

Practical Ethics

Third Edition

PETER SINGER

Princeton University and the University of Melbourne



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

of law, or perhaps just another example of our tendency to objectify our personal wants and preferences.

These are plausible accounts of ethics, as long as they are carefully distinguished from the crude form of subjectivism that sees ethical judgments as descriptions of the speaker's attitudes. In their denial of a realm of ethical facts that is part of the real world, existing quite independently of us, they may be correct. Suppose that they are correct: does it follow from this that ethical judgments are immune from criticism, that there is no role for reason or argument in ethics and that, from the standpoint of reason, any ethical judgment is as good as any other? I do not think it does, and advocates of the three positions referred to in the previous paragraph do not deny reason and argument a role in ethics, though they disagree as to the significance of this role.

This issue of the role that reason can play in ethics is the crucial point raised by the claim that ethics is subjective. To put practical ethics on a sound basis, it has to be shown that ethical reasoning is possible. The denial of objective ethical facts does not imply the rejection of ethical reasoning. Here the temptation is to say simply that the proof of the pudding lies in the eating, and the proof that reasoning is possible in ethics is to be found in the remaining chapters of this book; but this is not entirely satisfactory. From a theoretical point of view, it is unsatisfactory because we might find ourselves reasoning about ethics without really understanding how this can happen; and from a practical point of view, it is unsatisfactory because our reasoning is more likely to go astray if we lack a grasp of its foundations. I shall therefore attempt to say something about how we can reason in ethics.

WHAT ETHICS IS: ONE VIEW

What follows is a sketch of a view of ethics that allows reason to play an important role in ethical decisions. It is not the only possible view of ethics, but it is a plausible view. Once again, however, I shall have to pass over qualifications and objections worth a chapter to themselves. To those who think there are objections that defeat the position I am advancing, I can only say, again, that this entire chapter may be treated as no more than a statement of the assumptions on which this book is based. In that way, it will at least assist in giving a clear view of what I take ethics to be.

What is it to make a moral judgment, or to argue about an ethical issue, or to live according to ethical standards? How do moral judgments

differ from other practical judgments? What is the difference between a person who lives by ethical standards and one who doesn't?

All these questions are related, so we only need to consider one of them; but to do this, we need to say something about the nature of ethics. Suppose that we have studied the lives of several people, and we know a lot about what they do, what they believe and so on. Can we then decide which of them are living by ethical standards and which are not?

We might think that the way to proceed here is to find out who believes it wrong to lie, cheat, steal and so on, and does not do any of these things, and who has no such beliefs, and shows no such restraint in their actions. Then those in the first group would be living according to ethical standards, and those in the second group would not be. But this procedure runs together two distinctions: the first is the distinction between living according to (what we judge to be) the right ethical standards and living according to (what we judge to be) mistaken ethical standards; the second is the distinction between living according to some ethical standards and living according to no ethical standards at all. Those who lie and cheat, but do not believe what they are doing to be wrong, may be living according to ethical standards. They may believe, for any of a number of possible reasons, that it is right to lie, cheat, steal and so on. They are not living according to conventional ethical standards, but they may be living according to some other ethical standards.

This first attempt to distinguish the ethical from the non-ethical was mistaken, but we can learn from our mistakes. We found that we must concede that those who hold unconventional ethical beliefs are still living according to ethical standards *if they believe, for some reason, that it is right to do as they are doing*. The italicized condition gives us a clue to the answer we are seeking. The notion of living according to ethical standards is tied up with the notion of defending the way one is living, of giving a reason for it, of justifying it. Thus, people may do all kinds of things we regard as wrong, yet still be living according to ethical standards if they are prepared to defend and justify what they do. We may find the justification inadequate and may hold that the actions are wrong, but the attempt at justification, whether successful or not, is sufficient to bring the person's conduct within the domain of the ethical as opposed to the non-ethical. When, on the other hand, people cannot put forward any justification for what they do, we may reject their claim to be living according to ethical standards, even if what they do is in accordance with conventional moral principles.

We can go further. If we are to accept that a person is living according to ethical standards, the justification must be of a certain kind. For instance, a justification in terms of self-interest alone will not do. When Macbeth, contemplating the murder of Duncan, admits that only 'vaulting ambition' drives him to do it, he is admitting that the act cannot be justified ethically. 'So that I can be king in his place' is not a weak attempt at an ethical justification for assassination; it is not the sort of reason that counts as an ethical justification at all. Self-interested acts must be shown to be compatible with more broadly based ethical principles if they are to be ethically defensible, for the notion of ethics carries with it the idea of something bigger than the individual. If I am to defend my conduct on ethical grounds, I cannot point only to the benefits it brings me. I must address myself to a larger audience. 'So that I can end the reign of a cruel tyrant' would at least have been an attempt at an ethical justification of murdering the king, although as Shakespeare portrays the 'gentle Duncan', it would have been false.

From ancient times, philosophers and moralists have expressed the idea that ethical conduct is acceptable from a point of view that is somehow *universal*. The 'Golden Rule' attributed to Moses, to be found in the book of Leviticus and subsequently reiterated by Jesus, tells us to go beyond our own personal interests and 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' – in other words, give the same weight to the interests of others as you give to your own interests. The same idea of putting oneself in the position of another is involved in the other Christian formulation, that we love our neighbours as ourselves (at least, if we interpret 'neighbour' sufficiently broadly). It was commonly expressed by ancient Greek philosophers and by the Stoics in the Roman era. The Stoics held that ethics derives from a universal natural law, an idea that Kant developed into his famous formula: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.' Kant's theory received further development in the work of R. M. Hare, who saw 'universalizability' as a logical feature of moral judgments. The eighteenth-century British philosophers Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith appealed to an imaginary 'impartial spectator' as the test of a moral judgment. Utilitarians, from Jeremy Bentham to the present, take it as axiomatic that in deciding moral issues, 'each counts for one and none for more than one'; and John Rawls incorporated essentially the same axiom into his own theory by deriving basic ethical principles from an imaginary choice behind a 'veil of ignorance' that prevents those choosing from knowing whether they will be the ones

who gain or lose by the principles they select. Even Continental philosophers like the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre and the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, who differ in many ways from their English-speaking colleagues – and from one another – agree that ethics is in some sense universal.

One could argue endlessly about the merits of each of these characterizations of the ethical, but what they have in common is more important than their differences. They agree that the justification of an ethical principle cannot be in terms of any partial or sectional group. Ethics takes a universal point of view. This does not mean that a particular ethical judgment must be universally applicable. Circumstances alter cases, as we have seen. What it does mean is that in making ethical judgments, we go beyond our own likes and dislikes. From an ethical perspective, it is irrelevant that it is I who benefit from cheating you and you who lose by it. Ethics goes beyond ‘I’ and ‘you’ to the universal law, the universalizable judgment, the standpoint of the impartial spectator or ideal observer, or whatever we choose to call it.

Can we use this universal aspect of ethics to derive an ethical theory that will give us guidance about right and wrong? Philosophers from the Stoics to Hare and Rawls have attempted this. No attempt has met with general acceptance. The problem is that if we describe the universal aspect of ethics in bare, formal terms, a wide range of ethical theories, including quite irreconcilable ones, are compatible with this notion of universality; if, on the other hand, we build up our description of the universal aspect of ethics so that it leads us ineluctably to one particular ethical theory, we shall be accused of smuggling our own ethical beliefs into our definition of the ethical – and this definition was supposed to be broad enough, and neutral enough, to encompass all serious candidates for the status of ‘ethical theory’. Because so many others have failed to overcome this obstacle to deducing an ethical theory from the universal aspect of ethics, it would be foolish to attempt to do so in a brief introduction to a work with a quite different aim. Instead, I shall propose something less ambitious. The universal aspect of ethics, I suggest, does provide a ground for at least starting with a broadly utilitarian position. If we are going to move beyond utilitarianism, we need to be given good reasons why we should do so.

My reason for suggesting this is as follows. In accepting that ethical judgments must be made from a universal point of view, I am accepting that my own needs, wants and desires cannot, simply because they are my preferences, count more than the wants, needs and desires of anyone else.

Thus, my very natural concern that my own wants, needs and desires – henceforth I shall refer to them as ‘preferences’ – be looked after must, when I think ethically, be extended to the preferences of others. Now, imagine that I am one of a group of people who live by gathering food from the forest in which we live. When I am alone, I find a particularly good fruit tree and face the choice of whether to eat all the fruit myself or to share it with others. Imagine, too, that I am deciding in a complete ethical vacuum and that I know nothing of any ethical considerations – I am, we might say, in a pre-ethical stage of thinking. How would I make up my mind? One thing – perhaps at this pre-ethical stage, the *only* thing – that would be relevant would be how the choice I make will affect my preferences.

Suppose I then begin to think ethically, to the extent of putting myself in the position of others affected by my decision. To know what it is like to be in their position, I must take on their preferences – I must imagine how hungry they are, how much they will enjoy the fruit and so on. Once I have done that, I must recognize that as I am thinking ethically, I cannot give my own preferences greater weight, simply because they are my own, than I give to the preferences of others. Hence, in place of my own preferences, I now have to take account of the preferences of all those affected by my decision. Unless there are some other ethically relevant considerations, this will lead me to weigh all these preferences and adopt the course of action most likely to maximize the preferences of those affected. Thus, at least at some level in my moral reasoning, ethics points towards the course of action that has the best consequences, on balance, for all affected.

In the previous paragraph, I wrote ‘points towards’ because, as we shall see in a moment, there could be other considerations that point in a different direction. I wrote ‘at some level in my moral reasoning’ because, as we shall see later, there are utilitarian reasons for believing that we ought not to try to calculate these consequences for every ethical decision we make in our daily lives, but only in very unusual circumstances or when we are reflecting on our choice of general principles to guide us in the future. In other words, in the specific example given, one might at first think it obvious that sharing the fruits that I have gathered has better consequences for all affected than not sharing them. This may in the end also be the best general principle for us all to adopt, but before we can have grounds for believing this to be the case, we must also consider whether the effect of a general practice of sharing gathered fruits will benefit all those affected or will harm them by reducing the

amount of food gathered, because some will cease to gather anything if they know that they will get sufficient food from their share of what others gather.

The way of thinking I have outlined is a form of utilitarianism, but not the version of utilitarianism defended by classical utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick. They held that we should always do what will maximize pleasure, or happiness, and minimize pain, or unhappiness. This is ‘hedonistic utilitarianism’ – the term ‘hedonist’ comes from the Greek word for pleasure. In contrast, the view we have reached is known as ‘preference utilitarianism’ because it holds that we should do what, on balance, furthers the preferences of those affected. Some scholars think that Bentham and Mill may have used ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ in a broad sense that allowed them to include achieving what one desires as a ‘pleasure’ and the reverse as a ‘pain’. If this interpretation is correct, the difference between preference utilitarianism and the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill disappears. (Sidgwick, as always, was more precise: in *The Methods of Ethics*, he carefully distinguishes the preference view from the hedonistic one and opts for the latter.)

I am not claiming that preference utilitarianism can be deduced from the universal aspect of ethics. Instead of universalizing my preferences, I could base my ethical views on something completely distinct from preferences. Hedonistic utilitarianism, like preference utilitarianism, is fully impartial between individuals and satisfies the requirement of universalizability; so too are other ethical ideals, like individual rights, fairness, the sanctity of life, justice, purity and so on. They are, at least in some versions, incompatible with any form of utilitarianism. So – to return to the situation of the finder of abundant fruit, who is deciding whether to share it with others – I might hold that I have a right to the fruit, because I found it. Or I might claim that it is fair that I should get the fruit, because I did the hard work of finding the tree. Alternatively, I could hold that everyone has an equal right to the abundance nature provides, and so I am required to share the fruit equally.

If I take one of these views but can offer no reason for holding it, other than the fact that *I* prefer it – I prefer a society in which those who find natural objects have a right to them, or I prefer a society with a sense of fairness that rewards effort, or I prefer a society in which everything is shared equally – then my preference must be weighed against the contrary preferences of others. Perhaps, though, I want to maintain that this view is not just my preference, but I *really* have a right to the fruit I found, or everyone *really* is entitled to an equal share

of nature's abundance. If so, then that claim needs to be defended by some kind of ethical theory. Where are we to get such a theory? Some substantial moral argument is needed.

What this shows is that we very swiftly arrive at an initially preference utilitarian position once we apply the universal aspect of ethics to simple, pre-ethical decision making. The preference utilitarian position is a minimal one, a first base that we reach by universalizing self-interested decision making. We cannot, if we are to think ethically, refuse to take this step. To go beyond preference utilitarianism we need to produce something more. We cannot just rely on our intuitions, even those that are very widely shared, since these could, as we have seen, be the result of our evolutionary heritage and therefore an unreliable guide to what is right.

One way of arguing would be to hold up to critical reflection and scrutiny the claim that the satisfaction of preferences should be our ultimate end. People have very strong preferences for winning lotteries, although researchers have shown that those who win major lotteries are not, once the initial elation has passed, significantly happier than they were before. Is it nevertheless good that they got what they wanted? Faced with such reports, preference utilitarians are likely to grant that people often form preferences on the basis of misinformation about what it would be like to have their preference satisfied. The preferences that should be counted, the preference utilitarians may say, are those that we would have if we were fully informed, in a calm frame of mind and thinking clearly. On the other hand, hedonistic utilitarians would say that the fact that we would abandon many of our preferences, if we knew that their satisfaction would not bring us happiness, shows that it is happiness we really care about, not the satisfaction of our preferences. To this the preference utilitarians may reply that a would-be poet may choose a life with less happiness, if she thinks it will enable her to write great poetry. These are the kinds of argument we need to sort through in order to decide which is the more defensible form of utilitarianism. Then we also have to consider arguments against any kind of utilitarianism and in favor of quite different moral theories. That, however, is a topic for a different book.

This book can be read as an attempt to indicate how a consistent preference utilitarian would deal with a number of controversial problems. Despite the difficulties just mentioned, preference utilitarianism is a straightforward ethical theory that requires minimal metaphysical presuppositions. We all know what preferences are, whereas claims that

something is intrinsically morally wrong, or violates a natural right, or is contrary to human dignity invoke less tangible concepts that make their truth more difficult to assess. But because preference utilitarianism may, in the end, prove not to be the best approach to ethical issues, I'll also consider, at various points, how hedonistic utilitarianism, theories of rights, of justice, of absolute moral rules and so on, bear on the problems discussed. In this way, you will be able to come to your own conclusions about the possibility of reason and argument in ethics and about the merits of utilitarian and non-utilitarian approaches to ethics.

Equality for Animals?

RACISM AND SPECIESISM

In the previous chapter, I gave reasons for believing that the fundamental principle of equality, on which the idea that humans are equal rests, is the principle of equal consideration of interests. Only a basic moral principle of this kind can allow us to defend a form of equality that embraces almost all human beings, despite the differences that exist between them. (The exceptions are human beings who are not and have never been conscious and therefore have no interests to be considered – a topic to be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.) Although the principle of equal consideration of interests provides the best possible basis for human equality, its scope is not limited to humans. When we accept the principle of equality for humans, we are also committed to accepting that it extends to some nonhuman animals.

When I wrote the first edition of this book, in 1979, I warned the reader that the suggestion I was making here might seem bizarre. It was then generally accepted that discrimination against members of racial minorities and against women ranked among the most important moral and political issues. Questions about animal welfare, however, were widely regarded as matters of no real significance, except for people who are dotty about dogs and cats. Issues about humans, it was commonly assumed, should always take precedence over issues about animals. Now, thanks to organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and vocal animal advocates all over the world, the view that animals are in some sense our equals is less likely to meet with blank stares. It

has become more familiar, even if it is still a minority view and often misunderstood.

The belief that issues about humans should always take precedence over issues about animals reflects a popular prejudice against taking the interests of animals seriously – a prejudice no better founded than the prejudice of white slave owners against taking seriously the interests of their African slaves. It is easy for us to criticize the prejudices of our grandfathers, from which our fathers freed themselves. It is more difficult to search for prejudices among the beliefs and values we hold. What is needed now is a willingness to follow the arguments where they lead, without a prior assumption that the issue is not worth our attention.

The argument for extending the principle of equality beyond our own species is simple. It amounts to no more than a clear understanding of the principle of equal consideration of interests. We have seen that this principle implies that our concern for others ought not to depend on what they are like or what abilities they possess (although precisely what this concern requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do). It is on this basis that we are able to say that the fact that some people are not members of our race does not entitle us to exploit them, and the fact that some people are less intelligent than others does not mean that their interests may be discounted or disregarded. The principle also implies that the fact that beings are not members of our species does not entitle us to exploit them, and it similarly implies that the fact that other animals are less intelligent than we are does not mean that their interests may be discounted or disregarded.

We saw in the previous chapter that many philosophers have advocated equal consideration of interests, in some form or another, as a basic moral principle. Few recognized that the principle has applications beyond our own species. One of those few was Jeremy Bentham, the founding father of modern utilitarianism. In a forward-looking passage, written at a time when African slaves in the British dominions were still being treated much as we now treat nonhuman animals, Bentham wrote:

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognised that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it

that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, *Can they suffer*?

In this passage, Bentham points to the capacity for suffering as the vital characteristic that entitles a being to equal consideration. The capacity for suffering – or more strictly, for suffering and/or enjoyment or happiness – is not just another characteristic like the capacity for language or for higher mathematics. Bentham is not saying that those who try to mark ‘the insuperable line’ that determines whether the interests of a being should be considered happen to have selected the wrong characteristic. The capacity for suffering and enjoying things is a prerequisite for having interests at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in any meaningful way. It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a child. A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. A mouse, on the other hand, does have an interest in not being tormented, because mice will suffer if they are treated in this way.

If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that the suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – in so far as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. This is why the limit of sentience (using the term as convenient, if not strictly accurate, shorthand for the capacity to suffer or experience enjoyment or happiness) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary way. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin colour?

Racists violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. The white racists who supported slavery typically did not give the suffering of Africans as much weight as they gave to the suffering of Europeans. Similarly, speciesists give greater weight to the interests of members of their own species when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of other

species. Human speciesists do not accept that pain is as bad when it is felt by pigs or mice as when it is felt by humans.

That, then, is really the whole of the argument for extending the principle of equality to nonhuman animals, but there may be some doubts about what this equality amounts to in practice. In particular, the last sentence of the previous paragraph may prompt some people to reply: 'Surely pain felt by a mouse just is not as bad as pain felt by a human. Humans have much greater awareness of what is happening to them, and this makes their suffering worse. You can't equate the suffering of, say, a person dying slowly from cancer and a laboratory mouse undergoing the same fate.'

I fully accept that in the case described, the human cancer victim normally suffers more than the nonhuman cancer victim. This in no way undermines the extension of equal consideration of interests to nonhumans. It means, rather, that we must take care when we compare the interests of different species. In some situations, a member of one species will suffer more than a member of another species. In this case, we should still apply the principle of equal consideration of interests but the result of so doing is, of course, to give priority to relieving the greater suffering. A simpler case may help to make this clear.

If I give a horse a hard slap across its rump with my open hand, the horse may start, but it presumably feels little pain. Its skin is thick enough to protect it against a mere slap. If I slap a baby in the same way, however, the baby will cry and presumably does feel pain, for the baby's skin is more sensitive. So it is worse to slap a baby than a horse, if both slaps are administered with equal force. But there must be some kind of blow – I don't know exactly what it would be, but perhaps a blow with a heavy stick – that would cause the horse as much pain as we cause a baby by a simple slap. That is what I mean by 'the same amount of pain', and if we consider it wrong to inflict that much pain on a baby for no good reason then we must, unless we are speciesists, consider it equally wrong to inflict the same amount of pain on a horse for no good reason.

There are other differences between humans and animals that cause other complications. Normal adult human beings have mental capacities that will, in certain circumstances, lead them to suffer more than animals would in the same circumstances. If, for instance, we decided to perform extremely painful or lethal scientific experiments on normal adult humans, kidnapped at random from public parks for this purpose, adults who entered parks would become fearful that they would be kidnapped. The resultant terror would be a form of suffering additional to

the pain of the experiment. The same experiments performed on non-human animals would cause less suffering because the animals would not have the anticipatory dread of being kidnapped and experimented on. This does not mean, of course, that it would be *right* to perform the experiment on animals, but only that there is a reason, and one that is not speciesist, for preferring to use animals rather than normal adult humans, if the experiment is to be done at all. Note, however, that this same argument gives us a reason for preferring to use human infants – orphans perhaps – or severely intellectually disabled humans for experiments, rather than adults, because infants and severely intellectually disabled humans would also have no idea of what was going to happen to them. So far as this argument is concerned, nonhuman animals and infants and severely intellectually disabled humans are in the same category; and if we use this argument to justify experiments on nonhuman animals, we have to ask ourselves whether we are also prepared to allow experiments on human infants and severely intellectually disabled adults. If we make a distinction between animals and these humans, how can we do it, other than on the basis of a morally indefensible preference for members of our own species?

There are many areas in which the superior mental powers of normal adult humans make a difference: anticipation, more detailed memory, greater knowledge of what is happening and so on. These differences explain why a human dying from cancer is likely to suffer more than a mouse. It is the mental anguish that makes the human's position so much harder to bear. Yet these differences do not all point to greater suffering on the part of the normal human being. Sometimes animals may suffer more because of their more limited understanding. If, for instance, we are taking prisoners in wartime, we can explain to them that although they must submit to capture, search and confinement, they will not otherwise be harmed and will be set free at the conclusion of hostilities. If we capture wild animals, however, we cannot explain that we are not threatening their lives. Animals cannot distinguish attempts to overpower and confine from attempts to kill them; the one causes as much terror as the other.

It may be objected that comparisons of the sufferings of different species are impossible to make, and that for this reason when the interests of animals and humans clash, the principle of equality gives no guidance. It is true that comparisons of suffering between members of different species cannot be made precisely. Nor, for that matter, can comparisons of suffering between different human beings be made precisely. Precision

is not essential. As we shall see shortly, even if we were to prevent the infliction of suffering on animals only when the interests of humans will not be affected to anything like the extent that animals are affected, we would be forced to make radical changes in our treatment of animals that would involve the food we eat, the farming methods we use, experimental procedures in many fields of science, our approach to wildlife and to hunting, trapping and the wearing of furs, and areas of entertainment like circuses, rodeos and zoos. As a result, the total quantity of suffering we cause would be hugely reduced.

So far, I have said a lot about the infliction of suffering on animals but nothing about killing them. This omission has been deliberate. The application of the principle of equality to the infliction of suffering is, in theory at least, fairly straightforward. Pain and suffering are bad and should be prevented or minimized, irrespective of the race, sex or species of the being that suffers. How bad a pain is depends on how intense it is and how long it lasts, but pains of the same intensity and duration are equally bad, whether felt by humans or animals. When we come to consider the value of life, we cannot say quite so confidently that a life is a life and equally valuable, whether it is a human life or an animal life. It would not be speciesist to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities. (I am not saying, at this stage, whether this view is justifiable or not; I am saying only that it cannot simply be rejected as speciesist, because it is not on the basis of species itself that one life is held to be more valuable than another.) The value of life is a notoriously difficult ethical question, and we can only arrive at a reasoned conclusion about the comparative value of human and animal life after we have discussed the value of life in general. This is the topic of the next chapter. Meanwhile, there are important conclusions to be derived from the extension beyond our own species of the principle of equal consideration of interests, irrespective of our conclusions about the value of life.

SPECIESISM IN PRACTICE

Animals as Food

For most people in modern, urbanized societies, the principal form of contact with nonhuman animals is at meal times. The use of animals for food is probably the oldest and the most widespread form of animal use.