Is it morally permissible to eat meat?
By: Ana Maria Diez De Fex.

1. Introduction

Many approaches have been taken regarding this topic, some of them are anthropological or scientific that pursue the understanding of why we eat meat, but from the philosophical lens this question is solved in the field of applied ethics, which is the area that debate about the moral status of animals (non-human animals) and where different theorizations that tried to explain the relationship between animals and humans and the examination of the morality of meat consumption take place. Some of these approaches could be find within the concepts of animal rights, vegetarianism, animal cruelty and so on.

2. Context of the Debate

In that context is where some authors in the ethics field have substantive pieces of analysis regarding animal rights and morality, some of them tend to explain the meat consumption as a way of discrimination that we the humans do against other non human animals on the basis of belonging to different species and they name this concept speciesism[1]. On the other hand other authors argue that killing animals for meat consumption purposes is not only permitted but also required[2]. In this article I argue that the discrimination against animals is actually morally justified because animals and humans are significantly different and that substantial differences allow us to believe that discrimination is justified in cases when we are not equal since not all discriminations are unfair.

In order to prove the argument I will start introducing the most general objection to speciesism related to the incorrectness of general discrimination, then I will reconstruct the reasons why I think that discriminating a being for belonging to another specie is a fair discrimination, after that I will analyze some of the criticism to that reason and counter argue them and finally I will conclude explaining therefore why it is morally permissible to eat meat.

3. Objection to speciesism: About discrimination.

At this point is necessary to ask what is discrimination. A linguistic approach provides two different meanings of discrimination, a very wide one understood as simply seeing a difference in two different objects and a narrowed meaning understood as giving a worst treatment on which discrimination is defined as "the prejudicial treatment of an individual based on their membership in a certain group or category"[3]. The definition that we will use for this argument is the more narrowed or the concept of discrimination as certain treatment because there is no discussion on the fact that human animals and no human animals are significantly different but the point is whereas those distinctions justify a special, different or discriminatory treatment that works as a morally relevant reason for eating meat.

---

[1] "Speciesism | Philosophy | Britannica.com"; "BBC - Ethics - Animal Ethics."
[2] "Meat - Oxford Scholarship."
[3] "Discrimination Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary."

So the main argument for not discriminating animals as humans is that this kind of discrimination is a form of speciesism that implies a bias against or in favor of other members of different species. A very important part of this view is conduced by an analogy with sexism and racism that says that discriminating a being merely based on the specie operates very similarly to discriminating a human being for some specific characteristics because the reason behind this kind of discrimination is an arbitrary one, to belong to an specie or not, to belong to a race or not, to have one sex or the other. In this sense it is morally incorrect to discriminate against other species seen as animals.

The problem with this specific argument is the confusion of the two definitions of discrimination. On one hand, the discrimination understood as a merely observation of a factual difference and on the other hand the observation of the number and quality of this differences. This is precisely why this reasoning falls under the category of a weak analogy, because even though there is a differentiation that served as a justification for some sort of discrimination, the differentiation itself does not make relevant the comparison because, on one side, we have human animals that share a huge amount of similarities that are not shared with other species like the language, physical features and so on making the comparable categories incomparable to this extend and on the other side, even if we assume that they are all the same and comparable there is a faulty generalization that understands that all discriminations are equally bad.

Another problem with the speciesism argument is that if we apply that sole reasoning to other situations, then we will find that it could lead us to the absurd discussion on discriminating any other biological classification of species such as less complex living beings, like unicellular bacteria. I will get back to this point further.

4. Argument: discrimination against other species is fair.

Now I will reconstruct the reasons why I think that discriminating a being for belonging to another specie is a fair discrimination. To this purpose it is very relevant to examine the idea that human and non human animals are morally equal based on the idea not of the simplistic discrimination argument that could lead to absurd claims like the bacteria discrimination but on the idea of suffering as a differential category for comparison.[4] This means that adding another similarity to the comparison the argument implies that it is incorrect to discriminate against other species because we as humans share with them the potential suffering characteristic, disregarding their and our other abilities or capacities but still giving a moral status to other species that could suffer that implies that we treat them as morally equal[5]. In addition to that the potential suffering as a shared characteristic is highly irrelevant in the sense that brains of living being process pain in different ways and we could not be sure of the extent of it.

I dispute the shared moral status of humans and animals. I do that because the concept of morality that I assume implies a concern in the advance in the human welfare[6]. Morality refers mostly to the codes that

---

[4] Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status."
[5] Cochrane, *Animal Rights Without Liberation*.
[6] Copp, "Animals, Fundamental Moral Standing, and Speciesism."

a society or individuals accept or not and are followed by most rational persons[7]. In that sense it is reasonable to affirm that the creation of such a code is an artificial or positivist creation that just could be shared among the beings that are intended to potentially understand it or to which that at least we believe are equals because of the big number of common shared features between each member of the specie.

An important clarification needs to be done at this point, related to the objection that eventually somebody could have related to the unshared characteristics for example with people that have different cognitive capacities, to this point I will answer that even though having a cognitive capacity is an important common feature, on the first hand we do not share that capacity in the same represented for example in the different intellectual coefficients that could not lead us to the denial of capacity as a shared characteristic between humans and in the other hand there are still a lot of other genetic, biological, linguistic and physical features that we share as humans and allow us to be part of the group that share the same moral code.

Discrimination exist also in society, sometimes it is even called positive discrimination, for example when some states implement a quota in the parliament for woman or even the accepted discrimination on the limitation of the freedom of people we agree that should go to jail for committing a crime.

This means that there is not a thing as an absolute value of non discrimination and in this case is acceptable to discriminate the non human animals that do not share a moral code with the humans that are creators and practitioners of one.

This does not mean that the animals are morally or ethically insignificant, it only means that they do not share and could never share our human moral code, this is why the are externals on which a discrimination might be justified. We still could take care of them, and have other kinds of considerations to them for example reducing the suffering, but those considerations should not be confused with considering them morally equal because they are not.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion it is morally permissible to eat meat because even if we have moral considerations for animals it does not mean that those considerations are the same as a shaded moral code between humans and animals. The lack of shared moral code allow us to eat animal meat without violating any moral disposition, because we discriminate them for a reasonable difference that we have.

References.

- "BBC - Ethics - Animal Ethics: The Ethics of Speciesism." Accessed December 11, 2016. http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/rights/speciesism.shtml.

- Cochrane, Alasdair. *Animal Rights Without Liberation: Applied Ethics and Human Obligations*. Columbia University Press, 2012.

[7] Gert and Gert, "The Definition of Morality."

- Copp, David. “Animals, Fundamental Moral Standing, and Speciesism,” October 26, 2011. http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195371963.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195371963-e-11.

- “Discrimination Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” Accessed December 11, 2016. http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discrimination.

- Gert, Bernard, and Joshua Gert. “The Definition of Morality.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2016. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-definition/.

- “Meat - Oxford Scholarship,” November 1, 2015. http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199353903.001.0001/acprof-9780199353903-chapter-2.

- Singer, Peter. “Speciesism and Moral Status.” *Metaphilosophy* 40, no. 3–4 (2009): 567–581.

- “Speciesism | Philosophy | Britannica.com.” Accessed December 11, 2016. https://www.britannica.com/topic/speciesism.