

Is it OK to breed and slaughter cows and chickens?

Yes because animals don't have moral importance like humans.

No, animals have moral value because they're intelligent.

Humans have general intelligence which is what Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) researchers are trying to create. All documented behavior of animals is compatible with animals lacking general intelligence. All animal behavior is explainable as optimized versions of currently known non-AGI software algorithms. In other words, animals behave like self-driving cars and video games. Those are things we understand which is why we can build them, so we can be confident they aren't intelligent like humans are (they lack general intelligence – we aren't able to use those algorithms to create software with capabilities like humans). How to program an AGI is a current mystery but how to program robots like animals involves no fundamental mystery – our 4 legged robots are currently more clumsy than dogs but can do the same kinds of things.

But crows use rocks and sticks, pigs play video games, cats learn the layout of houses they live in, etc.

Those behaviors are the kinds of things explainable as non-AGI software techniques like used in Roombas. There is no expert literature documenting any animal behavior and then explaining that general intelligence, or even something dramatically different than currently known algorithms, is needed to explain it.

No, animals have moral value because they can suffer.

Suffering is a state of mind. It requires having a mind which makes value judgments or otherwise has some sort of opinions: that it wants, prefers or likes some things over others. Then it can be disappointed, can form a negative judgment of a situation, etc. Without human-like intelligence, animals are unable to decide what they like or dislike. They don't have any opinions. They don't care one way or another because caring is a type of intelligent thought.

But science shows animals have nerves and pain.

Suffering is a mental, software state, not a hardware state. Yes animals have similar hardware to humans for detecting and reporting bodily damage. But that doesn't tell you what animals think of damage. It's like a self-driving car with a tire pressure gauge so it can know when it got a flat tire and then behave differently. Everything animals do is explainable with that model. Studying nerves and chemicals related to pain has no bearing on that issue.

No, pain signals are inherently painful.

Data/information doesn't have inherent meaning. There has to be something to interpret the data and decide what it means. Otherwise it's just like a book full of numbers. A human can suffer when he realizes the numbers mean he's bankrupt, but the book itself isn't inherently painful. Another human can read the same book of numbers neutrally and another can enjoy it. Interpretation of data is computation.

Animals can compute so maybe they compute that they hate pain data from their nerves.

That's like saying Roombas can compute so maybe they compute that they hate sensor data indicating they bumped into an object and they suffer when that happens. There's no reason to view animals or Roombas that way when they can be explained in a more simple way. Don't tack on unnecessary extra claims to your model of the world when you can account for all your evidence, leaving no unanswered questions, without those extra claims.

But animals act like they suffer, e.g. they yelp.

There is evolutionary survival/replication value in animals having nerves which provide information about bodily damage which can be taken into account by the algorithms that determine their behavior. There is also evolutionary survival/replication value in communication behaviors related to danger, negative events, etc. Those behaviors can result in e.g. help from the pack. There are also scenarios where animals don't do that behavior because e.g. playing dead has higher survival/replication value. This behavior is all determined and explainable by evolutionary survival/replication value, not whether or not animals suffer (which would have no evolutionary advantage over animals being like complicated robots).

So you're saying pain is sensory input similar to vision, which is useful without any conscious experience. Then why did evolution design humans to be able to suffer if there's no survival/replication value there?

It didn't. Humans only suffer as a byproduct of intelligence because they're able to create their own opinions about things, including negative opinions. Humans evolved intelligence because other aspects of intelligence had survival/replication value, e.g. more sophisticated tool use and controlling fire.

No, animals have moral value because they're conscious.

Human and animal brains are universal classical computers. Conscious, intelligent minds are a particular type of software. Agree so far?

Yes. Go on.

I have evidence of my consciousness. I believe other people are conscious because they have the same capabilities are me. They have general intelligence and language. They can learn math, physics, art, economics, etc. I don't know of anything relevant to distinguish them from me. OK?

Yes.

I don't think a calculator, Roomba, self-driving car or video game character is conscious. We know how they're built and what they're made of. They aren't like humans. OK?

Yes.

So if all animal behavior fits the "Roomba with a few extra features" model, then there's no reason to think animals are conscious, since Roombas aren't. Animals are differentiated from humans (by general intelligence) but aren't differentiated from Roombas.

No, maybe a Roomba is conscious. Maybe video game characters are all conscious. Sure they lack general intelligence, but maybe there's some important commonality with humans that causes consciousness and which hasn't been discovered yet.

Maybe oil, trees, sand, paint, guns, and plastic water bottles (but not metal or glass bottles, and not plastic soda bottles) are conscious, too. Why not? Maybe one day we'll figure out the exact source of consciousness and realize it's something sand has too! How is your argument any better than that?

No, I'm a property dualist. I think consciousness is special and separate from computation.

Sounds unscientific.

Consciousness is a fundamental property of matter, like mass is.

How is that different than saying that God, spiritual energy, karma or anything else is a fundamental property of matter like mass is? What connection does your claim have to any scientific theories or evidence so that it's not just an arbitrary claim?

No, I'm not a materialist. There's more to reality than the physical, material world.

Like souls or ghosts? Are you rejecting science or what?

No, I just think science is limited and incomplete.

Can you point out a specific error in science? Where'd the scientific worldview go wrong?