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Animal Rights, with Stephen Wise



“Exploiting any Human Being is a Threat to Human Rights”

On Thursday 16 June, during the Closing Ceremony of the first edition of the postgraduate programme on "Animal Law and Society" at the UAB, the only postgraduate programme on Animal Law in all Europe, Steven M. Wise, renowned professor specialising in Animal Law held a lecture and UABDivulga had the opportunity to interview him. With an outstanding career of over 20 years, Wise led this academic discipline in the U.S., founded the ALDS (Animal Legal Defense Fund) and is currently president of the Center for the Expansion of Fundamental Rights.

For over 20 years, Dr Steven M. Wise's outstanding career has led him to become an expert in animal protection laws. He is professor in Animal Law at prestigious universities in the US, such as Harvard Law School, John Marshall Law School, Vermont Law School, Lewis & Clark Law School and the Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine. Dr Wise founded the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) and is currently president of the Center for the Expansion of

Fundamental Rights. He's written numerous articles on animal rights and for many years collaborated with renowned scientists from the fields of primatology and animal behaviour and intelligence. Professor Steven M. Wise participated in the closing ceremony of the first edition of the postgraduate programme in "Animals, Law and Society", organised by the research group Animals, Law and Society (ADS) at UAB. This is the only postgraduate programme on Animal Law in all Europe and will be offered next year as a master's degree in Animal Law and Society.

What differentiates humans from animals?

Humans are animals. A million species of animals are known, including humans. Each species differs from the other. We are just another species...

You say some animals should have the status of "legal persons" with similar rights to humans. What species do you refer to and where do we draw the line between those deserving this protection and those not deserving it?

A legal person is an entity with the capacity for legal rights. What I am saying is that, as a matter of liberty, one sufficient condition - and there are others - for legal personhood is "practical autonomy," which emphasises the notion of "dignity" and occurs when an entity has the cognitive ability to desire something, to act intentionally to achieve that desire, and has a sense of self sufficiently developed so that whether that desire is achieved or frustrated means something to the entity. These entities include, without being limited to, members of such species as the great apes and cetaceans. These animals, and others, may also be entitled to certain legal rights as a matter of equality.

What would be the ideal situation in the recognition of animal rights?

Those entities entitled to fundamental legal rights as a matter of liberty or equality should have them, no matter what their species is.

What do you think about the use of animals in biomedical research?

No entity with the capacity for practical autonomy, human or nonhuman, should have their most fundamental interests violated absent the most compelling reasons. The species is irrelevant. To the degree that biomedical research, or any other activity, violates an entity's fundamental interests, it should not be permitted.

What would you say to bullfight supporters?

Bullfighting, like every activity that exploits and abuses cognitively complex and sentient beings for insufficient reasons, should be abolished.

From the point of view of global ecology, do you not believe the survival of our species can be threatened if we fight for the rights of other species?

Exploiting and depriving any being of the legal rights to which they should be entitled without the most compelling reasons threatens the foundations of fundamental legal rights for humans, for it undermines those principles that justify fundamental human rights.

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