



Essays on  
Social Justice,  
Animals, Veganism,  
and Education

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# TEACHING LIBERATION



# DISMANTLING THE HUMAN/ANIMAL DIVIDE IN EDUCATION

THE CASE FOR CRITICAL HUMANE EDUCATION

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Western education systems are often based on neo-colonial, patriarchal, and humanist ideologies. In response to this, critical scholars and educators have developed innovative educational approaches that challenge Western education's problematic practices. The goal in doing so is to open schools to the possibilities of empowerment and social justice through education. Inspired by these efforts, I am proposing the adoption of a framework I call Critical Humane Education.<sup>1</sup>

Critical Humane Education (CHE) is a proposed educational praxis born from the merging of two important fields of schooling: Humane Education (HE) and Critical Pedagogy (CP). Humane Education encourages students to think critically about their relationships with animals, other people, and the environment, whereas Critical Pedagogy pushes students to note the political nature of education and to seek social justice through education. Thus, as a combination of these two, Critical Humane Education would, in practice, serve as a political means of confronting the patriarchal, colonial, anthropocentric systems currently informing formal education. It is time to move away from these systems that have dominated Westernized classrooms since the Enlightenment and which stand in the way of all students' success. When left undeterred, these patterns in education allow for racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression to work their way into classrooms.



Such barriers restrict students' academic success, their career opportunities, and their own ideas of self-worth and community. Critical Humane Education, I argue, would provide the tools needed to transform students into political actors able to dismantle the patriarchal-colonial human/animal divide upon which much of Western education is based. Disrupting this divide and Western conceptions of humanity would aid students in liberating themselves and their communities from the oppressive systems that keep them from fully thriving in the classroom and beyond.

The Critical Humane Education framework I propose places animal studies in conversation with other fields of critical scholarship and puts forth an educational praxis through which interspecies justice can be sought. Animal studies is strengthened and enriched when it engages with other disciplines, as proven by the widely popular merging of feminism and Critical Animal Studies in Carol J. Adams' work on the sexism connected to animal exploitation, and A. Breeze Harper's outstanding work on the racialization of food spaces. Critical Humane Education aims to bring these advances in animal studies into classrooms so that students become exposed to animal studies reaching its full potential through interdisciplinary exploration.

Critical Humane Education is intended to be multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary in practice. It not only aims to address the speciesist human/animal divide itself but also the specific struggles that stem from a society-wide adherence to this notion. CHE recognizes that although combating speciesism is a necessary *step* in seeking social justice, dismantling speciesism alone will not bring about liberation for all. Racism will not end with the dying of speciesism, and so combined with curricula working to erode speciesism must come curricula addressing the lived realities of racism and other oppressions.

Despite its roots in Humane Education, CHE would not place only the liberation of "the animal" at the forefront of its goals and lesson plans. Instead, it would allow students to come to know "the animal" in new ways that are oppositional to the very systems of power that hold hostage the progressive possibilities of educational systems, students, and animals alike. The notion of "the animal" exists outside a simple species definition, creating a *human* ideal. These ideals are governed by racism, sexism,



classism, speciesism, ableism, and queerphobia. Such power systems work to define who is humanized and who is animalized. Thus, whether overtly or covertly, Eurocentric society at large and the education that takes place within it works to dehumanize students of marginalized identities by pushing them towards the concept of “the animal.” In turn, animals are held firmly as an oppressed group: they represent the ultimate idea of “lesser than” allowing unchecked violence towards animals. In coming to know “the animal” as something other than a category of “lesser than,” students can begin to dismantle the process by which dehumanization and oppression across species lines is made possible.

### UNDERSTANDING PATRIARCHAL-COLONIAL BINARIES AND THOUGHT

To implement a resistance to oppressive structures into teaching practices, it must be understood how these systems emerge and how they sustain themselves. Re-conceptualizing both the animal and education means breaking away from the dualistic norms to which most Western formal education systems are currently bound. These dualisms—human/animal, man/woman, white/people of color (POC), civilization/nature—keep students from reaching their full potential when their education does not allow them to see the world and their place within it holistically, but rather as binary. Teachers and their curricula are often informed by these dualisms, causing the binaries to be reproduced and reinforced by formal education systems. In turn students, their parents, and the worlds we all navigate, are steeped in these dualisms as well. When these binaries become fixed within the minds of young students, they are taught which side of the binaries they fall on, and of equal importance, who falls on the *other* side and why. This is a dangerous process that neglects the complexities of identity as well as the relationships we create based on these identities.

Ecofeminist scholar Karen Warren attributes the process of othering to oppressive conceptual frameworks. “A conceptual framework,” explains Warren, “is a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions which shape how one views oneself and one’s world.” A conceptual framework is a “socially constructed lens through which we perceive



ourselves and others. It is affected by such factors as race, class, age, affectional orientation, nationality and religious background." A conceptual framework becomes oppressive when it "explains, justifies and maintains" unequal power structures.<sup>2</sup> Oppressive conceptual frameworks are not merely a set of *individual* beliefs, but are rather systematically constructed views through which we come to learn our world. Challenging an oppressive *conceptual* framework must mean challenging a *systemic* framework, not simply sets of beliefs and ideas as they trickle down to individuals.

Warren argues that oppressive conceptual frameworks are based on—among other elements—value dualisms: "disjunctive pairs seen as oppositional rather than complementary and exclusive rather than inclusive."<sup>3</sup> Greta Gaard expands upon Warren's work on value dualisms to illustrate how "the many systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing."<sup>4</sup> Here, Gaard stresses the similarities between interconnected forms of human oppression (racism, classism, sexism) and animal oppression (speciesism and naturism). Gaard notes that just as Western culture devalues certain genders, races, classes, and other identities, it too devalues nature and animals. Furthermore, Gaard argues that these devaluations mutually reinforce one another.<sup>5</sup> Gaard draws upon the work of Val Plumwood to further illustrate the value dualisms that constitute much of Western patriarchal-colonial thought. Introducing Plumwood's "master model," Gaard defines the latter as "the identity that is at the core of Western culture and that has initiated, perpetuated, and benefited from Western culture's alienation from and domination of nature."<sup>6</sup> According to Plumwood the master model continuously reproduces "dualized structures of otherness and negation"<sup>7</sup> which consist of the following binaries:

culture/nature  
male/female  
master/slave  
rationality/animality (nature)  
universal/particular  
civilized/primitive (nature)  
public/private

reason/nature  
mind/body (nature)  
reason/matter (physicality)  
reason/emotion (nature)  
human/nature (nonhuman)  
production/reproduction (nature)  
subject/object  
self/other<sup>8</sup>



To this list Gaard adds white/nonwhite, financially empowered/impoverished and heterosexual/queer,<sup>9</sup> in order to further decolonize critical thought.

The dualisms serve two purposes, as Gaard explains. First, they create difference between both elements in a dualism so as to establish one's superiority over the other based on "the full humanity and reason that the self possesses but the *other* supposedly lacks."<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the superior category of each pair is linked to the superior category of every other pair. We see "associations between reason and heterosexuality, for example, or between reason and whiteness as defined in opposition to emotions and nonwhite persons; or associations between women, nonwhite persons, animals and the erotic."<sup>11</sup> The dualisms thus mutually reinforce power on one side, and devaluation and subjugation on the other.

Such an understanding of oppressive conceptual frameworks, with their reliance on binaries, is crucial in critiquing the formal Western education system. Whether intentionally or not, these structures work their way into curricula, ultimately molding students' minds to see the world through a binary lens. Such a lens inhibits students from critically thinking about processes of Othering that lead to many of the inequalities and injustices that occur both in the classroom and society at large. Of particular concern here is the fact that "each of these oppressed identity groups, each characteristic of the other, is seen as 'closer to nature' in the dualism and ideologies of Western culture."<sup>12</sup> This system represents a measure of humanity through which power and privilege is granted within Western society; therefore, educational systems must move away from oppressive definitions of humanity itself. Otherwise, certain actors, including students of marginalized identities, will inevitably continue to be left out of the equation.

## **EUROCENTRIC STANDARDS OF HUMANITY AND EDUCATION**

Critical animal studies scholar Maneesha Deckha argues: "One of the organizing narratives of Western thought and the institutions it has shaped is humanism and the idea that human beings are at the core of the social and cultural order."<sup>13</sup> Given the oppressive conceptual frameworks that Western thought and its related institutions exist within, one must be critical of how far the idea of the "human" extends. To whom



does Western thought grant humanity? As one learns to see the world through a lens of Western thought, one comes to learn who is allowed to exist as central to society and who is pushed to the margins.

“Although there have been countless ways of expressing human activity throughout history,” Aph and Syl Ko argue, “the *model* we take for humankind is that devised by colonial Western Europe.” This model of the human centers the Western, white male and his “ideal female counterpart: the white, Western female.”<sup>14</sup> Developed throughout the Enlightenment period, this Eurocentric notion of humanity laid the foundation upon which modern education and European identity have been built. As the Western white male centered himself as the marker of humanity, he, too, centered his way of knowing. “This particular ethno-cultural way of knowing the world was universalized as the only way of being,” argues Michael Baker. “Consequentially,” notes Baker, “knowledges and experiences of all those who are *not* White, heterosexual, European men were and are excluded, unless they are willing and able to acculturate.”<sup>15</sup> Baker argues that in centering his way of knowing, the Western white man justified marking all other ways of knowing as inferior.

Furthermore, “the ways in which the West has learned to understand itself are tied to systems of knowledge and disciplinary practices of which modern education [. . .] is a central institution.”<sup>16</sup> If students come to learn about themselves through modern education grounded in Western thought, how are they coming to view the world? Students learn to see the world through an oppressive binary lens, in which certain actors are granted humanity and central interest in society, while others are marginalized. The world becomes categorized by those who are deemed human and those deemed sub-human/nonhuman. Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that our concepts of “what counts as human” inform violent hierarchies, such as those of race.<sup>17</sup> It, therefore, becomes clear that these structural binaries have real implications for those individuals who find themselves on the dehumanized side of the binary.

In education then, these conceptualizations of who counts as “human” reproduce this oppressive binary model of humanity through Eurocentric curricula. Through such curricula, students are given little context as to the power structures and violent histories from which such



narratives about humanity emerge. Westernized concepts of what it means to be civilized and progressive are taken for granted, becoming an unchallenged norm when taught in the classroom, especially in a teacher-student constellation that grants the teacher an authority over their students when it comes to passing down knowledge. Little is done to critique the violent colonial history in which these notions lie, or who loses within these definitions of civilized humanity. Many students then lack the critical awareness necessary to challenge an education that inherently bolsters certain actors, while pushing others towards sub-human status.<sup>18</sup> This has a significant impact on their lives outside the classroom, in a world where it is important for students to be able to recognize and challenge unjust power dynamics sufficiently.

If we educate our students through a dualistic worldview that places the human on the high end of the spectrum and those less like “the human” on the other, then to whom do those “less human” individuals fall closer conceptually? The animal. It is this mutually reinforcing oppressive system, with speciesist assumptions at its roots, that always allows us to come to learn that the Western white male is most human and subsequently most important. Thus, we are teaching the human/animal divide, which in turn further divides humans.

The human/animal divide does not merely act as a species divide, but as a sliding scale upon which all persons/beings are measured. “What separates ‘human Others’ from the Ideal Human and what distinguishes the human Others from each other is their ranking on the human-animal scale,” argue Aph and Syl Ko.<sup>19</sup> On this scale, what is human comes to be defined just as much by what it is—supposedly Western, white men—as it is by what it is not: the animal.<sup>20</sup> Thus, on the scale of humanity, opposite the human and opposite of whiteness sits “the (necessarily) nebulous notion of ‘the animal.’”<sup>21</sup> The power of this “<sup>vague</sup> nebulous” positioning of the animal lies in its ability to apply across species boundaries. It, therefore, serves as a violent label that Western thought can place upon anyone who the white male benefits from oppressing/conquering.

This label extends across all aspects of identity to create a “massive domain of subhumans.” Here, humanity isn’t simply measured by physically *having* white skin or *Homo sapiens* species status but *how* you are white



and *how* you are *Homo sapiens*.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, if you are unable to exist in a state of being in which whiteness is *simultaneously paired* with cisgender maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, “legal citizenship” status, Christianity, and high socio-economic status then you do not meet the qualifications of the ideally constructed form of humanity. This status pushes disabled, POC, queer, trans and/or non-binary, undocumented, non-Christian, and low-income individuals and communities further from humanity and closer to conceptual animality.<sup>23</sup>

This process of dehumanization perpetuates the deeply oppressive injustices that plague our classrooms and societies. Not directly tackling this divide allows all forms of marginalization and oppression to continue. Precisely because teachers are also part of the human–animal sliding scale, the knowledge that educators accumulate often reflects unjust power relations. In teaching, this translates into educators pushing certain ways of knowing aside in the classroom in favor of Eurocentric knowledge. This not only teaches students to come to know themselves and the world around them in a very narrow way, but also acts as a form of epistemological violence.<sup>24</sup>

Discrediting these other ways of knowing through Eurocentric standards of teaching also discredits marginalized students and their communities. That discrediting teaches white students that it is permissible to perpetuate the human/animal divide and that world history is centered upon them. This undoubtedly shapes the ways in which students come to know the world and how they treat others, with teachers acting not only as bystanders but as active participants in this process. Thus, it is an educator’s responsibility to undo human-centered learning facilitation by conveying knowledges produced by those who are animalized. Let us now explore to what extent principles from Humane Education as well as Critical Pedagogy can help us do this.

## MERGING HUMANE EDUCATION AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: CRITICAL HUMANE EDUCATION

Drawing from the existing fields of Humane Education and Critical Pedagogy lets educators promote a teaching and learning practice through



which the patriarchal-colonial binaries plaguing formal education can be challenged. In order to understand the importance of merging these two fields, they must first be explored individually.

Humane Education serves to provide students with the tools needed to actively participate in society through a holistic, empathy-based education. The focus is on what the individual can do to better their community and relationships with people, animals, and the environment. The Institute for Humane Education (IHE) views Humane Education as encompassing four main elements:

- (1) Providing accurate information about the issues of our time so that people have the information they need to understand the consequences of their decisions as citizens;
- (2) fostering curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking so that people can evaluate information and solve problems;
- (3) instilling reverence, respect, and responsibility so that people have the motivation to face challenges and act with integrity;
- (4) offering positive choices that benefit oneself, other people, the animals, and the earth so that people are empowered to create a more humane world.<sup>25</sup>

The Institute hopes to inspire young people to recognize their power as informed global citizens and to equip students with the knowledge necessary to become critical problem solvers. Helena Pedersen describes Humane Education's goals in similar terms to those of IHE: as an "innovative teaching and learning process that supports students in their development of empathy, responsibility, critical thinking and active citizenship." Pedersen stresses the role that education plays in fostering respect for "the other" in order to challenge violence and oppression among all beings.<sup>26</sup> Humane Education allows students to draw connections between all kinds of social justice movements in such a way that inspires "creative solutions" and "individual action, so that their life choices can improve the world."<sup>27</sup>



Critical Pedagogy emerged with a similarly socially conscious goal: to address the political nature of education. CP makes explicit that “education is not a natural, ahistorical phenomenon but that it should be understood in its sociohistorical and political context.” The goal of CP is to influence society in “the interest of justice, equality, democracy and human freedom.”<sup>28</sup> Critical Pedagogy equips students with politically relevant knowledge that allows them to become responsible citizens and activists.<sup>29</sup> According to Gert Biesta, “Critical pedagogy starts from a dissatisfaction with ‘what is’ and wants to bring education into action against injustice.”<sup>30</sup> Critical Pedagogy, therefore, is an educational practice meant to produce social change. It inspires critical reflexivity, a means through which students can begin to understand their own situations and the larger systems of injustice that shape their lives. Critical Pedagogy is also critical of the role that education itself plays in (re)producing oppressive and marginalizing social structures.<sup>31</sup> It is critical of classroom narratives that uphold systems of oppression. It operates as a means of exposure; an educational praxis through which students can begin to uncover the social fabrics by which they are held.

Both Humane Education and Critical Pedagogy aim to create active citizenship and combat violence, though how they do so differs: Humane Education is more focused on *individualistic* attempts to foster sustainable, equitable, and compassionate relationships. In contrast, Critical Pedagogy has a more *systematic* outlook through which students are encouraged to challenge oppressive systems of power.

In order to truly critique and begin to dismantle the human/animal divide through education, students must be educated through a holistic, political, non-anthropocentric schooling that is critical of not only violent relationships but also the oppressive systems that enable them. Here, Humane Education offers a comprehensive worldview in which all actors are considered and compassionate living is encouraged. Critical Pedagogy offers an education that dismantles structural violence and is dedicated to social justice and liberation. Both support active citizenship, which is imperative to challenging patriarchal-colonial binaries outside of the classroom as well as in it.

Humane Education is committed to “independent research and investigation, so that students may determine for themselves what is or



is not humane, rather than accepting at face value the information that is given to them.”<sup>32</sup> Critical Pedagogy insists that education should be understood within its socio-historical and political context. Combined, the two produce an education in which students are given the tools to look at the historical context from which problematic notions of humanity arise. Where HE is too individualistic in scale to truly inspire students to opt for systemic change, CP makes up for this in its critiques of larger networks of injustice. Where CP is too human-centric to promote a holistic ethic of interspecies justice, HE brings a more inclusive education to the table. Combined to create *critical humane education*, the two allow students to engage in compassionate, dignified relationships with “the other” while simultaneously stripping away the systems that enable othering in the first place.

Thus, the goal of Critical Humane Education is to ultimately combine the commitment to liberation from oppressive social structures that Critical Pedagogy promotes with the crucial understanding of the interconnectedness of all forms of life that is taught through Humane Education. Both focus heavily on the role that students play as informed citizens. Critical Humane Education would foster this focus in an attempt to encourage politically engaged scholarship and citizenship among its students and educators. A combination of both approaches would have to aim to move away from problematic methods of seeking social justice that rely on extending the reach of humanity in order to extend the reach of justice.

In other words, instead of moving those on the far end of the human-animal scale increasingly further to the left, thus granting them more “humanity,” Critical Humane Education should acknowledge and do away with this often-practiced attempt at fostering social justice. It is a proposed educational philosophy suited to do away with toxic notions of Eurocentric humanity altogether and to reimagine the human in such a way that is not separate from or opposite to the animal and thus less likely to (re)produce the category of “less-than,” while acknowledging and even promoting difference over assimilation.

Aph and Syl Ko provide important insight as to why social justice efforts centered on expanding the boundaries of humanity cannot



produce true liberation. They argue that when activists do so, they fail to recognize “that the basic building blocks they have used to structure their campaigns are actually products of the very same system they are trying to fight.” Ko and Ko claim that such activist frameworks inherit the “conceptual tools and activist theories from the Eurocentric system”<sup>33</sup> that they are attempting to dismantle. Furthermore, they argue that even attempts by social justice movements to “begin to disrupt the modern, imperialistic understanding of humanity” are bound to fail because they leave “the *foundation* untouched,” and thus “the dismantling can never be complete.” They continue by arguing that we must go beyond the racialized categorization of marginalized people and “subvert their anchor: the human/animal divide.”<sup>34</sup>

Inspired by, and convinced of the urgency of, these arguments, the Critical Humane Education framework does not accept the commonly held notion that granting the label of humanity to a greater set of humans will bring about more equitable treatment of all people. Instead, in practice, CHE would help students recognize that a social justice plan rooted in oppressive logic cannot produce a just outcome. CHE curricula would aid students in disrupting the human/animal divide. Any attempts by politically engaged citizens to do away with systemic injustices must be rooted in the dismantling of this divide. If the basis of the problem is left intact, then vulnerable groups will remain vulnerable, as those in power can go back to this foundation at their leisure as it best suits them.

Critical Humane Education curricula would enable students to recognize the human/animal divide as the epistemological foundation for all oppressions. An adaptation of the CHE framework within curricula design is necessary because neither HE nor CP alone is suited to tackle this speciesist divide. CP is still very much rooted in the idea that “the humanizing practice is a practice of liberation that puts persons in possession of their original freedom.”<sup>35</sup> Given its preoccupation with “the humanizing practice” of cultural assimilation and striving for equality rather than difference and emancipation, CP alone is not prepared to move away from humanist anti-violence discourses. However, paired with HE’s anti-violence discourses that center a reconceptualization of



the animal and an interconnectedness of life, CP is able to erode the Eurocentric standards of humanity it engages with.

A combination of both approaches can draw on HE's task of coming to (re)learn about animals and the environment in ways that exist outside the monolithic, theoretical category of "the animal." A Critical Humane Education curriculum would stress both the individual agency and interconnected dynamics of all animals. Through CHE practices, students would come to learn about animals not as a broad category of otherness, but as actors and communities with their own needs, preferences, and lived realities. Coming to learn about animals in this way works to re-conceptualize the notion of "animality" in a positive light that is not seen as being in opposition to humanity, but rather its own diverse phenomenon. CHE teaches students that (re)learning animality and moving away from reliance on problematic humanist discourses must extend beyond individual action. Students are taught to look at not only how current conceptions of humanity/animality play out in systemic power structures, but also how re-conceptions of these notions could play out (positively) on a larger structural level.

Deckha cautions us that a move away from humanist anti-violence discourses may cause discomfort, especially among marginalized groups and individuals. "Obviously, it can be very unsettling for vulnerable human groups to destabilize the boundary and the corollary belief in human specialness that is said to be at the root of Western knowledge systems," Deckha explains. "[T]his is especially so for human groups whose humanity has been historically denied."<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that Deckha argues that "this might be precisely what is required (if insufficient) to alter the dynamics of violence that amplify vulnerabilities," educators engaging with CHE, especially those on the "ideally human" end of the human-animal scale, must be respectful and cognizant of the given discomfort. Although a move away from humanist social justice discourse is absolutely necessary, educators engaging with CHE must be aware of their own positionality and how this may affect the way students of both similar and different identities receive such information.

For instance, it is the duty of white educators to actively attempt to dismantle the human/animal divide within their classrooms, as they



have a duty as citizens of privilege to disrupt the systems that afford them disproportionate power. This means being aware of the fact that it may be easier/less painful to immediately re-conceptualize animality and humanity from the position of whiteness given that animality has never been used to disempower white people on a basis of race alone. There are ways in which educators of all backgrounds can and should engage with the project of disrupting the human/animal divide within their classrooms, but this should be done differently, depending on the composition of the classroom and the educator's background. This is the type of contextual approach to education that Critical Humane Education aims to promote.

Ultimately, this approach not only liberates us as teachers and our individual students but more so impacts our complete social networks with a variety of other humans and animals navigating them. As Deckha argues, this must be done in order to put an end to Eurocentric logics of domination and the process of subhumanization and related violences. Doing so in a compassionate, contextual, critical, and self-reflective way will be the challenge for educators engaging with CHE. Nonetheless, I believe this process of beginning to dismantle the human/animal divide in the classroom can and must be encouraged.

### AVOIDING HARMFUL COMPARISONS

Among the most harmful practices that privileged vegan educators are guilty of is that of insensitive comparisons between human and animal suffering. Many vegan campaigns, classroom curricula, and conference talks include a comparison between situations of human and animal suffering. The most widespread examples of problematic comparisons include mentions of sexual violence, the holocaust, and chattel slavery as tools to explain animal cruelty. These comparisons become problematic when they are used insensitively and perhaps even casually, often purely utilizing human suffering to evoke a shock response (often through spectacle and controversy) with a pretense of inspiring empathy for the animal. Approaching comparisons in such a way often results in



(re)traumatizing the audience and possibly counteracts the actual goal of including animals in an anti-speciesist ethics.

A commitment to destabilizing the framework upon which oppression is based does not entitle educators—or anyone else—to make inappropriate and triggering comparisons between different forms of oppression. Whereas we can agree that oppression stems from the Eurocentric conceptualization of the human/animal divide, this in no way gives us license to make comparisons between the *experiences* of human and animal oppression. What must be made clear is that CHE is proposed as a means of tackling the *logic of domination* that upholds the human/animal divide—a logic that is rooted in virulent notions of humanity in which the Western white man and his counterparts will always win.

We regularly see such disrespectful comparisons arise among the predominantly white mainstream animal rights community. Activists openly compare animal agriculture and abuse to human rights atrocities. *Appropriating violent histories* is not only problematic because it re-traumatizes affected individuals when mentioning them, but also because in drawing such comparisons we further use the human victims of these crimes as props to bolster an animal rights agenda.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, when white vegan educators make comparisons between the way we use animals and chattel slavery when speaking to a black audience, it is, argues Christopher Sebastian McJetters, “nothing short of emotional blackmail. And emotional blackmail is one of ‘the master’s tools’, as Audre Lorde is famously quoted as saying.” McJetters further argues that this becomes “a pattern whereby blackness is used and commodified at different times and by different groups to further an agenda without offering any type of real solidarity on black issues.”<sup>38</sup>

Aph and Syl Ko argue that “not only are these types of comparisons or connections absurd—even worse, these simplistic characterizations miss the ways in which these struggles and these wounded subjectivities relate to one another.” Ko and Ko argue that when making connections between human and animal oppressions we should move away from comparisons that center “the *literal, physical* bodies of the oppressed” and instead tackle “the *root of these oppressions conceptually*.” Instead of making comparisons, Ko and Ko say, they encourage us to note the



common source that holds oppressions intact. They argue that when we do the opposite we miss the point, that "what makes the physical violation of these bodies possible is their citizenship of the space of the other or the 'sub-human.'"<sup>39</sup> Ko and Ko claim that if we rely on physical comparisons rather than getting to the conceptual base of oppressive behavior "we risk reproducing the oppressive framework in our own liberation movements."<sup>40</sup>

In dismantling the oppressive conceptual linkages between Western notions of animality and various forms of oppression, Critical Humane Education should act as a tool through which students can begin to understand the different aspects of their identities. Although CHE should not make disingenuous comparisons between experiences of oppression, the rejection of Eurocentric binary logic can act as a tool for students struggling to make sense of their oppressed identities. At the same time, CHE should encourage students to reflect upon their own identity aspects that make them powerful in certain situations. Thus, CHE fosters confidence, courage, and solidarity that not only includes the liberation of oppressed humans but also that of animals and the environment.

### REAL LIFE APPLICATIONS FOR CRITICAL HUMANE EDUCATION

Critical Humane Education should then actively work to reimagine how animals are portrayed in the classroom in ways that are beneficial to disrupting the human/animal divide. It should ensure that the way animals are represented in the classroom does not allow them to become reproduced as a category of justified violence and subordination outside the classroom. This means rejecting practices of dissection, resource management, and anthropocentric narratives of animals that rely on animals being positioned as resources, as disposable, and as background to human life.

Concretely, this includes that schools reject the use of animals (dead or alive) or their body parts for educational purposes in science classes. This also includes a rejection of "class pets" trapped in cages at the mercy of children who are supposedly learning a lesson in responsibility,



care, and empathy. Rejecting the idea of animals as resources then also includes a vegan cafeteria, and class trips that refrain from visiting places that imprison animals, such as circuses, aquaria and zoos. Learning materials should also not promote the exploitation of animals, especially in children's education, where many stories and fairy tales, other media and even toys include speciesist themes, when critical engagement with these might not always be possible.

Further, animals should be taught as having their own individual agencies, collective power, and importance rather than as a monolithic category. By re-conceptualizing animals in schools, students learn to see them as important actors in their own right, and move away from viewing "the animal" as a category of insult, degradation, and subjugation that human individuals and communities can be pushed into.

Discussions of animality and human-based oppressions can easily fall into the same oppressive logic that CHE stands in opposition to. Educators must be thoughtful and deliberate in the ways in which they address these topics. Being open to critique and feedback from students is immensely important. Educators should always learn and grow alongside their students. Dismantling the human/animal divide means dismantling hierarchies of knowledge; all knowledge brought to the table, whether student or teacher based, should be considered and taken seriously in the classroom.

I believe that a Critical Humane Education will look different in different educational institutions. The CHE framework is deeply committed to ecofeminist tenets of contextuality, positionality, and subjective knowledge. Depending on the composure of the classroom space and the positionality of the educator, CHE practices would likely manifest themselves in different ways. And this is encouraged. Lesson plans inspired by CHE that have both global but also specifically local applications are bound to be most productive to the goal of inspiring politically engaged students. A Critical Humane Education should be taught in such a way that students see themselves represented in the curricula and can relate to the subject matter on a personal level. There can be no one specific curriculum or lesson plan implemented across school districts. At the educators' discretion, CHE should be molded to represent the specific



classroom setting in which it is being taught, making it applicable across disciplines and age groups.

I do not expect Critical Humane Education to act as a solution to the human/animal divide or the political issues that stem from it. Rather, education should be used to address the ideologies in which our society is rooted and it should address these ideologies as they pertain to education. My hope is that, through CHE, education will continue to evoke new ideologies, hopefully those that are more fair and just on the broadest possible scale.

I do expect Critical Humane Education to act as a tool for liberation in the hands of students as they go about their inherently political lives. Given that education is inherently political, we need to equip students with an education committed to the politics of liberation, re-conceptualization, holistic worldviews, and representation of the intrinsic agency of all beings. With such an education in hand, students can begin to see the world outside the narrow and oppressive Eurocentric lens through which it is too often sculpted, and begin to recognize and critically address oppressive Western binaries and logic as they appear in their everyday lives.

Although there is no strict curriculum for Critical Humane Education, lesson plans should be structured around the following goals of an education: 1) that looks at the world systematically; 2) is able to identify and be critical of oppressive pedagogy; 3) that promotes a holistic worldview in which the individual and collective agency of all species is recognized; 4) that encourages politically engaged citizenship; 5) that represents all students and their communities; 6) that is rooted in post-colonial and queer feminist theory and practice; and 7) is always open to reassessment, critique, and self-reflection. In abiding by these guidelines, I believe Critical Humane Education has the power to liberate students in and out of the classroom, and promote a world in which interspecies justice might be possible.