

INTRODUCTION: FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

– OPENING AVENUES FOR RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC INTERVENTION

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Cooking is a distinctly human activity. Turning the raw into the cooked gave rise to social bonds and culture. Today we know that human evolution has had its twists, turns and varied options, rather than having been a linear process. Contrary to Claude Lévi-Strauss's belief that the formation of society started with the exchange of women in marriage, Richard Wrangham argues that it was cooking that made us human and produced society.¹ The invention of thermal food processing proved a truly revolutionary turning point, and the ultimate reproductive success was reaped by cooking trines. Richer in energy and flavor, the new diet was a launchpad for a considerable civilizational leap. The historian of culture Felipe Fernández-Armesto posits a similar thesis in his *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food*. He contends that that the domestication of fire and the invention of cooking produced a breakthrough not only in terms of culinary culture but also, first of all perhaps, in terms of social transformations: "Culture begins when the raw gets cooked. The campfire becomes a place of communion when people eat around it. Cooking is not just a way of preparing food but of organizing society around communal meals and predictable mealtimes. It introduces new specialized functions and shared pleasures and responsibilities."² Cooking promoted cooperation, division of duties and, consequently, mutual dependence of people.

All major events in people's lives take place at the table. What we eat and what we exclude from our diets

are strongly differentiating factors. Although globalization progresses, the foods that find their way onto our plates reflect the religions we embrace, the places we inhabit and the classes we belong to. Diets serve to construct individual and collective identities. As Robert Nozick aptly observes: "Eating food with someone can be a deep mode of sociability (...) a way of sharing nurturance and the incorporation within ourselves of the world, as well as sharing textures, tastes, conversation, and time"³.

The sensation of hunger and the need to feed bind us closely to the rest of animals, but the ways in which this need is met free humans from subjection to nature. *Food is Culture*, as the eminent food history scholar Massimo Montanari proclaims in the title of his book. And he adds: "Even Nature is Culture."⁴ Cooking is the most human of all activities. By cooking, we detach ourselves from the natural world and "master nature." Food preparation is a similar thing. Ever since the first farmers domesticated animals and started to cultivate land, developments have progressed, aimed to achieve effective and economical agricultural production. As food production became industrialized, food prices dropped and food products became more easily and more widely available. However, the processes have had negative social and environmental ramifications as well. Such effects as the mass-scale use of fertilizers, the misuse of abuse of pesticides and the loss of biodiversity have affected both the taste and people's health.

Evoked by Montanari, the privilege of "mastering nature" must go hand in hand with ethical reflection and responsibility for actions people undertake. We should improve our knowledge of the natural world and reconsider both our place within nature and the obligations of our species toward the natural environment.

Contributions in this issue partly overlap in three categories: a meta-ethical search for normative

¹ Richard Wrangham, *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

² Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food* (New York-London-Sydney-Singapore: Free Press, 2002), 4-5.

³ Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations* (New York – London – Toronto – Sydney: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006), 56.

⁴ Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9.

frameworks to tackle impending global and environmental problems arising from climate change and the transformation of agricultural systems; technology assessment especially of soft impacts of new tendencies in food production and life-stock framing; and finally reflection on the aesthetics of authentic culinary experience in an age of globalization and culinary mass production.

The first two contributions, by Paul Thompson and Samantha Noll pose meta-ethical questions about philosophical frameworks to be used when addressing ever more pressing problems of impacting the biosphere. Pragmatist approaches are proposed as ways of starting meaningful dialogue and entering transformative inquiry with the power to address problem situations without the need to wait for the resolution of philosophical disputes. Thompson develops his Dewey-inspired pragmatist approach to food ethics by contrasting it with analytic methods of treating issues in applied ethics. His discussion points out how analytically oriented authors, like Singer or McPherson treat answering of ethical questions, such as whether one should give up eating meat, as logical deductions from plausible normative premises. Thompson objects that demonstrating the soundness of ethical arguments by demonstrating their validity and establishing their premises as commonsensical precepts misses the boat in situations that require individual behavior change and redirection of public deliberation. Not only do we lose most people, who are not in a position to make consequential decisions on their lifestyle and/or their political orientation based on such analytic expositions, but it is also unhelpful to see the role of philosophy in searching for logical starting-points from which to arrive at secure conclusion. As an alternative, Thompson proposes to redefine the role of philosophers as mediating in public debates that have no natural beginning or end point. Following Dewey, Thompson stresses the importance of embarking on intelligent processes of philosophical inquiry by using criticism to ignite a genuine sense of

puzzlement and a sense of indeterminacy, which do have a compelling force to ignite public imagination and drive meaningful inquiry. These situations arise more from a reflection on empirical conditions, like the origin of our food, the determinants of our agro-food systems and the consequences of our eating habits than from principles like Singer's requirement to help at little cost to serve a greater moral good. For Thompson it is essential **for** a pragmatist food ethics "to actually learn something about food."

Samantha Noll also focuses on meta-ethical arguments that take their departure from an empirical analysis of the urgent environmental problem of climate migrant species. She thoroughly investigates and compares prominent but discordant ethical frameworks and comes to the conclusion that an applied ethics approach will only sophisticate and perhaps entrench the moral disagreements. A discussion of libertarian approaches that focus on the effects of migration for property holders and egalitarian and deep-ecology views that give priority of endangered species themselves makes this point. A timely consensus cannot be expected from these competing approaches. Problems of great urgency, like mitigating the worst consequences of climate change before we reach the natural deadline of the extinction of species, require an alternative approach that may reach common-sense without settling central epistemic and ethical disputes of competing paradigms. Pragmatism is proposed as just such an overarching approach. Noll argues that "pragmatism is a method for coming to consensus, when situated communities recognize a common problem and work to solve this problem, rather than cling to an individual ethical ideology."

Another recurrent theme in this issue is the assessment of progressing technological developments in food- and agricultural production, and in particular its soft impacts on democracy, communal life and human experience. Michiel Korthals and Bart Gremmen both champion philosophical approaches that open public

dialog to strengthen democratic participation in increasingly technocratic forms of food of production.

Understanding pragmatism as a pluralist approach that synthesizes different ethical frameworks is also the aim of Bart Gremmen's article. As his title declares, he attempts to outline "a moral operating system of livestock farming", consisting of four component approaches: "an *internal* professional *care* ethics combined with an *emergent* ethics in life sciences enabling change by responsible innovation, and *external* boundary conditions based on societal values and concerns in *animal* ethics and *environmental* ethics". Throughout the article he focuses not so much on developing this system but on elaborating the place of its most innovative aspect: the emergent ethics in life-sciences, which makes use of technology assessment as a resource and as a source of ethical problems.

The crux with ethical technology assessment is that in early stages of technological development we often do not know the ethical consequences of our innovations yet, whereas in later stages facts have been created, investments made and lock-in effects taken place. How to keep an ethical discussion on negative consequences alive throughout the maturing process of a technological development and implementation process? The case of precision farming, where animals become integral part and genetically coded elements in an internet of things is a case that calls for a wide societal response. Gremmen suggest that a moral operating system that includes the above mentioned elements is best in bringing together stakeholders from varying directions in an open-ended public dialogue which serves to keep technological systems open to reflection and re-direction.

Negative effects of the global food economy are addressed by Michiel Korthals in "Deliberative and pragmatist agriculture." In his contribution, Korthals builds on John Dewey's creditable idea of organizing edible gardens, which were meant to provide food and promote the personal and social development of children. Korthals appreciates the idea, but he believes at the same time that, obviously, small gardens are

hardly an alternative to the industrial production, whose debilitating influence was overlooked by Dewey. Korthals compiles a sizeable catalogue of consequences brought about by the activities of the global food industry. The fact that food production is so considerably monopolized and the recipients of its produce are uninformed consumers damages democracy, which is, after all, based on engagement and opinion-sharing. Korthals goes also beyond pure criticism, and proposes developing "a deliberative pragmatist theory of the food processing and retail sector," which should in effect help to produce healthier and more sustainable food and to bridge the gap between production and consumption. In other word, he insists on initiating dialogue.

Korthals's attention to the experiential aspects of food production and consumption is matched by Dorota Koczanowicz's thematic focus on culinary experience. Globalization entails long-distance and mass-scale movement of goods and people. Mass tourism is an element of this global movement. Contemporary eating practices combine two distinct tendencies: aestheticization and mass-production/use. Though divergent as such, the two tendencies converge in culinary tourism. Dorota Koczanowicz's article "Eating Abroad: In Search of Culinary Experience" focuses on the paradoxical situation in which the egalitarianism of mass tourism clashes with the desire for an elitist, authentic culinary experience fueled by the tourist industry as authenticity has become a commodity for sale. A solution to this impasse can be found in the pragmatist notion of experience. If we acknowledge that every meal can become an element in the creative fashioning of the soma, sources of satisfaction must be searched for not only in the external circumstances but in the mindful work on one's own experience.⁵

We hope that this issue makes a contribution to a growing body of literature that aims at more than commenting on contemporary developments of great

⁵ Cf. Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating," in: *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sh. Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 261–280.

concern but that tries to make constructive suggestions on how to re-appropriate a pluralist democratic voice within technology driven age. It is the sincere aim and effort of the contributing authors to outline how we can make use of the resources of philosophy to mediate solutions to pressing environmental problems, particularly where we cannot hope for timely resolution of divergent intuitions. Authors point at avenues to re-enfranchise a public of diverse stakeholders in market- and technology dominated environments in order to create room for responsible public deliberation. Finally, the contributions of this issue do not lose out of sight the centrality of human experience in a meaningful approach to evaluating and transforming systems of food production and consumption today.