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Title(What's for Dinner?)

One doesn't typically think too in depth about what they want to eat for dinner. The typical process involves using their emotions to determine what food they are in the mood for, with little regard for the emotions of what they eat. David Foster Wallace examined this in his piece, "Consider The Lobster" where he addresses the topic of pain and suffering in the way lobsters are prepared, but also relates this to the animal kingdom in general. Wallace's idea is that, "there are limits to what even interested persons can ask of each other", questioning the morality of human beings in regards to eating habits and overall lifestyle. Similar questions concerning morality and perspective arise in "Animals Like Us" by Hal Herzog and "Against Meat" by Jonathan Safran Foer.

During the past few months a crossroad has been presented in my mind where there are three different options; one being eating meat and justifying it, path two where meat is out of my life, or option three where I stand at the intersection and not make a clear decision and continue to eat meat without thinking about the issue. David Foster Wallace casted a light on not taking a clear stance, but nothing has come about my thoughts until recently. Herzog uses the term created by philosopher Strachan Donnelley "troubled middle" to describe the grey area I find myself in(Herzog 7). While these paths may be clear cut for a few individuals, others and struggle to develop our opinions on the matter. The troubled middle, while morally questionable and confusing, has worked in the past, but can not be justified due to the disconnect between individual thoughts and their actions.

To better understand the entirety of the argument, one must look back to the root of the problem in David Foster Wallace's piece, "Consider the Lobster". Although lobsters and lobstering are quite familiar to New Englander's, there are many aspects to both the biological processes and the cooking process which may intrigue one. Preparing a lobster is unlike any other meat preparation out there. For example when planning to cook chicken or beef, you can go to the store and pick up the desired meat in a foam tray covered with a layer of plastic. However to eat a lobster you must pick it out of a tank while it is looking at you. It is the only animal where to cook it, you would do it alive rather than having it be dead upon pick up. The typical fashion of cooking it involves placing the living lobster into a pot of boiling water, and while there are alternative options none seem to be better for the lobster pain wise. Bringing up the question while it may be, "the freshest food there is" is it morally right to boil it alive for our satisfaction or is it morally okay for humans to kill animals for pleasure(Wallace 502)?

The moral complexity of this arises from the lack of knowledge on the subject of pain and suffering of not just lobsters, but all animals. There are two main criteria used to determine whether or not a living creature has the capacity to suffer, since humans can not relate their pain and suffering into animal terms. The first criteria is do the subjects have the “neurological hardware required for pain-experience”(Wallace 506). In humans the experience of pain comes from the cerebral cortex, but lobsters do not have this area because their nervous system is much simpler, similar to one of a grasshopper. However Wallace states, “pain reception is known to be a much older and more primitive system of nociceptors and prostaglandins...the cerebral cortex is involved in what’s variously suffering, distress, or the emotional experience of pain.”(Wallace 504). Pain is still recognized the emotional aspect may not be completely there for the lobsters. This can even be denied by, “the claws scraping the sides of the kettle as it thrashes around. The lobster, in other words, behaves very much as you or I would behave”, meeting criteria two which is “[the] animal demonstrates behavior associated with pain”(Wallace 506). Then again, this is all about perspective, some may view this as pain and suffering, while others may see it as just the cause of death.

In the article, “Animals Like Us” by Hal Herzog, perspective is uniquely altered by the individual’s mind to help justify their actions rather than facing the truth in front of them. Judith Black knew killing animals were wrong and became a vegetarian, or called herself a vegetarian. A vegetarian is someone who does not eat meat, but in Judith’s mind she could eat fish and still be a vegetarian. Judith believed there was a moral difference between eating chicken for example and eating salmon, but why is the life of one animal considered more than the life of another? Human senses can cause people to question their morals and everything they stand for. Herzog states that ex-vegetarians, like Judith, outweigh vegetarians in the United states “by a ratio of three to one.”(Herzog 2). People do not simply stop caring about the treatment of animals, but rather they realize what food they have been missing out on. While their perspective and outlook on value of life may change over time, it is highly more likely that humans revert back to, “I was doing it for myself more than for her”(Herzog 2).

Considering an individual's personal perspective I can understand why Herzog is in favor of the “troubled middle” or fence-sitters position, however I still disagree. Herzog states, “ the trouble middle makes perfect sense because moral quagmires are inevitable in a species with a huge brain and a big heart”(Herzog 7). People can remain in the troubled middle, but I pose the same questions as David Foster Wallace did, “what ethical convictions have you worked out that permit you not just eat but to savor and enjoy flesh-based viands...what makes it feel truly okay inside, to just dismiss the whole thing out of hand?(Wallace 510). While the trouble middle seems like ideal territory, an individual can not knowing do something against what they believe without allowing for a fabricated justification to help them sleep at night. Judith Black had to convince herself that fish were not animals in order to keep her “vegetarian” status. How are fish

not considered animals when the only difference is that they do not live on land. Having consideration for some, but not all species puts you in that same troubled middle position in the sense that you can not only care about the rights of some animals and not all of them. This controversy forces individual actions to disagree with the beliefs in one's head.

Our perspective and life experience leads us to developing our own personal morals. In his article, "Against Meat", Foer has complex morals and personal beliefs giving him perplexing eating habits. Foer like many other Americans was an on and off vegetarian for most of his life, and his wife had a similar history with food and he describes it as, "there were things she believed while lying in bed at night, and there were choices made at the breakfast table the next morning."(Foer 4). While him and wife may believe one thing, their actions do not necessarily match their beliefs, giving their morals little weight behind them. If there is an issue you morally believe is wrong and your actions condone it, does that make you a man of your word? Foer later describes it as, "we became engaged and vegetarian...But only whenever we felt like it"(Foer 4). Foer and his wife spend a good portion of their lives in the troubled middle where they dip a toe into each pool of water, "we were vegetarians who from time to time ate meat"(Foer 4). Their whole perspective is one big oxymoron.