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Considerations on the integration of animal welfare issues into the subject of social studies at Waldorf schools (high school)

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ABSTRACT[1]. The interdisciplinary teaching of social studies, which include cultural, political and economic subjects, culminates in conjunction with the self acquired knowledge and individual ethical attitudes toward environment, culture, politics, society, and economics, that arise out of phenomenological instruction. Thus, within the collective group of social studies are represented the three core components of Waldorf education. This grouping of social studies, offers the opportunity to introduce students to topics on a meta-level and to practice and deepen the forms of developmentally appropriate judgment formation, in a manner consistent with other subjects, thus fostering engagement in discourse, toleration of alternative positions, and promotion of self-efficacy and agency.

This article focuses on the increasingly socially discussed relationship between animals, humans, and their habitats, as envisioned through human designed animal studies, their cultural, political, and economic dimensions, and the existential impact on the lives of animals, in a world dominated by humans. Animal welfare issues affect our everyday lives, from our clothing, food, and consumption habits, to our coexistence with pets, the environment and climate. All can be brought to light through the subjects comprising social studies, by exploring the interdependencies between cultural, political and economic topics. The goal of this article is to justify the curricular implementation of animal welfare and animal ethics studies within Waldorf education, in relation to culture, policy and ecological issues; a topic that is also underrepresented outside of Waldorf education.

1 Notes on Education, Ethics, and the Treatment of Animals in Education

1.1 Note on the anthropological basic assumption of experience, knowledge, ethics, and individuation in Waldorf education

Ethics emerge out of Waldorf education based on the assumption that, within the framework of the phenomenological method in the subjects, ethical attitudes can arise through (ideally) unbiased encounters, experiences, observations, and characterizations. This becomes possible when, after and during the dialogical exploration of the nature of the object, the relationship between the two leads to an appropriation. Thus, as implemented in Waldorf education, a transformation of one's own system of experience, meaning, and values (Schmelzer 1994) is given opportunity to develop, which can be understood as education in the sense of what Herder referred to as the so-called "second birth" of the individual (Schröder 2020, p. 61). The sum of these (ideally successful) encounters between students and the world in the broadest sense, then leads to

1. NOTE TO READER
Throughout this paper the word ‚social' is used specifically to define the grouping of the interdependent autonomous relationships that exist between cultural life, political life and economic life, that in totality constitute human social life.

what Steiner referred to as "ethical individualism" in the Philosophy of Freedom (Steiner 2018, p. 160). Thus, Waldorf education claims that ethics and value formation in the above sense, arise from the linkage of experience-judgment formation-concept formation-appropriation-education in the sense of enculturative individuation. Curricula and "education" in this sense do not represent educational maxims to be learned or internalized through a hidden curriculum (Steinwachs 2024), which, according to Oliver Geister, is part of a "negative order" in educational principles (Geister 2006, pp. 146 f.). However, this is not only based on an ethically conceived curriculum but on the fact that the Waldorf educational curriculum is anthropologically grounded and oriented towards the development of young people. Thus, Waldorf education establishes an anthropologically, culturally, and socially grounded curriculum, giving it a certain unique feature (Steinwachs 2019, pp. 170 ff.). This cannot be further elaborated here due to space constraints, hence the reference to relevant literature may be sufficient (Götte, Loebell & Maurer 2009; Schmelzer 2016; Zech 2016; Richter 2025). Against this background, a meta-subject like social studies (which also includes the interconnected areas of culture, politics and economics, subsumed under the term 'Social Studies' here), can be an opportunity, as it allows almost all subjects to culminate developmentally and additionally on the meta-level. It reflects what is referred to as "synergies" in the 7th edition of the so-called Richter curriculum (2025) (Richter 2025, pp. 163-222). In Social Studies, the threads from other subjects can be brought together, reorganized, and reflected upon. This subject not only provides political foundational knowledge about "forms of governance, society, culture, and economy" (for categorization see Meyer 2010), but also discusses discourses and ethical positions, which can then be individually discussed and negotiated on the basis of the respective contents. Especially in the upper grades, the so-called "latent questions" of the students simmer (Steinwachs 2020, 2022, and 2025). These represent a form of longing for understanding the world and self-positioning in it, aiding in the context of adolescent autonomy and early adolescence to grasp the tension between 'internal' and 'external', to experiment and position oneself (Ungefug 2019, p. 169). Thus, a related gradual awakening, experiencing, learning, negotiating, and experimenting with values emerges concerning the subject or the respective contents, which developmentally takes on a completely different shading in the 9th grade than in the 12th/13th grade. The political, cultural, and social facets of the subjects, to which usually little space is given or can be given, become a momentum that, through education, becomes part of preparing young people for self-efficacious action. The subject can accompany the process of the aforementioned 'ethical individualism' through its themes and methods and ideally enhance the potentials of the respective subjects through the meta-level. Although this unique approach in Waldorf education can only be hinted at due to space constraints, it may illustrate to what extent the relationship between young people and the world, growing in the classroom, can be expanded and deepened through the subject of Social Studies. Or, as expressed by high school students from Hannover:

> "We cannot consider politics as a small area of our society that, although also justified, is not the essence of life. Politics determines our lives, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. Whether it's about the education system and central exams, agricultural policy and allowing genetically modified seeds, or simply social policy and Hartz IV, politics always directly impacts our lives and freedoms." (Students Bothfeld 2010, p. 22

The need for understanding a complex interconnected world and a discipline that has the task of accompanying and promoting this is evident here. One part of these complex interconnections is the relationship between humans and animals, as it extends beyond the usual discourses on veganism, vegetarianism, organic farming, nature and climate protection, industrial animal husbandry, and animal welfare that are common in many classrooms. The destruction of habitats requires an expanded cultural ecological awareness of the interrelations between humans, animals, and the world (Zapf, Millesi & Coy 2023, p. 14). This has become a consensus as a paradigm for the critical perspective in (human) animal studies (Hayer & Schröder, pp. 9-15). Even the current curriculum explicitly addresses this for Waldorf schools (Richter 2025, pp. 169-176), making it even more relevant in the curricular implementation of the subject of social studies.

1.2 Animal - Human - Ethics in Social Studies Education

Animals have a strong emotional impact on children and adolescents, but various studies in recent years have shown how far removed is the actual world of concrete sensory nature experiences (Hartkemayer,

Guttenhöfer & Schulze, 2014, p.111), which also indicates a worrying distance between humans and nature in the adult world. Many children and adolescents today are not familiar with the actual living conditions and lifestyles of animals that have specifically been classified by humans according to economic and cultural interests as "wild," "domestic," and "livestock" (in everyday language). As a result, they lose important external knowledge about their environment and thus innerly their eating or consumption habits, leading to an even more distant and unrealistic image of animals and their species-specific needs (Erbstösser, 2000, pp. 69-81). An extreme example, but normal in conventional agriculture, is the dehorning of cattle. Alienation becomes visible when children ask why cows that are not dehorned (often kept in organic farming) have horns. Other examples include children's breakfast sausage in teddy bear shapes (Hartkemayer et al. 2014, p. 111) or smiling pigs in comic form on animal transporters. These examples are numerous, especially when it concerns the relativized or hidden consequences of individual images of prosperity and familiar lifestyles. This alienation must be understood as a prerequisite for current consumption habits and their potential proliferation. The obvious in the field of animal ethics is not questioned; industrial, increasingly vertical animal husbandry, intensive agriculture, unsustainable extraction methods, and the destruction of natural habitats by agriculture, forestry, overfishing, and ocean pollution. Conversely, this phenomenon of invisibility, in which living beings are 'produced' at a ruthless, industrial scale that contributes to the destruction of habitats does not stop on its own. Therefore, this alienation between humans and nature is inevitably necessary and desired by the actors in these industries and their lobbyists .

In becoming aware of these phenomena, the question arises, how can ethical awareness and corresponding principles of action be brought to life and promoted in schools. This cannot be learned through ethics courses, especially if sustainable education is pursued. Rather, it is–at least for Waldorf education–advisable to follow the educational approach outlined above. However, such an approach, as in other topics, is often not sufficient on its own if idea and practice do not necessarily go hand in hand, as convincingly argued by Martyn Rawson and Albert Schmelzer in the example of "Racism and School" (2022). The topics in the field of social studies (not only, but primarily) also include a reference to other subjects such as biology, geography, etc., at the meta-level in high school. This allows for the discussion of topics that may have been lacking time or space in other subjects. Culturally necessary topics such as animal protection and its ethics are given explicit space. However, the field also includes topics such as attribution ('evil wolf,' 'cunning fox,' etc.) or the phobization of wildlife and geo-ecosystems or ecosystems, such as the moor as it is particularly referenced in romantic literature, which still has its effect today. Not only does this speak in favour of the integration of animal protection issues in education; addressing these topics also promotes empathy, social competence, and assumption of responsibility in line with Dewey's experiential pedagogy (Wirth 2019, pp. 413 ff.; Binngießer & Randler 2011, pp. 24 f.; Teutsch, 1976, p. 78). In addition, studies have shown that the topic of animal protection has a positive impact on violence prevention, fosters a sense of justice, and can promote critical thinking, as Charlotte Probst (2006) pointed out. Through the early and developmentally appropriate sensitization of students to the needs of animals and ecological systems, as well as the impact of industrial animal husbandry and all associated infringements on the physical integrity of animals (housing-related damage, operations to ensure health in industrial animal husbandry due to housing conditions or breed consequences), it becomes clear that the potential for education, specifically in social studies, in the field of animal protection is significantly higher than what is actually implemented in practice. This is also demonstrated by empirical studies that are paraphrased below.

Note on research situation and teaching materials

The existing research cannot be extensively developed due to space constraints, especially since the topic has garnered great interest in recent years, particularly outside of biology, due to the increasing establishment of (human-) animal studies (e.g. in literary didactics: Grimm & Wanning 2019). On one hand, (human-) animal studies highlight the often deadly human speciesism towards animals (Giehl 2021), and increasingly point out the problematic and utilitarian relationship between humans, animals, and the environment. It is emphasized that the potential in education – across different subjects – is quite high (Horstmann 2021) and goes beyond biology to also touch upon literature, language (PETA 1), or art classes, among others. This is

convincingly elaborated on by didactic considerations and materials offered on PETA's website (J./PETA 2). However, it is significant that textbooks–the officially approved, official teaching materials–in the subject of biology are not suitable for animal protection issues, according to Binngießer (2013 and 2019).

With an awareness of the complex relationships in the human-animal-world connection, ethical attitudes are not only reflected upon and become part of education, but, as indicated, also offer a complex perspective on the corresponding connections of the world (Russell & Spannring, pp. 1137-1142). This promotes the increasingly important social tolerance or ambiguity tolerance (see Schnurr, Dengel, Hagenberg & Kelch 2021), which is still a desideratum from a didactic perspective. In recent years, there have been increasing teaching materials and concepts on animal protection/ethics in schools from external foundations and associations (e.g. Erna-Graff Foundation for Animal Protection, Animal Protection Association in Schools). There has been a significant rise in offerings, even with animal protection organizations providing materials and further education for so-called "animal protection teachers" (e.g. German Animal Protection Association, PETA).

However, it is not just the protection lobby that is active. Pet food companies also offer animal protection projects in schools, particularly in primary education, so a critical view is needed even with potentially useful materials (e.g. PURINA, Project Liebe für's Leben). The majority of animal protection organization offerings are aimed at primary schools. An empathetic education on the human-animal relationship, understanding the basic needs of pets, and the proper handling of pets are particularly emphasized (Achtung für Tiere e.V., Animal Protection in Education). There are increasingly, but still limited, teaching materials available for secondary level I and II (The German Animal Protection Association, ALICE; PETA).

The ALICE project, "Animals, Climate, and Civil Education" at the Institute for the Didactics of Democracy at Leibniz University Hanover, is a European collaboration of six institutes and organizations that have studied the human-animal relationship. The project ended in 2024, and the results in the form of analyses, teaching materials, podcasts, and method collections are freely accessible on the university's homepage with the goal of better anchoring animal ethics in educational contexts.

There are only two scientific, or empirical studies on animal protection in schools in Germany (Haimerl 2016; Binngießer 2013; 2019). Paula Michaela Haimerl's dissertation in 2016 at the Veterinary Faculty of LMU Munich examined the occurrence of animal protection topics in biology classes at high schools and the interest in them from teachers and students. The surveyed biology teachers expressed interest in animal protection and ethics but cited lack of time due to curriculum requirements (p. 4). Haimerl noted that animal protection topics are hardly represented in high school curricula and called for a nationwide adjustment in the biology curriculum (p. 117) and for the topic to be included in social studies as well (p. 125) to bring about lasting change.

Janine Binngießer (2013; 2019) studied factors influencing students' attitudes towards animals in her study on animal protection education in biology classes. A total of 543 students between 11 and 17 years old from two high schools in Leipzig were surveyed. Factors included specialized training of biology teachers, the incorporation of animal rights and ethics in biology classes, and the suitability of biology textbooks. The latter showed strong deficiencies in terms of animal welfare, as none of the ten textbooks examined could be recommended by Binngießer for animal welfare topics. This makes it clear that animal rights and animal welfare topics are increasingly receiving attention in the context of (human)-animal studies, but educational materials are primarily provided by civil society groups. University didactics have also discovered the topic for themselves, but so far have presented little in the form of substantive research or conceptual proposals. The Waldorf curriculum also does not include the topic in the 7th edition of the Richter curriculum, neither in the subject of biology nor in the subjects of social studies and ethics. However, the ethical dimension in the relationship between humans and nature is indirectly addressed across individual subjects, promoting ethics education in the sense of ethical individualism. Implementation includes excursions, farm days, animal-assisted education, or other forms of direct interaction between humans and animals (Hartkemyer/Guttenhöfer/Schulze 2014). In most cases of "animal-assisted" education, however, it is again an anthropocentric perspective and function. Animals are used to teach students responsibility, affection, and

sometimes healing, without necessarily considering the needs of the animals. This is evident, for example, in the individual keeping of herd animals in schools or in petting zoos consisting of prey animals. This topic is also only briefly addressed in the special issue "Education Art 06/2025 "School and Animal" (BdFWS 2025), with a focus on bees. The main emphasis is explicitly on the educational interest for the students. Although there is an (unofficial) claim to address animal ethics in Waldorf education, as can be found in the older publications of Karl König or Wolfgang Schad, the topics of animal rights and animal ethics are not explicitly formulated in the Waldorf pedagogical literature. This topic should therefore be understood as a desideratum in publications on Waldorf education.

A brief note on the current state of the subject „Social Studies" at Waldorf schools

In order to make it clear why this topic should not be solely located in the biology or geography curriculum, in addition to the introduction, a reference to the function and purpose of social studies education is needed. In the political lexicon by Schubert & Klein (2021) of the Federal Agency for Civic Education, it is stated that social studies is "a school subject where general political education is imparted and societal questions and issues in the areas of law and economics are addressed. The establishment of this subject was recommended by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) in 1950; the naming varies between different federal states (e.g., civics, civic education)." (Schubert & Klein 2020: social studies education)

For the subject of social studies, it is generally the case that there are different curricula and names for the subject in the German federal states, which, in the context of the curricular autonomy granted by the legislature, also applies to Waldorf schools. However, it is about more than just knowledge and politics, culture, or economics: the subject highlights humans as shaping communities, which means that the three areas must always be seen as human-made and changeable by humans. For this reason alone, it is a subject that must claim to discuss current issues and critically examine problems in micro- and macropolitical spaces, as well as to promote and accompany the political judgement formation of young people both in terms of content and on a meta-level (Juchler 2005, pp. 62-75). The contents, methods, and discourses set in social studies education are also to be understood as an offer to students to engage both globally with societal issues and personally with issues that concern them directly and the environment in which they live. Ideally, they come into contact with future-oriented solutions and alternatives or even develop them (Bauer 2017; Meyer, Hilpert & Lindmeier; 2020). These areas now also include cultural and socio-ecological education in the broader context of the tension between humans and the environment, rather than in the context of ideological or economic interests of particular interest groups (Slobodian 2023) (Richter, 2025, pp. 169 ff.; Steinwachs 2023a). A significant advantage of Waldorf education in the context of civic education, is that its school curricula provide more space for subject-oriented topics than the curricula prescribed by authorities, although this fact is unfortunately no longer discussed in political didactics.

Despite the advantages outlined for Waldorf education, the subject of social studies has a relatively poor standing at Waldorf schools. For example, it is only taught in a way that students can remember it, in about a third of German Waldorf schools. One third of the schools teach the subject only rudimentarily, and one third not at all, according to a survey by Till Ungefug (2017, pp. 52-54). The development of an "ethical individualism" (mentioned above) is certainly an ambitious but undisputed core concern of Waldorf education. Social studies is a relevant subject in this regard for guiding young people on their way to becoming capable, responsible individuals who are interested in the world (Dietz 2010; Schieren 2016). Social learning already takes place in kindergarten, and forms of participatory education have their institutional beginnings there, including at Waldorf kindergartens, when the topic is implemented pedagogically (Lisges 2021). The fact that the so-called Richter curriculum only introduces social studies as an explicit subject from the 5th grade onwards is extremely sensible from both anthropological and didactic perspectives. The subject builds on in grades 5 and throughout the lower secondary level in the focus area of general knowledge courses:

> "From the totality of the world experience, which is still little conscious in the child during the preschool time and also in the first two years of school, it should be led through the qualitative experience of the interaction

> of nature and humans to a more differentiated, more alert perception of the world. It is important that the connection the child has to nature, animals, and people does not break." (Richter-online 2025 1)

Thus, general knowledge offers possibilities of world experience in grades 1-4, which can now be brought to a more conscious level from grade 5 onwards and explicitly thought of in an interdisciplinary way. This also applies to other subjects such as history, animal studies, economics, mathematics, etc. (Richter-online 2025, 1). The upper secondary level is, in practice, the starting point for a densification of the social studies topics in most schools (as mentioned above), where the subject takes on the role of the mentioned synergy or meta-subject, which according to Richter encompasses three core aspects:

- Safety through orientation: Knowledge and reflection of basic principles of current orders in the political, legal, economic, and cultural environments enable a confident, critical, and effective interaction with them.
- Individualization of judgment: Reflecting on increasingly diverse and deeper interdependencies in human interactions allows for the maturation of judgment. Starting from a largely environment-determined upbringing in childhood, adolescents should acquire individual independence that considers as many factors as possible. The development of a differentiating self-judgment can be progressively supported.
- Responsible ability to act: A sustainable maturity and ability to act developing in the young individual as a member of society, builds on a maturing judgment and knowledge of their own rights and obligations within the community. In this sense, they can become global citizens of our time–and therefore also responsible citizens of the state–but also, by reflecting on their own background and cultural surroundings, become the architects of their own biography.
- The underlying goal of social studies can be summarized as follows:
- Sparking interest in a lifelong engagement with the constantly changing world of political and social connections
- Instilling motivation for societal engagement and active participation
- Imparting knowledge and skills that give young people confidence and foster their becoming capable of acting in the world they are growing into. (Richter-online 2025, 2)

In general, social studies at Waldorf schools is also aligned with the 17 goals of the BNE concept (Education for Sustainable Development) (Richter-Online 2025, 3), which Thorsten Meyer-Oldenburg is currently applying and developing in a research project specifically for Waldorf education (BNE-W) (Richter-online 2025; 4). Thus, social studies at Waldorf schools can be summarized as a space where experiencing and exploring the world in its broadest sense, as well as the (both cultural and destructive) transformation and shaping of it by humans, should be made possible. This ideally involves anthropological development and critical reflection, aiming for anthropologically grounded, evolving judgment formation in the upper grades (Zech 2018), as described by Florian Stille in 2011 as "Anthropology of the act of cognition" and of open, therefore evolving judgment (Stille 2011, p. 42 f.). In addition, social studies can unfold through its holistic approach and unique use of synergy effects, particularly in the field of cultural and socio-ecological topics. This also applies to postcolonial perspectives (Rawson & Steinwachs 2024; Boland, Hsueh, Rawson & Williams 2025), when they appear as an asymmetrical relationship between (white, "Western") humans and nature (especially in so-called developing and emerging countries) and are often referred to as "resources" in a colonial sense. In this context, social studies topics and thinking spaces provide a good opportunity to anchor animal welfare issues or the human-defined relationship between humans and nature to animals in the curriculum, and to address them as part of individually and collectively conceived political, societal, cultural, and economic world relationships.

Statements by Steiner on a subject of social science and the human-animal relationship

Steiner's statements on politics in schools are only indirect, and there are none on the subject of social science. However, considering the historical context in which the first Waldorf school was founded, one must notice the political motivation to have an impact on society (Steiner 2019, p. 18). At the end of World War I, just a few weeks before the founding of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart in 1919, Steiner went on an extensive lecture tour through southern and central Germany. He gave lectures in companies such as Bosch, Daimler, Delmonte, and the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory on the topics of social threefolding and workers' council movement, as well as lectures on the future of capital and human labor. In Stuttgart, he gave a series of lectures to members of the Anthroposophical Society titled "Spiritual-Scientific Treatment of Social and Educational Issues," in which he mentioned relevant aspects for Waldorf education and political education that can still be considered central to the curricular structure of the subject today (Ungefug 2017, p. 195).

In these lectures, as well as in the lecture he gave just before the opening of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Steiner's democratic principles become visible, as well as the importance he attributed to education:

> „Humanity will not be able to participate in decisions without organizing its social organism according to threefoldness: socialism [not used in the Marxist sense here, but in terms of sociality, note by the author] , politically democratic, and spiritually liberal. The big question for the future is: How should we behave towards children if we want to educate them so that they can grow into the fraternal, the democratic, and the liberal aspects in the broadest sense as adults? And one of the most important social questions for the future, even for the present, is the question of education." (Steiner 2019, p. 18)

In this quote, it is clear that Steiner believes that teachers must adopt fraternal, democratic, and liberal attitudes in order to address the "most important social questions of the future." He sets the goal of developing and negotiating such questions, and above all, finding ways to achieve this in the classroom. While he does not explicitly address the human-animal-environment relationship, he does touch on the issue of creating a sociality that is distinctly based on freedom yet cannot be thought of in isolation from the environment. This clearly reflects his position on the human-animal relationship, which, in our view, must be understood as a thematic complement to the stated educational goals of social studies. Steiner's statements on animals can be found in countless lectures, often focusing on the differences between humans and animals. He distinguishes humans by their specific physiognomy, dividing them into three aspects: upright posture, capacity for thought, and ego-ability. He sees humans as superior to animals in form, based on these traits (e.g. Steiner 2010a, p. 32, 47, 159). However, this superiority is morphological and consciousness-philosophical, not qualitative in nature. He believes that human beings are capable of acting conceptually, reflectively, and judiciously, in other words, freely, due to their capacity for thought and ego. The same cannot be said for animals: they are trapped in their organisms (Steiner 2010a, p. 56 f.). However, this does not imply a value judgment but rather a phenomenologically based distinction. In the lecture "Human Soul and Animal Soul," animals are highlighted in their uniqueness, with a consistently acknowledging attitude:

> „The question should not be whether animals are intelligent or not, but whether animals, in everything they achieve, unfold what humans can only achieve through their intelligence. Then one would answer that there is an internally creating and active intelligence in animals that works directly from their animal life. [...] Much has been said and is still said today about what instincts are in animals and what conscious activity is in humans. It would be better if we focused less on words in this regard and paid more attention to understanding the nature of instincts. Above all, the consideration we have just engaged in shows that instincts can be something that far surpasses human intelligence, and that we must not categorize the quality produced solely based on the word instinct. Humans are so quick to ask – one could almost say in their universal arrogance: What do I have over animals? Perhaps they could also ask, if they wanted, what am I lagging behind animals in?"(Steiner 1983, p. 76).

In this, as well as in the eight lectures on biodynamic agriculture, especially the seventh lecture, Steiner's holistic approach to the human-animal relationship becomes even clearer. He postulates: Not only are animals dependent on us, but we are also dependent on them, just as they are on each other. Consequently,

this must lead to a sustainable management or interaction with nature in the best sense (Steiner, 2010b, pp. 184-201). He describes the subtle interactions between minerals, plants, animals, and humans, and how not only courser material (e.g. manure and food), but also finer material (chemical-ethereal) interactions contribute to a healthy coexistence (Steiner 2010b, pp. 195-216). In agriculture, Steiner further explains, this means that the interaction between the plant world (meadows, orchards, shrub thickets, etc.) and the animal world leads to a healthy coexistence. So-called 'beneficial insects' and 'pests' (an already problematic everyday language assignment) can live in balance and support cultivation sustainably. This would prevent the poisoning of prey insects and animals (in the entire food chain) as well as the pollution of habitats and cultivation areas, and in extreme cases their possible death. This view is also in line with modern environmental and animal welfare perspectives.

Overall, he postulates that in the description of the human-animal relationship, it is not about whether humans are superior to animals, equal to them, or inferior to them. In a holistic view, all three of these relationship possibilities exist; not rigidly, but dynamically (Hurter 2020). From Steiner's perspective, the human-animal relationship in the areas he has addressed is not utilitarian-economic, based on exploitation, but rather a dialogical relationship that is naturally necessary. This is based on the assumption, according to Hurter, that coexistence in the world and in agriculture can only function in a mutually ethical manner, despite all hierarchies (Hurter 2020).

Suggestions for integrating animal welfare topics into the social studies curriculum and a brief preamble on dealing with anthropological assumptions

The proposed topics on animal welfare and animal ethics in the following are based on basic anthropological assumptions of Waldorf education, primarily derived from the Richter curriculum as an „orientation plan" and the „Waldorf Youth Education Study Book" by Steinwachs & Wiehl (2022). Both volumes contain a pedagogical-anthropological section on which the following paraphrased statements are based, the latter deliberately incorporating the non-Waldorf educational discourse of developmental psychology and reflecting it. For this reason, the anthropological assumptions of the following sections are only referenced in individual cases, while the discourse on the special anthropological interpretation of Waldorf education is not further considered due to space constraints. It has already been extensively addressed elsewhere, which should be sufficient at this point (Bauer & Schieren 2015; Schieren 2016). The anthropological paraphrase at the beginning of the following sections for the respective grade levels is justified, as explained at the beginning, with the causal relationship set in Waldorf education between anthropological development and curriculum setting (Steinwachs 2019, p. 170 ff.). The thematic suggestions that follow explicitly, relate to the subject of social studies and present opportunities to practically expand the current curriculum discourse (primarily Richter 2025; Ungefug 2017) in this regard. They also include the impulse to integrate the topics across different subjects, as referred to in the Richter curriculum as the „original impulse of Waldorf education" (Richter 2025, p. 209). The latter can also only be hinted at due to space constraints.

9th Grade: Ideals of Individuality and Justice

From the perspective of Waldorf education, the students in the 9th grade, around 15 years old, are at the beginning of high school and in the late peak of puberty. It is noticeable that the world is mostly perceived emotionally and encounters and experiences are increasingly related to the transforming self due to their growing developmental autonomy. This leads to a new relationship with the world. This can often be observed as enthusiasm during this tumultuous romantic and revolutionary period in their life, which can manifest as a search to reconcile a new developing personal experience of the world. As a core theme in the 9th grade, it is appropriate to address the topic of media, information, and (its) judgment formation within a multiperspective worldview. It is appropriate to offer topics that are idealistic and 'just'. This could lead, for example, to the question of what are human rights. Another, anthropologically grounded, legal aspect for this age group could be the issue of legal responsibility as a new relationship of adolescents

to the community. A new form of individual responsibility towards society and its administrative and legal order is growing. In accordance with the idealistic worldview of this age group, it is also relevant to address the biographies of idealistic personalities and global efforts towards a supranational legal order (UNO, International Court of Justice) (Ungefug 2017, p. 274-276). Questions about the implementation of politics by its protagonists and the associated handling of content, positions, and practicing political judgment formation provide meaningful opportunities for consolidation. The Richter curriculum lists areas such as parties, goals, personalities, clientele, propaganda, posters, and political slogans. In addition, central concepts for describing the spectrum of opinions lead to a synergy with the significance of information dissemination, filtering, as well as opinion and judgment formation described at the beginning (Richter-online 2025, 5). In these thematic contexts, it is also advisable to juxtapose the developed human rights with animal rights and present the biographies of individuals who can be regarded as pioneers of the animal rights movement since the 19th century (Roscher 2012). This could, for example, be achieved through the development of their own animal welfare laws, followed by a discussion and comparison with existing German animal welfare laws. Through the diverse perspectives of self drafted laws and the resulting judgments of the students, a democratic and complex discourse emerges, as positions focusing on cultural ecology, omnivorism, vegetarianism, veganism, etc. widely disseminate. Due to the strong identity-forming effect and social relevance, the topic offers not only substantial but also significant methodological potential. This is particularly evident in terms of communication, conversation management, judgment formation, and ultimately in the 'tolerating' of other contributions to the discourse. An expansion or effective connection with other subjects or extracurricular experiences and learning environments is provided by the agricultural internship (LWP). In advance, students are prepared thematically for farm work (including slaughter and consumption of animal products). In the follow-up, the immediate experiences with animal husbandry and cultivation methods are reflected upon. The thematically culminating possibility of the questions: 'What does the world have to do with me? What impacts do my actions have on our fellow creatures? Where do I locate myself ideologically?' connects students with ecological and agricultural reality, opens up spaces for thought and action, and places the individual in relation to the often controversial and ideological societal discourse. This immediately and without restrictions ties in with the anthropological assumptions and curricular considerations outlined at the beginning.

10th Grade: Basic structures of the political, legal and economic world of goods

In the 10th grade, according to the pedagogical-anthropological assumptions of Waldorf education (see above), the mood background changes. Strong emotions often feel trapped, which can manifest in a stronger withdrawal, but also in a massive collective eruption and a stance that continues to search for identities but increasingly questions or challenges them. In addition, there is a search for explanations, causalities, and tangible things. This can now expand the understanding and argumentative basis for the 'ideals' of the 9th grade and is associated with what is referred to in Waldorf education as 'latent questions' (Steinwachs 2020, 2022, and 2025; Fehn 2023). These questions, according to the assumption, represent an increasing, but often experienced as a diffuse longing for understanding of the world, which, due to its latent nature, often cannot be formulated as a concrete question. A successful lesson could convey to students against this background: 'I get answers to questions that I didn't know I had.' and 'The lesson is symbolic for me because the answers touch me and therefore I engage with them both intellectually and individually.' (see also Götte Loebell & Maurer 2009, p. 99). Now, dialectical thinking, the 'sober' and weighing judgment, logic, and rationality of conceptual thinking as tools for understanding the world come to the forefront. Objectivity and causality can create foundational experiences, cognitive support, and orientation which ideally build on the paths of (among other things, media-disseminated) information and related judgment formation reflected on in the 9th grade. The opportunity at this age to compare and test individual actions in the world against the concepts developed in the lessons can give the school a new and conscious relevance as a space for experiences, encounters, and learning for the individual and the world – if the lesson succeeds in this respect. Topics such as legal systems and separation of powers, central, regional and local government structures, and their combinational relationships with supranational structures including NGOs and not-

for-profits, expand the students horizon from local structures outward, bringing together a multitude of perspectives. In the 10th grade, most students are already 16 years old and, depending on the German federal state, are entitled to participate in either local elections or European elections. Therefore, topics on individual participation and the associated critical examination of parties and programs are important and are experienced with personal relevence and meaning. This also builds on the content of the 9th grade: The areas of political ideals, ideas, parties, as well as political opinion and judgment formation, can now be treated much less emotively-idealistically, but rather oriented toward knowledge. This includes economic themes such as the basic structures of working and economic life, production chains and mass production, as well as their outsourcing to so-called 'cheap labor countries' with predominantly precarious production conditions. However, alternative and ethically justified supply chains or forms of production also have their space to make it clear that there are alternatives to the (not only Western) growth paradigm. This means also addressing that 'The Economy' is not an 'entity' in which, according to Adam Smith, the "invisible hand" governs, making everything 'good' through the pursuit of subjective interests and their exchange (Smith 1974, p. 370) or setting rules and demanding something, but rather that the human being as an actor still stands at the forefront, shapes, and – albeit with many synergies – takes explicit responsibility for the consequences and must deal with them. Market mechanisms, price formation, working models and basic concepts of economics can be worked out, as well as reflecting on their ethical situation. Practical internships may also be used to further experience the lesson content, providing insight into the working world. After all, many of the students will be in company trainings within the following two years and thus begin to become a part of this system, while they continue to work on and discuss their experiences in the (protected) classroom. Topics of animal protection, including implicit considerations of living conditions or habitat protection, naturally blend into economic topics such as the production of meat or other animal products in agriculture and their connection to the market. With questions about purchase and sale prices, production conditions (also in agriculture outside Europe, for example in the field of meat production, animal products, cocoa or cotton), feed production, etc., topics such as state subsidies, markets, and supply and demand can be practically worked on and discussed in terms of their ethics as well as democratic practices (for example, the use of mostly higher-priced Fairtrade or organic products). The tracing of the commodity, from production through marketing to the consumer offers, in view of the recently significantly tightened supply chain laws, not only the social dimension but also the linking of ecology, animal protection, animal welfare/ethics with political life, as the decision-making authority for rules that result from a societal consensus, as a democratic ideal. Quality seals, labeling of food, social and greenwashing in animal husbandry, animal welfare debates in politics, central or decentralized production and marketing, and their specific economic and ecological consequences connect to the topics and methods proposed in the 10th grade curriculum. Excursions to businesses, visits to alternative production and marketing sites make the material worked on tangible, experiential, and (didactically thinking) increasingly criteria-based. Participation projects such as student companies or influencing the school kitchen or school kiosk etc. are (developmentally) meaningful in all grades, but starting from the 10th grade they offer new opportunities to practice independence, self-responsibility, and experience.

11th Grade: Questions of Humanity - Global Solidarity and Dignity

The empathy for the 'other' and an individual feeling of isolation can - in line with the question of redemption from Parzival "Uncle, what ails thee?" - be considered as guiding questions for the 11th grade. This motif, often used in anthropological literature on Waldorf education (Schirmer 1993; Boss 2018), refers not only to the empathetic side, but also to inner isolation and the developmental search for a self and a self in relation to others, as described by Martin Buber as a basic principle regardless of age (Buber 2018). The process of autonomy and individuation often takes on a new quality. The associated questions regarding a self that is discovering itself in new ways, as well as general world issues, are at the center, as well as a differentiation in socialization and acculturation. Therefore, the motiv for lesson planning could be: 'How can students be guided to encounter their latent questions through the material? How can they be enabled to work on the content (curriculum) and on themselves (individuation)?' (Götte, Loebell & Maurer 2009, p. 99). Building

on the dialectical-causal approach of the 10th grade, there is now a self-positioning in the world that can be best compared to the methodical logic of an essay. The topic becomes a factual and methodically justified engagement of a self with a subject, leading to an evaluation and positioning. Alongside essays, other recipient-oriented texts and written forms of dialogue, especially in small groups, are suitable for the mostly 17-year-olds who can be both withdrawing and opening, according to Till Ungefug (2017, p. 282). Through role plays, talk shows, or panel discussions, opportunities for adopting different perspectives and changes in perspective, as well as encounters between self and others, arise. On the other hand, through the 'protection' of the 'roles', difficult or touching questions can be communicated more freely and then reflected upon. In addition to the theme of the 'unknown' or 'strange' and its overcoming through empathy and approach, which is also recommended in conjunction with second and third languages, questions of human dignity are in the spotlight (Richter-online 2025, 6; Ungefug 2017, p. 282). Unlike the topic of human rights in the 9th grade, differentiations concerning human dignity are now being examined. This appears in the context of various societal issues such as abortion, assisted suicide, loss of self-control, as well as dependency, disability, childhood, old age, poverty, and the associated questions of human dignity and corresponding rights and duties, as well as the importance of civil society engagement. This also includes topics like cultural displacement, migration, root causes of displacement, or marginalized groups, who are given less and less space in an increasingly radicalizing (collective/identity-specific) "dominance culture" (Attia, Köbsell & Nivedita 2015). It is also important to provide basic knowledge on how conflicts arise or are fueled and how marginalized groups are instrumentalized for specific or partisan interests. Other focal points include global issues such as the tension and alienation in production, consumer responsibility in the global economic and consumption process, as well as wars and conflicts, where resources often take precedence or are obscured by ethnic conflicts. In this context, it is also appropriate to discuss the roles and workings of NGOs and aid organizations. Following the elaboration of the concept of human dignity, the concept of animal dignity can be introduced and discussed on a comparable methodological and content level. Philosophical and ethical reflections on the human-animal relationship can raise questions like: "What defines a human being?" "How or where does the human differ from animals?" "Is it permissible for humans to use or kill animals, and if so, which ones and why?" "Why do we differentiate between pets, working animals, and wild animals?" "Who decides what is a pet and what is a working animal, and how they should be treated?" "What is speciesism and why is it environmentally and ethically dangerous?" etc. Cultural differences and historical perspectives can deepen the question of how animals are treated in agriculture and nature, and their habitats. Dilemmas of the dairy industry, broiler chickens, and other economic and ethical issues related to industrial animal husbandry allow for questioning one's own actions based on expert knowledge and empathy, and provide discussion for potential solutions. This includes extensive or community supported agriculture and its separation from deterministic or unethical market structures, fair trade, and a re-evaluation of the price-performance ratio. These discussions can lead to biological, philosophical, and ethical questions: "What is life?", according to Ylva-Maria Zimmermann and Reinhard Wallmann (Zimmermann & Wallmann 2019). In addition to engaging with the content, the goal is to evoke a questioning attitude in the students and encourage them to reflect on their behavior: "How should I behave?", based on the knowledge gained in class. Critical reflections could include the importance of social pressure in consumption, the relevance of civil society engagement, or socially and/or ethically motivated purchasing decisions, among others. Social internships often undertaken in the 11th grade at traditional locations such as nursing homes, food banks, and other social or social-political institutions (such as the Omnibus for Direct Democracy) can also be expanded to include places like animal shelters, animal welfare organizations, marine mammal conservation programs, bird rehabilitation centers, seal rescue centers, and wildlife rehabilitation centers.

12th Grade: Globality and I-interdependencies of global developments in economy, politics, and culture

In the 12th grade, a significant step takes place for students in relation to the subject of social studies, alongside their internal and external development: reaching the age of majority. This not only signifies new rights but also entails responsibilities, such as full active and passive electoral rights (with the exception of passive

rights for the position of Federal President) as well as full legal capacity and, despite possible restrictions until the age of 21, full criminal responsibility. Thus, there is a particular focus on completing the school-supported education regarding content and competencies, and on the development of judgment, which is a prerequisite for the fully responsible step into the community of "adults." A few months after the beginning of the school year, the journey from school to the next stage of autonomy begins; students find themselves on the brink of social, legal, and somewhat personal maturity. Soon, they will reach the conclusion of their Waldorf school experience and at the end of the school year, they will either enter a professional training, learn a profession, continue their education at a higher level of schooling, or proceed to the 13th grade, which serves more as a preparatory training for academic studies, thus preparing them for the Abitur.

The instruction should be as diverse as possible and involve the students, who are in the process of becoming adults, in a participatory co-responsibility for shaping the lessons. Topics with real-world relevance, encompassing the countless interconnections of international politics, economics, and cultural issues, are suitable for raising awareness towards the world as a whole (and not only the regional or national contexts). This includes not only cognitive subjects but also artistic disciplines or projects: the class play, the 12th grade project or subject-related papers can provide thematic, artistic, or conceptual spaces for engagement that extend beyond cognitive methods or excursions.

Current issues in international politics and their backgrounds, crisis points and wars in connection with democracy and dictatorship, globalization, international economic agreements, the EU, WHO, WTO, development cooperation, and finally ecological or cultural-ecological areas are at the forefront. Inextricably linked to these are the internationally influential economic and financial systems, predominantly of a Western capitalist nature, and the issue of resource depletion (Ungefug 2017, p. 286; Keller 2015), which has already been reached before the end of the first half of the year. Here, questions arise regarding the relationship between political and social values and structures as well as the associated or resulting economic and consumer behavior. However, alternative concepts such as Gross National Happiness instead of Gross Domestic Product, common good economy, solidarity-based agriculture, etc., can also be discussed as alternative frameworks, as well as different perspectives (ideally in interdisciplinary contexts) on "NaturesCultures" (Gesing, Knecht, Flitner & Amelang 2019) and "Education as Knowledge of Humanity in the Anthropocene," which must also be understood culturally and ecologically as a supranational educational task, as postulated by Christoph Wulf (Wulf 2019).

These themes can also be applied to questions of animal and habitat protection, where the interconnection of politics, economy, and culture, along with social aspects, becomes relevant. For example, the issues surrounding overfishing off the coasts of Africa or in Asia and their impacts on marine ecology and the economic situation of local populations can be addressed. The underlying idea is to examine what consequences trade, for example in Germany, has on ecology, economy and society of other countries, other continents, or on inland and global seas. Critical inquiry could also focus on price trends for local animal products, the social consequences in agricultural production, and the changes or destruction of habitats due to open-pit mining (currently, e.g., rare earths for batteries, etc.), deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, the natural and primeval forests in Romania, or deforestation for palm oil (including chocolate) and the resultant destruction of habitats for orangutans, etc. Aspects of global nutrition and increasing meat consumption, alongside their exacerbating solutions (e.g., vertical factory farming), could offer insight into future problems. The interplay of internal wage policies in (not only) 'Western' countries also affects non-European extraction and production areas, as the higher costs of ethical or ecological products, for instance, may exceed the financial means of most families. Animal welfare issues are intricately intertwined in our world and build upon those from previous grade levels. The emphasis on "globalization" in 12th-grade social studies provides excellent opportunities for interconnections.

Final Remarks and Conclusion

As societies in emerging economies continue to develop, with rising living standards and increasing consumption, and as knowledge about these issues expands, the obligation to treat nature and animals as

co-creatures with respect and dignity–and consequently to protect them–grows ever greater. This behavior is far from self-evident in societies, communities, or family contexts, and for this reason, it must also be part of school education. The protection of flora and fauna, as well as animal welfare in agriculture and pet ownership, represents a special form of consciousness-raising education. The topics of ethics, animal protection, and sustainability are so broad and interconnected that they reflect a complex web of relations, which promote not only tolerance for ambiguity but also self-efficacy as an individual, together with social and political competence. This encompasses areas such as nutrition, health, agriculture, consumption, animal testing, culture, religion, philosophy, economics, politics, forms of governance, and education, as well as the arts, among others. Since 'Social Studies' as a meta-subject touches on nearly all subjects, it is natural to seek ways to address this complexity across disciplines and to generate topics through student participation, in which they are also involved in preparation and execution.

As outlined at the outset, the topic of animal protection in education fosters social competencies, enhances empathy and responsibility, and positively impacts the area of violence prevention. Through age-appropriate judgment development and a phenomenological approach to the content of instruction, a progressively objective engagement with these topics and questions emerges. In this context, knowledge is acquired, ethical stances and their reflection are practiced. This facilitates critical evaluation and articulation of individual behavior towards the environment in the broadest sense (Probst 2006), enabling students to act with judgment, ethically, and effectively. It is clear that this is a high expectation, but it is at least pursued through Waldorf education within the framework of what is possible in schools.

As a concluding thought, a quote from Hannah Arendt may serve as a guiding principle for the goals applicable in the field of Social Studies. This quote resonates with the demands expressed by the aforementioned student newspaper (p. 3), especially regarding each generation of adults involved in shaping education for young people:

"In education, it is decided whether we love the world enough to take responsibility for it and, at the same time, to save it from the ruin that would be unstoppable without renewal, without the arrival of the new and the young. And in education, it is also decided whether we love our children enough not to take away their chance to undertake something new and unexpected by us, but to prepare them for their task of renewing the world." (Arendt 1994, p. 267)

In doing so, Hannah Arendt highlights a significantly effective aspect in educational sciences as well as in Waldorf pedagogy: the professional pedagogical attitude (Solzbacher 2016), which in its formulation "whether we love our children enough" clearly indicates that education is not solely a matter of competencies but represents a self-reflective and responsive relationship. This aspect contributes to fostering an inquisitive stance and making education individually relevant and sustainable, especially concerning animal protection and animal ethics, in line with the social and cultural ecological responsibilities that education must assume at this point.

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