

Farm Animals Emotions

article by Professor Jeffrey Moussaieffe Masson

Jeffrey Masson has been a university professor and a Freudian psychoanalyst and is a co-author of the best-selling book *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*. A self-confessed animal lover, he has written about his extraordinary findings in the uncharted territory of animal emotions.

Who doubts that farm animals have the same emotions as their evolutionary cousins, the animals from whom they were domesticated? Only those who stand to profit from this particular kind of ignorance. If you are going to take a calf away from its mother as soon as it is born, it would be disturbing to admit that the reason the cow is bellowing for hours on end is that she "misses" her child. When a human mother is frantic because she is separated from her baby, we call it love. When a cow does the same, we do not give it a name, and say it is purely instinct. (What, by the way, is wrong with an instinct for love?). If a chicken, a bird born to nest in a tree, is deprived of any chance to move, it is not likely that the person who put them there will welcome a discussion about the joy chickens derive from dust-bathing and sun—bathing.

"Joy" is not a word likely to cross the lips of a person who works in a shed with a million chickens. When I told one that at least he was there of his free will, while the chickens had no say in the matter, he put me straight: "Pal, you think I enjoy this?" He was right. He was not about to be tortured in the same way as the chickens, but he was as much a part of this soul-deprived machine as the chickens. What he did not see was that solidarity would mean taking the side of his fellow workers AND the chickens, against the bosses of both sets of victims.

Ask a farmer, some time, what is the meaning of the strange sounds coming from his pigs when one is in trouble. "Doesn't mean anything," he will probably tell you. Wrong. Pigs are very sensitive to the suffering of other pigs. Like us, they don't enjoy hearing a fellow in agony. Like us, they are "programmed" to rush to his or her aid.

Baby pigs squeal because they know an adult will try to help. Imagine the terror in a herd of pigs listening at the gate of a slaughter house.

"Stupid" is a word I often hear from people who work with sheep, but what is so stupid about wanting to be close to your friends? A sheep can, as we have recently learned, recognise 250 of his closest friends by sight. If we prefer the company of our loved ones to that of complete strangers, are we said to be stupid?

In my opinion, when it comes to emotions, farm animals are just like us. Those seem to be fighting words to animal scientists and farmers alike. But stop for a moment to consider the reason: we dare not recognise the similarity between the emotional lives of farm animals and ourselves, because we would have to ask ourselves how we can treat them as if they were not even living creatures.

Is it not possible that, far from having no feelings at all, farm animals may have even more intense emotions than humans? After all, some animals have physical abilities beyond those of humans; they fly, they run faster, are stronger and so on, so why should it be so surprising that a cow's love for her calf might be every bit as intense, or even more intense, than our love for our children? Is it not possible that the joys experienced by a chicken surpass our own? And if this is

true, is it not something to celebrate, rather than rue? Maybe what we need from chickens is not their meat, or their eggs, but lessons in how to be more joyous.

If we stop thinking of farm animals as existing only to be of use to us, if we grant them individuality, life—interests, inner lives, is it not possible that we could develop an entirely new relation with these most demeaned of all domestic animals? Yes, we might have to give up meat, eggs, milk and feather pillows, but think what we might gain in return: an entry into a whole new world of intense and pure emotions the likes of which we may not previously have even suspected. I, for one, think it's worth the chance. Pass the soy milk please.

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