Introduction to Animal Rights
(Instructions)

Table of Contents
I. Introduction [4 paragraphs] [10 mins]
II. Animal Suffering [YouTube Video] [60 mins]
III. Discussion [discussion] [20 mins]
IV. Action Points

Total time = 90 minutes

Prerequisites:
Bring the following to the meetup:

- One copy of “Introduction to Animal Rights”
- One laptop/projector/screen and internet to watch the YouTube video

I. Introduction [10 mins]

Read the following paragraphs out loud:
Many people in the effective altruism movement care about a variety of causes. One of the largest and possibly most important causes is animal rights. Animal rights is the belief that animals have value, and are worthy of moral consideration. They have a right to be free of oppression, confinement, use and abuse by humans.

The idea of animal rights may seem foreign to many people because throughout the world, animals are often abused and killed for a wide variety of socially acceptable reasons. What is acceptable varies from one culture to the next. While eating dogs is morally offensive to some, there are those who would object to the practice of eating cows. The fact that these socially acceptable purposes vary from one culture to the next is an sign that the reasoning for current animal uses and killings is ingrained culturally, and is not based on a consistent moral position.
At the heart of the animal rights movement are two basic principles: the rejection of speciesism, and the knowledge that animals are sentient beings.

1) **Speciesism** is the difference in treatment of individual beings, based solely on their species. It is frequently compared to racism or sexism. (An example of this would be the conditions that factory farmed animals are often in. These conditions would not be acceptable for us to do to other humans but are accepted practices towards animals.)

2) **Sentience** entails the ability to suffer. As philosopher Jeremy Bentham wrote, “The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But, can they suffer?” Because a dog is capable of suffering, a dog is worthy of our moral consideration. A table, on the other hand, is incapable of suffering, and is therefore not worthy of our consideration.

Pretty much everybody cares about animal rights in regards to our pets or animals that seem close to humans. The next step that a lot of people take in regards to animal rights is to reduce their support for the use of animals in their food. Vegetarianism (not eating animals) and veganism (not eat any animal products) are growing trends both in the effective altruism movement and the world. This lecture is an introduction to vegetarianism/veganism and displays some of the reasons why people are changing.

II. Animal Suffering

Watch this video on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TlHcEcUWUE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TlHcEcUWUE)

III. Discussion

Now that the lecture is done

**Discuss the following questions.**

- Do you think animals can suffer? If so, should their suffering be taken into account, morally?
- Brainstorm ways to reduce animal suffering (can use the examples below if needed)
  - Don’t wear fur or leather
  - Don’t go hunting nor support hunting
  - Become vegetarian or vegan
  - Donate to a cause that supports animal rights
- How important is this cause relative to other causes, e.g. global poverty or the environment?
What would be the best way of talking to other people about animal rights?

IV. Action Points

Learn more:
- Effective Animal Activism
  - http://www.effectiveanimalactivism.org/
- Brian Tomasik’s papers
  - http://www.utilitarian-essays.com/
- Peter Singer’s “Animal Liberation”

Do more / path to impact:
- Look at ways in your own life to change and help reduce animal suffering.