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Food for Thought and Thought for Food: Applying Care Ethics to the American Eater

Catherine Manners Bucolo
University of North Florida, cbmanners@gmail.com

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND THOUGHT FOR FOOD: APPLYING CARE ETHICS
TO THE AMERICAN EATER

by

Catherine Manners Bucolo

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Unpublished work c Catherine Manners Bucolo

Certificate of Approval

The thesis of Catherine Manners Bucolo is approved:

Date:

Dr. Erinn Gilson
Committee Chairperson

Dr. Bryan Bannon
First Advisor

Dr. Mitchell Haney
Second Advisor

Accepted for the Philosophy Department:

Dr. Hans-Herbert Koegler
Department Chairperson

Dr. Andrew Buchwalter
Program Director

Accepted for the College of Arts and Sciences:

Dr. Barbara A. Hetrick
Dean

Accepted for the University:

Dr. John Kantner
Dean of the Graduate School

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For my husband Tim, for his never ending support.

For my daughter Diem, who taught me what it means to truly care.

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Abstract

This piece provides an application of care ethics to the typical American diet. In the first chapter, the problems surrounding the Standard American Diet are discussed at both the individual, familial, global, animal, and environmental levels. The second chapter provides an overview of the theoretical components of care ethics, and lays a framework for analysis. The third and final chapter demonstrates how in applying many of the core principles of care, great strides can be made in remedying the numerous problems that are a direct result of typical consumption habits in the United States.

Introduction

Everybody eats. Food is one thing, no matter who we are or where we live, that is required to sustain our existence. Human eating patterns have shifted over time, partly as a result of increasing technological advances. In the United States, changes in diet have been dramatic, particularly over the last century. The Standard American Diet has impacted all facets of life, from our personal health to the health of our nation's children, the well being of members of the global community, the welfare of the animals that often end up on our dinner plates, and the state of the environment as well. The vast majority of Americans are engaging in eating patterns that are detrimental on many more levels than they might realize.

I believe that a care ethics approach is the key to resolving many of these issues. Care ethics takes into account the interconnected nature of our world, and the vulnerabilities and dependencies of those who live in it. Accepting that we are intrinsically linked to one another can give us a better understanding of how our actions impact others, and how we possess the capabilities to better the lives of others. A care ethic demands that certain virtues such as empathy and compassion be brought to the forefront of our decision making processes.

In this paper, I will explore how applying care ethics to the manner in which we eat can help change our society for the better. In Chapter One, I will provide a detailed explanation of the problems that are a result of our current way of eating in the United States. In Chapter Two, I will outline the theoretical principles of care ethics that lay the

foundation for virtuous behavior. In the third and final chapter, I will apply the basic principles of care to the problems we are facing and discuss possible solutions, so that we might begin to move towards embodying a more thoughtful and compassionate society.

Chapter One: The Problem

What we choose to eat on a daily basis might seem like a simple task, one that revolves mainly around personal preferences. In reality however, what we choose to consume has consequences at many levels. These choices impact our own health, as well as the health and well being of our families. They impact other people throughout the world, whom we might not consider as being connected to ourselves. In choosing to consume animal products, our choices also significantly impact the welfare of farm animals and consequently, the environment. When we look a little deeper into the average American diet, and start to understand that what we eat is part of a process rather than an isolated event, we can start to uncover just how critical our food choices really are. In this section, I will provide an overview of several of the major problems resulting from our current eating habits.

Personal Health:

When it comes to food, what we choose to eat has a significant impact on our health and overall well being. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Americans have adopted a diet that is less than ideal, and even dangerous when it comes to their health. The so-called “Standard American Diet”, or SAD, is rich in animal products, but shockingly low in plant-based foods, such as fruits and vegetables. It is high in refined carbohydrates as well as fat. According to Peter Singer and Jim Mason, “a burger on a bun with a serving of French fries, followed by an ice-cream sundae and washed down

with a can of cola, fits squarely in this American tradition” (Singer & Mason p.15). The amount of food that we consume, in terms of calories, is a problem as well. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the “average daily caloric intake increased by 24.5 percent, or about 530 calories, between 1970 and 2000” (USDA). The leap in calorie consumption corresponds with an increase in obesity over the same period of time. The Standard American Diet has become so commonplace in the United States that most people don’t even think twice about it. The problem is, they should.

The United States has experienced dramatic changes in agricultural production methods over the last hundred years. Traditional farming methods in the United States revolved around the family farm, where one family was responsible for their own land, and the creatures or crops being raised upon it. Over the past century however, “periodic downswings in the economy have had major impacts on small-scale farming and rural economies, leading to bankruptcies and migrations... even with periods of relative prosperity and increased farm production, the number of small farms, along with midsized multigenerational farmsteads, has continued to decline, up to the most recent Census of Agriculture in 2007” (Gottlieb & Joshi p.27). In the late 19th century, industrial agriculture began to take root, and by the mid 20th century had quickly overtaken the traditional family farm. Huge farming operations began to monopolize the land, water supplies, and labor force. Industrial farms also began receiving government subsidies, which aided their ability to increase production.¹ According to Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi:

By the 1950s, industrial agriculture had expanded its reach and established new relationships that further transformed the nature of food growing and

¹ Gottlieb, Robert and Anupama Joshi. *Food Justice*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010.

production. New fossil fuel-based energy and capital-intensive inputs such as pesticides, fertilizers, and more advanced machinery, combined with long-distance transportation and more extensive marketing, helped change the face of agriculture throughout the country... Farming itself was reconfigured as an activity whose product- the food grown- became a type of industrial input for the increasingly processed, reformulated, and packaged end product. (Gottlieb & Joshi p.28)

Animal farming in particular changed drastically in the 1950s-1960s. Farmers who originally were able to exercise some independence over their flocks were essentially consumed by commercial agribusiness. These large corporations bought up smaller companies and family farms, and applied industrial farming techniques to their acquisitions.² Traditional farming was turned upside down, and the end result was what is commonly referred to as “factory farming.” Factory farming is the most common method of animal farming currently used in the United States. The agricultural shifts we have experienced over the last several decades are in part a result of the power of commercial agribusiness, however the consumer demands of the American people also play a large role in why we continue to support these farming methods. We can begin to see why this is the case when we take a moment to reflect upon the Standard American Diet.

The adoption of the Standard American Diet is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the 1950s, our eating habits as a population were starkly different. During the Great Depression, food was a scarcity, and was treated as such. Similarly, as we moved into World War II, Americans learned there was great value in rationing food, and there was a greater appreciation for the value of food itself. As we entered the 1950s, we experienced a large ideological shift when it came to food. Not only were there changes in the way the food itself was being produced, but our whole manner of eating changed.

² Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 36

Food became something innovative, and a strong emphasis on food being convenient and readily available arose. The popularity of the TV dinner and household appliances surged, and allowed housewives to “do it all” without devoting an entire day to slaving away in the kitchen. The emergence of fast food restaurants seemed revolutionary at the time, and they have rapidly increased in popularity ever since. Nowadays, it proves nearly impossible to drive anywhere without passing by at least one of these establishments.³

The evolution of the American diet has been less than ideal. We consume higher amounts of nutrient-deficient and overly processed foods than we did in the past. Our brains have now become hard-wired to desire foods that are high in sugar, salt, and fat.⁴ According to Michael Pollan, Americans are now consuming a diet in which half of all calories taken in come from sugar, in one form or another. This has contributed to a dramatic increase in debilitating diseases amongst Americans; “While the widespread acceleration of the Western diet has given us the instant gratification of sugar, in many people- especially those newly exposed to it- the speediness of this food overwhelms the ability of insulin to process it, leading to type 2 diabetes and all the other chronic diseases associated with metabolic syndrome,” asserts Pollan (p.113). The prevalence of obesity has also risen. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over 35.7% of American adults are obese; this statistic does not even include the number of Americans who are simply overweight. The American Medical Association provides similar statistics, recording that just 13% of adults were obese in 1980, yet the number

³ Gottlieb and Joshi 2010

⁴ Kessler, David A. *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*. New York: Rodale, 2009.

spiked over the next several decades and hovered around 34% by 2012. Why is being overweight a problem? An individual who is overweight is not necessarily unhealthy, just as an individual who is thin is not necessarily in good health. However we do know that there is a strong correlation between weight and the risk for certain diseases:

“Overweight and obesity may raise the risk of illness from high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, certain types of cancer, arthritis, and breathing problems. As weight increases, so does the prevalence of health risks”

(NHANES). Weight is just one component of the overall equation, a symptom of a much greater problem: the diet itself.

The Health of Our Children:

Recently we have begun to notice an alarming trend when it comes to our nation’s children. The chronic health problems that many American adults have been experiencing have started plaguing our children as well. At the Sixth Annual Pediatric Bioethics Conference at the University of North Florida, dietician Aurea Thompson addressed many of these concerns. Thompson pointed out that childhood obesity is a fairly modern phenomenon in the United States that is largely caused by eating patterns and family lifestyle. Many families who adhere to the Standard American Diet have created “obesogenic” environments in their own homes, that is, an environment conducive to excessive weight gain and thus health problems such as diabetes. Infants, children, and even many teenagers are incredibly vulnerable, in the sense that they are reliant on others (generally their parents) to provide for them. They are limited in what they can choose to eat based on what their parents purchase or what their schools serve up on the lunch menu.

When children do get to make their own choices regarding food, they tend not to make healthy ones. This is in part because children are very susceptible to marketing schemes, and are prime targets when it comes to advertising. This sends confusing messages to kids, as commercials rarely promote healthy foods:

Television advertising is particularly pernicious in this respect: convenience or fast foods and sweets, according to one study, account for 83 percent of advertised foods, while snack-time eating has been depicted more often than breakfast, lunch, and dinner combined. Clearly, junk food advertising is big business, and it has a significant impact: of the \$200 billion spent by children and youth consumers: the four largest categories in sales to children are candy and snack foods, soft drinks, fast food, and cereal. (Gottlieb & Joshi p.70)

Some nations limit marketing targeted at children, but the United States is not one of them. It becomes quite clear that these advertising campaigns have a huge influence over what children want to eat. According to Gottlieb and Joshi in their book *Food Justice*, on average teenagers eat at fast food establishments as often a twice per week, making them the highest consumers of fast food.⁵

It seems in our current times there is an overall lack of education when it comes to nutritious eating. If parents aren't leading by example, and schools aren't reinforcing good habits, it becomes unclear where children are supposed to glean this information. While adults have the ability to research what they are putting in their mouths and demonstrate purchasing power, children simply do not. Gottlieb and Joshi explain that many of our nation's children are "overfed but poorly nourished", meaning they take in adequate calories throughout the day but the food has little nutritious content.⁶ Therefore their bodies are being deprived of many of the essential nutrients that they need to

⁵ Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 66

⁶ Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 68

function optimally. They also still feel hungry, even though medically these children would be classified as being overweight or even obese. The Standard American Diet, and subsequent marketing of the foods that fall within it, are to blame for many of the issues we see arising in American children.

The Global Community:

What we choose to eat does not impact solely our own health, or the health of our immediate families. Like a stone being tossed into a pond, our food choices create a ripple effect. These choices effect individuals on all levels, from those who prepare our food to those residing in countries on the other side of the world. Farming, whether it be plant or animal based, is tedious, time consuming work. The immense pressure put on farmers to produce goods at rapid speeds for little money takes a huge toll on them. Many farmers throughout the world are in debt, and their farms are being overtaken by massive corporations. This is devastating to these individuals, both financially and psychologically. In his book *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World System*, Raj Patel addresses the high rates of suicide amongst these individuals. Patel explains how widespread farmer bankruptcies in 1980s resulted in the suicides of many farmers:

The number of US farms had been falling for decades, while the size of farms had been increasing. Debt had been the singular motor both of the increase in farm sizes and for the destruction of farming families. In a bid to make the farms more profitable, and then in a bid to repay the original loans when the economy turned sour, farmers borrowed heavily, mortgaging the soil on which they worked. When the banks came to repossess the land, some chose death over the dishonour of losing land that had been in the family for generations. (Patel p.47)

Suicide might seem extreme, but it is very much a reality for many of these farmers, both in the United States and abroad. Traditional family farmers have very little control over their own land, as many of them have been acquired as contractors for larger corporations. As they have become enveloped in commercial agribusiness, they are seeing less of a return on their investment and output. Agribusiness creates a multilayered system, with multiple players involved on a variety of levels. As money is doled out at every level, less of the money goes back into the hands of the farmer. The government also subsidizes certain crops, such as corn, which allows the price of it to remain artificially low. It also deters farmers from producing other unsubsidized crops, such as fruit and vegetables, as there is little financial incentive for doing so. Although these corporations certainly have their own agendas, with money often being the bottom line, it is important to understand that they are acting in a manner that is in accordance with the demands we are making of them.

Our adherence to the Standard American Diet not only has a significant impact on the farmers who grow our food, but also the workers responsible for the processing of these products. According to Gottlieb and Joshi, farm workers are often treated as modern-day slaves. They tend to live in extreme poverty, work under extremely hazardous work conditions for low wages, and are treated quite poorly by their supervisors:

Mike Anton in an article profiling grape pickers in California's Coachella Valley, states that when they are on their own, farmworkers share stories of being cheated out of pay, forced to skip a rest or lunch break, and even fired if they discuss these issues outside the fields. In the sweltering fields, farmworkers are often without drinking water or shade, a situation that has led to severe illness and death. Women farmworkers in these fields have been sexually harassed by their employers and have been too afraid to complain for fear of losing their only livelihood. (Gottlieb & Joshi p.20)

Many are immigrants who fear deportation for speaking up against injustices, and therefore continue to take the abuse. The exploitation of children in these situations is quite common; “Since 1938, exemptions in the federal child labor law, the Fair Labor Standards Act, have excluded child agricultural workers from many of the protections afforded almost every other working child” (Gottlieb & Joshi p.21). The hardship of physical labor on their bodies has created a slew of health problems for these children. Adults are certainly not exempt from these ailments either. In addition to back-breaking labor, exposure to chemicals and pesticides on these farms has resulted in illness and even sterility.⁷ Those individuals responsible for working in factory farm and slaughterhouse environments are subjected to psychological trauma on top of the physical hardships. Violence becomes commonplace, and workers become desensitized to the torture and death that surrounds them on a daily basis.

Branching out from the impact on farmers and farmworkers, the consequences of our dietary choices reach even further. Certainly there are some Americans that are hungry, and some poorer nations have wealthier individuals that are very well fed. However the obesity trends in the United States illustrate that many Americans are quite literally busting at the seams. This is in stark contrast to the masses in poorer nations who are struggling to obtain even the most basic nutrition. Patel points out an interesting phenomenon, that “the hunger of around one billion happens at the same time as another historical first: that they are outnumbered by the one and a half billion people on this planet who are overweight” (Patel p.9). At first glance this seems like a logical fallacy...

⁷ Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 23

how on earth could we have people suffering from issues of excess and insufficiency at the same time? The answer to this lies in the maldistribution of food across the globe. A 2011 TED Talk given by Josette Sheeran emphasized the destabilizing effects of hunger. One out of every seven people on the planet goes hungry on a daily basis: a staggering one billion people. Starvation is particularly rampant in the world's poorest countries, killing more children than AIDs. Every ten seconds a child dies due to starvation. This is in heavy contrast to the excessive overeating that takes place in wealthier nations like the United States. It can be difficult to even see a link between the two, yet they are undeniably intertwined. Food marketing targets those that can afford it, and makes products available in places where people have the ability to purchase it. Thus we have an excessive amount of food available in wealthier nations like the United States. There is more than enough food on the planet to food everyone, it simply becomes a matter of reallocating it so that it's available to those who need it.

Another problem lies in the production of the food itself. It takes a lot of resources to raise animals like cattle in a factory farm setting, as the animals themselves require a tremendous amount of grain in order to grow to a desirable size. Americans are funneling a ton of energy into producing the animals that end up on their dinner plates. Redirecting the grain used to feed cattle being raised for slaughter could feed the one billion people who are starving in the world.⁸ The process of factory farming is simply not a sustainable one, and shifting our methods of production and distribution could help put an end to world hunger.

⁸ *Forks Over Knives*. Directed by Lee Fulkerson. Performed by T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D and Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., M.D. Monica Beach Media, 2011. Available via Netflix.

Issues of Animal Welfare:

In order to keep up with consumer demands for meat, dairy, and eggs, we have continued utilizing industrial farming techniques in order to speed up production. Our consumption habits now sustain a system of agribusiness that did not exist a century ago. The days of farmers caring tenderly for their herds, hand milking their dairy cows, or gingerly collecting eggs one –by-one are over. Instead they have been replaced by enormous factory farming operations that have mechanized almost the entire process of raising and slaughtering animals. There are several trademark characteristics that are representative of factory farming. The animals are often confined to tight quarters, essentially living on top of one another. In some situations they are confined to individual cages, unable to even turn themselves around, and in others they are “free” to roam about, but with so many animals nearby they are unable to move. Their diets are shifted from what they traditionally meant to eat to one that is cheap and readily available (for example, cows that are meant to be eating grass are instead fed grain). Animals are often genetically engineered, and growth hormones are used to breed animals that are large in size at a faster pace. The animals are pumped full of antibiotics to prevent them from getting ill. Even their sexual behaviors are manipulated, with artificial insemination used as a means to ensure continued breeding in females, and castration used as a means to tone down the behavior of males. The conditions of these operations are generally quite heinous, and have been well documented by a variety of sources. Factory farming has quickly become the American norm for all types of land-based farms, including poultry farms, piggeries, cattle and dairy farms: “for each food animal species, animal agriculture is now dominated by the factory farm- 99.9 percent of chickens raised for meat, 97

percent of laying hens, 99 percent of turkeys, 95 percent of pigs, and 78 percent of cattle” (Safran Foer p.109). The process has even been adopted when it comes to raising fish and other sea creatures for human consumption.

One of the biggest issues is a matter of economics. “The core issue is the commercial pressures that exist in a competitive market system in which animals are items of property, and the conditions in which they are kept are not regulated by federal or state animal-welfare law” (Singer & Mason p.55). Because the demand for animal products is so high, it is imperative that animals are raised, slaughtered, and processed at lightening quick speeds to keep up with the market. The vast majority of processing facilities want to do this as cheaply and efficiently as possible, which unfortunately means animal welfare concerns are pushed to the side: “The real ethical issue about factory farming’s treatment of animals isn’t whether the producers are good or bad guys, but that the system seems to recognize animal suffering only when it interferes with profitability,” note Peter Singer and Jim Mason in their book *The Ethics of What We Eat* (p.54). Indeed money seems to be the only motivating factor behind the corporations that churn out animals at shockingly quick rates. The fact of the matter is these animals are sentient creatures, and they are capable of experiencing both physical pain and psychological suffering.

Poultry farms are notoriously infamous for their substandard conditions. Tens of thousands of birds are often confined to a single shed, where they are quite literally living on top of one another. The amount of waste produced by these chickens, in conjunction with the fact that they have little room to move about, poses significant health hazards. The way the birds have been bred over the past several decades has also altered their

genetic makeup: “Chickens have been bred over many generations to produce the maximum amount of meat in the least amount of time. They now grow three times as fast as chickens raised in the 1950s while consuming one-third as much feed” (Singer & Mason p.24). Due to their rapid growth, the birds often end up immobile and even paralyzed because their bone structures are unable to uphold the amount of muscle mass they acquire in a short period of time. Because they can’t move, they often die of thirst or starvation in the shed, and their carcasses are left to rot among the living. Not only is this traumatic for the birds, it’s completely unsanitary and can result in widespread health concerns.⁹ Egg-laying chickens are subjected to conditions just as damaging as birds bred for meat are.

The conditions of massive piggeries are not much better. As Jonathan Safran Foer points out, pigs are incredibly intelligent creatures, right on par with dogs.¹⁰ Dogs are pets that we lovingly care for, and they reward us with their companionship. In the United States, you’d be hard pressed to find anyone willing to eat a dog; eating pork however is not out of the ordinary. When it comes to the treatment of dogs, acting in an abusive or neglectful manner can land you behind bars. As Singer and Mason address, not only are there no federal laws governing the welfare of farmed animals on the actual farms, but the majority of states exempt “common farming practices” from anti-cruelty laws.¹¹ So it’s perfectly acceptable (according to our current laws), to torture a pig and then serve it up for dinner, regardless of the fact that the pig possesses every intellectual capability that a dog does. Raising a pig in a cramped, artificial environment is

⁹ Singer, Peter and Jim Mason. *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*. Rodale, 2006, 24.

¹⁰ Safran Foer, Jonathan. *Eating Animals*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2009, 25.

¹¹ Singer and Mason 2006, 45

psychologically damaging. Plucking piglets away from their mothers before they are ready to be weaned is cruel in the truest sense of the world. “The contrast between the life of a factory-farmed pig- pumped with antibiotics, mutilated, tightly confined, and utterly deprived of stimulation- and one raised in a well-run operation using a combination of traditional husbandry and the best of modern innovations is astonishing” (Safran Foer p.165). Why would one choose to support a torturous farming system that causes so much unnecessary anguish when there are other options?

Like pigs, cows are highly intelligent creatures. Like pork, Americans love to eat beef. The conditions that cattle are subjected to on factory farms are marginally better than their avian and porcine counterparts, however that really isn't saying all that much. Cows are meant to forage and eat grass, but this is not an economically feasible option when it comes to factory-farmed cattle. In order to bulk up the cows as cheaply as possible, they are fed a diet of grain. “Putting cattle on a corn-based diet is like putting humans on a diet of candy bars- you can live on it for a while, but eventually you are going to get sick. For the beef producer that doesn't matter, as long as the animal doesn't drop dead before being slaughtered” (Singer & Mason p.61). The cows are given antibiotics to prevent and treat the resulting illnesses, which in turn end up in the meat that humans are consuming. Similarly to the case for chickens, current industrial farming practices have allowed cows to grow and be ready for slaughter at a much faster rate than nature initially intended. Dairy cows, although initially spared from slaughter, do not lead a life that is any less painful. In fact their suffering might arguably be greater. Birth is what stimulates milk production in a female cow, like any other mammal. After delivery, dairy cows are forced into a constant state of lactation and given hormones to up their

milk production, which often causes mastitis, a painful infection of the milk ducts. Sadder still, their calves face the potential of living very short, very tragic lives. Veal is considered a delicacy in the United States, yet it is the flesh of a newborn calf, separated from its mother at birth and confined to a tiny space in order to keep its muscles soft.¹² Because they are dealing with the separation from their newly born calves, the mothers will often become agitated and bellow, crying out for their babies for weeks on end. The mothers of these calves appear to experience a true mourning over the loss of their offspring.¹³

Industrial fishing has come to mirror many of the same dynamics as factory farming. In commercial fisheries, large numbers of fish are bred in captivity in order to meet consumer demands. In the wild, breeds are being pushed to the point of extinction due to overfishing. Safran Foer points out that often we see fish as being even less worthy of moral consideration than we do other species simply because they are very different in nature: “Fish are always in another element, silent and unsmiling, legless and dead-eyed. They were created, in the Bible, on a different day, and are thought of as an unflatteringly early stop in the evolutionary march toward the human” (Safran Foer p.30). Indeed many people will say they don’t eat “meat”, but they do eat “fish”, as if to say fish could hardly fall into the same category as other animal species being consumed. However fish, like the other animals mentioned in this piece, are not immune to pain or suffering. In a farmed setting, fish will often cannibalize one another due to the cramped environment they are confined to. Because there are so many fish in such a small space, their excrement pollutes the water, making it difficult to breathe and a breeding grounds for

¹² Singer and Mason 2006, 58

¹³ Singer and Mason 2006

sea lice.¹⁴ The slaughter process for farmed fish is a painful one, as “often the fish will be slaughtered while conscious and convulse in pain as they die” (Safran Foer p.190). The lives of factory farmed fish are fraught with disease and pain, and the drawn out slaughter process only serves as an extension of this suffering.

Our adherence to the Standard American Diet is what continues to drive these factory farm operations in the United States. Animals are being inhumanely produced and slaughtered to satisfy the market demands of the American people. The corporations behind factory farming continue to use these production methods because they keep costs as low as possible, while keeping profits as high as they can. These big businesses are giving American consumers the products they desire at the price they want to pay for them, but it comes at a great cost in other areas, particularly that of animal welfare.

Environmental & Global Health Concerns:

Factory farming has a direct impact on the environment, and these environmental shifts have huge consequences for human health. Animals produce waste, this is a given. According to Safran Foer, “shit became a problem only when Americans decided we wanted to eat more meat than any other culture in history and pay historically little for it” (p.177). When you are raising thousands of animals in a space that was not meant to harbor so many creatures, the resulting amount of fecal matter is astronomical. And all of this waste has to go somewhere. Unfortunately, that “somewhere” ends up being our water supply. The fecal matter is often pumped into huge waste lagoons that are essentially pools of crap. “Conservative estimates by the EPA indicate that chicken, hog,

¹⁴ Safran Foer 2009, 190

and cattle excrement has already polluted 35,000 miles of rivers in twenty-two states (for reference, the circumference of the earth is roughly 25,000 miles)” (Safran Foer p.179). Obviously this has had an impact on the creatures living in these toxic waters. Perhaps not as obvious are the effects that this pollution has had on human health. The families living near these factory farms have suffered devastating consequences to their own health, by way of both the water they use on a daily basis and the air that they breathe in. The airborne toxins cause both physical and psychological ailments, including sore throats, headaches, depression, and fatigue among others.¹⁵ When we consume products that are a result of factory farming, we are endorsing a practice that is harmful to human health.

Factory farming reduces the total amount of food available for human consumption, and ravages the land that it takes place upon. It would make more sense from a sustainability standpoint to raise crops for human consumption rather than putting that energy into CAFOs, concentrated animal feeding operations.¹⁶ According to Valclav Smil, an agricultural efficiency expert, “it is simply not possible for everyone in the world to eat as much meat as people in the affluent world now eat, because to produce that amount of meat would, in the absence of some unforeseen advances in bioengineering, require 67 percent more agricultural land than the world possesses” (Singer & Mason p.232). Factory farming has led to the deforestation of rainforests in certain countries, like Brazil, and cattle farming has put a huge drain on freshwater supplies. According to the World Society for the Protection of Animals, roughly one quarter of global freshwater is used for farm animal production, with much of it going

¹⁵ Safran Foer 2009, 180

¹⁶ Singer and Mason 2006

towards the production of animal feed.¹⁷ Cows are also largely to blame for overgrazing, which is the single largest cause of land degradation in the world.¹⁸ As Singer and Mason point out, more environmentalists are now focusing on the issue of individual consumption, because it has such large consequences. According to the editors of *World Watch Magazine*, “as environmental science has advanced, it has become apparently that the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future- deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities and the spread of disease” (Singer & Mason p.240).

The issue of disease is a one of particular urgency. The cramped conditions of factory farms allow disease to run rampant. For this reason, animals are given antibiotics nontherapeutically; that is, not to treat an existing illness, but rather to prevent them from getting sick in the first place.¹⁹ The problem is that these antibiotics end up in the flesh of the animal, and when humans eat this meat, they are ingesting the antibiotics. Over time, people slowly build up a resistance to the antibiotics. This poses a problem when the person falls ill, and is unable to use antibiotics to treat their illness because they have built up an antimicrobial resistance within their own body. Should a pandemic like the Spanish flu outbreak of 1918 occur again, there is a likelihood that antibiotic resistance would inhibit us from being able to treat it and stop it from spreading.

¹⁷ World Society for the Protection of Animals. “Freshwater Use and Farm Animal Welfare”. 2011. Available: http://www.wspa-international.org/Images/Briefing%20-%20Freshwater%20use%20and%20farm%20animal%20welfare_tcm25-25548.pdf.

¹⁸ Singer and Mason 2006, 237

¹⁹ Safran Foer 2009,140

We can certainly begin to see how what seems like such a personal choice, what put into our mouths, has farther reaching consequences than we might ever have dreamed of. Because we are undeniably linked to one another through this ongoing chain of processes, it becomes crucial that we begin to address and understand eating from a different perspective. Safran Foer reflects upon the *eat with care* ethic, and a return to this might serve us well. In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the theory of care ethics, which I believe is the best approach we can take when it comes to deciding what to eat.

Chapter Two: Understanding Care Ethics

As illustrated in the previous section we can see that there are numerous problems surrounding our current dietary habits in the United States. How does one even begin to look for a solution when the problems themselves seem insurmountable? I believe the first step lies in adopting a moral theory that encompasses the welfare of all of the players in the food system. A utilitarian approach is often taken when it comes to discussing the ethics of eating. Peter Singer is at the forefront of this argument, particularly when it comes to the ethics of eating animals. Singer argues that we should abstain from eating animals due to their sentient nature: the fact that they have an ability to experience pleasure and pain. We should avoid eating animals altogether because it causes them pain, and pain is certainly not in their best interest. The utilitarian approach aims to achieve the greatest possible outcome for the greatest number of beings, and ethicists like Singer include animals in their realm of consideration.

I agree with Singer that animals do indeed require moral consideration, however not solely due to the fact that they are sentient. The relationship is much more complex than that, and utilitarianism doesn't factor in other components such as interdependency, vulnerability, and responsibility, which are all very real parts of the overall equation. A care ethic approach takes many of these extraneous variables into consideration when determining how one should act. For this reason, I would argue that adopting an ethic of care in regards to how we eat is the way to go. Using care ethics as a means to dictate how we should be eating can be instrumental in turning many of the problems in our

current food system around. What exactly is *care*? In order to approach the subject of food from a care ethic perspective, we must first establish what care is. Care is deeply embedded in all aspects of our lives, whether we are aware of it or not; it manifests itself in several different ways. In this section we will explore the theoretical components of care ethics and demonstrate why it is an ideal approach to take in regards to food.

Taking Care Of, Caring For, & Caring About:

One way we witness care is as an act of labor. A mother takes care of her child, providing him with a hot meal, helping him bathe and dress, and tucking him into bed at night. A nurse takes care of his sick patient, providing her with medicine and helping her walk through the halls of the hospital. We not only take care of fellow humans, but other things as well. A farmer takes care of his garden, providing adequate water and sunlight, so that the vegetables he has planted will flourish. *Taking care of* is one variation of care commonly noted by care ethicists, including Eva Feder Kittay. Care as labor, Kittay asserts, “is the work of maintaining others and ourselves when we are in a condition of need... It is most noticed in its absence, most appreciated when it can be least reciprocated” (Kittay p.52). A lack of care would be quite evident in the aforementioned examples. A neglected child would grow hungry and show visible signs of a lack of care. The ailing patient could grow even sicker, or perhaps even die without a caretaker there to aid her. The garden would become overrun with weeds, and the vegetables would slowly decay without the skillful care of the farmer. An absence of care in the form of labor can have devastating consequences, particularly for those who are in need of the care in the first place. Care is not only a necessary component for the sustenance of life, but it also has the capacity to enable flourishing to the fullest degree. It is important to

note that in regards to *taking care of*, there is generally some degree of dependency.

Often one party is reliant upon the care of another in order to thrive; it is this dependency that obligates us to care.

Just because an individual takes care of something, it does not necessarily mean that they care *for* that thing. The attitude of care is very different than the act of care, and it is possible to have one with out the other. Kittay elaborates further:

As an attitude, care denotes a positive affective bond and investment in another's well being. The labor can be done without the appropriate attitude. Yet without the attitude of care, the open responsiveness to another that is so essential to understanding what another requires is not possible. That is, the labor unaccompanied by the attitude of care will not be good care. (Kittay p.52)

Mark Timmons refers to the attitude of care as *caring for* something. When you like something, or are attracted to it, it can be said that you care for it. There is however a great variance between the degrees of *caring for* things. At the deepest end of the spectrum, *caring about* revolves around a sincere concern for that individual's well being. A husband cares for his wife; not only is he attracted to her, and enjoys her company, but he has a genuine concern for her life and interests. Her well being is generally at the forefront of his concern. This type of concern demonstrates *caring about* to the fullest extent. Like the labor of care, the attitude of care need not apply solely to the realm of living subjects; we can care for things like the environment or sports or even specific objects. We can also care about things simply in the sense that we like them; but we need not necessarily care about something in order to like it, or like it in order to care about it. For example, I could care quite a bit about the environment in general, but find a certain tree to be particularly hideous, and therefore dislike that aspect of it.

It is quite common to say “I don’t care for that,” meaning we do not have a preference for something. A child might care for ice cream but not care for brussel sprouts. A husband will undoubtedly care for his wife on a different level than a child cares for an ice cream cone. While the child enjoys the flavor of the treat, the scope of that care is quite small. A scoop of ice cream does not have interests (although the cow that produced it might, but we will touch on this later), thus it would be somewhat ridiculous to care for it on any level other than appreciating it for what it is. Perhaps it makes more sense then, to refer to the child’s preference for ice cream as “liking” rather than “caring.” When it comes to the doting husband, the nature of care is different. He not only cares for his wife in the sense that he likes her, but he cares *about* her. He has concern for her, and is emotionally invested in her well being. Human beings all have different dispositions, thus the things that we like and care for will vary from person to person. Certainly then, there are varying degrees of caring attitudes.

Timmons identifies three core components of *caring about*: intellectual, affective, and motivational-behavioral. The intellectual component is what allows us to recognize the needs of and what is good for others. The affective component encompasses our feelings for others; we are able to feel empathize with them, feeling joy when they succeed and sorrow when they experience hardships. The motivational-behavioral component relates to the welfare of those that we care about. Timmons asserts that “caring about others typically involves a non-self-interested desire to help them- one is disposed to act on someone’s behalf out of a direct regard for that person’s welfare. Caring about oneself involves wanting to do those things that will best promote one’s well-being and wanting to avoid what will be detrimental to one’s well-being” (Timmons

p.228). On Timmons' view, an individual who is caring will possess these three core components.

It is not necessarily easy to pinpoint a clear cut distinction between *caring for* and *caring about*. While Timmons considers them to be two separate categories, under Kittay's definitions they both appear to fall under the realm of caring attitudes. For the purposes of this paper, we will consider *caring about* to be a more heightened attitude of care. In *caring about* something, we acknowledge, along the lines of Kittay, the fact that the subject has interests that are worthy of moral consideration. The degree for which we care about other subjects often will vary based on our relationships with them; "Normally, one's level of care directed toward casual acquaintances is of a lower degree than the sort one has for loved ones, though higher in degree than the level of care one has toward strangers" (Timmons p.227). It makes sense that a man would care more about his wife than he does his friend, more about his friend than he does his co-worker, and more about his co-worker than he does a random person that he walks by on his way to work. However, many care ethicists argue that we should begin to care more about those individuals with whom we have less intimate relationships. Taking the time to care more about others can, over time, foster a more compassionate and fulfilled society. This is the stance taken by Robert Goodin, who suggests that we have not only a personal responsibility, but a collective responsibility to take care of the most vulnerable members of our society. As we will see later on, this point becomes critical when it comes to making changes within our food system.

Dependency & Interrelatedness:

Care holds a critical place in society. This is due largely to the fact that we are intimately connected to one another. It is virtually impossible for a person to exist in this world and have no exposure to or contact of any kind with other people. A key component of a care-based ethic is a dependency on human interrelatedness. Not only are we dependent upon one another, but we are also unavoidably interconnected to one another because of this fact. Humans are social creatures; we rely on one another on a daily basis. We depend on our families and friends for comfort and companionship. We depend on doctors to help heal us when we fall ill. We depend on the farmers who grow our food, the mechanics who fix our cars, the teachers who educate our children. Like care itself, there are varying degrees of dependence. A newborn baby is unavoidably dependent upon others, primarily its parents, when it is born into this world. Unable to care for itself on even the most basic level, the child is wholly dependent on others to fulfill its needs. Other dependencies have evolved over time; they are not primal in nature. For example, the dependency on a mechanic to fix my car when it is not functioning properly is more a result of the division of labor. I can't fix the car myself simply because I don't know how, so I turn to someone who is specialized in that facet of labor to help get the job done. While I am reliant on the mechanic to a certain degree, my life will not be doomed if I can't get my car fixed. Indeed it's quite possible to survive without a car, however inconvenient it might be. In the case of the newborn baby, an inability to receive care in terms of food, shelter, and nurturing would be entirely detrimental. An infant cannot survive without those basic needs being fulfilled, thus it is critical that someone respond to their needs. The same goes for individuals who are

physically or mentally disabled, or those who are elderly and incapacitated. Their special needs require attentiveness and care.

According to ethicist Joan C. Tronto, we are constantly and perpetually involved in caring relationships with others: “Care requires that humans pay attention to one another, take responsibility for one another, engage in physical processes of care giving, and respond to those who have received care” (Tronto p.145). Because we are undeniably and intrinsically linked to one another, we should care about one another; indeed we must care about one another. Our existence is dependent upon cultivating interdependent relationships, without them, we would be no more; thus it is imperative that we provide for others when they are in need, and allow them to provide for us when we are. Tronto argues that caring about others is a good in and of itself, and that by virtue of being human, we should work towards establishing a high quality of care in our society. Similarly, Virginia Held, another well-respected ethicist proposes that when it comes to the interrelatedness of social groups, care is arguably the best guarding value a society can possess. Caring relations lead to mutual respect amongst individuals, and this is critical to societal progress. These interactions can shape the world in which we live immensely.

Responding to Justice-Based Theories:

In many westernized societies, the United States in particular, care does not carry much weight as a prevailing ethical principle. In societies that praise autonomy above all else, it is easy for care to get pushed aside. From a young age, it is impressed upon Americans that they are the authors of their own lives. Independence is praised, and often heavily rewarded. Dependency, on the other hand, is viewed as weakness. Dependency,

however, in some shape or form, is generally unavoidable. There are certain things that we need in our lives that we are incapable of providing for ourselves. Thus it seems unwise to label it in a negative fashion, rather than just accepting it for what it is. It is not weak to depend on others; I would argue, it is merely a fact of life. Despite our desire to place autonomy above all else, we need not only to acknowledge a dependency on human interrelatedness, but embrace it as well. “Rather than seeing people as rational actors pursuing their own goals and maximizing their interests, we must instead see people as constantly enmeshed in relationships of care,” urges Tronto (p.142). When we put autonomy and independence on a pedestal, making those the characteristics to strive for above all else, we are setting ourselves up for failure. It is an illusion that we can be completely independent from one another; this is completely outside of human reality. We are constantly involved in relationships, interacting with others throughout our lives, and to suggest otherwise would be absurd. When we do this we begin to see ourselves as active participants within these relationships, we can see that the decisions we make on a daily basis have an impact on those around us, not simply on our own lives.

Ethicist Carol Gilligan takes a look at how care ethics are contrasted with theories of justice in our society. From a justice perspective, we tend to see things in terms of equality and fairness; this is the typical stance taken in the United States. Gilligan argues that shifting the perspective from one of justice to one of care can ultimately change the way in which we view society: “To organize relationships in terms of attachment rather than in terms of equality changes the way human connection is imagined, so that the images or metaphors of relationship shift from hierarchy or balance to network or web” (Gilligan p.22). Viewing our interactions as being part of a web

acknowledges the fact that we are all interconnected, rather than viewing us as being in competition with one another. It urges us to consider the ripple effects of our actions, as they are not isolated occurrences. It also encourages us to communicate more openly with those around us. When we shift from a perspective that it is wholly focused on rights and respect to one that is more focused on mutual understanding amongst individuals, our capacity to empathize with those around us is heightened. Adopting a perspective that has concern only for the individual can pose significant hazards:

As a framework for moral decision care is grounded in the assumption that self and other are interdependent, an assumption reflected in a view of action as responsive and therefore, as arising in relationship rather than the view of action as emanating from within the self and, therefore, “self-governed.” Seen as responsive, the self is by definition connected to others, responding to perceptions, interpreting events, and governed by the organizing tendencies of human interaction and human language. Within this framework, detachment, whether from self or from others, is morally problematic, since it breeds moral blindness or indifference- a failure to discern or respond to need. (Gilligan p.24)

We are all intertwined, and it would best serve us to act in a manner that fosters the well-being of us all. If we choose to see ourselves as being separate, disconnected, or detached, we are ignoring a huge part of what makes us truly human. Viewing ourselves as interdependent encourages us, rightly so, to act in a manner that is conducive to us all. Only thinking of oneself, or what is it in your own best interest, can lead to acting in a manner that is detrimental to the well-being of others.

Gilligan points out that individuals might have very different conceptions of what care is. What might be a necessary act of care in the eyes of one person could be completely unnecessary in the eyes of another. Thus Gilligan argues that “justice in this context becomes understood as respect for people in their own terms”(Gilligan p.24). We should still view people as individuals and respect their personal desires and preferences,

just not consider them as being isolated creatures that can, and ideally should, function independently of one another. People should certainly still be allowed to decide what a good life looks like for them, and to pursue that, just not to the detriment of others. The principles of justice that the United States was built upon are clearly important, and I am not arguing that we abandon them. I am simply arguing along the lines of Gilligan that we allow for care to take an equally important stance alongside them. Indeed, the two are intrinsically connected, as Gilligan argues can be demonstrated even by our nation's children; "Through the experience of inequality, of being in the less powerful position, children learn what it means to depend on the authority and good will of others... The child's vulnerability to oppression and to abandonment thus can be seen to lay the groundwork for the moral visions of justice and care, conceived as ideals of human relationship and defining the ways in which people 'should' act toward one another" (Gilligan p.28). Thus an ideal society would embrace both care and justice as prevailing principles to be revered.

Care as a Virtue:

Another way we can view care is as a virtue, in and of itself. I would argue that there is great virtue in caring for oneself and others. Virtue ethics were originally developed by the ancient Greeks, with much of the credit going to Aristotle. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle developed a table of virtues and corresponding vices, which were the result of there being either an excess or deficiency of the action or feeling that composed the virtue. The virtues themselves were akin to traits of character, and they struck a perfect balance between their linked excessive and deficient vices. According to Rosalind Hursthouse, "the concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its

possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent, or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should” (Hursthouse). While care itself was not one of Aristotle’s original virtues, it is not much of a stretch to make the assertion that care can certainly be considered one. Indeed both Kittay and Tronto view care as being a virtue. Many of the traits surrounding care are virtuous in nature; care often requires attentiveness, responsiveness, compassion, and empathy, among other things. These traits can be demonstrated in how we care for others, by way of our actions. When we tend to the needs of those who require our care, certainly we are helping them. However I would argue that the individual is only virtuous if they *care about* the subject they are tending to. Simply going through the motions of taking care of something is not enough to make someone virtuous. The emotional component of concern for the well being of the subject is critical. Action without this component is merely a habit, albeit a good one.

A person who is kind and compassionate, and who acts in a caring matter, is an admirable individual. I believe that possessing a caring disposition, and demonstrating care through one’s actions can certainly be considered moral goods. A virtuous individual will demonstrate care both by way of their actions and their thoughts and feelings. They will act in a caring manner not because it’s what they are supposed to do, but because it’s what they want to do. They will possess the traits that enable them to fully embody care.

Why Care Ethics?:

Now that we have established the basic theoretical components of care theory, we can take a look at why it’s the best approach to take when it comes to dealing with American dietary habits. The qualities of interrelatedness and dependency in care ethics

can also be seen in our food system. The entire food system is an interconnected web, from producer, to supplier, to consumer. The consumer is dependent upon both the producer and supplier in order to get food onto the dinner table. The relationship is a mutually dependent one, as the consumer will dictate the demands that both the producers and suppliers need to meet, and the producers will market products that incite demand. The three groups are undeniably interconnected, and crucial to one another. But these three groups are not abstractions; they are concrete, often living, beings that generally have some sort of interests. I would argue that the farmers, animals, and eaters of the subsequent food products all have welfare interests that should be acknowledged and addressed. Because we are all intrinsically entwined, it would serve us well to adopt a care ethic perspective when it comes to how we eat, as the ripple effects of the choices being made impact our lives on many levels. A care perspective pushes us to consider the nature of our relationships, as well as the broader implications that those relationships entail. In the following chapter, I will discuss how we can apply care theory to the aforementioned problems in the previous chapter. I will demonstrate how the adoption of care ethics can help remedy many of the major problems surrounding our personal health and that of our families, the well being of the other vulnerable people in our society, and the welfare of non-human sentient beings and the environment.

Chapter Three: The Practice of Care

Care for Self:

As discussed in chapter one, the Standard American Diet is having a highly detrimental impact on our own personal well being. Yet there seems to be very little movement towards making any changes for the better. So why do Americans continue to eat in the manner that they do, even though the consequences to their own health are dire? There are a variety of reasons, and it's best to make the distinction between matters of individual choice and those that are a result of externalities. Certain factors come into play that are beyond our control, such as issues of accessibility and affordability. Groups of lower socioeconomic status, particularly those residing in rural and urban areas, have limited grocery store options and limited incomes. Because of this, they are limited in the choices that they can make regarding food. You can only purchase what's made available to you, and budget constraints can limit those choices even further. Time is also a crucial factor. For families that have both parents working multiple low-paying jobs, the time it takes to prepare a healthy meal at home is simply a luxury they cannot afford. It becomes not only easier, but cheaper as well, to pick up either fast food or microwave dinners to get everyone filled up in a timely and affordable fashion. It is a travesty that in a nation that is quite literally overflowing with material goods, we fall terribly short when it comes to making sure all American citizens are adequately nourished, with access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. When it comes to the topic of care, it isn't necessarily fair to make the argument that these individuals don't care about their diets, and are

choosing to make decisions that are detrimental to their overall health. The external constraints being placed upon them are quite limiting. While they might in fact care quite deeply about their own health and well being, they might lack the means to prioritize purchasing healthier foods. They might choose, often out of necessity, to put their money towards daycare, medical care, or living expenses rather than sustainably produced food. In life we are always presented with choices, and those coming from a lower socioeconomic background are no exception; however it is important to acknowledge that these financial factors can make certain choices more difficult than others.

There are however, plenty of Americans who make a decent salary, and do have the luxury of time on their hands; those who have access to a great variety of foods at their local grocer, and can afford to purchase what they please. These homes might have a stay-at-home parent, or two parents who work a fairly regular weekly schedule. Or perhaps the household is not even a family at all, but a single adult living on their own. This is the group of Americans that I am particularly concerned with: those that have the power to make better food choices, but simply do not. I would argue that these individuals are not limited by the same social and economic factors as the aforementioned group is, and thus can make better choices in purchasing products that are better for their overall health, among other things.

Perhaps you are wondering why I have placed such an emphasis on the food itself when it comes to demonstrating caring behavior. Certainly there are a variety of other ways that a person can demonstrate care for oneself. From a physiological perspective, exercise is great for one's overall health. Taking vitamins can supply your body with any nutrients it might be lacking. Getting a massage or acupuncture can help your body

overcome a variety of ailments. There are many things that one can do to preserve their own health, and have their body function at an optimal level. And yet there is something very different about the nature of food. On the one hand, it is critical for human existence. You could probably get away without exercising or taking vitamins, and you can certainly get away without things like massages and acupuncture, and you will most likely be just fine. Food on the other hand is required by all of us, no matter our age or where we come from. Without food, you die, it's as simple as that. On the other hand, the complex nature of the consumption process demands a caring outlook. We have seen throughout this piece the interdependent nature of food; how we eat is part of a complex web of beings and processes, it's not an isolated occurrence. For this reason, it's something we should care about, and we should take the time to put these caring behaviors into practice.

Caring for oneself via eating calls certain virtues into practice. First we must have a basis of knowledge to work with. We need to understand how, why, and what we should be eating. Once you possess this information, you can make more informed decisions. We can then be more attentive to the needs of our bodies, and the needs of others. Caring is not simply about acquiring knowledge, although knowledge is a critical component of care. What you choose to do with that knowledge is what makes a difference; sharing it with others can empower them to make changes within their own lives. A willingness to share information with others is a way of demonstrating care and concern for their welfare, and is also a sign of virtue. Understanding the interdependent nature of food can lead us to have a more compassionate and responsive position when it comes to eating. Caring for oneself is the first step we can take towards the betterment of

the entire food system. This is not to say that we should err on the side of narcissism; our care for self shouldn't come from a place of self absorption. We should care about ourselves because doing has an impact on others.

What would it mean for individuals to actually care for themselves, to put this knowledge into practice? One particular way to demonstrate taking care of your self would be to make food choices that are beneficial to your overall health and well being. At first glance, this seems strikingly obvious. Yet it seems over time, many Americans have lost all common sense when it comes to choosing a good diet. Indeed the Standard American Diet has become so commonplace that the "good" choices often seem foreign to us. Pollan has written several books detailing how to adopt healthier, and subsequently, more caring, dietary habits. His most basic rule of thumb? "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants" (Pollan p.1) When Pollan says to "eat food", he means real, whole foods, not the industrialized, over processed imitations of food currently lining the shelves at the grocery store. "Ordinary food is still out there however, still being grown and even occasionally sold in the supermarket, and this ordinary food is what we should eat," asserts Pollan (p.147). Simple things, such as shopping the perimeter of the grocery store, or better yet, purchasing food directly from its source (such as at a farmers market), are a step in the right direction. If you do buy packaged food rather than whole foods, read the labels. Pollan urges us to avoid consuming foods that contain greater than five ingredients, as well as those that contain ingredients you cannot pronounce. If your grandparents would not have recognized the item as being edible, then don't eat it.

Controlling our portion size and consuming less calorically can have a huge impact on our health. The consumption habits of the French are often juxtaposed against

our own. The French as a whole are a much healthier group than the Americans are, yet they do not deprive themselves when it comes to food. They consume things like full-fat butter, cheese, and wine on a regular basis, yet they have much lower rates of coronary heart disease (CHD), a condition you might expect based on their diet. According to the American Heart Association, the mortality rate in France from CHD is half of what it is in the United States.²⁰ There are several explanations as to why this is the case; “A number of dietary factors, such as consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, and fish and reduced intake of milk products, differ between European populations and can be readily associated with reduced CHD risk” (AHA). In general, the French eat much smaller portions, and have a tendency to linger over meals. Eating a meal is a not a rushed experience, but rather an enjoyable one, shared with family and friends. This serves as a demonstration of care in and of itself, as they are being attentive to their feelings of satiety and responding accordingly, and allowing those dining with them to do the same, rather than hurrying through the meal. The French also tend to spend more money on higher quality food. Pollan hypothesizes that if Americans were to adopt a similar habit of spending, there would be a reduction in the amount of food consumed. “For the majority of Americans, spending more for better food is less a matter of ability than priority. We spend a smaller percentage of our income on food than any other industrialized society; surely if we decided that the quality of our food mattered, we could afford to spend a few more dollars on it a week- and eat a little less of it,” Pollan

²⁰ American Heart Association (AHA). “Wine and Your Heart”. A Science Advisory for Healthcare Professionals From the Nutrition Committee, Council on Epidemiology and Prevention, and Council on Cardiovascular Nursing of the American Heart Association, 2001. Available: <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/103/3/472.full>.

asserts (Pollan p.187). Eating seems to be a wholly different experience in countries like France; one that is partaken in both mindfully and carefully.

The “mostly plants” part of Pollan’s message is critical as well, particularly because Americans in general consume shockingly high amounts of animal products. One hundred years ago, meat at a meal was an infrequent treat. Now it is the standard. In fact, the majority of Americans have come to expect meat not only at dinner, but with breakfast and lunch as well. It’s not abnormal to have sausage and eggs for breakfast, a turkey sandwich for lunch, and then chow down on a meatloaf or roasted chicken for dinner. The consequences that this dietary shift has had upon the environment and the animals themselves are catastrophic, and we will touch upon those later. When it comes to our own personal health, the over consumption of these products has had serious consequences, including increasing rates of heart disease and cancer among us. By increasing our intake of plant-based foods, and lowering our intake of animal products, we can influence our health in a positive manner. The 2011 documentary *Forks Over Knives* explores this topic at length, imploring Americans to think along the lines of Hippocrates and “let food be thy medicine.” The doctors in the film claim that the current statistics surrounding disease mirror our diets, and that most of these diseases could be completely eradicated by adopting a whole foods, plant- based diet. This sentiment is echoed by Pollan:

... our biological dependence on plants goes back and runs deep, which makes it not at all surprising that eating them should be so good for us. There are literally scores of studies demonstrating that a diet rich in vegetables and fruits reduces the risk of dying from all the Western diseases. In countries where people eat a pound or more of fruits and vegetables a day, the rate of cancer is half what it is in the United States. We also know that vegetarians are less susceptible to most of the Western diseases, and as a consequence live longer than the rest of us. (Though

near vegetarians- so-called flexitarians- are just as healthy as vegetarians).
(Pollan p.164)

A Mayo Clinic article also states that vegetarians not only weigh less, but have significantly lower rates of heart disease than their non-vegetarian counterparts; “A National Cancer Institute study of 500,000 people found that those who ate 4 ounces (113 grams) of red meat or more daily were 30 percent more likely to have died of any cause during a 10-year period than were those who consumed less” (Mayo Clinic). For the past several decades in the United States, there has been a strong emphasis on the treatment of chronic disease. What Pollan and the doctors in the film are suggesting is that we focus instead on prevention. Fruits and vegetables are rich in antioxidants and vitamins, and can actually help detoxify our bodies. Other plant-based foods such as seeds, legumes, and whole grains are packed with nutrients. In choosing to consume these types of food, we are, in essence, taking care of ourselves. In making a conscious effort to eat healthfully, an individual is nurturing his body and giving it the essential nutrients that it needs to function at an optimal level.

Certainly not everyone will decide to make the switch to veganism or vegetarianism, despite the health benefits of doing so. In fact Safran Foer cautions that many literary pieces written on the subject of food turn into diatribes, pushing the reader to abandon the consumption of animal products, a leap that very few individuals will actually end up taking. The literature can often be a turn-off rather than inciting change. When it comes to eating animals, the argument can certainly be made that if the goal is to provide the utmost care and compassion for all creatures, the avoidance of consumption of these products is the most caring behavior to adopt. This is an argument that I find difficult to respond to, because it certainly makes sense. The problem I see lies in the fact

that for the average American, I don't think it's a realistic expectation. Safran Foer references the traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner in his book, and while he strives for something different within his own family, I believe the roots of the tradition itself run deep. Certain eating habits are deeply embedded in American history, and the consumption of certain animal products has become commonplace. Concerns for animal welfare might be at odds with other values held by an individual, such as the preservation of family traditions. For reasons such as this, I don't believe it's necessary to stop eating these products altogether and still be caring individual. Raising awareness and consciousness about the food system, and working towards establishing more mindful, healthful eating habits are ways of doing this. Adopting a diet of whole foods over those that wouldn't have even been recognized as being edible one hundred years ago is a change that many people are capable of making, should they simply put a little bit of effort into doing so.

While one way of demonstrating care is by making good choices regarding what we put into our bodies (taking care of ourselves), another way to look at care for self is in terms of virtue. I would argue that there is great virtue in caring for and about oneself. Again, I do not mean that we should deem ourselves the center of the universe, and adopt a narcissistic attitude towards life; this would clearly push a love of self towards being a vice rather than a virtue. Caring about yourself, your mind and body, is important; your body is the vessel that carries you through life on Earth, and your mind is what steers it in the right direction. A failure to care about oneself can have severe consequences for both the body and mind; we see evidence of this in instances where people have neglected to take care of themselves. Indeed, caring about oneself and caring for oneself are

intrinsically interconnected. When a person cares about himself, in the virtuous sense of the phrase, his well being and personal welfare become of paramount importance. The act of taking care of himself becomes the tool used to bring this balanced state of well being to fruition. When it comes to eating, choosing to consume foods that will condition the body towards optimal health, thus bringing it into a state of harmony, can be deemed a thoughtful demonstration of the care for self.

Care for Children:

Safran Foer succinctly states, “feeding my child is not like feeding myself: it matters more” (p.11). On this point I agree with him wholeheartedly; it does matter more. When a vulnerable being is entrusted to your care, you have a responsibility to care for it to the best of your ability. Children are wholly dependent upon their parents to fulfill their needs, and at the most basic end of the spectrum, this includes food. Unable to provide it for themselves, children epitomize the notion of dependency. It is the responsibility of the parent to embrace the virtues of attentiveness and responsiveness when it comes to nourishing their children.

The decisions surrounding how to feed our children start from the moment they are born. Mothers are presented with the option to breastfeed or formula feed their newborn babies. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. After six months of age, solid food

can slowly be introduced; it should be served in tandem with continued breastfeeding until 12 months of age.²¹:

This recommendation is supported by the health outcomes of exclusively breastfed infants and infants who never or only partially breastfed. Breastfeeding provides a protective effect against respiratory illnesses, ear infections, gastrointestinal diseases, and allergies including asthma, eczema and atopic dermatitis. The rate of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is reduced by over a third in breastfed babies, and there is a 15 percent to 30 percent reduction in adolescent and adult obesity in breastfed vs. non-breastfed infants. (AAP)

Yet the vast majority of American infants are not breastfed, at least not to the extent suggested by the AAP. According to the CDC in 2013, 76.5% of American infants are ever breastfed. By 3 months of age, only 37.7% of infants are exclusively breastfed, and by 6 months of age, the number of exclusively breastfed infants falls to just 16.4%. This means that only about one sixth of American babies are being fed in the manner suggested by the AAP for optimal health.²²

How we feed our infants lays the foundation for their dietary habits; starting off on the right foot can make a world of difference when it comes to their health in childhood and adulthood. Toddlers and children are often prime targets for the marketing of certain foods, yet it's up to the parent to determine how to feed his or her own child. Taking the knowledge we have about food and what goes into it can help us determine how to feed our children in the most caring manner possible. A common sense approach

²¹ American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). "AAP Reaffirms Breastfeeding Guidelines". 2012. Available: <http://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/AAP-Reaffirms-Breastfeeding-Guidelines.aspx>.

²² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC2). "Breastfeeding Report Card: United States/2013". 2013. Available: <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/2013breastfeedingreportcard.pdf>.

to feeding your children, much like feeding yourself, is often the best approach that can be taken. Avoiding overly processed foods, and sticking to a diet of healthy whole foods will yield the best benefits for overall health. Instilling healthy eating habits at a young age will not only ensure good health in the early years, but it will teach children how to eat later on in life. This can foster caring behaviors in your children that will carry them through life.

Perhaps the most caring approach a parent can take is to lead by example. Children often aspire to be like their parents, and will mirror their behaviors. This is why it is critically important that parents model good eating habits; it would be quite hypocritical to force a five year old to eat carrots and broccoli while his father sat beside him at the dinner table eating French fries and fried chicken. I should not expect my child to drink water as I sit nearby sipping Diet Coke. Children are like sponges; they soak up an abundance of knowledge on a daily basis. Teaching them how to eat properly, healthfully, and carefully is teaching them a life skill that will enable them to care for themselves in the future.

The return to family centered meal times is something we should strive for. This provides the perfect opportunity for family members to reconnect, to open up to one another, and to share in a communal experience. Fast food has made it all too convenient to eat on the run. For families who have parents working multiple jobs, and those that fall on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, that convenience might be a necessity. However there are many American families that do have the time to sit down together for at least one meal per day. It simply becomes a matter of making that time a priority. Financially stable parents tend to be doubly blessed, in the sense that they have both time

and the means to provide a healthy, home cooked meal for their children. Allowing your children to help prepare the meal, whether by shopping with you for the ingredients or helping you assemble it in the kitchen can serve not only as a learning experience, but it can also open up the channels of communication between parent and child. Eating should be a shared experience, one that we partake in with those whose company we value the most. When we take the time to teach our children that eating is something that should be done with care, we are instilling in them a set of values that can aid them in leading a healthier, more mindful life. I don't think that demonstrating appropriate care in regards to food is out of reach for the majority of us, in at least some shape or form. There are problems within the food system and the American lifestyle that place constraints upon certain groups of people, but I think most of us do have the capacity to expand our consciousness and make changes within our own homes, for the betterment of our children's futures.

It becomes clear that caring, specifically caring for and about our children, is an integral part of ensuring their well being. As much as we might revere the principles of autonomy and independence in our society, the dependency of children (among others) is unavoidable. Their dependency and vulnerability should serve as motivation for us to fully embody care, to manifest the virtues of care in our selves and actions. According to Robert E. Goodin, this type of care is forged out of dependency: "what most fundamentally underlies the reciprocal duties of family life- of spouses to one another, of parents to their children, of children to their aged parents- is the vulnerability of those parties to one another" (Goodin p.778). We shall see in a moment how this aspect of care

can be extended beyond our own families to embrace all members of the global community.

Care for Other Vulnerable Persons:

Our responsibility to care for those who are vulnerable should not be limited to our own children. Indeed there are many individuals, as discussed in the first chapter who are affected by the manner in which we eat. It is important to acknowledge our interdependence amongst one another, within our own nation and at a global level. It also important to acknowledge that this interrelationship and dependency calls for a certain level of responsibility. Goodin argues that we have a responsibility not only to our own families, but to any and all vulnerable members of society, no matter how far removed from us they may seem. He proposes an argument for “broader responsibilities” on a societal level:

We all acknowledge strong responsibilities toward our own families, friends, and certain others. Once we start examining the sources of those responsibilities, we discover there is nothing “special” about them. It is the vulnerability of the others, rather than any voluntary act of will on our part, that generates those responsibilities. There are many more people vulnerable to us, individually or especially collectively, than stand in any of the standard “special relationships” to us. If my analysis of the true basis of those standard responsibilities is correct, then we have strictly analogous (and potentially, equally strong) responsibilities toward all those others as well. Aid to vulnerable strangers is thereby justified on the same basis as aid rendered to our own parents or children. (Goodin p.782)

Vulnerability is not limited to our own children; we can see that there are many vulnerable members of the global community whose existence is fragile. A caring way of conducting ourselves would take into consideration the interests of others, particularly those whom are vulnerable to us due to the very nature of our relationships. I don't

believe a care perspective requires us to care more than our current circumstances allow, rather, I would argue that it pushes us to care in the best way that we can given the circumstances we are in. We should care about others in the sense that we can understand that they are beings that possess significant welfare concerns, much the same as those to whom we are intimately connected do. We need to have compassion for distant others, just as we would for those whom we are close to. In choosing to act in a certain manner, we are responsible for the effect that that has on others. This can seem overwhelming when it comes to food choice: can the way you eat truly have a significant impact on the welfare of others? Can changing your behaviors really even help, when the problems are so numerous and all-encompassing at a global level? Goodin makes a point to address these concerns, as they are quite valid in nature. He argues for both individual and collective responsibility. We have a responsibility to personally do the most that we can do to help, and our society as a whole has a collective responsibility to the vulnerable. For Goodin, it is this duty of responsibility that should serve as our guide in responding to the vulnerable.

I agree with Goodin in the sense that we do have a moral obligation to help those who we have an ability to help, yet I would argue that a care ethic takes it one step further. We should not act solely out of duty, but rather out of compassion. This is critical to the virtue of care; not simply acting because you are supposed to, but acting because you care about the other players involved. Thus making choices regarding purchasing products that are fair trade or sustainable can serve as a means of demonstrating care for others, for the vulnerable whose welfare we care about. This empathetic approach not only acknowledges the dependency of the vulnerable, but reinforces the fact that we are

all interconnected, and the choices that we make do indeed matter. I have mentioned that intent is a crucial component of possessing a virtuous disposition. While intent is measured based on one's attitudes and feelings, thus embracing how one *cares about*, I believe one's intent ought to embody an intent to act, thus demonstrating the labor of care. You can have all of the good intentions in the world, but if you don't act on them, change will not be brought about. When it comes to the welfare of others, it is critical that we act on these intentions.

Caring for those who are further removed from us can present certain challenges, however it is possible to demonstrate care for these distant others. The key to this is collective action; that is, working together as a group. When we work collectively, we can draw from a much greater pool of knowledge. Every person is an individual, who possesses a certain set of skills and strengths; when brought together, the cumulative effect of these skills can be quite powerful. This can start at the local level, calling on people such as nutritionists and farmers to come in and speak with children in the school system. Allowing field trips to traditional farms can also teach children about the effort that goes into raising our food, and can foster a greater respect for the process.

College campuses often provide the perfect setting for conferences on all sorts of topics, and the subject of food need not be exempt. Creating a dialogue amongst our nation's young adults, who are often a quite motivated group, can stimulate change at the local level. Collegiate environments can also provide a platform for change at the global level, as discussion can increase awareness about the consequences of our current way of eating. It is my belief that individuals are not intending to eat in a manner that is damaging the health and livelihood of others or the environment, but simply that there is

a lack of consciousness about the matter. When people *know* better, they presumably will *do* better. Capitalizing on the audience provided by the educational system is a great strategy, however it is not the only one. Making farmers markets more accessible within communities, as well as promoting knowledge and change in our neighborhoods can make a world of difference.

I have argued that those individuals with greater financial resources have a greater responsibility to make better choices. But do these consumers have a responsibility to help their poorer counterparts? I would argue yes, to a certain extent; I believe there are ways that they can demonstrate care for those in less fortunate circumstances. In choosing to regularly purchase sustainable, organic products for their own families, they can begin to drive down the prices to make them more affordable for others. By frequenting farmers markets or buying directly from local farmers, they can financially help out these individuals, thus giving them greater purchasing power for their own families. Donating fresh, healthy food to local homeless shelters or charities can be a way to give the poorest members of society a chance to enjoy the foods that every human is entitled to, yet sadly does not always have the opportunity to consume. At the global level, the wealthy can help by making monetary donations to charities that directly support the growth of sustainable agriculture and help feed those who are starving abroad.

The food system encourages detachment, and viewing ourselves solely as consumers certainly reinforces this. If we see our ability to demonstrate care as being limited only to what we choose to buy in the grocery store, we are seriously underestimating ourselves. As previously mentioned, there are a variety of ways that we can demonstrate thoughtfulness and attentiveness, both for our selves and others, and for

the actual food itself. Making meals a communal experience, taking the time to savor the flavors of the food we are enjoying, and understanding that we have the ability to help change the lives of others by being more conscious of what we consume are all wonderful things; things that consider food to be something so much more than just a commodity. If we look at food simply as something that can be bought and sold, and nothing more, we lose sight of so many of the valuable qualities of food that I emphasize in this piece.

Being attentive to the needs of others, whether it be an American farmer or a starving child in Africa, and subsequently choosing to act in a manner that will best serve them, is a virtuous response. The individuals I am targeting in this piece are in a position of power, and they have the ability to use that power to make a change for the better. Ignoring this fact will only exacerbate the existing difficulties that the vulnerable others are dealing with. Once you possess the knowledge that your actions impact the welfare of others, you have a moral obligation to act with a heightened level of consideration and care.

Care for Animals:

Food products derived from animals lie at the core of the Standard American Diet. The vast majority of Americans consume animal products on a daily basis, and I would question whether they give much thought to what it is they are eating. When a person consumes animal products, they are essentially eating the flesh of another creature that was once very much alive. The majority of these beings were also quite capable of feeling pain. Our current farming practices show little, if any, concern for the welfare of

the creatures that we willingly consume. If we are going to make the decision to consume animal products, we should not go into it blindly. A caring individual will acknowledge that much like their human counterparts, animals have welfare concerns and are worthy of moral consideration. For Singer, this moral consideration stems from the animals' sentient nature; they can experience pain, and therefore should fall into our realm of moral consideration. Ethicist Cora Diamond takes a different approach, noting that although they are both sentient, animals and humans have different types of relationships that ought to be taken into consideration. Singer believes we should refrain from consuming animals purely on the basis of their sentience, but Diamond argues that this stance doesn't give enough credit to the significance of human life.²³ As humans we are capable of developing a variety of relationships with others, including animals. It is possible to maintain a compassionate relationship with an animal, and yet still make the decision to consume it; for Diamond, it is the fact that the relationship is meaningful that is relevant. This vein of thought is not too far removed from that of Pollan, who believes that it is not morally wrong to consume animals so long as those animals are given the utmost care and dignity throughout the process. This view holds consistent with care ethics, because it is the nature of the interdependent relationship that matters. While it might not be possible for a consumer to have an intimate relationship with an animal, to the degree that a farmer might, the consumer can still empathize with what the animal goes through. In choosing humanely raised products, a consumer can demonstrate virtues such as care and compassion, as well as respect for the life of the creature.

²³ Diamond, Cora. "Eating Meat and Eating People." *Philosophy* Vol.53, No.206 (1978): 471.

In the book *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran Foer traces the evolution of American farming practices. Throughout history, humans adopted animal husbandry techniques that revolved around what Safran Foer refers to as an *eat with care* ethic:

The care for domesticated animals demanded by the *eat with care* ethic did not necessarily correspond to any official morality: it didn't need to as, as that ethic was based on the economic necessities of raising domestic animals. The very nature of the human-domestic animal relationship required some degree of caring, in the sense of providing provisions and a safe environment for one's flock. (Safran Foer p.102)

Farmers had to nurture the animals in order for them to grow and flourish, and in turn be used as a source of food. Because of this, farmers took good care of their animals, and ensured that they were healthy and thriving. The relationship was mutually beneficial to a certain extent: the animal was provided for and led a relatively good life, and the farmer was rewarded for his nurturing by the fact that he was able to feed his family. Looking at our farming practices today, the *eat with care* ethic seems largely to have vanished. A return to this type of farming is critical should we want to become ethical eaters. *Eating with care* embodies the very virtues of care that can allow us to prosper as a society. It takes into account the interests not only of our selves, but those of the animals being consumed as well. This extension of compassion and empathy to the animals is critical in demonstrating caring behavior.

Perhaps some people truly are ignorant in regards to what goes on in a factory farm, but once made aware, a person of virtue would surely not ignore it. As Safran Foer puts it:

However much we obfuscate or ignore it, we know that the factory farm is inhumane in the deepest sense of the word. And we know that there is something that matters in a deep way about the lives we create for the living beings most within our power. Our response to the factory farm is ultimately a test of how we respond to the powerless, to the most distant,

to the voiceless- it is a test of how we act when no one is forcing us to act one way or another. (Safran Foer p.266)

Ignoring the problem will not fix the problem, in fact it will only further exacerbate it. Once you become aware of the situation, you are presented with a variety of choices in how to respond to it. Safran Foer and Singer, among others, argue in favor of avoiding the consumption of animal products altogether. This is perhaps the easiest way to ensure that you are avoiding factory-farmed products; your odds of eating factory-farmed meat are virtually nonexistent if you're a vegan. This can be considered a caring response because it eliminates harm to animals altogether; however there must be intent behind the action. Making a conscious decision to avoid animal products is different than simply not having access to them, or not enjoying the taste of them. A person of virtue in this case is one who is prioritizing the interests of others above their own palate pleasure, not simply one who is avoiding animal products for superfluous reasons. For many people though, veganism seems extreme. Though they might have a significant concern for animal welfare, as I touched on earlier these feelings can be at odds with a variety of other values they might embrace, such as maintaining familial traditions; and it's important to acknowledge that that is okay.

While much of the literature surrounding the eating of animals serves as a plea for vegetarianism, or even veganism, I would argue (along the lines of Pollan) that abstaining from the consumption of animal products altogether is not a necessary condition for demonstrating caring behavior. I believe there can be great value in tending to the vulnerabilities of animals, of nourishing them and physically taking caring of them. A farmer can care about and care for his flock, and I don't believe the end result of slaughter is morally wrong behavior on his part, so long as it is done with care and

compassion. As Diamond asserts, it's the nature of the relationship that is important: the fact that it was meaningful to both the farmer and the flock. The factory farm environment is completely devoid of these qualities, and not only ignores the welfare of the animals but exploits their vulnerabilities. It is this uncaring exploitation that I find particularly problematic, this overtly apathetic approach to using animals purely for one's own benefit.

If you do decide to consume animal products, you have a moral responsibility to seek out food that was ethically produced. A caring individual should take the animal's welfare into consideration, because its vulnerability demands it. The animal should not simply serve as a means to an end. Although the movement is relatively small at this point in time, several smaller farms are attempting to return to traditional ways of farming, where an *eat with care* ethic takes precedence. It is possible to seek out these farms and consume products that have been raised and slaughtered as humanely as possible. Granted, you will most likely pay a premium for these goods, but that is a small price to pay for a step towards ending the abuse of farmed animals. As noted by Safran Foer, "compassion is a muscle that gets stronger with use, and the regular exercise of choosing kindness over cruelty would change us" (p.258). Changing ourselves can inspire others to change as well, and taking a kinder approach in general can help foster a more tolerant and considerate society. Vegetarians and omnivores should simply extend the *eat with care* ethic to encompass all categories of what they consume. Choosing to consume only animal products that were humanely raised and slaughtered is a huge step in the right direction. It might be challenging at first, taking the time to research and truly

understand where their food is coming from, but it is critical that we become conscious of where our animal products are coming from.

It might also be expensive, because it takes significantly more money to raise animals on traditional family farms than it does in a factory farm setting. The financial aspect is one that many Americans are concerned with, and while financial implications are quite real, it is best to distinguish them from being a part of the ethical equation. When something is wrong, it is wrong regardless of the price it costs. The financial factors are often used as a reason for not purchasing certain products, but in many cases there are compelling moral reasons why it makes sense to spend the extra money. We are talking about small changes, not spending hundreds of additional dollars per month. Singer and Mason argue that the corporations behind factory farming could make the changes themselves for just cents on the dollar, however it seems at this point in time those cents are not something they are willing to spare. If we can't rely on the individuals spearheading corporate agriculture to do the right thing, then we need to take that responsibility upon ourselves. The slightly higher prices at the grocery store for sustainably and humanely raised animal products are a small price to pay if we are making our own palate pleasure a priority.

I do believe that a truly virtuous individual would possess the capability to find value in the life of all creatures, not just those of our own species. As mentioned previously, a caring individual is one who has compassion, and acts in a manner that is reflective of that. I don't believe this compassion needs to be limited only to humans; we can quite easily extend this empathy towards animals. A great respect for all life, whether it be human, animal, or even environmental is a true sign of virtue.

Care for the Environment:

Certainly the way we eat has an impact on the environment, and we should take it into consideration when deciding what to consume. Although the earth is unable to express its own interests, it is intrinsically connected to the beings residing upon on it. We are reliant upon the land for food and water, and without it we would have no sustenance. I believe a person of virtue would possess an unwavering respect for the planet and the bounty that it provides. A caring individual would act in a manner that was beneficial not only to the sentient beings of the world, but the land as well. A kind approach to life need not be limited solely to living creatures.

Much like we should seek out farms that humanely raise their livestock, we should look for farms that practice sustainable agriculture. Sustainability is the key to ensuring that the world is around long enough for our future generations to enjoy it. One way to do this is by purchasing organic products. By definition:

Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that promotes environmentally, socially, and economically sound production of food, fiber, timber, etc. In this system, soil fertility is seen as the key to successful production. Working with the natural properties of plants, animals, and the landscape, organic farmers aim to optimize quality to all aspects of agriculture and the environment. (Singer & Mason p.199)

According to Singer and Mason, among others, organic farming has huge environmental benefits. Limiting pesticides not only maintains soil quality, but also encourages biodiversity; because no non-organic herbicides are used, many species of plants and animals are able to interact as nature intended. It also reduces pollution by limiting nitrogen run-off into freshwater supplies.²⁴ The avoidance of harsh chemicals is good for

²⁴ Singer and Mason 2006, 202-203

both the environment and human health alike. If we want to create the most natural state of balance in our world, we need to work with the land rather than fighting its natural tendencies; seeing the environment as something we should care for rather than conquer can help to guide our practices. Organic farming is a major way that we can demonstrate care and respect for the land; a caring consumer can choose to purchase organic, and take a step towards restoring a harmonious environment. We can only create change, and begin to return to a state of homeostasis, when we are acting in a manner that is conducive to doing so.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have argued why I believe it is critical that we embrace an ethic of care in regards to how we eat. The group I am specifically targeting in this piece, Americans who live financially comfortable lives, are in a position of power when it comes to shaping the food system. With that power comes a great responsibility, not only to our fellow humans, but other creatures and the environment as well. An adherence to the Standard American Diet is not only unsustainable, but it is careless. Embracing the virtues of care, including compassion, attentiveness, and responsiveness, can help us when it comes to the choices we make regarding food on a daily basis. Our world is undeniably interconnected, and rather than ignoring or exploiting various dependencies and vulnerabilities, we should be attending to them with our care and consideration. It is my hope that in adopting care ethics as our prevailing ethical principle when it comes to how we choose to eat, we can foster a happier and healthier life for all.

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Vita

Catherine Manners Bucolo was a 2007 cum laude graduate of Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where she received a B.A. in Philosophy with a minor in Peace and Justice Studies. Her philosophical interests lie predominately in contemporary moral issues, existentialism, and applied ethics. Originally from the Washington D.C. area, she now resides in Saint Augustine, Florida with her husband Tim and her daughter Diem.