

Ethical Veganism in RE

Unit 6 (ages 16 to 18)

What is sentience?

Why does it matter in relation to religion and worldviews?



'The Falling Rose'

Pahul, Age 12

NATRE Art in Heaven, 2020

Extracts from Pahul's accompanying statement:

"The Rose is meant to metaphorically represent hope, happiness and all things good, and the hand represents humanity... We don't rely on our conscience and common sense, but solely on society. Society has made it acceptable to kill and eat billions of innocent animals... the media gets tired of constantly covering the same things, and you go back to your happy, ignorant self. There is plenty we can all do to save the 'rose', but don't."

Aims of Religious Education

The principal aim of religious education is to explore what people believe and what difference this makes to how they live, so that students can gain the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to handle questions raised by religion and belief, reflecting on their own ideas and ways of living.

To help you to make the most of these units, please read and refer to the Teachers' Guide.

About this unit:

This Religious Education unit is offered to teachers and students of Key Stage 5 RE. Through studying the key questions in this unit, students will have opportunities to explore the concept of sentience. Advances in science have led humans to a sophisticated and unprecedented understanding of the inner lives of many non-human animals, factors including (but not limited to) their consciousness, self-awareness, capacity for experiencing emotional states, their abilities to make and maintain meaningful social connections, and so on. These are some of the factors to take into account when the sentience of non-human animals is under consideration. This unit invites students to consider the implications of what science can tell us about the inner lives of non-human animals in relation to religious and non-religious worldviews. Students will consider anthropocentrism – the worldview which prioritises the interests of humankind and assumes human superiority and separateness from the rest of the natural world. Anthropocentrism, it can be argued, is an unconsciously held worldview, which has become a master narrative/dominant worldview in Western societies, going largely unnoticed and unquestioned. Students will be introduced to some of key thinkers who have contributed to the development of anthropocentric worldviews and those who have challenged them, putting forward, by contrast sentiocentric worldviews. Sentiocentric worldviews forefront sentience as a main factor determining how humans should relate to non-human animals. This unit introduces the newly emerging non-religious worldview, 'Sentientism', which, like Humanism, is based on scientific thinking, evidence, reason and compassion, but seeks to more explicitly widen its circle of moral consideration beyond humankind, to encompass all sentient beings.

This unit will explore the centrality of the concept of sentience in relation to ethical veganism: a worldview which is of growing importance and popularity in the UK, and societies across the globe. Ethical veganism is an important area for study in RE that values teaching about religious and non-religious worldviews. Students who have had opportunities to study previous units in this series will be aware that ethical veganism is a non-religious worldview (it can stand independent of any religious belief or doctrine), but also how it is also intertwined with religious belief and practice in the lives of many adherents of major world faiths.

The unit explores and further develops questions about the moral status of animals and human beings' relationship with the environment: How do humans treat animals and does this align with how they *should* be treated? Do animals have rights? Do world religions support the idea of veganism? Has religion been good or bad for animals? Can veganism be important as a religious path that reduces suffering? The unit explores responses to these kinds of questions from non-religious and religious standpoints.

The unit sometimes challenges and sometimes supports religious and philosophical convictions and gives students opportunities to deepen and refine their own understanding and to articulate authentic and informed viewpoints. The enquiries present challenging standards for students, encouraging them to think critically and creatively and to engage in thoughtful discussion. As with the teaching of all religious and non-religious worldviews, this unit does not seek to promote any worldview as correct, nor does it seek to alter the views or behaviours of the children/young people who engage with it. By contrast, it aims to give learners a clear and accurate understanding of ethical veganism as a recognised philosophical conviction and way of life that is increasingly a feature of our communities in the UK and worldwide.

Where does this unit fit in?

The unit will provide teachers with guidance in planning and delivering up to three RE lessons designed for pupils in Key Stage 5 (Sixth Form, ages 16-18). Of course, these lessons can be adapted to suit children of other ages and teachers might wish to make adaptations to the content to suit their particular cohorts. These materials may be suitable but challenging for some statutory Key Stage 4 RE cohorts. The lessons are designed to slot easily into RE schemes of learning for statutory Key Stage 5 RE.

Teachers are encouraged to think about where these lessons may fit in with their current RE syllabus. The lessons can be used to enrich currently taught themes/religions/worldviews. For instance, to enhance teaching about stewardship and religious concern for the environment, as well as the more obvious placement within themes that deal with religious (and/or secular) views of animals. They may also be added to a systematic study of religion, offering a new dimension on belief and practice within a particular religious tradition. Alternatively, these lessons could be used within stand-alone RE enrichment days.

Estimated teaching time for this unit: 3–5 hours. Teach less, in depth, if you have less time – it is not recommended to skate over the surface of the important issues covered in these lessons. Invest more time if you can or teach fewer concepts well if time is limited.

The unit will provide these opportunities:

- Students have opportunities to consider a diverse range of views about questions connected to the concept of sentience as it relates to ethical veganism as a religious and non-religious worldview.
- Students will be introduced to 'Sentientism' – a newly emerging worldview, considering this in relation to other worldviews, including 'anthropocentrism'.
- Students will be able to examine and develop reasoned viewpoints and information, and will be encouraged to reflect upon them and evaluate a range of key questions.
- Students will encounter diverse religious and non-religious views about the moral status of animals, and human–animal relations.
- Experiences and opportunities provided by this unit include engaging with a range of views, and pupils will be encouraged to think critically and creatively, as well as to articulate their own authentic views

KEY THEMES ADDRESSED BY THIS UNIT**Beliefs and concepts:**

- What is sentience and why does our evolving understanding of it matter in relation to religions and worldviews?
- What is 'anthropocentrism' and can it be considered a dominant, hidden worldview/master narrative?
- Are scientific understandings of sentience influencing the beliefs, values and practices of major world religions?
- Are scientific understandings of sentience influencing non-religious worldviews?
- The centrality of sentience to ethical veganism
- Sentientism as a newly emerging worldview

ATTITUDES FOCUS:

Students will explore attitudes of:

- **Self-awareness** by becoming more aware of the implications for how they interact with non-human animals in the light of current scientific knowledge and understanding of sentience
- **Open mindedness** by distinguishing between opinions, viewpoints and beliefs with reference to ideas about sentience and how it relates to their worldview and the worldviews of others
- **Empathy** by considering issues from the perspectives of other people, as well as being encouraged to think about and reflect upon the experiences and inner lives of non-human animals
- **Compassion** by thinking about how their own actions and those of others impact on non-human animals and other people, and considering ways in which they have a positive impact in the world

CONCEPTS

The core concepts from RE that this unit addresses are beliefs, values, meaning and purpose, commitments, and diversity. Teachers should plan to enable learners to see the significance of these core ideas at every point.

Contributions to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

Opportunities for spiritual development come from:

- Engaging with profound questions about how religious and non-religious people understand the value of human and non-human animals and their relationships with each other, the natural world and, where applicable with God or a Supreme Being
- Reflecting on, expressing and developing their own views through critical encounter with diverse philosophical, theological and scientific ideas

Opportunities for moral development come from:

- Exploring and valuing a diversity of views and values on issues relating to sentience of non-human animals, and scrutinising anthropocentric worldviews which are often unconsciously held
- Asking and answering moral questions: can adopting a vegan way of living help humanity reduce its contribution to suffering in the world? Do we have moral duties towards non-human animals, and if so what are these duties? Do the ways in which humans use animals in today’s world – especially for food – make sense, morally? Should religions, worldviews and people’s behaviour in general evolve in step with increasing scientific understanding of non-human animals?
- Reflecting and formulating ideas around duties, rights, responsibilities and our place and status in the world in relation to non-human animals and the environment

Opportunities for social development come from:

- Appreciating what is meant by ethical veganism and developing an awareness of the presence of veganism in our communities
- Considering diverse religious and non-religious beliefs, and understanding why ethical veganism is one of the world’s fastest growing social change movements
- Articulating their own ideas and those of others on a range of contemporary issues and debates around the moral status of animals and human-animal relations

Opportunities for cultural development come from:

- Exploring the relationship between religious and cultural attitudes towards non-human animals
- Thinking about veganism as a cultural identity/phenomenon
- Acquiring an understanding of veganism which promotes respect and combats prejudice and discrimination and enables pupils to explore how individuals and communities with diverse, and even conflicting, worldviews can coexist and even cooperate with one another in pursuit of common goods
- Promoting inter-cultural understanding whereby pupils are encouraged to reflect upon their own cultural pre-dispositions

Expectations: By the end of this unit, most learners should achieve the following outcomes:		
<p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how beliefs around animal sentience have shaped religious and non-religious attitudes, teachings and practices • Explain, with reference to the concept of sentience, a range of religious and non-religious beliefs on the moral status of animals 	<p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how understandings of animal sentience inform and influence religious and non-religious beliefs, values and practices around the issues relating to non-human animals • Give reasons and examples to explain why people have differing views about the value and status of animals and how they should be treated or used by humans 	<p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast religious and non-religious views on issues relating to the moral status of animals in the light of evolving scientific understandings of sentience • Evaluate questions relating to the duties and/or responsibilities of humans towards animals

Please feel free to adapt these to meet the requirements of your RE syllabus.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR PUPILS

A basic knowledge and understanding of the religions/worldviews chosen as the focus for the activities in this unit, as would be expected from standard RE provision up to the end of Key Stage 4, is sufficient prior knowledge for this unit. Although not essential, learners will benefit if they have had opportunities to study any or all previous five units in this series.

SUB-QUESTION: What can we learn from perspectives on what it means to be human?	
<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p>
<p>‘Essence’ poem Ask students to read the poem, Resource 1 of the Supplementary Resource – you may wish to hide until later that it was written by 14-year-old Bethan as her entry to the <i>Spirited Arts</i> competition. Allow students to appraise and discuss the poem in groups. Give them some questions upon which to orient their discussion, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the poem suggest about what it means to be human? (Try to draw out answers that highlight our interconnectedness with the rest of the world, and universe.) • Does the poem suggest any religious or non-religious perspectives on the world and/or humanity? • Would you describe the poem as scientific, spiritual, religious, or something else? Perhaps challenge students to come up with three words to sum up the poem from their point of view. • What can you deduce, if anything, about the worldview of the poet? (We don’t know the answer to this – what is important is how students posit reasons and/or evidence from the poem for their views – it is a good opportunity to assess their knowledge and understanding of religion and belief and their ability to apply it to a new context.) • What do you think of the poem? What is good about it? What don’t you like? Why? • Does the poem align with your own worldview, or does it challenge it? Explain. <p>If you haven’t already done so, reveal the author. Does this change their perspective? This could begin an interesting discussion of how our perceptions and attitudes can change or remain fixed in the light of new knowledge. This is relevant to later learning in this unit. Discuss students’ ideas as a class. Draw out, through questioning, points articulating knowledge and understanding of religion/worldviews.</p> <p>Quick creative challenge: In no more than 10 minutes, ask students to produce a sketch, logo, symbol, poem, or phrase that sums up ‘human’ to them. Spend some time on show and tell, asking questions to encourage deep thinking. Which ideas emphasise the separateness of humans from the rest of the natural world, or superiority over it. Which ideas emphasise connectedness of humans to nature? Whose ideas express a negative/positive/neutral/ambivalent view of humanity? Which ideas align with or challenge religious beliefs and teachings? What about non-religious worldviews, like humanism or veganism (which can be, but which is not always, non-religious)?</p> <p>Human continuum (where do you stand?): Place statements at opposite end of the classroom, between which, students can form a line: Statement 1: Humans are part of the natural world; they are not separate from it nor superior over it Statement 2: Humans are distinct from and superior over the rest of nature</p> <p>Ask students to take a place on the continuum, which best represents where they stand in relation to the statements. Give them time to talk with their peers who are standing in the same area as them. After this discussion time, pick students from different points on the continuum to articulate their views. Make it clear that students may wish to take up a different position if contributors to the class discussion influence their view from where they stood initially. Encourage students to develop arguments, giving reasons and evidence, and importantly, encourage them to think carefully and exchange ideas around the implications and consequences of their views.</p>	<p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider beliefs about what it means to be human and the status of human beings in relation to other living beings and the planet <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think critically about the implications of beliefs around the status and purpose of human life <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw on prior knowledge and understanding of religion and worldviews in relation to the status and purpose of human life

<p>SUB-QUESTION: To what extent are animals worthy of our moral consideration?</p>	
<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p>
<p>These activities engage students with some deep and critical thinking around the moral status of animals.</p> <p>Circles of moral consideration Use Resource 2 in the Supplementary Resources. Cut out pictures of the 18 species of animals in the grid. Blow up the template with concentric circles on the page that follows to A3 size. In groups of around four, starting as a silent debate, make sure everyone understands the three categories of high, medium and low moral status. Place the animal picture cards face down and ask students to take turns to turn over a card and place the animal where they think it should belong. The next person can decide to either move the picture somewhere else or take another turn. Encourage them to do this without speaking. After everyone has had several turns, allow verbal discussion in groups, encouraging students to give reasons and criteria for their choices. If some of the cards are not yet placed, groups should now complete the task in discussion with one another. Give students 5 minutes to agree where the animals should go in the circles. Any they cannot decide on, they can put aside but these should still be visible.</p> <p>Students have a created a tabletop gallery! Get them up on their feet to view and compare the choices of other groups. Invite questions from individual students to the groups, to enable them to explain their choices. Use questioning to get students to think hard about what criteria they were using, e.g. ‘Which groups focused on intelligence/existing human relations with each species/religious considerations (note that pigs are regarded as unclean in Islam and Judaism, and cows are regarded as sacred in Hindu traditions – how could this affect moral status?)/the likeness of an animal to humans/ability to communicate/live as part of a community/what it looks like (cute, ugly, scary, etc.).</p> <p>Ask students to take a stand, and stand by the circles that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closest to the reality of human-animal relations as they stand today in the UK • The closest to their vision of an ideal for human-animal relations • The closest to their idea of the worst-case scenario for human-animal relations <p>Throughout, make sure there is lots of opportunity for discussion, exchange and challenge of a variety of ideas. Introduce or remind students of the terms, ‘speciesism’ and ‘anthropocentrism’. Have they themselves been speciesist/anthropocentric in their choices. You may wish to use Resource 3, Diamond 9 statements to encourage students to think deeply about what criteria they used to prioritise species of animals over others. How arbitrary or rationally justifiable were their choices?</p> <p>Evaluate, through discussion, to what extent speciesism and anthropocentrism are necessary and/or desirable. Introduce a thought experiment: What would the consequences be if humans were to see the world in non-speciesist and non-anthropocentric ways?</p> <p>Take pictures of the responses to card sort activities to re-visit later.</p> <p>REMEMBER! Speciesism is discrimination based solely on species membership. Speciesism does not imply that all animals, human and non-human are worthy of the exact same moral consideration, e.g., a fruit fly should be given the same consideration as a dog – they are very different, but speciesism challenges arbitrary human treatment of animals who are very similar, e.g., in terms of their biology, capacity to suffer, awareness of</p>	<p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think critically about how beliefs and worldviews influence views on the moral status of different animals • Understand key concepts, e.g., speciesism, anthropocentrism <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the implications of anthropocentric and speciesist worldviews <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate how far it is the case that prevailing worldviews in relation to animals are speciesist and/or anthropocentric and to what extent these views are necessary, beneficial, or harmful

<p>the world around them, experience of emotional states, intelligence, etc. A case in point is that of pigs and dogs, two very similar animals in terms of biology, intelligence, ability to initiate and sustain social connection, but who are treated very differently by humans.</p> <p>Ask students to record in writing four key take-aways:</p> <p>Something I considered that I hadn't before....</p> <p>Something I strongly agreed with...</p> <p>Something I strongly disagreed with...</p> <p>I changed my mind about... OR I now more firmly believe...</p>	
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SUB-QUESTION: What is sentience and is it the basis for giving other animals moral consideration?	
<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p> <p>What is sentience? What is sentience? Introduce or recap the term ‘sentience’ (put simply, having the capacity for feeling, e.g. to experience positive and negative feelings such as pleasure, joy, pain and distress). Ask students to think about where they have heard the word previously. In what context? Can they come up with a definition?</p> <p>Look at different definitions such as those from academic texts by copying and pasting this link into your browser: https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/sentience#:~:text=Sentience%20means%20having%20the%20capacity,wide%20Orange%20of%20nonhuman%20animals. You may want to select a few of these or allow students to explore them themselves.</p> <p>Historical and scientific lenses on animal sentience Give students time to read this article: Sentient Meaning & Definition: What Makes A Thing Sentient? (thehumaneleague.org). It explains sentience clearly and refers to historical views as well as recent scientific studies. It also deals with the scientific findings relating to different types of animals. From reading the article students should appreciate that our scientific understanding of the sentience of other animals is continually evolving. It may also be helpful for students to read and discuss the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness: https://fcmconference.org/img/CambridgeDeclarationOnConsciousness.pdf</p> <p>Ask students to make a concise page (or double page) of notes. This could be in mind map or some other visual format. What did they learn from the sources? What surprised them? What information challenged or supported their views? What would they like to investigate further?</p> <p>10 key thinkers Use Resource 4 in the Supplementary Resource for this unit – Timeline of 10 key thinkers who have influenced Western views on animals. Introduce the term ‘sentiocentric’ – this refers to worldviews which put sentience at the centre. Ask students to consider the summaries of each thinker’s view on animals on a spectrum of anthropocentric to sentiocentric. Exchange views as a class. Challenge students to write a statement of their own, setting out their own position on moral consideration for animals. Where would they place this on the same spectrum? This reflective activity required students to consider to what extent sentience is a ground for moral consideration of non-human animals.</p> <p>Anima: What do religious and spiritual traditions have to say on animals and sentience? As a class, watch the short film, Anima: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCDhPRPQMuo In this film, students will see people of different religions and spiritual traditions (some not standard stock for RE lessons) talking about how animals are seen in their religion or spiritual tradition. Make clear that the film was made by the Guibord Center, an educational interfaith organisation based in the USA in partnership with Animal Defenders International. Ask students to think carefully as they watch. After watching, ask students to make notes and discuss the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does anima mean? • Draw attention etymological connection to the English word ‘animal’ – can we argue that, linguistically, we have always acknowledged animals’ sentience? 	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p> <p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what is meant by sentience and explain a variety of positions and views on the issue of sentience • Explain scientific and historical views relating to sentience <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how historical and scientific attitudes on the issue of sentience have shape views and actions in relation to human treatment of animals • Explain how our evolving understanding of sentience in non-human animals is influencing contemporary attitudes <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how religious and non-religious worldviews have shaped attitudes towards animal sentience • Evaluate how far it is the case that sentience should be a central factor in determining how humans relate to other animals

- What common values do the worldviews discussed share in relation to animals?
- What differences do you see in the perspectives expressed?
- The film specifically chooses commentators that advocate for religious and spiritual traditions to grant moral consideration to non-human animals. How might some of these perspectives be challenged – choose one or two religious/spiritual perspectives and write a paragraph on how the views expressed in the film might be challenged by members of the same group. Use reason, evidence and refer to sources of wisdom. What conclusions can you draw from this?

Ask pupils to write a short review of the film – no more than 100 words, articulating their own views on the film.

Further video commentaries articulating religious and spiritual ideas about animals can be found here: <https://theguibordcenter.org/initiatives/animals-and-creation/faiths-animals-relationship/>

You may wish to ask students to engage with more in-depth research on views of animals around one or more of these religious/spiritual traditions. You could present their findings as a reflective blogpost or present them to the class.

Review: Circles of moral consideration

Use the pictures taken of the earlier card-sort activities. To what extent did students consider sentience in their choices? Would they approach the activities differently, with more knowledge and understanding of sentience?

Class debate

“This house believes that sentience should be the deciding factor in how humans treat other animals.”

Set up a class debate, making sure that you give students time, either at home or in class to prepare, after assigning affirmative and negative roles to students. Conduct the debate formally, making sure that students discuss and agree to rules and parameters. Here are some good pointers for conducting a class debate: <https://busyteacher.org/7245-conducting-class-debate-essential-tips.html>

Write it up! Challenge students to write a single-page commentary of the debate or sum it up in a 3-minute vlog. Ask them to reflect on the main points, saying what most challenged and what most supported their own stance on issues. Which side, in their own view, put forward the best quality, most robust arguments? Why?

SUB QUESTION: What is Sentientism?	
<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p> <p>What is Sentientism? Having discussed and debated sentience in relation to how far it should be a factor in moral consideration for animals, introduce students to Sentientism as a worldview. Explain that, like Humanism, Sentientism is based on scientific thought, a commitment to evidence and reason and rejection of the supernatural. It differs from Humanism, as Sentientism seeks to explicitly include in its circle of moral consideration, all sentient beings (sentients). Refer to the Glossary definition in the Teachers’ Guide for a more detailed definition.</p> <p>Give students time to explore https://sentientism.info/ . Jamie Woodhouse, who began the Sentientist project, also hosts the ‘Sentientism’ podcast. Ask them to be creative and design a ‘Wanted!’ poster for a Sentientist. On their poster, include things that set Sentientists apart from other worldviews such as Humanism, or Ethical Veganism – of course, many Ethical Vegans may well identify with Sentientism, and many Sentientists will be ethical vegans, but there are some differences, e.g. Sentientism implies concern for all sentient beings – in the future this may include AI or alien life – Ethical Vegans’ concerns are around animals.</p> <p>As a class, read the following article: https://sentientism.info/humanism-needs-an-upgrade-is-sentientism-the-philosophy-that-could-save-the-world . This is a detailed article about the beginning, development and current issues relating to Sentientism. It poses the question of whether Sentientism can be seen as an upgrade to Humanism as a non-religious worldview. Encourage careful reading and text marking. Ask students to note down similarities to other worldviews they have studied and points of departure and difference – what is new about Sentientism?</p> <p>Challenge students to write a one-paragraph response to the question: ‘Is Sentientism the Upgraded Humanism for the 21st century?’</p> <p>Summing up Sentientism Use Resource 5 in the Supplementary Resources for this unit as a framework for an essay or presentation to show what students know and understand about Sentience and Sentientism.</p> <p>Community of philosophical enquiry Invite students take part in a philosophical discussion, focusing on a question of their choosing. Ask students to suggest questions that relate to the themes and issues considered in this unit. Choose a question by voting as a class, making sure that it meets the following criteria. The question chosen should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious and important to our understanding of religions/worldviews/philosophical convictions • Contestable – people are likely to have different views to bring to the discussion • Conceptual – about ideas and beliefs, not just facts and figures that could be researched <p>Choose the question in advance of the discussion to give students time to prepare their thoughts and responses. Ensure that students know that the community of enquiry discussion is not a debate- no winners or losers, just talking with a common purpose to make progress in their understanding of the issues raised by the question they have chosen.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p> <p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what is meant by Sentientism • Explain factors that may lead a person to identify as a Sentientist <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the implications in relation to adopting a Sentientist worldview <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a coherent account of Sentientism, appreciating how it differs from other worldviews • Evaluate to what extent Sentientism can be considered a helpful worldview in the contemporary world

Stretch and challenge: Ideas for further exploration of the issues in this unit

Psychologist Dr Melanie Joy, argues from a vegan perspective, that ‘carnism’ is a worldview most people are unconsciously conditioned into. Carnism, Joy argues, means that people uncritically accept that eating other animals and products from them is normal, natural and necessary, but furthermore it leads people to make speciesist, arbitrary choices when it comes to food, e.g., most people will eat pigs or cows, but not cats or dogs in the UK. You may wish to show clip ‘The Secret Reason Why We Eat Meat’ to students, keeping in mind that it comes from a vegan worldview aimed at challenging accepted norms: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao2GL3NAWQU>

Ask students to reflect on the content of Joy’s talk in relation to their discussions around the moral status of animals.

The following ideas for further learning have been inspired by Jamie Woodhouse who runs the Sentient.info website (<https://sentientism.info/>) and who hosts the ‘Sentientism’ podcast and a related You Tube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@Sentientism>. We are grateful for Jamie’s input into this unit for RE, and hope students and teachers will enjoy the intellectually challenging ideas here.

Going Deeper with the Circles of Moral Consideration:

- Ask students if the very idea of these ‘circles’ might be a problem! Maybe they imply we, as humans, are at the centre. Is the activity, in itself, anthropocentric? And what does this imply? Perhaps anthropocentrism is in fact the most sensible way to view the world, or perhaps we need to work harder to see the world in other ways.
- Challenging the categories – people with sentiocentric worldviews (vegans, sentientists) would probably challenge the three categories of moral consideration in the activity. How might this be? Encourage students to think this through themselves and share ideas. Explain that the ‘medium and low categories’ would most likely be challenged by an ethical vegan or sentientist as some of the treatments mentioned under ‘Medium’ and ‘Low’ status definitions would imply, according to their worldview, ‘zero moral status’. Just as it would if these treatments were applied to humans. Vegans/Sentientists would argue that to cause harm/death to someone for trivial human ends, e.g., taste preferences in what they wear, eat, etc, compliance to prevailing social norms implies that there are practically no moral consideration for them at all. One way of extending and challenging thinking may be to include different ‘types’ of humans in the placing exercise: family, strangers, foreign citizens, babies, elderly people, etc. This can encourage thinking around treatment of people as well as other animals.

Philosophical discussions

Sentience – deep dive: Are there degrees of sentience? Is sentience the same for all sentient beings, or are some more sentient than others? How can we tell and if there is uncertainty, should we assume sentience, and treat the beings in question in ways we would if we knew they were sentient? This approach is the opposite to the way things work now, where sentience of other animals seemingly needs to be proven, rather than being assumed. An interesting thought experiment might be to think about how things would be if it operated the other way around. Should we change stance and assume beings are sentient, and treat them that way, if we are unsure?

Sentientism – a step too far or not going far enough? Anthropocentrism says Sentientism and sentiocentrism have gone too far – but biocentrism (giving moral consideration to all living things, regardless of sentience) and ecocentrism (giving moral consideration even non-living things, including ecosystems) say that sentiocentric worldviews and Sentientism don’t go far enough in expanding their circle of moral consideration! Is Sentientism itself actually a form of anthropocentrism in placing moral value on those whose experiences are analogous with ours? The information here will help to inform discussion of these issues: <https://sentientism.info/why-should-we-care-about-the-environment>
Animism and Paganism are spiritual worldviews that fit well with these discussion in the RE classroom. See RE Online for subject knowledge: <https://www.reonline.org.uk/knowledge/paganism/basic-beliefs/>

Sentientism and suffering not caused by humans

If Sentientism is based on concern for all sentient for all sentient beings, should this concern extend beyond the suffering that is by humans, e.g., the suffering of animals who are killed by other animals in the wild. One way of stimulating thinking around this issue is to watch a clip of a nature programme, where predators are hunting prey – or maybe even a clip of others watching such a clip (e.g., Gogglebox – there are plenty of examples, e.g., the famous BBC Planet Earth 2 Racer Snakes). What are the implications here?