



# Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 675, Interview with Ryuji Chua

**Mariann Sullivan:** Welcome to Our Hen House, Ryuji.

**Ryuji Chia:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Mariann:** I am thrilled to have you because I saw your appearance on *The Daily Show* and I said, “What is going on here?” Because: Why were you on? How did you get so good at messaging? Why did they let you come on and talk about this stuff? It was amazing.

It was an amazing piece. I think when I posted it, I said, “This is a masterclass in vegan messaging.”

**Ryuji:** Thank you so much.

**Mariann:** I just want to start with, we have a lot to talk about and a lot to talk about with your videos and your goals in producing them, but let's start by talking about *The Daily Show*, because I was blown away by it.

What were your goals going in?

**Ryuji:** Yeah, so it was really interesting. So the reason that I was invited onto *The Daily Show* was to talk about an independent documentary that I made called *How Conscious Can A Fish Be?* It's not really that much of an independent documentary, I made it as a YouTube video and just put it up.

But then everyone started calling it a documentary and then Trevor invited me and was like, “Oh, we'd like to talk about your documentary.” So originally I thought it was going to be this conversation about the documentary, the documentary's about fish and fish consciousness and intelligence and their capacity to feel pain, and also what we do to them in the fishing industry.

And so I thought that's what we were going to primarily discuss. And then I got to the green room and the producer walked in and was like, "Oh, so Trevor's super excited to talk to you. He's really excited to talk to you about veganism and stuff." And so I didn't actually expect that the conversation was gonna be mostly about animal rights more broadly and veganism.

So originally my goal going in was to represent the documentary, say something that would be interesting and hopefully would make people think differently, a little bit, about fish in particular. But as soon as the conversation pivoted...you know, my goal when talking to people is always to represent the animals as best as I can.

And so my goal was just to try to get people to see animals a little bit more differently, not see them as a something, but as someone, and then try to make them think about how they might suffer a lot more than they might expect. That's kind of all that I was thinking.

**Mariann:** Yeah. Did this come at you out of the cold? Trevor Noah's people just called you and said, do you want to be on *The Daily Show* to talk about your YouTube? Or was there some particular reason you got chosen to do this? I mean, it's a great piece. The video is great, But you know, they don't usually want vegans on TV talking about this stuff.

**Ryuji:** Oh, no, for sure.

I thought that it was fake when I first got the email, but, yeah, they just reached out to me and I looked at all the previous guests that had been on before me and I saw that they're either actual celebrities or if they're...First of all, there were no documentary filmmakers, that I could find at least. So that was the first thing that I was like, "How can I be the first? That makes no sense."

And then it's either celebrities or people who, if they've done some work, it's been recognized. So usually the conversation goes, "Welcome to the Daily Show."

"Thank you so much for having me."

"Well, congratulations on your new Emmy nomination," you know? And here I am sitting with this YouTube video with 10,000 views. So I was like, "There's no way!" But, yeah, they just reached out to me and after talking to the producer a little bit, I was just invited because apparently Trevor somehow stumbled

upon my content and the video and thought it was really interesting, and thought I'd be a good guest and they just invited me.

**Mariann:** That is so cool, it's just so cool. It's just a crazy story. One of the things that I really liked about the way you did...he kept bringing it to, and we're UNfair. Vegans do sort of judge other people, not in the sense that we're better people than they are, but in this particular instance, we feel like what we're doing is better than participating in eating animals.

But you just didn't let it go there. Why do you think people always want to go there? Say, "Well, you're judging us, right?" And why do you think it's important to kind of get out of that?

**Ryuji:** That's a good question. I think that, in general, people like to make things about themselves. We usually think of our ourselves, in a conversation or just any situation.

And to me, the reason why I try to veer away from that, and the reason I don't think it's so important is because it kind of makes no difference for the animals, right? Like, I'm not interested in judging people because me judging people doesn't really help the animals in any way, shape or form. And so to me, I just don't like talking about that because, A- it doesn't help and also I think it's just irrelevant when it comes to the conversation of talking about what we do to animals and changing the way we treat them and stuff like that, right? Because then it becomes a conversation about what you think about me. And I'm like, let's just stop talking about you and me and let's just talk about the animals for a second.

And whether or not I think, or you think you are good or bad, doesn't change the fact that when we take certain actions, those actions hurt animals. So that's why I just don't talk about it. I think it just doesn't matter.

**Mariann:** It was so effective and I have to remember that. It's hard not to fall into that, and so many of the things you did on that, you always, always brought it back. Whatever that he said, you brought it back to the point of view of the animal who was being harmed, which was, I just thought, so powerful.

Were there any questions he asked you that you were surprised by? Well, it sounds like in a way you were surprised by the entire interview, but was there anything in particular that stands out for you as like, "Wow..."

**Ryuji:** Yeah, for sure. He asked me one question about animals' capacity to feel pain and whether or not I thought that we were humanizing them a little bit too much, is basically the question that he was asking.

And you can actually see in the interview, I'm pretty sure it's when he asked that...no, no, he said something else and I was a little bit taken aback...but no, that was one question that I was a little bit surprised by and that I didn't fully feel prepared to answer. Not because I didn't know the answer, but I just really did not expect that in that interview.

So I was kind of like, "oh my God, I'm not sure how to answer that." But yeah, I think I got through it anyway.

**Mariann:** Yeah, no, I thought you did a great job with it. He was compare... which I've heard people do, "maybe they can feel pain, but does that mean they can suffer?" It just seems like dancing on the head of a pin to me, \*laughs\* the way people theorize how to get out of having to feel bad about this.

But I thought you did it extremely effectively. So let's talk a little bit about this video since apparently the video got to Trevor Noah and really had a huge impact on him. So why fish? Well, of course you made videos about many things. Maybe we should start by saying that, and then this one was your video on fish, but it was one of your more elaborate ones, right?

**Ryuji:** Oh yeah, for sure. It's the biggest project I've worked on so far.

**Mariann:** And why did you decide to focus on fish?

**Ryuji:** So the reason why is just because I just thought it was a really important issue that I thought was underrepresented even by many animal rights activists, at least in my personal circle. And the thing with fish is that, at the same time, they're the animals that we kill in the largest numbers, by very far, for food. But they're also the ones that we protect the least from cruelty and suffering, both culturally and legally.

So there's a huge potential to make the world better for fish, far more than for other animals. I mean, we can improve pretty much infinitely for other animals as well. But for fish in particular, the issue is so bad and yet we care so little about it. I wanted to try to bridge that gap a little bit.

And I've found that in the animal rights community, we often say things like, which I've said too in conversation, we always say things like, "Well, studies show that fish feel pain and research shows that this and that..."

And I realized that, I'm pretty sure, 90% of us who say this have no idea what this research is. I mean, I had no idea what it was and so I just thought it was really important for me to try to understand the evidence that suggests that the claims I'm making are true. Because at the end of the day, that's what makes something true, is actually understanding the evidence.

And so I set out on this journey to try to understand the evidence. And as I was doing that, I thought to myself, "I should probably make this into a resource that people can consume," because at the time, my first jumping off point, let's say, was a book called *What A Fish Knows* by Jonathan Balcomb, which is an incredible book.

But the thing with books, in general, is that they're kind of hard to read and a lot of people don't like reading. And I encourage people to read, and I think it's incredible to read, but I knew that just having this information in a book wouldn't get it out to as many people as it could. Also I found that the way that the book was written, it was great, but it wasn't so engaging to me that I just could not put the book down.

Like I would get bored at certain points, not that the book is not great or anything, but for me personally, I was just reading it and I was like, "man..." Some things I would have to read two or three times in order to fully understand them. And so I just wanted to try to make this information more accessible.

And I'm not claiming that video reached more people than the book, I'm pretty sure that it didn't, but at least I wanted to try to make it in a format that people who might not want to read a book could still have access to the information and understand the evidence that suggests that fish feel, think and suffer.

And so that's why I decided to create this.

**Mariann:** Yeah, no, I totally hear you. I don't think Trevor Noah would've sat down and read the book and he happened to come across the video, so there you go. Point proven. \*both laugh\*

So let's talk a little bit about the content of the video because you really did do a good job of putting together some of the science. I mean, I'm sure there's a lot more science out there, but you kind of succinctly gave us some of the science

and it is very convincing. And we all say all the time, "Of course fish feel pain," but we don't know any of the science. But it's really not controversial among scientists. So you make that point over and over.

Why do you think that point has not made it into the mainstream? Trevor Noah, who's a pretty bright guy, seemed to think, at least in the beginning of your interview, seemed to think it was a *crazy* notion that fish feel pain. I think a lot of people feel that way. That information really has had a lot of trouble sinking into mainstream minds.

Do you think it's because they're fish?

**Ryuji:** That's a good question. First of all, I don't know if that's the position that Trevor himself was holding, because the way that he phrased the question was, he said, "You know, a lot of people would say this..." So I actually think he was pretty sympathetic towards the idea of fish feeling pain and stuff like that, especially.

**Mariann:** Ultimately, yeah. It started off like that and then...

**Ryuji:** And he invited me so I think he was very sympathetic, in fact.

But, for me personally, I think the reason that I, at least, did not care about fish for the majority of my life is just that, first of all, they're so different from us and I didn't spend a lot of time with them.

And if I did spend time with them, it would be in an aquarium and I would see them as these pretty shapes and colors to marvel at, kind of like the wax in a lava lamp. Or I would go fishing and I would see them as toys to play with. Or I'd go to the restaurants and just see this piece of what I perceived as food at the time.

And so because of that, we don't get to see fish as individuals. And even if we do spend time with them and observe them and try to look into their eyes and see a someone not a some thing, they're so different to us. The way that they move and express themselves. I mean, they live in water! It is so far from how we act that I think it's hard to relate to it.

It's just so easy to see them as a something. And I think it doesn't help that we exploit them so much in our society right now. And obviously when we do something harmful to a certain animal, it's hard to reconcile that with the idea that they think and feel and suffer just like dogs and cats. And so I think that it's

just easier to believe that none of that is true, and they're these primitive, stupid animals.

**Mariann:** Yeah. I really want to get into a little bit more about fish, but I think that the point you just brought up is such an interesting one. I always like to talk about what is it that keeps people from recognizing this nightmare that has been created in the world? You know, kind people, sympathetic people. Do you think one of the things is that it's so bad, it's gotten so big, we do so much harm, that people just...to acknowledge it is too painful?

**Ryuji:** It could be, but I think also most people have no idea how bad it actually is in the first place. So I really don't know. But I think it has a lot to do with how we spend very little time with them and how they're very different from us, more than anything. Because I don't think that people don't want to acknowledge how fish are sentient because of how bad it is, because I don't think people see it as very bad. Or in fact, from a welfare perspective, I don't even think most people think about it at all.

Maybe from an environmental perspective, people think, “oh, we're emptying the ocean.” But I don't think people are thinking, “oh, the fishing industry must be so painful for the fish who are being fished. I don't think that a lot of people are thinking that at all. So yeah, I'm not sure, but at the end of the day, I think that...and maybe the reason why I made the documentary is because I believe that one of the reasons, also, that people don't think that fish feel pain and stuff like that is because they're unfamiliar with the evidence. I mean, there's no one who has ever come to them and tried to challenge their perspective on who fish are. So that's also one of the reasons why I wanted to do that.

**Mariann:** No, I'm really glad you have. Though, to be fair to everybody in the movement too, people do try to get to people with this information. And you're trying really hard and sometimes it is a big job. So thank God for Trevor Noah.

One of the points you were making in the video, which I thought was so compelling, is that one of the reasons we don't see fish as intelligent, and we do see, say chimpanzees or other of our beloved...even though we are really horrible to them too...other of our beloved, close to us animals, is because our intelligence was designed to solve the same sorts of problems that chimpanzees have in the world. So we recognize their intelligence. And you point out that fish intelligence was designed to solve different problems. So, you know, being humans we're like, “Eh, that's no big deal!”



Is that right? And can you kind of give an example of those kinds of mistakes that we make about seeing fish and not being impressed.

**Ryuji:** Yeah, absolutely. So a simple definition of intelligence is the capacity to solve problems. And most often, we define it as not the capacity to solve problems in general, but the capacity to solve problems that are specifically important to humans. Given that definition of intelligence, no wonder other animals are not intelligent. Why would they be as good at solving problems that are important to us than us? They didn't evolve in the same environment. So for example, with fish, they evolved in the ocean, in a very different environment to us.

And so throughout their lives they have to solve very different types of problems to the ones that we have to solve. And so to them it might not be essential or important that they can solve quadratic equations or do long division or have the capacity to conceptualize and do these things. In fact, they've survived for hundreds of millions of years more than we have.

**Mariann:** I can't do quadratic equations either.

**Ryuji:** Oh, yeah. \*laughs\* I completely forgot. \*both laugh\*

But they have lived in the ocean for hundreds of millions of years before humans even existed without that ever having been a problem. But I think the issue comes when we take this definition of intelligence, then say that other animals are not as intelligent as us, and then use that as a reason to think that their lives are less valuable.

I think an example to kind of make this point a little clearer, would be to think about salmon. So salmon are the fish that I ate the most out of any fish. I really, really loved eating salmon. My mom's Japanese, it is huge in Japanese culture. Like I really, really loved it. But it turns out that they're really fascinating animals.

And we look at a the salmon, we're like, "they're stupid, right?" But in fact, they do quite a lot of things that are very, very impressive. So they're born in these freshwater streams, and as they grow older and they hit their version of puberty, let's say, they go downstream and they go towards the ocean. When they do this, their organs change to be able to live in saltwater, it's actually quite an impressive transformation.



Anyways, they get to the ocean and they spend two to seven years, in that range depending on what type of salmon they are, in the ocean. Just moving up the food chain, having a really tough life in general and just trying to survive.

And then one day it's time for them to reproduce. And when it's that time, they turnaround and they go all the way back and they show up sometimes in the literal stream that they were born in. They go home. And now this is absolutely incredible. It's the equivalent of...so I was born in a hospital outside of Paris, and imagine you dropped me in the middle of Poland and you asked me, "So now walk back. Not just back to Paris, the city where you're from, but to the doorstep of the hospital that you were born in."

And I have to do this without any street signs or even streets or Google maps or anything like that, it's just like wide open ocean. This is what salmon are doing, and the way that they do it is that they have these specialized cells in their bodies that can sense the Earth's magnetic field, and they use that to navigate back to the general vicinity of where they're from.

From there they pick up on the subtle chemical cues in the water, as they're swimming upstream in the river, to try and figure out where exactly they come from. So that's the equivalence of smelling, is basically how we would perceive it, right? So it's kind of as if, imagine I somehow get back from Poland to Paris and now I'm like, "Okay, let me smell the wind and figure out where the hospital is."

Like that's literally what they're doing. And while they're going upstream, back to the stream where they're from, they face all these obstacles like bears and waterfalls. And when they encounter these waterfalls, they will jump up these waterfalls, and the highest jumps of salmon rival the highest jumps of dolphins and kangaroos, and is way higher than the human high jump world record.

So that's a pretty impressive physical feat to throw on top of all of that. But in any case, a salmon can navigate better than I ever could. Like I can barely show up to the grocery store without using maps, in a city that I don't live in, you know? That being the case, we never look at that and say, "Well, salmon are so much more intelligent than us because they can navigate better than we ever could."

We say, "We are so much more intelligent than them because we can solve quadratic equations." And so that way of seeing intelligence, I think, really limits us from fully appreciating the cognitive abilities of different animals that

would be really fascinating, but that might also help us see them more as someone and, and not as something.

**Mariann:** Yeah, it's so true. And just as you were talking about it, I was thinking, when we talk about animal intelligence, and a lot has evolved in the past 50 years, but still...particularly when we're talking about animals like fish, who are very unfamiliar to us, all these things that they do that obviously require a lot of intelligence in this specific sphere of their behavior, we call it instinct. As if it's completely mindless, as if there's not this combination between their innate talent and a conscious negotiation of the world. I mean, each time they hit one of those waterfalls or see one of those bears or do something that, on the way, is an obstacle in their way, they have to negotiate that specific obstacle.

They can't possibly have a mind this pre-programmed to do that. It's the combination of a certain amount of pre-programming, which all creatures have to live in their environment, and consciousness, a conscious negotiation. And we leave that part out, don't we? When it comes to a lot of animals, especially fish.

**Ryuji:** Yeah. No, no, absolutely, I think so as well.

**Mariann:** You know, so much of the problem for vegan messaging is not conveying the intelligence, I think that's a hugely important piece of it, but then you also have to convey the horror of what it is happening to animals. And you have to do that in a way that avoids shutting people down and making them turn it off and go watch TV or something.

So how do you work at striking that balance?

**Ryuji:** So that's a really good question and it's something that I think about a lot and the reason I think about it is because I have shown slaughterhouse footage to more people than I can count. And a shocking number of those people look at the footage and kind of don't care that much.

And what they're looking at is videos of cows, pigs, and chickens receiving treatment that is so cruel. Like I don't even think we can understand what it's like to be in their position, and yet they're kind of like, "I don't really care." And the thought experiment that I would always do with myself is, I would think, "What if instead of cows, pigs, chickens, or fish, these animals were dogs or cats?"

People would be outraged. In fact, people would have to see much less to be completely outraged and not just say something like, “Oh, well we need to treat them better,” but, “This needs to stop yesterday.” And so I think one of the reasons why slaughterhouse footage does not get to people sometimes is because, to a large extent, we still see animals like cows, pigs, chickens, and fish not as a someone, but as a some thing.

And so that's why I think it's so important to challenge the stereotypes we have of those animals and try to communicate that alongside the horror. Like it's not just enough to show how bad these animals have it, in my opinion, but I think we also have to show that these animals are the same as dogs and cats in all the ways that matter.

And so that's why the entire structure of the documentary on fish is that I spend the first like two thirds of it trying to challenge our stereotypes of fish and then I talk about the horrible things that we do to them. Because why would you care about the horrible things that we do to an animal if you essentially see them like a vegetable?

It doesn't really make sense. So that's why I think it's extremely important. I think it's an underrated way to make people care about the things that we do to animals. I don't think we should take for granted that people already care about cows, pigs and chickens. I mean, some people do, but a lot of people don't.

And so I think that it's really important for us to start there. By challenging people, I mean, I sound like a broken record, but it is because I really believe in this and I've just been thinking about it so much. You know, to challenge the stereotypes we have of them and to try to make people not just see them like dogs and cats, but to make them feel about them like dogs and cats.

I think that if everyone felt the way that a lot of people feel about dogs and cats, but about fish and cows and chickens and turkeys and other farmed animals, then the world would be a lot better place. So that's why I communicate that in my advocacy.

**Mariann:** Yeah. So the goal in a particular video would be to set the whole question up as what are these animals like, and try to convey that.

And then, as you did in the fish documentary, at the end sort of reveal to people these terrible things that we're doing to them. But the setup is really who these animals are, and you managed to do it with fish. I mean, if you could do it with

fish, you could probably do it with almost anybody, because they are the hardest animals to communicate about.

But you really do. And a lot of it was with science, which is really exciting. So yeah, I think that makes sense because just showing them slaughterhouse footage, they shut down. If they're with you, maybe they still watch it and say, "I don't care," some of them. But you know, if they're home, they just turn it off. It's very easy for people to turn it all off.

All right. I also wanted talk about your TEDx talk. You recorded it a while ago, but my understanding is it just came online. It's so good.

**Ryuji:** Thank you so much.

**Mariann:** Is that true? That it was from a year or so ago and then it just got published.

**Ryuji:** Yeah, about 10 months ago. It was like last November. So by the time you are listening to this, it was over a year ago that I recorded that.

**Mariann:** So it's really blending, which is so hard to do, environmental messaging and animal rights messaging. I mean, if you agree with me that environmental, particularly focusing on climate...but you manage to take that very always abstract subject. The way environmentalists talk about the environment is as if it's out there somewhere and doesn't really have anybody living in it or anybody that you have a particular interest in. And you turn it, as all your messaging does, focusing on the individual. Was that your goal?

**Ryuji:** Yeah, that was my goal. I think that for me, when I first started learning about the climate crisis, I thought it was about trees and oceans and melting glaciers and greenhouse gas emissions. In other words, I thought it was about the planet. And that's often the messaging that we have, right? We say, "We need to save the planet," for example.

And what I didn't realize was that the only reason all those things are important is because they lead to the suffering or wellbeing of individuals who feel, think, and suffer, whether they be human or non-human right? That's like the whole point. And so one analogy that I give in the talk is I say, "Well, what if the climate was drastically changing on a different planet like Venus, for example?" Would we care and I don't think we would, and I don't think we should because it doesn't affect...There's no one there to feel the consequences of that change. Right? Another analogy that might help bring that home would be to say

something like, “If there's a house and it's getting destroyed by a storm, it only matters if there's someone living in that house. If it's a house in an abandoned village or something like that, then it doesn't really matter that that house is getting destroyed because no one is suffering as a result of that house being destroyed. But if someone, if a family lives in that house, then it is very much an issue.”

And so the argument that I make in the talk is that this is more or less obvious for humans. We've got this under control, right? We understand that we're doing this for future generations and even people now who live in parts of the world who are feeling the effects of the climate. But when it comes to animals, we think we have this position that it's the individuals that matter because when we think about the environmental destruction and how it affects animals, we think about a polar bear who's starving. We think about koala who's burning alive in a bushfire, or we think about a turtle who has a plastic straw stuck in his nose.

But when we talk about them, at least in kind of like a mainstream place, we use words like species extinction, biodiversity, and ecosystems, and these things are important, but talking about these things is very similar to talking about the climate crisis and thinking that it's about the forests and the oceans and the glaciers.

Yes, those things are important, but not because they're inherently important, but because they help individuals. And so my argument was, if we are going to care for animals because of the climate crisis, we should care because it's hurting individuals and not because it's hurting species or ecosystems or biodiversity.

While, yes, we should look at those things, but we should look at those things and care about those things if destroying those things lead to the suffering of individuals. If not, then I don't think we should be attached to those things at all.

**Mariann:** I just totally love that messaging. The constant ability to talk about the world in abstractions, I think is so harmful.

And just to make it about me for a second, \*laughs\* I've always resented when people consider animal...you know, I teach animal law. So when people consider animal law kind of a subset of environmental law, I would say, “No, environmental law is a subset of animal law. It's the consciousness that matters.”

We live in this world of consciousness. It's a miracle, like all of these individual consciousnesses, that's what matters. And the environment serves that and promotes it and creates the place for it to exist. But it's all the consciousness that...well, I've said that eight times now. So why can you see this when others don't?

Like, why do people insist on seeing the environment and the climate... You know, people talk about polar bears, but they don't really focus on that one polar bear who is starving, they talk about how we won't have polar bears anymore. Why do people always go to the species, to the abstraction, and you don't? What do you think is the difference?

**Ryuji:** That's a good question. I'm not sure why other people think the way that they think, I have no idea. But the reason that I think the way that I think is because I think the most important thing is the perspective of individuals. I think that what matters most is, in any situation where we're thinking about anything, is thinking about this issue or this event from the point of view of the individuals who suffer.

And I try to ask myself the question, what would I want if I was in that position? So for example, you think about a polar bear who's starving as a result of the climate. In this situation, the being who is suffering is that polar bear. And I would ask myself, "If I was in the position of that polar bear, what would I want?"

And what I would want is I would want for my suffering to end, no matter what that looks like. And I would not be thinking something like, "Oh, I'm worried about my species." Like there's no animal in the world who cares about species extinction. They just care about their own individual wellbeing.

And again, I'm not saying this to say that species don't matter. I'm just saying that the reason that species extinction would matter is because individuals matter, not the other way around. Or like species as a thing is not inherently valuable, is what I'm saying. And the reason why is because I consider it from the point of view of the one or the ones who are suffering.

**Mariann:** Yeah. One thing, I'm not sure this really conveys it probably, but one thing I usually say to my students is, "Species is an idea, it's not a thing. It's a way that we think about the world and a way that we organize the world, but it's not real in a material sense." But I don't know whether that gets through either.

It's just the thought in my head. And you seem to have have taken that thought and developed it better than most anybody. What about your work? I saw in your bio that you do work with Surge Activism and also with Vegan Hacktivists, but do you do most of your work just on your own? Is this an individual project or are you working with others on it?

**Ryuji:** Uh, no. So the fish thing was completely independent. I had two illustrators that I hired to do some of the illustrations because I can't draw to save my life. But, it was 100% led by me, but it's something I did on the side because I do work full-time, besides the projects that I do independently. So, yeah.

**Mariann:** So some of your videos are collaborative and some of your videos are individual. We've just covered some of the real high points and the big one, which you got on *The Daily Show* for, but you've made lots of videos, can you talk a little bit about some of the other topics that you've tackled?

**Ryuji:** Yes. I always try to tackle topics that I think are going to make the world a better place. And I've chosen animal rights as the place to be in but I think, to be honest, a lot of the other videos that I've worked on, the topics are pretty generic. It's just things like exposing various industries that hurt animals and mostly, for a long time, I just did that.

And then talking a lot about kind of the rational arguments behind why people might want to be vegan and try to debunk certain arguments against veganism and stuff like that. So a lot of that is stuff that's been said a million times. I made a lot of content like that, both for myself and for others as well.

But I think more recently I've tried to shift towards telling stories and talking about things that are maybe a little bit more difficult to understand and topics that take a little bit more research. It's because I think a lot of the other topics like, you know what happens to animals in certain industries has been said a million times, the resources are out there. But I think something like understanding the evidence that explains why fish feel pain is something that's just not as readily available. And so that's the kind of thing that I want to try to tackle, hopefully in a way that's easy to digest and entertaining.

**Mariann:** You know, we live in an incredibly bizarrely divided world right now and it seems like nothing can bring us together. Do you think of animals as having potential as an issue that can bring people who are not aligned on other issues necessarily? Is it our last possible? I don't want to call it bipartisan because I don't even want to put it in that political framework, but just



something that can reach people from all different ends of this crazy spectrum we seem to be on?

**Ryuji:** Yeah, that's a good question. I think that it could or it could not. I think it could depend on many things. For example, like how it's framed and stuff like that. But definitely things like, for example, if there was an issue revolving around things that we do to dogs, I think that could bring people together because people love dogs, no matter what.

Really, like most people, and so that's that. But for example, I don't know, like what we do to farm animals, maybe not. Because I think that it could be a similar thing, where we look at these innocent animals being treated horribly and everyone comes together to save them. Or it could be a thing where, you know, for example, animal rights is viewed as this ultra-liberal issue.

And so people who are conservative don't want have anything to do with it because it's just a liberal thing to care about this in the first place. So, I mean, it probably depends.

**Mariann:** Yeah. It would be nice because we could certainly get more done and we seem to have trouble getting anything done.

All right. I asked you this question already and you did answer it, but it was kind of preliminarily, and you answered it specific to what we were talking about then, which is that a lot of people just don't have the information about what's happen to animals. But other than that, for people who do have the information, how do you make sense of the essential question- Why people, those who care about animals, which I think is most people, I mean, most people would not deliberately harm an animal, there are the psychopaths out there and, you know, whatever. But most people, who do kind of know that it's bad, why do they continue to contribute to their exploitation? One of the thoughts I've had of late is that people really don't believe that their individual actions can make a difference. Do you think that's, I don't mean to put words in your mouth, but that's one idea.

Do you agree with that or do you have other ideas? What is this block? We all know that vegan food is good now. You can totally live really easily. What is this block that people have that, really wonderful people, who are doing so much good in their lives and kind of do know that there's something wrong, like Trevor Noah, why don't they just stop? Do they think it's pointless?

**Ryuji:** Yeah, I mean it probably depends on the individual. There's probably a million reasons why people don't stop. I mean, for example, one reason might be something along the lines of, like I said earlier, they just don't see cows, pigs, and chickens the way that they see dogs and cats.

I'm pretty sure that a lot of people, if they realized all of a sudden that the burgers they've been eating and loving their entire lives were actually made from the bodies of puppies and kittens, would stop eating burgers overnight, and the same with any animal products.

And so the fact that they don't stop, given that it's from other animals, just show that I think they don't quite see farmed animals in the same light as we do the animals that we love at home. So that that could be one reason. Another reason could be some form of cognitive dissonance where people's self-image of caring about animals and loving animals does not align with their behavior of eating and consuming animal products.

And because there's this dissonance, they feel a need to change one or the other. One of the theories behind cognitive dissonance and the way that humans behave is we're gonna take the path of least resistance, and in this case, it's much easier to change our beliefs rather than our actions. So it's much easier to believe that animals don't suffer that much or that animals don't feel pain, like cows don't feel pain the way that dogs do. It's much easier to believe that than to to change habits because at the end of the day, changing any habit is very difficult. And for me, this is also something that wasn't really relatable to me for the longest time, because I'm one of those people that when I found out how bad animals had it, I became vegan over night.

So I didn't even know the word vegan. I just knew that animals in the meat, dairy, and egg industry suffered way more than I was okay with. And so I stopped overnight. And so it was never really relatable to me why people would take a long time. But recently, I've myself, tried to change something big in my life where I try to make exercise a big part of my life because I realized that, well, it's probably a very important thing, like health is probably pretty important.

So, I wanted to do that. And for the majority of the pandemic, I was at home and didn't really exercise much at all. So for me, it was a big change in my life that I had to make. And I realized, well, this is actually not very easy to do. And I'm sure it's still much easier than doing something like changing.

everything that you eat at every single meal. So I think that sometimes we underestimate how hard it can be for people to change. But also I think that when people don't want to change the relationship, or the thing that I would think about is that I think the why is just not strong enough. At a certain point, if you have a reason why you want to do something and that reason is extremely important to you, or you perceive it as extremely important, then you're going to figure out a way to make that change.

But if it's just not that important, then you are just not going to make that change. And so another way that I think about it is that I think that's the reason that a lot of us change at the end of the day, and maybe you can confirm if this is your experience, but this is my experience, is that at the end of the day, we're emotional creatures as human beings, and we want to do the easiest thing or the thing that hurts the least.

So when you find out how much animal suffer as a result of the meat, dairy, and egg industries. That kind of hurts and you feel bad about that. But then you think about it and you're like, "Well, one solution would be for me to stop consuming these products. But if I did that, that would mean that I could never eat the burgers I love. And what am I gonna eat for breakfast? I eat eggs every morning, and how am I ever gonna have pizza again and ice cream and this and that, and how am I gonna celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving and blah, blah blah...?" Right. And you think about it, and that also hurts. And then you compare, maybe not consciously, but you compare those two things.

The pain of knowing how much animals suffer and the pain of living your life without ever eating the foods that you love and whichever one is less painful, I think is what we're going to do. So for me, it was very clear that no matter how much I would miss out on food, it's not even a conversation. The pain, like me living the rest of my life, knowing how much animals suffer for the food that I eat is so great that even if I could never eat my favorite foods ever again, that pain would be way greater.

And so I just decided to stop. But I think that for a lot of other people, they think about what happens to animals. They're like, "Yeah, I feel kind of bad about it." Maybe they don't see, again, cows, pigs and chickens the way that they see dogs and cats. So they're like, "Well, how bad can it really be?"

They go to the grocery store and they see pictures of happy animals on pastures, and they're like, "Well, it really can't be that bad." And then they think about, "Well, but if I can never eat a burger again, that's basically gonna ruin my life. Like, how am I ever gonna enjoy a meal ever again? I can't do that."

And so they just don't do that. So, yeah, I think that's definitely one of the reasons that some people know the information, but then don't change.

**Mariann:** I totally hear you. Well, also, people feel like, “Why should I have to change? That's not gonna change the world.” So that's another reason counting against changing. And I guess people don't realize that vegan food is fine or they really don't think it's fine. I mean, maybe I'm just not enough of a foodie to really care but people do seem to have like...oh, I know the other thing I wanted to say also, like when you give up eating animals for animal rights reasons, as opposed to environmental or health reasons, it's kind of an all or nothing thing.

Like, not that everybody does, they're vegetarians or whatever, but they have blocks about the eggs and milk issues. They just don't think about them. But when you decide every individual matters and therefore I don't wanna contribute to their harm, that's pretty much, well, you have to give them up.

Or with environmentalism, you know, you can do it a little, cut down on your meat with your health, you can cut down. But animal rights really does feel like, “Okay, once I do this, it's done. I will never eat a hamburger again. I will never have Thanksgiving turkey. Like that's it. I've changed my entire life. I can't go back.”

It's black or white. And I think that really might get, I don't know how to fix that, but I think that might get in people's way. Well, I could obviously talk about this topic for weeks. Really appreciate your insights. You're obviously a terrific communicator. We could all learn a lot from your messaging. Thanks so much for sharing it with us today, Ryuji.

Did you wanna talk about, I know that you had a video coming out about Greyhound racing. Did you just wanna mention that?

**Ryuji:** Sure. So along with an organization called Faunalytics, which is a fantastic animal rights organization that...

**Mariann:** Yes, we're very familiar with Faunalytics. Love them!

**Ryuji:** So for anyone who's unfamiliar, they put together these resources for animal advocates. So they summarize research and make it accessible and they really do fantastic, fantastic work. And so I teamed up with them to make a sort of exposé on the greyhound racing industry. And it's something that I didn't know a lot about going into it, but I've been researching it for the past eight months or so, or at the time it came out, I worked on this piece for about eight

months and I went down this rabbit hole and the things I discovered were really, really, really shocking. And so we put together this thing talking about the history of greyhound racing and how it came together and then talking about the problems with greyhound racing and how greyhound racing hurts animals.

I think this piece is particularly important, in a way, because greyhound racing is one of those issues where we are hurting animals, but we actually are seeing it come to an end. And you know, it's down now. And I think that now that it's down, it's time for us to to kick it until it dies to be quite honest.

Yeah. So you can watch that if you want. It's on the Faunalytics website. It's called *Run to Death, the Rise and Fall of Greyhound Racing*.

**Mariann:** That's really helpful. I totally agree with you. This is winnable. Greyhound racing is winnable and it would be nice to have a win.

Thank you so much for joining us today on Our Hen House today, Ryuji. It's really been a pleasure.

**Ryuji:** Thanks so much for having me. It's been a pleasure for me, as well.