

Andrew Stone
Prof. Xavier
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Annotated Bibliography

Research Question: Is it ethical to eat animals? In what ways does eating animals relate to socioeconomic structures and institutions, such as factory farming, overfishing, or fine dining? What do these questions reveal about humanity's relationship to animals?

Source Entry 1

Wallace, David Foster. "Consider the Lobster". *Consider The Lobster and Other Essays*. New York: Little, Brown, 2005.

"Consider the Lobster" by David Foster Wallace was first published in the August 2004 issue of Gourmet Magazine. Wallace, primarily known for his novels and non-fiction essays, was asked to write a feature on the Maine Lobster Festival (MLF) in Rockport, Maine. While the essay begins with a journalistic, almost brochure-like description of the Maine Lobster Festival, Wallace uses the platform to investigate the ethics of killing lobsters for gustatory pleasure and economic gain. Furthermore, the essay is full of footnotes in which the author gives additional facts and often scathing opinions.

Like any writer writing an event feature, Wallace begins by discussing topics related to the event: the culinary history of the lobster (lobster was only eaten by the lower classes and prisoners in the 1800s), the scientific classification of the lobster, the economics of Rockport Maine, and the yearly presence of PETA at the event. However, a shift in the purpose and tone of the essay occurs when he begins to talk about lobster preparation. After gradually introducing the questionable conditions and procedures of lobster prep, he goes on to ask outright the central question of the essay: "Is it alright to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure?" (Wallace 60). Wallace then acknowledges that in order to answer this question, we must first explore questions of whether and how animals feel pain. According to the author, we can determine this based on the common criteria set by ethicists: first, does the animal in question have the "neurological hardware" to feel pain? Secondly, does the animal's behavior indicate an experience of pain? (Wallace 63). As a result, Wallace discusses the nerve system of the lobster in great detail and describes with gut-wrenching rhetoric the struggle of the lobster when being boiled alive. While Wallace never directly answers his central question, he concludes that in order for an animal to feel pain it must exhibit preferences, and to his mind, lobsters seem to exhibit preferences.

Considering the primary audience for the essay would have been readers of Gourmet Magazine and attendees of the MLF, the article serves both to challenge those readers who mindlessly eat animals for pleasure and to critique the MLF and American Tourism in general. This source would be good for anyone considering the relationship of humans to animals in contemporary society or the ethics of eating animals. It is well-researched and the author manages to maintain an objective distance from the topic, despite the author's tendency to present his own opinions on the subject.