Global Food, Global Justice

Global Food, Global Justice:

Essays on Eating under Globalization

Edited by

Mary C. Rawlinson and Caleb Ward

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Global Food, Global Justice: Essays on Eating under Globalization

Edited by Mary C. Rawlinson and Caleb Ward

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7769-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7769-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part III: Food Justice under Globalization

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume is based on a panel at the 8th General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research at the University of Glasgow in September, 2014. Many thanks to Emanuela Ceva of the University of Pavia and Matteo Bonotti of Queen's University Belfast, who organized the section of the conference on the Political Theory of Food and Drink Policies, of which this panel was a part.

INTRODUCTION

FOOD: A CULTURE OF POSSIBILITIES

MARY C. RAWLINSON

Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.
Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du Goût*, 1825

Philosophy and political theory have seldom attended to food and the ethics of eating as important themes of social justice. Plato, Epicurus, and the Stoics recommend diets to promote well being and intellectual activity. Voltaire and Hume remark on the sociality of food. Marx and other modern political philosophers contrast agrarian life with industrialization in defining capitalism. More recently, philosophers and political theorists have considered food in relation to animal rights or environmental ethics, but even these discussions are rarely informed by a robust analysis of the ethical implications of the need to eat or of the constitutive role that food plays in social, cultural, and political life.

For centuries, human beings took responsibility for what they ate, raising or killing their own food. Only very recently has it been possible for large human populations to eat without taking any responsibility for the production of their food or even without knowing where their food comes from or how it is produced. As Michael Pollan has argued, it is unlikely that humans would eat as they do if the conditions of contemporary agribusiness were well known (Pollan 2006, 10–11). Ignorance proves essential to agribusiness and to maintaining the industrial food chain, as the ethical costs and injustice of industrialized food would otherwise be intolerable.

In our time, eating has become an urgent ethical challenge; the scale of industrial agriculture threatens the wellbeing of all living things and the earth itself, while the processing and maldistribution of food threatens public health globally. Obesity is epidemic in high-income countries (HICs): the U.S. Centers for Disease Control estimates that one in four

adults and one in five children in the U.S. is obese. In the U.S., as in most HICs, obesity tends to be addressed as a medical problem, rather than as a reflection of culture and structural inequity. While obesity is directly related to poverty and to "food deserts" where fresh, wholesome food is unavailable, public policy relies on medical intervention, rather than on structural change. The National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that medical treatments for obesity cost $168.4 billion a year, or 16.5% of national spending on medical care (Cawley and Meyerhoeffer 2010). Public policy favors a medical approach to obesity despite these high costs, or perhaps in part because treating obesity and obesity-related diseases offers such an opportunity for profit. There has been little effort to change policy to favor wholesome food over the interests of agribusiness or to promote home cooking and exercise as effective interventions.

Recently, agribusiness and the processed foods industry have targeted low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) as new markets. While infectious disease is declining rapidly in these contexts, obesity-related diseases are spiking. At the same time, the spread of agribusiness and processed foods in these regions is directly related to environmental degradation and a loss of biodiversity, as well as to the dispossession of indigenous farmers. In many LMICs, war, violence, and climate catastrophes also threaten food security.

The essays collected here address a lack in philosophy and political theory by analyzing the contemporary food crises of obesity, malnutrition, environmental degradation, and cultural displacement as global issues of public policy and social justice. Policies that address the global obesity crisis by focusing on individual responsibility and medical interventions ignore *the dependency of human agency on a culture of possibilities.* The single mother of four living on a minimum wage in a food desert in the South Bronx does not have the option of making the choices that would protect her family from obesity. She may not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables or be able to afford them if she does. The high-calorie, high-fat fast foods that are readily available and affordable take advantage of her poverty and substitute for the home cooking that is not feasible on her schedule and budget. The emphasis on personal choice and medical management elides the structural determinants of eating habits, at the same time that it deflects the political strategies and collaborations necessary to install and sustain infrastructures adequate to the just production and distribution of wholesome food.

The false dichotomy between individual choice and state paternalism that currently dominates food policy debates proves doubly misleading.

On the one hand, the focus on individual responsibility operates under a fiction of liberty. In HICs, agribusiness controls markets and imposes poor food options that are directly related to the epidemic of obesity and obesity-related diseases. Agribusiness and the processed food industries target consumers early on in order to build brand loyalty. The Internet, video games, and television provide ample opportunity to deploy powerful advertising strategies on even the youngest children. Processed food companies develop free merchandise, such as toys, t-shirts, pins, or key chains, to distribute to young children and teenagers in order to create brand identification. Companies provide cookies, candy, or soft drinks as prizes for schools, clubs, and sports teams. Most disturbingly, fast food and soda companies, such as Coca-Cola, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell, have taken advantage of the widespread underfunding of American schools, particularly in low-income areas, to develop exclusive contracts for their goods in exchange for donating textbooks and other supplies or supporting school activities.[1] Through such marketing strategies, agribusiness and the processed food industry aggressively endeavor to habituate children early on to foods that tend to be addictive and high in fat, sugar, and salt, in effect branding children's eating so as to eliminate choice.

On the other hand, while isolated state bans on certain products are unlikely to remake the culture of possibilities that determines how people eat, these bans do not represent a new intrusion of the state into the domain of food. For decades policies in the U.S. have favored industrial agriculture over local sustainable farming. Many HICs have been complicit with agribusiness in shaping culinary practices and norms to favor global, processed food over healthier, local alternatives. In LMICs national governments often collude with agribusiness out of an interest in producing foreign capital. In India, for example, global firms like Monsanto and Archer Daniels Midland have been allowed to patent seeds that were traditionally traded by local farmers, thus transforming a renewable resource into a commodity that must be purchased annually. India has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, and evidence appears to link it to the "liberalization of the agricultural sector" in the 1990s, including restrictions by multinationals on the sharing of seeds and the high cost of "inputs" such as fertilizers and pesticides required by the globally marketed seed strains (Kennedy and King 2014; see also Patel et al. 2012). India's recent shift to "free market economics" in the agricultural sector and the intrusion of global industrialized agents and practices appear to have made the lives of indigenous farmers unsustainable. In many LMICs, the collusion of global agribusiness, macro-actors like the WTO and World Bank, and national governments

results in the displacement of indigenous farmers, a reduction in biodiversity, and an undermining of both food justice and environmental integrity.[2]

The policy focus on medical intervention impedes the structural reforms that are necessary to insure the availability of wholesome food, at the same time that it substitutes expensive, invasive treatments for more effective strategies in nutrition and exercise. Saudi Arabia, for example, currently suffers an obesity crisis among women that is directly related to the immobility imposed on them. In 2009 the Kingdom closed all gyms to women, who are also confined by dress codes and prohibitions against appearing outside the home without a male guardian. Obese women are shunned and held responsible for their condition, at the same time that they have little agency to address their plight. Recourse to bariatric surgery has become common and substitutes for an analysis of the way in which obesity reflects the culture of possibilities in which people live (see Alqout and Reynolds 2014).

An ethics and politics that begins with the right to property or the rational calculation of goods will see food as a commodity like any other, but what is actually universal in human experience is the double dependency on the mother and on food. Everyone is born of a woman and everyone needs to eat. Starting from this universal dependency requires respect for the conditions of life: the integrity of the elements of life, including fertile soil, breathable air, and potable water; the generativity of the seed that guarantees the sustenance of future generations; the animals who live and work with humans and are regularly sacrificed as food; the women and men who work in the field; as well as the generations of women who have saved the seed and created the history of cooking. Agribusiness appears efficient, because its costs in environmental degradation, malnutrition, and social dislocation are not assessed, while it depends on invisible underpaid labor, as well as an ethically unsustainable treatment of animals. Ignorance, misinformation, and a lack of transparency prove essential to industrialized agriculture.[3]

Against a model of ethics and politics based in the right to property and the calculation of debt and entitlement, the model of the seed prefigures an ethics of intergenerational generativity. For thousands of years, women have collected seeds and planted them. When the crops were harvested, the seeds were saved for the next year to insure the community's future. Seeds have always been traded and shared, and they speak of the interdependence of the community members and the vulnerability of each and all to hunger. "Indeed, scholars are pretty well in agreement in acknowledging a *female* priority in the work of observation

and selection of the plants that accompanied the birth of agriculture around the first village settlements" (Montanari 2006, 7). The commodification of food differentially affects women who have traditionally been the keepers of seed and the producers of food. As Vandana Shiva argues:

> The myth that chemicals and machines can replace the life in food and the life of the soil dispenses with the productive role of women in conservation and in food production and processing. Work and labour that go into maintaining essential ecological processes on the farm and conserving nutrition in food are not registered on the linear scale of inputs and outputs that come from and feed distant markets. Commodification of food production thus either destroys the basis of women's work or devalues it.[4]

Women's agricultural practice has traditionally preserved biodiversity, emphasized the return of organic matter to the soil in order to sustain fertility, and collaborated with animals in fertilizing and pollinating. These sustainable practices depend on the integration of human life with other forms of life and a respect for the integrity of the elements of Earth—the air, water, and soil on which all life depends. While industrialized agriculture focuses on turning a profit, doing so through domination of other species, through unsustainable chemical strategies, and through the reduction of biodiversity in favor of monocultures of commodity crops, women's traditional practices aim at the preservation of fertility for the next generation and the interdependent flourishing of diverse species.

In an almost miraculous creativity, women learned to transform wheat into bread, to turn milk into yoghurt and cheese, to identify edible plants and roots, to use fire to boil, bake, and roast, and to use the berries, seeds, and roots of their local environments to create the distinctive spicing that separates one cuisine from another. As Montanari notes, in the Mesopotamian epic of *Gilgamesh*, written some 4,000 years ago, the "wild man" is civilized when he learns the secret of bread from a woman (Montanari 2006, 7).[5] Taste, Montanari argues, is not only a sensation, but also a form of knowledge (Ibid., 61). A crusty loaf of bread, a savory stew, or a luscious sauce represents centuries of experimentation and discovery. This knowledge belongs to the intergenerational community of cooks that have perfected and amplified the articulation of the basic tastes of which the human tongue is capable and the fundamental techniques for transforming plants and animals into cuisine. Thus, "taste is not in fact subjective and incommunicable, but rather collective and eminently communicative" (Ibid., 62). Just as a scientist confirms the truth of another scientist by repeating his experiment, so too across the generations each cook has confirmed the knowledge of the others by reproducing the recipe

in the bread or the stew. Like a scientist taking the other's experiment as a starting point for his own research, each generation of cooks proves infinitely inventive, introducing their own variations and innovations into the traditional dishes. Farming and cooking have always provided women an opportunity for transcendence that has been regularly denied to them in the communities of science, politics, and philosophy, an opportunity to participate in the "we" of a community of knowledge and practice.

Lévi-Strauss locates the origin of human culture in cooking. Among all the mythic codes, the gustatory code "occupies a privileged position." Introducing a series of myths on the "origin of cultivated plants," in which a woman teaches men to eat and plant maize, Lévi-Strauss argues that "not only does cooking mark the transition from nature to culture, but through it and by means of it, the human state can be defined with all its attributes, even those that, like mortality, might seem to be the most unquestionably natural" (Lévi-Strauss 1975 [1964], 164). Human cultures are differentiated, first and foremost, by diverse foods and cooking practices. Both across cultures and within any given culture, the coherence of communities consists largely in eating the same foods and practicing the same culinary techniques. "On all social levels sharing a table is the first sign of membership in a group[…] If the table is the metaphor for life, it represents in a direct and exacting way both membership in a group and the relationships defined within that group" (Montanari 2006, 94–5). The difference between the Christmas turkey and stuffing, on the one hand, and the matzot and gefilte fish of the Passover Seder, on the other, speaks of long and deep histories and traditions and intense identities of cultural practice, which remain distinct even as they intermingle. Within traditions, food marks significant cultural differences: irreducible specificities of identity and history are inscribed when the Ramadan fast is broken with a biryani or with mahshi or with masgouf. Within a culture, food provides a key marker of social class, as well. Currently, in the U.S., culinary habits reflect social inequity: fast food and food deserts for the poor and elaborate tasting menus for the well-to-do.

As Montanari argues, food frequently provides the first and primary contact with another culture. Most Westerners have eaten Chinese or Japanese food before ever traveling to Asia, just as most people in the U.S. have indulged in pizza and pasta or corned beef and cabbage without having traveled to Italy or Ireland. In a foreign country, the taste and smell of food provide a constant reminder of cultural difference, as do the timing of meals, table manners, and interactions with food providers. "Eating the food of the 'other' is easier, it would seem, than decoding the other's language. Far more than spoken language itself, food can serve as a

mediator between different cultures, opening methods of cooking to all manner of invention, cross-pollination, and contamination" (Ibid., 134). In a discussion of the highly differentiated cultural understandings of "raw," "cooked," and "rotten" in *The Origin of Table Manners*, Lévi-Strauss recounts the way in which an increase in Italian restaurants in France altered the category of the "raw," giving the French a "taste for raw food [specifically vegetables] in a much 'rawer' form than was traditional." In the same discussion, he notes that American soldiers in Normandy in 1944 destroyed dairies, having mistaken the strong scent of Norman cheeses for rotting corpses (Lévi-Strauss 1978 [1968], 478). These translations and mistranslations indicate that food, as Roland Barthes argues, constitutes a system of differences analogous to language. Not only within cultures, but also across cultures, humans "communicate by way of food" (Barthes 2013, 29).

Tourism contributes over 7 trillion U.S. dollars to the global economy, and about a third of that is spent on food or food-related activities. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), food tourism constitutes one of the fastest growing strategies of the sector (UNWTO 2012). Food tourism depends on sustaining the distinction of the local culture and landscape, and, thus, may prove an economic bulwark against the homogenization of place that comes with the spread of industrialized agriculture and global, processed food. In LMICs it may provide a strategy for satisfying the national interest in producing foreign capital that, at the same time, requires protection of indigenous farming and local food cultures.

Lévi-Strauss locates the origin of ethics in table manners. By learning what and how to eat, humans learn respect for others, for the earth, and for the other forms of life that sustain them. Lévi-Strauss fears that in our time this "lesson in humility" coursing throughout the mythologies of "savage peoples" may have been forgotten:

> In the present century, when man is actively destroying countless living forms, after wiping out so many societies whose wealth and diversity, from time immemorial, constituted the better part of his inheritance, it has probably never been more necessary to proclaim, as do the myths, that sound humanism does not begin with oneself, but puts the world before life, life before man, and respect for others before self-interest: and that no species, not even our own, can take the fact of having been on this earth for one or two million years—since in any case man's stay here will one day come to an end—as an excuse for appropriating the world as if it were a thing and behaving on it with neither decency nor discretion. (Lévi-Strauss 1978 [1968], 508)

In the 21st century the threat posed by the economic self-interest of agribusiness and the processed food industries to indigenous cultures and agricultures, to the elements of the earth on which life depends, and to other living species has only intensified.

This volume of essays calls to mind the ancient knowledges of sustainable agriculture and cooking that have provided the essential infrastructure of human history. The essays call for an acknowledgement of food as more than a mere commodity. They demonstrate the way food production and culinary practices form a culture of possibilities, so that what and how we eat is not merely a matter of individual choice. They expose the unsustainable hidden costs to the earth, to human communities, and to other species on which agribusiness and industrial farming depend. They make visible the invisible labor of the women around the globe who grow food and feed their families and communities. And, they call for new solidarities and new public policies to insure the sustainable practices necessary to the production of wholesome and satisfying food. They make clear the need to change the way we eat, if we are to live on the earth together with decency and discretion.

References

Alqout, O., and F. Reynolds. 2014. "Experiences of obesity among Saudi Arabian women contemplating bariatric surgery: An interpretive phenomenological analysis." *Journal of Health Psychology* 19 (5): 664–77.

Barthes, Roland. 2013. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. 20–28. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Brillat-Savarin, Jean Anthelme. 2009 [1825]. *The Physiology of Taste*. Translated by M.F.K. Fisher. New York: Merchant Books.

Cawley, John and Chad Meyerhoeffer. 2010. "The Medical Care Costs of Obesity: An Instrumental Variables Approach." www.nber.org/papers/w16467.pdf (accessed April 10, 2015).

Kennedy, Jonathan and Lawrence King. 2014. "The Political Economy of Farmers' Suicides in India." *Globalization and Health* 10: 16.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1975 [1964]. *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology I*. Translated by John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1978 [1968]. *The Origin of Table Manners: Introduction to a Science of Mythology III*. Translated by John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Levine, Susan. 2008. *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Montanari, Massimo. 2006. *Food Is Culture*. Translated by Albert Sonnenfeld. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nestle, Marion. 2007. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Patel, Vikram, et al. 2012. "Suicide Mortality in India: A Nationally Representative Survey." *The Lancet* 379 (9834): 2343–2351.

Pitts, Jessica. 2012. "'Ag Gag' Legislation and Public Choice Theory: Maintaining a Diffuse Public by Limiting Information." *American Journal of Criminal Law* 40 (1): 95.

Pollan, Michael. 2006. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. New York: Penguin Books.

Shiva, Vandana. 2010 [1988]. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development.* New York: South End Press.

Slade, David. 2012. "'Ag Gag' Laws: Industry Trumps the First Amendment." *Arkansas Journal of Social Change and Public Service*. October 25, 2012.

UNWTO. 2012. "Global Report on Food Tourism." AM Reports, vol. 4.

Notes

[1] See Nestle 2007, especially part three, "Exploiting Kids, Corrupting Schools." See also Levine 2008. Levine demonstrates the link between the rise of fast food in public schools and the underfunding of public schools in economically and socially disadvantaged communities. She also exposes the way in which the school lunch program has served agribusiness as its market for surplus commodity foods.

[2] See, for example, Shiva 2010 [1988], 120–145. Shiva shows how the "green revolution" disrupts the "essential links between forestry, animal husbandry, and agriculture" that have historically sustained agriculture in LMICs.

[3] In the U.S. so-called "ag gag" laws prevent investigative reporting on the practices of industrialized animal farming, as well as on the health risks and hidden costs of agribusiness. See Slade 2012 and Pitts 2012. Pitts shows clearly how this strategy is aimed at managing consumers and eliminating choice.

[4] Shiva 2010 [1988], 117. Shiva demonstrates the link between this devaluing of women's labor and the undernourishment of girls in India.

[5] Montanari goes on to note that the woman in the tale was also a prostitute. Thus, the poem accords the woman "both the role of guardian of food knowledge and that of custodian of sexuality." Historically, women have sheltered both the generativity of the species and its nourishment.

PART I

TOWARD AN ETHICS OF FOOD

CHAPTER ONE

REDESCRIBING FOOD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES OF SCIENCE

ILEANA F. SZYMANSKI

Introduction

"What is food?" This is a question that is timely and necessary. Food has become an increasingly visible topic in the humanities. For the first time in the history of scholarship in this field, there are researchers from multiple disciplines contributing in a sustained manner to the same, ongoing conversation about issues that intersect food. Discussions are not happening only in the confines of specific disciplines; philosophers, historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and others are collaborating on interdisciplinary projects to enhance their research on food issues. Some examples of these issues are responses to world hunger, legal mechanisms to support a worldwide right to adequate nutrition, the validity of arguments that discourage the consumption of meats and meat products, the question of whether junk food is food at all, the best solutions to urban food deserts, the availability and regulation of financial, industrial, and legal supports for farmers to grow specific products in specific ways, and whether genetically modified organisms should be labeled, restricted, or banned.

Common to all of these issues, and to many more, are questions of ethics and politics, which are often explicitly engaged in these discussions across disciplines. However, also common to all of them is the concept of *food*. A yet unspecified account of food underlies all discussions about issues such as the ones mentioned above, and, as I will argue here, this account steers the conversation such that possible solutions to food issues are mostly the province of those in power. Further, it is precisely those privileged actors whose restricted and seemingly neutral concept of food obstructs the task of addressing these issues in their complexity. A second look at what we mean by "food," then, should be undertaken with care.

The aim of this essay is to examine some of the common assumptions about what food is—specifically, that food is and must be only *one thing* and that it is *a thing* to begin with—and to propose a different way of understanding food that may provide a new, humanities-based perspective on the current food research. This essay proposes that food is not simply a thing, and that it can be accounted for in several ways, some of which are unavoidably contradictory in nature.

Section I: What is "food"?

I want to address the semiotic architecture of the word "food." Words can account for different parts of the world; they are shorthand for descriptions, definitions, or statements about what a part of the world is and what makes it distinct from all other parts of the world. Evidently, even within one and the same language, the ratio of parts of the world to words that account for them is not one to one. Indeed, synonyms provide us with more than one word for the same part of the world for which we seek to account. In addition, not everyone agrees that the world should be divided into the same parts or exhibits the same features. Thus, some parts of the world have no words that can account for them; if *x* is not a part of my world, then there is no need for me to name or account for *x*. To make matters more complicated, the same word may be used to account for parts that are not defined in the same way, thus giving rise to a multiplicity of meanings, some of which contradictory to one another, that are covered under the same term.

The term "food" appears to be in this last category. "Food" is a word that is seemingly univocal and neutral—food is not inherently "good food," or "bad food," or "junk food," or "gourmet food"; it is simply "food." A closer look at the term, however, reveals that it is much more complex than on first view. For, indeed, when one probes the account that accompanies the word "food," a multiplicity of meanings, some of which oppose one another, is revealed. This meandering discussion will move toward an argument that, when the seeming neutrality and univocity of the term "food" are maintained, we limit the possibilities for changing the outcome of the ethical and political issues we face regarding food.

One way of accounting for food is to say that "food" is "what is edible." The edible need not be instantiated in any specific food *item*; it only needs to be able to be eaten. For example, while some do not consider ants, bats, or warthogs to be food because they do not eat them, those items will be food for others who do eat them; if anything is edible by anyone, anywhere, it is indeed food for that person. From this perspective we make

no judgments as to whether ants, bats, and warthogs *should* be food, whether they taste good, whether they make us healthy or not; we simply state that they can be eaten. The concept of food, thus, seems neutral and open to cultural and individual preferences; it seems innocent of any political or ethical labels.

I argue, however, that this simplicity is an illusion. The analysis of food that defines it as what is edible reveals other layers in the complex and discordant phenomenon we seek to understand. First, there is an undisclosed emphasis on *humans* when we speak about food. The concept of "what is edible" implies a commitment among humans to stay away from many things, among them animal feed. Of course, some humans do indeed eat animal feed (and in some cases human food becomes animal feed); however, there is a reason we have decided to label certain items as *dog* food, *cat* food, or *fish* food, and not simply *food*. "Food," when we invoke it in our discussions, apparently means "food for humans." This implies that, by saying that food is what is edible, we tacitly refer to the subject of the action of eating—to she who eats, and thereby makes the edible *actually* edible—and, hidden even deeper in this layer of meaning, we mean that such a subject is human, and only human. From the beginning, then, conversations about feeding the planet quietly refer only to feeding *the humans* of the planet. With more probing, additional layers of this question could be uncovered about who counts as human and why—and, therefore, who gets to eat, and what.

Second, there seems to be a persistent understanding that whatever is food (i.e., whatever is edible for humans) comes from *nature* in some way, and that it is grown or farmed using some degree of technology. This idea, however, is problematic on several accounts. "Nature" and "natural" are understood and used in different ways by consumers and by the food industry, and this discrepancy is exploited by many companies who use the term "natural" in their branding and packaging. Consumers react positively to the term because they assume it means something along the lines of healthy, free of artificial ingredients, supportive of a balanced diet, free of technological intervention, and so forth. However, the definition of "natural" that food industry regulations allow does not in fact support any of those consumer motivations. Since consumers ignore that their beliefs are not represented in the industry-sanctioned use of the term "natural," they continue to have confidence in the brands and continue to purchase those products. When consumers are made aware of their epistemic gap, the question of whether a given food is natural can have at least two answers: it is natural if we replace our beliefs with those of the industry, but it is not natural if we do not. This prompts another question: Is there

any food that is entirely natural, if by "natural" we mean healthy, free of artificial ingredients, supportive of a balanced diet, free of technological intervention, and so forth?

The issue of food technology is closely related to the question of "natural" food. The line that divides technology from nature is sometimes quite fine, particularly when technology is used to infuse more "nature" into so-called natural products (for example, by fortifying foods with vitamins). There seems to be an epistemic commitment in our understanding of "nature" that implies that what is natural has as little human intervention as possible. This commitment, however, is not always aligned with our understanding of food; some will argue that one should eat only natural food, and others will argue that nature cannot give us everything we need without technological intervention. Food items that include genetically modified organisms, artificially grown meat, factory-farmed fish or shellfish, infant formula, powdered milk, or anything else canned, jarred, or otherwise packaged clearly undermine the boundaries we assume between nature, technology, and food. Thus, not only is it delusional to think that all food *must* be "natural," but also the very distinction between natural and artificial breaks down so easily that it may become useless for telling us what food is.

The category of the edible may be further circumscribed by focusing on entities whose primary function, in the world of humans, is not that of being edible. Thus, paper, coins, and balloons are not considered food, because they are artificial items whose creation was not undertaken with the specific purpose of having them satisfy hunger the way food does. Yet, paper, coins, and balloons can and are eaten (by humans), thus making them edible. Of course, this is the case only if, by "edible," we mean the rather broad category of the *ingestible*. Once again the problem of a neat divide continues to present itself: If not everything that is ingestible is edible, what counts as edible?

Perhaps the edible can be understood not merely as the ingestible, but rather as the *digestible*. Thus, while one can ingest many different substances and items, this does not mean that the body can digest such substances. An immediate difficulty with this criterion is the problem of universality; some people are unable to digest things that one would not consider excluding from the category of food (e.g., dairy, gluten), while others easily digest such items. As a consequence, if we say that food is what is digestible, the same food items both would and would not be food, depending on the individual who is eating. However, if we were to allow for a variation in degrees of digestibility of the substances we call food, we could say that the digestible includes what humans are able to digest (at

least in most cases), whereas the indigestible includes on top of that all the things that no human could ever digest—e.g., rocks, books, dishtowels, cutlery, cell phones, etc.[1] Those items could be classified as generally indigestible, thus inedible, and therefore not food.

Layers of meaning in the category of the edible, however, continue to appear. The class of the edible can be further divided into what is *actually* edible and what is *potentially* edible, with both of these subcategories dependent on the larger category of the "digestible" and distinct from the inedible per se. The *actually edible* comprises the items that humans eat—not necessarily those that we may be eating right at this very moment, but those that are available abstractly as choices in human food, regardless of our individual preferences. In other words, if we make a list of food items of which we are aware—even if we have never tried them, or we would not consider eating them ourselves, or we dislike them—those items would be considered actually edible, because someone, somewhere eats them. This is a further refinement of the first account of food as the edible, addressed earlier in this section. In contrast to the actually edible, there could be said to be the *potentially edible*, namely, items that cannot be considered actually edible for the reason that nobody eats them; they are outside of our foodscape, and not because we are unable to put them in our mouths and swallow them (or ingest them in some other way, such as with a feeding tube to the stomach).

Obviously, the list that any one individual could make of the items that she considers to be actually edible would be closely tied to social status, economic status, gender, religion, culture, current state of health, etc. However, there are things that would not be seen by most people as actually edible. One example is human flesh. Human flesh would seem to be excluded from the actually edible and, also, from the inedible. Yet, it has certainly been the case that starving survivors of plane crashes and shipwrecks have eaten other humans, thus making human flesh part of the province of the potentially edible; thus, it would be incorrect to state that human flesh is inedible per se (when "inedible" means "not ingestible" or even "not digestible"). Yet, most humans would not consider it food.

We could indeed agree to limit food to cover only things that can be considered actually edible. Nevertheless, even this is not sufficient to determine what food is; we cannot reach an agreement as to whether certain items that are digestible are indeed food, even when they are actually eaten. The varied reasons behind this disagreement are ethical (e.g., is it a violation of ethics to eat animal flesh and animal products?), cultural (e.g., are insects *food*?), and nutritional (e.g., are sugar, ice cream,

soda, and so-called junk food actually "food," strictly speaking, or are they poisons?).

I will first speak about the nutritional aspect. Food, one might think, should allow the body to perform by providing the necessary energy for basic functions to occur: breathing, circulation of the blood, and so forth. However, is the only thing that nutrition provides or should provide a kind of maintenance of the status quo of the body? In other words, should "nutritional" be understood as "having caloric value," or should it be understood as something more, something that not only contributes to the *sustenance* of the organism, but also makes it healthy or healthier than it is now? If we agree that nutrition calls for the latter case, then what counts as food will depend on the initial state of health of an individual and her specific bodily conditions. What makes one person healthy need not make another one so, and what makes someone unhealthy need not have the same effect on someone else. Still, we could indeed take up the position that, in order for something to be considered food, it must not only be actually edible, but it must also be nutritional; and, further, that nutritional food should be understood as not only what enables the organism to resist breaking down, but, rather, what allows the organism to thrive.

The problem with this stance, however, is that, if we were to agree that the category of food should be limited to what encourages flourishing in this way, it would turn out that many people—perhaps even *most* people—do not eat food, properly understood. Furthermore, there is no absolutely valid science that explains the nutritional quality of food items and the nutritional requirements assumed to have the effect of making bodies thrive; in many cases, scientific knowledge in this area is at the mercy of unregulated and under-regulated agencies, companies, and lobbyists.[2] What is the ultimate authority on food nutrition? Whose opinion do we follow when we gauge what one should eat and what one should feed to others? Should scientific findings trump cultural or familial practices regarding the foods that are understood to be adequate for survival in the different stages of human life?

These questions provide a unique perspective on the term "food," because they introduce an entirely new level of complexity in its multiple meanings. In addition, several ethical and cultural dimensions of the category of the actually digestible are yet to be explored. The discussion about the semiotics of food that I have undertaken up until now hinges on food as referring to physical materials; however, it is also possible to refer to food as entailing an active dimension. In this case, food can refer to *activities*, some of which do not depend on what we identify as the paramount activity regarding food—namely, eating. Indeed, the cultural

and ethical dimensions of food that I have touched upon above illuminate that the material understanding of food is but one aspect. I will return to these considerations in the next section.

As is evident from the preceding discussion, the semiotic architecture of the term "food" is quite complex. Nevertheless, the issues surrounding the concept of food seem to rely upon several implicit commitments to a particular ontological status of food. Given that these commitments inform our discussions and attitudes about food, and that those discussions deal with matters of great ethical and political consequence, it is worth our while to bring such assumptions out into the open and to examine the ways in which our conversations and attitudes are limited by how we account for food.

Section II: Redescribing food from a feminist perspective

I propose that the term "food" be revisited and redescribed in such a way that makes evident that it is a complex entity, and that it can and must be simultaneously understood in more than one way. Elsewhere I argue that, drawing on Aristotle and Levinas, we can construct a new understanding of food as activity, thus suggesting that an understanding of food simply as a class of items only encompasses one aspect of what food is (Szymanski 2014). Here, I offer a different avenue to approach the issue, namely by drawing on the perspectives of feminists who have already attempted a redescription of other terms in science.

In philosophy of science, terms such as "knowledge" and "objectivity" are often used as if they had only one meaning. As Donna Haraway, Helen Longino, and many other theorists have proposed, the univocity and neutrality claimed for terms such as these are false and illusory. Furthermore, this illusion obscures the power differential that generated it, and it works to silence those who disagree with it; such terms seem to have only one meaning because their meaning benefits those in power. This univocity serves specific aims of domination and control of the subjects and objects of science as well as of its processes, methodologies, and commercialization. Haraway and Longino have proposed different strategies to corrode the veneer of univocity and neutrality for the above-mentioned terms, and they explore the complex challenge of attaining scientific knowledge that addresses multiple perspectives, neither neutral nor univocal. In other words, they have redescribed the terms of engagement for science in order to change the conversation. Here are five general lines of inquiry that I take from these two theorists:

1. Knowledge is active.

2. Knowledge is always situated. This means that knowledge as a product is always generated by an individual person embedded in a specific time and place, with specific gender, abilities, financial and social resources, education, language, life goals, etc. It also means that knowledge claims can only be judged valid or invalid in a specific time and place and for specific people.
3. Objective knowledge is scientific knowledge. However, objective knowledge is always situated; the idea of a non-situated objectivity is illusory and must be rejected.
4. The current science operates on the assumption that there is one truth to be discovered, and that the way to discover it is exclusively through an inquiry devoid of claims about the situatedness of the knower and the knowledge produced. This needs to be succeeded by a different science.
5. The successor science[3] can only obtain when multiple groups and perspectives collaborate in a shared conversation that will include perspectives, methodologies, and processes that may be contradictory.

There is a valuable lesson to be learned from Haraway and Longino for this inquiry. It appears that the term "food" shares a great deal with terms such as "knowledge," and "objectivity": they all seem to be neutral and univocal when in reality they are not. The appearance of this neutrality, for food as well as for scientific knowledge, hides the power differential that is needed to impose it. This is apparent because each of these concepts can be interpreted in ways so diverse that the multiple meanings of each term contradict one another. Importantly, this contradiction does not amount to the demise of the overall project; rather, it provides an opportunity to respond to the world in a more realistic and democratic way. For these reasons, it is relevant to review the strategies that Haraway and Longino use to redescribe terms in philosophy of science, redeploying them for the concept of food. In what follows, I give a brief description of some of the strategies employed by these theorists, and I show how they allow for further avenues to redescribe food.

The objective of redescribing a term is to reveal a phenomenon in all of its complexity rather than obscure it, and to do so with the specific aim of addressing ethical and political questions that hinge upon the meaning of such a term. Donna Haraway proposes a redescription of the term "objectivity," from the feminist perspective, so that we can achieve

> [A] successor science project that offers a more adequate, richer, better account of the world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive

> relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions. In traditional philosophical categories, the issue is ethics and politics perhaps more than epistemology. (Haraway 1991, 187)

The resulting successor science that Haraway and other theorists pursue is a paradoxical one. It implies the necessary, simultaneous commitment to "an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects" and to "faithful accounts of a 'real' world" (Ibid.). At the same time that science is "objective," this objectivity needs to be understood not as univocal, neutral, or disembodied; rather, it must be embodied and situated. As I showed in the first section of this essay, "food" is a term that has multiple meanings, some of which are contradictory. For example, in one way human flesh is food, while in another it is most certainly not; the same can be said for junk food, dairy, etc. Just as Haraway's task of redescribing objectivity seeks to hold all the perspectives—including contradictory ones—of the phenomenon together, our account of "food" must accept the contradictory accounts of particular food items, as well as the accounts of food as both an item and an activity. This implies that there will be no one epistemic perspective that can claim the privilege of saying what food is, but, rather, the meaning of food will be constructed according to situated agents of knowledge and situated knowledge claims. When an authoritative voice attempts to extricate food from this sticky situation, the concept appears to be univocal; as such, it is much more vulnerable to being tamed and regulated and much more liable, perhaps, to being caught between claims of moral sainthood about what food should be for everyone, everywhere.

An immediate criticism to the situated view of food is that, if food is not one thing—if, indeed, we accept that it must address contradictory realities—then we have fallen into the unsavory rut of relativism. This is a criticism that Haraway faces from the start. She knows that those accustomed to working with binary logics will see only two tenable alternatives in epistemology: either there is one truth, knowable or not, or there are multiple truths, all equally true. Her suggestion is a third alternative. She breaks the binary logic by addressing the criticism of relativism head on, writing, "the alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called *solidarity* in politics and *shared conversations* in epistemology" (Ibid., 191, emphases mine). "Objectivity," understood as that which encompasses, assumes, and welcomes contradictory perspectives that are situated, is thus more akin to reality than the objectivity of an illusory "view from nowhere." In the same way, when

food is a category that encompasses, assumes, and welcomes situated, contradictory perspectives, it is more akin to the complexity of the items and activities it addresses.

The project of science that Haraway wants to see is one where the process of making science implies "[d]ecoding and transposing plus translation and criticism; all are necessary. So science becomes the paradigmatic model not of closure, but of that which is contestable and contested" (Ibid., 196). Multiple perspectives need not be harmonized into a single singing voice; what Haraway welcomes is discordant speech from multiple directions, each able to be contextualized and understood, decoded, translated, etc. Science, then, should provide the possibility of a discordant account of different parts of the world as its departure point. She writes: "The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read. The world is not raw material for humanization […]; the world encountered in knowledge projects is an active entity" (Ibid., 198).

Knowledge about anything (scientific knowledge, knowledge about science, etc.) is, Haraway tells us, active. This is an incredibly powerful assertion. It means that it takes work to produce knowledge, and, once it is produced, it needs active sustenance; knowledge is sustained or abandoned by other work, which is itself sustained or abandoned by further work, and so on. Knowledge is not static, per se, and neither is its transmission, guardianship, or erasure. Categories such as normalcy, rationality, and objectivity, which seemingly ground what knowledge is about, are, in truth, more akin to figures distorted by the moving pieces of a kaleidoscope than to figures suspended in ether, preserved for posterity. Food is exactly the same way: every food item, every food practice, every food memory is in flux. Nothing about food is static; food, like knowledge, is active.

In her work, "Subjects, Power, Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science," Helen Longino makes similar claims to those of Haraway. Her proposal asserts that the things we can know are known through specific perspectives, and these perspectives can render contradictory accounts. In her view, this entails that "cognitive needs can vary and that this variation generates cognitive diversity" (Longino 2001, 220). This implies that not only should one tolerate contradictory accounts of phenomena, but, further, that one should indeed expect and embrace this variation to serve the *cognitive needs* of different groups. An important question to be raised at this point is the status of scientific knowledge—namely, knowledge that, in one view, would quell any contradictory accounts of a phenomenon by providing *the* definitive account. How can scientific knowledge be possible if contradiction in explanations about the world is not only accepted but even expected and

welcome? According to Longino, the redescription of scientific knowledge requires redescribing objectivity as being "socially constituted." This means that the new ideal of objectivity will work by (a) "detach[ing] scientific knowledge from consensus, if consensus means agreement of the entire scientific community regarding the truth or acceptability of a given theory," and, (b) "detaching knowledge from an ideal of absolute unitary truth" (Ibid.). Objective knowledge or scientific knowledge, thus, would be committed to adequacy of models as truth, viz., the models that explain the world the best "in relation to our aims" (Ibid., 221).

Of course, different groups have different aims with respect to the parts of the world their theories and models try to explain. Longino adds, "Knowledge is not contemplative, but active" (Ibid.). In this activity of knowledge, there is a power differential that can coopt scientific aims, processes, and methodologies, such that they generate one univocal and unchanging view. Longino believes that no one perspective should tower over others as being *the* truth: "the structures of cognitive authority themselves must change. No segment of the community, whether powerful or powerless, can claim epistemic privilege" (Ibid., 223). Thus, not only should the subjects who do science be multiplied, but they should also have equal footing with respect to their epistemic access.

As can be seen, Haraway and Longino are both committed to a vision of the scientific project that underscores knowledge as activity and the consideration of multiple and contradictory knowledge claims as necessary to the activity of the production of objective scientific knowledge. They have decided to continue to use terms such as "objectivity," "knowledge," etc., and redescribe them with the goal of changing the outcome of the scientific process.

The way in which a term such as "objectivity" is understood influences the decisions made based on the context of the term; in other words, a specific account of objectivity will answer differently questions about who can be objective, what are the things one can be objective about, whether objectivity has degrees, whether science is the only keeper of objectivity, whether objectivity is indeed achievable, etc. Moreover, the methodologies, spaces, techniques, and technologies—and those who study, inhabit, evaluate, sell, teach, and distribute them—will be understood and valued differently depending on how we account for the meaning of their root terms. As Haraway tells us, the feminist project aims at telling a different story than the one that has been legitimated as *the only* story by those who benefit from it; with this aim in mind, feminism crafts new meanings and finds new names. She writes: "Feminism is therefore a