

## Not So Humble Pie

I'm making a pie. I take pies very seriously, and so should you. A good pie is a work of art. Of course, pastry is a tricky thing to get right, but filling is where the real difficulties lie. Here we confront all sorts of problems to do with taste and texture, and, if some are to be believed, an ethical problem to boot. I'm making a steak and kidney pie (it's very English), and, being frank, that means at least one animal had to live in captivity, only to be killed so I can cook it. How can I be *justified* in sacrificing a living thing for a humble pie?

Humble pie is precisely what those who think consuming meat is unethical expect us to eat. They think that, when it comes to deciding what we can and can't do to living creatures, meat eaters make an illegitimate distinction between humans and other animals. As far as they're concerned, we can't think it's wrong to eat each other *and* think it's okay to eat animals.

Utilitarianism provides the strongest argument for this claim, and it goes something like this: a) *value* is what justifies action, b) the *source* of all value is pleasure and pain, c) our *capacity* for pleasure and pain is something we share with all other animals, therefore d) *distinctions* between types of animal can never justify differences in *kind* in the way we act toward them, only differences in *degree*. So, even if we acknowledge that our capacity to enjoy a bit of Shakespeare is worlds apart from a rabbit's orgasm, there must be some standard by which their value can be compared. You can garnish this idea in various ways, but here's the meat of it: there must be a certain number of rabbit orgasms that is worth more than the complete works of Shakespeare – and, if we were compelled to choose, we would have to pick the former over the latter.

I think that there is no amount of rabbit gratification that's worth even a single line of Shakespeare, and that explaining why will let me save my pie, if not its humility.

The dodgy utilitarian premise is (b). Although pleasure and pain *cause* other animals to act, they don't give them *reasons* to act. While pleasure and pain have value for us, they don't have value for animals. Nothing has value for animals, because there's no sense in which their behaviour could be justified or unjustified. This is the essence of the difference between us and them: animals merely *behave*, whereas we *act*. What we have in common with animals is that we both have *biological lives*: we continually metabolise, consuming and digesting sustenance, regulated by nervous systems. What distinguishes us is that we also have *personal lives*: we reason and act, making choices that reflect upon who we are, constructing ourselves as persons.

The true source of value is the capacity for action itself, or *freedom*. The value which transcends usefulness is *beauty*, and the beauty that we make for ourselves is *art*. We are free insofar as we don't just make beauty *for* ourselves, but also *out of* ourselves. We warrant ethical special treatment not because we're a special kind of animal (*humans*), but because we're our own works of art (*persons*).

I am a work of art, and so is my pie. Animals can be beautiful, but they are not thereby works of art, either for others or for themselves. Life is cheap. Pies are art. I'll take art over humility any day.