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Lesson Plan: Animal Rights

Goals:

- Students will scrutinize anthropocentrism and discuss the moral standing of animals relative to humans.

Plan:

- Do icebreaker activity.
- Define concepts:
 - Anthropocentrism - a human-centered philosophy which asserts that humans are the only, or primary, holders of moral standing (humans are the most important beings in the world).
 - Moral standing / worth - a particular way in which an action or agent is valuable.
- Ask discussion questions (see below).
- Conclude.

Icebreaker:

- Have students go around and say how animals have impacted their lives (deliberately vague; can range from “animals were tested on to make sure my makeup is safe for human use” to “I love my pet”).

Activity idea: What animal-adjacent foods are acceptable to eat? Palm oil? Honey? Dairy? Eggs? Chicken? Cow? Horse? Dog? Invite students to explore these limits. What is important about where they draw the line (what makes it acceptable to eat chicken but not dog?)?

Discussion questions:

- Do animals have moral worth that is independent of their utility to humans?
- Is assigning moral values on the basis of species membership alone (a.k.a. speciesism) wrong?
 - If not, what makes it distinct from other -isms we disagree with (racism, sexism, etc.)?
- Why does our society deem some entities as deserving of rights but not others? Should it be that way?
- Should we value all life equally? If not, which factors determine which lives ought to be weighed more (cognition, self-awareness, etc.)?
- Does eating meat “disqualify” one from being an animal rights activist? Conversely, does being a vegan make one a “better” animal rights activist?
 - Underlying question: what’s the balance between belief and action? Is it a contradiction to hold some beliefs (animals have rights) and perform some actions (eating animals), or is there a middle ground? Is there anything obligatory or

excusable about individual action as opposed to group action, political action, etc.?

- What about pets? Does owning a pet make you “less” of an animal rights activist? What *is* pet “ownership”/“companionship”? Is it like owning people? Is it like having a child/family member? How is it the same or different? How could we tell?
- Has society too far gone for these considerations? For instance, even when defending animals, some will say we must “extend personhood” to animals or give them “rights.” Would extending rights to animals ironically assert anthropocentrism?
- How ought we evaluate ecoterrorism (animal rights extremists using violence to destroy laboratories, farms, restaurants), especially if we consider animals to be equal to humans?
- How do we weigh the lives of human and non-human animals against one another in practice? E.g., animal testing may save human lives, eating meat or animal products may provide us with necessary nutrients? What are the alternatives? What is the cost of these alternatives? Should the cost matter? Should we talk in absolutes?