

Educating for harmonious co-existence, Educating for peace

Respect for animals is an attitude that can be acquired through education. The awakening of sensitivity toward animals, their welfare and respecting their interests is something that can and should be encouraged in everyone. The language and the means employed may vary, but what must not vary is the conviction that by so doing we are contributing to improving the friendly co-existence of humans and animals, and among humans, because a culture of harmonious co-existence is, after all, a culture of peace. Not long ago someone said to me: “Look, those of us who have grown up hunting birds with traps, tearing the wings off flies just for fun or dissecting a white mouse at school, will go after anything that moves. We are unreformable...” I was left thinking and smiling at such a graphic way of dismissing the idea of seeing in animals anything beyond that which he had learned from his environment, beyond being simply something useful and at our unlimited disposal. It was a crude expression of the fact that, what one sees all around, the absence of punishment or reproof for abusing animals in the society in which one lives, generates indifference toward any forms of animal abuse, including acts which are openly and blithely described as “childhood mischief.” It is actually much more than that. Nothing is indifferent to a person’s education, not only in childhood. Everything exerts an influence on us, whether good or bad. But I do agree with this particular person in that the sooner one is taught to be sensitive toward animals, the better. On a different level, also an adult can be “reformed” toward attitudes of respect and sensitivity, admiration and considerateness for animals. However, the stages in which human beings are opening themselves to the surrounding world and taking in the most, at childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, are very important.

I propose the inclusion of education programmes in primary and secondary education that foster attitudes of respect for, and knowledge of, animals, their interests, needs and rights. It is all very well to tell children (and adults) that animals are not toys, that they are not things to use and throw away, but perhaps we need to go further.

We need to make an effort to create Educational Programmes, with the appropriate monitoring procedures, suitable for teaching at all stages of Primary and Secondary education. At the moment there are some private initiatives that are very worthy of note, and which are making up for the absence of programmes integrated in the public or private education systems. Examples of such initiatives are the educational talks given by the Volunteers of the [Animal Protection Society of Sabadell](#) , and the Programme of talks and activities that have been organised in the past few years in [Valencia](#). At Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona I have been pioneering a course on Animal Law for the past four years, and in January 2011 we will launch a postgraduate specialisation course in Animal Law ([Animals, Law and Society](#)), the first of the kind to be taught at a Spanish university.

The idea is to instil the notion that violence toward animals is to be condemned, in the same way as violence exerted on anyone that is weaker is condemnable, and here I include the children themselves, women, the elderly and those who are seen as different. An education based on these premises necessarily generates all-embracing attitudes of respect.

Some time ago I read that the most frequently used words in English are “please” and “sorry.” Indeed one can believe this when one inevitably gets pushed around on the underground or the bus at rush hour. But

how infrequently do we hear anyone say “excuse me” or “I’m sorry!” This is just a very minor example of how we have gradually drifted toward an ill-tempered society in which we have little respect for others.

Educating for harmonious co-existence and for peace is an endeavour we have taken along very necessary paths that are plain to see, such as the recent protection of groups that were discriminated against and used because of their weaker position (women, the elderly, immigrants, homosexuals). We must absolutely not evade educating for respect toward animals.

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