



THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK

SOME WE LOVE, SOME WE HATE, SOME WE EAT

Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals

by Hal Herzog

Combining the boundless intellect of Malcolm Gladwell with the irreverent humor of Mary Roach and the paradigm-shifting analysis of Jared Diamond, a leading scientist offers an unprecedented look inside our complex and often paradoxical relationships with animals.

Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It Is So Hard to Think Straight about Animals takes a fresh look at the psychological and moral complexities that characterize our relationships with other species. The book is based on contemporary thinking in cognitive psychology, ethics, animal behavior, and anthrozoology (the new science of human-animal interactions). A mix of social and biological science, stories, and the author's experiences as a researcher, the book covers the gamut of human-animal interactions and raises a host of fascinating, often controversial issues. Among these are why humans (and only humans) keep pets, the moral thinking of cockfighters, why so many animal activists are women, how Congress decided mice were not animals, the hidden connection between vegetarianism and eating disorders, the psychological costs of moral clarity, how our brain is wired to fall in love with kittens, why meat is both delicious and disgusting, and how random chance explains fads for dog breeds.

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The anthropologist Claude Levi-Straus wrote, "Animals are good to think with." In this book, I show how our interactions with animals reflect basic aspects of human nature. These include the roles instinct, culture, and language play in our lives. I show how a new theory in psychology—the social intuitionist model of morality—explains why our relationships with animals are so psychologically and morally problematic. I argue that our thinking about animals reflects an uncomfortable mix of logic and intuition, and I show why inconsistencies and paradoxes in our relationships with other species are inescapable. .

HOW DID YOU GET THE IDEA FOR THE BOOK?

As a research psychologist, I have studied how people think about and relate to animals for 25 years. I became interested in human-animal interactions when I was unjustly accused by an animal rights activist of procuring kittens from an animal shelter and feeding them to my son's

baby boa constrictor. The charge was, of course, ridiculous, but it did cause me to question troubling ethical aspects of our relationships with animals, including pets. At the time I was an animal researcher studying snake behavior, but I soon shifted gears. I closed up my lab and began to investigate the psychology of how humans think about the use of other species.

My research has generally fallen into two categories. The first includes people with morally complicated relationships with other creatures, for instance, moral vegetarians, lab animal technicians, animal rights activists, women hunters, animal researchers, and cockfighters. The second addresses the question of why our attitudes toward other species are so paradoxical

HOW DID YOUR BACKGROUND SHAPE YOUR OUTLOOK AND, ULTIMATELY, THE BOOK?

As a child I was fascinated by animals, particularly unusual ones like lizards and snakes. I obtained my undergraduate degree from the American University of Beirut, and after a stint as an Army medic, I enrolled in graduate school in experimental psychology at the University of Tennessee. I was delighted to find a mentor who was a leading researcher in ethology, the study of animal behavior. Much of my early research was rooted in my childhood interest in the behavior of reptiles. I conducted some of the first studies of how alligators talk to each other and even developed a test to measure the personalities of baby snakes.

However, a series of incidents that I describe in the book caused me to shift my research interests from animal behavior to the study of human-animal interactions. The book is based, in part, on my experiences over two decades as a researcher in the new field of anthrozoology.

WHAT DID YOUR RESEARCH FOR THE BOOK ENTAIL?

While the book is based on decades of research, it took two years to write. During that time I interviewed circus animal trainers in Florida and cockfighters in Tennessee, participated in sea turtle rescue on the beaches of South Carolina, attended dog shows and snake handling church services, and spent time volunteering at the animal shelter in the Utah desert where 22 of Michael Vick's pit bulls have found a new home. I visited a woman who runs a shelter for 70 wolf-dog crosses, and I ate dinner that featured raw T-bone steak at a utopian eco-community in which most residents are ex-vegetarians.

WHAT MAKES *SOME WE LOVE, SOME WE HATE, SOME WE EAT* RELEVANT TODAY?

Where to begin? First, in recent years we have seen a shift in the relationships between humans and other species. Over sixty percent of American households include a pet, most of which are regarded as family members. The blurring of the boundaries between pets and people has given rise to a booming industry in pet clothing, greeting cards, day spas, and even a pet airline. We now spend nearly \$50 billion dollars a year on the care and feeding of the animals we love, an amount which appears to be surprisingly recession-resistant.

Second, there is increasing awareness that pets can facilitate human health and well-being. But, as I show in the book, some of the claims about the “healing powers of pets” are questionable. The idea that there is a causal link between childhood animal abuse and adult criminality is equally suspect. (Contrary to popular belief, most school shooters did not abuse animals, and most children who are cruel to animals grow up to be perfectly normal human beings.)

Third, though we love some animals, we are ambivalent about others. Irrational animal fears are among the most common phobias in the United States, and three fourths of Americans support the right to hunt and shoot other creatures. Despite efforts by animal activists to equate meat with murder, the number of animals killed each year for our dining pleasure has tripled from three billion a year to over nine billion since the rise of the animal rights movement in 1975.

Fourth, the treatment of animals is a divisive moral and political issue. Nearly every day, media reports appear on controversial animal issues. These range from the recent Supreme Court case on the legality of the sale of dog fighting videos to the ethics of swim-with-dolphin programs to the question of whether the ownership of pit bulls should be banned. In 2008, for instance, Californians voted against a proposition which would have recognized the rights of gay people to marry, but passed a proposition that will improve the lives of chickens and pigs. The debate over the use of animals in science is particularly vitriolic, as witnessed by the recent increase in attacks directed at biomedical researchers.

Finally, our relationships with animals offer a window into the quirks of human nature. Often our attitudes toward the treatment of other species are morally incoherent. Why, for instance, do people care so much about the rare Giant Panda but so little about the equally endangered Giant Chinese Salamander, the world’s largest amphibian? How can 70% of Americans say they agree with the aims of the animal rights movement, yet 97% of us eat animal flesh? What are the ethical implications of keeping cats as companion animals—given that our pet kitties kill a billion songbirds in the United States each year?

WHAT SETS YOUR BOOK APART?

While there are hundreds of trade books on pets, nature, and animal ethics, none of them focus on the psychology and moral paradoxes inherent in a wide scope of our relationships with other species. The most similar trade book would be *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, which is concerned with our relationship with food animals. There are also several academic books that deal with these issues, but they are intended for scholarly audiences rather than the general reader.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR YOUR BOOK?

There are three groups of potential readers. First, individuals interested in new ideas emerging in the social and biological sciences—readers of books by Malcolm Gladwell, Stephen Levitt, Jared

Diamond, Steven Pinker, Jonah Lehrer, and Richard Dawkins. The second are people interested in issues related to our relations with and treatment of other species. Books in this category include *The Omnivores Dilemma*, *When Elephant Weep*, *The Hidden Lives of Dogs*, and *Animal Liberation*. Finally, many colleges and universities now offer courses in animal ethics and in human-animal relationships. I anticipate the book will be used as a supplementary text in many of these.

The book is intended to be a “good read” as well as being informative. The general reader will find it entertaining and thought provoking. Because the book is also high in content and thoroughly referenced, researchers and students will also find it a useful introduction to the study of human-animal interactions and a valuable reference to the most important research in this field.

DO YOU HAVE A PET?

Yes, a cat named Tilly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hal Herzog is recognized as one of the world’s leading experts on human-animal relations. His research has been published in prestigious academic journals including *Science*, the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, *The American Psychologist*, *The American Scholar*, *Journal of Social Issues*, and the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, and has been featured in *Newsweek*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Scientific American*, *New Scientist*, *Slate*, CNN, National Public Radio’s *Morning Edition*, MSNBC, *Science Daily*, the *London Times*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *New Zealand Herald*, and *India Times*. He is Professor of Psychology at Western Carolina University and lives in the Great Smoky Mountains near Asheville, North Carolina, with his wife and their cat Tilly.