



## **Eating Animals**

*Jonathan Safran Foer*

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**Jonathan Safran Foer spent much of his life oscillating between enthusiastic carnivore and occasional vegetarian. Once he started a family, the moral dimensions of food became increasingly important.**

Faced with the prospect of being unable to explain why we eat some animals and not others, Foer set out to explore the origins of many eating traditions and the fictions involved with creating them. Traveling to the darkest corners of our dining habits, Foer raises the unspoken question behind every fish we eat, every chicken we fry, and every burger we grill.

Part memoir and part investigative report, *Eating Animals* is a book that, in the words of the *Los Angeles Times*, places Jonathan Safran Foer "at the table with our greatest philosophers."

## Eating Animals Details

Date : Published November 2nd 2009 by Little, Brown and Company (first published October 31st 2009)

ISBN : 9780316069908

Author : Jonathan Safran Foer

Format : Hardcover 341 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Food and Drink, Food, Philosophy, Animals, Health

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# From Reader Review Eating Animals for online ebook

brian says

## TO SERVE MAN

i can't review this book. can't even finish it. the page-count to tears-shed ratio is just too high. and my head's not in the right place for this shit. (and talk about preaching to the choir...) -- i haven't read jonathan safran foer's novels and fuckoff what he's ever written or what he ever will write: he's a great man for this book alone. he's a great man by default, perhaps, because most people are such evil and miserable cunts. but, no. set apart from a race of miserable cunts he's still a great man.

the problem, really, with hitler and stalin and mao and all those other guys is not what they did... but what they didn't do. a bad case of extreme short-sightedness. they set their crosshairs on specific targets when what they really should have gone after was the destruction of the entire human race. (logistically i know this is problematic; you need to start small. but i can dream, eh?) if i found a magic lantern, before the genie uttered 'and your first wish can't be for a million more wishes', i'd already have made my only wish: that every human being on the planet be instantly transformed into a dog except for me (and rosario dawson. or marisa tomei. decades of silence and masturbation and i'd probably end up throwing myself off a bridge after a week-long romp with a border collie). and i'd hang out with all of 'em. i'd toss a few hundred dogs into a swimming pool and do laps. i'd play tag in forests with 'em. i'd take 'em swimming in oceans and lakes. and then i'd retire to my cabin, start a fire, pour myself and rosario a cold beer, stuff about 3 or 4 hundred dogs into a large room, and me and my woman'd take a long nap with/on them.

the human race is capable of such beauty and goodness, and life is not easy -- there's little clarity: it's seldom easy to know what is truly right or wrong. but factory farms? the torture and intense suffering of creatures weaker than us? no brainer. and all the *war and peaces*, all the mona lisas, all the moonlight sonatas, all the oskar schindlers and MLKs cannot possibly justify what we've done to one another, what we've done to the planet we inhabit, and most offensively, to the rape and utter destruction of the animal kingdom.

my dream scenario: as a result of the evil actions perpetrated on animals, a variant of swine or bird flu gets ultra-deadly, goes airborne, and wipes us all out. yes. we have reached the point in which the kanamits should come and 'serve' us. we've earned it. and we should know what it's like to be on the other end.

as human beings we simply must lie to ourselves about much -- but not about this. it is not necessary. but we do. and for what? for the least interesting of our five senses? because stuff tastes good? we tolerate factory farms because stuff is 'yummy'?  
evil and miserable cunts.

do i sound too angry? hyperbolic? unstable? juvenile? like some blood-throwing PETA nut? am i 'not going to convince anyone with this tone'? good. i don't want to convince anyone. i just want the human-eradicating disease to come.  
and come soon.

and if considering a vote for this review, understand that it's almost totally certain that if i knew you i'd wanna toss you in a woodchipper.  
keep your vote, miserable cunt.

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## Lori says

Well, fresh fruits and vegetables are alive and responsive to light when you eat them, grain harvesters leave a wake of maimed and mutilated wildlife, and a songbird dies for every cup of coffee. I suspect that last is an imprecise ratio. So, Burroughs point that your food was alive is absolutely true. While North Americans aren't the only people who overeat, it's obvious that we do. Ninety dollars for a Thanksgiving turkey would certainly limit my household consumption.

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## Books Ring Mah Bell says

Well done, Jonathan Safran Foer, well done.  
(your book, not steak)

Look, I love meat. I really do. I hate myself for that, but I love meat. I also deplore seeing living creatures suffer. (I'm the jerk that lets spiders out of the house instead of squishing them.) I also know that if I had to kill the animal myself, I'd be a veggie for sure. I'm a total sucker for animals, but not enough of a sucker, I guess.

In junior high, I became a "crazy animal rights/environmentalist tree worshipping bunny hugger". This required me to not eat meat. I don't remember what started it, but it only lasted a few weeks.

A few years later I read, *The Jungle* and that put me back on the veggie wagon for a month or two.

In college, my anatomy and physiology lab completely cured me of eating beef roasts. (the human muscle in the lab was WAAAAAY to similar to the hunks of cow flesh wrapped under the cellophane.) That lasted a few months.

When driving, if the livestock truck passes me on the highway, I go veggie. (for a day if the truck is empty, maybe for a week if it's full)

This book may have changed me for good. Now, I'm not 100% vegetarian all of a sudden or attempting to go vegan, but I'm starting. When I go out for dinner, I will not choose meat. I will cook here at home with less meat. (This may drive my carnivore husband to divorce court. I'll send you the bill, Jonathan Safran Foer!)

Some veggies and vegans may say Foer was not "forceful" enough, but I am hopeful that at the very least, people like me will cut back on meat, which may lead to quitting meat altogether. Maybe enough people will see the horrid conditions of factory farms and demand fair treatment for animals.

Maybe I'm just living in a fantasy world... I mean, really, the most dedicated carnivore *has* to admit that factory farms are beyond awful. Exception to the rule: those who think the Lawd JEE-ZUS put the animals here for us to shoot -perhaps from helicopters- and eat. Those folks won't care that factory workers stick electric prods up animals' orifices (orifii?) and put cigarettes out on the animals' flesh. (Yep, sure makes ME believe we are higher, more civilized beings!)

Anyway... some people will NOT be moved by that at all. (NUTJOBS!)

Maybe the heartless population could be enticed to cut back on meat consumption with a little common sense? I am a sucker for common sense, and this book clearly points out that eating meat does not make a hell of a lot of sense.

Consider the impact of meat lust on the environment; the nasty pollution from factory farms, the decimation of wildlife (think overfishing). Think about how many calories of food go into making one little calorie of meat... No sir, makes no sense.

So, if the sad brown eyes of Bessie the cow are not enough to sway you off meat, and, like Rush Limbaugh, you could give a shit about the environment, maybe the fact that meat is not exactly the best thing for your health will get you to lay off the dead animal flesh. Increased meat consumption has been linked to colon and breast cancer. Anyone else noticed the increase of neurological and autoimmune diseases? You don't think that factory farms, which pump the animals full of antibiotics and hormones may play a part, do you?

Perhaps?

Maybe the surge of MRSA, H1N1 and H5N1 are revenge from the animals. Karma for all the suffering. Maybe when a pandemic of H1N1 wipes out a massive chunk of the population, the animals will go to slaughter with a little smile on their faces.

Okay. Maybe not.

I think this is one of the most thought provoking books I have read in ages. Should be required reading for those who put meat in their mouths.

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## **Darwin8u says**

*"If Nothing Matters, There's Nothing to Save"*

- Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals*

I'm going to have to chew on this book for a bit. I'm not sure a review the day after reading will fully vest what I plan on doing after reading this. I might be about ready to go veg, but there is something just annoying enough about JSF that almost wants to keep me eating meat just to piss him off. Nah, that really isn't true, but I wish it was.

The book isn't as well-written as I would have liked. It gave me what was important, but just not in the portions or the way I would have preferred. The book's narrative shifts were a little confusing. At times, I didn't know if JSF was trying to produce an academic screed or a philosophical screed. In total, I guess it worked, but barely. I think 'Eating Meat' was held together more by the power of the message than the way that JSF cooked the message.

To be fair, I did really like Foer's ideas/themes of creating new stories of food and his idea that animals are

often recepticals of our forgetting. I thought that was the strongest piece of his whole book.

Anyway, off to bed. I'll dream of factory slaughtered turkeys and hogs and wake tomorrow ready to think more about this book, the Animals I eat, the resources I waste, and what I plan on doing for the rest of my life in relation to the meat I eat. We will see what tomorrow brings.

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## **Melissa says**

I think that this book has changed my life, albeit in a really f\*cking inconvenient way. I've read *Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Fast Food Nation* and all the types of books that people who are trying to be socially conscious are supposed to read, and I know about the horrors of factory farming and how brutally animals are treated in the course of getting to my plate. But somehow it's been easier to live with it and ignore it in the past; Pollan even gives you a convenient out at the end of his book, where he "pities" the "dreams of innocence" of the vegetarian. I've never quite had it put to me the way that Safran Foer does, and it is this way that I cannot escape. This book asks just what the hell are you going to do about it? Knowing what you've just told about how chickens are raised & slaughtered, how the hell can you ever go to the store & buy chicken breasts again? After reading about what's done to pigs in the course of their lives, how can you go buy bacon? And even if you don't want to admit that turkeys and chickens and cows can feel pain, how can you support of an industry that Human Rights Watch says is guilty of "systemic human rights violations"? I'm not trying to get on a high horse or anything here: I love meat. I love bacon & sausage & desebrada & chicken fingers and pork roasts. I love these things and I don't want to go without them. And I never asked for the farming industry to use genetic manipulation to breed animals that are weaker & sicker. I never asked for them to jam-pack animals with antibiotics & end their lives in horrifically violent ways. But I don't think I can eat meat anymore because whether I asked for it or not, buying their products is supporting their ways. This review's getting too long. I suppose to sum up, this book has changed my life & I really wish I hadn't read it. I really wish I could just go on pretending that none of this ever happens. I wish I didn't tear up when I think about the chicken in my freezer (keep in mind that I am pregnant & emotional, please).

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## **dara says**

This isn't as much of a review of Jonathan Safran Foer's latest book as it is a reaction to it--a reaction to the reactions of others, even. The title of this book garners a reaction from people who haven't read it and who may never read it. Just carry [Eating Animals](#) around for a few days and you'll understand. There's an assumption that a book about eating animals is going to tell you that it is in some way wrong to eat animals--whether for the welfare of animals or for your own welfare--and most people "don't want to hear it." We know something is wrong with meat today--with how completely estranged we are from the process that turns animal into product. We have that general feeling and we don't want the specifics. We don't want to face being held accountable for what we know. We don't want to think about eating animals. Why not? If there's no shame in it, then why is there such an aversion created by the title alone?

I say "we" because I'm guilty of the same, and it took this book to make me realize it. It took seeing how the people around me wanted nothing to do with a book that might challenge their eating habits. Allow me to explain with a little bit of backstory here, which is irrelevant to the book itself, but entirely relevant to my reading of the book:

I've been a vegetarian for close to five years. I've had a moral qualm about eating animals since I first made the connection between the meat on my plate and the animals in my backyard. (I grew up on a farm. There were cows and they had much happier lives than most do these days, though I never saw what end they met once my parents sold them.) Why then did I only become vegetarian at the age of eighteen? (I mean, obviously, I pieced together that burgers were made from cows long before then; I wasn't *that* slow of a child.) My various attempts to give up meat failed. I'm not sure why. The obvious answer would be that I had weak willpower, but I think that's a cop out. When vegetarianism did stick, I didn't feel any more self-empowered. In fact, the attempt that succeeded started as a fluke. I had no intention of seeing it through. I found out about PETA's 30-day challenge and I was curious. "I can abstain from eating animals for a month," I reasoned. When the month was over, I didn't want to eat animals anymore. No craving for meat was strong enough to compensate for the amount of suffering inflicted on animals. (What can I say? I'm a bleeding heart, a pussy, whatever.)

I surrounded myself with literature and images of slaughterhouses long enough to fend off the desire for flesh. The desire disappeared and I felt better. I felt better because I was eating better (fresh fruit and veggies was a vast improvement over my childhood diet of Hardees and Mountain Dew). I felt better once the nagging guilt the conflict between my beliefs and my actions caused was no longer. Or so I thought.

The truth is that over the years I became lax in my beliefs. Not eating animals became more habit and preference than moral conviction. People wore down my enthusiasm. Oh, the enthusiasm was there to begin with! There's nothing more exciting and refreshing than newfound vegetarianism! I felt better and I wanted other people to feel better, too. I thought I could help initiate that. I thought that I could lead by example--I wouldn't push my opinions down anyone's throat, of course, because I didn't want to be uppity about it. It doesn't work that way, or at least it didn't for me in rural North Carolina--in the county supporting the largest Smithfield slaughterhouse in the world, to be exact. People were interested, but only for the sake of arguing. Foer obviously experienced the same, writing:

**"I can't count the times that upon telling someone I am vegetarian, he or she responded by pointing out an inconsistency in my lifestyle or trying to find a flaw in an argument I never made. (I have often felt that my vegetarianism matters more to such people than it does to me.)"**

There's only so much antagonistic query I was equipped to handle at the age of eighteen. To be perfectly blunt, I stopped giving a fuck. I decided to be a vegetarian, not explain my reasons to others, and to stop giving a fuck what others thought about it. When someone asked me why I didn't eat meat, my responses ranged from "I don't like being overwhelmed by choices" to "I was raped by a butcher." When you stop giving a fuck, then people generally stop harassing you. These people aren't that clever to begin with, so they usually don't bother if they have to compete with another's nonchalance.

My initial reason for not considering becoming vegan was the difficulty. I felt it was a big enough change to quit cold turkey cold turkey. Yeah, I know, there's no excuse for my sense of humor. Over the years I should have made the necessary steps to eliminate eggs and dairy from my diet. I have no excuse for that either. I knew neither were essential to my nutrition or well being--that it was just a matter of putting forth more effort. In the back of my mind I knew, too, that my inaction was supporting animal cruelty towards laying hens, as well as indirectly promoting the veal industry. That nagging guilt was still there, but I pushed it aside.

I realized this past week that I can no longer do this. It is no longer acceptable. In fact, it never was. Nothing changed.

I was hardly beginning the book when I started to suspect that I was on the brink of a life-altering decision. Was Foer so persuasive that he alone managed to turn me vegan within the first few chapters? No. It wasn't even the news that Natalie Portman turned vegan after reading Eating Animals, either. ;)

It was my boyfriend telling me that he "didn't want to hear it" when I mentioned that piglets on factory farms have their testicles removed without anesthesia within the first ten days of their lives.\*

It was the moment when my literature teacher asked me if Eating Animals contains information so disturbing and disgusting that she would probably never want to eat meat again; and then without pausing for a reply, she said, "I'd better not read it then."

It was this general reaction I received coinciding with what I read that made me re-examine my own unwillingness to live by what I know--something I've known without needing to be told, but something I needed to be reminded of: **shame**. I am ashamed to be part of a system that is inexcusable.

**"Not responding is a response--we are equally responsible for what we don't do. In the case of animal slaughter, to throw your hands in the air is to wrap your fingers around a knife handle."**

What does all of this say about the book? Not much. Just read it. Throw your assumptions away, quit looking for someone else to tell you what to expect, and just read with an open mind, and a willingness not only to accept what feels right, but to take the actions necessary so that you may be at peace with yourself.

*\* In defense of my boyfriend--although no defense is necessary--since the conversation mentioned took place, he has agreed to read Eating Animals. Ideally, he'll read it and never eat another bite of meat again; just as ideally, when I handed my copy of the book to my mother a few hours ago and asked her to please do me a favor and read it, she would have done so in earnest, in an attempt to understand her daughter's lifestyle, instead of putting it down after a few pages and resuming her crossword puzzle, which although not ideal, was what actually happened. I can't allow myself to expect much to come of it, because there's enough disappointment in life as it is, but I am grateful for this much: that he cares enough about me to read what he would otherwise rather turn away from.*

**Written 11/12/09.**

**Update (7/6/11):** He never read it. We broke up, for reasons unrelated to diet. But if you know any cute, single, straight, literate, vegan boys, send 'em my way. If they do, in fact, exist.

**Update again (5/2/13):**

*I'm a feminist now, so I apologize for the derogatory use of the word "pussy" within the original review. If there were any point to it, I'd also amend the previous update to exclude the word "straight" and change "boys" to "men" (not the band) because it's creepy when grown men want girls, so vice versa? There's no point though, because I'm not looking. I'm no longer single.*

*We're dating again. Everyone advises against dating an ex, but everyone can go fuck themselves. I'd like to think compassion is about second chances. For whatever more-complicated-than-that reasons, I've decided*



*to give it a second go. He recently read the book. Kudos, right? Everything in its own time, or something. He's been vegetarian since, but I announce that tentatively, because obviously, things change: you can see that in just the span of updates to this not-a-review review. I'm happy right now. I'm hopeful. I finally realized I can't change the people I love. I can't shake them until they see what I see if they don't want to look, but I can tell my truth and maybe, just maybe, it will reach someone willing to take off the blinders.*

11/15/13: Another update! But you'll have to scroll through my blog post if you want it bad enough:  
<http://averagelookingvegan.wordpress....>

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## **Jennifer says**

Eating animals ...is about eating animals..and much much more. I've always felt wrong for eating meat yet continued to do so. For some reason, I thought it would be so hard to give up. Over time my conscience spoke louder than my fears (denials) and the ball has been rolling ever since. I wanted some extra encouragement, so I ordered this book.

I knew about slaughter houses and what goes on: to an extent. Little did I know, I really knew nothing. I've ingested this food all my life! HOLYYYYYYY SHIIIIIT! How can I keep this to myself?! All I keep thinking is, "Everyone needs to know about this!"

Yet, I don't want to be "that person" but then I do, I really really do. I wish I could convince more people to read this book but some just don't want to hear it. Once you "know" there is no going back.

This is not only about the terror millions of animals experience(turkey,chickens,pigs,cows,fish), it's also about the incredible impact it has on our environment and health.

Farming as we knew it, is no more. Our meat comes from industrial factory farms that claim they want to feed the people, but in reality, it's all about money, and there is no limit to the extreme measures they take to make it. (Regardless of the consequences) I can't even begin to describe the horror.

A video that was mentioned in the book, Meet Your Meat, (Google it) was eye opening and heartbreaking. Watch it. I dare you.

"If we are at all serious about ending factory farming, ... To those for whom it sounds like a hard decision ... The ultimate question is whether it's worth the inconvenience. We know, at least, that this decision will help prevent deforestation, curb global warming, reduce pollution, save oil reserves, lesson the burden on rural America, decrease human rights abuse, improve public health, and help eliminate the most systematic animal abuse in world history. What we don't know, though, may be just as important. How would making such a decision change us?" -Pg. 257

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## **Raeleen Lemay says**

This book should be required reading in America. No joke.

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## Eric\_W says

Addendum 2/11/10 at bottom, edited to remove some grammatical errors 5/20/10

For Feb reading club. This NYTimes science article should help heat things up:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/22/sci...>

Joint review with Pollan's Omnivore's Dilemma

Let's see, things we can't or shouldn't eat: butter, steak, meat, spinach because of the salmonella (or maybe it's only the organic spinach that gets contaminated), apples because of the alar, salt, sugar, fat, any food not bought at a farmer's market, any food bought at a non-union grocery, any food bought at a chain, any food that's not organic, any food that's labeled organic by the USDA because their standards aren't strict enough, kosher food, non-kosher, non-grass fed beef (and now we've learned that grass-fed beef is salmonella contaminated, too -

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12....>) pasteurized milk, raw milk, etc. etc),

This issue seems to engender as much animosity as whether communion should be allowed to non-Catholics. Factions abound, each with a slightly different take on the issue: those who believe eating meat is immoral; those who believe eating meat from factory farms is immoral; those who believe eating meat is immoral because it's environmentally unsound; those who believe eating meat is bad for your health; those who believe eating meat is fine; those who believe eating some kinds of meat is fine; those who believe eating meat is immoral because animals are sentient beings; and those who think the issue is cultural rather than moral or environmental. How can one reconcile these views and where does each of the authors take a stance. All of these views represent a moral position, i.e. a personal one in which the believer needs to persuade others of the necessity of adopting his view to the exclusion of the others and convince that not to do so will result in calamity. Up front we have to recognize that only people who have tons of food available, i.e., the rich, would even consider any of the positions.

Let me state my biases up front. I am very skeptical of any argument that proposes calamity will result if a particular position is not adopted and I am skeptical of moral arguments (not ethical ones). I believe that the most difficult decisions require choosing between grays, not black and white; that sentience as we understand it requires some form of self-awareness and we have no way to judge that in beings that we can't communicate with, and that sentience varies tremendously across species, indeed across individuals within that species; and that pain as we understand it may be very different across animals and plants with structures. (David Foster Wallace in "Consider the Lobster" discusses scientific evidence that lobsters, because of their structure, may in fact feel a state of euphoria when being boiled rather than pain as we understand it.)

I worked on two dairy farms for several years, milking about 120 cows, both in stanchions and parlors, dehorning calves, and shoveling shit. Contrary to Foer's claims, cows are not treated regularly with antibiotics. A test tube of milk coming out of the farmer's tank is pulled before loading on the truck, and this is tested at the plant before being mixed with the rest, and if any suspicion of antibiotic is found, the entire load is dumped and the farmer loses the value of the entire load. We were meticulous about dumping milk from any treated cow (usually for mastitis) for the required period before selling it. Those who think drinking raw milk is the answer are asking for trouble. We did, but that was probably stupid. Besides that, I saw what was in the strainer sometimes. None of that milk is tested and come on folks, there's a good reason why we started pasteurizing milk. It saved a lot of lives. I don't have any experience with feedlots, but I do know that

stress on animals is to be avoided at all costs as it slows the rate of growth, cuts profits, and leads to disease.

It's impossible to discuss these books in a vacuum, and I need to start out by making clear several assumptions:

1. Humans are omnivores biologically and, in fact, only very recently (say about 10,000 years ago) began to farm grains for food. Before that we were hunter/gatherers relying primarily on meat and berries. I find the push for grass-fed beef somewhat amusing, since corn is actually a grass.
2. Everything is interconnected. Just not eating meat will not even begin to address the issues of environmental degradation. Computers, roads, cars, pets, travel, ipods, plastics, toilet paper, etc., all have their downsides. If Foer and Pollan and Berry et al choose to emphasize one aspect of life and deliver broadsides against a particular activity, that's fine as long as we understand that limiting that activity will have a minuscule effect on the environment. More benefit would accrue if all the hand-wringers stopped flying about the country wasting fuel and polluting the environment, just staying put. Problem is that apocalyptic thinking and lecturing is very profitable.
3. Environmental activism is very much a white, rich, western game. People who have no money and who live a hand-to-mouth existence can't afford to choose. The best way to promote conscious environmental action is by raising living standards around the world. It also reduces the rate of population growth.
4. My very strong bias is that the only practical solution to the myriad number of problems is technological. Some examples: algae oil is already being used successfully mixed with Jet-A by Continental Airlines and the results are a reduction in carbon-footprint of 60-80% and fuel efficiency of 1-2%; production of methane gas as an energy source (very clean burning) from large factory-farms, something not possible if the animals are parsed out in smaller farms where runoff occurs in large quantities, etc., etc.
5. We quite naturally tend to read and find books and data that support a preconceived opinion and avoid those that present an opposing view.
6. My other bias is that I'm very sympathetic to vegetarianism, not veganism, for I love my bread and butter and cheese way too much. I milked cows for several years, churned my own butter and would gladly have turned several fresh heifers into instant hamburger had I been able to after wiping their manure off my face. (If you've ever milked cows you know exactly what I'm talking about.)

One of my heroes is Norman Borlaug who virtually single-handedly began the green revolution that increased wheat yields spectacularly ([http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/pe...](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/pe...)). He DID something, unlike the Paul Ehrlichs who just run around making a fortune proclaiming the sky is falling. ALL of Ehrlich's predictions have been wrong because of people like Borlaug.

I find the definition of what constitutes sentience to be worse than muddled and mixing up moral issues with that and environmental concerns makes the issues even murkier. There are clearly differences in "sentientness" from one species to another (no one would argue that a snail has the same level of consciousness as a dog) and whether that should play any part in deciding what to eat or not makes an interesting debate. Personally, I wish the discussion would leave the realm of "morality" with its concomitant religious overtones and focus on the more rational (IMHO) environmental concerns.

OK, now to the books in question.

Foer is, interestingly, apparently not a vegan and his main target seems to be factory-farming, not surprising since he sits on the board of Farm Forward and has several links to PETA. His moral stance against factory farming and an almost slavish love for the "family farm" seems oxymoronic since many factory farms are family owned. (I know several extremely large dairy farms owned and operated by families.) Perfect book for the masses since the message seems to be "eating meat is wrong for me but might not be for you if you kill animals and treat them in an approved manner." I read *The Jungle* many years ago and while reading kept suffering from severe *deja vu* although, if I remember correctly, Sinclair's emphasis was on the maltreatment of the workers (still an issue today in meat-packing plants) not the animals.

Foer, like any good muck-raking journalist, likes to shock and shock the book does with horrifying images of the worst of the cattle industry. He takes a moral position. I have no problem with that. If you don't want to eat meat, more power to you. But from a larger view you have to then also have to look carefully at the pet industry which uses a lot of meat from those same slaughterhouses. Cats and dogs can survive on plants but not well, they did not evolve into omnivores - just look at the teeth.

Foer has written a very religious book. He clearly starts from the premise that eating meat is morally reprehensible and then marshals very effective arguments against the way in which we treat animals. He takes a moral position. When we lived on the farm we raise a steer. I took it next door, the neighbor shot it and butchered it and we (I) ate it. My wife wouldn't because she knew the steer as a calf. (How many of you out there know the difference between a heifer, steer, and a bull?) The irony of it is that people raised on family farms (she wasn't) are much less sentimental than those who never had to shovel manure two or three times a day. But ultimately he doesn't come down against eating meat but against the way we get it ready to eat.

And he doesn't deal with the distinction I have seen often, that we can't eat sentient animals. I don't want to get into a debate over what constitutes sentience in non-human animals, but I do think one could make a distinction between a dog and a snail. So is it OK to eat a snail? Or an oyster? A recent article on why it was OK for vegetarians to eat oysters raise a firestorm of protest.

We hear from many people (and Foer) that animals suffer pain when they are killed and because of that it's immoral to eat them. What if pain could be removed from the equation. In *Knowledge Magazine* (April 2010) a philosopher (and vegetarian), Adam Shriver, suggests that it will soon be possible to genetically raise animals that are immune to pain (as we know it.) His argument is that factory farming will be with us for a long time and if we have the ability to eliminate pain in those animals isn't it morally irresponsible not to do so.

see also

Adam Shriver (2006). *Minding Mammals*. *Philosophical Psychology* 19 (4):433-442.

I actually enjoyed the book immensely, fun, lots of humor (why we should all eat dogs...) and personal anecdotes and he makes a very strong case. Will it change anyone's mind? Nope.

Pollan's Omnivore's Dilemma

Another book I enjoyed. (I actually listened to this and while Scott Brick is one of my favorite readers, he was all wrong for this book. Way too pedantic sounding.) A very interesting book with tons of detail (which I like) displaying the symbiotic relationship we have with corn and fossil fuels, a very destructive relationship, but one that nevertheless has allowed us to feed many, many more people than would have been possible otherwise. Ultimately, something will have to change, we cannot continue to use 1.5 calories of

energy to produce 1 calorie of food. Pollan emphasizes the mono-culture of corn but the same problems exist with the banana and other crops. In order to ship food to where it's needed requires products that mature at the same time, don't bruise easily, etc. He also shows that virtually all the food we eat has been genetically modified, if not at the gene level, certainly through seed selection, chosen for productivity, disease resistance, and a variety of other qualities.

I learned that in order to increase yields the nitrogen that was added was in the form of ammonium nitrate which existed as a surplus after world war two, no longer needed for explosives. That nitrogen leaches off the ground, into wells, (blue baby syndrome, too much nitrogen cause respiratory issues,) and into the water supply in other ways. (As an aside, no one around here uses much of that, preferring anhydrous ammonia injection directly into the soil with presumably much less runoff.)

I do have some issues with his very limited perspective on industrial farming, which he never defines, by the way. My neighbors, family farms all, farm thousands of acres. At what point does the size become optimum? Families run feedlots, too. My veterinarian has 40 steers in a feedlot. Is that a factory farm? They have the same conditions, the same feed, etc., as the larger feedlot a few miles away. It's almost as if Pollan had decided that farming on a grand scale was apocalyptic and then pulled together data to support his view. His data with regard to corn prices are woefully out of date. Just check commodity prices over the last five years. His choice of George Naylor must have required considerable searching in order to find someone who thought just the way he did.

The history of price supports and the switch under the Nixon administration from a "loan" program to direct payments was something I had completely forgotten and had no idea how much influence it would have on corn production. On the other hand, Butz's intent was to increase production to take the heat off Nixon following the huge increase in food prices as the price for corn had increased so dramatically.

All that being said, there's a lot of useful information, particularly with regard to government policy, and lots of fuel to support the libertarian side of the equation. There is no question that our over reliance on fossil fuels will get us into serious trouble very soon.

A final comment. All of the recent food books could only have been written by a society that doesn't have to worry about where its next meal is coming from.

The problem we have is scale. Wrigley just changed their gum wrappers from the little foil wrap to paper and thereby saved the equivalent of 60 million cans of aluminum. There's the problem in a nutshell

Fun trivia: the corn plant has 32,000 genes, more than humans. Astonishing. (Knowledge Magazine Mr/Apr 2010)

Addendum: I decided to check out a couple of Foer's citations. I chose one related to downer cattle, something I know just a little about. He presents the alarming statistic that each year it's estimated there are 200,000 downer cows (pg 56.) He uses that as a segue to discuss the Food Sanctuary program. I looked up the source of his data in Bovine Practitioner and something from the article he *didn't* tell you is that the incidence of downed cattle: "Results of the herd-size analysis showed that dairy herds with <50 cows and beef herds with <100 cows were at the highest risk for unknown non-progressive plus unknown and total progressive cases in this study." This would indicate to me that larger farms manage the cause of down cattle better. Causes of "downers" include calving (46%) and "cows with metabolic problems, such as milk fever (low calcium in the blood), grass tetani (low magnesium) or winter tetani (low calcium and magnesium)." [source: <http://www.copperwiki.org/index.php/D...>

] Treatment for milk fever and downing as a result of calving stress are quite simple and easy with very good results. The total number of cattle on farms in the U.S. in 2000 was a little over 98,048,000, down somewhat from 1999. The 200,000 number, while on its face high, represents .2% of the total. A very small number indeed.

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## **Rebecca says**

In his book *Heat*, Bill Buford reflects (as he prepares to butcher a pig) that he has always respected vegetarians for being among the few who actually think about meat.

In *Eating Animals*, JSF doesn't seem to respect much of anybody, other than his grandmother and Kafka. For all the promising ethical paths he walks down, from traditional animal husbandry to Bill Niman's sustainable beef to animal rights activism, he's so determined to shit on everyone else's ideas about eating meat that I'm not sure what conclusions he actually comes to. Granted, just showing up seems to be getting him pretty far. As a weapon in the battle against factory farming, this book is a Big Deal. A big name author, a splashy cover, a few celebrities just waiting to be converted. Hey, by all means necessary, right?

But as cogent writing? As a satisfying philosophy? As a vision for the future? Fail. For all the navel gazing, armchair philosophy, Jewish guilt, and postmodern literary affectations, this book boils down to a litany of war crimes. A fantastically damning pamphlet it would be. Perhaps even a moral call to arms. Condensed. But unless you find that "Save the Children" infomercials improve on the umpteenth viewing, you're better off with the less-injuring testimony in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* or *Fast Food Nation*. I mean, hell, they had me at the slaughterhouse filmstrip from the Simpsons.

The question remains. Is eating meat part of being human?  
Personally, I remain a vegetarian with respect for thoughtful butchers.

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## **JSou says**

I am not a vegetarian. Honestly, I've never even tried to be a vegetarian at any point in my life. I love steak. I love bacon. I love sushi. I could go on, but you get the idea.

With my son not being able to have any sort of gluten or artificial coloring in the food he eats, I've always thought I was doing good by stopping by the actual farmer's stand to get fresh eggs and some fruit & veggies (one benefit of living in a small, hick town) and then picking up my nicely-packaged and already butchered meat from the store. Foer addresses this in the book about how people just don't want to think about how their meat ends up ready for them to purchase, and that's surely the case with me. I have no issues picking up the value-pack of chicken breasts, yet I can't go to Red Lobster anymore since I feel so bad for those damn lobsters on display. I've always assumed operations in a slaughterhouse wouldn't exactly be pleasant, but again, I willingly ignored to really think about what goes on there.

One of the main points Foer brings up in this is factory-farming. Corporations have taken over the aspect of farming, and of course done everything they can think of just to make it as profitable as possible. The majority of all meat in this country comes from this type of farming now, and there is only a very small percentage of actual farmers left. How these animals are treated throughout their short lives in these factory-

farms is sickening. I don't think anyone who reads this book will be able to ignore these issues anymore. I know I'm not able to. This book really opened my eyes not only to the ethical standpoint of eating animals, but also to the health-related issues. The conditions at these factory-farms are *vile*. There is no way I can feed my kids this kind of meat knowing the shit (yes, actual shit) it's been through.

JSF's writing throughout this is never preachy or whiny; he just presents the facts and wants the reader to make his/her own choice on the matter. He talks with ranchers who are still trying as best they can to hold onto the old way of farming, members of PETA, and vegans who are trying to construct more humane slaughterhouses. The book never felt one-sided or that it was attacking people who eat meat. It did inspire me to make a drastic change though, and I think anyone who reads this would feel the same.

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### **Ashley Brooks says**

I realize I finished this book 10 days ago and have not rated it...and I also can't stop thinking about it.

There's a lot I could say about this book and how much it made me think-it's completely riddled with highlighter-but honestly, most people I know wouldn't bother picking this up no matter what I say. We eat animals because we're too selfish and stubborn to change. We eat animals because we're too lazy to make the "inconvenient" choices. We eat animals because we've been told over and over and over that it's the only healthy option. We don't want to hear about where our food comes from because from the little we do know, we know it's horrible, and if we were truly educated about it we'd have to admit the impact factory farming has on our health and our environment and the animals we continue to genetically mutilate and make those "inconvenient" choices.

It's plain and simple. It's irresponsible and dangerous to simply choose to not know where your food comes from. If you're going to choose to eat it, you should do so fully informed and own the responsibility of what you're doing.

If you've made it this far, I urge you to read this book regardless of your dietary choices. I really appreciate that this book presented fact. It's not going to try to guilt you into anything, though you very well may end up feeling guilty after reading it.

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### **Chloe says**

*"For us to maintain our way of living, we must tell lies to each other and especially to ourselves. The lies are necessary because, without them, many deplorable acts would become impossibilities."*

-Derrick Jensen

People cannot talk about their food choices without resorting to a narrative, and I'm no different. Food is so intensely personal; we relate to it on such an elemental level, that it's easy to understand. The foods we eat are part of the mythos we use to delineate our identities. We eat kosher or halal because this is part of the cultural heritage that we are either born into or adopt as our own. We have our comfort foods and guilty pleasures and food phobias and all of these help inform who we are. My own narrative is none too exciting:

I stopped eating meat at fifteen as a bet with a very intense (self righteous?) vegan and animal rights activist

friend of mine and just sort of never stopped. I have to admit that videos of slaughterhouses and feedlots disseminated by PETA (regardless of my current feelings about them) played a large part in my continued change of diet- I love the taste of animal flesh, but cannot agree with the way in which it is culled. If I'm going to be eating an animal then I am going to be the person who raises it, cares for it, kills it and prepares it and I want to honor its sacrifice as best as possible. Since my laziness precludes that active of a relationship with my food, I've stuck with my current diet. Along the way I've slipped up- sushi while living in Hawaii (who am I to say no to that?) and goulash while living in the Czech Republic (because there's really only so much fried cheese a person can eat) - but I've always come back to the fold. To this day I still don't call myself a vegetarian because I grow easily tired of people trying to find some hypocrisy in my actions, as though a failure to adhere to doctrine on my part would make the entire case of animal rights a moot point. Instead I just tell friends that "I don't eat meat." This is both a good way of circumventing any sort of new age stereotypes they may hold about vegetarianism as well as paving the way for a positive (read: non-adversarial) discussion as to my various reasons for it.

Suffice to say that when I heard that Jonathan Safran Foer, revered author of both *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, was penning a book about his lifelong debate about whether or not he should eat meat, I was sold. Fast-paced, impeccably researched, witty, heart-breaking and infuriating, this book did not disappoint. There's relatively little that is ground-breaking or new here, the literature on animal rights has been dittoed for decades now. What makes this book so remarkable is Foer's voice. Foer is an author able to evoke the most fragile of emotions from some of the most embittered hearts and to have the opportunity to look into the world of slaughterhouses and feedlots with one of the few authors to reduce me to a shuddering wreck was like looking at the world through less jaded eyes.

Rather than use the horrific realities (and they truly are horrific) of factory farming to attempt to shock the reader, a tactic that I would have taken much umbrage with, Foer presents the sad facts in a straightforward, almost clinical, tone: "At a KFC 'Supplier of the Year,' Pilgrim's Pride, fully conscious chickens were kicked, stomped on, slammed into walls, had chewing tobacco spit in their eyes, literally had the shit squeezed out of them, and had their beaks ripped off" (Pg. 182). Rather than minimizing the impact these facts would have, this allows the reader's imagination to fill in all the gory details, which cannot help but be far more persuasive. This book isn't a rant, it's a conversation. It is a conversation about our existence in relation to other beings and the level of respect that they should be afforded. It's a conversation about the dehumanizing effect brought on by our near-complete divorce from the natural world. Foer just makes his points in as straightforward a manner as possible and lets the reader pose the question themselves: "Now that you are aware of what goes into making your food, what are you going to do?" When ignorance is stripped away what can be left but to change or be reduced to flimsy excuses and hardened hearts?

The solution, as solutions invariably are, is not a simple one. There is not one hard and fast answer to what we should do, though I've had many discussions with animal advocates who claim that making the mass slaughter of animals illegal would spur a massive increase in the number of vegetarians in the world. Ignoring the fact that such pie-in-the-sky utopianism is simply *never* going to happen (sorry, Obama, systemic change does not come from within), it also neglects the true cost of the farming of soy, the protein replacement choice of millions of vegetarians.

Every day some 200 acres of Amazonian rainforest get bulldozed so that their mineral-scarce soils can be used as beds for another crop of soy. American farmers alternate growing vast fields of genetically modified corn with vast fields of genetically modified soy, never allowing a field to lay fallow for a season or two and recapture the necessary nutrients for growing, which leads to the addition of dozens of petrochemical fertilizer cocktails to spur it on. In short, the problem of farming animals is a symptom of a far larger problem, one which activist and author Derrick Jensen has been writing about for years: civilization in and of



itself is a ravenous self-sustaining cancer bent on feeding desires that it hasn't even thought of yet. It is the uncontrolled id to our Prius-driving, Trader Joe's-shopping, plant-a-tree on Earth Day, National Geographic-subscribing ego. No story that we spin for ourselves will change the fact that our individual impact on slowing this destruction will be nil.

This is also why I don't get down on myself for my cheese addiction (yes, addiction is the correct word. I will fight a strung-out tweaker in Thunder Dome for a block of cheddar and perform far more unsavory acts for just the promise of a good muenster). The problem of is huge, probably insurmountable, but to not even attempt to change is to tacitly approve of the system as it stands. An activist hoping to make a difference can be easily overwhelmed by the sheer scope and interconnectedness of the problems facing us. When confronted with just how much suffering goes into our comfortable First World living it's easy to suffer an empathy overload and just be rendered numb to new atrocities. As the Buddhists like to say, all of life is suffering. It is up to us to determine just how much we can bear on our consciences. The trick is finding a level of compromise that you as an individual can live with. It could be as simple as beginning to cook vegetarian once or twice a week and making more conscious selections when in the grocer or it could be as extreme as eschewing all animal products, from steak to gelatin to leather- or any middle ground in between. Even the smallest step is still forward momentum.

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### **mason says**

i've long flirted with vegetarianism. for a few months in the early '00s, i even dated her. but i'd never truly wanted to spend all of my time with her, send her flowers, or introduce her to my parents (and everyone i've ever cared about) until i read this book.

foer claims early on that he hasn't set out to write a book about why people should become vegetarians, an argument that holds zero ounces of water once you actually start reading his descriptions of factory farms. i found it impossible to learn about the government-sanctioned degradation of our environment and the systematic (mis)treatment of animals as mere protein, without questioning my own complicit support of the entire system.

i'll save the proselytizing for others. i'll just say that despite its lack of nuance, this book tipped the scale for me. i think i'm going to ask her to go steady.

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### **Greg says**

I've been a vegetarian for a few years now, and it was a long process that brought me here (literally too, I didn't go cold turkey). I'm sometimes surprised by how little I thought about certain things throughout my life. And coming from someone who grew up with a face in a book, and his head in the clouds, I find this interesting. I over-thought and over-analyzed everything (or at least everything I thought about). I spent my days thinking about fantasy worlds and the future, about girls and relationships (of which I was not very adept at having), about what ifs and what could bes. I thought. I was philosophizing about the universe, and society, and the self long before I knew I was even doing it. And yet even with everything I thought about, there was so much that I never questioned, that I just took for granted.

The state of consumerism in our society makes it very easy for us to not question certain things (though I certainly can't blame my choices on "the system"). We are so far removed from the process that brings things to our doorsteps and our dinner tables, that it usually takes an effort to even begin contemplating it. How many of us question where our tvs and laptops came from, how that cup of coffee got in our hands, who made the sneakers we're wearing and how did this food get on our plates? I certainly didn't. And yet when we start asking ourselves these questions they become hard to ignore. That last of those questions becomes most salient when we start asking, "what" was this food before it got to our plates?

I imagine many children one day suddenly realize they're eating Babe for dinner and ask their parents why. Their parents probably tell them not to worry about it, and to finish their dinner, and most of them do, end of story...vegetarianism averted. I was recently shocked to learn that as a child I actually went vegetarian for a year or two (I vaguely recall this). Without any real explanation to my mom, I just refused to eat any meat. When I started again, it was sparingly (once a week), and never ventured out past a few staple meats. I never ate pork (Jewish schooling gave me an aversion to it, even though my family didn't keep kosher), I refused to eat seafood (it was gross), and mainly stuck with chicken and turkey. Even when I started eating steak I had to eat it well done. Thinking about it now I like to tell myself that deep down I knew what I was doing was wrong. That I didn't eat seafood because it still too closely resembled the animal it had been before, that I couldn't eat rare meat because the blood reminded me of what I was eating, and that I felt too sorry for all the other animals to eat them. This probably isn't that unlikely, but I wouldn't stake my life on it (pun intended), my general pickiness as an eater is kind of damning for my "I was ethical but didn't know it" theory.

As an adult, the more I thought about the life and suffering of the animals that were sacrificed for my meal, the harder it became to continue eating them. I never watched any of those horrible factory farming videos, I didn't have to, though I had some idea of the content. Having seen these videos now, I only wish someone had shown them when I was 15 because I would have been a vegetarian for 15 years now, rather than three. I'm sometimes baffled by individuals that are aware of the practices involved in the meat industry, but continue to support it (with their dollars and their dinners). I imagine there are two types. One intellectually believes they shouldn't be eating meat anymore, but is held back from making the choice. I understand this state of being. I lived it. I struggled most of my life with acting on, and making a reality, my inner beliefs. How often do we say we're going to start working out, or stop wasting time on this or that, and we never do it. I fully empathize with this predicament.

Then there are those who understand the system, but who don't care, or don't agree it's wrong in any way. This second case is more baffling, though it shouldn't be. The human ability to engage in cognitive dissonance (is that something you engage in?) is truly amazing. I'm sure there were plenty of good and kind people who owned slaves, men who value loyalty above all else but cheat on their wives, and though I doubt anyone reading this would rob a bank, how many of us have cheated on our taxes or stolen something from work? I imagine this second case consists of people who understand what's involved in the meat industry, but don't think that animals feel pain like us, or that their suffering is like that of a machine or a bug. Or who maybe buy into the fallacy that we need to eat all that meat to fulfill our protein requirements (I should note I'm not a vegan yet). Whatever it is, they feel the positives of eating that food outweighs any negatives involved in bringing it to their plate.

As if this wasn't enough, the more I thought about the chemicals we pump into these animals, and the damage done to our environment and the resources we consume in feeding, housing, raising, processing, and transporting our food, I just couldn't justify taking part in it anymore. The only thing left is the "but it tastes good" philosophy, and I really do struggle sometimes to find sympathy for it. It's worth noting I'm not the kind of vegetarian who is against the idea of eating meat in theory (it's just dead flesh), but given the realities

of our system I don't find I have another choice for myself.

I've always been an animal lover and the happenstance of our willingness to eat Porky but not Skippy strikes me as odd. This has been another tough part of society for me to come to grips with. As someone who wants to work in cognitive science, and who owns and loves two ferrets, I have to wrestle with the fact that much neuroscientific research is done on ferrets. We live in a world of contradictions and hypocrisies and this is not on the verge of changing any time soon. And I guess we each have to ask ourselves, how far are we willing to go to break out of the system and act on our beliefs?

I didn't intend for this book review to turn into a story about me, but I think it's a fitting way to write about a Jonathon Safran Foer book. Foer can weave a sad, funny, and heartbreaking story in beautiful prose like it's spilling out of his mouth. His stories are fantasy, but they are also personal journeys. In a way this book was about his personal journey to becoming a vegetarian, and the case he makes for it. I can't think of a better way to recommend this book than to tell you about the personal journey I took, and direct you to *Eating Animals* if you want to read a thorough case for it, written by someone with more talent than yours truly, and an amazing ability to be frank, and yet empathetic and non-judgmental at the same time.. I should warn readers though, I only vaguely mention the fact that there are many problems with the meat industry, Foer goes into much more specific detail about these practices. If you're a squeamish person, you may have serious problems getting through this book. One half of me wants to tell you to not read this book to protect you, and the other half wants you to go through that if it makes you take stock afterwards...

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### **Stephanie \*Very Stable Genius\* says**

Hear are my thoughts in order as I was reading this book....

1. OMG.....OMFG!
2. Crap...now I'm a vegetarian!
3. I can never have my favorite Mongolian Chicken from Mings again (snif).

Yes in that order. I have not eaten meat since half way through this book. Will it stick? I hope so.

Not only the mind numbing cruelty of the factory farms (which is plenty), and the environmental damage they cause, but the sheer crap they feed the animals did it for me. H1N1....factory farms. traced back to a hog farm in one of the Carolinas. They feed them antibiotics in every meal. That is how the resistant strains of bacteria are born.....now they are using Cipro, which the medical community screamed out against. But the farm lobbies were stronger.

most chickens and turkeys can't naturally reproduce anymore.....What? They have been so genetically altered that they can't reproduce....eeww! They can't even walk.

The author made the statement that if this was 60 years ago he would probably eat meat. But things have changed with factory farming for the worse. People want really cheap meat....well you get what you pay for.

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## **j says**

I am floating this again (last time! Swear!), this time for the Facebook 30 Day Book Challenge. Day whatever I am on asks for a book that changed your life. I... don't know that I have ever read a book that *really* changed my life. But this one comes the closest.

That sounds a little dippy, but really. For years, I had skittered around the margins of vegetarianism. I'd forgo meat the majority of the time, perhaps even the vast majority, but I didn't have really concrete reasons as to why. Health? Environmentalism? Animal rights? That time I found a hunk of cartilage in a Subway chicken breast?

This book gave me reasons. Reasons I knew about already, sure -- we've all heard horror stories, seen a PETA protest, read *Fast Food Nation*. But Jonathan Safran Foer, in addition to laying out all the terrible truths about where our food comes from nowadays, managed to make me realize that my choices *do* matter, even if I'm not really "making a difference."

After having a child, JSF realizes that what he eats and how he goes about it is part of the story of his life, a story that he is telling to his children every day, just by living it. He decided his story can't be about eating animals anymore, not while he carries the knowledge of how harmful modern farming techniques are, in so many ways, and how much of a liberal pipe dream phrases like "free range," "cage free" and "humane" almost always are.

Have I eaten meat since I read this? Yes, a few times, see below. But it has also, in the last six months, been a big, big contribution to the drastic, near complete reduction in my egg and dairy consumption. Because those foods, as much as I love them, are part of the story too.

Food choices are deeply personal. It is also easy to slip into stridency and defensiveness when talking about them, no matter which side you are on. If you are curious, or questioning, read this book. It might change your life too, sort of.

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This isn't really a review; it's just a comment I left on another review that I decided to lazily re-post. And now I am lazily bumping it, because I have accidentally eaten meat a whole bunch of times in the last few weeks after going like 6 months without (though in my defense I was on vacation in a country where as far as I know they raise their animals using more humane, old-style techniques). So anyway I wanted to re-read my review again and re-commit. Then I found a typo.

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What I appreciated about *Eating Animals* is the way it argues that even if you totally ignore the question of whether it is "right" to eat meat or not, the way meat is "farmed" in our country is intrinsically *wrong*, in my mind, unarguably so.

Whether you think animals have any right to exist or even to die with a minimal amount of suffering (which I think is also pretty obviously the case, because we all know pain is horrible and try to avoid it, and feel empathy when we hear about people or cute animals suffering, unless we are sociopaths or something), modern factory farming produces food that is frequently unsafe for consumption, and in any case loaded with

bacteria (seriously, did you know every piece of chicken you buy is bloated with feces-contaminated water, a lot of it, which is there because of the way the animals are slaughtered and processed?) and antibiotics.

Far from only hurting animals and occasionally making people sick, these practices do great harm to the environment, poisoning the land and the air. Yes, they produce cheap food, but only because the huge corporations that own the farms don't pay for all that environmental damage, and for some reason our government has a totally incomprehensible farm subsidies system in place that somehow makes all this possible and profitable.

I don't eat meat anymore, even though I love it and constantly crave it (well, not so much chicken anymore). If it was still farmed the way it was 100 years ago, on small farms that treated animals well, but also did far less harm to the environment, I probably would still do it. You can get that kind of meat today, but it is expensive, because it costs what it *should* cost. Cheeseburgers at McDonald's should *not* cost \$1.

I do realize that the foods I do eat are also part of a huge corporate system that is still really screwed up (I eat bananas and drink coffee, for one thing). The way I see it, cutting out meat, which is by far the most harmful eating practice I engaged in, is the least I can do.

*Facebook 30 Day Book Challenge Day 10: Book that changed your life.*

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### **Meredith Holley says**

I don't mean this dismissively, but I feel like I finally get what Charlton Heston meant when he cried out, "Soylent Green is people!! It's peeeeeople!" Just . . . I don't know. That movie's pretty silly, but I keep walking around the house feeling like all those years that I ate meat, I was really eating human souls. And I even knew almost all of this information before reading the book. I know I'm being dramatic, as per usual, but there really is something about food that brings out both the best and the worst in humans. I think that's part of the point of the title of this book. It's about eating animals, but it's also about us *being* eating animals. See what he did there? Anyway, I can't give this book a full 5 stars because I have really high expectations for JSF, and, honestly, this book isn't extremely well organized. I think the topic of what we eat is probably the most important one in American society today, though, and the dialogue Foer creates is very representative of the arguments that smart people make in legitimate disagreement over the topic of eating animals.

I saw Foer read from this book at Powell's last October, and the day after that was the last time I ate meat. For a long time I knew about the health and environmental issues of factory farming, but I really love hamburgers, so I thought I would just be really careful about where I bought meat. I realized, though, that I really do care how we treat each other and how we treat animals, and I was *not* careful about where my meat came from. I became a vegetarian partly because it's easier than having that mental dissonance, where I really care about all of the corruption and waste of the meat industry, but I set it aside because something tastes good. Other things taste good, too. It's not worth the energy. I guess, the other part of why I became a vegetarian is that I forgot how to put up the mental walls between the human behavior that is so disgusting to me that is almost uniformly represented in the food industry and my condoning it by eating its products. The points that Foer read from this book in October just haunt me.

I don't think that death is the worst thing, and so eating animals doesn't horrify me because of the killing. I really get that other people do think that death is the worst thing, and I don't necessarily think I'm right, but

that's the place I'm at in life. My friend pointed out how silly this is of me yesterday when he was asking why I love the movie *True Romance* so much. I was talking about how wonderful I think it is, and then I was qualifying it by saying that the part between Christopher Walkins and Dennis Hopper is so racist and makes me really uncomfortable. So, my friend started laughing at me and was like, "So, you don't care about the total disregard for human life, but it really gets to you that they're being racist?" What can I say? Maybe someday all of the things I'm offended at will line up really neatly. As it is, obviously it would offend me a lot more in real life to see someone killed than to see someone be really unpleasant, but in movies the opposite is true.

Even then, even in real life, I think that pointless suffering, not death, is the worst thing. And when pointless suffering is knowingly caused by humans, I think it's bad just for the suffering itself, but also because of what it means for the people causing the suffering. What have we done to ourselves? What have we made each other? There is a letter toward the end of this book, written by a slaughterhouse worker, that describes this slaughterhouse atrocity that is burned into my brain now in a way that I can only think to describe as a Skye O'Malley. But this is a real, true incident, that I'm glad was written because it needs to never happen again. The incident itself was purely sadistic, but writing about it was somehow Important in the way that confessions and justice are important. But also important because although this man is responsible for his own actions and atrocities, people who work in slaughterhouses, like the animals going through them, are some of the most vulnerable elements our society. Both Gandhi and Aristotle are attributed with saying something like, nations should be judged by how they treat the most vulnerable among them. By that standard of judgment, the U.S. is not passing.

One of the major themes in this book is about traditions surrounding food and the way it brings people together in this really wonderful way. I think Foer speaks about family, even humanity, in such a beautiful, nostalgic, and hopeful way that there is something worthwhile about his unique exploration of this topic. It is not a cold, moral topic. It is about our mothers and fathers in the kitchen and our children playing in the yard while we barbeque. But that doesn't remove us from complicity in what goes on to get the food to the table. It doesn't excuse us.

There were two points he made about that particularly, which really influenced my decision to become a veggie. I'm going to spoiler them a little bit and probably mangle them a lot, so skip over if you wish. Also, my friend made this homebrew oatmeal stout in honor of his daughter's birth, and it and its progeny are slowly changing this review into a drunk review, so there's a chance none of this will make sense anyway.

(view spoiler)

If you want more details on what exactly all this is so appalling to me, I suggest you do read the book. Or, even watch *Food, Inc.*, which is wonderful. And movies about the food industry are way more immediately powerful and entertaining than books. Sorry, JSF, but I honestly fell asleep a couple of times reading this book. Not in a way that means I didn't like it, just in that way that I fall asleep to *Blue Planet* or *The Vertical Ray of the Sun* or the Documentary History of the United States. All wonderful works of art with magical sleep powers.

There's one more point I want to make about this whole topic, and then I'll leave you alone. It's not my point, it's the point of this girl who took JSF on his tour of factory farms. We make these justifications for the sense of taste that we make for no other sense. For example, if someone tortured a pig to death for a painting, we wouldn't justify it in the way we justify torturing a pig to death for bacon. The girl says is,

“Why doesn’t a horny person have as strong a claim to raping an animal as a hungry one does to killing and eating it?” If we would die of hunger otherwise, that might be a difference, but there is a lot of evidence that says a vegetarian or vegan diet can be healthier than an omnivorous one, and none to say they lead to starvation. What I’m trying to say is on a scale of bad, death is not worse than pointless suffering. But why live on that scale at all?

I am so sorry to be proselytizing here. It’s totally unacceptable. Blame it on the oatmeal stout and progeny if you wish. Plus, you know how new converts are. Rabid (wrote “rabit” first. Typing equivalent of slurring my words). All I’m saying is this: people eat more meat now than they ever have in history. And the diseases propagated by meat, not to mention the antibiotics made useless because of overuse on animals, make the meat industry possibly the most dangerous instance of institutionalized terrorism that exists in America. Hi, FBI, no offense intended! Even if you (FBI readers included) cut back a little bit on the meat you eat, it makes a huge statement to the meat industry. I came to being a veggie after many years of just cutting back on the animals, and I’m still not a vegan. It’s so doable.

Anyway, my plan is that my next review not be about something totally horrifying. For my first week free from school, this week has been strangely scarring in the reading. I always hope that there are some things that people will not do just because why would you? But I guess the excessive and sometimes ridiculous laws have a purpose. When I get back to school maybe some kind of class action against factory farms for H1N1, MRSA, salmonella, e. coli, and other crimes against humanity? We’ll talk.

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## Caroline says

\*\*\*NO SPOILERS\*\*\*

The title alone may scare off those who’d rather not know how their meat got from farm to table, but *Eating Animals* is one of those books that’s too important not to read. This is part memoir, part journalistic investigation, but the book is strongest when going inside slaughterhouses and educating, exposing the truth of something heinous beyond imagining. When people think of farms, idyllic *Charlotte’s Web*—like images might spring to mind, but according to *Eating Animals*, the farm of today is a factory. Our clothing, toys, cars, boxed and canned foods, and many, many other products are created and processed in factories. Farm animals are now no different.

Lest passionate meat-eaters think *Eating Animals* is a stringent pro-vegetarian, “meat is murder” book, Foer is sure to approach the topic from another angle; he points out factory farming’s effects on human beings. One of the most compelling and frightening sections concerns the connection between factory farming and the rise in aggressive flus that jump from animals to people, such as avian flu. Information about the serious health ailments suffered as a result of living near factory hog farms will have readers looking at Smithfield with new eyes. Slaughterhouse work has an almost 100% turnover rate; workers cannot handle the psychological toll.

Is *Eating Animals* life-changing? It most definitely is. It’s arresting, thoughtfully researched, and intensely interesting, *and* what’s quite notable is that Foer is never militant or holier-than-thou in his vegetarian views; in fact, the book is well balanced by italicized sections that are first-hand accounts from farmers, an animal activist, and even a vegan who builds slaughterhouses. These are interesting and offer a welcome reprieve from the shock and statistics of the rest.

At one point, Foer says something especially intriguing. He says that sales of cruelty-free/cage-free (sadly, labels that actually mean nothing) eggs are rising in the United States. This proves that people *want* to do right by animals. He therefore surmises that if 100 meat-eaters were fully informed about factory farming, 95 would choose vegetarianism.

Finally, the entire book is food for thought, but perhaps nothing hits home more than this: “Not responding is a response--we are equally responsible for what we don't do. In the case of animal slaughter, to throw your hands in the air is to wrap your fingers around a knife handle.”

Final verdict: *Eating Animals* is one of those “just read it now” books. Engrossing from start to finish, this is a five-star book to make you think.

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## **Lisa Vegan says**

I was torn how to rate this book. It isn't perfect (I noted many flaws in its comprehensiveness) but it's amazing enough, so 5 stars it is.

I've read so many books such as this but none for a while, and it's because reading about how humans use animals is so devastating for me. It's not just the books' contents, it's knowing that, at most, only 1% of Americans feel as I do, that my feelings and beliefs are shared by so few (The latest statistics I have are that 3% of Americans are truly vegetarian and 1% are vegan. vegetarian = never any meat, poultry, fish, vegan adds never any dairy, eggs, honey, leather, wool, silk, beeswax, or, as much as is feasible, any product of animal origin) Also disturbing for me is that I know that others will read this book and won't absorb what it offers but will dissociate, that even more people won't have the courage or the interest to read it at all. (Oh, I kind of told a lie: The information in here is incredibly disturbing, whether or not you've known it. I don't want to discourage readers from reading this book though, so I'll say it's upsetting but hope that people will want to make an informed consent about what they do. I'm hoping that's the case because I want many, many people to read this book.)

I highly respect Foer. He is thoughtful and philosophical and, maybe most importantly, non-judgmental and empathetic, and he's very funny and that helps with taking in the disturbing facts. I appreciated how he incorporates his Jewish background into the book, and enjoyed the family stories that he tells. I'm truly puzzled why he doesn't have better communication with his dog/why he can't interpret better his dog's communications, but given that he started off not even liking dogs I guess he's made great progress in dog-human relationships.

He provides little snippets of information that are so interesting. For instance: Americans choose to eat less than .25% of the known edible food on the planet. I always know I'll learn a little with every book I read and I learned a lot, especially about some individual animals/cases.

The letter on page 84 is hilarious, if the reader is already aware that the last thing any factory farmer wants is for the public to see their operations. I laughed and laughed at this letter and I'm so grateful it was there because so much of the book's contents caused me much emotional pain. (When I needed cheering up while reading the book I kept going back and rereading that letter.)

I'm glad he touched on the connection between animal agriculture and the existence of influenza illnesses in humans. It's one of my perennial rants, and with H1N1 in the news (and scaring me) it's very topical.



This book – well, it will depend on what the reader brings to it and who the reader is. For me, it's so obviously a cogent argument for veganism, but it's like my last stint as a juror. At the end of the case, as the twelve of us were about to go into deliberations, I said to myself, it's obvious how we should vote, but our first vote when we got into the jury deliberation room was 6 to 6, not so obvious in the same way to everybody, and the deliberations ended up being very stressful. People feel different ways and believe different things. Foer respects that and that's one reason why I think this book can strike a chord in anyone who reads it.

This book is very well researched, and Foer spent three years in some hands on type research. The book proper including acknowledgements went through page 270, the notes went from pages 271-331 and the index is on pages 333-341, but it reads more like the memoir it partly is; it does not read like a textbook. The writing is engaging and not at all dry.

Well, it's good to read a book that isn't preaching to the choir (ethical vegans) because I think more readers will be open to what this author offers. I don't see how anyone can read this book and not be changed, whether or not they make changes.

Foer has a "beef" with Michael Pollan, as do I, but I have a bit of a "beef" with Foer: it's his book (and there are many other books out there and they're all doing a lot of good in my opinion) but I wish he hadn't provided so much time to give their points of view to the 4 more humane animal farmers and the vegan who was designing a slaughterhouse. It boggles my mind even more, that those who've really known these individual animals could kill them, especially when one is vegetarian and one other says he knows it isn't necessary for humans to eat meat. I have such mixed feelings, but I'm afraid their rationalizations will give permission for readers to act with the status quo. However, only 1% vegan and 3% vegetarian of the American population, the actions these individuals take can make a difference. Never will 100% of Americans go 100% vegan so reducing suffering and having less of a negative impact on the environment - well how can I argue wholeheartedly?, but I felt very uncomfortable reading these parts, although certainly not as uncomfortable reading the factory farming and slaughter parts of the book.

I've heard some vegans complain that Foer doesn't go far enough and the book doesn't promote veganism, but this book is getting more mainstream attention than most books of its type, and some people say that they are eliminating or reducing the animal products they consume because of this book. So Foer, along with a bunch of others who are my heroes, are putting more and more information out there. It makes a difference. This book will make a difference. Hopefully, many will read this book and then continue and read some of the other many books and other resources out there as well. I'm very happy that this book is getting the attention and readership that it is.

I found it very interesting reading this book in early November because Foer talks about American Thanksgiving in the book.

So, now I feel incredibly sad and very angry (I know anger is a distancing emotion and I don't want to others to withdraw from me, but I have a lot of compassion for myself right now and I have a reason to feel that way and that's how I feel) and I definitely need some lighter reading materials, pronto. (Edit: Re the compassion for myself, blah blah: I'm not a new age type person at all and I don't remember ever saying anything like this with regard to myself, but I was very distraught after reading this book.)

Please go read other reviews of this book. Don't let my distress dissuade you from reading this important book. I can guarantee that if you get even remotely as emotionally involved as I did while reading this book,

you're either already vegan or you'll be grateful for the information.

I do have a fundamental disagreement with Foer, who seems to think it's okay at some level to use and kill animals if done humanely. I don't feel that way. Maybe because I'm already vegan and knew so much of the information in this book, my favorite parts were when Foer wrote about his (holocaust) survivor grandmother.

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