Does the Revolution Start from What We Eat? Ethics, Social Habits and Vegan Lifestyle

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In the ‘70s, the topic of nutrition started to have a prominent role in sociology as a new subject of study. Our meals have unattended consequences on all aspects of human and non-human life: it will be enough to think about the implications of the choice of a meal instead of another affecting the everyday lives of people and the environment. In this frame, the diffusion of veganism in the last two decades has drawn attention to the need for an analysis of its roots and to test the consequences on people’s everyday lives.

Differently from what happens in developing countries, where a vast part of the population is vegetarian because of poverty, in industrial societies veganism has been voluntarily adopted also because of material conditions: industrialized and intensive agriculture, global market, capitalism. With the advent of modernity, the pluralisation of eating styles and diets multiplies this, allowing for the exploration and birth of alternative identities and lifestyles.

For most people, to become vegan is a real “way of life”. The connection between veganism and its repercussions on the values and habits of the individuals appears evident: activism, political participation, critical consumption, self-production, the preference for organic agriculture are all practical tools by means of which social actors make themselves aware and responsible. Through their decisions, they can actively condition the internal dynamics of society and become drivers of change.

Exploring a minority eating practice from a sociological point of view is necessary to reflect on the role human beings have taken in this world, but also to reason on the environmental, ethical and political dimensions. This new lifestyle integrates modernity but it also aims at re-founding it on different principles. A rethinking process of the relation between society and the natural environment and between humans and non-humans seems to be in progress.

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