



The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: The Emotional World of Farm Animals

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

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Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's groundbreaking bestseller, *When Elephants Weep*, was the first book since Darwin's time to explore emotions in the animal kingdom, particularly from animals in the wild. Now, he focuses exclusively on the contained world of the farm animal, revealing startling, irrefutable evidence that barnyard creatures have feelings too, even consciousness.

Weaving history, literature, anecdotes, scientific studies, and Masson's own vivid experiences observing pigs, cows, sheep, goats, and chickens over the course of five years, this important book at last gives voice, meaning, and dignity to these gentle beasts that are bred to be milked, shorn, butchered, and eaten. Can we ever know what makes an animal happy? Many animal behaviorists say no. But Jeffrey Masson has a different view: An animal is happy if it can live according to its own nature. Farm animals suffer greatly in this regard. Chickens, for instance, like to perch in trees at night, to avoid predators and to nestle with friends. The obvious conclusion: They cannot be happy when confined twenty to a cage.

From field and barn, to pen and coop, Masson bears witness to the emotions and intelligence of these remarkable farm animals, each unique with distinct qualities. Curious, intelligent, self-reliant—many will find it hard to believe that these attributes describe a pig. In fact, there is much that humans share with pigs. They dream, know their names, and can see colors. Mother cows mourn the loss of their calves when their babies are taken away to slaughter. Given a choice between food that is nutritious or lacking in minerals, sheep will select the former, balancing their diet and correcting the deficiency. Goats display quite a sense of humor, dignity, and fearlessness (Indian goats have been known to kill leopards). Chickens are naturally sociable—they will gather around a human companion and stand there serenely preening themselves or sit quietly on the ground beside someone they trust.

For far too long farm animals have been denigrated and treated merely as creatures of instinct rather than as sentient beings. Shattering the abhorrent myth of the “dumb animal without feelings,” Jeffrey Masson has written a revolutionary book that is sure to stir *human* emotions far and wide.

From the Hardcover edition.

The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: The Emotional World of Farm Animals Details

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Megan says

Let me preface this review by saying that after a decade of working with all sorts of animals, I fervently believe that most, if not all vertebrates, possess the same complexity of emotions that humans beings are blessed with. I believe that what we do to farm animals is tortuous and cruel and that humane farming MUST be a part of our plan for the future...

..but this book is horrible. Even agreeing wholeheartedly with his point of view, I found him infuriating. If you do not wholeheartedly agree with him, you will utterly and outright dismiss the point he is trying to get across. Masson uses no scientific data or studies, even going so far as to make a point of saying how uncomfortable it made him to call a herd someone's cows because no living being can be rightfully owned. Garrr!

Read Dominion and don't bother with this book. Seriously. Particularly if you have mixed emotions about the topic because you will not be able to really examine the issue at hand and will assume all animal rights activists are lunatics.

Hannah says

This is not at all what I was expecting from the warm and fuzzy title. It is moralistic, and academic in the sense that it is full of references. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it. I was expecting anecdotal tales about animals being anthromophized. I could not have been further from the real content. It is about how humans treat animals (poorly in this author's opinion.) I think it is best for vegetarians.

Kimmy says

This book gets a high rating from me, simply because I know what the author is saying true. Animals are NOT given enough credit for intelligence, or enough compassion. They are treated unfairly and seriously people should rethink what they are doing.

The author states in the book that people as children know and have more compassion and KNOW what is right & wrong and then UNLEARN it because of social norms. I have to agree. Kids are TOLD to eat & drink certain things knowing it is not right but then they unlearn it. yeah unlearn , i like that word even if it isn't officially a real word. The author is correct.

People are taught that 'disconnect', how is it that kids are smarter than adults?? Well IDK, but is is true.

I knew some of the things in this book already, having spent most my life around animals, but i did learn quite a few things.

Some things I wish I didn't know. Like the ducks feet being nailed to the floor and force fed so people can eat duck livers...people actually feel the NEED to do this crap ? gross, and to put the poor ducks through all

that to get a diseased liver and then WANT to eat it.

Salad sounds a WHOLE lot tastier. Yeah I think I will skip the duck liver... If I hadn't KNOWN someone who eats rabbit liver I would have thought well who eats that anyway? but now I know people really DO eat that ? Doesn't LIVER detox the body? So they are eating something that would be higher in toxins, i guess maybe some people don't know that ?

Also the part about the duck feathers... well why did I never think that through? No more feather pillows or down jackets for me.

I knew where the feathers came from, but I didn't know how they GOT the feathers. Yeah, that was pretty bad & sad. Who does that & a better question is... Why??

Pros & cons of the book. The author clearly writes from his heart, which is a good thing. I thought maybe he could have put some more statistics in there, but maybe it doesn't really matter in the long run, I mean his mission of getting these points across was accomplished... at least for me.

Maria João Fernandes says

Às vezes é preciso saber desistir e seguir em frente...mas antes disso, quero partilhar um pensamento.

Fui vegetariana durante 4 anos e há mais de 1 ano que não consumo qualquer alimento de origem animal, mas mesmo assim afirmo, sem qualquer hesitação ou dúvida, que a maioria dos veganos são extremistas e eu não me identifico com os seus valores. Tudo o que é extremo é mau. Eu sou vegana, mas não sou extremista.

A meu ver, uma pessoa que critica o seu igual, só porque não faz as mesmas escolhas alimentares e que o ataca agressivamente por aquilo que come ou deixa de comer, não tem moral para dizer o que quer que seja. Se não respeitamos aqueles que são como nós, como vamos respeitar os animais, as plantas e o mundo?

Acho que este livro tem histórias muito bonitas, sobre vários animais domésticos, que demonstram como eles sentem e apreciam a companhia do ser humano. Porém, a humanização que tenta ser feita dos animais deixou-me um pouco alienada, porque em troca dela as pessoas são criticadas e julgadas. Eu comi carne e peixe até aos 21 anos e sempre gostei de animais.

Eu sei que há muitas coisas erradas no mundo que devíamos alterar relativamente à nossa atitude e comportamento perante os outros seres vivos, mas eu não gosto mais deles só porque fiz uma opção alimentar diferente. A mudança começa em nós, mas ela pode adquirir as mais variadas formas.

Scott says

Ignore the rambling and repetition. The author doesn't claim he is being scientific - merely anecdotal, but my

common sense from hanging around farm animals is that he is correct - they are smarter than we have thought (even chickens) and they have a rich emotional life and personal-social culture that hasn't been bread out of them by domestication & being farmed. Factory farming cruelly denies them that at great pain. His best examples are when rescued factory farm animals are allowed to live outside the cage, they live enriched lives like their wild relatives. Mason explores new territory and that is why I rate it a 5/5.

Russell Warfield says

Significantly less robust and more anecdotal and speculative than I was expecting it to be, and often to its detriment when he lapses into wild non sequiturs, denting an 'argument' which never really takes shape. At several points, it feels as if a more fitting title would be something more like 'I Have Spent Some Time With Cows'.

Having said that, taken for what it is, it's a charming piece of observation and empathy, with many of its disquieting passages supporting my recent decision to go vegan this new year - particularly in relation to dairy cows. Also redemptive in its more philosophical, concluding chapters which speak more self consciously and unashamedly from the heart, while bringing up some interesting concepts.

If like me you were expecting a research-led investigation into the emotional life of animals, offering some verifiable conclusions from which we could draw some clear sighted ethical conclusions, this isn't it. But taken as a personal meditation on Masson's experiential knowledge of the subject, it's a fine enough read. And as a lot of other user reviews would appear to attest, a lot of readers are moved and convinced by its fevered tone, presumably resulting in a good number of new veggie/vegan recruits, so it's also to be commended for that of course, if nothing else!

Kelly says

A beautifully tragic look at “food” animals

My first introduction to Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's work was in high school, when I read his 1996 book, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*. At the time, I was a newbie vegetarian, just becoming involved in animal advocacy. *When Elephants Weep* helped validate my decision to go veg, and reinforced my resolve to stay that way.

Fast-forward thirteen years. I picked up Masson's latest ethology tome, *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: The Emotional World of Farm Animals*, on a whim. Remembering his earlier work, I expected a beautiful, brilliant, touching look at the inner lives and experiences of farmed animals. I was not disappointed.

In *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon*, Masson lays out the evidence – from the highly scientific to the folksy anecdotal – which points to a wide range of emotional experiences in farmed animals, including love, grief, sorrow, joy, empathy, altruism, fear, trust, friendship, contentment and the like. Far from being unfeeling brutes, the billions of animals bred, farmed and slaughtered for human consumption (10 billion annually in the U.S. alone) have complex emotional and intellectual lives. Some of their emotions – such as the strong maternal instinct – mirror our own, while other emotions and intellectual abilities far surpass those of humans. For example, when suffering egregious cruelties (such as those found on modern factory farms), non-human animals can't always identify the source of or reason for their pain and abuse. This serves to heighten their fear, such that some species of non-human animals may actually have a *greater* capacity for

suffering than humans. Clearly, this could – *should* – have profound implications vis-à-vis our treatment of non-human animals, particularly those of the “farmed” variety.

Masson structures the book so that each chapter covers a different species of farmed animals: pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, cows and ducks, in that order. He juxtaposes information about the animals’ emotional lives - thoughts, feelings, sentience, capacity for joy and sorrow, etc. - with the brutal reality for the vast majority of these “owned” animals. Treated like milk and meat machines, dehumanized and objectified, their individuality obscured and their needs ignored, farmed animals suffer the worst of humanity’s whims and wants.

A theme which threads its way through nearly every chapter is that of female suffering: the extra-special abuses (the collective) we mete out to the female members of the species. With brutal precision, farmers routinely turn the reproductive systems of female animals against them, finding newer and more callous ways in which to exploit them as science and technology allow. This isn’t to suggest that males don’t suffer as well - they do. But their suffering isn’t as prolonged or extensive as that of their female counterparts; veal calves, for example, are tortured for sixteen weeks and then, “mercifully,” (relatively speaking) slaughtered. Their sisters, meanwhile, are exploited as baby and milk machines for three to four years, after which they become ground beef. First, their babies and their babies’ food is stolen from them; and, finally, their lives are snatched away as well.

By the mere fact of their sex, sows, hens, ewes, does, nannies, cows and heifers - not to mention mares, bitches, jennies, jills, etc. - are ripe for especially cruel and prolonged exploitation. Oftentimes, this involves a constant cycle of pregnancy, birth, nursing and baby-napping, culminating with the female’s own death when she’s no longer able to breed or “produce” to her “owner’s” satisfaction. Given these parallels – women’s bodies, too, are used as tools of and rationalizations for their own subjugation - it’s a wonder why all Western feminists aren’t also vegans.

A beautifully tragic look at food animals, *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon* should be required reading for all “meat”-eaters. As Masson notes in the book’s conclusion – “On Not Eating Friends” –

“What has any of this got to do with you, you might ask? If you eat these animals, if you wear their skins as shoes or belts, then their lives must be of concern to you. It has something to do with you, because you have something to do with them. Our lives, all of our lives, are inextricably intertwined with the lives of farm animals, even when we would prefer that they not be. It would take a very hard-hearted person to say: ‘I don’t care what kind of lives they lead, how much they suffer, how far removed from their ordinary life, it just means nothing to me, holds no interest for me. I will continue to eat them and use them in any way I feel like without taking the slightest responsibility to know what kind of creatures they are, what they feel, what kinds of lives they lead in order to give me the products I want.’”

If you enjoy the taste of animal flesh – and dismiss concerns about the well-being of farmed animals with appeals to their emotional, intellectual and/or evolutionary inferiority – then you owe it to yourself to pick up a copy of *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon* and educate yourself. It’s the least you can do.

And yes, the book opens with a pig who quite enjoyed serenading the full moon!

Note: I “read” the audiobook version of this book. Though the narrator’s voice is disconcerting at first – as it seems to emanate from a family farmer of olden days, like Old MacDonald or somesuch, certainly kinder than the big agribusiness which now dominates farming, but an animal killer just the same – it grew on me rather quickly. Tim Jerome’s narration has a gentle, lulling quality about it, which lends itself well to Masson’s storytelling style.

<http://www.easyvegan.info/2009/03/18/...>

<http://www.easyvegan.info/tag/the-pig...>

Lisa Bennett says

I really enjoyed reading this book because it is anecdotal. Sometimes our understanding of animals comes from what we know instinctively; from our interactions and experiences with them. This is something that science really cannot measure. We can never *know* what a member of another species is thinking or feeling - we can only guess based on their actions. I think it is the arrogant fool who assumes that because they cannot understand the thoughts and feelings of a different species, or because science cannot define them, that they do not exist. For those willing to see, I think animals can and do communicate with us in very obvious ways.

I did learn some new things about the behaviours of farmed animals discussed in this book, but mostly it just affirmed what I believe - that they are individuals with moral value, emotions and desire to live a live free of the cruelties that we inflict on them. If you are looking for a lot of scientific studies and irrefutable facts, you will probably find better sources than this book. But for those that can accept animals for who they are, there are some wonderful observations within these pages.

Diane says

Not what I was expecting from the whimsical title and cover illustration. I was hoping for anecdotes that would show the reader how much more there are to farm animals than most people suspect. Far from stupid emotionless meat sources they have full lives of social structure, interactions and emotions.

Unfortunately the book is written with a strident animal rights tone in which no farm - no matter how humane - is acceptable. One-time anecdotes, speculation, quotes from historical documents produce a diatribe, er, dialog, that is designed to turn off anyone with a scientific background or an ability to separate the wheat from the chaff.

There is no doubt that large animal farms geared towards producing meat, eggs and dairy have and do keep animals in less than optimal conditions. Sometimes those conditions are cruel. I have no argument with that.

I completely reject the author's claims that all farm animals should live in the wild and that their lives would be far happier than any life they could have, even if living in an animal sanctuary. He doesn't seem to realize that they would be considered a food source in the wild by other animals. Additionally the life span of an animal in the wild is much lower (with a few exceptions) than the same animal in captivity.

The author's response is that the animals would be living as their ancestors did and would be happier. He argues that free range farms which inoculate animals against horrible diseases, provide veterinary care, ensure a balanced diet and access to water and shelter are worse than allowing the same animal to live in the wild. I don't think I can buy that argument.

This book had a lot of potential but wastes it. My advice is to skip it.

Moira Clunie says

if i were to give you a reading list to help you understand why i'm vegan, this book would be on it. when i first read these stories, i'd been vegetarian for more than a decade and had already stopped eating dairy and eggs. even so, the book completely changed my perspective on pigs and other farmed animals, animal rights and compassion as a reason for vegetarianism.

comparing the situation of farmed pigs, cows, goats, sheep, ducks and chickens with animals in sanctuaries and similar species in the wild, masson illustrates the effect of farming practices on animals' behavioural range and emotional lives. his argument is not anthropomorphic, but simply assumes that an animal is happy when it can live according to its nature; the institution of animal agriculture doesn't allow for animals to follow their instincts and express normal behaviours. chickens like to dust-bathe, cows like to raise their baby calves. one particular pig who lives in a beach community north of auckland likes belly scratches and singing to the moon.

i'd highly recommend this book to anyone who is concerned about the wellbeing of animals, and especially anyone who cares about animals but eats animal products.

Lisa Vegan says

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this book. I often don't like animal rights books with little anecdotal stories because I'm afraid they won't be believable. But I loved all the stories of the animals in this book. It's not a gruesome hard hitting type of book and can be enjoyed by everyone, in my opinion.

Nicole says

I strongly recommend this book to anyone who's ever flirted with the idea of becoming a vegetarian/vegan. It was one of the most powerful and heart wrenching books I've ever read, but is my new favorite. I've you've ever said that animals don't have feelings, or ever wondered if they do, please read this book.

Jonathan says

I went vegan a year ago and it was without a doubt one of the best choices I ever made; so the author of 'The Pig Who Sang to the Moon' didn't need to convince me of the rationale of the changes I've already made in my life. Still, without ever being preachy, condescending or unduly sentimental, Jeffery Mason presents an overwhelming case for veganism based solely on the unimaginable levels cruelty that we are inflicting on animals as a society. That's an achievement in itself - he barely touches on the environmental costs of our demand for animal products (which, as any honest investigation will quickly and indisputably demonstrate, are enormous) - and even the health benefits of an animal-free diet get only a passing treatment. It's well researched, backing up the anecdotal evidence with science where necessary, but immediately accessible to the general reader. It's a book I'd recommend to vegans and non-vegans alike. If you're a non-vegan, and you can get through a book like this without even questioning the ethics of how you sustain your existence, then I have serious doubts about your capacity for morality of any kind at all.

Caroline says

I couldn't concentrate on this book to the degree that I should have done. I find it so hard to read about how we abuse animals via our factory farming practices.

I found Masson's approach overly anthropomorphic at times. I don't believe that most farm animals seem less emotional to us just because we don't know them as well as cats and dogs. I can see there is a big difference in different animals' abilities to communicate. Even as an enthusiastic cat lover I can see this difference between dogs and cats, and I think I can rightly extrapolate how much greater this distance must be between something like dogs and sheep.

Having said that, Masson gives some very touching stories about animals in loving homes or animal sanctuaries who have made special relationships with people, or with each other, and he argues well for things like the intelligence and sensitivity of pigs, and the companionship enjoyed by cows and sheep.

I was however alienated by ideas like this.

"My friend Matthew Scully, who writes speeches for President Bush, was surprised to see a mother and her ducklings walking right by the White House in downtown Washington, and he wondered why they would nest in a city when there's miles and miles of river around the city. I think the answer, surprising as it is, lies in the ability of ducks to recognize that there are places where humans protect them from both their natural predators, other animals, and from their unnatural predators, namely us. Nobody would ever shoot a mother duck walking across a busy city street....."

I don't know why the odd duck and her brood end up in the middle of cities, but it inevitably seems a mistake or oversight, never a deliberate ploy on the part of the duck to take refuge in a city centre, on the grounds that city centres are safe places for ducks. And it was occasional writings like this which undermined Masson's position for me.

Having said that, even as a skeptic, it was hugely powerful to read on the one side Masson's arguments for the breadth of animals' sensibilities, and on the other about the horrendous environments in which most farm animals find themselves. As a vegetarian, and wannabe vegan, the book made me think again about what I buy and where I buy it, and it renewed my commitment to buy as expensively as possible when any animal produce is concerned.

I think at the end of the day I feel that any sentient being, capable of feeling pain and discomfort, and capable of experiencing things like a mothering instinct, needs to be treated well, according to their nature, and with respect. Arguments that they can experience emotions in the ways that we can I find less convincing. It may be that I need more evidence, and we just haven't had enough work on the subject.

All in all I found this a very sad read, but very worthwhile.

Stefani says

It's difficult to believe that this is the first real book, to my knowledge, which has explored the issue of whether or not farm animals have a sense of self. The sad part is, the less cute and cuddly animals often get the short end of the stick when it comes to people's sympathies. I guess the rationale is if the animal is awkwardly large and/or perceived as dirty (one myth that the author counteracts is that pigs actually abhor being dirty) they are less worthy of our attention and consequently abused without any intervention.

I'm supportive of most of the author's basic arguments in that I think animals should not be sentenced to hellish lives on factory farms with complete disregard for their well-being purely to support an unhealthy obsession with meat in this country. Knowing that millions of animals suffer in this way every year while nothing is done makes me queasy. I'm not even sure that the emotional life of animals is even relevant when it comes to whether or not factory farming is an abusive practice; animals can feel pain, distress and possibly pick up on other cues about their imminent fate due to their superior senses. I recently visited a farm where a calf had been separated from its mother; the mournful bellowing of the mother cow was unlike any sound I'd heard before and hope to hear again.

As for the argument that animals would perish without our domesticating them, I hardly think that the way in which they are produced now is any kind of life worth living, doomed as they are from the start. Many live short, miserable existences in factory farms—some are force fed and others cannot turn around or even stand. At least having a chance to survive with their own natural instincts in the wild would allow the population to regulate itself.
