

Ethical Veganism in RE Supplementary Resource

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

Resource 1 Poem

'Essence'

Bethan, Age 14

NATRE Spirited Poetry, 2019

I was born of nuclear fusion.	And the bonds holding it together
A compound of Hydrogen and Helium.	I am the cracks in a rock face
I was auroral and aglow,	The carpets of forgotten forests
An incandescence in the abyss, ablaze	The depths of dark trenches
Reduced to ashes and adrift	And the eminent sky
I floated through universes,	I am the laughter of newborns
Abandoning fragments of myself,	And the anguish of grief
On innumerable stars.	The cacophony of silence
Particles settled and became dust	And the betrayal of love
Collecting and forming planets	I am your bones and their strength
Creating and destroying	Your muscles and their power
In spiritual synchrony	Your brain and its logic
I became the earth and sky,	Your heart and its passion
Mountains, valleys and oceans.	I am you
I became the very molecules of life	

Resource 2

Moral consideration: 18 different animals



hamster



rat



bear



spider



dog



cow



pig



squirrel



octopus



chicken



cat



ape



lion



trout



snake



sparrow

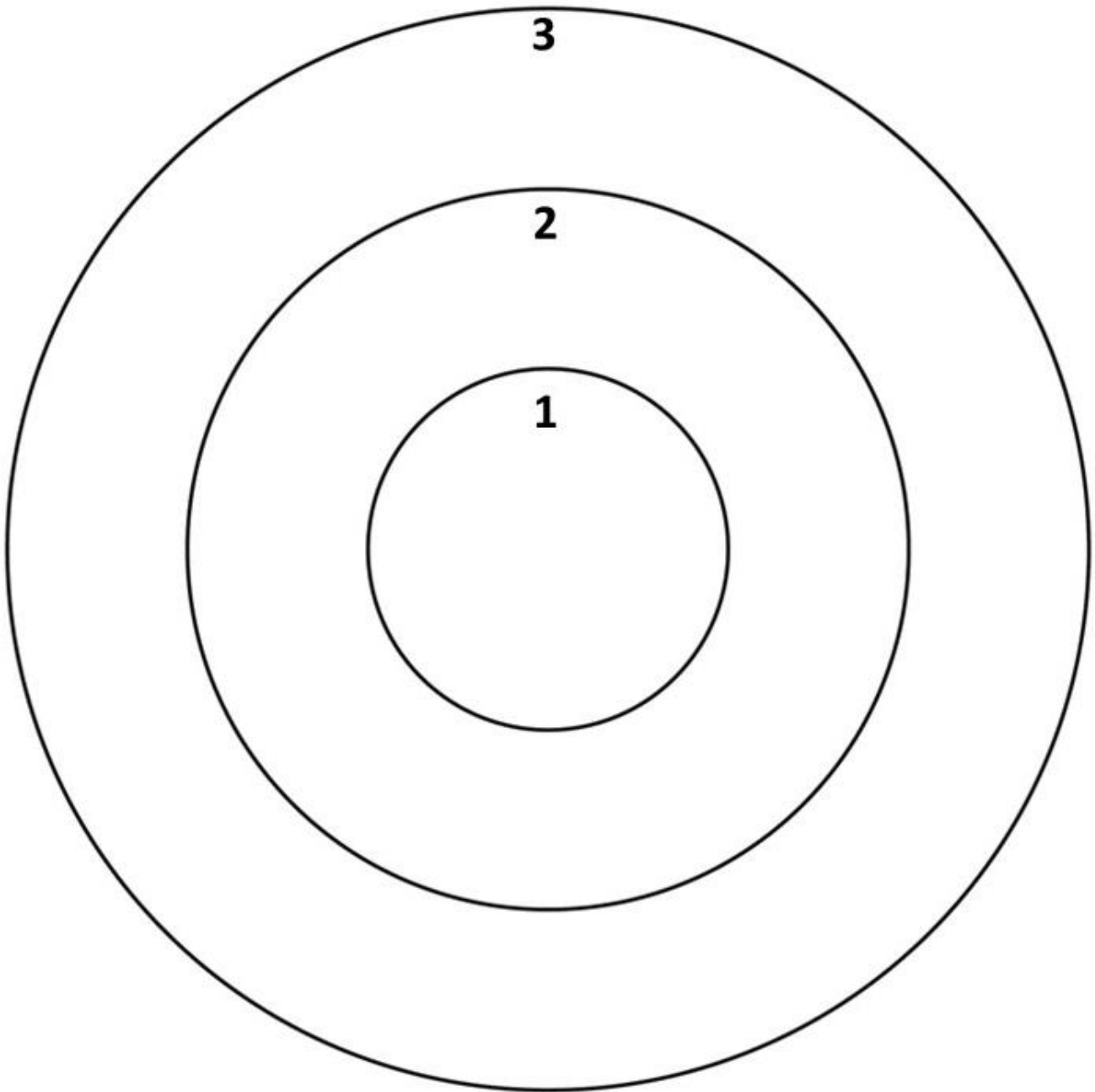


dolphin



ant

Which animals are most and least worthy of moral consideration?



1. High moral status

These animals are worthy of the highest moral consideration – they should be allowed to live out their lives in full, engage in the usual natural behaviours of their own species. Humans should do their best to ensure the needs of these animals are met, whilst taking care to avoid limiting their lives in any way possible.

2. Medium moral status

Humans should consider the needs and welfare of these animals; however, they may be used for the benefit of human beings. Humans can use these animals in ways that seriously limit their freedom, cause pain, e.g. they may be caged, have their young taken from them, etc. Humans may kill these animals, e.g. to provide food, clothing, medical advancements, but care must be taken not to cause unnecessary pain or distress to these animals.

3. Low or no moral status

These animals do not warrant a great deal of moral consideration, and perhaps none at all. Such animals may be killed, confined or used by humans as they please or as they need.

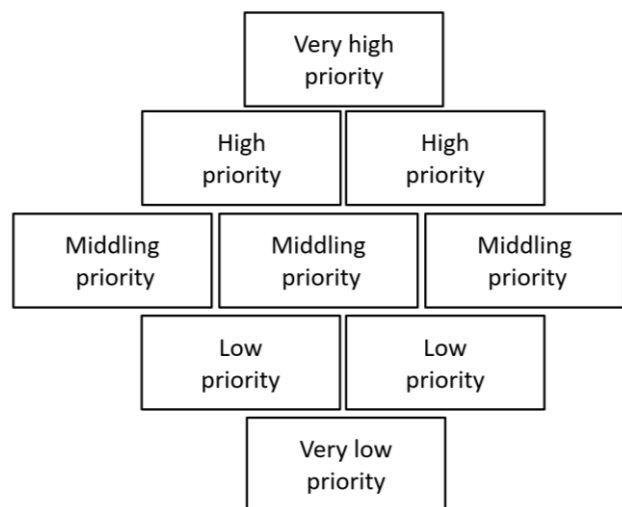
Resource 3

Diamond 9 Activity

What matters most in considering non-human animals?

Intelligence	Sensitivity to physical pain	Evidence that an animal can feel emotions, e.g. joy, contentment, fear
Evidence that an animal has an interest in its own future	Family and kinship ties/ability to form bonds with other animals and perhaps people, too	Does the animal live on land or is it an aquatic animal?
The animal makes a good pet	Biological similarity to humans	Is the animal rare, exotic, beautiful or endangered?

Rank the statements in order of priority, in a diamond shape, as shown here.



Is there a statement missing that you would like to include instead of any provided above?

Resource 4

Timeline:

10 key thinkers who have influenced Western attitudes towards animals

1. Pythagoras (c.570 BCE – c.490 BCE)

Non-human animals have souls as well as humans. Pythagoras was vegetarian, believing in the transmigration of souls between and across humans and animals. He rejected the idea that humans are separate from and superior to other animals. He expressed horror at the eating of meat, spoke of butchers being impervious to the cries of a lamb or a calf, which are so similar to the cries of human babies. He appealed to people to be compassionate and sympathetic towards other animals, particularly animals such as goats, oxen and sheep used for food and labour. Vegetarians were often referred to as Pythagoreans until modern times.

2. Aristotle (c.384 BCE – c.322 BCE)

Everything has an end purpose, which Aristotle calls 'telos'. Plants exist for the sake of animals. Animals, or 'brute beasts' as Aristotle calls them, exist for the sake of humans. Aristotle says that as nothing exists without telos, it is undeniably true that animals are to be used for human purposes, such as food and clothing. The telos of all of nature is the fulfilment of humankind.

3. St Augustine (354–430)

Humans are superior to animals because only they are created in the image of God, and this is seen in humans' capacity for reason and rational thought. Humans possess rational souls, setting them apart and making them superior to animals. Augustine saw refraining from killing animals or destroying plants as 'the height of superstition.'

4. St Francis of Assisi (c.1181–1226)

Known by many Christians as the patron saint of animals, St Francis of Assisi emphasised the importance of caring for all animals as gentle stewards of God's creation. He recognised that, like humans, animals feel pain and pleasure, and have emotional needs, too. He urged people not to exclude any of God's creatures from their compassion, arguing that those who do, risk becoming insensitive to their fellow humans as well. St Francis said that all animals have the same source as humans: God the Creator. He taught that, not only do humans have the duty to avoid harming animals, God also expects them to actively care for them when they need it, too.

5. St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Aquinas was strongly influenced by the pre-Christian philosopher, Aristotle, and the concept of 'telos' (see above). He argued that those who have claimed that it is sinful to kill 'dumb' animals are wrong because God intended them for human use. He claimed that is not possible to sin against non-human animals.

6. René Descartes (1596–1650)

Descartes believed that only humans possess a soul. Descartes thought that it is the soul that makes humans conscious beings, able to experience pleasure, pain and emotions. He saw non-human animals as complex natural machines, akin to man-made machines like clocks. Because Descartes argued that animals do not have souls, he held that they were unable to experience pain and, therefore, do not warrant moral consideration.

7. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)

Bentham is often thought of as the first Western philosopher to afford animals equal moral consideration based on non-religious, systematic moral theory, centred around sentience, and particularly an animal's capacity to suffer. He refuted long-established justifications for the lack of regard for the treatment of animals based on rationality and language. He asserted that when asking whether it is morally acceptable to inflict pain, 'the question is not, Can

they reason? Nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?’ He staunchly defended animal welfare laws. However, he did not disapprove of killing and using animals, as long as pointless cruelty could be avoided.

8. Charles Darwin (1809–1882)

Published in 1859, Darwin’s book, *On the Origin of Species*, put forward his Theory of Evolution, which challenged Christian belief in the account of Creation as told in the Book of Genesis, including the belief that humankind was uniquely created in God’s image. Darwin spoke of the arrogance of believing that humans are the pinnacle of God’s creation and God-like, and attested, instead, that humans are created from animals in the long process of evolution.

9. Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)

Schweitzer is considered a pioneer of animal rights. He argued that ethical systems should be based on the most basic principle of ‘reverence for life’. In Schweitzer’s view, all life – sentient, non-sentient, animal or plant – is sacred and should be treated with reverence. According to Schweitzer, a person can only be truly ethical if they avoid harming and actively seek to help all life. He is often referred to as a ‘Deep Ecologist’ based on his philosophy.

10. Peter Singer (born 1946)

Currently Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, Singer asserts that sentient beings – those with the ability to experience conscious pleasure and pain, who are self-aware and capable of perceiving themselves as individuals – should be regarded as ‘persons’. Personhood, for Singer, is not about being a member of the human species, but about to what extent a being is sentient. Singer popularised the term speciesism (coined by Richard Ryder), arguing that species membership alone should not determine the extent to which an animal is given moral consideration. He argues that sentient animals have interests of their own, and to view human interests as taking priority over these is speciesist. Singer does not argue that every animal should be regarded as equal in relation to humans or other animals, but, rather, he says that species alone should not be the deciding factor.

Resource 5

Sentientism Structured Essay/Presentation

Choose at least two sentence starters/prompts from each row (so at least two of the same colour) to construct an essay or a script for a presentation, to capture what you have learnt about Sentientism. You may adapt the starters/prompts if they don't fit exactly what you want to write – they are there to guide you and help you to focus.

I would define 'Sentientism' as...	It is important to consider Sentientism as a worldview because...	One of the main points to keep in mind when discussing Sentientism is...
Humanism can be considered like Sentientism because...	Sentientism differs from Humanism in that...	Humanism and Sentientism can both be understood as...
Sentientism is very similar to ethical veganism in that...	Sentientism differs from ethical veganism in that...	Sentientism and ethical veganism can both be understood as...
Sentientists reject... because...	Instead, Sentientists would argue...	Sentientists are committed to... so...
Sentientism shares..... with [ADD A RELIGION YOU KNOW ABOUT OR HAVE STUDIED HERE]	Sentientism challenges some religious beliefs, such as...	Sentientism and religion...
I agree with... because....	I disagree with... because...	If Sentientism were to become a worldview adopted by many people, then...
Finish your essay/presentation script with a conclusion, expressing your own points of view.		

Image Credits Resource 2, 18 Non-human animals

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Dolphin, Adam Berkecz
Grey Squirrel, Zuzanna J
Hamster, Melissa Keizer
Lion, Mika Brandt
Octopus, Serena Repice Lentini
Pig, Forest Simon
Rat, Brett Jordan
Snake, Alfonso Castro
Sparrow, Matthew Schwartz
Spider, Ed Van Duijn
Trout, Sara Kurfeß

**Some images have been cropped.*

Links to animal images

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