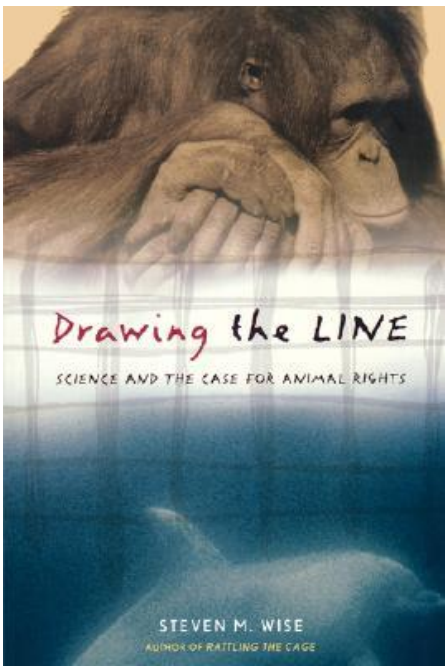

Drawing the Line: Science and the Case for Animal Rights

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Are we ready for parrots and dolphins to be treated as persons before the law? In this unprecedented exploration of animal cognition along the evolutionary spectrum-from infants and children to other intelligent primates, from dolphins, parrots, elephants, and dogs to colonies of honeybees-Steve Wise finds answers to the big question in animal rights today: Where do we draw the line? Readers will be enthralled as they follow Wise's firsthand account of the world's most famous animal experts at work: Cynthia Moss and the touchingly affectionate families of Amboseli; Irene Pepperberg and her amazing and witty African Grey parrot, Alex; and Penny Paterson with the formidable gorilla Koko. In many cases, Wise was able to sustain an extended conversation with these extraordinary creatures. No one with even a shred of curiosity about animal intelligence or justice will want to miss this book.

Drawing the Line: Science and the Case for Animal Rights Details

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From Reader Review Drawing the Line: Science and the Case for Animal Rights for online ebook

Jennifer says

(this review was originally written for Bookslut)

If you're looking for an impassioned argument for animal rights, *Drawing the Line* is not the book for you. If you're looking for a manifesto, a clearly drawn out list of rights and wrongs for living a life respectful of animal rights, then *Drawing the Line* is still not for you. But if you're looking for a well thought out discussion of animal rights, based on science and with an eye for the law... Well, then, Steven Wise's *Drawing the Line* is just about perfect.

Although many of his anecdotes have deep emotional appeal, Wise does not rely on tugging the heartstrings to make his case. An animal rights lawyer, his writing is careful and structured, frequently consulting the opinions of experts in the fields of philosophy, psychology, neuroscience and animal behavior. Fundamentally, his argument is a legal one, aiming to convince the law community to grant legal "dignity rights" to animals based on their capabilities.

Based on the idea that personal autonomy is not absolute, but rather can exist on a variable scale, Wise proposes extending that scale to nonhuman animals. Just as a judge would grant more rights to a fully capable adult than they might to a two-year-old child, does it not make as much sense to grant the same rights to an animal with the same ability to reason and communicate as that child? He then defines a scale of autonomy, where one is a fully autonomous human being, and zero is no autonomy, say a single-celled organism. Eight different species are discussed, concentrating on one or two well-studied examples from each, such as Koko the gorilla and Alex the grey parrot. Using standards of child development psychology, and the classic mirror self-recognition test (simply whether or not an animal can recognize that it is looking at itself in a mirror), an autonomy value is assigned to each.

For those not already well versed in the emotional and rational lives of animals, you will come away from each chapter with a new respect for the animal in question. Even the chapter on honeybees was filled with surprises. Most of us probably learned that honeybees can communicate through dances, but that they can disregard "nonsense" messages (there can't be nectar in the middle of a lake!) and their ability to apparently make collective decisions on new hive locations were truly surprising. And whose heart would not be broken by Alex the parrot's cry when left at the veterinarian for lung surgery: "Come here. I love you. I'm sorry. I want to go back."

Wise's reliance on anecdotes, while necessary, is both the book's strength and its weakness. In the chapters on elephants and orangutans, I doubt there exists a single story that I didn't read aloud to someone, anyone, who would sit still and listen. The elephant stories were mostly heart-rending, about broken family ties and emotional reactions to death. The orangutan stories, by contrast, were mostly of cleverly manipulating their human trainers and observers. The orangutans are so charismatic in fact, that Koko comes off a little dull by comparison, and the higher autonomy value given to gorillas relative to orangutans seems to be based on the gorilla's closer evolutionary relationship to humans alone. A little further justification for the higher rating would have been welcome.

But by the end of the book, what I wanted most was a list of rights and wrongs. I was completely convinced that animals should be granted dignity rights, and desperately wanted something to do about it. The stories about elephants in circuses were enough to keep me away from those, but should I now be avoiding zoos, too? What does it mean to respect the dignity rights of animals? What can I, as an individual do?

Unfortunately, I'm really not the target audience for this book. However I wish that Wise would have acknowledged that it wouldn't only be judges and lawyers reading his book, and given the average citizen something to do with conviction surely acquired reading the book.

So maybe I was looking for a different sort of book when I picked up *Drawing the Line*. But if a manifesto is what I really wanted, I suppose I could always pick up some Jeremy Bentham or Peter Singer. Drawing the Line however, is excellent at doing what it does, which is laying a basic framework for the eventual adoption of dignity rights for non-human animals.

Liz Buehler says

I read this book for a thesis paper in college and It was so informative and taught me that my reasoning for being a vegetarian wasn't stupid or silly but proven by science! Would defiantly recommend to anyone and everyone and I am defiantly going to read it again!!

Fox says

Amazing book.

Steven M. Wise lays out the case for increased rights for animals from a scientific standpoint. Bit by bit he examines the cognitive ability of various animals (honeybees, dogs, great apes, birds, and cetaceans) in a rather rigorous and thorough way. He doesn't shy away from controversy (though he failed to bring up some of the questionable claims involving Koko) where it arises (especially in the case of the care of dolphins) and meets a lot of the questions that would be raised head-on.

While Steven M. Wise makes an excellent case for animal rights, he also acknowledges the trouble it will take to put those rights in place. He acknowledges and even postulates why people find it hard to grant rights to animals, and compares it rather compellingly to the trouble America had in granting both slaves and women increased rights in their respective times of emancipation.

Fascinating read, highly recommended to anyone and everyone who has ever loved a pet.

Matthew says

This book is a sequel, conceptually, to Professor Wise's previous book, "Rattling the Cage." In "Rattling the Cage," Professor Wise laid out a rough case for the extension of some legal rights to non-human animal species. "Drawing the Line" takes as a give the information and conclusion contained in his prior book and extends the analysis to examine what types of rights need to be given, to what types of non-human animals, and on what legal basis such duties are owed to these creatures. The book travels down this path by examining a series of unique non-human lives, exploring their well-developed psychologies, language skills, and mental representations and then comparing those attributes with those of his own son, noting that if his own son is granted a whole host of rights, we cannot keep these same rights from the non-human individuals examined in his book without resorting to arguments which are explicitly speciesist. A quality read for anyone interested in non-human animal rights, but much more valuable if read in conjunction with a prior reading of his seminal work, "Rattling the Cage."

Worthless Bum says

In this fascinating book by pioneering Harvard animal rights lawyer Steven Wise, the case is laid out for extending legal rights to some non-human animals. Owing to difficulties with extending legal protections to all animals with the capacity to suffer, as well as the operative reality of the legal system being a rule based deontological system, Wise opts for a non-utilitarian criterion for evaluating which animals get legal protections and which don't. Wise discusses the main schools of thought in American jurisprudence and how the law works with respect to humans. The criterion that Wise comes up with is what he calls "practical autonomy". A being is said to have practical autonomy if it: (1)has desires, (2)can intentionally act to fulfill those desires, and (3)has a sense of self sufficient to understand that they, as individuals, have desires and intentions.

Owing to obvious epistemic difficulties in esablishing whether a particular species possesses practical autonomy, Wise sets up a probablilistic scale as a way of determining the likelihood that an animal has practical autonomy. The scale ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating a definite lack of practical autonomy, and 1 the definite possession of it. A score of 0.50 indicates an equal probablility that an animal does or does not have practical autonomy.

Wise uses the following test subjects for the evaluation of practical autonomy: Christopher, Wise's son; Koko, the gorilla; Marbury, Wise's dog; honeybees; Echo, the African elephant; Chantek, the orangutan; Alex, the African grey parrot; and Phoenix and Ake, the Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphins.

Christopher, the first test subject, is evaluated in terms of the psychologist Jean Piaget's 6 stages of early childhood development. The 6 stages are based on experiments conducted on children under the age of 2, and involve a progression of ever greater sophisitication and problem solving capabilities until all 6 stages are reached. This serves as a useful comparison with non-human animals, because the testing is on children before the age of speach, and cognitive ethology testing must be conducted on animals who do not have a language. Neuroscientific expertise is brought in from the likes of Antonio Damasio and others, and Martha Nussbaum and other philosophers are used for their views about the role emotions have to play in who we are. Damasio's and William James' theories of self are discussed as well.

The remaining subjects are evaluated in terms of experiments in cognitive ethology. Similar cases to the specific animals in question are used as evidence, as well as more general information about the species under discussion. There are some interesting things about the animals discussed other than that which is strictly pertinent to the evaluation of practical autonomy. For instance, honeybees have the most sophisticated method of communication after humans, consisting of a number of dances indicating where food is located, the quality of the food, and locations for establishing another colony. Elephants sometimes perform a sort of burial, they cover an animal that they killed or dead elephants. All in all a very interesting book which covers a number of fascinating subjects.

Judy says

Should animals have rights similar to those afforded to humans? If so, all animals? Even down to insects? Or just companion animals. This book discusses various individual animals and their intelligence -- exceedingly interesting!