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Joy, Melanie. 2011. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*. San Francisco: Conari Press. 216 pp. $ 16.95. ISBN 978-1-57324-505-0.

Since ancient times, within the Western tradition, vegetarianism – the refusal to kill nonhuman animals to eat their meat – has developed based on philosophical and ethical motivations. The first indication of this ethical-food policy dates back to ancient Greece, when first of all Orphic philosophers and subsequently Pythagoras and his followers – the so-called Pythagoreans – adopted a vegetarian diet, differing from other schools of thought, not only by virtue of the rules relevant to their nutrition but also, and most importantly, regarding the ethical principles behind such a choice.

Until this day, the term 'vegetarian' might evoke the image of someone guided by a definite worldview – an ideology – from which stems, among other behavior, the no meat diet. Oddly enough, a similar situation did not occur as far as the opposite worldview was concerned; on the contrary it has never been regarded as a single belief system and therefore has not been investigated in its profound motivations, and has never even been defined by a particular name. The term 'carnivores' has been traditionally used to identify those who base their behavior on the basis of such a worldview; yet – taking a closer view – this definition belongs to the field of biology and counters the notion of 'herbivore', not 'vegetarian': the term lacks an ethical scope which can explain its ideological character.

The term 'meat eaters' has also been used but once again the definition does not express a choice opposed to vegetarianism, but merely outlines a simple food practice without referring to a specific belief system. Melanie Joy – a social psychologist and professor of psychology and sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston – devotes his research, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* specifically to this conceptual and semantic gap, identifying the cause of this absence, by no means in a random manner, but rather by deliberate omission.

As Joy declares, echoing the famous Wittgenstein's consideration "the limits of my language are the limits of my world": "The primary way

entrenched ideologies stay entrenched is by remaining invisible. And the primary way they stay invisible is by remaining unnamed. If we don't name it, we can't talk about it, and if we can't talk about it, we can't question it" (p. 32).

For this reason, the author first makes a point of giving a name to this deeply entrenched – and violent – ideology, calling it carnism (pp. 28-30). She then examines its basic socio-psychological and economic assumptions (pp. 95-134). Thus, it emerges the role played by both *mental numbness* (i.e. the psychological process through which we mentally and emotionally dissociate ourselves from our experience) and its action mechanisms (i.e. rejection, elusion, routinization, justification, objectification, de-individualization, dichotomization, rationalization and disassociation) in the conceptual sequence that allows us to refer to the meat we eat using the pronoun 'what' rather than the more suitable 'who' on a daily basis.

In her study Melanie Joy also deals with the breaking down of the same *mythology* of meat into its constituent elements: that array of more or less rational explanations generally used by those who eat meat in order to validate their choice. In this regard, Melanie talks about "the three N's of justification": eating meat is *normal*, *natural* and *necessary* (pp. 105-12). The critical analysis of these principles can be summed up emblematically when the author focuses on the choice of which animals to eat – why pigs, for example, and not dogs (pp. 23-8). On second thoughts, there are no 'normal' or 'natural' nor 'necessary' reasons for choosing to eat a particular animal rather than another, and the same concept of normality simply refers to what we are accustomed to consider a gesture or an action as such. The naturalness of a certain behavior does not guarantee its morality – just bear in mind infanticide and rape – and the same necessity of eating meat is being increasingly questioned by contemporary medical research, which in turn reveals the dangers connected with a meat diet. Instead, there is a system of power – states Joy – able to make normal what would be humanly abnormal, that is to accept the violence of intensive rearing (pp. 95-113). Again, there is a system within which we are placed – the carnistic Matrix – that speculates on our eating meat and does not allow the truth of things to arise. In this respect, the scholar presents a considerable amount of data relevant not only to what takes place within the herds of animals, but also to the dynamics of power which exist between the meat industry and Government apparatus.

The fact that Joy's survey was conducted in America does not prejudice the usefulness of her work in the European context. Socio-psychological assumptions underpinning the eating of meat are common to the entire Western world and the meat industry in Europe is not unrelated to the

violent practices of its American 'cousin'. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* therefore remains a key work, which undoubtedly will be quoted on every occasion, over the next few years, by any Western scholar who writes about vegetarianism/carnism or the industrial system of meat production.

Joy's book shows how invisibility, de-individualization, and routinization are, at the same time, both the weak points and the strong points of the carnistic system. In fact, they can perform opposite roles. They are weak points since on being shown what happens inside slaughterhouses or factory farms people could change their eating habits; but they are also valid points because, as Joy emphasizes, these habits could sometimes be even stronger than our natural empathy; a case in point are the people working in such structures, who, as psychological defense, tend to detach themselves to such a degree that they are no longer able to empathize. In so doing the book points out that the victims of carnism are not only nonhuman animals but humans as well. For this reason one of the most important achievements of this book is that activists should address both sides cited as victims of the carnistic system, instead of saving one and blaming one another.