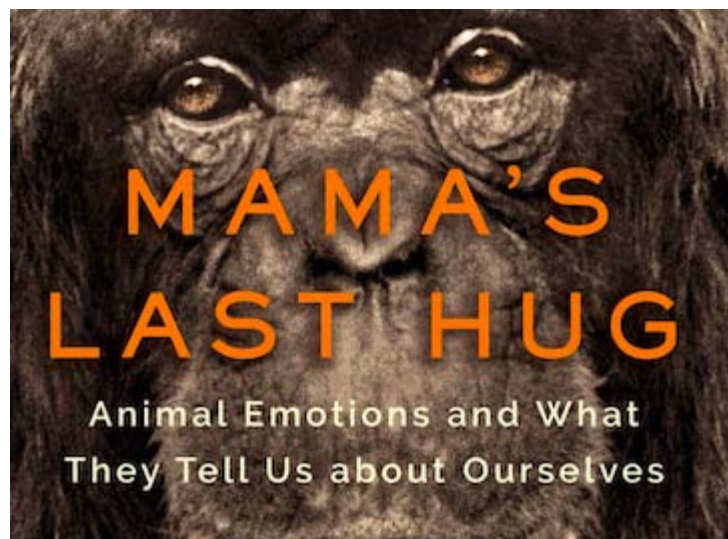


Saturday, April 6, 2019

*Book & Film*  
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NON-FICTION

# When Doves Cry

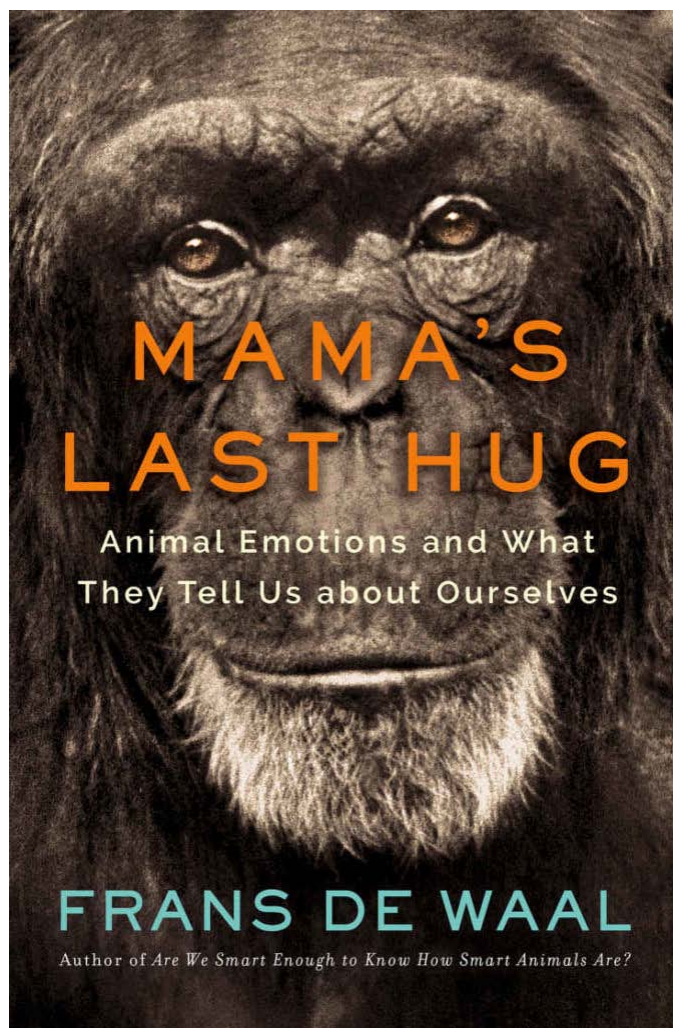
## *'Mama's Last Hug' Conclusively Shows That Animals Have Feelings Too*

March 19, 2019     Michael Giltz

Do animals feel? Like most people, my immediate response is, “Duh.”

So ask a tougher question. Do any or some or most animals (like primates and elephants and dolphins) experience emotions even remotely like the emotions of humans? Or is it just instinct, an of-the-moment burst of pain and pleasure, an unthinking response to environment?

Primatologist Frans de Waal says yes, animals have feelings. This best-selling author of *Are We Smart Enough To Know How Smart Animals Are?* claims the science is overwhelming, based on countless social behavior experiments of animals in captivity and real-world observation and analysis of their brains and other organs. Every attempt to differentiate humans from animals falters when faced with new facts.



In his new book *Mama's Last Hug*, de Waal draws on a lifetime of observation and research to lead us through the evidence. He begins by describing a viral video in which the primate “Mama” lies on her deathbed but

rallies to warmly greet a human friend she hadn't seen in years. Her embrace of this person and the way she pats him on the neck in a comforting manner is so familiar and "human" to the casual observer that the scene becomes deeply moving.

And we're off. de Waal details countless fascinating experiments and real-world observations made by himself and other scientists. He makes you laugh with the fact that rats like to be tickled. But he also reveals substantial proof of long-term memories, a sense of fair play, complex social groups, and self-sacrifice for the betterment of the community. He thoroughly demonstrates the rich emotional lives of creatures, especially, but not limited to, primates.

One idea leads to the next. Before you know it de Waal has you contemplating the fact of pre-meditated murder among animals and rethinking your understanding of the "alpha" male. He describes the peaceful, matriarchal social structure of the bonobo and explains why chauvinist scientists rebelled at the fossil record linking them to us more directly. He floats an amusingly simple idea of labeling all animal products like beef or eggs with a bar code that lets consumers see the living conditions in which their specific food was raised. After 100 or so pages of this book, his idea seems not just effective, but essential. These living creatures, he says, deserve our consideration and respect. They're more like us than we think.

In countless ways, de Waal shows animals exhibiting a sense of "fairness" familiar to any parent dividing a treat for their kids. For example, a primate will sacrifice a bigger reward for itself (choosing a colored ball that means equal treats for it and another primate in a different cage) rather than a ball that gives it even more treats but none for its neighbor. Why? Just to keep the peace when they're reunited in a communal setting after the experiment ends.

I found each example fascinating, the sort of intriguing tidbit you want to share with anyone nearby. Still, after reading the details of ten or twenty such experiments, my appreciation dimmed a bit. The evidence started to run together for a layperson like me, and the radical nature of de Waal's thesis got a little lost at times. Still, he does a good job showing how far the science has progressed, leading us gently and kindly to the realization that the line we draw between us (humans) and them (other animals) has been blurred, and perhaps erased, for good.

**(W.W. Norton, March 12, 2019)**

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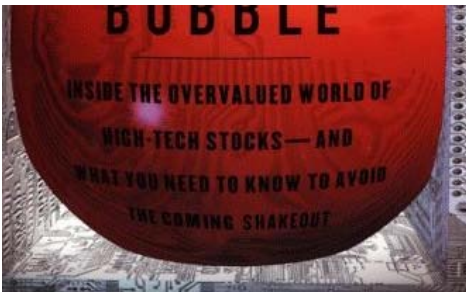
## Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily



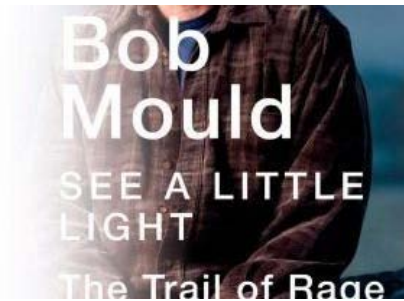
News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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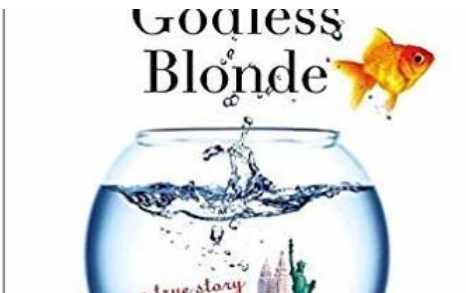
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