

Les Nourritures. Philosophie du corps politique.

Nourishment. A Philosophy of the body politic. Philosophical Essay, published by Le Seuil, coll. "L'Ordre philosophique", Paris, 2015, 386 p. Awarded the Prize Edouard Bonnefous of the French Academy for Moral and Political Sciences, 2015.

The modern and contemporary dualism between nature and culture explains why it is so difficult for us to change our lifestyles and why environmentalism has a hard time influencing national and international politics. For Western philosophies, from Hobbes to Heidegger, nature is essentially a means to an end and human beings are considered as free moral agents. The sole limit to their freedom is the freedom of other living humans. In such a context, the environment is always secondary. When it becomes central, it is because the depletion of resources threatens our lifestyles and the conditions of our existence. Fear is that what makes ecological norms enter politics. On the contrary, environmental ethics, which goes hand in hand with the extension of ethics to non-human entities and the introduction of the notion of non-instrumental, if not intrinsic, value, rejects the idea of the human being as an empire within an empire. Although one cannot deny the theoretical creativity of this field of applied ethics, which began in the seventies, one has to acknowledge that the books of Leopold or Callicott did not succeed in fostering people to change their lifestyles and reduce their ecological footprints. Lastly, by simply addressing rational arguments and by neglecting the importance of emotions, they share with animal ethics a rationalist bias that could not help us change our relationship with other beings and our way of inhabiting the Earth.

To avoid these two pitfalls (the dualism between nature and culture in the philosophy of the subject that still grounds political liberalism, and the inefficiency of environmental and animal ethics), we have to consider ecology and animal welfare as chapters of a philosophy of existence, taking into account the materiality of our existence, the fact that we live in and depend upon natural and cultural things, such as water, food, river, trees, but also bridges, landscapes and towns. "Nourishment" is the word to speak of the natural and cultural things I live in and depend upon and it is a way of avoiding the word "resource" that reduces the world and nature to tools and means and does not convey the idea of enjoyment. The phenomenological description of eating, dwelling, walking, living in a place and being co-residents with other human and non-human animals, breathes new life into the concept of human existence. Not only is the subject embodied and dependent on natural and cultural things that nourish his or her life, giving it taste, the subject is also always relational.

The description of eating shows that we are always connected to current, past and future persons and with other animals, since our consumption has an impact on them. Eating is a saying. It has an affective, social and cultural dimension, but also an ethical and political one. Ethics makes sense once I am eating, since my lifestyles show whether I am prone to set limits on my right to use whatever pleases me for the sake of other human and non-human beings. Likewise, birth is a structure of existence that does not prove our facticity, as in Heidegger, but instead installs inter-subjectivity inside the subject. Lastly, to live in a place has an existential meaning since landscapes, towns determine us as we determine them, which means that there is a co-institution between the landscape and the self and this has implications upon the way we could assess the link between geography and history. Moreover, to live is to share space and nourishment with other human beings, but also with other animals, whose existence puts me into question and raises issues of justice.

Such a philosophy that stresses the corporality of the subject pertains to a phenomenology that is focused on phenomena that escape my power or my intentionality. The world I live in and depend upon is not the object of my representation. It corresponds to my needs, but it also pleases me. In this book, I insist more on the dimension of pleasure and enjoyment than on our vulnerability, which shows

our passivity and our need of others and was at the core of my previous books (*The Broken Autonomy. Bioethics and Philosophy*, PUF, 2009/2014 and *Elements for an Ethics of Vulnerability. Humans, Nature, Animals*, Cerf, 2011). This is why eating is the paradigm of this philosophy of sensations that describes our being with the world and makes aesthetics enter ethics. In a nutshell, the embodied and relational subject, which refers in the book to “the gourmand cogito” and “the born cogito”, renews the meaning of ethics and justice and our inhabiting the earth and it leads to replace the philosophy of the subject that still grounds political liberalism in another conception of our being-with-the-world-and-the-other which has far-reaching political implications. This creates the link between the first part of the book (A phenomenology of nourishment) and the second one (Establishing a common world).

Such an embodied, relational subject provides the philosophical foundation for another political theory in which the goals of the State can no longer be reduced to security and the reduction of unfair inequalities. The protection of the finite biosphere, the alleviation of animal suffering, the concern for future generations and the consideration of all the dimensions that enable us to flourish, and not only to survive, frame a new social contract, which corresponds to the normative aspect of such an ambitious political theory, which we could compare to the work of an architect: whereas the phenomenology of nourishment stands for the foundations and plays the part that the fiction of a natural state played in Rousseau, the social contract, which establishes the criteria of politics and is linked to a theory of justice (with 9 principles), represents the pillar. Lastly, the chapters that deal with the conditions of a reconstruction of democracy and refer to institutional but also cultural innovations that could enable us fulfil the promises entailed in the new social contract can be compared to the roof.