

# Summer School “Cibo: la vita condivisa”

## Editorial

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Food has always had a heavy influence on human biological and cultural evolution. Actually, a careful look reveals that in shaping food habits, nutritional factors have played a limited role over time. Food has moved beyond mere sustenance and turned into symbol and meaningful part of community-based traditions. It has become a vehicle for values and beliefs, which, in turn, have built up our perception of food and eating. Even now, culture directly affects the choices of consumers and has an impact on their attitudes towards food products. Animal source foods have always been a constituent of human diets. Animal farming can be seen as involved in a co-evolutionary process, in so far over thousands of years has affected biology, behaviour, and the quality of life of both humans and (domestic) animals. Problematizing food choices and relating them to the power humans exert on domestic animals urges us to focus on the way humans treat other living beings.

In this perspective, thinking of food of animal origin helps to rethink humans-animals relations. Objections against animal agriculture often refer to the disrespect for animals' life, integrity and welfare, especially in current intensive production systems. Exploitation of animals and associated factors in farming for foodstuffs and for industrial and trade purposes cannot be separated from matters of ethics and self-discipline. The ethical concerns arising from current food production practices unavoidably involve the ethics of keeping animals for this purpose. Most consumers completely ignore how farm animals are raised in contemporary agriculture. Despite this, the attitude of EU citizens towards animal welfare is currently documented (Eurobarometer Surveys). Consumers show a considerable interest in getting more and clearer information about animal husbandry and about what is behind the products they find on the market shelves. Indeed, in the EU policy ethics has been framed as an essential component of European

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citizenship. Moreover, it has long acknowledged that animals are *sentient beings*. This is formally recognised by article 13 of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, which requires full regard to be given to the welfare requirements of animals in the formulation and enforcement of EU policies.

It remains nevertheless true that there are many unsolved ethical and sustainability conflicts within animal productions systems. It was against this background and with the aim to provide a new perspective on food choices and connected ethical implications that the University of Milan planned to organize the Summer School “Food: shared life”, 1st and 2nd edition. The Summer School has been designed to raise awareness about sustainability of food choices and was intended to guide the participants towards perception of food of animal origin as “shared life” and to promote growing responsibility. The goal of the event was to debate the main issues at the heart of animal welfare. A multidisciplinary approach was proposed, through lessons and thematic workshops, involving academics, practitioners, leading figures from the institutional realm and proponents from the associations. The current and desirable ways to address the ethical issues involved were discussed with distinguished university lecturers, representatives of the European and Italian authorities in the fields of animal health and welfare and of food safety, stakeholders from working life and representatives from national and international NGOs .

The Summer School had both cultural and educational purposes and wanted to carry out a thorough analysis in order to pinpoint some of the critical aspects of the prevalent concepts of animal welfare, give proper information, encourage reflections and handling of the emerging ethical concerns. These aspects are deeply connected with the very true meaning of eating food of animal origin and they come to dealing with food ethics, that is the field where food and ethics converge. All the above opened an “analytic” space where the participants found the key elements for making their evaluation and therefore rethinking their approach to the broad field of food ethics and to the food itself. More widely, the School made an effort to move some “unknown unknowns” into the realm of the “known unknowns”, in the spirit of Donald Rumsfeld (US Secretary of Defense 2002) when he said: “There are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – there are things we do not know we don’t know”. Therefore rethinking food and its meanings helps to rethink the human-animal relation.

The double issue of *Relations* which concern the Summer School “Cibo: la vita condivisa” gathers a set of contributions as representative

of the main topics addressed. The contributors – Antonella Baldi, Davide Gottardo, Lorenzo Bertolesi, Niccolò Bertuzzi, Nicholas Chiari, Marco Damonte, Maurizio Fürst, Enrico Giannetto, Alba L’Astorina, Alma Massaro, Letterio Mauro and Corey Lee Wrenn – are academics and scholars working in scientific, legal and philosophical areas. Their papers explore crucial themes from different, theoretical and applied, perspectives, offer an interesting body of knowledge and provide “food” for reflection.

Issue 5.1 features seven essays, focused on four main topics: the challenges of food production; food as a socio-political agent; the philosophical/theological approach to the act of eating; the economic/legal approach to the act of eating. Finally, the section *Reviews* includes a review where the young anthropologist Eleonora Adorni analyses the book *Power Feels Before It Thinks: Affect Theory and Critical Animal Studies in Religious Affects*, by Donovan O. Schaefer.

Issue 5.2 features five essays that explore the significance of applying an ethical approach in different fields of private, professional and social life, from individual food choices to the paths research and justice could take while respecting animals, deepening knowledge of the political consequences of veganism, the EU ethical approach at the base of the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) and the ethics of care. The section *Comments, Debates, Reports and Interviews* offers a Christina Dodkin’s report, which is about the Review of Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, and the section *Reviews* offers the review of the book *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights*, by Wrenn Corey, performed by the young philosopher Alma Massaro.

Shall food demand and production take steps to move towards a sustainable balance between the interests of all parties engaged? What action can be taken to face the future challenge that livestock production will be expected to overcome in the next years? In this Special Issue, the theme of sustainability is addressed by taking a horizontal look at the current and future landscape of food production and food consumption. Reflections regarding the epistemological debate which arose together with the definition of sustainability are proposed. What about the ethical issues that arise from everyday meals? Which are the main philosophical arguments in favor of vegetarianism and veganism? An analysis of the scenario, through an examination of the main topics and issues in the field of nutrition, helps the reader to familiarize themselves with the deeper meaning and significance of the actual eating. Furthermore, two historical excursus on the relationship between christian religion and animal ethics on one side and ecology on the other side, open a large window on non-human animals as an important element of an integral reading of Christian Scripture. The

Summer School “Cibo: la vita condivisa” is the first Italian Summer School to provide a new perspective on food and on the ethical consequences of food choices. The Special Issue of *Relations* has the purpose to share the formative spirit that has animated the whole initiative.

## REFERENCES

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