



# A Defense of Free-Roaming Cats from a Hedonist Account of Feline Well-being

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## Abstract

There is a widespread belief that for their own safety and for the protection of wildlife, cats should be permanently kept indoors. Against this view, I argue that cat guardians have a duty to provide their feline companions with outdoor access. The argument is based on a sophisticated hedonistic account of animal well-being that acknowledges that the performance of species-normal ethological behavior is especially pleasurable. Territorial behavior, which requires outdoor access, is a feline-normal ethological behavior, so when a cat is permanently confined to the indoors, her ability to flourish is impaired. Since cat guardians have a duty not to impair the well-being of their cats, the impairment of cat flourishing via confinement signifies a moral failing. Although some cats assume significant risks and sometimes kill wild animals when roaming outdoors, these important considerations do not imply that all cats should be deprived of the opportunity to access the outdoors. Indeed, they do not, by themselves, imply that *any* cat should be permanently kept indoors.

## 1 Introduction

A widespread belief shared by conservationists, animal rights advocates, and feline-protectionists is that, for their own safety and for the protection of wildlife, cats should be permanently kept indoors. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) (2017), for example, says “it’s a no-brainer” that cats should not roam outdoors, while the Humane Society of the United States (2017) likewise urges guardians to “keep...cats safe indoors.” As cat-protection agencies warn, free-roaming cats are exposed to serious hazards, such as the threats of being run over, poisoned, caught in traps, or killed by larger predators. Moreover, confining cats to the indoors is assumed to be necessary for keeping wildlife safe. When cats are kept indoors, it seems that everyone

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wins: wildlife thrives and cat guardians enjoy years of cuddles and purrs, and cats themselves live long, cozy lives in the warmth and safety of the indoors.

Against the orthodox view that cat guardians should permanently confine felines to the indoors, I argue that cat guardians have a *prima facie* duty to provide their felines with outdoor access because *especially pleasurable* pleasures and rewarding experiences are available to felines *only* when they roam outdoors. My argument acknowledges that pleasure-maximizing activities typically involve the exercise of species-normal capacities, and because the need to exercise and use their senses is connected to feline-normal territorial behavior, which cannot be sufficiently performed in confinement, indoor-only cats' ability to flourish is impaired. Given that cat guardians have a duty not to frustrate feline well-being, the impairment of cat flourishing via permanent confinement signifies a moral failing.<sup>1</sup> Although some cats are subject to risk and sometimes kill other animals when roaming outdoors, these important considerations do not imply that *all* cats should be deprived of the opportunity to access the outdoors. Indeed, they do not, by themselves, imply that *any* cat should be permanently kept indoors.

## 2 Preliminary Remarks

The following argument is a defense of *semi-controlled* outdoor access for house-based felines. I do not recommend that *every* cat, located in *any* environment, be permitted to access the outdoors at *any* time of day. For instance, here are some circumstances in which the duty to let felines roam outdoors does *not* apply:

- when cat guardians live in areas where there are high levels of traffic
- when it is dark outside<sup>2</sup>
- when cat guardians live in areas where large predators are known to roam during the day

But the duty *does* apply:

- when cat guardians do not live near busy roads, such as in rural areas and some suburban areas
- when it is light outside<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By “flourishing,” I mean “well-being,” and by “well-being,” I mean something akin to a “happy life.” While there are competing approaches to well-being, such as the desire-satisfaction approach and objective-list approach, I assume that the hedonist approach is the correct approach when it comes to the well-being of non-rational animals. However, there is a deeper issue regarding theories of the “good life” (or theories of “eudaimonia,” which some argue is different than “well-being”), especially as it pertains to humans. In this paper, I simply provide basic conceptual tools for thinking about what it means for *felines* to have good, *happy* lives.

<sup>2</sup> Studies show that cats are more likely to be vulnerable to larger predators and involved in traffic accidents at night (Rochlitz 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Ideally, guardians will be home when felines venture outdoors, in part, so that they can reward their cats with treats upon their return to the indoors, which encourages them to remain nearby (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016). While this is preferable, it certainly is not required.

- when cat guardians do not live by large predators who are known to roam during the day

Readers are thus encouraged to remember that when I argue that felines ought to be provided with *the opportunity* to roam outdoors, I am referring only to *semi-controlled* outdoor access.

When I use the word “well-being,” I have something akin to “flourishing” or “thriving” in mind. I take well-being to be something different than merely having “a life worth living.” While a life with well-being is certainly a life worth living, not every life worth living is a life with well-being. A life worth living merely refers to a life that has net positive affective or hedonic states, i.e., a life with more pleasure (or happiness) than pain (or suffering). But it would be strange to say that someone who *just barely* has a life worth living has well-being. This is because a life with well-being is a life that is filled with *highly* rewarding experiences, such as feelings of being energized, engaged, and a sense of being in control. It is questionable whether most indoor-only cats have lives worth living, as many, without us realizing it, endure lives filled with overwhelming boredom, listlessness, and frustration. While I grant that felines confined to sufficiently enriched indoor environments have lives worth living, I deny that they have *well-being*. As I will argue, only cats with outdoor access can have well-being.

Because this is a project on *feline* well-being, I do not address the well-being of other companion animals, such as dogs, fish, birds, or rabbits. We must be careful not to lump all animals together in conversations about well-being, as what enhances the well-being of cats does not necessarily enhance the well-being of dogs or other animals. The moral issues surrounding feline confinement are distinct from the moral issues surrounding the confinement of other companion animals, so we ought to consider these issues separately. Due to space constraints, I cannot provide an answer in this article to the question of whether, or when, it is obligatory to provide other companion animals with outdoors access. Because of this, the following discussion about felines ought not to be used to generate a conclusion about the ethics of providing outdoor access to other companion animals. Some animals may not derive especially pleasurable pleasures from outdoor access, while others may face additional risks to which cats are not vulnerable.

### 3 Philosophical Perspectives on Feline Roaming

While it is widely believed that permanently confined felines do not lose enough to overturn the reasons for keeping them indoors and are moreover benefited by the “cushiony” indoor life, some animal ethicists and behaviorists worry that this downplays the serious harms of permanent confinement. As some suggest, many indoor-only cats live restricted lives, which often leads to boredom and frustration, due to being deprived of the opportunity to engage in feline-normal behavior (Bradshaw 2013; Palmer and Sandøe 2014; and Pierce 2016). David DeGrazia (2011) expresses a similar concern, noting that it is unlikely that basic exercise and sense-stimulation needs of felines are met when they are permanently kept indoors. He thus recommends that people who are opposed to providing outdoor access to felines “not have cats at all” (DeGrazia 2011, 763). As feline behaviorists observe, when given the chance to go

outdoors, cats readily embrace the opportunity to run at full speed, climb trees, bask in the sun, roll in the dust, and explore their surroundings (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016). In other words, the well-being of cats is often diminished when they are permanently kept indoors, and they “tend to suffer in silence” (Bradshaw 2013, xxii).

In what follows, I develop a sophisticated account of hedonism and explore what it implies for feline confinement.<sup>4</sup> I proceed as follows. First, I assume, for the sake of argument, that the hedonist account of well-being is the right approach to animal well-being. Then, I develop the best account of hedonism and show why this account of well-being implies that cat guardians have a *prima facie* duty to provide their felines with outdoor access. Finally, I respond to the claim that even if having outdoor access promotes feline well-being, we ought to confine cats for the good of wildlife. I engage the scientific literature on feline predation and show that it is unlikely that *house-based*, free-roaming cats cause significant harm to wildlife. I moreover argue that even if hunting cats harm wildlife, we can offset this harm by carcass provisioning. For these reasons, morally responsible cat guardians should aim to provide their felines with reasonably safe outdoor access.

#### 4 Animal Well-being and Hedonism

To determine what is needed for feline well-being, I start by asking a basic question: what is a good life for an *animal*? The view in this paper is that the right theory of well-being, at least for nonhuman animals, is a kind of hedonist theory. Hedonism about well-being holds that an animal’s level of well-being is determined by the balance of pleasure over pain in her life, whereby pleasure includes both positive bodily sensations and positive mental states, such as the feelings of happiness, satisfaction, joy, or any other pleasant affective state. On this view, as Ben Bradley describes it, “[h]ow well someone’s life goes for her is determined by subtracting the total amount of pain she receives in her life from the total amount of pleasure she receives” (2014, 223). But, as mentioned earlier, the view in this paper is *not* that every life with net positive affective or hedonic states has well-being. Only lives with certain kinds of *especially* rewarding experiences have well-being. As I will argue in Section 7, *ethological* pleasures, which are *highly pleasurable*, are especially important for animal well-being.

Determining what activities promote animal well-being is not any easy task, as what brings animals the maximal amount of pleasure over pain is not obvious. When we discuss animal well-being, we must try to access the lives of animals from, as Nussbaum puts it, “our imperfect human point of view” (2006, 354). Although we might have evidence that certain acts bring some pleasure to animals, we do not know which acts are especially rewarding. For instance, playing fetch seems to bring pleasure to most dogs, as evident by their behavioral, emotional, and physiological responses during this activity, yet there may be other activities that bring them *even more* pleasure. Given that animals cannot speak, they cannot tell us which activities are the *most* pleasurable for them. Rather than use the human point of view to determine what maximizes net pleasure in an animal’s life, the best we can do is, as Nussbaum advises,

<sup>4</sup> This account of well-being draws on the one developed by Bramble (2016), and it can be viewed as an extension of the simple hedonist theory considered by Palmer and Sandøe (2014).

observe animals on their own terms and consider what they do when “left to their own devices” (2006, 369). As DeGrazia (2011) notes, animals want to move about and do certain things, and we can best determine what it is that they want and need in the absence of external constraints on their movement and behavior. Presumably, animals perform certain acts because they expect that they will derive pleasure from doing so, and they repeatedly perform certain acts because such acts do in fact bring them pleasure (Samuel Jackson Holmes 1911, 6). Moreover, when animals are denied the opportunity to perform acts they want to perform, they suffer from the felt frustration of their desires.

When unconstrained and left to their own devices, animals tend to exercise their innate capacities by engaging in modes of behavior that are characteristic of their species. While this does not imply that the *nature* of well-being differs from species to species, it does suggest that there are species-specific ways of achieving well-being, as pleasure-producing behaviors vary from species to species. For instance, while critical thinking often brings pleasure to humans, it is not part of chicken well-being. And while chickens usually derive pleasures from pecking, roosting, and dust bathing, these behaviors do not promote human well-being. This is not to say that the performance of species-normal behavior is always good in-and-of itself; rather, the claim is that the performance of species-normal behavior is good only when *it is itself pleasurable* or when *it is a means to obtaining pleasure*. This entails that animal well-being is a function of the actual pleasures of that animal and not a function of the exercise of the animal’s capacities or the performance of species-normal behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Further support for the claim that animal well-being is often enhanced by the performance of species-normal behavior comes from the standard view on pleasure and pain in evolutionary biology, which holds that the capacity for pain and pleasure is an adaptive trait that promotes survival. While life-threatening behaviors tend to be painful, such as eating toxic food, behaviors that promote success (both survival and reproduction), such as sex and eating good food, tend to be pleasurable. Because behaviors and traits that are characteristics of a species usually evolved because they promote the success of that species, there is reason to think that the exercise of innate capacities through the performance of natural behaviors is indeed pleasurable. As I will argue in Sections 7 and 8, performing certain species-normal behavior is *highly pleasurable*. Thus, if we are to promote the well-being of an animal, we must, at the very least, provide the animal with *opportunities* to act in species-normal ways, as this will enlarge the opportunities for pleasure in an animal’s life.

## 5 Harming Animals

Having briefly explained how we can benefit and promote animal well-being, I now turn to a brief discussion of harm. On my account of well-being, there are two distinct kinds of harm: the harm of infliction and the harm of deprivation. Infections, which involve acute or chronic physical or psychological suffering, are paradigm instances of harm. This includes the thwarting of benign preferences, when doing so causes *felt* frustration to the preference-holder. Moreover, as Tom Regan (1983) notes, individuals

<sup>5</sup> Thank you to Mylan Engel for encouraging me to emphasize this point.

can be harmed without ever hurting.<sup>6</sup> While inflictions are harms that hurt, deprivations are harms that involve a loss of benefits that make possible or enlarge the opportunities for satisfaction in life. Benefits, as described by Regan, are the basic requirements that must be met if an individual is to have a realistic chance at living well. They are distinct from pleasures insofar as they are what make pleasures possible, and thus, they increase the opportunity for pleasures. Individuals are harmed when their benefits are taken from them or when others deny them the opportunity to have a benefit that they need in order to have a chance at living well relative to their abilities (Regan 1983). On this plausible account of harm, animal well-being depends, in part, on the *opportunity* to exercise innate capacities by engaging in modes of behavior that are characteristic of the species to which the animal belongs. Some benefits just are opportunities to behave in species-normal ways, because the opportunity to engage in this behavior enlarges one's opportunities for pleasurable experiences—including *especially* rewarding experiences.

The freedom to act in species-normal ways is important for animals, human, and nonhuman, because without this freedom, they are denied important opportunities for pleasurable experiences. Consider Regan's example of the capable young woman who is turned into a "contented imbecile" by the continual (painless) injection of debilitating drugs (1983, 97). In this case, there is a deprivation or loss of benefits that would enlarge the sources of satisfaction in this woman's life. As Regan argues, contented imbeciles, as well as "contented" housewives and "happy" slaves, are harmed even if they are unaware that they are harmed. They are harmed precisely because they are denied the opportunity for some benefit(s) that they need in order to live well relative to their abilities (Regan 1983, 97). In these cases, the foreclosed benefit is the opportunity to participate in rational autonomous behavior, which is a behavior that is characteristic of the species *Homo sapiens*. For both Regan and the view defended in this paper, value is lost when an animal's capacity to act in species-normal ways is blighted, because most animals, in appropriate conditions, experience a variety of pleasures when they engage in species-normal behavior. Consequently, when animals are denied the opportunity to behave in species-normal ways, they are deprived of *opportunities* to live well relative to their abilities, and thus, they are harmed in the deprivational sense. So even if a captive animal does not suffer, confinement nevertheless is deleterious to her well-being insofar as she is deprived of the opportunity to do things she would enjoy doing were she not confined (Simmons 2016). This is not to say that anytime anyone experiences less enjoyment than they could have, they have been harmed. But it is to say that if an animal is denied *by others* the opportunity to experience enjoyment, that animal has been harmed.

## 6 Feline Capacities, Species-Normal Behavior, and Well-being

To determine what conditions must be met for a cat to have a good life, we must first ask: What innate capacities does the cat have? And furthermore: what conditions must be met

<sup>6</sup> There can also be *unfelt* frustration of preferences. For instance, suppose person X strongly desires to live in the real world, and person X believes that he does, but he's actually in an experience machine. Although he doesn't suffer, the thwarting of his preference still seems to thwart his opportunities for well-being. But even if the well-being of persons can be impaired by unfelt preference frustration, this is not the case for non-persons. Since the well-being theory I advance is for just (non-person) animals, it is not vulnerable to the experience machine objection. Thank you to David DeGrazia for suggesting this line of thought.

for the cat to have the opportunity to behave in species-normal ways? Although members of the species *Felis catus* may be to some extent domesticated, they are only “semi-domesticated” (Montague et al. 2014). As few as thirteen genes may separate domestic cats from their wild kin, *Felix silvestris*, and domestic cats retain genes that evolved to expand their hearing range, sense of sight, and sense of smell, all of which enable and motivate them to track prey and monitor and protect their territories (Montague et al. 2014). Thus, domestic cats are not much different from wildcats, who spend much of their time both hunting and defending territories they claim (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016, 257).

Some suggest that we can allow cats to exercise their hunting capacity by providing them with human-made outlets for hunting behavior (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016, 265; Herron and Buffington 2010). Relatedly, Nussbaum (2006) speculates that while a predator usually experiences pain and frustration when her capacity to exercise her predatory nature is impaired, it is unlikely that she experiences pain and frustration when she is denied the capacity to kill small animals. Insofar as the exercise of predatory capacities usually brings pleasure to animals, it is the *capacity to exercise one’s predatory nature*, and not the *capacity to kill small animals*, that has value. Thus, if we can satisfy a cat’s capacity for predation without causing the death of other animals, such as by encouraging the cat to chase toys that mimic prey, we should do so.

If hunting just involves pouncing on and tackling moving objects, then it seems right to say that cats can fulfill their hunting natures in the indoors.<sup>7</sup> But even if we can provide cats with opportunities to exercise their predatory capacity by encouraging hunting behavior through the use of toys that mimic prey, there is another innate capacity of indoor-only cats that is blighted: the capacity to maintain a territory. I will thus focus on this capacity throughout the remainder of this article, assuming that hunting behavior can be subsumed under territorial behavior.

Before cats entered human homes, they relied on their territory for hunting, mating, shelter, and safety. Because of this, cats have an instinctive need, or biological imperative, to protect and maintain territories they regard as their own (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016; Casey and Bradshaw 2007). One aspect of territorial behavior is *information gathering*. The survival of the wild ancestors of cats depended upon their abilities to gather general information about their hunting grounds and the abilities to predict where they might find prey or competitors. The second aspect of territorial behavior is *territory protection*. Cats feel compelled to patrol and “protect” the areas near their homes, which they perceive as their territories, from other cats or potential threats and to track the whereabouts of competitors (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016). Territorial behavior, unlike predatory behavior, cannot be sufficiently performed in captivity. For one, the average home range of a house-based free-roaming cat is 4.9 acres (Horn et al. 2011), which is much larger than the average human home. Moreover, a large part of territorial behavior involves gathering information about both prey and potential predators, and this is something that felines cannot do indoors. For instance, it is likely that cats are frustrated when they cannot reach or interact with prey or competitors who pass by the windows of their homes,<sup>8</sup> and this is because

<sup>7</sup> This arguably is an oversimplified view of hunting insofar as hunting involves an intricate process of tracking, waiting, and watching prey.

<sup>8</sup> Feline “redirected aggression” often occurs when indoor cats are aroused, frustrated, or excited when they observe outdoor-roaming cats. Because indoor cats cannot interact with the outdoor cats they observe, they may redirect their aggression toward other objects (including other cats or humans) that are near them.

observing potential prey or competitors from windows is not comparable with using their sensory capacities to interact with and search for prey in the outdoors. Since exercising one's innate capacities through species-normal behavior is central to animal well-being and outdoor access is required for felines to perform feline-normal territorial behavior, cats must have outdoor access if they are to have a realistic chance at living well relative to their capacities.

But perhaps cat well-being does not require the opportunity to perform *every* activity definitive of feline life. As one might argue, cats can “learn” to derive a great deal of pleasure from indoor life, perhaps even more pleasure than they would have if they were permitted to roam outdoors. Just imagine a cat who is fed a proper diet, has access to window perches and plenty of vertical structures for climbing, receives face and neck rubs throughout the day, and has ample catnip, interactive toys, scratching posts, and treats. Perhaps an enriched indoor environment sufficiently enables feline-normal behavior and compensates for deprivations caused by indoor living (Jongman 2007).

It is true that, under certain conditions, some cats can “learn” to enjoy the indoors, and they can derive pleasures from indoor environmental enrichment. Still, even in enriched environments, indoor-only cats lack well-being. This is because the pleasures associated with outdoor roaming are *especially pleasurable and rewarding* for cats, and thus, when they are denied opportunities for these pleasures, their ability to achieve well-being is impaired, even if they experience many bodily pleasures from enriched indoor environments. In defense of this claim, I provide three separate arguments: (1) the argument from qualitatively diverse pleasures, (2) the argument from ethological behavior, and (3) the argument from evolution.

## 7 The Argument from Qualitatively Diverse Pleasures

The first reason for saying that outdoor pleasures are *more pleasurable* than indoor pleasures is that outdoor pleasures, unlike indoor pleasures, involve qualitative diversity. In defense of this view, I draw on and slightly modify Ben Bramble's (2016) sophisticated hedonist account of well-being, which invokes an illustrative distinction between flow pleasures and bodily pleasures. Consider Bramble's analysis of Fred Feldman's example of Porky, the human being who:

spends all his time in the pigsty, engaging in the most obscene sexual activities imaginable ... Porky derives great pleasure from these activities and the feelings they stimulate. Let us imagine that Porky happily carries on like this for many years. Imagine also that Porky has no human friends, has no other sources of pleasure, and has no interesting knowledge. Let us also imagine that Porky somehow avoids pains—he is never injured by the pigs, he does not come down with any barnyard diseases, he does not suffer from loneliness or boredom (Feldman 2004: 40).

Critics of hedonism about well-being claim that, given the great pleasure in Porky's life, hedonist theories are committed to the view that Porky's life is high in well-being, and this a counterintuitive commitment to which most well-being theorists, including hedonists, want to avoid. In explaining how hedonism does not imply that Porky's life is high in well-being,



Bramble draws a distinction between bodily pleasures and flow pleasures, such as the pleasures of love, learning, and aesthetic appreciation. As he argues, a life of flow pleasures involves much qualitative diversity. For instance, the pleasures of learning “have quite a different phenomenal character depending on what one has learned, the particular way in which one’s mind has been opened up, and how one’s new knowledge or understanding fits with what one already knows” (Bramble 2016, 98). One reason why Porky’s life is not high in well-being is that a life of purely bodily pleasures, like Porky’s life, involves very little qualitative diversity in pleasures, and thus Porky’s pleasures quickly become “just more of the same” (Bramble 2016, 98). Purely repeated pleasures, according to Bramble, introduce nothing qualitatively new in terms of pleasurable-ness, and thus, they add *nothing* to lifetime well-being.

Consequently, Bramble’s hedonist theory can explain why Porky is not well-off, at least in comparison with a normal human being. While Porky’s life contains many bodily pleasures, these pleasures are less valuable because there is not much qualitative diversity available in them. There is thus an important distinction to be made between (1) the number of pleasures one has and (2) the type of pleasures one has, as some pleasures are more valuable because they have a great deal of qualitative diversity available in them. Although in Feldman’s example, Porky does have a great time insofar as he experiences many pleasures; his life is still deficient in well-being because he lacks pleasures that have a great deal of *qualitative diversity* available in them. Thus, as Bramble puts it, “a life like Porky’s, no matter how long it lasts, is not high in well-being (compared with a normal human life)” (2016, 101). Drawing on similar considerations, I argue that an indoor-only cat’s life, *no matter how long it lasts*, lacks well-being, especially in comparison to the *normal* life of an outdoor-roaming feline. In defense of this claim, I argue that the indoor-only cat’s situation is analogous to Porky’s situation, while the situation of free-roaming cats is analogous to the situation of those who live normal human lives.

The average lifespan of outdoor cats, which is 4.5 years, is much shorter than the average lifespan of indoor-only cats, which is 15 years (Zoran 2011; Foley et al. 2005). But even with this significant disparity, the lives of indoor-only cats do not necessarily contain more net pleasure than do the lives of free-roaming cats. For one, while the average lifespan of outdoor cats is only 4.5 years, the felines I am concerned with in this paper are not like regular outdoor cats. The cats under discussion here are those who are regularly fed, kept inside at night, sheltered from the cold, and receive regular and emergency medical care. Certainly, the average lifespan of *these* free-roaming cats is much higher than the average lifespan of feral cats, as many deaths of feral cats are attributed to untreated diseases and injury, starvation, and being run over at night by motor vehicles. In fact, the average lifespan of outdoor cats who live in communities with human caretakers is 10 years (ASPCA 2018). While there are no publicly available statistics on the average lifespan of *house-based*, free-roaming cats, it is reasonable to assume that it is greater than the average lifespan of feral and community cats.<sup>9</sup>

Surely, though, the average lifespan of an indoor-only cat is longer than the lifespan of house-based, free-roaming cats, given the unique risks any cat assumes when venturing outdoors. But if we are not willing to justify the permanent confinement of

<sup>9</sup> Vetinfo (2018) claims that house-based cats who spend some time outdoors live, on average, two or three years less than cats who live exclusively indoors, but it’s not clear how they came to this estimation.

human beings by appealing to the additional, routine risks they face when they leave their homes, we ought to question our willingness to permanently confine felines on the grounds that they face additional, routine risks when they roam outdoors. Most humans, for instance, readily operate motor vehicles, even though this involves the routine risk of car accidents. Just as it is plausible to judge that human lives are better overall if we can use cars because the associated benefits outweigh the risk of harm, it is also plausible that the lives of cats are better overall if they are allowed to roam outdoors because the associated benefits outweigh the risk of harm.

Perhaps, one might argue the risks “free-roaming” humans face are much smaller than the risks that free-roaming cats face. But this is not always true. In fact, the risks that outdoor cats face can be minimized to a degree such that they are comparable with the routine risks that humans assume when they venture outdoors. For instance, cat guardians might grant outdoor access only when it is light out, as during the mornings and days, larger predators are less active and cats are less likely to be run over by motor vehicles (Rochlitz 2003). Coordinating “outdoor schedules” with neighbors who also permit their cats to roam outdoors can minimize, if not eliminate, the risk of cat fights. Providing cats with predictable and restricted outdoor access, such as granting outdoor access only when guardians are home, encourages cats to stay nearby and out of trouble (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016, 233). Training cats to wear specially designed tracking devices or collars can enable cat guardians to keep tabs on their cats and these devices can be used to alert guardians if their cats roam outside areas that are designated as “safe” (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016, 233). In many cases, cats can be trained to stay within the near vicinity of their homes and come when called (Bradshaw and Ellis 2016, 239–245).

If lifespan is the only factor relevant in the feline well-being debate, surely we ought to permanently confine cats. But there are other considerations here. One important consideration is the diversity in pleasures outdoor cats experience when they roam outdoors, to which I now return.

While Bramble says that diversity in pleasures is both instrumentally and non-instrumentally valuable, my view is that qualitative diversity in pleasures is valuable for felines primarily because this prevents boredom or a loss of interest in things. The pleasures that indoor-only cats typically experience, such as the pleasures of playing with toys, catnip, head and neck rubs, tasty treats, and relaxation, are mainly bodily pleasures; thus, indoor-only cats experience some, but not much, qualitative diversity in pleasures. Given that there are limited kinds of pleasures available to indoor-only cats, the pleasures they do experience are often “purely repeated pleasures,” and thus, further instances of each bodily pleasure become “just more of the same.”

While neurons are wired to respond to novel events, animals are neurologically wired to stop responding to repeat physical stimulus (Seligman 2002). This seems especially true in the case of felines, as evidence shows that cats rapidly habituate to unchanging toys, and this causes cats to lose interest in playing, unless their toys are continually changed out (Hall et al. 2002). Because felines become habituated to sensory characteristics of objects, indoor-only cats easily bore from object play and are quick to lose interest in those things that, at one point, gave them pleasure. While one might enrich the indoor environment by supplying felines with a wide variety of toys, each with different sensory characteristics, there are only so many toys guardians can provide. And as I will discuss in Section 11, felines need a wide range of visual and

olfactory stimulation, which arguably cannot be sufficiently replicated with even the most interactive toys. Thus, simply rotating cat toys does not promote feline well-being. Moreover, even with a large assortment of toys, indoor cats still miss out on a variety of other *highly* rewarding outdoor experiences, to which I now turn.

Like the pleasures of love and friendship, there is a great deal of qualitative diversity available in *territorial pleasures*. The outdoor environment constantly changes, so when cats roam outdoors, they encounter unique experiences and challenges, and thus, qualitatively new pleasures are made possible by roaming outdoors. Cats spend a significant amount of their outdoor time exploring and observing the changes in their environment, but when they are kept indoors, they face a stagnant environment, devoid of sensory change. Outside, there are new smells to investigate, new animals to interact with, new objects to perch on, new bark to scratch, and new territorial objects to mark, and the pleasures of each activity are qualitatively distinct from one another. For instance, the pleasures of investigating smells are qualitatively very different from the pleasures of chasing butterflies. Moreover, territorial pleasures have different phenomenal characters depending on what the cat learns, what the cat encounters, and the problems the cat solves. Roaming outdoors thus does not involve experiences of the same pleasure over and over again, as pleasures seem to be in the case of indoor cats. Because outdoor-roaming cats can experience a wide variety of pleasures that are unavailable to indoor-only cats, having some outdoor access is important for feline well-being.

## 8 The Argument from Ethological Behavior

Suppose, though, that some indoor-only cats do not bore from repeated bodily pleasures. Still, even these cats are unable to achieve well-being. This is because hunting and territorial pleasures are, while bodily pleasures are not, especially pleasurable *in themselves*. Some evidence for this claim is that many felines prefer to express their territorial behavior in the outdoors *even when they have (indoor) access to food, safety, and comfort*. The best explanation for this is that (1) territorial behavior cannot be sufficiently performed in the indoors and (2) territorial behavior is not only pleasurable, but *especially pleasurable* for felines. And note that cats who are given some outdoor access often communicate a *repeated* desire to go outdoors.<sup>10</sup> The distinction between physiological and ethological needs, which is widely discussed in the animal welfare science literature, helps explain this phenomenon.

As animal welfare scientists note, animals have not only physiological needs, such as food, water, thermal comfort, sleep, and reproduction, but they also have *behavioral needs*, i.e., *ethological needs* (Hughes and Duncan 1988).<sup>11</sup> “Ethological need” refers to adaptive behavior that is primarily internally motivated and is *itself* pleasurable or rewarding (Bracke and Hopster 2006). For instance, dustbathing is an ethological need for hens, as caged hens without litter material still perform dustbathing behaviors

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<sup>10</sup> And the fact that cats with outdoor access normally *repeatedly* request to access the outdoors indicates that they are not just “scratching an itch” to explore new territory.

<sup>11</sup> To remain consistent with the language of ethologists, I use the terms “behavioral and ethological needs,” although, as an anonymous reviewer from *Acta Analytica* suggests, perhaps more accurate terminology would be “emotional/psychological needs.”

(Vestergaard 1982), and nest building is an ethological need for domestic hens, as they will build nests even if pre-formed nests are available (Hughes et al. 1989). Foraging is an ethological need for foraging animals, as most spend substantial time searching for food, even when there is an abundance of food available to them (Bracke and Hopster 2006). Likewise, hunting is an ethological need for cats, as most felines remain strongly motivated to hunt, even when they are well fed (Adamec 1976; Liberg 1984; Turner and Meister 1988). Indeed, one cause of stress-related behavior in indoor felines, such as urine marking, is attributed to limited outdoor access (Pryor et al. 2001). This observation suggests that felines have different drives for the chase, capture, and killing of prey, which operate independently of their hunger state (Leyhausen 1965).

Because certain behaviors, such as territorial behaviors, are performed independently of external rewards, they are said to be *intrinsically rewarding* (Clark and Smith 2013; Langbein et al. 2009). This suggests that there are at least two distinct kinds of pleasures, which are, to varying degrees, important for animal well-being. First, there are *bodily pleasures*, which refer to the pleasures one experiences when one's physiological needs are met. Examples include the pleasures of eating, sex, and comfort. These pleasures are achieved by *consummatory activities*, which occur when the end of some behavior is achieved—for instance, when food is consumed. Second, there are *ethological pleasures*, which refer to the pleasures of performing certain skilled and controlled behavior. Examples include the pleasures of foraging (for foraging animals), hunting (for predators), and rooting (for pigs). These pleasures involve *active engagement*, *cognitive challenge*, and *control*, and they are achieved by *appetitive activities*, which are exploratory and investigative activities that usually precede consummatory behavior.<sup>12</sup> I will refer to adaptive appetitive activities that are performed independently of external rewards as *ethological behavior*.

Observations of animal behavior inform us that ethological pleasures are *more pleasurable* than bodily pleasures. After all, if bodily pleasures are just as pleasurable as ethological pleasures, animals would not be motivated to perform certain behavior when they are provided with the environmental endpoint of that behavior. For instance, if relaxing and territorial behaviors are equally pleasurable, cats would not continue to roam outdoors when they have access to constant relaxation in the indoors. If the pleasure of eating is just as pleasurable as the pleasure of foraging, foraging animals would not continue to forage when an abundance of food is available to them. Indeed, research shows that animals often prefer to work for food rather than to consume freely offered food, a phenomenon known as *contrafreeloading* (Inglis et al. 1997). Moreover, animals prefer to explore novel environments and objects, even when those environments or objects are not directly associated with physiological needs, which indicates that exploratory behavior *itself* has high reward value (Clark 2017). This all suggests that engagement, challenge, choice, and control are self-rewarding for most animals (Clark 2017; Owen et al. 2005; Zebunke et al. 2013). On the other hand, a lack of active engagement is identified as a primary cause of boredom, depression, and anxiety in animals (Wemelsfelder 1993; Clark 2017). Because the performances of certain natural behavior patterns are evidently especially pleasurable and are thus *themselves* necessary for well-being, promoting feline well-being requires more than just giving cats “the environmental endpoints” of their natural behaviors, i.e., their physiological needs; it

<sup>12</sup> The distinction between consummatory and appetitive activities comes from Dixon et al. (2014).

requires that we moreover enable them to experience ethological pleasures by providing them with opportunities to perform territorial behavior.

## 9 The Argument from Evolution

The above argument provides a common sense argument in defense of the claim that feline territorial pleasures are more pleasurable than bodily pleasures. By just observing what cats, in general, choose and prefer to do, we have reason to think that, for felines, territorial pleasures not only are pleasurable but also are *more pleasurable* than bodily pleasures. I now provide an evolutionary argument in defense of this claim.

I begin by returning to a discussion of ethological behavior, which is behavior that is performed even when the environmental endpoint of it is available. Consider what the mentioned ethological behaviors of foraging, nesting, and hunting have in common: they are adaptive, especially important for animal fitness (respectively), and they are time consuming. From an evolutionary perspective, animals must be motivated to engage in behavior that is important for fitness (i.e., adaptive behavior), and they must be *especially* motivated to engage in *time-consuming* behavior that is *especially* important for fitness (i.e., time-consuming adaptive behavior). But animals are not themselves motivated by evolutionary benefits. That is, the proximate reason *why* they behave adaptively is not that they understand that adaptive behavior will increase their fitness (Balcombe 2006). After all, animals do not, and cannot, ponder evolutionary benefits before acting (Balcombe 2006). But animals nevertheless *are* motivated to behave adaptively. So, what best explains this motivation?

A more likely motivation for adaptive behavior is *pleasure* (Balcombe 2006). Indeed, there is a selective advantage for animals to feel pleasure from performing behavior that keeps them alive and helps them reproduce, and there is a selective advantage for animals to feel *especially pleasurable pleasures* from performing *time-consuming* activities that are *especially important* for fitness. Because feeling intense pleasure from time-consuming activities motivates the continued performance of such activities, there is a selective advantage for cats to experience intense pleasurable feelings when performing territorial activities, as territorial activities are both time-consuming and especially important for feline fitness.

Territorial behavior is not only especially important for feline fitness, but it is also time intensive. For instance, since wild cats take in few calories per mouse consumed, they must go on lengthy searches before finding enough prey (Shettleworth 2010). Wild cats thus spend much of their energies hunting and exploring their territories (Amat et al. 2016; Beaver 2004). Because wild cats perform territorial activities for long periods of time, cats need to be *especially motivated* to perform territorial behavior. And if territorial behavior is *especially pleasurable* for cats, they will engage in it more often than they would have if it were not that pleasurable.

Moreover, the pleasures obtained through territorial behavior must be *more pleasurable* than bodily pleasures. If bodily pleasures were equally or more pleasurable than territorial pleasures, cats might spend too much time having sex, eating food, or lounging, and not enough time hunting or patrolling, and this presumably would decrease their fitness. Bodily pleasures can make cats vulnerable to attack, such as when they indulge in catnip, which often induces a dramatic, ecstatic state of oblivion

(Bradshaw 2013, 115). The relentless pursuit of bodily pleasures, such as the pleasures of eating and relaxation, impairs cat fitness insofar as this can lead to inactivity, which is linked to obesity and thus decreased fitness (Clarke et al. 2005). Consequently, there is a good evolutionary-based reason to think that territorial pleasures are *more pleasurable* than bodily pleasures, such as the pleasures of eating, rolling in catnip, or lounging on the couch.

## 10 Is *all* Species-Normal Behavior Pleasurable?

It might be objected that feline territorial behavior is not pleasurable, but rather fear-driven. After all, felines do not *always* find it pleasurable to exercise their innate capacities through species-normal behavior. By way of example, consider the following: exercising a “fleeing capacity” through predator-fleeing behavior might not be pleasurable, and it might moreover be painful, as animals likely are in a state of fear when they perform this behavior (Stankowich and Blumstein 2005).

This objection misses the mark, insofar as my account of well-being does not endorse the view that the exercise of innate capacities through the performance of species-normal behavior is always pleasurable. In Section 3, I argued that species-normal behavior is connected to pleasure, insofar as, in normal circumstances, it is either itself pleasurable or a means to obtaining pleasure or reducing pain. This leaves open the possibility that some species-normal behavior, such as predator-fleeing behavior, is not itself pleasurable, and is rather only a means to obtaining pleasure (or escaping pain). Indeed, I argued that only a certain kind of species-normal behavior is intrinsically rewarding: ethological behavior. And predator-fleeing behavior, unlike territorial behavior, is not ethological behavior. Cats are motivated to flee from predators only when doing so is necessary to achieve an environmental endpoint—safety. Moreover, in order to avoid interactions with other cats and potential threats, felines usually seek out places to hide and remain hidden when they feel threatened (Rochlitz 2000); they are indisposed to emerge from hiding and seek out interactions with threats just so they can engage in predator-fleeing behavior. But cats *are* continually motivated to perform territorial behavior, even when the environmental endpoints of this behavior (safety, food, comfort) are available to them. So why are cats unmotivated to engage in predator-fleeing behavior when the environmental endpoint of safety is available to them? And why are cats motivated to engage in territorial behavior when the environmental endpoints of food, shelter, and comfort is available to them?

The most compelling answer to the former question is this: fleeing a perceived threat is not pleasant and is moreover likely unpleasant (Stankowich and Blumstein 2005). Consequently, cats must be *extrinsically* motivated to engage in predator-fleeing behavior—their motivation is likely the avoidance of an adverse outcome, such as injury, or the expectation of a reward, such as the comforting feeling of safety and security, and these motivations arise *outside* of them. But perhaps feline territorial behavior, too, is extrinsically motivated. After all, territory protection is necessary to keep out competitors, which is itself important for feline comfort. So perhaps the expectation of the comforting feeling of safety and security is what motivates territorial behavior, and not the alleged pleasantness of the behavior itself.

While I grant that the prospect of comfort may at times motivate feline territorial behavior, I deny that this is the only thing that motivates it. If the desire to be comfortable is the only reason why felines maintain territories, then they would not continue to maintain territories when comfort is provided to them in human homes. The best explanation why cats remain motivated to perform territorial behavior when the relevant environmental endpoints are available to them is that territorial behavior is itself pleasurable. Feline territorial behavior is, at least some of the time, intrinsically motivated, and not solely extrinsically motivated, as is predator-fleeing behavior.

We can thus give an evolutionary explanation as to why territorial behavior is intrinsically rewarding while predator-fleeing behavior is not: performing territorial behavior for lengthy periods of time is important for feline fitness, while engaging in predator-fleeing behavior for lengthy periods of time likely reduces feline fitness insofar as it is tiring and consumes energy that should be preserved for finding prey and protecting territories. For evolutionary reasons, felines should reduce the amount of time they spend fighting and fleeing from predators, so it makes sense that these behaviors would be painful, insofar as the unpleasantness encourages animals to quickly cease the performance of these exhausting behaviors. For evolutionary reasons, felines should increase the amount of time they spend engaged in territorial tasks, so it makes sense that territorial behavior itself would be pleasant, insofar as the pleasantness encourages animals to continue to perform this important, time-intensive activity.

## 11 Are Flow Pleasures the Most Pleasurable Pleasures?

Perhaps, though, ethological behavior is especially pleasurable only if it results in *success*. After all, if ethological behavior does not result in achievement, it might be so frustrating that it *reduces* well-being. This view offers an alternative explanation why animals are motivated to perform territorial behavior when they are well fed and comfortable indoors: they want the especially pleasurable feeling of obtaining external goods *through their own doings*.

On this view, *successful* ethological behavior is important for well-being because it produces *flow pleasure*, which refers to the pleasure of *achieving* certain ends (physiological needs) by using cognitive skill and control to meet a challenge. This pleasure involves *challenges met with equal skill*, and for this to happen, animals must be *successful*; they must *achieve* the environmental endpoint of the activity *through their own doings*. Examples include hunting *successfully* and maintaining a territory *successfully*. Flow pleasures may be deeply enjoyable in that they, unlike other pleasures, involve the feelings of *achievement* and *success* that accompanies the use of skill to meet a challenge, which adds a new dimension of pleasure to both consummatory and ethological behavior.

In support of the view that flow pleasures are especially important for well-being, one might appeal to human self-reports that special enjoyment is associated with *high challenge met with equal skill* (Clarke and Haworth 1994; Haworth and Evans 1995; Myers and Diener 1995; Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Siddiquee et al. 2016). As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) plausibly argues:

The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 3).

And there is an evolutionary explanation as to why animals likely derive pleasure or satisfaction from meeting high challenges with equal skill: it is adaptive for animals to enjoy doing what they are good at (Balcombe 2006). The more proficient one is at doing what is necessary for survival, the more likely it is that one will live longer and produce more offspring. So, from an evolutionary standpoint, it is important that cats find pleasure in being good at hunting and maintaining a territory. That is, finding pleasure in hunting *successfully* and maintaining a territory *successfully promotes feline fitness*.

Even if flow pleasures are *the most* pleasurable pleasures and ethological behavior is not itself rewarding, we still have reason to permit our felines to access the outdoors. First, when given the option, even cats who live in enriched indoor environments *routinely* choose to roam outdoors, and perhaps this means that the best moments in their lives are not the “passive, receptive, relaxing times,” but the moments when their bodies and minds are stretched to their limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish the difficult tasks that they find satisfying, such as hunting or territorial maintenance. Felines, like other “wild” animals, evolved to have a number of cognitive skills, such as exploration, problem solving, learning, and spatial awareness in order to respond to the challenges of life in the “wild,” and these skills are enhanced through problem solving and the ability to control their environments (Shettleworth 2010). When roaming outdoors, cats skillfully solve problems and meet certain challenges that they would not encounter indoors. They become completely absorbed in challenging activities that they find satisfying, and they seem to feel alert, in control, and at the peak of their abilities. Although felines do not hunt successfully on every outdoor occasion, the challenge of maintaining a territory is almost always met. Insofar as felines likely feel a sense of accomplishment from patrolling their territories, accessing the outdoors is important insofar as free-roaming cats often experience the flow pleasure of maintaining territories *successfully*.

But when it comes to indoor playtime, the “challenges” of chasing toys do not match the skills of cats. For one, some games are too easy. When toys are dangled in front of cats, they are not provided with *the high challenge* of searching for prey with the use of their senses. This explains why cats often prefer to search for prey outdoors, *even when interactive toys are available to them*. Other toys involve high challenges that are not matched by equal skill because the challenges are too difficult, if not impossible to meet. For instance, laser games involve a challenge that can never be met—that is, the cat is physically unable to “catch” the red dot she chases. Arguably, performing this “vacuum activity” is less pleasurable than catching live prey outdoors because laser-chasing lacks the intense feeling of *satisfaction* that accompanies success or achievement. Relatedly, the feline instinct to hunt is often triggered when cats see moving prey from the window, yet because they cannot interact with the prey, felines often become frustrated (Beaver 2004).

Something similar can be said for territorial pleasures. While indoor-only cats may perceive the house as part of their territory, the “challenge” of maintaining it, if there even is a challenge, does not match the skills of cats, because rarely, if ever, do they



have the opportunity to use their senses to gather information and defend the “territory” from competitors. Moreover, because the average house is much smaller than the average home range of outdoor-roaming cats, it is likely that indoor cats are unable to feel in control of what they perceive to be their “home range,” as part of it is not accessible to them. While one might object that cats might be unaware that there is a world beyond their walls if they have never accessed it, clearly this would apply only to cats who have never perched on a windowsill. Indeed, *redirected aggression* often occurs when an indoor cat, while sitting on a windowsill, sees another free-roaming cat pass by (Beaver 2004). Cats likely become agitated in these situations, in part, because they perceive the other cat to be intruding upon their “territory.”

Because cats feel the deep enjoyment of meeting challenges with equal skill only in the outdoors, an indoor-only cat’s opportunity for well-being is thwarted, even when the cat experiences an abundance of bodily pleasures and is provided with important “environmental endpoints,” such as food, security, and “prey” (i.e., toys that mimic prey). Cats possess more cognitive skill than they can exercise in an indoor environment, as the “challenges” of indoor tasks are both infrequent and inappropriate. Thus, when we play games with indoor-only cats, it is likely that we are just occupying them at a low level, and not engaging their high-level cognitive skills, which is needed for flow pleasures. As Bramble might put it, indoor pleasures can relax or stimulate cats and make their lives interesting for them in the gaps between outdoor pleasures; they can be a sort of “oil for their joints.”<sup>13</sup> But they simply are not enough for feline well-being.

## 12 Cat Guardian Duties and Feline Well-being

I have argued that, for the sake of feline well-being, cats need some access to the outdoors. Now, I argue that feline companions have a *duty* to provide felines with outdoor access. A compelling argument against permanent confinement proposes that the duty to provide felines with outdoor access is negative in nature. After all, any minimally decent theory of ethics accepts the claim that there exists at least a *prima facie* duty not to harm others. As argued, impairing one’s capacity to achieve well-being by thwarting one’s opportunities for pleasure constitutes harm, and since keeping cats indoors impair their ability to achieve well-being, permanent confinement constitutes a *prima facie* harm.

Perhaps, though, feline confinement is justified on the grounds that some cats kill other animals, like mice, birds, or lizards, when they roam outdoors. One might thus argue that the duty to provide cats with outdoor access applies only if harm is not done to others, and since harm is allegedly done to other critters when cats roam outside, cat guardians ought to confine their felines to the indoors, or at least to cat patios, also known as “catios.” Call this the “precautionary approach” to feline management.

There are at least two compelling responses to the precautionary approach. First, we can challenge the claim that just because *some* cats kill other animals when roaming outdoors, *all* cats ought to be confined to the indoors. Not all house-based cats hunt and not all cats who hunt are successful. Research on the hunting habits of house-based free-roaming cats consistently shows that only a minority of these cats hunt (Baker et al. 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Here, I use some of the language in Bramble’s (2016, 100) discussion about human well-being to motivate my argument. Bramble himself does not discuss feline well-being.

The most reputable study on the hunting behavior of “owned” cats, which tracked feline predation through the use of “kitty cams,” reports that only 44% of house-based cats with outdoor access hunt, and only 30% of these cats successfully capture wildlife (Loyd et al. 2013).<sup>14</sup> Even if it is justified to confine successfully hunting cats, this certainly does not imply that we ought to confine cats who do not hunt.

Second, we can argue that the harms caused by successful cat predation are not as significant as we might assume at face value. After all, predators mainly prey on substandard individuals who are sick, have weak immune systems, or have poor muscle condition (Genovart et al. 2010). Evidence indicates that cats who hunt successfully mainly kill surplus animals: animals who are weak or sick and thus would not survive for long anyway (Baker et al. 2008; Møller and Erritzøe 2000; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds 2016). It is thus predicted that cat predation is compensatory to natural mortality and not additive, which means that the predation of cats merely replaces other forms of mortality and thus just compensates for wildlife death that is inevitable (Tantillo 2006). Insofar as cats rarely become competent predators if they did not have their mothers with them when they first were exposed to prey (Caro 1980), it is likely that successfully hunting *house-based* cats who grew up in confinement are poor hunters and thus normally kill only sick or injured prey, as this is all they are able to capture.

As far as I am aware, there is no research that compares the harm felines cause to their prey with the harms that prey endure from other causes of mortality. It is, however, widely accepted that the “natural” deaths of free-roaming animals are typically violent and extremely unpleasant (Sagoff 1984), and it certainly is not obvious that the alleged trauma that felines inflict upon their prey before killing them is more detrimental than a drawn-out death by disease, starvation, or parasitism. This being the case, we cannot jump from the claim that “some cats *kill* other animals when they roam outdoors” to the claim that “these cats cause significant *harm* to other animals when they roam outdoors.”

Relatedly, what cats do to their prey is arguably no worse than what other animals would eventually do to them. After all, many other predators, unlike cats, chase their prey, and thereby cause more trauma than do cats who often kill their prey instantly. Some predators, such as shrews, keep their prey alive for days for extended feeding, which likely causes more pain than do less-sophisticated feline hunters who injure their prey before killing them. While one might counter that feline predation *increases* the number of painful animal deaths, this is far from obvious. Almost one-third of prey items are consumed by feline hunters themselves (Loyd et al. 2013), and arguably there is less suffering in a bird or mouse dinner than there is in a bowl of Fancy Feast. Given that there is insufficient evidence that even the best plant-based cat foods can meet feline nutritional needs (Gray et al. 2004), we should assume that felines require animal-based diets.<sup>15</sup> Because standard pet food is produced by the animal agriculture industrial

<sup>14</sup> And “wildlife,” as a broad category, includes insects, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, and birds.

<sup>15</sup> I am not aware of any studies that conclude that vegan diets are nutritionally adequate for cats. Although one widely cited study indicates that cats fed certain vegan diets had normal serum cobalamin concentrations (B12) and that 14 of 17 cats had whole-blood taurine concentrations within the reference range (Wakefield et al. 2006), this does not, by itself, indicate that vegan diets are nutritionally adequate for felines. One cannot jump from the claim that some vegan diets have adequate levels of B12 and taurine for cats to the claim that vegan diets are nutritionally adequate for felines. After all, vegetarian protein sources are often poor sources of other specific essential vitamins (vitamin D, vitamin A, niacin), fatty acids (arachidonic acid, docosahexaenoic acid, and eicosapentaenoic acid), and minerals (calcium and potassium) (Kayo Kanakubo et al. 2015).

complex, purchasing “pet” food arguably causes more harm than do subsistence-hunting cats. Consequently, the least harm principle implies that those who have control over feline diets ought to permit cats to hunt and consume wildlife. For *all* animals (human and nonhuman), harm is an unavoidable side effect of the exercise of basic liberties.<sup>16</sup> Hence, why the solution to the “problem” of free-roaming cats cannot be to eradicate cats, whether this be house-based or completely feral cats. To suggest otherwise would be to endorse the speciesist view that while it would be wrong to exterminate humans, despite the *enormous* amount of harm humans cause to other animals and the environment, it is perfectly fine to remove cats from the landscape, just because they *might* harm some birds and/or pose a threat to bird populations.<sup>17</sup>

While we can reduce the amount of harm we, ourselves, cause to other animals and the environment by adopting a plant-based diet, we cannot eliminate it, as even vegan diets themselves cause the death of healthy animals in crop production (Fischer and Lamey 2018; Matheny 2003). Likewise, while we can reduce the potential harm outdoor-roaming felines cause by equipping recreational hunters with anti-predation collars, such as bell collars or Birdsbesafe (BBS) collars, and by confining them during the night, we cannot eliminate it if cats are to have a realistic chance of living well relative to their abilities.<sup>18</sup>

But if it is especially important for felines to achieve flow pleasures, collaring felines might impair a feline’s chance of achieving well-being, insofar as these collars make cats susceptible to the frustration of repeated hunting failure. What we should do, then, is permit cats to roam outdoors without anti-predation collars and offset the potential harm recreational hunters cause through *carcass provisioning*, which involves relocating the “kills” felines bring home to a location near the habitats of carnivorous scavengers. Or, cat guardians should donate feline “kills” to wildlife sanctuaries and rehabilitation centers that feed dead animal “donations” to their carnivores. If a fox consumes a mouse that my cat kills, this is one less mouse that will be killed to feed a fox; thus, feline predation, in this case, does not increase the total number of wildlife deaths, and thus does not cause harm.<sup>19</sup>

Although it might seem that what I have argued can be used to justify the human hunting of animals, there are compelling reasons to provide felines with outdoor access, while deeming it morally wrong for humans to hunt and kill animals. Animals who are killed either by a cat or a human hunter die sooner than they would have otherwise, and thus, there is a risk that they are harmed insofar as their potentially valuable lives are cut

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in 2005, it was estimated that humans are responsible for between 500 million to over 1 billion bird deaths annually in the USA (Erickson et al. 2005).

<sup>17</sup> It’s also worth noting that, in many environments, cats are keystone species because they control rat and mice populations. Consequently, cats actually protect bird populations, insofar as rats and mice often feed on bird eggs. This, then, is another reason why we ought not to eradicate cats from the landscape (Courchamp et al. 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Studies report that collar-worn deterrents decrease feline predation as much as 54% (Hall et al. 2015). Also, see Ruxton et al. (2002); Woods et al. (2003); Hall et al. (2015); Calver et al. (2013); and Willson et al. (2015) for the efficacy of feline predation collars. Moreover, research shows that when cats are kept indoors at night, they bring home fewer mammals, as most small mammal activity is nocturnal (Woods et al. 2003; Getz 2009).

<sup>19</sup> However, not all cats return their kills to households, and one study reports that almost 50% of kills are left at the site of capture (Lloyd et al. 2013). If this is true, feline guardians should try to locate these kills by using “kitty cams.” If this is too demanding, then we simply cannot offset some feline-caused harm. Yet this does not imply that we ought to permanently confine cats any more than our inability to offset human-caused harm implies that we should permanently confine humans to the indoors.

short. Consequently, there needs to be a morally compelling reason for humans to hunt if they do hunt. But human hunters, unlike cats, do not have an innate desire to hunt. Moreover, as feminist scholars and virtue theorists convincingly argue, hunting diminishes the well-being of those who hunt—and the well-being of others—as human hunters cultivate vicious character traits that lead them to act in ways that are harmful to themselves and others (Kheel 1996; Luke 2007; Vice 2017). And while there is evidence that successfully hunting felines usually kill “substandard prey,” human hunters often prey on “trophies,” killing perfectly healthy animals, which not only harms the ones who are killed but also has negative evolutionary and ecological consequences (Diekert et al. 2016). Consequently, while there are compelling reasons *against* human hunting, there are morally good reasons to allow cats to roam outdoors, even when foreseeing that they may kill other animals. And if it turns out that cats harm other animals when roaming outdoors, it is possible to offset this harm through carcass provisioning. This is something that human hunters certainly do not consider.

### 13 Concluding Remarks

The common thought that we should keep felines in lifelong confinement is fed by the widespread belief that cats are better off or that they do not miss out on anything of significant importance when they are kept indoors. The inconvenient truth is that the outdoors offer especially pleasurable pleasures, and cats cannot get comparable pleasures indoors. By exploring creative outdoor options for our felines and training them to behave safely when outdoors, we can nurture their innate capacities in a way that minimizes dangers to cats themselves and to other small critters. And if these dangers cannot be reduced to an acceptable degree, cat guardians ought to cultivate rich, stimulating, and interactive indoor environments for their felines. Indeed, we can responsibly promote the well-being of the creatures we claim to love, if only we try.

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