THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

It should be our goal to eliminate or prevent the suffering of others if we believe them to be beautiful. It follows that in a goal of such momentous horizons, it is not an *actual summation of equality*, but rather the guiding principles of which we will employ when actually living our lives.1 There is no reason we shouldn’t afford equal considerations towards animals as well as human beings in these principles. I will be drawing from the late Peter Singer’s famed novel, *Animal Liberation*, to argue that compassion for animals is just as necessary in forging a community of solidarity as compassion for humans.

First though, why ought we care about the feelings of animals? They cannot reason like us—surely there is a fair basis for the way we have historically treated them? I urge you to think outside the realm of your average pet, who was likely bred with the specific intention of being more kind and tolerable of human affairs. If we are to be just in this critique, we must establish the limit for considering the feelings of other beings. This limit is essential because, as Singer argues, “suffering and enjoyment” are the keystones not only for ascribing meaning to life but also in establishing that “a being has interests—at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering.”2 We aim to diminish suffering through compassion. It matters not if an animal is capable of contextualizing its learned experiences for the purpose of preparing it for the future as we do. Nor does it matter if an animal is able to articulate thoughts as we do. Pain and thus, suffering, is an affliction of the present. It is hardly a matter of whether or not a being will remember being in pain, for if a being feels pain and suffers, “there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration.”3 Singer is right—since our interests here are to recognize the beauty in the world and apply it to our lives, compassion for *all beings* is assumed into that grand vision.

One might think that suffering is not as easy to quantify and that something like intelligence is a more apt method of caring for those that “actually matter,” but then you introduce and invite contradictions in your ideology that need exceptions. If you believe intelligence is perfectly useful to draw this distinction, you have to contend with the inconsistencies that arise. Are you really to argue that, because a human infant is incapable of complex thought, that it is not worthy of compassion? I should think not. One may also disagree, stating that the human infant is fostered into that concern because it is human. But why should that matter? What then is the basis for the morality of the issue? Is its pain only significant because it is a member of our own species? Is the pain of a pet of less significance because it isn't human like our siblings? No, Singer says, because an “appeal to [the] difference [of species] is to reveal a bias no more defensible than racism or any other form of arbitrary discrimination.”4 We have to avoid making conclusions through arbitrary means if we want to apply any sense of logic to our conclusions. Clearly, the capability for a being to suffer and feel joy is the one consideration we need in justifying its rights.