Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It’s So Hard to Think Straight About Animals by Hal Herzog

Our Skewed Moral Calculus About Animals

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

Does living with a pet really make people happier and healthier? What can we learn from biomedical research with mice? Who enjoyed a better quality of life—the chicken on a dinner plate or the rooster who died in a Saturday-night cockfight? Why is it wrong to eat the family dog? Drawing on more than two decades of research in the emerging field of anthrozoology, the science of human–animal relations, Hal Herzog offers surprising answers to these and other questions related to the moral conundrums we face day in and day out regarding the creatures with whom we share our world.

Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat is a highly entertaining and illuminating journey through the full spectrum of human–animal relations, based on Dr. Herzog’s groundbreaking research on animal rights activists, cockfighters, professional dog-show handlers, veterinary students, and biomedical researchers. Blending anthropology, behavioral economics, evolutionary psychology, and philosophy, Herzog carefully crafts a seamless narrative enriched with real-life anecdotes, scientific research, and his own sense of moral ambivalence.

Alternately poignant, challenging, and laugh-out-loud funny, this enlightening and provocative book will forever change the way we look at our relationships with other creatures and, ultimately, how we see ourselves.
My Personal Review:
Hal Herzog is fascinated with our moral relationships with animals, the contradictions we feel and the ethical problems when we avoid contradictions. A dog, he points out, is a member of the household in the United States, vermin in India, and food in Korea. We humans tend not to eat animals we either adore or despise. As Koreans and Chinese have started keeping pets, they have become more ambivalent about eating dog meat and relegate certain species to the dog trade.

Herzog is an anthrozoologist who studies the interactions between humans and animals. He is also possessed with a quick eye for absurdity and a broad range of interests. In this book he has visited industrial farms and Appalachian cock fights, dogmeat markets, dolphin treatment centers, loggerhead turtle nests protection runs, animal research laboratories, and rescue refuges for injured animals. Even his family pets come up for scrutiny, when an animal rights neighbor called to ask if he was feeding kittens to his new pet boa constrictor and he experienced a revulsion that he did not feel about feeding them mice. And it led to a comparison of the food a snake needs compared to a cat—5 pounds of flesh versus 50 each year which leaves a moral burden of owning a cat ten times that of a boa. Herzog writes well. I had trouble putting the book down, stopping only to ponder some of the questions he raises.

Like most of us, Herzog eats meat, wears leather shoes, but thinks that animals should not suffer. He foresees veal, spends more money to get chickens that roamed under open skies, and is more troubled by the use of laboratory animals for safe eye makeup than for medicine. But he spends time with animal rights activists of all stripes, giving them a fair hearing and pointing out where people he may disagree with are correct.

For instance he looks at regulations protecting lab animals. Dogs are entitled to a period of play each day while cats are not. Mice have very little regulation, but a lab mouse is entitled to more protection than a wild mouse in the same lab, even if most of the wild mice are escapees from the experiments. He goes so far as to design a series of animal experiments and submitted them for approval to Animal Care Committees at research universities, expecting similar responses. In fact approvals varied 80% of the time and were quite arbitrary.
In fact Herzog tells us that the most comprehensive legal protections for animals, which still are admirable, were developed in Nazi Germany while human beings were tortured and slaughtered. The cognitive dissonance is amazing.

But he points out that we have our own cognitive dissonance. Why do we treat cockfighting as more cruel than the slaughter of chicken for food? Your average Tennessee gamecock will be pampered during its two year life, running free with 150 feet of lawn and a private bed, fed special rations, being exercised like an athlete, able to mate, then sliced by the Mexican short knife after a fight to the death. Your average industrially raised Cobb 500 chick will live in utter squalor, bred too large for its aching legs, lungs burning for 24 hours a day from ammonia-laden air, never seeing daylight, pumped full of medicated chicken chow, then will be jammed into a crate, suspended upside down and electrocuted around its 42nd day of life. Herzog gives the red light to both activities, but sees the hypocrisy of trying to make cockfighting a felony while permitting wholesale torture for food production.

He looks at vegetarians, and vegans and ex-vegetarians: 97-99% of Americans eat some flesh including 60% of people who call themselves vegetarians but ate meat in the past 24 hours. There are 3 times as many ex-vegetarians than vegetarians, usually because they often felt sick. Actual vegetarians can range from his friend Pete who is disgusted by meat but will shoot the racoons who steal his vegetables, to people who wrestle with taking the life of a carrot, much less a fish. Herzog considers the various theories of animal rights, from an absolutist vision where choosing between saving a baby or a hamster in a fire is equivalent, to considering an animals ability to suffer, its level of cognition or more arbitrary determinants (say cuteness) to decide whether one can kill or eat an animal. Is it better to kill 200 chickens or one cow? How about 70,000 chickens or one blue whale?

Since this book deals with the morality of killing animals. I wish that Herzog had looked at the religious treatments of killing for food or ceremony. Both Kosher and Halal restrictions look seriously at the treatment of animals, before and during slaughter. Even the separation of milk and meat is justified by revulsion over the idea that a kid might be stewed in its mothers milk. And Kosher vegetables must be inspected to not inadvertently kill and consume insects, which would be more sinful than eating pork. A friend who is a priest of Ifa, will ceremonially kill chickens or African rats, but is otherwise vegetarian. A college professor spent time with a tribe of nominally vegetarian New Guinnean natives who four times a year would religiously kill a boar and distribute its meat to every member. There is much to be learned from religious attitudes towards killing food.

This is a book that will change the way you look at food and our relationship with animals no matter where you are coming from. He wrestles with complexity, personally coming down on the side of non-food
fundamentalism, an omnivore who takes animal consciousness seriously. I highly recommend it.

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