

Crocodiles also cry

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Popular expressions directly reflect popular belief. The expression “crocodile tears” [*lágrimas de cocodrilo* in Spanish] is used pejoratively in English and Spanish to characterize someone faking pain, expecting that his or her tears will induce a favorable reaction from an observer, as it seems impossible that a crocodile can in fact cry. In the fables of the Spanish poet Félix Samaniego (1745-1801), the crocodile receives a similar nickname, preserved in the Spanish memory as “*el taimado cocodrilo*” [the astute crocodile]. That is, the great crocodile who observes his victim at the river, with an attentive and patient expression, recommends the victim not to drink and walk at the same time, waiting for the best moment to attack the victim. In response, the “prudent” dog –says the author -, responds that it is not healthy to drink and walk, but even less so is “to follow the advice of the enemy”(!).

I don't doubt that the morale of this fable is true, that prudence includes taking precautions, when it deals with the “thin red line”, which sometimes quickly appears before us in encounters when we deal with certain people in certain situations. But, speaking of crocodiles, we cannot avoid considering the animal as a potential enemy, a lurking danger, which our language has reserved for the animal. We can think of the children's image – which we may have etched in our memory-, of Captain Hook in "Peter Pan"¹, crossing borders fleeing from the voracious crocodile that has swallowed his pocket watch: tick, tock, tick, tock..., like a drum leading him to his gallows!

However, this may not be the case; it may be that crocodiles (no joke) also have feelings, a sense of belonging, strong family links and affections that they know how to demonstrate. This is something which science has shown and which, according to the research by Vladimir Dinets (<http://dinets.info/>), presented in a recent congress celebrated organized by the Humane Society International in Washington D.C., has been offered as a reliable result². It may be that we need to rethink our relationship with animals in many ways, stripping away prejudices, although this doesn't necessarily have to start with crocodiles!

The language we use in relation with animals needs to be revised to reflect what science has managed to prove, that they are “sentient beings”. Animal sentience should impregnate our language, as an acquired value, a value of citizenship that helps us remake our relations that the Law uses to regulate our society

1 BARRIE, J.M., Peter Pan, or the boy who wouldn't grow up (London 1904)

2 GIMÉNEZ-CANDELA, T., Sentient Beings (<http://www.derechoanimal.info/eng/page/3142/sentient-beings>);

which, necessarily, includes animals and not only in a subordinate relation to human beings³.

That we share an extremely high percentage of DNA with the great apes is beyond all doubt today. However, there are those who throw bananas at players of color while taking corner kicks at soccer stadiums. This is not to speak of the cry shouted out from the public, imitating the sounds of these animals in the jungle with the same offensive, violent and ridiculing sense. In reality, we are speaking of our “first cousins”. As a result, when I finish writing this, I am going to eat a banana and, just maybe, I will decide to take a “selfie” and post it on social networks.

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³ Vid. The conclusions of the Congress on Sentience as a Factor in Policy and Practice (<http://www.derechoanimal.info/eng/page/3106/congress-the-science-of-animal-thinking-and-emotion-sentience-as-a-factor-in-policy-and-practice-march-17-18-2014-washington-dc>).