



## The Emergence of Food Ethics

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**Abstract** Philosophical food ethics or deliberative inquiry into the moral norms for production, distribution and consumption of food is contrasted with food ethics as an international social movement aimed at reforming the global food system. The latter yields an activist orientation that can become embroiled in self-defeating impotency when the complexity and internal contradictions of the food system are more fully appreciated. However, recent work in intersectionality offers resources that are useful to both philosophical and activist food ethics. For activists, intersectionality provides a way to preserve and strengthen the meaningfulness of protest and resistance, even in the face of complexity and uncertain outcomes. For philosophers, intersectionality chastens the tendency to regard moral problems as inherently solvable, and provides a way use tensions inherent in food system reform as a source of ethical insight.

**Keywords** Agriculture · Food systems · Social movements · Intersectionality

Philosophical food ethics is a deliberative inquiry into the normative dimensions—the reasons and rationales—of food. It encompasses debates over the production, consumption and cultural significance of the human diet and the technological apparatus that supports it. The expression ‘food ethics’ is used more widely to reinforce popular political orientations to food and dietary choice, however. For non-philosophers, food ethics evokes objectives relating to social justice and sustainability and enjoins citizens to achieve these objectives by making dietary choices that have desirable consequences. This paper begins with a discussion of how this popular form of food ethics has emerged in recent decades, emphasizing the North American context. That is followed by a review of possible strategies for connecting it to philosophical food ethics. In the final section of the paper, I advocate a strategy that draws upon the literature of intersectionality. Consistent with the stance that I have taken throughout my career, I frame this as a fecund and intriguing approach that has yet to be developed, rather than the only correct way for interpreting food ethics from a philosophical perspective.

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## Food Ethics as a Social Movement

In philosophical and popular ideas alike, food ethics concerns the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food. Addressing the practices that constitute the contemporary food system under the aegis of ethics implies bringing them in line with humanity's accumulated standards and procedures for right conduct, social justice and sustainability. I will henceforth refer to right conduct, social justice and sustainability as 'the overarching goal set' for food ethics. Philosophers are, of course, less confident that we know what right conduct, social justice and sustainability mean, but like social activists we share the goal of reforming food practices to better accord with this overarching goal set. The popular conception of food ethics tends to presume that the overarching goal set is well-enough articulated to assess alternative policies and decision options. An activist alternative to philosophical food ethics is widely promoted by individuals who self-identify with "the food movement". If their view is open to possible ambiguities, it nonetheless presumes that food ethics is a straightforward implementation of reforms known to further the overarching goal set.

As characterized by Ronald Sandler, participants in the food movement are critics of something they call the global food system. The systemic nature of this entity is vaguely conceptualized, but it is serviceably indicated by the conglomerate of major corporations that manufacture farm inputs such as seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides and machinery, on the one hand, and that control the processing, trade and distribution of farm commodities right down to the retail level through restaurants and grocery stores, on the other. A more detailed description would include both the policies of national and local governments, as well as the international organizations that regulate global trade. In the middle are farmers, who are seen as both victims of this system and also as players within it, especially to the extent that they are themselves well capitalized and are represented by politically powerful organizations such as various commodity based lobbying groups, (Sandler 2015).

As I perceive it, the social movement to promote food ethics in Western industrialized countries has attained enough participation and influence to be called a social movement only in the last decade. Nevertheless, the global food movement builds upon multiple sources of discontent that have existed for decades. Perhaps the most obvious complaint is the impact of agricultural chemicals on human and ecosystem health. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* was published in 1962. Many scholars call it the beginning of environmental consciousness in the United States. The title of Carson's book calls attention to the bioaccumulation of toxic chemicals in the environment and their impact on songbirds. The immediate effect of the book was the passage of laws such as the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, and the ban of DDT (Lewis 1985). DDT was not used solely for agricultural purposes. It had been developed primarily for controlling insect vectors of infectious disease. Nevertheless, *Silent Spring* had the effect of raising questions about the use of chemical pesticides in food production, and these questions have continued to be a primary motivation for North American environmental and consumer groups who advocate for change in farming practice. Indeed, consumer concerns about chemical additives being used in food date back to the first decade of the 20th century when Harvey Wiley's laboratory in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Chemistry began to undertake studies on adulterated foods. This led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, and the creation of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (Vileisis 2008). Concerns about food and health continue to be an important component of the food movement: organic food, gluten-free foods and concerns about chemical hazards found in food packaging.

Of course, chemical hazards and social issues represent only two of the most obvious points of discontent. Colleagues from the United Kingdom have told me that it was Ruth Harrison's *Animal Machines: The New Factory Farming* that had an impact on public opinion comparable to that of Carson's *Silent Spring* in the United States. Published in 1964 with a foreword by Carson, Harrison's book sparked a new interest in the treatment of animals generally. Like *Silent Spring*, many of the book's impacts have very little to do with food production—reforms in animal testing and commercial hunting being prominent examples. However, also like *Silent Spring* the proximate focus of *Animal Machines* was on an agricultural technology. Harrison critiqued the crowded conditions in which livestock were being raised in a relatively new generation of industrial animal production systems. Campaigns against factory farms or concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) have been an element of the food movement that has been of particular interest to philosophers who have been persuaded by ethical arguments for vegetarianism. Concern for animal ethics has created an academic home for food ethics in many veterinary colleges.

Although I will argue below that there is enough consonance and overlap among goals and themes to characterize the food movement as having truly global dimensions, the political ecology of the movement continues to be strongly influenced by local histories and regional political institutions. The dominance of neo-liberal political ideologies in the United States has had a notable influence, for example. As such, any analysis of how popular food ethics has emerged needs to reflect how events have unfolded on something less than a global scale. Also of interest is the relationship between philosophical and popular food ethics. Does the popular movement provoke interest among philosophers, or do philosophers themselves play a role in stimulating the emergence of food ethics. The next sections offer some speculative assessments.

### The Food Movement in the United States

The summary given above suggests that food safety, environmental impact and animal welfare provide a core set of policy issues for the food movement's overarching goal set. However, in the United States, at least, there is a long history of concern with social issues associated with agriculture and agricultural production. On the one hand, perceived unfairness to economically vulnerable farm producers can be traced back to the last quarter of the 19th century. The Grange, the Populist Party of the 1890s and then eventually the wave of foreclosures and bankruptcies chronicled in John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath* are evidence of these troubles within rural America. On the other hand, there were greater injustices in American agriculture that include the exploitation of Chinese, Japanese, Philippine and Mexican field workers, not to mention the enforced servitude of several million African slaves prior to the Civil War. This class of injustice could be expanded to include collusive acts to disenfranchise free Black farmers after the war, and the genocide and removal of Native Americans from their ancestral access to land, fisheries and other natural resources, (Hurt 2002). Although Communist organizers made attempts to promote the interests of marginalized groups in the 1930s, these grave injustices in the history of American food production began to dawn upon the conscience of white, middle-class Americans only in the 1960s. Edward R. Murrow's television documentary *Harvest of Shame* and Caesar Chavez' efforts on behalf of California migrant labor are visible markers of a discontent within the American food system that predates the emergence of a food movement, (Thompson 2015b).

There was significant social unrest associated with a spate of U.S. farm bankruptcies during the 1980s. Organic food production and consumer food co-ops had origins in the counter-culture of the early 1970s. It would, however, be an exaggeration to characterize these early signs of activism and discontent as a social movement. Nevertheless, they did attract the attention of a small cadre of academics. As I have written elsewhere, North American philosophers began to undertake new scholarship and teaching on both environmental and social justice issues within the food system in the 1970s. The individual scholars who contributed to this renaissance in food ethics were encouraged by leaders in agricultural research and education, and received significant financial support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Higher Education and the U.S. National Science Foundation. The Agriculture, Food and Values Society was founded in 1988, and three of its first five Presidents were philosophers (Thompson 2015a).

My career as an observer and scholar of dissent in the U.S. food system began in 1981, and there was scarcely a year that went by without the publication of some book or prominent media event attempting to expose sources of trouble and injustice in the food system. None of them had anything like the impact of Carson's *Silent Spring* or Harrison's *Animal Machines*. I am at a loss to explain why suddenly in 2001, Eric Schlosser's book *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* broke like a firestorm over the American cultural landscape. Schlosser's book was followed in 2002 by Marion Nestle's *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* and in 2006 by Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. Pollan styled himself as an affable naïf trying to express his environmentally-oriented ethical values through his dietary choices. Peter Singer and Jim Mason also hit the bookstores in 2006 with *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*.

Clearly, the social and historical basis of the recent food movement will be a topic for scholars for some decades to come. There is certainly a sense in which one can see a continuous crescendo of dissent and resistance to what Sandler characterizes as the industrial food system. The food movement of today can in this respect be seen as a growth in public awareness and concern about topics that scholars (including philosophers) were writing and teaching about in the 1970s. In *From Field to Fork*, I note that Singer had been taking his stance on hunger and animal liberation since 1971 and 1972, respectively, and that Frances Moore Lappé had advocated an environmental ethic in *Diet for a Small Planet* in 1971 (Thompson 2015b). Nevertheless, I believe that these books in the first decade of the 21st century gave significant impetus to the emergence of food ethics both as a social movement and as a consumer practice within North America. They were followed by a rapid increase in attention to food issues by North American journalists, filmmakers, popular authors and contributors to social media.

In making these observations about public discourse in the United States and Canada I do not presume to be offering an explanation of the food movement that would meet the standards of a sociological theory. As noted throughout my discussion, the cumulative growth of awareness and the various forms of political action that have been advocated and undertaken provide the basis for more than one plausible theory. I do claim (while citing little evidence, I admit) that there is a marked increase in awareness and activism between the 1970s or 1980s and the 2010s. My claim that the publication of key books triggered a cascade can be regarded as a hypothesis. My point in any case is that none of these books (including Singer's) or any of the subsequent media attention note or acknowledge any influence from the cadre of scholars who had been working on food issues for a quarter of a century before Schlosser's book

appeared in 2001. While there is a sense in which philosophical food ethics predates the social movement in North America, the inference that philosophical food ethics played an important role in stimulating popular food ethics is highly questionable.

The larger significance that my list of books has for philosophical food ethics consists in the way that they have provided a new generation of North American philosophers with an important entrée into reflective or critical food ethics. While Pollan may have thought that ‘ethics’ was a convenient rhetorical device for a journalistic effort, the effort of Singer and Mason advocated eating with conscience with straight-laced seriousness. As such, this cluster of books has connected social activist goals to the notion that what one eats is a topic for morality, if not also for critical reflection and analysis. There are now hundreds of books and thousands of magazine articles, webpages and other ephemera promoting the idea that eating is an act of conscience, and suggesting all manner of ways in which poor farmers, migrant laborers, wage workers in the food industry, animals, and the environment—not to mention ourselves and our own health—can be affected by diet in morally significant ways. These materials are important for both senses of the phrase ‘food ethics’. I began to hear people in the U.S. talking wishfully about a new social movement organized around food as early as 2005. By 2010, it was obvious that they were right. By 2015, dozens and possibly hundreds of courses on that topic were being taught under the supervision of American philosophy departments.

### The International Dimension

There are, of course, other developments that precipitated the explosive growth of food consciousness between 2005 and 2010, and it would be impossible to document all of them without becoming tedious. One that does warrant our attention is the emergence of process standards such as ‘organic’ and ‘fair-trade’, and the accompanying labeling that has made these standards into effective instruments for transformative change. As will be generally known, ‘organic’ and its various equivalents is a standard that disallows the use of certain synthetic chemicals in agricultural production, either as pesticides or as soil amendments. ‘Fair-trade’ indicates that the primary farm producer has received a specific share of the final consumer price for a product that is designated as “fair”, or that wage workers employed in the primary production process have received similarly fair compensation for their labor. Both require record keeping and inspection of production practices by third parties to ensure that the specific requirements of the standard have, in fact, been met. There is no way to perform a test on an avocado or coffee bean that has left the field to determine whether or not it was fairly or organically produced. Both of these standards, as well as others relating to animal welfare or social and environmental aspects of production, have been developed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating internationally. The organic standard, in particular, emerged through a decade long process of discussion and negotiation through the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) (Belasco 2007).

These international standards augment the story that I have told on the emergence of food ethics in two important respects. First, organic and fair-trade standards were *not* peculiar to the U.S. in the way that concern over the welfare of agricultural labor might be. They testify to the sense in which a taste for food ethics was brewing as early as the 1970s in many quarters of the world. Organic agriculture, in particular, had strong roots in biodynamic production methods that had been inspired by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher who died in 1925. The Soil

Association of the United Kingdom was formed in 1946, and developed their first standards for organic production in 1967. Second, these standards provided the basis for verifiable labels that could be affixed to food products, enabling consumers to express ethical commitments to fair prices for farmers and farm workers, or for environmentally friendly production at the point of purchase, (Busch 2011). Once products with these and other ethically-oriented labels began to appear in stores or markets, consumers could operationalize the ethical values that were being promoted by the authors of consciousness-raising books. There is thus a sense in which food ethics, understood not as a philosophical inquiry but as a kind of social movement, has a history of at least a half-century, and that it is a history with a rhizomic structure that both penetrates and draws from diverse sources and locations in Western culture.

The food movement thus characterized is a phenomenon with strong and visible elements in Europe and North America, as well as Australia, New Zealand and other locales where European culture dominates. It is thus clearly an international phenomenon. Importantly, the Asian contribution to the emergence of food ethics does not originate in activist tracts. One early source was F. H. King's *Farmers of Forty Centuries*, published originally by his widow in 1911. King was an American soil scientist who toured China, Korea and Japan observing techniques for continuously maintaining soil fertility on plots that had been in production for far longer than then common Western methods could have sustained (King 1911). King's book eventually became one of the key sources for the organic farming movement that began to blossom in the West after World War II. The work of Masanobu Fukuoka (福岡 正信) was also an important influence in the emergence of sustainable farming methods in the West. Fukuoka, who died only in 2008, conducted research on methods for reclaiming exhausted and denuded soils without the aid of chemical amendments or power-driven machinery. An English translation of his book *One Straw Revolution* became available in 1978 and was widely read and adapted by Western proponents and developers of organic farming methods (Fukuoka 1978). Fukuoka also traveled in the United States, Canada and Europe and became known as a general advocate for nature preservation and environmental consciousness.

King and Fukuoka portrayed Asian production systems as having achieved sustainability through methods that eschewed the Western application of mechanization and chemical amendments. Synthetic fertilizers became commonplace in Western agriculture after the industrial infrastructure for producing nitrogen through the Haber-Bosch process was developed for weapons production in the 20th century's two world wars, (Kroese 2002). Although the Japanese, at least, had the industrial capacity to produce both synthetic fertilizer and chemical pesticide, Japanese farmers have never adopted these technologies to the extent that they have been used in Europe, the U.S., and Australia. Although agricultural systems throughout Asia continued to differ remarkably from those in the West well into the 1980s, the Green Revolution of the 1960s introduced seed varieties that respond well to fertilization into India, the Philippines and Southeast Asia. China has very recently undertaken a massive agricultural modernization project modeled on U.S. production systems. As a result many of the critiques that spawned a Euro-American food movement are now beginning to be heard in Asia.

Recognizing the international dimension and the structural changes associated with standards is important for the analysis I am making because these points acknowledge the larger structural and global context for the emergence of food ethics. As noted above, a sociological explanation of the food movement might well single out these or other global phenomena in developing an alternative analysis. The task I have set for myself in this paper is to highlight the connections (or lack thereof) between the food movement and more reflective

philosophical forms of ethical inquiry. The key point to notice in this connection is the way in which ethical language is deployed in the public discourse that is associated with these structural changes. Even within the popular sphere, food ethics connotes both individual and collective agency, and draws upon a diverse set of cultural traditions.

### The Aesthetic Dimension

Returning for a moment to a U.S. perspective, the more significant contribution of Asia might be grasped by viewing the food movement through an aesthetic lens. I doubt that one could find very many Westerners today who have had no exposure to some form of Asian food, and even fewer who could honestly say that they had lacked the opportunity. Asian-style restaurants are ubiquitous everywhere. The big three are Chinese, Japanese and Thai cuisines, though Korean, Philippine, Malaysian and Indonesian restaurants are becoming increasingly common in North American or European cities. Westerners are also gradually recognizing and eagerly learning to appreciate the diversity and variety of cooking styles that co-exist within these Asian traditions, though Asian-style cooking first came to the Americas with Chinese immigrants in the late 19th century. It was immediately adapted to Western tastes, and began to spread beyond urban “Chinatowns” in the 1950s.

There is no such thing as Chinese food from a Chinese perspective, of course. There are instead numerous regional cuisines that are seen as totally distinct and recognizable. Meanwhile, Chinese expatriate cooks are supporting thriving businesses in every corner of the world by adapting some basic methods of Chinese cooking to local tastes. The phenomenon has been studied well in the recent documentary *The Search for General Tso*, where filmmakers discovered that the popular dish General Tso’s Chicken does not exist in Hunan Province, homeland of the real General Tso, (Cheney 2014). In one of the most important philosophical books on food Lisa Heldke worries that the tendency to create stereotyped dishes that have no authentic connection to the homeland invites us to adopt stereotyped viewpoints not only of Asian cultures, but also of individual representatives of Asian culture. She notices, in short, the way that an aesthetically inspired appreciation of foods from any culture other than one’s own can rapidly take on ethical significance, (Heldke 2003). Food aesthetics inevitably gives rise to food ethics.

A more general rise in food aesthetics can be seen in the popularity of food magazines, television programs, and especially in the international celebrity of chefs: Gordon Ramsey, Jamie Oliver, Wolfgang Puck and many others. Film should also be mentioned in this connection. Technological advances dating back to the 1970s allowed foods to be represented with eye-catching detail and clarity. Arguably beginning with Gabriel Axel’s 1987 film *Babette’s Feast*, the preparation and consumption of food itself began to be thematized cinematically. Most of the film’s 102 min running time is dedicated to Babette’s loving and meticulous orchestration of the meal, the sumptuousness of the feast itself and the pleasure of diners who are members of an abstemious religious sect that has offered her asylum. As the story winds up, we learn that in Babette’s former life she was a great chef, and that having spent her fortune on the meal, she will be remaining among the sect as a chambermaid dedicated to their austere way of life. Babette reveals that her artistry in cooking is her true wealth—presumably a point against the somber asceticism of the religious sect. (As an interesting aside, I note that a 2013 *New York Times* article reports that *Babette’s Feast* is Pope Francis’ favorite film.)

There are now hundreds of films that celebrate cooking and the life of the chef. Although sensual pleasure dominates, the aesthetic side of the food movement is showing signs of openness to food ethics. Carlo Petrini, founded Slow Food primarily as an act of aesthetically based resistance to fast food, but Slow Food is now embracing the social justice and environmental sustainability goals of food ethics. The celebration of fine dining, elegantly prepared and leisurely consumed artisanal foods certainly complicates and challenges some thrusts of food ethics, as will be discussed in more detail below, but along with the three celebrity chefs just mentioned, Petrini has attempted to resolve these tensions in favor of an integrated social movement that would add beauty and delight to the overarching goal set for food ethics, without sacrificing the commitment to right conduct, social justice and sustainability, (Petrini 2013).

In fact, I would argue that Petrini's activism reflects the way that the food movement has been strong on action, but has not had significant engagement with philosophical ethics. Seen as a social phenomenon, food ethics arises both from social activism to promote organic farming, consumption of local or artisanal foods *and* as a call to appreciate careful selection and preparation of meals that represent both innovative and traditional cuisines. In the latter sense, especially, food ethics advocates attention to food as an expression of cultural identity. It suggests that through the aesthetic appreciation of food, individuals can undertake a spiritual practice that will connect them to their own culture, as well as to cultural traditions and ways of being that originate in the far flung corners of the globe. This interest in food culture has an academic counterpart in the creation of courses and scholarly production in food studies. Interestingly, Heldke's work is virtually the only thing done by philosophers that is acknowledged by this body of scholars in history, social theory and literary criticism. Given the way that activism in pursuit of the overarching goal set tends to become suspicious of a reflective or critical attitude, it is ironic that the aesthetic side of the food movement seems to provide more openings to a truly reflective and philosophical engagement with ethics than the attempt to engage overtly ethical rationales.

### **Making Philosophical Sense Out of Popular Food Ethics**

Whether or not they identify themselves as participants in a social movement, many contemporary citizens view alternative consumer practices such as buying directly from farmers, sourcing foods locally, eating a vegetarian diet and purchasing food items that are variously labeled as 'organic,' 'fair-trade,' 'free-range,' 'gluten-free' and 'sustainably-grown' as a corrective to the abuses of the global food system, and they largely equate such practices with food ethics. Michel Korthals has argued that this view of food purchasing decisions mediates the dichotomy between citizen and consumer, placing the decision maker in a situation of "consumer sovereignty," (Korthals 2001). Aside from references to fair trade, animal welfare and Petrini's Slow Food, my discussion of the food movement above does not take up the emergence of food ethics within the European Union. A narrative of the food movement outside the United States would probably place less stress on books and more emphasis on events such as controversy over genetically engineered food crops, concerns about contamination of farm environments following the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, a series of food safety scares including fears about the spread of bovine spongiform encephalitis and the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak in the United Kingdom. As I have speculated, there is no doubt some feedback between the mobilization of public opinion



caused by these European events and American social activists' renewed interest in food issues (Thompson 1998).

At this juncture it is important to note the plurality of theoretical perspectives that vie against one another within the scholarly discourse on food systems. There is an obvious sense in which the food movement expresses forms of dissatisfaction with the prevailing structure of markets, property rights and the power of capital. But the last two centuries have produced so many competing theoretical tropes for theorization of this dissatisfaction that the practitioners of any academic discipline become embroiled in complex debates over terminology and theoretical perspective. Does the word 'ethics' include or exclude politics and collective action? Is it capitalism or neo-liberalism that are at the heart of the problem, and what would one mean by either? Why didn't 20th century social movements achieve the recognition of class interest that would have facilitated social change? Did Freud have the answer to this riddle, or was it Nietzsche? Unraveling the layers of accrued meaning and theoretical investment that are embedded within these questions would take several books and a lifetime to write. And who would read them? Certainly not the citizens who are participating in the popular food movement! One advantage that the phrase 'food ethics' has over the necessarily abstract treatments of social theory and political ontology is that attendance at the junctures where people encounter food can engage members of the lay public who are understandably impatient with the jargonizing of academic theorists.

While Korthals' analysis provides a suggestive avenue for moving beyond conventional liberalism in philosophical food ethics, there is little evidence that the practitioners of food ethics in the popular sense regard reflective and deliberative inquiry into philosophical matters to be a particularly worthwhile activity. In fact, to the extent that open-ended inquiry into the production, distribution and consumption of food complicates their attempts to reform the global food system, philosophy may even be unwelcome and to be regarded with suspicion. My discussion of how food ethics has emerged in recent years must thus be regarded as a partial hypothesis and an invitation for scholars if all persuasions to both augment and contest my analysis. Yet my sketch of the relationship between popular and philosophical food ethics does articulate the backdrop for my recent attempt to consolidate many of the strands evident in the food movement view of food ethics and to offer an interpretation of these issues that is worthy of the reflective and critical approach to ethics that is taken in the discipline of philosophy, (Thompson 2015b).

As Raymond Boisvert has observed, intersectionality is a recurrent theme in my recent work. He quotes *From Field to Fork* to the effect that we should "see the significance of food as an intersectional locus, as a point of contact that integrates various social and political topics to our personal lives," (Thompson, 2015b, pp. 104–105). Boisvert interprets this orientation as advocating a move away from more traditional approaches in ethics that apply a pre-developed theory to some practical problem. "Paul specifically emphasizes how he wants to move away from this," says Boisvert. "Food means 'intersectionality,' it means interlocking and interweaving concerns. It means that the neat clear separations between, for example, self-regarding and other-regarding, can now be challenged. It means that an ethical framework which emphasizes personal health over environmental concerns or vice versa, will be a truncated one," (Boisvert 2016). Boisvert's observation offers an avenue for reformulating the relationship between philosophical food ethics and the food movement.

Intersectional analysis can be defined concisely as the study of sites or loci where forms of oppression coincide or intersect. The key forms of oppression that have been the focus of intersectionality are race, gender and sexuality, though practices of exclusion based on religion,

ethnicity, body type or disability are also sometimes included. In the work of Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality became an approach to black feminist social theory that was able to identify the way that putatively liberatory social movements not only remain insensitive to patterns of domination or misrecognition, but may in fact draw upon and reinforce an oppressive structure in pursuing the ends of liberation and resistance to domination, (Collins 1998). Gloria Anzaldúa's 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* was, for me, the prototype for intersectional studies long before I had ever heard the term 'intersectionality.' Through autobiography Anzaldúa articulates her own life story on the Texas-Mexico border as one of struggle against subjection that took the dual form of White, English speaking persecution of Spanish speakers plus oppression of Indian or mixed-blood peoples within the Spanish speaking population. This struggle against colonialism failed to jibe with the parallel struggles against male domination that were occupying Anzaldúa's feminist colleagues. At the same time, other participants in feminist and Hispanic protests refused to recognize Anzaldúa's identity as a lesbian. *Borderlands/La Frontera* thus identifies the intersectional locus—in this case the person of Anzaldúa herself—as the standpoint from which systems of oppression can most potently be identified and analyzed, (Anzaldúa 2007).

Given this understanding of intersectionality, I am loath to represent my own work in food ethics as representing a true intersectional analysis. There is no sense in which *From Field to Fork* attempts to replicate or even mimic the resistance to power implicit in the work of Collins and Anzaldúa. However, being attentive to intersectional nodes helps draw philosophical food ethics a little closer to the advocacy food ethics that we find in the food movement. Like the intersectional identities of black women or Latino lesbians, address paid to problems in food ethics leads one beyond one set of problems or inadequacies and immediately on to another. Yet these very transitions across the intersection between diet and health, on the one hand, or food security and social justice, on the other, reveal ways in which the very language we use to articulate the nature of an ethical problem in one domain becomes implicated in oppressive or obfuscating measures in another.

Consistent with Boisvert's observations, the very idea of an intersectional locus challenges one conception of overridingness that is frequently emphasized by traditional ethical theory. The philosophical conceit is that ethical reflection can identify the most fully justified course of action, even in situations where beneficial outcomes are offset by costs, or where rights and duties conflict. This implies that philosophy has the means to identify which concerns or norms have overriding force. Collins and Anzaldúa show us how the social mobilization of moral and political argument forms can simultaneously effect positive change in one dimension while reinforcing power relations and retarding change in other dimensions. They recognize the need to participate in discursive practices—including acts of protest and resistance—that have this dual (we might also say dialectical) character while rejecting the claim that doing so signals that one imperative overrides or relinquishes obligations with respect to another. It is in this sense that (as one of the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript put it) an intersectional food ethics shows how we are always dealing with inherently "wicked" problems (Thompson and Whyte 2012).

My book *is* intended to show that a similar kind of dialectical complexity is pervasive in food ethics. It is seldom possible to do just one thing in food ethics, and as in the intersectional loci analyzed by Collins and Anzaldúa, doing almost anything for one morally important reason often involves one in practices that reinforce evils of other sorts. Yet intersectionality is offered as a philosophical approach that refuses to view this kind of complexity as politically disabling. To take one example, food ethics advocates consumption of meat from livestock

grazed on pasture as opposed to having been raised in CAFOs as a way to oppose the ills of factory farming identified in Harrison's 1964 exposé. Activist philosophers have coupled this with an environmental argument, citing the polluting effects of CAFOs (Dieterle 2008; Ilea 2009). Yet there is overwhelming evidence that CAFOs outperform pasture based systems with respect to methane pollution, especially for ruminant animals, producing an environmental ethics case for eating beef produced in CAFOs (Steinfeld et al. 2006; see also Henning 2011). Recent approaches in philosophical ethics would regard this as a logical conflict and would seek either to resolve it by identifying which imperative has overriding force, or perhaps by finding some third course of action (such as veganism) that would putatively resolve the conflict by showing how the putative arguments for eating either pasture or CAFO beef are overridden by some superior alternative (see Bruers 2015).

Without implying that veganism is always inappropriate, an intersectional food ethics would lay stress on three points. First, there are people with little discretion to adjust their diet along the lines that one or more of these ethical rationales suggest, including the vegan alternative. Philosophers adopting mainstream philosophical approaches in both consequentialist and deontological traditions will, of course, *excuse* such people from blame through some version of an "ought implies can" dictum. But the effect of making excuses is arguably a form of disrespect for those who occupy an intersectional locus. People with little discretion are often (though not always) in precisely the marginalized and oppressed circumstances that gave rise to intersectional thought in the first place. To resolve conflict through strategies that stress trade-offs or overriding duties vitiates the tension that is the very heart of intersectionality, and this is the second key point to notice. We should recognize and acknowledge difficulty within the intersectional locus and respect the struggles of those who occupy such a locus. We should not formulate philosophical analyses that drain the situation of its tensions or resolve its contradictions through finding the resources for making exceptions based on ethical theory. The intersectional point is to notice and struggle with the inconsistencies, not to dissolve them by treating the human beings who occupy an intersection as if they were less than capable of full moral agency.

Finally, and possibly of greatest importance, the philosophical strategies of seeking to resolve contradictions and making excuses undermine the possibility of engagement in a dietary practice as a form of protest or resistance. Paying a premium to express support for humane treatment of animals is an act whose political meaning is not canceled out by the logical conflicts with environmental objectives (or, for that matter, by more radical pro-animal objectives). It would be naïve to engage in such a dietary practice on the assumption that it represents a clear solution to the abuse of animals, yet this limitation does not imply that the practice is politically impotent or normatively vacuous. The intersectional interpretation of this particular dietary locus preserves and even intensifies the sense in which participation in food ethics is a form of moral and political discourse even while it acknowledges the wicked complexity of food systems. It is, in this respect, a challenge to the claim that morality can or even should be pure. Intersectional loci will always be pervaded by conflicting purposes. There is thus a sense in which intersectionality becomes a kind of self-pedagogy that helps sensitize those who participate in scholarly *or* popular food ethics to mechanisms of structural exclusion, oppression and inequality.

Food justice is another locus that thrives under an intersectional approach. Within the North American context, at least, it is impossible to engage questions of food justice without also confronting the challenges of structural racism. Structural racism is a product of social structures that reproduce patterns of advantage and disadvantage along racial lines. It is to

be distinguished from attitudinal racism or prejudice that takes shape in the belief systems that motivate individual or group behavior. Iris Marion Young's posthumously published *Responsibility for Justice* discusses how inequality is structural for black women who have limited job prospects, forcing them into employment and housing that further limits their ability to improve their job prospects, putting them into a cycle of marginalization. She asks how responsibility for correcting structural injustices that become most visible at intersectional loci can be apportioned. Her answer notes that while social structures for which no living individual can be held responsible are significant causal factors in reproducing these patterns or oppression, individuals do bear a personal responsibility for engaging in political activities that increase awareness and propose structural change (Young 2010). Arguably, at least some elements of the food movement are intended to be a response to her question.

Food activists operate in the hope that relatively small scale projects such as farmers markets, community gardens, food hubs and networking or governance activities (such as food policy councils) respond to structural injustice. They are thought to do so because these projects are thought to increase the agency or capability of individuals at intersectional points of oppression. There are both stated and unstated elements to this hope. At a minimum, the explicit goals of these activist projects include improved access to foods that are more nutritious than the highly processed and calorie dense foods that are available through the industrial food system. Food production and distribution may also provide opportunities for employment and self-help for highly marginalized individuals, (Myers 2015). What is left implicit is that the skills and abilities needed to grow, process and prepare food are either widely dispersed or readily acquired, so that when combined with every individual's interest in eating something, food ethics is a promising point for intervention in opposition to structural injustice. It is not entirely clear that this unspoken assumption is warranted, however. What is more, the implicit assumption that food is a venue of particular relevance to women may itself reproduce elements of gender oppression.

It is, in fact, possible to go further in critiquing the unspoken elements of the food movement. Food activism has been controversial within some neighborhoods in Detroit where projects for urban agriculture and community gardens have been seen as reinforcing a racial stereotype. Proposals to encourage food production within the city are criticized as too much like sharecropping, the structurally marginalizing labor and land tenure system that kept black farmers in the American South in poverty for much of the 20th century. Attempts to promote more nutritious foods are said to be paternalistic and patronizing. Nutrition education programs that encourage better diets may inadvertently discourage foods that are viewed as important for the performance of ethnic, family or other group identities. Programs that tarnish the reputation of such traditional foods may thus be experienced as moments of misrecognition, at best, and even as attempts to eradicate these identities in favor of a dominant group's cultural prototypes and body images. Even projects that have been organized by the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network have spawned opposition on the grounds that they are trying to recreate the milieu that a 1950s Black exodus from the American South was trying to escape.

Although arguments such as these are in fact raised against food activists in American cities, we should not take the criticisms they articulate as definitive reposts to the food movement. The critiques may function as a way to perpetuate female stereotypes and dominance of black males, for example, and the food traditions they celebrate may themselves be relatively short-lived practices that reflect the way that diets of marginalized groups were shaped by markets designed to serve the extractive goals of colonialism. An intersectional approach can help to expose the junctures where campaigns to promote one form of justice

unintentionally reinforce another form of oppression. Arguably, a philosophically reflective approach to food ethics has the potential to expose misunderstanding, misrecognition and miscommunication that arises at the intersections of structural injustice. At a minimum, philosophical food ethics deployed in service to creating greater sensitivity to the ways in which unreflective structural practices defeat the goals of the food movement could thus be an important step forward.

However, the examples just given and indeed the very idea of intersectional critique itself may be very much products of North American experience. It must be acknowledged that the experience of marginalization and enforced alterity that lies at the heart of intersectionality may be especially cogent for food ethics in racially and ethnically diverse American cities. It is thus not at all clear that this way of moving forward is the most promising one for dialog with African or Asian philosophical traditions, or with the recent experience of African or Asian societies in dealing with the production, distribution and consumption of food. It is also notable that there has been very little engagement with intersectionality even by European ethicists who have always had strong commitments to social justice. At the same time, the experience of living a life characterized by cultural and ethnic homogeneity may be challenged at the moment when someone confident of their norms and institutions encounters the other in any unfamiliar form. Furthermore, it is becoming clear that gender-based forms of structural oppression and inequality are seen virtually everywhere. We should therefore not dismiss the possibility that food movements beyond North America do not also involve some of the wicked complexity that I have been trying to indicate with this brief discussion of intersectionality.

## Conclusion

The concluding observation, however, can be relatively brief. After centuries of philosophical neglect, eating is once again an act that is rich in ethical significance. This change has come about in part because the cities of industrialized nations have done such a thorough job of concealing the food supply chain from the ordinary citizen. The last two decades, however, have seen first a gradual and then eventually a sudden and seemingly rapid growth of interest in food. It has taken shape as elite consumption through the growth of fine-dining establishments, the increasing availability of ethnic cuisines and the proliferation of media celebrating and promoting food. Although there are certainly reasons to be skeptical of elite consumption, the new aesthetic appreciation of food has been accompanied by acts of conscience and heightened ethical awareness. In short, gourmet tastes have gone hand in hand with growing concern about the social and environmental impacts of the global food system. If the courtship between ethics and aesthetics is not always observed in every case, it is still frequent enough so that a global movement for “fair-trade”, sustainable, humanely produced and locally grown foods is surely becoming an undeniable reality.

At the same time, the act of eating has become so thoroughly mediated by monetized exchange that for many participants in this food movement it is difficult to get beyond the idea that we will save the world with better shopping. Korthals’ emphasis on food sovereignty notwithstanding, it is difficult for me to see how so much emphasis on making better choices truly escapes the presumptions of liberalism. Yet whether tied to the word ‘food’ or the word ‘consumer’ the notion of sovereignty gestures toward the complex form of resistance that is also signaled by the intersectional approach. This may, in fact, have been exactly the sense in

which Korthals saw consumer sovereignty as a move “beyond liberalism.” In this paper I have suggested that philosophical food ethics should engage the reflective mind more deeply than anything we have seen thus far in the food movement, and that participants in the movement should not be so confident that all the answers are ready to hand. It is clear to me that this inquiry must be one that is pursued from all quarters, and with philosophical tools and concepts that derive from the full array of ethical and cultural traditions, reflecting the experience of peoples from all quarters of the globe.

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