

ANIMALS

From *Moral Issues that Divide Us* and *Applied Ethics: A Sourcebook*

James Fieser

www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class

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1. OVERVIEW

Every day we are intimately connected with animals. We eat animals for food, wear animal skins for clothes, own animals as pets, use animals for recreation, and experiment on animals to test drugs and consumer products. We are aware of this, yet we typically give little thought to the staggering number of animals that we use in these ways, and what the animals themselves might be experiencing as we use them for our purposes. While no non-human animal on this planet has the sophisticated rational abilities that we do, many, nevertheless, have mental capacities that enable them to experience pain, suffering and anxiety from our treatment of them. In this chapter we will look at some of the more controversial ways that society treats animals, and whether animals might have rights that protect them from our conduct towards them.

BACKGROUND

The underlying problem with many of the uses of animals is that they cause them to experience pain. Our first line of inquiry, then, is to determine which if any animals are capable of experiencing pain. Next we must look at the specific pain-producing ways in which we treat those animals.

Animal Consciousness and Pain

How do we know which if any animals have the conscious capacity to feel pain? There are many different animals out there with varying degrees of neurological complexity, from primitive ones like worms, to sophisticated ones like chimpanzees. How do we get inside the minds of any of these or know what they are experiencing? This points to a larger problem of how we know the mental experiences of *any* conscious creature, whether it is a human, an animal, or an alien from outer space for that matter. The only mental experience that I can directly encounter is my own. If a rock falls on your foot, I cannot directly experience your thought process to know whether you are consciously feeling pain, and, so too if a rock falls on the foot of an animal. In fact, I can't even say with complete certainty whether you or anyone else has a conscious mind at all since I can't access anyone else's mind directly. All I see is how you behave, but for all I know you are just an unconscious biological robot that is programmed to respond to certain stimulus, such as shouting "ouch" when a rock is dropped on your foot. This is what philosophers call *the problem of other minds*. Although the barrier between my mind and the minds of other people is a permanent one, there is nonetheless a partial solution to this problem. If there are enough physical and behavioral similarities between me and you, then I'm justified in inferring that you have mental experiences just like I do. The solution, then, is one based on analogy, which can be expressed as follows:

1. When a rock falls on my foot, I consciously experience pain.
2. Joe has physical and behavioral features that are similar to mine.
3. Therefore, when a rock falls on Joe's foot, he consciously experiences pain.

Since Joe and I are members of the same species and essentially identical physiologically, it is reasonable for me to conclude that Joe's mental experiences are essentially the same as mine.

What, though, about animal consciousness and animal's experiences of pain? We are different species and physiologically distinct in many important ways. But, while there may be dramatic differences between me and the animals, the same solution from analogy still applies. If there are relevant physiological and behavioral similarities between me and a cat it may be reasonable to conclude that the cat experiences pain the same way that I do. The more physical and behavioral features animals have in common with me, the more likely it is that they are conscious like me. Often we rely on the behavior of an animal to make the judgment call, such as if it limps, whimpers, or makes a recognizable facial expression of distress. These signs, though, are not always reliable since we can too easily read into these our own human experiences. A better test of whether an animal feels pain involves its physiology: the closer its biological pain mechanism is to that of humans, the more reasonable it is to assume that it experiences pain the way that we do. In humans, the experience of pain involves the presence of (1) pain receptors throughout our body, (2) neurological pain pathways within our brains, (3) natural painkillers that are released within the brain when pain increases, and (4) specific pain pathways to the association cortex, which gives the emotional aspect of pain.

Which animals, then, have these pain mechanisms? Invertebrate animals, such as sea slugs, only have the first of these features, but lack the remaining ones which involve more sophisticated nervous systems. It appears, then, that their receptors operate as only stimulus-response reflex mechanisms, without involving any conscious experience of pain. The story is different with most vertebrate animals, though, particularly mammals, whose nervous systems are complex enough to support the first three of the above features, thereby implying that they consciously experience pain. As to emotional suffering, only a small number of mammals have an association cortex, and in smaller mammals such as mice it is virtually nonexistent. It is particularly prominent in chimpanzees and dolphins, which suggests that they might be capable of experiencing human-like suffering.

Factory Farming

In the U.S., over 10 billion animals are raised and killed each year for food—about 9 billion chickens, 250 million turkeys, 100 million pigs, 35 million cows. The vast majority of these are not raised on small family farms but, rather, in large agricultural facilities called *factory farms*, also known as Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). The idea of factory farming originated in the 1920s with the discovery of vitamins A and D. When mixed with feed, farm animals were capable of growing without sunlight or exercise, which enabled them to be raised more efficiently in barns throughout the year. With population growth, and increases in meat eating, by the 1960s factory farming became widespread and today it dominates the meat production industry. The driving force behind factory farming is economics: it is cheaper to raise animals in a confined area using assembly-line methods than it is to manage them in larger and open areas. The meat industry is highly competitive, and to stay in business farmers need to adopt the most cost-effective methods of raising animals.

In the process of cutting production costs, factory farming has been notoriously neglectful of animal welfare, and the main animals affected are cows, pigs, turkeys and chickens. The central problem is that an excessive number of animals are held in tightly confined areas, typically in metal buildings that allow no access to sunlight, fresh air, or vegetation, and prevent them from moving around or carrying out other normal behaviors. It is typical for feedlots to house thousands of cows, or egg-laying facilities to hold over a million chickens in small cages stacked several layers high. Many animals are so restricted that they cannot turn around to satisfy their natural inclinations of self-grooming. Within these tightly compressed areas, chickens often become aggressive and, to prevent them from pecking their neighbors, farmers clip off their beaks shortly after they are hatched. Diseases rapidly spread in such close and unsanitary living quarters, and to combat this antibiotics are mixed in with their feed. To maximize efficiency, animals are given growth hormones or specially bred to put on bulk, often to the point that their legs break under their weight. About 10% of factory farm animals die from disease, injury and stress, without ever making it to slaughterhouses. The enormous amounts of urine and feces from these animals is stored in large lagoons or sprayed on

crops, which pollutes the air and contaminates groundwater.

The principle products of factory farming are meat and dairy items. However, built into the economics of animal agriculture, all parts of slaughtered animals are used as ingredients in various consumer products, as described here regarding the rendered byproducts of slaughtered cows:

the blood of a slaughtered cow is used to manufacture plywood adhesives, fertilizer, fire extinguisher foam, and dyes. Her fat helps make plastic, tires, crayons, cosmetics, lubricants, soaps, detergents, cough syrup, contraceptive jellies and creams, ink, shaving cream, fabric softeners, synthetic rubber, jet engine lubricants, textiles, corrosion inhibitors, and metal-machining lubricants. Her collagen is found in pie crusts, yogurts, matches, bank notes, paper, and cardboard glue; her intestines are used in strings for musical instruments and racquets; her bones in charcoal ash for refining sugar, in ceramics, and cleaning and polishing compounds.[Steven M. Wise, *Drawing the Line: Science and the Case for Animal Rights*, (2002)].

The life spans of all factory-farmed animals are very short. While the normal life of a cow is 25 years, factory farm beef cattle are slaughtered at around age 1, and dairy cows at age 4. Pigs, which live to 15 years, are slaughtered at less than a year. Chickens, with a 7 year lifespan, are killed at 5 weeks for food and 2 years for egg-laying. As the egg-laying industry uses only hens, unwanted male chicks are killed as soon as they hatch—about 200 million a year—typically by being dropped alive into a grinding machine.

Animal Research

Over 25 million animals are killed each year in the US for animal testing. The specific type of animal used depends upon the type of test that's performed. Around 90% of these are mice and rats, and about 1% (i.e., 250,000) are cats, dogs and primates. Other animals used in research are hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens, sheep, horses and cows. There are three main purposes of animal testing. First is to advance scientific knowledge about animals themselves, such as their behavior and physiology. Second is to use animals as models for studying human diseases, such as viruses, and the effectiveness of human medicine. Third is to use animals as models for toxicity testing of drugs, food, cosmetics, and household chemicals; these experiments tell us whether a particular manufactured substance might be harmful or even lethal for humans. Almost all research animals are killed when the studies are complete.

Inhumane treatment of laboratory animals can occur at every stage of their lives. There is distress from their early weaning, transporting them in unfamiliar and harsh conditions, housing them in cages for most of their lives, and restraining them during testing procedures – such as strapping a primate to a chair. Then there is the test procedure itself which involves administering a drug or chemical, or performing surgery. Toxicity tests are vivid examples. Suppose, for example, that a cosmetic company develops a new facial cream. To test for potential harm, researchers will apply the chemical agents in the cream to lab animals' skin and eyes, feed it to them, and have them breathe its vapors. The chemical will be introduced in both low and high quantities to detect the point at which physiological problems might emerge. Specific problems might include skin rash, weight loss, nausea, pain, genetic damage, birth defects, organ failure, convulsions, coma, and death. Some animals will be subjected to long term exposure—about two years—to test for carcinogenicity. One particularly controversial toxicity experiment is the Draize test, which involves placing a substance directly into the eyes of a live, conscious animal, usually an albino rabbit. While some countries are phasing out this particular procedure, it is still practiced in the U.S.

To help limit the harm done to animals in laboratory experiments, some researchers advocate what are known as the *Three Rs* of humane animal experimentation: replacement, reduction, and refinement. The original creators of this standard explain what each means here:

Replacement means the substitution for conscious living higher animals of insentient material. Reduction means reduction in the numbers of animals used to obtain information of a given amount and precision. Refinement means any decrease in the incidence or severity of inhumane procedures applied to those animals which still have

to be used. [William Russell Rex Burch, *The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique*(1959), Ch. 4]

With replacement, alternative laboratory tests might involve experimenting only on parts of animals, such as isolated cells, tissues, or organs; they might also test invertebrates such as horseshoe crabs in place of vertebrates and mammals, or they might study vertebrates only during early stages of fetal development. Computer models of living organisms are also becoming an option. With reduction, one effort would be to eliminate unnecessary duplication of animal experiments, which often occur when researchers are unaware of or don't have access to the data of earlier experiments. Researchers note that while needless redundancy should be eliminated, it is often important to replicate the same experiments as part of the scientific method whereby one researcher confirms the findings of another. With refinement, animal suffering can be reduced by giving them more natural environments and better anesthesia.