

# Animal ethics as a critique of animal agriculture, environmentalism, foodieism, locavorism, and clean meat

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## 6.1 Introduction

*For in whatever form it has taken through the centuries...speciesism—or the total organization of material and symbolic human life around the domination and mass killing of other sensitive beings—has throughout history served as the “primordial” substructure or organizing principle of the human project, the determining episteme and habitus of every human culture, economy, and society.*

*(Sanbonmatsu, 2011, p. 31)*

In all of human history, approximately 110 billion *Homo sapiens* have ever walked the planet (Curtin, 2007). However, in just one Earth year, *Homo sapiens* slaughter more than 70 billion land animals, while the global commercial fishing industry kills 1–3 trillion animals each year (*Animal Advocacy by Numbers*, 2016). Most individual land animals are raised in conditions that cause great suffering within a global system so vast that one-third of the Earth’s surface is devoted to imprisoning, transporting, and killing other beings for their milk, eggs, flesh, skin, and bones (Bland, 2012). If that were not enough, world fishing trends point to a global eradication of all taxa currently fished by the year 2048 (Worm et al., 2006). Surely, by any coherent calculus, these figures amount to a moral atrocity.

Given these dire facts, the focus of this chapter is to examine some of the key concepts and debates in the areas of environmental, food, and animal ethics; to look at some of the theoretical ethical arguments for ending animal exploitation; to challenge some of the key justifications from those in the environmental, foodie, and locavore movements who are so attached to “humane” exploitation; to investigate whether so-called “clean meat” will end animal agriculture as we know it; and finally gesture toward what I see as the root cause of the suffering of countless sentient beings.

## 6.2 Ethics basics: Moral status, moral value, and anthropocentrism

Unlike rocks and plastic straws, human beings and nonhuman animals are experiential subjects, that is, there is a subjective “what it’s like” *from the inside* to be a human

being or nonhuman animal. Humans and other animals are the kinds of things whose experiences matter to us, beings whose lives can go better or worse, *for us*, a capacity that generates *interests*, for example, interests in our own well-being. Having interests in this sense implies that humans and other animals can be wronged in a way that rocks or plastic straws cannot, so interests for one entity create duties and obligations for the rest of us. The fact that our interests can be violated creates *duties and obligations* upon certain others of us to respect those interests. In other words, experiential subjects have *moral status*. To say that an entity has moral status is to say that its interests matter morally *for its own sake*—not merely for the sake of the interests of others—and that it has *entitlement* to protections afforded by moral norms. To have moral status is to be the sort of thing whose interests must be considered from the moral point of view. But what about things like trees, rivers, and ecosystems? As far as we know, they are not the kinds of things that have subjective experiences and so are not the kinds of things that have interests, at least not in the *same sense* that human and nonhuman animals do.

When we think about things like interests and well-being, it's important to consider their relations to ethical or moral value. Put simply, *values* ground judgments regarding those things that we, valuers, care about; things like what is good or bad, right or wrong. Generally, ethicists identify two kinds of value. *Intrinsic value* refers to the value that a thing has *in itself*, or *for its own sake*. Philosophers argue that things like humans, (human) well-being, and justice possess intrinsic value. On the other hand, things that provide only *extrinsic* or *instrumental value* are not seen as valuable in-and-of-themselves but rather as valuable because of the goods they bring about. One might say, for example, that while human well-being is intrinsically valuable, the *means* to human well-being—proper nutrition, adequate healthcare, etc.—are merely instrumentally valuable.

Related to the notion of value are the concepts of moral considerability and moral significance. An entity is said to be *morally considerable* just in case it is a bona fide member of the moral community in that it has robust interests and can be wronged in a morally relevant way. The fact that a being is morally considerable means that moral agents have obligations to that being. Saying that an entity is morally considerable is like saying that it's "in the club" of things whose interests moral agents must consider. Once a being is morally considerable, however, we may then need to adjudicate questions of relative moral value between beings. That becomes a question of moral significance. *Moral significance* speaks to the moral value of the members once admitted to the "club." Just because two entities are "in the club," it does not follow that they are of equal moral value. Surely, beings like all living, sentient humans, chimpanzees, dogs, cats, deer, wolves, and birds are in the club, i.e., are morally considerable. But does that imply—all things being equal—that a human being and a sparrow have equal moral value? This a complex question worth exploring in more detail. But at this point, we can formulate a notion of moral status as follows: an entity X has moral status just in case (1) moral agents have moral obligations to X, (2) X has basic welfare interests, and (3) the moral obligations owed to X are based on X's interests (DeGrazia, 2008).

There are a number of theories for the grounds of moral status. The most widely held view is the *anthropocentric* account of moral status. The anthropocentric account holds that only being a member of the species *Homo sapiens* confers moral considerability and maximal moral significance. On the anthropocentric account, all and only humans have full moral status; being human (i.e., being conceived by human parents or possessing a human genetic code) is a necessary condition for entrance into the “club.” One virtue of the anthropocentric account is that it secures moral status and maximal moral significance for *all* humans, including infants, the severely cognitively differently abled, and those humans living with a permanent loss of consciousness (e.g., those in a persistent vegetative state). Yet, the anthropocentric account is fatally problematic for a number of reasons. According to the anthropocentric account, there exists some set of distinctively human properties that confer full moral status on *all and only* human beings. But for the anthropocentric account to be successful in securing full moral status for all human beings, the account must (1) identify which set of characteristics is distinctively human, (2) demonstrate that the set is possessed universally by *all* humans, (3) provide an account of why *those particular characteristics* (but not others) are the morally relevant ones, and (4) explain why those particular characteristics are sufficient to secure moral status for all and *only* human beings. With regard to (1), the anthropocentric account clearly, though trivially, identifies a characteristic of being human that is distinctively human, namely, being human; with regard to (2) the account trivially asserts that the characteristic of being human is possessed universally by all humans. Asserting that being human is distinctively human, and that the characteristic of being human is possessed universally by all humans tells us very little about why *all and only* human beings are in the moral club.

Furthermore, the anthropocentric account appears to beg the question here because the very question at the heart of the anthropocentric account is this: What is it about membership in the species *Homo sapiens* alone that uniquely confers full moral status? To say that being human—a characteristic clearly possessed by all human beings—is the uniquely morally relevant characteristic securing moral status for all and only human beings tells us *nothing whatsoever* about *why* being human is sufficient. Were we to encounter an extraterrestrial who possessed human-like capacities for reasoning and planning, should we deny this being the same moral status that we afford full human persons? It seems clear that, contrary to the anthropocentric account, human biological properties cannot be necessary for moral status.

In response, the advocate of the anthropocentric account may concede that it is not merely membership in the species *Homo sapiens* that is doing the moral heavy lifting here, but rather those distinctively human species-typical abilities that are necessary for entrance into the club, capacities like rationality, intelligence, language, etc. Yet, this response will not do. For the anthropocentric account to secure full moral status for all humans it must also demonstrate that the alleged distinctively human abilities are possessed universally by *all* humans. However, if the moral divide between human and nonhuman animals rests on the possession of some required set of uniquely human cognitive abilities possessed by all and only humans, then there will always exist

some humans who lack these characteristics. That is, for any human capacity we select, there will always exist some human who lacks this capacity, while there may exist some nonhuman animals who will possess this capacity, to varying degrees.

A common anthropocentric response is to claim that though some human beings lack those cognitive abilities required for entrance into the moral club, they remain members of a species whose *typical members* possess the requisite capacities, something that cannot be said for any member of a nonhuman animal species. This *species-typicalism* approach argues that though a permanently and severely congenitally cognitively disabled infant may forever lack the abilities required by the anthropocentric account, because she is a member of a species whose *typical member* possesses these abilities, she is afforded full membership in the moral community.

This view is implausible since it holds that some individuals can entirely lack the properties supposedly required for moral considerability, yet still be morally considerable merely because most members of the group possess those properties. Imagine someone arguing in a like fashion that since some particular artist's works are, by and large, excellent works of art, it therefore follows that *every* work of art produced by that artist must also be an excellent work of art solely in virtue of their being produced by an artist whose typical artworks are excellent (Lowe, 2014); this a terrible argument.

But how then does the permanently severely congenitally cognitively disabled infant gain full membership into the moral community? Her honorary membership can't be due to her biological species membership since, as we have seen, that view is a woefully problematic account of moral status. Furthermore, were humans able someday through gene therapy to produce a chimpanzee who developed cognitive capacities comparable to those of a human person, surely this "Superchimp" would be entitled to the same moral status due human persons despite her being an atypical member of a species whose typical members do not possess the kinds of cognitive capacities she now does (McMahan, 2002). Conferring moral status on nonparadigm members of a species based on the capacities of paradigm members is unwarranted. These and other challenges provide grounds for rejecting anthropocentrism as a basis for moral status.

## 6.3 Ethical foundations of the modern animal rights movement

In contrast to the anthropocentric account, a number of philosophers have formulated more inclusionary accounts of moral status intended to expand the sphere of the moral world to include nonhuman animals as robust members of the moral community. Easily the most influential theory advocating increased moral status for nonhuman animals is that of Singer (1975).

Singer provides what can be described as a *sentientist* account of moral status. To be sentient is to be the subject of experience, to have subjective experiences. In particular, sentient beings possess the capacity for joy, pleasure, pain, and suffering,

capacities that make a difference morally, i.e., capacities that are morally relevant. According to Singer, sentience—the capacity to experience pain or pleasure—is both necessary and sufficient for having morally considerable interests.

Understanding Singer's argument for what he calls *animal liberation* requires understanding five notions central to Singer's view: (1) the basic principle of equality, (2) sentience, (3) the principle of equal consideration of interests, (4) speciesism, and (5) the relevance principle.

Reflecting on recent social justice movements such as women's liberation, black liberation, LGBT+ rights, disability rights, and others, we notice that one thing that underlies and connects these movements is a belief that, in an important and profound sense, all humans are equal. This belief, the *basic principle of equality*, lies at the heart of Singer's view. But what does it mean to say that all humans are equal? Given that humans differ from each other so significantly in their physical, moral, emotional, and cognitive abilities and capacities, surely, as a descriptive empirical assertion, claims of human equality in this sense are clearly factually untrue. The basic principle of equality is not intended as a factual but a *normative* concept: "equality is a moral idea...a prescription of how we *should* [emphasis added] treat human beings" (Singer, 2011, pp. 4–5). The primary central descriptive claim grounding the basic principle of equality is the fact that humans are experiential subjects. As we've seen, since we are sentient beings, and the kinds of beings whose experiences matter to us, we possess morally relevant interests (e.g., interests in our own well-being).

The basic principle of equality, coupled with sentience, and combined with the interests that the possession of sentience provide, lead to the central principle driving Singer's view: the *principle of equal consideration of interests*, the essence of which is "that we give equal weight in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions" (Singer, 2011, p. 20). When engaged in any decision-making procedure concerning how we ought to treat one another morally, the principle of equal consideration of interests requires that we consider the interests of all humans *equally*. But since sentience provides the basis for the equality of human beings, and since human beings are not the only sentient beings, *to be consistent*, we must extend the principle of equal consideration of interests to *all* sentient creatures. The principle of equal consideration of interests requires that we weight interests not on the basis of the species (or race or gender) of an individual, but on her own merits, independently of such morally irrelevant considerations. Importantly then, the principle of equal consideration of interests emphasizes the moral salience of our interests as individuals, not as members of a particular species.

Yet, equal consideration of interests is not synonymous with moral equality and equal treatment. The principle of equal consideration of interests "commits us to treating like interests in a comparable fashion, a key principle of justice, but it does not tell us what interests particular individuals have" (Garner, 2013, p. 98). To privilege the interests of humans over nonhumans solely in virtue of species membership is a form of *speciesism*.

There are a number of important and distinct ways that scholars have characterized speciesism. I will discuss these in some detail anon. But for Singer, speciesism

is akin to other “-isms” such as racism, sexism, and ableism, and is best conceived of as a bias in favor of the interests of the members of one’s own species and against the interests of members of other species based solely or primarily on species membership. In Singer’s view, speciesism involves the belief that members of one’s own species are more valuable than and morally superior to members of another species, a prejudice that often leads to discriminatory practices and institutional oppression. Just as the wrongness of racism consists in discrimination based on a morally irrelevant trait (namely, race), the wrongness of speciesism consists in discrimination based on a different morally irrelevant trait, namely, species membership.

To reiterate, equality for nonhuman animals does not entail equality of treatment, but merely the equal consideration of interests. Adjudicating differences in treatment between competing interests requires the last notion key to Singer’s view, the relevance principle. The *relevance principle* states that whether a difference between individuals justifies a difference in treatment depends on the kind of treatment in question.

The extension of the basic principle of equality from one group to another does not imply that we must treat both groups in exactly the same way, or grant exactly the same rights to both groups. Whether we should do so will depend on the nature of the members of the two groups. The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration. Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights (Singer, 1975, p. 2).

Thus equality for animals does not require, for example, that we grant pigs the right to vote, not because the interests of pigs are of less moral concern, but rather because pigs, unlike humans, have no interest in voting. On the other hand, since pigs, like humans, have an interest in not suffering, livestock production techniques that inflict suffering on pigs solely to satisfy the palates of consumers are impermissible (Cochrane, 2012, p. 5). Singer’s view, combined with his utilitarian stance, champions maximizing the overall welfare of all sentient beings and condemns practices such as industrialized livestock production as discriminatory, immoral, and clear cases of institutionalized violence and oppression.

In contrast to Singer’s approach to animal liberation, philosopher Tom Regan in his influential *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983) rejects Singer’s utilitarian arguments for animal liberation and instead provides an account of liberation for animals that requires recognition that nonhuman animals possess moral rights. For Regan, what matters morally is the capacity to be the *subject of experiences that matter to oneself*. Possessing certain physiological, emotional, psychological, and cognitive capacities, over and above mere sentience, makes one what Regan calls a *subject-of-a-life*:

*To be the subject of a life...involves more than merely being alive and more than merely being conscious...Individuals are subjects-of-a-life if they have beliefs and desires; perception memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independent of their being the object of anyone else’s interests.*

(Regan, 1983, p. 243)

Since a great number of nonhuman animals are subjects-of-a-life whose value cannot be reduced to their utility to humans (i.e., their instrumental value), it follows for Regan that the other animals possess what he calls *inherent value*, a value that is *intrinsic*, independent of how animals are valued by—or valuable to—humans. Possession of inherent value merits the respect due a subject-of-a-life and confers upon nonhuman animals strong moral rights.

For Regan, all who possess inherent value possess it *equally*. The possession of rights implies not merely an entitlement to equal consideration of interests, but categorical protection against being treated merely as a means to some human end. Unlike Singer's utilitarian view, which allows for the possibility that individual interests may be trumped in cases where appeals to the general welfare outweigh the interests of the individual, in Regan's view, rights are, for the most part, *inviolable*, even if trumping them, or harming the rights-bearer, would increase general welfare.

Though it follows from Peter Singer's view that practices such as the confinement conditions found in "livestock production" facilities (a.k.a., factory farms) are institutionally oppressive, immoral, and should be ameliorated (if not abolished), being that Singer's view is largely utilitarian, it allows for the possibility of the instrumental use of other-than-human animals in cases where their interests are considered equally and such use increases aggregate welfare. However, for Regan, the possession of rights implies not merely an entitlement to equal consideration of interests, but categorical protection against being treated merely as a means to some human end. Understood this way, nonhuman animals make valid moral claims upon us to protect their interests in the face even of appeals to their general welfare. Thus Regan's theory condemns and calls for the *total abolition* of every form of nonhuman animal exploitation and any instrumental use of animals, even in cases where such use improves general welfare, advocating nothing less than the "total dissolution of the animal industry as we know it" (Regan, 1983, p. 395). Specifically, the animal rights movement proper is "committed to a number of goals, including: the total abolition of the use of animals in science; the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture; the total elimination of commercial and sport hunting and trapping" (Regan, 1985, p. 13). For Regan and his adherents, e.g., Francione (1996), true animal liberation can be achieved only through a rights-based approach, since only a rights-based approach can properly ground calls for the abolition of all forms of animal use and exploitation at the hands of humans.

Though Singer and Regan provided the first extensive systematic ethical theories built upon a set of core philosophical principles aimed at expanding the moral status of nonhuman animals and overthrowing the anthropocentric view of moral status, a number of other thinkers have offered alternative accounts of animal liberation (Gruen, 2015; Ko, 2019; Nibert, 2002; Pluhar, 1995; Rachels, 1990; Rollin, 1992; Sapontzis, 1989; Taylor, 2017).

## 6.4 Animal liberation never was a triangular affair

As we have seen, the traditional view of moral status, the anthropocentric view, holds that all and only humans have moral status; that is, only humans have intrinsic value, whereas nonhuman animals and the natural world and environment have, at best,



instrumental value. By contrast, animal liberationists like Singer argue that sentient beings (or subjects-of-a-life) have intrinsic value, while nonsentient entities have instrumental value only. In the 1970s, a different view arose that challenged this thinking, claiming distinction from and superiority to both the anthropocentric view and the animal liberation view. This view, known as *environmental holism*, became and continues to be the basis for modern environmentalism. In contrast to both the anthropocentric and animal liberation/sentientist/subject-of-a-life views, environmental holists see not *individual* beings—be they humans or nonhuman animals—as the primary objects of moral considerability, but instead see the integrity of *ecosystems*, the “land,” and biotic *communities* as the primary units of ethical concern. For environmental holists, groups and communities—not individual sentient beings—possess intrinsic value and thus deserve ethical primacy. Sentient beings by contrast have instrumental value and are thus subordinated to the well-being of the ecosystem and biotic communities. Following the publication of *Animal Liberation*, environmentalists went on the offensive against such theories. In his debate-defining essay “Animal liberation: A triangular affair” (Callicott, 1980), philosopher and environmental holist J. Baird Callicott lays out what remains to this day the central issue pitting animal rights folks against environmentalists.

For Callicott, *biotic communities* have intrinsic value, with the ecological *whole* being the ultimate measure of moral value. On this view, the value of individual organisms lies primarily (or even solely) in their ecological function, and their well-being should be considered only inasmuch as they contribute to the ecological whole. Aldo Leopold’s Maxim captures the moral heart of environmental holism: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise” (Leopold, 1949, pp. 224–225).

With such a maxim driving environmental holism, the radical egalitarianism implicit in the animal liberation view is overridden by an *inegalitarianism* manifest in the “land ethic” where individual nonhuman animals are assigned varying degrees of instrumental value depending on their contribution to the whole. The tension between the animal rights advocate’s primacy of individual sentient beings and the environmentalist’s holism remains the “most fundamental theoretical difference between environmental ethics and the ethics of animal liberation” (Callicott, 1980, p. 337). Callicott sees environmental holism as life-affirming in its celebration of the value of ecosystems and biotic communities, whereas he sees animal liberation as “life loathing” and “world denying” and too narrowly individualistic (Callicott, 1980, p. 333). When the needs of the “whole” clash with the interests of the individuals that comprise it, the former should trump the latter. This best explains the plight of endangered species. Is the moral badness we find in our driving species to extinction found in the suffering of its individual members, or do we decry the loss of species because of its impact on ecosystems and biotic communities? For the environmental holist, the answer is obvious.

To clarify, in Callicott’s view, animal liberation is actually a “triangular affair” between (1) the *individual*-human-valuing anthropocentrists, (2) the *individual*-nonhuman-animal-valuing animal liberation individualists, and (3) the nonanthropocentric, nonindividualist environmentalists whose commitment to environmental holism makes it clearly a superior view. However, animal rights advocates have had plenty of time to reply.



The first critique of the environmentalist position argues that the very conceptual foundation of the environmentalist's view (namely, Leopold's Maxim) fails not only as a land ethic, but as an ethic of any sort, for it makes absolutely *no* reference to ethical values. Instead, the view employs concepts of esthetic value (beauty) or of biological or ecological condition (integrity, stability). For an ethical theory to employ no moral concepts is, at best, impoverished. Second, it is difficult to accept that the moral considerability of an individual is completely determined by the role they play in an ecosystem. This seems to imply that it may be legitimate to use some individuals as mere means to promote, in this case, the alleged integrity, stability, and beauty of nature. Third, the most damning flaw of environmental holism resides in the fact that animal liberation *never was* a "triangular affair," but really a difference between (1) the radical egalitarianism of animal liberation and (2) the *anthropocentrism* of *both* the anthropocentrists and the environmentalists. Allow me to explain.

Many environmental holists condone sacrificing individuals for the sake of the whole—for example, by shooting rabbits to preserve plant species—but they are reluctant to sacrifice human interests in similar situations. Yet, the most abundant species destroying biotic communities is *Homo sapiens*. If human individuals are just another element within the larger and more important biotic community, environmental holism should call for us to "control" or "eliminate" some of these individuals for the sake of the larger whole, an implication Tom Regan calls "environmental fascism" (Regan, 1983, pp. 361–362). Accordingly, when the interests of wholes clash with the interests of individuals, the interests of individuals must be sacrificed. However, if humans cannot be sacrificed for the good of the whole, why can rabbits, deer, and wolves? Environmental holists reply by claiming that while the biotic community matters morally, it is not the *only* community that matters. We humans are part of various "nested" human communities, all of which have claims upon us; we are part of a tight-knit human community, but only a very loose human–rabbit community. Thus our obligations to the biotic community may require the culling of rabbits, but may not require the culling of humans (Callicott, 1999).

But the environmentalist reply will not suffice. It would seem now that some relations within the biotic community carry more moral weight than others, an implication derived not from Leopold's Maxim, but from the point of view of *individual human members* of a given biotic community. Yet, when decisions regarding the content and strength of our various community attachments and commitments are left up to individual human members of a given biotic community themselves, the door to sanctioning diverse and repugnant moral obligations opens. For example, if an individual believes that he has a much stronger community attachment and commitment to White men than Black men, does this mean that he can legitimately favor the interests of the former over the latter? If our moral commitments to the biotic community are trumped by our obligations to the human community, and if other members of the biotic community are merely instrumentally valuable, then environmental holism collapses to the anthropocentric view. And if that's the case, then animal liberation never really was a "triangular affair." Unacceptable implications of environmental holism such as these should give one pause before rejecting animal liberation as too individualistic. At a societal level, recent environmental and food movements trace their antecedents

to the philosophical foundations of anthropocentric environmental holism. Foodie and locavore culture presents a most striking and emblematic example.

## 6.5 Foodieism and locavorism: A celebration of “humane” exploitation

The 2011 Sydney Writers’ Festival featured late British food critic A.A. Gill and late American celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain in conversation with restaurateur Tony Bilson. A significant part of that discussion involves the trio criticizing the animal rights movement (*Food Fighters: AA Gill and Anthony Bourdain in conversation—YouTube, 2011*). Decrying animals rights as a “false morality,” Bilson criticizes the movement for its concern for animals at a time when countless human beings are suffering (apparently he cannot imagine a person being both an animal and human rights advocate). Bilson’s comment prompts the following exchange:

*Gill: Well, I don’t know if it’s a false morality, I just don’t agree with it. I also don’t really care if animals suffer. If I’m perfectly honest, I don’t give a shit!*

*Bourdain: (laughs) I’d rather not see it.*

*Gill: Once you’ve heard one pig scream, the second one’s easier.*

*Bourdain: And he’s right...you learn something about yourself when you kill a pig!*

Putting aside such arrogance and condescension, I’d like instead to focus on their attitude, a certain indifference to the suffering and death of animals slaughtered for food. Not only their indifference, but their giddy, mocking behavior. It is that attitude—an attitude not necessarily emblematic of foodie culture, but not entirely foreign to it either—that I’d like to discuss here.

In researching for this chapter, I found myself struggling to formulate a clear and precise definition of the term “foodie,” while simultaneously grappling to identify those most morally debased characteristics of foodie culture. However, as Wittgenstein (1953) taught us, trying to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for the proper application of a given term is a fool’s errand. Nevertheless, I did exert some effort in trying to be clear on those aspects of foodie culture—specifically those related to animals as food—that I find most morally objectionable. To that end, I devised the following rough taxonomy. I formulated four, nonexhaustive, loose distinctions I refer to as *moral-belief states* in relation to the consumption of animal products and the plight of animals used as food. I employ (as philosophers are wont to do) a term of art in describing these four states, specifically, the term *akrasia*, from the Greek meaning a weakness of the will; acting contrary to one’s moral values. The four moral-belief states I wish to discuss in relation to foodie culture and so-called “humane meat” are as follows:

1. *Nonakratic ignorance.* Individuals in this state are oblivious to the moral issues surrounding the suffering and death of animals for food. This person has never seriously questioned the morality surrounding the production and consumption of animal products, including their flesh, bodily secretions, and zygote-containing roe. Though a person of interest, this person is not my focus here.

2. *Akratic nonignorance*. This is a rather common moral-belief state. Though individuals in this moral-belief state believe the production and consumption of (at least some) animal products is morally problematic, they nevertheless suffer *akrasia*—weakness of will—and therefore continue to consume animal products. As with the first moral-belief state, this person is not my focus.
3. *Nonakratic nonignorance*. Individuals in this moral-belief state believe that the production and consumption of animal products is not morally problematic, thus they suffer no *akrasia* or weakness of the will. This person accepts the suffering of animals as an *unfortunate consequence* of production and consumption. They believe the production and consumption of animal products is not morally problematic usually for at least one of four reasons (known as the “4Ns”): namely, that the consumption of animal products is (1) normal, (2) natural, (3) necessary, and/or (4) nice (Piazza et al., 2015). This, too, is a common moral-belief state. Persons in this state recognize that animals suffer and are killed in food production. While they do not think that suffering and death are necessarily good things, they do accept the suffering as a necessary part of food production and perhaps even part of the “cycle of life.” People in this moral-belief state are often opposed to “factory farms” and industrialized food production methods. They may even express this opposition by purchasing only locally produced, artisanal, “humane” animal products. This category includes people like Michael Pollan and many people who self-identify as foodies.

It’s important to acknowledge that the focus of my analysis here is on affluent Western foodie culture, and also to address briefly a critique of ethical veganism as a form of Eurocentric colonialism (Schlanger, 2018). In a nutshell, the critique goes as follows: for many poor rural communities particularly in the Global South where environmental resources are limited, animals function as an exploitable resource—indispensable as food, forms of economic security, capital, labor, etc.—that can raise standards of living and improve qualities of life. To demand of these people a commitment to ethical veganism is yet another act of colonial and cultural imperialism. While this criticism has some force, if animal ethicists are correct and the use of nonhuman animals by humans is a severe violation of interests and rights, then these differences form a legitimate case of conflicting values surrounding moral, cultural, and economic justice. Resolving such conflicts requires more than simplistic dichotomous thinking. Gruen (2001), for example, provides a sophisticated, nuanced analysis that teases out the moral complexities of such divergent conflicting values, while offering a systematic proposal for adjudicating such conflicts. Though a robust exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of this chapter, it’s safe to say that attempting to shut down discussion of veganism as morally obligatory by labeling it “colonialist” ignores the subtleties involved in such conflicts of values.

Before moving onto my fourth and final category of moral-belief state in relation to the production and consumption of animal products and the plight of animals used as food, I’d like to throw out a rough-and-ready definition of “foodie.” A *foodie* is a kind of gourmet, a gourmand, a person who purports to have an ardent or refined interest in food, who seeks new food experiences as a kind of hobby rather than simply eating out of convenience or hunger. I’ll have more to say about this, but for now, I would like to turn to the fourth moral-belief state.

4. *Sadistic nonakratic nonignorance*. Like the third moral-belief state, the fourth moral-belief state involves nonakratic nonignorance, but with a twist I call *sadistic nonakratic nonignorance*. Like persons in the nonakratic nonignorance moral-belief state, folks in the sadistic nonakratic nonignorance state believe that the production and consumption of animal products is not

morally problematic. However, the crucial moral difference between those in the nonakratic nonignorance moral-belief state and those in the sadistic nonakratic nonignorance moral-belief state is that persons in the latter moral-belief state reject that the suffering of animals is unfortunate. This rejection can manifest itself in myriad ways, including (1) indifference to the suffering and killing of “food animals;” (2) the mocking of the animals and their suffering and killing, and (3) in some cases, even a celebration of the suffering and killing of animals. In these cases, the knowledge of the animals’ suffering can actually add to the exotic, hedonistic, debauched dining pleasure. For these *sadistic foodies*, taste preference and palate satisfaction trump all competing considerations, including issues of animal suffering or even animal welfare.

For sadistic foodies, the pursuit of new food experiences is best interpreted as an artifact of affluence, and in many ways is ultimately about power, prestige, and privilege: *power* over the animal, the food producers, the servers, etc.; *prestige* with other foodies and aspiring foodies; and the *privilege* to afford to seek out novel and exotic food and drink. Sadistic foodies are absolved from all moral culpability since moral culpability is hidden behind the fact that these practices are culturally, socially, and legally sanctioned, encouraged, and even aspired to. In light of this discussion, it should be clear that folks like A.A. Gill and Anthony Bourdain are paradigm cases of sadistic foodies. For these reasons, sadistic foodie culture is particularly morally debased especially regarding the plight of animals used as food.

Let me provide some other examples of sadistic foodies. Describing her experience cooking lobster, Julie Powell, author of the best-selling book *Julie & Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen*, writes:

*Over a period of two weeks...I went on a murderous rampage. I committed gruesome, atrocious acts...If news of the carnage was not widely remarked upon in the local press, it was only because my victims were not Catholic schoolgirls or Filipino nurses, but crustaceans. This distinction means that I am not a murderer in the legal sense. But I have blood on my hands, even if it is the clear blood of lobsters. People say lobsters make a terrible racket in the pot, trying-reasonably enough-to claw their way out of the water. I wouldn't know. I spent the next twenty minutes watching a golf game on the TV with the volume turned up...When I ventured back into the kitchen, the lobsters were very red, and not making any racket at all...Poor little beasties.*

*(Powell, 2005, p. 194)*

Commenting on these passages, B.R. Myers notes in *The Atlantic*:

*This is a prime example of foodies' hostility to the very language of moral values. In mocking and debasing it, they exert, with Madison Avenue's help, a baleful influence on American English as a whole. If words like "sinful" and "decadent" are now just a cutesy way of saying "delicious but fattening," so that any serious use of them marks the speaker as a crank, and if it is more acceptable to talk of the "evils of gluten" than of the "evils of gluttony," much of the blame must be laid at their doorstep.*

*(Myers, 2007)*

The indifference to animal suffering here is exacerbated by the mockery and sarcasm of the sadistic foodie.

Other examples of sadistic foodie culture abound. In a 2015 article from *The Guardian* we learn that:

*Noma's Japanese restaurant serves up a rare treat...The world's best restaurant has opened a pop-up in Tokyo and its still-twitching, slightly gruesome menu, has critics salivating...[T]he celebrated chef behind Noma, Rene Redzepi, has upped the sushi and seasoning stakes with a creation featuring live jumbo prawns, topped with tiny black ants. At Noma Tokyo, perched on the 37th floor of the Mandarin Oriental hotel with views of Mount Fuji in the distance, the presence of half a dozen ants clinging to the wobbling flesh of each prawn is more than just a visual gimmick. With their natural reserves of formic acid, the ants give the botan ebi—or botan prawn—a sour kick.*

(McCurry, 2015)

In her 2014 best-selling book *Anything That Moves: Renegade Chefs, Fearless Eaters, and the Making of a New American Food Culture*, journalist and foodie Dana Goodyear chronicles (sadistic) foodie culture, writing:

*"It's not Bacchanalian, it's Caligulan!" the woman to my left exclaimed one night at Totoraku, an invitation-only, all-beef restaurant in Los Angeles, as course after course of raw beef came to the table. She was a member of a dining group that calls itself the Hedonists. On my right, another Hedonist, a Totoraku regular who had invited me along, was photographing each dish with a macro lens and macro flash. I felt obliged to gulp down as much raw beef throat as I could, and made sure that I was seen doing it.*

(Goodyear, 2014, p. 15)

As research for this chapter, I conducted an interview with Elsa Newman, a server from the exclusive Plumed Horse restaurant, a high-end, French foodie favorite in Silicon Valley. In the course of our discussion, Newman provided keen insight into the precise phenomenon that I am getting at here in sharing her views on and experiences with foodie culture:

*Foodieism is really a way for foodies to talk about money. It's a disguise, a lead-in for braggadocio. They don't talk so much about the food as much as they talk about their travels and material possessions...We offer two different kinds of caviar here. One is produced by rubbing the fish mother's belly rather than cutting it open. That costs \$200 an ounce versus \$90 an ounce for the run-of-the mill caviar. When told that the difference in price is due to the fact that the belly-rubbing caviar is more humane in that it doesn't hurt the mother, customers are turned off by this and order the eggs from the slaughtered fish. But when you tell them that the \$200-an-ounce caviar has slight and unique accents of cucumber, customers fork over the \$200 an ounce without hesitation.*

(Newman, 2015)

To reiterate, sadistic foodie culture is about more than food. It's about intent; it's an expression of cultural capital, economic power, power over the supply chain that

must come together to make “exceptional, special dishes.” Unlike other kinds of foodieism, it is indifferent to and even relishes in the suffering and killing of the animals it requires. And it is morally debased.

Of course, a foodie might respond to these aspects of foodie culture by pointing out that sadistic foodies are a small, elite, nonrepresentative segment of foodie culture. Most foodies are of the nonakratic nonignorance type (type (3)) who, though not indifferent to the suffering and killing of food animals, nevertheless do not see the production and consumption of animal products as morally problematic.

That said, I can only wonder, how many nonsadistic foodies are in reality aspiring sadistic foodies? For those that are, it would seem that the main difference between nonsadistic foodies and sadistic foodies is nothing more than wealth and access. And that’s morally troubling. And even foodies of the Michael Pollan sort—emblematic of a popular kind of foodieism—are themselves accompanied by their own troubling moral consequences.

An increased awareness of the destructive nature of industrialized animal agriculture and fishing, including environmental degradation, individual and public health threats, and the atrocious conditions under which animals are raised, has led to a shift in attitudes toward meat and meat production. This acknowledgment, coupled with a sentimental nostalgia for a time when a majority of Europeans and Americans were farmers and craftspersons, has led to a booming alternative food movement. Known as locavorism, compassionate carnivorism, the sustainable meat movement, the humane meat movement, the happy meat movement, the nose-to-tail food movement, and the conscientious omnivore movement, this movement markets itself as “free range,” “grass fed,” “organic,” “natural,” and “cage free.” For those who desire to consume animal products but are ethically troubled by industrialized animal agriculture, so-called “happy” meat, eggs, and dairy purport to offer an ethical alternative both to veganism (abstaining from the exploitation, instrumental use, and consumption of animals and their products) and to the cruelty of the factory farm, ensuring happier lives (and “humane deaths”) for animals destined to become food. Measured against the vast majority of consumers whose lack of connectedness to their food enables the near-total erasure of suffering from their plates in the form of neatly shrink-wrapped, bloodless cuts of meat, so-called “compassionate carnivore” foodies deserve praise. Yet, despite this supposed concern for the animals’ lives and deaths, relatively little public attention has been paid to the experiences of their short lives or the brutality of their slaughter.

In truth, an overwhelming majority of animals raised on “local” farms are sent to industrial slaughterhouses, butchered alongside their kin raised in factory farms. Animals raised in “humane” conditions routinely suffer branding, dehorning, forced impregnation, tail docking (without anesthesia), overcrowding, beak trimming, castration, tooth filing, ear notching, and nose ring piercing (Bohanec, 2013; Stănescu, 2010).

In “How happy is your meat?: Confronting (dis)connectedness in the ‘Alternative’ meat industry,” geographer Kathryn Gillespie analyzes the tension between the desire for DIY butchers to forge a connection to their food by involving themselves in every step of its production (including slaughter), and the Herculean efforts they make to



disconnect themselves from the actual animal they will butcher to avoid a sentimental or emotional attachment to the hapless subject. For many “compassionate carnivores,” the killing and eating of animals is justified by their interest in forming a consumer–food connection, where personally taking on the death of the animal acts as a means to more ethical eating, a way of honoring the subjects of slaughter while eating them. Yet, as Gillespie points out, even Michael Pollan advises DIY butchers to quickly disconnect from what it means to slaughter an animal. Gillespie characterizes this most profound disconnect, the connected disconnection, in the following way:

*All of the justifications for DIY slaughter as a way to connect to food, to become an artisan, to embody rusticity, and to make slaughter more humane are enlisted to conceal what the process really does. DIY slaughter connects participants to the violence against the animal, and not to the animal him/herself. This “connection” is a wholly false connection. DIY slaughter denies the actual connection we have with animals. Animals are still, in DIY slaughter, conceptualized not as individual animals but as products ready to become meat.*

*(Gillespie, 2011, p. 120)*

A further problem with both “humane” and industrial agriculture is that both rely on putting animals in the category of the edible, an ontologizing of animals as food who are made absent referents, stripped of subjectivity, individual personality, interests, and desires (including the desire not to be harmed) (Adams, 1990; Gruen, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2018; Vialles & Noilie, 1994).

Intimately connected to foodie culture is one popular justification for eating animal flesh and secretions, namely, the claim that eating meat is a personal choice. A common response to the suggestion that nonsadistic foodies ought to go vegan goes something like this: “Though being vegan is fine for some people, vegans shouldn’t try to force their views on others. Eating meat is my personal choice.” However, though meat eating is a personal choice, it is not *merely* a personal choice. In claiming that meat eating is a personal choice we affirm the belief that even trivial palate pleasures trump the life and suffering of a sentient being. Selectively breeding sentient beings into existence to maintain a steady supply of future meals because we see animals as commodities is not merely a “personal choice.” Furthermore, animal agribusiness is the leading single cause of water pollution, air pollution, and climate change (Gerber et al., 2013; Mateo-Sagasta, Zadeh, Turrall, & Burke, 2017) such that, collectively, the consumption of animal products does impose and externalize the costs and consequences of such “personal choices” on others (Simon, 2013; Weis, 2013). Clearly, to argue that the consumption of animal products is merely a personal choice is to ignore and overlook important moral consequences of such choices (Grillo, 2012). But perhaps foodies’ expressions of cultural capital or locavores’ aspirations to artisan Arcadianism might all be made immaterial by a technological advancement so groundbreaking that it will entirely obviate the animal from the food production cycle. Though such an innovation may displease both foodies and locavores, would not advocates for animal liberation and ethical vegans be well advised to embrace such a development?

## 6.6 Will “clean meat” end animal agriculture?

Produced in a laboratory using a complex bioengineering process, “clean meat” (known also as “cultured meat,” “cellular meat,” and “synthetic meat”) is the term being used to describe an emerging category of new animal meat products in which cells from a living animal are grown into muscle intended to approximate the flesh of actual animals. Proponents of clean meat—an alliance of Big Ag, venture capitalists, and even animal welfare advocates—proclaim it as the panacea for both the horrors of and environmental devastation caused by the animal agriculture industry, predicting not only a short-term reduction in the number of animals killed for food, but an end to animal agriculture as we know it within decades. In reality, not only is the clean meat movement already damaging, but there are grave reasons for rejecting such prognostications.

First, the clean meat movement obscures the most direct and simplest way to create a sustainable, ethical food system, namely, a plant-based food system based on sustainable agroecological production. Furthermore, even if the clean meat phenomenon booms, the number of animals now slaughtered for food will not be reduced. A 2019 report by AT Kearney consultants predicts that, in 20 years, most protein products will consist of clean meat or plant-based meat alternatives. However, coincident with this prediction is the fact that the global meat market is expected to double in the next 20 years. Thus the overall number of animals killed will remain unchanged ([AT Kearney Consultants, 2019](#)).

Furthermore, the development and marketing of clean meat technologies ensure that the clean meat industry works not as a replacement for but in concert with the conventional meat industry. Multinational agribusiness giants such as Cargill, Tyson, and Perdue invest heavily in clean meat technologies, not with an eye to transitioning away from or even reducing their factory farming operations, but rather to expanding and diversifying their “protein portfolios.” Cargill assures stockholders that while they invest in new “innovations” like cultured meats, they remain committed to “investing in, and growing” their “traditional protein” businesses, as these are “both necessary to meet [consumer] demand” ([Cargill, 2017](#)).

In an effort to dominate both the clean meat/vegan and “traditional protein” markets, industrial agriculture giants are busy buying up vegan enterprises. For example, over the past 5 years, vegan food producers such as White Wave, Field Roast, Lightlife, and Daiya have been purchased by meat or pharma multinationals. These takeovers represent a kind of “catch and kill” strategy in which meat conglomerates acquire smaller vegan start-ups in an effort to control production and marketing.

Despite these disturbing trends, too many animal rights advocates proclaim that the solution to the atrocity that is animal agriculture can best be found in the capitalist free market vis-à-vis clean meat, the very same system responsible for the development and implementation of massive and systemic industrial mechanisms of slaughter, colonialism, and environmental destruction ([Nibert, 2013](#)). How imprudent, how ill-considered, how treacherous an idea that a planet-annihilating capitalist free enterprise system—itsself, to paraphrase Pythagoras, a ruthless destroyer of animal life—should be entrusted with solving such a colossal instance of systemic

injustice and structural oppression. Perhaps I am being cynical; too skeptical. Is my skepticism warranted? Clearly, the philosophical foundations for establishing robust moral entitlements for nonhuman animals are sound, entitlements that make other-than-human animals proper and legitimate subjects of justice. From the fact that nonhuman animals suffer systemic and institutional domination and oppression, it follows that animal liberation is, indeed, a social justice issue (Jones, 2015; Tuttle, 2014). But show me one social justice movement that was solved by the free market. Clean meat is a pie-in-the-sky market solution to an atrocity that requires not merely an alteration in supply–demand curves, but rather a titanic shift in the moral vision and behavior of humanity.

## 6.7 Redefining speciesism

Though the *practice* of animal-based food production is at the heart of what Crist (2019) calls our “ecological demolition,” it is our *values* that have driven us to this place, in particular, human supremacy and speciesism. While human supremacy is a kind of unjustified privileging of human interests over those of all other nonhuman existence, speciesism has manifold forms. As we’ve seen, Peter Singer sees speciesism as a kind of belief state that places all humans morally above all nonhuman animals. However, paralleling the theoretical expansion and application of the concept of racism by sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s (Nibert, 2002), the concept of speciesism has been greatly broadened since the publication of Singer’s work.

Ecofeminists criticize this kind of individualist interpretation of speciesism as blind to an explanatorily powerful feminist analysis, one that highlights the interconnectedness of racism, sexism, classism, and speciesism (Adams, 1990; Cantor, 1983; Gaard, 2002; Gruen, 2009, 2015; Kheel, 1988). On this view, speciesism is best understood as a manifestation of a deeper, pernicious ideology of domination and violence rooted in patriarchy. Adams (1990), for example, argues that patriarchy makes invisible both animals and women qua *subjects*, making them instead absent referents to be objectified, fragmented, and consumed. Awareness of patriarchy as the root of human supremacy—in particular, speciesism—moves one to resistance of such forces and toward a restoration of the absent referent to her proper status as *subject*.

Similarly, Nibert (2002) argues that casting speciesism as a kind of individual prejudice obscures a more powerful, Marxist analysis of speciesism, revealing deeper social, structural, and economic origins of animal oppression. Both feminists and Marxists see speciesism as an *ideology* that acts to legitimate the structural oppression and exploitation of other animals, while benefiting the power structures and economic interests of capitalists, oligarchs, and the patriarchal power elite. Speciesism reveals itself as a complex set of shared beliefs—imbedded at the systemic, structural, and institutional levels through patriarchy and forces of class oppression—that inspire individual prejudice and discrimination. For Marxists, conceiving of speciesism as a form of prejudice among individuals who then create and legitimate oppressive structures, gets the causal story backward. On an ideological analysis, individual biases and prejudices are *caused by* the formation and implementation of the ideology.

By contrast, John Sanbonmatsu finds both the “liberal” view of Singer and the “radical” views of Marxists and feminists to be fatally impoverished (Sanbonmatsu, 2011). Against the liberal view, Sanbonmatsu argues that if speciesism were merely a set of mistaken, ill-informed beliefs, born of ignorance, then speciesism could be overcome by exposing people to facts and to better arguments. Despite the fact that this knowledge is both pervasive in the literature on animal ethics and promulgated throughout the general populace, human supremacy and speciesism remain ubiquitous. For Sanbonmatsu, the liberal model fails to account for the “sheer obstinacy” of the prejudice, which leads to the question: Why do human cultures “choose to cling to prejudicial and irrational beliefs and attitudes in the face of alternative beliefs that are logically and morally superior” (Sanbonmatsu, 2011, p. 30)?

Sanbonmatsu finds the radical analysis of speciesism inadequate as well, for “if speciesism were merely the expression of the interests of a dominant class, then why does it enjoy virtually universal appeal across class, racial, national, cultural, and gender divides?” (Sanbonmatsu, 2011, p. 30). Not only elites, but “virtually all human beings in all walks of life and social positions, rich and poor, men and women, First Worlders and indigenous tribes” participate in and profit from the speciesist system. What’s missing from the radical critique is a recognition that *we* human beings, ourselves, constitute a dominant class (Sanbonmatsu, 2011, p. 30).

Sanbonmatsu, instead, sees speciesism as a mode of production, a way of producing human life in which the bodies and minds of other beings are treated as objects for human appropriation, exploitation, and extermination. So deeply bound to the core of what it means to be human, speciesism constitutes a fundamental *existential structure* of human life. Borrowing from Sartre’s analysis of anti-Semitism, Sanbonmatsu argues persuasively that speciesism operates as a universal form of *bad faith*, a mode of self-deception—manifest as a potent *social structure*—that constitutes a *total way of being in the world*. In our refusing to refrain from violence toward other sentient beings, we both alienate ourselves from our own embodied being as animals and estrange ourselves from our own humanity.

Other conceptions of speciesism include that of indigenous Cree scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt who sees speciesism as a vestige of colonialism, centering domesticated animal bodies as colonial subjects (Belcourt, 2015), while others like Heitzeg (2012) and Jones (2013) see speciesism as the foundational form of oppression where the relationship between humans and nature is shifted from kinship to dominion, and subsequently to domination of other humans according to class, race, gender, etc. (see also Chapter 2).

## 6.8 Conclusion

I remain dubious that undermining systemic speciesism is possible. Yet the suffering and killing of billions of our fellow earthlings annually morally obligates us to try. Liberally paraphrasing Sartre, we do not fight speciesism because we think we’re going to win; we fight speciesism because it’s speciesist. It is imperative that we as

individuals, at the very least, commit ourselves to vegan practice. Though capitalist markets are ineffective moral vehicles in social justice advocacy, adopting veganism from a political stance, one that involves consumer choice and effective activism, may move the moral needle away from speciesism and toward global justice (Jenkins & Stănescu, 2014; Jones, 2016; McMullen & Halteman, 2019). Educating ourselves about the role that human supremacy and speciesism play in biodiversity loss and the destruction of planetary life while raising awareness and forcing the issue into the public consciousness with an end to shifting public opinion through strategic nonviolent direct action is also required (Crist, 2019; Engler & Engler, 2016). Yet, as I hope to have made clear, we do not suffer from a lack of knowledge, or a kind of epistemological blindness. Rather, we suffer from moral bad faith. Transforming and rethinking animal agriculture does not require better science, innovative research methodologies, or conceptual arguments. That enterprise requires a kind of moral transcendence, a clear-eyed forsaking of our moral bad faith and the hubris of our unfounded human supremacy.

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