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Animals and Teaching

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Teaching respect for animals is key to any reform we wish to bring about in the future. The law plays an indispensable role for better regulating the relations of a society whose future is entwined with the environment within which it unfolds.

I speak of animals and not of the ‘animal’ as if it were an entity of reason. I refer to the animals with which we share our environment and with which we engage in different types of relations, some of genuine closeness, such as companion animals, but also those used for production, with wild fauna or with animals that are used for shows or experimentation.

When we speak of respect for animals, to what are we referring? What does this imply for modern society? What are our obligations as individuals, as a society, as members of a state of law? What strategies must be used to generate respect for animals?

Respect is knowledge and recognition of the individuality of someone. Its first premise is knowledge, and the acceptance of their intrinsic value and dignity.^[1] In practice, this consists of something as simple as valuing someone’s interests for being their own; their acceptance and protection. Therefore respect, in relation to animals, entails a greater knowledge of their natures, their individuality, their dignity, their interests, and the safeguarding and protection of all these things. This is the primary motivation of a working group, of which I am a part, based in Paris and dedicated towards finding new forms of including respect for animals within teaching curricula.^[2]

Whether we ‘like’ animals or not, they form part of our society. Yes, I am aware of what I said: they are a part of our society. For centuries, perhaps, it has been possible to turn our backs on the reality that we share living space, but scientific discoveries have, for a long time now, put before us two key data that have great relevance: that animals have their own culture, and that they are sensitive to pain, like us. If we ask ourselves, to how many of our fellow citizens these data seem ‘natural’, the answer can be disheartening. However, even without explicitly knowing it, society increasingly demands fresh awareness in favour of animals; an attitude of public respect towards animals. Therefore, to overcome this clear contradiction – the demand for an improvement in the situation for animals, the effective incorporation of public policies to achieve this, and ignorance about why this challenge must be addressed – the key is teaching.

Introducing respect for animals, and ways to regulate their incorporation in current society, at all levels of teaching, is a direct consequence of the fact that the State assumes this role of regulating the needs and demands of society. It is about introducing training courses for the teaching faculty and specific courses at each level of teaching, including at the university and career level.

Some months ago, the local government of Amsterdam published a very relevant

document about how an improved public policy in favour of animals had caused a decrease in violence and aggression in social environments. Holland is one of the pioneering countries in the creation of a support helpline for animal mistreatment and a police body specifically for, and trained in, the rescue of mistreated animals. It is one example, among many, of the results of an effective public policy of teaching protection and respect for animals.

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[1] Vid. HALL, B., [Reseña bibliográfica de Adela Cortina, Las fronteras de la persona. El valor de los animales, la dignidad de los humanos](#)

[2] Vid. BRELS, S., [Table ronde sur l' "Animal et l'enseignement"](#), Luxemburg Palace in Paris, 16 December 2013