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The question that I decided to answer was, “Are we obligated to consider the suffering and pain of animals that are not rational? That is, do humans have an obligation to prevent animal suffering (where they can) even when those animals are not rational?” This question refers to Singer’s view and argument and a majority of the argument presented in this essay will come from his original work. Humans are obligated to consider the suffering of other animals, even those who are not rational, because the right not to suffer is not based on intelligence.

To begin, the right not to suffer should be attributed to an organism’s ability to suffer, not the level of their intelligence. This claim implies that rights are linked to an attribute that an object or organism possesses. An example of this would mean that a male does not have the right to an abortion simply because a male is unable to become pregnant, which is a necessary attribute to have the right to have an abortion. That being said, some people claim that suffering is of moral importance based on rationality. This would imply that human suffering has moral weight while animal suffering does not because of their levels of rationality. Now, this would mean that humans who are not as intelligent as others’, particularly those who are handicapped, suffering does not need to be necessarily considered by other humans. In other words, those who claim that rationality is the basis for determining whether one is obligated to consider the suffering of an organism or not have to accept the idea that humans are not morally obligated to consider the suffering of mentally handicapped humans. This is very counterintuitive, but is a claim that those who claim morality is based on rationality have to accept. As well, and as the other extreme, this would mean that the value of a person’s suffering would depend on how intelligent they are. For example, Isaac Newton is a very intelligent person, thus his suffering would matter more than one who is less intelligent than him. This is also very counterintuitive. Now, the problem is that these counterintuitive contradictions come from the fact that the right not to suffer is based on rationality; however if the right not to suffer were based on another attribute, such as the ability suffer, it is no longer counterintuitive. In other words, the right not to suffer should solely be based on the ability to suffer, not rationality; thus humans are obligated to consider the suffering of animals.

Another problem with using intelligence as the basis for the right not to suffer is that whatever intellectual criterion is used to determine who’s (animals and humans) suffering matters, there will always be humans below that line and other animals above it. In other words, if intelligence is the only attribute being used, then not all humans will be able to meet the criterion without some animals meeting that minimum criterion as well. As well, the only way to make this “line” only include humans’ suffering to be considered obligatorily based on only intelligence would result in being arbitrary; therefore it would be based on random choice which creates a fallacious argument. The need for an non-arbitrary criteria must be used, and the attribute of the ability to suffer being one criterion satisfies this need.

In conclusion, humans are obligated to consider the suffering of other animals who are not rational because rationality cannot be the only criterion people use to determine whether one should suffer or not because it is generally considered immoral to mistreat a handicapped person. As well, another reason that intelligence, or rationality, cannot be used to determine who’s suffering matters more is because it is arbitrary. The ability to suffer should be criteria, and this makes is obligatory for humans to consider the suffering of other animals.