

ACQUIRED TASTES: VIRTUE, COMMUNITY, AND EATING ETHICALLY

By

CHRISTOPHER EDWARD FOUCHE

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2017

© 2017 Christopher Edward Fouche

To my parents, without whom this dissertation would have been an utter impossibility

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I wish to thank my parents, Ed and Pam Fouche. I do not know if I can adequately put into words everything they have done for me. In fact, I am certain I cannot. They made me believe that I was capable of this sort of work, and have given countless helps and aids along the way.

My dissertation committee has been a fountain of wisdom and encouragement. First and foremost, Anna Peterson, who has been the Virgil to my Dante, guiding me through a process which has at times seemed not very different from the one Virgil guided Dante through! Jeffrey Burkhardt opened his office doors to me repeatedly, never failing to offer comfort, focus, and friendship during my visits there. Whitney Sanford has been open, accessible, and helpful, making excellent suggestions for authors who needed to be read, and directions which needed to be taken. David Hackett, from my first day in the program, has been a beneficent presence, always willing to share his experience, his expertise, and his time. He has also been instrumental in finding funding for my career as a doctoral student, an obvious and appreciated blessing. All told, I am pleased and so grateful to have had access to their insights and encouragements during this project.

My time in the University of Florida Religion department has shaped and molded me profoundly as a thinker and a writer. I have been blessed to gain the friendship of a whole slew of brilliant and dedicated peers and colleagues. In particular, I would like to thank Sarah Werner, Amy Brown, and Robin Veldman, who, being ahead of me in the process, offered invaluable advice on avoiding pitfalls and navigating the terrain as efficiently as possible. They have been open, generous, and wise, offering the wisdom which can only come from someone who has walked the same path. Bron Taylor's

classes were intimidating mountains which needed to be scaled, and while I might not have appreciated the effort at the time, I certainly do now. Finally, I am not the first person to call Annie Newman “indispensable,” and I will not be the last. I have never known a label to be quite so fitting for a particular individual. I suspect that if Annie was not present, Anderson Hall itself might collapse in a heap. She is truly indispensable.

There have been many people, over the years, who have been willing to ask me what I was writing on, watch me grimace at the question, and then patiently listen to my garbled attempt at an answer. Richard Horner, Debbie Piper, Jeromy Donlon, Geoffrey Reiter, Will Langley, Sam Spragens, and Jad Denmark all deserve thanks. I value their friendship more than words can express. I would like to thank Corynne Fouche for her support and motivation, as well as the University of Florida College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for the Dissertation Fellowship, which greatly aided in the completion of this work.

I would like to thank my daughters, Julianna and Olivia. I write on matters of ecology and sustainability, due in no small part for my concern for your future. Thank you for that added focus and motivation. Thank you also for teaching me how to concentrate and write while *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* is playing loudly on the television in the next room. It is just one of many things you have taught me, and will continue to teach me, for the rest of my life, I am sure. You are both amazing.

Finally, I would like to offer thanks and praise to God. The planet, food, and my ability to write about both are all gifts. May we learn to use your gifts well, for the flourishing of your creation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	11
Significance of the Study	13
The Argument of This Dissertation	22
2 THE STATE OF FOOD IN AMERICAN LIFE	35
American Ambivalence about Food	35
“Have it Your Way” - Abundance, Efficiency, and Individual Autonomy	38
Indications of Trouble.....	42
Overwhelmed - Too Much, Too Fast	42
The Costs of “Have it Your Way”	47
Marketing, Hyperpalatability, and “The Eating Script”	52
The Power of Marketing	56
Who is in Control?	59
Applying the Sociological Imagination to Food	63
3 RESPONSES TO THE INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM	67
The Problem of Agriculture	67
The Pioneers of Alternative Agriculture, and a Different Way of Eating	71
Sir Albert Howard, and the Law of Return	72
Wendell Berry and the Birth of Agrarianism.....	74
Peter Singer and the Question of Eating Animals	79
The “Food Movement”	81
Eating Organic.....	81
The Local Food Movement.....	87
Genetically Modified Foods	96
Slow Food - Taste and Cultural Aesthetics.....	103
The Moral Quandary of Eating Animals.....	112
Finding the Pathway	117
4 RATIONALITY AND DESIRE	120
The Problem with Rationalist Approaches to Food Ethics	121
The Problem with Ignoring the Effects of Culture	123
The Problem of the “Nudge”	123
Ethical Anthropology	126

John Locke, the Social Contract, and Rational Agency	127
Challenging the Rationalist Position	131
Descartes' Error, Emotion, and the Limits of Rational Agency	132
The Adaptive Subconscious	135
Overestimating Our Abilities	139
Avoiding Idealistic Utopias in Food	140
Humility...or Fatalism?	143
Niebuhrian Ambivalence and the Common Good	145
Virtue, Narrative, and Community	146
5 VIRTUE: HABITS AND ACQUIRED TASTES	149
Virtue Ethics.....	149
Environmental Virtue Ethics.....	151
Virtue as Habit? Yes, But Also a Lot More.....	155
Virtue and Tradition	157
Food Virtues	159
Hospitality as a Virtue	159
Temperance.....	164
Understanding Temperance Through Understanding Gluttony	165
Temperance as a Virtue	170
Humility	175
Humility as a Food Virtue	177
Phronesis - Putting Virtue into Practice.....	180
6 EUDAIMONIA AND PHRONESIS	181
Definitions	181
Eudaimonia as Sustainability, in All Its Forms	183
The Three-Legged Stool.....	185
Functional Integrity	188
The Problem with the Functional Integrity Approach to Sustainability	190
Polarization and Distrust.....	193
A Case Study in Polarization and Distrust - Biotechnology in Food Production	195
A Word on Phronesis	197
Virtue as the Path to Holistic Sustainability.....	202
Phronesis and the Golden Mean	206
7 FOODWAYS AS THE SEEDBEDS OF VIRTUE	211
Defining Foodways	212
The Tale We've Fallen Into	215
The Possibilities of Foodways.....	218
Historical Continuity.....	219
Community	222
Practice	227

Affection	231
Foodways and Virtues	234
Culture of the Table	236
Food Ethics and the "Middle"	242
Differentiating "Foodways" from Local, Organic, and other Modifiers	246
Foodways, Elitism, and Equality	247
Giving Up on Perfection	249
8 CONCLUSION.....	252
Review	252
Unpacking the "Individual Choice" versus "Systemic Pressures" Dilemma.....	257
Unpacking the "Ideas" versus "Practices" Dilemma	261
How Virtue can Help Tie Things Together	264
Purity or Effectiveness?	265
Living Models.....	267
An Analogy - The Benedict Option.....	271
Turning Abstraction into Reality.....	273
But What About the World Left Behind?	276
Is Modernity all Bad?.....	278
Does a Commitment to Foodways Need to be Powered by Religion?.....	281
Do We Have Time For This Approach?	285
LIST OF REFERENCES	287
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	299

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ACQUIRED TASTES: VIRTUE, COMMUNITY, AND EATING ETHICALLY

By

Christopher Edward Fouche

August 2017

Chair: Anna Peterson

Major: Religion

The standard American diet revolves around the ideal of individual autonomy, expressed through choice. The modern industrial food system shaped itself to fit consumer demands, and has actively attempted to reify them at the level of subconscious habits and desires. This has made it more challenging to treat food as an ethical subject, to be considered beyond the notion of individual tastes.

However, issues of ecology and justice in the raising and consumption of food have demonstrated that food ethics is a necessary discipline. Food ethics has been brought to the popular mind most effectively through the “Food Movement,” a social movement spanning across several issues related to food and agriculture, and spearheaded by author and journalist Michael Pollan, and including agrarians such as Wendell Berry, chefs such as Dan Barber, and social justice advocates such as Vandana Shiva.

The food movement has grown dramatically, and has done much good, but is, however, limited by the fact that it accepts the same ethical anthropology as the industrial system, which posits humans as primarily individualized rational agents who can

simply choose to eat better, regardless of social context, and regardless of the impulses and drives which lie below the level of conscious decision making.

Virtue ethics offers a needed corrective, engaging not only the conscious mind but also subconscious habit. It offers guidance on the daily practices of life, while simultaneously offering a big vision of what eating could be, and the sort of people we would need to be to want to eat in a better way.

The “better way,” or eudaimonia, is captured by the concept of sustainability. Underneath that banner, several approaches to food virtue can be pursued, and adherents of each can trust and honor the differences of the other. The virtues needed to reach such a goal can be best inculcated through the development of and adherence to distinctive cultural patterns and habits of eating, known as foodways. Those who commit to eat in this fashion can serve as living models, providing a glimpse into a better way of eating.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Food is at once an incredibly simple subject, and an incredibly complex one. When I say the word “cookie” to my four year old daughter, her face immediately lights up with understanding and joy — she knows what a cookie is, knows that one is most likely coming her way soon, and knows that this is a very good thing indeed! Little Olivia easily grasps the reality of the situation. However, as visceral and as basic as the subject seems in this introductory circumstance, upon further reflection a discovery is made: the topic of food has no bottom. It allows a scholar to go deeper and deeper into analysis, without any assurance that they will ever arrive at a sure footing. David M. Kaplan, in discussing the metaphysics of food, lists seven different options as to its fundamental nature, all argued for by various philosophers, including food as nutrition, food as product of nature, food as product of culture, and food as aesthetic object. He notes that his list is far from exhaustive, writing,

Food is vexing. It is not even clear what it is. It belongs simultaneously to the worlds of economics, ecology, and culture. It involves vegetables, chemists, and wholesalers; livestock, refrigerators, and cooks; fertilizers, fish, and grocers. The subject quickly becomes tied up in countless empirical and practical matters that frustrate attempts to think about its essential properties. It is very difficult to disentangle food from its web of production, distribution, and consumption.¹

The difficulty of the subject matter is but one of the reasons why, as several observers have noted, the philosophical coverage of food has been rather uneven through the centuries. As with nearly every topic in philosophy, coverage begins with Plato, as Socrates famously outlined a vegetarian diet as the ideal for citizens of the Republic in

¹ David M. Kaplan, “Introduction,” In *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 5-6.

Book II (one that Glaucon, Socrates' dialogue partner, complained was "without relish" — in other words, unduly ascetic in its orientation), and several other ancient Greek philosophers spoke about food and diet, including Stoics such as Epicurus and Seneca. There is also a long history of the study of food in the religious traditions, particularly Judaism and Islam, but as a subject of modern philosophy, observers agree, food has historically been neglected. Carolyn Korsmeyer notes that smell and taste, the senses associated with food, have traditionally been labeled "lower senses," less important for philosophical and ethical explorations than the "higher senses" of sight and hearing.² The objects of sight and hearing are abstract and removed, suitable for objective analysis; the objects of smell, taste, (and to a lesser extent, touch) are physical, sensual, and, as a result, overwhelmingly subjective and hence, not well suited for philosophical analysis. Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard note that cooking, and, by extension, food, have been long considered to be "woman's work," and, hence, not suitable for exploration in a field dominated by white men.³ Ironically, food has at once been considered both too easy and too hard, too physical and too ethereal, too mundane and too controversial, and, hence, as Hub Zwart points out, it was largely ceded as a topic of study by ethicists and philosophers to scientists and nutritionists.⁴

The difficulties noted above have certainly influenced and informed my own approach to the topic. I have sought to write humbly and carefully, and I have thought, more than once, that the process of writing about food has felt a lot like stumbling in the

² Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p 3.

³ Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, "The Nourishing Arts," in *Food and Culture: A Reader, 2nd edition*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), p 67.

⁴ Hub Zwart, "A Short History of Food Ethics," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 12 (2000): 113-126.

dark. As such, my thoughts about this project mirror the thoughts of political theorist Yuval Levin, who, writing on a different topic, opens one of his books with these words:

This book is an essay, in the original sense of the term. An essay is an attempt to understand. It is not a legal brief, or a treatise, or a manifesto of some kind, but an effort to grasp what isn't easy to reach, and to see what isn't perfectly clear. An essay gropes and grapples. So the arguments that follow are not intended to be delivered in a tone of confident authority but in a mode of questioning and trying out.⁵

I, too, view my own project as an essay in the sense Levin described, and take his words as my own: hoping to understand, albeit through a glass darkly, a complex, multifaceted, and challenging topic.

Significance of the Study

All of that being said, the difficulties of the topic of food ought not to discourage scholars from analyzing it, because, to put it simply, food matters. It is an interesting and significant topic of study, one with ethical implications for everyone, because everyone eats. Food is a universal need, which means it influences nearly all aspects of life, including ecology, animal welfare, social justice, and cultural identity. The connection between food and environmental concern will be explored in depth in this dissertation, as the production and consumption of food has a profound effect on ecology, and the way in which humans inhabit their environmental contexts.

In an essay entitled "Nets of Beads, Webs of Cells," the bioregionalist Gary Snyder writes,

Our stance in regard to food is a daily manifestation of our economics and ecology. Food is the field in which we daily explore our "harming" of the world. Clearly it will not do to simply stop at this point and declare that the

⁵ Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in an Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), p. 8.

world is pain and suffering and that we are all deluded. We are called instead to practice. In the course of our practice we will not transform reality, but we may transform ourselves.⁶

In a similar vein, Wendell Berry, in his essay “The Pleasures of Eating,” declares that “eating is an agricultural act.”⁷ Both Snyder and Berry, in their respective statements, placed food and eating firmly into the category of an environmentally significant topic, the former by way of ecology and the latter by way of agriculture.⁸ How we raise and consume food has environmental consequences, and is intimately connected with the notions of practice and identity, both frequent topics of environmental literature. The topic of food feels very different, however, than do other environmental topics which garner headlines today, including, most notably, climate change. Climate change is a topic which leans heavily upon the inputs of experts — scientists who can interpret the reams of data — and it is also highly politicized. Multiple sources have reported that those who identify themselves as progressive, or affiliated with the Democratic party, are overwhelmingly more likely to take climate change seriously than their conservative and Republican counterparts.⁹ In an era which is more politically polarized, perhaps, then any before it, and one in which populism and skepticism of traditional sources of

⁶ Gary Snyder, “Nets of Beads, Webs of Cells,” in *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds*, (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008), p. 70.

⁷ Wendell Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in *What are People For? Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), p. 145.

⁸ Of course, for a very long time, agriculture was not considered to be an environmental topic, as environmentalism was dominated by a concern for “unspoiled” wild nature, and did not have the conceptual categories to think environmentally about lands which had been so heavily altered by human action. Thanks to the work of Berry, Wes Jackson, and others, however, this has changed, and agriculture now fits comfortably under the umbrella of environmentalism. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

⁹ For one example of such a study, see Aaron M. McCright, “The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public’s Views of Global Warming, 2001-2010,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 52 (2011): 155-194.

authority are very high, it is easy to understand why significant portions of the population continue to resist arguments for anthropogenic climate change, even though the evidence for the phenomenon is overwhelming.

By contrast, food is less overtly politicized, and while there are some aspects of food ethics which are also expert-heavy (the role of scientists in debates over genetically modified foods, for example), the sheer ordinariness of food makes it more accessible as an environmental topic. As a result, food becomes a more promising gateway to environmental concern than climate change or even biodiversity loss could ever be for those who are not already predisposed to be concerned over environmental matters. The warming of the oceans, or the loss of the Hawaiian monk seal, dangerous and tragic though they are, are removed from the realities of everyday life; “Hey dad, what’s for dinner?” is not. To that end, I am hopeful that this study will make a small contribution to the field of food ethics and, in its focus on environmentalism and virtue, to the field of environmental virtue ethics as well. Food ethics is not intrinsically focused upon ecology — food ethicists who study the obesity epidemic, for example, do not often cite environmental concerns in their work, but the two worlds join together so naturally that the opportunity to focus on food leads seamlessly into the opportunity to focus upon environmental virtue.

An example of a scholar who has already done a great deal of work in connecting food to environmental realities, and environmental virtue in particular, is Paul B. Thompson. Thompson delves into the classical Greek period in order to locate the origins of a philosophy of agriculture. In so doing, he shows that modern philosophy has been more interested in the rights, duties, and interests of the individual, while ancient

Greek thought emphasized the effects of the social and natural milieu in the shaping of the individual. As Thompson writes, “For the Greeks, it is impossible to be a good person in a bad society, and the place and manner in which one derives a living plays a large role in making a society good.”¹⁰ Thompson notes the work of Victor Davis Hanson, who argues that this ancient conception of society created three concentric webs of societal structure: family, community, and nature. Moreover, Hanson argues that agriculture was what bound them together, in its mixture of independence and interdependence, of responsibility for what can be controlled on the one hand, and the realization that there are certain elements beyond control on the other. There is a sense of “agency in place,” in developing suitable habits, in keeping with the surrounding community and the ecology, which in time develop into virtues. This is the foundation for what Thompson calls “the agrarian mind.” He writes,

Even people who buy most of their food in farmers’ markets or through cooperative arrangements will encounter the same people repeatedly, week after week. They will build bonds with them and the need of honesty and mutual respect is critical in such repeated encounters. Furthermore, the people they encounter are either the people who are actually growing the food or they are but one step removed from them. Consumers learn the rhythm of the seasons, and they will know what grows well under local conditions. They can inquire about the condition of the land and animals under the farmer’s care. The agrarian hope is that these kinds of localized transactions will gradually develop into an affection for the people and the place in which one lives and this affection, this sympathy, will in turn mature through the constant repetition of those rhythms into full-fledged habits of character — virtues, if you will.¹¹

The seedbed for virtue, as Thompson describes it, is the intersection of human culture and ecological context. This is a different approach than what is often found in

¹⁰ Paul B. Thompson, “Nature Politics and the Philosophy of Agriculture,” in *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 217-218.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

environmental ethics for, since its inception, environmental ethics has predominantly argued for the separation of, and the preservation of, ecology over and against human activity and human culture.¹² It is also different in that it is not focused upon the ethical decisions of the individual so much as it is focused upon the societal structures which narrow down the choices that the individual has to pick from, and even sometimes make the decision before the individual has even realized the decision has been made. In short, this approach affirms the power of culture to form ethical behavior, an idea which fell out of favor with the dawning of Kantian deontological ethics and utilitarian ethics as the major schools of ethical thought in the modern era. Virtue ethics has experienced a renaissance in the past several decades, however, and with this dissertation, I seek to travel that path as well, exploring what it might mean to produce a food culture in which eating ethically develops organically through the constant repetition of practices which develop into habits of character. In other words, how can tastes for “good” food be acquired, so that the food we desire is the food which is most beneficent — for the planet, for the animals involved, and for the ethical development of humanity? As such, I am hopeful that this project and others like it will continue to develop food as a proper environmental topic and as a topic of virtue, and will help to provide an ethical framework which takes human culture seriously as a method by which to produce positive results.

Beyond food as a topic in and of itself, I am also hopeful that this project will contribute to the resolving of two knotty questions which have been debated in all areas for

¹² A founding father of environmental ethics, Aldo Leopold, was a notable exception, famously writing in *Sand County Almanac*, “There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace. To avoid the first danger, one should plant a garden, preferably where there is no grocer to confuse the issue. To avoid the second, he should lay a split of good oak on the andirons, preferably where there is no furnace, and let it warm his shins while a February blizzard tosses the trees outside.”

ethics for many years. The first is the relationship between individual action and systemic pressures. There are two extreme positions to take in this dilemma, neither of which is satisfactory. Some put all of the ethical weight upon the decision making of the individual, completely disregarding the context, or what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “habitus,” which gives form and shape to the process, determining which choices are viable and which are not. Others swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction, positing little to no individual agency at all. This project will attempt to hold both ideas in tension — arguing for external constraints which affect decision making behavior, while still ascribing weight and consequence to the choice an individual eater makes.

The second ethical question this dissertation will address is the relationship between idea and practice. Again, many are tempted to focus on one of these elements to the detriment of the other. The modern tendency, ascendant since the Enlightenment, is to ascribe all decision making to a mental calculus, and to assume that there is a linear relationship between knowing and doing. If a person knows the right thing, the argument goes, they will act upon that knowledge and do the right thing. Others, following David Hume, argue that our rational minds do not steer our passions as much as they are steered by them — we will act in a certain way, and then fabricate intellectual arguments in order to rationalize that which we already knew we were going to do. As with the previous question, this dissertation will attempt to hold both ideas in tension, arguing for the importance of rational conceptions of the good while simultaneously arguing that practice is indispensable for shaping those rational conceptions. Practice, in other

words, forms our minds to desire the right things. Food, then, in addition to being a worthy topic of study in its own right, hopefully stands to offer guidance on these long-standing ethical controversies.

In my judgment, the link which is able to tie all of these disparate fields together, including food ethics, virtue ethics, and environmental ethics, lies in what Anna Peterson calls “ethical anthropology,” which, in her words, “examines the connections between ideas about human nature and ideas about values.”¹³ In other words, how we see ourselves as human beings guides our understanding of what matters, which in turn guides our priorities in action. To Snyder’s point, even if the barriers to effecting positive change in the world seem insurmountable, transforming ourselves, including our own perceptions of ourselves, offers a place to begin. Virtue adds to the conversation by forcing humanity to consider not only what it means to be a human being, but what it means to be a virtuous human being, to be a good human being. The Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics argues that this cannot be done in isolation, and that the social milieu plays a formidable role in the construction of human virtue. We are, to Aristotle and to those who follow him, fundamentally social beings. Environmental virtue ethics adds still one more layer to the conversation by insisting that the ecological milieu must also be accounted for when discussing human goodness. Humanity is embedded in social and ecological contexts, even if we do not always see ourselves in this fashion. In fact, much of the modern project has encouraged human beings, directly or indirectly, to see themselves as atomized and abstracted from all contexts. The focus overwhelmingly

¹³ Anna Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 4.

came to rest on the rights of the individual, over and above the social, cultural, or ecological ecosystem they found themselves to be a part of. This was not an entirely negative development, of course — this is the birthing place, for example, of the human rights movement, to say nothing of increased focus on the rights of historically marginalized peoples, including women and African-Americans. However, it is also not an entirely positive development, as goodness, for example, has been often considered without any thought at all to natural context, or “fit,” into a larger milieu. The renaissance of virtue ethics, and the profusion of environmental virtue ethics in particular, has served as a corrective to this impulse.

Food ethics, as Thompson has shown, fits organically into all of these discussions. This dissertation will argue that it is impossible to eat ethically in isolation, and it is impossible to eat ethically without considering the ecological context in which the food was raised. Further, it is very difficult to eat without considering our identity as human beings, because food inevitably connects to identity. No matter if a person eats ethnic cuisine or an energy bar; they are communicating a message to themselves and to the larger world about themselves. Communal identities, shaped by social and ecological contexts, become pivotal in the formation of a virtuous way of eating, with “virtue” being defined as that type of eating which contributes to sustainability on all its forms. It is more precise to say “virtuous ways of eating,” for this dissertation will argue that there is no one virtuous method; rather, the contexts help to determine the paths to virtue. These disparate methods form a “federalist” approach to food ethics, in that inhabitants of specific contexts have the freedom to be distinctive and different in their ethical priorities (it looks rather different to be an ethical eater amongst vegetarians than amongst

cattle ranchers such as Will Harris and Allan Savory, for example), while still aiming for the eudaimonia of sustainability.

Before proceeding into the outline of the argument to come, I feel compelled to address one more question: Where is the religion in all of this? My background is in Christianity, and this is a dissertation for the religion department, after all. Why stop at virtue, and community, and not go all the way into religious devotion and the church as necessary components of what I am advocating? Well, I do not believe that Christianity, or that religion at all, is sufficient for food ethics. Some of the most inspiring examples of food ethics, many of which will be covered in more detail in chapter eight, are indeed religious in nature, but for every example of Christians and other religious devotees holding a high view of food, and taking food ethics seriously, there are countless other examples of religious devotees paying food ethics no mind whatsoever. Moreover, the argument of this dissertation is predicated on several different styles of eating ethically, powered by several different types of motivation. It would do no good to limit it to any one religious tradition, and exclude so many participants of other traditions that would be needed in order to make this scheme work. Virtue seems like a better foundation than explicit religious devotion, because many religious traditions, and secular philosophical traditions, give a prominent role to virtue, even if it is called by another name — piety, discipleship, or something else.

That being said, however, there is significant overlap between the arguments being made in this dissertation and the arguments an explicitly Christian theorist might make. For instance, this dissertation will argue that rational, cognitive thought is not

enough to spur transformative change, and that emotional affection is required to provide the requisite force to transform an entire food system. This emotional pull can be provided by several factors, of course, but one of the strongest, particularly when it comes to denying short-term gratification in favor of long term fulfillment, is religious devotion. Moreover, this dissertation is rather critical of some of the effects of modernity — specifically, its penchant for atomization, individualization, and abstraction. It is, in part, a call to conserve that which is under threat by the homogenization brought on by globalization, and other effects of modernity — not to live in the past, but also not to jettison that which has been effective in the past, and promises to be effective in the future. Therefore, this argument is not specifically religious, but I imagine it is one to which many religious people might assent.

The Argument of This Dissertation

With those preliminary questions out of the way, we return to the pressing problem with which we began. Although the pressing environmental issues connected to food demand ethical attention, many continue to have difficulty in connecting the subject of food to the moral or ethical life in society today, and this is at least partially due, in addition to the factors already mentioned, to the instinct to treat food as an object of aesthetic evaluation rather than ethical evaluation. People know what types of foods they like and which they do not like, and it is exceedingly difficult to analyze them in an objective fashion. As the Latin saying goes, “De gustibus non est disputandum.” (“In matters of tastes, there can be no disputes.”) To put the statement more formally, the majority of the American public would argue that their aesthetic tastes and their ethical responsibilities are unconnected, and that discussions of food have room to include the

former but not the latter. As Carolyn Korsmeyer points out, this debate parallels a debate currently taking place in the world of art, with proponents of “ethical realism” arguing that a piece’s moral properties have a bearing on its aesthetic ones, whereas “autonomists,” by contrast, argue that a piece’s aesthetic value is not connected, in any way, with its moral value.¹⁴

If food is understood as the foundation of an interconnected system of societal structures, as argued for above, then there is no place for the autonomists’ argument. Food is not consumed in isolation, and the practices which undergird the production and the consumption of food have a formative impact upon the character of those who participate in these practices, either for good or for ill. The American industrial food system revolves around the ideals of abundance, personalization, and convenience, because this is what American eaters have long demanded. In other words, a lot of food, just how I like it, available to me at any time (and at a low price). The food industry shaped itself to fit these consumer demands, focusing, for instance, on massive monocultures rather than smaller diversified polycultures, and long-distance shipping to ensure that foods would be available in all climates, regardless of season. As the food industry shifted to meet demand, it also proceeded to reify those priorities in the mind of the individual consumer; consumer and producer thus entered into a feedback loop, each reinforcing the other. The evidence of these changes is pervasive: the proliferation of fast food and obesity rates, and the erosion of long-held ways of eating, including not only the foods which are eaten, but also the rituals in which foods were eaten, including the very idea of the meal itself.

¹⁴ Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Ethical Gourmandism,” in *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 87-102.

This feedback loop between individual tastes and the system which has arisen to meet them has made it more challenging, I believe, to treat food as an ethical subject. How can one person's taste for Thai be set against and compared with another's taste for Italian? Is not this entire exercise completely subjective? And yet, there are clues which suggest that tastes cannot be completely separated from ethical sensibilities. For instance, the "guilty pleasure" is defined as a food which we know we should not eat, but we do anyway. Of course, that term is more often used in a nutritional sense today than in any other ("I should not eat that chocolate cake while on a diet") but even so, the language hints at a reality: that the connection between food and ethical behavior never fully disappeared in the public mind. More significantly, there are also clues in the physical world which suggest that the way in which food is produced and raised carries with it significant negative effects. From obesity rates to soil erosion to pervasive hunger and malnutrition, it is obvious that more is involved with the process of eating than merely the tastes I do or do not enjoy. Chapter two of the dissertation studies these phenomena in more detail, and attempts to explain how a system which produces so much abundance can also produce so much ambivalence when it comes to what we eat.

These connections between food and ethical behavior, always latent in public understanding, have been writ large thanks to the work of the "food movement," a social movement spanning across several issues related to food and agriculture, and spearheaded by author and journalist Michael Pollan. Pollan's 2006 book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, has done more to associate food with ethical questions, particularly ecological ethics questions, than perhaps any other book released over the past several decades.

The book has sold several million copies, spawned a Young Reader's edition, and elevated Michael Pollan as the preeminent spokesman of the Food Movement. In it, Pollan attempted to answer a simple question which turned out to be not so simple: "Where does my food come from?" His answer took him to fast-food restaurants, confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and to Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm in rural Virginia. Along the way, Pollan articulates, more clearly and accessibly than anyone before him, the outlines of the industrial food paradigm, and the potential dangers which it poses to animal welfare, ecology, and public health alike. According to Paul B. Thompson, it was Pollan who put food on the map as an environmental issue, and who connected the industrial way of eating with questions of sustainability and environmental calamity.¹⁵

The food movement, however, goes much further than Michael Pollan. In fact, the term itself is something of an umbrella, containing a chorus of voices, which overlap at many, though not all points. Agrarian farmer Wendell Berry is in many ways the heart of the movement (*New York Times* food author Mark Bittman calls Berry the movement's "soul"), and those like him, farmers and those sympathetic to them such as Salatin and Wes Jackson, have some of the movement's loudest voices. They write poignantly about the land, and the human connection to it. However, there is also a diversity of voices which should not be discounted, all of whom have spoken about food in ways which are uniquely their own, while simultaneously contributing to the larger aims of the movement. Vandana Shiva, for instance, is a fierce critic of the effects of the Green Revolution in India, arguing for food democracy and for indigenous farmers to have control of what they plant. She is joined in these concerns by activists who decry

¹⁵ Thompson, "Nature Politics," p. 217.

the presence of “food deserts” in American inner cities, such as urban farmer Will Allen. For this wing of the food movement, justice is the organizing principle. For organizations such as Slow Food, and gourmet chefs such as Alice Waters and Dan Barber, the guiding principle is distinctive flavor — in the food, but also in the culture which produced it. Others have engaged in the food movement for the cause of animal welfare, human health, or a host of other reasons. What unites them is food — how it is raised, how it is prepared, how it is consumed, and the webs of connection uniting people and land, which are affected by those processes.

Even though members of the food movement have admitted that the movement is still largely inchoate, it has achieved real milestones, particularly in the last decade. Farmers markets have experienced explosive growth in the United States, nearly doubling from 4,685 in 2006 to 8,144 in 2014 according to the USDA. (In 1994, there were only 1,700 farmers markets in the US!) The organic food market continues to grow, with behemoths such as Wal-Mart and McDonalds either entering the market or at least making overtures to it. Former First Lady Michelle Obama, through her efforts in tackling childhood obesity, raised awareness on the issue of food, planting a garden in the White House which, while not certified organic, was largely chemical-free and reliant on composting.¹⁶ These milestones led commentators such as Bryan Walsh, writing for *TIME*, to declare, “It is amazing how quickly the food movement has become a measurable

¹⁶ The in-between nature of the garden — not certified organic, but certainly influenced by organic principles — has caused it to be used as a political football by proponents on both sides of the organic-industrial divide. See Melanie Warner, “The War Over Michelle Obama’s Sort-of-Organic White House Garden,” *CBS News*, June 16th, 2011, accessed June 16th, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-war-over-michelle-obamas-sort-of-organic-white-house-garden/>

force in American society.”¹⁷ Forecasts are optimistic that the “measurable force” will only increase in the days ahead. Chapter three examines the heroes and leaders of this movement in more detail, parsing the various strands which comprise the food movement, including organic food, locavorism, and vegetarianism, among others.

The food movement is, on the whole, a positive one, full of admirable figures and sentiments. Pollan comes off in his writings as a likable everyman, while Wendell Berry carries a gravitas few others can match. The goals of the movement are noble, whether they are focused on animal welfare, ecology, or public health. The food movement presents the image of a food system very different from the current one, and many authors in the movement offer a beatific vision of what eating could be if the objectives of the movement were met — happy farmers, better tasting food, and a healthier planet. This vision is a hallmark of the movement, as is pointing out just how far short the current mode of eating falls when compared to it. However, it also reveals a difficulty with the food movement, a limiting factor in its effectiveness.

This difficulty manifests itself in two ways. First, some in the movement have suggested that all that is needed to make the vision happen is an alteration of individual consumption patterns. All that needs to be done is for the consumer to choose the organic option, or the local option, and all will be well. There is plenty to commend such choices, of course, but unfortunately there is little to suggest that individuals altering their own shopping patterns will have a significant impact on the food system as a whole. In fact, as Pollan and others have shown in their analysis of what Pollan calls “industrial organic,” the purchase of organic foods at a larger scale often only serves to

¹⁷ Bryan Walsh, “Foodies Can Eclipse (And Save) the Environmental Movement,” *TIME*, February 15th, 2011, accessed June 16th, 2016. <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2049255,00.html>

make the vision of organic food align more closely with the industrial vision which organic food was designed to be a counter to in the first place! Local food faces a similar problem, as the definition of “local” gets increasingly nebulous as the scale of the enterprise grows. Clearly, to achieve the vision of food put forward by the food movement, more substantial changes are needed, changes which are more difficult to implement, and which require more sacrifice and fortitude to sustain.

The second way in which this difficulty manifests itself is in some ways the mirror image of the first: if the proponents of individual choice undersell the level of changes needed in order for the food system to be meaningfully changed, there are also those who call for the drastic changes which are needed, while underselling the obstacles which would prevent those changes from being implemented. Primarily, this means underestimating the power of existing culture to shape habit, against which the forces of rational argument are limited in their effectiveness. Arguments for giving up meat, for example, often fail, because they represent the construction of an entirely new food culture from whole cloth, and an attempt to implement it from on high. Not surprisingly, the recipients of these visions rarely embrace them, largely because their behavior is determined by actions which occur below the level of conscious cognition. Chapter four addresses the deficiencies of an exclusively rational approach, following the work of scholars such as Timothy D. Wilson who argue that the adaptive subconscious is the critical factor in decision-making, and any ethical theories looking to change behavior must begin there. It also examines the problem of addressing individual eaters, arguing instead that ethical approaches to food must be fundamentally communal in nature.

Instead of focusing on individual interest, or upon a predominantly rational framework to food ethics, I argue that it would be wiser to engage consumers at the level of habit — daily practices, amidst a community of like-minded fellows, inspired by a vision of a better way of eating, in order to produce the growth necessary for these big visions to be made into reality. This is an understanding of humanity which progresses beyond that of homo economicus and aims to ask the question, “What sort of people do we want to be, what sort of character do we desire, and how is that made manifest by the way in which we eat?” When one starts talking about habit, practice, and character, conversations about virtue naturally follow. It is a rite of passage, of course, for virtue theorists to explain why deontological and consequentialist ethics are insufficient for addressing the ethical task at hand, but in this case, I believe there is some truth in the exercise, and this is partly due to the challenge mentioned above — food is an issue where ethics and aesthetics intertwine. What is needed is to train the desires, to train people to developed “acquired tastes,” if you will, for better food — better in taste, but also better in animal welfare, and ecological sensibility. It is a long process, which requires development and growth, and this is precisely what virtue ethics has to offer.

Chapter five explores virtue ethics and environmental virtue ethics specifically, arguing for its suitability in addressing the problems of our current food system. The pursuit of virtue can uproot the habits entrenched by the dominant food system, in favor of habits which reflect character, and lead toward flourishing. The chapter ends by considered three virtues in closer detail — temperance, hospitality, and humility. First, I will look at hospitality as a way for proponents of these distinctive ways of eating to interact

with each other with respect and care. To be hospitable is to take ownership of the eating experience of the other, and to share that which is distinctive in your tradition with the other in a spirit of generosity and goodwill. Second, I will look at temperance, arguably the virtue most obviously connected with food. In the midst of a food system which allows everyone, it seems, to “have it their way,” temperance demands constraints upon our appetites, and it is precisely those constraints which provide the contours for a distinctive, sustainable way of eating. Finally, I will consider humility, as a way to facilitate the transition, in Aldo Leopold’s famous language, from seeing ourselves as “conquerors” of the biotic community to being “citizens” of it. Humility allows humanity to understand that our lives are embedded in both ecological and cultural ecosystems, ecosystems with elements which lie outside humanity’s control, and as such to resist the urge to try to control every variable through technological wizardry.

“Flourishing” is a way to translate the Aristotelian term *eudaimonia*; others include “happiness” or “welfare.” The question must be raised: when we speak of flourishing, or happiness, what does that mean? Flourishing for whom? What would be the evidences of such flourishing? This is a contentious question, even amongst those who would seem to be on the same wavelength when it comes to food ethics, and the need to reform the way in which Americans raise and consume their food. In fact, conflicts abound. For instance, the differences between those who would classify themselves as animal rights activists, such as Gary L. Francione and Andrew Linzey, and those who would classify themselves as animal welfarists, such as Simon Fairlie and Will Harris, will not be resolved easily. The former consider the latter to be half-hearted at best;

Linzey writes that animal rights advocates are “animal welfarists who mean it.”¹⁸ Francione argues that animal welfare was essentially a way for those who eat meat to try to feel a little better about their meat-eating more than it was about actually being concerned for the animal in question.¹⁹ Conversely, animal welfarists, who raise and eat animals while professing a commitment to treating them with respect and dignity throughout their lives and through their deaths, tend to see animal rights advocates (and the veganism which naturally follows from their position) as profoundly out of step with the natural processes of life. In farmer Joel Salatin’s words,

It is a profound spiritual truth that you cannot have life without death. When you chomp down on a carrot and masticate it in your mouth, that carrot is being sacrificed in order for you to have life. Everything on the planet is eating and being eaten. If you don’t believe it, just lie naked in your flower bed for three days and see what gets eaten. That sacrifice is what feeds regeneration. In our very antiseptic culture today, people don’t have a visceral understanding of life and death.²⁰

Both groups are highly concerned about the animals at hand, but have very different visions as to what is appropriate in humanity’s relationship with those animals. This is just one example — genetically modified foods and the local food movement are also battlegrounds of conflict, where people who would seem to have common cause bitterly attack the other’s approach to food.

Virtue offers a way out of these stalemates, not through pressuring people to give up their convictions, but rather, in helping them to hold those convictions well, and to

¹⁸ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 46.

¹⁹ Gary L. Francione, “Animal Welfare, Happy Meat, and Veganism as the Moral Baseline,” in *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p 170ff.

²⁰ Quoted in Madeline Ostrander, “Joel Salatin: How to Eat Animals and Respect Them, Too.” *Yes! Magazine*, March 27th, 2011, accessed March 17th, 2017, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/can-animals-save-us/joel-salatin-how-to-eat-meat-and-respect-it-too>

disagree well. An approach which focuses upon character facilitates this development, because character builds trustworthiness, and trustworthiness will allow those who passionately disagree to at least sit down with each other, to have discussion, and to reach compromise in the service of a larger goal. The animal welfarist, or the GMO proponent, will not feel so compelled to “win” the argument as they will to seek consensus on approaches which, while not giving them everything that they want, still build positive momentum towards achieving flourishing. Chapter six argues that the most beneficial way to conceive of flourishing, or eudaimonia, in such an approach is to conceive it as sustainability, sustainability in the classical “three-legged stool” model of sufficient food for all, ecological responsibility, and social health. In this way, mouths are fed, the earth is treated more beneficently, and rural communities remain vibrant. Within this large vision of flourishing, there is room for distinctive approaches, so long as they work together in the service of the larger goal. What unites these distinctive approaches is concern for the long term integrity of ecosystems and those which live within them, and the virtues which lead to their respect, and hence, to flourishing for many generations yet to come.

The types of virtues needed for such an outcome, I will argue in chapter seven, are best inculcated through foodways — the distinctive pattern of dietary habits and actions unique to a certain group. The call for distinctive ways of eating, unique to the people who participate in them, stands against the homogenizing tendencies of the modern industrial food system, wherein thousands of different foods are, in reality, found to be variations of a handful of staple crops, most notably corn and soy. The concept of a foodway is a fluid one, and can be fraught with difficulty, particularly when it involves words such as “traditional” and “authentic.” As numerous scholars have shown, tradition

and authenticity often lie in the eye of the beholder, and often have more to do with power struggles and self-identity than they do the restoration of indigenous cuisines. Still, it is possible to speak of distinctive ways of eating, limited by the constraints of geography, ethnic tradition, or some other factor. These can be powerful tools in the search for sustainability, because foodways often have four factors critical in the cultivation of virtue: historical continuity, practice, community, and emotional affection. Food which conjures images of the past, needs to be worked for, is experienced with others, and is regarded with emotional affection due to its connection with self-identity provides a platform upon which virtue can be constructed. It provides the motivation to make the major changes needed in order to see real transformation in the way food is raised and consumed in America.

Foodways involve more than the individual and the culinary choices they make. That is important, of course, and a “culture of the table,” following Albert Borgmann, is required because such a culture can promote the mindfulness and commitment from which the pursuit of virtue begins. By itself, however, the culture of the table is insufficient. There needs to be structural implements in place which support the culture of the table, because it is, in this day and age, an increasingly countercultural phenomenon. The structural implements in question are what Fred Kirschenmann and his collaborators in the organization *Agriculture of the Middle* call “value-based food supply chains,” comprised of farmers, seed companies, distributors, and consumers, all dedicated towards the same goal. Some supply chains may place a higher premium on localism, some on organic, some on vegetarianism, but all share the trait of providing the structures within which communities and those who live within them can practice a “culture of

the table,” and resist the homogenization and industrialization of the food system which is dominant in American life at the present moment.

In addition to providing a cohesive unit, a haven for communities to live and eat according to a certain narrative, framed by sustainability, foodways also have the capacity to serve as living models, showing the larger world what this countercultural approach to food has to offer, and inviting them to try that approach themselves. The final chapter, chapter eight, explores this concept in more detail, focusing in particular upon certain intentional communities which have arisen, communities which attempt to provide a scale model of what eating ethically would look like in the larger population. The inhabitants do not necessarily invite everyone to live in intentional communities, but they do invite everyone to participate in the spirit of mindfulness and commitment which they embody, and they invite everyone to seek the virtuous ways of raising and eating food in their own daily contexts. Many of these expressions are religious in nature, and although I do not argue that the religious life is mandated in order to live and eat in this way, it can be a helpful tool in achieving these objectives, because the religious life requires elevated levels of mindfulness and commitment, and because it also calls for a good-natured embrace of constraints upon behavior, including dietary behavior. This is critical to the process of acquiring the taste for ethical eating. In the end, it is the embracing of those constraints, ironically enough, which clears the path which leads to true freedom. We are free to follow our desires and our tastes, because the desires and tastes we have acquired are better ones, leading to better outcomes — better for ourselves, and better for the planet itself.

CHAPTER 2 THE STATE OF FOOD IN AMERICAN LIFE

This chapter attempts to analyze the dominant approach to food in America, using an approach pioneered by C. Wright Mills calls “the sociological imagination.” The sociological imagination does not focus entirely on the behavior of individuals, or on the machinations of governments and huge corporations, but rather attempts to understand each in light of their relationship with the other. The structure of the food system — large monocultures, chemical-intensive farming and high food miles — has been formed by the desires of the consumer. However, it also forms the desires of the consumer in return, creating a feedback loop which revolves around the ideals of abundance, efficiency, and personalization. The system which has resulted, and the appetites it has generated, have become a food culture, a malevolent one with potentially disastrous ecological and ethical effects. This chapter attempts to explain the feedback loop, and to identify the values which undergird it, in order to provide a starting point for thinking about a better food system in America.

American Ambivalence about Food

For American eaters today, food is an ever-present reality.

¹ Whether it comes from a fast-food restaurant or a vending machine, a food truck or the catering tray at a business meeting, we are never far from food. The world of our ancestors — hunter-gathers chasing prey, or perhaps agriculturalists praying for rain to water their crops — seems like a distant, if not altogether alien, reality. A disproportionate

¹Obviously, this comment, and largely, this dissertation, is directed at those who have the means to ensure that food is indeed there. There are a great many people, including a great many Americans, who do not have such certainty. Their cause has been taken up commendably by scholars elsewhere. For example, see Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice (Food, Health, and the Environment)*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

amount of the time, energy, and resources of those generations was devoted to procuring and consuming food, and that is just no longer the case. Indeed, as USDA agricultural economist Annette Clauson demonstrates, the per capita income spent on food by consumers in the United States has fallen precipitously even over the last half century, from 17.5 percent in 1960 to 9.9 percent in 2012. As she summarizes the data, “We are purchasing more food for less money, and we are purchasing our food for less of our income.”²

However, even if people in the modern age lack the urgency of previous generations in procuring their food, and the dire consequences of failing to do so, we do not seem to be any less devoted to food, even if we show that devotion in very different ways. For example, food is a topic taken up by religionists, philosophers, environmentalists, and serious observers of culture. Entire television networks are devoted to its preparation and consumption, chefs such as Emeril Lagasse and Mario Batali are celebrities on par with actors and musicians, and books hawking trendy diets dominate nonfiction bestseller lists. Fifty-seven percent of respondents tell Harris pollsters that they enjoy cooking, with twenty-seven percent saying they “enjoy it a great deal.”³

In fact, this devotion to food is significantly related to not just physical wellbeing, but also emotional wellbeing, and cultural identity. Barbecue, for example, is about far

² Data and quotation found in Eliza Barclay, “Your Grandparents Spent More of Their Money on Food Than You Do,” *NPR - The Salt*, March 2nd 2015, accessed April 12th 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/03/02/389578089/your-grandparents-spent-more-of-their-money-on-food-than-you-do>

³ “Kitchen Creations: Nearly 4 in 5 Americans Say Dinners at Home Mean Cooking From Scratch,” *The Harris Poll*, June 23rd, 2016, accessed August 19th, 2016. <http://www.theharrispoll.com/health-and-life/Cooking-Dinners-At-Home.html>

more than a pig and smoke. It represents a food shared by a distinct community of people, in which both the identities of the people who prepare the food and the ones who eat the food are bolstered in the acts of preparation and consumption, as are the boundaries between community groups. These boundaries do not merely delineate between carnivores and vegans, or even Southerners and Northerners, but they can even connote region-specific preferences - Texas brisket vs. Carolina pork, Kansas City sweet sauce vs. Memphis dry rub, and so on. Each style is claimed by a contingent of the larger barbecue community, and the competition between them is fierce, not unlike the rivalries among college football fans in these regions. Whether the food in question is barbecue, or vegetarian fare, or “ethnic cuisines,” food plays a critical role in the formulation of cultural identity in America as elsewhere. Or, to as French food writer Jean Brillat-Savarin famously put it, “Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are.”

For all of the importance of food in American culture, however, including its role in forming and shaping cultural identity, an observer cannot shake the sense that the Americans who participate in this system are widely dissatisfied with it; at the very least, American food culture is marked by ambivalence, which sometimes is revealed in envy of those who eat differently. As Michael Pollan points out in a *New York Times* column provocatively titled “Our National Eating Disorder,”⁴ American eaters have long looked at the French with a combination of disgust and envy. How can a nation of “wine-swilling cheese eaters,” in Pollan’s phrase, have lower rates of heart disease and obesity? How do they have the time to sit together for hours over a meal, at home or in a sidewalk

⁴ Michael Pollan, “Our National Eating Disorder,” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 17th, 2004, accessed April 4th, 2017. <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/our-national-eating-disorder/>

cafe? Put simply, why do they seem to enjoy food so much, without any of the guilt which so often stalks Americans? After noting this “French paradox,” Pollan turns his attention to what he calls “an American paradox,” which is a reverse mirror image of the French one: “a notably unhealthy people obsessed by the idea of eating healthily.”

“Have it Your Way” - Abundance, Efficiency, and Individual Autonomy

Full-throated apologists for the dominant, industrialized food system in America find such claims of ambivalence overblown, if not completely preposterous. The major food producers proclaim the American system of raising food as “the envy of the world,” and a triumph of human ingenuity which has saved millions of lives around the globe.

As engineer Anthony Arroyo phrases it,

Make no mistake, this Revolution (the Green Revolution) helped save humanity from perennial catastrophist predictions of famine and is an excellent example of the application of human creativity to our most wicked problems...The net result of agricultural intensification is that we can now grow more food, more consistently, on less land, using less water, wasting less fertilizer and emitting fewer greenhouse gases.⁵

This “intensification,” apologists add, will only need to increase to meet the food demands of a rapidly growing global population. As Jim Blome, President and CEO of Bayer CropScience puts it in a *Washington Post* editorial, “The amount of food we’ll need to produce in the next twenty years is twice the amount of the food we’ve produced in the past 10,000 years.”⁶ This efficient, innovative style of farming, it is argued, is what is required to avert global catastrophe.

⁵ Anthony Arroyo, “Laudato Si and Industrial Agriculture,” [AnthonyArroyo.com](http://www.anthonyarroyodotcom.com/blog/2016/3/1/laudato-si-and-industrial-agriculture) (blog), March 1st, 2016, accessed April 12th, 2016. <http://www.anthonyarroyodotcom.com/blog/2016/3/1/laudato-si-and-industrial-agriculture>

⁶ Jim Blome, “Modern Agriculture is Based on Sound Science,” *The Washington Post*, November 19th, 2014, Accessed April 12th, 2016. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/brand-connect/wp/perspectives/modern-agriculture-is-based-on-sound-science/>

This intensification has certainly paid dividends for the American consumer as well. The majority of Americans have immediate access to a truly astounding amount of food, presented in seemingly staggering varieties, all for a relatively inexpensive price. This is largely a result of the effort of major food producers, who have been only too happy to take over the cooking responsibilities, providing food conveniently and cheaply, in the quantities and the varieties desired by a busy and stressed-out American public. Pollan, controversially, cites the feminist movement⁷ as a catalyst for this shift, pointing to a billboard taken out by fast food company Kentucky Fried Chicken in the 1970s. The billboard featured a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and the words “Women’s Liberation,” the upshot being that Kentucky Fried Chicken was coming to the rescue of women who had been previously confined to their kitchens and consigned to the role of putting dinner on the table every night. The role of gender in food preparation remains contentious; but for our purposes, it is enough to say at this point that large numbers of male and female Americans alike have been more than happy to let Kentucky Fried Chicken, Kraft, and other producers take care of food production, while they pursued other priorities.

Even as consumers were subcontracting the duty of food preparation to the large producers, however, they were still finding food “good to think.” As such, the marketing and advertising departments of the food producers were also happy to supply the existential connections of meaning and identity with the food they were serving. The predominant message which the food producers tried to convey to their customers was that

⁷ Feminist author Martha Burk took Pollan to task on this point. See Martha Burk, “Cooked: Is Fast Food Feminism’s Fault?” *Huffpost Books*, June 13th, 2013, accessed April 12th, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martha-burk/michael-pollan-cooked_b_3133615.html

this new processed food was a way to gain individualistic autonomy, by means of personal choice. As the slogan for Burger King, first conceived in 1974, put it, the consumer could “Have it Your Way!” The customer’s burger, and her ability to choose not only where to get it, but also the exacting specifications by which it would be prepared, spoke to her freedom, which in turn spoke to her identity, and thus to her empowerment in articulating that identity. This could all be done cheaply and conveniently, due to the astounding variety of choices the American food system could put before its consumers — not only in the fast food joint, but also at the grocery store, on restaurant row, in the food court at the airport, and so on. Endless varieties of food served and packaged in endless variations to meet every taste imaginable, presenting seemingly endless opportunities for American eaters to proclaim their authentic selves through their food choices. One could eat as much or as little as they’d like; from any cuisine the world has to offer, in accordance with any type of food philosophy or ethos (Vegan? Gluten-free? Paleo? No problem!) Even the laws of nature were powerless to prevent the choosing (You want pineapple in Boston in the dead of winter? You got it!). A diversity of choices, presented cheaply and conveniently, allowed American eaters, so the narrative proposed, to express their identities through the food they chose to eat, while spending less time and money to procure that food than ever before. Having it your way, then, was having it all.

An interesting example of identity-through-food-choice which illustrates the larger principle can be found in a recent controversy involving the chicken-sandwich chain Chick-Fil-A. Founded by S. Truett Cathy in 1967, the restaurant chain has long been

famous for “selling chicken with a side of God,”⁸ as a 2014 *Atlantic* article puts it. Most famously, this involves closing every Chick-Fil-A restaurant on Sundays, but it also includes putting Bible verses on cups, and playing Contemporary Christian music on restaurant sound systems. This infusion of a conservative Christian ethic into the business model led to controversy in 2012, as its donations to organizations which support, in company president Dan Cathy’s (son of Truett) words, “traditional family values” resulted in a firestorm of controversy, and a battle of competing ideological positions, in which the restaurant chain became clearly marked as an avatar in the culture wars. For proponents of same-sex marriage and their allies, Chick-Fil-A became a symbol of oppression and bigotry, and hence, boycotts and protests were necessary responses. Conversely, for conservative Christians, Chick-Fil-A carried the mantle of “Christian restaurant,” and such, needed to be defended against those who would attack it. This defense came most vividly in the form of the wildly successful “Chick-Fil-A Appreciation Day” on August 4th, 2012. Created by former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, the event was designed to “affirm a business that operates on Christian principles and whose executives are willing to take a stand for the Godly values we espouse,” in the words of Huckabee’s Facebook page. In rallying to Chick-Fil-A’s side in the face of controversy, these counter-protestors affirmed the identity of the restaurant as “Christian,” and also affirmed their own identities as Christians by choosing it, at least that day, over Zaxby’s or Church’s Chicken, two of Chick-Fil-A’s competitors.

⁸ Emma Green, “Chick-Fil-A: Selling Chicken With A Side of God,” *The Atlantic*, September 8th, 2014, Accessed December 7th, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/09/chick-fil-a-selling-chicken-with-a-side-of-god/379776/>

Indications of Trouble

It would seem, then, that the American food system has been overwhelmingly successful at meeting its objectives — it offers an abundance of food, in all varieties, available all times of day, at minimal cost, so that the consumer can be empowered to choose exactly what they want to eat, in accordance with their authentic self. Even deeply held religious commitments can be selected for and exercised. American consumers, by and large, have found the system suitable, to the point where its goodness is accepted and unchallenged. As Christian ethicist Matthew C. Haltemann phrases it, “The status quo in North American Christendom is that eating the standard American diet requires no explanation.”⁹ Does the fact that this state of affairs is the unexamined status quo make for a “good” food system? Are choice and personal freedoms the only elements that matter? Indicators are starting to emerge which suggest otherwise, that we cannot truly “help ourselves to happiness,” as buffet restaurant Golden Corral promises, and that the idea of autonomy through choice contains real problems.

Overwhelmed - Too Much, Too Fast

For example, the sheer volume of choices American consumers face contributes to what psychologist Barry Schwartz called “choice overload,” and actually inhibits our ability to make smart, well-informed decisions. He wrote, “As the number of options increases, the costs, in time and effort, of gathering the information needed to make a

⁹ Matthew C. Haltemann, “Knowing the Standard American Diet by It’s Faults: Is Unrestrained Omnivorism Spiritually Beneficial?” *Interpretation* 67 (2013): p 384.

good choice also increase. The level of certainty people have about their choice decreases. And the anticipation that they will regret their choice increases.”¹⁰ Far from ensuring the best option, or representing our true selves, choosing from an overwhelming panoply often causes eaters to throw in the towel and settle on a decision that is less than optimal.

Further, there is evidence to suggest that the food system has placed such a high premium on efficiency and immediate access due to the frenetic pace of American life in general, which is not guaranteed to be healthy or sustainable in any sphere, including that of food. Of course, American busyness, so often remarked upon and decried, is not a new phenomenon. In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville writes of the “feverish ardor” with which Americans pursued their own welfare, and “the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it.”¹¹ Seventy years later, in 1905, Max Weber published his seminal *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he argues that the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination inspired the creation of the “Protestant Work Ethic,” as groups such as the Puritans strove to illustrate with the success of their worldly endeavors that they were the recipients of God’s salvific grace. The Protestant work ethic would become embedded in the modern economic order, and in the development of America itself. It is an element of Americanism which has lasted, and, particularly over the past three decades, has appeared to increase dramatically. An *ABC News* report from May 2016 declares that “not only are Americans working longer hours than at any

¹⁰ Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* (New York: Ecco Press, 2004), p. 65.

¹¹ Book II, Chapter 13.

time since statistics have been kept, but now they are also working longer than anyone else in the industrialized world.”¹² Books with titles such as *The White-Collar Sweatshop* and *Crazy Busy* sell briskly, and there is a general sense, particularly amongst Americans who are members of what Swedish economist Steffan Linder calls the “harried leisure class,” that the pace of life is simply overwhelming.

This frenetic activity, the constant need to be “on-the-go,” has dramatically affected American eating habits and, in turn, has dramatically affected how food products have been designed and marketed for American consumers. Specifically, it has brought convenience to the fore as a hotly desired commodity in virtually all types of food which is sold. Again, this is not new. In 1955, Charles Mortimer, the CEO of General Foods at the time, addressed a group of food executives and apprised them of this cultural development. He said,

Convenience is the great additive...Modern Americans are willing to pay well for this additive in the products they purchase, not because of any native laziness but because we are willing to use our greater wealth to buy fuller lives and we have, therefore, better things to do with our time than mixing, blending, sorting, trimming, measuring, cooking, serving, and all of the other actions that have gone into the routine of living.¹³

As Mortimer pointed out, the need for convenience was spurred by the quintessentially American desire for more — more time to experience more things, and to get more done.

The quest for convenience, however, has gone to previously unheard of levels, particularly in the last two decades. In fact, observers have been sounding the alarm

¹² Dean Schabner, “Americans: Overworked, Overstressed,” *ABC News Online*, May 2016, Accessed April 8th, 2016. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=93604&page=1>

¹³ Quoted in Michael Moss, *Sugar Salt Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (New York: Random House, 2013), pp. 60-61.

that American busyness has begun to erode the very idea of the “meal” as it was traditionally understood — what constitutes it, when it takes place, and who is present to share it. Even for the families who do come together to eat dinner six or seven times a week (more than half, according to Gallup data¹⁴), the meal itself looks very different from previous times. The traditional idea of a dinner at home — a family sitting together to share a common meal cooked by one of its members — has had to make room lately for a model of the family dinner, when it happens at all, in which a family of four eats four distinct meals, tailored to the taste of the individual family member. In Sophie Egan’s words, “Family meals are nowadays following more of an ala carte model.”¹⁵ In *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Michael Pollan illustrates the effects of the model as he recounts an episode in which he, his wife, and his son each bought different individually packaged frozen meals, and sat down to dinner to eat them. It was not so much a dinner prepared and eaten together as it was one eaten by three individuals one at a time, as each meal needed to be heated up individually in the microwave in order to be consumed.¹⁶ The Pollan family shared a table, but ended up eating three different meals at three different times — does this count as a family meal?

¹⁴ Heather Mason Kiefer, “Empty Seats: Fewer Families Eat Together,” *Gallup* January 20th, 2004, accessed August 19th, 2016. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/10336/empty-seats-fewer-families-eat-together.aspx>

¹⁵ Sophie Egan, *Devoured: How What We Eat Defines Who We Are* (New York: WM, 2016), p. 98.

¹⁶ A related phenomenon is the fact that increasing amounts of the foods Americans eat have been prepared by someone else. A 2014 study revealed that less than 60 percent of dinners served at home were actually cooked there, and in March 2015, for the first time ever, Americans spent more money in restaurants and bars than in grocery stores. See Roberto A. Ferdman, “The Slow Death of the Home Cooked Meal,” *The Washington Post* March 5th, 2015, accessed August 19th, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/03/05/the-slow-death-of-the-home-cooked-meal/>

It is not only the contents of the meal, or the way in which it was prepared, which is changing. The very conception of the “meal” itself is undergoing significant transformation. Instead of a traditionally cooked meal (or even a microwaved one), consumed at the usual time of day (seven am for breakfast, noon for lunch, etc), around a table with others, the American meal appears to be transitioning to extended snacking, throughout the day, at the work desk, the gym, or even in the car. As Harry Belzer, expert and eating patterns for the market research firm NPD Group puts it, “The snack food is becoming the meal.”¹⁷ As Egan describes the phenomenon,

A major change in how we eat is that snacks have begun to dominate our main meals. Today, we are more likely to cobble together several pre-packaged foods than, say, buy the necessary ingredients and assemble a sandwich. A packet of almonds, a bag of chips, a bar, a yogurt, and there you have it: lunch.¹⁸

This cobbling together of a meal from disparate, pre-packaged foods, is sometimes known as “grazing.” It is also directly correlated to consuming more calories than those who follow the traditional idea of the meal, as those grazing sessions, in calorie content, approach the levels of what were traditional meals for previous generations.

One food which exemplifies this shift in the way Americans eat is the nutritional/health bar. According to research from Synergy Flavors, sales of these bars, made by producers such as Kind Bars and PowerBar, grew thirty-four percent between 2011 and 2013, reaching an annual sales figure of 2.2 billion dollars.¹⁹ The Kind brand alone has six of the top ten best selling bars on the market, and, according to Egan, has

¹⁷ Quoted by Egan, p. 23.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Crawford, “Nutrition and Health Bars Expand Market Share by Tying Into Wellness, Athleticism,” *Food Navigator* January 15th, 2015, accessed August 23rd, 2016. <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Markets/Nutrition-bars-expand-market-share-by-tying-into-wellness-athleticism>

seen their sales surge from fifteen million dollars in 2008 to one hundred twenty million in 2012, and there is nothing to indicate the boom in sales will slow down. Bars are portable, convenient, and marketed for an array of nutritional concerns (protein added, gluten-free, etc.) Whereas in previous years, the primary audience for these bars would have been a weightlifter leaving the gym, they are now being incorporated into all facets of life, to the point of replacing meals, breakfast foremost among them. In the search for extreme efficiency, pouring a bowl of cereal and milk just takes too much time, and it can't be consumed in a vehicle (unless one likes to live dangerously, of course).

In a foodscape where “grazing” is becoming the norm, the traditional times of the day in which eating usually occurs are also breaking down, as food is expected to be on offer at all points in the daily schedule. As consumer behavior expert Melissa Abbott notes, “There is food at every gathering — boy scouts, soccer club, office meeting; there’s food everywhere, whereas it was not like that before. There were times when we ate, and times when we didn’t eat.”²⁰ The drive for efficiency, then, becomes married to another quintessential American ideal: the love of excess. Simply put, Americans are eating a lot of food, and are demanding to eat that food with maximum efficiency.

The Costs of “Have it Your Way”

The marriage of efficiency and excess has had clear negative effects, on consumers and on society as a whole. The obesity epidemic is a direct consequence, and consumer efforts to negate excessive weight gain have been ineffective, as, too often, they have been grounded in a reductionist understanding of food, as eaters have tried

²⁰ Quoted in Egan, p 46.

to watch calories, fats, and other elements which constitute the food, rather than monitoring the food itself, or how it is consumed. As food industry critic Marion Nestle writes, "The problem with nutrient by nutrient nutrition science is that it takes the nutrient out of the context of the food, the food out of the context of the diet, and the diet out of the context of the lifestyle."²¹ Michael Pollan calls this, following Gyorgy Scrinis, the ideology of "nutritionism," and argues that it has convinced the American public of "three pernicious myths": the nutrient is more important than the food, consumers need help from the "experts" in determining which nutrients to pursue, and, finally, the only purpose for eating is physical health, as if eating were the equivalent of putting gasoline in a vehicle.

22

To view food solely as nutrients to put in the body or poisons to keep out of it renders the consumer incapable of judging the goodness of a food beyond what they can read on the label. In previous generations the collective wisdom bound up in a cuisine had a process of weeding out that which was good from that which was bad, or at least that which was a daily food, and that which was a food for special feasting. By removing foods and even the nutrients they contain from their contexts, nutritionism replaces the traditional arbiters of food culture — "your mom," in Pollan's words — with scientists and laboratories, and, ultimately, marketing executives in high-rise boardrooms, as dependence upon, for instance, governmental agencies tends to dovetail all too closely with the economic goals for the makers of the foods in question. Why did a nation of people be-

²¹ Quoted in Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 2009), p. 67.

²² *Ibid*, p 9.

come obese on “low-fat” foods? Simply, because the messages the consumer was receiving from the food companies and also from government agencies such as the FDA gave them permission to eat the food, which often possessed huge quantities of sugar and salt to replace the fat taken out, because it was “low-fat” and, hence, “healthy.”

Beyond nutritionism and the obesity epidemic, other problems persist. For example, there are hungry people, around the world and in the country, who are not served well by the present system. Even though the American industrial food system labors under the stated goal of “feeding the world,” the world — and America itself — is a long way from being “fed.” Many thousands will die today as a direct consequence of malnutrition, and many Americans living in the “food deserts” of inner cities, are not properly nourished. Simultaneously, however, many thousands will also die from diseases brought on by “over-nutrition” — i.e., from the effects of obesity and overeating mentioned earlier.²³ This would suggest that production is not the central issue in dealing with world hunger, but rather, as Amartya Sen famously argues, that distribution is the problem. Even if every technology imaginable were leveraged to help produce more food, it doesn't mean that more people would get fed, because that food would only travel to those who already have more than enough, or, even more tragically, would be left to spoil in warehouses. According to the National Resources Defense Council, forty

²³ The exact numbers are disputed, since obesity is an indirect cause (it will not kill, but causes that which will). See Maggie Fox, “Heavy Burden: Obesity May Be Even Deadlier Than Thought,” *NBC News*, August 15th, 2013, accessed August 17th, 2016. <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/heavy-burden-obesity-may-be-even-deadlier-thought-6C10930019>

percent of all food in the United States goes uneaten every year.²⁴ This is due to a variety of causes. As Elizabeth Royte, writing for *National Geographic*, points out, there is a difference between food loss, which often occurs in undeveloped nations which lack the infrastructure to get good food into hungry mouths, and food waste, which is more of a problem in the industrialized world, as when buffet restaurants throw out mountains of “unchosen” cooked food at the end of every dinner shift, and grocery stores throw out food-grade produce simply because of “blemishes” (which can often be as insignificant as being slightly misshapen.)²⁵ All of this suggests that efficiency, in the form of increasing the amount of food produced per yield, is not the bar by which a successful food system ought to be measured.

In addition to the human cost, the environmental costs of a food system comprised in this fashion have been well documented. Pollan, Wendell Berry, and a host of others have weighed in on the costs of the “Have it Your Way” mentality, and the agricultural practices which are necessary to meet the system’s demands. The critiques generally fall into two categories: those regarding the treatment of the animals which are used for food, and those regarding the treatment of the earth itself. Douglas R. Tompkins provides a representative sample of the former, in the foreword of the 2010 edited volume *The CAFO Reader*:

In The CAFO Reader, we recognize the logic of industrialism applied to domesticated food animals. The result is a tragic, pathetic, and inhumane method of raising animals in factory farms to produce meat, milk, eggs,

²⁴ Dana Gunders, “Wasted: How America is Losing Up to 40 Percent of its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill,” *NRDC Issue Paper*, August 2012, accessed August 17th, 2016. <https://www.nrdc.org/food/files/wasted-food-ip.pdf>

²⁵ Elizabeth Royte, “One-Third of Food is Lost or Wasted: What Can Be Done,” *National Geographic* October 13th, 2014, accessed June 1st, 2016. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141013-food-waste-national-security-environment-science-ngfood>

leather, fur, and nonessential culinary luxuries such as liver pate. Living creatures are treated as machines, reduced to “units” in an assembly line of protein production by corporate food purveyors, with the individual animal’s suffering ignored. This is the kind of atrocity for which the word evil seems too meek and mild.²⁶

The latter critique is represented well by agrarian Norman Wirzba, in a passage analyzing the “Green Revolution” in agriculture, which was marked by industrialized monocultures, heavy chemical usage, and reliance upon fossil fuels:

...this revolution is really not “green” or sustainable. For instance, the Green Revolution should also be called the “brown” revolution because it is saturated with the use of fossil fuels to provide fertilizers and pesticides and to run the equipment to irrigate, cultivate, harvest, transport, and process whatever commodities are grown. We cannot expect that fossil fuels will be available in endless or easy or cheap supply, or pretend that our burning of them does not have atmospheric consequences. We also need to register that steadily increased yields have now plateaued or are declining, suggesting that wheat, corn, and rice varieties have likely reached or are near reaching their maximum productivity. When we add ecological indicators to the mix, factors like climate change, soil erosion and toxification, water depletion and pollution, and disease drift, the hope for dramatically increased yields in the future looks unrealistic...it is unrealistic, if not fanciful, to put our hope in “super-seeds” grown on an exhausted, degraded, and poisoned planet.²⁷

The “Have it Your Way” mentality, then, carries with it real harm — harm for people, for animals, and for the planet itself.

Finally, there are costs associated with the nature of the food itself, as the customization and variety which form such a pivotal role in the narrative which American food producers sell to their constituents, may in fact be an elaborate deception. In *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Michael Pollan traces the overwhelming majority of the food on

²⁶ Douglas R. Tompkins, Foreword to *The CAFO Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories*, ed. Douglas R. Tompkins (Bristol: Watershed Media, 2010), p. 4.

²⁷ Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 72-73.

offer at grocery stores and restaurants back to one single food item: corn. “You are what you eat,” he writes, “and if this is true, then what we mostly are is corn — or more precisely, processed corn.”²⁸ Pollen goes on to quote Todd Dawson, a biologist who quipped that “we North Americans look like corn chips with legs.”²⁹ Corn is present in its obvious forms — corn chips, tortillas, etc — but is also pervasive in much less intuitive places, such as in the feed of industrially produced cows and chickens, and in processed sweeteners such as High Fructose Corn Syrup, a sweetening agent present in sodas, energy drinks, and barbecue sauces, among many other food products. Reviewing Pollan’s book for the *New York Review of Books*, Tim Flannery exclaims, “It’s hard to avoid the conclusion that the food industry has confined many Americans to their own urban feedlots, in which they have grown obese, ill, and uncurious about the source or nutritional quality of their food.”³⁰ What previously looked like thousands of genuine choices, then, becomes little more than variations, in presentation and in packaging, of processed corn, as the customization and choice which seemed to be one of the dominant system’s strengths is revealed to be illusory.

Marketing, Hyperpalatability, and “The Eating Script”

Whistling nonchalantly and cavalierly throughout the day, assuming that Monsanto and Tyson will somehow always come through for you, is putting your faith in some pretty dubious people. Try to go visit their farms and see how far you get. Ask them for their data and see if they’ll show it to you. Do you really trust them?³¹

²⁸ Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, p. 20.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tim Flannery, “We’re Living on Corn!” *New York Review of Books* June 28th, 2007, accessed April 27th, 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/06/28/were-living-on-corn/>

³¹ Joel Salatin, *Folks, This Ain’t Normal: A Farmer’s Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World* (Nashville: Center Street, 2011), p. 54.

In offloading the responsibilities of cooking and preparing food to major producers, American eaters have been able to remove the burden of food preparation from a busy schedule, freeing up the time and energy to pursue other goods. This is by no means a completely bad thing. It is, however, an enormous investment of faith into a system, and in the producers within that system, which do not always or even often have benevolent motives. The logic which drives these companies is not rooted in health or sustainability but rather economics, and the economic Holy Grail for all producers of any sort of product is growth. It is not enough to sell high amounts of product; sellers must be constantly looking for ways to sell more. To stay at the same level is stagnation, something to be feared, according to most economic analysts.³² Food producers, however, were historically faced with a hard ceiling to growth: the limit of the individual appetite. The companies could beat each other out for what the industry calls “stomach share,”³³ it was believed, but there was little chance of expanding the market. Once a person got full, they did not desire any more food. There is only so much food a stomach can hold — one cannot expect appetites to continuously expand ad infinitum!

This conventional wisdom, however, is no longer true. According to David A. Kessler, former head of the Food & Drug Administration, in the 1980s food processors began to tinker with the foods that they produced (right around the time obesity rates started to explode), in order to make them “hyperpalatable” — virtually irresistible foods which elicit intense and repeated cravings on the part of those that eat them, and which

³² This is one of the reasons why the work of Herman Daly, proponent of the “steady-state economy,” is so noteworthy. It is strikingly countercultural.

³³ Defined by Moss as “the amount of digestive space that any one company can grab from the competition.” Moss, p xxvii.

do not respond to being full. This process has only intensified, even as the debates surrounding American obesity (and the obesity of American children in particular) have become more earnest. Michael Moss describes this process of physical manipulation:

Scientists at Nestle are currently fiddling with the distribution and shape of fat globules to affect their absorption rate and, as it's known in the industry, their "mouthfeel." At Cargill, the world's leading supplier of salt, scientists are altering the physical shape of salt, pulverizing it into a fine powder to hit the taste buds faster and harder, improving what the company calls its "flavor burst." Sugar is being altered in myriad ways as well. The sweetest component of sugar, fructose, has been crystallized into an additive that boosts the allure of foods. Scientists have also created enhancers that amplify the sweetness of sugar to two hundred times its natural strength.³⁴

These processed foods are made hyperpalatable by adjusting their textures — adding layers (cheese is a mainstay) while simultaneously making the food easier to chew — and by tapping into and exploiting our evolutionary desire for sugar, fat, and salt to achieve what Moss refers to as the "bliss point" — the point at which the food makes the eater want to consume more without ever being quite being satiated. Humans have long sought out high amounts of sugar, fat, and salt, as a means of survival, and we retain the evolutionary instincts of our ancestors in wanting these substances. However, as opposed to in earlier days, when these substances were only available at the end of a successful hunt, or after hours of work in a kitchen, they are now scientifically maximized, "engineered to compel overconsumption," in Moss' words. Or, as Kessler puts it, "we follow an eating script that has been written into the circuits of our brains."³⁵

Kessler and Moss are hesitant to use the word "addiction" when it comes to the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ David A. Kessler, *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Publishing, 2009), p. 48.

goals of the food makers vis-a-vis the individual consumer, but they do note the industry's own term when it comes to their most faithful customers: Soda companies, potato-chip companies, and other food companies refer to these consumers as "heavy users." The "heavy users" are loyal, purchasing the products of their brand of choice without conscious thought — these choices are now ingrained habits, reinforcing itself and the system which supports such food, undergirded by the pillars of salt, sugar, and fat, and disastrous for human health and ecological health alike.

Hyperpalatable foods fall into the category of what the sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard calls "hyperreal." The substances involved may have began as real foods, born from distinctive patterns of eating based upon geographical and cultural factors, but they have been modified into, in Pollan's words, "edible food-like substances" — which resemble the real thing, but with amplified, and ultimately distorted, characteristics, designed to deliver the maximum multi-sensory experience. Throughout the process, there appears to be a concerted effort to relieve the consumer of as much of the burden as possible — the distinctive ways of cooking and the effort to track down the ingredients required, are no longer needed! Consumers, so the implicit message states, should not have to work that hard to get all of these tastes. As a result, Kessler and Moss argue, the American food culture suffers from stunted growth. Kessler provocatively calls our culture one of "adult baby food."³⁶

Kessler and Moss are both unambiguous as to the cause of these developments — they point the finger directly at the food companies themselves. Kessler quotes this ad copy from the restaurant TGIFridays:

³⁶ Ibid, p 95.

This isn't about grabbing a bite. It's about a bite grabbing you. 'Cause when Friday's gets hold of your appetite, we're not letting go. We are going to bring on the flavor 'til your taste buds explode like fireworks. We are going to dribble glazes and pour on smoky sauces. We are going to pan-fry, saute, and dream up new dishes that have never been created before. Three Courses. New Tastes.³⁷

The Power of Marketing

The eating script which has been inscribed into the psyche of American eaters by the manipulation of physical substances has been strengthened by the power of mass marketing. Marketing, in the form of packaging, advertising, social media, among others, strongly influences (some would say compels) eaters to respond to cues that have nothing to do with their level of hunger. Marketers have learned to create food cravings, digging beneath cognitive reasoning and tapping into decision-making impulses driven by emotion and instinct. Egan notes two techniques in particular which the food marketers have mastered for these purposes: novelty and nostalgia.

The American desire for novelty and the "next big thing" is not limited to food and drink. Exploration, adventure, and discovery have long been held up as American ideals, inherent goods. In the era of mass consumerism, their status has only been elevated, as Americans, particularly younger Americans, are extraordinarily given to seeking out new experiences, and fleeing from anything which smacks of boredom. According to Anat Keinan and Ran Kivetz, this hunger for new, "collectible" experiences arises from a desire for productivity; even in leisure time. Americans wish to construct, in their words, an "experiential CV" which consists of "unusual and extreme consumption experiences."³⁸ In fact, according to Keinan and Kivetz, consumers are more likely

³⁷ Ibid, p.48.

³⁸ Anat Keinan and Ran Kivetz, "Productivity Mindset and the Consumption of Collectible Experiences," *NA - Advances in Consumer Research* 35 (2008): 101-105.

to choose the new and unusual, even if they are less pleasant or luxurious than the old familiar standbys. As evidence for their argument, the authors conducted surveys in which they gave participants a series of scenarios, asking them to choose between traditional pleasant experiences and those which would be less luxurious and more strenuous, but novel and exciting. They found that while only eleven percent of the respondents believed that staying in a freezing ice hotel in Quebec would be more pleasurable than a Florida Marriott, ninety-eight percent believed it would be more memorable, and seventy-two percent would choose the ice hotel over the beachfront Marriott. Similarly, in choosing between an exotic and familiar restaurant, four percent rated the exotic restaurant more pleasurable, but ninety-two percent rated it more memorable and seventy percent would choose it over the familiar one.

This impulse to try the new and weird has led to the rise of “stunt food,” including such unusual creations as the Doritos Loco Taco from Taco Bell, the Bacon Sundae from Burger King, and the infamous Double Down from Kentucky Fried Chicken, a “sandwich” in which the bun consisted of two fried chicken patties, holding in bacon, cheeses, and sauce. Even if the combinations are strange, or even unappetizing, many Americans have tried these foods for the experience of novelty, and for fear of missing out on the next big thing.

The marketing counterpoint to an appeal to novelty, one which is no less powerful, is the appeal to food nostalgia. The idea is to tap into the consumer’s happiest memories, and the food which is associated with them, in order to sell the consumer food which is reminiscent (or even identical) to the food connected to those happy memories. A common way in which this is done is to re-release food products which were popular

a decade ago or more, to rekindle the memories of those times in the minds of consumers, who will purchase the product to make those memories even stronger and more tangible. Examples of this tactic include the breakfast cereal Cinnamon Toast Crunch, discontinued in 2006 and restarted in 2015, Surge, the high-caffeine soda owned by Coca-Cola, discontinued in 2002 and brought back in 2014, and, most recently, Crystal Pepsi, sold for only a couple of years in the early 1990s (and generally considered to be a flop), before being re-released in August of 2016 for a limited eight week run. In a direct appeal to 1990s nostalgia, PepsiCo released a video game called “The Crystal Pepsi Trail,” a retooled version of the phenomenally popular computer game “The Oregon Trail,” played by many a student in the 1980s and 1990s. The new version of the game included other 1990s nostalgia favorites, such as the “Furby” and the pager, and featured 1990s music as well.³⁹ As a marketing angle, this tactic makes a great deal of sense. Those who grew up on these products as children are buying food and drink for themselves now, and are primed to purchase these blasts from the past. Derek Thompson, writing for the *Atlantic*, explains the rationale this way: “The consumer brain is a bag of concrete mix before a person turns 13. Anything you can slip in the soft blend is likely to harden, along with our neural networks, by the time we become a money-spending adult.”⁴⁰ This also explains the widely documented use of cartoonish charac-

³⁹ E.J. Schultz, “Crystal Pepsi is Coming Back to Stores Nationwide: The 90s Era Clear Soda is Pushed by Nostalgic Campaign,” *Advertising Age* June 29th, 2016, accessed August 25th, 2016. <http://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/crystal-pepsi-coming-stores-nationwide/304750/>

⁴⁰ quoted in Egan, p. 272.

ters in a wide variety of products, food and otherwise, from breakfast cereals to the notorious Joe Camel cigarette advertisements. A cynical strategy perhaps, but a lucrative one nonetheless.

Who is in Control?

At this point, one might object, “This is a very cynical perspective. After all, when it comes to modifying foods, fusing together various cuisines, and making emotional connections, haven't chefs been doing this exact same thing for years now? In similar fashion, hasn't food marketing been around as long as food has?” Perhaps, but never before have so many forces been marshaled for the express purpose of influencing individual desires for economic gain. Food engineering and marketing both are precision targeted for maximum effect. Food makers have the resources for scientific analysis, focus groups, and technological innovation that they did not possess, even in the recent past. What is critical to understand is that consumers do not exercise their tastes in a vacuum, and that the machinations described earlier actively form dietary patterns and habits, which operate below the level of conscious cognition. No one is putting a metaphorical gun to the consumer's head, demanding they eat this way, but the food system in America does help to steer tastes, desires, and dietary habits — exactly as any other food culture would do. Americans have long held themselves to be fiercely independent — not relying on any external factors in decision-making and in living life — but this independence, at least in the case of food, is largely illusory. Our tastes are not our own; they have been shaped and molded, at times without our even being aware of what was happening.

All of this serves to raise pointed questions about the nature of the American consumer's relation to food in the modern age - Are we free to choose our food? Is it

wise to base at least part of our identity upon commodities we can purchase? It is possible to “eat as an individual?” In fact, these sorts of questions are not relegated only to matters of food. Philosopher Matthew B. Crawford suggests that American attitudes about food, and attention, are symptomatic of larger cultural forces at work.⁴¹ American capitalists, or, in Crawford’s phrasing, the “choice architects,” have shoehorned the ideal of individual freedom and autonomy into the category of “fulfilling preferences,” and then have used their power and influence to make sure that individual consumers all fulfill the same preferences in the same way — by purchasing their products. The result is the “massification of the individual,” and the serious curtailing of true freedom. This is ironic because, as Crawford points out, the Enlightenment thinkers who argued for individual autonomy - Crawford highlights Kant and Locke in particular — did so in order to facilitate the overthrow of institutions (whether political or ecclesiastical) from their position of dominion over the individual. As a way to rebut these institutions, they put the locus of freedom within the human mind, in Reason, which allowed each to chart their own course and to possess true freedom and autonomy.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Locke and Kant’s opponents could be known and faced, and their claim to dominion over the individual was forthright and obvious. By contrast, Crawford argues, the “powers” of that age have been replaced today by faceless corporate entities — who will not take power by force, but will rather persuade the individual to sell it to them voluntarily, in exchange for commodities designed to fulfill preferences, and thus to give the illusion of freedom and autonomy. To illustrate this

⁴¹ Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2015).

philosophical point, Crawford devotes a deeply unsettling chapter of his book to slot machine gambling, an industry which has been “engineered to be addictive,” and the terrible toll it exerts on those who fall under its sway. As is the case with food, the gambler is seduced by a form of control which requires minimal effort, and as such settles on “pseudo-actions” as opposed to real ones (For instance, Crawford details the decision of slot machine makers to go from the traditional hand cranks to simple push-button slots, and the resultant increase in revenue generated by the move), “as an escape from the contingencies and frustrations that one contends with in dealing with the recalcitrant material of the real world, including other people.”⁴² For these poor gamblers, as with conditioned hypereaters, the end result is not autonomy and it certainly is not individuality; on the contrary, their entire lives are governed, and governed ruthlessly, by a grand social engineering, in which the choices they continue to make, in the end, are no longer choices at all. The similarities between Crawford’s account of gambling in Las Vegas and what we have seen of the American food system thus far are more than superficial. They both suggest that American consumers have been taken in by what Crawford calls “autonomy-talk,” and the idea that consumption was the way to achieve it.

The eating choices of individuals rely upon far more than their conscious thought, or even their subconscious appetites — and they always have. As individuals living in a highly individualist society, it is only natural that American food consumers would claim the mantle of autonomy for themselves, of primary agency in assembling their own diets. There was never a time, however, in which this was completely true. The systemic

⁴² Ibid.

forces which shape a way of eating were more obvious in previous generations, coming in the form of family, and the rituals which define eating in a family, and even in the ecological and social particulars which helped to define regional cuisines. Many of the most noted cuisines in the world were the creations, at least in part, of decidedly non-wealthy people taking the land gave them, and turning it into a distinctive way of cooking and eating. These cultural structures were obviously present, and could easily be adhered to, or rebelled against.

All of these systemic forces have been, to varying degrees, neutralized and replaced. The traditions of the rituals of the family meal, as we have seen, are breaking down, as are the wider cultural norms which defined the “meal” in the first place. The combination of the forces of busyness, excess, and individual customization have swept away the cultural “checks” which helped to regulate consumption. It is important to stress at this point that this new reality has not swept away all of the systemic forces which restrict the autonomy of the individual in choosing food. It has simply brought in new ones, and these forces do not work in accordance with any kind of traditional logic, or even ecological logic. They function entirely as an outworking of economic logic, of the logic of the market. The trick is to get the consumer to eat increasingly large quantities of the same foods, which appear to be novel and innovative but are really a repackaging of the same old staple ingredients which can be raised in industrial monocultures. This is done through aggressive and innovative marketing, and also in engineering the foods themselves to strike the “bliss point” of the eater’s palate, making them exceedingly difficult to forsake. There is indeed a food culture in America, and while it may not resemble traditional food cultures in places such as, say, France or northern Italy, it is

no less effective at shaping the appetite and the desires of those who reside within its boundaries, and the way in which American food habits have been shaped raise doubt as to whether the food system is ecologically sustainable over the long term.

All of this, however, does not abnegate the responsibility of the individual. Individuals are not merely hapless victims of decisions made in high-rise boardrooms. There are forces at work which attempt to shape their desires and habits, but as noted above, there have always been such forces. While they are perhaps more seductive than the cultural forces of the past, the individual still has the agency to negotiate them. Moreover, the individual bears the responsibility of the food choices that they make, and the resultant consequences. As former Coke executive Jeffrey Dunn describes the way in which Coke became the beverage of choice for millions around the world: "It's not like there's a smoking gun. The gun is right there. It's not hidden. That's the genius of Coke."⁴³ Perhaps individuals themselves cannot fundamentally change the food system in the way it is constructed, but they can navigate it, fight its worst tendencies, and, in their own choices, help to construct alternative food cultures to the one which currently exists. In order to do this, they will have to examine their own desires and habits, and seek to be the type of person who can better undertake such a navigation. In the process, perhaps they can even regain some of the autonomy which has escaped them.

Applying the Sociological Imagination to Food

In thinking through our problems with food, and in imagining a food system which would be better than the dominant one at present, an ongoing question in this dissertation will be that of scale — is it better to design an ethic primarily for individuals? For

⁴³ Moss, p. 118.

nation-states? Or perhaps some median structure? Ethicists have done all of these, of course, but I will argue specifically for a middle way. It will not do to lay the blame entirely at the feet, for instance, of food producers, or wait for governmental action which will compel them to produce better food. Many do indeed point the finger squarely at bad federal policies and the large agribusinesses which benefit from them. They focus on the systemic problems, and sometimes paint the individual consumer as a hapless victim of forces which are beyond their control. Compel the big actors to put better food in front of the people, they argue, and the people will eat better. However, focusing on top-down policy solutions may put better food in front of consumers, but it will not necessarily compel them to choose that food. As we will see, desires for certain foods are entrenched (and are further fortified by the food companies themselves) and will not be dislodged by merely offering healthier, more sustainable foods alongside the foods that individuals already like, nor compelling the food companies to make drastic changes to the food they sell.

Others, in looking for ways to mitigate and remove the harms of the food system, however, swing the pendulum the other way, and blame individual eaters alone for the poor choices they make. If you want to make the food system better, they argue, simply make better choices yourself, persuade others to do the same, and watch the movement grow! However, as James Davison Hunter argues, this “one by one” method of social change — based upon personal transformation transmitted organically, thereby creating a grassroots, bottom-up movement — is, in his words, “almost wholly mistaken,” because it “ignores the institutional nature of culture and disregards the way culture is

embedded in structures of power.”⁴⁴ To hope for widespread social change based upon the actions of a few small groups far removed from the centers of power does not seem to be a feasible plan of action. Can a farmers market or a CSA topple Monsanto, or even impede their goals in any way? There is a grain of truth in both of these perspectives, the top-down and the bottom-up, but they are both partial at best. They focus, respectively, on the issues of structure and agency, but do not pay sufficient attention to how these issues interact with each other; indeed, social structures and individual agencies are formed and shaped, at least in part, by each other.

In 1959, a young sociologist named C. Wright Mills wrote of the need for “a quality of mind that will help (modern people) to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves.”⁴⁵ He called this dual focus “the sociological imagination,” and it is an approach to analysis which has resonated, for it does not simply focus on what Mills calls “history” — the larger social, political, and cultural trends which often seem disconnected from individual lives — but also “biography” — the ideas, actions, and behaviors of individual people. The larger trends influence the lives of the individuals who are within them, but the lives of the individuals can also shape and mold the larger trends themselves. In their book *Lost In Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, Christian Smith, Kari Christofferson, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog used the sociological imagination to explain the problems unique to the lives of

⁴⁴ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p 27.

⁴⁵ C Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* Fortieth Anniversary Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

American 18 to 23 year olds, and in the process provided a model for showing how the concept can help to explain the state of the American food system and those within it.

Discussing alarmingly high rates of drug and alcohol abuse in this cohort, they write:

Poor individual choices are of course involved in problems concerning emerging adult intoxication. Yet to suspend the analysis after highlighting individual choices only would miss the influence of the larger institutional and cultural contexts that in fact powerfully shape these choices. To adequately understand people's lives, we need to understand not only their decisions and actions but also the social contexts in which their lives and choices are embedded. We need to see, for example, how those individuals have been socialized — how their assumptions, beliefs, and aspirations have been formed and internalized. We need to understand the composition of their social networks, the significant social relationships that provide and constrain information, opportunities and social pressures. We need to analyze how the social institutions in which people live their lives shape their expectations and resource flows, fostering and constraining certain forms of social action. And we need to understand how the larger culture in which people live defines the conceivable and legitimate cognitive categories, life-course scripts, and norms and justifying accounts that shape people's thinking, feeling, desiring, choosing, and living.⁴⁶

This chapter has been an attempt to use the sociological imagination to understand how all of these levels of human interaction, from the individual to the nation-state, have been intertwined, and to examine the fruits of these connections. In order to put forward a better way forward, knowing the starting point is essential.

⁴⁶ Christian Smith, et al. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 141.

CHAPTER 3 RESPONSES TO THE INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM

In the previous chapter, we examined American eating, both in its systemic elements and in the choices of its individual actors. The purpose of this chapter is to probe into the history of the food system — to answer the question, “How did we get here?” — and also to review the responses to this dominant model, in the form of negative critiques and also positive movements which emerged as a response. The most famous movement, mentioned in chapter one, is the “food movement,” which has acted as a banner beneath which separate-but-overlapping issues in food ethics have found a home. These issues include the question of organic food, locavorism, genetically modified foods, the role of culture and aesthetics in determining “good” food, and the moral imperative of vegetarianism. There are more, of course, but to provide an exhaustive analysis of every issue is beyond the scope of this project. These five issues offer a suitable path forward into food ethics, with a heavy emphasis upon ecological and animal welfare questions. In examining this countermovement, comprised of smaller sub-movements, we can learn from its success, and also from its shortcomings, which will be useful in explaining why an approach to food ethics based upon virtue and foodways can be a helpful corrective and supplement to the positions noted here.

The Problem of Agriculture

Before studying responses to the industrial food system, it will be worthwhile to pause, and to reflect, however briefly, upon how we got to this era of agricultural history, paying particular attention to the relationship between agriculture and environmental concern. Obviously we will only be able to cover the major contours of this story; however, even this cursory action will help to ground the contemporary issues of food ethics

into their proper historical and ecological contexts, for the benefit of clearer understanding. The story began some ten thousand years ago, when humans largely shifted from hunter-gatherer modes of procuring food to agricultural ones. According to environmental thinkers such as Paul Shepard, this move was disastrous, as humans traded synergy with nature (and the chance to be their best selves) for domination over, and ultimately disconnection from, the natural world. As Shepard puts it, “as though in some disastrous contract with the devil, they traded their social freedom for authoritarian regimes, the illusion of control in barren natural environments, and slavery in the garb of security.”¹ Instead of an egalitarian community, united with the earth and with each other, humans instead chose a system of feeding themselves which fostered hierarchy and fear of the sky god who sat atop it, and alienation from the ground beneath their feet. Even though most environmentalists have not condemned agriculture as forthrightly as Shepard, antipathy toward agriculture was a long standing feature of the environmental movement, as proto-environmentalists such as John Muir and Arne Naess struggled to find any redeeming value in it. They saw any human action in nature as primarily destructive, and as a result, saw little need to make common cause with farmers who worked the land. For them, and for the scores of environmentalists they influenced through the years, the preservation of unadulterated wilderness was the only environmental goal worth pursuing.

For a long time, this environmentalist critique of agriculture, and the sharp human-nature dichotomy which fueled it, went largely unchallenged, and was taken as a given by those in the movement. Challenge did eventually come, however, in a number

¹ Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, 2nd edition (Washington DC: Island Press, 2004), p. 85.

of forms. In a famous essay from 1995, William Cronon argues that, for all of the wilderness cult's condemnation of the hubris of human action, the idea of "wilderness" is itself a human creation.² Wild places are obviously real — environmentalists respond to what they find in nature — but it is obvious that these places are also "created," and that the goal of "getting back to the wilderness" is more dependent on the condition of the human soul than on what is actually present in the wild places of the world. What these largely white, urbane explorers most wish for is distance from the problems which come from humans living too closely to each other in cities, and they find in wilderness, but also form there, the idea of wilderness as an escape from humanity. Sadly, however, the humanity to be escaped from has historically included indigenous peoples, and as Mark David Spence observes, "wilderness preservation went hand in hand with native dispossession."³ For the wilderness aficionado, there has seemed to be little notion of humanity and "nature" existing together. For them, nature was what existed where humanity did not.

Wes Jackson, the famed geneticist, advocate for sustainability, and founder of the Land Institute in Salinas, Kansas, offers an even more zealous critique of wilderness preservationists than Cronon, showing how a single-minded devotion to wild places is ultimately ruinous to the planet as a whole, because it takes no notice of non-wild nature, the sort which is involved in the project of agriculture. He writes,

Well, to treat wilderness as a holy shrine and Kansas or East Saint Louis as terrain of an altogether different sort is a form of schizophrenia. Either

² William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1995), pp. 69-90.

³ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 3.

all of the earth is holy or none of it is. Either every square foot of it deserves our respect or none does...It is possible to love a small acreage in Kansas as much as John Muir loved the entire Sierra Nevada. This is fortunate, for the wilderness of the Sierra will disappear unless little pieces of nonwilderness become intensely loved by lots of people.⁴

Jackson's argument, as does Cronon's, represents a call for environmentalists to expand their parameters, and to take an interest in the ways in which food and agriculture affect the planet's well-being. There is no question that this call has had significant success; issues such as industrial monoculture, pesticides, fertilizers, Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and genetically modified foods all now feature prominently on the agendas of groups like the Sierra Club, a statement which could not be made even a few decades ago.

However, people who are passionate about both agricultural and environmental concerns are still a distinct minority. Indeed, there is cause to doubt whether sustainable agriculture can even exist at all, and to wonder if environmental degradation is not woven into the fabric of the agricultural enterprise. As Jackson acknowledges when he refers to the "10,000 year old problem of agriculture," it is not enough to address problems in agriculture; one also has to consider the problem of agriculture itself. The problem stems from the fact, that, in Jackson's words, "we gotta have food and yet it undercuts the very basis of our existence."⁵ In other words, the necessity of raising food for survival leads to human beings imposing patterns and rhythms upon the land which are foreign to it, which tend to produce greater soil erosion and biodiversity loss. As Jackson

⁴ Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), p. 67.

⁵ Wes Jackson, "We Can Now Solve the 10,000 Year Old Problem of Agriculture," Lecture given January 18th, 2013, accessed June 26th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2fqNxyqubQ>

points out, destructive agricultural practices are not a modern anomaly. They have been the rule in history, and sustainable practices have been the exception. As he writes,

Small societies have pulled it off here and there, but it has been beyond the cultural stretch of most of humanity to do agriculture right century after century...sooner or later, someone is going to show up and do something stupid to degrade the land. That's been the history of agriculture.⁶

There are several examples which suggest that the history of American agriculture has indeed lived down to his description. George Washington himself disparaged the wasteful methods of “slovenly farmers” around him, and American farming was marked by farmers who would exhaust the soils of their farms, before simply moving on to new farms, made available solely due to the abundance of virgin territory on the American continent. In his book *Larding the Lean Earth*, historian Steven Stoll describes the pattern this way:

In a common pattern, farmers who had occupied land for only 20 or 30 years reduced the fertile nutrients in their soils until they could no more than subsist. Either that, or they saw yields fall below what they expected from a good settlers' country and decided to seek fresh acres elsewhere. Forests cut and exported as potash, wheat cropped year after year, topsoils washed — arable land in the old states of the Union had presented the scars of fierce extraction by 1820.⁷

The Pioneers of Alternative Agriculture, and a Different Way of Eating

The advocate for what would come to be called sustainable agriculture, then, has always been a voice in the wilderness, speaking prophetically against entrenched social

⁶ Wes Jackson, quoted in Dan Barber, *The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food* (New York: Penguin, 2014), p. 175.

⁷ Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), quoted in Barber, pp. 48-49.

structures. This was certainly the case after the Industrial Revolution in the West, as humanity's technological proficiencies allowed agriculturalists to exert their will upon the land with much more force. This widened the already existing separation of agricultural production from the rhythms and dictates of nature, and in time the character of agriculture shifted, as it became focused, even more than in previous times, upon yield, efficiency, and, ultimately, profit.

Sir Albert Howard, and the Law of Return

One of the first to notice this shift, and the potentially calamitous effects it promised, was Sir Albert Howard (1873-1947), who spent a quarter of a century in India, observing traditional agricultural practices such as composting, and becoming convinced of the value of farming in a way which was consistent with natural ecological cycles. In 1940, he wrote his seminal work, *An Agricultural Testament*, arguing that this method of farming, which he called "The Indore Process," was vital in sustaining the life and fertility of the soil, and thus maintaining the "wheel of life." Howard argues,

Such are the essential facts in the wheel of life. Growth on the one side, decay on the other. In Nature's farming a balance is struck and maintained between these two complementary processes. The only man-made systems of agriculture — those to be found in the East - which have stood the test of time have faithfully copied this rule in Nature. ⁸

For Howard, agriculture in and of itself is not destructive — he does not seem to share Jackson's pessimism in this regard — so long as it is practiced in accordance with farming traditions which respect the natural cycles of life, and which do not corrupt the homeostatic properties of the natural world. In order for this to happen, farmers have to be

⁸ Albert Howard, *An Agricultural Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 31.

every bit as intentional about putting nutrients back into the soil as they are about extracting them out, observing and obeying what Howard calls “The Law of Return.” If the balance of nature, and the balance of the soil, is respected, then the practices of farming can last across generations.

However, it was the western methods, methods which did not respect these properties of nature, which were continuing to gain ascendancy. Howard mourns the treatment of the soil in these systems, and writes with searing contempt for those who would abuse the soil, and the earth, for their personal gain. He declares,

It is when the tempo of denudation is vastly accelerated by human agencies that a perfectly harmless natural process becomes transformed into a definite disease of the soil...It is always preceded by infertility : the inefficient, overworked, dying soil is at once removed by the operations of nature and hustled towards the ocean, so that new land can be created and the rugged individualists — the bandits of agriculture — whose cursed thirst for profit is at the root of the mischief can be given a second chance.⁹

Howard clearly foresaw that technological innovations provided humanity with a standing temptation (or, better, exacerbating an already existing one) to maximize the “growth” part of the cycle, while overriding the decay of the soil and failing to bolster its health.

In the wake of World War II, the technological achievements and logistical skill of the American military were brought to bear upon the raising of food, aided by relatively inexpensive fossil fuel. Heavy machinery allowed for the efficient harvesting of monocultures (usually corn and soy) which had been aided by fertilizers and protected by pesticides. At the same time, the federal government moved to accelerate these developments and to codify them into national food policy. This effort was led by President

⁹ Ibid, p. 140.

Nixon's Secretary of Agriculture, Earl K. Butz, who famously called upon farmers to "get big or get out" and to plant "fencerow to fencerow." Diversified polycultures and margins were out; monocultures and maximized efficiency and production were in, as combines, fertilizers, and pesticides became ubiquitous in global farming. The maximized growth, and the system which facilitated it, appeared to pay tremendous dividends — the yields which it produced were truly staggering. Howard's warning, along with those of J.I. Rodale, Rudolf Steiner, Lady Eve Balfour, and a handful of others, went largely ignored. Even though they all declared, in various ways, that a system which ignores the balance of nature, and the health of the soil, is not a system which will last, the siren call of huge yields was too persuasive.

Wendell Berry and the Birth of Agrarianism

In his writings, Wendell Berry has repeatedly cited Sir Albert Howard as a major influence on his own thinking. Berry takes Howard's central point — the interconnection of soil health with animal health, human health, and, ultimately, the health of societies — and expands upon it, showing how industrial agricultural methods are not only devastating environmentally, but also socially, ruining rural communities in particular. With righteous anger, Berry condemns the consolidation, and resultant mechanization of agriculture for squeezing out farmers attempting to hold on to smaller, more regenerative practices of farming. The land and its rural inhabitants are both the victims of the same ideology, what Berry calls, in his 1977 agrarian classic *The Unsettling of America*¹⁰, that of "the exploiter." He contrasts the exploiter with the perspective which was being lost, that of "the nurturer," in a way similar to Howard's demarcation between those who

¹⁰ Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977), pp. 7-8.

maintain the health of the soil by putting nutrients back in, and those whose sole objective is to extract as much as they can from the soil, leaving no thought to its condition. Under the reign of the “exploiter,” Berry warns, the issues and tensions inherent in agriculture of any sort explode into crises with devastating consequences for ecology, animal welfare, human health, and even human spiritual wellbeing.

In order to solve the crisis, the first step is to deal with the disconnect between consumers and the farmers and land which produced their food. This disconnect, according to Berry, is maintained, and possibly even created by, the emergence of the major food producers discussed in chapter two, and their willingness to sell American eaters the vast majority of the food they consume, and the disconnect is aided and abetted by eaters who have lost all knowledge for how this food is actually raised. To correct this, Berry argues, the key is to remind the people, “Eating is an agricultural act.” He explains,

Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy which begins with planting and birth. Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture. They think of themselves as “consumers.” If they think beyond that, they recognize that they are passive consumers. They buy what they want — or what they have been persuaded to want — within the limits of what they can get.¹¹

American eaters, in accepting the role of “consumer,” and allowing corporations to not only raise but also cook their food for them have, according to Berry, willingly relinquished their freedom, and have implicitly signed on to disastrous agricultural practices, to ruinous effects. In the name of convenience, food traditions which lasted for generations are withering away, as eaters become increasingly disconnected with the

¹¹ Wendell Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in *What Are People For? Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010).

rhythms of the land, and the ways in which their food is raised. Some of this disconnect is due to simple geography — the Center for Urban Education About Sustainable Agriculture estimates that the average meal travels about 1500 miles to get to the plate of the person eating it.¹² When food is produced and grown so far from the eater, how can the two be connected?

This disconnect was exacerbated by the consolidation of food production in America into the hands of a small number of very large, increasingly opaque companies. Dan Barber, author and chef of Blue Hill at Stone Barns restaurant, points to the marketization of the chicken as a representative example of this process, naming Frank Perdue, of the Perdue chicken company, as someone who “ultimately revolutionized the business of food.”¹³ This was done first through labeling products (an innovation in the chicken industry) and then in aggressively marketing them, with Perdue himself becoming the company’s pitchman. However, the most important innovation was the breaking up of the chicken into its component parts and selling them individually. As Barber notes, Don Tyson and other chicken producers were doing this as well, but the practice really took off when Perdue began to do it. All of a sudden, the consumer did not have to worry about where the chicken came from, or even about knowing how to prepare and cook it. Once the consumer got used to thinking about the chicken not in terms of a former barnyard animal but rather in terms of “breast,” “thigh,” and, later, “nuggets,” a whole new world of food production was born, as producers could now sell seemingly infinite amounts of “value-added products,” where before they could only sell chickens.

¹² “How Far Does Your Food Travel to Get to Your Plate?” *CUESA* Accessed July 1st, 2016, <http://www.cuesa.org/learn/how-far-does-your-food-travel-get-your-plate>

¹³ Barber, p. 149.

Demand exploded, and chicken producers adapted, most commonly by adopting the confined-animal feeding operations which produce so many of the chickens consumed by American eaters today. All the while, the separation between the consumer and the chicken continued (and continues) to grow.

The separation of production and consumption of American food is now firmly embedded in American culture. How can it be reversed? If food traditions could be reclaimed, and if American eaters would take on the responsibility of learning where their food comes from, or, better yet, growing it themselves, Berry argues, a healing of the rift could be possible. Moreover, not only would Americans eat more responsibly and ethically, they would also have a greater aesthetic enjoyment of the food they eat. For all of our whiz-bang technology when it comes to food production, Berry asks, has it actually improved the quality? His answer is an emphatic no, suggesting that eaters have traded taste for efficiency and quickness, with a great deal of coercion from the food industry, and we are now satisfied with food that is “a degraded, poor, and paltry thing.” Eating responsibly, then, first involves reestablishing a long dormant relationship with the land, not taking it for granted, but rather considering it as the gift that it is and acting accordingly. As Berry puts it in an interview with Bill Moyers,

And there’s no justification for the permanent destruction of the world. My belief and I’ve written out of it for many years is that the world and our life in it are conditional gifts. We have the world to live in and the use of it to live from on the condition that we will take good care of it. And to take good care of it we have to know it and we have to know how to take care of it. And to know it and to be willing to take care of it, we have to love it. And we’ve ignored all that all these years.¹⁴

¹⁴ Wendell Berry, interview by Bill Moyers, *The Bill Moyers Show*, originally aired October 4th, 2013, accessed April 5th, 2017, <http://billmoyers.com/segment/wendell-berry-on-his-hopes-for-humanity/>

The connection to the land which is so eloquently expressed in Berry's writing has become the foundation for the philosophical movement known as agrarianism. The aforementioned Jackson, Norman Wirzba, and Fred Kirschenmann are also a part of this movement.¹⁵ Wirzba defines it this way:

Agrarianism is a compelling and coherent alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm. It is not a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future. It is, rather, a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past as they have been realized in our engagement with the earth and with each other. Authentic agrarianism, which should not be confused with farming per se (since severe economic pressure and the dash for quick profits have often led farmers to compromise agrarian ideals), represents the sustained attempt to live faithfully and responsibly in a world of limits and possibilities.¹⁶

At the heart of agrarianism lies the idea of restraint — of living within the confines of what the land allows. As such, it stands as a rebuke to the conventional way that food is raised in America - against the previously mentioned chemical fertilizers and pesticides which the organic movement rose up against, but also against the way that conventional food production defies seasonality (trucking foods hundreds of miles across the country and flying them across the globe) and also defies the previously held limits of what the land could produce. Nature, the agrarians have argued, must be the “measure” — the rule which governs human behavior, both in agricultural practices and in

¹⁵ The prolific and eloquent nature of Berry's body of work has made him a foundational figure of many movements. In addition to agrarianism and the larger food movement, Berry is also a central figure in bioregionalism. While the movements are not identical, there are several points of overlap. Bioregionalists and agrarians both look askance at monolithic institutions of power. Agrarians do not seem to target the nation-state as specifically as do the bioregionalists, but they have a great deal to say against rampant, unchecked economic growth, and the mindset which feeds it. Most obviously, however, both movements share a devotion to “place” — a specific location, often defined by a watershed. Gary Snyder, Freeman House, and Kirkpatrick Sale are all representatives of the bioregional tradition.

¹⁶ Norman Wirzba, “Why Agrarianism Matters - Even to Urbanites,” in *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), p. 4.

consumptive practices. Consumers must not ask for what the land cannot provide — no pineapple in Boston in February, for instance — and must forge a way of eating unique to a particular place.

Peter Singer and the Question of Eating Animals

While Howard, the agrarians, and the majority of their intellectual descendants primarily raise questions as to how food is grown, Peter Singer, and the vegetarian movement he popularized, shifts the focus to the consumer, and to the question, “What should we be eating as our food?” Published two years prior to Berry’s *The Unsettling of America*, Singer’s book *Animal Liberation*¹⁷ catalyzed a movement, grabbing its readers by the lapels and compelling them to pay attention not only to how the food on their plate was being raised, but also to the deeper philosophical question of whether eating animals was a just action in any scenario. This won Singer fame and recognition — as Gregory E. Pence notes, “Peter Singer is the most well-known living philosopher in the English-speaking world”¹⁸ — but it has also made him a lightning rod for controversy. Singer often uses arguments from marginal cases — such as intellectually disabled adults and unborn babies, for instance — as foils to illustrate the injustices society puts upon non-human animals. This has brought him vociferous criticism, and even protests of his speaking engagements from pro-life and disability rights advocates, among others.

¹⁷ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Harpercollins, 1975).

¹⁸ Gregory E Pence, *The Ethics of Food: A Reader for the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. viii.

Singer is a utilitarian philosopher, which marks him as distinctive from animal rights philosophers such as Tom Regan. Singer is not interested in rights so much as in the equal consideration of interests. Non-human animals deserve the same consideration of their interests as humans, due to the fact that they are sentient beings with the capacity to suffer and conversely, the capacity for enjoyment or happiness. In this Singer follows the classical utilitarian position, famously articulated by Jeremy Bentham, who Singer calls “the founding father of modern utilitarianism.” These animals suffer pain and enjoy pleasure just as humans do, and as a result, their interests — to avoid the one and partake in the other — are every bit as morally relevant as the desires of a human being to do the same, and to insist otherwise is to fall into the trap of “specieism,” giving undue weight to the interests of humanity over non-human animals.¹⁹ For Singer, this is akin to racism — putting one group over another for arbitrary, fundamentally unfair reasons. The capacity to suffer puts humans and animals on a level playing ground. We cannot not precisely calculate the suffering of animals, of course, but for Singer, observing the behavior of an animal obviously suffering, combined with observing the neurological similarities between humans and animals, gives us enough evidence to plausibly suggest that sentient animals suffer just as humans do, and as such, their suffering carries moral weight.

The philosophical foundation of Peter Singer’s argument manifests itself in many practical actions, but none are quite so well-known as his commitment to vegetarianism. As he phrases it in *Animal Liberation*, “It is impossible to be consistent in one’s concern

¹⁹ The term “specieism” was actually coined by British philosopher Richard Ryder. It was Singer, however, who introduced the idea to a wider audience.

for nonhuman animals while continuing to dine on them.”²⁰ In his estimate, humans who eat animals are subjugating their claims to justice in order to satisfy their personal palates, a consideration which he repeatedly calls “trivial.” To forgo meat, then, is, in Singer’s words, to participate in a “boycott” against a categorically unjust food system.

The “Food Movement”

Sir Albert Howard, Wendell Berry, and Peter Singer are just a few of those who have voiced protests against modern industrial methods of agriculture and eating; there are many others. In so doing, these writers laid the groundwork for the modern movement which was to become known as simply “the Food Movement.” As mentioned in chapter one, the Food Movement consists of a loose conglomerate of separate-but-related questions which pertain to food ethics. The questions to be considered here, focusing as they do primarily upon ecological and animal welfare issues, are five: organic foods, locavorism, genetically modified foods, culture and aesthetics, and vegetarianism.

Eating Organic

The dichotomy which Sir Albert Howard draws between fertilization via synthetic chemicals (the way of the “bandits of agriculture”) and fertilization via compost became the distinction, and ultimately the foundation, for what in time would become one of the major countermovements to the industrialization of agriculture — “organic” food and agriculture. Organic foods are grown without the use of chemical agents, such as fertilizers or pesticides, and it is safe to say that they have exploded anew onto the scene of American food, after many decades in which conventionally raised foods were the only

²⁰ Singer, p. 159.

options at hand for American consumers. A 2014 Gallup poll reported that forty-five percent of Americans “actively try to include organic foods in their diets,”²¹ and large stores such as Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe’s have arisen to meet the growing demand for organic foods.

The rise of the organic movement is generally viewed as a positive development for human and environmental health, and it is easy to understand why. Even though the science is contested, it is, at least, highly plausible that the removal of poisonous chemicals, chiefly in the form of pesticides, from foods would render them safer. It is also not difficult to see how lessening the amounts of nitrogen running off into bodies of water, which organic farming does, would be environmentally beneficial. However, the overall efficacy of organic food as a driver of change in the way Americans eat has been diluted, at least in part, because the definition of the word “organic” has shifted widely over the years, and has come to encompass so many concepts that it is now nebulous what the word itself is referring to. The original meaning for the word was narrow — organic food was grown of traditional, compost-heavy methods, while the alternative was grown by way of synthetic fertilizers.

However, this relatively narrow conception of “organic agriculture” gave way over time, as different farmers and producers of food attempted to leverage the marketing power of the word by associating it not merely with soils and compost, but also with such heretofore unrelated ideas as personal health, concern for animals, and even conceptions of economic justice (what would go on to be called “fair trade.”) The term came

²¹ Rebecca Rifkin, “Forty-five Percent of Americans Seek Out Organic Foods,” *Gallup*, August 7th, 2014, accessed May 1st, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/174524/forty-five-percent-americans-seek-organic-foods.aspx>

to denote not simply a way of growing food but an entire lifestyle. As the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements defines organic agriculture,

Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that promotes environmentally, socially, and economically sound production of food, fiber, timber, etc. In this system, soil fertility is seen as the key to successful production. Working with the natural properties of plants, animals, and the landscape, organic farmers aim to optimize quality in all aspects of agriculture and the environment.²²

Far from merely referring to methods of fertilization, the word “organic” became a catch-all for environmentally and socially conscious consumers, giving them a heuristic device which allowed them to feel good about their purchases without having to do meticulous research on the origins of every single product. They merely had to look for the word “organic,” and they were set. Heuristic devices, however, are limited, and words such as “organic,” as well as other common words on labels such as “natural,” “humane,” and “cage-free,” began to take on increasingly broad, unfocused definitions. As such, the words became ripe for manipulation by clever marketers, despite the best efforts of governmental entities such as the United States Department of Agriculture, which has on numerous occasions attempted to clarify what “certified organic” actually means. Organic has also become a primary technique for major food producers to sell more conventionally raised food, paradoxical though that may sound, by way of what is known as “line extension” — by selling an organic line of products, food makers can cast a “health halo” over the conventional, distinctly non-organic (and non-healthy) products in their line, facilitating higher sales. Food makers can thus sell their conventionally

²² quoted in Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2006), p. 199.

raised products while declaring their ecological concern in advertisements and press releases, raising the esteem of their brand in the marketplace.

It is worth pointing out that a holistic definition of the word “organic” is completely aligned with Howard’s philosophy and views. For Howard, the whole of civilization is endangered by the switch to what he called “artificial manures.” As he argues, “Artificial manures lead inevitably to artificial nutrition, artificial food, artificial animals, and finally to artificial men and women.”²³ His is a holistic view — the health of the soil, the animals, and the people are all connected. However, that is a lot for one word to carry, and the limitations in the descriptive power of the word “organic,” in addition to the machinations of the food industry, have allowed a wide discrepancy in the types of food which are allowed to fit underneath that label. This limitation works in two ways: it excludes food and farmers who are clearly in line with Howard’s philosophy but are not officially associated with the term organic, and it also allows farmers to bear the label “organic” while appearing to go against the principles to which Howard devoted his life’s work.

The former category — farmers who operate in the spirit of Howard’s conception of farming, but, for one reason or another, the food they produce is not certified organic — are represented most widely among farmers in developing countries, who farm as Howard envisioned — compost, crop rotation, honoring the “wheel of life” — but do not have the means (it is expensive for a farmer to be certified organic) or perhaps even the knowledge, of organic certification and the benefits it entails. Does it detract from the farmer if their goods do not carry the label “organic?” Does it mean they respect the

²³ Howard, p 37.

rhythms and the processes of the earth any less? Those may seem like foolish questions, but if the consumer's only parameter for ethically good food is the presence of the word "organic" on the label, then these farmers unfortunately miss out on needed financial benefits. This category also includes farmers who have grown disillusioned with, as farmer Joel Salatin artfully puts it, "6,000-hen confinement laying houses with 3 feet dirt strips being labeled "certified organic."²⁴ These are farmers who view the "organic" label as too inclusive, allowing farming practices which cohere closely to those in conventional industrial agriculture, while still checking the boxes required to maintain a "certified organic" status. Farmers such as Salatin are aiming for, in his words, "an idea and a paradigm rather than a visceral list of dos and don'ts."²⁵ They want to live up to the spirit, rather than the letter, of what organic food represents, and see those who do not match their zeal as members of the status quo in agriculture, albeit with slightly tweaked practices. "Organic," then, is not sufficient to capture what these farmers really want to achieve, and Salatin and others have even taken up the label "beyond organic" to show the distance between themselves and other organic farmers, further clouding the mind of the consumer searching for food in the grocery store that they can feel good about.

The other category involves the farming operations which operate much in the manner of conventional organic operations, while still achieving organic certification. Michael Pollan calls this style of agriculture "industrial organic," while organic farmer Elliott Coleman refers to it as "shallow organic." Several critics have questioned the motives of

²⁴ Megan Phelps, "Everything He Wants to Do is Illegal: Interview with Joel Salatin," *Mother Earth News*, October 1st, 2008, accessed June 9th, 2016, <http://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/sustainable-farming/joel-salatin-interview.aspx>

²⁵ Ibid.

those who engage in this style, noting that many conventional producers, lured by the positive press acquiring an organic line entails, not to mention the premiums organic food commands, have bought out small organic companies and have commenced to run them according to the principles and philosophies which made the conventional producers so large in the first place. The virtues of these operations are, in Tom Philpott's words, "spectral"²⁶ — the image of wholesome responsibility is there, but it is only an apparition, designed to appeal to the conscience of the consumer, and also to the longstanding American attraction to the agrarian ideal, while still operating by the logic and principles of industrial farming. It is, as Sarah Searle phrases it, a "carefully curated version of farming"²⁷ which resonates with the agrarian ideal, and even shares some characteristics (lack of chemicals), but still functions very much like their industrial, conventional counterparts. Critics point to such operations as Dean Foods, the makers of Horizon Organic dairy products, which feature a smiling cow in mid-leap on the packaging, while the company houses its cattle in large (many thousands of heads of cattle) confined feeding operations and adds questionable nutrients to its products.²⁸ Even though it is "organic" — it does not use chemical fertilizers or pesticides — this type of agriculture, and the food which results from it, seems a far cry from Howard's vision of what agriculture ought to look like.

²⁶ Tom Philpott, "Let's Make A Meal," grist.org, featured on <http://www.michaelpollan.com>, April 13th, 2006, accessed July 5th, 2016, <http://michaelpollan.com/reviews/lets-make-a-meal/>

²⁷ Sarah Searle, "Stop Romanticizing Farms," *Modern Farmer*, June 30th, 2014, accessed June 1st, 2016, <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/06/stop-romanticizing-farms/>

²⁸ Horizon's defenders note that everything added is done with the express consent of the USDA, and that the additions are well within the confines of "organic" certification.

The Local Food Movement

Organic food has certainly been a helpful step forward in producing sustainable food, but, as discussed, problems remain. For example, organic says nothing about the land which produced the food, and does nothing to foster the idea of connection to a specific place. Most organic food raised domestically is from California, and must therefore travel thousands of miles before reaching the plate of a consumer in Florida. The idea of connection to a specific place, and eating in accordance with what that place produces, has come from a similar-but-distinct movement known as the local food movement. As mentioned, there is a great deal of overlap with the organic movement, but the local movement excludes organic foods produced monoculturally, such as lettuce from the massive organic farms in California, in favor of food which does not have to travel very far from the farm to the plate of the consumer. As Gail W. Feenstra defines it, the local food movement is “a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies — one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption are integrated to enhance the economic, environmental, and local health of a particular place.”²⁹ Food is grown, processed, and consumed in a particular geographic area, and the concern is not just the presence or absence of chemicals, but also the wellbeing of the farmer, the animals, and the land itself. In place of big-box stores and chain restaurants, this food is most often purchased by way of local farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSAs.) It is also produced in

²⁹ quoted in Laura B. Delind, “Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking Us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagon to the Wrong Stars?” *Agriculture and Human Values* 28 (2011): 273-283.

restaurants which promote themselves as “farm-to-table.” The restauranteurs who operate farm-to-table establishments usually get their food directly from farms which are close to the restaurant, often citing the farmer who provided the food for the entree by name on the menu, a trend popularized by the famous chef Alice Waters in her restaurant, Chez Panisse. Some farm-to-table establishments, such as that of Blue Hill at Stone Barns, a restaurant led by chef and author Dan Barber, have gone one step farther, including a working farm on the grounds where their restaurant is located. The point is to celebrate the locality of the place, and the distinctive food each place produces.

Much like the organic movement, the local food movement has enjoyed significant growth, particularly over the course of the last two decades. “Locavore” (one who eats locally) is now an official word in the New American Oxford Dictionary. Farmers markets have proliferated, as have backyard gardens, and even, in some cities, backyard chicken coops. In 2010, even the mega-chain Walmart launched an ambitious campaign to get more local food on the shelves of its stores, and to support medium and small scale farmers in various ways.³⁰ There is no question that the local food movement has gained enormous stature and influence, and there is no indication that the momentum will abate any time soon.

³⁰ Of course, Wal-mart being who they are, the plan to bolster their local food availability was met with a mixed reaction. Some experts applauded the move, and surmised that Wal-Mart, as a corporate giant, could really affect change. Others were skeptical of the relatively modest goals that were being pursued and pushed the company to do more. See Stephanie Clifford, “Wal-Mart to Buy More Local Produce,” *The New York Times*, October 14th, 2010, accessed June 4th, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/15/business/15walmart.html?_r=0

The benefits of the local food movement have been proclaimed by a broad scope of writers, including popular writers such as Michael Pollan, farmers such as White Oak Pastures owner Will Harris, and academic researchers such as Kenneth A. Dahlberg. It is Dahlberg, in an influential 1993 essay called “Regenerative Food Systems: Broadening the Scope and Agenda of Sustainability,”³¹ who captures the greatest strength of the local food movement: it does not merely focus on production techniques, but rather considers the entire food chain, from production to consumption, examining all of the relationships which exist up and down the chain. It does not try to isolate environmental consequences from cultural consequences, but rather takes them together. The food grown and consumed locally avoids the ecological damage wrought when foods are mass-produced in giant monocultures and trucked hundreds of miles, but this is entirely dependent on the wellbeing of the local farmer, and the distribution channels which exist for him to sell his food. The health of the ecosystem, the farmer, and the rural locality which contains them both are all interrelated, and inseparable from each other. There is an entire food system at work, Dahlberg argues, and the idea is to maintain the system’s ability to regenerate itself. This is an inherently participatory task, and also, an inherently communal one. The citizens of a place take collective responsibility for food which is grown and consumed there. The power of this sort of model shows itself most clearly in the case of urban farming stories like that of Will Allen, founder of Growing Power. The expressed mission of the organization is to develop what they call “Community Food Systems,” ensuring safe, high-quality, and affordable food to residents who, otherwise, would reside in what sociologists call a “food desert,” — an urban area where

³¹ in *Food for the Future*, ed. Patricia Allen (New York: Wiley, 1993), p. 75-102.

the only available options for food are convenience stores or even liquor stores which sell highly processed, unhealthy food. This will not only be a boon to the residents in terms of the food they eat, but also in the way in which they seek to empower themselves in all facets of life. Growing Power, and similar organizations, show the potential of what the local food movement can be.

Before getting carried away, however, it is worth noting that the local food movement is not without questions and concerns. For one, is it a given that local food is more environmentally beneficent? Wouldn't organic from California be better for the environment than conventionally grown local food from Florida? Not necessarily; as previously mentioned, a great deal of organic food is produced in energy-intensive monocultures, and when the effects of food miles are added to the equation, the case for local becomes stronger. Of course, there are energy-intensive local producers of food, particularly ones which attempt to sell food outside of its natural season, but again, this is not unique to local food production. On the whole, the idea of buying from local producers carries ethical heft.

However, again as with organic food, eating under the auspices of "local" is not by any means a foolproof guide to eating ethically. Local food systems, as Dahlberg define them, require active participation and a strong sense of collective responsibility. The conventional food system, which is still overwhelmingly dominant in the United States, is shaped to cater to convenience, and to individual autonomy. This is what the vast majority of Americans expect and are used to when it comes to their food. There is evidence to suggest that the local food movement, to some extent, has been pushed to

adopt the same individualist, consumerist tendencies of the larger food system in general. Much like in the organic movement, critics are making the charge that big food producers, having noticed that local food has proven to be an attractive idea for increasing numbers of consumers, have taken the concept and shoehorned it into the economic models which the big producers have historically used, models which value profit margins above all else, to the exclusion of ecological health, community involvement, and all of the other factors of a regenerative food system. Ironically, as the local food movement continues to grow as a national movement, it may run the risk of losing that which is “local.”

Sociologist Laura B. DeLind expands this critique (or, more accurately, this concern with some of the trends in the local food movement) into three different strains: what she calls the locavore emphasis, the Wal-Mart emphasis, and the Pollan emphasis.³² The locavore emphasis, as the title suggests, places all of the emphasis upon the individual consumer (the “locavore”) and the ways in which their individual choices affect the food system. Countless articles call upon the reader to “Eat Well and Save the Planet!”, directing their attention away from certain products and in the direction of others, promising the benefits of a clean environmental conscience. While choosing locally raised food does have ethical warrant, the impact of these choices is often dramatically overstated, because they say little about the food systems which tend to drive the choices of individuals. These pieces promise the eater that she does not have to change in any real way — just make some small tweaks to the shopping list, and then

³² Delind, p. 275.

join the ranks of the ethically informed who are fighting to save the world! As DeLind summarizes the problem,

Individualizing social issues in this manner suggests that we can still have it all. We can individually eat our way to health and happiness. And, by doing so, we feel we have been admitted into the ranks of that group of committed individuals, which, according to Margaret Mead, has historically been responsible for changing the world. Ultimately, such rhetoric does more to comfort and accommodate the individual eater than it does to challenge inequity and existing power structures.³³

According to DeLind, then, focusing on the individual's patterns of consumption as a means for social change assumes that power is only exercised moving from the individual consumer to culture. In reality, power tends to flow more strongly in the other direction, from the system to the individual, and the one who consumes to change the world often finds themselves as the ones who are changed.

In DeLind's terminology, the Wal-Mart emphasis is when the big companies, such as Wal-Mart itself, appropriate the term "local," and they distort the ideas which the term was originally meant to signify. This is similar to the previous discussion regarding "organic" food, and the wide disparity which exists between organic providers like Joel Salatin and Horizon Organic. If "local," or "farm-to-table," becomes primarily a marketing term, signifying a hot commodity that eaters are attracted to, often the very underlying ideas which formed the concept itself become diluted, or even displaced, as the big producers wish to co-opt that which makes local food attractive, but still under the aegis of the logic by which they run their big-box store or chain restaurant. In many cases, this leads to misinformation, and even outright deception. Laura Reiley, food critic for the

³³ Ibid.

Tampa Bay Times newspaper, has published a searing expose of several notable farm-to-table restaurants in the Tampa area which proclaimed their commitment to locally-sourcing the items on their menu.³⁴ One such restaurant even featured a salad with the provocative title of “F*** Monsanto Salad.” Upon further review, however, Reiley found that many of the items on the menu, while touting their Florida origins, were actually shipped in from far away. The cheese curds came from Wisconsin. The shrimp were farm-raised in India, purchased from a large-scale food distributor. Even the ingredients in the “F*** Monsanto” salad, coming as they did from larger-scale distributors, were hardly guaranteed to be free of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs.) When she confronted the chef about these discrepancies, he replied, “We try to do local and sustainable as much as possible, but it’s not 100 percent. For the price point we’re trying to sell items, it’s just not possible.” Another restaurant owner, caught in a similar situation, moved the goalposts: “Well, we serve local within reason. (italics added)”³⁵

The “reason,” of course, which dictates the decision to sell local is profitability, driven by cost, convenience, and, perhaps most importantly, scale. Local relationships are exchanged in favor of relationships with large distributors, and the dictates of the market determine the feasibility of selling “local” cuisine, no matter what the menu says. This is not to say, of course, that all restaurants and farmers markets blatantly lie about the origin of their foods. It is to say, however, that Audre Lorde’s question, pertinent for the discussion about organic foods, is also quite pertinent for local ones as well: “Can the master’s tools dismantle the master’s house?” According to Lorde, and, accordingly,

³⁴ Laura Reiley, “Farm to Fable,” *Tampa Bay Times*, April 13th, 2016, accessed June 22nd, 2016, <http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2016/food/farm-to-fable/restaurants/>

³⁵ *ibid.*

to DeLind, the answer is no. The “tools” which make large-scale industrial food production successful cannot be easily transplanted into the world of local cuisine, without problematic effects.

Finally, what DeLind calls the “Michael Pollan emphasis” deals with the idea that the local food movement, as it has grown, has become particularly entranced with a certain group of leading figures, or “heroes,” as its focal point. Pollan himself is the most obvious example, but he is certainly not alone - Joel Salatin, Dan Barber, Will Allen, and, perhaps most of all, Wendell Berry himself have all been lionized. This is not to downplay their achievements. Each of these figures has accomplished significant, perhaps even monumental good, and it is only right that they are celebrated. However, when the focus of the movement stays upon a handful of nationally known figures, DeLind argues, the local eccentricities of the movement become overlooked and neglected. The local food movement becomes defined solely through the interpretive lens of a food writer in California, a chef in New York, or a farmer in Virginia. Paradoxically, as the movement, inspired as a reaction against the hegemony and homogenization of the American food system, grows, it becomes susceptible to similar forces of hegemony and homogenization. The local food movement is what Michael Pollan says it is, or it is nothing at all. As DeLind puts it, “My point here is that as the local food movement grows more popular, it begins to whittle away local ambiguity and redundancy as well as basic local freedoms.”³⁶ DeLind is careful to point out that these figures do not seek this kind of autonomy; but given the platform they have, as national figures, their work

³⁶ DeLind, p. 279.

causes the local food movement to be viewed primarily through a national lens, obscuring or overlooking the little wrinkles which make each local food economy different.

If the problems stem from the local food movement becoming too large and cosmopolitan, then is the answer to focus solely on the local communities, and to treat them as insular entities, each so unique in its context that those who live outside of those communities really have nothing to say to them? According to E.M. Dupuis and David Goodman, this focus on the “radical particularism” of each local food economy is also problematic. It can lead to what they call an “unreflexive localism”³⁷ — an instinctual move to call the local automatically good, and conversely to view the global with abject suspicion. This view ignores the blind spots of localism — namely, the narrow provincialism and inequality which can sometimes flourish in local food economies. The rural communities which are most associated with local food, farmers markets, and the like, are also most closely associated with these sorts of traditionalist ways of life, which some observers of the local food movement have found confining, or even oppressive. In fact, Berry himself was caught in a controversy which highlighted these themes. In one of his essays, entitled “Why I am Not Going to Buy A Computer,”³⁸ he reveals that his wife, Tanya, types his work on a typewriter, serving as a copy editor of sorts. This is the “literary cottage industry,” Berry explains, in which his writing is produced. He was taken to task, however, by some feminist critics, who objected to what they saw as exploitation or at least, a commitment to outmoded gender roles.

³⁷ EM Dupuis and David Goodman, “Should We Go “Home” to Eat? Toward a Reflexive Politics of Localism,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 21 (2005): 359-371.

³⁸ Berry, Wendell, “Why I am Not Going to Buy a Computer,” in *Technology and Values: Essential Readings*, ed. Craig Hanks, pp. 500-503. New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2010.

The local food movement, at its root, developed out of a concern for “place,” and regaining a connection with your place that had long been lost. Find your place, be committed to that place, and also that which it produces, including, most prominently, its food. This is the heart of the local food movement. This requires significant, often messy action, in the form of community involvement. It is incongruous with the idea of “fast” food, a cuisine based and built upon convenience. It also requires its participants to constrain their tastes, and even to give up foods which the industrial system has made commonplace. The restraints include seasonality and geography and they also include price. This food costs more, so, if a person is committed to eating locally, most likely they are either buying less food in general, or increasing their food budget, and cutting costs in other places. At any rate, to eat in a way which honors the capacities of regenerative, local food systems takes considerable effort and, for the person who is not used to eating this way, significant alterations in their lifestyle. Will large numbers of the American population willingly take on these changes? The picture of American eating in the previous chapter gives cause for pessimism in this regard. As “good” as local food is, it is also simply out of alignment with what the majority of American eaters have been conditioned to expect and to want when it comes to food.

Genetically Modified Foods

Although the Green Revolution, which revolutionized global agriculture in the mid twentieth century, is often associated with India, the beginnings of the movement can be traced to Mexico. In 1940, vice-president elect Henry A. Wallace traveled to Mexico, in order to attend the inauguration of Mexican president Manuel Avila-Camacho, the first US official ever to have attended such an event. While there, Wallace made it a point to

meet Mexican farmers of all types and income levels, to learn firsthand about the challenges they faced. More than a politician, Wallace was a farmer, an enthusiastic promoter of hybrid seed technology, and a former US Secretary of Agriculture. He spent a month touring Mexico, and was appalled by what he saw: scores of Mexican peasants working pitiful plots in the worst of conditions. According to Carmelo Ruiz-Marrero,

He found that it took a typical Mexican farmer at least 200 hours of back-breaking labor to produce each bushel of corn; in his home state of Iowa, it took the typical farmer 10 hours for every bushel of corn. Wallace came back convinced that modern agricultural technology could help Mexico out of poverty and hunger.³⁹

Upon his return to the United States, Wallace met with Rockefeller Foundation president Raymond Fosdick, urging him to fund an effort to increase yields in corn and beans for Mexican farmers.⁴⁰ A central part of the program was the sending of American agronomists to Mexico to train their Mexican counterparts. Norman Borlaug, then a young plant geneticist, joined the effort. In order to bolster the poor soil, Borlaug used nitrogen-based fertilizers, which increased yield, but the increases caused the stalks of the wheat he was working with, tall and thin as they were, to collapse under their own weight. To counter this problem, Borlaug bred semi-dwarf wheat, and its shorter, thicker stalks were able to better handle the fertilizer-induced increases in yield. In addition, he bred the wheat to be disease-resistant, using techniques such as multiline crossing. Production exploded, so much so that in 1963, 19 years after Borlaug arrived, Mexico actually became a net exporter of wheat. He then replicated these successes in India,

³⁹ Carmelo Ruiz-Marrero, "The Life and Passion of Henry A. Wallace," *CounterPunch*, March 27th, 2012, accessed August 1st, 2016, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/03/27/the-life-and-passion-of-henry-a-wallace/>

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

helping it, too, to become a net exporter of wheat in just a few short years. Dwarf and semidwarf varieties, fed with copious amounts of chemical fertilizers, had made the difference, and Borlaug's varieties would go on to dominate the global wheat market, displacing traditional varieties.

However, the Green Revolution is not universally regarded as a boon to humanity. Critics excoriate it as a symbol of hubris, of humanity exceeding the boundaries of nature, with disastrous ecological and social results. A particularly noteworthy critic is physicist and activist Vandana Shiva, who describes the Green Revolution as "a technological strategy for peace, through the creation of abundance by breaking out of nature's limits and variabilities."⁴¹ Shiva has written voluminously in defense of traditional methods of farming and indigenous farmers. As the title of one of her books, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, suggests, she views the motives of Green Revolution practitioners as anything but altruistic. The technological innovations which allowed the Green Revolution to happen, Shiva argues, were not simply deployed to aid subsistence farmers in developing countries. They were put into place as a new form of colonialism, a "planned destruction of diversity in nature and culture to create the uniformity demanded by centralized management systems."⁴² In other words, the Green Revolution, for Shiva, is all about control, as Western agro-scientists can impose their way of farming upon the indigenous farmers of India and other places. This homogenization of global agriculture, for Shiva, has devastating cultural and ecological consequences, curtailing indigenous cultures and biodiversity as well.

⁴¹ Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution* (London: Zed Books, 1991), p. 11.

⁴² Ibid.

The critiques of Shiva and others have only intensified as the technological innovations which gave birth to the Green Revolution expanded into the development of what are now commonly referred to as Genetically Modified Organisms, or GMOs, for short. Whereas Borlaug's crosses, while using varieties foreign to the soils of Mexico and India, were "natural," in the sense that they were between two species of wheat which were capable of cross-breeding, GMOs are achieved by recombining the genes, something which can only be done with laboratory technology, allowing for complete and heretofore impossible cross-speciation. This is done for a variety of purposes, including pest resistance and increased yield, among others, and the technology has elicited a radically polarized response, as its opponents and defenders have argued over its ethical ramifications since its inception in the 1980s.

Defenders of GMOs continue the argument which Borlaug first put forward during the onset of the Green Revolution in the mid 20th century: this technology saves lives. In fact, Borlaug himself would go on to win a Nobel Peace Prize, and to be touted as a man whose life's work had saved over a billion lives. Borlaug would also go on to be a vigorous defender of all genetically modified foods, arguing,

Thanks to the development of science over the past 150 years, we now have the insights into plant genetics and breeding to do purposefully what Mother Nature did herself in the past by chance or design. Genetic modification of crops is not some kind of witchcraft; it is rather the progressive harnessing of the forces of nature for the benefit of feeding the human race.⁴³

⁴³ Norman Borlaug, "Are We Going Mad?" in *The Ethics of Food*, ed. Gregory E. Pence (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 76.

The shorthand for Borlaug's position is the phrase "feeding the world" — using human ingenuity to take on the problems which have historically bedeviled humanity, most notably starvation and disease. As the human population explodes, proponents argue, there is no choice but to invest fully in these technologies which pull higher yields from the soil.

The crown jewel of genetically modified foods designed specifically to "feed the world" is golden rice. Rice is a staple food around the world; indeed, it is the sole source of subsistence in some places. However, rice does not naturally contain vitamin A, so diets which rely on it exclusively leave people open to blindness, and also a wide variety of potentially fatal diseases. It has been estimated that 670,000 children under the age of five die every year as a result of Vitamin-A deficiency.⁴⁴ To fight this, scientists genetically modified traditional rice grains by infusing them with beta-carotene, making it a potent source for Vitamin A (and also providing the golden color which gives it its name), and potentially a major weapon in the fight against blindness, starvation, and death. The rice has been tested, and is in the process of being distributed around the world, with groups such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation offering their support to the effort.⁴⁵

At first blush, it would seem difficult to criticize the Golden Rice initiative — how do you argue against saving lives? However, many environmental organizations, Greenpeace foremost among them, question the efficacy and the unintended side effects of Golden Rice. They point out that Golden Rice has not been empirically proven

⁴⁴ George Harrison, "Golden Rice: The Miracle Crop Greens Love to Hate," *Spiked* July 19th, 2016, accessed August 1st, 2016, <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/golden-rice-the-miracle-crop-greens-love-to-hate/18570#.V5Im5FczjU>

⁴⁵ "What We Do: Agricultural Development: Golden Rice," *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*, accessed July 24th, 2016, <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Agricultural-Development/Golden-Rice>

to address Vitamin A deficiency, and accuse GMO advocates of using it as a ploy to make GMO foods of all stripes more acceptable, thereby improving the financial bottom line of the companies which are creating these new foods. As Wilhelmina Peregrina, writing for Greenpeace, puts it, “Rather than invest in this overpriced public relations exercise, we need to address malnutrition through a more diverse diet, equitable access to food and ecoagriculture.”⁴⁶ In this argument, GMOs, even ones that have the potential to be beneficial, are reductive shortcuts, the equivalent of trying to put Band-Aids on broken limbs. If the deeper issues are not addressed, the solutions will ultimately prove ineffectual.

In some ways, the fight over genetically modified foods is a proxy for larger questions. This larger fight was illustrated in June of 2016, when over 100 Nobel Laureates signed a letter criticizing opponents of GMOs, and Greenpeace in particular, urging them to accept and celebrate these technological achievements. The letter stated,

We urge Greenpeace and its supporters to re-examine the experience of farmers and consumers worldwide with crops and foods improved through biotechnology, recognize the findings of authoritative scientific bodies and regulatory agencies, and abandon their campaign against 'GMOs' in general and Golden Rice in particular.⁴⁷

When asked why the Nobel Laureates felt compelled to speak, Columbia University's Martin Chalfie had a striking response, noting that “when we feel that science is not being listened to, we (must) speak out.” The compulsion to defend “science” against what

⁴⁶ quoted in Joel Achenbach, “107 Nobel Laureates Sign Letter Blasting Greenpeace Over GMOs,” *Washington Post*, June 30th, 2016, accessed July 24th, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2016/06/29/more-than-100-nobel-laureates-take-on-greenpeace-over-gmo-stance/>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

they see as scurrilous attacks against it shows the philosophical stakes at play in the argument. On the one side, there is “science,” put towards the benefit of humanity. This is the position of Borlaug, the Nobel Laureates who signed the letter, and for defenders of industrial agriculture in general. In some ways, this line of thought goes back to Frances Bacon, and to what Donald Worster and others referred to as a “mechanistic” view of the world. On the other side, Greenpeace, Shiva, Joel Salatin, and other critics warn of hubris (Shiva is reported to have said, “GMO stands for “God, Move Over”) and advocate for a “organic” view of the world which respects, and, in the case of agriculture, attempts to imitate the rhythms of nature. As Salatin declares, “to view DNA as no more special or sacred than a piece of plastic or extruded copper fitting is to approach all of life as a simple mechanical function. Biology is more than mechanics.”⁴⁸ Shiva connects the dots politically, calling the mechanistic approach, with its top down approach augmented by technology “food totalitarianism.” What started out as a debate over food, then, quickly turns into a dizzying clash of worldviews: Modern/Industrial vs. Indigenous, Western vs. Eastern, and so on.

In making sense of this complicated issue, and the bitter dispute which engulfs it, it might be wise to start by dealing with points both sides agree on. First, exploding populations are putting the world’s food supply under enormous pressure. Second, genetically engineered crops have been widely, if unevenly, adapted. (Europe has, on the whole, been more skeptical of GMOs than the US, for example.) Third, no one wants to see children in India, or anywhere for that matter, die of starvation. This is where the points of agreement end, as a profound distrust separates the two sides of this issue, as

⁴⁸ Salatin, p. 233.

much or more than any other pressing question in food ethics. As Paul B. Thompson pointed out, genetic modification of food can mitigate global hunger, but that by no means ensures that it will. Opponents of GMOs see a clear and vested interest on the part of GMO proponents — acceptance of the technology means furtherance of the technology, which means furtherance of the grants which support those who study the technology. There is a bright, sharp line between scientific “insiders” on this issue, and the “outsiders” — those who lack formal training in science but who do have the wherewithal to point out, for example, the vast majority of GM technology has been employed to create foods consumed by eaters in developed nations, therefore raising the question as to whether altruism or profit is the primary motive at play. A harsh analogy, but a fair one, to the relationship between GM foods and food producers would be the relationship between erectile dysfunction medications and the pharmaceutical companies which produce them. They both help people, but they also, more pointedly, are aimed at the populations which can afford them, to keep the profit margins high. There are certainly no easy answers, but one thing is for certain: the question of genetically modified food, and the ferocious debates which encircle it, are not going away anytime soon.

Slow Food - Taste and Cultural Aesthetics

It is perhaps fitting that one of the foremost protest movements of the industrial food system came to prominence in a fight over a McDonalds franchise. In 1986, the fast food giant moved to install a location in Rome, adjacent to the Spanish Steps in the Piazza di Spagna. An Italian journalist named Carlo Petrini, outraged by the proposed desecration of such a significant cultural landmark, and also the threat the globalized food giant posed to the small, local food establishments, rose in protest, handing out bowls of penne and juxtaposing artisanal “slow food” with its industrialized counterpart.

The effort ultimately gave rise to the Slow Food Manifesto in 1989, which continued to draw this sharp dichotomy. The document opens:

Born and nurtured under the sign of Industrialization, this century first invented the machine and then modelled its lifestyle after it. Speed became our shackles. We fell prey to the same virus: 'the fast life' that fractures our customs and assails us even in our own homes, forcing us to ingest "fast-food."⁴⁹

Instead of "fast food" — food produced not for flavor so much as for speed, efficiency, and cheapness — the movement, which became known as the "Slow Food Movement" argued for a defense of food traditions, cultures, and, above all, flavor. Slow Food's purpose is to argue for "a firm defense of quiet material pleasure." This is not asceticism — instead, Petrini consistently argues that food prepared the "right" way, protecting community, culture, and also the environment, will, in addition to being ethically virtuous, taste the best. Moreover, it will result in a higher quality of life in general. When we give way to the logic of industrialized food, when we go on a frenzied search for more productivity, Petrini says, we put ourselves on "the road to extinction," and we also deprive ourselves of real pleasures. As a logo for the movement, which would eventually become global, Petrini chose the snail, noting its slow pace, but also that the snail grows in concentric circles, then stops, then strengthens its shell by growing the other way. So too, instead of overextending ourselves, and compromising the things in our lives which matter most, we ought to consolidate the strength of what we already have, which would allow us to enjoy it more.

As Slow Food grew as a movement, it became obvious that Petrini wished to engage with far more than merely methods of production. Particularly in his later writings,

⁴⁹ <https://www.slowfoodusa.org/manifesto>

he addresses the economic system which gives birth to fast food much more sharply and directly, calling for an economy based and built on the idea of the gift, rather than the transaction. As he writes,

I want to analogously propose the project of a network which gives economic weight to the important values that it carries within it — not translating them into money, nor trying to make a profit from them, but inserting them into a logic of exchange, or rather in a logic of giving freely where there is no utilitarian exchange, but a mutual giving of knowledge, hospitality, opportunities, tastes, visions of the world, and educational elements.⁵⁰

In this way of thinking, then, food becomes a vehicle, a way to reach what Petrini calls a “convivial society,” bolstered by a set of values which strengthen community bonds and reciprocity between people, instead of a “turbo capitalism” which isolates and alienates. The gift economy fosters not just a new way to experience food, but also a new way to enjoy life and the relationships which life offers.

The idea of the gift economy certainly did not originate with Petrini. It has featured prominently in several critiques of capitalism and its effects, notably from feminist and indigenous scholars. To give just one example, in her book *Subversive Spiritualities*⁵¹, Frederique Apffel-Marglin argues that the market economy severs relationships between people, and it also separates humanity from nature, an argument Petrini makes as well, albeit less directly. Both writers stand to speak in defense of the peoples, and of the ways of life, which have evolved organically, out of the place where they are located.

⁵⁰ quoted in Justin Myers, “Logic of the Gift: The Possibilities and Limitations of Carlo Petrini’s Slow Food Alternative,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 30 (2013): 405-415.

⁵¹ Frederique Apffel-Marglin, *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2012).

What motivates this defense, at least in part, is angst over the homogenizing, totalizing nature of the modernist project. McDonalds does not merely coexist with traditional ways of eating, just like Wal-Mart does not coexist with the mom-and-pop retail stores of a small town. Both McDonalds and Wal-Mart appropriate the market share of the smaller stores, beating them on price and efficiency, and, eventually, putting them out of business. This angst, and the defense of traditional ways of living which stems from it, has been articulated by a number of sources. It is a major theme, for instance, of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, in which he argues against the "throwaway culture" brought on by the modern obsession with production and progress. What makes Slow Food distinctive, however, is their insistence that losing these foodways, and losing the traditional knowledge of food preparation has a ruinous effect on the taste of the food itself.⁵² Flavor is a guiding principle of Slow Food, and it has grown to be a fundamental platform of the Food Movement as a whole. It is foundational for Michael Pollan's call to "eat (real) food," and also with chefs such as Dan Barber and Mark Bittman, who have argued that that taste and flavor are inextricably linked with sustainability, and that in order to have one, the other is needed. Or, as Carlo Petrini succinctly phrases it, "A gastronome who is not an environmentalist is stupid."⁵³ In fact, for Barber, the flavor is the

⁵² Wendell Berry, in his essay "The Pleasures of Eating," also dealt with this topic. He wrote, "Like industrial sex, industrial eating has become a degraded, poor, and paltry thing. Our kitchens and other eating places more and more resemble filling stations, as our homes more and more resemble motels. "Life is not very interesting," we seem to have decided. "Let its satisfactions be minimal, perfunctory, and fast." We hurry through our meals to go to work and hurry through our work in order to "recreate" ourselves in the evenings and on weekends and vacations. And then we hurry, with the greatest possible speed and noise and violence, through our recreation — for what? To eat the billionth hamburger at some fast-food joint hellbent on increasing the "quality" of our life? And all this is carried out in a remarkable obliviousness to the causes and effects, the possibilities and the purposes, of the life of the body in this world."

⁵³ quoted in Barber, p. 247.

leading indicator that the system is indeed in tune with its place and the cultural systems which evolved from that place. In his book *The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food*, Barber writes,

We know that delicious ingredients come from good farms, which, almost by definition, means farms that promote healthy environments. How could they not? A badly managed farm will not produce consistently good food.⁵⁴

In the book, Barber highlights several examples of “good farms” raising food: an organic grain farmer in upstate New York, a geese farmer who produces foie gras in Spain, a fish farm situated in a national park (also in Spain) and a seedsman striving to repatriate native brands of rice in the American south. While highlighting the various things which these producers do in order to work in rhythm with the natural world around them, including soil rotations and human killing of their animals, Barber also declares repeatedly that these producers raise the very best foods in terms of taste and flavor, stressing that the ecological fidelity of the process is what leads to the superlative flavor. Barber punctuates this point by recounting a conversation he had with Eduardo Sousa, a goose farmer who produces foie gras (a controversial product by any standard) without the use of “gavage” — the funneling of grain down the bird’s esophagus by way of a metal tube, in order to fatten the livers prior to slaughter — and without stressful and painful methods of slaughter. Barber asked Sousa why he used the techniques that he did: was it for the welfare of the animals, or for the best tasting livers? What was

⁵⁴ Barber, p. 247.

the priority? In Barber's telling, Sousa raised his eyebrows, asking, "What's the difference?"⁵⁵ In this method of farming, great taste and a concern for animal and ecological welfare were inseparable, even indistinguishable, from each other.

The appeal of flavor as a guiding principle is obvious. In 2008, Joan Gussow, Michael Pollan, and Dan Barber appeared in a talk sponsored by the 92nd St Y memorably titled, "Hedonistic, Healthy and Green: Can We Have it All?" It is encouraging to think that food can be virtuous and healthy, but also delicious, especially considering the fact that the prevailing knock on both health food and food seen to be ecologically virtuous was that it did not taste good. In talking about the countercuisine movement, for instance, and whole grain bread's foundational place in it, Barber summarizes the dilemma: "Whole wheat loaves from the countercuisine era often seemed more like bricks, better suited to building forts. They were virtuous, but they weren't always delicious."⁵⁶ So, when Gussow, Pollan, and Barber talk about the taste of well-grown food, arguing that the most environmentally beneficent methods are now capable of producing the very best kinds of food, it is easy to see why gastronomes of all sorts become excited.

There are, however, reasons to question the veracity of the claim. For instance, it is doubtful whether all or even most gastronomes share Barber's conviction that food raised in accordance with nature is better tasting food. *New York Times* columnist (and chef) Mark Bittman raises this concern in a column entitled "Rethinking the Word Foodie," in which he wrote,

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 160.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 341.

As it stands, many self-described foodies are new-style epicures. And there's nothing destructive about watching competitive cooking shows, doing "anything" to get a table at the trendy restaurant, scouring the web for single-estate farro, or devoting oneself to finding the best food truck. The problem arises when it stops there.⁵⁷

Bittman argues that the "good" food which foodies ought to be caring about is real, healthy, sustainable, fair, and affordable. He concludes by calling for widespread changes in the American food system, and for fighting for a system which would allow for food to be all of these things. While, within the world of the "foodie," there is concern with these issues is indeed growing, the fact that the column needed to be written is itself evidence that many foodies are not making the connective leap Bittman, Barber et al., are asking them to make, between taste and ecological health.

A second reason to be skeptical of flavor as the ultimate arbiter of a good food system is the fate of certain trophy species which have been known for their abundant flavor. The bluefin tuna, for instance, is prized for its toro, the meat from its midsection, which is highly touted for its flavor and texture. Toro is a mainstay in Japanese sushi, with some estimates of eighty percent of its catch being used in this capacity. Bluefin tuna, however, is in critical danger as a species, and they are certainly not alone. In fact, according to the World Wildlife Federation, more than eighty-five percent of the world's fish stocks are now reported as fully exploited, overexploited, depleted, or recovering from depletion.⁵⁸ What is causing this devastation? There are several factors, but chief among them is the global consumer's rising taste for seafood, and particularly for

⁵⁷ Mark Bittman, "Rethinking the Word "Foodie," *The New York Times*, June 24th, 2014, accessed June 28th, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/opinion/mark-bittman-rethinking-the-word-foodie.html

⁵⁸ "Unsustainable Fishing," *World Wildlife Fund*, accessed June 26th, 2016, http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/blue_planet/problems/problems_fishing/

marquis fish such as salmon, sea bass, and bluefin tuna. In addition, consumer desire for these fish leads to the presence of fish farms, trawlers, and bycatch (fish mistakenly caught in the hunt for these types of fish which are unceremoniously left to die, and then tossed back into the water). The state of the Bluefin, or the Pacific Salmon, or the Swordfish, seems to contradict the notion that the best tasting food is always the sustainably raised food. The tastes for these fish are ingrained into ethnic cultures (Japanese sushi) and also into the culture of the “foodie.” They will not be erased, or even modified, easily.

Moreover, even if high-end food culture were to change, and acquire more ecologically beneficent tastes, would that automatically result in a large-scale overhaul of the American food system? The vast majority of American eaters have not entered the debates over toro, or foie gras, for the simple reason that these foods do not constitute even a sliver of a portion of their diets. Even if they wished to consume these foods, they would not be able to do so. This is due in part to economics — it takes considerable money and time to shop in farmers markets, and to prepare food, particularly for economically disadvantaged citizens living in “food deserts.” If a consumer’s access to food, and their resources, are limited, it is often too much to ask for them to eat in the way that a Mark Bittman or a Dan Barber might recommend. It is also due, however, to a cultural elitism — a disconnect between food writers and chefs on the one hand, and ordinary middle-class Americans on the other. As Phoebe Malz Bovy puts it in her provocatively titled article, “Food Snobs Like Mark Bittman Aren't Even Hiding Their Elitism Anymore,”

The food movement has officially stopped pretending it has anything useful to offer to anyone with ordinary, or even better-than-ordinary, grocery

options...Elite food writers aren't just out of touch with the working and middle classes. They are out of touch with people who aren't elite food writers. They're oblivious not just to those who struggle to put food on the table, but to those whose jobs don't send them on tours of Paris's finest restaurants.⁵⁹

It is perhaps ironic that she would single out Bittman, given his concerns about the word "foodie" mentioned above, but this is not an isolated critique. There is a widespread sense that, even though Bittman, Barber, Alice Waters, Michael Pollan, and even Wendell Berry are saying wonderful things, beautiful things, things that might even be true, they are so disconnected from the ordinary experience of the ordinary citizen that it is difficult to apply that wisdom into everyday life. A family of four in the suburbs, for instance, in which the husband and wife both work long hours, take kids to youth sporting events, and so on, does not lend itself to traipsing around the farmers market on the weekends, on the hunt for the best arugula.

Moreover, even if the American public had the ability to consider their food this way, what evidence is there to suggest that they would? With all due respect to the notion of "well-raised food," plenty of Americans and international residents alike enjoy food which has been raised industrially, due at least in part to the previously mentioned formative influences of food engineering and marketing which dominate the American foodscape. As a result, as much as food activists might hate to admit it, if you place a Big Mac up against a quinoa salad, the majority of American consumers, if not consumers in general, are taking the burger. To expect these consumers to change their tastes

⁵⁹ Phoebe Malz Bovy, "Food Snobs Like Mark Bittman Aren't Even Hiding Their Elitism Anymore," *The New Republic* March 25th, 2015, accessed June 28th, 2016, <https://newrepublic.com/article/121374/foodie-elitism-are-mark-bittman-and-michael-pollan-elitist>

so rapidly, to be enthusiastic patrons of farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture so rapidly, is too much to ask. What is tasty for a New York chef with a refined palate is not necessarily tasty for a middle class mother in Birmingham, Alabama. As David M. Kaplan argues, taste is not entirely subjective — “People disagree about tastes because there is actually something about their food — not just their experiences -- to disagree about.”⁶⁰ There is also, however, a powerful subjective dimension to taste, one that has meaning, telling us something about the world. This meaning is different for every individual, and if the only acceptable barometers for taste are set by chefs, activists, and food writers, then some tastes will be left behind, and the movement for change will be hindered.

All that being said, however, Slow Food, and the related movements for taste, have a powerful advantage — they appeal not merely to reason or consciousness. This movement appeals, albeit imperfectly as we have seen, to impulses, desires, and tastes, to a deeper level than cognitive understanding or a Kantian sense of duty. When it comes to shaping behavior and action, this approach carries real potential.

The Moral Quandary of Eating Animals

There are two separate issues to consider when considering the question of eating animals, both in the work of Singer and in like-minded vegetarians: the way in which the animal is treated during its life, and the idea of killing to eat it. It is relatively easy to make the argument that much of our industrial food system is categorically unjust, and Singer is hardly alone in standing against it. In the book *The Ethics of What We Eat*, cowritten with Jim Mason, Singer cites an interview given by noted philosopher and

⁶⁰ David M. Kaplan, “Introduction,” in *The Philosophy of Food*, p. 4.

noted critic of animal rights Roger Scruton, in which Scruton mischievously reveals that he named one of the pigs on his farm Singer, and that the sausage which was being enjoyed at the time of the interview came from that very same pig. As Singer points out, the episode “illustrated his (Scruton’s) attitude toward animal rights.”⁶¹ All the same, however, Singer does mention that Scruton is a fierce critic of factory farming, one who has declared, “A true morality of animal welfare ought to begin from the premise that this way of treating animals is wrong.”⁶² Joel Salatin, as well, remarks that if he and his wife Teresa “didn’t know somebody like us, we’d practically be vegetarians too!”⁶³ In standing against factory farming, Singer is joined by a wide range of voices — vegetarian, but also those who eat meat as well.

The point at which Salatin, Scruton, Michael Pollan, and others part company with Singer, however, is in his insistence that consuming even “humanely raised” meat is ethically problematic. To gain a sense of Singer’s view, it is helpful to review his own rebuttals to meat-eaters who wish to defend their practices.⁶⁴ First, Singer confronts those who claim that we have no duties to animals, because they have no duties to us. This line of thinking states that, “if a shark in the ocean or a bear in the woods can attack and kill a human being, then why should humans refrain from killing animals for food?” In answering this claim, Singer again calls upon the marginal cases to illustrate the inconsistent way in which social contract theory is typically applied. If only moral

⁶¹ Singer and Mason, p. 242.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Salatin, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Variations of these arguments appear in several of Singer’s writings. For an accessible, lucid summary, see Singer and Mason, pp. 243-258.

agents are a part of the social contract, and thus are protected by a common morality, where does that place babies or the intellectually disabled? Singer raises the question of future generations, who are also unable to enter into current contracts of morality — do we not have duties to them as well? Regan approaches this question in a similar way, drawing a distinction between moral agents and moral patients. The latter, even if they cannot choose to enter into a social contract, still lay claim to the moral responsibilities of moral agents. They still deserve to have their interests considered.

The second argument which Singer addresses is similar to the first. Singer calls it “the Benjamin Franklin defense,” named after the American founding father who was a vegetarian for many years, until one day, in the company of friends who were fishing, noticed that some of the fish they had caught had eaten other fish. He reasoned, “If you eat one another, I don’t see why we may not eat you.” Franklin admits, in his recounting of the incident, that his reasoning was affected by the fact that the fish already in the frying pan were “beginning to smell admirably well,” and as such, he ate the fish. The crux of the argument as it is applied today is that eating meat is natural, and that to abstain from meat is to attempt to abstain from the very rhythms of nature itself. Singer counters the argument by noting that carnivores who follow their instincts do not choose to eat meat, whereas human beings, in particular human beings in developed societies, have the means to make that choice. Andrew Linzey makes a similar argument from a Christian perspective, arguing that Christians and other like-minded people ought to choose to abstain from killing and eating animals in anticipation of the future age in which the kingdom of God will be made manifest on the earth, a time in which violence of all kinds will be unthinkable. For Linzey, Christians ought to be vegetarians, even if they are in

the minority, in order that they may live as models of what life will look like for all in the peaceful kingdom to come. Of course, Singer does not attach religious eschatology to vegetarianism, but the argument is similar: do not live as the animals live, red in tooth and claw. Deliberately choose a different way to live.

The third argument which Singer attempts to rebut was the one he refers to as the “best defense” for meat eating. It comes primarily from Michael Pollan, who argues that the act of domestication goes both ways. Yes, humans domesticated cows, chickens, and pigs, but a convincing argument can also be made that these species domesticated humanity! An evolutionary mutualism has taken place, which benefits both humans and the domesticated species in question. The humans received a steady food source, while the cows, chickens, and pigs received environments in which the species could flourish, even with the individual members killed by humans for food. This argument is not persuasive when it comes to factory farming, but in a humane setting, Pollan argues, a cow, chicken, or a pig will find the best life they could conceivably hope for, an argument Singer refers to as “The Good Life on the Good Farm.” Salatin, in a memorable phrase, pledges his commitment to “honor the pigness of the pig” in which way he raises them — to let the animal be what it has evolved to be, expressing its natural behaviors. Even though the life of a domesticated animal is cut short, it is still, according to this point of view, a better deal for the animal in question. Singer again quotes Roger Scruton who notes that, while humans “are conscious of their lives as their own, having ambitions, hopes, and aspirations, cows do not. The whole scope of a good life for a cow, by contrast, is the state of their present comforts. There is no fear of missing out

on a long life, or missing out on significant achievements.” So long as the animal is killed humanely, cutting its life short is not a harm to the animal.

In response, Singer again points out that this line of reasoning, for those who put it forward, is acceptable when it relates to animals, but would be absolutely untenable for humans who, for one reason or another, are not moral agents — babies, intellectually disabled adults, etc. The marginal cases, once again, reveal what Singer calls “speciesism” — we treat these animals this way because they are animals and we are people. This is our desire, it is what we want to do, and as a result we create rational justifications which will allow us to pursue our interests without being ethically burdened.

Peter Singer is an able advocate for vegetarianism, and his work represents a stirring call for justice on behalf of a truly voiceless population — the billions of animals killed for food every year. Vegetarianism has long been associated, either in celebration or derision, with moral fervor, and the desire to do good. There is an inherent idealism in the act of abstaining from food to achieve a desired ethical outcome, one which often engenders respect. As with other cases of idealism, however, the charge that advocates for vegetarianism frequently face is tenability, particularly on a large scale. It is ok for a small group of true believers to be vegetarian, the critique goes, but you will never get large numbers to sign on with the program. It is “normal,” culturally, and also biologically, for societies to raise and consume herbivores.

How is it normal biologically? Meat advocates such as Salatin and Allan Savory point to the extraordinary amount of tillage that would need to occur in order to feed large numbers of people vegetarian diets, and, as Oregon State animal scientist Steve Davis pointed out, the death of animals, as field mice, moles in the harvesting process.

All told, they conclude, herbivores on pasture is more tenable from an ecological perspective than is intensive tillage of vegetarian staples such as soy. This line of thought is hotly contested by Singer, George Monbiot, and a host of others, who counter by citing the exorbitant amount of land, energy, and water that it takes to produce a calorie of meat, noting that plants take significantly less of each to produce. They also note the disturbing trend of “desertification” — land which is becoming desert — and point the finger at overgrazing as a central cause.

Finally, how do we determine what is historically normal? Even if raising herbivores on pasture for meat has been a “normal” cultural element of the agricultural period, that does not make it the “normal” diet for humanity at every stage of its development, “paleo” diets which promise huge amounts of meat consumption notwithstanding. If meat-eating is, however, inextricably linked with the “problem of agriculture,” in Wes Jackson’s phrasing, will vegetarianism ever be more than a protest movement while the age of agriculture persists? For the vast majority of the global population, death is a part of eating. Entire food cultures have grown up around the idea of killing animals for food. As agrarian Norman Wirzba puts it, “Death is eating’s steadfast accomplice.”⁶⁵ American food culture, such as it is, is certainly no exception. Singer can sneer at the triviality of our personal palates and tastes, but those “trivial” desires are installed, over time, and below the level of conscious thought. They will not be given up easily.

Finding the Pathway

One thing which unites the issues in this chapter, and the thinkers associated with them, is their capacity to paint a compelling picture of what our relationship to food

⁶⁵ Wirzba, p. 1.

could be. There is a reason, for example, why the agrarian ideal — rolling fields, picturesque barnhouses, and “happy cows” — is used to advertise everything from Chipotle Mexican Grill to Dodge Trucks and even to dating services. It provides a compelling image which still captivates large portions of the population. In the same way, these thinkers are not simply making cognitive arguments, but appealing to the emotions and desires of their readers. It bears repeating, however, that all of the voices in this chapter, and indeed anyone who challenges the industrial food system described in the previous chapter, remains a voice in the wilderness, taking a minority position from which to critique the dominant paradigm. Even with the enormity of the gains made by the organic, local, and vegetarian movements, just to name a few, these are all overwhelmingly minority positions. Organic food, perhaps the most successful of these alternative food categories (and as we’ve seen, “organic” contains within it a great deal of variation), accounts for about four percent of total US food sales, according to statistics released by the USDA in 2015.⁶⁶ Now, the growth of the organic market, and of the alternative food movement in general, is cause for celebration. It will inevitably hit a ceiling, however, if it does not reckon with the dominant tastes of the American public, which have a way of becoming the dominant tastes of the global market. It may seem an easy thing to shift our desires for certain types of food in light of new information received, or a new emotional epiphany, but our taste for food is not determined by the information we process cognitively, nor the emotions which we associate with certain types of food. They play a role, of course, but the role is subservient in relation to the role of our habits — the way

⁶⁶ “Organic Market Overview,” *USDA*, accessed June 28th, 2016, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/natural-resources-environment/organic-agriculture/organic-market-overview.aspx>

we eat food without even thinking about what we are doing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the industrial food system is not merely making food efficient and available — it is conditioning consumers to eat in a certain way, which will be most profitable for the food companies themselves. The consumer's tastes are being shaped so much that they can be pursued below the level of conscious thought. By appealing to logic, or justice, or any other emotional value, those who advocate for the alternative food system are still appealing to the conscious mind.

CHAPTER 4 RATIONALITY AND DESIRE

The movements surveyed in the previous chapter are inspiring, and they have provided a platform for authors and speakers to articulate an attractive, winsome vision for what eating can be, marked by the ideals of justice, connection with nature, and good food. However, as we saw, there are elements in these movements which will ultimately limit their effectiveness. The elements present differently in each movement, but they can be grouped into two central approaches: First, there is a focus on changing individual eating patterns by way of instituting “rules,” based upon an “eat this, not that” approach. Get the consumer to swap out the conventional food for organic food, and all will be well. Second, there is a dramatic underselling of that which would prevent the sorts of changes needed in order to build an ethical food system. Tell the consumer to simply change their entire way of eating - What could be simpler? What both of these approaches share is a view of humanity as a predominantly rational, making decisions and changing behavior based upon conscious thought. This, however, is a flat picture of humanity, as rationality is only one element in behavioral change. Understanding the mental processes which lead to the formation of habits, including the role of the adaptive subconscious, will be critical in thinking about our ethical anthropology, and how we can feasibly pursue a better way of eating. This chapter will examine all of this, ultimately concluding that virtue, a way of behavioral change which operates at the level of habit and the alteration of desire, is a potentially fertile way forward in the field of food ethics.

The Problem with Rationalist Approaches to Food Ethics

As we saw in the previous two chapters, altering the choices of individual consumers counts very little in the face of overwhelming systemic pressures. This is true for all forms of social change, but food is particularly immune to this sort of approach, because foods are often chosen and consumed under the radar of consciousness, and also because the “good” alternatives face an unyielding pressure to become more like the “bad” ones, in order to keep up in terms of scale and pricing. “Organic” and “local” have hence become watered down versions of their former selves, virtually indistinguishable in some places from their conventional counterparts. As James Davison Hunter argues, cultures are embedded in structures of power, and when those power structures are challenged ineffectually, then those who do the challenging are the ones who have power exerted upon them. This is not to say that there is no good which can be done - not at all. When Wal-Mart and other major producers, for example, include organic lines of their products, and provide greater amounts of shelf space for organic product in their stores, these are certainly good results. Are they good enough to change the nature of American eating in a manner sufficient to achieve significantly higher levels of sustainability? It does not seem so.

The “Eat This, Not That” approach lacks the strength to produce transformational change chiefly due to its focus upon the individual eater - or, more precisely, its very modern propensity to treat the eater as an isolated individual. The American food system caters to the ideal of individual choice, customization, and ultimately, autonomy. Carried to its extreme, this ideal has an atomizing effect, encouraging the habit of dining alone, or, if dining with other people, doing it in such a way so as to maintain individual autonomy (ordering your own food at a restaurant, for example.) This individualism is

certainly not limited to food; Robert D. Putnam¹, among many others, has marked the increasing individualism in American life, the corresponding loss of social capital, and the resultant decline of civic institutions such as, in Putnam's archetypical example, bowling leagues. While the number of bowlers has increased dramatically, the number of bowling leagues declined precipitously.

It is true that some of the visions laid out in the previous chapter (Berry and Pettrini in particular) have strong communal elements to them, and really do not make sense apart from the context of other people. In an individualistic culture, however, it becomes exceedingly difficult for their ideas to gain traction. If Putnam and others are right, the level of communal involvement needed to sustain a bowling league - let alone an alternative food system - is in short supply. According to *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, this is due, at least in part, to a widespread lack of communal trust. In a column titled "The Avalanche of Distrust," Brooks notes, "A generation ago about half of all Americans felt they could trust the people around them, but now less than a third think other people are trustworthy."² If American individualism is fueled, at least in part, by rising levels of distrust and cynicism, it is hard to see how the sorts of local food economies championed by Dahlberg, Berry and Pettrini could possibly flourish, no matter how many individuals choose the organic option at the grocery store.

¹ His famous work in this vein was *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York:Touchstone Books, 2001).

² David Brooks, "The Avalanche of Distrust," *The New York Times*. September 13th, 2016, accessed October 1st, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/13/opinion/the-avalanche-of-distrust.html?_r=0

The Problem with Ignoring the Effects of Culture

The second approach is similar to the first, in that it also designates cognitive decision making as the path to significant change. However, where the first attempts to minimize the effects of the change - with “good” food which was produced a lot like “bad” food - the second calls for profound, systemic changes in eating, while underestimating that which would prevent those changes from occurring. It assumes that, presented with the correct information, consumers will make the changes being asked of them as a matter of consequence. Peter Singer is often guilty of this in his writings, incredulously wondering how consumers could let the trappings of culture keep them from becoming vegetarians, even after he has laid out a massive ethical framework explaining why vegetarianism is the most moral option. Singer’s arguments are impressive, of course, and that cognitive element can spur changes in behavior. The process is far from linear, however, and what often ends up happening is that the changes, which represent a profound break from the previous ways of eating, lack staying power, and the individual falls back into old dietary habits and patterns before too long. That which was trivially dismissed as “culture” ended up shaping patterns of behavior in a more powerful, long lasting way than did well-reasoned argumentation.

The Problem of the “Nudge”

Both of the previous approaches rely on a rationalist understanding of behavior and behavior modification. Elements of both have been made manifest in the attempts of governments to modify the behavior of their constituents, by way of what Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler call the “nudge.”³ By changing the laws, the argument goes,

³ Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

governments can “nudge” individuals towards better thoughts, and, ultimately, better behaviors. Some have suggested that, in light of the individualism and decline of communal institutions previously described, the “nudge” of government is all that remains to improve individual behavior for the better.

Altering behavior through administrative fiat, however, runs the risk of drifting into paternalism or, at the very least, engendering animosity from those on the receiving end of the “nudge.” A famous example of this is the controversy over the “soda tax” that then New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed in 2012 as a way to combat obesity. Even though the tax was small, and his motives were (ostensibly) good, the pushback was fierce, as Bloomberg was commonly depicted as a power-hungry nanny who wanted nothing more than to meddle in the private lives of New York City residents. On June 26th, 2014, the New York Court of Appeals ruled that the New York City Board of Health, in adopting the measure, exceeded the scope of its regulatory authority, and so struck it down. Soda taxes have been adopted, however, in Berkeley, California, and in Philadelphia, with more to come, and early reports out of Berkeley seem to indicate that soda consumption indeed fell after the tax was implemented, particularly when compared to soda consumption in neighboring Oakland and San Francisco.⁴

Questions remain, however, about the government’s ability to “legislate morality” - that is, to regulate behavior based upon a notion of the good. Some have questioned whether such an approach compromises the free choice of individuals. Others question

⁴ Dan Charles, “Berkeley’s Soda Tax Appears to Cut Consumption of Sugary Drinks,” *NPR*, August 23rd, 2016, accessed October 14th, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/08/23/491104093/berkeleys-soda-tax-appears-to-cut-consumption-of-sugary-drinks>

the efficacy of these sorts of behavior taxations, pointing out that a soda tax, for instance, can never truly produce a civic victory, as it will be either be a victory for revenue and a defeat for right behavior (if people continue to drink soda) or it will be a victory in behavioral modification and a defeat for revenue (if people avoid soda for non-taxed alternatives.) Lastly, there is the fact that this is a regressive tax - soda taxes and taxes on other highly processed inexpensive foods disproportionately fall onto the poor and marginalized, because they are the ones who consume these types of foods disproportionately. These taxes are recent innovations, which means that there is not enough data to state definitively that they will work or they will not work. It is fair to say, however, that this is a consequentialist response to the problem - it does not address the desires for the soda in the first place. It is also a law imposed from the top down, which often engenders resentment from those who are not already sympathetic to the idea in question, canceling out any positive effects of the action.

Whether the proponent for a better way of doing things is a philosopher such as Peter Singer, or a politician such as Michael Bloomberg, they would be wise not to underestimate the level of attachment people have to their prior ways of operating, including their prior ways of eating food. This is particularly true if the change being presented is dramatic or severe. Rationality, emotions, and also subconscious processes all go into making us human beings, so it is only natural that they would go into forming our desires for food, and our habits in consuming that food. In order for the food system to be changed on a large scale, every element of our humanity will need to be accounted for.

Ethical Anthropology

In her book *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World*,

Anna Peterson writes,

To say that ethics are intimately connected to ideas about what it means to be human suggests that understandings of what humans ought to be or do rest, almost always, on ideas about what human beings are: individualistic or social, rational or emotional, violent or peaceful, biologically or socially constructed, among countless other possibilities.⁵

All ethical claims rest on an assumption, sometimes stated and sometimes not, about what humans fundamentally are, and this has implications not only in regards in what humans ought to do, but specifically in the nature of instruction for behavioral change. Understanding these assumptions is not all that is needed, as Peterson herself points out, but it is a vital piece in the process of constructing an informed food ethic. Or, as Peterson phrases it, “Thus, we had better understand what our humanness means to us if we hope to change the ways we live in this world.”⁶

With all of this in mind, what is the ethical anthropology of the various food movements listed in the previous chapter? Even though these movements challenge the modern industrial food system, they are making this challenge while still being largely geared toward the same modernist anthropology which animates the industrial food system, in which the human is portrayed in Cartesian terms - utterly rational, governed exclusively by conscious thought, and individually sovereign. In this understanding, “peo-

⁵ Anna Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 2.

⁶ Ibid, p 4.

ple are rational agents who set goals and pursue them intelligently by using the information and resources at their disposal,”⁷ in Jonathan Haidt’s words. This ideal of individualized, rational agency, “I think, therefore I am,” has been the dominant anthropology since the Enlightenment, and in incorporating arguments in line with its ethos, the food reformers are attempting, in Audre Lorde’s oft-quoted phrase, to dismantle the master’s house by using the master’s tools. In order to illustrate the dominance of the human-as-rational-agent paradigm, it is worth a brief pause to look at how these developments came about, before exploring how this modernist perspective has influenced views on food, even amongst those who would see significant changes in those views.

John Locke, the Social Contract, and Rational Agency

The ancient philosophers - Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and others - saw the objective of ethics as the pursuit of the good life. This was a communal “good” - the foremost “good” being discussed in Aristotle’s case, for instance, was that of the city, and how the individual could contribute to that good. His “good” was summarized by the term “eudaimonia.” This was the highest goal of humanity, for Aristotle, and he posited virtue as the way to get to it. Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas joined the streams of Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy together, to form the “Thomistic synthesis.” Aquinas used Aristotle’s conception of the virtues, but added three more to the equation – faith, hope, and love, the predominantly Christian expressions of virtue. He also modified Aristotle’s conception of telos, arguing that the ultimate end to strive for, even more than happiness, was that of God Himself. This was the ultimate goal, the ultimate end for Aquinas.

⁷ Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 3.

The Thomistic synthesis held sway through the Middle Ages, but with the advent of the Reformation and the Renaissance, radically different views of the “good” began to stake their claim. (These dissenting voices had always been there, many would argue, but had been muffled by the power structures which allowed the schemes of Aristotle, Aquinas, et al to flourish.) In any case, big changes were coming in the field of ethics, and they began with Descartes, whose method famously involved doubting everything which had come previously in the field of philosophy, and relying only upon what could be conclusively proven by logic. In this light, the old notions of the “good life,” which couldn’t be proven in this way, seemed quaint and out of date. Reason was the force to be reckoned with in philosophy now.

It was in this context that the work of Hobbes and Locke emerged, and the birth of the social contract. Whereas the ancient thinkers had believed that society was a natural entity, much like a human body (hence expressions like the “body politic,”) and as a result was meant to operate in a certain way - in accordance with natural law, eudaimonia, or some other organizing framework - the social contract thinkers saw society as an artifice, constructed as a way to deal with the competing interests of its members. In Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, for instance, there is no shared conception of the good life in accordance with nature. Rather, there was the war of “all against all,” and life that was “nasty, poor, solitary, brutish, and short.” So, Hobbes reasons, in order to keep us all from killing each other, let’s begin to think about our rights, and how we can give them over to a strong governing body, in order that we may survive.

Hobbes was far too radical to gain a wide following in his time, but he laid the groundwork for thinkers such as John Locke to build upon. Locke’s state of nature is

much kinder and gentler than Hobbes' version, but he still argues for a social contract as the most efficacious way for humans to protect and exercise their rights to "life, liberty, and property." This was, as thinkers such as Matthew B. Crawford point out, a reaction against the ancient understanding of natural hierarchies in society, with the sovereign being categorically different from those over whom he ruled. The sovereign was the son of God, either symbolically or at least metaphorically, and as such, the sovereign's reign was to be unquestioned. Locke, in response, argues instead for a "state of nature," in which there is no recognized authority, save for the ones in whom the individuals in the state of nature consent to give their allegiance to. In such a state, one carries the full burden of self-responsibility, and relies on their own Reason in order to discover the world as it actually exists. As Locke himself writes, "The floating of other men's opinions in our brains makes us not a jot more knowing, though they happen to be true."⁸ Instead of one dominant vision of the "good life" for the body politic, the field of ethics soon became primarily about thinking through the natural rights of the individual, which, for Locke, even entailed the ability to rebel against ruling governments which curtailed those natural rights. Obviously, Locke's work was extremely useful for Thomas Jefferson and the American revolutionaries, and America today is built on the foundation of Locke's ideas, and is built upon the foundation of individual Reason as the most effective way to maximize human potential.

It is not difficult to see how the industrial food system coheres to the anthropology of rational agency. American eaters strive to be autonomous individuals, who independently choose what they want to eat, in accordance with the sort of lives that they

⁸ quoted in Crawford, p. 121.

want to lead. Hence, efficiency, abundance, and individuality come to the fore and become the pillars around which the system is organized. However, those who would critique the dominant paradigm also appeal to our individualized autonomy, our ability to consciously choose, albeit in the service of fighting for a system which is more just and environmentally beneficent. Even something like the local food movement, which was based and built upon community participation and warm feelings toward home, is often promoted as an individual, conscious choice - with no interference from anything which could affect the act of choosing. The choice is put to the individual - choose this better way of eating! - and the assumption is that the individual will choose it calmly, rationally, replacing one way of eating for a better one. This is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that the vehicles by which these values are transmitted - the book, the lecture, the documentary - are designed to convey ideas in precisely this modern manner. The one reading the book or taking in the lecture is usually alone, or surrounded by strangers in a lecture hall, and the part of her faculties which are most consistently engaged are the cognitive, intellectual ones. This mindset is also manifested in the common belief that education, the bolstering of Reason, is the primary weapon, or even the only one, in the battle to banish primitive desires, and to eradicate evils such as racism, sexism, and so on. In order to do better, this approach argued, all you have to do is think better. Of course, this idea is far older than even Descartes - stories about the gift of divine reason delivering humanity from primitive passions and desires go back to ancient Greek mythology and the tale of Prometheus, but it is an idea which is particularly relevant, even today, for American audiences, as so much of the American identity is based and built upon the solitary rational agent, making the world bend to the power of his will.

Challenging the Rationalist Position

The challenges to this perspective, it should be noted, are nearly as old as the perspective itself. It was challenged by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, in which he wrote,

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.⁹

In more recent times, environmental ethicists, for example, have put forward similar arguments, demonstrating clearly that there is no straight line between the cognitive understanding of a situation and a change in behavior in line with that understanding.

To quote Peterson once again,

The paradox of modern environmentalism is that while pro- environmental values have become mainstream in the U.S. and many other parts of the world, anti-environmental practices continue to escalate. In survey after survey, large majorities of Americans identify themselves as environmentalists. This diffusion of environmental values, however, is rarely connected to changes in individual behavior or social structures.¹⁰

Arun Agarwal¹¹, Jim Cheney, and Anthony Weston¹² have also written on this conundrum, and what is true is environmental ethics also shows itself to be true in food ethics: knowing about food, and what makes one food system better than another, does not

⁹ Romans 7:15-19, NRSV translation.

¹⁰ Anna Peterson, "Toward a Materialist Environmentalist Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 28 (2006): 375-393.

¹¹ Arun Agarwal, "Environmentality, Community, Intimate Government, and the Making of Environmental Subjects in Kumaon, India." *Current Anthropology* 46 (2005): 161-190.

¹² Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston, "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette: Toward an Ethics-Based Epistemology," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 115-134.

guarantee that the consumer will eat in accordance with that better approach. Cheney and Weston, in fact, argue for what they call “ethics-based epistemology,” rather than “epistemology-based ethics.” The latter approach assumes we can know the right course of action and then impose that paradigm upon the world we find ourselves in, purely by the force of our own will. By contrast, in espousing the former approach, Cheney and Weston argue for practices as a way of learning about the world we inhabit, and an ethics which is nimble and flexible enough to adapt to the world as we find it, not as we imagine it to be.

This is not to say that epistemology is unimportant, of course, but it is rather to argue for a sort of epistemological modesty, one in which “we know what we don't know.” There are forces at work which collude against human reason, and also lie beyond its grasp. Any anthropology which pretends otherwise, which ignores the formative influence of practice, or social contexts, and the processes of the mind which take place beyond the control of our conscious understanding, in the part of the brain Timothy D. Wilson labels the “adaptive subconscious,”¹³ is a truncated anthropology. It does not fully capture how human beings make decisions, does not take into account everything which is involved in the process, and is therefore not fully reliable as the foundation for a food ethic.

Descartes' Error, Emotion, and the Limits of Rational Agency

Beyond St. Paul and environmental ethicists, some of the stiffest challenges to the Cartesian paradigm have arisen from what has been called “the cognitive revolution.” This revolution challenged the paradigm, dominant since Descartes, which posited

¹³ Timothy D. Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Subconscious* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004).

a sharp division between the mind from the body, and also the primacy of conscious, rational thought, to the exclusion of subconscious thought processes. One of the seminal texts in this challenge of Descartes is neurologist Antonio Damasio's 1994 book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. In it, Damasio argues that emotions, and the bodily processes which are responsible for so many of them, are indispensable for all sorts of decision making, and they are inescapably intertwined with cognitive reason when it comes to decision making processes. He puts forward what he calls the "somatic marker hypothesis," which argues, as author David Brooks summarizes it, that "emotions measure the value of something, and help unconsciously guide us as we navigate through life - away from things that are likely to lead to pain and toward things that are likely to lead to fulfillment."¹⁴

Brooks builds on Damasio's point by relating the story of Elliot, a patient treated by Damasio whose story, in Brook's words, "has become one of the most famous in the world of brain research." Elliott was a man who had a tumor removed from the prefrontal section of his brain, damaging some frontal lobe tissue in the process. As a result, his personality changed quickly and dramatically. Brooks summarizes his story thus:

Elliot was intelligent, well-informed, and diplomatic. He possessed an attractively wry view of the world. But, after surgery, Elliot began to have trouble managing his day. Whenever he tried to accomplish something, he'd ignore the most important parts of the task and get sidetracked by trivial distractions. At work he'd set out to file some reports, but then would sit down and just start reading them. He'd spend an entire day trying to decide on a filing system. He'd spend hours deciding where to have lunch, and still couldn't settle on a place. He made foolish investments that cost

¹⁴ David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011), p. 19.

him his life savings. He divorced his wife, married a woman his family disapproved of, and quickly divorced again. In short, he was incapable of making sensible choices.¹⁵

Upon intensive study, Damasio came to realize that Elliot never showed emotion, in fact was incapable of it, even when shown traumatic images designed to produce fear or horror. His capacity for emotion was compromised in the brain surgery he underwent, and as a result, “his decision-making landscape was hopelessly flat,” in Damasio’s words.¹⁶

Damasio’s research shows the importance of emotion in making decisions, in dealing with and responding to the stimuli of life, and reacting accordingly. However, emotions can often exacerbate the tensions present in logical disagreements, thus making dialogue much more challenging, particularly if their presence in the debate is not registered and accounted for. This is demonstrated, I would argue, in the controversy over genetically modified foods, and specifically the tension which exists between opponents of GMOs and representatives of “science.” Both sides of the debate wish to use logic as a means of swaying the other, but, as anyone who has followed the controversy can see, the logical arguments are built upon foundations which rely more on emotion and loyalty than upon cold reason and impartiality. GMO advocates take their opponents as affronts to “science,” while GMO opponents use imagery such as “Frankenfood” to conjure negative emotions in their hearers. This is surely a complicating variable in the work of any philosopher or ethicist who thinks about the nature of the food system and how we eat, given that so much of their task revolves around logic and cognitive prowess, but this is a hurdle which must be negotiated nonetheless. In order to

¹⁵ Brooks, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ quoted in Brooks, p. 18.

move forward, ethicists must realize that emotions play a vital role in any discussion about food and choosing one way of eating over another. Again, this is what makes, for example, Peter Singer's disparagement of tastes and palettes as "trivial" problematic. In treating tastes as things which can and should be easily discarded in light of a compelling logical argument, Singer ignores this facet of human decision-making, and his argument suffers as a result. Our desires, including our desires for certain types of food, are not trivial. They cannot be vanquished merely by a better way of thinking.

The Adaptive Subconscious

Beyond reason and emotion, there is an even deeper level in the human psyche which has been shown to be indispensable in the decision-making process. At this level, subconscious processes in the brain are present, which lie beyond humanity's conscious capacity to access them. There is a conscious mind, of course, but there is also the "adaptive unconscious," to use Wilson's phrase, working below the level of conscious cognition. The analogy which Wilson uses to demonstrate the relationship of the conscious to the adaptive subconscious is that of the President of the United States and the vast governmental organization which the President oversees. Wilson writes,

In this conception, there is a vast network of agencies, aides, cabinet officers, and support staff who work out of view of the president. This is the adaptive unconscious, and a smooth-running government could not exist without it. There is simply too much for one person to try to do, and a president could not function without his or her many (nonconscious) agencies operating out of view. The president is in charge of this vast network, setting policy, making the major decisions, and intervening when serious problems arise. Clearly, consciousness plays a crucial function in these activities. The adaptive unconscious is subservient to consciousness (the president) and reports to it. At the same time, the president who becomes too out of touch is in trouble. If he or she is ignorant of what is occurring

out of sight (lacking in self-insight) then the agencies of the adaptive unconscious may start to make decisions that are contrary to the wishes of the president.¹⁷

Jonathan Haidt describes this same phenomenon using the memorable image of the elephant and its rider, with the latter being the conscious mind, and the former the adaptive unconscious mind. As Haidt puts it,

I'm holding the reins in my hands, and by pulling one way or the other, I can tell the elephant to turn, stop, or go. I can direct things, but only when the elephant does not have desires of its own. When the elephant really wants to do something, I am no match for him."¹⁸

The work of these theorists represents, in some ways, a return to St. Paul, and the idea that there are forces at work in the person which can easily subvert the conscious will. What makes the work of these theorists especially significant, however, is their insistence that not only do known emotions and impulses affect our actions, but so also do processes of the mind which the human has no way of seeing, and hence often no knowledge of whatsoever. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Wilson references a study¹⁹ which he conducted with Richard Nisbett in which they attempted to show the limits of humanity's understandings of why we make the decisions we do. They set up a display table in a retail store with a sign which read, "Customer evaluation survey - which is the best quality?" Upon that table they arranged four pairs of panty hose, labeled A, B, C, and D from left to right. Wilson and Nisbett noticed that consumers showed a marked preference for the items on the right side of the table, C and D, in a clear demonstration of what they call a "position effect." When Wilson and Nisbett asked the consumers why

¹⁷ Wilson, p. 46.

¹⁸ Haidt, p. 4.

¹⁹ Wilson, p. 103.

they made the decisions they did, all but one were completely oblivious to the influence of where the panty-hose was positioned on the table. They pointed to an attribute of the pair they chose — knit, elasticity, etc — as the key factor in their decision-making process, even though all four pairs were absolutely identical. This is an exercise Wilson refers to as “confabulation,” and it appears to be a constant element in many of the decisions human beings make. Instead of using logic as a basis to make decisions, Wilson argues, confabulation involves making a decision (via non-conscious processes) and then making a logical argument to justify the action which already occurred. Following an argument made by David Hume long ago, Wilson argues that, in several occasions, the reason does not steer the passions; in fact it is often, in Hume’s words, their “slave.” Even in decisions which appear to stem entirely from the conscious mind, non-conscious processes are doing much of the work beyond our notice. In Haidt’s imagery, the elephant moves, and then the rider explains how it was all a part of the plan.

The place in which the subconscious of the consumer is directly engaged perhaps more than anywhere else, with the possible exception of the casino, is the supermarket. Every detail in the supermarket has been meticulously thought through by what Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein call “choice architects,” which they define simply as “those who organize the context in which we make decisions.”²⁰ The choice architects do this with one central goal in mind - to get consumers to purchase more food. Author Michael Moss, fittingly, calls this process a “seduction,” suggesting that cognitive capacity is not the most important element in the decision-making process. He writes,

Some of the tricks being used are subtle, and awareness is key: the gentle canned music; the in-store bakery aromas; the soft drink coolers by the

²⁰ Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, “Designing Better Choices,” *The Los Angeles Times* April 2nd, 2008, accessed October 1st, 2016, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/opinion/oe-thalerandsunstein2>

checkout lanes; the placement of some of the most profitable but worst-for-you foods at eye level, with healthier staples like whole wheat flour or plain oats on the lowest shelf and the fresh fruits and vegetables way off on one side of the store.²¹

The extent to which the grocery store experience has been made to align with psychological insights about why humans make the choices they do is downright unnerving. The Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University reports the results of a study²² in which they measured the level of eye-contact between the spokes-characters of children's cereal with the parents of the children, and with the children themselves. They found that the children's cereals tended to be placed in the bottom two shelves of an aisle, and that, indeed, there was a statistically significant phenomenon of the gaze of the characters on the cereal box directly meeting the gaze of the child walking down the aisle in the grocery store. Did the eye contact matter? In the second part of the study, the researchers determined that, in their words, "participants in the direct eye-contact condition felt more connected to the brand and were more likely to choose that box over competing brands."²³ The reliance on non-cognitive aspects of decision making process such as the bond fostered by eye contact, not to mention the focus of the food companies on minors, led the researchers to warn against exploiting children "who are especially vulnerable to influence." The exploitation, however, is hard to argue, given the nature of what the researchers were studying. It does reveal, however, that if humanity relies solely on its ability to use rational thought processes to discern and then act upon

²¹ Moss, p. 346.

²² Aviva Musicus, Aner Tal, and Brian Wansink, "Eyes in the Aisles: Why is Cap'n Crunch Looking Down at My Child?" *Environment & Behavior* 47 (2014): 715-733.

²³ *Ibid.*

the right way of acting, and does not pay attention to the non-rational cues which it is constantly subjected to in the modern industrial food system, then an ethical food system will be impossible to reach, as consumers will only move in accordance with the food makers who are pulling the puppet strings, not acting out of freedom but rather servility.

Overestimating Our Abilities

The television show *American Idol* (2002-2016) has made a great deal of money from humanity's lack of self-awareness and propensity to exaggerate their capacities. During the first few weeks of every season, the judges of the reality show would face a cavalcade of aspiring pop singers. Some would be quite talented, progressing to the next rounds. Others, however, would be absolutely dreadful, even though they believed themselves to be otherwise, and hence were absolutely crushed when Simon Cowell and the other judges would savage their performances. They were convinced that stardom was inevitable...but clearly were not able to view their own abilities (or lack thereof) realistically.

What was true for *American Idol* is largely true for humanity as a whole - we have a consistent tendency of exaggerating our abilities and downplaying our deficiencies. As David Dunning, Chip Heath, and Jerry M. Suls put it,

In general, people's self-views hold only a tenuous to modest relationship with their actual behavior and performance...On average, people say that they are "above average" in skill (a conclusion that defies statistical possibility), overestimate the likelihood that they will engage in desirable behaviors and achieve favorable outcomes, furnish overly optimistic estimates of when they will complete future projects, and reach judgments with too much confidence.²⁴

²⁴ David Dunning, Chip Heath, and Jerry M. Suls, "Flawed Self-Assessment: Implications for Health, Education, and the Workplace," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 5 (2004): 69-106.

People believe themselves to be better than the norm in all facets of life. Ninety-four percent of college professors believe themselves to do above-average work. Motorcyclists believe they are less likely to cause an accident than a typical motorcycle rider. Business leaders are overly sanguine about their leadership abilities, interpersonal abilities, and the long term fortunes of their businesses. Finally, and perhaps fittingly, people even state that they are more likely than their peers to provide accurate self-assessments that are uncontaminated by bias.²⁵ Most people, then, appear to be mildly delusional - unaware of the factors which can complicate or even sabotage their choices, actions, and behaviors. In fact, as Wilson notes, studies have been done in which perfect strangers predicted the actions and behaviors of subjects better than they predicted themselves. It is indeed important to “know thyself,” as the ancient Greeks exhorted, and this includes knowing ourselves in relation to food. It is, however, also important, critically so, to understand that knowing ourselves is a great deal more difficult than it is often let on to be.

Avoiding Idealistic Utopias in Food

All of this suggests that, for anyone interested in food ethics, there is real danger in overestimating the human capacity to diagnose patterns of eating, and to choose better ones. We need to understand that the forces allied against a food system which is more environmentally beneficent are considerable, both outside and within the person, and hence, we should be wary of thinking that humans can overcome these forces sheerly by the strength of their own cognitive capacities. This is perhaps why so many Americans' experience with food is tinged with ambivalence. Ask consumers to describe

²⁵ Ibid.

their perfect meal, and it probably involves cooking, it probably involves loved ones, and it probably involves food which is physically and psychologically satisfying. If a researcher was to hypothesize about the consumers' perception of an ideal meal based solely on actions - purchases, time allotted, etc - the meal would look rather different. The food would probably be pre-cooked and processed, and the eater would probably be alone. Once again, ideals become frustrated by reality. Theologians might be tempted to insert a word about the concept of sin at this point, attributing the fallibility of humanity's conscious processes to our rebellion against God, and our propensity to set ourselves up as God instead. You don't have to accept the theological ramifications of the doctrine of sin, however, to accept the notion of sin, defined by New York Times columnist David Brooks as "our perverse tendency to f*** things up" by way of "favoring the short term over the long term, the lower over the higher." Or as Christian theologian and public intellectual Reinhold Niebuhr liked to say, the idea of original sin is "the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith."²⁶ If we are the sort of people who have this bent, then it becomes possible to see why the high visions of food and eating laid out by reformers such as Berry and Singer either fall on deaf ears, or are admired, but not acted upon. By and large, American consumers are not the sort of people who can enact their visions, or the sort of people who would want to enact them even if it were possible to do so.

Even if one is not willing to use the word "sin" in the description of the problems in the food system (it is a terribly loaded word, after all) the idea that humans will chase impulses and desires to the detriment of comprehensive visions of the good with which

²⁶ This quote is often attributed to Niebuhr himself, but he didn't actually compose the line. He was citing a British author in a London newspaper, as Niebuhr himself was always quick to acknowledge.

those desires conflict is not implausible, and the human relation to most things, including food, is rife with ambiguity and ambivalence. Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar give a fascinating example²⁷ of what happened when a particular people group were faced with the choice between a life marked by beautiful physical surroundings and a healthy relationship with the natural world on the one hand, and personal freedom and autonomy on the other. They undertake what they call a “subaltern history” of people living the northern Indian province of Rajasthan in the 1930s through the 1950s, and even though it seems as far removed from the modern American food system as one could possibly get, there is much to learn here. The time period under review in Gold and Gujar’s book was a time of kings and princes, and the scholars provide a rich account of the difficulties of life for the subaltern people under their rule, including forced labor and exorbitant taxation. It was also a time of environmental conservation, however, as royal figures took pains to ensure that their lands were verdant and healthy. It was, additionally, a time of community bonding and connection to place.

After the time of the kings and princes was replaced by a form of democracy which allowed for a measure of personal autonomy for the people, the forced labor and the arbitrary taxation disappeared, but so did the trees, as land was transformed into farmland by land reforms passed into law democratically. The connection to place also disappeared, as the care for the land spearheaded by the rulers gave way to a hesitance on the part of anyone to claim responsibility for the common places. The tragedy of the commons reared its ugly head once again. Finally, Gold and Gujar found in their interviews that the sense of community which used to bond the people together had

²⁷ Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

given way to atomized individualism. For these people, the subjects of Gold and Gujar's study, the world had changed in a dramatic way.

From the outside looking in, it would be natural to suppose that the nature of the change for these residents was negative. The loss of natural beauty, connection to place, and community? Those are significant losses, to say the least. However, Gold and Gujar are emphatic in their insistence that, despite all of this, the residents they interviewed would not choose to go back to that previous life. The residents acknowledge the losses, and they mourn those losses, but the freedoms they have acquired have, in their eyes, outweighed the costs. The book ends with individuals planting trees, trying to rectify the environmental damage which has been done, but still within the framework of individual freedom and choice. Again, while we probably do not want to label the choices of these people as "sin," we must take note of the fact that the desire for individual autonomy is powerful, often more powerful than any cognitive understanding of a communal, environmentally beneficent existence.

Humility...or Fatalism?

The need for epistemological modesty, of "knowing what we don't know," combined with an awareness of the human proclivity for hubris and degradation, makes humility an essential asset when thinking about the nature of the food system and the way we eat. Even if all of the misinformation which surrounds food in the American system were cleared away, even if the consumer knew exactly what they were eating - how the animal had been treated, how the food was manipulated in the laboratory, how the marketers were attempting to create an emotional connection with that particular food - the scope of the change in actual habit and practice would not be so large as advocates

would like to think. Humility also suggests that the beautiful, winsome pictures of alternative food systems posited by Berry, et al, while captivating and inspiring, will all, inevitably, run up against reality, and the confluence of forces working against those visions. The problem is not, ultimately, in the corruption of institutions, or in the lack of beneficent ones, but in human nature. As the Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn famously puts it in *The Gulag Archipelago*,

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?²⁸

In any conception of food ethics, then, there must be an element of chastening, of understanding that our best laid plans will often go astray, and that even those who fight for the good must check their motives and their goals regularly, to avoid falling into hubris, and ultimately into error.

If Niebuhr, Brooks, et al, are right, however, and the human story is ultimately a tragic one (or at least rife with tragic elements), then how is fatalism to be avoided? Or, if not, fatalism, at the very least an acceptance of the status quo, and a celebration of small changes which prove to be utterly ineffectual in the long run? Basing ethics, even partially, on the status quo, and the “way things have always been done around here” moves the benchmark, the standard of moral behavior, from an ideal beyond current human capacities to merely what humans are capable of in the present moment, a significant downgrade. Most significantly, to accept the status quo when it comes to the current food system is to accept a system which is fundamentally unsustainable, which is

²⁸ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Collins, 1974), p. 168.

to accept and invite ecological disaster. The status quo cannot be accepted, there needs to be significant reform in the way in which Americans eat, and the good news is that human beings are capable of making these sorts of changes. In chapter eight, we will look at communities who, by their very existence, are modeling a better way of raising and consuming food. These organizations, and the people who are involved in their work, are the best arguments against fatalism, against the argument that humans will inevitably screw things up anyway and as such there is no need to try to make things better. The problems remain, of course, but they can be faced, and the common good can be advanced.

Niebuhrian Ambivalence and the Common Good

In a 2007 interview, then-presidential candidate Barack Obama was asked who his favorite philosopher was, and to the surprise of some, he cited Reinhold Niebuhr.

When asked what he “took away” from Niebuhr’s writing, he responded:

“I take away,” Obama answered in a rush of words, “the compelling idea that there’s serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn’t use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction. I take away ... the sense we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naïve idealism to bitter realism.”²⁹

When it comes to humanity's relation to the world, which obviously includes the act of eating, there is no room for triumphalism, and also no room for a simple good vs. evil bifurcation, as if those who eat organic, or local, are the forces of light, straining against the forces of darkness who eat industrialized, processed food. We all have desires for food, desires shaped by several factors, and while it is possible to be sharply critical of

²⁹ David Brooks, “Obama: Gospel and Verse,” *The New York Times*, April 26th, 2007, accessed October 4th, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/opinion/26brooks.html>

the large industrial foodmakers, and the tactics they use to gain market share, it is less effective to be critical of those who partake in that kind of food.

That being said, however, it is imperative to continue to work for the good, to the best of our abilities, and that includes the way in which we eat. The impulse to pursue the food is, I would argue, essentially human, and it sits alongside the proclivity for sin in the human psyche. This tension goes back at least to Augustine, if not further, and must be taken in account in any framing of food ethics. As Jean Bethke Elshtain, writing on Augustine (one of the central progenitors of this idea of human ambivalence), phrases it, "If Augustine is a thorn in the side of those who would cure the universe once and for all, he similarly torments cynics who disdain any project of human community, or justice, or possibility."³⁰ Augustine's reflections on the conflicted nature of humanity were influential in the formulation of the doctrine of Christian realism, formulated by Reinhold Niebuhr in the middle of the twentieth century. Like Augustine, Niebuhr was certainly a "thorn in the side" for those who sought perfection in human society, calling the idea that humanity can achieve a state of goodness and peace on its effort a "Promethean Illusion." However, he co-founded The Americans for Democratic Action, and worked tirelessly for racial reconciliation, workers rights, and other pursuits of the common good. In Niebuhr's ethical anthropology, a fallen human nature sits alongside a desire to do good in the human psyche, and both must be reconciled together in some way.

Virtue, Narrative, and Community

In making the turn from analyzing what is wrong with the way we raise and eat food to how it can be made right, or at least better, I believe we should emulate Niebuhr

³⁰ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995): p. 91.

in keeping these two poles in mind: the fallibility of humanity on the one hand, and the noble aspirations of humanity on the other. Thus, we ought to choose a path which acknowledges both of these ideas, holds them in tension, and takes them seriously. We also need an approach which takes the non-cognitive aspect of our decision making seriously, making room for emotions and subconscious action. How can our desires, conditioned as they are by emotion and subconscious activity in addition to cognition, be trained to desire higher ends and better outcomes? Of the three central schools of thought in ethical theory, I believe that virtue ethics is the best positioned to offer substantial guidance on food and the way we eat, not to the exclusion of other ethical approaches, but as a needed corrective and supplement. Virtue ethics, while not abandoning cognitive rationality, supplements it with a healthy emphasis upon practice, and upon training the will to respond to stimuli in a certain way. As previously mentioned, there are forces at work which are actively seeking to bend our wills to purchase certain types (and large quantities of foods) so it makes sense to look for an approach which will rise to meet those external pressures in kind, with an effort to fashion our wills towards wanting better choices. Or, as Michael Pollan phrases it, it's "probably better to manipulate ourselves than to let marketers manipulate us."³¹

Striving for virtue engages not only the rider, but also the elephant as well, and it provides, at least in parts, a plan of action in getting from our current state as eaters to a state of eating which resembles the visions of organic and local food advocates from the previous chapter. It is also helpful because it presupposes that humans are not naturally inclined to choose the good, but that the will to choose the good is only gained with

³¹ Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, p. 194.

struggle. It provides a realistic account of our current state, and a plausible strategy to improve. Finally, and most significantly, virtue ethics “goes all the way down” - engaging thoughts, practices, and ultimately, ethical anthropology - our understanding of who we are. It is not behavioral change through government fiat,

One of the more common objections levied against virtue ethics as a school of thought is that it is “egoistic” - the individual works to improve their own character, to develop virtue within themselves, but that does not necessarily translate into any sort of action for the common good. There is an element of truth to this critique (although I would argue that the critique applies to most ethical theories in the individualistic society we inhabit), and it needs to be considered. I would answer the critique by arguing, in fact, that the development of virtue is best facilitated in community; not just in community but in a community driven by a collective narrative, and a collective identity which is found within that narrative. This is the greenhouse in which the virtues blossom. In the world of food, this is best represented by the concept of the foodway, or the distinctive food culture. The foodway provides a median structure, between the individual and society as a whole, and contains within itself certain identity cues, histories, and practices. (This is who we are, this is where we came from, and this is what we do.) It also provides the most tenable way to simultaneously address the impulses and the desires of the individual and the needs of the common good. In the remainder of this dissertation, I wish to argue that the conscious promotion of distinctive foodways, and the practices and narratives which help to shape the character of eating of those within them, is the best way to pursue a better way of eating, one which coheres to an ecological way of thinking, and avoids the excesses and the waste of the current system.

CHAPTER 5 VIRTUE: HABITS AND ACQUIRED TASTES

As the Modern age progressed, optimistic ethical systems based solely upon rational thought and promising a systematized understanding of complex human issues came under increasing scrutiny. The revival of virtue ethics in the last few decades is a product of such scrutiny, and it is also an ethical approach which promises a way forward in line with advances of in cognitive understanding outlined in the previous chapter. Further, virtue ethics takes into account human frailty and imperfection, while still allowing a framework for improvement. This chapter provides an introduction to virtue ethics, and to the subcategory of environmental virtue ethics in particular. It argues that food ethics argued from an environmental virtue perspective could offer a useful corrective and supplement to Kantian deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics, both of which fall prey to the excesses of rationalism. I close this chapter highlighting the specific virtues of hospitality, temperance, and humility, in an attempt to make the value of virtue ethics in conversations about food more concrete and tangible.

Virtue Ethics

As is well known, the founding of virtue ethics as a school of thought in the Western world dates to ancient Greece - to Plato, and particularly to Aristotle. As Father Joseph Koterski argues, Aristotle undertook the task of examining human ethics with a “anthropological and a biological eye,”¹ attempting to point out similarities which range across human communities, as well as ethical characteristics which are limited to spe-

¹ Joseph Koterski, “The Philosopher of Common Sense” Fordham University, Lecture. *The Ethics of Aristotle*. The Great Courses, 2006.

cific human communities. At the core of his project was finding out what produces eudaimonia, often translated “happiness”, “flourishing.”, or “the good life.”² Aristotle’s answer, ultimately, was arete, often translated “excellence,” or more commonly, “virtue.” What are the virtues, the excellences, which mark human character, and lead to the good life? How can they be developed? These are central questions for Aristotle - if virtue is pursued and developed, eudaimonia, both on the level of the individual and also that of the city, will surely follow.

Virtue ethics was the dominant framework throughout the medieval period, with Augustine and Aquinas famously making use of Aristotle’s thought in their own theological projects. With the advent of the Enlightenment, however, it was passed by two other major ethical schools of thought, Kantian deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics. Instead of virtue, the central ethical questions began to revolve around duties, interests, and rights. However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, a virtue ethics renaissance began, brought about by such theorists as Philippa Foot³ and Alasdair MacIntyre⁴. It is worth noting that theologians have found the application of virtue ethics to their projects to be quite a boon, with Stanley Hauerwas⁵ and N.T. Wright⁶, among others, using the concept of virtue to great effect. Virtue ethicists are still a marked minority compared to Kantians and consequentialists - but the virtue approach to ethics has

² An extended conversation on the difficulties of translating the word will be present in the following chapter.

³ Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

⁶ N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

grown, particularly over the last thirty years, and is being applied to an increasing number of fields.

Environmental Virtue Ethics

One of the fields in which virtue ethics has proven to be “particularly fruitful,” in Rosalind Hursthouse’s words, is environmental ethics. The field of environmental virtue ethics examines the dispositions of character human beings ought to possess regarding the natural world. Beyond rules for behavior, what sort of people should we be as we relate to our environment? As Ronald Sandler notes, when it comes to environmental heroes such as Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and John Muir, their actions are admired, as are the legacies they leave behind, but the admiration goes deeper than action or reputation. We admire the people themselves, and we aspire to be like them in some small way. Our admiration goes to the level of their character, and the traits which allowed them to achieve what they did in their lifetimes.⁷ This approach to ethics challenges dry, rule-based approaches, as well as calculated utilitarian approaches. It manages to keep the inspiring visions of the good life which power the food movement, while providing a roadmap for how to get there. Virtue ethics has been applied to food by philosophers in the past⁸, but the application of environmental virtue ethics to food is much less common. However, given the unmistakable environmental significance of food and agriculture, it is important, I think, to examine food through the lens of environmental virtue ethics, in order to understand how our character dispositions expressed

⁷ Ronald Sandler, “Introduction: Environmental Virtue Ethics,” in *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 2.

⁸ A prominent example is Leon R. Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

through food are larger expressions of the way in which we relate to the natural world in general.

So when it comes to environmental virtue ethics being applied to the topic of food, a suitable place to begin is the question: what constitutes a virtue? What human character trait, related to the act of eating, can contribute to an optimal disposition regarding the environment? According to Sandler, there have been four primary approaches for specifying environmental virtue. The first, and most common, is what he calls the “extensionist” approach, wherein virtues which are typically cited in human relationships are applied to relationships between humans and the natural world. Second is the appeal to agent benefit, and the idea that pursuing environmental virtue will actually serve to make life better than it would have been if that virtue were not present. In Sandler’s words,

In this way environmental virtue ethics emphasizes the role that enlightened self-interest can play in promoting or motivating environmental consciousness and its corresponding behavior in a way that reinforces rather than undermines the other-regarding aspects of environmental ethics. It allows for environmental ethics to be self-interested without being egoistic.⁹

The third approach for specifying environmental virtue, closely related to the second, is to argue from considerations of human excellence. In other words, how do we relate environmental flourishing to human excellence? What does human excellence mean from an ecological perspective? Fourth, and finally, there is an approach based upon studying the character traits of individuals who are widely recognized as heroes and role models, alluded to earlier.

⁹ Sandler, pp. 4-5.

The food movement, as discussed in chapter two, has made use of several of these approaches, without explicitly appealing to virtue. For instance, the extensionist approach, which dates in environmental literature to Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic," is prominent in the writings of agrarian authors such as Wendell Berry and Norman Wirzba, who have argued, in various ways, that the land deserves to be regarded and respected as a critical entity in any discussion of food. Animal welfare advocates such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan have used an extensions approach to individual animals, arguing that we ought to extend to animals the same considerations we extend to fellow human beings. The appeal to agent benefit, or to what Sandler called "enlightened self-interest," has also been used effectively, by Carlo Petrini, Dan Barber, and all who appeal to heightened taste as a marker of a better food system. Finally, the appeal to role models has also been widely practiced, as Will Allen, Michael Pollan, and Joel Salatin, among many others, have extolled the virtues of learning from family members of a different era, such as a grandmother or a father. This is closely related to Salatin's call for a return to the "historically normal," to people who raised their own food, cooked their own meals, and generally knew what was going into the food they consumed. From the perspective of these writers, the people who raised, cooked, and consumed food in those more "historically normal" days are the ones to emulate in present days.

The one approach that has not been as prevalent in food ethics is the connection between eating and human excellence. This is due to a number of reasons, including the fact that discussions of "excellence" often run afoul of modern ideals of equality, and also because talking about "human" anything is often fraught with peril. As feminists have rightly noted, "human" often becomes a shorthand for "white european male." In

addition, to speak of “human excellence,” or “human flourishing,” is often to imply that the non-human world has merely instrumental value, that its primary or even singular purpose is for the elevation of human beings. This is precisely what Holmes Rolston III warns against in his essay, “Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole.” These concerns all have merit, but I do not believe that they cancel out the categories of virtue and human excellence altogether. As Sandler points out, excellence does not preclude humanity’s setting in nature; in fact, in his words, “what it means to be a good human being - to flourish as a human being - is typically understood naturalistically.”¹⁰ In a naturalistic sense, then, human excellence can be thought of as describing how well human beings fit - into their social milieus (humans being the social creatures that they are) and also into their ecological milieus. This understanding is helpful in dislodging both the anthropocentrism which bothers Rolston, and also the “andropocentric” tendencies which feminists decry. It is also helpful in thinking about the American food system, because, as noted in chapter two, much of the way in which we live and eat is predicated upon disconnecting ourselves from our niches, which present themselves as constraints. Excellence construed as fitting into a particular community, and contributing to that community’s strength and wholeness, offers a new way of understanding how we can be made better by the choices we make about food. In order to understand how this might work, it is helpful to look deeper at the practices related to food that can be considered virtuous.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

Virtue as Habit? Yes, But Also a Lot More

As previously noted, the dominant industrial food system in America is designed to inculcate certain eating habits in its constituents, appealing to emotion and the adaptive subconscious in an attempt to disengage the reasoning faculties from the process of choosing and eating food. It is also designed to dislodge constraints which hinder us from eating what we want, in whichever quantities we like. The point that is critical to make about this situation is not that the old ways of eating are being disassembled, with a vacuum left in its wake. The old habits and ways of eating, one might even say the old food cultures, are being replaced with a new and lesser one - a distinctly modern culture predicated upon the ubiquitousness of available food, and the ability to customize the food experience to meet individual preferences. What has not changed in this scenario is the fact that most people do not engage their conscious reasoning powers when it comes to choosing, preparing, and consuming food. They rely on habit - either habits developed personally, or habits which developed first in the homes they grew up in, or in family situations, and then carried over into their individual lives. These habits can be good - environmentally sustainable, socially just, etc - or they can be harmful. They are reinforced through practice, and from the time of Aristotle, the formation of habit through practice has been a fundamental element in the construction of personal virtue. As Julia Annas notes, this is not mere routinization - conscious reasoning and moral decision making is required...at first. To illustrate this, she gives the metaphor of learning the most efficient route from her home to the parking garage at her university:

At first I have to think consciously about the best way to do this, avoiding traffic without going too far from the most direct way, modifying the route at different times of day and so on. Gradually I become used to driving on this route, and it becomes habit with me. I no longer have to think about

which way to turn at every corner, where to slow down and the like. My driving has become routine.¹¹

Routines take conscious, explicit, repeated actions to form, and also to change, but once the routine is set, conscious thinking disengages, and decisions are made more quickly and efficiently. In a food environment where consumers are bombarded and overwhelmed with messages which promise choice but actually deliver disconnect and alienation, it is not plausible to insist that consumers think through every food choice they make. Better to accept that we form non-conscious routines, and to think about how that happens, so that we might form better ones.

Now, this is not to suggest that virtue is the mere formation of routines. There is something akin to skill involved in the formation of virtue, which the formation of routine simply does not possess. The difference, according to Annas, is that the former includes the desire to learn and to improve, while simple routine does not. A routine is an end in itself. Once it is established, there is typically no need to improve it or learn more about it. Conversely, virtues and skills are driven by a desire to learn, and a desire to get better. There is still an element of disengagement from the conscious mind - the professional golfer does not have to think about every element in her golf swing, nor does the courageous person need to think about being courageous when a situation which requires it emerges. This does not mean that conscious thought is absent, however. In Annas' words, "The practical mastery is at the service of conscious thought, not at odds with it." Conscious thought and unconscious mastery come together, allowing for the individual to respond to whatever situation is set before them in an intelligent, effective fashion, rather than repeating the same routine over and over. As Annas writes,

¹¹ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 13.

A central feature of routine is that the reaction to the relevant situation is always the same, which is why routine can be depended on and predicted. But practical skill and virtue require more than predictably similar reaction; they require a response which is appropriate to the situation instead of merely being the same as that produced in response to other situations. This appropriateness comes from the habituated disposition that a virtue is...Virtues which are states of character, are states that enable us to respond in creative and imaginative ways to new challenges.¹²

This is not a static condition - skill and virtue alike are subject to improvement or to decay. They require constant monitoring and sharpened in order to be maximized, in order to meet the challenges which are presented in the best possible manner.

Virtue and Tradition

Annas' conception of virtue, explicitly connecting it to the idea of skill, is enormously helpful in disarming one of the most persistent critiques of food reform advocates: the idea that they are Luddites, hopelessly devoted to obsolete models of agriculture and of eating, and unwilling to face the realities of the present day. The claim has been widespread and persistent, and, in fairness to the critics, some food reformers have lived down to this description, and when people such as Joel Salatin and Will Harris speak of the need of returning to the "historically normal," it is easy to see why some might see advocates for food reform as stuck in the past. By and large, however, this is an unfair generalization. Salatin himself is world renowned as a farmer who uses technological innovation to achieve biomimicry, which is precisely what allows him to forgo the methods of the industrial food system. If virtue is, in fact, a state of character which allows people to respond well to the challenges of the day, then the idea of virtues become extremely helpful in uniting a respect for tradition and culture on the one hand, and an innovative imagination on the other. They are handed down through family and

¹² Ibid, p. 14.

tradition, but they are not frozen in amber. Rather, the virtues reveal themselves to be flexible, able to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

This conception of virtue is not unlike the model of reform advocated by the Irish statesman Edmund Burke, who calls for “prescription” as the most effective means of social change. Burke defines prescription as “tradition tempered by expediency.” For Burke, tradition is the collected wisdom of the human experience, wisdom which far exceeded that of any individual person’s ability to grasp. Tradition is the wisdom of the ages, handed down, and as such, humanity jettisons tradition at its own peril. To insist, as people like Thomas Paine did, “we have it in our power to begin the world again,” is, in Burke’s view, foolishness. The wisdom of the ages needs to be taken into account.

At the same time, however, prescription is no ossified traditionalism. The tempering nature of expediency means that the traditions need to still be capable of serving people in the present day, and if they are not capable of doing so, than those traditions need to be discarded. Burke was, after all, a social reformer, albeit a cautious one. For him, as for us, the change needs to be marked by clear human need, rather than by abstraction, or humanity’s need to tinker. Change is inevitable, but there is a way to go about it which preserves the hard-won wisdom of those who came before, while still allowing for creativity to meet the needs of the present moment. As Burke puts it, “we are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and ages.”¹³

¹³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, originally published in 1790. Quoted by Russell Kirk, “Burke and the Philosophy of Prescription.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953): 365-380.

Food Virtues

Virtue, then, is conceived as habituated dispositions of character, developed over time by a combination of rational and non-rational processes, allowing humans to deal well with the circumstances and the situations in which they find themselves. Which virtues, then, are useful in talking about food ethics? Which virtues would allow for keeping elements of our food traditions which have been marked by wisdom and beneficence, while allowing for the rejection of traditions which are outmoded in a rapidly changing world? Which virtues, in returning to the understanding of virtue put forward by environmental virtue ethicists, would allow for the best “fit” within our ecological niches? Of course, the four cardinal virtues, elaborated by Plato and then Aristotle, are courage, temperance, prudence, and courage. Christian theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas add the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Over the centuries, other virtues have been suggested as additions to the list, including humility, mercy, and hospitality. Producing an exhaustive list of all of the virtues which apply to food would far exceed the bounds of this project; I would like to consider hospitality, temperance, and humility. I will take each of these virtues, elaborate their classical meaning, before attempting to show their relevance both in a food ethics framework as well as an environmental virtue ethics framework. This will allow for a clearer picture of what these individual virtues look like in terms of the interests of this dissertation.

Hospitality as a Virtue

The virtue of hospitality, as David M. Kaplan defines it, is “the virtue of sharing one’s accommodations, food, and drink with friends, strangers, and guests. In so doing, we recognize in another our common vulnerabilities and needs. A good host provides

warmth and community and, above all, something to eat and drink.”¹⁴ As Elizabeth Telfer points out, this virtue developed from ancient times, in which travelers were reliant upon the residents of the towns they traveled through for food and shelter.¹⁵ In some cultures, such as that of the Israelites as recorded in the Old Testament, for example, this took on a sacred obligation, as the Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly exhorted the Israelites to watch after the “alien” and the “stranger.” Obviously, in a modern society including hotels, restaurants, and interstate highways, the call to hospitality might not have the same life-or-death consequences (ancient travelers were in a constant state of peril without it) but hospitality is still significant.

However, does that mean that the notion of hospitality meets the criteria of being a virtue? If so, in what capacity? In order to gain clarity at this point, I shall follow the criteria for virtue laid down by philosopher Philippa Foot in her paper “Virtues and Vices.”¹⁶ Foot lists three criteria for determining a moral virtue. First, virtues are “qualities which a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows.” Second, a virtue is a quality of the will. Third, they are, in the Aristotelian sense, a golden mean between the extremes of deficiency and excess.

That hospitality, as a virtue, is a benefit for the recipient of that virtue is easy to understand. If I am poor and hungry, and a family invites me in to have dinner and gives me a bed for the night, I have greatly benefitted from their hospitality. That is one form of hospitality. If friends invite me over to a dinner party, and they serve me good

¹⁴ Kaplan, “Introduction,” pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Telfer, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁶ included in Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

wine and excellent food, and we have pleasant conversation, I have also greatly benefited from their hospitality, although it is hospitality of a different nature. The one possessing the virtue takes the initiative for the welfare of the other. As French food writer Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin writes, "To entertain a guest is to make yourself responsible for his happiness so long as he is beneath your roof."¹⁷ Is hospitality, however, also a good for the one who practices it? On the one hand, it does place a burden on the individual who wishes to be hospitable. That burden can be financial, it can be expressed in terms of time and energy (preparing and cleaning up, for example), or it may be psychological - how will we live it down if the evening does not go well? What if the person to whom I offered hospitality abuses my kindness and becomes difficult to deal with?

There are also benefits, and not merely of the instrumental kind. In fact, as Elizabeth Telfer argues, hospitality performed from selfish motives is not true hospitality. What is needed, in her words, are "hospitable motives." What are those motives? Obviously, hospitality cannot be done as an exchange of favors, or as a means to impress those who might benefit you as a result of your hospitality. It is also not truly hospitality if it is done to show off skills in cooking, or to show off a person's generosity. It is not even truly hospitality if it is done with bitterness and resentment. The action must have an intrinsic motivation - it is done for its own sake, when the pleasure of the other converges with the pleasure the hospitable one gets for performing the action. In throwing a dinner party and taking genuine pleasure in the recipients enjoyment of your hospitality, or providing food to a hungry person with no other motivation than to say, "I want his

¹⁷ quoted in Telfer, p. 83.

life to be a little better tonight” -- here is where hospitality becomes a virtue, and becomes a step on the road to human excellence.

At this point, one might raise an objection - all of this is fine and good if a person has friends to exercise hospitality for, or even has the funds to be able to provide food for a hungry person, but how does the benefit extend beyond the level of transaction? How does it become a general benefit to society? The answer, and the core idea, I think, is the presence of responsibility in hospitality, and how that sense of responsibility transcends the immediate members of the relationship in which the act of hospitality is performed. The hospitable one takes on responsibility, and, ultimately, agency - if you are the host, then it is up to you in order to ensure the happiness of your guests, whether that involves a dinner party with friends, or offering food and shelter to a stranger in need. Once that responsibility is taken on, the overall welfare of the other becomes, at least in part, the hospitable one’s responsibility. This is especially significant, and downright countercultural, in a food system as described in chapter two, in which everything is set up around meeting the desires of the individual, through abundance, variety (real or imagined) or customization. In such a system, massive corporate food makers have taken on the responsibility of feeding consumers, while encouraging them not to lift a finger. By contrast, hospitality encourages the person to look beyond their own needs, and to look to the needs of others. The sense of responsibility, developed out of the virtue of hospitality, could act as a countercurrent, helping to shape American eating in a better way.

Foot's second criteria for identifying a virtue is that it is a quality of the will. This is distinct from, in her words, "bodily strength or intellectual ability." This coheres with Annas' statement, noted earlier, that virtues and skills are both characterized by a desire to learn and to improve, but Foot notes that significant differences also exist between the two. She cites both Aristotle and Aquinas, who noted that "in the matter of arts and skills...voluntary error is preferable to involuntary error, while in the matter of virtues it is the reverse." In other words, skills such as cooking can be honed and developed in order to make one a better host, but they are not sufficient to make someone truly hospitable. The best chef in the world, without the will to be hospitable, will not become hospitable. The skills and capacities certainly help - one is more likely to be a good host if they are an amazing cook, or good at defusing an argument. However, if the will to be hospitable is not part of the disposition of the individual, they are not necessarily a truly hospitable person.

Finally, Foot's third criteria is that virtues are what she calls "correctives," correcting both the excess of motivation to pursue bad things, and the deficit of motivation to pursue good things. Hospitality does not come easy. It is a conscious sharing of food and shelter, and it costs the hospitable one time, money, and convenience. However, the virtue of hospitality is powerful, including ideas of warmth, community, and support. It provides a means to seek the good things which hospitality brings, while avoiding the obstacles which prohibit it.

This sense of hospitality, of benevolently taking on responsibility for the wellbeing of others, is a feature which shows up constantly in environmental virtue ethics literature, even if it is not named "hospitality." It has been called "benevolence," "respect,"

and other similar terms, but the root idea is the same. Namely, that taking responsibility and agency over another's well-being is not simply done in human-to-human relationships, but is also done in relationships between human beings and nature. Instead of treating nature as something only with instrumental value, something to be used and exploited for the gain of the human, this sort of responsibility, this showing hospitality to nature, takes the focus off of the self, and what they can gain from the transaction, and puts it onto the person, or in this case the entity, which is the recipient. This trait, this other-centered focus, is what runs underneath all of the disparate instances of hospitality, and it ultimately connects them - from the one hosting the dinner party, to the one feeding the hungry, to the one cleaning trash off the beach. This is what allows, for example, a homeless person to be hospitable even though they have no home to share with others. The virtue can manifest itself in both great and small actions, and it is good for the one receiving this kindness, the one giving it, and, ultimately, the collective of society. As Telfer puts it, "a society where people are hospitable...is better on balance than one where they are not."¹⁸ It is a society in which humans more clearly recognize the "other," whether it is another human, or the natural world. Indeed, hospitality which does not recognize the latter as well as the former is not a fully developed virtue.

Temperance

Hospitality is an inherently social virtue - an other is required to practice it. However, temperance can be experienced and practiced in solitude. This does not mean, however, that temperance does not have profound social and environmental consequences. Unlike hospitality, there are not many people who would question whether

¹⁸ Telfer, p. 98.

temperance can be considered a virtue. It was one of Plato's cardinal virtues, and has been widely recognized as a central virtue even though the virtue ethics revival of the late twentieth century. Also, there is little difficulty in understanding how temperance relates to food, although the way in which the term is applied to food is often uneven, as I hope to show. The central difficulty of this section will be to explain how temperance relates to communal flourishing - socially and ecologically.

Understanding Temperance Through Understanding Gluttony

When it comes to food, the term temperance often refers to abstention from alcohol. The Temperance movement, after all, is associated in America with the rise of Prohibition in the 1920s and early 1930s, and with absolute teetotalism. In food and alcohol alike, it is associated with its vice, gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins of historic Christianity. These views of gluttony, and of temperance as its opposite, are too narrow. Thomas Aquinas named gluttony as an "inordinate desire for food and drink," inordinate because it involves "leaving the order of reason." It is not the food itself, to Aquinas, which is sinful, but rather the inordinate desire for it.

This "inordinate desire" for food and drink need not refer only to the amount of food consumed. C.S. Lewis writes of the "gluttony of delicacy," as well as the "gluttony of excess." He goes on to describe the former in *The Screwtape Letters*, which take the form of a senior demon coaching a junior demon to become better at ensnaring humans in vices. On the effects of this gluttony of delicacy upon an individual, Lewis explains,

She (the human in question) would be astonished—one day, I hope, will be—to learn that her whole life is enslaved to this kind of sensuality, which is quite concealed from her by the fact that the quantities involved are small. But what do quantities matter, provided we can use a human belly and palate to produce querulousness, impatience, uncharitableness and self-concern? Glucose has this old woman well in hand. She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from

what has been offered her to say with a demure little sigh and a smile ‘Oh please, please ... all I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeni-est bit of really crisp toast’. You see? Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she never recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others. At the very moment of indulging her appetite she believes that she is practicing temperance.¹⁹

Lewis’ great insight here, I think, is to differentiate the moral value of the food itself from the emotional and the psychological reasons why foods are consumed. It is easy to look at a man or a woman who ate so much that they felt sick as a run-of-the-mill glutton. It is more difficult, but ultimately more helpful, to look for gluttony in its much more subtle forms. The woman in question does not eat too much, but she does use food as a cudgel with which to bludgeon others and gain control over the situations in which she finds herself. It is clearly valuable to her as a tool. The definition of gluttony, then, can be expanded, meaning, in Telfer’s words, as “caring too much for the pleasures of eating and drinking.”²⁰ The woman in Lewis’s example cares very much for the pleasures of eating, which have very little to do, in fact, with the food itself, and more to do with the sense of control food provides. This has interesting implications, for example, for the phenomenon known as “food porn,” in which food is glamorized, stylized, and even made into something which is “hyperreal,” in Baudrillard’s terminology. This can be seen on television networks, and particularly on social media, as Instagram users practice the rite of snapping a photo of the meal they have cooked, or ordered from a restaurant, for all of their contacts to “share.” The focus is less on that which is

¹⁹ CS Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, originally published in 1942. Quoted in Daniel Laitler, “CS Lewis on the Deadly Sin of Gluttony,” *Intellectual Takeout*, December 21st, 2015, accessed November 14th, 2016, <http://www.intellectualltakeout.org/blog/cs-lewis-deadly-sin-gluttony>

²⁰ Telfer, p. 107.

eaten - look at this fabulous food! - as it is upon the person eating - look at me eating this fabulous food! In a culture where these behaviors are prevalent, temperance becomes critical for reconnecting eaters with the food itself, rather than the external validations which food can help to supply.

In her explanation of this wider form of gluttony, Telfer lays out three different kinds of glutton. There is the “weak-willed glutton,” who knows he cares for food more than he should and yet cannot stop, the “principled glutton,” who is a glutton and yet does not see his behavior as inappropriate, and finally, the “self-deceiving glutton” - who has tricked himself into believing that his behavior is appropriate. Is it fair to judge all of these people for their moral failings? For instance, is someone who knows that their diet is suboptimal, is actively trying to make changes, but is still subject to cravings and breakdowns someone who needs to be judged as failing? As previously noted, the dominant industrial food industry in America is in the business of producing weak-willed gluttons, through, among other things, foods engineered for hyperpalability. Would calling them to the carpet for their behavior be the best way to enable change, or would it rather engender guilt and despair? A similar question can be asked in relation to the principled glutton. If called out for their behavior, when they don't believe said behavior is wrong, the principled glutton will most likely entrench themselves further into their behaviors, particularly if they do not trust the one who is pointing out their behavior. This is depressingly evident in the reactions to the food movement in America today. When food reformers (who too often give way to smugness and virtue signaling) point out ways of eating which they view to be problematic, the ones who eat that way read the criticism as a personal attack, and frequently respond in kind, calling the food advocate

“elitist,” “snobbish,” or any other of a whole slew of epithets. Very little suggests that this is an effective way to enable change. Finally, the self-deceiving glutton” may be the most difficult of all to persuade to change because, when called for their behavior, they may experience guilt and defensiveness simultaneously!

A way out of this morass, for ethicists, is to be clear about what the standard for appropriate behavior actually contains. What is the measure for gluttony? This is a question which Telfer takes up in her analysis, and it is a helpful one.²¹ First, she considers, and quickly rejects, the glutton’s own judgment as the criteria for measuring behavior. While this may be effective for the weak-willed glutton, the other two categories are unaffected. Further, as we have previously mentioned, humans are not the best at evaluating their own behavior, or their capacity for living up to their ethical ideals. Telfer then moves to what she calls “reasonably uncontroversial standards for what counts as gluttony.” They are: damage to one’s own health, failure to respect one’s obligations to others, and inability to carry out one’s own plans. The first criterion is fairly self-explanatory, and Telfer cites the obesity epidemic as the prime example of ways in which humans harm themselves through their dietary habits. This is especially ironic, because the abundance of food and of choices of food are touted as goods to be celebrated, and the ills which result from this system are often thrown back onto the individual’s lack of willpower. The system itself often escapes scrutiny. Teller's final criteria - inability to carry out one’s plans - is closely related to the one just discussed - damaging one’s own health has an obvious bearing upon their ability to carry out plans and goals.

²¹ Telfer, pp. 108-113.

The criteria which is has most to offer out on Telfer's list is whether the behavior allows ones to respect one's obligations to others. As with hospitality, this has social implications for the human world, but also for our relationship to the non-human world. Telfer explicitly connects with this idea, as she mentioned the difficulties which animal welfare advocates have had in getting people to respect the rights of animals raised in CAFOs - not because they think the cause is unreasonable, but rather because they simply enjoy the meat which comes from this system too much. She writes, "I once said to a friend of mine, "You know, I can't help thinking that there is something in the arguments in favor of vegetarianism." "Of course there is," she replied, "but meat is nice.""²² Telfer concludes, "This is an example of a glutton, as measured by the uncontroversial standard: their desire for nice food led them to do what they themselves admitted to be wrong."²³ Does this apply to all meat-eating, as someone like Singer would argue? Or is it possible to eat meat raised humanely and hence to avoid this vice? There are legions of passionate advocates who line up on either side of that question, but for now it is enough to say that, in terms of gluttony and temperance, the question cannot be limited to how human beings treat each other. It must also include the non-human world. The value of interdependence, prevalent in environmental ethics literature, comes to our aid here, as interdependence reminds humans that we are situated into ecological niches. Gary Snyder articulates it well:

Do you really believe you are an animal? We are now taught this in school. It is a wonderful piece of information: I have been enjoying it all my life and I come back to it over and over again, as something to investigate and test. I grew up on a small farm with cows and chickens, and with a second-growth forest right at the back fence, so I had the good fortune of

²² Telfer, p. 112.

²³ Ibid.

seeing the human and animal as in the same realm. But many people who have been hearing this since childhood have not absorbed the implications of it, perhaps feel remote from the nonhuman world, are not sure they are animals. They would like to feel they might be something better than animals. That's understandable: other animals might feel they are something different than "just animals" too. But we must contemplate the shared ground of our common biological being before emphasizing the differences.²⁴

There are many reasons why humans have historically had trouble accepting their animality, of course. The tradition of the Abrahamic religions is perhaps foremost among them; as John Muir, Lynn White, and so many others pointed out. The view of the world which views humanity as separate from the world, elevated from it, lends itself to an anthropocentric view of the physical world, one in which humans can and should eat what they want, without any sorts of limitations or restraints based upon external realities. In such a view, what we ought to eat is replaced by what we have the capacity to eat - or rather, what the food companies have the technological wizardry to create for us. There is no thought given to external restraints, or to the welfare of others, both human and non-human. Or, more precisely, the thoughts which are given are overwhelmed by impulses and passions. This does not mean, however, that Hume's dictum "the reason is the slave of the passions," is immutable and unchangeable. They can be changed, albeit slowly, through the practice of temperance.

Temperance as a Virtue

We can now move to considering what temperance is, particularly in light of the previous discussion on its concordant vice, gluttony. Aquinas declares gluttony to be an "inordinate desire for eating and drinking," and he declares that such desires are made

²⁴ Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), pp. 15-16.

inordinate through “leaving the order of reason, wherein the good of moral virtue consists.” As such, there has long been within the notion of temperance the idea of bringing in the reasoning capacities of the human being in order to temper the passionate desires. As Benjamin Franklin puts it, “Temperance tends to procure that Coolness and Clearness of Head, which is so necessary where constant Vigilance was to be kept up, and Guard maintained, against the unremitting Attraction of ancient Habits, and the Force of perpetual Temptations.”²⁵ This is not to say, of course, that the “ancient Habits” or even the “perpetual Temptations” for food are malevolent things; a claim which has a long history, particularly in relation to religious cults and also, since the twentieth century, at least, diet and nutrition. It is, however to state that, unchecked, these impulses lead to vice, and the way to counteract them is through the conscious cultivation of temperance, often labeled “moderation” in popular culture, and reason, the “Coolness and Clearness of Head,” is vital, although it must be noted that reason does not bring the virtue into existence, in Franklin’s framing. Rather, it is what is what the virtue of temperance procures.

Revisiting Philippa Foot’s three criteria for a moral virtue will help to give more shape to the virtue of temperance. Her first criterion is the idea that a virtue is a “quality which a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows.” Is it good for humans to love food, but not too much? For those who are dieting, for instance, this seems to be a no-brainer, although it must be noted that the “nutritionism” which Michael Pollan attacks in his book *In Defense of Food* does seem to swing the pendulum too far in the other direction. To be obsessive over caloric content and the absence of

²⁵ quoted in Kass, pp. 154-155.

unhealthy elements is not conducive to a healthy love of food. In anything, it is a conducive of an ill which can be treated by dealing with foods as they are, not as they have been made to be through technological wizardry. Or, as nutritionist Joan Gussow pointedly states, "As for butter versus margarine, I trust cows more than chemists." As such, temperance is in line with Pollan's dictum from the same book, "Eat Food." It is to understand that food cultures are, in some ways, emergent systems - greater than the sum of their individual nutrients. This is a perspective which lends itself to a healthier understanding of what food's role in life ought to be, and the motivation to keep it there.

Intemperate eating does not merely produce negative consequences for the individual attempting to lose weight, for example. It contributes to imbalances in food availability which so often fall along class and racial lines. The existence of "food deserts" - urban districts in which the procurement of fresh food such as fruits and vegetables is difficult, if not impossible - is exacerbated by a food culture which prizes an abundance of quantities and choices for those who can afford them. The cultivation of the virtue of temperance - of appreciating food and drink rightly, which includes an understanding of appropriate quantities, presents itself then as a social virtue, and also an environmental one, relevant to discussions of cultural well-being, and ecological well-being.

That temperance is a quality of the will, in accordance with Foot's second criteria, seems apparent. The action of forgoing food for the sake of others is, on its face, illogical. (The extended debates over the role of altruism in evolutionary development bear witness to this assertion.) Forgoing food for the sake of the natural world seems an even further stretch. Anyone who has ever raised children knows that selfishness abounds in the human person. A child given a piece of cake, or a chocolate chip

cookie, will guard that treasure with the ferocity of a mother grizzly bear defending her cubs. Our behavior as adults is not dissimilar - it is difficult to tell ourselves “no,” and it is even more difficult to accept other people telling us “no.” Even if the reason for the deprivation is logical, it is still a challenge. Very few, if any, are naturally skilled at it. As such, the virtue of temperance must be cultivated, it must be practiced and developed, in order that the voice inside of us which yells “mine!” may become quiet, and, ultimately, silenced.

Foot’s third criteria for a moral virtue is that it acts as a corrective for an excess or deficiency of motivation. Regarding the latter, there is a long history of renouncing food, particularly in religious contexts, in order to gain spiritual benefit. Even among those who have never fasted, there is a common urge to discount food as a moral issue, or to posit it as a minor one in comparison with other, weightier matters of the spirit. This has resulted, ironically, in an embrace of “edible food-like substances,” in Michael Pollan’s memorable phrase, instead of food, and an embrace of what Wendell Berry called a “degraded, poor, and paltry”²⁶ way of eating. The way out of this system, Berry argued, was to reestablish eating as a fundamentally agricultural activity, thereby reconnecting it to the physical world in a real way. By growing food, and forging relationships with those who grow it, we can avoid the hubris of assuming that food is secondary to the “real” moral issues of life, and we can ground it as a fundamental action of humans and non-humans alike.

In some ways, correcting an excess of motivation - loving food too much - is relatively straightforward. To correct the person who loves food too much is to turn them

²⁶ Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/wendell-berry-pleasures-eating>

from a glutton into a temperate individual. However, there is again the temptation to think exclusively in terms of quantities and numerics. Is the person who insists, for example, on foie gras gluttonous in that their taste for the delicacy outweighs their concern for the way the duck is raised in order to provide it? Is it gluttonous, to use Mark Bittman's example, to "watch competitive cooking shows, to do "anything" to get a table at the trendy restaurant, to scour the web for single-estate farro, or to devote oneself to finding the best food truck?"²⁷

Here, I think, is where the Aristotelian notion of virtue as the "golden mean between two extremes" is especially useful. When food is not appreciated enough, it becomes, in Joel Salatin's memorable phrasing, "transgenic modified factory-farmed amalgamated extruded reconstituted spam." It moves from food to "edible food-like substance," in the name of efficiency and abundance. However, when food is appreciated too much, or, to put it better, appreciated in an unhealthy way, it becomes a tool for social status. Cultural critics have noticed that millennials, in particular, are drawn to thinking of food in this way. According to MaryLeigh Bliss, columnist at mediapost.com, "Forty-four percent of Millennials have posted a photo of food or drinks that they or someone else was having on social media, and 19% of 21-24 year olds have borrowed someone else's food to take a picture of it and post on social media." Bliss goes on to describe a popular Instagram account "You Did Not Eat That," which serves the purpose of, in her words, "calling out social media mavens who just use food as props, often posting pictures of high-calorie food staged with their high-end accessories and donuts held next to their thigh-gaps. Though the intent of the account is to "out" those who

²⁷ Bittman, "Rethinking the Word "Foodie.""

are likely not actually eating those fatty treats, the feed also gives insight into the fact that food is being used interchangeably with luxury items to display a lifestyle to aspire to, and moments that other people should lust after.”

The food in these contexts is being used instrumentally, as a way to establish identity, status, and a measure of success. It is important to the consumer, but not in a way which suggests a belief in that food’s intrinsic value. It is merely a tool to be used. In these cases, although the quantities are not high, this use of food can be called gluttonous. The “golden mean” lies in the middle: appreciating food, enjoying it, but not staking existential issues such as meaning, identity, or success on it. In some ways, then, the call for temperance in food ethics mirrors the calls for non-anthropocentric views of nature itself which have been a fixture in environmental ethics for the last half century or more.

Humility

Temperance and hospitality are both virtues with ancient pedigrees. The former was one of the four cardinal virtues, dating to Plato, while the latter was understood as a fundamental component of life, and hence an obligation, in the ancient world. By contrast, humility has been celebrated but also derided over the years, as Friedrich Nietzsche and Murray Bookchin, among others, have dismissed it as, in Louke van Wensveen’s words, a “counterfeit virtue”²⁸ - something often thought to be a virtuous but what is in reality destructive for the human person, inhibiting their goals for self-actualization and allowing them to be controlled by malevolent social forces. Humility, however, has become a focal point in environmental discourse, as ethicists and activists

²⁸ Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p. 51.

have continuously warned against the human impulse for hubris, for putting ourselves “above” non-human creation. As van Wensveen writes,

Nature itself will “pull down the mighty from their thrones and raise up the humble” - that is, it will undercut those who have sought to lift themselves above the structures of biological life (the Latin term for pride, *superbia*, translates the Greek *huperbios*, which means “above life”) and it will support those who have remained close to the ground (the Latin term *humilitas* literally suggests closeness to *humus*, i.e. “soil” or “ground.”)

In the realm of ecological ethics, this sharp distinction between hubris and humility dates back to Lynn White’s seminal (and oft-quoted) essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” In that essay, White points the finger squarely at Western religious traditions, Christianity foremost among them, as being responsible for environmental degradation, due to the fact that they inculcate hubris in human beings by teaching that they are elevated over the rest of creation. As White writes,

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the 2nd century both Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.²⁹

As a way to counter the anthropocentric hubris of this form of Christianity, White proposes looking to Francis of Assisi as the basis for an alternative model based upon humility. Francis, according to White, represented a minority view which proclaimed a humble equality between humanity and the members of the natural world. As a result, White famously referred to Francis as the “patron saint for ecologists.” As many have

²⁹ Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

pointed out, some Christians took White up on his challenge, and commenced to produce Christian ecological ethics based upon this inter-species humility. For example, James Gustafson applied what he called “theocentric ethics” to the natural world in his book *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment From a Theocentric Perspective*. Gustafson argues that humans are not the center of nature, that God is, and that humans have the responsibility to participate in nature, and to respect the non-humans which also participate.

Humility as a Food Virtue

In the realm of food ethics, realizing our limitations has direct ramifications for the way in which we do agriculture, which will then have ramifications for the way we eat. For many years, industrial agriculture has labored under the noble goal of “feeding the world” through agricultural efficiency produced through technological innovation. The virtue of humility should cause us to question whether this is a truly plausible goal, and should certainly cause us to question whether the soil degradation, the confinement of animals, and the general environmental dangers which accompany the industrial approach to feeding the world are worth the payoff. At bottom is the notion of control - what know what we need to do, and we will leverage all of our technical skill to accomplish the objective. This desire for control permeates our lives, and also our ethics, as feminist ethicist Sharon Welch famously points out. Her ethic of risk was predicated upon the idea that we cannot control every outcome or the consequences of every action. Instead we must act responsibly, working for the good as best we can with our partial knowledge and incomplete perspective. Welch argues that ethics which promise to harness and control every variable result in cynicism and despair, when they inevita-

bly fail. As a result, affluent and middle-class people, people who could engender significant social change, detach and disconnect, because the problem is simply too large and imposing. She writes,

It is easier to give up on long-term social change when one is comfortable in the present—when it is possible to have challenging work, excellent health care and housing, and access to fine arts. When the good life is present or within reach, it is tempting to despair of its ever being in reach for others and resort merely to enjoying it for oneself and one's family.³⁰

Welch's argument is the bridge which takes humility from agricultural production and the raising of food to the level of the consumer and the eating of food. As discussed, much of the American food system is based upon the notion of customization and ready availability. What you want, when you want it. In other words, control. Humility on the part of the consumer would be the willing forfeiture of this ideal, and in return, a commitment to accept the limits of a food system which does not attempt to push the envelope of what nature can handle. To accept a sustainable food system would be a profound act of humility; it would be admitting that perhaps there are some foods to which we simply should not have access. This is not a Luddite fear of technology, but rather a willingness to accept constraints on the way we eat. The constraints which make the most sense to adopt, I believe, are those which would follow from adopting what Wes Jackson calls "Nature as Measure" - nature as the rule, or the standard, by which we judge our production and consumption of food.

To return to Foot's criteria for a moral virtue, then, we find that humility meets the criteria. First, it is a quality which "a human being needs to have, for his own and others." The "others" in this formulation include other peoples, but also other members of

³⁰ Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 41.

the natural world, and the very earth itself. As for ourselves, is humility beneficial? Is it beneficial, say, to voluntarily adopt constraints on the amount of food which we can eat, or the different types? Is it beneficial to be pressed into a diet, for example, which is more localized than the one most partake of now? Local food advocates would certainly answer in the affirmative, as would those such as Carlo Petrini and Dan Barber, who repeatedly argue that local food fixed according to local traditions and methods is superior to industrial food, even though the latter promises an innumerable amount of options for the palate. For them, food beats edible food-like substances, every time. Secondly, Foot refers to virtue as “a quality of the will.” That would certainly seem to be the case with humility. It is simply not standard behavior for human beings to put the needs of others before their own, let alone to put the needs of nature ahead of their own. It is not standard behavior to willingly relinquish control, but it is noteworthy that many religions, including Christianity and Buddhism, call upon their adherents to do exactly that. Perhaps this is why these calls are couched in the language of sanctification, or asceticism. It takes practice, and commitment, for humility to be cultivated, which of course is the requirement for all virtues. Some may be more naturally humble than others, but all have room to develop and cultivate this virtue.

Conversely, if neglected, the demands of the self will overwhelm and overpower humility. Finally, does humility represent an Aristotelian golden mean between the extremes? I believe so. The extremes, in this case, are self-aggrandizement on the one hand, and an overriding self-abnegation on the other, willing giving up dietary options for the sake of others in a way which is harmful for the person herself. That harm may look like starvation, or it may be some kind of emotional trauma, an active impediment

to self-actualization. While self-aggrandizement is a far more tempting option for the vast majority of American consumers, there is a continuum, which means that humility, indeed, represents a golden mean, and can therefore be classified as a virtue to be considered in any discussion of food ethics.

Phronesis - Putting Virtue into Practice

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between two types of wisdom: *sophia* (often translated “theoretical wisdom”) and *phronesis*, or “practical wisdom.” In the case of food, the latter assumes a critical role in any discussion of ethics, because the consumption of food is a practice, performed every day by everyone - it is one of the few elements of life which unites all people. In order to live, we must eat. Hence, translating these virtues into “real life” is important. How do hospitality, temperance, and humility manifest themselves in the daily practices of raising and consuming food? On one level, this question is impossible. Every life is different, which means that every virtue will be made manifest in distinct ways. This does not mean that the argument stops here, however. The way forward is to focus on another crucial part of virtue ethics, *eudaimonia*, and to work backwards from there. *Eudaimonia* is the good life, it is flourishing, it is the common good. It is the goal to which all social change is geared to accomplish. Incorporating the practice of these virtues into a vision of *eudaimonia* will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6 EUDAIMONIA AND PHRONESIS

In the previous chapter, I argued that virtue is a helpful and productive foundation for thinking through ethical issues relating to food, and considered hospitality, temperance, and humility as examples of what such an approach might look like. We now turn to elements which have been intimately connected with discussions of virtue from the time of Aristotle: eudaimonia and phronesis, translated as “flourishing” and “practical wisdom.” We will examine how these historic foundations of the virtue ethic correlate to our discussions about food. Ultimately, I will argue that eudaimonia ought to be construed in terms of sustainability, and that virtue ought to be applied in terms of its most famous formulation, the golden mean between the extremes. This can be done practically, in the vein of phronesis, by way of a focus on and development of distinctive food cultures, often known as “foodways.”

Definitions

Eudaimonia is a word which has often been translated “happiness,” although more recent translators, perhaps wary of the shallowness of many modern notions of that word, have tended to favor “flourishing” instead. At its core is the idea of the good life, of living well. The concept of eudaimonia was critical in the virtue framework of Aristotle himself, who argues that “well being” (or eudaimonia) comes from “well doing” - acting in accordance with virtue (arete) as delineated by human reason. Virtuous actions, then, are animated by a larger vision of the good; in Julia Annas' words, “virtue is a successful commitment to goodness.”¹ This Aristotelian understanding of virtue ethics

¹ Annas, p. 103.

as driven by a vision of eudaimonia has lived on, although not without controversy. Eudaimonia is a loaded concept - a vision of the good life implies that some ways of living are objectively superior to others. Aristotle argues that eudaimonia is found only when humans live according to their telos, their ultimate end. Notably, in his vision the telos of a free man differed markedly from that of a slave or a woman, both of which Aristotle considered to be lesser beings, and as such, incapable of the same level of eudaimonia. Philosophers and ethicists in the modern era reacted strongly against this, for good reason, but in so doing many threw out the concept of a "good life" altogether, because they would not consent to a single external standard against which individual lives could be measured.

However, I do believe that eudaimonia is still a useful concept for ethical thought and reflection, partly because engaging in eudaimonistic understandings is very nearly a universal practice among all people. To put the point simply, we all want happiness and seek flourishing², and, critically, we all seem to instinctively grasp that we do not completely possess them! In Annas' words,

The entry point for ethical reflection is thinking about how your life is going, thinking that can only arise in people who already are, or are becoming, adult, and who are aware that everything in their life is not satisfactory. Nearly all of us engage in this reflection, since it is exceptionally rare for our lives to be completely satisfactory and to give us no basis for reflection on how they are going.³

² Of course, there are counter arguments to be made here, including suicide, and perhaps also addictive behaviors which do not promote flourishing, although the individual seeks them as if they will. However, it is plausible to argue that these counterarguments do not mandate an absence of this search for happiness and flourishing in humanity, but rather, the common tendency for this search to become misguided or even corrupted by external factors.

³ Annas, p. 121.

Upon engaging in reflection on our lives, we attempt to organize the minute details in accordance with a larger vision of finding happiness, or flourishing.

Food plays a large role in that process, even if that role has not always been fully appreciated. We want to eat in such a way so as to produce happiness, fulfillment, and flourishing, or at the very least, to eat in a way that does not preclude them from being present in our lives. In a previous chapter, American ambivalence toward our food system was highlighted - we are the recipients of a system which is made possible through astounding technological innovation, innovation which has allowed for an abundance of food to be available to millions of consumers without excessive cost. Moreover, the individual eater has the ability to customize that food, and the experience which accompanies it, in nearly countless ways. The American food system is built around individual autonomy - "have it your way, right away." And yet...there is discontent. Discontent related to environmental concerns, to animal welfare concerns, to imbalances in food availability (as they relate to hunger on one hand and obesity on the other), and others. There is a sense that the food system could be better, could be more closely aligned with our hopes for the planet and its inhabitants, and as such, eudaimonia becomes a viable topic in discussions of food ethics. So how do we eat in accordance with eudaimonia? What is the vision of flourishing that could lead to such an outcome?

Eudaimonia as Sustainability, in All Its Forms

In our day of environmental peril, it is perhaps unsurprising that one of the adjectives used most frequently to describe a "good" food system is the word "sustainable." If humanity is truly in danger of marring, if not destroying, the planet itself by way of reckless and erroneous practices, it is only natural, in seeking to counter that, commentators would reach for a word that stresses the importance of continuity, of things lasting

through generations of time⁴. However, as Paul B. Thompson points out⁵, there has not always been a uniform understanding as to what the word actually means. Some have viewed sustainability as meaning, in Thompson's words, merely "food sufficiency" - is there enough food to sustain an exploding global population? Will there be enough for the foreseeable future? If not, famine and its concomitant ills will spread and multiply, making the food system which fails to provide food sufficiency fundamentally unstable, and prone to disturbances such as war and revolution. Also, obviously, such a system which feeds a portion of the world and leaves the rest to starve would be morally deficient. This is the standard position taken by defenders of the industrial food system, who argue for the place of external chemical agents, biotechnology, and other methods in order to maximize yields.

Others, however, define the term as relating primarily to "ecological integrity" - operating in a way that does not threaten the ecological processes necessary for life on the planet. For example, those concerned with ecological integrity would argue that a system which endangers pollinators such as monarch butterflies and honeybees, ultimately endangers entire food systems (and the inhabitants of those systems, including humans), thereby rendering itself unsustainable and morally unsavory. This is the position closely associated with the work of Michael Pollan, in which environmental issues and animal welfare issues rise to the fore. It argues, simply, that humans cannot run

⁴ There are several other understandings of a "good" food system, of course, but from an ethical perspective, serious issues such as impending environmental disaster and global hunger trump issues of lesser significance, such as variety of cuisines available for consumption at any given moment.

⁵ Much of what follows is indebted to Paul B. Thompson, *From Field to Fork: Food Ethics for Everyone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 163ff.

roughshod over the planet, eating indiscriminately, and expect for there to be anything of value for the generations to come.

Finally, there are those who view sustainability in terms of "social sustainability" - does the food system in question prove to be conducive to healthy and vibrant communities, or does it prove to be hazardous to their formation? As farms grew larger and more mechanized, they squeezed out the need for a great deal of skilled human labor. They have also served to squeeze out the smaller farmer, who, unable to "go big," in Earl Butz's words, have had no choice but to "get out." This has resulted in the death and decay of many rural communities in the United States and elsewhere, which were built around active, engaged farmers. Sustainability, in this sense, means to provide a way in which these communities, and the people who inhabit them, can survive and thrive. The agrarianism of Wendell Berry is the foremost representation of this position.

The Three-Legged Stool

Of course, the definition of sustainability need not be an "either/or." All three of these elements ought to be present in order for a food system to be declared truly sustainable, and hence truly good. If any one piece is missing, the food system is beset by ethical quandaries. Many observers have used the "three-legged stool" metaphor to describe this phenomenon - remove any of the "legs" mentioned above, and the concept of sustainability, the "stool," falls over. Subtract the "sustainability as resource sufficiency" position, for example, and ethical questions surrounding global hunger become more pressing, and, I would argue, the case for locavorism begins to resemble the declaration famously attributed to Marie Antoinette: "Let them eat cake!" To insist upon having access to locally-grown arugula while those around you starve is, if nothing else, terrible optics. In a similar fashion, to ignore ecological integrity, or social sustainability, is,

if nothing else, horribly short-sighted and morally stunted. Ecological health and social health are both critical concerns, and any system which dismisses them as lesser or even irrelevant is morally deficient.

However, a dilemma emerges at this point, because the ideals which drive the sustainability-as-food-sufficiency paradigm are quite different from the ones which drive the other two definitions of the term. As Thompson puts it, "The food sufficiency perspective implies that agricultural production will have to become much more efficient: farmers and food producers will have to extract even more output from a dwindling supply of land, water and usable energy."⁶ By contrast, those who advocate for sustainability based on ecological integrity and/or social sustainability argue that, in the service of increasing yields per acre, the technological innovations which have been employed have compromised both the integrity of ecological systems and of social ones as well. Environmental advocates as far back as Rachel Carson have pointed to the devastating effects of pesticides and other chemical agents upon wildlife, while agricultural reformers such as Wes Jackson have pointed to the practice of raising large monocultures as detrimental to the health and quality of the soil. To quote Thompson again, "advocates of ecological integrity were of the view that these impacts were not a necessary consequence of agriculture. They believed that alternative (though perhaps slightly less productive) farming methods could sustain agricultural ecosystems indefinitely."⁷

Advocates for social sustainability also faulted the practices inherent in the food sufficiency paradigm, but their critiques had more to do with the effects on rural life and

⁶ Thompson, *From Field to Fork*, p. 165.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 166.

rural communities. There is a great deal of overlap between concerns for ecological and social sustainability, as Wes Jackson and Berry have been ardent defenders of not only the health of the ecosystem, but also the health of the farmers and the farming communities which live within those ecosystems. Industrial monoculture, for instance, requires a very different sort of labor than does small-scale polyculture. The latter requires significant knowledge of the land, the weather, the plants and animals being raised, and a host of other factors. It is also extremely labor intensive. By contrast, the former is heavily automated, with much less labor required, and the labor which is required is much less skilled in nature. In fact, the primary skill required to work in many settings of industrial monoculture settings is that of tolerance for unpleasant working conditions. As such, with less of a need for labor, and the declining quality of the labor in question, rural communities have hollowed out, as those who were once farmers or the children of farmers look for work in other fields, and, especially, in other places. The result is what some commentators have called "the death of rural America,"⁸ as once vibrant-communities are now dominated by boarded-up store windows, decaying school systems, and rampant drug epidemics⁹.

⁸ For one of many examples, see Jeff Spross, "The Unconscionable Abandonment of Rural America," *The Week*, June 8th, 2016, accessed January 8th, 2017, <http://theweek.com/articles/628371/unconscionable-abandonment-rural-america>. For a more extended treatment, see JD Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper, 2016).

⁹ For an analysis of how drugs, and methamphetamines in particular, are both part of the cause and the effect of rural decline, see Nick Reding, *Methland: The Death and Life of an American Small Town* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2009).

Functional Integrity

The underlying idea which has united advocates for ecological integrity and social sustainability is the conviction that a food sufficiency paradigm, and the technological innovations which have enabled it, have compromised the food system and have jeopardized its usefulness for future generations. The integrity of the system has been breached, through humanity's overreach and as such, the homeostasis of the system, its ability to adapt and course-correct through small, incremental changes, has been disrupted. For these advocates, the answer is to advocate for a system marked by what Thompson calls "functional integrity." A system which possesses functional integrity is one which can be sustained, generation after generation, not with an absence of change but rather with a commitment to historical continuity and gradual change.

Critically, a system of functional integrity also treats food and agriculture as more than just one more domain for the principles of capitalism and technology to dominate and to master. Rather, functional integrity unites the concerns of the ecological and the social advocate by stating that yields are only a part of what agriculture offers. The right practice of agriculture also helps to develop and reproduce the key social systems which lead to flourishing. This is a very old idea. As historian Victor Davis Hanson argues¹⁰, the willingness of the household farmers of Greece - the *hoi mesoi* - to defend their farms and their communities gave birth to the phalanx, a specialized defensive military formation that called for absolute reliance on the part of each person upon everyone else in the unit, in order to turn away much larger invading forces. This underwrote

¹⁰ Victor Davis Hansen, *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Roots of Western Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

a vision of citizenship which was simultaneously committed to the welfare of the community, and fiercely independent, thus infusing Ancient Greek society with resilience and strength.

This is also the vision of citizenship which Thomas Jefferson gravitated to in his idealization of the citizen farmer. Jefferson believed that the farmer was the "most valuable citizen" because, as in Hanson's argument regarding Ancient Greece, their commitment to a specific patch of land would translate into a broader commitment to the national good of America. The farmer would not be an unproductive resident, more concerned about their welfare than their nations. Rather, the two would be inextricably linked in the farmers mind, propelling them to actively seek the best interests of the community, including the national community, within which they found themselves. A society peopled by farmers, for Jefferson, was a society in which self-reliance and solidarity came together, in Thompson's words, "an ecology of virtues, a generator of values that structures, ennobles, and gives purpose to life, not only for farmers but also for the vast majority of participants in the food system."¹¹

In the modern era, the one who is identified with this vision of functional integrity more so than any other is the aforementioned Wendell Berry. Through his fiction and non-fiction alike, Berry presents an evocative image of what such a society might look like. In his Port William novels¹², for example, Berry contrasts, in the sharpest terms possible, the actions of the industrialist and industrial farming in general, with the strong sense of place which is shaped by localism and small-scale family farming practices.

¹¹ Paul B. Thompson, *The Agrarian Vision: Sustainability and Environmental Ethics* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), p. 83.

¹² For example, see Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2000).

The former eats away at small towns like Port William from the inside out, while the latter provides what hope there is for these communities' survival, from an ecological and cultural perspective. It also provides the virtuous society that is critical to the shaping the forming of virtuous people.

The Problem with the Functional Integrity Approach to Sustainability

Whether primarily occupied with ecological or social issues, the functional integrity perspective of sustainability has been able to capture the imagination of ever-increasing numbers of people. With their appeals to an agrarian ideal rooted in the way things were, and to virtues often proclaimed to be endangered in today's culture, such as self-reliance, they present a powerful vision. It is the rare person who is not swept up in the writings of Wendell Berry. However, as previously mentioned, the idealistic visions of functional integrity advocates have not gone unchallenged. Three problems present themselves immediately: the romanticization of agricultural life, the exclusion of the "other" in many agricultural contexts, and the unsettling question as to whether an approach based exclusively on functional integrity can supply the food needed for a global population experiencing sustained, explosive growth.

The romanticization of agriculture and the life which accompanies it is a well-documented problem, one which is exacerbated by the disconnect which urban and suburban residents have with their food and those who prepare it. I have experienced this in my own life as I became acquainted with Berry's work. I am a child of the suburbs through and through, and I had just read *The Unsettling of America* and *Jayber Crow* in rapid succession. The arguments, the writing, and, most of all, the places contained therein completely captured my imagination. I went to tell my dad all about my discovery. Now, my father grew up in a rural community in southwest Georgia, and he is well

acquainted with farming and manual labor. As I excitedly told him about agrarianism, and this new (to me) vision of a society populated with small-scale farmers, his facial expression was decidedly skeptical. "Have these people farmed for their living?" He asked. "Do they have any idea how hard it can get?" He did not need to say anymore, as I got the message immediately. It is all too easy for urban and suburbanites to idealize small-scale farming, but ultimately, it benefits no one to assume that local, small farms are always beneficent, or that farming communities are always bastions of virtue.

In fact, many of these visions of the farm, and of farming communities, are dogged by an unfortunate fact - that the beatific vision of farming life in the agrarian community presented therein leaves many on the outside looking in. Whether it was women and slaves in the time of Aristotle, or members of the LGBTQ community in rural farming communities like Berry's Port William, it has always been clear that the agrarian vision of a virtuous society was not equally available for everyone. As Thompson summarizes the problem,

Arguments based on a conception of the virtuous person often select a particular exemplar and then proceed by asking, "What would that person do?" Since exemplars have often been white males, this mode of argument has had little appeal to feminists or advocates of civil rights. Arguments based on the moral character of a particular exemplar can be made to suggest that each person has a "natural" place or role in society. But the natural places and roles repressed people are contrary to the aspirations of women, racial, or ethnic groups, and gays who are seeking new places and new roles.¹³

What makes this problem particularly compelling for food ethics is its connection with a modern dilemma - ensuring that global populations get sufficient food in a time of explo-

¹³ Thompson, *The Agrarian Vision*, p. 80.

sive population growth. Indeed, the problem is not merely the social ostracization of outsiders in rural communities, as serious as that is, but rather that of the global “outsiders,” looking on with empty stomachs as “insiders” in wealthy nations have more food than they could possibly eat. This is the most serious critique leveled against those who advocate for sustainability as functional integrity: how can you, in good conscience, call for an agricultural system which limits yields and thus endangers the lives of long-marginalized people in places like India and Africa, in the name of your agrarian ideal? We have an ethical mandate, food sufficiency advocates argue, to “feed the world,” and in light of that mandate, preferences which are not life-or-death propositions, such as organic, non-GMO, even the fate of farming communities and small farmers, must give way.

In short, proponents of resource sufficiency argue, our understanding of the “community” is far larger and far more diverse than it was in the time of Aristotle, or in the time of Jefferson. As such, they argue, a different vision is needed, and those who would cling to obsolete visions of food in such a time as this can be accused of selfishness and myopia. Functional integrity advocates respond in a number of ways, including the charge that all of the wondrous technology which promises to “feed the world” primarily goes to overfeed the Western world, and to feed the pockets of those who patent this technology. Those who are concerned about the ecological and social costs of our food system have often been inclined to view the food sufficiency camp as morally sinister, or at least ignorant. There are many in the industrial food system to whom this critique would be well suited. However, while the excesses of the industrialized food system are well documented and morally disastrous, the concern they raise as a counter -

that of global hunger - is certainly a valid concern which all who are interested in food ethics ought to share, particularly in light of the long standing criticisms of virtue ethics and agrarianism as culturally elitist and exclusive. Unfortunately, the food sufficiency and functional integrity paradigms are often portrayed as being completely incompatible with each other, featuring no overlapping concerns at all. As Thompson, and also authors such as James E. McWilliams have demonstrated, however, this is not the case. A truly good food system will treat the food sufficiency and functional integrity paradigms as connected, as necessary components. Both are needed to determine a food system which passes for ethically "good," a vision worth pursuing. I believe that Paul B. Thompson is correct when he calls for an "interpretative framework," comprised by elements of the positions of both sides. In fact, this could be a positive development, as it encourages holistic solutions to ethical problems, and encourages real dialogue, discussion, and, hopefully, agreement for solutions moving forward.

Polarization and Distrust

So how do we combine both of these frameworks? How do we marry the agrarian idea of cultivating an ecosystem in which virtue develops on the one hand, and the commitment to the rights of individuals which those systems have so often excluded over the years? At a more basic level, how do we commit to a food system which feeds the maximum amounts of mouths possible without causing catastrophic environmental calamities? Interestingly enough, these debates, in their focus on the needs of the "ecosystem" versus the needs of the individual which inhabits that ecosystem, parallel the long-standing disagreements in environmental ethics between ecocentric and biocentric perspectives, between those who would argue for the health and maintenance of the collective of the species, and even that of the land itself, against those who would argue

that the welfare of the individual member of the species is prior to that of the species or of the land itself. At bottom in both disputes is the question of whether it is better to focus on the quality of the collective, even if that means some individuals are negatively impacted, or whether it is better to fight for each individual to receive equal or near-equal treatment, with less focus being paid on the health of the collective in and of itself. It is an argument which remains to this day, with passionate advocates on both sides.

Similarly, the debates between proponents of a vision of food production based upon functional integrity and one based upon food sufficiency have also been strident and passionate, punctuated by heated disagreements between resource sufficiency and functional integrity advocates. The result has been polarization, of “us vs them,” with proponents of each approach not merely critiquing the logic or the feasibility of competing plans, but also the moral character of those who hold them. As such, for example, the proponent of biotechnology in food production becomes, in the eyes of their opponents, money-hungry and indifferent to the sufferings which their “frankenfood” has wrought upon the earth and farmers. As famous singer- songwriter Neil Young phrases it in his protest song, “The Monsanto Years:”

You never know what the future holds in the shallow soil of Monsanto,
Monsanto,
The moon is full and the seeds are sown while the farmer toils for Mon-
santo, Monsanto,

When these seeds rise they're ready for the pesticide
And Roundup comes and brings the poison tide of Monsanto, Monsanto...

Dreams of the past come flooding back to the farmer's mind, his mother
and father ,

Family seeds they used to save were gifts from God, not Monsanto, Mon-
santo,

Their own child grows ill near the poisoned crops

While they work on, they can't find an easy way to stop, Monsanto, Monsanto...¹⁴

Monsanto is a popular target for ire, a great deal of it well-earned, but the charge that anyone at Monsanto, or anyone associated with biotechnology in food production, is willingly propagating poison and killing the children of farmers are the sorts of overheated claims which shut down discussion and compromise. Both sides of these debates, in fact, tend to become needlessly emotivist, as Greenpeace and other organizations which oppose GMOs are frequently smeared as “scaremongers,” “anti-science,” and such. Both sides do not attack positions as much as they do the failings of the individuals who oppose their agendas.

A Case Study in Polarization and Distrust - Biotechnology in Food Production

The best example of this polarization in action, and its ill effects on discussions of food ethics is the debate over GMOs and biotechnology in food production. The debate erupted in the late 1990s and shows no signs of abating today. Amidst all of the online screeds and misinformation propagated by both sides of the debate, it is hard to know what is actually true, and what approaches to the issue are most beneficial for both human and ecological concerns. Nevertheless, it is an illustrative example because it shows the differences in the food sufficiency and the functional integrity camps so clearly.

In the view of food sufficiency advocates, biotechnology in the production of food has been a smashing success - not merely in financial terms, but also in moral terms. As previously mentioned, the Green Revolution, spearheaded by Dr. Norman Borlaug

¹⁴ Neil Young, *The Monsanto Years*, Performed by Neil Young and the Promise of the Real, 2015, Reprise Records.

and the innovations he engineered, has been credited with saving the lives of over a billion people. As such, Borlaug and others have no patience for what they see as the picky eating of those who can afford to be picky. Reject those foods if you want, they argue, but do not deprive those in developing countries who live or die based on the availability of this technology.

In contrast, those in the functional integrity camp have a very different conception of Borlaug, the Green Revolution, and the presence of biotechnology in foods. They oppose genetically modified foods for a number of reasons, including, most notably, concerns over safety, justice, and what Thompson calls "aretaic objections" - objections based upon the "the moral character of the people and the groups supporting biotechnology."¹⁵ In other words, they do not trust the proponents of the technology, quite apart from the trustworthiness of the technology itself. This mistrust is often accompanied, GMO defenders argue, by a fuzzy understanding of how these technologies actually function. As James E. McWilliams puts it,

The fact is, most Americans who object to GM crops lack the scientific grounding to back their objections with concrete information. More often than not, their problem is not with genetic engineering per se, but with what "Frankenfoods" vaguely represent - corporate greed and global exploitation.¹⁶

As a result, it really does not matter how many times GMOs are tested, or how safe they are claimed to be. It will never be enough. McWilliams goes on to argue that this obfuscation based on emotionalism and identity, rather than scientific acumen, harms those

¹⁵ Thompson, *From Field to Fork*, p. 201.

¹⁶ James E. McWilliams, *Just Food: Where Locavores Get it Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly* (Nashville: Back Bay Books, 2010), pp. 84-85.

in developing countries who could really use the benefits of the technology properly executed. The not-so-subtle implications of the argument are that the scientific “insiders” are actually morally superior in these debates, and are only thwarted from doing good by the contradictory actions of anti-GMO activists. Those who oppose GMOs, of course, believe the opposite to be true.

What is clear is that in polarized debates such as this one, both sides view the other not only as mistaken, but also as morally sinister. This is a myopic viewing of the way things actually are. For example, is it really so implausible for anti-GMO proponents to assume that these technologies will not always be used for laudable means? The privatization of seeds and other activities associated with Monsanto and other purveyors of GM technology have indeed been destructive. As such, thinkers like James E. McWilliams argue that this technology needs to belong to the public domain, to minimize the motivation for profit margins in its deployment. This argument implicitly acknowledges the frequency with which this technology has been misused. Those who hold the patents for genetically modified foods have, and exert, enormous power over the way food is raised and grown, and a change as radical as that which McWilliams proposes seems likely to be a distant reality, if it becomes a reality at all.

A Word on Phronesis

Virtue ethics then, as related to food, has the capacity to be a social solution, and not one merely limited to individuals in its scope. Each individual learns how to pursue eudaimonia in their own specific context, and those individual pursuits, heavily shaped by that context and the people involved in it, contribute to the larger eudaimonia, sometimes known as the common good. Questions remain, as to the scale of the community which best lends itself to this, and, practically, how these virtues are implemented into

daily life. Virtues lead to eudaimonia, but how are the virtues to be practiced in regard to our modern food system? To answer this question, I wish to reference the idea which is probably the most widely known when it comes to virtue: the idea that virtue constitutes “the golden mean between the extremes,” in Aristotle’s words.

The golden mean, perhaps above all else, denotes balance. It is the idea that, in Edmund Burke’s words, the ethical human being is the one “who would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure the unity of his end; and when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be endangered by overloading it on one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise.”¹⁷ This is not moral relativism so much as it is the understanding that doing good requires timing and context in order to be effectual. It is not an abandonment of firmly held principles, but a movement toward those principles in a complex world. As such, it is an approach well suited to the complexities of the food system, as James E.

McWilliams captures well:

Regrettably, our current culinary discourse has been pushed to extreme ends of the spectrum. There’s agribusiness on the one hand and there’s the local farmer on the other. But somewhere in the middle there’s a golden mean of producing food that allows the conscientious consumer to eat an ethical diet in a globalizing world.¹⁸

Philosopher Lisa Heldke has also bemoaned the stark polarization which is so prevalent in discussions of the modern food system. She writes,

I see it (the dichotomy between local and industrial) operating as a kind of moral/political sorting mechanism in contemporary culture, separating “us” (whoever we are) from “them” (whoever they are) with no remainder, and no overlap. For instance, no small amount of the heat generated by de-

¹⁷ These are the concluding lines of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, originally published in 1790.

¹⁸ McWilliams, p. 4.

bates about the virtues and failures of local food movements can be attributed to the fact that participants, opponents, and commentators alike often discuss these movements in ways that suggest that the food choices available to growers and consumers always already neatly, completely, and unambiguously embody one side of the dichotomy or the other - and thereby illustrate the shortcomings of the other side.¹⁹

It is obvious that the industrial food system, the way we eat now, is not balanced. In fact, its reliance on cheap energy and economies of scale have led commentators to call it “brittle”, and a “house of cards.” However, the urge to “go small,” carried to extremes, leads to insularity and ineffectiveness, hardly a stabilizing influence. Moreover, when questions of food ethics become a matter of “us vs. them,” equipoise, to use Burke’s term, becomes impossible, as any movement to correct an imbalanced approach is only seen as a concession, a sign of weakness, ground lost to “them.” Or, to change the metaphor, it becomes contamination, loss of the purity of the original vision for how a food system ought to function. As the subtitle of her essay suggests, Heldke puts forward a third way, the way of the “nested traveler,” which seeks to incorporate the best of the localist and the cosmopolitan traditions. Even though she does not use the term, it is clear that Heldke is looking for that same “golden mean between the extremes.”

The golden mean between the extremes is a way to transcend the dichotomies which hobble progress on the making of an ethical food system. For example, the previously mentioned virtue of hospitality demands that those in developed nations do not insist upon their preferences if those preferences foster hardship and starvation in other parts of the world. It is a failing of hospitality, of taking ownership of the needs of the

¹⁹ Lisa Heldke, “Down-Home Global Cooking: A Third Option Between Cosmopolitanism and Localism,” in *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David M. Kaplan, p. 36.

other. On the other hand, it is no virtue to sacrifice functional integrity, or even the distinctiveness of our dietary cultures, on the basis of “feeding the world.” Not only would this create problems of a different stripe, it would also jeopardize something quite important - the dietary traditions and distinctive elements of both the one giving the food, and the one receiving the food. This is one of the reasons why, for instance, the idea of a McDonalds on the Spanish Steps in Rome, Italy, produced such an explosive reaction, starting the Slow Food movement, or why food donation programs have been labeled “colonialist.” This insight is also relevant in the vegetarianism debates, and in the debates over animal welfare more generally. To not consider the welfare of the animals being raised for food is certainly a moral failing; to assume that traditions of meat consumption that have lasted generations, and can be easily discarded as trivial, is also problematic. Hospitality implies giving of ones self to the other, but it also requires a maintaining of that which is distinctive in both parties.

Similarly, temperance, when viewed through the golden mean, proves instructive. For instance, with the quantities of food, and, specifically, the quantities of meat which are consumed in this nation, it is hard for Americans to avoid the tag of “glutton.” As multiple commentators have pointed out, any system of food production would struggle to supply the quantities of food our eating habits demand. Temperance demands, then, a reduction in the amount of food we consume, and the amount of meat we consume. It means that we forgo the right, even if it is technologically possible, to have pineapple in Boston in the dead of winter. It also strikes a note of caution to foodies, and to those who spend an inordinate time obsessing over food, in various ways. However, temperance also precludes merely viewing food as “fuel,” something that is merely important

for its ability to sustain other aspects of our daily routines. It precludes “nutritionism,” and any other instrumental views of food. The golden mean, again, denotes balance - appreciating food, but not too much.

Finally, the golden mean serves as a way to think about humility in conjunction with our food system. Humility, in fact, connects back to the fundamental questions which were raised at the beginning of this inquiry - how does how we eat serve as a reflection of who we are? Humility is admitting that humans have a bent towards excess and self-gratification, so as a result, the precautionary principle is a useful tool for evaluating the technology we use in the raising of our food, as well as our motives and goals in instituting that technology. This becomes relevant in judging the merits, for example, of genetically modified foods, and evaluating between, for example, the merits of golden rice on the one hand, and massive swaths of genetically modified corn to be made into high fructose corn syrup on the other. Humility also precludes an Edenic view of agriculture which was once in harmony with the natural world, but has been lost. All agriculture is manipulation, is exerting some sort of power over the natural world. There is no way to be completely innocent in agriculture. In fact, as Christian theologian Norman Wirzba has argued, there is no way to be completely innocent in eating anything. There are simply degrees of guilt, and various conditions have been set for determining animals to eat and animals to avoid eating. Examples include Tom Regan’s subject of a life, and Peter Singer’s description of sentience. However, the plethora of opinions on the matter reflect a general uncertainty on the question. Human actions have consequences, and often, they are consequences unforeseen. On the other hand, the precautionary principle, when used incorrectly, can ironically be an extreme position, as it represents a

jaded cynicism which suggests that human beings cannot act beneficently in regard to food. Too much humility can turn to nihilism, and the inability to do anything for the common good.

Even this conversation, however, is still a bit vague in its ability to offer guidance for how to raise and consume food. The golden mean is a helpful tool for navigating the various dichotomies in the food system, including the farmers market and agribusiness, the individual and the state as agents of change, traditionalism and innovation, and rational habit and learned habit. However, the argument needs to go further: how can the golden mean become concrete, and real? One answer, I believe, is the foodway: a food culture which extends beyond the farmers market, or even the single community, but stops short of a completely globalized food system, thus retaining its particularity. Foodways, retaining their distinctiveness while yet engaging with the globalized world, can be facilitators of virtuous eating, mitigating against the worst excesses of the food system as it is currently constituted, and can allow for diversity and freedom, with the ideals of eudaimonia in the form of sustainability firmly in view. The next chapter will be devoted to presenting this argument in detail.

Virtue as the Path to Holistic Sustainability

A shared commitment to virtue is one of the few, if not only, things which could help to break the present stalemate in these types of discussions, because, as we have seen, the stalemate is not generally caused by deficiencies in technological innovation, or in cognitive expertise, but rather, it is caused by the breakdown of trust amongst those who disagree on the best paths to take to achieve a common good. Trust is what will allow for people who disagree to come other and seek compromise, because trust is

what will allow people to give up pieces of their vision in the face of disagreement because they know that the other party is committed to same goods that they are; they are simply in favor of a different way to get there. At this point in time, the arguments are still largely consequentialist in how they are conceptualized. As long as mouths get fed, or as long as corporations which engage in environmentally malevolent behavior get punished for it, so the argument goes, then everything is as it should be. However, the distrust can derail the best laid plans, and the only way it can be avoided is to turn the focus to virtue, to the characters of the people who are arguing for each position.

In the case of GM crops, Paul Thompson makes the helpful distinction between “insiders” and “outsiders,” outlining how this has affected the debates. As Thompson argues, for the scientific “outsider,” the one who does not have the training to understand fully the technical aspects of the technology, the arguments of those who do, the “insiders,” are only “insider testimony,” given by those who stand to gain from the widespread embrace of biotechnology in foods. From the perspective of the outsider, the insiders are not operating from altruistic motives, and, critically, not taking the concerns of the outsiders seriously. As Thompson warns the insiders, “Telling the doubtful to pipe down because we are busy helping the poor is not a respectful response.”²⁰ Because there are researchers who react to doubters with this level of scorn, outsiders tend to view the entire community of insiders as being disreputable, even though objectively, that is not the case at all. Thompson himself makes the anecdotal observation that scientific proponents of GM crops fall roughly into a 20-60-20 pattern. Twenty percent are truly virtu-

²⁰ Thompson, *From Field to Fork*, p. 225.

ous and respectful of the doubters, twenty percent are “truly disreputable,” while the majority in the middle are dismissive of the debate, due to busyness, ignorance, or some other factor. As such, Thompson argues that the onus was on the scientific community, for although many in that community are truly benevolent, and even though they may be “right” when it comes to what the technology can do, the tensions and fights over that technology are partly the result of their own doing, of not taking the outsiders seriously. This is a problem which is not solved through information or even of reputation management. This can only be solved through gaining the trust which come from being trustworthy, which comes as a development of virtue.

Even though GM crops and biotechnology in foods provide the clearest example of this dynamic, I would argue that its presence can be seen at all points in food ethics. Sharp disagreements and polarized visions of the good are everywhere, and the division they foster inhibits the ability of those interested in these questions of coming to practical solutions. So much so, in fact, that it is doubtful that there will ever be a full resolution of the disagreements, and a synthesis of views into one, coherent food ethics platform for resolving the ethical questions which may arise. The sides are just too entrenched. This, historically, has been a difficult message for nearly all ethical thinkers to accept, in food ethics or any other subcategory of the discipline. The temptation to create an all-encompassing framework fully equipped for every community and circumstance is a strong one, but instead of creating an entire structural framework, and attempting to install it into our current debates on food, better to start with reality, the way things are, and then to work from there. Virtue is well suited to do just this, and, ironi-

cally, this is so due to a trait of virtue which is often criticized by deontological and consequentialist thinkers: those who follow a virtue ethics approach will not compose detailed to-do lists which everyone must follow in order to create an ethical system. Proponents of virtue recognize that individual lives vary widely, and as such, the paths to virtue for these individuals will vary widely as well.

It is important to note, however, that this is not a license for relativism, for shackling an objective, transcendent morality with our foibles and predilections. There needs to be a commitment to a eudaimonistic vision of sustainability, one marked by all three elements of the triad described above - food sufficiency, ecological integrity, and social sustainability. This commitment ought to be marked by a strong desire for continuity. This continuity includes an appreciation for tradition, for knowledge, customs, and traditions handed down through the generations. This would be in marked contrast with so much of the modern food industry as it now stands, a system which seems designed to erode and degrade historical ways of eating, even in something so basic as relegated meal times. However, dead traditionalism is not the goal; the appreciation for continuity must be accompanied by the courage to innovate and adapt in conjunction with the needs and the demands of a twenty-first century world. More important than looking back, however, is looking forward - understanding that the way we act now reverberates through time, making a profound impact on the lives and the livelihoods of those who come after us. This sentiment lies at the heart of the Brundtland statement, which introduced sustainability as a noteworthy issue, and it is still a vital one now. This is at the core of any worthwhile vision of eudaimonia, and any actions which fall outside of its

bounds ought to be rejected as morally deficient, or at least morally less than actions which fit the outlined description.

Phronesis and the Golden Mean

If sustainability, in all of its facets, is going to be the standard for a vision of eudaimonia, but the notion of sustainability is so fraught with debate and contention that consensus seems impossible to find, then how can we proceed? How can the virtues be implemented in society in such a way as to foment virtue in the way we raise and consume food? To put the question another way, how can something long associated with individual character - virtue - be implemented to resolve social problems?

Ironically, I believe that the polarization and the contention referenced earlier help to explain why food movements have tended to focus on their energies on the individual - or more precisely, the individual consumer. If there is so much disagreement as to what constitutes moral eating, perhaps it is better to focus on consumer choices and behaviors, avoiding that minefield altogether. As previously argued, however, the value of such an approach is questionable, at best, as structural realities in our current food system make such an approach untenable. As Paul Hawken memorably puts it in his book *The Ecology of Commerce*, "The government subsidizes energy costs so that farmers can deplete aquifers to grow alfalfa to feed cows that make milk that is stored in warehouses as surplus cheese that does not feed the hungry."²¹ The result is what Paul Roberts calls "institutionalized overproduction,"²² and it serves to effectively create a

²¹ Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce, Revised Edition: A Declaration of Sustainability* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2010), quoted in McWilliams, p. 197.

²² Paul Roberts, *The End of Food* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), p. 122.

setting where we cannot eat benevolently, because the system rewards unsustainable, unethical behavior.

The top-down initiative, however, famously exemplified by the terminology of the “nudge,” popularized by Cass Sunstein, does not appear to fare much better. Sunstein and Thaler argue for what Thomas C. Leonard labeled “the new paternalism.” This differs from direct governmental action enforced by the power of laws (i.e., do this whether you like it or not, or else face the authority of the law). Rather, it is an approach characterized by, in Sunstein and Thaler’s language, “libertarian paternalism” - steering people into making choices with better consequences. If the system as currently constituted promotes and rewards bad behavior, why not alter it in such a way as to promote better choices?

In some ways, the “nudge” resembles the food system as it is constructed now, just with motives which expand beyond the profit margin. Both are reliant upon “choice architecture” - those external elements in the environment which influence decision-making far more than our own rational processing does. Proponents of the “nudge” understand what those who organize supermarkets understand - that, in Leonard’s words, “real people don’t use the techniques of Hamilton and LaGrange to make choices; they lack common knowledge in strategic settings; and it is costly to acquire and process information—there are no cognitive free lunches.”²³ Overwhelmed, our rational selves cede decision making control to our adaptive subconscious, which, influenced by the architects of choice, makes inconsistent and often faulty decisions. The only difference is

²³ Thomas C Leonard, “Book Review - *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*,” *Constitutional Political Economy* 19 (2008): 356-360.

that of intent - the marketer arranges choice architecture to their own financial gains, while the nudger does so with more beneficent intentions in mind.

However, at bottom, the nudge is still manipulation. It still assumes a low view of humanity and an inclination to believe that no real improvement in the decision making process can occur. It also puts freedom and autonomy into the hands of the few - the ones doing the nudging, who somehow escape the foibles of the nudged. Do they do so through their own rational excellence? Wouldn't that be a contradiction of the terms they've already laid out? There is no path to true flourishing that goes through the "nudge."

The problems which pervade the food system are, ultimately, social problems which require social solutions. I have argued for virtue as a means by which to engage these social problems, because virtue can shape the sort of people who are trustworthy. Virtue can shape people who can consider the needs of the other, and engage in the sorts of give-and-take discussions which can lead to positive action. Perhaps most significantly, virtue can train the adaptive subconscious, strengthening it to withstand the architects of choice. However, virtue is typically associated with the individual, with a single person developing virtues with a certain end in view. In fact, some have gone so far as to equate virtue with egoism - the individual seeks her own flourishing, her own eudaimonia, and is not concerned with that of others. Critics of virtue might posit, in contrast, an ethical theory based upon Kantian conceptions of duty, for instance, of doing what needs to be done not because it is enjoyable, or leads to flourishing, but rather because that is what the world needs.

There are several ways to answer the challenge of egoism, and to explain why a food ethics which highlights virtue makes sense in a communal context. First, we must make the point that any ethical theory which calls for large numbers of people to radically disavow their own wellbeing for the good of a larger, abstract community, is not going to gain many adherents. Sacrifice is noble indeed, but it is also rare, particularly on behalf of those we do not know. An element of “enlightened self-interest” must be present in any workable theory of food. Second, this charge relies on a vision of virtue which is connected to “happiness,” or, in some cases, even “pleasure.” This is a thin conception, which is why “flourishing” is the word I have chosen as a translation for *eudaimonia*. Virtue is not a selfish indulgence of pleasure; it is a response to the call of our “better angels,” leading towards a deeper sense of fulfillment. Third, it is important to remember that virtue is not formed in solitude, or in a vacuum. Rather, in Annas' words, “learning to be virtuous always takes place in an embedded context.”²⁴ Virtue is learned most often in community, whether that community is the immediate physical one, or a larger “invisible” community accessed through books and, increasingly, technology. It is learned through teachers and mentors, and it is made manifest in practices which are oriented towards others. As Roger Scruton provocatively argues, to be a person, to be fully human, is to be formed in relation to others. Human beings can live and exist in solitude, of course, but according to Scruton, there is an essential element of their humanness which goes missing in such a set up.²⁵ Even if Scruton overstates the case, the formation of virtue presupposes community. In this way, it is even more communally

²⁴ Annas, p. 23.

²⁵ Roger Scruton, “Real Men Have Manners,” in *The Philosophy of Food* ed. David M. Kaplan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 24-32.

based than other ethical systems, which are entirely housed in the rational mind of the individual. In those systems, the right thinking of the individual is what matters most, and the external features of the world - including other people - are to be acted upon in accordance with the chosen ethical framework. In the case of virtue, the path runs opposite, as interactions with others give rise to opportunities to learn, practice, and hone the ethical system.

CHAPTER 7 FOODWAYS AS THE SEEDBEDS OF VIRTUE

When words such as “virtue” get used, one has the temptation to think about Sunday school, or maybe that one elder relative who began every story with “Back in my day.” So how can virtue be inculcated and made real in the ethical debates surrounding food in “a world come of age,” to borrow a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer? An answer, or at least a partial answer, lies in the restoration, and the creation, of foodways. If the industrial food system upon which America relies constitutes a giant, overarching food culture, it does no good to attempt to supplant it with another giant, overarching food culture. Better to foster the growth and the flourishing of myriad food “cultures” - distinctive from each other, and yet intersecting and connecting for the benefit of the eudaimonia, the flourishing, which sustainability brings. Foodways are not inherently virtuous; I will make the case, however, that they make excellent seedbeds for virtue. This is due to their emphasis on historical continuity, practice, community, and affection. They can also be seedbeds for vices such as tribalism and elitism, of course, but, ultimately, the humility of understanding that we do not eat in a culture-less fashion, that we have no choice to but to be embedded in a specific context, has the potential to build empathy and trust which extend beyond the boundaries of the in-group and out to the world, thus providing a way out of the stagnant polarizations which define so many food debates. Foodways aid us in understanding our own identities, and also in understanding who we ought to become. As M.F.K. Fisher puts it, “with our gastronomic

growth will come, inevitably, knowledge and perception of a hundred other things, but mainly of ourselves.”¹

Defining Foodways

Before proceeding further into the argument, it will be helpful to pause and clarify what foodways are, and why they deserve attention from an ethical perspective. While it is dated, Margaret Mead’s definition for what she calls “food habits” is still an excellent starting point for thinking about foodways today: “the culturally standardized set of behaviors in regard to food manifested in individuals who have been reared within a given cultural tradition.”² Mead’s essay was written in the context of the mid twentieth century, and focuses on the ways in which global warfare and technological innovations alter traditional dietary patterns on a global scale. Her point is that food habits, what I am calling “foodways,” denote cultural understandings of food and eating, and as such are not easily altered. As a result, proposed dietary changes performed in the name of nutrition or science must always be tested against “the total cultural picture.”³

Foodways denote what a given culture eats, how it does so, and why it does so. As Mead points out, the behaviors are not chosen by individuals so much as they are a product of an inculcation process. Moreover, participation in that inculcation process forms the identity of the participant, and marks the individual as a member of that particular community. To put it another way, the food which is consumed by a member of

¹ Quoted by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, “Introduction,” in *Food and Culture*. 2nd edition. Ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 9.

² Margaret Mead, “The Problem of Changing Food Habits,” originally published in 1943. Featured in *Food and Culture*, pp. 18-27.

³ Ibid.

that culture is a form of communication announcing the cultural association. Foodways, then, are about more than just what is on the table - they are an identity to be claimed, and to announce to the larger world. They are often formed regionally, as in the case of barbecue, for example. Foodways can also be formed in accordance with ethnicity, as in, for example, in the prevalence of Hmong cuisine in Minnesota and Wisconsin emanating from the emigrant communities there.

Geography and ethnicity have been, perhaps, the most prevalent lines along which foodways form, but other variables also can shape dietary cultures, including perceived levels of status. For example, Roland Barthes notes that the “business lunch” constitutes a food culture, and, I would argue, a foodway, which inculcates expected behaviors, and, critically, messages about the status of those who participate in them. The message is sent to others, but also to the self - I am important, I am significant, I am a businessman or businesswoman, and this distinct way of eating helps to prove that.¹ The protein bar, referenced in an earlier chapter, performs a similar function, advertising concern for health and nutrition, but also, as the business “power lunch” does, self-importance and significance - I am so busy (read: important) that this is all I have time to eat! These are particular dietary habits borne out of a particular culture which fosters identity, and, as such, they are to be considered foodways as well, in that they are collections of behavior which form out of particular associations within a community, born out of a common accumulated wisdom therein, and designed to meet the specific challenges faced by a member of said community.

¹ Roland Barthes, “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption,” in *Food and Culture*, pp. 28-35.

A point in this definition of foodway's favor is that it does not posit traditional ways of eating as distinctively cultural while positing modern forms, such as the energy bar, as acultural. Again, modern industrial food is not the absence of culture; it is the substitution of one for another. Additionally, as we have seen, not all foodways are created equal. Comparing barbecue and the business lunch, for example, reveals glaring, obvious differences - barbecue has a historical pedigree which the modern business lunch lacks, it is less ostentatious, more egalitarian in its appeal, and generally inspires a higher level of fervor, even passion, than does the culture of the business lunch. However, those who participate in the foodway of the business lunch have a greater capacity to make the meal healthy and ethical than, say, those who live in an urban food desert, and who are forced to participate in a foodway dominated by sodas and processed foods. The business diners often have the means to choose organic or vegetarian options, means which those in the food desert do not share. Hence, in most cases, there is greater potential for ethical eating in the former than in the latter.

As a result, blame and praise alike are not to be automatically laid at the feet of those who participate in a particular foodway. The options for dietary action facing the one who lives in the food desert are dramatically different, dramatically more limited, than the business diner. As a result, the ethical ramifications of the decisions of they make within such a system are quite different from the ones made by people who do not face such severe limitations. The foodway which we inhabit limits the scope of our choices. There are choices to be made, of course, but those choices lie within the well-established parameters of the foodway itself. Virtue can be exercised in all contexts - in

the business lunch, the barbecue joint, and even in the food desert - and it will look different in all of those contexts. This is not relativism - the eudaimonia remains unchanged - but it is a way to acknowledge the fact that ethical decisions are not made in vacuums, but in embedded contexts which shape and form the scope of the decisions being made. It is also a way to recognize the fact that these foodways, distinctive ways of eating which are inculcated as identity markers, constitute restraints upon what can be eaten. To choose one distinctive way of eating means to reject other ways of eating.

The Tale We've Fallen Into¹

The majority of Americans, however, have bought in to a system which attempts to contain within itself all other systems and traditions, a system which persuades its adherents that they do not really need to choose a distinctive dietary pattern, but rather can “have it all.” Many American eaters are taught to think of themselves as being outside of these embedded contexts, able to impose our ethical frameworks upon them ex nihilo, and also as having the ability to cherry pick elements of all of the embedded con-

¹ This is a quote from Samwise Gamgee in the Two Towers story which constitutes part of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. See JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, Volume II: The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins, 1999, pp 399-400). The phrase is the climax of this larger passage:

Yes, that's so,' said Sam. 'And we shouldn't be here at all, if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually - their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on - and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same - like old Mr Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into? '

texts in order to use them. However, as theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas famously points out, this is not a viable option. It does no good to act, in his words, as “those who believe they should have no story except the story that they chose when they had no story.”¹ In eschewing historical food “stories” (in which the dietary habits were governed by, as in Mead’s definition, the culture in which we were raised, or geographical realities, or some other limiting factor) in favor of a food story which includes all other food stories - whichever sort of cuisine we want, in whatever quantities we want - we have made a choice. We have chosen a story without realizing in fact that this is what we have done, and the story we have unconsciously chosen places inexorable pressure on the daily choices we do sense ourselves making. Back in chapter two, we noted some of the ways in which this process was unfolding in the industrial American food system. Most notable in this regard is the development of hyperpalatable foods - foods which aim to fly below the level of cognition, making their consumption more of a mindless habit than a conscious choice. Addictions to processed, unhealthy, environmentally destructive foods, then, become a consequence of the foodway we inhabit, even as we are being told that we inhabit no foodway, that our choices are without any sort of restraint.

What must happen, then, is the choosing of stories which shape their inhabitants to desire better choices, in light of the eudaimonia of sustainability. Foodways can constitute those alternative stories, alternative ways of eating governed by forces and fac-

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, “The End of American Protestantism,” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, July 2nd, 2013, accessed February 6th, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/07/02/3794561.htm>

tors beyond that of individual autonomy. In Alasdair MacIntyre's words, we are "storytelling animals," and the stories we tell about ourselves are critical in understanding our perceptions of ourselves and for understanding our actions. MacIntyre writes,

Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'¹

These alternative stories can serve as a counterpoint to, in Hauerwas' words, "a social order built on the contrary presumption that I get to make my life up."² There are still choices to be made, of course, but those choices take place within the confines of a narrative which is not chosen. As Whitney Sanford argues, "Story, narrative, and metaphor provide the frameworks through which humans choose what roles they play in relationship to the other members of the biotic community."³ In other words, to think of ourselves in terms of the stories we inhabit can change our perception, can change what matters to us, and ultimately, can change the parameters of what we consider to be acceptable behavior. In the narratives we see ourselves in, our larger frames of ethics are shaped by who we are, and where we are, in the light of the story of which we find ourselves a part. Indeed, an action will not be perceived to be "right" at all, if it doesn't fit the parameters of the narrative, and of who we understand ourselves to be in the light of the narrative.

¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 201.

² Hauerwas. "The End of American Protestantism."

³ A. Whitney Sanford, *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), p. 203.

Foodways perform this function by giving testament to the fact that we do not indeed, get to “make our lives up,” and that there are parameters to the story - which is another way to say external restraints upon reality - that we ought to conform our decision-making around. For example, the specter of environmental degradation and collapse deeply shapes the story of food - how it ought to be raised and consumed. It has become a major factor in the story of food for all citizens in all countries. Sustainability, then, as defined in the previous chapter, becomes a guide, a north star for navigating the realities of eating in world where many thousands die of hunger daily, ecologies are compromised, and farming communities are hollowed out from the inside. Sustainability is not the only element in the story, however, and for that reason it is prudent to think in terms of the continual innovation and the improvement of foodways which already exist, in addition to the construction of entirely new ways of eating.

The Possibilities of Foodways

As can be witnessed for the sheer variety of approaches to ethical eating - vegetarian, local, organic, and so many others - there is no one accepted way of eating ethically. There are, rather, distinctive approaches which lend themselves to particular contexts and circumstances. Better to let diversity flourish than to impose from on high one way of eating. This is not to say all foodways are naturally suited to sustainability. It is to say, however, that there are certain food stories in which the ingredients for sustainability are already ingrained into their fabric. All that is needed is to bring them out. The action of reclaiming these diverse stories, of reclaiming the foodways which have been abandoned for the sake of an inferior foodway revolving around homogeneity born of technological innovation, contains within itself the potential for eating in a more sustain-

able way. These foodways, by their very nature, express a very different sort of eudaimonia than “Have it Your Way.” Again, this is not to say that they are inherently virtuous, or will automatically produce more virtuous eaters. The concept of foodways, and particularly of turning to traditional foodways for guidance, carries problems of its own, problems which will be addressed later in the chapter. The fundamentals are there, however, and can be strengthened by a conscious commitment to live within these stories, and to incorporate sustainability, in all its forms, into the eudaimonia for each story. If this occurs, foodways have the potential to serve as incubators for the environmental virtues which lead to that goal. This potential is seen in four elements common to most forms of foodways: historical continuity, community, practice, and finally, the power of emotional affection. These will be examined in turn.

Historical Continuity

If a foodway is older than one generation, then it bears the DNA of sustainability within it, even if the adherents of the foodway have never given a thought to environmental concerns. The definition of sustainable development given in the Brundtland Report, perhaps its most famous iteration, states that sustainable development “is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Inbuilt in both this definition and the concept of the foodway, at least in Mead’s definition, is concern which transcends generations. Concern for generations yet to come, of course, has been a staple of environmental discourse for decades, but implicit in this also is concern for the generations which have come before, and the idea that they can be learned from. For instance, one of Michael Pollan’s “Food Rules” admonishes readers to “Never eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food.” He goes on to write,

Imagine how baffled your ancestors would be in a modern supermarket: the epoxy-like tubes of Go-Gurt, the preternaturally fresh Twinkies, the vaguely pharmaceutical Vitamin Water. Those aren't foods, quite; they are food products. History suggests you might want to wait a few decades or so before adding such novelties to your diet, the substitution of margarine for butter being the classic case in point. My mother used to predict "they" would eventually discover that butter was better for you. She was right: the trans-fatty margarine is killing us. Eat food, not food products.¹

The ways of eating which have lasted - the ways of our "great-grandmothers," in Pollan's language - have lasted because they represent the collective wisdom of a given people, wisdom which was earned through living in a specific context.

Even though the contexts have changed dramatically in many ways, that wisdom can still be useful. It can serve as the framework through which modern challenges can be engaged and dealt with, shedding light on questions which previous generations never had to consider. For example, according to the Earth Policy Institute, the total meat consumption in the United States has risen dramatically in the past century, from 9.8 billion pounds in 1909 to 52.2 billion pounds in 2012.² This expansion results from both increased frequency in eating meat and eating increasingly large portions per meal. The American Cancer Society famously suggests that the optimal portion size for meat in a meal is about the same size as a deck of cards. To put it mildly, these are not the portion sizes American eaters are accustomed to. They are, however, the portions of the past, and using them as a guide for the way in which we eat today can serve as a natural teacher of temperance and, if we are embracing these restraints while mindful of the welfare of livestock and of other human beings, of hospitality as well.

¹ Michael Pollan, "Six Rules for Eating Wisely," *TIME* June 4th, 2006, accessed February 6th, 2017, <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/six-rules-for-eating-wisely/>

² Cited by Eliza Barclay, "A Nation of Meat Eaters: See How it All Adds Up." *NPR* June 27th, 2012, accessed February 8th, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2012/06/27/155527365/visualizing-a-nation-of-meat-eaters>

As previously noted, this will not please every ethical food advocate. Even a piece of meat the size of a deck of cards is immoral in the eyes of a vegan, after all. Further, a vegan may respond to above argument for lesser portions, or to the meat-eating environmentalist who insists that their meat is humanely raised, with the charge of rationalization, if not outright relativism. Is virtue merely a sliding scale designed to let meat-eaters enjoy their burgers without any guilt? I do not believe this is the case. There are some, of course, who have the resources and the ability to be vegetarians, and moreover, that standard of eating is precisely what they believe virtue requires of them. If these people continue to consume meat even if they believe it is not the most ethical way to eat, and have the means to pursue alternatives, they are not pursuing virtue in any sort of committed fashion, and a half-hearted pursuit of virtue is no pursuit at all.

There are others, however, who will not be in this position, due to a variety of reasons, from economics to culture to sheer taste. For them, virtue calls not for abstention from meat, but rather for eating it with gratitude, and in the full knowledge that all people rely on the death of other organisms in order that they may live. Or, perhaps, their context makes vegetarianism a practical impossibility.¹ Virtue looks to a better way of eating, and is rigorous in its insistence upon eating which reflects a positive character, and yet, at the same time, acknowledges that all people are positioned in different places, in situations which mandate different responses to the question of what is re-

¹ The Inuit peoples are commonly cited as examples here.

quired. Looking to the ways of the past, and viewing our moral and technological innovations through those lenses, can aid humanity in leaning in to that paradox, and making it a reality in the way that we eat.

Community

The whole notion of a foodway is built upon the idea of community, of people who have been shaped to approach food in a certain way, and who mark themselves as members of the community who do it as they do. An individual person's dietary habits do not constitute a foodway. However, as previously argued, our current foodway in the United States has attempted to present the narrative that this is not the case, that each individual can consciously form their own specific way of eating. In this system, a high premium is placed upon customization, of each individual at the table (if they even gather at the table) eating foods which are different from the others, in accordance with their own specific tastes and habits. However, as Michael Pollan and others have argued, our insistence on personalization consists in taking a handful of staples (corn and soy most notably), raising them in vast monocultures, and then dressing them up by way of processing and technological wizardry. The staggering variety on display the grocery store is an illusion. We are "corn chips with legs." Or to put the point another way, we have a collective foodway, even as we insist upon personalization and customization of our food. Better, than, to acknowledge that point, and to consciously seek out truly distinctive ways of eating, and the like-minded people who also eat that way. Real diversity in food is not flavoring high fructose corn syrup in six different ways; it is distinctive cuisines, distinctive ways of eating, standing alongside each other.

What defines the parameters of these distinct foodways? What marks them as distinct from each other? As mentioned, they are most often delineated by geography

and/or ethnicity. However, it would be a mistake to act as if these were the only parameters that mattered, or to act as if this always held true. The truth is, foodways are extraordinarily fluid in their composition. As several anthropologists and sociologists have pointed out, following Pierre Bourdieu in his discussion of “cultural capital,” ethnic and geographically based cuisines are complex creations, imbued with power struggles of various kinds. Dietary practices, then, serve to mark social and economic strata, and as such, those who pine for “traditional” cuisine can sometimes use it as a way to exercise their privileged position. As Alison Leitch points out, when groups such as Slow Food attempt to rescue “endangered foods,” as in the case of lardo di Colonnata, (salted pork fat from a specific region of Italy), what began as a food associated with peasants transformed into a food associated with affluent foodies, to the frustration of the original purveyors of that particular food item.¹ In its most extreme forms, this impulse can resemble what Lisa Heldke terms “cultural food colonialism,” as people groups impose their idea of what is “authentic and traditional” upon those without the means to resist.² For instance, food activists in Mexico were aghast, as Jeffrey M. Pilcher notes, at the fact that Mexicans, and particularly working-class Mexicans, had no difficulty in eating at Taco Bell fast food restaurants. How could people in the home of “authentic” tortillas eat those Americanized copies? The answer was that it was not about the tortilla itself, but rather that they were “eating” American culture - clean, brightly lit restaurants, the democratic process of waiting in line for food, the egalitarian equality inherent in dining there. In so doing, these diners appropriated that most American of cuisines - fast food

¹ Alison Leitch, “Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity,” in *Food and Culture*, pp. 381-399.

² Lisa Heldke, “Let’s Cook Thai: Recipes for Colonialism,” in *Food and Culture*, pp. 327-341.

- into their own identities, including their understandings of themselves as Mexican citizens.¹ Hence, the mission of groups such as Slow Food can often be dangerously reductionistic - it is not so simple to find “traditional, authentic,” cuisine based upon geography or ethnicity.

That being said, however, foodways based on ethnicity and particularly geography carry an ecological logic and, as the fervor over the local food movement attests, they hold emotional power with increasing swaths of the American population. The philosophical roots of the local movement can be found in agrarians such as Wendell Berry, and also the bioregionalist movement, founded by Peter Berg and poet Gary Snyder, among others. Snyder argues that the idea of reinhabiting a specific “place” implies engagement with the community of people who share that place, and as such it is only natural that foodways will be primarily conceived in terms of geography. Many scholars and thinkers have noted the power of food to unify people and to bring them together into a cohesive community, and it stands to reason that people who share the same “place” are more likely to share tastes for the foods which are prevalent there. As Ayelet Fishbach of the University of Chicago puts it,

I think that food really connects people. Food is about bringing something into the body. And to eat the same food suggests that we are both willing to bring the same thing into our bodies. People just feel closer to people who are eating the same food as they do. And then trust, cooperation, these are just consequences of feeling close to someone.²

¹ Jeffrey M Pilcher, “Taco Bell, Maseca, and Slow Food: A Postmodern Apocalypse for Mexico’s Peasant Cuisine?” in *Food and Culture*, pp. 400-410.

² Quoted in Shankar Vedantem, “Why Eating the Same Food Increases People’s Trust and Cooperation,” *NPR*, February 2nd, 2017, accessed February 10th, 2017, http://www.npr.org/2017/02/02/512998465/why-eating-the-same-food-increases-peoples-trust-and-cooperation?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social

Fishbach and her colleague, Kaitlin Wooley, ran a series of experiments in an attempt to demonstrate just how powerful food, specifically the eating of same food, can be in forming community. As Shankar Vedantem summarizes their work,

In one of their experiments, they had volunteers play the role of a manager and a union representative. The two had to agree on the hourly wage that management was willing to pay and that union members were to receive. Pairs of volunteers were sometimes given candy to eat together or sometimes given salty snacks. And sometimes, one of the volunteers was given one kind of food and the other was given the other kind of food. When the volunteers ate the same kinds of food, they reached agreement much more quickly than when one person ate the candy and the other person ate the salty food.¹

Fishbach and Wooley are not conclusively sure what caused these results, but the results do bear testament to the power that eating the same food has to unify people. Geography is a powerful predictor of similar dietary patterns, for obvious reasons.

However, this is not always the case. Barbecue was previously mentioned as a style of cuisine prevalent in Texas and the American South - what if a person is a vegetarian or a vegan living in these locales? They will obviously not eat the same cuisine - how can these people possibly enter into the sort of foodway which will promote virtue? In her discussion of virtue, Annas notes this very criticism - how can virtue be formed in embedded communities if those communities are not virtuous? As an answer, she writes of the "invisible" community - one not connected by geographical or familial bonds but rather connected through the realm of convictions and ideals.² These communities may consist of like-minded souls communicating through books, or, in particular in the modern era, through the radical advances in communication as seen in social

¹ Ibid.

² Annas, p. 55.

media, Skype, and so on. A Google search for “Texas Vegetarian” reveals recipes, restaurant choices, and community groups peopled by fellow “lonesome vegetarians,” to borrow the title for one of these groups. This sort of online support is critical for that person’s success in maintaining their vegetarianism. That invisible community provides support, encouragement, and information (in the form of recipes, for instance), none of which may be available in physical, local settings. Are these types of invisible communities be as effective as their localized, physical counterparts? The evidence seems to be inconclusive, but in an era when the concept of community is so powerfully shaped by communication which transcends differences, it is not wise to leave out invisible communities in any discussion of community-focused foodways.

Communities of all sorts negotiate the individual autonomy of the members with the needs and priorities of the group in question. It is in this very tension where virtues have the potential to be formed, as members renounce their desired outcomes, at least in part, for the benefit of other members and the group as a whole. Humans are, in the words of Aristotle, “social animals,” and as so much of that interaction revolves around food, then the idea of a foodway, a community connected by way of dietary practices, has real and obvious potential for forming virtue in the context of those interactions. In fact, according to English philosopher Roger Scruton, this is precisely the source for what we call “table manners,” and without these manners, and the virtues that they make manifest, we could not be truly human. Scruton writes,

Manners, properly understood, are the instruments whereby we negotiate our passage through the world, earn the respect and support of others, and form communities, which are something more than the sum of their members.¹

¹ Scruton, “Real Men Have Manners,” in *The Philosophy of Food*, p. 24.

It is not difficult to see how the virtues, and specifically, how the virtues we have already discussed, fit into this picture. The manners Scruton describes, which are often specific to their particular foodway, turn feeding into eating (fressen into essen), and they do this primarily by turning our focus to the other.¹ We eat less to make sure the other has enough (temperance), we take responsibility for the dining experience of the other (hospitality), and we are reminded once more that the world, or even the inhabitants of a dinner table, do not all revolve around us. (humility.) It is part of the acknowledgement of being embedded into a particular context. That context inevitably involves other people, which means it will always contain complications and even annoyances, but it will also be an incubator for virtue.

Practice

As previously noted, the physicality of food, and its association with “women’s work,” were two factors which made food a less than savory topic for modern philosophical analysis. Nonetheless, as scholars and popular writers alike have discovered, particularly within the last ten to fifteen years, the very characteristics of food which were derided - its sheer ordinariness, its reliance upon physical practice more than cognitive understanding, and its association with the home and with the women who were responsible for it - carried a unique power all their own.² Michel De Certeau and Luce Giard write in praise of what they call “doing-cooking,” and the sorts of learning which flow from it. The practice of doing-cooking, of practicing “the nourishing arts,” conveys a

¹ Scruton highlighted the use of chopsticks as a way to limit the amount of food eaten at one time and the speed at which that food is consumed. Chopsticks require slow, deliberate eating, which enables conversation around the table, as opposed to merely the sounds of grunts and lipsmacking. See Scruton, p 26.

² As with so many topics related to food, Michael Pollan’s popular work is of note, particularly his book *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*. (New York: Penguin, 2013).

very different form of intelligence than that of cognitive learning - this is learning which is physical, and it is sensory. It is no less profound for its ordinariness, however, as it is a way to rediscover the secret wisdom of the ones, almost always women, who, in this practice, exhibited “a way of being-in-the-world and making it one’s home.” They go on to write,

Doing-cooking is the medium for a basic, humble, and persistent practice that is repeated in time and space, rooted in the fabric of relationships to others and to one’s self, marked by the “family saga” and the history of each, bound into childhood memory just like rhythms and seasons.¹

As de Certeau and Giard note in this passage, historical continuity and practice come together in the foodway, as the practices of cooking, which sustained families and communities for generations, are passed down and remembered. However, it is easy to romanticize these “basic, humble, and persistent” practices. The “home-cooked meal” is a trope which is pervasive in American culture, often associated with comfort, home, family, and memories of a better time. What the trope leaves out, however, is that what makes these practices effective for cultivating all of those good things is also what makes them, at times, a prison which needed to be escaped, particularly for women. There was a reason, after all, why Kentucky Fried Chicken could run their famous billboard which featured a bucket of chicken and the words “Women’s Liberation.” These practices, despite the benefits they convey, often proved to be incompatible with the pace and the needs of modern life, and women and men alike found themselves unwilling or unable to maintain the social knowledge of the “nourishing arts” in a world which continues to move at a frenetic pace.

¹ De Certeau and Giard, “The Nourishing Arts,” in *Food and Culture*, pp. 69.

The ramifications of the collective forgetting of the practices of “doing-cooking” have been profound for the way in which food is raised and consumed. No one captures this dilemma more eloquently than Wendell Berry, in his essay, “The Pleasures of Eating.” Berry writes,

The specialization of production induces specialization of consumption...Indeed, this sort of consumption may be said to be one of the chief goals of industrial production. The food industrialists have by now persuaded millions of consumers to prefer food that is already prepared. They will grow, deliver, and cook your food for you and (just like your mother) beg you to eat it. That they do not yet offer to insert it, prechewed, into our mouth is only because they have found no profitable way to do so. We may rest assured that they would be glad to find such a way. The ideal industrial food consumer would be strapped to a table with a tube running from the food factory directly into his or her stomach.¹

As several food reformers have pointed out, echoing Berry, the loss of the knowledge of these practices of gardening and cooking have produced a stark dependence upon the industrial producers of food to do that work, and as these producers have gotten more efficient, consumers have found themselves to be increasingly dependent. As has been well chronicled by Michael Pollan and others, cooking is on a steady decline, as increasing numbers of American citizens opt for the restaurant, or for pre-cooked meals in their homes. To use de Certeau and Giard’s language, knowledge of “the nourishing arts” has become rare, and, with the loss of knowledge in the kitchen has come a concomitant loss in the loss of knowledge in the basics of what constitutes food.

If the exchange of freedom and independence for the convenience of industrialized food is not a trade we are willing to make, then the cultivation of foodways, held together by the “nourishing arts,” by practices, would be a wise course of action to pursue.

¹ Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in *What are People For?*

In Albert Borgmann's words, such an action would put "the tissue of skin and flesh"¹ upon the bone structures of abstract theories of food ethics. Practice is the way in which theories are made manifest in the physical, sensory world. What Borgmann calls "focal practices" help the individual orient themselves to the world in an ethical manner. However, practices need a suitable context within which to flourish; it does no good to, as some have argued, eschew all modern ways of eating in favor of the "historically normal." In other words, the pressures and the pace of life which helped give shape to a food system predicated upon speed and efficiency do not go away when someone resolves to cook like their grandparents used to cook. More importantly, the abundance of cheap, easily accessed food on offer does not lend itself to undertaking practices which are time and labor-intensive. Obviously, a tragic event resulting in a global food shortage would change this situation immediately, but in the meantime, where does the motivation to undertake these practices come from? For Borgmann, the "context of engagement" is what makes the difference. In other words, we need to build the structures and the systems within which these types of practices make sense. The foodway, the distinctive way of cooking and eating born out of a community and passed down through time can provide the context for the development of these practices, and to their use. To build a distinctive culture, a particular context which facilitates ethical eating is the most promising way for the virtues to be made manifest. It is what turns food from pleasure into something more fulfilling. As Borgmann writes,

¹ Albert Borgmann, *Real American Ethics: Taking Responsibility for Our Country* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). p/ 90.

A pleasure which gets detached from its context of engagement with a particular time, a special place, and a beloved community can become addictive, especially when a lot of technological sophistication is employed to refine the pleasure and make it easily available. ¹

Eaters who do not know the context of engagement for the foods they eat are vulnerable to just this sort of addiction, exploited, as previously argued, by large food producers. The “nourishing arts,” the practices of a certain way of raising and consuming food found in specific, cultural foodways, can provide valuable defenses against it, enabling freedom and independence by way of the food which is consumed.

Affection

The power required to restore contexts of engagement for food is not insignificant. Where would it emerge from, particularly in the face of a dominant food system pushing hard in the other direction? As previously argued, reason and calculation are simply not powerful enough to spur lasting behavioral change. They must be strengthened, and affection, the power of emotion, is a strengthening agent which can provide power for change. Eating in a foodway - a communal way of eating fostered by distinctive practices handed down through the generations - can foster the sense of connection and ownership required to undergird the commitment to live and eat in a countercultural fashion, in a way which develops and shows virtue. Roger Scruton coined the term *oikophilia* to describe a similar phenomenon, which he calls “the love of home.”² According to Scruton, *oikophilia* is the only force strong enough to compel beneficent environmental action. People will act on behalf of their homes not because of a top-

¹ Ibid, p. 132.

² Roger Scruton, *How to Think Seriously About the Planet: The Case For an Environmental Conservatism* (Oxford: oxford University Press, 2012).

down edict from an international organization, he argued, but rather out of a sense of love, connection, and commitment to a place - *their* place.

When it comes to food, the foodway performs a similar function. In a previous chapter, we argued that emotion and other non-rational mental processes influence the choices of food that we make, a fact that marketers continue to use to their full advantage by marketing foods based upon nostalgia, idealized notions of farming, and other emotionally loaded tropes. As Alasdair MacIntyre, Mark Johnson, and many others have pointed out, humans act, at least in part, on the basis of the narratives they locate themselves in, and the imagination required to produce these narratives is inextricably linked with emotional capacities. As such, affection is vital for the formation of the moral imagination which drives narratives, including the alternative narrative that a foodway represents. Mark Johnson defines the idea of moral imagination as “an ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting in a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given action.”¹ This is not to say that principles are not needed; Johnson calls such an approach relying exclusively on imagination “arbitrary, irresponsible, and harmful.”² It is to say, however, that foodways, fueled and aided by reason, can provide the imaginative frameworks, with all of their emotional affection, to steer decision-making into beneficent directions.

Each community, from the Hmong community in Minnesota to a community of business leaders in a power lunch has aspirations, a eudaimonic vision for what their

¹ Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 2.

² *Ibid*, p. x.

eating experience ought to be. What these visions consist of is predicated on the cultural realities of the group in question; as many anthropologists have pointed out, a delicacy in some others is repulsive in others. From Vegemite to Rocky Mountain Oysters, there are foods which those in the culture love...and those outside cannot stomach, and the reason for loving these particular foods often comes from the environments they are embedded in, constructed by the moral imagination. Thus, if the moral imagination is the action of imaginatively discerning possible ways of acting in a given situation, then the moral imagination for any group of people in the present day is going to be shaped and altered by the prospect of environmental degradation and destruction, and the horror these realities inspire. These concepts, and the emotions they engender, have the potential to shape the range of acceptable actions in accordance with virtue, for the flourishing of humans and non-humans alike. In other words, it is possible to use the emotional valence of environmental degradation as fuel for driving better ways of eating.

It is also possible to use positive emotions, such as pleasure, to produce a similar effect. This latter strategy is what drives Dan Barber, Carlo Petrini, and others who put forward what has been called “a politics of pleasure.” In such a way of understanding, that which is the best tasting food is also the most sustainable. As Petrini puts it, “A gastronome who is not an environmentalist is stupid.”¹ Even if they overstate their case, what the success of Slow Food and other like-minded organizations does show is that it is possible for sustainability, and the goal of sustainable food, to infiltrate already-existing structures of taste and dietary action. It is possible to begin with the emotional power of environmental degradation and create a new way of eating propelled by that

¹ Quoted in Barber, p. 247.

emotional power, but it is not mandatory. It is also possible to work from within already-existing systems, systems which are powered by other factors which create that emotional pull. Sustainability can be woven in as an additional element, providing an even stronger emotional affection than the one which existed beforehand. Starting from scratch to create sustainable foodways is not mandatory.

Foodways and Virtues

The traits of historical continuity, community, practice, and affection are common to most (although not all) foodways. They are relatively absent, in fact, in the dominant foodway, the modern industrial American foodway. In this system, novelty is prior to tradition, individualism is prior to community, and ease is prior to practice. Interestingly enough, affection does indeed have a place in the dominant system, but it bears closer resemblance to addiction than it does real, lasting pleasure. For all of the Instagram photos, the *Food Network* shows, and the Sunday brunches, for all of the obsessing over done which is done in America today, the question needs to be asked: do Americans really enjoy their food? As noted, a spirit of ambivalence reigns - there are elements we enjoy, and also the vague sense that we ought to enjoy our food because of the technological marvels which produced it...but even so, food tends to bring as much strife and stress as it does enjoyment and betterment. Why? As Borgmann argues, the context of engagement is critical, and the context of a distinct foodway, which highlights and includes the four pillars mentioned above, can make these fleeting pleasures more substantial by connecting them to a eudamonia of sustainability, and the virtue required to work towards that vision of flourishing.

In describing what this might look like, let us return to the three virtues highlighted earlier: hospitality, temperance, and humility. First, any way of eating which focuses on its communal nature will be involved in hospitality in some way. Thus, specific foodways have the benefit of reminding their denizens that eating is never done in isolation, and that the process of raising and consuming food connects not just humans, but humans, animals, and the land itself. It is our mandate to take responsibility for the other, to ensure that their needs are met and taken care of. One major way this is done is through the virtue of temperance, of valuing food correctly. This entails eating less, and it entails enjoying the food we eat with the other person in mind. The entire enterprise is wrapped in humility, as it is understood that there is no one correct way to eat, no universal sustainable diet, and that differences in the way we raise and consume food reflect distinctive belongings into the ecosystems, both ecological and cultural, where we find ourselves.

This approach is marked, then, not by fiat from on high mandating sustainability, nor is it even marked by “nudges” from well-meaning, if not paternalistic, governmental organizations. Rather, it is a process which works in reverse, attempting to cultivate virtue “in place,” in contexts which already exist. It has the advantage of developing organically in the consciousness of the participants themselves, rather than being imposed from the outside, an approach which often engenders resentment, and even backlash amongst those on the receiving end. However, the same qualities which can be strengths also have the potential to become liabilities, as some ethically-minded people may wonder if this approach attempts to soft-pedal real environmental problems,

and absolute connotations of right and wrong behavior. Further, an approach which attempts to be nuanced and subtle can, in the pains taken to avoid unnecessary offense, be left vague and unrealized. Fortunately, however, we can turn to ethicist Albert Borgmann for help, as his “culture of the table” is immensely helpful for fleshing out how the ideas argued for here might be conceptualized in daily life. It is to his work we now turn.

Culture of the Table

Historical continuity, community, practice, and affection are traits which are inherent in foodways, and they are what helps these foodways to act as incubators of virtue, developing in their adherents an ethical approach to eating marked by, among others, the environmental virtues considered previously - temperance, hospitality, and humility. As mentioned, however, this does not mean that those who eat in ways consistent with distinctive cultural foodways are automatically to be considered more ethical and more virtuous in their eating. There are foods which are central to certain foodways which people in other cultural habitats would find abhorrent (shark fin soup, or the aforementioned barbecue, for instance) and further, particularly in America, the pressures of the dominant system, the dominant foodway, are such that keeping rigorous ethical standards in all times and circumstances is exceedingly difficult. After a hard day at work, with the prospect of feeding a picky family ahead that evening, the siren song of fast food can be awfully hard to resist. For this reason, and also for the fact that contexts are distinctive and do not lend themselves well to easy replication of culture, we cannot simply point to a certain culture and a certain foodway as a model for all to follow.

Albert Borgmann's work, and in particular his "culture of the table" offers a great deal of assistance. We have already discussed Borgmann's work on practice, and "focal practices" in particular, but his "culture of the table" grows from those practices, and encompasses the four elements listed in this chapter: practice, obviously, but also continuity, community, and affection. Moreover, it brings these abstract elements together in an image which contains clarity and familiarity: the dining table. As Thompson summarizes Borgmann's work,

He (Borgmann) suggests that becoming more deeply involved in the preparation and consumption of one's food can serve as an antidote to the spiritual alienation rampant in contemporary American life. This means, at a basic level, simply learning to cook and appreciate good food, but Borgmann sees these steps as significant because they open the way to further engagements of an extraordinarily diverse sort. Dining with friends and family grows into a rich form of sociability. Cooking grows into a craft with true elements of art. The thoughtful procurement of food and food ingredients links one with farmers and vendors in a social interaction that invites the exchange of ideas, recipes, and expressions of appreciation and mutual interest or suggestions for future interaction; it also initiates a deeper connection with nature. The culture of the table leads to new understandings of seasonality and can bring a richer understanding of place through knowledge of local foods.¹

At the core of the culture of the table is mindfulness - mindfulness in resisting the commodification of food and community, and mindfulness in pursuing a different way of being. From there, the focus turns into development and progression. Perhaps the gathering around the table, in the early going, is marked by awkward silence and mediocre food. Perhaps the trip to the farmers market does not produce the bounty of fresh food originally hoped for at first, but only a couple of items and a lot of confusion or even frustration. However, with mindfulness and a commitment to growth, these experiences can become something more. They can become Borgmann's focal practices, and

¹ Thompson, *The Agrarian Vision*: pp. 120-121.

hence become wellsprings of meaning and richness in a life - and a culture of eating - which so often lacks both. Finally, in the culture of the table there needs to be a celebration of what is on offer. As Borgmann noted, the mandate for celebration falls particularly heavily upon those, like so many Americans, to whom so much has been given. Celebration is accompanied by gratitude, and, finally, a focus upon the wellbeing of the other. In Borgmann's words, "the determination to widen the circle of well-being until it includes everyone in this country and on earth."¹

Borgmann's last point offers clues as to how a foodway-based approach to ethics can hope to offer any guidance in a pluralistic world, where several distinct food cultures are evidenced in the food court of every shopping mall in America. What does it mean to hold on to one distinct dietary pattern in a world in which the patterns are all blended together? Further, how does such an approach avoid the charge of elitism so often levied at anyone who argues for a specific way of eating?

In Borgmann's conception of the culture of the table, the "culture" organically grows from the focal point of the "table," and from the development of the focal practices which surround that focal point. These are what eventually develop into distinctive patterns of eating. If the practices are accompanied by the appropriate mindfulness, commitment to growth, and celebration of what is there, the dietary pattern (read: foodway) will be beneficent, both culturally and ecologically. It offers aid in resisting the commodification of food and the communities of people which surround it - those who grow the food, and those who consume it. For instance, as Thompson points out, the culture of the table promotes seasonality - respecting the offerings of the earth at the times of year

¹ Borgmann, *Real American Ethics*, p. 199.

when they are given, and those who strive to honor the earth in the way they raise food from it. What is vital here is the respect for the context, for the certain circumstances which will lead the focal practices to be experienced in a certain way. A family in Birmingham, Alabama has the opportunity to experience the culture of the table in a very different way than does a family in Osaka, Japan, for example. Within the city of Birmingham itself, the culture of the table may look different from neighborhood to neighborhood. The particulars matter, of course - this is not relativism - but the approach, the overall goals, and the character of those involved matter more than the specifics. The culture of the table, and the distinctive foodways which arise from it, begin with mindfulness, allow room for practice and improvement, and end in gratitude and celebration. It is a natural fit for a virtue-ethics paradigm, and, I think, a useful tool for understanding just how virtue can play a positive role in questions of food ethics today.

The culture of the table as a model for virtue can also provide guidance in understanding how different “cultures of the table” can coexist in an ethical manner. As mentioned, Lisa Heldke and other philosophers warn against “cultural food colonialism” which treats other cuisines as simply tools to use in fulfilling our own culinary desires. Borgmann makes a similar point, arguing that since American culture is so broad and multifaceted, naturally incorporating elements from so many other cultures, that there is an added responsibility upon Americans to acknowledge this fact, and to act in accordance with it. He writes,

The beginning of wisdom is to be broadly familiar with the width and the depth of American culture and to realize deeply one of its possibilities at the dinner table. Whatever grace and fellowship come from that realization, there needs to be the wider recognition of the economic and military power that has been generated by American culture, and there has to be an acceptance of the moral obligations that follow from power. Although

the celebration of dinner should be wholehearted, it cannot be unre-served.¹

As previously argued, it is no good to argue for gastronomic purity, in the sense of trying to find “authentic” cuisines uniquely and perfectly derived from specific cultural and ecological places. It is possible to move in that direction, however imperfectly, and to use the base of a distinctive cultural foodway as a platform from which to engage the other foodways we encounter. After all, there is a world of difference between a colonialist taking liberties with other cultural foodways in the fulfillment of their own desire for novelty, and two neighbors coming together as equals, to enjoy the culturally distinctive foods of the other, and to present their own cultural distinctive foods for enjoyment. The latter represents a form of what might be called a “federalist” food system, in which diverse food cultures contribute to the unity of sustainability-based eudaimonia by virtue of their diversity. It is a “patchwork quilt” style of food ethics, where the various cultures, fueled by their traditions, their community, their distinct practices, and their affections for their places and people, come together to pursue a food system based upon the ideals of sustainability in all of its forms. This is not an overarching cosmopolitanism in which all cultures blend into one, but neither is it a pure localism in the sense of strictly delineated geographic cuisines. Rather, it is a third way, in which localism is prized, but so are the cultures from around the world which permeate American neighborhoods. So, we can still eat Chinese food from the restaurant around the corner, for instance, but it is better to do so from our own distinct cultural patterns of eating, and also if it is done not with a colonialist taste for conquest, but rather as a way to enter into the culture of

¹ Ibid.

the Other, and to learn from what is found there. If we do this, it is plausible to suggest that the Chinese meal becomes more enjoyable for us in the process as well.

Carlo Petrini calls this network-based approach to food ethics “virtuous globalization,” as it allows for members of distinctive foodways to pursue their particular visions of good eating, while simultaneously engaging in exchange with members of other foodways attempting to do the same, and hence allowing for connection and overlap between cultures, while still maintaining that which is distinctive about each. Petrini's adjective “virtuous” is an interesting and fitting choice, because virtue is critical in the success of such a system. Only virtue will create trustworthy trading partners who desire the wellbeing of the other, who take ownership for the needs of the other, rather than squeezing each other out of the market. Only virtue produces a temperance which will lessen the consumption of food in the developed countries, easing some of the pressure on food producers and allowing for ways of production which are not so taxing upon the earth, rather than producing a fixed-pie mindset which regards uneaten food as a “loss,” an experience missed out on. Only virtue produces the humility which proclaims that my way of eating ethically is not the only way, and that there is room for disagreement in broader issues of food ethics, because the other individual can be trusted to desire and pursue the same goal. Otherwise, there is no reason to trust someone who disagrees, and it is all too easy to demonize the other, rather than seeking to work with them. In essence, then, one of the more ethical courses of action in the arena of food is the conscious promotion and development of these cultural institutions - the table and the foodway - in order to achieve the goal, the eudaimonia, of sustainability in all its forms.

Food Ethics and the "Middle"

Petrini's insight is also noteworthy because it implies the need for structures which fall between the levels of industrial food, and farmers markets, between enormous CAFOs and tiny garden plots. It implies the need for "medium-sized" structures, which arise out of the culture of the table, but also support the culture of the table, allowing it to flourish. The dining table and these middle institutions would create a homeostatic system, in which both elements are in balance with each other and support each other. From the agricultural side, Fred Kirschenmann and others call the development of such systems the "agriculture of the middle." In the early 1980s, the US Department of Agriculture released a report clearly delineating three sizes of farms: small (gross annual sales between \$5,000 and \$40,000 in 1981); large (sales over \$250,000); and medium-sized (sales between \$40,000 and \$250,000).¹ According to the report, the medium-sized farms were dropping out, as the larger farms supplied the commodities which were processed into foods of mass consumption, while the small farmers had the advantage of direct marketing, in the form of farmers markets, CSAs, and other techniques. The medium-sized farms were falling between the cracks, due to a variety of factors, including policy, globalization, and changes in agricultural practice and technology.

¹ "Agriculture of the Middle." *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, ed. by Paul B. Thompson and David M. Kaplan, (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science+Business Media, 2014), web, accessed February 21st, 2017, <http://agofthemiddle.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AOTM-Encyclopedia-of-Food.pdf>

Agriculture of the middle does not market directly to consumers, as the small farms do. It also does not market enormous quantities of a handful of staples as commodity crops, as do the industrial mega farms. Rather, it provides such things as seed and grain, which the small farms can use in their direct-to-consumer production. Moreover, it can serve as a hub, a reference point, for all of the small farmers in a region to connect with each other and to learn from each other. Therefore, it is mandatory in any discussion of distinctive, specialized patterns of eating. In his book *The Third Plate*, Dan Barber highlights the work of Klaas and Mary-Howell Maartens, founders of Lakeview Organic Grain, as exemplars of medium-sized food producers. As Barber puts it,

Klaas remembers talking to neighbors who wanted to go organic but were locked out by infrastructure, especially the lack of available milling and proper storage facilities. Mill operators have generally been reluctant to serve an organic market, in part because thoroughly cleaning the equipment - a requirement if one is dealing with both organic and conventional grains - is onerous and expensive. Through Lakeview, Klaas and Mary-Howell could fill yet another niche in their community, providing milling and storage for organic grain and selling the grain to a growing market of organic dairies.¹

Barber goes on to argue that the work of Klaas and Mary-Howell is what distinctive food cultures are made of, and only these cultures have the heft to change the way food is raised and consumed in a significant way. This happens not only because of the success of their business, but also in part because of their influence as role models upon smaller farmers, and the way in which their businesses serve as community hubs for like-minded farmers in the region, committed to soil health and fertility. Individual virtue

¹ Barber, p. 326.

is crucial, of course, but without these sorts of ecosystems sustaining the virtue of an individual, or of a family gathered around the table, the virtue will most likely not last very long.

Lakeview Organic and other similar entities, serve as critical elements of what Kirschenmann and company call a "values-based food supply chain model." In such a system, like-minded food producers in a region come together to form strategic partnerships based on shared commitments. These partnerships seek to build scale not through the sizing up of individual ventures, but rather through the power of collective action, taking advantage of the ability of the individual farmer to market directly to consumers, while also taking advantage of the scale created by the collective to challenge the dominant, industrial system. As a result, an entry into the market is created for companies committed to sustainability who would otherwise be frozen out.

In addition to the creation of a market for mid-scale producers, thought and attention has also been given, quite naturally, to the ethical outcomes which midscale agriculture might produce. Agriculture of the Middle, the organization formed in the wake of the original USA report in 1981, notes five. First, fairness and equity throughout the supply chain, as the shared values of the partners help to prevent them from treating one another in an instrumental fashion. Second, it promotes diversity, resilience, competition and opportunity in agriculture, as noted earlier, as the story of partners coming together for the service of shared agricultural values provides a compelling brand and a compelling narrative for the marketplace, in addition to the flexibility required to adapt to rapidly changing customer preferences. Third, it promotes environmental stewardship and ecological health, or, at least, it provides the potential to do so, as the demand for

organic, local, and other ecologically-conscious types of food increases. Further, these partnerships reward the same sort of farming extolled by the agrarians such as Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, a style characterized by allowing the land itself to be the "rule," and the processes of nature to be the model in how the foods are chosen to be raised, and how they are raised. Fourth, midscale farming promotes rural vitality, as food producers who had previously been marginalized and isolated come together, for the benefit of communities and regions. As in the case of Klaas and Mary-Howell Maartens, this often occurs out of necessity, as an individual member has the vision to see the need which is shared by the larger community, and rises to meet that need, with the benefits accruing for the community as a whole as well as for the individual who first provided the initiative.

Fifth, and finally, it is argued that medium-sized structures are a boon for "consumer choice and control." This last outcome deserves special mention because it helps to answer the question: where does the consumer fit into this plan? Foodways and values-based supply chains might be great for those involved in agriculture, but what about the vast majority of consumers who are not? Where is their benefit located? In the words of Agriculture of the Middle, "AOTM provides food buyers—whether the end consumer or intermediary purchaser— with additional options to act on their values." In other words, they provide a venue for the practice of virtue in the choices which are made, and an ethical narrative in which the consumer can participate, complete with fellow travelers (like-minded producers and consumers) and tasks to be accomplished

(the sort of food which comes from these supply chains mandates the practice of cooking - they are not turning out Hot Pockets.) This is a story to enter into, or more precisely to reclaim, and that story calls for change in the way we raise and consume food.

Differentiating "Foodways" from Local, Organic, and other Modifiers

At this point, one may wonder, how is this approach significantly different from local, organic, and so many of the other modifiers found under the umbrella of the food movement? There are indeed many similarities, and, in fact, many of the principles of these other movements will be incorporated into any discussions about sustainable foodways and the virtue they help to foster. For instance, the affection for place which drives localism's passionate defenders, and serves as a catalyst for the formation of virtue, is also present here, as the love for a certain way of eating, born of a particular context which the eater is embedded in, plays a critical role in the construction and maintenance of a foodway. Also, the environmental sensibilities which fortify the organic movement do the same for sustainable foodways, as the whole point is the development of dietary cultures which have staying power, transcending generations and producing historical continuity. Finally, as is true with the Slow Food movement, the concept of pleasure is put to use as a way to drive ethical behavior. This may seem counterintuitive - the Protestant background of America makes us slightly uncomfortable with the idea that anything enjoyable can also be ethical - but it is also starkly pragmatic: if the food doesn't taste good, it will not be eaten.

With all of these similarities, then, where do the differences lie? The first and most fundamental difference is that a foodway, even though it does delineate a specific cuisine, just as importantly delineates a way of eating. In some ways, the foodway is simply the vehicle to help people think more seriously about what they eat and why, and

about the company they keep (or do not keep) while they eat. As argued, so much of the standard way of eating food in America lies below the level of thought, and is based upon subconscious habit, altered and shaped by the power of marketing and of food production, among other things. This approach, based on foodways cultivating virtue, does not attempt to replace subconscious eating with entirely conscious eating - that would be a fool's errand. Rather, it attempts to shift the locus of authority from a modern food system designed around efficiency and profit to more trustworthy cultural pillars, most notably the collected wisdom of a community in place, who have learned to eat a certain way for a reason. Traditions are not to be held as sacred and inviolable; they are also not to be discarded lightly. The conscious decision to place oneself into a certain cultural stream, a certain foodway, entails taking food seriously, treating as something more than the calories it contains or the ease with which it can be eaten. However, there is also a sense in this approach that food can be taken too seriously, or as an end in itself. Food and the way we eat has the ability to promote flourishing of humans and non-humans alike, and at the core of that flourishing is connection: to each other, to plants and animals, and to earth itself. If food is not being used to facilitate these goals, it is not being used properly.

Foodways, Elitism, and Equality

The focus of this dissertation, of virtue born out of culturally distinct foodways, is well positioned to engage the criticism which dogs food reformers more than any other - the charge of elitism. Food reformers of all sorts have been commonly tagged with this label, as their efforts to persuade people to eat ethically are sometimes interpreted as, "Eat like me, for I am morally superior to you." Further, ethical paths such as organic and local carry price premiums that make it exceedingly difficult for those without the

means to eat this way. Is someone from a poor neighborhood to be relegated to "unclean" status simply because they cannot afford to shop organic - or, more likely, they have no outlets which will sell them this sort of food? This is slowly changing - organics and others take an increasingly larger share of the market every year - but it is a problem which by no means has been solved. Those who live in food deserts have no access to "ethical" food in these schema, so what are they to do?

This approach helps to mitigate this concern by stressing the fact that virtue is at least partially dependent upon the circumstances one finds themselves in, as what is virtuous often does depend on the context of the situation. Aristotle himself acknowledges that a person's quest for virtue is irrevocably altered by their circumstances, for good or ill. Further, foodways are so fluid and varied that they, too, are heavily dependent upon the circumstances which they grow out of. This is not only true from an ecological standpoint, but also from a cultural one, and it includes variables such as taste and flavor preferences, but also, economics and questions of class. As a result, there is a realism which must be taken into account, as a resident of a food desert will have very different expectations upon them than someone from an affluent neighborhood. As Borgmann notes, from those to which much has been given, much is required, and the onus is on those who benefit the most from the way the system is constituted currently to make the hard changes needed to instigate change. This is not to say that those from poorer neighborhoods are powerless to create drastic social change. Some of the most famous cuisines in the world were born out of "peasant cooking," after all. It is to say that those who have the resources to make the changes needed for food reform

have the primary responsibility to begin the process. It is also to say that, when distinctive foodways, born of distinctive communities, are allowed to grow, flourish, and be passed down through generations, they will create a form of virtue which, while appealing to the lofty, universal ideals of food reformers, will also be distinct to the position of those who claim it, differing from those in another foodway, and this diversity will come together, ultimately, to create more positive change than if everyone was simply given a homogenous set of marching orders to follow.

Giving Up on Perfection

When the subject of virtue is raised, it is often associated with starry-eyed idealists, dreaming of utopias. The cynic asks, "How can anyone have time to think of virtue in the gritty realities of daily life? People are just trying to get by." There is an element of truth to this, of course. With its emphasis on eudaimonia and "the good life," virtue lends itself to idealism, and to dreams of food systems perfectly calibrated to be both ethical and delicious, just and fulfilling. Moreover, some who advocate virtue evince little to no understanding of what life can be like, not just in obvious scenarios, such as inner-city food deserts, but also, for instance, in suburbia, as the grind of the busyness of daily life seems to lend itself to a posture of survival, not of moral perfection. In other words, it is much more feasible to think about concepts like virtue when one is not stressed out, tired out, and burned out.

Yet, virtue, particularly when flavored with a strong pinch of realism, proves itself able to handle both ends of the spectrum: the lofty ideals of the activist, and the ordinary irritations of life, due to the fact that virtue emphasizes the process of improvement, and the arduousness which that process can often include. In the realm of food ethics, this means that a virtue-based approach is accepting of the proposition that we will nearly

always fall short of our aspirations, that growth is a long, slow process, and we will never achieve eudaimonia fully. There is room for failure, so long as it coexists with the desire to learn, grow, and improve. Both of these impulses tend to live side by side in human nature. As the founder of Christian Realism, Reinhold Niebuhr, puts it, "The truth about man is that he has a curious kind of dignity but also a curious kind of misery."¹ There is room for hope, as humanity is capable of astounding good, but there is equal cause for despair, as humanity proves itself, again and again, to be given to the pursuit of short-term indulgence over long-term good, and given to selfishness rather than selflessness. To quote Niebuhr once more, this time from the opening words of his opus *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, "Man is his own most vexing problem."

Niebuhr was not a virtue theorist by any stretch of the imagination, and yet, his vision of incremental social change, of pursuing "a little more justice," as opposed to an unrealistic expectation of perfection, is a natural complement to the virtue ethic I have been arguing for in this dissertation. This is, in essence, a restrained ethic, attempting to meet people at where their tastes and preferences already are, and then pushing them, through the practice of giving up "having it their way" in favor of a restrained, distinct dietary pattern, towards a better, more sustainable (in all its senses) way of eating. It is a way to ask people to make difficult changes, to take the responsibility of effecting real change, but in a way which honors reality, and does not aim for absolute perfection. It will probably not satisfy idealists, but I do believe it has the potential to create positive change, as adherents to foodways develop virtue, and come together in their distinctive-

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Mike Wallace Interview," April 27th, 1958, Accessed February 24th, 2017, http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/multimedia/video/2008/wallace/niebuhr_reinhold_t.html

ness and their differences, to focus on the critical questions, the things that really matter, and to seek consensus there. It will help us in the task to become, to use Aldo Leopold's famous language once again, "citizens" rather than "conquerors" in the biotic community, assuming our place in the world, loving and appreciating that place, and not attempting to overstep its bounds.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to survey and summarize the terrain covered to this point, focusing on two threads which have run through all of the preceding chapters, threads which involve questions which have been present in virtually all forms of ethical discussion: the relationship between individual choice and systemic pressures, and the relationship between ideas and practices. Both of these dyads are complicated, and difficult to unpack, but food offers a means by which to make progress, because eating, universal activity that it is, helps us to address these questions in a holistic, unique way. This is especially true for food viewed through the lens of virtue theory, for virtue theory is well suited to explain the impediments to choosing the good in food, and is also well suited to offer realistic solutions which can be implemented in the real world. Then, we will look ahead at some of the questions that remain, including how the ethical system laid out in the previous chapters would be implemented, whether religious faith is required in order to embrace significant changes in eating patterns, and, finally, whether we as a society have time to construct the virtue needed for such an approach to succeed before our environmental situation reaches the point of no return.

Review

In the previous chapters, we have argued that the American food system is based upon the ideals of personalization, abundance, and efficiency - getting the consumer what they want, in whatever quantities they'd like, as quickly and cheaply as possible. This system, however, has not merely delivered food to the consumer; it has profoundly shaped the American consumer's eating practices. It has done so by way of

what Albert Borgmann calls “Churchill’s Principle,” which was taken from a famous quote in which the wartime Prime Minister reminded the English Parliament, discussing the need to rebuild buildings after the Second World War, “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.”¹ The same principle applies for any element of human culture, and it is important to realize that the dominant food system in America does constitute, in fact, a food culture. It is a food culture, however, which is deficient in several respects, including, most notably, its destructive effects upon the earth, and the widespread abuse of the animals which it uses, such as cows, chickens, and pigs. Further, it has also shaped a people who are ambivalent in their feelings about food - obsessing over it on one hand, and sublimating it to the needs of a frenetic schedule, or a frenzied effort to count calories, on the other.

Advocates for food reform have pointed all of this out, and have proposed several new paradigms for a more ethical way of eating, including locavorism, organic foods, and vegetarianism. These alternative visions, while winsome and even inspirational at times, have received their own criticisms, including, but not limited to, charges of provincialism, exclusivism, naïveté, and excessive nostalgia. The most serious problems, however, lie in reform advocates’ propensities to try to use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house, to revisit Audre Lorde’s evocative phrase. The way food is raised and consumed will not be overhauled by individuals making individual choices at the grocery store, nor will it be overhauled by merely theorizing a better food system into existence. Our current food culture has seeped into our habits, into the level of our

¹ Quoted in Borgmann, *Real American Ethics*, p. 5.

subconscious. It will take more than the thoughts and efforts of isolated individuals to reverse this action.

So how are habits to be altered in a way which results in a more ethical approach to food? The school of ethics known as virtue ethics, descended from Aristotle, is an enormous help in this regard, because while it too (at least in its teleological form) is strengthened by an idealistic vision of the good life (eudaimonia), it is also heavily concerned with practices, not performed after excessive deliberation, but rather as an instant, organic outgrowth of the character of the one making the choice. This occurs below the level of conscious cognition, and is the result of a lengthy inculcation process leading up to the moment of decision. By the time the decision needs to be made, much of the critical work has already been done.

Virtue offers a way out of the current polarizations which dominate food ethics, polarizations which are driven, at least in part, by a profound distrust of the other: local vs cosmopolitan, traditionalist vs technological innovation, etc. This distrust will not be overcome by shoehorning everyone into one “ethical” way of eating; rather, the best hope is to acknowledge that ethical eating depends heavily upon context, upon the natural and cultural ecologies the eater finds themselves embedded in, and to encourage those eaters to embrace their distinctive ways of eating, while at the same time respecting and honoring the differences in others’ approaches to eating ethically. This can only be done with the aid of virtue. With a vision of eudaimonia characterized as sustainability (in all of its senses), a commitment to virtuous eating can bring together a wide range of philosophies - from the vegetarianism of Peter Singer to the philosophies of cattle ranchers such as Allan Savory - and while they might not agree on every little thing (or

even some big things), the representatives from the various schools of thought will at least be able to have discussion, and maybe even reach compromise, because they deem the other to be trustworthy and acting in good faith, even if they disagree with all of their prescriptions. This is a “messy” approach, in that no group, whether it be the locavores, the cosmopolitans, or others, will get entirely what they want. It does, however, hold promise for achieving positive results and positive momentum, far more than would waiting for consensus on any one approach.

The most effective inculcation process for virtuous eating is the foodway, the distinctive pattern of dietary habits and actions unique to a certain group, whether that group is classified geographically, ethnically, or by way of some other variable. This is not to say that everyone who eats according to a traditional dietary pattern is eating ethically, nor is it to say that eating across foodways is inherently unethical. Foodways must be guided by the eudaimonia of sustainability, and eating across foodways, when done virtuously, becomes a beautiful expression of respect and hospitality, rather than an ugly display of colonialism and instrumentalism. It is to say, however, that foodways have certain inherent traits which allow for their participants to eat ethically with greater effectiveness. These traits include historical continuity, practice, community, and emotional affection. These are the bulwarks which strengthen participants in foodways to reject the “Have it Your Way” mentality which has proven so destructive on so many levels, and to embrace a certain way of eating, and the limits and restraints which are inherent in it. These four elements are the building blocks which can be used to form an alternative story, an alternative way of approaching the raising and consuming of food.

The commitment to the restoration and development of sustainability-based foodways necessitates what Borgmann calls “a culture of the table,” rejecting processed foods and takeout in favor of a mindful, committed approach which takes food seriously. In order for the culture of the table to flourish, however, it needs to be supported by structures which extend beyond the table, or even the farmer’s market, for that matter. What is needed for foodways to flourish is an “agriculture of the middle,” medium-sized food systems all committed to the same values and goals. These are constituted by like-minded participants, forming what Fred Kirschenmann and others call a “value-based food supply chain,” and participants range from farmers to seed companies to distributors...and ultimately to consumers. These value-based food supply chains help to sustain virtue, not least of which the virtue of humility which is fundamental in the transformation of our mindset from “conquerors” to “citizens” of the biotic community, as Aldo Leopold put it: committed to the betterment of the community for all who reside in it, human and non-human alike, while understanding that perfection will always elude our grasp.

There are two conceptual threads which have run through the entire argument thus far: the relationship between individual choice and systemic pressure, and the relationship between ideas and practice. At this point, it is worth unpacking those knotty questions a little further, in order to show how food offers an interesting vantage way from which to view these problems, and, ultimately, how virtue can act in such a way as to tie these tensions together.

Unpacking the “Individual Choice” versus “Systemic Pressures” Dilemma

As argued, the ideal of an individual’s autonomous choice was most thoroughly expressed during the Enlightenment.² Philosophers such as Locke and Kant, in a shift from premodern and medieval thought, shifted the locus of decision-making power from a corporate body, such as the city or the church, to that of the individual. The individual has rights, bestowed from God, the social contract, or some combination of the two, they argued, and, as such, only the individual has the ability and the authority to choose the good. Meanwhile, in the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther was articulating the doctrine which would come to be known as the “priesthood of all believers.” In his Address to the Nobility of the German Nation (1520), Luther writes: “For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although of course it is not seemly that just anybody shall exercise such office.”³ His caveat appealing for decorum notwithstanding, Luther is clear: the individual, “ordinary” believer has the same capacity for priestly work as do the priests themselves. There is no mediating institution which needs to stand between the believer and God. The believer can stand on her own.

Even though shifting the seat of decision to the individual has led, in some cases, to outright relativism (the individual alone can decide what is right, and there are no external standards to be considered in the decision making), this is less of a concern when

² What follows is, of course, a simplistic analysis, but hopefully not an inaccurate one.

³ Quoted in Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *First Things*, October 31st, 2016, accessed April 12th, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>

it comes to food, not least of which because of the ecological realities which are connected so intimately with the raising and consuming of food. The specter of environmental disaster has the capacity to make absolutists of us all, at least in the case of this one issue. Beyond the pragmatic impulse to avoid environmental disaster, however, there are still many individuals who would state that yes, there is a definitively good way to eat - whether that good is expressed through kindness to animals, equity for the poor, or, as this argument has done, expressed through the idea of sustainability as a means of flourishing for humans, animals, and the natural world. There is a good to strive for, and all individuals, across geographical, social, and economic differences, have the obligation to orient their decision making process, in large and small decisions, towards that good.

However, there is another reality which presses on the individual, every bit as much as the obligation to choose the good: the fact that human beings are all embedded in contexts which place constraints upon, or conversely enable, them to make that choice in the first place. Humanity, at least since the modern age, has the propensity to consider ourselves as idealized and abstracted, particularly when it comes to the way we make choices. For example, some ethical thought gives the impression that human beings make their decision in a laboratory, with every variable controlled. That is simply not the way things work in daily life. The work of ecofeminist scholars is greatly helpful as a corrective on this point, particularly the epistemological work of Lorraine Code. Code argues⁴ that we know only as members of an ecosystem of thought, with the rela-

⁴ Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

tionships, and also the limitations, that implies. There is no “god’s- eye view” which humanity can access. We do have the mandate to seek the good, but we also have the responsibility to realize that we cannot see it fully, but imperfectly, from a certain vantage point, defined by the physical, cultural, and intellectual ecosystems in which we find ourselves.

This tension - between seeking the good and realizing that we only see it “through a glass darkly,”⁵ as the King James Bible translated St. Paul’s language, is not a new one. The ancients believed in an absolute good, whether they referred to it as eudaimonia, a beatific vision, the Tao, or another term, and they also recognized that achieving or even approaching that good was neither easy nor natural. Thus, as Peter Kreeft argues⁶, the ancient philosophers conceived society primarily as a means to create and promote virtue. More than anything else, society was designed as a context which would strain out harmful choices and emphasize good ones, which will make it easier to choose the good and pursue virtue. The human being was conceived as primarily a social being, whose virtue - and thereby, whose happiness - was at least partially dependent upon the context in which they operated. As many have pointed out, these societies were not designed to propagate virtue in all people - the rigid hierarchies were undoubtedly stifling for many. There is much to admire, however, in the vision, as it honors the notion of the good as something to strive for, while at the same time acknowledging that individuals do not pursue it outside of a context. Let them do so, therefore, in a context which makes that pursuit as successful as possible.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

⁶ Kreeft has argued this point in several places, including *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

In moving the conversation to food ethics, we note that the tension between individual choices, and the freedom to make those choices, and a rigid society which constrains those freedoms in the name of virtue or some other social goal, is still present today. I have argued for a structured, somewhat rigid way of eating - the foodway - which, by its very nature, restrains the options of the individual. There is no room in such a system for non-seasonality, for example, nor for culinary fusion for the sake of novelty. The approach of this dissertation declares those as being out of bounds ethically. How does this square with individual freedom and individual choice? As argued, I believe that the “choices” which threaten us are largely illusory: the dizzying varieties of processed foods on offer at the grocery store are, in the end, variations of corn and soy, interspersed with supplements of sugar, salt, and fat. Frozen meals (or “TV dinners”), despite featuring Mexican, Italian, and even Indian cuisines, have a way of tasting essentially the same, as does virtually all fast food. Again, we have not swapped out distinctive foodways in favor of “having it all.” We have simply swapped out one food culture for another one, defined by, as Michael Pollan puts it, “salt, soy oil, and MSG.”⁷ It was not a trade of less for more; if anything, it was a trade of more for less.

Further, this dissertation has argued that freedom functions as it should only in clearly defined boundaries. Jazz improvisation, for example, is only possible within the confines of the structure of the song, and, more broadly, within the confines of the genre of jazz itself. We need the structures which provide the boundaries in order to even recognize improvisation for what it is - a deviation from established patterns. There is a

⁷ Pollan, *Cooked*, p. 164.

similar principle at work in food. In the modern food system, individual choice is portrayed as occurring upon an endless plane of options - "have it your way." However, I think one of the central causes of American ambivalence towards food comes precisely from the ignorance of those boundaries which would give our choices actual meaning and weight. After all, humans do and always will labor under constraints, and this also applies to the way we eat. The food system as it is presently constructed has fostered an image of utter and total independence in our decision making, while at the same time actively working to form and shape constraints which affect the choices we make for the benefit of their profit margins. The choices which matter, and the choices which are ultimately a result of our freedom to make them, paradoxically occur within boundaries which constrain our choices, preferably in a benevolent way. The foodway, as I have conceived it here, is designed to function in this manner, and as a result, enables rather than hinders individual choice.

Unpacking the "Ideas" versus "Practices" Dilemma

The other main undercurrent running through this dissertation has been the relationship between idea and practice, between rational thought and behavior. I have argued that the industrial food system sells the idea of rational thought while simultaneously working on consumers at the level of the subconscious. I have argued further that many of the responses to this dominant system were inescapably modern, based upon rational choice and the powers of the mind to alter behavior. Finally, I have argued that this approach is incomplete, and, ultimately, ineffective against a food system designed to operate below the level of cognition, and to form subconscious habits of eating.

What is important to note, however, is that a focus upon habit and practice does not negate the importance of conscious thought. Without some sort of organizing structure, the practices and behaviors which take place on any given day do not amount to much. That organizing structure might be a Kantian sense of duty, a system for figuring out “the greatest good for the greatest number,” an Aristotelian telos, a narrative that we’ve fallen into, or some combination of the above. This dissertation has focused particularly on the latter two options - upon our ethical anthropology (what food reveals about our conceptions who we are as human beings) and upon our penchant for narrative, and for inserting ourselves into the narratives we construct, forming and shaping our ethical behavior in accordance with the demands of the story we find ourselves in.

In addition to large, overarching structures of thought to guide our actions, the sharper-edged scalpel of cognition and rational thought is also indispensable for eating ethically. In Jonathan Haidt’s imagery, the subconscious is the elephant, and the conscious mind is the rider. The subconscious is shaped and guided by conscious thought, even as the conscious mind is shaped and guided by subconscious thought. The elephant and the rider work in concert with each other, and as such move towards the desired destination. Unfortunately, the dominant instinct through the centuries has been to focus almost entirely upon the machinations of the rider. Philosophers from as far back as Socrates himself have equated knowledge with the good, and deontological and consequentialist ethical agendas have followed suit. If the good can be discerned, the argument goes, then good action and behavior will result.

This perspective is, ultimately, an overestimation of the human person, and of our natural propensities. We do not have the mental equipment to rationally process all

of the information we receive in a day, and moreover, we would not want to even if we could. There are forces at work, both external and internal forces, which shape our will, and determine whether the thing is done. Even if we recognize it as a good thing to do, the right thing to do, as often as not, we will do something else, as St. Paul recognized so long ago when he wrote, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”⁸ Or, as Matthew B. Crawford more colorfully puts it,

This might seem exotically pathological, but I can detect something like a death instinct in myself, for example in those times when I slump in front of the TV and watch whatever is served up. It becomes an occasion for self-disgust as soon as I rouse myself from the couch, and is no great source of pleasure while I am in the trance, so why do I do it? I think because the passivity of it is a release from the need for control. As someone who is self-employed, I don't have the jig of a regular job, so the disposition of every hour is a matter of choice, an occasion for reflection and evaluation. Sometimes I just want to stay where I am and watch Dateline, because *that's whats next*. Let death come.⁹

The modern ideal is to posit humanity as master of his own destiny, above concrete circumstances, able to use the power of Reason to make the world conform to his own will. As Crawford wryly notes, it does not always work that way. Relying on mental faculties alone is a recipe for failure and disappointment.

So how do we cultivate and maintain the desire to do the right thing - in this case, to eat in an ethical way? It may seem paradoxical, but the answer is to do the right thing, in order that the desire for the right thing may be cultivated. This is how we “acquire tastes” - we try them when we do not like them, and we eat them until we come to like them. The desires need to be trained, in accordance with the good which lives in

⁸ Romans 7:18-19, English Standard Version

⁹ Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head*, p. 105, italics in original.

our minds. Practice, then, becomes an integral part of any ethics, putting skin on theory, and reifying it in the mind of the one who holds the theory. Food is an ethical topic particularly well suited to an approach in which practice plays a fundamental role, as everyone engages in the practice of eating everyday.

How Virtue can Help Tie Things Together

Virtue theory is a fitting tool to tie these concerns together, and to make progress in both, using food as a conduit into these larger conversations. Regarding the first question, virtue ethics acknowledges the power of external forces to shape our internal decision making processes. We do not make ethical choices in a vacuum; rather, we are social animals, more interdependent than independent. The contexts which we inhabit, and the people and animals which inhabit those contexts with us, have a powerful influence upon our faculties. However, virtue does not allow for an abandonment of ideals and larger goals of goodness; on the contrary, it requires their pursuit, all the while knowing we will never fully reach our goals, and emphasizing the importance of growth towards excellence more so than a definite destination. Finally, virtue ethics commends the virtuous person as someone who possesses the attributes needed to reject the dominant system which seeks to entrap her into unhealthy and unsustainable habits of eating. The virtuous person is able to overcome the forces aligned against her, and to choose patterns and habits of eating which are sustainable, and truly “good.”

Regarding the second question, virtue ethics acknowledges that right behavior takes more than a mental calculus. In a world in which consumers are bombarded with messaging and sales pitches, attempting to figure out the most ethical action in the moment of choosing is a debilitating process. In virtue, the focus is less upon “what should I do?” and more upon “what sort of person am I when I enter the situation?” In effect,

virtue ethics aims to win the battle before the battle even starts. The formation process to get to that point involves, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, practices in communities bound by a common narrative. An intentional identification with and participation in the life of a grouping of like-minded fellows is the setting from which this growth in virtue emerges. This is how eaters gain the strength of character to eat ethically in whatever situations they find themselves in.

Purity or Effectiveness?

At this point, a skeptic might point out that, for all of the buzz surrounding the food movement, and the various approaches to ethical eating (including this one) put forward by advocates of all stripes, this is still a movement sharply in the minority. The vast majority of American consumers simply do not treat food as an ethical issue; moreover, many of the ones that do are content to buy the organic milk instead of the conventional and to then call themselves an ethical food advocate. It is true that organic, local, and other types of food focused on ethics are looming larger in the collective consciousness than they previously did, but it is also true that food reformers understand, or ought to, that this way of considering food will not be dominant in the culture for some time, if it ever happens at all. This is doubly true when it comes to considering food through a virtue-ethics lens, because there is just no way to form virtue quickly, in food or any other arena of life. Moreover, virtue ethics, like most ethical approaches to food, is profoundly countercultural, in that it embraces restraint, limits, and unselfishness. To put it mildly, this is profoundly out to step with the food system as it is presently constituted.

As argued in the previous chapter, this should give would-be food reformers cause for humility - the actual state of the world, and the state of the way most people

eat, is far removed from their idealistic visions of what the food system could be. It is wise to learn from realists such as Reinhold Niebuhr, who warns that the best laid plans will never be fully fulfilled, and that the human propensity to screw things up - whether or not we use a religious term like “sin,” as Niebuhr did — always needs to be accounted for. However, the danger with realists such as Niebuhr is that the concessions to reality and to human frailty that they demand can often lead to resignation, and ultimately to assimilation.¹⁰ In fact, this is precisely the criticism levied at Niebuhr by fellow ethicist and theologian Stanley Hauerwas, who argues that the realism espoused by Niebuhr was actually pragmatism which inevitably ended in compromise. In Niebuhr’s attempts to be effective, Hauerwas argues, he lost that which was distinctive and truly countercultural in his Christianity. Niebuhr never responded to Hauerwas (he died in 1971 before Hauerwas became a prominent figure), but one can imagine his response: If you wish to focus on the purity of your community, go right ahead, but do not be surprised if you are ineffective at creating any real change, any real improvement of the status quo in the pursuit of justice.

Even though the debate between Niebuhr and Hauerwas (and their resultant followers) is primarily concerned with theological ethics, there is much here which is relevant to the conversation regarding food ethics, particularly as we turn in the direction of social ethics related to food. Food reformers, too, have had to decide whether to aim for

¹⁰ Of course, Niebuhr fought hard against this very impulse, balancing realism and sin on the one hand with the mandate to make the world a better place on the other. As biographer Richard Wightman Fox summarized his work, “He exhorted his readers and listeners to take responsibility for their world while warning them against the temptation to try to perfect it.” Fox, Richard Wightman. Interview with Krista Tippett. *OnBeing*. February 10th, 2005.

effectiveness, ala Niebuhr, while risking assimilation, or rather to aim for absolute faithfulness to an ideal, ala Hauerwas, thereby risking irrelevance and separatism. Is it enough, for instance, to settle for “organic” as a victory, even though the milk which bears the label may have been produced in a facility which is eerily similar to a conventional CAFO? Is it wise to insist on one way to eat ethically, even though such an insistence would threaten to marginalize you and the relatively small number of people who think like you do?

Living Models

The foodway-centered approach to ethics put forward in this dissertation attempts to reconcile both of these positions, or at least to exist in the tension between them. It does this by acknowledging that the dominant system is in fact in need of reform, but at the same time eschewing top-down, homogenizing mandates for one ethical approach above all others. Rather, the various foodways constitute living models - communities committed to living in a countercultural way which defies the dominant paradigm, but also with an eye towards showing the larger world the value of the approach they espouse. Building virtue through foodways is not simply a "eat this, not that" venture, nor is it a cavalier call to radically change entire ways of eating (something of which vegetarians are sometimes guilty). Rather, it is the construction of a new way of eating; or, more precisely, a reclamation of older ways of eating. It is a positive vision, not merely a critique of the way things currently are. Critiquing and resisting the dominant order of things is right and good, but critique in itself is not enough. What is also required are communities living out their visions for ethical food, albeit imperfectly, in order to show what it looks like to eat differently, and to show that it is better than what the

dominant order has to offer. Social change will happen slowly, incrementally, in such a model, but there is real promise to positive change to occur.

The idea of the foodway as living model takes seriously the corrosive effect of the dominant food culture on traditions and practices, and as a result partly exists as a means to resist and stand against it. It regards the modern, industrial vision of food much in the same way as Alasdair MacIntyre does the larger culture as a whole. In his book *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that there can no longer be any large-scale moral consensus in society, due to the onset of a pervasive emotivism. What is needed, in response, is “the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness.”¹¹

Foodways constitute the very same “local forms of community” which MacIntyre speaks of, preserving traditions which would otherwise be lost to the homogenizing effect of monocultures and mass-produced foods. This is a “defensive” vision, in that the primary objective is the preservation of the virtues under threat in modern life. This is vital work in the present time, due to the fact that the habits, tendencies, and patterns of the dominant, deficient culture have already been seeping into its inhabitants. It is not enough to resist some external force - the forces are in our own selves as well. The virtues must be maintained, according to this view, in order that those forces may be rooted out. Food is an arena in this conflict, and it is also a tool to use in it, as it is a way for communities to tell themselves their own stories, every time they sit down for a meal, thus reifying that which matters most in the community participants - what Matthew B.

¹¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 244.

Crawford calls “the inheritance of the past,”¹² which serves as a guide for meaning, and, ultimately, action.

Beyond the defensive crouch, however, the foodway also presents its vision of eating in an attractive, winsome way, showing the watching world that this is a way which can indeed be lived out, and also showing that there is much to commend making this sort of sacrifice on behalf of food. Again, theological ethics offers guidance, as this idea follows a pattern articulated by the Christian animal welfare theologian and vegetarianism advocate Andrew Linzey.¹³ Facing the common criticisms that the call to vegetarianism was too strenuous to be adopted by large amounts of the population, and that vegetarianism did not align with the natural order of things, Linzey does not deny the charges. Rather, he points to the Bible, to Genesis 1 and 2, to suggest that the natural order did not always operate in this fashion, and he also points to passages such as Isaiah 11¹⁴, which suggest a future beyond predation and killing, to argue that the cycles of predation and carnivory would not always be as they are in the present time. As a result, vegetarians, and particularly vegetarian Christians, articulate a theology in their dietary choices. They provide a snapshot, a living model of what life was like before sin

¹² Crawford, p. 205.

¹³ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

¹⁴ In particular, verses 6 through 9 of chapter 11:

“The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.” (NRSV translation)

entered the world, causing predation and death, and they provide a living model of what life will be like after the final redemption of the world. They function as signposts pointing the way to a better way of eating, and to a better world in general. In so doing, Linzey argues, vegetarians protest the violence inherent in the current ways of eating, and they act as prophetic signs, making the biblical promises appear more plausible by living them out, albeit on a smaller scale, in the here and now.

One does not need to buy into the theology involved, or into vegetarianism for that matter, to take Linzey's point: living an alternative way of life, in this case an alternative way of eating, even on a smaller scale, plants the idea in the mind of the person on the outside looking in that it really is possible to live in this sort of fashion, in accordance with strongly held ethical beliefs. It makes the entire concept more plausible than it otherwise would have been. Also, it makes the notion of making the necessary sacrifices more desirable, in that it shows to the outsider that this countercultural way of doing things is aimed towards a telos, which carries benefits and rewards. For Linzey, the rewards are primarily concerned with ethical fulfillment - in feeling good that one is eating in such a way so as to cause minimal pain and suffering to non-human creatures.

Others, such as Carlo Petrini and Dan Barber, focus on taste and flavor as rewards for eating sustainably. Sustainable food, they argue, offers the pleasure of a distinct way of eating which, frankly, tastes better than the alternative. This improved taste and flavor comes from the quality of the food itself, and also from eating the right foods and right times of year. Several authors, including most notably Barbara Kingsolver in her widely regarded book *Animal Vegetable Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, extol the benefits of seasonality, of eating food in its proper location, and in its proper season. There

is ethical value to this, but also, they argue, aesthetic value, as the taste of a first strawberry in the summer, or asparagus in the fall, produces a culinary experience far beyond that of having these foods accessible year round. In the case of food, as with other things, absence really does make the heart grow fonder.

There are, of course, considerable difficulties in eating with this kind of intentionality, and forsaking the dominant industrial paradigm, as previously mentioned. It takes time, money, and effort to do this, in a world where all seem to be in short supply. It requires a willful kind of isolation, which many fear would inevitably turn into an insular sort of solipsism, leading to ostracism from the broader community. It is true that all of those who have chosen to eat in alternative ways, from vegetarians to locavores, have faced these criticisms. Roger Scruton, for example, labels as “rude” the individual who would put their own dietary peccadilloes above the common meal around the table.¹⁵ In order to live and eat in such a way as to resist and challenge the dominant paradigm, however, these risks are required.

An Analogy - The Benedict Option

The need for alternative ways of eating to stand over and against the dominant, modern, industrial paradigm is paralleled by a conversation currently taking place in the field of Christian ethics. Christian writer and blogger Rod Dreher, following MacIntyre, argues for the Christian church in America¹⁶ to take what he calls “the Benedict Option” - taking a conscious step away from politics and the search for influence in the modern

¹⁵ It is worth pointing out that Scruton would have no patience for the processed fast foods which dominant modern culture. In fact, much of his ire was reserved for “faddists” who subscribe to the sort of “nutritionism” described by Gyorgy Scrinis and Michael Pollan.

¹⁶ Dreher is a member of the Russian Orthodox church, and his message primarily appeals to conservative Orthodox, Catholics, and also, to a lesser extent, evangelicals.

world, in favor of bolstering the strength of the Christian community from within, in order to withstand the corrosive pressures of the Modern era. In Dreher's words,

The "Benedict Option" refers to Christians in the contemporary West who cease to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of American empire, and who therefore are keen to construct local forms of community as loci of Christian resistance against what the empire represents.¹⁷

Dreher's prescription for the American church is the same as MacIntyre's prescription for society in general: building local communities around distinctive traditions and beliefs, undergirded by practice, in order that the brand of Christianity he advocates for can withstand what he considers the onslaught of modernity. Also, like MacIntyre, Dreher believes that the habits and thought patterns of modernity have seeped into the life of the church, and need to be consciously rooted out by the cultivation of virtue in these communities.

The primary antagonist against this goal, for Dreher, is what he calls "expressive individualism" - a hyper-individualized autonomy which threatens all cultural structures, including the Christian church. As the title implies, Dreher borrows heavily from the monastic tradition in his conception of the Benedict Option, citing values such as stability and community as essential to its formation. It represents a rejection of any attempt at persuasion by means of assimilation, and it represents a rejection of partial measures. It represents, instead, an ethic where, in Stanley Hauerwas' phrasing, the community itself is the ethic.

The similarities between the Benedict Option and the foodway-based approach to food advocated for in this dissertation are fairly obvious: both call for the preservation

¹⁷ Rod Dreher, "Benedict Option FAQ,' *The American Conservative*, October 6th, 2015, accessed March 3rd, 2017, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-faq/>

(and in some cases, production) of distinctive ways of life formed in community, around a common story, and marked by practices for the formation of virtue. This is done as a way to maintain these traditions against the corrosive influence of the dominant, modern cultural apparatus. Accordingly, the primary criticisms levied against the Benedict Option are three criticisms which food advocates also face on a regular basis: that the vision is too vague, and that the vision is marked by retreat and separatism, and that the dominant entity being resisted (whether the industrial food system or the American empire), while being far from perfect, does have redeeming value, and as a result, the effort ought to go into fixing what is broken, rather than pulling away and starting anew. These three criticisms will be handled in turn, first from the perspective of the Benedict Option, and then in consideration of how these arguments apply to food ethics debates.

Turning Abstraction into Reality

The Benedict Option calls for “local forms of community as loci of Christian resistance against what the empire represents.” What does that mean? The language is vague, and in Dreher’s case, the language tends to be spiritualized, focused upon the community’s relationship with God more than its daily activities amongst other people. Caleb Bernacchio and Philip De Mahy seek to rectify this problem, noting that MacIntyre himself cites, as exemplars of the types of communities he calls for, cooperatives, feminist groups, and “those who are at work within schools, hospitals, a variety of industrial and financial workplaces, laboratories, theaters, and universities in order to make of

these, so far as possible, scenes of resistance to the dominant ideology and the dominant social order.”¹⁸ It is not enough for these communities to make moral arguments; they must also make socio-economic ones. This is how the ideas are fleshed out and made real in modern life. The socio-economic argument to be made, according to Bernacchio and de Mahy, follows the work of Karl Polanyi’s book *The Great Transformation*, in which Polanyi argues that early proponents of globalization attempted to free the market from the social structures it was embedded in during the pre-modern era, most notably the family and the local community. As such, the logic of the market, and the needs of the market, overwhelmed the common good of the local community in question. Household management was replaced by making money, and the work itself became instrumentalized, judged not by its inherent value, or service to the family and community, but rather by its income-earning potential.

The local forms of community to be maintained and constructed, then, are those in which socio-economic structures are re-embedded within the local community, either inside the home, such as cottage industries, or within the local community, and the energies of these structures are harnessed for the good of the community itself, rather than for maximum financial gain on the larger, impersonal market. These are the sorts of institutions which will have the strength to resist the machinations of the larger market. Within them, work is elevated, even approaching the status of prayer, as in the Benedictine tradition. MacIntyre makes this connection explicit, in an excerpt quoted by Bernacchio and de Mahy:

¹⁸ Caleb Bernacchio and Philip de Mahy, “The Benedict Option at the Crossroads of Ethics and Economics,” *Ethika Politika*, June 19th, 2015, accessed March 6th, 2017, <https://ethikapolitika.org/2015/06/19/the-benedict-option-at-the-crossroads-of-ethics-and-economics/>

“What makes it worthwhile to work and to work well is threefold: that the work that we do has point and purpose, is productive of genuine goods; that the work that we do is and is recognized to be our work our contribution, in which we are given and take responsibility for doing it and for doing it well; and that we are rewarded for doing it in a way that enables us to achieve the goods of family and community. This conception of work develops in secular form the core of the Benedictine belief that work is prayer. (“Where We Were, Where We Are, Where We Need to Be”)¹⁹

In the Benedictine understanding of work, it is elevated to the level of prayer: for a Christian, the highest level of human activity possible. Even if we remove the religious connotation, it can be safely argued that the “local forms of community” advocated for by MacIntyre and, later, by Dreher, are anchored by an understanding of work as a means of elevation, of becoming a better person and cultivating virtue, regardless of whether the market gives a maximum monetary reward for the work which is performed or not. The motivation is not financial so much as it is social: do not act to get rich, but rather for the benefit of the community, and, while the profits may be less, at least in the short term, such an approach promises long-term rewards both financial and moral, for the community which benefits from the work.

The values-based supply chains, articulated by Fred Kirchenmann and discussed in the previous chapter, represent prototypical examples of the local forms of community discussed by MacIntyre and elaborated by Bernacchio and de Mahy. In these systems, the work is not primarily motivated by profit, but rather by ideals of sustainability, both in an ecological sense and in a cultural sense. There are localized, concrete communities which benefit from the work, and those communities include, ala Aldo Leopold, both human and non-human inhabitants. Finally, the sort of work being done - agricultural work

¹⁹ Ibid.

using nature as the rule, or the “measure,” in Wes Jackson’s language - has the potential to cultivate virtue in the worker, an idea which goes back as least as far as to Thomas Jefferson, if not farther. These types of communities, focused on the production of food, can also extend into its consumption, producing cultural structures able to withstand the corrosive influence of the modern industrial system. As is the case with the Benedict Option, then, this is where ethics and economics meet, and where the vision of eating ethically becomes concrete, tactile, and, ultimately, more plausible.

But What About the World Left Behind?

The primary critique of the Benedict Option is that it is “heading for the hills and bunkering up,” in Matthew Loftus’ language²⁰ - a withdrawal from the systems which dominate modern life, and an attempt to construct alternative ones untainted by them. This leaving, in the minds of critics, constitutes a denial of the mandate to care for and work for the common good of the entire community, instead preferring to set up “pure” enclaves for people who have the means to take advantage of them. In fact, Catholic theology professor CC Pecknold counters the Benedict Option with a proposal which he calls “The Dominican Option,” marked not by withdrawal, but in his words, “a “contrast society” that is very much engaged with the world—an evangelistic witness which is joyful, intellectually serious, expansive, and charitable.”²¹ The differences between what Pecknold sees as a “contrast society” and a society based upon withdrawal parallel the differences between the “Christ Transforming Culture” and “Christ Against Culture”

²⁰ Matthew Loftus, “Q and A for People Who Hate the Benedict Option,” *First Things*, October 16th, 2015, Accessed March 6th, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/10/q-and-a-for-people-who-hate-the-benedict-option>

²¹ CC Pecknold, “The Dominican Option,” *First Things*, October 6th, 2014, accessed March 6th, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/10/the-dominican-option>

types in H. Richard Niebuhr's famous fivefold schematic, articulated in his book *Christ and Culture*. Whereas the former is actively engaged with the world, invested in the larger world's welfare, the latter is perceived as aloof, sectarian, and unconcerned with the fate of the world it is perceived to be leaving behind.

Not surprisingly, Dreher's reaction to these charges is markedly similar to the reaction of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder facing similar charges of withdrawal and seclusion - frustrated exasperation. Throughout his writings on the topic, Dreher is at pains to proclaim that the Benedict Option is not primarily about escape (although that is certainly an element of it) but rather of pulling back to ensure that there is something there to offer to the larger world. Yoder's argument was a similar one - if the church resembles the larger society, than what does it have to offer that society? Rather, the community itself is the ethic, and its distinctiveness adds value and contributes to the common good by offering a countercultural vision of what the good actually consists of, even if the sharp difference in the community's vision results in friction and conflict in the short term. Critical to this vision is what Dreher terms "ecumenism of the trenches," citing the efforts of Catholics, evangelicals, and Mormons - groups who have deep and longstanding theological differences - to work together for common cause on subjects such as abortion and human trafficking. The groups do not assimilate into each other, they remain distinctive, but they are able to put the differences aside in order to achieve goals which are important to all three communities.

Again, the connection to food ethics is clear and stark, for as with the Benedict Option, a foodway-based approach to ethics may conjure images of retreat and withdrawal, but it is not defined by these images. Rather, as with Dreher's "ecumenism of

the trenches,” the various communities which form around distinctive dietary patterns, aimed at the telos of sustainability, will need to be able to come together to achieve goals which are important to all. For instance, the mistreatment of cows, chickens, and pigs in CAFOs is an issue with a broad base of support among those in the food movement, and it is not difficult to see why. Vegetarians, locavores, and conscientious carnivores all see the wrong inherent in the current system, and all see how fighting against the current system and for the welfare of these animals represents an advancing of the causes they hold to be dear. Ideally, these groups work together, even though their long-standing differences (vegetarians and conscientious carnivores most notably) remain, and define these groups as distinctive. In these cases, focusing on that which makes the communities distinctive does not lessen the drive to form social movements, it actually augments that drive, and promises to build social movements with larger bases of support.

Is Modernity all Bad?

The final critique of the Benedict Option to be considered is the radically pessimistic view of history which accompanies it. Dreher is a member of the Orthodox Church who came out of the Catholic church, and those ecclesiological roots may help to explain why his view of history, particularly after the Enlightenment, appears to resemble a steady decline. The first pillar of the Benedict Option is a full-throated condemnation of the modern project as homogenizing, corrosive, and ultimately destructive of traditional cultural practices which were the primary generators of virtue across the centuries, foremost among them the family and the local community. In Dreher’s reckoning, modern structures of living, what he variously called “the American project” and

“American empire,” seem to have very little, if any, redeeming value. They are to be resisted. However, in advocating withdrawal from the American project, critics have asked, does Dreher actually advocate withdrawal from the opportunity to do enormous good, an opportunity made possible by the achievements of American modernity?

For his part, Dreher does not deny the critique: while acknowledging the “genuine and valuable” advances, both materially and morally, society has experienced largely as a result of the Enlightenment, he stands by the claim that this pivotal moment in history, which gave birth to, among other things, the American project, was also a catalyst for the social fragmentation and disintegration which is visible in the present day. It is perhaps ironic, given the oft-quoted notion of America as a “Christian nation,” and the prevalence of the American civil religion which persists even in a “post-Christian” culture, that a program for Christian ethics would be so pessimistic about America and about the liberal democracy which birthed it. Is this pessimism warranted, or does it represent a rejection of the many blessings and advances which have come from the Enlightenment, liberal democracy, and America?

Interestingly enough, food advocates have had to wrestle with similar questions as they relate to the American industrial food system. Yes, it may have flaws, its defenders might respond, but the criticisms ignore all of the good which has been accomplished, largely through technological innovation. More of the hungry are fed than ever before, and astonishing yields are coming from increasingly fewer acres of farmland, allowing for more land to be protected as wilderness. To reject all of this as irrelevant in light of the systems’ problems, defenders conclude, is at best naive, at worst ethically malevolent. It would be better to take the good we can get from the system, flawed as it

is, and work on improving it. The problem with such an approach, however, is that the technological innovations are divorced from the character of the people involved; in the case of food ethics, technological production is not united to consumption patterns. Technology can produce a great deal of food (at quite an environmental cost, mind), but those who it feeds, history has shown, will not stop when they have had enough. They will simply consume more. As Marion Nestle, among many, many others, points out, food shortages do not stem from deficiencies in production, but rather in distribution. When production and consumption are unhooked from each other, the latter will always run out ahead of the former. What is needed is the reconnection of production and consumption. When they are taken in tandem, and when consumers have awareness and ownership in the production process, consumption patterns are likely to adjust accordingly.

Further, the impulse to “feed the world,” noble as it is, rests on the modernist, rationalist assumption that every variable in a given situation can be accounted for, that outcomes can be guaranteed through the sheer force of human will. This mindset results in seeing the problems which exist in the dominant system - animal welfare, social justice, and ecological to name a few - and yet, to be hesitant to change them, because the system works better than any alternative we could possibly imagine. If we are fed reasonably well, if we are food secure, then stepping into the unknown of a new way of doing things seems to be an unnecessary risk to take.

Moving away from a centralized, industrial food system, in favor of a “federalist” approach to food powered by specific foodways and the communities that live in them

seems to be terribly inefficient, and destined to cause more hunger. This is fiercely debated, of course, but again, the assumption is that a centralized food system is the only way in which these problems can be addressed, and further, the assumption is that we would know exactly what would happen should the “calamitous” decision be made, to step away from centralized food. However, following the ethic of risk which Sharon Welch articulates, to do so is actually to align our moral imaginations more closely to the world as it actually is, and to allow the possibility for positive ethical outcomes, even if the full scope of those outcomes cannot be seen at the present moment. To borrow the phrasing of naturalist John Burroughs, sometimes the thing to do is to leap, and the net will appear.

Does a Commitment to Foodways Need to be Powered by Religion?

Many of the arguments cited in this chapter, along with the thinkers who articulated them, are thoroughly Christian. Part of that is due, no doubt, to this author’s familiarity with that world, but one reading this may still wonder: is Christianity required to make such a system work? In the United States, there has been some excellent work produced on food and agriculture from Christian theologians and ethicists, particularly by Norman Wirzba, Ellen Davis²², and others. There have even been whispers of a “Christian food movement,” as evangelical bastions such as Wheaton College have installed community gardens, and Princeton Theological Seminary has created the “farmi-

²² Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

nary,” which aims to “integrate theological education with small-scale sustainable agriculture in the conviction that the skills and character vital to faithful Christian leadership must be formed in direct relationship with God’s good creation.”²³

At the same time, however, there remains a longstanding wariness toward the food movement in many quarters of the Christian church in America, as Christian authors have warned of the “subtle dangers” which accompany it, including, but not limited to, an invitation to gluttony, self righteousness, and finally, the danger of elevating food above “important” issues such as sin, salvation, and others.²⁴ Some of these arguments have merit, many have absolutely none, but the important thing to remember, for our purposes, is that for every foray into food ethics on the part of the Christian community, there are plenty in the community warning against such an idea.

And yet, there are examples, in Christianity and also in Hinduism and other religious traditions as well, as communities of people, coming together to eat in a certain way, in order to save meaningful traditions, and also to show a better way, to show a vision of ideals being lived out on a small scale, in order to encourage the broader society to take those ideals on in a larger one. The most potent examples are when the participants come to live together, forming intentional communities to facilitate these visions, of which food plays a substantial part, but not the only one. For instance, Koinonia Farm, in Americus, Georgia, was founded by Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin

²³ “Why Farminary?” *Princeton Theological Seminary*, accessed March 8th, 2017, <http://farminary.ptsem.edu/vision-why-farminary/>

²⁴ Brandon J. O’Brien, “How Should Christians Understand the Food Movement?” *Christianity Today*, October 23rd, 2012, accessed March 8th, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/personalconcerns/understand-food-movement.html?start=1>

and Mabel England as a “demonstration plot for the kingdom of God.”²⁵ In addition to focusing on agriculture and stewardship, Koinonia Farm places a premium upon racial reconciliation, which includes paying black and white farm workers an equal wage, and inviting everyone, of all races, to the same table when the community shares a meal. In so doing, the participants in Koinonia Farm attempt to show what the “brotherhood and sisterhood of all people” looks like, in a region where Jim Crow once ruled.

Although vastly different in religious tradition and in geographical location, the intentional community of Brahma Vidya Mandir, in Paunar, Maharashtra, India, displays many of the same ideals as Koinonia Farm, and, like Koinonia, places a high value upon food and agriculture as a way to be faithful to those ideals, and to display them to others. This intentional community, as Whitney Sanford points out, attempts to operate based upon Gandhian principles such as self-sufficiency, non-violence, simplicity, and public service.²⁶ The idea is to enact with their lives an alternative narrative than the dominant narrative on food and agriculture. As Sanford writes,

The women of BVM and the farmers who work with them enact a counter-narrative to the prevalent narrative that large-scale agriculture is inevitable, necessary, and the sole possibility for feeding the world. They consciously reject a narrative of progress that privileges centralization of knowledge and power and increases reliance on expensive technologies. The narrative of contemporary agriculture, for example, emphasizes productivity, that is, high yields (an arbitrary standard), as the sole measure of value, and progress in the form of improved seeds and inputs such as fertilizers that are priced beyond the range of most farmers.²⁷

²⁵ “A Brief History,” *Koinonia Farm*, accessed March 8th, 2017, <https://www.koinoniafarm.org/about/>

²⁶ A. Whitney Sanford, “Gandhi’s Agrarian Legacy: Practicing Food, Justice, and Sustainability in India,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 7(2013): 65-87.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 67.

This counter-narrative serves as a form of resistance to the hegemonic tendencies of industrial food, while also serving to stir the moral imagination of those on the outside of the community looking in - this is what life, and eating, could be like. In BVM, there is a focus on radical democracy, and human-scale technologies, what EF Schumacher calls “appropriate technologies” benefitting those which use them, rather than businessmen and businesswomen far away. In Sanford’s words, BVM, and communities like it, “provide a test-lab for new and alternative ideas and demonstrate that other frameworks for food and community exist and are possible.”²⁸

Now obviously, joining an intentional community is not a life choice which will be practical, or desirable, for the majority of people. Moreover, it is true that such communities can sometimes become insular and separatist, interested in helping no one except those who commit to the community itself. However, with Koinonia Farm, and BVM, there is an invitation to all who visit and aware of such communities to join with them in the seriousness with which they consider food ethics, even if that does not mean joining the community itself. One does not need to join such a community to be inspired to adopt the commitment to eat ethically demonstrated by the members of the community. This drive and motivation can be adapted to fit the circumstances of those outside of these communities. It can goad them to eat in a way which takes ethics seriously, and to pursue virtue in the way in which they raise and consume food. In short, it can be successfully translated to foodways. The members of these intentional communities are religious, and that is unquestionably part of what drives them to live in such a way; the urge to preserve historical traditions is integral to several different forms of religious

²⁸ Ibid, p. 84.

faith, as is the urge to act as an “evangelist” to those outside the faith, inviting them to consider a different way of living. As Slow Food and other movements have shown, however, that religious faith is not a prerequisite for eating ethically, or for pursuing virtue at all. It is a useful source for generating the commitment to take food ethics seriously, but it is not the only one.

Do We Have Time For This Approach?

As this argument winds down, perhaps the final question to consider is the most urgent one of all: do we have time for such an approach? From the perspective of one who has to live in a food desert every day, or perhaps from the perspective of an alarmed environmentalist, the approach of slowly constructing virtue through foodways may feel positively glacial; it is unquestionably long and arduous. There is much to be done, and also much to be undone, and this takes time. Should we not instead search for big, dramatic solutions that boldly address the issue and attempt to solve it in grand, sweeping style? To answer, I will use the words of Wendell Berry, in his PBS interview with Bill Moyers:

When you ask the question what is the big answer, then you're implying that we can impose the answer. But that's the problem we're in to start with, we've tried to impose the answers. The answers will come not from walking up to your farm and saying this is what I want and this is what I expect from you. You walk up and you say what do you need. And you commit yourself to say all right, I'm not going to do any extensive damage here until I know what it is that you are asking of me. And this can't be hurried. This is the dreadful situation that young people are in. I think of them and I say well, the situation you're in now is a situation that's going to call for a lot of patience. And to be patient in an emergency is a terrible trial.

I would agree with the claim that we are in a time of emergency; however, as Berry argues, patience is a required virtue for these times of emergency. This is so, as he argued, partly because of the track record of humanity - big, grandiose solutions often

have undesirable effects. Focusing on foodways may seem hopelessly quaint, or ethically irrelevant. The virtue which they can create, however, runs deeper than cognitive assent, or emotivism, or any other motivation for changing behavior. Perhaps only virtue is strong enough to enable the drastic, lasting changes which will need to be made to stave off environmental destruction. It takes courage and persistence to follow this road - courage to believe that these changes can be made, and persistence to pursue them even in the small, seemingly insignificant actions of ordinary life. It is just these “ethically insignificant actions” that are called for in these times, however, in order to reverse the trends which have put us in this predicament in the first place, and to generate trends which lead to a better future.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- "A Brief History." *Koinonia Farm*, accessed March 8th, 2017, <https://www.koinonia-farm.org/about/>
- Achenbach, Joel. "107 Nobel Laureates Sign Letter Blasting Greenpeace Over GMOs." *Washington Post*. June 30th, 2016, accessed July 24th, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2016/06/29/more-than-100-nobel-laureates-take-on-greenpeace-over-gmo-stance/>
- Agarwal, Arun. "Environmentality, Community, Intimate Government, and the Making of Environmental Subjects in Kumaon, India." *Current Anthropology* 46 (2005): 161-190.
- "Agriculture of the Middle." *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*. Edited by Paul B. Thompson and David M. Kaplan. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science and Business Media, 2014. web, accessed February 21st, 2017, <http://agofthemiddle.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AOTM-Encyclopedia-of-Food.pdf>
- Annas, Julia. *Intelligent Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Apfel-Marglin, Frederique. *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Arroyo, Anthony. "Laudato Si and Industrial Agriculture." *AnthonyArroyo.com* (blog). March 1st, 2016, accessed April 12th, 2016, <http://www.anthoniaroyodotcom.com/blog/2016/3/1/laudato-si-and-industrial-agriculture>
- Barber, Dan. *The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food*. New York: Penguin, 2014.
- Barclay, Eliza. "Your Grandparents Spent More of Their Money on Food Than You Do." *NPR - The Salt*. March 2nd, 2015, accessed April 12th, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/03/02/389578089/your-grandparents-spent-more-of-their-money-on-food-than-you-do>
- _____. "A Nation of Meat Eaters: See How it All Adds Up." *NPR - The Salt*. June 27th, 2012, accessed February 8th, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2012/06/27/155527365/visualizing-a-nation-of-meat-eaters>
- Barthes, Roland. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." in *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp 28-35. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Bernacchio, Caleb, and Philip de Mahy. "The Benedict Option at the Crossroads of Ethics and Economics." *Ethika Politika*. June 19th, 2015, accessed March 6th, 2017, <https://ethikapolitika.org/2015/06/19/the-benedict-option-at-the-crossroads-of-ethics-and-economics/>

- Berry, Wendell. *What Are People For? Essays*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010.
- _____. *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977.
- _____. *Jayber Crow*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2000.
- _____. Interview with Bill Moyers, *The Bill Moyers Show*, originally aired October 4th, 2013, accessed April 5th, 2017, <http://billmoyers.com/segment/wendell-berry-on-his-hopes-for-humanity/>
- _____. "Why I am Not Going to Buy a Computer," in *Technology and Values: Essential Readings*, ed. Craig Hanks, pp 500-503. New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2010.
- Bittman, Mark. "Rethinking the Word "Foodie."" *The New York Times*. June 24th, 2014, accessed June 28th, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/opinion/mark-bittman-rethinking-the-word-foodie.html
- Blome, Jim. "Modern Agriculture is Based on Sound Science." *The Washington Post*. November 19th, 2014, accessed April 12th, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/brand-connect/wp/perspectives/modern-agriculture-is-based-on-sound-science/>
- Borgmann, Albert. *Real American Ethics: Taking Responsibility for Our Country*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Borlaug, Norman. "Are We Going Mad?" in *The Ethics of Food*, edited by Gregory E. Pence, pp. 74-79. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.
- Brooks, David. *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. New York: Random House, 2011.
- _____. "The Avalanche of Distrust." *The New York Times*. September 13th, 2016, accessed October 1st, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/13/opinion/the-avalanche-of-distrust.html?_r=0
- _____. "Obama: Gospel and Verse." *The New York Times*. April 26th, 2007, accessed October 4th, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/opinion/26brooks.html>
- Burk, Martha. "Cooked: Is Fast Food Feminism's Fault?" *Huffpost Books*. June 13th, 2013, accessed April 12th, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martha-burk/michael-pollan-cooked_b_3133615.html
- Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Originally published in 1790.

- Charles, Dan. "Berkeley's Soda Tax Appears to Cut Consumption of Sugary Drinks." *NPR*. August 23rd, 2016, accessed October 14th, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/08/23/491104093/berkeley-soda-tax-appears-to-cut-consumption-of-sugary-drinks>
- Cheney, Jim and Anthony Weston. "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette: Toward an Ethics-Based Epistemology." *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 115-134.
- Clifford, Stephanie. "Wal-Mart to Buy More Local Produce." *The New York Times*. October 14th, 2010, accessed June 4th, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/15/business/15walmart.html?_r=0
- Code, Lorraine. *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Counihan, Carole, and Penny Van Esterik. "Introduction." in *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp 1-11. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Crawford, Elizabeth. "Nutrition and Health Bars Expand Market Share by Tying Into Wellness, Athleticism." *Food Navigator*, January 15th, 2015, accessed August 23rd, 2016, <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Markets/Nutrition-bars-expand-market-share-by-tying-into-wellness-athleticism>
- Crawford, Matthew B. *The World Beyond Your Head: Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2015.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble With Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground*, edited by William Cronon, pp. 69-90. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1995.
- Dahlberg, Kenneth. "Regenerative Food Systems: Broadening the Scope and Agenda of Sustainability." In *Food for the Future*, edited by Patricia Allen, pp. 75-102.
- Davis, Ellen. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of Scripture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- de Certeau, Michel, and Luce Giard. "The Nourishing Arts." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd Edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp. 67-77. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Delind, Laura B. "Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking Us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagon to the Wrong Stars?" *Agriculture and Human Values* 28 (2011): 273-283.

- Dreher, Rod. "Benedict Option FAQ." *The American Conservative*. October 6th, 2015, accessed March 3rd, 2017, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-faq/>
- Dunning, David, Chip Heath, and Jerry M. Suls. "Flawed Self-Assessment: Implications for Health, Education, and the Workplace." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 5 (2004): 69-106.
- Dupuis, E.M. and David Goodman. "Should We Go "Home" to Eat? Toward a Reflexive Politics of Localism." *Journal of Rural Studies* 21 (2005): 359-371.
- Egan, Sophie. *Devoured: How What We Eat Defines Who We Are*. New York: WM, 2016.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995.
- Ferdman, Roberto A. "The Slow Death of the Home Cooked Meal." *The Washington Post*, March 5th, 2015, accessed August 19th, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/03/05/the-slow-death-of-the-home-cooked-meal/>
- Flannery, Tim. "We're Living on Corn!" *New York Review of Books*, June 28th, 2007, accessed April 27th, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/06/28/were-living-on-corn/>
- Foot, Philippa. *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Fox, Maggie. "Heavy Burden: Obesity May Be Even Deadlier Than Thought." *NBC News*, August 15th, 2013, accessed August 17th, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/heavy-burden-obesity-may-be-even-deadlier-thought-6C10930019>
- Francione, Gary L. "Animal Welfare, Happy Meat, and Veganism as the Moral Baseline." In *The Philosophy of Food*, edited by David M. Kaplan, 169-189. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- George, Timothy. "The Priesthood of All Believers." *First Things*. October 31st, 2016, accessed April 12th, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>
- Gold, Ann Grodzins, and Bhoju Ram Gujar. *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Gottlieb, Robert, and Anupama Joshi. *Food Justice (Food, Health, and the Environment)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.

- Green, Emma. "Chick-Fil-A: Selling Chicken With a Side of God." *The Atlantic*. September 8th, 2014, accessed December 7th, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/09/chick-fil-a-selling-chicken-with-a-side-of-god/379776/>
- Gunders, Dana. "Wasted: How America is Losing Up to 40 Percent of Its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill." *NRDC Issue Paper*, August 2012, accessed August 17th, 2016, <https://www.nrdc.org/food/files/wasted-food-ip.pdf>
- Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.
- Haltemann, Matthew C. "Knowing the Standard American Diet by It's Faults: Is Unrestrained Omnivorism Spiritually Beneficial?" *Interpretation* 67 (2013): 383-395.
- Hanson, Victor Davis. *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Roots of Western Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Harrison, George. "Golden Rice: The Miracle Crop Greens Love to Hate." *Spiked*. July 19th, 2016, accessed August 1st, 2016, <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/golden-rice-the-miracle-crop-greens-love-to-hate/18570#.V5Im5FcfzjU>
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- _____. "The End of American Protestantism." *ABC Religion and Ethics*. July 2nd, 2013, accessed February 6th, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/07/02/3794561.htm>
- Hawken, Paul. *The Ecology of Commerce: Revised Edition: A Declaration of Sustainability*, New York: Harper Business, 2010.
- Heldke, Lisa. "Down-Home Global Cooking: A Third Option Between Cosmopolitanism and Localism." in *The Philosophy of Food*, edited by David M. Kaplan, pp 33-51. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- _____. "Let's Cook Thai: Recipes for Colonialism." in *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp 327-341. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Howard, Albert. *An Agricultural Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.
- Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Jackson, Wes. *Becoming Native to This Place*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014.

- _____. "We Can Now Solve the 10,000 Year Old Problem of Agriculture." Lecture given January 18th, 2013, accessed June 26th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watchv=A2fqNxyqubQ>
- Kaplan, David M. "Introduction." In *The Philosophy of Food*, edited by David M. Kaplan, 1-24. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Kass, Leon. *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Keinen, Anat, and Ran Kivetz. "Productivity Mindset and the Consumption of Collectible Experiences." *NA- Advances in Consumer Research* 35 (2007): 101-105.
- Kessler, David A. *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Publishing, 2009.
- Kiefer, Heather Mason. "Empty Seats: Fewer Families Eat Together." *Gallup*, January 20th, 2004, accessed August 19th, 2016. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/10336/empty-seats-fewer-families-eat-together.aspx>
- "Kitchen Creations: Nearly 4 in 5 Americans Say Dinners at Home Mean Cooking From Scratch." *The Harris Poll*. June 23rd, 2016, accessed August 19th, 2016, <http://www.theharrispoll.com/health-and-life/Cooking-Dinners-At-Home.html>
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn. *Making Sense of Taste*. Ithaca: NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- _____. "Ethical Gourmandism." In *The Philosophy of Food*, edited by David M. Kaplan, 87-102. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Koterski, Joseph. "The Philosopher of Common Sense." *The Ethics of Aristotle*. Fordham University Lecture Series. The Great Courses, 2006.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.
- Leitch, Alison. "Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity." in *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp 381-399. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Leonard, Thomas C. "Book Review - Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness." *Constitutional Political Economy* 19 (2008): 356-360.
- Leopold, Aldo. *The Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949.
- Levin, Yuval. *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in an Age of Individualism*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.

- Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. Reprint Edition. New York: HarperOne, 2015.
- Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Gospel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- _____. *Animal Theology*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Loftus, Matthew. "Q and A for People Who Hate the Benedict Option." *First Things*. October 16th, 2015, accessed March 6th, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/10/q-and-a-for-people-who-hate-the-benedict-option>
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981.
- Malz-Bovy, Phoebe. "Food Snobs Like Mark Bittman Aren't Even Hiding Their Elitism Anymore." *The New Republic*. March 25th, 2015, accessed June 28th, 2016, <https://newrepublic.com/article/121374/foodie-elitism-are-mark-bittman-and-michael-pollan-elitist>
- McCright, Aaron M. "The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public's Views of Global Warming, 2001-2010." *The Sociological Quarterly* 52 (2011): 155-194.
- McWilliams, James E. *Just Food: Where Locavores Get it Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly*. Nashville: Back Bay Books, 2010.
- Mead, Margaret. "The Problem of Changing Food Habits," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp 18-27. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. Fortieth Anniversary Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Moss, Michael. *Sugar Salt Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*. New York: Random House, 2013.
- Musicus, Aviva, Aner Tal, and Brian Wansink. "Eyes in the Aisles: Why is Cap'n Crunch Looking Down at My Child?" *Environment & Behavior* 47 (2014): 715-733.
- Myers, Justin. "Logic of the Gift: The Possibilities and Limitations of Carlo Petrini's Slow Food Alternative." *Agriculture and Human Values* 30 (2013): 405-415.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. "The Mike Wallace Interview." April 27th, 1958, accessed February 24th, 2017, http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/multimedia/video/2008/wallace/niebuhr_reinhold_t.html

- O'Brien, Brandon J. "How Should Christians Understand the Food Movement?" *Christianity Today*. October 23rd, 2012, accessed March 8th, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/personalconcerns/understand-food-movement.html?start=1>
- "Organic Market Overview." *USDA*. accessed June 28th, 2016, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/natural-resources-environment/organic-agriculture/organic-market-overview.aspx>
- Ostrander, Madeline. "Joel Salatin: How to Eat Animals and Respect Them, Too." *Yes! Magazine*. March 27th, 2011, accessed March 17th, 2017, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/can-animals-save-us/joel-salatin-how-to-eat-meat-and-respect-it-too>
- Pecknold, CC. "The Dominican Option." *First Things*. October 6th, 2014, accessed March 6th, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/10/the-dominican-option>
- Pence, Gregory E. *The Ethics of Food: A Reader for the Twenty-First Century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.
- Peterson, Anna. *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- _____. "Toward a Materialist Environmental Ethic." *Environmental Ethics* 28 (2006): 375-393..
- Phelps, Megan. "Everything He Wants to Do is Illegal: Interview with Joel Satatin." *Mother Earth News*, October 1st, 2008, accessed June 9th, 2016, <http://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/sustainable-farming/joel-salatin-interview.aspx>
- Philpott, Tom. "Let's Make a Meal." *grist.org*, April 13th, 2006, featured on <http://www.michaelpollan.com>, accessed July 5th, 2016, <http://michaelpollan.com/reviews/lets-make-a-meal/>
- Pilcher, Jeffrey M. "Taco Bell, Maseca, and Slow Food: A Postmodern Apocalypse for Mexico's Peasant Cuisine?" in *Food and Culture: A Reader*. 2nd edition, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, pp 400-410. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- _____. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York: Penguin, 2009.
- _____. *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*. New York: Penguin, 2013.

- _____. "Our National Eating Disorder." *The New York Times Magazine*. October 17th, 2004, accessed April 4th, 2017, <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/our-national-eating-disorder/>
- _____. "Six Rules for Eating Wisely." *TIME*. June 4th, 2006, accessed February 6th, 2017, <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/six-rules-for-eating-wisely/>
- Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Touchstone Books, 2001.
- Reiley, Laura. "Farm to Fable." *Tampa Bay Times*. April 13th, 2016, accessed June 22nd, 2016, <http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2016/food/farm-to-fable/restaurants/>
- Rivkin, Rebecca. "Forty-five Percent of Americans Seek Out Organic Foods." *Gallup*, August 7th, 2014, accessed May 1st, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/174524/forty-five-percent-americans-seek-organic-foods.aspx>
- Roberts, Paul. *The End of Food*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
- Royte, Elizabeth. "One-Third of Food is Lost or Wasted: What Can Be Done." *National Geographic*, October 13th, 2014, accessed June 1st, 2016, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141013-food-waste-national-security-environment-science-ngfood>
- Ruiz-Marrero, Carmelo. "The Life and Passion of Henry A. Wallace." *Counterpunch*. March 27th, 2012, accessed August 1st, 2016, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/03/27/the-life-and-passion-of-henry-a-wallace/>
- Salatin, Joel. *Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World*. Nashville: Center Street, 2011.
- Sandler, Ronald. "Introduction: Environmental Virtue Ethics." In *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, edited by Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, pp 1-13. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
- Sanford, A. Whitney. *Growing Stories from India: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012.
- _____. "Gandhi's Agrarian Legacy: Practicing Food: Justice, and Sustainability in India." *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 7 (2013): 65-87.
- Schabner, Dean. "Americans: Overworked, Overstressed." *ABC News Online*. May 2016, accessed April 8th, 2016. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=93604&page=1>

- Schultz, E.J. "Crystal Pepsi is Coming Back to Stores Nationwide: The 90s Era Clear Soda is Pushed by Nostalgic Campaign." *Advertising Age*. June 29th, 2016, accessed August 25th, 2016, <http://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/crystal-pepsi-coming-stores-nationwide/304750/>
- Schwartz, Barry. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. New York: Ecco Press, 2004.
- Scruton, Roger. "Real Men Have Manners." *The Philosophy of Food*, edited by David M. Kaplan, pp. 24-32. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Searle, Sarah. "Stop Romanticizing Farms." *Modern Farmer*, June 30th, 2014, accessed June 1st, 2016, <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/06/stop-romanticizing-farms/>
- Shepard, Paul. *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. 2nd edition. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004.
- Shiva, Vandana. *The Violence of the Green Revolution*. London: Zed Books, 1991.
- Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*. New York: HarperCollins, 1975.
- Singer, Peter and Jim Mason. *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2006.
- "Slow Food Manifesto." *Slow Food*, accessed June 27th, 2016, <http://www.slowfood.com/about-us/key-documents/>
- Smith, Christian, and Kari Christofferson, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Snyder, Gary. *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008.
- _____. *The Practice of the Wild*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990.
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago*. New York: Collins, 1974.
- Spence, Mark David. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Spross, Jeff. "The Unconscionable Adandonment of Rural America." *The Week*. June 8th, 2016, accessed January 8th, 2017, <http://theweek.com/articles/628371/unconscionable-abandonment-rural-america>.

Sunstein, Cass and Richard Thaler. *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

_____. "Designing Better Choices." *The Los Angeles Times*. April 2nd 2008, accessed October 1st, 2016, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/opinion/oe-thalerandsunstein2>

Telfer, Elizabeth. *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Thompson, Paul B. *The Agrarian Vision: Sustainability and Environmental Ethics*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010.

_____. *From Field to Fork: Food Ethics for Everyone*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

_____. "Nature Politics and the Philosophy of Agriculture." In *The Philosophy of Food*, edited by David M. Kaplan, 214-232. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Tompkins, Douglas R. Foreword to *The CAFO Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories*, edited by Douglas R. Tompkins. Bristol: Watershed Media, 2010.

"Unsustainable Fishing." *World Wildlife Fund*. accessed June 26th, 2016, http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/blue_planet/problems/problems_fishing/

Van Wensveen, Louke. *Dirty Virtues*. New York: Humanity Books, 2000.

Vedantem, Shankar. "Why Eating the Same Food Increases People's Trust and Cooperation." *NPR*, February 2nd, 2017, accessed February 10th, 2017, http://www.npr.org/2017/02/02/512998465/why-eating-the-same-food-increases-peoples-trust-and-cooperation?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social

Walsh, Bryan. "Foodies Can Eclipse (And Save) the Environmental Movement." *TIME*. February 15th, 2011, accessed June 16th, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2049255,00.html>

Warner, Melanie. "The War Over Michelle Obama's Sort-Of-Organic White House Garden." *CBS News*. June 16th, 2011, accessed June 16th, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-war-over-michelle-obamas-sort-of-organic-white-house-garden/>

Welch, Sharon. *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

"What We Do: Agricultural Development: Golden Rice." *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*. accessed July 24th, 2016, <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Agricultural-Development/Golden-Rice>

White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

"Why Farminary?" *Princeton Theological Seminary*, accessed March 8th, 2017, <http://farminary.ptsem.edu/vision-why-farminary/>

Wilson, Timothy D. *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Subconscious*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004.

Wirzba, Norman. *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

_____. "Why Agrarianism Matters - Even to Urbanites." In *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, edited by Norman Wirzba, 1-22.

Wright, N.T. *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.

Young, Neil. *The Monsanto Years*. Performed by Neil Young and Promise of the Real, 2015, Reprise Records.

Zwart, Hub. "A Short History of Food Ethics." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 12, (2000): 113-126.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Edward Fouche moved to Orlando when he was ten years old, and still considers it home. He graduated from Florida State University with a degree in communication studies and a minor in political science. After working for the Walt Disney Company for a number of years, he went to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, receiving a Master of Divinity degree in 2006. Upon graduation, he worked in several churches, and also taught Biblical studies and spiritual formation, at the collegiate level, for the Baptist College of Florida. He entered the doctoral program at the University of Florida in 2012, in order to better understand the connections and the tensions between religious tradition and environmental thought. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Florida in the summer of 2017.