



---

# The Moral Permissibility of Feline Confinement – A Response to C. E. Abbate’s Defense of Free-Roaming Cats

---

**Frances Paola L. Daval-Santos**

De La Salle University Integrated School, Manila

**Maria Regina B. Dimacuha**

De La Salle University Integrated School, Manila

**Seth Erin S. Fernandez**

De La Salle University Integrated School, Manila

**Jenson B. Yu**

De La Salle University Integrated School, Manila

**Mark Anthony L. Dacela, PhD**

Philosophy Department, De La Salle University, Manila

---

**ABSTRACT:** The moral permissibility of indoor confinement has been a recent debate among philosophers C.E. Abbate and B. Fischer. Abbate, using a hedonistic framework, contends that cats should be given outdoor access to achieve their well-being. According to her, ethological pleasures can only be attained by cats outdoors because they can freely perform their species-normal behavior. Thus, she claims that it is the prima facie duty of the cat guardian to provide outdoor access. However, she fails to consider that cats can also experience pleasures even when they are indoors, so long as cat guardians can provide these for them. In fact, cat harm caused outdoors has significantly increased over time. Act Utilitarianism (AU) suggests that as long as the action produces the best possible results for everyone, then that act is ethical. In a world where there is constant environmental degradation and harm caused to wildlife, the debate on feline confinement is still prevalent more than ever. This paper shall argue that feline confinement is morally permissible using concepts on Environmental Enrichment and Symbolic Interactionism.

**KEYWORDS:** Abbate; feline confinement; feline ethics; hedonism; utilitarianism

## INTRODUCTION

The debate on feline confinement has prevailed over time and has introduced itself to Philosophy. Cats are widely domesticated alongside dogs, with over 200 million to 600 million in population worldwide (Kays et. al., 2019). This has also led to differing beliefs such as the ethicality of feline confinement that has sparked this debate. The study will only focus on domesticated cats or *felis catus*. Any other species such as dogs, or exotic cats do not apply to this study.

This paper aims to answer the question: is feline confinement morally permissible? Abbate (2019) claims that outdoor access is necessary for feline well-being. She argues that cats are not able to achieve their well-being indoors because a) they are not able to gain their ethological pleasures indoors, and b) they are not able to perform species-normal behavior which is *especially pleasurable* for felines (Abbate, 2019). Replying to Abbate (2019), Fischer (2020, p.1) contends that “cat guardians have a responsibility not to let cats harm wildlife” due to the significant harm it brings forth. Moreover, this paper argues mainly on Abbate’s 2019 study on her defense of free-roaming cats. Her recent paper, Re-defending Feline Liberty: a Response to Fischer, shall only be briefly discussed due to her same position on the issue.

The succeeding sections include discussions on animal ethics and rights, a review on Abbate’s and Fischer’s studies, sociological and scientific studies on Symbolic Interactionism and Environmental Enrichment (EE), utilitarian concepts, Act Utilitarian (AU) implications on feline confinement, a discussion of possible objections and replies, and a summary.

### Animal Ethics

Domestic cats play an important role in their households. They provide company and care to children, the elderly, and other family members. Animal ethics describes how humans should treat animals, regardless of a human’s relationship to an animal. This is grounded on how real-life interactions among sentient beings are perceived. Furthermore, animal ethics seeks to address how humans should properly treat animals and wildlife. This section shall discuss animal ethics and the moral duties of guardians.

Sentience is the capacity of all living beings to experience pleasure, pain, and suffering. This is concerned with how cats feel when they are outdoors; they may achieve pleasure from hunting but may experience pain and suffering from accidents and other unforeseen circumstances. Along with this idea, Pelluchon’s (2015) principle of equality of interests highlights an essential factor. Although animals and humans cannot always receive the same level of treatment, they must be respected and be provided with living spaces, food, and water. Hence, human beings have an ethical obligation to give animals the ability to live freely.

Fraser (2012) mentioned three ways on how humans affect animals. First is how they take care of animals. Some owners can provide their pets' needs such as vaccines and food, but fail to give them affection. In other cases, owners spend time with them but lack access to their necessities. In addition, he also discussed how cats are unintentionally harmed by human beings and how they are affected indirectly. To illustrate, if a cat accidentally gets hit by a vehicle, the driver did not intentionally kill the animal, but it does not change the fact that the animal was killed. This also disturbs their life-sustaining process and the balance of nature. Hence, there are ethical considerations that result from the extent an owner would care for his cat.

Considering these ways, Fraser proposed four mid-level principles to address them. However, not all principles could be generalized and applied to all animals. This is because the effects of human actions on animals have varying outcomes. The first principle is to yield comfortable lives for the animals while the second principle is to "treat suffering with compassion" (Fraser, 2012, p.13). Humans should be committed to knowing and preventing the potential hazards for their pets. The third principle is to be mindful of unseen harm. Owners should always think of worst-case scenarios that could happen to themselves and to their pets. Similar to how a child is raised, a cat guardian or the owners, have the responsibility to look after their pets' health. Lastly, the fourth principle is to protect "life-sustaining processes and balances of nature" (Fraser, 2012, p. 10). Owners must attempt to identify the disturbances their cats bring to wildlife be it directly or indirectly.

Animal rights are a fundamental basis on how animals should be treated throughout their existence. Animals deserve to be protected from harm and live their lives based on their needs. Unfortunately, several animal species face cruelty and, not long after, extinction. They simply are living beings; hence, they also need to be prioritized. Zoopolis, one of the many theories of animal rights, suggested that since animals live in the same environment as us, may these be any form of land or body of water, our policies have to take into account their needs, even if they are not domesticated and are merely seen outside the vicinity of a home (Pelluchon, 2015).

Moral agents, being caretakers, have a responsibility to equally consider their cats' natural interests and their prey's. Although pleasure may be difficult to compare when cats are free-roaming or when they are confined indoors, the potential harms outdoors significantly outweigh potential pleasures (Bernstein, 2007). For instance, when cats are outside, they may be involved in fights with other animals, but Abbate does not take into account an added cost that these domesticated pets may face the risk of consuming toxic substances. In addition, when free-roaming cats are often seen outside, they may have a higher risk of acquiring a pest reputation in their respective neighborhoods (Duffy, 2013).

The best illustration of this would be a cat strolling around its owner's community. The cat approaches a resident's house where the resident was known to be unsympathetic and only cares for their aggressive pet dog. To a greater extent, the residents could abuse the cat and violate its animal rights or the dog could harm it. The cat's owner would be unaware of what happened to his pet because he was not present, and he permitted his cat to be alone outside.

### **The Defense of Free-roaming Cats**

C.E. Abbate's "A Defense of Free-roaming Cats from a Hedonistic Account of Well-being" argued that cat guardians have the prima facie duty to give cats the opportunity to roam outdoors. In the debate whether felines should be outdoors or indoors, Abbate's position was a compromise between completely being confined indoors or being outdoors, Abbate gave her proposition of semi-controlled outdoor access. Abbate (2019) stated that not all cats, in any location and at any time, should be given outdoor access. She presented a provision called semi-controlled outdoor access where the duty of cat guardians to give outdoor access only applies when: (1) there is light outside, and (2) the cat guardian lives in an area where there is no high volume of traffic. And on the contrary, cats should not be allowed to be given outdoor access when: (1) there are known large predators around the area, (2) it is dark outside, and (3) there is a high volume of traffic (Abbate, 2019). Ruxton's study in 2002 was recommended by Abbate, in which providing cats with collared bells would help reduce the rate of predation in their areas. However, according to Nelson et al. (2005), the study conducted by Ruxton et al. has been proven to only allow cats to view the bell as a form of compensation and thus makes them hunt more efficiently.

Hedonism is a moral theory for the pursuit of pleasure. This theory viewed that maximizing pleasures is a necessity and that pleasures are intrinsically valuable. Abbate (2019, p. 3) derived her definition of well-being as "akin to flourishing" or being able to become engaged, energized, having a sense of control of life, and filling it with highly rewarding experiences. She asserted that well-being is different from simply having "a life worth living" because "while a life with well-being is certainly a life worth living, not every life worth living is a life with well-being" (Abbate, 2019, p. 3).

Before discussing her argument on qualitatively diverse pleasures, bodily pleasures and flow pleasures need to be distinguished. Flow pleasures, which are obtained from ethological pleasures, are defined as the "pleasures of performing certain skilled and controlled behavior" (Abbate, 2019, p. 12). This includes, but is not limited, to cat species-normal behavior such as hunting and protecting their territories. On the other hand, bodily pleasures are defined as the "pleasures one experiences when one's physiological needs are met" (Abbate, 2019, p. 12). This is another type of pleasure that

includes practices such as eating and mating for animals. To maximize their well-being, the pleasures that cats obtain must be highly rewarding and diverse. These kinds of pleasures are identified as qualitatively diverse pleasures. Although ethological and bodily pleasures provide cat satisfaction, ethological pleasures are much more pleasurable. Abbate's argument stated that if cats are unable to have outdoor access, then they do not receive the pleasures necessary for their ability to flourish.

Bramble's analysis of Fred Feldman's example of Porky's life (as cited in Abbate, 2019) examined the flow and bodily pleasures that it receives. This analysis suggests that even if Porky's life is filled with bodily pleasures, flow pleasures enable much qualitative diversity. Abbate drew more of her argument from this analysis from Zoran in 2011 and Foley et. al 2005 by comparing the average lifespan of house-based cats (15 years) and free-roaming cats (4.5 years). Abbate reassured that even if the number of years has a big quantitative difference, indoor cats who only receive not much of a qualitatively diverse pleasures do not maximize their well-being indoors compared to free-roaming cats.

By nature, cats prefer to experience their innate behaviors despite guardians providing them with their necessities such as food, comfort, and security indoors. Animal welfare suggested that animals have "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, as cited in Abbate 2019, p.11). To be able to determine what is best for feline well-being, observing felines when they are left by themselves is needed (Nussbaum, 2006, as cited in Abbate, 2019). Lastly, she presented an argument on evolution that discusses adaptive behavior. Foraging, nesting, and hunting motivate cats to perform time-consuming tasks that promote their feline fitness and well-being. Thus, Abbate (2019, p. 2) argued that: (1) "cat guardians have a prima facie duty to provide their felines with outdoor access," (2) their ability to flourish is impaired when confined indoors, (3) ethological pleasure is the most pleasurable pleasure which can only be achieved when cats are given outdoor access and can practice species-normal behavior, and (4) it is a moral failing when the cat guardian restricts cats with outdoor access. It could be argued that Abbate provides a reasonable discussion towards the well-being of the cat since she emphasized the pleasures necessary for them to have well-being. However, due to the inability to predict and navigate different circumstances around each cat owner's environment, it would be difficult to implement the approach that Abbate had suggested which is semi-controlled outdoor access. Aside from this, the hedonistic theory did not fully maximize the well-being of cats, as pleasures are not the only thing necessary for their well-being but external factors as well, thus making her argument weak.

### **Fischer's Reply**

Fischer (2020), who replied to Abbate (2019), agreed with the significance of outdoor access to feline well-being. Fischer's claims were supported by statistics on feline predation, thus making his argument against Abbate valid. His stance was also strengthened due to this, as Abbate failed to support her claims with scientific findings on predation. However, this was clarified and expounded on in her reply to Fischer which will be discussed in the following section. Under defined circumstances, they both argued that cat guardians have the moral duty to allow cats to roam freely, and the harms and risks outdoors outweigh the benefits.

However, Fischer argued on Abbate's claims about cats causing less harm to wildlife. This is because Abbate contended that the prey that cats hunt are substandard, meaning they have little to no well-being, and it would not be too much of a concern if their cats were to hunt them (Abbate, 2019). Furthermore, Fischer cited statistical research from Loss et al. (2013) which suggested that 25.8 animals get killed per year by domesticated cats. To support Fischer's claims, other studies were examined that suggest the negative effects of feline predation on wildlife. Dufty's (1994) study revealed that cat predation is the primary cause of death for bandicoots while Erickson et. al. (2005) reported 500 million to 1 billion bird deaths in the United States. Dabritz et. al. (2006) and Herron (2010) also reported that inappropriate waste from free-roaming cats contributes to tons of feces that lead to water pollution. Although it is important to consider that giving cats outdoor access creates a balance in the ecosystem, it also hinders the well-being of many. These findings assert that free-roaming cats pose harm outdoors and that confining them would resolve the said problems.

### **Re-defending Feline Liberty**

In reply to Fischer, Abbate redefended her position that the harm of permanent confinement for cats is still greater than the harm cats give their prey. She was opposing the permanent feline confinement and asserts that owners at the very least should provide their felines with an opportunity to go outdoors and perform their innate territorial behavior. The animals that cats prey on, in fact, benefit from feline predation because this "hastens the end of their miserable lives" (Abbate, 2021, p. 3).

Predominantly, Abbate addressed the misconception that cats are dependent on their owners. If they were given outdoor access, cats would not act in self-destructive ways, but would be aware of their surroundings. Cats may avoid moving vehicles and people outside because of their acute sense of hearing and fast reflexes. Hence, Abbate strongly implied that cats are self-sufficient and independent; they are not completely under their owners' care.

In closing, she stressed that those who support feline confinement fail to acknowledge that cats can only fulfill their pleasures outside. Keeping cats indoors is imprisonment for them because morality demands that owners should give their cats opportunities for basic needs, concerning their liberties. This may be the case, but there are certainly alternatives owners can give their cats. Studies that are discussed in further sections prove this. Owners confining their cats do not necessarily mean that they do not believe in the potential pleasures and behaviors of their pets when they are outdoors. There could be multiple reasons why owners opt to confine them.

### **The Human-Cat Relationship**

To achieve feline well-being indoors, our approach takes into account (1) one's understanding of cat personality, (2) how cat guardians provide the cat's well-being indoors, and (3) the importance of symbolic interaction between cats and their guardians. Abbate claimed that cats have innate species-normal capabilities but failed to consider that they have varying behaviors that are dependent on their personalities.

Feaver et. al. (1986) identified types of cat personalities, namely Active/Aggressive, Timid/Nervous, and Confident/Easy-going. These personality types may also be tied with the Feline Five as mentioned by Litchfield et.al. (2017), namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Impulsiveness, Agreeableness, and Dominance. Cats with high scores of (1) Neuroticism show that they may be experiencing stress. Similar to the Timid/Nervous spectrum as mentioned by Feaver, it is suggested that they may benefit from quiet areas to calm them down. High scores on (2) Extraversion imply that they may need more compounded environments as it shows that they have high levels of boredom, hence exhibiting Confident/Easy-going personality types. Giving them sensory toys and providing more social interactions with humans shall help to sustain their well-being. Conversely, low scores may indicate age-related health issues such as cognitive dysfunction. (3) Cats with high scores of Impulsiveness may also reveal that once they are confined in a stressful environment, it can greatly affect their welfare negatively. Low scores, on the other hand, show that they are comfortable in their environment. In addition, high scores of (4) Agreeableness show that cats are enriched in their environments and lastly, high scores of (5) Dominance shows that it is likely that they have aggression and are shown to be associated with the traits of being irritable, forceful, and moody (Litchfield et.al., 2017) and also exhibits the last personality type of being Active/Aggressive.

Aside from these personality types, identifying the cat's behavior is significant when establishing a meaningful relationship. According to Ellis (2009), a cat can express itself using facial expressions, body postures, and showing emotions to its owners. If cats were to sneer at other people or act passively when their guardians initiate outdoor activities, then it does not give the cat pleasure. Ellis also stated that determining a cat's

emotions can inform what type of intervention can be done for the cat, especially with respect to establishing Environment Enrichment Programs suitable for them. If a cat is observed and it fits into at least one of these personality types, then their behavior is dependent on its personality. If the cat constantly hides from onlookers and other inhabitants of the home, it may indicate that they will not achieve well-being outdoors.

Both social play and social interaction are essential for cats to have well-being when confined indoors. Social play helps in a cat's developmental process when adapting to a new environment or a domesticated lifestyle. West (1974) discussed social play's goal as a means of engagement through physical contact. By simply maintaining a friendly social relation through petting, engaging during their "playtime," and using sensory toys could be a good practice to achieve a symbolic or meaningful interaction. It is believed that owners who want their pets to be confined indoors will be fully committed to providing them with lives filled with satisfaction. They must take one step further by immersing themselves in an owner-to-cat relationship, and Symbolic Interactionism, a term coined by sociologists, explains this.

Alger and Alger (1997, p. 67) defined Symbolic Interactionism as a perspective wherein humans are considered as "active constructors of the human world." For this to exist in human and cat relationships, both actors must be able to picture how "others perceive them and how others might react to their choices" (Mead, 1962, as cited in Alger & Alger, 1997, p. 68). Although Mead strongly asserted that this does not apply to human and non-human relationships, Alger and Alger's later study with felines and their caretakers in 1997 proved otherwise. According to the results of their research,

"they [cats] demonstrate strong cognitive skills, including the ability to define situations (both physical and social) and to select courses of action based on their assessments. In short, we have found that cats routinely engage in symbolic interaction." (Alger & Alger, 1997, p.79)

Cats are minded actors, unique individuals with distinct personalities, and emotional beings. Felines, indeed, can create a symbolic relationship with their guardians. For instance, isolating cats, especially when they are imposed with strict indoor confinement 24 hours a day, may cause unfamiliar attitudes of anxiety, inappropriate urination, and so on (Stella & Croney, 2016). Numerous behavioral problems are produced by a lack of consideration of a cat's needs and unrealistic expectations of its owner.

Veevers (1985) presented the symbolic meaning of animals as companions. He provided a sociological perspective that consists of a projective function, which means that by understanding the function of pets, what would be beneficial to them and at the same time be able to identify possible risks to harm may be identified. Bernstein (2007) discussed that owning cats or other companion animals generally has benefits for human health in different aspects and could even cater to important roles in therapy with



people who experience psychological complications. It may also promote several skills and values for child development as they would learn mutual respect, kindness, and caretaking skills (Triebenbacher, 2000, as cited in Bernstein 2007). Stammbach and Turner (1999) as cited in Bernstein (2007, p. 13) found that cats “appear to take on the role of a significant partner in relationships involving [older] people living alone.” Thus, confining them would promote a rapport that bridges them together.

In essence, Symbolic Interactionism is a mutual concession of an owner taking into account his well-being and his pet’s. Owners truly have a deep and meaningful connection with their pets that some even consider these sentient beings as family. It is significant to be able to identify the cat’s personality and common behaviors to be able to effectively have symbolic and meaningful relationships with them.

### **Environmental Enrichment (EE)**

The previous section on Symbolic Interactionism now enables us to discuss Environmental Enrichment (EE) and its implications on improving the living conditions of cats when indoors. Therefore, this discussion of the strategy allows us to give recommendations for cat owners and support for our arguments.

A proper enrichment plan is one of the many possible frameworks that allow felines to experience a conducive environment suitable for their wants and needs. Identifying cats’ various personalities and behaviors can also help in enriching indoor environments due to their differing needs. A scientific study conducted by Ellis (2009) entitled Environmental Enrichment presents a practical strategy that owners can utilize to improve feline well-being in impoverished environments. EE’s goals are to stabilize normal behavior patterns and increase an animal’s ability to cope with challenges.

EE’s first animal social strategy is intraspecific social interaction, which promotes a cat-to-cat bond. However, Ellis stated that it is complicated to determine if every cat-to-cat relationship would be successful. It is the actor’s second social strategy propounds interspecific social interaction, wherein human interaction is promoted because it is more beneficial. Positive reactions with regard to the stress levels of cats from their owners were recorded. Other significant strategies found in EE are more considered as alternatives for the natural behavior of cats when they are outdoors. Ellis explained how the use of toys, fitting floor space, and including hiding places or structures can be incorporated into an indoor confinement plan. This makes a significant change because increasing the positive utilization of the environment allows pets to handle challenges in a normalized way.

Owners can adopt inanimate strategies such as providing toys, complex methods for feeding, adjusting the environment to their preference such as keeping it at a warm temperature, using different materials such as straw and fleece, and adding cat

structures around the environment. According to Ellis (2009), a recommended feeding method includes hiding a small amount of food in different locations to allow the cat to exhibit territorial behavior when they begin to search for food. For their living and playing space, she recommended providing cat structures, most preferably vertical structures, such as shelves and cat poles to allow them to experience complexity in their environment. Although it may be difficult for cat owners to provide their cats with these strategies, it is still encouraged, as it would benefit the cat's well-being the most, amidst the added risk of providing cats with outdoor access. These strategies enable the cats to exhibit their hunting and territorial skills by modifying the common way of how they live to meet their species-normal capacities indoors.

In addition, macroenvironmental and microenvironmental considerations must be given attention with regard to the well-being of the cat according to Stella and Crony in 2016. Macroenvironmental considerations include adjusting the cat's own space and regulating it to avoid stress and discomfort in cats while microenvironmental considerations include providing functional activities and structures within the cat's housing space. This may include providing elevated vantage points, species-typical feeding methods, and activities that help the cat exhibit their potential. These considerations are crucial in order to eliminate stresses on the cat's environment and instead enrich their environment. It is crucial to emphasize that the well-being of cats is directly related to the level of enrichment their owners provide. By utilizing the given recommendations of EE, cats can achieve well-being even when they are indoors.

### **A Discussion of Utilitarian Concepts**

Before having an elaborate discussion on AU, utilitarianism and the people who have contributed to its emergence must be explored. AU was derived from utilitarianism, a family of ethical theories which dictate that actions must maximize happiness and welfare for the greatest number of living beings. Utilitarianism was developed in the 18th century and was fully recognized in the 19th century as a secular point of view (Baujard, 2013). This theory was created for people to have perspectives based on rational thoughts. Furthermore, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill were two of the most classic proponents of utilitarianism during the past centuries. Both of these philosophers have made a lasting mark on people's views that are deeply rooted in the theory until today.

Bentham advocated for 'The Greatest Happiness Principle' that is concerned with the utility and consequences of an action, not an action's intentions (Veenhoven, 2012). If the intentions of action were good, but it did not clearly satisfy the needs of most, then according to Bentham, it does not practice utilitarianism. Happiness should always be achieved for the greatest number in all cases. Similarly, Mill believed that happiness is the

only thing that is desirable (Baujard, 2013). For him, actions are right if they promote happiness and actions are wrong if they produce unhappiness.

Utilitarianism is considered to be a form of consequentialism and welfarism. Consequentialism holds that the condition of action merely depends on the goodness or the badness of an action's consequences, while welfarism declares that someone's happiness is intrinsically good and someone's unhappiness is intrinsically bad. Hence, any argument that is grounded by utilitarianism must meet the stated objectives of the consequentialist theory of the right and welfarist theory of the good (Fyfe, 2011). Moreover, utilitarianism is a philosophy of action. This theory creates a standard for individuals to improve decision-making and collectively achieve welfare for the greater good (Baujard, 2013). Because AU aims to fulfill these, it is crucial to calculate factors such as benefits and harms.

Actions must always produce the best possible outcomes for the most number of beings when viewed from an AU perspective. Thus, in comparison to Rule Utilitarianism (RU), acts need not conform to a social practice or norm. In other words, it holds that only well-being matters (Eggleston, 2014). AU also holds that any sentient being is important to the moral value of an act.

Although it can be advantageous that the well-being of all comes first rather than everything else for decision-making, it also poses negative consequences. Eggleston (2014) believes that AU can be too profound because it can excessively influence immoral actions to be committed instead. AU also lacks consistency. If it will be applied on a larger scale, meaning that if societies were to be completely utilitarian, they will also lack predictability and growth. Utilitarianism is claimed to be influencing 'selfish actions' because some may only consider what can produce the most utility for themselves, not for others. However, as stated by Baujard (2013), this is just an exaggeration of the theory. If one only considers the most utility for oneself, then this is not utilitarianism.

Notable philosophers of AU such as J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams had defended AU against the mentioned objections. Act utilitarians did not necessarily relinquish the rules of society, but they regard them as rules of thumb. They use these rules as 'rough guides' in essence (Smart & Williams, 1973). Nonetheless, applying AU and other ethical theories should only be done to a certain extent. One must evaluate the condition of one's community and other individuals involved first, instead of making impulsive decisions. As AU and utilitarianism have been generally prevailing for centuries now, their fundamental principle remains the same; what matters for society is that most, if not all individuals, can experience well-being. These can be refined and modified, depending on different contexts.

## **Act Utilitarian (AU) Implications on Feline Confinement**

The previous sections on Symbolic Interactionism and EE assert that the pleasures can be obtained indoors. To further imply the moral permissibility of feline confinement, the AU ethical theory shall be utilized as a framework. Due to the high risks and harms cats can bring to wildlife, AU further supports the claims of this study since it would promote the best possible outcome for the most number of individuals.

As people focus solely on one's pleasure, they tend to become blindsided by what is right or wrong. This may become harmful not only for the individual but also for the community. Thus, merely prioritizing cat pleasures at the expense of everything else such as other living beings is problematic in itself and should not only be the factor that needs to be prioritized. Free-roaming cats' pursuit of pleasures allows other animals living in the vicinity to be affected by the harm caused outdoors. As aforementioned, various researches suggested that there is a significant effect of feline harm to wildlife. Abbate (2019, p. 18) cited an example that the critters they kill when they are outdoors are "weak or sick and thus would not survive for long anyway." Moreover, just because cats are used to hunting and it is natural for them to do so, it does not make it justifiable to take the lives of animals and decrease their populations greatly (Duffy, 2013).

Feline confinement is ethical since previous literature established that pleasure can be attained indoors. The implications of AU as mentioned must be acknowledged concerning this. Thus, merely prioritizing cat pleasures at the expense of everything else such as other living beings is problematic in itself and should not only be the factor that needs to be considered and prioritized. Hence, keeping cats indoors entails the maximum utility possible, in contrast to Abbate's hedonistic approach which only focuses on the maximum pleasure for the cat. It focuses on the overall well-being of not only the cat but of everyone involved in the case.

Therefore using AU, the consequences of decisions that would maximize the overall good over bad, and the welfare of cats is the only intrinsic good. By proving through sociological and scientific studies that feline confinement can promote feline well-being and by having statistical data that prove the negative effects of felines on wildlife, it can be asserted that it is morally permissible. In fact, not only will cats be able to achieve a life with well-being, but also the cat guardian shall be able to establish a stronger relationship with their pet.

## **Objections and Replies**

There are empirical studies and policies on feline indoor confinement; however, none explicitly state that indoor confinement is the best option. The following sections will

discuss the possible objections the paper may face, such as RU and policy-making and the evolution of cats.

### ***Rule Utilitarianism (RU) and its Influence on Policy-making***

Although RU is an ethical theory that could be considered, this study did not utilize this theory. Just like AU, RU was obtained from utilitarianism. In this context, a persistent question is its integration into public policy-making. Some systems involve a rule-based perspective in analyzing policies. An indirect rule utilitarian, according to Martin in 2008, is someone who sets existing rules designed to be accepted by society. These rules are usually designed to be simple so that they may increase the cooperation of the masses. If domestic cats were placed in the situation of an alternate perspective, indirect RU must be acknowledged, especially in the discussion of public policies for feline confinement. There are also different circumstances that cat guardians consider that may not be the same for everyone. When it comes to feline confinement, some cat owners would not conform to public policy. Every cat guardian relationship is different as well as each cats' needs and personalities, so the application of rules may not apply to every cat-guardian relationship.

### ***On Evolution of Cats***

It could be argued that indoor confinement would alter the evolutionary trajectory of its species and that it would pose damages to the species as a whole. However, genetic and archaeological findings had proven that wildcats had already been domesticated even before 10,000 years ago by Egyptians (Driscoll et.al., 2009). With the current changes in our environment and with little biomes existing suitable for wildcats' flourishing, for instance, leopard cats or serval cats, it is questionable whether there are risks to their species through domestication.

As previously discussed, EE provides a sufficient amount of opportunities for felines to practice their ethological behaviors such as hunting, foraging, and protecting their territory indoors (Ellis, 2009). Cats may inevitably evolve to be more inclined into becoming domesticated in the forthcoming years, but this does not pose a significant threat to their species. Besides, animals and humans can adapt and survive through the changing world.

## SUMMARY

This study is in support of Fischer's (2020) claim on the significant effects of feline predation on wildlife and objected against Abbate's (2019) claims on the prima facie duty of cat guardians to provide free-roaming outdoor access for cats. Using the AU approach, feline confinement is regarded morally permissible for the reason that (1) ecology can be protected, (2) less harm and risks are posed to cats, (3) and Symbolic Interactionism promotes human-cat relationships, thus providing well-being for cat guardians as well. In addition, feline psychological and sociological studies on Symbolic Interactionism and EE help support this claim. These prove that cats can still experience pleasures even when confined indoors.

This study discussed that there are a number of ways they can contribute to their pets' lives. As stated, guardians can create safe spaces with vantage points inside their homes, purchase sensory toys to promote qualitatively diverse pleasures, and truly understand what type of personalities their cats have. Henceforth, it is recommended that guardians be reminded of their duties as caretakers and consider not only the well-being of their feline companions but also the well-being of affected individuals.

## REFERENCES

- Abbate, C. E. (2019). A defense of free-roaming cats from a hedonist account of feline well-being. *Acta Analytica*, 35(3), 439-461. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-019-00408-x>
- Abbate, C. E. (2021). Re-defending feline liberty: a Response to Fischer. *Acta Analytica*, 36, (451-463). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-020-00457-7>
- Alger, J. M., & Alger, S. F. (1997). Beyond Mead: Symbolic interaction between humans and felines. *Society & Animals*, 5(1), 65-81. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853097X00222>
- Baujard, A. (2013). Utilitarianism and anti-Utilitarianism. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 1-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2357441>
- Bernstein, P. L. (2007). The human-cat relationship. In *The welfare of cats* (pp. 47-89). Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-3227-1\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-3227-1_3)
- Dabritz, H.A., Atwill, E.R., Gardner, I.A., Miller, M.A., & Conrad, P.A. (2006). Outdoor fecal deposition by free-roaming cats and attitudes of cat owners and nonowners toward stray pets, wildlife and water pollution. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 229, 74-81. <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.229.1.74>
- Driscoll, C. A., Clutton-Brock, J., Kitchener, A. C., & O'Brien, S. J. (2009). The evolution of house cats. *Scientific American*, 300(6), 68-75.
- Duffy, A. C. (1994). Population demography of the eastern barred bandicoot (*Perameles gunnii*) at Hamilton, Victoria. *Wildlife Research*, 21(4), 445-457. <https://doi.org/10.1071/WR9940445>
- Duffy, J. (2013). Ethical considerations concerning domestic house cats' access to the outdoors. [https://www.academia.edu/10163125/Ethical\\_Considerations\\_Concerning\\_Domestic\\_House\\_Cats\\_Access\\_to\\_the\\_Outdoors](https://www.academia.edu/10163125/Ethical_Considerations_Concerning_Domestic_House_Cats_Access_to_the_Outdoors)
- Eggleston, B. & Miller, D. (Eds.). (2014). Act Utilitarianism. *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, S. L. (2009). Environmental enrichment: Practical strategies for improving feline welfare. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, 11(11), 901-912. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfms.2009.09.011>
- Erickson, Wallace & Johnson, Gregory & Young, David. (2021). *A summary and comparison of bird mortality from anthropogenic causes with an emphasis on collisions*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228662931\\_A\\_summary\\_and\\_comparison\\_of\\_bird\\_mortality\\_from\\_anthropogenic\\_causes\\_with\\_an\\_emphasis\\_on\\_collisions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228662931_A_summary_and_comparison_of_bird_mortality_from_anthropogenic_causes_with_an_emphasis_on_collisions)
- Feaver, J., Mendl, M., & Bateson, P. (1986). A method for rating the individual distinctiveness of domestic cats. *Animal Behaviour* 34, 1016-1025. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0003-3472\(86\)80160-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0003-3472(86)80160-9)

- Fischer, B. (2020). Keep your cats indoors: A reply to Abbate. *Acta Analytica*, 1, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-020-00431-3>
- Fraser, D. (2012). A “practical” ethic for animals. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 25(5), 721-746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-011-9353-z>
- Fyfe, A. T. (2011). *Mill's proof of Utilitarianism. Just the arguments: 100 of the most important arguments in Western philosophy.* <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444344431.ch57>
- Herron, M. E. (2010). Advances in understanding and treatment of feline inappropriate elimination. *Topics in Companion Animal Medicine*, 25(4), 195-202. <https://doi.org/10.1053/j.tcam.2010.09.005>
- Hughes, B. O., & Duncan, I. J. H. (1988). The notion of ethological “need”, models of motivation and animal welfare. *Animal Behaviour*, 36(6), 1696-1707. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0003-3472\(88\)80110-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0003-3472(88)80110-6)
- Kays, R., Dunn, R. R., Parsons, A. W., McDonald, B., Perkins, T., Powers, S. A., ... & Woods, L. (2019). The small home ranges and large local ecological impacts of pet cats. *Animal Conservation*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acv.12563>
- Litchfield, C. A., Quinton, G., Tindle, H., Chiera, B., Kikillus, K. H., & Roetman, P. (2017). The ‘Feline Five’: An exploration of personality in pet cats (*Felis catus*). *PLOS One*, 12(8): e0183455. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0183455>
- Loss, S. R., Will, T., & Marra, P. P. (2013). The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. *Nature Communications*, 4(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms2380>
- Martin, R. (2008). Two concepts of Rule Utilitarianism. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 5(2), 227-255. <https://doi.org/10.1163/174552408X328993>
- Nelson, S. H., Evans, A. D., & Bradbury, R. B. (2005). The efficacy of collar-mounted devices in reducing the rate of predation of wildlife by domestic cats. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 94(3-4), 273-285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2005.04.003>
- Nussbaum, M. (2006). *Frontiers of justice*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15017410601003171>.
- Pelluchon, C. (2015). *Animal ethics*. Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05544-2\\_19-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05544-2_19-1)
- Ruxton, G.D., Thomas, & S., Wright, J.W. (2002). Bells reduce predation of wildlife by domestic cats (*Felis catus*). *London: J. Zool*, 256, 81-83. doi:10.1017/S0952836902000109
- Smart, J. J. C., & Williams, B. (1973). *Utilitarianism: For and against*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840852>



- Stammbach, K.B. and Turner, D.C. (1999). Understanding the human-cat relationship: human social support or attachment. *Anthrozoös* 12, 162-168. <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279399787000237>
- Stella, J. L., & Croney, C. C. (2016). Environmental aspects of domestic cat care and management: implications for cat welfare. *The Scientific World Journal*, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/6296315>
- Veenhoven, R. (2012). Happiness as a public policy aim: The greatest happiness principle. *Positive Psychology in Practice*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470939338.ch39>
- Veevers, J. E. (1985). The social meanings of pets: Alternative roles for companion animals. *Marriage and Family Review*, 8, 11-30. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v08n03\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v08n03_03)
- West, M. (1974). Social play in the domestic cat. *American Zoologist*, 14(1), 427-436. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icb/14.1.427>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Philosophy undergraduate students, mentees, and advisors of Dr. Dacela from De La Salle University, Manila, thank you for sharing your skills and experiences with us. The research workshops, critiques, and peer evaluations were very helpful in conducting and executing our research.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Frances Paola L. Daval-Santos

She studied in De La Salle Lipa and is a Humanities and Social Sciences student from De La Salle University Integrated School Manila. She recently participated in research events such as the 3rd DLSU SHS Research Congress and the 1st DLSU SHS Philosophy Conference.

### Maria Regina B. Dimacuha

She is a former student of De La Salle Lipa and is a Humanities and Social Sciences student from De La Salle University-Manila. She has participated in and organized both the 3rd DLSU SHS Research Congress and 1st DLSU SHS Philosophy Conference respectively in 2021.

### Seth Erin S. Fernandez

She studied in Colegio San Agustin Makati and is a Humanities and Social Sciences student of De La Salle University Integrated School Manila. She has participated in events such as the 3rd DLSU SHS Research Congress and 1st DLSU SHS Philosophy Conference.

### Jenson B. Yu

He studied in St. Paul College of Bocaue during junior high school and was an alumnus of the De La Salle University Integrated School Manila from the Humanities and Social Science strand. He recently participated in events such as the 3rd DLSU Senior Highschool Research Congress and the 1st DLSU Senior High School Philosophy Conference.

### Mark Anthony L. Dacela, PhD

Dr. Dacela is an Associate Professor and the Undergraduate Program Coordinator of the Philosophy Department of De La Salle University. He is specifically interested in the nature and structure of beliefs and the application of this theoretical understanding to other areas like education, business, creativity, and innovation. He strives to integrate his research expertise in designing innovative learning programs and devising structural mechanisms to facilitate program implementation.