

# Sample essay on ethics and morals of gourmets and non-vegetarians

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



David Foster Wallace, in his essay *Consider the Lobster*, questions the ethics of being a non vegetarian consumer and whether it is morally alright to kill an animal for food. The essay addresses the Maine Lobster Festival (known as MFL) where lobsters are abundant in supply. While covering this story Wallace was faced with certain issues of morality towards killing of animals. In this paper I will discuss Wallace's concerns, in addition to which I will give my response to the issue.

Wallace begins the essay by introducing the MFL of 2003 where he describes how it is a tourist attraction where people gather in large amounts (approx. 80, 000 in number) to consumer large portions of freshly caught and cooked lobster in the area. He then goes on to educate the reader about this crustacean creature which we relish. By providing such information, Wallace has cleverly formed a bond between the reader and the creature whom he's about to discuss in the essay. After giving standard encyclopedic information, Wallace continues to speak about the history of consumption of the lobster. He traces it back to the 80's a time when lobster was considered to be a poor man's meal as opposed to the 21st century where a lobster dinner is a lavish affair. In due course he then goes on to enumerate the various ways in which gourmets (professionals and home cooks) cook a lobster. It is at this point that Wallace's concerns about animal cruelty come through. Wallace raises the question of discomfort felt by many cooks while cooking the lobster. He wonders how these cooks for "gustatory pleasure" are able to boil or stab a living being by asking, "Is it alright to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure? Is it all just a matter of individual choice?" (Wallace, 6)

Wallace's concern is that even if the person eating meat is aware of the procedure he/she turns a blind eye to the greater impact of this action that is advocating animal cruelty. He says that the cooks deal with this discomfort while boiling the lobster by moving out of the room till the lobster is fully boiled. Here he is pointing out that this empathy doesn't justify the action. Wallace also gives the example of Dick who "articulates what he and his family feel is the crucial mitigating factor in the whole morality-of-boiling-lobsters-alive issue: 'There's a part of the brain in people and animals that lets us feel pain, and lobsters' brains don't have this part.'" (Wallace, 7) This belief enables Dick to eat the crustacean without feeling guilty about killing a living being. With reference to this statement, Wallace refutes it by saying that studies have shown that lobsters have sensitive outer shells which make them alert to the slightest change in temperature, hence the argument that lobsters cannot feel is invalid. Wallace further explains that before boiling the lobster, the anxiety of the lobster can be seen when it clings to the edge of the container before being poured into a bath of scalding hot water. Another example which exemplifies the lobster's anxiety is the fact that their claws need to be banded as they become very violent and attack each other out of anxiety. In the essay Wallace establishes that all living beings have a sixth sense of some sort which makes them aware of what's to come. By establishing such facts, Wallace then brings up the question that if killing a lobster is "alright" then earlier practices which involved human sacrifices and cannibalism too should be considered as ethical and morally correct by referring to the MFL being similar to a "Roman circus or medieval torture-fest". Wallace concludes saying, "Given the (possible) moral status and

(very possible) physical suffering of the animals involved, what ethical convictions do gourmets evolve that allow them not just to eat but to savor and enjoy flesh-based viands (since of course refined enjoyment, rather than just ingestion, is the whole point of gastronomy)?” (Wallace, 12)

There is a kind of blindness towards the whole issue of non-vegetarianism by consumers. We fully understand and acknowledge the process and yet find reasons to not feel guilty. We blame eating of animals on the law of the nature where we make ourselves believe that it is necessary for carnivores to exist so as to maintain a balance in the food chain. I agree with Wallace when he talks of how finding ways to reduce the pain process during killing the lobster, does not rid the cook or the eater of the guilt of killing it. The fact remains that for survival the human race has been programmed to hunt and eat; killing an animal for dinner does not alarm the conscience.

However, it is important not to be apathetic to the whole system of meat eating instead one should be aware of the choice they make, that is they should accept that they are advocating animal cruelty while demanding their meat, but because they enjoy eating or find it to be a necessity, they continue to eat. So in a sense, eating the meat is not wrong (since it is part of our DNA) but being unaware and non-compassionate while making the decision is unethical. Another point raised is that the fact that human don't hear the animals scream, they believe that it is not feeling the pain, is just another excuse to try and free themselves of the guilt. Wallace's attempt through this essay can be viewed similar to the attempts made my other organizations to try and create awareness that there is animal cruelty being inflicted by companies processing the meat. I agree with the questions

raised by Wallace in the essay and I believe that it is important for meat eaters to be completely knowledgeable about the impact of their actions before choosing to make a decision.

### **Source**

Wallace, David Foster. "Consider the Lobster", *Gourmet Magazine* (Aug 2004). PDF File.