

Animal Farm by George Orwell

The animals take over Manor Farm. It becomes Animal Farm, based on the principles of Animalism - principles articulated to the animals in a dream by the wise old pig, Old Major. It is a dream of economic and social co-operation, equality and prosperity.



Old Major's vision

In the opening paragraph, Old Major gathers the animals into the barn and outlines his vision for the future. It is an idyllic and utopian dream based on equality. (Its principles reflect those of Karl Marx; he, too, believed that the workers (the proletarians) should control the factory and thereby control the means of production and their economic future.)

Old Major elaborates upon his visionary dream:

“Never listen when they tell you that Man and the animals have a common interest, that the prosperity of the one is the prosperity of the others. It is all lies. Man serves the interests of no creature except himself. And among us animals let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle. All men are enemies. All animals are comrades.” ... At this moment there was a tremendous uproar. While Major was speaking four large rats had crept out of their holes and were sitting on their hindquarter, listening to him. The dogs had suddenly caught sight of them, and it was only by a swift dash for their holes that the rats saved their lives. Major raised his trotter for silence ...

I have little more to say. I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his ways. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And above all, no animal must tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal.” (7)

The seven commandments are the bedrock of “Animalism”

Snowball, Napoleon and Squealer reworked old Major's teachings into a “complete system of thought, to which they gave the name of Animalism” The principles of “Animalism” were reduced to seven commandments:

“THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.” (p. 17)

The pigs establish their authority based on their “intellect”; their brainpower which also derives from their literacy skills; only the pigs can read. Most of the animals are illiterate. Snowball and Napoleon never agree on any point of debate, but they do agree on the priority needs of the pigs. Squealer becomes Napoleon’s mouthpiece. He is a “brilliant talker” who can turn “black into white”. “The mystery of where the milk went to was soon cleared up. It was mixed every day into the pigs’ mash. The early apples were now ripening, and the grass of the orchard was littered with windfalls. The animals had assumed as a matter of course that these would be shared out equally; one day, however, the order went forth that all the windfalls were to be collected and brought to the harness-room for the use of the pigs.” Squealer explains: “Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig. We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! Yes, Jones would come back! Surely, comrades’, cried Squealer almost pleadingly, skipping from side to side and whisking his tail, ‘surely there is no one among you who wants to see Jones come back?’ (25)

Snowball and Napoleon agree to disagree

The two leaders are in constant disagreement. Snowball is a strategic thinker, organises the rebellion and articulates the principles of Animalism. Napoleon observes and undermines his projects. “These two disagreed at every point where disagreement was possible.” At one meeting, the animals had to vote on whether they should begin work on the windmill - the tool of their economic prosperity. The trouble started after Snowball finished his speech “By the time he had finished speaking there was no doubt as to which way the vote would go. But just at this moment Napoleon stood up and, casting a peculiar sidelong look at Snowball, uttered a high-pitched whimper of a kind no one had ever heard him utter before. At this there was a terrible baying sound outside and nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars came bounding into the barn. They dashed straight for Snowball, who only sprang from this place just in time to escape their snapping jaws. In a moment he was out of the door and they were after him. .. One of them all but closed his jaws on Snowball’s tail, but Snowball whisked it free just in time. Then he put on an extra spurt and with a few inches to spare, slipped through a hole in the hedge and was seen no more.” (39)

Napoleon starts to brutalise the animals who do not follow his commands. He also begins to explore trade links with the humans - starting with Farmer Whympers.

“One Sunday morning Squealer announced that the hens, who had just come in to lay again, must surrender their eggs. Napoleon had accepted through Whympers, a contract for four hundred eggs a week. The price of these would pay for enough grain and meal to keep the farm going till summer came on and conditions were easier. (56) When the hens heard this they raised a terrible outcry. They had been warned earlier that this sacrifice might be necessary. .. for the first time since the expulsion of Jones there was something resembling a rebellion. ... Napoleon acted swiftly and ruthlessly. He ordered the hens’ rations to be stopped, and decreed that any animal giving so much as a grain of corn to a hen should be punished by death. .. For five days the hens held out, then they capitulated and went back to their nesting boxes. Nine hens had died in the meantime. Their bodies were buried in the orchard and it was given out that they had died of coccidiosis. Whympers heard nothing of this affair, and the eggs were duly delivered, a grocer’s van driving up to the farm once a week to take them away.” (57)

Later in a meeting, four pigs, who dare to challenge Napoleon, are slaughtered.

“Three three hens who had been the ringleaders in the attempted rebellion over the eggs now came forward and stated that Snowball had appeared to them in a dream and incited them to disobey Napoleon’s orders. They too were slaughtered ... Then a goose came forward ... then a sheep confessed to having urinated in the drinking pool.. by Snowball. They were all slain on the spot. And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon’s feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones.” (62)