



The Philosopher's Dog

Raimond Gaita

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Drawing acutely on philosophers such as Rene Descartes, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Simone Weil and writers such as Isak Dinesen, George Orwell and J.M. Coetzee, The Philosopher's Dog is about our creatureliness and its place in the understanding of our humanity.

The Philosopher's Dog Details

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From Reader Review The Philosopher's Dog for online ebook

Judy says

Interesting and made me think a bit more about animals. I found some statements a bit generalistic and definitive. I think we do know how dogs are thinking, at times, because humans and dogs have a unique and deep communication which is not evident between other species.

Tom Brennan says

I think this is one of those books that I would appreciate more if I had more background knowledge of the subject, in this case, philosophy. It tries to make some sense about the relationship of people and animals, and the lengths the former would go through to preserve the latter's health and well-being. I was unable to form a cohesive idea/conclusion of what Mr. Gaita was getting at, apart from the notions of being a unique individual and of what it means to be a creature.

I will note that the anecdotes provided often involves bad things happening to animals, so if that puts you off, you might want to look elsewhere.

Kathy says

Wow, this was heavy. Too heavy for me. I was expecting some nice stories of people and their relationships with their pets. While there is some of that, it's really more a deep philosophy treatise. Not exactly a quick, pleasant read. Perhaps I would have enjoyed it more if I'd know what I was getting into.

Miranda says

I've never wanted to finish a book so badly because I was frustrated by it. Rather than put it down, I was pushed to finish it because I could not understand the continuity between the author's arguments. His argumentative style at times leaves much to be desired. While at times searingly thought-provoking, I found some of his actual evidence he used misunderstood and not well connected. The author appears blind to his own statements made earlier in the book. I don't think I'll ever pick this book up again.

Merinde says

I'm not quite sure how I feel about this book. I liked how thoughtful it was and how it seemed torn between objective analysis and what we actually experience in the beginning. The stories were nice, but simply not enough, and after a while he starts repeating himself. I agree with the final conclusion, but I think it could have taken a lot less long to come up with it. And perhaps could have had some more depth. The intent was good and after reading it I'm pretty sure I'd probably like the author, as a person. But that's not what you read

this kind of book for. It was just a little too slow and the final conclusion could have been made after half this book already.

Katie says

Gaita's use of anecdote is an effective tool--at first. However, it quickly becomes apparent (and maddening) that he relies almost entirely upon these anecdotes, to the detriment of the work as a whole. The end result is, unfortunately, a book that comes across as absolute fluff for mass-consumption, whatever the original intent. This is, in essence, a less efficient, less compelling attempt at what Scully so elegantly penned in [Dominion].

Inder says

I admit, I couldn't make it all the way through this book. The personal anecdotes are great, but sections on the "philosophy" of our relationships with dogs and other animals were ponderous and boring. I am too pragmatic to read 200 pages of wandering prose discussing whether or not dogs are "sensate creatures." I mean, duh! Of course they are! (Which is the conclusion of the book, too, but he just takes longer to get there.) Don't waste my time!

Laçin says

Essay-style writing in this book can make you think about life & death, automatons, emotions, meaningfulness/meaninglessness of killing, saving, protecting and loving animals. One theme/question that seems to come up repeatedly seems to be: 'why so affectionate towards some animals some times and why not so affectionate at other times and towards certain other species?' Well, answer to this one is not really quite intriguing: Because this is life, and we are practical creatures, and that makes our connection to pet-world complicated. Oh, well. Obviously, I was expecting more from this book. Perhaps, somethings that incorporated the views/data from neuropsychology, more of first-hand experience and so on; not just Wittgenstein or Coetzee citations. I can go look them up myself. Reading this, instead, I found myself repeating page after page, "OK, so we are practical animals. We kill and love the same sort of things at the same time. Reasons we show more affection to animals than to humans are horrid. Other life forms are interesting because they tell us something about ourselves." The last sentence sounds a bit too obvious, doesn't it? But that was what I repeated to myself, trying to get a sense of arguments included in the book, to be able to follow why and how the author jumps from animal-human affective interaction to human-baby affective interaction and one human killing another one. The link is not very convincing in the way it is presented by Gaita here. Pushing for "human needs animal to find a meaning for his/her life" should not be what a reader gets from the book, right? But, honestly, that's come up in my mind several times while reading through the chapters. I am sure Gaita is doing more than that and has done more elsewhere (in other books) too. However, there should be another way to approach such affective relation.

Now I am off to find some intriguing source to understand why the Fool (in tarot) seemingly stands by the cliff together with its dog, whereas they actually walk (not for completion or a feeling of being complete, safe, happy; instead, for the sake of moving).

Jennifer O'Kelly says

I enjoyed reading this book, but did not find it particularly innovative in terms of philosophy and animal rights. The book is, however, very readable, and might prove thought provoking for anyone in need of a little nudge towards thinking about animal ethics.

Celest says

This is a somewhat "philosophy heavy" writing interspersed with personal experience. The author discusses societies treatment of and attitudes towards animals in the context of our own animality. I found the philosophy (for me) is too deep for a layman to readily absorb, and not enjoyable. The personal anecdotes were very relatable and saved this book for me.

Clare Rhoden says

I very much enjoyed this book, though it was slow going. It's quite dense in ideas, and much more philosophy than anecdote. I find myself musing over Gaita's notions, though, and thinking that we have moved to a different place in our attitudes towards animals since this book was written. I find myself not entirely convinced by the arguments put forward here, but then, I am not a philosopher.

I think I will dive into this book in the future for thinking material, especially as I continue to write my own fictional animals, to help me consider their outlook and position in life as we know it. Definitely a keeper!

Thomas Vincent says

Having read and enjoyed this book, I was astonished to find that it had been rated poorly on here, and many reviewers questioned the author's reasoning, methodology and his target audience. I do not ordinarily write reviews, but thought I would write down my thoughts on this book while they were still fresh.

The Philosopher's Dog is a work of philosophy, and as such, having only read it once, there will be much that I didn't allow time to seep in or grapple with as I read the book. It is well written and does not lack for clarity, and the only reason why it needs time and rereading is because of the subject matter, not the quality of writing. There are many different points put across in the book, and many seeming contradictions that Gaita does not shy away from, given that he does not believe ethics to be easy. It seems that he believes that we can hold seemingly contradictory views about animals because our ethical considerations cannot simply be filtered down into the things that we believe. Every word we use is packed with meaning, and it could take an age to pick our terms apart.

This attitude justifies his method of using stories to make his point clear. He does not include these to make his book more accessible to non-philosophers, but because they are at the heart of what he is getting at. An interaction between a human and animal can involve a huge amount of understanding on the part of both

without any language involved even in the thoughts of either. His examples allow us to see his message and follow the discussion instead of getting lost on the way as difficult concepts are picked apart.

Gaita's book perfectly balances sensitivity and reason, and shows you what perfect friends the two can be. It is well worth reading, but its sincerity and scope should not be underestimated - just because it has a dog on the front, does not mean that it will be a walk in the park.

Brenda Deflem says

Filosphy can be written either extremely interesting or eccentricly boring. This author, unfortunately, chose the last option. Didn't even make my way through it.

Joe Rowan says

I found this a tremendously moving and thought-provoking book. I have to confess that although I was well aware that there would be quite a lot of philosophy (unlike some reviewers who seem to have been taken unawares) I did find it quite difficult in parts. As with all philosophy, though, I suspect the meaning will become clearer on further readings and it is certainly a book I woud like, and feel I ought, to re-read some day. Very beautiful in its own way, and I will have to have a good long think about the things Gaita says and whether I should adjust some of my beliefs and behaviours because of them. I think that is the greatest compliment I can pay this book.

Leslie says

Yes, I picked up this book for the cover. I even expected to like the book. After about 50 pages, I decided that life is too short to read books that I'm not enjoying or from which I'm not learning anything. The animal-related anecdotes in this book have too many horrific endings, and the "philosophy" is really just pedantic and pompous musings. I'm sending this book on its way to the thrift shop, but I'm keeping the cover.
