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Annemarie Mol: *Eating in Theory*
Durham, NC, 2021: Duke University Press, 208 pp.

Anthropologist and philosopher Annemarie Mol presents this book as an 'exercise in empirical philosophy'. Pursuing the ambitious aim of rekindling theoretical terms in alternative ways, she examines the bodily, cultural, and social processes that are entailed in the act of eating. Based in science and technology studies, anthropology, and philosophy, Mol combines her philosophical argument with ethnographic examples. However, *Eating in Theory* is neither a contribution to food studies, nor does it elaborate a general theory on eating. Even if the author intensively engages with theoretical discourses, she calls her approach a *style*, not a *theory*. By taking inspiration from eating instead of thinking, Mol aims to escape humanist universalisms, revalue life-sustaining labour, and allow for greater inclusion of nonhumans in theory: 'What if we were to stop celebrating 'the human's' cognitive reflections about the world, and take our cues instead from human metabolic engagements with the world?' (p. 3)

While the book's theoretical ambition is laid out in the introductory and concluding sections, the other chapters, discussing alternative interpretations of the terms *being*, *knowing*, *doing*, and *relating*, serve as exemplary interventions of the proposed style. Like the dishes in a buffet, they do not add up to a coherent whole but are offered for selective inspiration. Thanks to the very comprehensible language, it is easy to follow Mol's thoughts even when she navigates us through challenging waters. All the chapters follow the same structural principle: An empirical story about eating is put into dialogue with a text from the canon of philosophical anthropology in regard to the realities it sought to address, but leading to alternative theoretical conclusions. Her repetition of the phrase 'this is the lesson for theory' allows for a purely result-oriented reading. Additional ethnographic examples, set off from the main text, run in parallel throughout the book. Even if the two-column division is difficult to follow at times, these examples effectively enrich the empirical basis of the book. Despite these regionally diverse illustrations, the book's theoretical focus is limited to authors writing in English, Dutch, French, and German, because Mol's aim is to revisit the dominant canon of continental philosophical anthropology. Accordingly, the author starts with an introduction to 20th-century continental philosophical thought. Acknowledging the relevance and historical validity of works such as Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, Mol criticises the hierarchical conceptualisation of 'the human' that prioritises the political as a distinguishing feature of humanity while relegating bodily and life-sustaining aspects, perceived as 'too close to nature', to the background. In her view, this conceptualisation does not provide an adequate response to current challenges such as planetary ecological fragility: 'The Anthropocene requires us to revisit what we make of Anthropos' (p. 20). Mol's suggestion is to revisit historically evolved concepts for contemporary purposes by using the principles of empirical philosophy. She sketches the initial divergence between philosophical normativity and the empirical gathering of facts and

explains how these opposites were eventually fused in 'empirical philosophy'. The aim of the sub-discipline is, on the one hand, to bring philosophy down to earth and, on the other, to alter the empirical by conceptually giving it a multiple character.

In the first intervention chapter, Mol turns to *being*. In contrast to the prior assumption that thinking resides in a transcendental realm, phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's contribution was to situate it inside human bodies. But since he drew his inspiration from the brain injuries of former soldiers, his model of the body was primarily a neuromuscular one. Mol expands it to include metabolic aspects that lead to different conclusions about being. Responding also to Tim Ingold's thoughts on walking, which are equally focused on the neuromuscular body, Mol notes: 'while, as a walker, I move through the world, when I eat, it is the world that moves through me' (p. 49). As we eat, we do not primarily apprehend our surroundings, but become mixed up with them. At the same time, if we consider where our food has traveled from, our being is not just local, but multi-sited and dispersed.

In the next chapter, dedicated to *knowing*, Mol highlights how the classical subject-object distinction changes fundamentally if we approach it from the perspective of eating and cooking, as the incorporation of objects into a subject transform both the eater and the food. Moreover, the model of *doing* is revisited thoroughly by turning our attention to processes of digestion. This more uncontrolled form of activity stands against the established understandings of doing as based on wilful action. The chapter on *relating* is both complex and revealing. Unlike many philosophers of the 20th century who have described and thought of relations primarily between people, Mol extends her frame toward nonhumans. She points to the asymmetrical nature of relations when it comes to eating and thus shifts the question from 'how to achieve equality to how to avoid the erasure of what is different' (p. 4).

The book concludes with a return to the political, over which Mol initially privileged the sensual. Based on the increasing theoretical sensibility to nonhumans over the last decades, the question is how to reshape politics so that it overcomes anthropocentric predispositions. Mol suggests looking for the political in places where we would normally not expect it to exist. This requires, the author tells us, a broader understanding of politics, equating it 'not just with making decisions but also with exploring alternatives' (p. 138). Even though she is aware of the skepticism of some who find this extension of the term too loose and doubt its effectiveness, Mol underlines that much can be gained. Through this, demands such as those of subaltern studies, which criticised elitist historiography and instead aimed for a 'history from below' that describes the role of women, peasants, farmworkers, etc., are being implemented. Mol follows this call by making such actors relevant through a focus on food and, thus, life-sustaining labour.

The book produces an insightful provocation that emphasises the necessary equality between thinking and doing as well as between theory and empirical research. The credo 'form follows function' is fully applicable in this case, as the elegant but at the same time remarkably clear language allows for a transdisciplinary and even general readership. Philosophical considerations that are perceived as difficult to access elsewhere are sketched effortlessly without losing historical depth or omitting contexts. Actually, the rigid contextualisation and empirical cross-checking of philosophical works is the book's greatest strength.

Another strength of the book is how Mol lets us get close. Following the phenomenological tradition, she shares with us the situations and (physical) experienc-

es from which she draws her reflections. Mol writes about her own cooking, eating, pregnancy, digestion, and eventual physical decay. This radical orientation towards the body addresses aspects that have been silenced in humanist discourses before. Mol's interest in the metabolic level upturns the long-established hierarchy of the senses, as she starts her thinking from the most fundamental processes of life: eating, digesting, and excreting. Since these are essential to human life, but at the same time are not exclusively human properties, Mol creates an inclusivity that answers the calls of feminist theory and post-humanist literature. However, her discussion of metabolism might not be too fine-grained for those who engage more intensely with the term. Instead it functions as an incentive to deeper engagement with it through other literature.

While the book thoroughly develops the link between empiricism and theory, the connection from theory back to practical application, on the other hand, is left to us, as Mol's interventions do not lead to specific solutions. However, she explicitly invites the reader from the beginning of the book to understand her text as a toolkit, to be used selectively, and that spinning it further is what the author wishes for. In this respect, the book lives up to its promise of being a provocative stylistic stimulus – rather a scratch on the surface than an in-depth elaboration. In this way, Mol avoids a philosophical claim to uniqueness; nor does she force a paradigm shift. Instead, she presents a solution-oriented approach to theory, to serve as a descriptive tool to understand the world and consequently to act differently in it. Precisely because of this pragmatic approach, the book is a chance also for non-philosophers to productively engage with philosophical thought. By taking eating as the lens through which she looks at philosophy, Mol reveals its blind spots while also opening a door to its possibilities and strengths. The book thus helps to make philosophical thought accessibly usable in the social sciences and beyond.

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Susan D. Blum (ed.): *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*
Morgantown, WV, 2020: West Virginia University Press, 274 pp.

'The saddest and most ironic practice in schools is how hard we try to measure our students and how rarely we ask them' (p. 29). This quote emphasises what this book is about: bringing learning back to the students and involving them in the classroom. The book starts by elaborating what grades are for. It explains how grades are a measurement developed to evaluate students. But also, how this book intends to provide examples of what to do instead of grading and why this is the future of education instead of continuing to give grades.

The teachers who contributed to this book teach in different fields. They show that going gradeless in the classroom can be done in various ways. The teachers draw a connection between a theoretical framework and real-life settings, where concepts, problems, and reasons are addressed to explore the field of 'ungrading'. This part of the book also reveals the intention behind giving grades. The system was developed to be able to rank students, but it leads students to focus more on the grade than on their learning outcomes: 'students are taught to focus on schooling rather than on learning' (p. 57). The contributing authors are all concerned about how grades standardise learning and practice through a model of education that they do not find applicable in their classroom.