



# The Face on Your Plate: The Truth About Food

*Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson*

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**The Face on Your Plate: The Truth About Food** Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

**The best-selling author of *When Elephants Weep* explores our relationship with the animals we call food.**

In this revelatory work, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson shows how food affects our moral selves, our health, and the environment. It raises questions to make us conscious of the decisions behind every bite we take: What effect does eating animals have on our land, waters, even global warming? What are the results of farming practices—debeaking chickens and separating calves from their mothers—on animals and humans? How does the health of animals affect the health of our planet and our bodies? And uniquely, as a psychoanalyst, Masson investigates how denial keeps us from recognizing the animal at the end of our fork—think pig, not bacon—and each food and those that are forbidden. *The Face on* intellectual, psychological, and emotional expertise over the last twenty years into the pivotal book of the food revolution.

## **The Face on Your Plate: The Truth About Food Details**

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Author : Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

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# From Reader Review *The Face on Your Plate: The Truth About Food* for online ebook

## Sarah Reicker says

When you pick up a book with a title such as this and a cover that features an adorable baby calf on a plate, you kind of understand that there is a very deliberate agenda here. And so, I was wary. The first half of the book however was really informative and very well written. It was educational and stripped for the most part of the heart string tugging and guilt, which made it easier to read objectively. It was very enlightening and particularly the section on farmed fish (side note, almost instinctively spelled that like 'Phish,' so...should probably lay off them for a bit) was horrifyingly eye opening. So overall, the first half of the book was compelling and had a didactic approach. Then came the inevitable moralizing. At first he made some good points: why kill another living being so that we can eat meat? I'm like yeah well that makes sense, why do it? Especially knowing about the atrocities committed to the animals and the environmental impacts of the industry. I mean the industry is also pushing out small time farmers, and meat and dairy have proven adverse effects on human health. But this guy just goes onnnnnn to the point where I'm like ok fuck you I'm going to eat bacon wrapped salmon dipped in a chicken just out of spite. He also spent a weird amount of time talking about Freud's theories on dicks? I guess it was supposed to tie into his chapter on denial but to me I'm thinking he's just got a dick thing of his own. At the end he wrapped up this book by going on about how easy it is to be a vegan, he's like in the morning I eat organic nuts, mejool dates, bla bla. All this is also interwoven with other things you want to avoid like too much salt, caffeine, gluten, etc. Im like fuck, does this guy even eat?! Anyway, here's my beef with him (pun fully intended): aside from the obnoxious moralizing, he spends a lot of time talking about WHY you should eat this way but fails to mention that it's not necessarily feasible for people of a modest income. He goes on about eating local, eating foods in season, getting organic. And I agree with everything he says, like we SHOULD do that in a perfect world. But, most people can't afford to eat 17\$ organic dates and shit like that, so, I'm interested in reading a book that would not only highlight the cruelties of the animal food industry, but also suggest financially feasible solutions to people who don't have a bunch of money but still care about their health, animal welfare, and the environment.

### Conclusions:

Learned shit about the industry  
was properly horrified and outraged  
felt he perpetuated the stereotype that all vegans are holier-than-thou  
was bored as fuck by the end

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## Ron says

This is a straightforward argument for why people should start eating a vegan diet, cutting out eggs and dairy products as well as meat and fish. In addition to the cruelty of "factory farm" food production, Masson also discusses the environmental damage caused by raising animals such as cattle, pigs, and chickens in such massive quantities. For many readers, this information won't be revelatory, but it'll certainly make you stop and think.

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## Peacegal says

Dear Jeff: Please get a better editor. You have some good stuff in here, but you gallop off on so many unrelated tangents as to bury some of your most informative material, and not all readers are as patient or forgiving as I am.

Masson makes some decent observations of agribusiness throughout his book, such as:

*[W]hen I talk to farmers about how they treat the animals on their farms, I come up against a strange fact: while the general public and most research scientists all acknowledge that farm animals suffer, the farmers responsible for them have a tendency to deny it.*

He also cites scientific studies that contradict the meat industry's claims that animals don't experience pain when, for example, chickens are debeaked with a searing blade. The Brambell Report on farm animal welfare concluded:

*"Between the horn and bone [of the beak] is a thin layer of highly sensitive soft tissue, resembling the quick of the human nail. The hot knife blade used in debeaking cuts through this complex horn, bone and sensitive tissue causing severe pain."*

Despite my already being familiar with many of the facts of factory farming presented within its pages, *The Face on Your Plate* had some new information for me. For example, biologists have noted that the sound hens continually make in battery cages is identical to the specific call for help hens make to roosters when they are in distress.

I also appreciated that Masson devoted an entire chapter to the ethical and environmental consequences of the seafood industry. Many a vegetarian and even vegan will lament that one of the first questions we are asked is "Do you eat fish?" More than a few people call themselves "vegetarians" and continue to eat fish, perpetuating the myth that fish aren't even worth considering as animals.

However, at times Masson gets a little silly. He realizes not everyone is willing to become vegan, but he does encourage them to be more mindful in their food choices. At one point, he suggests:

*Asking about how chickens are kept when you buy eggs, or how the dairy cows live when buying milk, is a fine beginning.*

Ok, that might have been feasible in the days of the general store, but when one considers that the vast majority of Americans buy their milk and eggs at chain grocery stores—and that the food was most likely trucked hundred or thousands of miles to get there—the thought of asking such queries at point of purchase seems ridiculous. (Imagine grilling the 17-year-old Walmart clerk as to the treatment of the cows who produced the cheese on a Great Value frozen pizza.)

Masson admits that while he is a committed vegetarian who tries his best to be vegan, he is not vegan all of the time. I truly appreciated his honesty. Masson writes:

*What is the difference? I have a visceral reaction to meat, but not to butter or cheese or milk chocolate. Perhaps because of the disguise: it is hard to eat a chocolate chip cookie and think "suffering."*

I'm the same way, so I found it very comforting that a well-known animal welfare writer struggles with some of the same problems I do.

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## **Mazola1 says**

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson is a thinker of considerable originality, a writer of rather modest talent, and a man of strong opinions who does not suffer from a lack of self confidence in the correctness of those opinions. Masson, a complex and fascinating character, is an accomplished Sanskrit scholar who trained as a psychoanalyst and worked with Anna Freud in London compiling her father's writings. Masson edited the definitive version of Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fliess, a work of considerable scholarly importance. He also had a messy falling out with Anna Freud, in part over the issue of whether Freud "sold out" on the issue of childhood sexual abuse.

Given that background, it's hardly surprising that when Masson decided to write "the truth about food," the resulting book would be serious, copiously footnoted, and boldly, if somewhat sloppily written. Although Masson comes across as a bit of a fanatic on veganism, nonetheless, *The Face on Your Plate* is still a good and disturbing, basic book on the subject.

In *The Face on Your Plate*, Masson explains why he is a vegan, and urges the reader to consider becoming a vegan or a vegetarian, or at the very least, eating less meat. Although Masson writes with a touch of self-righteousness that ranges from mildly off-putting to infuriating, he makes a powerful and even convincing argument for the proposition that eating meat is not good for humans, the animals they eat, or the environment. Masson's argument that these animals are sentient beings who suffer from the way they are treated is hard to take issue with, and the details of the way cows, chickens, pigs and fish are cruelly treated before being killed are graphic and disturbing. Masson also explains how raising animals for food uses a wasteful amount of resources, and why a vegetarian diet is more health that one which includes meat and animal products. In a chapter on denial, Masson draws on his background as a psychoanalyst to try to explain how we use denial that meat comes from once living animals in order to be able to keep on eating them. It's an interesting chapter, but its ideas seem somewhat underdeveloped and pretentious. Masson also includes a description of his diet, which was not interesting.

Really, Masson's book is best when it leaves aside such things as denial and diets, and turns to its central thesis: that "we like our meat disguised," because the more natural it looks, i.e., the more it looks like what it is -- a dead animal that was killed to make food -- "the more likely it is to cause disgust and physical aversion." Masson's chapters on the short, pain filled and sad lives of the cows, chickens, pigs and fish we eat certainly flesh out that thesis.

I've always been of a divided mind about Masson. I hated his book *The Assault on Truth*, but greatly admired his edition of the Freud letters to Fliess. Some of Masson's worst faults are on display in *The Face on Your Plate*, but so are some of his greatest strengths. Among those strengths are the ability to write boldly and persuasively. The bottom line is that even though I still find Masson to be irritating and smug, *The Face on Your Plate* has convinced me to do some hard thinking about what I eat, and to try meatless Mondays. If the definition of a good book is one that gets you to think, and maybe even to change your mind, then this is a good book.

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## **Liz says**

As a vegan, I had already heard about/read about a lot of the facts and argument he presents in this book. I also thought some chapters were better than others. But there were two things I really liked. I liked that the author dedicated a whole chapter to discussing the cruelty and environmentally dangerous practices involved in fishing, as I think fish are often easily overlooked in discussions about food ethics. I also like that the author chooses to address the process of denial in one of the chapters, because I think this is something that many people can relate to, but also something that ultimately prevents people from changing. I know that it's still possible to be in denial about denial, ie. you can still read about denial and refuse to engage, but ultimately I hope that by addressing it Moussieff Masson has prompted at least some readers to think more deeply about how they react to certain information.

Finally, this is a very personal book, written in a very personal style and contains lots of personal antidotes. A lot of reviewers on here seem to dislike this about the book. However, I think it works, because there are so many other books out there on the market that discuss similar issues (Eating Animals, Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows etc.) I think he can afford to be a little bit more personal and opinionated in delivering his version.

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## **David says**

I have been a vegetarian for a number of years, and leaning toward being a vegan. That is to say, I try to avoid milk, cheese, and eggs. So, most of the ideas in this book are not new to me. Most animals kept in captivity for the purpose of food really do suffer. Immensely. There are no two ways about it.

Jeffrey Masson rebuts all of the sayings that meat-eaters use to rationalize their addiction to meat, poultry, and fish. And he makes a every one of the rationalizations sound truly pathetic. There are no good reasons for eating meat; just denials. Masson goes into some depth, about why meat-eaters are in denial. Basically, people just don't want to think about it; the horrendous suffering that animals undergo--all animals that are used for food--is overwhelming.

The one surprising thing that Masson writes is that if you want to do the simplest thing that will reduce animal suffering the most, it would be to avoid milk, cheese, and eggs. Masson maintains that the harvesting of dairy products actually causes *more* suffering than the harvesting of meat! He goes into some detail as to why this is; and after understanding the reasoning behind this claim, I would have to agree.

Of course, the reasons for being a vegan can go beyond simply the moralistic ideas of preventing suffering. The health advantages are enormous. The reduction of environmental harm is huge, too.

I strongly recommend this excellent book to all who really care about the world, about animals, and their own health.

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## **mis fit says**

I've been a vegetarian for about 13 years now, and I picked up this book because I wanted to finally commit to a vegan diet (over the years, I've gone off and on with veganism too many times to count). The book is a

good refresher on most of the arguments for veganism, and I especially appreciated the chapter on aquaculture, which gave me some new info and perspective.

Thinking about all my attempts to go vegan, it's kind of funny-- I often made this excuse "oh cheese is just too good to give up!" But if you pick that apart, it doesn't hold up at all! There are so many other (less exploitative) ways to feel pleasure. It's kind of sad to feel like the pleasures of eating cheese or ice cream outweigh all the negative impacts on animals and environment. The chapter on "Denial" also sort of helps pick apart these inconsistencies in thinking about animal products, which is nice to be able to draw on, especially in social situations.

Overall, this book is a solid resource, especially for someone just delving into these ideas.

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### **Jack says**

This is a short and sweet introduction to animal rights as it relates to our food choices. Masson was 68 when he wrote this but had only been vegan for a few years, so he is well placed to empathise with the understandable reluctance to embrace such a lifestyle while still promoting it vigorously.

This book's strongest asset is that it has been researched rigourously and is rife with footnotes. Masson is a psychoanalyst by profession, which helps him to evaluate the research responsibly. It also equips him to analyse the complicated process of denial that keeps even the most compassionate of us eating animal products. He explains that this is the same mental reflex that can govern how we respond to and deal with the horror and negligence we read about and even see in our day-to-day lives, not just how we cope with the ways factory farming brings food to the plates of billions.

However, this isn't a heavy book. Masson's style is personal and conversational and he draws on many anecdotes from his own life in addressing vegan nutrition and his own gradual awakening to the damage caused by animal industries. His writing style can occasionally be clumsy in his quest to be affable, but it's a minor irritation compared to the wealth of useful information he presents in an accessible and persuasive fashion.

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### **Fiona says**

I borrowed this book from the library (I was actually browsing cookbooks at the time). I am not vegetarian however I don't eat a lot of meat as I find it doesn't really agree with me and I admit the thought of eating the flesh of a previously living creature does feel somehow wrong. The author quotes Cesar Chavez early in the book who said if you want to lessen animal suffering in the world you would do better to eat meat and give up dairy and eggs. As part of his research for this book the author visited dairy farms and hen laying facilities and witnessed the misery and suffering the animals endured so people can enjoy their milk and eggs. Technically it is possible to obtain milk without harming a cow unfortunately that is not how milk is obtained today and reading about the suffering a cow goes through in a high milk production dairy farm made uncomfortable reading and has certainly made me think about my consumption of the dairy foods I love like cheese and creamy sauces. The chapter on aquaculture also gave some uncomfortable moments such as bathing live eels in dry salt which slowly desiccates their bodies. The chapter on denial did ring true

that we want the meat but we don't want to hear about the slaughterhouse. This book has certainly left a lasting impression on me and made me question my food choices it has also prompted me to read some more about Chavez and Isaac Bashevis Singer both of who are quoted in the book.

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### **Patricia says**

I am not a vegetarian or vegan, but this book definitely gives me pause and makes me consider.... Actually in the last few years the taste of meat has not been pleasant to me. Animal lover that I am, I don't know why I have continued eating sentient beings. This book gets down to the nuts and bolts of how much of our planet we are using up to feed the livestock which we as Americans love to eat. Now other countries are getting the taste for meat and deforesting in order to raise same livestock. Plant crops can feed more people on less land and water, without hurting the water and air and land. If you have any interest in saving our planet, not just due to global warming, but also due to mankind's inhumanity to animals and each other, this is a good one. I wish I had read it years ago. Some of the figures are staggering.

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### **Amber Anderson says**

When I first picked up this book I thought I already knew everything there was to know on the issue. I was wrong. Especially on the fish chapter of the book. I'm not really into fish. They're so strange, so different, but I respect them and I learned a lot about them. For instance, We share 85% of our DNA with fish (98% we share with primates). Crazy, right?

I also believed the myth that fish have a teensy memory span. Not true. Fish have a memory span of at least 3 months and probably much longer (it hasn't been tested further than three months). Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson quotes Culum Brown, (U of Edinburgh biologist) "Fish are more intelligent than they appear. In many areas, such as memory, their cognitive powers match or exceed those of 'higher' vertebrates, including non-human primates."

Fish are freaky, they made no sounds but their sporadic out-of-water wriggling and flopping seem unnatural and clearly anguish-driven. The author says, "It is a bit puzzling why we feel that something not like us deserves less respect. That it's death is less troubling." Here, here. Some people think fish are vegetables. You know those people who say, "I'm a vegetarian but I eat fish." Those people really need to read this book.

And this book explores the lives of all the animals we eat. Pigs, cows, chickens. It explores what they eat. It's disgusting. But this book is wonderful and had me gasping with surprise which I really didn't expect. I wish it could be required reading for everyone. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that the only people that will pick it up will be vegans, vegetarians, or people already interested in vegetarianism. That's a shame because this is really good stuff.

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### **Berk says**

Kitabın çok etkileyici bir kapağı var, içeriği de böyle olsaydı ke?ke. Masson bu kitabı "vegan olduktan" iki



y?l sonra yazm??; "vegan olduktan" ifadesini t?rnak içinde kullan?yorum çünkü kitap içinde ö?reniyoruz ki asl?nda hayvan eti haricindeki konularda "esnek" davranmaktaym??, örne?in "bal" hayvan sömürüsü içermesine ra?men yazar?m?z? çok da alakadar etmiyormu?, yedi?i ürünlerde yumurta ve süt olup olmad???na çok fazla tak?lm?yormu? vs. Ke?ke veganl??? konu edinme iddias?nda bulunan bir kitap yazmaya karar vermeden önce tutarl? olarak vegan olsaym?? ve birkaç sene de mesele üzerine biraz daha netle?seymi?. Çünkü kitab?n argüman? net de?il, birbirini izleyen paragraflar?n içerdi?i tutars?zliklar ve konunun sürekli olarak da?l?yor olmas? yazar?n ya?ad??? kafa kar???kl???n? aç?kça yans?t?yor. Ço?u bölümün sonu maalesef "mutlu sömürü" te?vi?ine ç?k?yor, birden bal?klar?n "huzur içinde" yeti?tirildi?i bir yerin övgüsü ya da Whole Foods marketin "efkatli hayvan ürünleri" reyollar? olumlu sözlerle konu edilmeye ba?lan?yor. Son bölüm ise gerçekten kafa kar???t?r?c?, mevzu hayvanlarla ilgili bir mesele olmaktan ç?k?p glutensiz beslenme, organik tar?m ve bunun gibi bir dizi diyet önerisi ile karmakar???k hale geliyor. Hayvanlarla ilgili bir kitapta glutene hay?r denirken, bala evet deniyor :S Do?rusu kimseye tavsiye etmem, oldukça fazla kafa kar???kl???n?n söz konusu oldu?u hayvan haklar? mevzusunda bu kitab?n yapt??? ?ey kafalar? daha da fazla kar???t?rmak.

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### **Sarah Beth says**

An eye opening account of our factory farms. I've been a vegetarian for almost ten years, after reading this I'm considering becoming vegan. The animals used for producing animal products are treated worse than the ones simply raised for their meat. Although, my main reason for being a vegetarian is for my personal health it is hard to ignore or as, the author states, deny, the treat of animals and the environmental effects of being a carnivore.

I have visited enough feedlots, dairy farms and hog farms to have seen first hand most of information the author discusses but I was surprised to learn that sugar is not vegetarian (it contains bone meal made from cow's bones.)

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### **Effie says**

I'm not a vegetarian; I like meat too much. I had no expectations going into the book, but I found myself getting annoyed with the author's preachiness. If you believe that animals are on this earth to be eaten, you must be a religious fundamentalist. I'm not, but can you blame early humans for taking advantage of all food sources? I don't buy that we are supposed to be herbivores.

His other opinions were rather annoying as well. All animals have feelings and we must respect them. Whole Foods is a wonderland for vegans. His pediatrician wife believes that diet can help with autism. Frankly, I was more fascinated by the notion that he is 25 years older than his wife and at age 68, he has two small sons.

I sighed when I read his assertion that when we take honey from bees, we are robbing them. When he claimed that he won't consume maple syrup because trees are wounded to collect it, I rolled my eyes. When I got tot he nearly 90 pages of footnotes, I resolved to not think about this book again.

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### **Lisa Janda says**

In the vast ocean of books that are currently in vogue regarding the horrors of eating any form of animal

product, be it meat, cheese, eggs, this is the one book I didn't want to hurl against the wall. Will I become a vegan or even a vegetarian? No, I'm comfortable with my diet and feel no need to defend myself to anyone. And this is precisely why I got through this book. The author does not lecture, nor proselytize, and it was refreshing to read his arguments for a vegan way of living without thinking "Yeah, well I'll show you!" and chowing down on a turducken just because you can. He questions why people still choose animal products but does not mock or ridicule them; rather, he encourages the reader to seek out nature's bounty and expand one's diet because there are many options from which to choose. His writing is conversational not confrontational and it made for an engaging--and sometimes horrifying--read. The only tiny gripe I have is that he lives in a bit of a paradise--New Zealand, if I remember correctly--and seems to have it a bit more idyllic than the rest of us, which often left me thinking "Must be nice to have a banana fresh from the tree." Overall, I can easily recommend this book to anyone who wants a bit of insight into the food industry and how much better off the earth would be if proper change could come about and manufacturers/producers/factory farmers were held accountable for their actions. A glut of vegans may not flood Whole Foods after reading this but I certainly feel a hell of a lot more informed and am even more grateful for each meal I have the opportunity to prepare, be it meat-free or not. A much better read than "Fast Food Nation" in my book.

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