



Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets

Jessica Pierce

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A life shared with pets brings many emotions. We feel love for our companions, certainly, and happiness at the thought that we're providing them with a safe, healthy life. But there's another emotion, less often acknowledged, that can be nearly as powerful: guilt. When we see our cats gazing wistfully out the window, or watch a goldfish swim lazy circles in a bowl, we can't help but wonder: are we doing the right thing, keeping these independent beings locked up, subject to our control? Is keeping pets actually *good* for the pets themselves?

That's the question that animates Jessica Pierce's powerful *Run, Spot, Run*. A lover of pets herself (including, over the years, dogs, cats, fish, rats, hermit crabs, and more), Pierce understands the joys that pets bring us. But she also refuses to deny the ambiguous ethics at the heart of the relationship, and through a mix of personal stories, philosophical reflections, and scientifically informed analyses of animal behavior and natural history, she puts pet-keeping to the test. Is it ethical to keep pets at all? Are some species more suited to the relationship than others? Are there species one should never attempt to own? And are there ways that we can improve our pets' lives, so that we can be confident that we are giving them as much as they give us?

Deeply empathetic, yet rigorous and unflinching in her thinking, Pierce has written a book that is sure to help any pet owner, unsettling assumptions but also giving them the knowledge to build deeper, better relationships with the animals with whom they've chosen to share their lives.

Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets Details

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Bethany says

I expected to have some real eye-opening experiences as a result of having read this book and I didn't get any. I feel like she touched on many arguments, but didn't delve into any of them in a meaningful way. I'm really disappointed.

Alex says

This book made me think in the best way.

I felt uncomfortable reading a lot of this because it was things I had never known before or never thought of. I think this is an important book to read if you like animals or call yourself an animal activist

Johnny Martin says

Slap in the face with ethics and facts that build off (what I believe are common) principles about pets and what we consider when we think of them. And then to see the shortcomings of the pet industry and the lack of attention given to animal companions' wellness. A great, illuminating, provocative book.

Byron Kimball says

Left a lot to be desired. I think the crux of my issue with Run has to be the fact that the entire book is written in a style akin to a blog. Too biased (just look at her chapter about euthanasia), too brief. While she raises several key points, such as whether or not it's ethical to keep pets and all and what constitutes ethical treatment, she never digs deep enough into these issues to really satisfy the heart of the questions she's trying to answer.

carolyn says

Thought-provoking but certainly biased.

Colette says

I heard about this book on NPR and thought it sounded good, but when it came in from the library, I worried it would be too radical. It was not. There are so very few laws protecting animals from violent and often deviant owners. This book offers some very reasonable solutions to big problems animals encounter. I highly

recommend it.

Thomas says

This feels like a collection of blog posts, but that isn't really a bad thing. The writing is still backed up by facts and figures. It's conversational in tone and very easy to engage with. While I already understood most of what the author presents, it has definitely opened my mind a little more to the pet industrial complex. Basically, is it ethical to have an 'animal companion'? Well first up, as I would have guessed intuitively, the author concludes that dogs are the most ethical (presuming you do everything for them correctly). But it goes very deeply into every aspect, from food to sheltering to the fact that pets are cheap but the items we buy for them are where the cost comes in. If you've never thought about pet ownership (and even if you have and want a deeper discussion) then this book is perfect to make you think twice before you buy your next goldfish.

On the downside, the author has some clear biases showing (she seems the anti-GMO anti-chemicals type), and uses the word "problematic" too much which is a red flag for me, but overall she speaks sense. I do wonder, after all this talk about keeping pets, whether she is vegan...

Sara Jane says

If you want me to tell you about this book quickly: Ms. Pierce comes across as having a more lenient attitude towards "responsible" bestiality than responsible breeding. Despite acknowledging the success' of the spay and neuter programs she thinks it is time to consider other options, because "animals like sex." Honestly, Ms. Pierce was completely unqualified to write this book - a bulldozer could not have moved her from any of her opinions. It will be great reading for other people who have already made up their minds, and just want to confirm their biases. I have not read any of her other books, but she comes across less as a bioethicist and more as a lady who writes stuff from home.

It is obviously an interesting and timely topic, one that should have been (and could still be) explored by somebody else (a proper journalist, perhaps?). I will fully admit that there was one chapter I thought she did a good job on, and that was where she talks about the euthanasia classes she attended in Denver. Of course, even in the one chapter she did well in, she complained loudly and often from her high horse.

Ms. Pierce actually suggested to look things up online multiple times (puppy mills, gestation crates, etc). I also fully admit that, as somebody working in the dairy industry, I got tired of her numerous negative references to animal agriculture; that seems to be yet another topic she researched with shoddy sources and propaganda videos. The book could have been a successful exploration into this topic if she approached the whole thing like she did the euthanasia chapter, and experienced all the things she grumbled about. Go to a puppy mill and tell us about the horrors, don't tell us to google some video (we are reading a book for crying out loud, why would you tell us to stop?). Have a formal conversation with a few veterinarians instead of quoting flippant remarks. Talk to someone passionately involved with the AKC, I'm sure she would have had her mind already made up with that one, but don't assume all your readers are the same kind of biased person you are.

Overall, an absolute waste of my time. I do not recommend this book at all.

Valerie says

The ethics of companion animals is very complex!

Kathleen O'Neal says

This is one of those books which put into words many thoughts and feelings that had been germinating within my heart and mind for quite a long time. This work of practical ethics is not at all afraid to buck traditional wisdom on topics such as allowing cats some freedom to roam outside of the home, the ostensible necessity of spaying and neutering all companion animals, and the suitability of keeping reptiles, amphibians, birds, and small mammals as pets. Everyone who owns an animal or is thinking of acquiring one should read this book.

Mallory says

Interesting overall but gosh she had some weird and inconsistent arguments. Like "euthanasia in shelters is TERRIBLE MURDER but maybe it's immoral to spay and neuter our pets." Also her constant comparisons to slavery and the Holocaust struck me as super unnecessary.
