

Friends and Enemies (page 32-33)

No reader of this book would tolerate someone swinging a pickax at a dog's face. Nothing could be more obvious or less in need of explanation. Is such concern morally out of place when applied to fish, or are we silly to have such unquestioning concern about dogs? Is the suffering of a drawn-out death something that is cruel to inflict on any animal that can experience it, or just some animals?

Can the familiarity of the animals we have come to know as companions be a guide to us as we think about the animals we eat? Just how distant are fish (or cows, pigs, or chickens) from us in the scheme of life? Is it a chasm or a tree that defines the distance? Are nearness and distance even relevant? If we were to one day encounter a form of life more powerful and intelligent than our own, and it regarded us as we regard fish, what would be our argument against being eaten?

The lives of billions of animals a year and the health of the largest ecosystems on our planet hang on the thinly reasoned answers we give to these questions. Such global concerns can themselves feel distant, though. We care most about what's close to us, and have a remarkably easy time forgetting everything else. We also have a strong impulse to do what others around us doing, especially when it comes to food. Food ethics are so complex because food is bound to both taste buds and *taste*, to individual biographies and social histories. The choice-obsessed modern West is probably more accommodating to individuals who choose to eat differently than any culture ever has been, but ironically, the utterly unselective omnivore — "I'm easy; I'll eat anything"—can appear more socially sensitive than the individual who tries to eat in a way that is good for society. Food choices are determined by many factors, but reason (even consciousness) is not generally high on the list.

There is something about eating animals that tends to be polarizing: never eat them or never sincerely question eating them; become an activist or disdain activists. These opposing positions--and the closely related unwillingness to take a position --converge in suggesting that eating animals matters. If and how we eat animals cuts to something deep. Meat is bound up with the story of who we are and who we want to be, from the book of Genesis to the latest farm bill. It raises significant philosophical questions and is a \$140 billion-plus a year industry that occupies nearly a third of the land on the planet, shapes ocean ecosystems, and may well determine the future of earth's climate. And yet we seem able to think only about the edges of the arguments --the logical extremes rather than the practical realities. My grandmother said she wouldn't eat pork to save her life, and though the context of her story is as extreme as it gets, many people seem to fall back on this all-or-nothing framework when discussing their everyday food choices. It's a way of thinking that we would never apply to other ethical realms. (Imagine always or never lying.) I can't count the times that upon telling someone I am vegetarian, he or she responded by pointing out the inconsistency in my lifestyle or trying to find a flaw in an argument I never made. (I have often felt that my vegetarianism matters more to such people than it does to me.)

We need a better way to talk about eating animals. We need a way that brings meat to the center of the public discussion in the same way it is often at the center of our plates. This doesn't require that we pretend we are going to have a collective agreement. However strong our intuitions are about what's right for us personally and even about what's right for others, we all know in advance that our positions will clash with those of our neighbors. What do we do with that most inevitable reality? Drop the conversation, or find a way to reframe it?

Suffering (pgs-76-77)

What is suffering? The question assumes a subject that suffers. All the serious challenges to the idea that animals suffer tend to grant that animals "feel pain" at one level, but deny them the sort of being—the general mental-emotional world or "subjectivity"—that would make this suffering meaningfully analogous to our own. I think this objection hits at something very real and alive for many people, namely the sense that animals' suffering is simply of a different order and therefore not really important (even if regrettable).

We all have strong intuitions of what suffering means, but they can be extremely difficult to capture in words. As children, we learn the meaning of suffering by interacting with other beings in the world—both humans, especially our family, and animals. The word *suffering* always implies an intuition of a shared experience with others—a shared drama. Of course, there are special kinds of human suffering—the unfulfilled dream, the experience of racism, bodily shame, and so on—but should that lead one to say that animal suffering is "not really suffering"?

The most important part of definitions of or other reflections on suffering is not what they tell us about suffering—about neural pathways, nociceptors, prostaglandins, neuronal opioid receptors—but about who suffers and how much that suffering should matter. There may well be philosophically coherent ways to imagine the world and the meaning of suffering so that we come up with a definition that won't apply to animals. Of course, this would fly in the face of common sense, but I'll grant that it might be done. So, if those who argue that animals don't really suffer and those who argue that they do can both offer coherent understandings and present persuasive evidence, should we be dubious about animal suffering? Should we grant that animals might not *really* suffer—not in the ways that matter most?

As you can guess, I would say no, but I'm not going to argue over this. Rather, I think the essential point is simply to realize the magnitude of what is at stage when we ask "What is suffering?"

The Life and Death of a Bird (pgs 129-137)

The second farm I saw with C was set up in a series of twenty sheds, each 45 feet wide by 490 feet long, each holding in the neighborhood of 33,000 birds. I didn't have a tape measure with me and couldn't do anything resembling a head count. But I can assert these numbers with confidence because the dimensions are typical in the industry—though some growers are now building larger sheds: up to 60 feet by 504 feet, housing 50,000 or more birds.

It's hard to get one's head around the magnitude of 33,000 birds in one room. You don't have to see it for yourself, or even do the math, to understand that things are packed pretty tight. In its Animal Welfare Guidelines, the National Chicken Council indicates an appropriate stocking density to be eight-tenths of a square foot per bird. That's what's considered animal welfare by the "mainstream" organization representing chicken producers, which shows you how thoroughly co-opted ideas about welfare have become—and why you can't trust labels that come from anywhere but a reliable third-party source.

It's worth pausing on this for a moment. Although many animals live with far less, let's assume the full eight-tenths of a square foot. Try to picture it. (It's unlikely you'll ever get to see the inside of a poultry factory farm in person, but there are plenty of images on the Internet if your imagination needs help.) Find a piece of printer paper and imagine a full-grown bird shaped something like a football with legs standing on it. Imagine 33,000 of these rectangles in a grid. (Broilers are never in cages, and never on multiple levels.) Now enclose the grid with windowless walls and put a ceiling on top. Run in automated (drug-laced) feed, water, heating, and ventilation systems. This is a farm.

Now to the farming.

First, find a chicken that will grow big fast on as little feed as possible. The muscles and fat tissues of the newly engineered broiler birds grown significantly faster than their bones, leading to deformity and disease. Somewhere between 1 and 4 percent of the birds will die writhing in convulsions from sudden death syndrome, a condition virtually unknown outside of factory farms. Another factory-farm-induced condition in which excess fluids fill the body cavity, ascites, kills even more (5 percent of birds globally). Three out of four will have some degree of walking impairment, and common sense suggests they are in chronic pain. One out of four will have such significant trouble walking that there is no question they are in pain.

For your broilers, leave the lights on about twenty-four hours a day for the first week or so of the chicks' lives. This encourages them to eat more. Then turn the lights off a bit, giving them maybe four hours of darkness a day—just enough sleep for them to survive. Of course chickens will go crazy if forced to live in such grossly unnatural conditions for long—the lighting and crowding, the burdens of their grotesque bodies. At least broiler birds are typically slaughtered on the forty-second day of their lives (or increasingly the thirty-ninth), so they haven't yet established social hierarchies to fight over.

Needless to say, jamming deformed, drugged, overstressed birds together in a filthy, waste-coated room is not very healthy. Beyond deformities, eye damage, blindness, bacterial infections of bones, slipped vertebrae, paralysis, internal bleeding, anemia, slipped tendons, twisted lower legs and necks, respiratory diseases, and weakened immune systems are frequent and long-standing problems on factory farms. Scientific studies and government records suggest that virtually all (upwards of 95 percent of) chickens become infected with E.

coli (an indicator of fecal contamination) and between 39 and 75 percent of chickens in retail stores are still infected. Around 8 percent of birds become infected with salmonella (down from several years ago, when at least one in four birds was infected, which still occurs on some farms). Seventy to 90 percent are infected with another potentially deadly pathogen, campylobacter. Chlorine baths are commonly used to remove slime, odor, and bacteria.

Of course, consumers might notice that their chickens don't taste quite right—how could a drug stuffed, disease-ridden, shit-contaminated animal possibly taste?—but the birds will be injected (or otherwise pumped up) with “broths” and salty solutions to give them what we have come to think of as the chicken look, smell, and taste. (A recent *Consumer Reports* found that chicken and turkey products, many labeled as *natural*, “ballooned with 10 to 30 percent of their weight as broth, flavoring, or water.”)

The farming done, it's now time for “processing.”

Our New Sadism (pgs 181-188)

Environmental problems can be tracked by doctors and government agencies whose assigned task is to care for human beings, but how do we find out about the suffering of animals on factory farms, which doesn't necessarily leave any traces?

Undercover investigations by dedicated nonprofit organizations are one of the only meaningful windows the public has into the imperfect day-to-day running of factory farms and industrial slaughterhouses. At an industrial pig-breeding facility in North Carolina, videotape taken by undercover investigators showed some workers administering daily beatings, bludgeoning pregnant sows with a wrench, and ramming an iron pole a foot deep into mother pigs' rectums and vaginas. These things have nothing to do with bettering the taste of the resultant meat or preparing the pigs for slaughter—they are merely perversion. In other videotaped instances at the farm, workers sawed off pig's legs and skinned them while they were still conscious. At another facility operated by one of the largest pork producers in the United States, some employees were videotaped throwing, beating, and kicking pigs; slamming them against concrete floors and bludgeoning them with metal gate rods and hammers. At another farm, a yearlong investigation found systemic abuse of tens of thousands of pigs. The investigation documented workers extinguishing cigarettes on the animals' bodies, beating them with rakes and shovels, strangling them, and throwing them into manure pits to drown. Workers also stuck electric prods in pigs' ears, mouths, vaginas, and anuses. The investigation concluded that managers condoned these abuses, but authorities have refused to prosecute. Lack of prosecution is the norm, not the exception. We are not in a period of “lax” enforcement—there simply never has been a time when companies could expect serious punitive action if they were caught abusing farmed animals.

Whatever farmed-animal industry we turn to, similar problems arise. Tyson Foods is a major KFC supplier. An investigation at one large Tyson facility found that some workers regularly ripped off the heads of fully conscious birds (with explicit permission from their supervisor), urinated in the live-hang area (including on the conveyor belt carrying birds), and let shoddy automated slaughter equipment that cut birds' bodies rather than their necks go unrepaired indefinitely. At a KFC "Supplier of the Year," Pilgrim's Pride, fully conscious chickens were kicked, stomped on, slammed into walls, had chewing tobacco spit in their eyes, literally had the shit squeezed out of them, and had their beaks ripped off. And Tyson and Pilgrim's Pride not only supplied KFC; at the time of writing they were the two largest chicken processors in the nation, killing nearly five billion birds per year between them.

Even without relying on undercover investigations and learning about the extreme (though not necessarily uncommon) abuse that results from workers' taking out their frustrations on animals, we know that factory-farmed animals have miserable lives.

Consider the life of a pregnant sow. Her incredible fertility is the source of her particular hell. While a cow will give birth to only a single calf at a time, the modern factory sow will birth, nurse, and raise an average of nearly nine piglets—a number that has been increased annually by industry breeders. She will invariably be kept pregnant as much as possible, which will prove to be the majority of her life. When she is approaching her due date, drugs to induce labor may be administered to make the timing more convenient for the farmer. After her piglets are weaned, a hormone injection makes the sow rapidly "cycle" so that she will be ready to be artificially inseminated again in only three weeks.

Four out of five times a sow will spend the sixteen weeks of her pregnancy confined in a "gestation crate" so small that she will not be able to turn around. Her bone density will decrease because of the lack of movement. She will be given no bedding and often will develop quarter-sized, blackened, pus-filled sores from chafing in the crate. (In one undercover investigation in Nebraska, pregnant pigs with multiple open sores on their faces, heads, shoulders, backs, and legs—some as large as fists—were videotaped. A worker at the farm commented, "They all have sores....There's hardly a pig in there who doesn't have a sore.")

Proposals (pgs 234-238)

In the not-so-distant history of America's animal protection organizations, those advocating vegetarianism, small in number but well organized, were definitively at odds with those advocating an *eat with care* stance. The ubiquity of factory farming and industrial slaughter has changed this, closing a once large gap between nonprofits like PETA that advocate veganism and those like HSUS that say nice things about veganism but primarily advocate welfare.

Of all the ranchers I met in my research, Frank Reese holds a special status. I say this for two reasons. The first is that he is the only farmer I met who doesn't do anything on his ranch that is plainly cruel. he doesn't castrate his animals like Paul or brand them like Bill. Where other farmers have said "We have to do this to survive" or "Consumers demand this," Frank has taken

big risks (he'd lose his home if his farm failed completely) and asked his customers to eat differently (his birds need to be cooked longer or they don't taste right; they also are more flavorful and so can be used more sparingly in soups and a variety of other dishes, so he provides recipes and occasionally even prepares meals for customers to reeducate them in older ways of cooking). His work requires tremendous compassion and tremendous patience. And its value is not only moral, but, as a new generation of omnivores demands real welfare, economic.

Frank is one of the only farmers I know of who has succeeded in preserving the genetics of "heritage" poultry (he is the first and *only* rancher authorized by the USDA to call his birds "heritage"). His preservation of traditional genetics is incredibly important because the single biggest factor preventing the emergence of tolerable turkey and chicken farms is the present reliance on factory farm hatcheries to supply baby birds to growers—almost the only hatcheries there are. Virtually none of these commercially available birds are capable of reproducing, and serious health problems have been bred into their genes in the process of engineering them (the chickens we eat, like turkeys, are dead-animals—by design they can't live long enough to reproduce). Because the average farmer can't run his own hatchery, concentrated industry control of genetics locks farmers and their animals into the factory system. Aside from Frank, most all other small poultry farmers—even the few good farmers that pay for heritage genetics and raise their birds with great regard for their welfare—usually must have the birds they raise each year sent to them by mail from factory-style hatcheries. As one might imagine, sending chicks by mail poses serious welfare problems, but an even more serious concern is the conditions under which the parent and grandparent birds are reared. Reliance on such hatcheries where the welfare of breeding birds may be as bad as in the worst factory farms, is the Achilles' heel of many otherwise excellent small producers. For these reasons, Frank's traditional genetics and skill in breeding give him the potential to create an alternative to poultry factory farms in a way almost no one else can.

But Frank, like many of the farmers who hold a living knowledge of traditional husbandry techniques, clearly won't be able to realize his potential without help. Integrity, skill, and genetics alone do not create a successful farm. When I first met him, the demand for his turkeys (he now has chickens, too) couldn't have been higher—he would sell out six months in advance of slaughter time. Though his most loyal customers tended to be blue-collar, his birds were prized by chefs and foodies from Dan Barber and Mario Batali to Martha Stewart. Nevertheless, Frank was losing money and subsidizing his ranch with other work.

Frank has his own hatchery, but he still needs access to other services, especially a well-run slaughterhouse. The loss of not only local hatcheries, but also slaughterhouses, weigh stations, grain storage, and other services farmers require is an immense barrier to the growth of husbandry-based ranching. It's not that consumers won't buy the animals such farmers raise; it's that farmers can't produce them without reinventing a now destroyed rural infrastructure.

The First Thanksgiving of His Childhood (pgs 264-267)

For what, at Thanksgiving, am I giving thanks? As a child, the first kernel I transferred to the table was symbolic of my thankfulness for my health and the health of my family. Strange choice for a kid. Maybe it was a sentiment made in the shade cast by no family tree, or a response to my grandmother's mantra of "You should be healthy"—which couldn't help but sound like an accusation, as in, "You aren't healthy, but you should be." Whatever the cause, even as a young child, I thought of health as something unreliable. (It wasn't only because of the pay and prestige that so many children and grandchildren of survivors became doctors.) The next kernel represented my happiness. The next my loved ones—the family surrounding me, of course, but also my friends. And those would be my first three kernels today—health, happiness, and loved ones that I am giving thanks for. Perhaps it will be different when my son is old enough to participate in the ritual. For now, though, I give my thanks for, through, and on behalf of him.

How can Thanksgiving be a vehicle for expressing that most sincere thankfulness? What rituals and symbols would facilitate an appreciation for health, happiness, and loved ones?

We celebrate together, and that makes sense. And we don't just gather, we eat. This wasn't always so. The federal government first thought to promote Thanksgiving as a day of fasting, since that was how it had been frequently observed for decades. According to Benjamin Franklin, whom I think of as a kind of patron saint of the holiday, it "a farmer of plain sense" who proposed that feasting "would be more becoming the gratitude." The voice of that farmer, who I suspect was a stand-in for Franklin himself, is now the conviction of a nation.

Producing and eating our own food is, historically, much of what made us Americans and not subjects of European powers. While other colonies required massive imports to survive, early American immigrants, thanks to help from Native Americans, were almost entirely self-sustaining. Food is not so much a symbol of freedom as the first requirement for freedom. We eat foods that are native to America on Thanksgiving to acknowledge that fact. In many ways, Thanksgiving initiates a distinctly American ideal of ethical consumerism. The Thanksgiving meal is America's founding act of conscientious consumption. But what about the food we feast upon? Does what we consume make sense?

All but a negligible number of the 45 million turkeys that find their way to our Thanksgiving tables were unhealthy, unhappy, and —this is a radical understatement—unloved. If people come to different conclusions about the turkey's place on the Thanksgiving table, at least we can all agree on those three things.

Today's turkeys are natural insectivores fed a grossly unnatural diet, which include "meat, sawdust, leather tannery by-products," and other things whose mention, while widely documented, would probably push your belief too far. Given their vulnerability to disease, turkeys are perhaps the worst fit of any animal for the factory model. So they are given more antibiotics than any other farmed animals. Which encourages antibiotic resistance. Which



makes these indispensable drugs less effective for humans. In a perfectly direct way, the turkeys on our tables are making it harder to cure human illness.

It shouldn't be the consumer's responsibility to figure out what's cruel and what's kind, what's environmentally destructive and what's sustainable. Cruel and destructive food products should be illegal. We don't need the option of buying children's toys made with lead paint, or aerosols with chlorofluorocarbons, or medicines with unlabeled side effects. And we don't need the option of buying factory-farmed animals.

However much we obfuscate or ignore it, we know that the factory farm is inhumane in the deepest sense of the word. And we know that there is something that matters in a deep way about the lives we create for the living beings most within our power. Our response to the factory farm is ultimately a test of how we respond to the powerless, to the most distant, to the voiceless—it is a test of how we act when no one is forcing us to act one way or another. Consistency is not required, but engagement with the problem is.