant's recollection were activists from PETA. There were no PETA people in obvious view at the 2003 MLF,[10] but they've been conspicuous at many of the recent festivals. Since at least the mid-1990s, articles in everything from the *Camden Herald* to the *New York Times* have described PETA urging boycotts of the Maine Lobster Festival, often deploying celebrity spokesmen like Mary Tyler Moore for open letters and ads saying stuff like "Lobsters are extraordinarily sensitive" and "To me, eating a lobster is out of the question." More concrete is the oral testimony of Dick, our florid and extremely gregarious rental-car liaison,[11] to the effect that PETA's been around so much during recent years that a kind of brittlely tolerant homeostasis now obtains between the activists and the festival's locals, e.g.: "We had some incidents a couple years ago. One lady took most of her clothes off and painted herself like a lobster, almost got herself arrested. But for the most part they're let alone. [Rapid series of small ambiguous laughs, which with Dick happens a lot.] They do their thing and we do our thing."

[10] It turned out that one Mr. William R. Rivas-Rivas, a high-ranking PETA official out of the group's Virginia headquarters, was indeed there this year, albeit solo, working the festival's main and side entrances on Saturday, 2 August, handing out pamphlets and adhesive stickers emblazoned with "Being Boiled Hurts," which is the tagline in most of PETA's published material about lobsters. I learned that he'd been there only later, when speaking with Mr. Rivas-Rivas on the phone. I'm not sure how we missed seeing him *in situ* at the festival, and I can't see much to do except apologize for the oversight — although it's also true that Saturday was the day of the big MLF parade through Rockland, which basic journalistic responsibility seemed to require going to (and which, with all due respect, meant that Saturday was maybe not the best day for PETA to work the Harbor Park grounds, especially if it was going to be just one person for one day, since a lot of diehard MLF partisans were off-site watching the parade (which, again with no offense intended, was in truth kind of cheesy and boring, consisting mostly of slow homemade floats and various midcoast people waving at one another, and with an extremely annoying man dressed as Blackbeard ranging up and down the length of the crowd saying "Arrr" over and over and brandishing a plastic sword at people, etc.; plus it rained)).

[11] By profession, Dick is actually a car salesman; the midcoast region's National Car Rental franchise operates out of a Chevy dealership in Thomaston.

This whole interchange takes place on Route 1, 30 July, during a four-mile, 50-minute ride from the airport[12] to the dealership to sign car-rental papers. Several irreproducible segues down the road from the PETA anecdotes, 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."

Besides the fact that it's incorrect in about nine different ways, the main reason Dick's statement is interesting is that its thesis is more or less echoed by the festival's own pronouncement on lobsters and pain, which is part of a Test Your Lobster IQ quiz that appears in the 2003 MLF program courtesy of the Maine Lobster Promotion Council:

> The nervous system of a lobster is very simple, and is in fact most similar to the nervous system of the grasshopper. It is decentralized with no brain. There is no cerebral cortex, which in humans is the area of the brain that gives the experience of pain.

Though it sounds more sophisticated, a lot of the neurology in this latter claim is still either false or fuzzy. The human cerebral cortex is the brain-part that deals with higher faculties like reason, metaphysical self-awareness, language, etc. Pain reception is known to be part of a much older and more primitive system of nociceptors and prostaglandins that are managed by the brain stem and thalamus.[13]

[12] The short version regarding why we were back at the airport after already arriving the previous night involves lost luggage and a miscommunication about where and what the midcoast's National franchise was — Dick came out personally to the airport and got us, out of no evident motive but kindness. (He also talked nonstop the entire way, with a very distinctive speaking style that can be described only as manically laconic; the truth is that I now know more about this man than I do about some members of my own family.)

[13] To elaborate by way of example: The common experience of accidentally touching a hot stove and yanking your hand back before you're even aware that anything's going on is explained by the fact that many of the processes by which we detect and avoid painful stimuli do not involve the cortex. In the case of the hand and stove, the brain is bypassed altogether; all the important neurochemical action takes place in the spine.

On the other hand, it is true that the cerebral cortex is involved in what's variously called suffering, distress, or the emotional experience of pain — i.e., experiencing painful stimuli as unpleasant, very unpleasant, unbearable, and so on.

Before we go any further, let's acknowledge that the questions of whether and how different kinds of animals feel pain, and of whether and why it might be justifiable to inflict pain on them in order to eat them, turn out to be extremely complex and difficult. And comparative neuroanatomy is only part of the problem. Since pain is a totally subjective mental experience, we do not have direct access to anyone or anything's pain but our own; and even just the principles by which we can infer that other human beings experience pain and have a legitimate interest in not feeling pain involve hard-core philosophy — metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, ethics. The fact that even the most highly evolved nonhuman mammals can't use language to communicate with us about their subjective mental experience is only the first layer of additional complication in trying to extend our reasoning about pain and morality to animals. And everything gets progressively more abstract and convolved as we move farther and farther out from the higher-type mammals into cattle and swine and dogs and cats and rodents, and then birds and fish, and finally invertebrates like lobsters.

The more important point here, though, is that the whole animal-cruelty-and-eating issue is not just complex, it's also uncomfortable. It is, at any rate, uncomfortable for me, and for just about everyone I know who enjoys a variety of foods and yet does not want to see herself as cruel or unfeeling. As far as I can tell, my own main way of dealing with this conflict has been to avoid thinking about the whole unpleasant thing. I should add that it appears to me unlikely that many readers of *Gourmet* wish to think about it, either, or to be queried about the morality of their eating habits in the pages of a culinary monthly. Since, however, the assigned subject of this article is what it was like to attend the 2003 MLF, and thus to spend several days in the midst of a great mass of Americans all

eating lobster, and thus to be more or less impelled to think hard about lobster and the experience of buying and eating lobster, it turns out that there is no honest way to avoid certain moral questions.

There are several reasons for this. For one thing, it's not just that lobsters get boiled alive, it's that you do it yourself — or at least it's done specifically for you, on-site.[14] As mentioned, the World's Largest Lobster Cooker, which is highlighted as an attraction in the festival's program, is right out there on the MLF's north grounds for everyone to see. Try to imagine a Nebraska Beef Festival[15] at which part of the festivities is watching trucks pull up and the live cattle get driven down the ramp and slaughtered right there on the World's Largest Killing Floor or something — there's no way.

The intimacy of the whole thing is maximized at home, which of course is where most lobster gets prepared and eaten (although note already the semiconscious euphemism "prepared," which in the case of lobsters really means killing them right there in our kitchens). The basic scenario is that we come in from the store and make our little preparations like getting the kettle filled and boiling, and then we lift the lobsters out of the bag or whatever retail container they came home in . . . whereupon some uncomfortable things start to happen. However stuporous a lobster is from the trip home, for instance, it tends to come alarmingly to life when placed

[14] Morality-wise, let's concede that this cuts both ways. Lobster-eating is at least not abetted by the system of corporate factory farms that produces most beef, pork, and chicken. Because, if nothing else, of the way they're marketed and packaged for sale, we eat these latter meats without having to consider that they were once conscious, sentient creatures to whom horrible things were done. (N.B. "Horrible" here meaning really, really horrible. Write off to PETA or peta.org for their free "Meet Your Meat" video, narrated by Mr. Alec Baldwin, if you want to see just about everything meat-related you don't want to see or think about. (N.B.$_2$ Not that PETA's any sort of font of unspun truth. Like many partisans in complex moral disputes, the PETA people are fanatics, and a lot of their rhetoric seems simplistic and self-righteous. But this particular video, replete with actual factory-farm and corporate-slaughterhouse footage, is both credible and traumatizing.))

[15] Is it significant that "lobster," "fish," and "chicken" are our culture's words for both the animal and the meat, whereas most mammals seem to require euphemisms like "beef" and "pork" that help us separate the meat we eat from the living creature the meat once was? Is this evidence that some kind of deep unease about eating higher animals is endemic enough to show up in English usage, but that the unease diminishes as we move out of the mammalian order? (And is "lamb"/"lamb" the counterexample that sinks the whole theory, or are there special, biblico-historical reasons for that equivalence?)

in boiling water. If you're tilting it from a container into the steaming kettle, 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 (with the obvious exception of screaming[16]). A blunter way to say this is that the lobster acts as if it's in terrible pain, causing some cooks to leave the kitchen altogether and to take one of those little lightweight plastic oven-timers with them into another room and wait until the whole process is over.

There happen to be two main criteria that most ethicists agree on for determining whether a living creature has the capacity to suffer and so has genuine interests that it may or may not be our moral duty to consider.[17] One is how much of the neurological hardware required for pain-experience the animal comes equipped with — nociceptors, prostaglandins, neuronal opioid receptors, etc. The other criterion is whether the animal demonstrates behavior associated with pain. And it takes a lot of intellectual gymnastics and

[16] There's a relevant populist myth about the high-pitched whistling sound that sometimes issues from a pot of boiling lobster. The sound is really vented steam from the layer of seawater between the lobster's flesh and its carapace (this is why shedders whistle more than hard-shells), but the pop version has it that the sound is the lobster's rabbit-like death-scream. Lobsters communicate via pheromones in their urine and don't have anything close to the vocal equipment for screaming, but the myth's very persistent — which might, once again, point to a low-level cultural unease about the boiling thing.

[17] "Interests" basically means strong and legitimate preferences, which obviously require some degree of consciousness, responsiveness to stimuli, etc. See, for instance, the utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer, whose 1974 *Animal Liberation* is more or less the bible of the modern animal-rights movement:

> It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a schoolboy. A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. A mouse, on the other hand, does have an interest in not being kicked along the road, because it will suffer if it is.

behaviorist hairsplitting not to see struggling, thrashing, and lid-clattering as just such pain-behavior. According to marine zoologists, it usually takes lobsters between 35 and 45 seconds to die in boiling water. (No source I could find talks about how long it takes them to die in superheated steam; one rather hopes it's faster.)

There are, of course, other ways to kill your lobster on-site and so achieve maximum freshness. Some cooks' practice is to drive a sharp heavy knife point-first into a spot just above the midpoint between the lobster's eyestalks (more or less where the Third Eye is in human foreheads). This is alleged either to kill the lobster instantly or to render it insensate, and is said at least to eliminate some of the cowardice involved in throwing a creature into boiling water and then fleeing the room. As far as I can tell from talking to proponents of the knife-in-head method, the idea is that it's more violent but ultimately more merciful, plus that a willingness to exert personal agency and accept responsibility for stabbing the lobster's head honors the lobster somehow and entitles one to eat it (there's often a vague sort of Native American spirituality-of-the-hunt flavor to pro-knife arguments). But the problem with the knife method is basic biology: Lobsters' nervous systems operate off not one but several ganglia, a.k.a. nerve bundles, which are sort of wired in series and distributed all along the lobster's underside, from stem to stern. And disabling only the frontal ganglion does not normally result in quick death or unconsciousness.

Another alternative is to put the lobster in cold saltwater and then very slowly bring it up to a full boil. Cooks who advocate this method are going on the analogy to a frog, which can supposedly be kept from jumping out of a boiling pot by heating the water incrementally. In order to save a lot of research-summarizing, I'll simply assure you that the analogy between frogs and lobsters turns out not to hold — plus, if the kettle's water isn't aerated seawater, the immersed lobster suffers from slow suffocation, although usually not decisive enough suffocation to keep it from still thrashing and clattering when the water gets hot enough to kill it. In fact, lobsters

boiled incrementally often display a whole bonus set of gruesome, convulsionlike reactions that you don't see in regular boiling.

Ultimately, the only certain virtues of the home-lobotomy and slow-heating methods are comparative, because there are even worse/crueler ways people prepare lobster. Time-thrifty cooks sometimes microwave them alive (usually after poking several vent-holes in the carapace, which is a precaution most shellfish-microwavers learn about the hard way). Live dismemberment, on the other hand, is big in Europe — some chefs cut the lobster in half before cooking; others like to tear off the claws and tail and toss only these parts into the pot.

And there's more unhappy news respecting suffering-criterion number one. Lobsters don't have much in the way of eyesight or hearing, but they do have an exquisite tactile sense, one facilitated by hundreds of thousands of tiny hairs that protrude through their carapace. "Thus it is," in the words of T. M. Prudden's industry classic *About Lobster,* "that although encased in what seems a solid, impenetrable armor, the lobster can receive stimuli and impressions from without as readily as if it possessed a soft and delicate skin." And lobsters do have nociceptors,[18] 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. From this fact, though, one could conclude either that lobsters are maybe even *more* vulnerable to pain, since they lack mammalian nervous systems' built-in analgesia, or, instead, that the absence of natural opioids implies an absence of the really intense pain-sensations that natural opioids are designed to mitigate. I for one can detect a marked upswing in mood as I con-

[18] This is the neurological term for special pain-receptors that are "sensitive to potentially damaging extremes of temperature, to mechanical forces, and to chemical substances which are released when body tissues are damaged."

template this latter possibility. It could be that their lack of endorphin/enkephalin hardware means that lobsters' raw subjective experience of pain is so radically different from mammals' that it may not even deserve the term "pain." Perhaps lobsters are more like those frontal-lobotomy patients one reads about who report experiencing pain in a totally different way than you and I. These patients evidently do feel physical pain, neurologically speaking, but don't dislike it — though neither do they like it; it's more that they feel it but don't feel anything *about* it — the point being that the pain is not distressing to them or something they want to get away from. Maybe lobsters, who are also without frontal lobes, are detached from the neurological-registration-of-injury-or-hazard we call pain in just the same way. 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.

Still, after all the abstract intellection, there remain the facts of the frantically clanking lid, the pathetic clinging to the edge of the pot. Standing at the stove, it is hard to deny in any meaningful way that this is a living creature experiencing pain and wishing to avoid/escape the painful experience. To my lay mind, the lobster's behavior in the kettle appears to be the expression of a *preference;* and it may well be that an ability to form preferences is the decisive criterion for real suffering.[19] The logic of this (preference ⟶ suffering) relation may be easiest to see in the negative case. If you cut certain kinds of worms in half, the halves will often keep crawling around and going about their vermiform business as if nothing had happened. When we assert, based on their post-op behavior, that these worms appear not to be suffering, what we're really saying is that there's no sign the worms know anything bad has happened or would *prefer* not to have gotten cut in half.

[19] "Preference" is maybe roughly synonymous with "interests," but it is a better term for our purposes because it's less abstractly philosophical — "preference" seems more personal, and it's the whole idea of a living creature's personal experience that's at issue.

Lobsters, though, are known to exhibit preferences. Experiments have shown that they can detect changes of only a degree or two in water temperature; one reason for their complex migratory cycles (which can often cover 100-plus miles a year) is to pursue the temperatures they like best.[20] And, as mentioned, they're bottom-dwellers and do not like bright light — if a tank of food-lobsters is out in the sunlight or a store's fluorescence, the lobsters will always congregate in whatever part is darkest. Fairly solitary in the ocean, they also clearly dislike the crowding that's part of their captivity in tanks, since (as also mentioned) one reason why lobsters' claws are banded on capture is to keep them from attacking one another under the stress of close-quarter storage.

In any event, at the MLF, standing by the bubbling tanks outside the World's Largest Lobster Cooker, watching the fresh-caught lobsters pile over one another, wave their hobbled claws impotently, huddle in the rear corners, or scrabble frantically back from the glass as you approach, it is difficult not to sense that they're unhappy, or frightened, even if it's some rudimentary version of these feelings . . . and, again, why does rudimentariness even enter into it? Why is a

[20] Of course, the most common sort of counterargument here would begin by objecting that "like best" is really just a metaphor, and a misleadingly anthropomorphic one at that. The counterarguer would posit that the lobster seeks to maintain a certain optimal ambient temperature out of nothing but unconscious instinct (with a similar explanation for the low-light affinities upcoming in the main text). The thrust of such a counterargument will be that the lobster's thrashings and clankings in the kettle express not unpreferred pain but involuntary reflexes, like your leg shooting out when the doctor hits your knee. Be advised that there are professional scientists, including many researchers who use animals in experiments, who hold to the view that nonhuman creatures have no real feelings at all, merely "behaviors." Be further advised that this view has a long history that goes all the way back to Descartes, although its modern support comes mostly from behaviorist psychology.

To these what-looks-like-pain-is-really-just-reflexes counterarguments, however, there happen to be all sorts of scientific and pro–animal rights counter-counterarguments. And then further attempted rebuttals and redirects, and so on. Suffice it to say that both the scientific and the philosophical arguments on either side of the animal-suffering issue are involved, abstruse, technical, often informed by self-interest or ideology, and in the end so totally inconclusive that as a practical matter, in the kitchen or restaurant, it all still seems to come down to individual conscience, going with (no pun) your gut.

primitive, inarticulate form of suffering less urgent or uncomfortable for the person who's helping to inflict it by paying for the food it results in? I'm not trying to give you a PETA-like screed here — at least I don't think so. I'm trying, rather, to work out and articulate some of the troubling questions that arise amid all the laughter and saltation and community pride of the Maine Lobster Festival. The truth is that if you, the festival attendee, permit yourself to think that lobsters can suffer and would rather not, the MLF begins to take on the aspect of something like a Roman circus or medieval torture-fest.

Does that comparison seem a bit much? If so, exactly why? Or what about this one: Is it possible that future generations will regard our present agribusiness and eating practices in much the same way we now view Nero's entertainments or Mengele's experiments? My own initial reaction is that such a comparison is hysterical, extreme — and yet the reason it seems extreme to me appears to be that I believe animals are less morally important than human beings;[21] and when it comes to defending such a belief, even to myself, I have to acknowledge that (a) I have an obvious selfish interest in this belief, since I like to eat certain kinds of animals and want to be able to keep doing it, and (b) I haven't succeeded in working out any sort of personal ethical system in which the belief is truly defensible instead of just selfishly convenient.

Given this article's venue and my own lack of culinary sophistication, I'm curious about whether the reader can identify with any of these reactions and acknowledgments and discomforts. I'm also concerned not to come off as shrill or preachy when what I really am is more like confused. For those *Gourmet* readers who enjoy well-prepared and -presented meals involving beef, veal, lamb, pork, chicken, lobster, etc.: Do you think much about the (possible) moral status and (probable) suffering of the animals involved? If

[21] Meaning *a lot* less important, apparently, since the moral comparison here is not the value of one human's life vs. the value of one animal's life, but rather the value of one animal's life vs. the value of one human's taste for a particular kind of protein. Even the most diehard carniphile will acknowledge that it's possible to live and eat well without consuming animals.

you do, what ethical convictions have you worked out that permit you not just to eat but to savor and enjoy flesh-based viands (since of course refined *enjoyment,* rather than mere ingestion, is the whole point of gastronomy)? If, on the other hand, you'll have no truck with confusions or convictions and regard stuff like the previous paragraph as just so much fatuous navel-gazing, what makes it feel truly okay, inside, to just dismiss the whole thing out of hand? That is, is your refusal to think about any of this the product of actual thought, or is it just that you don't want to think about it? And if the latter, then why not? Do you ever think, even idly, about the possible reasons for your reluctance to think about it? I am not trying to bait anyone here — I'm genuinely curious. After all, isn't being extra aware and attentive and thoughtful about one's food and its overall context part of what distinguishes a real gourmet? Or is all the gourmet's extra attention and sensibility just supposed to be sensuous? Is it really all just a matter of taste and presentation?

These last few queries, though, while sincere, obviously involve much larger and more abstract questions about the connections (if any) between aesthetics and morality — about what the adjective in a phrase like "The Magazine of Good Living" is really supposed to mean — and these questions lead straightaway into such deep and treacherous waters that it's probably best to stop the public discussion right here. There are limits to what even interested persons can ask of each other.

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