Whale Meat Again?
How consumption of non-endangered species gives rise to an ethical dilemma

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• Whale meat again
   – don‘t know where, don‘t know when…
My interest

• Neither
  – those who do not see what can be wrong with the hunting non-endangered marine mammals

• nor
  – the conservation activists who see this type of hunting as the beacon of cruelty and disregard for the delicate environment of the North-Atlantic
… but this lot

• (The Reykjavik tourist)
• Is the ethical thing to look out for a “whale friendly” sticker in the windows of restaurants or should she taste the meat of the common minke-whale her guide-book recommends?
Ethical Dilemmas

• A dilemma occurs because both sides have strong arguments going for them

• Taking these arguments seriously is, indeed, a hallmark of being part of the moral sphere
The dilemma of whaling

• Source of protein and cultural experience despite important role as majestic ornaments of fragile yet imposing environment

• Special beauty and magnificence, although other mammals are indeed slaughtered and may experience more suffering
Source of the dilemma

• Three considerations
  – Ecological consciousness
  – Whales are hard to hunt
  – Why (is there demand for the meat?)
Main attitudes

• Science:
  – Mocks the ‘Bambi-effect’ of those who wish to elevate the symbolic status of marine mammals, doubts particular claims about the level of intelligence of marine mammals (whales)

• Symbolic status:
  – Highlight the special aura of liberty of marine mammals. Scientist offer biased research
Main attitudes II

• Conservation of the marine environment is today’s most important issue

• We need to harvest all marine resources
Main attitudes III

• Cultural perspectives:
  – Less humane?
  – What is ‘tradition‘?
Arguments

• These “attitudes” not presented on their own
• Supported with various arguments
• Seven arguments (together with sub-arguments) are the stable of both the public and the theoretical discourse
Argument I

• Questions what to hunt, when and in what capacity is a matter of economic importance
Argument II

• One cannot exclude certain animals from moral considerations. Just as it is wrong to kill a human being it is wrong to hunt other mammals.
Argument III

• If we fail to protect the biological diversity of the more than 100 species of marine mammals the environment has no chance – this means *no exceptions*
Argument IV

• One should proceed cautiously when interfering with natural processes that have evolved through the millennia
Argument V

• A sovereign state has the right to make decisions on its natural resources without interference from other states
Argument VI

• Marine mammals express nature in its most majestic form. Human beings have no right hunting these magnificent creatures.
Argument VII

• Hunting is a sickening activity; even more so when the animal is large and cannot easily be put to death
Good arguments?

• Fallacious and factually limited

• However, are soundly portrayed and based on good moral intuitions
Emotions

- Appeal to emotions a major obstacle to the rational discourse?
  - False contrast factual and emotional reasoning?
  - Wanton cruelty is always wrong
  - An individual should never have to do something that threatens her basic survival
The three points come together in the observation that when a hunt is not necessary for survival, be it on security reasons or for nourishment, one needs to be very careful with the hunt not to offend those who can truly say that the killing of charismatic marine mammals is a horrifying event.
Humane hunting

- Wild animals can never be made insensible to pain – the hunter must guarantee instant kill
- The chase should be minimised as possible and preferable left out
- Old and dated equipment and inexperienced hunters is a combination that may result in inhumane hunting practices
Trust

- A notion that in the end pervades discussion in any field of bioethics
- Consensus is possible – rests on trust between arguing parties
- One is obligated to hunt *properly*
  – Best established by a written code of conduct
Obligation

• Primary moral obligation to make an effort to understand each other

• The cost of a possible code, e.g. in effective monitoring and catch verification systems, may make hunting economically unviable in many cases
Consuming Whale Meat

• Disagreement between stakeholders can be softened and made less confusing
• The ethical dilemma for ordinary people (e.g. the Reykjavik tourist) is real and, indeed, unavoidable
• The possible (and desirable) moral code must be to deal with the dilemma’s presence and accept its nature, i.e. that neither side is totally in the wrong