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Animal Ethics, Animal Welfare, and Speciesism: Considerations for Social Work

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Abstract

Social work is a human-centric social science that by design does not traditionally look beyond an anthropocentric perspective of practice, and this has consequences for nonhuman animals. Indeed, certain aspects of social service are oppressive towards nonhuman animals by advocating for the primacy of human rights and self-determination, which in a number of instances actively discriminates against nonhuman species through various forms of exploitation including (but not limited to) factory farming, hunting, entertainment, and ritual slaughter. This paper is a review of the curious relationship that social work has in regards to nonhuman animals in the United States, and how this dynamic can encourage and engender widespread forms of discrimination towards these sentient beings. Animal ethics, animal welfare, and speciesism are examined in the context of social work ethics, principles, and practice. Considerations are proposed and discussed for finding common ground between the NASW Social Work Code of Ethics and animal ethics, with the purpose of allowing for the social work profession to develop a more inclusive value system, one which

is not limited to that of just our own species. Such a change would allow for a more just and complete value system within the social work profession in the U.S., which in turn could help to advance the cause for the rights and wellbeing of nonhuman animals on a wider national as well as international scale.
Keywords: Animal ethics, animal rights, animal welfare, anthropocentrism, anthropogenic, ethics, human rights, oppression, NASW, self-determination, sentience, social work ethics, speciesism, posthumanism, utilitarianism

Introduction

We are living in an age of incredible social change and upheaval in which society (particularly Western Society) is reevaluating its past and present relationship with oppressed groups. Certainly, here in the United States, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen this progressive societal evolution with traditionally disenfranchised minorities. This societal evolution has also extended into the world of nonhuman animals, albeit in a far less decisive and uniformed manner (Fraser, Taylor, & Riggs, 2021; Milligan, 2015; Ryan, 2014). Many of the pro-environmental groups and animal rights organizations advocating for nonhuman animals are rooted in the social activism and revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, and this growing movement has become part of mainstream public discourse over subsequent decades in the West and beyond (Bright, 2021; Fraser, Taylor, & Riggs, 2021; Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Milligan, 2015; Ryan, 2014; Wolf, 2000). Indeed, as a deeper understanding of oppression has seeped into the greater collective human consciousness, it has become clear that its existence is not a phenomenon which is unique to just our own species, *Homo sapiens* (Fraser et al., 2021; Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Jones, 2014; Ryan, 2014; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Ryan, 2011; Moore, 2009; Singer, 1990).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest social work professional organization in the world (NASW 2023; NASW, 2021; Kopeikin Brill, 2001). The NASW Code of Ethics is the document that provides the moral and professional framework by which social workers are to

conduct themselves in the United States (NASW, 2021; Kopeikin Brill, 2001). The NASW Code of Ethics essentially describes the mission statement of the social work profession and this is (in short) to enhance and improve the *human condition*. It can therefore be said by extension that social work holds an *anthropocentric* or human-centric value system (Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019; Ryan 2014; Ryan, 2011; Shaw, 2011; Wolf, 2000). Thus, that is to say, there is no mention in the NASW Code of Ethics of nonhuman animals nor how or if their existence means anything in the context of these principles of professional conduct (it is nonetheless glaring that they are *omitted*). It is far too easy to forget that we humans are animals as well; in this regard the social work profession; like so many others, is guilty of promoting human exceptionalism, espousing a species-based dichotomy or "othering" between ourselves and the rest of the animal kingdom (Caviola, Everett, & Faber, 2019; Peggs. 2016; Ryan 2014; Hanrahan, 2011; Ryan 2011). It can be argued that in a spiritual sense, this condition is the antithesis of the very principles that guide the NASW and the profession at large, including notions of justice, inclusion, diversity, and advocating for the oppressed, among other banners of social work.

Why should social workers care about animal welfare, animal ethics, and the natural world in general? To begin with, this can be answered in a very much anthropocentric manner. It is becoming increasingly clear that environmental issues are perhaps the greatest threat to human social welfare and humanity on a global scale (Almiron & Tafalla, 2019; Decker Sparks, Massey Combs, & Yu, 2019; Risley-Curtiss, 2013; Hanrahan, 2011; Coates, 2003; Wolf, 2000). Environmental crises inevitably spill into the human arena; indeed, humanity (namely human behavior) itself is directly responsible for a growing number of catastrophes across the natural world, including anthropogenic climate change, pollution, the biodiversity crisis, and the 6th Mass Extinction - the first event of its kind in the history of life on earth by which a singular species is responsible for the destruction and impoverishment of life on our planet (Naggs, 2017; Cafaro, 2015; Diamond, 1989). Human exploitation, degradation, and mismanagement of the natural world has led to worsening drought, floods, food crises, pollution, eco-

system collapse, and disease development, including zoonotic (i.e., animal to human) diseases, such as COVID-19 (Fraser et al., 2021; Decker Sparks et al., 2019; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Hanrahan, 2011; Heinsch, 2011; Coates, 2003; Wolf, 2000). There is an intrinsic, direct relationship between the health of the planet and human society at large (Garlington & Collins, 2020; Almiron & Tafalla, 2019; Hudson, 2019; Shaly, 2019; Risley-Curtiss, 2013; Gray & Coates, 2012; Heinsch, 2011; Coates, 2003). Social work has finally begun to acknowledge this relationship and this has resulted in some limited changes in education and practice, such as the relatively recent development of "environmental social work" (Kati & Aila-Leena, 2018; Szucs, Geers, Jezierski, et al., 2012; Heinsch, 2011; Coates, 2003; McMain Park, 1996).

From a human-centric perspective, it is also well-known for example that animal cruelty is a key indicative behavior for human violence and criminality in general (Arkow, 2020; Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019; Ryan, 2014; Wykoff, 2014; Risely-Curtiss, 2013; Risley-Curtiss, 2010; Faver & Strand, 2003; Wolf, 2000). Despite this relationship, social workers do not typically assess for animal abuse in the field, an oversight which can furthermore put our human clients at risk (Ryan, 2011; Risely-Curtiss, 2010; Risley-Curtiss, Zilney, & Hornung, 2010). Moreover, companion animals (i.e., "pets") often play an important role in the lives of our clients and patients – and this has far too often been overlooked when examining psychosocial factors such as family systems, support, stressors, trauma, as well as death and dying (Fraser et al., 2021; Rauktis & Hoy-Gerlach, 2020; Hoy-Gerlach & Wehman, 2017; Ryan, 2014; Risely-Curtiss, 2010; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2010; Hines 2003). According to Arkow (2020), there are more companion animals in the United States today than children. This is a fascinating statistic unto itself and perhaps also an indicator of the changes in Western society as to whom or what comprises a family member in the early 21st century.

This review takes a broad-based look at the often-contradictory relationship that exists in social work in the United States as it compares to animal ethics, animal welfare, and speciesism. These interrelated concepts fall under the broad-based philosophy of "animal rights," which is concerned

with the moral value of nonhuman animals. It should be emphasized that the state of animal rights in the U.S. represents just one particular snapshot of this complex philosophical movement which has developed in different ways across the world (Munro, 2022; Weitzenfeld & Joy, 2014).

Social Work and Animal Welfare

An Overview of Animal Welfare

Animal welfare pertains to the physical and emotional wellbeing of animals – it is a state that can be scientifically measured as opposed to being something arbitrary (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2016; Fraser & MacRae, 2011; Fraser, 1999). Animal welfare is a multidisciplinary field, and has been studied by veterinarians, ethologists, biologists, and other researchers (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2016; Fraser & MacRae, 2011; Lund, Coleman, Gunnarsson, et al., 2006; Fraser, 1999). Animal welfare is not a subject matter that can necessarily be painted with broad brush strokes as what constitutes the adequate welfare of different species varies (Lund, 2006; Hewson, 2003). Indeed, each species has its own ideal parameters as to what "welfare," or broadly speaking, its state of "wellbeing" is. The definition of wellbeing here is multidimensional, as is the case with our own species. Animals as sentient creatures can achieve wellbeing by having their basic needs met (including adequate food, water, natural space, and safety), and this ultimately translates into *feelings* as well – which relates to a state of mind as opposed to the body (Kumar, Choughary, Kumar, et al., 2019; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2016; Lund, 2006; Lund et al., 2006; Hewson, 2003). Animal sentience can encompass a spectrum of feelings that are shared by our own species - which not long ago was argued to be a uniquely human phenomenon (Proctor, Carder, & Cornish, 2013; Proctor, 2012; Francione, 2010; Singer, 1990). Such feelings may include (but are not limited to) pleasure, pain, contentment, and fear (Kumar, Choughary, Kumar, et al., 2019; Proctor, Carder, & Cornish, 2013; Proctor, 2012). It must be emphasized that this state of mind also necessitates the capability to perceive and feel these emotions in a manner not unlike

our own species. To that end, Kumar, Choughary, Kumar, et al. (2019) note that in 2012, an international group of preeminent neuroscientists signed what is known as the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, which confirms that "many animals – including all mammals and birds – possess the neurological substrates (i.e., biological machinery) that generate consciousness," (p. 635). As social workers, this sentient state that we share with nonhuman animals should be appreciated as empathic practitioners.

Lund (2006) clearly explains the holistic nexus of animal welfare theory as including (1) natural living, (2) biological functioning, as well as (3) affective states. These interrelated factors can be illustrated by numerous examples in accordance with species affiliation. In terms of domestic animals, we can think of a cow (*Bos taurus*) for example, living an undisturbed life on a farm with ample pastureland to graze, and amongst its herd in relative tranquility. This again describes an ideal biological (and hence psychological) setting for this given species. The same concepts can be applied to wild animals. Thus, we can look at the largest land mammal, the African bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), which requires ample wild grazing land (savannah) to forage in their herds while being undisturbed by human encroachment and interference. In both of these cases, we see the intimate and profound interconnection between natural living, biological functioning, and affective states.

It should be clarified that for the purposes of this article, we are specifically considering the subphylum Vertebrata (essentially those animals which have a backbone, such as ourselves) - which include the classes encompassing the fish (Osteichthyes), amphibians (Amphibia), reptiles (Reptilia), birds (Aves), and mammals (Mammalia). A particularly weighted look will be focused upon the mammals because they are the most common (but certainly not the only) nonhuman animals encountered in the social work field as the predominant animal companions of our human clients (Loue & Vincent, 2021; Arkow, 2020; Strand et al., 2012). At the same time, it is important to be aware that animal welfare extends well beyond this *categorization based upon phylogenetic* (or evolutionary) *relatedness to ourselves* and indeed, it can in principle be extended to other forms of life. For example,

notions of sentience are now well-recognized in the arthropods (i.e., lobster, shrimp, crabs) and cephalopods (i.e., octopuses, squid, cuttlefish), types of invertebrate animals who have been scientifically documented to feel pain and anxiety (Passantino, Elwood, & Coluccio, 2021; Horvath, Angeletti, Nascetti & Carere, 2013). With the above in mind, an appreciation for animal welfare and its incorporation into the social work profession can afford the social work practitioner to look more profoundly into the multidimensionality of "welfare."

Social Work and Animal Welfare - Intersectionality

Animal welfare science pertains at least nominally to social work practice when considering animals as a *means of treatment*, such as animal-assisted therapy – but this is a matter of regulation above all (Taylor, Fraser, Signal, & Prentice, 2016; Ryan, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Risley-Curtiss, 2010; Netting, Wilson, & New, 1987). To that end, in an article by Taylor, Fraser, Signal, and Prentice (2016), the authors not only acknowledge that social work is a human-oriented profession, but state that the field does not officially recognize animals as being sentient – despite an overall rise in animal-related interventions utilized by social workers and the development of the veterinary social work specialization. The social work-centric literature in this study pertaining to animals largely emphasizes that this profession has traditionally considered the utilitarian aspect of the human-animal relationship (Loue & Vincent, 2021; Arkow, 2020; Taylor, Fraser, Signal, et al., 2016; Ryan 2014). Ryan (2014) makes the related argument that animals themselves are largely ignored in social work practice, to the disadvantage of the profession and its guiding principles at large. Similarly, Risely-Curtiss (2010) explains that a consequence of social work not addressing nonhuman animals has at times resulted in confusion and suboptimal practice while encountering them in the field.

This limited conceptualization and emphasis of animal welfare in social work is somewhat counterintuitive as there are tens of millions of companion animals living in the United States (dogs, cats, birds, and others),

comprising approximately 60% of U.S. households where most of these animals are considered to be family members by their owners (Arkow, 2020; Ryan 2014; Risely-Curtiss, 2010; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2010). For this demographic of Americans, these companion animals may hold a central place within the family system and thus are an important part of the lives of our clients and patients (Fraser et al., 2021; Holcombe et al., 2015; Strand et al., 2012; Risely-Curtiss, 2010; Mercer, 2007; Netting et al., 1987; Crocken, 1982). Is this in itself not a reason for a more progressive, open-minded stance towards animal welfare and expanded (i.e., nonhuman) notions of justice in the social work profession? There are a number of compelling arguments for the incorporation of animal welfare considerations in social work which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Social Welfare and Animal Welfare in the United States – A Shared History

There is a curious and fascinating shared history between the origins of the social welfare movement and animal welfare here in the United States and as a social work-geared article, this bears attention. For the great majority of Western Civilization at large, enforceable social service measures to protect the most at-risk members of society (that is, children and animals), were largely ineffective, inconsistent, or nil until the 19th century (Arkow, 2020; Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019; Zilney & Zilney, 2005; Watkins, 1990). In the United States, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1866, which was structurally and philosophically based on the British Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals founded in 1824 (ASPCA, 2023; Zilney & Zilney, 2005). Mr. Henry Bergh (1813—1888) was the founder of what would later become the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and he is known as perhaps the greatest animal welfare advocate in the U.S. during the 19th century. Throughout the course of his professional life, Mr. Bergh had prosecuted over 12,000 cases of animal abuse and in this process, became a known and respected public figure (Cappiello, 2017).

It was also through the animal welfare laws advocated by Mr. Bergh and his allies that the early legal mechanisms preventing cruelty against children would (in part) come into being, as highlighted by a landmark case involving a severely abused foster child by the name of Mary Ellen (McCormack) Wilson (1864 – 1956) in 1874, which involved ASPCA intervention (Hoy-Gerlach, Delgado, & Sloane, 2018; Norton Greene, 2013; Jalongo, 2006; Zilney & Zilney, 2005; Watkins, 1990). Mr. Bergh soon after notably founded the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1875 (Cappiello, 2017; Myers, 2008). Of further note, the advocate Henry Bergh was never a parent or a pet owner himself (Cappiello, 2017).

Since the revolutionary Mary Ellen Wilson case, child welfare and animal welfare laws, regulations, and approaches have experienced a kind of schism in the U.S., in part because of the differing, evolving views on human rights versus animal rights – though as indicated previously, this trend has begun to change (Arkow, 2020; Zilney & Zilney, 2005). Of course, there are consequences for the differentiation in these welfare laws. In case of animals, such legalities ultimately allow for further exploitation up to a legally sanctioned limit and this can vary based upon a given species and their given purpose(s) to serve their human masters (this will be more thoroughly analyzed in the "Speciesism" section below). There are different ways to consider this from a social welfare perspective.

For the social work practitioner, it is perhaps most immediately practical to recognize that the situational correlations and parallels between child abuse and animal abuse continue to be striking in many ways. To that end, research has shown an important association between the perpetrators themselves and these often cooccurring forms of violence (Arkow, 2020; Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019; Wykoff, 2014; Risley-Curtiss, 2010; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2010; Zilney & Zilney, 2005). As an illustration of this relationship, in a national survey of the largest shelters in the U.S. serving women and child survivors of domestic violence, researchers found that a remarkable 83% of shelters surveyed observed the coexistence between domestic violence and animal abuse (Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019). For social workers focused in on their human clientele, this should

have meaning on multiple levels – from a (1) treatment perspective, (2) to reporting, (3) to structural matters within the shelter system – such as the need for more facilities to be pet friendly. Yet, these glaring gaps remain. In this regard, Vincent, McDonald, Poe, and Deisner (2019) emphasize that the critical link between interpersonal violence and that of animal abuse is not typically a part of mainstream social work education and training, which is a significant detriment to the individuals and families that we work with. This argument points to the idea that one need not be an animal lover to appreciate animal welfare as an element within social welfare that deserves further consideration (Arkow, 2020; Rautkis & Hoy-Gerlach, 2020; Vincent, McDonald, Poe, & Deisner, 2019; Risely-Curtiss et al., 2010).

Social Work and Animal Ethics

An Overview of Animal Ethics

Animal ethics is a more philosophical field of study as compared to animal welfare, which is a science (Kymlicka & Donaldson, 2016; Fraser & MacRae, 2011; Fraser, 1999). Animal ethics examines and describes how nonhuman animals should be treated and considered by human beings (Sterman & Bussert, 2020; Webb, Woodford, & Huchard, 2019; Kymlicka, & Donaldson, 2016; Zuolo, 2016; Fraser, 1999; Singer, 1990). Animal ethics therefore does share an inherently interconnected relationship with animal welfare as well as speciesism (Sterman & Bussert, 2020; Webb, Woodford, & Huchard, 2019; Kymlicka & Donaldson, 2016; Zuolo, 2016; Fraser, 1999; Singer, 1990).

The broad idea of ethics and the act of "being ethical" pertain to a given code of morality or value system. Human moral codes are different than scientific calculations and facts. These codifications do not apply to the same kind of objective, formulaic, testable rules, as moral codes are relative – and yet their existence in some form is ubiquitous across human societies (Saroglou, 2019; Ayala, 2010; Broom, 2006). To that end, notions of ethics and morality can vary between peoples and cultures and evolve over time (Saroglou, 2019; Ayala, 2010; Broom, 2006). This is not to take away from the

meaning of "being ethical" or "being moral," but it does potentially complicate things. Ayala (2010) argues that the existence of deliberate moral behavior is unique to humanity alone, whereas its existence in other animals is purely the product of instinct or "the product of genetically determined behaviors" (p. 9016). This conclusion that moral altruism is unique only to humanity is a reductionist, anthropocentric, and speciesist approach, which does not appreciate the vast and complex span of selfless behaviors that have been documented in what Ayala (2010) refers to under the catchall term of "biological altruism." To be clear, biological altruism in basic scientific terms specifically refers to the reduction of direct reproductive fitness of one organism to the benefit another (Dugatkin, 2009; Wilson, 2000).

Ayala (2010) is correct in acknowledging that morality exists outside of the realm of human experience. Morality, biologically speaking, is an evolved trait and occurs in other animal species (most striking perhaps, but not limited to social and eusocial species), and includes (1) minimizing harm and (2) engaging in altruistic (or "selfless") behaviors (Ryan, 2014; Rowlands, 2012; Dugatkin, 2009; Broom, 2006; Wilson, 2000; Singer, 1990). This biologically-based morality is important for humans to grasp in order to gain a deeper appreciation of nonhuman species and our profound similarities in so many ways. In addition, it must be said that there is no shortage of compelling cases of animals behaving as *deliberate* moral beings (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Ryan, 2014; Proctor, 2012; Rowlands, 2012). This growing body of evidence has not gone unnoticed – yet the debate continues no doubt in part because of the ramifications for humanity on social, philosophical, religious, as well as legal levels. In this sense, it is perhaps threatening to human exceptionalism. This writer would argue that these perceived threats in recognizing at least some nonhuman animals as moral beings ultimately are a hindrance to an enhanced human moral awakening and the ability for human beings to become greater planetary citizens as opposed to simply masters of the natural world.

The Codification of Animal Ethics

The effective codification of animal ethics has occurred in a gradual, limited fashion in American society and in a manner which is rather compartmentalized in terms of what species of animals are deserving of certain protections and why (Matheny & Leahy, 2007; Cohen, 2006; Mench, 2003). For example, a type of codification may be specific to select protections for work animals, research animals, or those destined to be farmed (that is, slaughtered). Other legal documents protecting animals, such as the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are specific to particular forms of wildlife that have already been negatively impacted by human behavior to the extent that there is a threat of extinction (Bean, 2009). In case of all of these examples, note that there no single *all-encompassing* document for the ethical consideration of nonhuman animal species. This is a curious and deliberate detail, which has consequences for nonhuman animals and our behaviors towards them.

Perhaps the closest thing to a defining document on animal ethics is the Universal Declaration on Animal Rights (UDAR) of 1978 which was declared by a number of NGOs and later revised in 1989 and then again in 2018 (Peters, 2020; Peters, 2018; Neumann, 2012). This document was in part deliberately modeled after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 (Peters, 2020; Peters, 2018; Neumann, 2012). It is noteworthy that the UDHR itself was partially created with an idea of species hierarchy (an idea that will be further examined in the "Speciesism" section below), in which an asserted, inherent, human "otherness," "exceptionalism," and "superiority," to other animals was argued to have necessitated such a legal framework—a seemingly unnecessary and perhaps counterproductive rationale for the existence of this important document (Kymlicka, 2018). More than this, the UDHR can be understood as a legal document for the continued species-based discrimination, domination, and exploitation of nonhuman animals precisely by codifying "human exceptionalism." To that end, human rights and animal rights as they currently stand are not always mutually compatible (Kymlicka, 2018; Cochrane & Cooke, 2016; Behrens, 2009). In this sense, the idea of human rights may sometimes infringe upon

animal rights and vice versa. The examples in this instance are abundant and worldwide in scope. One can consider human hunting practices, development projects, animal experimentation, ritual slaughter, and other means of exploiting nature as causing tension between these competing concepts (Kymlicka, 2018; Behrens, 2009).

It should be made clear that unlike the UDHR, the UDAR declaration is purely symbolic in nature and remains as such. Indeed, the UDAR has still yet to be codified or applied in any meaningful, enforceable way (Peters, 2020; Peters, 2018; Neumann, 2012). This unfortunate reality does not mean that the development towards a codified, universal system of animal rights has no practical, conceivable future. On the contrary, liberal theories of justice have continued to evolve in society, and as noted by Cochrane and Cooke (2016), there have been a growing number of political theorists and philosophers who have increasingly spoken up to discuss this matter and its implications for the rights and (by extension) protections of nonhuman animals as sentient beings. The existence of sentience in nonhuman animals continues to be a powerful argument when talking about the significance of animal ethics overall. The necessity of developing a sound ethical system in regards to nonhuman animals is not a trivial nor a baseless idea, but rather one which is supported by a growing body of comprehensive scientific evidence based upon rigorous research in the fields of biology, physiology, ethology, and comparative studies (Cochrane & Cooke, 2016; Ryan, 2014; Proctor, Carder, & Cornish, 2013; Proctor, 2012; Francione, 2010; Aaltola, 2008). It should be highlighted that, ethology, or the study of animal behavior, has provided insight into the complexity and nuance of animal behavior and communication on the intraspecies and interspecies level – illustrating the many fascinating parallels as well as applications within our own species (Ryan, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Dugatkin, 2009; Wilson, 2000; Singer, 1990).

Thus, in an article by Cochrane (2012), an argument is made for the reconceptualization of human rights to become something much more profound an inclusive – to what the author refers to as "sentient rights." In short, the idea of sentient rights according to Cochrane (2012), is that all sentient creatures have biological as well as conscious interests (which can be

affected by the actions of others) – and as such, they have rights. This notion, per Cochrane (2012) is referred to as being *prima facie* (or being effectively understood face value), where certain basic rights are inherent by the state of being sentient. At the same time, the author reassesses the universality of the argument for human "personhood," in remarking that notions including "a conception of the self" do not apply to all parts of humanity nor human existence - including (1) during early stages of development and (2) for those with severe mental disabilities. Such an argument is an effective consideration for the many gray areas of commonly held ideas regarding human exceptionalism. This line of reasoning furthermore echoes the philosophical arguments made by philosopher Peter Singer in his 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, which is discussed in further detail later in this review. From the opposite perspective, it is worthwhile to note that there are many cognitive ethologists who have argued with ample scientific evidence that animals do in fact have "minds," and moreover are individual beings in terms of their own interests, capacities, and experiences (Kumar, Choughary, Kumar, et al., 2019; Freeman, Bekoff, & Bexell, 2011; Aaltola, 2008; Francescotti, 2007; Singer, 1990). This overdue recognition has potentially profound implications in various domains, such as in animal research and testing practices – including in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and yes, social work.

With the above information in mind, Cochrane (2012) argues that the "basic rights of sentient humans and nonhumans are neither conceptually nor ethically distinct," (p. 656). All of these ideas are worth careful consideration and may offer insight into a future which is a post-humanist world - one by which universal rights are not limited by species membership alone. Such a world would have major implications for social work practice and how we engage our clients and the systems in which they live. Posthumanism is a philosophical perspective which considers nonhuman animals as agents worthy of moral consideration and is discussed in detail in the "Speciesism" section below.

The NASW Code of Ethics in the Context of Nonhuman Animals

For those human beings in favor of animal rights codification, it has been observed that there are examples of anthropocentric ethical codes which appear to bear striking parallels in terms of their moral spirit (Peters, 2020; Hoy-Gerlach, Delgado, & Sloane, 2018; Milligan, 2015; Ryan, 2014). Yet some glaring, critical discrepancies can also simultaneously exist in this codification. In the following section, a careful analysis will be made in case of the NASW Code of Ethics. The purpose of this examination is to (1) highlight conceptual common ground with animal ethics as well as to (2) identify potential problem areas which are exclusionary towards nonhuman animals. In addition, the NASW Code of Ethics will be put into a wider Western sociocultural perspective in order to provide a more profound context for the document itself.

The NASW Code of Ethics was first adopted in 1960 and has since been revised on a number of occasions throughout the years (NASW, 2021; Swick, Dyson, & Webb, 2021; Kopeikin Brill, 2001). Structurally speaking, the NASW Code of Ethics is subdivided into four (4) sections, which are worth summarizing for the purpose of this review. The first section of the NASW Code of Ethics is titled the "Preamble." In this section, the core values of the profession are introduced. These values are elaborated upon in the subsequent "Purpose" section. The "Ethical Principles" and "Standards" sections round out this document by enumerating, describing, and discussing these aspects of the said code. In the following sections, these portions of the NASW Code of Ethics will be considered in the context of animal ethics.

The Preamble of the NASW Code of Ethics is a glaring anthropocentric piece of writing containing blatant, species-based clarifiers (Wolf, 2000). A curious question in reviewing this section of the document is why is this language even necessary? From a post-humanist and animal rights perspective, this could be interpreted as a means to allow for the domination and suffering of nonhuman animals on the basis of achieving "well-being" for human client populations – in a manner parallel to that of the UDHR. Personhood too is limited by species membership here and indeed, such

language extends to that of the core values which include "service", "social justice", "dignity and worth of *the person*", "importance of *human relationships*," "integrity," and "competence." These core values per the NASW (2021), are moreover to be "balanced in the context and complexity of *the human experience*."

A growing body of literature within social work itself contradicts the speciesist, unidimensional, perspective of the NASW Code of Ethics Preamble, which at this time remains closed to the idea of greater-species inclusivity by the profession - despite conveniently allowing for nonhuman animals to enhance the human condition in practice (Sterman & Bussert, 2020; Ryan, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Risely-Curtiss, 2010). In this regard, Sterman and Bussert (2020) highlight the reality that there is in fact a "considerable body of research documenting the physical, psychological, and social benefits of human-animal interaction (HAI)," (p. 47). Simultaneously, these authors also remark that even in this basic facet, such recognition is lacking in social work education and practice (Sterman & Bussert, 2020). While this writer does not entirely agree with the overarching assumption that HAI is *always* necessarily good for "everyone," there is certainly a strong point to be made here for social workers in regards to the importance of (1) HAI (which includes the specific human-animal bond category) and the (2) recognition of this often very powerful and deep *relationship* - which is currently not included in the NASW Code of Ethics. It is clear that relationships are not necessarily limited by species membership, and this is most simply and commonly exemplified by our pets or companion animals, who are partners in the human-animal bond (Arkow, 2020; Sterman & Bussert, 2020; Ryan, 2014; Hanrahan 2011; Risely-Curtiss, 2010; Netting et al., 1987).

The "Purpose" section of the NASW Code of Ethics serves as a primary guideline for ethical considerations in the social work profession. The section is subdivided into six (6) separate purposes, which create the basis of a value system supposedly defining the field from others (NASW, 2021). In the stated purpose of the NASW Code of Ethics, *ethical responsibilities are intrinsically linked to human relationships*. In addition, judgement is specified as being something *informed*, and decision-making and action steps within

professional conduct should be consistent with the "spirit of the code." Both of these points are of notable consideration for any future amendments concerning the inclusion of nonhuman animals. The code moreover does not provide a set of rules for conduct in all situations (NASW, 2021). It is therefore a code that in a sense, also recognizes its own limitations as an ethical guide. This too in theory seems to allow for the possibility of future amendments. The arguments made in the previous sections in regards to scientifically-supported, evidence-based notions of (1) sentience, (2) the concept of the individual, and (3) basic rights as a result of these qualities, call into question some very fundamental notions of the "Purpose" portion of the NASW Code of Ethics and why this document is ultimately incomplete in its current, restrictive form.

There are several subsections in the NASW Code of Ethics that should be examined in the context of animal ethics. Self-determination (1.02) is an interesting concept within the code. Self-determination is an ethical standard which is roughly akin to goal-setting in an unobstructed manner and can be understood to be linked in a philosophical way to ideas like "destiny" and "potential" (Freedberg, 1989). Self-determination in the context of social work is often client-centered in nature, but it can also be thought of as nation or people-centered as well (i.e., a given ethnicity, a given nation, etc.), particularly in the context of postcolonialism. Self-determination as it is written in the NASW Code of Ethics itself brings up an interesting point, which is that there are *limitations* to this process – and that in any measure, it does have the capacity to inflict harm when exercised in destructive ways (NASW, 2021). This is an interesting concept when one considers the balance between human self-determination and animal rights as well as other environmental issues. To that end, humanity as a whole, in exercising its own species-wide self-determination, has caused the destruction of enormous swaths of the planet, the exploitation of the natural world, biological impoverishment, and extinction (Decker Sparks et al., 2019; Naggs, 2017; Cafaro, 2015; Hanrahan, 2011; Coates, 2003). Cultural competence (1.05) in the broad sense is a related concept here as it includes understanding norms. While Western social progressivism has grown to teach inclusion

across different human cultures and societies, it has struggled to consistently find a cohesive moral voice in regards to the treatment of animals (Fraser et al., 2021; Peters, 2020; Milligan, 2015; Ryan, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Mutsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Wolf, 2000). This point is well-illustrated by the NASW Code of Ethics.

Freeman, Bekoff, and Bexell (2011) note that the history of Western Civilization has been founded upon "human superiority and dominion, and the Cartesian human-animal dualism," (p. 594). Such ideas have significant roots in select, ancient Greek writings, as well as in Judeo-Christian biblical texts (Szucs et al., 2012). These concepts pertaining to the domination of nature in religious, philosophical, and utilitarian terms (which are not unique only to the West), have continued to influence many aspects of society in both direct and indirect ways - and this too is evidenced by the NASW Code of Ethics. The Western World has continued to be amongst the great drivers and purveyors of animal exploitation in numerous and industrialized ways (Peters, 2020; Peters, 2018; Szucs et al., 2012; Freeman, Bekoff, & Bexell, 2011; Singer, 1990). In terms of animal ethics, these examples present a great hurdle for sowing palpable progress on the global stage, as indicated by the impotence of the well-intentioned UDAR.

The NASW Code of Ethics and the Promise of a More Inclusive Social Work Profession

It is the opinion of this writer that Section 5 of the NASW Code of Ethics, "Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession," is a significant, overarching standard in the process of forwarding the agenda of animal rights and fighting species-based discrimination. This ethical standard infers the importance of sound, empirically-based evidence in our profession, which by extension includes (1) the growing amount of knowledge about nonhuman animals and (2) the intrinsic value of behaving ethically towards them. Moreover, Section 5.01(b), titled "Integrity of the Profession," allows for the improvement "of the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of

the profession." Sections 5.01(d) as well as section 5.02, titled "Evaluation and Research," furthermore allow for the possibility of a profession-wide evolution through the scientific method and evidence-based study.

The arguments for the inclusion of animal ethics in social work practice is not based upon hearsay but rather careful scientific observation and analysis (Ryan, 2014; Proctor, Carder, & Cornish. 2013; Proctor, 2012). This is philosophically challenging for the current set of ethical codes by which social workers are to carry themselves professionally – but that should not preclude the changes that are ultimately necessary. Thus, the final NASW Code of Ethics standard worth consideration is titled "Social and Political Action" (6.04), which necessitates the inevitable steps towards progress and change. This has been an important element in the evolution of society in the United States and the Western World over the course of the past century. In this manner, the trend towards social progressivism has continued gradually but steadily since the end of the Second World War (1939-1945).

Social Work and Speciesism

An Introduction to Speciesism

Social work is aware of what Wolf (2000), refers to as the oppressive existence of "noxious 'isms'" (p. 88), which include the likes of racism, ageism, and sexism – negative, bias-based forces which unfortunately remain pervasive in society today. These isms are directed towards at-risk, often historically marginalized groups in a discriminatory fashion. *Speciesism* is not traditionally part of the aforementioned list of "noxious 'isms'", as it is a form of discrimination which traditionally exists outside of direct *human* experience (Kymlicka & Donaldson; Wolf, 2000). Conceptually however, there is a clear and direct relationship with the other types of prejudice listed above, as speciesism is the belief in the inherent superiority of certain species versus others – with humanity always dominating among all (Singer, 2015; Wykoff, 2014; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Moore, 2013; Wolf, 2000; Singer, 1990). Everett, Caviola, and Savulescu (2019) define prejudice as an

"attitude, emotion, or behavior towards members of a group, which directly or indirectly implies some negativity or antipathy toward that group," (p. 785). This definition is as appropriate for speciesism as it is for the other forms of the noxious isms listed above.

Speciesism is manifested in many ways across all cultures and peoples globally, depending on the cultural norms and taboos related to different animal species. A number of scientific studies have noted the remarkable psychological similarities between speciesism and other more "traditional" forms of prejudice, discrimination, and hate (Everett, Caviola, & Savulescu, 2019; Singer, 2015; Wykoff, 2014; Horta, 2010; Singer, 1990). In this manner, speciesism has often translated into violence and destruction, whether in case of the sanctioning of industrial-scale killing of nonhuman animals, to hunting practices, to entertainment, to deliberate eradication campaigns – some of which have led to the extinction of numerous species across the scale of human history (Naggs, 2017; Cafaro, 2015; Diamond, 1989).

The term "speciesism" was coined in 1970 by Richard Ryder (b. 1940), a British psychologist who wrote a provocative book and exposé of sorts titled "Victims of Science: The Use of Animals in Research", which examined the *inhumane* treatment of research animals (Horta, 2010; Moore, 2009). Ryder has compellingly argued that like racism, speciesism is inherently illogical, and is based upon an appearance of otherness. Peter Singer (b. 1946), the renown Australian philosopher, later reviewed Ryder's work and then adopted the term speciesism (Moore, 2009; Singer, 1990). Singer brought the concept of speciesism to a broader audience with his seminal book "Animal Liberation," first published in 1975, which is a difficult, often damning read, providing graphic descriptions of the horrors of animal testing, factory farming, and other forms of ethically dubious behaviors conducted on animals for the benefit of humans, which results in the violent, unnatural deaths of about *80 billion terrestrial animals per year globally* (Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Ritchie, Rosado, & Roser, 2017; Milligan, 2015; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Moore, 2009; Singer 1990). The major argument made in the book returns to the idea of sentience and the ability of animals to suffer and feel pain (Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013;

Francione, 2010; Franklin, 2005; Singer, 1990). This central idea of being able to feel is tied to notions of rights - although Singer himself also recognizes certain generalized differences between human and nonhuman animals, such as in terms of intellectual capacities. Such differences however do not negate the latter group to an equal consideration of *interests* (Singer, 1990).

Singer (1990) notes that speciesism is fundamentally human-centered, in which more value is placed upon our own species as compared to all others who are classified and subdivided according to their given uses for human purposes (within one society to the next). Animal rights and ethics are said to fall under the philosophical banner of what is known as "posthumanism" – a broad-based philosophical movement which is not anthropocentric and strongly considers non-human players, such as animals (Singer, 2015; Moore, 2009; Singer 1990). Posthumanism has been considered by some to be radical, if not dangerous – as it philosophically erases the human exceptionalism that has defined our species in fundamental ways since the dawn of civilization. Singer supports this notion and has argued for it in the name of true animal rights (Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Singer, 1990). It should be noted that the particular moral philosophy which Peter Singer is associated with is known as *utilitarianism* (Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Francione, 2010; Franklin, 2005; Singer, 1990). Utilitarianism in short advocates for a greater, more enlightened form of equality - for all creatures that possess sentience, and to minimize pain and promote happiness (Chaohwei & Singer, 2018; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Francione, 2010; Franklin, 2005; Singer, 1990). This philosophical construct certainly seems in principle to be complimentary with the NASW Code of Ethics – and yet there is again the antithesis here whereby social work practice is solely geared towards human need

Based upon the current literature examined throughout the course of this review, it does not appear that social workers in general are familiar with speciesism as a major form of discrimination (Peggs, 2016; Ryan; 2014; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Hanrahan, 2011; Wolf, 2000). It is possible based on the review of the literature that this impoverishment of

knowledge may well be a deliberate, top-down decision from NASW as well as the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), and there is certainly a growing body of literature supportive of this perspective (Taylor, Fraser, Signal, & Prentice, 2016; Ryan, 2014; Hanrahan, 2011; Wolf, 2000). To that end, there is an absence of speciesism taught in social work education – something which contradicts that of other closely related professional fields, including psychology (Peggs, 2016; Wolf, 2000). This is troubling when one considers the NASW tenets of justice, morality, and ethics in very fundamental terms. Moreover, this may be problematic for more holistic, practical approaches to practice, in which nonhuman animals and their wellbeing are related to that of our clients (Arkow, 2020; Walker, Aimers, & Perry, 2015; Ryan, 2014; Faver & Strand, 2003).

Humanism, Speciesism, and Nature

Humanism is a notable philosophical area of consideration while arguing for the inherent value of nonhuman animals from the position of a social worker. Humanism as its name implies, is fundamentally anthropocentric in nature – which is traditionally the case for the majority of philosophical and psychological paradigms (Figdor, 2021; Cushing, 2003; Joy, 2002; Shapiro, 1990). From a philosophical point of view, humanism places an unquestionably greater moral worth upon humanity as compared to nonhuman animals based upon cognitive differential (Figdor, 2021; Shapiro, 1990). From this, an imperfect dichotomy exists between *humanism* and speciesism in regards to fundamental questions of moral consideration and personhood (Figdor, 2021; Cushing, 2003; Shapiro, 1990).

The principles of humanism can be applied to a wide number of diverse fields and enterprises, including social work (Payne, 2011; Goroff, 1981). Humanism within the context of clinical practice is a thought system by which human potential and self-actualization are held as being a primary force (Payne, 2011; Shapiro, 1990; Goroff, 1981). Certainly, we as social workers are familiar with the concept that the *social sciences* themselves are in reference to human behavior and the human condition overall. This

relationship is exemplified by the content found in the NASW Code of Ethics itself.

From a species egalitarianism perspective, humanism is an "ism" too – and one that has arguably been noxious towards nature, which has historically served as its philosophical antithesis (Figdor, 2021; Rusen, 2006; Shapiro, 1990). However as noted by Shapiro (1990), there are select concepts within humanism that allow for a limited degree of rapprochement. In this respect, it can be argued that there is a philosophical divide between two key aspects of humanistic thought: (1) empathy and (2) reason (Shapiro, 1990). While empathy has traditionally been a driver for the animal rights movement, reason has historically been associated exclusively with human beings (Shapiro, 1990). It is worthwhile to point out that the opposite of reason is considered to be "instinct," or innate, non-learned behaviors, which have classically been associated with the animal kingdom (Ayala, 2010; Dugatkin, 2009; Tooby & Cosmides, 2005; Wilson, 2000; Nicholson, 1998). This strict, latter dichotomy, which has been held as a core belief in humanistic philosophy, is no longer deemed as true based upon scientific inquiry (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005; Wilson, 2000; Nicholson, 1998).

In terms of nonhuman animals, there is growing and compelling scientific evidence that animals do in fact engage in rational decision-making (Kumar, Choughary, Kumar, et al., 2019; Freeman, Bekoff, & Bexell, 2011; Aaltola, 2008; Cushing, 2003; Singer, 1990). Particularly striking examples of this have been found in a number mammalian species, including (but certainly not limited to) the proboscideans (elephants and kin), cetaceans (whales and dolphins), and the apes (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Ryan, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Singer, 1990). Such revelations about the natural world and the consequences of humanity's destructive relationship with it have brought about voices within the humanistic framework to reconsider certain anthropocentric, ecocidal aspects of this approach (Ryan, 2014; Rusen, 2006; Shapiro, 1990).

Future Considerations

Wolf (2000) asserts that discussions about animal rights and speciesism do indeed have a place in the social work profession. Ryan (2014) presents a similar case which is made from a number of different compelling perspectives, including philosophical, physiological, and biological – arguments that have previously been addressed in this paper. The social work profession would benefit from reevaluating its relationship with nonhuman animals through these prisms as a broad-based means to consider the significant ideological and philosophical overlaps that exist between social work ethics and the case for animal rights. Despite these important commonalities, social work remains a profession that is not allied with the animal rights movement in any significant or official way (despite the efforts of some individual social workers) (Fraser et al., 2021; Sterman & Bussert, 2020; Ryan, 2014; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Ryan, 2011). This moral shortcoming arguably weakens the NASW Code of Ethics and its mission statement. To that end, this inaction can also be said to be oppressive as it reflects the will of the dominant species in power. This power dynamic moreover has yet to be considered by NASW, despite the organization's respectable work in fighting other forms of injustice and reducing various human-centric noxious isms in society, including racism, sexism, classism, etc. (NASW, 2023; NASW, 2021; Sterman & Bussert, 2020; Ryan, 2014; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2013; Risley-Curtiss, 2013).

Social work has, since its founding in the United States, been a progressive field that has advocated for the rights of the oppressed, the marginalized, and those within society without a voice. These ideas are embedded in the NASW Code of Ethics – which up until now have only applied to human beings. This does not mean that these core values are necessarily forever fixed exclusively on the needs of the world's dominant mammal. Indeed, one of the great strengths of the social work profession is its ability to evolve and incorporate big ideas and concepts from other fields, including (but not limited to) psychology, nursing, education, sociology, economics, law, and more. Today, as described above, aspects of environmental issues have

begun to infiltrate the field of social work given the scope of the human-caused, worsening disasters now endangering our planet (Bright, 2021; Shaly, 2019; Dominelli, 2013; Gray & Coates, 2012). Environmental justice for example (albeit in an anthropocentric form), has become a growing cause in social work advocacy. Simultaneously, some initial conversations have been presented in at least considering human companion animals as an important part of the ecological systems of our patients and clients – even though this too remains ultimately based on the needs and concerns of our fellow *Homo sapiens* (Fraser et al., 2021; Ryan, 2014; Fraser & MacRae, 2011; Risely-Curtiss, 2010; Fraser, 1999).

In his book "Animals in Social Work," Ryan (2014) makes an interesting observation that great social movements must necessarily occur in three stages of development, including (1) ridicule, (2) discussion, and (3) adoption. Certainly, one can see aspects of these components when carefully examining the likes of many great progressive movements here in the U.S., including Civil Rights. Ryan (2014) firmly believes that for social work, the true incorporation of the animal rights movement within the profession has entered into its "discussion" stage – which is seen as a victory unto itself. For Ryan (2014), evidence of the discussion stage is demonstrated by the growing number of publications which have begun to address the relationship between nonhuman animals and social work. This article then can perhaps be considered further evidence of Ryan's contention. At the same time, it proposes avenues for real change in social work in both a philosophical and methodological manner.

Limitations

This study does have limitations. First, this literature review primarily serves as a critique of the social work profession in regards to animal ethics, animal welfare, and speciesism in a Western, and a predominantly American context. While NASW is the largest professional social work organization in the world, it is far from being the only one (NASW, 2023; Banks & Nøhr, 2012). Social work as a profession is recognized and practiced globally across

different cultures (Banks & Nøhr, 2012). Social work practice varies across different societies and this has implications for practice as well as advocacy work (Banks & Nøhr, 2012). Moreover, different civilizations and cultures have their own particular histories and relationships in regards to the human-animal dichotomy. Thus, animal ethics, animal welfare, and speciesism are universal themes that are addressed in a variety of different ways across different continents, countries, and regions (Munro, 2022; Weitzenfeld & Joy, 2014; Singer, 1990). Further research is needed to (1) better understand these global issues and (2) to determine how and if social workers are acknowledging them. Finally, the current literature pertaining to social work and its relationship with animal ethics, animal welfare, and speciesism remains limited. This is problematic unto itself in terms of (1) data availability and analysis as well as (2) effectively disseminating this topic within the broader spheres of social work research, education, practice, and advocacy.

Action Steps

An important question is what action steps can be taken for social work to be more inclusive towards nonhuman animals? Educational development will certainly be necessary as an action step for change, including by being incorporated into foundational social work learning and training. This would necessarily require the engagement and consideration of the CSWE. If the stated policy agenda of the CSWE (2023) is to promote the social work ideals of education, social justice, and research into practice, can this truly be achieved by effectively ignoring the global oppression of trillions of terrestrial and aquatic animals per year? The only rational conclusion that can be made here is no – as the current slate of social work ethics provides only a narrow, prejudiced form of justice favoring those in power (i.e., humanity).

Similarly, the NASW Code of Ethics must be revised. This is not an insurmountable task as the Code of Ethics is understood to be a "living document" and indeed, it was last revised only in 2021 as the result of systemic

societal changes - including pertaining to (1) the COVID-19 pandemic and (2) social justice movements (NASW, 2021; Swick, Dyson, & Webb, 2021). The latter rationale for the revisions is particularly pertinent for the purposes of this paper (NASW, 2021; Swick, Dyson, & Webb, 2021). Similarly in 2017, revisions made to the NASW Code of Ethics were a *recognition of cultural changes that were impacting social work practice* – and this was in case of technology-based applications (NASW, 2021, Reamer, 2017). In other words, we see here in both revisions that the realities of societal evolution had effectively necessitated changes in the law of the land as they so often do in many sociopolitical domains. The march towards animal rights has been steadily heading in this same direction. In this regard, social work has the unique opportunity to serve as a flagbearer given the many philosophical overlaps that already exist – though (as of now) in a context limited by species membership. In an anthropocentric world, it is perhaps too easy to forget that we are but one of *millions of species* here on earth.

As with any effective social movement, organizing is key. Like-minded social workers who have a background in the fields of green social work and veterinary social work certainly have roles to play in action group creation and alliance building. In this regard, environmental social work organizations have grown globally, with aspects of animal rights being one of a number of declared mission statements (Hudson, 2019; Dominelli, 2013; Gray & Coates, 2012; Shaw 2011). Interdisciplinary work is also a crucial step in the road of organizing a movement and creating more profound links between animal welfare science and social service. This area of collaboration remains in a rather primordial stage of development based upon the current review (Dominelli, 2013; Gray & Coates, 2012; Shaw, 2011). Nonetheless, social work has an untapped potential as a bridge builder within the environmental humanities, which ultimately requires the strengthening of bonds between humanity and nature – that is to say, all living things. Humanity does not and cannot live inside of a proverbial bubble. Social work inherently recognizes this reality from a systems-based perspective.

The time has come for the beginning of a sustained, serious conversation to allow for nuance and the recognition that (1) sentience is not unique

to our species and similarly, (2) oppression is not limited by human experience alone – *although humanity ultimately bears the sole responsibility for its existence*. It is precisely through oppression of course by which our species has become the dominant animal on earth. The future of life on our planet now rests with the urgency of a moral and ethical evolution within our species to become more empathetic, considerate, and inclusive in how we live and conduct ourselves in relationship to nature as well as towards each other.

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