



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Relief, An Ethical Reflection on Animal Welfare Poem

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The Poem: Relief

When I named you
I discovered
you were not I,
and I celebrated this relief.

Original
belief

If you are not I
you won't feel what I feel
when you die,
and I celebrated this relief

Questioning
belief

I try to remember
when my thoughts,
when my feelings,
became the genesis of life.

I try to remember
when my thoughts,
when my feelings,
became the route to yours.

Call to
remember

Do you remember
when the stones listened
as the trees told their stories?

Can I remember
when the water danced
as the wind sang their songs?

The issues

How could you?
You are frozen and stamped in blood
so I get fifty percent off!

How could I?
With my clogged and broken heart
numbed in your bottled side effects!

Reversal/New
understanding

It is my shame,
when I named you
I discovered
you were not I.

It is my fear,
you are not I but
you will feel what I feel
when you die.

and I am burdened with this relief

Concluding
line

Introduction

While doing research for various topics in Ethics and Critical Thinking courses, I found that when I wrote a poem about a topic, it would help me to identify key components, and develop a philosophical theory worthy of exploration.

- In this case, I chose to explore the subject of ethics pertaining to the sentience and consciousness of non-human animals and their quality of life, both in the industrial farming industry, and in scientific research.
- This topic has many vast and complex issues which face an array of ethical and moral consideration.
- Writing "Relief" helped to uncover a simple but powerful reflection on commonality and accountability in regards to non-human animal welfare.

Methods

- First step is research. I collect a series of journals and articles pertaining to the topic, then I begin condensing the data. The next step is organizing that data into five sections, which becomes the basis of the poem.
- The poem, is split into five sections, not unlike a standard research and argument essay, but unlike a standard essay, I am not looking to argue, but rather express and discover an ethical idea.
- The first two stanzas address the original belief, an anthropocentric view of animal welfare.
- The third and fourth stanza question this belief, pulling oneself out of the mindset of having the "status of a small god in nature" (Yunt 10).
- The fifth and sixth stanza are a call to remember our connection to the natural world, inspired by George Tinker's essay on consciousness.
- The seventh and eighth stanza call out the issues incumbent to the industrialization of animal husbandry and scientific research on animals.
- The ninth and tenth stanzas are the new understanding, and address the experience of sentience and consciousness in non-human animals alongside human animals. It is a reversal of the first two stanzas.
- The concluding line relates to the moral and emotional struggle with addressing animal welfare, and the difficulty in ethically approaching the complex systems that are involved with the issue.

Key findings

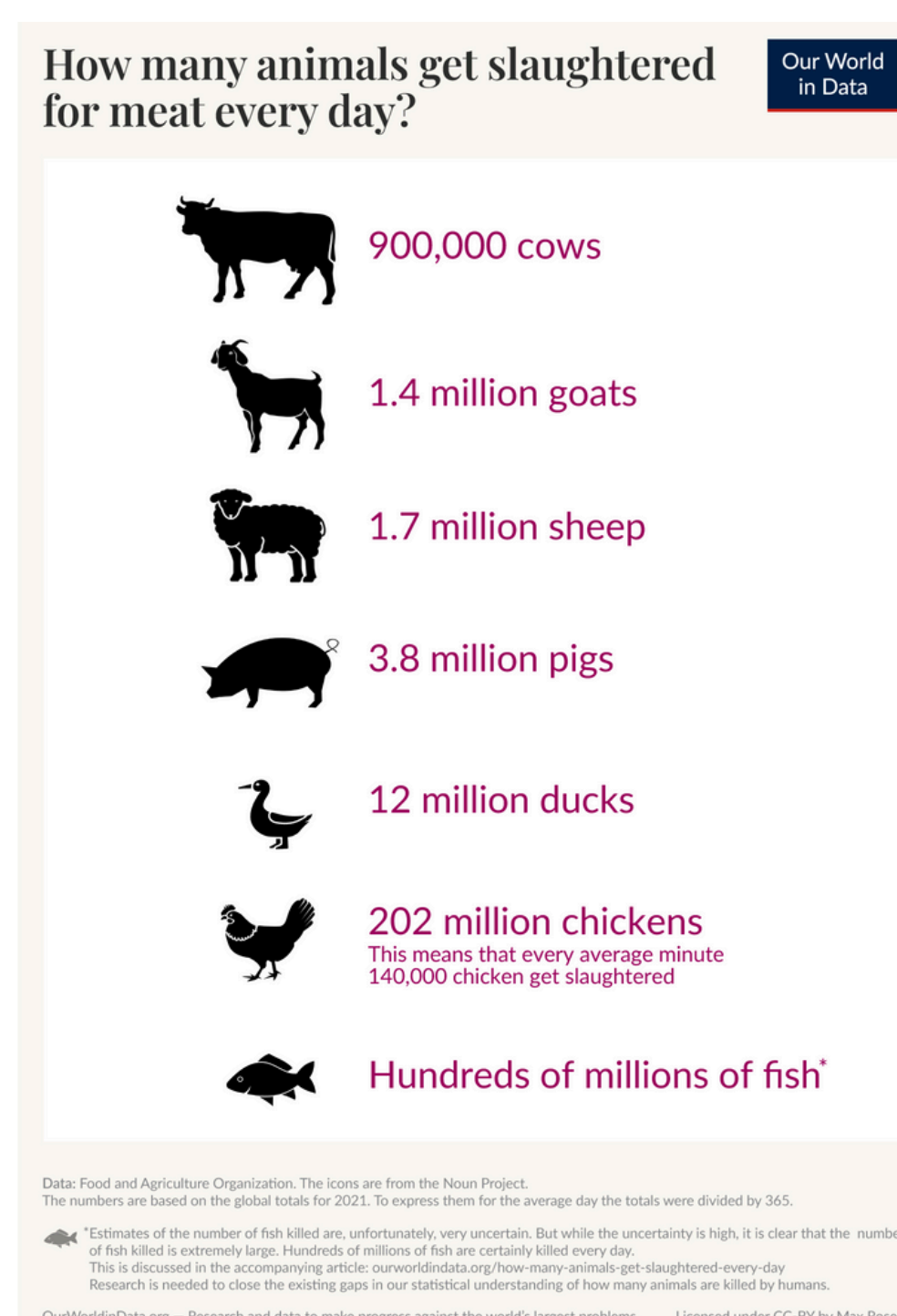
"Exhibiting the stark power of cognitive dissonance, humans deal with their repressed guilt and horror of this by concealing the killing of the animals inside factories carefully closed off from public scrutiny." (Yunt 21)

"It should be acknowledged that in many cases animals do clearly express their will, and that it is generally considered acceptable to overlook (to some degree) signs of distress and temporary discomfort for the sake of the ongoing trial." (Mancini et al 10)

"Among those things that are alive, in turn, there is a consistent distinguishing between plants and animals and between human consciousness and the rest of existence in the world." (Tinker 106)

"The reason we should prioritize sentient life in our ethical considerations is that nonhuman animals have a conscious will-to-live rooted in their ability to cherish life; they seek, just like humans, to avoid suffering and death" (Yunt 14)

"We can only say that all these painful experiments are executed because the pain and joy of others cannot be directly experienced by us." (Akpan et al 236)



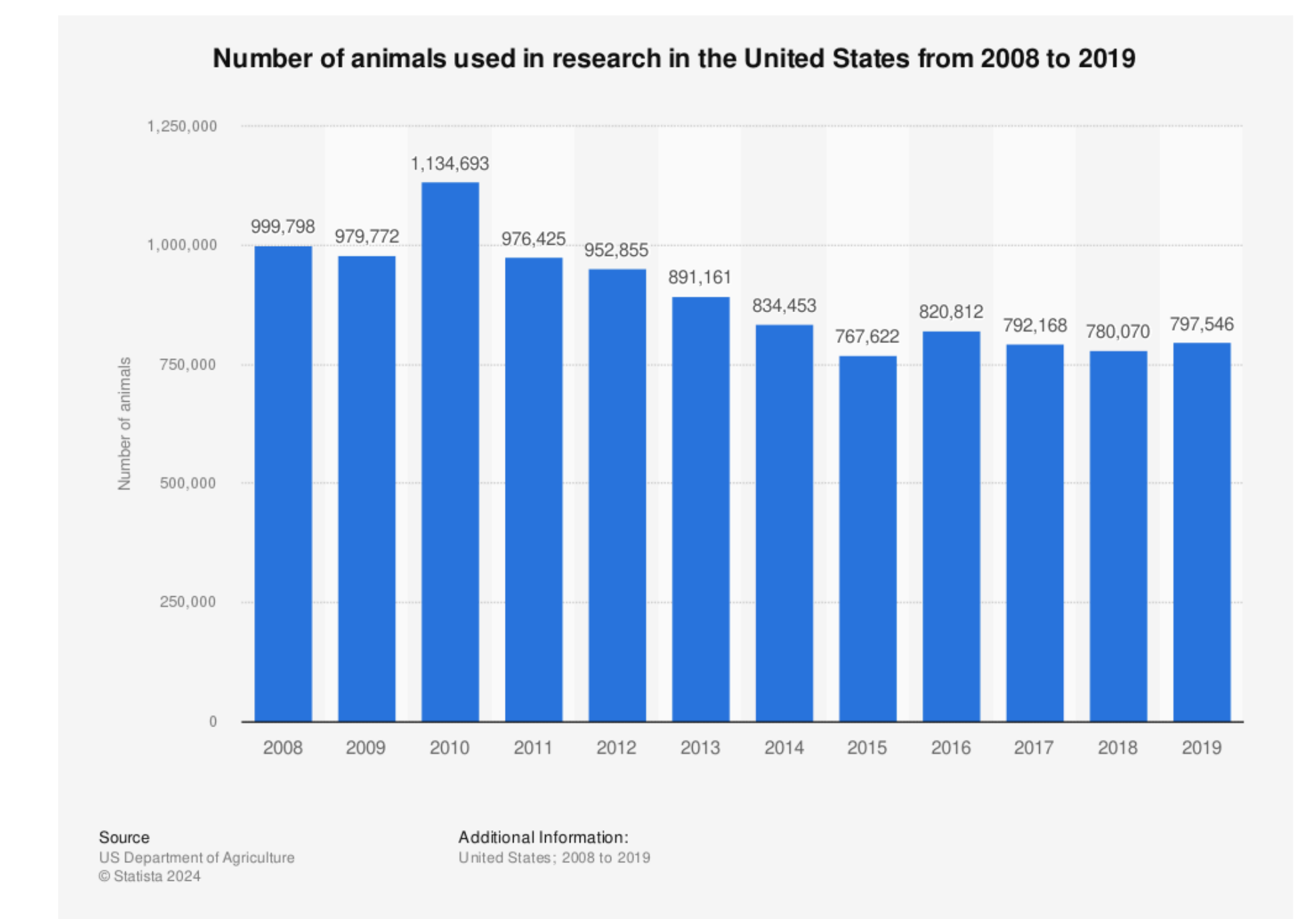
"The assumption that animals are without rights and the illusion that our treatment of them has no moral significance is a positively outrageous example of Western Cruelty and barbarity." – Arthur Schopenhauer

Analysis

The poem is designed to inspire accountability and provoke questions about the welfare of animals involved, both in the food we eat, and the testing of the medications we take. There are no easy solutions, but it's important to acknowledge that because non-human animals are not like human animals, that difference doesn't mean non-human animals don't lead a rich inner life. That inner life is often ignored, and these animals can be negatively affected by what we humans do to them. If we choose to place ourselves as superior, which I do not believe we necessarily are, then it still falls upon humans to be responsible with the lives we are caretakers for. Under no circumstance should superiority be an excuse for cruelty, and being better means doing better for the well-being of all.

Conclusions

Since 2008, there has been a steady decline in the number of animals used in research, but the statistics don't tell the whole story. Research labs only need to report animals covered under the animal welfare act, and species like mice, rats, and birds are not covered. It also doesn't relay the kind of research that is done, and some of it is pretty awful, including testing pesticides, herbicides, and viral contagions on a variety of species to see how it might affect humans. It is a complex issue, and there is no easy answer on how to address animal welfare, but "Relief" is designed to question these things, and force us to critically think about what non-human animals are capable of experiencing. Most importantly, to address their quality of life, and that non-human animals desire an opportunity to experience a life free of fear and pain.



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